

HIERARCHICAL COMPOSITIONS IN LATE-EIGHTEENTH- AND  
EARLY-NINETEENTH-CENTURY LANDSCAPE ART AND POETRY

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

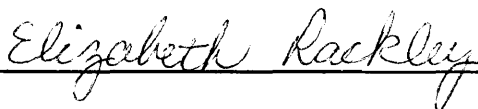
Elizabeth Rackley

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APPROVAL SHEET

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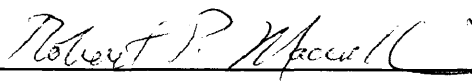
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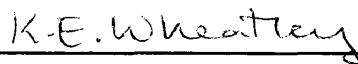
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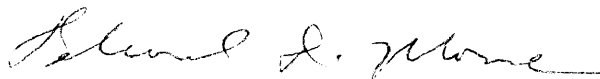
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DEDICATION

To my mother, for her love and endless patience.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses a selection of landscape artwork and poems, from the period approximately between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, in which the artist or poet depicting the British countryside situates himself at a distancing height while positioning the laboring rustic in the lower level of the construction. The purpose of this examination is to show that the landscapist imposes on dynamic, chaotic nature a fixed, stratified structure which denies those at the bottom of society the opportunity to overturn the established order (as the landscapist himself resists integration with the land while depicting the farm worker as inextricably tied to it). Working from Carole Fabricant's assertion in "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century" that landscapists command the area they overlook, I have attempted to develop the idea that these portraits of the countryside reflect and help maintain strict class divisions, arguing against Fabricant's association of "power with the gratification of appetites rather than the assertion of hierarchic order" (56). In an effort to tie poetry to art in a shared cultural and political climate specific to the time period under investigation, this analysis looks at the artwork of Thomas Gainsborough, John Constable, Thomas Hearne, and Henry Raeburn in conjunction with the poems of Oliver Goldsmith, William Wordsworth, Thomas Warton, Jr., and John Langhorne. Further, a comparison of these works which demonstrate an undisturbed, balanced, and neatly structured order in nature, to the compositions of J. M. W. Turner which display nature's flux, dynamic energy, and violence is made to emphasize the narrowness of the philosophies of the landscapists under consideration.

HIERARCHICAL COMPOSITIONS IN LATE-EIGHTEENTH- AND  
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In the eighteenth century, a cult of nature had arrived in England as that nation's artists and poets recurrently depicted their countryside as a refuge from the tedium of labors or from the din of city-life: a place where one could reflect undisturbedly on displays of grandeur or on peaceful, idyllic pastoral scenes. Samuel Monk writes that the many who ranged out into the countryside during this time went in search of beautiful and perfectly ordered natural objects, picturesque unity in a variety of landscape elements, and sublimity in the vastness and primitiveness of the land. It was a movement towards nature whose strength Monk, in his exhaustive treatment of the notion of sublimity and its relation to this period--The Sublime--attributes to, among other causes, reverberations of the seventeenth-century artwork of landscape masters Claude Lorrain, Nicholas Poussin and Salvator Rosa; the monumental popularity of Thompson's The Seasons; the writings of Rousseau and Ossian, as well as to the great heap of journal entries and books penned by travellers around this period. The existence of such a cultural tradition behind the eighteenth-century landscapist's work suggests that the pictorial landscapes from this period are not merely topographical representations of striking pieces of

naturalistic scenery and that the literary landscapes are not purely literal descriptions; instead, both would seem also to be representations of particular views of nature shaped by the artist's or poet's education in the pastoral myth.

This analysis of landscape art and poetry will argue that the artist or poet often reinvents the British countryside, fabricating the natural truth, by selecting elements to paint or describe (such as a peasant, a sloping hill, a castle, or a fence) possibly from more than one locale and arranging them to create a meaningful, synthetic though beautifully naturalistic image. Further, the significance of the organization will be shown to come in part from where the landscapist decided to position himself in relation to the scene, as artists and poets of this time often admired from a distancing height the natural environs they portrayed, forming what David Morris calls "the popular genre of 'prospect' landscapes" (42).

Carole Fabricant in "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century" (56-7) theorizes on this issue that the landscape artist's habit of "commanding" grounds from an elevation bears political implications and does not merely reflect an adoration of nature for its own sake. She argues that overlooking a territory suggests proprietorship, as it affords the spectator a sense of authority over whatever lay below (farmer, shepherd,

cornfields, and so on). Fabricant, however, understanding strict class divisions to be a thing of the past, associates "power with the gratification of appetites rather than the assertion of hierarchic order" (56) and emphasizes the spectator's "sensuous and visual abandon to nature's seemingly infinite variety," (56) which she claims is paradoxical in relation to his habit of "commanding". This paper will argue that there is often no paradox and that many landscapists of this period do indeed advance a hierarchy, conveying distance from the land and superiority to those who work it. Poets are often detached witnesses to the human events taking place on the rural landscapes chronicled in their poems, while painters exist just outside their compositions. And the disassociated demeanor that the artist or poet adopts for himself towards the figure in the landscape is tied to ideology, with regard to class structure, as, in the works to be discussed, the grade of gentle nobility prescribes that the individual be a spectating visitor to the countryside or a property owner, while an inferior rank, such as that of tenant farmer, wage laborer, or peasant, meant that one was closely linked to the natural environment (I will attempt to show that when the figure drawn or painted is one of the number of rural poor, he or she is displayed as an organic element indistinct from the landscape).

This analysis of landscape art and poetry, then, will

locate a continuum of these rigidly contrived constructions that reflect the landscapists' understanding of the organization of society as static and hierarchical, as well as examine how the Arcadian iconography displayed is woven into a tiered political vision. The artists whose paintings will be given consideration here are Thomas Gainsborough, John Constable, Thomas Hearne, and Henry Raeburn; and the poets whose poems these paintings will be compared with are Oliver Goldsmith, William Wordsworth, Thomas Warton, Jr., and John Langhorne. By consciously or unconsciously withholding direct proof of his presence or by posturing as observer on a mound of earth, each artist retains his dignity by resisting integration with the landscape. He achieves distinction from the rural poor, whose kinship with the land was generally accepted, and imposes upon dynamic, chaotic nature a fixed hierarchical structure that would deny those at the bottom level of society the opportunity to overturn the order. The poets achieve the same effect in their poems by employing a scheme whereby they witness unseen the events in the lives of poor rustics from a distance rather than participating in them.

A brief comparison of these works, which demonstrate a halcyon, balanced, and tightly structured order in nature, to the compositions of J.M.W. Turner which display nature's fluidity, wild energy, and chaos will also be made to emphasize the narrowness of the philosophies of the

landscapists under consideration. Turner's focus on nature's inexplicability, irrationality, and lack of discrimination between the reasoning sophisticate and any other inhabitants of its domain will be compared with the other landscapists' presentations of a vision that pits the cultured individual above the scene or on the outside looking in, untouched, unsullied, and not at nature's mercy unlike the peasantry who are absorbed into the environment and, therefore, susceptible to its whims.

David Morris notes that the landscape painter Thomas Hearne, a principled conservative, paid allegiance to institutions that girded the aristocracy: undemocratic institutions such as the British royalty and the Anglican Church, which instructed parishioners to reverence authority. These are organizations that functioned to fend off the disruptive forces of change, which allow for those out of power to rise up and alter the social system. Morris writes:

Hearne was a staunch defender of both the Anglican Church and the monarchy, and a deferential supporter of aristocratic hegemony exercised within a paternalistic and virtuous moral context.  
(50)

And the hierarchical compositions in Hearne's art would indeed seem to promote the patriarchy and its traditions.

For example, in his antiquarian-style Caister Castle, Norfolk (1805-06) (fig. 1), Hearne situates himself as artist/observer in a privileged position of authority above

the scene, where he appears to "command" much of the landscape spread panoply-fashion before him. Below the artist's eye-level, at the bottom left, resides the single figure of a woodman lounging thoughtfully by the lakeside while, above the artist's own elevated position rises the Gothic edifice of Caister Castle. This tiering-effect allowed Hearne to promote through his art the concept of a "natural" hierarchy which positioned the simple peasant at the nadir of society being overseen by the cultivated artist/aristocrat who in turn owes an obedience to law, tradition, and God.

In Hearne's painting, as the mass of Caister Castle is covered by an allee of trees, its highest tower stands decidedly above all else in the pictured terrain; as a result, this crenelated peak sits like a metaphoric diadem, symbolic of British antiquity, that had left its imprint upon the countryside. David Morris notes that Hearne had stated that the neo-classicists, who had chosen to look away from England for stimulus for their art, posed a threat to the traditional patriarchal structure that favored Britain's blue-bloods (24-7). A reaffirmation of Christian morality and the right reason of aristocratic traditions could come from contemplation of those crumbling edifices, as England's old buildings would seem testaments to the values of the orthodox medieval world now in a state of detritus. Hearne's targeted audience for panoramic, antiquarian art

could then be assumed to be the aristocrat who, like himself, could find inspiration and purification locally in the viewing of those monuments to Britain's autonomous political and religious heritage that dotted the countryside.

Hearne does not appear to be advocating the contemplation of complex ideas as an appropriate occupation for the common man or woman. Actually, he disdains such precocious reaching beyond one's office, as is evidenced by the positioning of the diminutive figure of the rustic in Caister Castle: he is shown not to be perusing the ancient building, as his line of vision is steered with deliberate aim away from the imposing castle tower that looms authoritatively over his person. Hearne's woodman is one of the peasants Carole Fabricant argues is "pent up in a narrow Compass" and, thereby, excluded from the class of Augustan spectators (67). In Hearne's world-view, the peasant need not concern himself with the recondite ideas embodied in the Gothic edifice because morality is dictated to the common masses in a paternalistic fashion by England's ruling elite. The rustic's concern should then be confined to his immediate environ which provides him his living; therefore, Hearne presents the woodman as meditating undisturbedly with downcast vision on a smooth pool of water while circumscribed by a ring of formidable-appearing trees. Nature, in this painting, rather than being a force of

change, conspires to maintain the peasant's low stature in society. By limiting the peasant's scope or his "prospects," artists of this period ensured that there was no challenge to the status quo, and that the caste-system remained intact.

Similarly to Hearne, the predominant landscape artist John Constable communicates by his choice of theme and compositional style a hierarchical vision of social relationships. A discussion of one important painting by this master of the genre, The Cornfield (1826) (fig. 2), involving a comparison to Hearne's Caister Castle, will help to disclose his viewpoint.

First, an insight into Constable's biography provided by John Barrell in The dark side of the landscape may tie this artist's political views to his subject matter, as well as to the painterly design he selects by which he harmonizes that content in a single frame:

As far as we can characterise Constable's political attitudes, he seems to have been, unsurprisingly enough in view of his birth and the position of his family, an old-style tory, convinced that the social and economic stability of England depended on a flourishing agriculture.  
(133-4)

The stability of that fruitful agricultural system Constable represents in his work hinges upon the rural poor's persisting in their position rather than threatening the inflexible structure's balance by disruptively seeking a higher station.

The rosy content and the stratified composition of The Cornfield, a sentimentalized image of harvest time on a farm, reveal this. In this picturesquely ordered scenario, two workers, one a shepherd boy and the other a harvester, are shown temporarily at rest while two others are seen laboring, in the georgic tradition, in a healthy, gloriously sun-lit wheat field that constitutes the middle ground of the larger constitution of the painting. Reminiscent of Hearne's ruminating woodman finding solace at a lakeside, the shepherd boy in the painting finds pleasurable diversion as he immerses his face in a natural water basin to abate a thirst. The boy dodges his shepherding duties to indulge playfully for only an instant, as he is certain to return momentarily to his flock and follow the dirt path that the sheep have continued along. The rascally boy's return is imminent as a man who might be the boy's father casts a watchful eye in the sheep's direction perhaps aware of the boy's mischievousness; certainly no real disruption of the order of this farm is likely. John Barrell writes this on the subject of rest for the worker:

That labourers in agriculture be presented as honest and laborious is a constraint which operates in our tradition throughout the period...It does not of course always mean that they must never be shown at rest, though it comes to mean something very near that, but it does prescribe the terms on which they may relax...never far from the hooks and scythes which indicate that they are resting only for moment...(21)

Again approximating Hearne's woodman, not one of the

laborers pictured by Constable is in a position to inspect the world beyond his constricted rural sphere, as all are intent upon their primary surroundings and are petrified in their posts. One might conjecture that such figures would not even desire to consider what lay past their bucolic milieu in the distant township, which is that goal of the winding dirt path meandering through the middle of the panorama, if life on the farm were indeed as quaint as Constable sentimentally defines it. In the context of the painting, each farmhand is destined to remain in his station, in the lower plane of the construction, because, unaware of any other reality, he cannot aspire to anything else. The two figures in the background bending over their work as well as the two figures, boy and corn-harvester, in the foreground appear incognizant of the organization of which they are a part because Constable, like Hearne, seems to assume that in the actual society that he represents the working class is oblivious of social arrangement, while the artist is not only aware of it, but takes part in its maintenance, or re-creation, as an act of well-meaning condescension.

Another element of the painting, the removed church in the outlying town, bears examination for its emblematic significance, which Constable magnifies by placing it at the focal point of the configuration of picturesque topographical imagery. Dillian Gordon points out that the

church is most likely a fiction, not a topographical actuality, as Constable's son identified the view as probably of a pathway leading from East Bergholt in Suffolk to Dedham, from which no such church structure could be viewed (Gordon 84). The iconographic edifice, as an artificial construction, takes on even more symbolic weight as the artist willed it into being and placed it where he did in the core of the composition; it would seem then a shrine to institutionalized religion and a testament to the values of the patriarchy which supervises it.

The spectating painter is on par with the fictionalized church (as he appears to be at the same level of elevation), a formal alignment which may be due to a real affinity that Constable had for the religious establishment, having as a young man trained in Suffolk schools to become a cleric. The equality of the painter's and the church's standing in the painting's hierarchical constitution betokens several associations: artist and God, artist and society, artist and church leaders (overseers of the parishioners).

Edward Lucas writes that Constable opted, however, at the age of eighteen, to take over at the East Bergholt mill that was owned by his family, despite his father's preference that he pursue a clerical vocation (19-20). So rather than command souls by guiding worshipers through their supplications to God, Constable elected to manage the millworks (and its workers) located in the countryside,

which may explain his proprietary position in the scene of The Cornfield and the situating of the church in the remote background but in the same middle tier inhabited by the spectating artist.

A painting by an earlier exalted landscape painter, Thomas Gainsborough, has a strikingly similar composition to that of Constable's The Cornfield and shares its rudimentary thematic content; and that work is his 1746-7 Wooded Landscape with Woodcutter, Figures, Animals, Pool and Distant Village (Gainsborough's Forest) (fig. 3). Traditionally, Gainsborough announces a visionary countryside, a land of idyllic pastoral rusticity. Like the boy at the left in The Cornfield, the two figures in the bottom left quadrant of Gainsborough's painting (a young man and a young woman) find pleasure in respite, in this case, both aiming attentions away from work duties and towards the sporty romps of a dog. But, as in Constable's painting, work will soon resume, as the male figure supports his retiring body on the very instrument of his labors, the shovel, not having cast it aside in forswearance of his responsibilities.

But the closeness in theme and design to Constable's painting extends further as the focus of Gainsborough's work is also an emblematic white church at the end of a meandering trailway, adding to the creation of an iconographical tradition. And again in this painting, the

visual line between spectating artist and far-off church spire is a direct one, a formula which contributes to the conventionalization of this tiered vision of the landscape.

This same hierarchical landscape structure, containing the aforementioned special features (winding trail, picturesque countryside, distant church, and resting laborers) and in similar positions, appears in different guises throughout the canon of Gainsborough's works, becoming paradigmatic in its recurrence if one looks at the paintings as a continuum in the 1740's, 1750's and 1760's. Such paintings based on the same basic compositional principles include Wooded Landscape with Woman and Small Boy Passing a Pool with Ducks, Cows, Farmhouse and Distant Church (1755-57) (fig. 4), Wooded Landscape with Herdsman and Cows and Distant Church Tower (1755-57) (fig. 5), Wooded Landscape with Woodcutter, Donkeys and Distant Church (1762-63) (fig. 6), and the list goes on.

\* \* \*

One can spot this same iconography systematically arranged in the poetry of this period, such as in Goldsmith's nostalgic "The Deserted Village," in which the poet/persona returns to the plain now empty wherein the bustling, happy, pastorally ideal rural village of his childhood once laid. He describes the same familiar charming sites from the Arcadian tradition that Constable and Gainsborough were fond of displaying in their works:

"the sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,/the never-failing brook, the busy mill,/the decent church that topped the neighboring hill" (10-12) as well as the "bold peasantry" (55) whose "light labour" provided them with a "wholesome store" (59). The persona of "The Deserted Village" characterizes the "sweet smiling village" (35) that he inhabited as a child as the "loveliest village of the plain/Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain" (1-2), a place where "humble happiness endeared each scene" (8). The persona in this poem, however, confronts, from the distance of years, only an illusionary memory of the way the countryside was; he had gone from quaint Auburn to seek intellectual fulfillment in an urban environment, rather than remain in the village to work in the fields. The speaker here, then, like the artists Hearne and Constable, is a detached observer, separated by experience and education from the rustic life.

According to Goldsmith in this poem, the rustic's labors "Just gave what life required, but gave no more...his best riches, ignorance of wealth" (60-2). But, in Goldsmith's poem the rural poor must uproot themselves from the land to depart for the dissolute city as a result of the rapacious greed of the "man of wealth and pride" (276) who "[t]akes up space that many poor supplied;/space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,/Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds" (278-30). Goldsmith exposes the

avariciousness of the elite and sympathizes with the dispossessed rural class, but he doesn't see the possible positive effects of the agricultural workers becoming aware of their relative impoverishment: "If to the city sped-what waits him there?/To see profusion that he must not share; To see ten thousand baneful arts combined to pamper luxury, and thin mankind" (311-314). In the cities, they will observe freely, unlike the peasant in the pastoral tradition whose vision is restricted to his rural domain; and, though the poor in the city may experience an unpleasant intensified awareness of their poverty, this realization may prompt them to demand more for themselves or possibly even to fell the established order which fixes them at the bottom. Though the eighteenth-century Enclosure acts stripped previously self-sufficient farmers of their lands and broke the communal bonds of the small agricultural village, they contributed to an urbanization movement that created a new industrial working class (Greene 41). Donald Greene argues that this new class of factory workers demonstrated no real desire to return to the farm. He writes: "Whatever their grievances, as Marx himself pointed out, their lot was at least a cut above the stultification of the farm laborer's life" (42). And though Goldsmith's sympathy for the farm workers seems genuine and appropriate, it may not have been, after all, the best thing that the peasants remain in ignorance and out in the countryside.

Wordsworth's pastoral poem "Michael" (1800) is reminiscent of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" as it too warns against the rustic learning of the material wealth which abounds in the city by leaving his appointed pastoral arena. With this poem, Wordsworth provides an example of the strife that is the upshot of Michael's son looking beyond his own bucolic realm: his agreement to allow Luke to move off to the far-off "dissolute city" (453) in search of gain rather than forfeit a portion of the land leads to "ignominy and shame" (454) for the family, as Luke falls in with a bad lot. The son, like his father, belonged in the country, and, his untoward estrangement from his father's land pilots him to an inescapable demise. Aside from Michael's wife and child, the "patrimonial fields" (234) in which he labors are his entire life; they harbor the memories of his past daily occupations and the promise of his future sustenance. In this poem, Wordsworth limns a portrait of an aging man who wears out his days tending sheep and musing upon those "green Valleys, ...Streams and Rocks" (63) that conjure up for him remembrances of the many incidents in his life "Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear" (69). The fields

...like a book preserved the memory  
 Of the dumb animals, whom [Michael] had saved,  
 Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts  
 So grateful in themselves, the certainty of  
 Of honorable gains...(62-74)

But, just what Wordsworth means by "honorable gains" is debatable; and Wordsworth's cautioning against ambition in

the rural poor only serves to keep them in their place, grounded on the lower rung of the social order.

Like the spectator/gentleman/artist spying on the relaxing woodman in Caister Castle, Wordsworth, from his high position on top of Green-Head Gill Mountain in "Michael," overlooks the composite landscape of which the indigenous shepherding family is pictured as an integral part. The poet in "Michael" watches over the quaint rustic who is rendered oblivious of him as his sight is confined to his proximate, pastorally idyllic surroundings. As poet/prophet, Wordsworth, in this poem, positions himself, along with "a few natural hearts" (36) and "youthful Poets" (38) who might also possess an intellect superior to and a sympathy keener than the common man or woman's, above the scene (atop Green-head Gill mountain, gazing down into the valley wherein lies the domicile of the shepherd, Michael, and his family). Wordsworth's rationalization for adopting this somewhat patronizing stance can be found in The Prelude: though in this work Wordsworth advocates viewing rural scenes from a state of "wise passiveness" and confronting them from the perspective of a lover, he asserts that it is the exceptional acumen of the poet only which has the capacity to find truth through its ability to "see" with the imagination, "half-creating" the perceived universe.

The difference between Hearne's outlook and Wordsworth's is only then that Hearne bows to tradition

while Wordsworth crowns himself, as poet, the final arbiter in matters of interpretation. Though Wordsworth was given to passively reposing in nature (and, in this sense, Wordsworth splits with the Augustan spectator), he echoes those before him who commanded the landscape when he finds that his poet/prophet's status deems him superior to the scenery he peruses. Wordsworth does not break with those, who succeeded in commanding the landscape from a proprietary standpoint, because his sympathy for the rustics he images does not lead him to dismantle the hierarchy which stations him over his subject. He argues in Book XIII of The Prelude that from his peak position he is best able to interpret the scene below as when he climbs to the pinnacle of Snowden Mountain: "we stood, the mist/Touching our very feet" (52-3) and through a breach in the fog espied "The Soul, the Imagination of the whole" (6).

When we do hear protest of this patronizing attitude from the rustic in John Langhorne's "The Evening Primrose" (1762), the poet's purpose in allowing him to speak is to finally silence the restless, discontented shepherd whom he terms an "anxious swain" (40) and to command him to keep his sights on his meager, isolated plot of earth. Seemingly unsatisfied with his own lot remote from society's limelight, the poem's shepherd reveals an enviousness of those who shine in social circles with his pitying words to the evening primrose:

"Ill-fated flow'r, at eve to blow,...  
 Thy bosom must not feel the glow  
 Of splendid suns, or smiling skies.

"Nor thee, the vagrants of the field,  
 The hamlet's little train behold;  
 Their eyes to sweet oppression yield,  
 When thine the falling shades unfold.

"Nor thee the hasty shepherd heeds,  
 When love has fill'd his heart with cares,  
 For flow'rs he rifles all the meads,  
 For waking flow'rs-but thine forbears.  
 "Ah! waste no more that beauteous bloom  
 On night's chill shade, that fragrant breath,  
 Let smiling suns those gems illumine!  
 Fair flow'r, to live unseen is death."

(17-32)

Philomela answers the lament for the forsaken flower with a chastisement of ambition demanding that both the primrose and the shepherd "Live unseen!" (41). She queries,

Didst thou, shepherd, never find,  
 Pleasure is of pensive kind?  
 Has thy cottage never known  
 That she loves to live alone?  
 Dost thou not at ev'ning hour  
 Feel some soft and secret pow'r,  
 Gliding o'er thy yielding mind,  
 Leave sweet serenity behind;  
 While all disarm'd, the cares of day  
 Steal through the falling gloom away?" (48-57)

Philomela assumes the questions she asks are of a rhetorical nature, but, really her assumptions simply go unchallenged because the "aged hind" is not allowed to respond. The old man would seem to regret his life, if what he says regarding the flower reflects how he feels about his own humble career; and he has a right to his emotions. Should the shepherd not be sorrowful that circumstances frustrated his aspiration to "the splendid walks of fame" (22)? The

persona of the poem would not have him "risk Ambition's losing game" (4), but risk generates reward and the persona would seem to concede that truth with his statement "vainer flow'rs" are "sweeter far" (9). However, the persona still judges the shepherd is better off with "the modest mien" (46) in his "small but kindly sphere" (8) and, therefore, commands the rustic to "Love to think thy lot was laid/In this undistinguish'd shade" (59). Langhorne himself, however, remains far from "the modest mein" and the rustic's sphere, searching for and finding fame with the writing of his poetry. The poet gains recognition by drawing from the pastoral legacy to contribute another idealized portrait of the rural life to an audience receptive to the genre and to him.

Langhorne, Hearne, and Wordsworth, in the tradition of the classical pastoralists tended to illustrate rustic living as quaint, charming in its lack of artifice and free from corrupting urban influences; the three, drawing from an established literary genre, found rustic life picturesque and in their art we can locate examples of what Ann Bermingham describes as a "contradiction between the social reality of the countryside and its idealized aesthetic representation" (11). In "The Evening Primrose," only the shepherd's quiet hours of relaxation and meditation are referred to. In Caister Castle, the woodman is seen languishing idly by the lakeside rather than assiduously

gathering wood. And, in "Michael," though the shepherd's statement to his wife "Our lot is a hard lot" (243) does seem a concession on Wordsworth's part that this rustic life is not one of ease, Wordsworth glorifies hard labor in the oppressive heat of summer when he writes that the shepherd's life was passed "toiling in the open sunshine of God's love" (229) and he assumes an unlikely zealousness when he writes that Michael and his family were engaged in "eager industry" (122).

In another of Wordsworth's poems "The Solitary Reaper," the poet again images a formulaic stratified social order and repeats the illustration of rustic life as picturesque, attractive and utterly natural, helping to create what Sarah Burns in Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture calls the "rhetoric of the pastoral" (15). Burns' contention that the continuous selection of particular iconographic elements by American landscape artists for their works contributed to a false vision of the real countryside would seem to have application also to Wordsworth's nature poetry.

In the case of "The Solitary Reaper," the poem's persona, a traveller, crosses paths with a woman harvesting in a vale before he ascends a contiguous mountain leaving her behind. The persona (a detached, free-moving observer of the countryside) describes the good fortune of his tour having led him to come across this "solitary Highland

Lass!/Reaping and singing by herself" (a fixed object in the terrain) (2-3). She is an attraction along the route, a fixture not denoted in a traveler's companion guide and, therefore, more delightful for the serendipity of her presence in that spot. The sojourner enjoys himself while listening to the anguish he recognizes as being expressed in the reaper's "melancholy strain" (6) as the purity of her voice charms him. He is genuinely attracted by the beauty of her melody, and perhaps it is this captivation that partially blinds him to the disagreeable reality of her circumstance and allows him to focus on his delight at hearing her. And though the itinerant persona knows that she sings to herself as she is engaged in song as he approaches, he still somewhat vainly fantasizes that the lament she cries is for his entertainment as he journeys past (as it seems he fancifully likens himself to an voyager in exotic lands):

No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
 So sweetly to reposing bands  
 Of Travellers in some shady haunt,  
 Among Arabian Sands...(9-12)

The persona of the poem displays both a recognition of the back-breaking nature of the work that the harvester performs and an incongruous lack of authentic empathy for her. The emphatically sad tone of the reaper's song leads the poem's persona to wonder of what she sings. He postulates: "Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow/For old, unhappy, far-off things,/And battles long ago" (17-20) or

maybe for "Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,/that has been, and may be again" (23-4). The subject of the tune is irrelevant, however, as any unhappy melody would serve equally to declare her feelings about her ceaseless toil; and the traveler recognizes this: "Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang/As if her song could have no ending;/I saw her singing at her work,/And o'er the sickle bending" (25-8). But Wordsworth or the persona would seem to regard the interminability of her reappings to be as natural as the endless return of the harvesting season or the continuity of drudgery in the farm cycle.

The persona satiates himself on her song and then climbs the slope, elevating himself above the reaper he leaves fettered to the landscape behind him, though he does pay tribute to her giftedness by carrying her lyric in his breast: "I listened till I had my fill:/And, as I mounted up the hill,/the music in my heart I bore,/Long after it was heard no more" (29-32). Once again, Wordsworth provides an image of the right order of society mirrored in his distancing of the spectator from the entrenched, static, unseeing rural laborer.

Harboring a faith in the validity of the status-quo, Wordsworth, Gainsborough, Constable, and Hearne located in England's countryside reflections of the harmony of its static social arrangements, dismissing the sublime mysteries which others such as artist J.M.W. Turner found to be the

essence of nature. A brief comparison of the rigid compositions in works such as The Cornfield and Caister Castle to Turner's dynamic canvasses may benefit our understanding of how the artists' philosophies impacted their vision of the natural environment. The energetic quality of the "moving" vortex (which Ronald Paulson detects a repetition of in most of Turner's works) is appropriate for a view of nature which accepts its elemental dynamism while the linear, hierarchical structure that Hearne conforms to in Caister Castle conservatively rejects the idea of change as fundamental in our world and institutes an order in defiance of a natural chaos, or at least, in opposition to the unstable earthly existence which spinning vortices suggest.

In his 1800 Doldabern Castle (fig. 7), Turner would seem to turn Hearne's Caister Castle on its head, as in this painting the artist's eye is directed upward towards the darkly threatening gothic edifice and intimidating angry sky, whose clouds, painted in elliptical broad strokes, appear to rush ominously as if a wind was violently blowing. The diminutive figures of soldiers in the bottom foreground are dwarfed not only by the castle but by the monstrous, shadowy rocky mountains which rise up intimidatingly before them. Here, the worthy warrior, one of society's elite, is positively dominated by riotous natural forces.

The lines which Turner attached to this painting also

uncover thematic content:

How awful is the silence of the water,  
Where nature lifts her mountains to the sky.  
Majestic solitude, behold the tower  
Where hopeless OWEN, long imprison'd, pin'd,  
And wrung his hands for liberty, in vain.

Turner's words reveal his purpose to depict that prison fortress which held Owen, the Welsh prince, from 1254 to 1277. Here, the nobleman is manacled, shut up behind dungeon walls, not to be set free to assume his once powerful role in society. In Turner's landscapes, the balances of power shift as no one's status remains changeless in the forever-metamorphasizing universe this artist visualizes.

Turner's Snowstorm: Hannibal and His Army crossing the Alps (fig. 8) uses the same compositional principles to reiterate themes analogous to those expressed in Doldabern Castle as this description of the painting provided by Diana Hirsh in The World of Turner reveals:

By custom, painters arranged such historical and mythological scenes in horizontal and verticals planes that yielded a foreground, middleground and background. To achieve the dramatic effect he wanted in Hannibal, however, Turner substituted the circular swirl of a storm for the traditional verticals and horizontals. The soldiers, interrupted in their plundering of a mountain village by the storm, cringe beneath its exaggerated vortex. Here Turner has repeated one of his favorite themes—men humbled by nature's titanic force. (72)

And, here, great warriors and the fearless conquering Hannibal become prey to the whims of nature.

Turner even pictures himself directly confronting the

reality of the volatility of nature in his 1802-3 seascape painting Calais Pier, With French Poissards Preparing for Sea: An English Packet Arriving (fig. 9) in which the artist reflects on his own experience of being "Nearly Swamped" (qtd. in Gordon 72) as he passed through Calais on his first journey abroad. In a succession of sweeping circuitous lines, Turner depicts the fitful sea during a storm and, with similarly rounded strokes, he mirrors the water's ferocity in the dark clouds above. Turner suggests that the man-made pier and boats, populated with cowering figures, may not withstand the brutality of the combined force of wind and water. The artist, rather than being disconnected from the scene like Wordsworth, is a participant in the action: one of the many trembling at his dilemma and no more apt than any other to survive the situation. Nature seems ignorant of all social order as, here, all hierarchies created by human beings are leveled by the crushing spirals of indiscriminate winds. This work is another example that might document Paulson's argument that "we can regard Turner's sublime as the shrinkage of the human in relation to the natural phenomenon: man's insignificance in the face of nature" (78). Nature in Turner's paintings is frighteningly tumultuous and entirely insensitive to human predicament, and inspires in its viewer awe and a sense of sublimity. If a greater order exists, it is insensible to the ordinary mind which cannot comprehend its infiniteness

or its eternity.

Unlike Turner's embracement in his art of the mystery of nature, or his acceptance of the human race's ill-equipment to understand God's design, the landscape visions of Hearne, Constable, Gainsborough, and Wordsworth affirm the rightness and "naturalness" of man's organization, following God's prescription, of a "closed" society which pits the rustic at the lowest level. Such an unequivocal philosophical standpoint intimated by the fixity of the landscapist's arrangements is further indicated by their own entrenchment in a chosen spot of a hillside in their works ("entrenchment in" rather than "integration with"). Their often elevated height, rather than being a source of anxiety, reassuringly provides them a clear perspective on a physical scene which is reflective of their inner vision. Instead of dallying imprudently on the edge of a precipitous cliff poised to embrace the sublime or the unknown, their position would appear secure as neither the suggestion of forthcoming twisting winds by darkening skies nor the depiction of a perilously close headlong declivity threatens to dislodge the formidable figure of the artist or poet intent upon his own convictions. In contrast to the vertiginous views of those such as Turner which suggest disorder and volatility, Hearne's, Gainsborough's, Constable's, as well as Wordsworth's prospects are tidy microcosmic slices of a harmonious macrocosm, which lend to

feelings of assurance in the observing landscapist as well as in an unskeptical reader of the poem or viewer of the painting.

Poets and artists required this feeling of security as they wandered far out into nature and away from civilized society; they needed to be certain that, even in the wilds of England, they were still part of a natural elite: still the decorous, gentile, rational nobility whose power and position could not be threatened by the disorder and chaos of nature. This anxiety over the possibility of one losing rational sense and becoming victim to one's own ungovernable feelings can be seen in the writings of this period. For example, in the following paragraph from "A Journey to the Western Islands," Samuel Johnson intimates that a relationship with powerful nature can leave one vulnerable, sapped of energy, or otherwise weakened as one confronts a force much more potent than oneself:

the imagination excited by the view of an unknown and untravelled wilderness are not such as arise in the artificial solitude of parks and gardens...man is made unwillingly acquainted with his own weakness, and meditation shows him only how little he can sustain, and how little he can perform. (645)

The prudent poet or artist then remains outside the scene peeping in, distanced from enervating nature.

Thomas Warton, Jr.'s "The Suicide" (1770) is a cautionary poem that further argues the dangers of the thinking person's becoming closely aligned with the natural

world and relinquishing civilized society. Warton writes that the dejected man whom the poem is titled after (a poet like the poem's persona) squandered his hours in antisocial meditation having heedlessly abandoned the "social board" (29) to join volatile nature: "Full oft, unknowing and unknown/He wore his endless noons alone,/Amid th' autumnal wood" (25-7). The melancholy figure forfeits the consolation which companionship offers as well as the creative stimulus of eager patrons and metropolitan life to center his attention on the "tumbling flood" (30) which only beckons "the wretch to torments new" (31), as isolated in nature, his imagination runs rampant without boundaries as "misery's form his fancy drew" (53).

The persona of "The Suicide," however, stays cautiously aloof, distanced, while observing the suicidal poet whose erratic peregrinations he tracks, not offering any assistance. It may be that the persona unconsciously desires the death of what the melancholic poet represents to him: man become too excruciatingly sensitive due to an unhealthy, too-intimate alliance with turbulent nature, a union which decimates the suicide's literary potency. It does seem ironic that the poet would be "too late" (16) to prevent the self-slaughtering yet be within close enough proximity to his subject to mark his "varying face" (14) and his anguished mutterings. His remove from the suicide is more than a few yards of physical distance as an

intellectual divide exists between self-controlling spectator and careless romantic.

The artist or poet is then the disembodied overseer existing just outside the earthly scene in the realm of ideas while the figure in the landscape is the representation of human being as sensuous terrestrial creature. As mentioned before, Wordsworth, however, did indeed join nature by lying supine on the sun-lit, grassy fields of Britain, and here he differs from the Augustans. But, though Wordsworth embraced the land fully and even resided in a country cottage for a time, he never severed himself from his social peers or gave up his poetic career which kept him in contact with England's high culture establishment. Warton, in "The Suicide" suggests that human beings minus their social constructions, intellectual thoughts, and culturally-defined morality roam unsafeguarded from the violence, disorder, and savagery of the world.

In "The Suicide," the persona finds the social institution of religion to function as a buffer, protecting the human race from the brutal realities of nature which God allows to exist for His own reasons. The cherub-voice tells the poet,

Just Heav'n, man's fortitude to prove,  
Permits through life at large to rove  
The tribes of hell-born Woe:  
Yet the same power that wisely sends  
Life's fiercest ills, indulgent lends  
Religion's golden shield to break th' embattled  
foe. (85-90)

Without that defensive barrier that culture provides and nature does not, human beings are left unprotected from their own irrationality and animalistic emotionalism and indistinct from inhabitants of the wild.

Similar to Constable and Hearne's formal grounding of their rustics in the cultivated landscape, Warton images the suicide as having become a component of the countryside; or at least nature aligns itself with the dangerously depressed poet, having anthropomorphically taken on his morbid mind:

Lowered the grim morn, in murky dyes  
Damp mists involved the scowling skies,  
And dimm'd the struggling day;  
As by the brook, that ling'ring lane  
Yon rush-grown moor with sable waves,  
Full of the dark resolve he took his sullen way.  
(7-12)

Then in death, he becomes reintegrated with nature, a part of the soil that feeds organic life; and though the persona entreats that his body not be fodder for thorn and nightshade, it most likely will:

Then wish not o'er his earthly tomb  
The baleful nightshade's lurid bloom  
To drop its deadly dew:  
Nor oh! forbid the twisted thorn,  
That rudely binds his turf forlorn,  
With spring's green-swelling buds to vegetate anew.  
(55-60)

Warton's suicide relinquishes his individualized identity and becomes a part of the countryside.

The poet, before committing suicide, loses his identity and becomes part of the landscape by relinquishing his

communicative powers (poetic and otherwise) as a consequence of his leaving the community of friends, family, fellow writers, and patrons. He was once "the youth whose genius high/ Could build the genuine rhyme" (38-9) but was beguil'd by "treach'rous magic" (44) from her bosom and mutters only words indecipherable to the persona before committing his self-murder. Correspondingly, in the case of Wordsworth's solitary reaper, the figure in the landscape has no real expression in the poem, as its reader is not privy to the words of her song (probably a Gaelic tune), or a translation of their meaning. Though the persona insists she sings, the reader of the poem cannot hear her, and because of her true voicelessness, her tongue is as fettered as her feet. The same can be claimed of the rustics of the painted landscapes who muse silently; by being branded mute, the rustics are again prevented from evolving into individualized identities who transcend their environment, remaining instead inextricable components of the agrarian topography and existing, without hope of change, in a subordinate level of a tightly constructed social arrangement.

In Caister Castle Hearne illustrates the woodman, through "formal correspondences" (Birmingham 32) in the lines of the painting, as inextricably conjoined with his natural environ. An incorporated part of the landscape itself, the woodman broods near lurking trees, reposing against a scabrous hillside, his own bent lineaments

blending with the broken lines of his discordant surroundings. He appears an extension of the shade: his elbow is cocked and his leg is thrust outward so that his leaning position creates an illusion that he is not in the sun at all but a part of the dark sweep of landscape shielded from its light. Hearne characterizes the woodman as being one with his surroundings no less than an animal or a tree would be, because, as he would seem to presuppose, the native rustic lives in natural, comfortable harmony with the world which sustains him. Hearne would seem to be of the mind of Wordsworth, who writes in his Preface To "Lyrical Ballads" that low and rustic life was generally chosen as subject matter for his art, "because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature" (597).

The impulse to interconnect the rustic with the environment in a framework of an idealized agrarian fiction resurfaces also in Constable's The Cornfield. Here the shepherd boy takes sustenance from nurturant nature with his face submerged beneath the water's surface as he lies prone, clinging to the earth (but he does so with joyful inhibition unlike Warton's poet/suicide who "grasp'd in agony the ground" after knifing himself [18]). In Constable's painting, the boy's figure fuses with the uneven ground, his distinguishing face hidden and his chestnut-colored boy's britches, undefined and fluid, mixing colors with the

surrounding dirt and plant-life. Even less discernable from the landscape are the three adult figures in the painting: the two in the background are mere color blots above the cornfield horizon and the third, his face blurred unrecognizably and his lower-half hidden by a fence, rises up stalk-like out of the overwhelmingly abundant field in which he labors, an organic offspring of fertility. The heads of the two in the background are bent so that the farm-workers themselves are patterned after the contour of the scythe, the tool of their travails, perhaps, and hopefully unconsciously, intimating that they are less individuals than equipment owned and implemented by the land's proprietor. John Barrell argues that Constable's reason for reducing his figures "until they merge insignificantly with the landscape" and for painting them "as indistinctly as possible" was to avoid the embarrassment of imaging the poor "as they really are" and to "evade question of their actuality" (134). However, rather than trying to blur his figures to hide them from view (though he may indeed have been concealing their poverty), Constable was attempting to expose them openly and distinctly as inextricable parts of the natural environment.

Conversely from the depictions of minute rustic figures in the landscape, large, frontal full-figured portraits of members of the gentry biding time in the English countryside were produced in this period. The unempowered peasant was

certainly more vulnerable to being stifled than the haughty aristocratic subjects who dominated the era of portraiture whose eyes leer directly out from paintings and appear to look past the artist or the painting's viewer. In these paintings, the subject is only dubiously connected by formal correspondences to the landscape which serves as background, such as in several works by Thomas Gainsborough. Ann Bermingham writes, these correlations between subject and background which Gainsborough creates appear contrived and a part of a compositional scheme "in which the artifice of the artist is evident" (32). She writes that this estrangement is most pronounced in Gainsborough's 1753-4 John Plampin (fig. 10), in which the uniformed figure rests against a tree, with his legs splayed out in an informal manner and his unbuttoned jacket in a state of disarray. These tensions created between gentleman and nature in portraits such as the one of Plampin would seem purposeful as Gainsborough would not want to offend by showing the sophisticated to be as intimate with nature as the rustic.

An attempt, similar to Gainsborough's, to connect a gentleman to his surroundings only loosely is discernable in Sir Henry Raeburn's Walter Scott (1808) (fig. 11), in which the meditating writer, journal and pen in hand, seems at first glance to meld harmoniously with the ruinous wall that serves as a backdrop (his dark coat and black hair being almost indistinguishable from the unlit stone behind him).

Scott's overly-relaxed position and his careless dress, however, belie a lack of authentic connection with his environment; and he appears posed. Rather than being on level with the landscape, the figure of Walter Scott perches on the stone edifice almost as if it were a throne and he a stately prince overseeing his territory. Though he is not a prince, he is an established poet with the authority and privilege which that imposing status grants him in society.

Only that portion of the ancient architecture which provides Scott his resting-place is visible in this cropping of the landscape, and that crumbling facade appears diminished in juxtaposition to the vitality of the poet, a predominant figure in the age of revolution. The ignited soul of the writer is represented in the drawing by the illumination of head and breast, the light having no apparent source other than the life-force emanating from the poet. His hands are similarly luminous, signifying their role in the creation of a present unmanacled by the bleakness of rules and convention. He sits metaphorically upon the building blocks of tradition—a new prince seeking an altered destiny for his country and his culture; inspired but not restrained by the past, he melds only partially with his background as he emerges from the dark morass of receding history.

The poet in Raeburn's painting could perhaps be labeled a Wordsworthian type: a "Prophet of Nature" whose aim it is

to glean a spiritual message from nature so that he can remit to others what he has deduced with his superior insight. He is the interpreter of nature for those lacking expository powers. This is perhaps why the figure of Walter Scott, not the landscape, is central in this painting. We are not even privy to the landscape that the poet surveys and that of his environ which we can see is diminutive in comparison to the figure of the man. Like Wordsworth, Raeburn's Scott reigns over the landscape, detached from it, as a great poet, perhaps finding it his duty to "Instruct [men] how the mind of man becomes/A thousand times more beautiful than the earth/On which he dwells..." (Prelude, Book XIII, 446-8).

Whether great poet, venerated painter, cultured aristocrat, or landowner, the empowered in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were portrayed as detached overseers, superior and mobile, in the pictorial and literary landscape. However, it should not be claimed that the great landscapists were without genuine sympathy for the land and its people as their work demonstrates great sentiment, inspiration, and emotion. The themes of oppression and domination are certainly covert and only recognizable when placed in a social and political context, and, therefore, were probably beyond the artist or poet's power to detect. It remains, however, that despite the landscapist's professed love of nature, their move out into

nature was concomitant with a paradoxical discernable withdrawal from the land as they, consciously or not, defensively and ardently sought to sustain the gap between themselves and the rural countryside's denizens. And their romanticizing of country life as pastoral sanctuary still appears a monumental effort to deny the reality that the poor peasant's marriage to the rural land was not always a desired one but, often, one made and kept for economic reasons.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

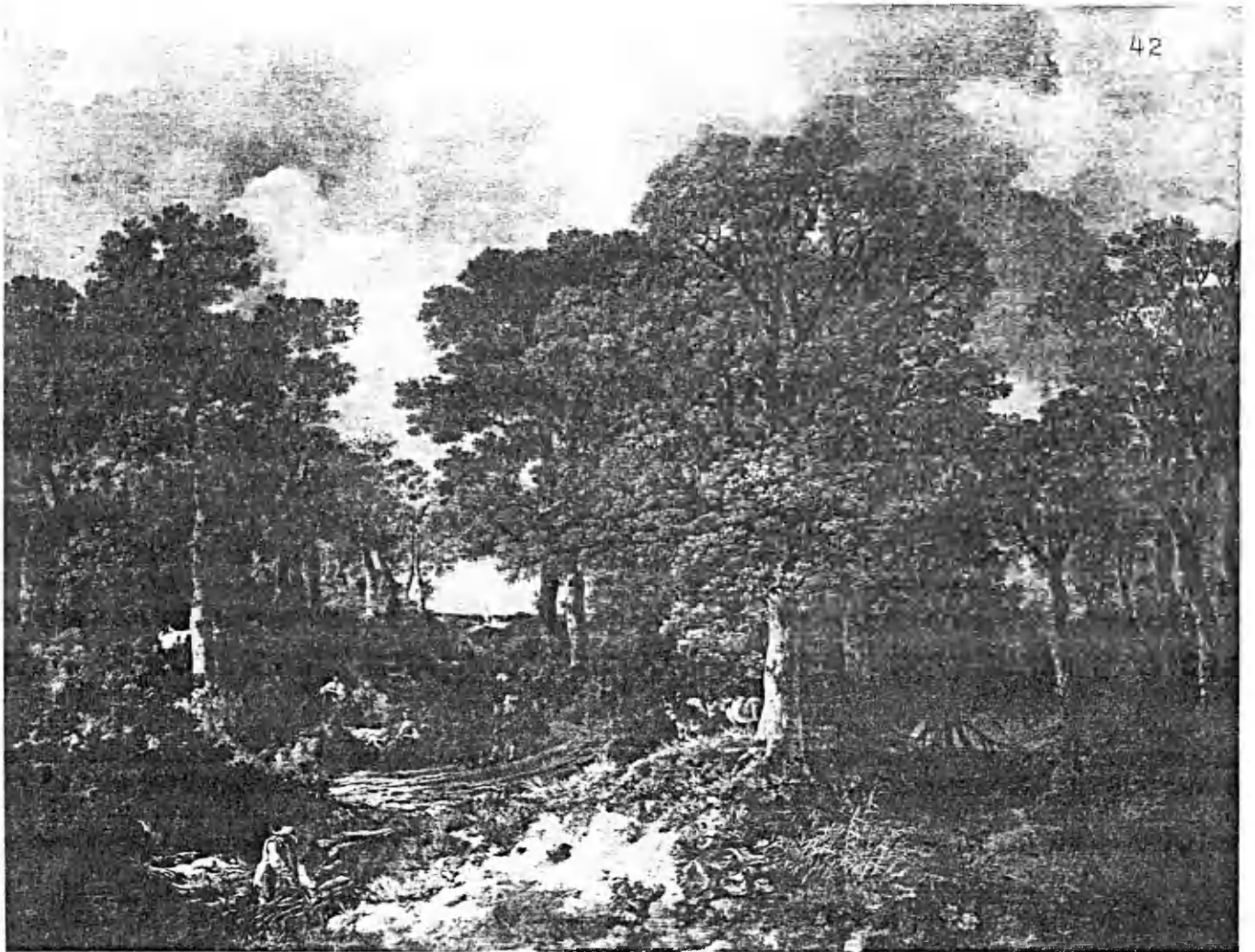


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

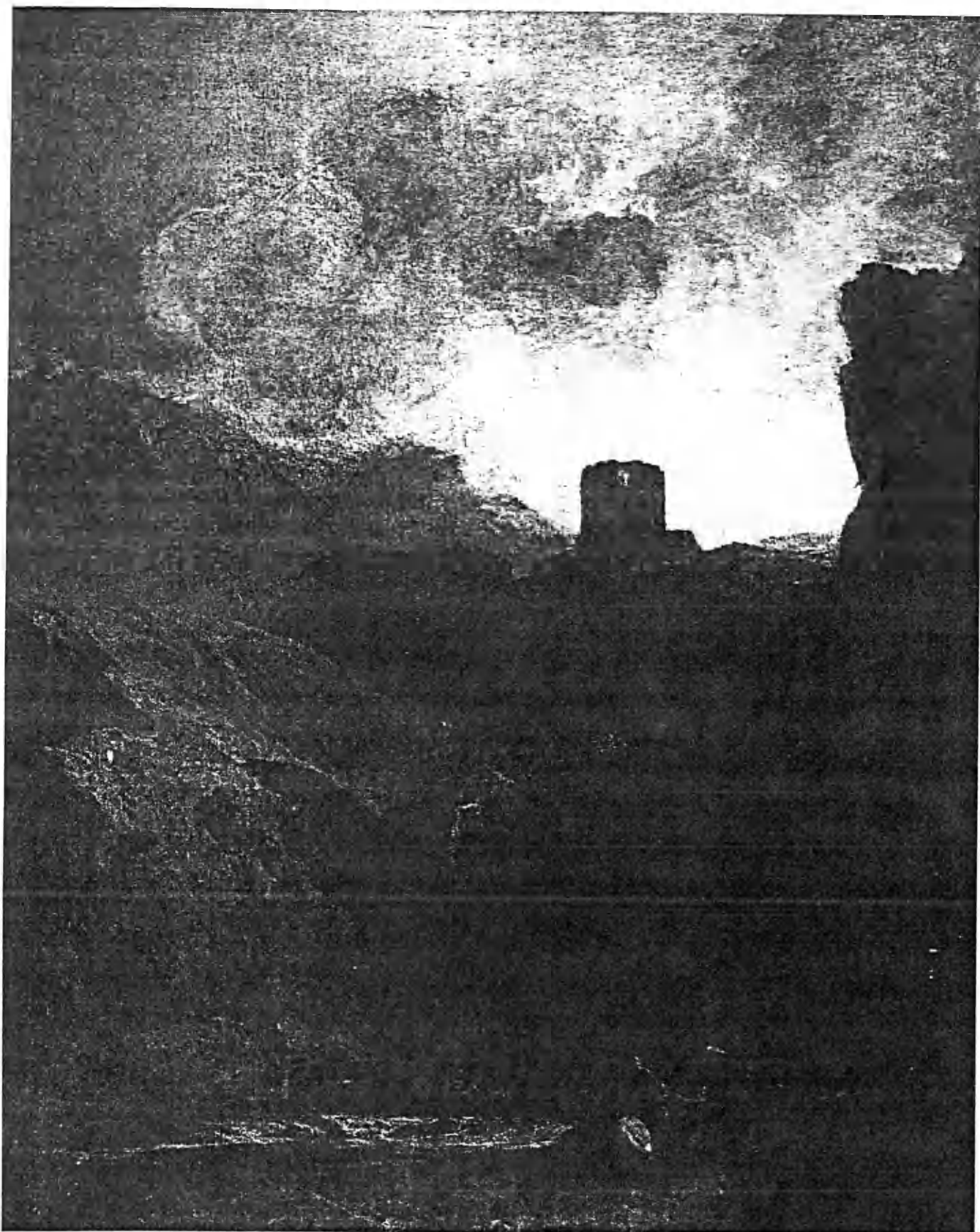
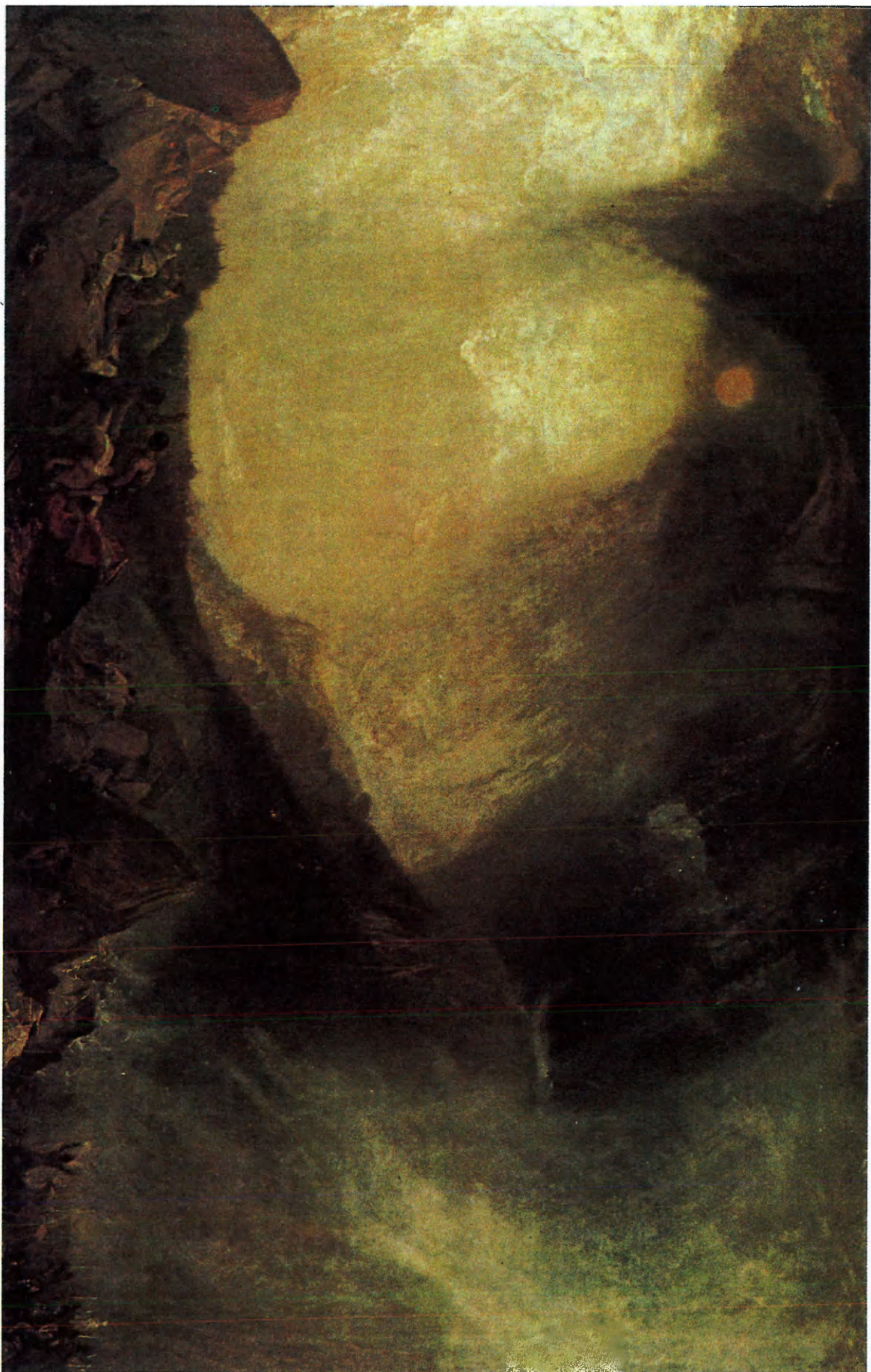


Fig. 7



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Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

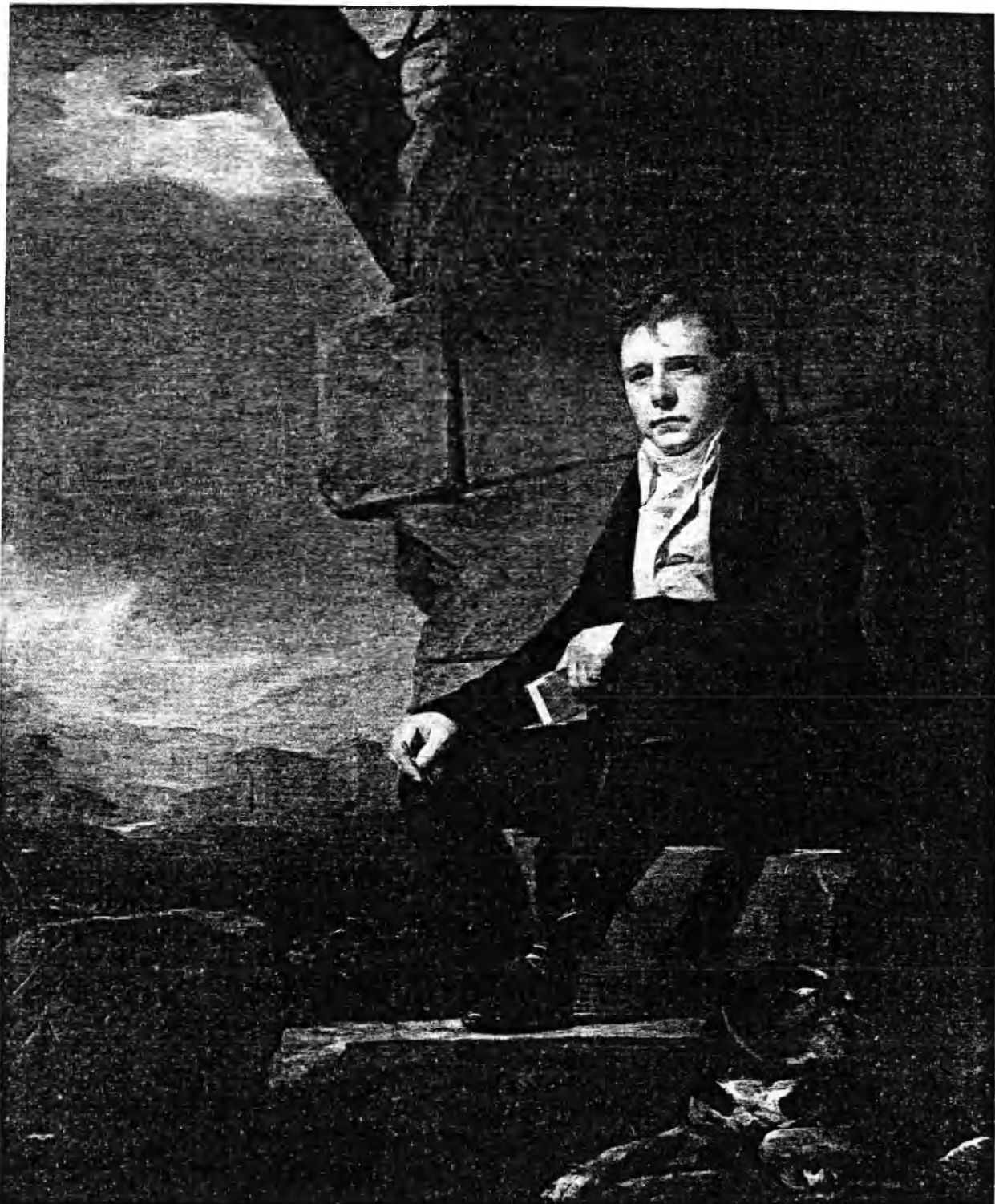


Fig. 11

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