

Innovative Landscape Painting in Britain

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Looking at landscape paintings will involve us in understanding a wonderful and complex process that can offer the opportunity to invigorate and renew us. The process that may begin in the land we are looking at, or in a memory of it, what the painting becomes may involve invention. We can look at this artefact of human ingenuity again and again and it can provide a place for contemplation and sustenance.

When we look at anything we are involved in a very complex set of processes. Some of these processes are very rapid, continuous and varied. Initially this means the reception of light in the retina of each eye which almost instantaneously involves the brain in an activity that formulates images. We may not need detailed information about these processes for looking and reading a landscape painting, but it will be useful to recognise that looking and reading are not simple or straight-forward activities.

Here is a partly self-evident, seven point summary of initial addresses:

- The landscape involves a combination of the natural conditions (Nature) and human industry (such as farming or mining). 'The combined effects of human activity over the millennia include the creation of extensively altered, highly cosmopolitan species assemblages on all landmasses. "Pristine" landscapes simply do not exist and, in most cases, have not existed for millennia. Most landscapes are palimpsests shaped by repeated episodes of human activity over multiple millennia.'¹
- Looking at pictures always involves looking from a particular cultural position. 'From the technology of representation to its psychology and politics, in any society the representation of landscape involves the entire values of the culture.'² Clive Bush.²
- Pictures are factured by artists, but also rely on the aesthetic reception of the viewer.
- Looking at pictures involves sustained attention by the perceiver, the viewer.
- Pictures have structures and designs as a consequence of artistic facture.
- Innovations are a consequence of artistic facture that can involve the need for innovative viewing.

¹ Nicole L. Boivina, Melinda A. Zederc, Dorian Q. Fuller (傅稻镰), Alison Crowtherf, Greger Larsong, Jon M. Erlandsonh, Tim Denhami, and Michael D. Petragliaa, 'Ecological consequences of human niche construction: Examining long-term anthropogenic shaping of global species distributions', edited by Richard G. Klein, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 113, no. 23, 6393, June 7, 2016.

² Clive Bush, 'On Location: Landscape in the Western', *Holding the Line. Selected Essays in American Literature and Culture*, Oxford, Bern &c.: Peter Lang, 2009, 291.

- In art the dominant function is aesthetic, but other functions (decorative, educational, political) may be part of the experience

In this text I have made a series of extracts from writings about landscape painting. Before that, here are a few indicators of, what might on the surface appear to be straight-forward, the complexity of looking.

The physiologist David H. Hubel writes, ‘When we look at the outside world, the primary event is that light is focused on an array of 125 million receptors in the retina of each eye. The receptors, called *rods* and *cones*, are nerve cells specialised to emit electrical signals when light hits them. The task of the rest of the retina and of the brain proper is to make sense of these signals, to extract information that is biologically useful to us. The result is the scene as we perceive it, with all its intricacy of form, depth, movement, colour, and texture.’³

Our receptive field is a combination of overlapping processes. For our purposes, looking at and understanding a landscape and a landscape painting involves attention. Rita Carter helps to make aspects of this clearer. ‘Attention,’ she writes, ‘is necessary for thinking, and possibly for consciousness. The brain constantly scans the environment for stimuli. This is done largely by automatic mechanisms in the brainstem. ... Attention requires three elements: arousal, orientation, focus.

‘Arousal is dependent on a group of nuclei in the midbrain — the top of the brainstem — called the Reticular Activating System. The core of the brain stem is made up of neurons that have unusually long dendrites stretching up and down. Some of these travel right up to the cortex. Some of them are responsible for consciousness ... When they are stimulated they release a flood of neurotransmitters, which sets neurons firing throughout the brain. The ones known to be particularly involved in activating the prefrontal lobe are dopamine and noradrenaline. Stimulation of this group of reticular neurons also creates alpha brainwaves ... which are associated with alertness.

‘Orientation is done by neurons in the superior colliculus and parietal cortex. The superior colliculus turns the eyes to ... new stimulus, while the parietal cortex disengages attention from the current stimulus. ...

‘Focus is brought about by the lateral pulvinar — a part of the thalamus — which operates rather like a spotlight, turning to shine on the stimulus. Once it is locked on, it shunts information about the target to the frontal lobes, which then lock on and maintain attention.’⁴

³ David H. Hubel. *Eye, Brain, and Vision*, New York: Scientific American Library, 1988, p. 2.

⁴ Rita Carter in consultation with Christopher Frith. *Mapping the Mind*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998, pp. 186-87.

In the early sixteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci wrote, 'If a painter wants to see fair women to kindle his love, he has the power to create them, and if he desires to see monstrosities to arouse his fear, his amusement and laughter or even his compassion, he is their Lord and Creator. And if he wishes to bring forth sites or deserts, cool and shady places in times of heat or warm spots when it is cold, he fashions them. So if he desires valleys or wishes to discover vast tracts of land from mountain peaks and look at the sea on the distant horizon beyond them, it is in his power; and so if he wants to look up to the high mountains from low valleys, or from high mountains towards the deep valleys and coastline. In fact, whatever exists in the universe either potentially or actually or in the imagination, he has it first in his mind and then in his hands, and these (images) are of such excellence, that they present the same proportioned harmony to a single glance as belong to the things themselves ...'⁵

The eleventh-century artist Sung Ti is reported to have criticised the landscape paintings of Ch'en Yung-chih in the following way: 'The technique in this is very good but there is a want of natural effect. You should choose an old tumbledown wall and throw over it a piece of white silk. Then, morning and evening you should gaze at it until, at length, you can see the ruins through the silk, its prominences, its levels, its zig-zags, and its cleavages, storing them up in your mind and fixing them in your eyes. Make the prominences your mountains, the lower part your water, the hollows your ravines, the cracks your streams, the lighter parts your nearest points, the darker parts your more distant points. Get all these thoroughly into you, and soon you will see men, birds, plants, and trees, flying and moving among them. You may then ply your brush according to your fancy, and the result will be of heaven, not men. Ch'en's eyes were opened and from that time his style improved.'⁶

'A painter cannot be said to aim at universality in art, unless he love equally every species of that art. For instance, if he delights only in landscape, this can be esteemed only as a simple investigation; and, as our friend Botticelli remarks, is but a vain study; since, by throwing a sponge impregnated with various colours against a wall, it leaves some spots upon it, which may appear like a landscape.'⁷ Leonardo de Vinci.⁷

Much of Leonardo's writing was translated into English in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1756 Edmund Burke wrote: 'Among colours, such as are soft, or cheerful, (except perhaps a strong red

⁵ *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* with an introduction by Edward MacCurdy, volume one, 1938, London: 1954, pp. 111-12.

⁶ Ch'en Yung-chih, quoted by H.A. Giles. *An Introduction to the History of Chinese Pictorial Art*, Shanghai and Leiden, 1905, p. 100.

⁷ Leonardo da Vinci. *A Treatise on Painting*, pp. 500-01. The collection of essays derives from the manuscripts gathered together after Leonardo's death in 1519 by Francesco Meizi, a painter and member of Leonardo's household. It was first printed in French and Italian as *Trattato della pittura* by Raffaello du Fresne in 1651 and first translated into English by an unnamed author in 1721 and then by John Francis Rigaud, published London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1835.

which is cheerful) are unfit to produce grand images. An immense mountain covered with a shining green turf, is nothing in this respect, to one dark and gloomy; the cloudy sky is more grand than the blue; and night more sublime and solemn than day. ... when the highest degree of the sublime is intended, the materials and ornaments ought neither to be white, nor green, nor yellow, nor blue, nor of a pale red, nor violet, nor spotted, but of sad and fuscous colours, as black, or brown, or deep purple, and the like.’ Edmund Burke.⁸

‘In the study of our art, as in the study of all arts, something is the result of *our own* observation of Nature; something, and that not a little, the effect of the example of those who have studied the same Nature before us, and who have cultivated before us the same art, with diligence and success. The less we confine ourselves in the choice of those examples, the more advantage we shall derive from them, and the nearer we shall bring our performances to a correspondence with nature and the great general rules of art. When we draw our examples from remote and revered antiquity, — with some advantage undoubtedly in that selection, — we subject ourselves to some inconveniences.’ Joshua Reynolds.⁹

One of the main foci in the histories of landscape painting in the Western tradition finds origination in the Hellenistic era and in the art of ancient Rome. Renaissance theorists wrote of landscape in terms of pleasure and described the solace offered by decorative landscape frescoes. The first writer to discuss the aesthetics of landscape was Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo in 1584.¹⁰ His work was preceded by many painters, in particular in the work of Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer. In the 18th century thought about landscape was enriched by new aesthetic ideals. One continually evoked is that of Edmund Burke’s treatise on the Sublime and the Beautiful. Subsequently writings by William Gilpin (1768-92) and Uvedale Price (1794-6) created the Picturesque, a third idealistic category between Burke’s distinctions.

For example, in 1796 Uvedale Price wrote: ‘A good landscape is that in which all the parts are free and unconstrained, but in which, though some are prominent and highly illuminated, and others in shade and retirement; some rough, and others more smooth and polished, yet they are all necessary to the beauty, energy, effect, and harmony of the whole. I do not see how a good government can be more exactly defined.’¹¹

⁸ Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1756, James T. Boulton (ed.) London, 1958, pp. 81-82.

⁹ Joshua Reynolds. The Fourteenth Discourse, December 10, 1788. Roger Fry (ed.). *Joshua Reynolds, Discourses delivered to the students of the Royal Academy*, London: Seeley & Co., 1905.

¹⁰ Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo. *Trattato dell’arte della pittura* (Libro VI, vol. lxii; Milan, 1584). Lomazzo gave an account of different categories of landscape, which drew distinctions of lasting importance between ‘privileged places’, enriched with noble architecture, wild landscapes, with forests, rocks and stones, and ‘places of delight’ with fountains, fields and gardens.

¹¹ Sir Uvedale Price, *Essay on the Picturesque*, 1796: 39

‘Nature could never have become “picturesque” for us unless we ... had acquired the habit of seeing it in pictorial terms. Richard Payne Knight (1805) ... knew very well that the search for picturesque beauty that sent poets and painters to the Lakeland was a search for motifs that reminded the art lover of paintings, preferably those of Claude and Poussin.’ Gombrich.¹²

‘Carl Gustav Carus ... anticipated [Alois] Riegl in his interpretation of the history of art as a movement from touch to vision. Wanting to plead for the recognition of landscape painting as the great art of the future, he based his advocacy on the laws of historical inevitability: “The development of the senses in any organism begins with feeling, with touch. The more subtle senses of hearing and seeing emerge only when the organism perfects itself. In almost the same manner, mankind began with sculpture. What man formed had to be massive, solid, tangible. This is the reason why painting . . . always belongs to a later phase Landscape art ... pre-supposes a higher degree of development.”’ E.H. Gombrich and Carus (1835).¹³

‘A work of art [is] “a corner of nature seen through a temperament.”’ Gombrich and Emile Zola (1866).¹⁴

In the late nineteenth century, John Ruskin wrote: ‘Landscape painting is the thoughtful and passionate representation of the physical conditions appointed for human existence. It imitates the aspects, and records the phenomena, of the visible things which are dangerous or beneficial to [humankind]; and displays the human methods of dealing with these, and of enjoying them or suffering from them, which are either exemplary or deserving of sympathetic contemplation’¹⁵

‘Should we believe the photograph represents the ‘objective truth’ while the painting records the artist’s subjective vision—the way [they] transformed ‘what [they] saw’ ? Can we here compare ‘the image on the retina’ with the ‘image in the mind’? Such speculations easily lead into a morass of unprovable. Take the image on the artist’s retina. It sounds scientific enough, but actually there never was *one* such image which we could single out for comparison with either photograph or painting. What there was was an endless succession of innumerable images as the painter scanned the landscape in front of [themselves], and these images sent a complex pattern of impulses through the

¹² E.H. Gombrich. *Art and Illusion. A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London: Phaidon Press, 1960, p. 265.

¹³ E.H. Gombrich. *Ibid.* p. 16. Gombrich is quoting from Carl Gustave Carus. *Neun Briefe über die Landschaftsmaleri* (1815-34), Leibzig, 1835, 5th letter, p. 81.

¹⁴ Gombrich *Ibid.* p. 55. Gombrich is quoting from Emile Zola. *Mes Hines*, Paris, 1866, *Collection des Oeuvres complètes Emile Zola*, Paris, n.d. XXIII, 176.

¹⁵ John Ruskin. *Lectures on Landscape. The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, publisher: Crown of Wild Olive, Time & Tide, 1871, p. 9.

optic nerves to [their] brain. Even the artist knew nothing of these events, and we know even less. How far the picture that formed in [their] mind corresponded to or deviated from the photograph it is even less profitable to ask. What we do know is that these artists went out into nature to look for material for a picture and their artistic wisdom led them to organise the elements of the landscape into works of art of marvellous complexity that bear as much relationship to a surveyor's record as a poem bears to a police report.' Gombrich.¹⁶

'It would be interesting if some real authority investigated carefully the part which memory plays in painting. We look at the object with an intent regard, then at the palette, and thirdly at the canvas. The canvas receives a message dispatched usually a few seconds before from the natural object. But it has come through a post office *en route*. It has been transmitted in code. It has been turned from light into paint. It reaches the canvas a cryptogram. Not until it has been placed in its correct relation to everything else that is on the canvas can it be deciphered, is its meaning apparent, is it translated once again from mere pigment into light. And the light this time is not of Nature but of Art.' Winston S. Churchill.¹⁷

'Having looked at Constable's creations we may ... see clouds in a fresh way. If so, we will owe this heightened awareness to the memory of the images created by art. May it not be argued that when the grand classical manner of narrative painting died a natural death in the eighteenth century, it was this new function of art which brought landscape painting to the fore and compelled the artist to intensify the search for particular truths?' Gombrich.¹⁸

For John Berger, 'Landscapes, of all the categories of oil painting, is the one to which our argument applies least. Prior to the recent interest in ecology, nature was not thought of as the object of the activities of capitalism; rather it was thought of as the arena in which capitalism and social life and each individual life had its being. Aspects of nature were objects of scientific study, but nature-as-a-whole defied possession.

One might put this even more simply. The sky has no surface and is intangible; the sky cannot be turned into a thing or given a quantity. And landscape painting begins with the problem of painting sky and distance.

The first pure landscapes [were] painted in Holland in the seventeenth century ... Landscape painting was, from its inception, a relatively independent activity. Its painters naturally inherited and so, to a large extent, were forced to continue the methods and norms of the tradition. But each time the tradition of oil painting was significantly modified, the first initiative came from landscape painting. From the seventeenth century onwards the exceptional innovators in terms of vision and therefore technique were Ruysdael, Rembrandt (the use of light in his later work derived from his landscape studies), Constable (in his sketches), Turner and, at the end of the period, Monet

¹⁶ Gombrich *Ibid.* pp. 57-58.

¹⁷ Winston S. Churchill. *Painting as a Pastime*, London: Oldhams Press, 1949, pp. 28-29.

¹⁸ Gombrich *Ibid.* pp. 155-52.

and the Impressionists. Furthermore, their innovations led progressively away from the substantial and tangible towards the indeterminate and intangible.¹⁹

Kenneth Clark wrote an appraisal of landscape painting in 1946.²⁰ ‘In his early years,’ Clark noted, ‘Turner was able to produce the most marketable of all collectors’ items, watercolours of picturesque scenery. ... I need not enlarge on the reasons why watercolours of gothic architecture had become so fashionable in the 1780s. They were part of the sentimental — as opposed to the violent — phase of the Romantic movement.’²¹

Clark divided his book into different kinds of landscape: landscapes of symbols, of fact, of fantasy, and then discussion of ideal landscape and natural vision, followed by a chapter on the work of

¹⁹ John Berger. *Ways of Seeing*, London & Harmondsworth: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 104-05.

²⁰ Kenneth Clark. *Landscape into Art*, John Murray, new edition 1976, originally 1946.

²¹ Kenneth Clark. *The Romantic Rebellion. Romantic versus Classic Art*, London: John Murray & Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1973, p. 224.

Turner and Van Gogh and one on the Impressionists and Cézanne.²² Many opposing views followed and after the 1960s new approaches developed, most of which discuss landscape painting in terms of rhetoric practices, involved in studies of socio-economic context, as the purveyor of ideas about property, status and social class, further attention to wall painting and attention to the intellectual background in which landscape artists worked; other studies have sought parallels between art and literature, and explored the role of metaphor and symbol.²³

John Barrell noted, ‘... in the first place the word “landscape” ... was introduced from the Dutch in the sixteenth century to describe a pictorial representation of countryside, either as the subject itself of a picture, or as the by-work in a portrait, the background scenery behind the main subject.’²⁴ ‘Landskip is a Dutch word, and it is as much as we should say in English landship, or expressing of the land by hills, woods, Castles, seas, vallies, ruines, hanging rocks, Cities, Townes, So: As farre as

²² ‘Landscape of Symbols’, landscape as marking stages in conception of nature; the rise and development since Middle Ages as part of a cycle to create harmony with environment. Symbols of spiritual truths. Prepares way for landscape of symbols. ‘Landscape of Fact’, where facts become ‘art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and, in landscape, this all embracing love is expressed by light’. (33) ‘Landscape of Fantasy’, from an urban population which had long since learnt to control natural forces. ‘Ideal Landscape’, *Ut pictura poesis*, Ovid, Virgil, ‘... Wilson, at his best, understood the two chief lessons of Claude, that the centre of a landscape is an area of light, and that everything must be subordinate to a single mood.’ (139) ‘The Natural Vision’, highlighted by what Clark calls ‘The fabulous successes of Turner took place only thirty years after the failure of Wilson; and in the course of the century landscapes which at least purported to be close imitations of nature, came to hold a more secure place in popular affection than any other form of art.’ (147) ‘The Northern Lights’, where he discusses Turner and Van Gogh, ‘... painters of the midnight sun and the aurora borealis... both were inspired by the landscape of the Mediterranean countries, because only in these could they find that delirium of light which was to release their emotions.’ (181) ‘The Return to Order’, in the work of Impressionism and Cézanne.

Kenneth Clark provides a range of precedents for landscape painting. In abbreviated summary they are: Hellenistic fresco, the Roman House of alibis fresco, the Tacuim Sanitatis manuscript, the Utrecht Psalter C9th, the Canterbury Psalter ca. 1150, C12th mosaics, foliage capitals ca. 1293 Southwell Minster, the Virgil frescoes of birdwatchers ca. 1343, the work of Simone Martini, French tapestry ca. 1510 *Lady with the Unicorn*, Stefano da Zevlo *Virgin in a Rose Garden*, the Cologne School *Paradise Garden*, *The Thebaid* by an unknown Florentine ca. 1410, the Limbourg Brothers *Tres Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Giovanni di Paolo *John in Wilderness*, Liver de Chase de Gaston Phoebus ca. 1400, Benozzo Gozzoli *Journey of the Magi*, Uccello *Hunt in the Wood*, *Occupation of the Months* by an unknown painter ca. 1415, Jan van Eyck *Birth of John the Baptist* from *Hours of Milan* and the *Landing of William of Bavaria* from *Hours of Turin*. Van Eyck *Virgin of Chancellor Rollin* and *St Barbara*, Robert Campin *Nativity*, Konrad Wintz *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, Dürer *View of arch and Pond in a Wood*, Altdorfer *Satyr Family* and *St George*, Grunewald Isenheim altar, Piers di Cosimo *Forest Fire*, Pollaiuolo *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* and *Rape of Dejanira*, Piers Della Francesca reverse of the Montefeltro portrait, Antonella da Messina *Crucifixion*, Giovanni Bellini *St Francis In Wilderness* and *Virgin of the Meadow*, Giorgione *Orpheus and Eurydice*, Mantegna *Virgin of the Quarries*, Leonardo Landscape drawing and *Deluge* Drawing and *Virgin and Child with St Anne*, Lotto *St Jerome*, Patenter *Rest in the Flight into Egypt* and *Charon's Boat*, Bosch triptych *Adoration*, Pieter Brueghel *Winter*, *The Dark Day*, and *Fall of Icarus*, Rembrandt's drawing *Canal with a Rowing Boat*, Jacob van Ruisdael *View near Haarlem* and *The Banks of a River*, Vermeer *View of Delft*.

²³ *Grove Art Online*, url: <http://www.oxfordartonline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/art/T049026>

²⁴ John Barrell. *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840. An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 1.

may be shewed within our Horizon. If it be not drawne by itselſe, or for its own ſake, but in reſpect, and \ for the ſake of ſome thing elſe: it falleth out among thoſe things which we call *Parerga*, which are additions or adiuncts rather of ornament, then otherwiſe neceſſane.

'Peacham associates landscape with *parerga*. By the time he is writing it seems that landscape can be 'drawne ... for its own sake'. In other words, landscape is not automatically relegated to 'by-work'; it is only so when an accompanying subject assumes precedence.'²⁵

'Sometime walking not unſeen
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green,
Right againſt the eaſtern gate,
Where the great ſun begins his ſtate,
Robed in flames, and amber light,
The clouds in thouſand liveries dight,
While the ploughman near at hand,
Whiſtles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid ſingeth blithe,
And the mower whets his ſcythe,
And every ſhepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.
Straight mine eyes hath caught new pleaſures
Whiſt landscape round it meaſures,
Ruſſet lawns, and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do ſtray,
Mountains on whoſe barren breaſt
The labouring clouds do often ret:
Meadows trim with daiſies pied,
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide.'²⁶ John Milton, *L'Allegro*, around 1631.²⁶

Constable's mill-owning family in Suffolk was acutely aware of the Agricultural depression in the years that followed Waterloo which provoked rioting among the labourers desperate for work. John Barrell notes, 'His paintings over the period 1814-24 (including *Boat Building*, *View of Dedham* and *The Hay-Wain*), in order to render the working East Anglian landscapes as he wanted them to be, and to some extent as he remembered them from his childhood, diminish and distance the figures and facial expressions of the labourers so that they seem almost naturalised as part of the landscape—backs turned, heads down or faces hidden by hat brims as they bend to their tasks of reaping, digging, and ploughing.' Barrell further remarks: 'if they obtruded more, if they became less

²⁵ Malcolm Andrews. *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 29.

²⁶ John Milton. *L'Allegro*, lines 57-76. Written probably around summer 1631, published 1645. *John Milton. Complete Shorter Poems*, edited by John Carey, London: Longman, 1968, pp. 135-36.

symbolic, more actualised images of men at work, we would run the risk of focusing on them as men-not as tokens of a calm, endless, and anonymous industry, which confirm the order of society'.²⁷

Kenneth Clark responded to the painting *The Hay Wain* as 'an eternally moving expression of serenity and optimism'.

'However, pictorial naturalism may imply, but does not ensure, social realism. *The Hay Wain* was painted in Constable's London home, in a very different world both from the Suffolk farmlands of his childhood, and from the contemporary scenes there of poverty and rioting among the labourers. In 1823 he wrote to his close friend, Archdeacon Fisher, who had strong ties with Suffolk parishes and some proprietorial interest in the land there:

'Though I am here in the midst of the world I am out of it—and am happy—and endeavour to keep myself unspoiled. I have a kingdom of my own both fertile & populous—my landscape and my children.'²⁸

Fisher had first option on buying *The Hay Wain*, but had to relinquish his claim, 'Let your ... Hay Cart go to Paris ... I am too much pulled down by agricultural distress to hope to possess it.'²⁹

For Malcolm Andrews, 'Landscape art ... has from early on been implicated in nationalist, imperialist and socio-economic ideologies, and often most potently so when, superficially, least touched by suggestions of any political agenda. This is not a matter of past history only. The heightened consciousness in the western world about the environment in the late twentieth century makes us increasingly aware of what, in different ways, has always pertained: landscape is a political text.'³⁰

'Turner's concern to embed himself in the experience of the play of natural forces, and to let that experience dictate the terms on which the landscape image is constructed, is a new development in the relationship between the artist and the natural world. It advances one to further those moves towards a more sustained practice of open-air painting, which European landscapists had undertaken over the previous 60 years or so, in order to immerse themselves in the same elements they were recording ...'³¹

²⁷ Barrell, 1972, p. 28

²⁸ Letter from Constable (in London) to Fisher, 9 May 1823; *John Constable's Correspondence*, edited by R.B. Beckett, Suffolk Records Society, 1968, VII, p.116.

²⁹ Letter from Fisher to Constable, January 1824, *ibid*, VI, p.151.

³⁰ Malcolm Andrews. *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 172-75.

³¹ Andrews 1999, pp. 177-79.

Once out of the studio, the landscape painter becomes more alert: the instability of the physical environment, its moody changefulness, complexion and countenance. Turner's *Snow Storm* provoked a series of critical attacks ... these in turn provoked John Ruskin (1819-1900) into his magisterial defence of Turner, *Modern Painters*, the first volume of which appeared in 1843. Ruskin attacked the academic tradition of generalizing and idealizing landscape forms and features, and, in line with calls from Goethe and others, argued for the landscape painter's greater attention to the specifics of the natural world 'every class of rock, earth, and cloud, must be known by the painter, with geologic and meteorologic accuracy. The five volumes of *Modern Painters* proceeded to inform the landscape ?? painter at great length 0:-. precisely these matters and to compare Turner's fidelity to the "Truth' of nature with the practices of the revered old masters of landscape.'

Following his critical comment on Claude Lorrain's Roman Campagna, Ruskin proposed a verbal picture of what he feels to be the true character of the landscape 'under evening light':

'Let the reader imagine himself for a moment withdrawn from the sounds and motion of the living world, and sent forth alone into this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, tread he never so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men [a footnote adds at this point: "The vegetable soil of the Campagna is chiefly formed by decomposed lavas, and under it lies a bed of white pumice, exactly resembling remnants of bones"']. The long knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep; scattered blocks of black stone, four-square, remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose rents the red light rests, like a dying fire on defiled altars. The blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners, passing from a nation's grave.' John Ruskin.³²

To be continued ...

³² John Ruskin. *Modern Painters* I, 1860, London: George Allen 1906, pp. xli-xlii.