

FROM *ELEPHANT TO PENGE WEST*
THE RAILWAY IN THE ARTIST'S LANDSCAPE

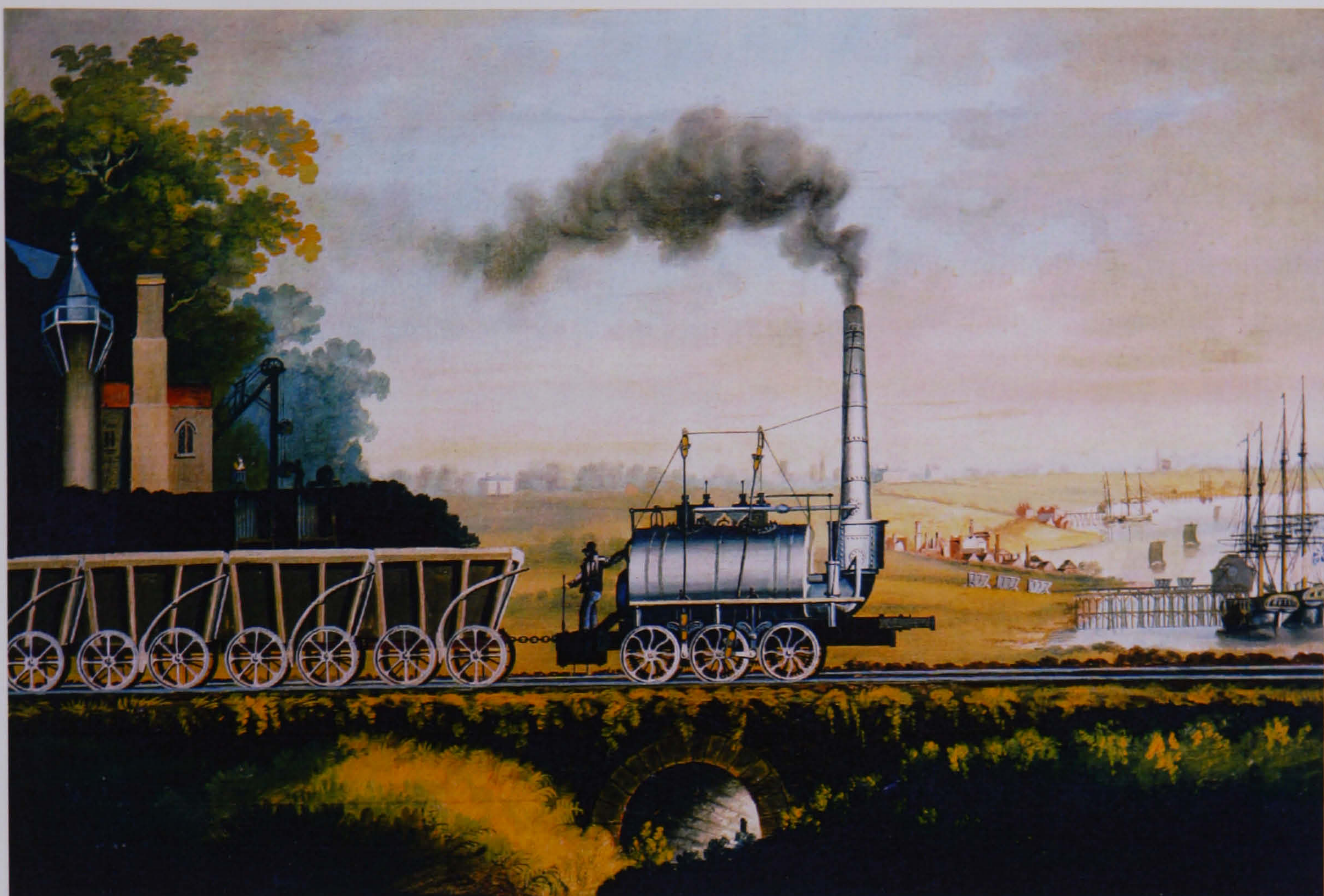
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March 2003



Anonymous, *The Elephant*, c. 1815, Beamish Open Air Industrial Museum



Camille Pissarro, *Penge West [Lordship Lane Station]*, 1871, Courtauld Institute, London

ABSTRACT

In the early nineteenth century, land remained the primary source of political power in Britain. *Landscapes*, in country estates and in art, had been constructed and reconstructed in ways that supplied narratives underlying the right to govern. The railway shattered the landscape conventions that had long disguised social tensions in the countryside: it brought the 'chaos' of modernity into the heart of the rural idyll. This phenomenon has been extensively studied in American histories of technology and culture, but less so in Britain. Such a study can provide an insight into the complex ebb and flow - and interweaving - of political power, economic influence and cultural hegemony during the course of the nineteenth century.

This thesis looks at the portrayal of the railway in the nineteenth-century painted landscape, using it to access changing class relationships in Britain. Strategies chosen by artists to deal with the arrival and spread of the railway in the countryside are examined in the light of eighteenth-century approaches to the landscape that became untenable in the economic, political and physical changes that accompanied industrialization. It is suggested that - more than other technological developments - the railway was able to disrupt artistic discourses that had served to maintain a ruling class ideology.

The focus of the thesis is on those paintings classified as 'fine art' and the role of patronage is discussed as an important factor in the artist's choice of subject. The study opens in the early days of the railway, with the 'Elephant' puffing proudly to coal staithes in the north-east, passes through the middle years of the century when the railway had taken the centre of the economic stage and Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed* shocked the art establishment, and closes in the 1870s, at a time of delicate political compromise, with Pissarro's calm acceptance of the train ensconced in his railway landscape at Penge West.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go first to Dr. Michael Peagram whose generous funding of two scholarships to the fledgling Institute of Railway Studies made this thesis possible. Next, I am grateful for the invaluable guidance of my supervisor, Colin Divall, who somehow never lost hope. The help of archivists and librarians at a number of places has been much appreciated: the far from complete list includes the National Railway Museum, the University of Newcastle, Princeton University, the Institution of Civil Engineers, Beamish North of England Open Air Museum, Windsor Castle, the Tate Gallery. Owners of private art collections mentioned in the text have also been generous with their time and their knowledge. Friends and colleagues have offered exceptional assistance and support. Among these are Michael Bailey, Rachel Holland, Patrizia Ciocci. My special thanks are due to John Wardle for his inexhaustible enthusiasm for searching out arcane facts, while imaginatively applying a professional trainspotter's eye to painted engines; and, of course, Sue, who always found time, and whose advice, constructive input, predilection for coffee, and unshakeable certainty that all is for the best, have been invaluable. And, most especially, to Adrian who has heroically, against all the odds, believed throughout, while offering unwavering support, encouragement and understanding.

The work is dedicated to my niece, Janet, whose anticipated lively interest partially motivated my initial decision to take up the research. She is much missed.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

This work contains no material that has been previously published and it is based entirely on individual research by the author.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: FROM *ELEPHANT* TO *PENGE WEST*

*The essence of what Ruskin then taught us was simple enough, like all great discoveries. It was really nothing more recondite than this, that the art of any epoch must of necessity be the expression of its social life.*¹

The eponymous steam engine dominates the painting of *The Elephant* (Fig. 1). Its tracks cross the foreground on a horizontal embankment. To the right ships wait at staites on the estuary for the cargo of coal from Elephant's laden wagons. The driver on the footplate is diminutive against his engine's massive boiler and towering chimney. The tall structures of a pit head stand just behind the wagons and in front of a clump of trees, closing the left-hand side of the composition, and there is evidence of other industrial activity in the background of the picture. On the hill in the distance is a grand country house.² This is the north-east of England, Tyneside, in 1815. The Steam Elephant - which acquired its name for fairly obvious reasons - was a new phenomenon, a version of the steam driven locomotives that, replacing horses, were transforming the haulage of coal from mine to dock. The painting is in the naive, or vernacular, style which was popular at the time with prosperous farmers who, enthused by agricultural improvement, wished to have a record of a prize agricultural animal (see Fig. 2 which also makes use of the distant view of the owner's grand house). Such pictures were 'a significant feature of the agricultural revolution in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth.' By choosing an artistic convention familiar to landowners, the artist has taken pains to show the pride taken in the creation of

¹ William Morris, quoted in Stephen F. Eisenman (ed), *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994; 12.

² The *Elephant* is an oil painting of unknown provenance. It came into the possession of Beamish North of England Open Air Museum in 1995. It is believed to be the earliest oil painting of a railway scene. Recent research has identified the country house as Carville Hall at Wallsend, located near the colliery and the coal staites on the Tyne. (A mid seventeenth century construction, the house was demolished in 1898 to make way for what was to become the Swan Hunter shipyards.) The pit top that is glimpsed fits with illustrations of the pit managed by John Buddle and the ropeworks belonging to William Chapman can also be seen. Buddle and Chapman were the designers and builders of the *Steam Elephant*, of which this is an illustration, for use on the colliery waggonway. For details of the research on the painting and on the engine itself, see Jim Rees, 'The Strange Story of the *Steam Elephant*' in Andy Guy and Jim Rees (eds), *Early Railways*, Newcomen Society, London, 2001; 145-170. I am grateful to Sunderland Local History Library for additional information.

the engine, the new prize animal, the 'source not only of income, but also of prestige.'³ As part of an integrated transport system, the Elephant, along with the industry that it served and enhanced, brought prosperity and a sense of modernity. The north of England, and perhaps especially the north-east, was a powerhouse of the country in terms of technological inventiveness and the growth of the new industrial capital. Moreover, about ten years later, the north-east was to become home to the first public railway line in the world, between Stockton and Darlington, a direct development from the experience of the private industrial lines like that depicted here.

Just over 50 years later Camille Pissarro, an artist associated with what was to become the Impressionist group in Paris, lived in exile in London during the Franco-Prussian war. He stayed in Upper Norwood, Surrey and while there he painted a landscape with another railway at its heart in *Penge West* (Fig. 3). In the middle of the painting is a semi rural railway station, Penge West, on the London, Chatham and Dover Railway, where the line curves round a hill through the burgeoning suburbs south of the city.⁴ The tracks are vertical, in the centre of the canvas, and on them a train steams directly at the viewer on its way out of town. The landscape is both shaped by the railway line and shapes it. There is a peaceful acceptance of functionality. By the time *Penge West* was painted, the country was covered, from north to south, in a web of railway tracks.

These two pictures, in very different ways, portray a railway in a landscape that easily accommodates it. In their specific historical moments they are both modern landscapes and the role of the railway in that modernity is obvious. In the half century between the two painted moments the railway has made a journey from the north-east coalfields to the London suburbs, and yet few records in fine art of that journey exist - or, at least, few that were made for public consumption. This is a contentious statement: most rail enthusiasts would say that there are dozens of railway paintings that have come down to us from the nineteenth century. But this notion seems to derive from two pieces of evidence: first from

³ James Ayres, *Two Hundred Years of English Naive Art 1700-1900*, Art Services International, Alexandria, Va., 1996; 85, 87. See also Elspeth Moncrieff, Stephen and Iona Joseph (eds), *Farm Animal Portraits*, Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., Woodbridge, 1996; 24.

⁴ The station in this painting was for a long time identified as Penge West but has recently been re-identified as Lordship Lane. The latter is no doubt a correct identification and has now been adopted by most commentators as the name of the painting; but the original name lingers in the title of this thesis and will be used throughout.

the proliferation of lithographs of railway subjects and second from J.M.W. Turner's famous canvas, *Rain, Steam and Speed* in the National Gallery in London.

The lithographs covered almost every stage of the railway's growth during the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. Some recorded the engineering achievements and some sought to show how little disruption the railway caused in the countryside. The technology of lithography was new itself and enabled images of the railway to be mass produced either singly or in books. They sold in great numbers, almost certainly to people who were not normally collectors of art.⁵ They were a novelty, often very beautiful (undertaken, in many cases, by highly skilled artists) and were, moreover, informative. Mary Poovey has described the historical development of types of representation and defines the mass production of engravings and mechanical printing as a 'properly modern stage'. It became 'possible for nearly everyone to know about nearly everything before actually encountering it'.⁶ Many were commissioned by the railway companies as a way of promoting the existence of their new lines and in the hope of presenting the new-fangled transport system as clean and quiet (which it certainly was not), as safe (which it often was not) and as harmonious with its surroundings (which, especially in the early days just after construction, it rarely was); one *could* see them as an early form of advertising. For the purposes of the current work, and for reasons that should become clear, I intend to focus primarily on fine art of which Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed* is the best known example.

Rain, Steam and Speed was produced for exhibition in 1844, on the cusp of the two or three years that became known as the 'Railway Mania' when track mileage, that had grown from 500 in 1838 to 2,000 in 1844, leapt to 7,500 by 1852. In the two years 1840-1, only one new railway line received parliamentary approval; but in 1846 alone, 272 companies were sanctioned to build 4,540 miles of track.⁷ The railways emerged from the decade with a poor

⁵ At 12 shillings for one of the early books of lithographs of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the purchasers must have been limited to professionals, business people and perhaps some of the top ranks of artisans.

⁶ Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830-1864*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995; 185n.

⁷ M.J. Daunton, *Progress and Poverty: An economic and social history of Britain 1700-1850*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995; 311; Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1997*, Arnold, London, 2nd edit., 1997 [first pub. 1987]; 11. C. Hamilton Ellis, *British Railway History* Vol. I 1830-1876, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1954; 154.

reputation for financial dealings, but with their presence in the landscape firmly established. Landscape art was at its zenith in Britain from the late eighteenth century and through the nineteenth century: 'More than a third of exhibited paintings at the Royal Academy were in this category, and the prints and publications on the subject were legion.'⁸ Artists like Turner, Constable and Gainsborough were enormously popular in their own time and remain so today. Yet, at a time when railways were spreading so rapidly, and despite the extent to which they impinged on the public consciousness, Turner's painting was one of a very tiny number of railway landscapes that managed to get into the Royal Academy, notwithstanding the example set by the foremost landscape painter of his day. There *are* records in fine art of the railway's journey through the middle years of the century, but most were produced for the home, for private spaces. *The Elephant* would itself almost certainly be in this category, produced for private or, at most, local display.⁹ This thesis will look at why this should be and at why it might be that the aggressive - and magnificent - declaration of the railway's presence in station architecture in city spaces took so long to appear in the *public* spaces of landscape art.¹⁰

The railway's journey took it through a society coping with radically altered ways of life, with challenges to established power relations and demands from both middle and working classes for enfranchisement and political reform. The shifts in economic power, the conflicts over political reform and new roles for many groups in society led to a crisis in both collective and individual identities. I will contend that art was one of the areas for such conflicts to be played out and that this can be seen in an examination of the fate of the railway in landscape art in particular. For Pierre Bourdieu the very 'definition of art ... is an object of struggle among the classes' and Andrew Hemingway sees 'pictorial sign systems', although 'neutral material entities' in themselves, becoming 'the focus for conflicts of interest between different social groups, which take the form of struggles over meaning and

⁸ William Vaughan, *British Painting: The Golden Age from Hogarth to Turner*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1999; 183.

⁹ Vernacular art is actually on the fringes of what is generally included in 'fine art', although it goes in and out of fashion and, therefore, assessed quality. David Fraser has defined it as 'the high art of low cultures'. See David Fraser, *Primitive Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1962; 13.

¹⁰ See Jeffrey Richards and John MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986; Steven Parissien, *Station to Station*, Phaidon, London, 1997; Charles Sheppard, *Railway Stations: Masterpieces of Architecture*, Todtri, London, 1996; Nicholas Faith, *Locomotion*, BBC Books, London, 1993, esp. Chapter 8 pp 165-183; Carroll L.V. Meeks, *The Railway Station*, Castle Books, Secaucus, 1978.

use.’¹¹ Dianne Sachko Macleod has studied changing patterns of art patronage during the nineteenth century and has said that ‘art was a key element in the affirmation of a middle class identity that was distinct from the leisured existence of the aristocracy’. She suggests that it is ‘open to debate ... whether the middle class manipulated the cultural field for its own ends, or whether it simply used it to legitimate itself’.¹² The railway’s position in this cultural field becomes significant when one considers Geoffrey Channon’s view that it played a critical role ‘in one of the most significant transformations in modern British history: that is the process by which the traditional landed classes lost their historical identity.’¹³ This thesis will try to link and make a contribution to these debates. It will be mainly concerned with the years between *Elephant and Penge West*, roughly 1820 to 1870. The visual marker for 1870 as a cutoff point is the proliferation of railways in art works thereafter; Rieger and Daunton have also identified 1870 as a watershed: for them it was the beginning of the ‘age of mass politics’ ushered in by the Reform Act of 1867 and the year when ‘public discussion about the modern’ broadened out. They pinpoint it as the moment of transition for Britain ‘from an industrializing to an industrial society.’¹⁴

Landscape as metaphor

Arguments for the metaphorical content of paintings can be met with scepticism; this has been so since at least the early nineteenth century. John Barrell describes the view put forward by the art critic William Hazlitt who insisted that ‘the only legitimate satisfactions that painting can offer are private satisfactions’ and that commentators should not ‘impose upon them a political concern which their authors give no sign of sharing.’ Barrell’s response to such a stance is that ‘to fail to see that concern is to impose upon them the

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Routledge, London, 1989; 48. Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape imagery and urban culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; 9.

¹² Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian Middle Class: Money and the making of cultural identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; 1, 15.

¹³ Geoffrey Channon, *Railways in Britain and the United States, 1830-1940*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2001; 194.

¹⁴ Martin Daunton and Bernard Rieger (eds), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, Berg, Oxford, 2001; 2-3.

private concerns of the present, and of an identifiable class interest.’¹⁵ Yet when David Solkin, in his catalogue notes to a 1982 Tate exhibition of Richard Wilson’s late eighteenth century landscapes, suggested that the works went beyond the documentation of contemporary anxieties and expressed approval of a patrician view of the world, he caused uproar in the art establishment, was vilified in, notably, the *Daily Telegraph*, and there were suggestions that the Tate should censor future catalogues.¹⁶ Bourdieu has stated categorically that ‘art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences’¹⁷ and in the nineteenth century artists and critics from Constable to Ruskin and Schelling all expressed the need for landscape painting ‘to play an important discursive role in the unfolding of politics, ethics and morality.’¹⁸

In 1965 Theodor Adorno, in a discussion on the autonomy of art, concluded that it was ‘simultaneously socially determined *and* autonomous.’¹⁹ Given the material basis of art and that the ‘imagination of the artist is not a creation *ex nihilo* ... there is no material content, no formal category of artistic creation, however mysteriously transmitted and itself unaware of the process, which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free.’²⁰ This builds on Erwin Panofsky’s work on iconology (as opposed to iconography) in the 1930s. He defined iconology as the process of understanding the documents of a civilization in which

we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more particularized evidence of this ‘something else’. The discovery and interpretation of these ‘symbolical’ values (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call ‘iconology’ as

¹⁵ John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995 [first pub. 1986]; 340.

¹⁶ See Neil McWilliam and Alex Potts, ‘The Landscape of Reaction: Richard Wilson (1713?-1782) and the Critics’ in A.L. Rees and Frances Borzello (eds), *The New Art History*, Camden Press, London, 1986; 106-9. David Solkin, *Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction*, Tate Gallery, London, 1982.

¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; 7.

¹⁸ Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art*; 189.

¹⁹ John Roberts, ‘After Adorno: Art, Autonomy, and Critique’, *Historical Materialism* 7, Winter 2000; 227.

²⁰ Theodor Adorno, ‘Commitment’ in Ernst Bloch *et al*, *Aesthetics and Politics*, New Left Books, London, 1977; 190.

opposed to 'iconography'.²¹

Studies of the ideological content of paintings developed further during the 1970s as cultural history became popular. In the early heady days Nicos Hadjinicolaou wrote that 'in all societies up to our times the history of the production of pictures is the history of ruling class visual ideologies.'²² T.J. Clark qualifies this statement, maintaining that painting is never a 'simple' *reflection* of an ideology: it may 'become intelligible only within the context of given and imposed structures of meaning; but in its turn it can alter and disrupt these structures.'²³ Ideology is, itself, a highly contested term in marxist literature (and elsewhere) but for present purposes I am accepting Terry Eagleton's definition of ideologies as 'sets of discursive strategies for displacing, recasting or spuriously accounting for realities which prove embarrassing to a ruling power; and in doing so, they contribute to that power's self-legitimation.'²⁴

In the present work Gramsci's concept of hegemony will be of particular use. As Raymond Williams describes it, 'hegemony' goes far deeper than mere ideology, 'saturating the consciousness of a society', forming the 'limits of common sense'; it is 'the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived ... It is ... our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world.'²⁵ What is especially important for my thesis is Gramsci's theory of the 'subaltern groups' within a hegemonic structure. I take this term to cover those classes and groups which emerge in society through 'developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production' and which 'attempt to influence the programmes of [dominant

²¹ Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Doubleday Anchor, New York, 1957 [first pub. 1939]; 26. See also useful discussion of iconology and iconography as disciplines in art history in Jane Turner (ed), *The Dictionary of Art*, Vol. 15, Macmillan, London, 1996; 89-98. For a more entertaining explanation of the theory and the practice (and the dangers) of iconology, as well as the manner in which a knowledge of history can specifically shed light on landscape painting - and *vice versa* - see Michael Frayn's novel *Headlong*, Faber and Faber, London, 2000; esp. p26.

²² Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, Pluto Press, London, 1978 [first pub. in French 1972]; 102.

²³ T.J. Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1982 [first pub. 1973]; 13.

²⁴ Terry Eagleton (ed), 'Introduction' in *Ideology*, Longman, London, 1994; 8.

²⁵ Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *New Left Review*, 82, June 1973; 9.

political] formations in order to press claims of their own.’ Such groups are ‘always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only “permanent” victory breaks their subordination, *and that not immediately*.’²⁶ The existence of these groups may explain why, as we shall see, a painting may ‘have ideology ... as its material [but] ... it *works* that material; it gives it a new form and at certain moments that new form is in itself a subversion of ideology’;²⁷ but there is no necessary, direct or immediate relationship to perceived economic or political change. This will prove fundamental to my analysis of the relation between railways and art.

David Matless has said, ‘[l]andscape carries meanings as well as minerals and agricultural wherewithal.’²⁸ A number of writers in recent years, from a variety of different disciplines including geography, archaeology, history and art history, have looked at the meaning that landscape, both real and represented, held (and holds) for different audiences. Landscape, it has been argued, is a ‘way of seeing’, a way of organizing perceptions of the environment. It is a way of seeing that emerged at the same time as early capitalism, during the Renaissance.²⁹ It began with pictorial representations and moved on to include reified chunks of the environment. As an artistic genre its very name is fraught: all ‘[t]he complex relations between nature and culture or nature and art are summed up in the term “landscape”.’³⁰ In the introduction to a recent book, Michael Rosenthal provides a concise history of the status held by eighteenth and nineteenth century British landscape art during the course of the twentieth century. It is only since the 1960s that it has been widely recognized as worthy of study. The results of the studies that have emerged from the last 30 to 40 years - by, amongst others, Stephen Daniels, John Barrell, Ann Bermingham - lead him to conclude that ‘landscape painting, aesthetics and politics in Britain are not only indissolubly linked but

²⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1978; 53-55. [My italics.]

²⁷ Clark, *Image of the People*; 13.

²⁸ David Matless, ‘An occasion for geography: landscape, representation, and Foucault’s corpus’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol 10, 1992; 44.

²⁹ Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, Croom Helm, London, 1984; 70.

³⁰ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century*, Harper Collins, London, 1997; 620.

also demanding of scrupulous and sophisticated analysis.’³¹ In the Preface to the catalogue for an exhibition of English landscapes in 1977, Andrew Wilton wrote: ‘While portraiture and genre painting have reflected social history in a literal sense, providing circumstantial records of the changing conditions of men’s lives, landscape painting in England offers a subtler commentary on the philosophical development of the culture that produced it.’³²

At least from the seventeenth century English landscape had been constructed and reconstructed through agricultural improvement schemes (typified by the enclosure movement). From the eighteenth century, further reconstruction was introduced by the landscape gardening movement which partly sought to obscure the ravages of the ‘improvements’ and to maintain (or create) the illusion of a leisured country life free of economic dependency. Land was intimately bound up with the governing class in Britain: on the one hand, political enfranchisement was based on land holding while, on the other hand, the philosophy of civic humanism that underpinned the right to rule in the eighteenth century contained the belief that the ownership of land provided the freedom from economic need that was essential to a disinterested exercise of power. (This will be enlarged upon in Chapter 2.) As the basis for enfranchisement was increasingly challenged in the nineteenth century ‘[l]and and its changing role in defining relations of power are at the center of the political conflict’³³ and representations of the land and of the country became increasingly contested. Daniels argues that ‘the power of landscape then as now was to give the impression that far from being implicated in the commodification of land and any attendant class tensions, it represented a world of nature, or a world where land and life were in harmony’³⁴ while, in his recent book, Kenneth Olwig analyses the political construction of the landscape over time and how, far from revealing a nation’s true character, it has been

³¹ Michael Rosenthal, ‘Introduction’ in Michael Rosenthal, Christiana Payne, Scott Wilcox (eds), *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British Landscape, 1750-1880*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997; 1. And see John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The rural poor in English painting 1730-1840*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980; Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986; Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993.

³² Andrew Wilton, ‘Preface’ in Christopher White, *English Landscape 1630-1850: Drawings, Prints & Books from the Paul Mellon Collection*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977; xi.

³³ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, ‘Land and National Representation in Britain’, in Rosenthal *et al* (eds), *Prospects for the Nation*; 25.

³⁴ Stephen Daniels, ‘Marxism, culture, and the duplicity of landscape’ in Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift (eds), *New Models in Geography Vol II*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989; 206.

consciously constructed to display the *required* characteristics.³⁵ In order to construct the required social world, representations of landscape in paintings and in gardens laid claim to a rural idyll based on ‘specific histories and broad ideological assumptions about the nature of social relations, such as the notion that the prevailing socio-political hierarchy is both natural and beneficent.’³⁶

The railway, I will suggest, intruded into this constructed Arcadia and disrupted both the landscaped estates and the artist’s raw material. The present work is an attempt to assess what the railway’s journey from *Elephant* to *Penge West* may have done to changing ideas of the landscape as it fell to the artist to mediate the conflicting messages contained in and implicitly (or, sometimes, explicitly) required of any representation of landscape. The arrival of the railway revealed profound tensions between ideologies of landscape and ideologies of progress and is representative of a highly nuanced hegemonic struggle. An examination of the railways in art in their social and ideological context is fraught with complexities but can shed light onto a period of massive change. As Michael Freeman has shown, the railway functioned ‘as a cultural metaphor, a symbol of a radical crisis that permeated all of society.’³⁷

The radical crisis

The Elephant uses iconography that was standard in landscape art of the period. It presents an ‘ideal of social order and harmony [which] is represented visually in the image of the country house situated upon a hilly prominence, at one with the surrounding landscape’.³⁸ However, the foregrounding of the engine and pit workings radically subverts the message by presenting industry (in all senses of the word) as the source of wealth; more would need

³⁵ Kenneth Olwig, *Landscape, Nature and the Body Politic: From Britain’s Renaissance to America’s New World*, Wisconsin University Press, Wisconsin, 2002.

³⁶ Kay Dian Kriz, ‘French glitter or English nature? Representing Englishness in landscape painting, c. 1790-1820’ in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (eds), *Art in Bourgeois Society, 1790-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998; 79.

³⁷ Michael Freeman, ‘The railway as cultural metaphor: “What kind of railway history?” revisited’, *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser., 20/2, Sept. 1999; 162.

³⁸ Kriz, ‘French glitter or English nature?’ in Hemingway and Vaughan (eds), *Art in Bourgeois Society*; 79.

to be known about the iconology of *The Elephant* to ascertain the degree to which this subversion is intended and the degree to which it is expressive of the crisis in the harmonious social order.

So what is the 'radical crisis' in society to which Freeman refers? and why was the railway its symbol? The railway appeared in Britain in a land that was experiencing, until 1848, regular bouts of unrest in both city and countryside. There were hopes, on the one side, and fears on the other, that major political change might be possible. The public railway, from its inception, inadvertently became a symbol of the conflict. On 15 September 1830, the day of the inauguration of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, the celebrations were seriously disrupted by a large and angry political demonstration directed at the Prime Minister, the Duke of Wellington. He had acknowledged the significance of the first mainline railway and had consented to be a guest in one of the special trains. Manchester textile workers also recognized the significance of the event and were protesting at the spread of machinery and the resultant unemployment and poverty in the town. The Duke was a prime target as he had adamantly refused to contemplate political reform. A huge loom was erected above the railway line and a tattered man sat at it 'to protest against this triumph of machinery, and the gain and glory which the wealthy Liverpool and Manchester men were likely to derive from it'.³⁹ A planned civic dinner in Manchester had to be abandoned for fear of serious civil disturbance. Klingender believes that there is 'little doubt that the opening ceremony was designed in part to distract the attention of the people from other and more dangerous topics' - although obviously to little effect!⁴⁰ By the end of the 1830s the railway had become an important tool in the government's armoury, being the most effective way to move soldiers and police around the country at speed to meet and quell unrest, as in 1839 when a force of London policemen was sent to Birmingham by train.⁴¹

Historians have argued about whether any of the riots and other manifestations of unrest in the first half of the nineteenth century should be taken seriously as threats to the state. Many

³⁹ Letter from Fanny Kemble to her sister, quoted in Francis Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1968 [first pub. 1947]; 128.

⁴⁰ Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; 128.

⁴¹ Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia? Reflections on the threat of revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000; 181.

have seen them as purely economic protest when, for example, the price of grain was high, or work or food was scarce. David Cannadine argues that, as in other such movements of the early nineteenth century, support for Chartism was 'never better than patchy and ephemeral'.⁴² However, Edward Thompson, in *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963 and Edward Royle, in *Revolutionary Britannia?* in 2000 have both argued persuasively for the political content of economic protest and the power of human agency in the making of history. In his examination of contemporary documents, Royle makes a strong case for the fact that, at the time, the governing classes had a real fear of revolution. The emotions generated by the French Revolution of 1789 lingered and were exacerbated by revolutionary events in France in 1830 and throughout most of Europe in 1848. The years from *circa* 1811 to 1816 were marked by the 'Luddite' riots directed against industrial machinery, followed by Peterloo in 1819, the commencement of the Swing Riots aimed at agricultural machinery in 1830, insurrection in Newport in 1831, the unrest generated by the Reform Bill crisis of 1830-32, the betrayal felt by the working classes after the successful passage of the Act, anti-Poor Law protests of 1834, the Anti-Corn Law League of 1838-1846, all of which contributed to the People's Charter in 1838 and the ensuing crises from the late 1830s and culminating in 1848. Royle emphasizes the 'potential for revolutionary disturbances in Britain in the 1830s' and the 'inherent instability which on occasions spilled over from sporadic rioting into actual insurgency.'⁴³ In a discussion of one of the first political achievements of the early years of unrest - the 1832 Reform Act - F.M.L. Thompson explicitly connects it to the development of the railway, or at least to the railway as symbol. He sees the Liverpool and Manchester railway as the 'culmination of the application of the new technological skills, enterprise and capital which had been transforming the British economy for the previous half century or more' and he suggests, rather contentiously, that the 'first Reform Act was an attempt to adapt political institutions to the alteration in the balance of social forces brought about by this transformation.'⁴⁴

The Reform Act did succeed in calming immediate protest and took the higher ranks of the

⁴² David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999; 84.

⁴³ Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?*; 88.

⁴⁴ F.M.L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: a social history of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900*, Fontana Press, London, 1988; 13.

middle classes off the streets but essentially the political and social structures were left intact - leading to claims that the British aristocracy was exceptionally resilient.⁴⁵ Freeman claims that 'the railways ultimately helped to cement the persistence of the old order' as after mid century the aristocracy came to realize that they were one of the more secure investments in the country.⁴⁶ But the 'leaders of popular radicalism ... felt betrayed by the Reform Act. ... Out of this sense of betrayal, the Chartist movement was born.'⁴⁷ It was across this landscape of 'radical crisis' that the railway began to spread.

The impact of the railway

There are few aspects of life in Britain that were not transformed by the development of the railway during the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1857 Samuel Smiles said that 'the founding of the railway system by George Stephenson and his son must be regarded as one of the most important events, if not the very greatest, in the first half of this nineteenth century'⁴⁸ and in 1880 Benjamin Disraeli stated in *Endymion*, his last novel, that 'railroads, telegraphs, penny posts and penny newspapers' were the four key developments of the Victorian years to date. The impetus it gave to industrial development and the growth of capitalism was huge, both economically and structurally: 'They exhibit,' wrote Smiles, 'the grandest organisation of capital and labour that the world has yet seen.'⁴⁹ It was an essential piece in the jigsaw in Karl Marx's detailed analysis of the workings of capital which 'must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e. to exchange, and conquer the whole earth for its market, [while] it strives on the other to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another.'⁵⁰ Railways were seen as the very embodiment of the power of capital.

⁴⁵ Royle, *Modern Britain*; 117.

⁴⁶ Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999; 34.

⁴⁷ Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?*; 89.

⁴⁸ Samuel Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers*, Vol. III 'The Locomotive. George and Robert Stephenson', John Murray, London, 2nd edit., 1877; 380.

⁴⁹ Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers* Vol. III; 380.

⁵⁰ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Pelican Books, London, 1973; 539.

The railway encouraged manufacturing with the increased ease of access both to raw materials and to markets while for consumers it cheapened the purchase of and made available a wider range of goods in those markets. Economists argue about the precise contribution of the railway to the development of British industry and consumerism, and it is clear that their effect increased over time (unsurprisingly), but Gourvish assures us that ‘their impact was greater than that of any other single innovation in the period [1830-1870], and although a satisfactory measure of their contribution to the economy must necessarily remain elusive, this is not to imply that it was in any way a meagre one.’⁵¹ Smiles tells us that, in 1873, ‘over one hundred and sixty-two million tons of minerals and merchandise were carried by rail in the United Kingdom’ as well as 448 million passengers.⁵²

Jack Simmons asserts that the railway was established as a ‘national institution’ by the early 1840s;⁵³ this can be seen in the lives of individuals as well as in the workings of public bodies. In 1839, Sarah Elizabeth Ellis wrote from Clapham South to her friend Mrs. Caroline Munby in Colnbrook in 1839: ‘These railroads will facilitate your having the best of everything in provincial towns’ and then in May 1840: ‘We shall certainly expect to see our distant friends oftener now the railroads are becoming general, and I do not despair of seeing you sometime the temptation will be so great.’⁵⁴ Almost from the inception in 1830 the Post Office used them to carry the mail, an activity that was regulated by Parliament in 1838. In 1845 a Board of Trade report on Lancashire concluded: ‘The possession of good railway communications has now become almost as much a matter of necessity as the adoption of the most improved machinery to enable a manufacturing community to contend on equal terms with its rivals and to maintain its footing.’⁵⁵ By 1850 over 200,000 travellers took a trip to the coast during Whit week.⁵⁶ The *Illustrated London News* had no doubt, in 1843,

⁵¹ T.R. Gourvish, *Railways and the British Economy 1830-1914*, Macmillan Press, London, 1980; 40.

⁵² Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers* Vol III; x.

⁵³ Jack Simmons, *The Railways of Britain*, Book Promotions Ltd., Bristol, 3rd edit., 1986; 15.

⁵⁴ Acc 54:276 & 279, York City Archives.

⁵⁵ Quoted in John R. Kellett, *Railways and Victorian Cities*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979 [first pub. 1969]; 9.

⁵⁶ John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, Sage, London, 1990; 21.

of the railway's role in the nineteenth century and in civilization itself: 'Were we to enumerate the turn-pike roads, canals, docks, manufactories, and last, and greatest, the railroads, which the trade of this country has called into existence, it would far outstretch even the proudest record of the power and energy of civilized man which any age or country can possess.'⁵⁷

Before the railway, travel had been slow, tedious and (though not often acknowledged when railway accidents became common occurrences) dangerous; travel by any means other than foot or cart was accessible only to those of some means. The railway democratized travel enormously. The political meaning of this was not lost on some commentators: Dr. Tom Arnold is quoted as saying, when the new London to Birmingham railway passed close to Rugby School at which he was Headmaster: 'I rejoice to see it and think that feudality is gone forever. It is so great a blessing to think that any one evil is really extinct.'⁵⁸ But Royle points out correctly that the 'wealthier classes benefited disproportionately; travel other than by foot was a luxury for the poor right through the nineteenth century. For many of the less well-off, liberation from the limitations of a pedestrian existence came only at the end of the century, with the electric tram and the bicycle.'⁵⁹

The astonishingly rapid growth of lines around the country reveals not only the immediate success of the railway but also its early apparent profitability. 'Consistently profitable even during the economic slump of 1837-43, railways became the preferred outlet for new investment capital' which, with a boost to available capital from a bumper harvest in 1844, contributed to the railway 'mania' of the mid-1840s. But this was a period when there was 'more fraud and felony than ... ever heard of before in connexion with public matters' according to one MP quoted in Hansard on 3 July 1844. Another said that 'one of the grossest frauds ever perpetrated [in England] had been called a railway company.'⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Illustrated London News*, Vol II, 28 January 1843. Report on the Etheron Viaduct on the Sheffield and Manchester Railway.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers*, Vol. III; 355. Like Wordsworth, however, Arnold's enthusiasm waned a little when his own house was threatened with this loss of evil. See Nicholas Faith, *The World the Railways Made*, The Bodley Head. London, 1990; 55.

⁵⁹ Royle, *Modern Britain*; 9.

⁶⁰ R.W. Kostal, *Law and English Railway Capitalism 1825-1875*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994; 24.

Traditionally the popularity of the railway - and the corruption in its finances - has been associated with the middle class industrialists whose wealth and growing power was, moreover, seen as a threat to established institutions; that is, however, a selective reading of history.⁶¹ It is a reading that appears to be confirmed in one of the first histories of the railway, written in 1851 by J.A. Francis. He described the subscribers of the Liverpool and Manchester railway as 'the merchants, bankers, traders, and manufacturers' of those towns⁶² and four years later J.S. Williams, in his history, described the 'stags' who were selling railway shares in the 1840s: such a one would be characterized by

a face wearing a peculiarly sinister expression, tainted with colours suggestive of strong drinks ... there was almost invariably a tint about his garments, which is only to be expressed by the word - *seedy* ... an appearance akin to that of those 'sporting gents' who are to be found near the betting places ... He has a knowledge of business for he has failed in it ... the bulk in his coat pocket consists of several enormous bundles of prospectuses, greasy outside, and bound up with red tape.⁶³

This creates a lasting image: couple it with the stories of the aristocracy who objected to railway lines - such as the Lords Sefton and Derby who caused great problems for the Liverpool and Manchester line by refusing permission for it to cross their lands, forcing Stephenson to find a route around them⁶⁴ - and the prejudice about the split between aristocracy and middle class industrialists is established. Of course, many aristocrats who initially objected were more like Lord Petre who refused absolutely to give the Eastern Counties engineers permission to cross his land until he had been paid '£120,000 with interest ... for land which was even then said to be worth only £5,000'.⁶⁵

But the reality is that investment in the railway was not confined to any one group in society. In his list of the types of subscribers to the Liverpool and Manchester, Francis failed to

⁶¹ See Geoffrey Channon, 'The recruitment of directors to the board of the Great Western Railway, II', *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd ser., 20/1, March 1999, 1-16, and his more recent book, *Railways in Britain and the United States 1830-1940*, esp. chapters 8 and 9. See also Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*; 33-34 and M.C. Reed, *Railways in the Victorian Economy: Studies in Finance and Growth*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1969; 199-202.

⁶² J.A. Francis, *A History of the English Railway: Its Social Relations and Revelations 1820-1845*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1967 [first pub. 1851]; 100.

⁶³ Frederick S. Williams, *Our Iron Roads: Their History, Construction and Administration*, Bemrose and Sons, London, 2nd edit., 1885 [first pub. 1855]; 45-6.

⁶⁴ Frank Fernyhough, *Liverpool and Manchester Railway 1830-1980*, Robert Hale, London, 1980; 24.

⁶⁵ Francis, *A History of the English Railway*; 259.

mention one category that was represented. The Marquess of Stafford, who was the heir to the Duke of Bridgewater's canal fortune, and despite the threat posed to this business by the new railway line, subscribed in the amount of £100,000 - one fifth of the total cost of the railway.⁶⁶ However, Francis did point out that in 1834 'there were peers who never attended the board' of the Eastern Counties Railway, suggesting that, while prudence may have kept such people out of the limelight, investment opportunities were not missed.⁶⁷ Kostal notes that a feature of the 1844-5 railway boom was the endorsement of 'the well-born'. 'Since 1836 many more members of England's landed and urban élites had become willing and eager publicly to endorse new railways in return for shares and other perquisites. Many of the most infamous bubbles were set afloat with the enthusiastic support of the country's most revered and noble families.' In fact, by 1844, 'railways had captured the imagination of the English propertied classes like no industrial enterprise had ever done. The success of the early trunk-line companies, twinned with the romance of a new and powerful technology, lent railways an aura of limitless financial possibility.'⁶⁸ As the *Railway Chronicle* opined on 27 September 1845: 'The more extravagant the scheme, the more readily it seems to find patrons of quality and nominal substance.' Francis was possibly guilty of a little exaggeration in claiming that a major factor in so many people being 'deceived' into supporting the mania was their reading about 'princes mounting tenders, of peers as provisional committee men, of marquises trundling wheelbarrows.'⁶⁹ But, despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary, the notion of the middle-class railway capitalist and the aristocratic landowner in opposition is tenacious. We will return to this in Chapter 3.

This is not to say that there was *no* opposition; it came, however, from many sections of society. Francis gave the following list of complaints:

Every report which could promote a prejudice, every rumour which could affect a principle, was spread. The country gentleman was told that the smoke would kill the birds as they passed over the locomotive. The public were informed that the weight of the engine would prevent its moving; the manufacturer was told that the sparks from its chimney would burn his goods. The passenger was frightened by the assertion that life and limb would be endangered. Elderly gentlemen were tortured with the notion that they would be run over. Ladies were alarmed at the thought that their horses would take fright. Foxes and pheasants were to cease in the neighbourhood of a railway. The race of

⁶⁶ Ferneyhough, *Liverpool and Manchester Railway*; 25.

⁶⁷ Francis, *A History of the English Railway*; 247.

⁶⁸ Kostal, *Law and English Railway Capitalism*; 28-30.

⁶⁹ Francis, *A History of the English Railway*; 144.

horses was to be extinguished. Farmers were possessed with the idea that oats and hay would no more be marketable produce; cattle would start and throw their riders, cows even, it was said, would cease to yield their milk in the neighbourhood of one of those infernal machines.⁷⁰

Similarly, ‘hundreds of innkeepers and thousands of horses would, it was said, have nothing to do. Labour for the poor would be lessened, and rates for the poor would be increased ... houses would be crushed by falling embankments. The 27,000 miles of turnpike-roads in Great Britain ... would be made useless’ while as for the construction of a line from London to Birmingham, it was declared that ‘it would be “a drug on the country”’.⁷¹

It is not hard, then, to gain the impression that, by the time of the ‘railway mania’ in the mid 1840s, the ‘railway capitalists’ and their railway were seen by many as an overwhelmingly destructive power. The cartoonist George Cruikshank, for example, had a cartoon published in *Omnibus* in 1845, at the height of the mania, in which a devouring engine breaks in on a family dinner (Fig. 4). But it was inevitable that such a radically new form of travel engender not only hostility but also fear. Smiles said that even the railway entrepreneurs did not believe ‘that people would trust themselves to be drawn upon a railway by an “explosive machine”’ and tells us that ‘a writer of eminence declared that he would as soon think of being fired off on a ricochet rocket, as travel on a railway at twice the speed of the old stage-coaches.’⁷² The Liberal politician Thomas Creevey had a trip on the uncompleted Liverpool and Manchester railway in 1829 and reported that ‘the quickest motion is to me frightful; it is really flying and it is impossible to divest yourself of the notion of instant death to all upon the least accident happening. It gave me a headache which has not left me yet.’ A famous actress, Fanny Kemble, was, however, on the inaugural run in 1830 and she shared the sensation of flying but for her it was a very different experience: she wrote to her sister that ‘when I closed my eyes this sensation of flying was quite delightful and strange beyond description; yet strange as it was, I had a perfect sense of security, and not the slightest fear.’⁷³ But an undercurrent of fear about the dangers of the railway did persist - although often for good reason as there were many horrific accidents in the early years, and newspapers and cartoonists of the day made the most of them. (See, for example, Fig. 5, the

⁷⁰ Francis, *A History of the English Railway*; 101-2.

⁷¹ Williams, *Our Iron Roads*; 34-35.

⁷² Smiles, *Lives of the Engineers* Vol. III; vii.

⁷³ Creevey and Kemble are both quoted in Faith, *The World the Railways Made*; 14 & 34.

engraving that appeared in the *Illustrated London News* to depict the aftermath of the crash at Staplehurst on June 9, 1865. This crash is noteworthy for the fact that Charles Dickens was in it and was lucky to escape alive. It left him nervous of railway travel for the rest of his life.)

History gives us another source of opposition to the railway, from what might be described as the cultural élite. As they were able to make themselves well heard in their day, so they are well remembered now. Thomas Carlyle, for example, seems to have been a querulous traveller who is quoted as saying 'I was dreadfully frightened before the train started; in the nervous state I was in, it seemed to me certain that I should faint, from the impossibility of getting the horrid thing stopt.'⁷⁴ He hated the 'mechanical' nature of all modern life and referred to steam engines (whether locomotive or stationary) as 'fire-demons' and travel on the railway was the 'likeliest thing to a Faust's flight on the Devil's mantle; or as if some huge steam night-bird had flung you on its back, and was sweeping through unknown space with you'.⁷⁵ This description of the railway as demonic was not uncommon and fitted the popular aesthetic of the sublime, which will be discussed elsewhere. But the railway was new and strange and public attitudes should perhaps be treated with some caution. Charles Dickens is quoted as having once said, in relation to railways, that of course 'we all pretend to miss stagecoaches'.⁷⁶ And yet when we are told today by historians that Dickens 'persistently romanticized the stagecoach travel of his youth', the conclusion is that he 'disliked the railways'.⁷⁷ Wolfgang Schivelbusch comments:

The 'esthetic [*sic*] freedom' of the preindustrial subject is only discovered at the moment when the preindustrial methods of production and transportation seem threatened in their very existence by mechanization. ... Thus 'organic' travel and artisan manufacture become a conscious need, i.e., a valued esthetic quality, only at that moment when a new technology arrives'.⁷⁸

Modern day distortions of contemporary commentators are not uncommon. William

⁷⁴ Quoted in Faith, *The World the Railways Made*; 41.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*; 38.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2001; 94.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey Richards, 'The role of the railways,' in Michael Wheeler (ed.), *Ruskin and Environment: the Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995; 124.

⁷⁸ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980 [first pub. 1977]; 122.

Wordsworth is remembered now as a rabid opponent of railways, but in fact he welcomed them as nature's 'lawful offspring in Man's art'⁷⁹: it was only specific manifestations of railways to which he objected - particularly the Kendal to Windermere line which would have run close to his home in Grasmere. Such distortions of early opinions of the railway work the other way too. H.G. Wells is credited in innumerable railway histories with the great quote that seals the railway's position in nineteenth century life. In 1902 he said: 'The nineteenth century ... will, if it needs a symbol, almost inevitably have as that symbol a steam engine running upon a railway.' What greater affirmation of progress and the railway's place in it could we have? Oddly, no reference is ever made to the rest of the passage from which that quote is taken. In fact Wells was expressing resignation to the choice of the railway as symbol despite it being 'the result of accidental impediments, of avoidable difficulties that we travel to-day on rails'. If anything, for him the railway was the symbol of the nineteenth century's 'fumbling from compromise to compromise as [the world] always has done' until a cheap path to development was found along which 'went short-sighted Nineteenth Century Progress, quite heedless of the possibility of ending in a *cul-de-sac*.' Read in its entirety, this passage cannot be taken as an endorsement of the 'vast system of horse-waggons and coaches drawn along rails by pumping-engines upon wheels.'⁸⁰ Latter-day selectivity and re-interpretation of contemporary opinion arises again in the discussion of art as a historical document below.

But if contemporary opinion of the railway, at least as handed down by the intellectuals, was at best ambiguous, Marshall Berman has succinctly described their position in the nineteenth century 'landscape of steam engines, ... railroads, vast new industrial zones; of teeming cities that have grown overnight, often with dreadful human consequences' and perhaps explains the ambiguity that is read today:

The great modernists of the nineteenth century all attack this environment passionately, and strive to tear it down or explode it from within; yet all find themselves remarkably at home in it, alive to its possibilities, affirmative even in their radical negations, playful and ironic even in their moments of

⁷⁹ William Wordsworth, extract from 'Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways', 1833, in *Complete Poetical Works*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1936; 374.

⁸⁰ H.G. Wells, *Anticipations of the reaction of mechanical and scientific progress upon human life and thought*, Chapman & Hall Ltd., London, 1902; 4-12.

gravest seriousness and depth.⁸¹

Baudelaire described the dilemma most accurately: 'progress, that eternal *desideratum* that is its own despair.'⁸² With the railway, for the first time goods and people could travel faster than a horse, a fact which was not only shocking and disorientating but which also gradually transformed the psychological geography of the country. Julie Wosk describes the advent of the railway as the classic example of 'breaking frame', the phrase used by Erving Goffman to describe the experience when 'the basic frameworks of understanding used to make sense out of events no longer apply.' Unlike any previous industrial development, or any previous transport system, railways represented the 'fracturing that haunted the nineteenth century's surface rhetoric of progress.'⁸³

In its essential contradictions and the contradictory reactions inspired by it, the railway epitomized the condition of modernity. Ralph Harrington tells us that the fears engendered by it were a

psychological reaction to the forces of civilisation and industrialisation embodied in the railway, forces which expressed themselves in the unnatural jolts and vibrations experienced by passengers, but also in the speed, disorientation and noise of railway travel, the disconnection of passengers from their surroundings, their helplessness in the event of accident, and the fragility of the technical means by which the potentially disastrous forces of fire, steam and mechanical energy were controlled.⁸⁴

To match the psychological chaos, it also created enormous environmental chaos - as, for example, brilliantly depicted in the oft-quoted passage on the ripping apart of Staggs's Gardens for the construction of the London to Birmingham line in Dickens' *Dombey and Son*⁸⁵ (a scene depicted equally graphically in a lithograph by J.C. Bourne - see Fig. 6) yet, paradoxically, despite all of this apparent chaos and fear, it 'ran on a fixed schedule along a prescribed route, and so, for all its demonic potentialities, became a nineteenth century

⁸¹ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience Of Modernity*, Verso, London, 1983; 18-19.

⁸² From *Salon of 1846* in Jonathan Mayne (translator and ed.), *Art in Paris 1845-62*, Phaidon, London, 1965; 127.

⁸³ Julie Wosk, *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1992; 3-4.

⁸⁴ Ralph Harrington, 'The Neuroses of the Railway', *History Today*, July 1994; 20.

⁸⁵ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., Ware, 1995 [first pub. 1848]; 60.

paradigm of order'.⁸⁶

There is a clear thread that emerges from contemporary accounts: for all groups in society the railway carried a signification that went beyond its role as a new (albeit somewhat disconcerting) transport system as it progressed along the tortuous route from the industrial world of *The Elephant* to the suburban world of *Penge West*. It is this that suggests that an examination of the role it played in art will contribute to an understanding of reactions to new technology, as well as giving an insight into the dynamics of radically altered social relations.

Art as history

Can an attempt to access processes of historical change and responses to technology through looking at pictures be justified? Halla Beloff believes that emphasis on the written word has been a facet of Western culture since the middle ages. She argues for the inclusion of visual images in 'the canon of respectable "good science"' since in art ideas are communicated 'more directly, more subtly and, of course, more elegantly, than one ever could in words.'⁸⁷ In *A View from the Iron Bridge* Barrie Trinder insists that 'pictures are *part* of the historical process, not just a comment upon it.'⁸⁸ In claiming art as a historical record, I, like Richard Wollheim in *Painting as an Art*, make no claim to credentials as an art historian. Wollheim defines his interest as being in the 'substantive aesthetic'⁸⁹ but where he proceeds to an analysis of the psychoanalytic revelations of that aesthetic, I wish to pursue its historical and sociological properties.

Increasingly in the last 30 years, specifically in the areas of cultural history, art has been admitted to scholarly historical studies. Raymond Williams wrote that a study of the art of a given period, in conjunction with all other aspects of social and economic life, allows us

⁸⁶ Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air*; 159.

⁸⁷ Halla Beloff, 'Reading Visual Rhetoric', *The Psychologist*, November 1994; 495 & 499.

⁸⁸ Barrie Trinder, 'Introduction' in Stuart Smith, *A View from the Iron Bridge*, The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Ironbridge, 1979; 10. [Italics in original.]

⁸⁹ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987; 7.

to access a 'structure of feeling'⁹⁰ without which a history remains lacking in life. This thesis does not privilege artistic production, examining it within its own terms, but rather views art as one element among many in a complex pattern of information, 'impressions of mentality, not vessels of Art' to use Simon Schama's formulation.⁹¹

Williams defines 'the theory of culture as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life. The analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships.'⁹² Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan have recently said that 'a theory of social and of historical change is a prerequisite of any discourse that claims to engage with the historically specific circumstances involved in the generation of art objects or other cultural products.'⁹³ I agree with them that marxism, as an analysis of capitalism and its specific social relations, has not been bettered nor even seriously challenged. I would maintain that class, as an organizing framework for society, is fundamental to a historical analysis. A number of scholars in recent times have disagreed with this and have questioned views of class that are based on economic criteria.⁹⁴ I reject the premise of their work but I will now briefly turn to it as they offer an additional tool that can be used in a historical examination of class through the medium of art.

These writers have emphasized not only the fluidity of class definitions and self definitions but also the role of the individual in *creating* their own sense of social position. This is not inconsistent with Marx's theory of class as a manifestation of the social relations of the productive system, as social relations are dynamic and contain inconsistencies. Bourdieu explicitly makes the link between the materialist and non-materialist aspects of class definition: the 'individual or collective classification struggles aimed at transforming the categories of perception and appreciation of the social world and, through this, the social

⁹⁰ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1961; 48.

⁹¹ Simon Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches: An interpretation of Dutch culture in the Golden Age*, Fontana, London, 1991; xi.

⁹² Williams, *The Long Revolution*; 46.

⁹³ Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan, 'Preface' to Hemingway and Vaughan (eds), *Art in Bourgeois Society*; xi.

⁹⁴ See, for example, Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: the Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985; Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The political representation of class in Britain 1780-1840*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995.

world itself, are indeed a forgotten dimension of the class struggle.’ However, he cautions that ‘one only has to realize that the classificatory schemes which underlie agents’ practical relationship to their condition and the representation they have of it are themselves the product of that condition, in order to see the limits of this autonomy.’⁹⁵

Nonetheless, Patrick Joyce (for one), in his recent work, seeks to replace the economic underpinning of class with a political one: ‘Class identities were, therefore, a product of arguments about meanings, arguments which were primarily political in character. Class does not seem to have been the collective cultural experience of new economic classes produced by the Industrial Revolution.’⁹⁶ Despite this, he accepts that there is an impetus to classify oneself as a member of one class or another. He ignores the economic basis of such classification but proposes a powerful conceptual tool which is that ‘the language of class, and therefore the identity of class, arguably only came to have real purchase when it was put into narrative form.’ He suggests that ‘social life is itself *storied* and that narrative is an *ontological condition of social life*’: people choose their own story from amongst a ‘multiple but ultimately limited repertoire of available social, public and cultural narratives.’⁹⁷ Anthony Giddens adds that a ‘person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*.’ In this way, with its shattering of space and time constraints, ‘[m]odernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by standardising effects of commodity capitalism.’⁹⁸ Joyce acknowledges (confusingly) that one of the primary bearers of narrative that serves a sense of identity is class which, ‘in the course of the nineteenth century, accrued its own narrative’.⁹⁹

Bourdieu deems that a ‘class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*, by its consumption ... as much as by its position in the relations of production’ while accepting

⁹⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; 483-4.

⁹⁶ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*; 161.

⁹⁷ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*; 161, 153. [Italics in original.]

⁹⁸ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991; 54, 196. [Italics in original.]

⁹⁹ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*; 149.

that 'the latter governs the former'. In other words, 'goods ... are signs of distinction'.¹⁰⁰ This concept of consumption as a marker of identity appears in the work of a number of writers: Walsh believes that the 'consumption of superfluous commodities was part of a trend towards the construction of an image of self in the light of one's relationship to others'.¹⁰¹ Simon Dentith concludes from his study of culture in the nineteenth century that '[c]ultural forms and genres ... are ways of negotiating social relations, historically created resources which people use to make sense of their lives and to manage their place in the world in relation to others.'¹⁰² Similarly, Ann Bermingham explores how 'individuals appropriate cultural forms to their own individual ends, as tools to construct social selves'. This appropriation serves sometimes to 'comply with and at other times to resist institutional and social coercions.'¹⁰³ Macleod's work has shown that a 'primary impetus behind British middle class patronage [of art] was the desire for self-definition.'¹⁰⁴ The consumption of art seems an obvious method of creating and securing a personal and collective narrative - whether compliant with social demands or not. This implies that art-as-narrative may be a particularly incisive method of accessing class structures and the historical process of their transformation and, in turn, that narratives of class will be an effective way of deciphering meaning in the production of art.

Art perhaps holds a status as a record of social history like no other since the 'relationship between the making of a work of art and the reception of a work of art, is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of social organization and relationship'.¹⁰⁵ Jameson reminds us that a painting remains inert, 'a reified end product'

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; 483.

¹⁰¹ Kevin Walsh, *Representations of the Past: Museums and heritage in the post-modern world*, Routledge, London, 1992; 29.

¹⁰² Simon Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth Century England*, Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1998; 182.

¹⁰³ Ann Bermingham, 'Introduction' in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, Routledge, London, 1995; 11.

¹⁰⁴ Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'The Dialectics of Modernism and English Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 35 no. 1, January 1995; 11.

¹⁰⁵ Williams, 'Base and superstructure'; 15.

unless it is regrasped ‘as praxis and as production.’¹⁰⁶ Solkin argues for the need to go beyond even this position and ‘to adopt a critical approach aimed at understanding pictures as active participants in a dynamic history.’¹⁰⁷ However, Hemingway warns that individual paintings cannot reasonably be made to bear too great a cognitive load: ‘we must be sensitive to the contradictions of culture, acknowledging that the aesthetic is simultaneously a realm of ideology *and* cognition, of social power plays *and* utopian possibilities.’¹⁰⁸ This becomes particularly problematic when one considers the different cognitive approaches to art of the nineteenth century and the late twentieth century. To take one example: a number of twentieth century writers have made much of the political content of Turner’s work despite no contemporary direct evidence for it. James Hamilton, for instance, invests significant political meaning in Turner’s *Crossing the Brook* from 1815, finding references to the transition from girlhood to womanhood, in turn signifying the potential for England to enter economic and industrial maturity following Napoleon’s defeat;¹⁰⁹ yet John Ruskin, Turner’s great contemporary defender and interpreter, commented at the time only on its glorious composition, its perfection ‘in all that is most desirable and most ennobling in art ... it is an agreeable, cool, grey rendering of space and form’.¹¹⁰ Turner appears never to have explained either his paintings or his opinions in letters or memoirs. Indirect evidence from his life and times - the paintings’ social context - can, however, allow considerable confidence in some modern interpretations. Hemingway takes it as ‘axiomatic that the intentions of an artist in producing an aesthetic object are (a) ultimately unknowable, and (b) ultimately irrelevant to its meaning and effects’ but he insists that this does not ‘preclude speculation as to the factors determining the artist’s agency and motives’.¹¹¹ Ludmilla Jordanova asserts that a picture ‘certainly can be treated as a document, as just about anything can be, if and only if it is carefully interpreted using as wide a range as possible of

¹⁰⁶ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the cultural logic of late capitalism*, Verso, London, 1991; 7.

¹⁰⁷ Solkin, *Richard Wilson*; 134.

¹⁰⁸ Hemingway, ‘Introduction’ in Hemingway and Vaughan, *Art in Bourgeois Society*; 14-15.

¹⁰⁹ James Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*, Tate Gallery, London, 1998; pp 92.

¹¹⁰ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. I, George Allen, London, 1900 (3rd ed); 180. More recently Rosenthal has agreed with Ruskin, writing that there is ‘no content’ in the painting. See Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982; 112. The painting is discussed further in Chapter 6 of the present work.

¹¹¹ Hemingway, ‘Landscape Imagery’; 189.

related materials. It emphatically does not speak for itself - nothing does.'¹¹² Quentin Skinner confronts the same problem in his attempt at a *historical* reading of classical thinkers, seeking to assess their meaning in their own terms, rather than interpreting them through modern-day needs: his 'aspiration is not of course to enter into the thought-processes of long-dead thinkers; it is simply to use the ordinary techniques of historical enquiry to grasp their concepts, to follow their distinctions, to appreciate their beliefs and, so far as possible, to see things their way.'¹¹³ This applies equally to visual art. While caution should still be exercised, encouragement can be taken from the Enlightenment philosopher David Hume's belief that 'the meaning of great works of art ... discloses itself slowly, and with great difficulty, over the years, through the co-operative work of those who happen to be interested in painting.'¹¹⁴

There is a further problem with the use of art as a historical document: both contemporary and latter-day issues around preservation and taste come into play. On the one hand, in an analysis of reactions to works of art in their own time, it is just as interesting to see what is *not* selected for exhibition or comment as it is to examine examples of more popular work. This itself presents obvious hurdles. But, on the other hand, and far more problematic, is the fact that there is a tendency for the significance of works of art to be 'obfuscated by later art-historical mischaracterisations'.¹¹⁵ Williams calls this the 'selective tradition' whereby not only has the historical period made its own selection of what suited contemporary tastes but subsequent periods will have reselected those things that suit a theory of the development of society, so that:

within the terms of an effective dominant culture, [the selective tradition] is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture.'¹¹⁶

¹¹² Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice*, Arnold, London, 2000; 99 (fig. 4.1 caption).

¹¹³ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Vol. I 'Regarding Method', Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002; 3.

¹¹⁴ Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*; 357.

¹¹⁵ Paul B. Jaskot, 'The discreet charms of bourgeois art', *Historical Materialism* 7, Winter 2000; 286.

¹¹⁶ Williams, 'Base and superstructure'; 9.

An illustration of the problem of selectivity is offered by Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*, which will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 6. Given an iconic place now in art, this work is not only highly popular but is also used to prove whatever discourse of technology or progress is required, positive or negative. In 1844, when it was exhibited in the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy, it was dismissed as shocking, confusing and eccentric. Any search for the railway in nineteenth century art needs to confront selectivity in interpretation, preservation and display head on.

The railway in art

The railway has been familiar in fine narrative art in Britain as a social marker from the late 1850s and as a feature in representations of the landscape in Europe from the 1870s. It is hard now to realize how excluded it was from art until that time, even by those artists who prided themselves on their representation of real life. As late as 1869 when Frederick Walker painted *The Plough*, he worked, following stringent standards of realism set by the Pre-Raphaelites, 'outside in conditions of severe physical discomfort, concerned himself with exactitude, catching the low light of evening and the precise colour of the ploughed field. But he chose not to see the Minehead Branch of the Great Western Railway.'¹¹⁷ (See Fig. 7 for *Punch*'s take on this conundrum in 1860.¹¹⁸)

The social narratives of Solomon (*Second Class - The Parting* and *First Class - The Meeting*, 1854), Egg (*The Travelling Companions*, 1862) and Frith (*The Railway Station*, 1863) dealt with the pressures and moral dilemmas of the crowded urban spaces of modernity and the new and problematic opportunities presented. It was not until the last part of the century that the Impressionists, largely based in France, exhibited the railway as a motif in an entirely new way - as seen in *Penge West* - giving the railway a place in the public landscape and in the life and society from which the painters came and which they represented on canvas. The railway became a celebration of modernity. In the twentieth

¹¹⁷ Stephen Daniels, 'Images of the railway in nineteenth century paintings and prints' in *Train Spotting: images of the railway in art*, Nottingham Castle Museum, Nottingham, 1985; 15.

¹¹⁸ I am indebted to Andy Guy of Beamish North of England Open Air Museum for bringing this cartoon to my attention.

century, technology, 'no longer jostling for a comfortable place in the landscape, now radiates outward, pushing the boundaries of the pictorial frame, extending notions of the proper subject of art itself.'¹¹⁹ But it was not long before the most cherished beliefs and myths of modernity began to be questioned and, while the railway retained its iconic place within the art of modernist movements, it became (or returned to being) a symbol of the darker side of the modern world.¹²⁰

It was Hegel who argued that all art, philosophy and religion must inevitably reflect the *zeitgeist*, the spirit, the consciousness of the historical period. How, then, could 'the iron road ... the very symbol of man's triumph through technology',¹²¹ remain so absent from the public discourse of landscape art in the first three quarters of the nineteenth century during the period that it was transforming life in the country and despite - as we shall see in Chapter 5 - taking pride of place on the walls of a number of country homes? Simon Dentith talks of the problem caused by cultural forms not conveniently following the precise time scale of changes evident in other aspects of society and says that it is because of this that 'we cannot speak of a *Zeitgeist* for the nineteenth century, or any portion of it, such as the "Victorian age", since every period of history is characterized by multiple and contradictory ways of thinking, seeing and feeling.' Like Gramsci, he points out the rarity of decisive moments of change across cultural, social and economic fields.¹²² But as the railway has been so consistent an icon in modern art, the differing forms of and spaces for the railway's presence in cultural life make it tempting to believe the artistic silences are themselves iconic in some way.

Francis Klingender claimed that the 'art patrons of the day wished for anything rather than to be reminded of the social and technological revolution going on all around them.'¹²³ This statement is obviously true for many art patrons but, as we will see, does not hold across the

¹¹⁹ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 212.

¹²⁰ See Dietmar Elger, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art*, Benedikt Taschen, Cologne, 1991. Tim Martin, *Essential Surrealists*, Dempsey Parr, Bath, 1999. Wendy Beckett, *The Story of Painting*, Dorling Kindersley, London, 2001.

¹²¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Abacus, London, 1977 [first pub. 1962]; 60-61.

¹²² Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth Century*; 181.

¹²³ Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; 137.

board; later chapters will develop this conflict. However, even were it entirely true, it would not have been the first artistic suppression of the facts of modernity in the landscape. Hugh Prince details his ‘fruitless search for English eighteenth-century paintings that depict newly enclosed fields, newly built farmsteads, newly reclaimed heaths and newly introduced crops’ and asks ‘why artists who were increasingly sensitive to landscape, and to that of the contemporary English countryside, seemed to ignore such graphic evidence of agrarian change.’¹²⁴ John Barrell and Timothy Barringer have both published work on the disappearance of the troubled rural poor,¹²⁵ while landscapes containing city views suppressed the urban riot, rendering it safe and distant. These issues will be discussed in the next two chapters. Barringer concludes that ‘inconsistencies, absences and disavowals are of primary importance in the production of meaning.’¹²⁶ Eagleton confirms that ‘an “ideological” discourse, properly understood, means one which, when deciphered and decoded in certain ways will betray in its limits and emphases, its *silences*, *gaps* and internal contradictions, the imprint of real material conflicts.’¹²⁷ It is my contention that the railway’s absence from publicly exhibited landscape art during the mid nineteenth century articulates with social changes and conflicts over both technological developments and political power.

There is a distinction between the display of art works for private pleasure and their display in public galleries or institutions. As will be seen later, the development of institutions for the display of art to the public had the effect of maintaining some control over the ‘rules’ of art while, paradoxically, putting it outside the immediate control of those who sought to establish and maintain those rules by commodifying it in an open market place. It was at this time that the ‘bourgeois public sphere’ appeared in which ‘public opinion’ came to the fore for the first time. Habermas has explored the emergence of the public sphere in Europe and traced how the centrality of private property came to define the public sphere. The public sphere developed alongside concert and theatre attendance - and, of course, with the new galleries and exhibitions. Habermas mysteriously says that art was thus ‘released from its

¹²⁴ Hugh Prince, ‘Art and agrarian change, 1710-1815’ in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; 98.

¹²⁵ Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*. Timothy Barringer, *Representations of Labour in British Visual Culture 1850-1875*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1994.

¹²⁶ Timothy Barringer, *Representations of Labour in British Visual Culture 1850-1875*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1994; 25.

¹²⁷ Eagleton, ‘Introduction’ in *Ideology*; 7. [My italics.]

functions in the service of social representation' - a statement that I hope to demonstrate is incorrect - and became 'an object of free choice and of changing preference. The "taste" to which art was oriented from then on became manifest in the assessments of lay people who claimed no prerogative, since within a public everyone was entitled to judge.'¹²⁸

The fear that art would be degraded in response to uneducated taste was tempered by an awareness, especially among the industrial bourgeoisie, of the role that art galleries could play in the education of the masses. In the nineteenth century art in public spaces possibly took on a more urgent role in 'the service of social representation' as exhibitions were sponsored for the edification of the 'lower classes'. Macleod asks: 'Were these philanthropic gestures intended to sanction the ideology of their organizers or to subdue and control the unruly masses?'¹²⁹ I would suggest that there is not necessarily a distinction between the two. Reynolds' categorisation of art, with history painting elevated to the highest status, was based on the relative edifying effect of the different categories on those exposed to them. Was it important, then, to exclude from public exhibition works that challenged, for example, the uplifting ideal of history painting or the political import of landscape painting - as inclusion of a railway would have done - especially in a time of unrest and disturbance? Such paintings were perhaps more comfortably kept in the home for personal gratification and for display to a select few.

The home as private space, separate from work space, was something that emerged for all classes, alongside the growth of capitalism and the factory system. By the time the railway intervened to break boundaries between different ways of life, the process of segregation of domestic and working life for the individual was close to completion. 'Productive work first had to be banished from the domestic area' and then came 'the suburban villa: physically, financially and socially removed from the enterprise' such that it was 'the middle ranks who erected the strictest boundaries between private and public space, a novelty which struck many early nineteenth century travellers in England.'¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992 [first pub. 1962]; 39-40.

¹²⁹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 15.

¹³⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850*, Routledge, London, 1994 [first. pub 1987]; 359. This book provides a detailed analysis of
(continued...)

Davidoff and Hall suggest that the idea of 'home' strengthened as 'people struggled to control their destiny through religious grace and the bulwark of family property and resources' and created 'shields' which included the 'organization of the immediate environment'.¹³¹ Klingender would have said that, in these protected spaces, they would want nothing that reminded them of the chaos and tumult of everyday working life or of the confusing changes taking place all around. But, to repeat, the evidence in many cases suggests the opposite. I have already mentioned that there *were* fine art industrial landscapes in private homes (a fact that will be explored in Chapter 5) but there is also the evidence of the lithographs of the railway that sold in huge numbers to the 'middle ranks'.

The fact that the homes of the gentry were sometimes graced by paintings of railways steaming through the landscape is particularly interesting if one accepts Davidoff and Hall's suggestion that these homes served as examples for visiting members of the lower ranks when developing their own domestic space. They 'were regularly opened to a select public, providing a glimpse of taste to be followed'¹³² as well as 'inevitably locat[ing] the eye of the visitor within the ambience of the patron's cultural power.'¹³³ The secret may be in the phrase 'select public'. A 'select' public was one that was chosen and could be, in a sense, controlled. Display of everyday reality was not necessarily undesirable, and could perhaps do no harm if kept from the masses.

The function of such private collections of art - and other artefacts - and the process of collecting itself, have been the subject of a number of recent theories, from a variety of academic disciplines, including anthropology and museum studies. The anthropologist James Clifford has suggested that the accumulation of property is an aspect of Western individualism in which the assemblage of a material world, a 'gathering' around the self and the group marks off a subjective domain¹³⁴ - a version of 'commodity fetishism' where

¹³⁰ (...continued)
the separation of home and work spaces.

¹³¹ Davidoff & Hall, *Family Fortunes*; 357.

¹³² Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; 362.

¹³³ Gordon J. Fyfe, 'Art exhibitions and power during the nineteenth century' in John Law (ed), *Power, Action and Belief*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1986; 25.

¹³⁴ See Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 9.

goods, commodities, are believed to be able to endow the owner with some aura.¹³⁵ Works of art that displayed modernity may have shared this progressive aura with the owner whilst also, if the painting was of, for example, a railway on the collector's own land, having the effect of doubly displaying ownership. Bourdieu has said that '[c]onsumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication ... which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code.'¹³⁶

In an obvious link with Joyce *et al*'s work on self-definition and social narrative, the idea of collections as signifiers of identity for both individual and group has been developed by Susan Pearce in her work on museums. She suggests that 'all societies, without any exceptions known to us, use objects as they do language: to construct their social lives.' Collecting is seen as a social practice enabling communities to 'develop strategies which enable them to bring together the accumulating possibilities of objects and other social structures - like family relationships, notions of surplus and prestige, and religious practices - in order to maintain the social pattern and project it into the future.'¹³⁷ It is not hard to see how this would relate both to aristocratic collecting practices up to at least the mid eighteenth century as well as to bourgeois collecting practices in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Pearce sees the collecting process as a 'form of fiction' which enables the objects to be used 'according to the view and capacity of the collecting individual ... to create and project the image of himself and how he sees the world.' The hegemonic possibilities - both for dominance and subversion - are acknowledged: 'collecting has contributed to the creation of patterns of dominance but also ... can be an assertive force for change.' But that potential for ideological power is first expressed as an individual power, for we 'can control our collections as we can few other matters in this world.'¹³⁸ One can easily see how art works held in private could be subversive of a dominant ideology - which is maintained in public displays - and how confirmatory of a specific personal and class narrative this could be.

¹³⁵ See Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. I*, Penguin, London, 1976 [first pub. 1867]; Chapter 1 esp. p.165.

¹³⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*; 2.

¹³⁷ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An investigation into collecting in the European tradition*, Routledge, London, 1995; 28.

¹³⁸ Pearce, *On Collecting*; 32, 33 and 178.

Railways and the nation

It was a French writer - Stendhal - who, in 1825, wrote in the *London Magazine* that the painter should be 'the historian of the physical world before him' and that art should 'keep pace with the progress of society.'¹³⁹ Yet Marc Baroli, in a review of nineteenth century French literature, suggests a similar public reticence to that in Britain on the subject of the railway in the same period, a reticence unbroken until the mid 1850s. His view is that it takes time for technology to enter the 'universe of the senses that art and poetry translate'. He believes that it was necessary for the public to first make up its mind whether the changes wrought by the railway were for good or bad, and that writers began to address it only when it was clearly 'admitted among the objects of everyday life'. Only then could their 'laws and their beauty be discovered.'¹⁴⁰ This explanation, while attractive, seems to be too simple, and not only because the acceptance of the railway and its role in life seems to have come as readily to France as to Britain. A trivial example from a French magazine serves to illustrate this: in January 1840 an advertisement for a house for sale included the information that it was a 'very lovely rural residence, twelve hectares of *jardins anglais*, cover and grounds ... magnificent view over the Seine, ten minutes from Paris by railway.'¹⁴¹

The painted meaning of the railway differed, however, from country to country, depending on specific social and political circumstances. The bourgeoisie in France had supplanted the traditional power structures of the aristocracy 40 years prior to the advent of the public railway and, from the latter's inception, the state took tight control of its development.¹⁴² A study of landscape art in France might find meanings inscribed in landscapes very different to those found in Britain in relation to technological innovation and commercial interests. In Italy the railway was instrumental in forging the emerging nation out of the disparate

¹³⁹ Quoted in William Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997; 10.

¹⁴⁰ Marc Baroli, *Le Train dans la littérature française*, Editions NM, Paris, 1963; 482-3.

¹⁴¹ From *Journal Général d'Affiches, annonces judiciaires, légales et avis divers*, 31 January 1840; 9. Quoted in Nicholas Green, 'Rustic retreats: visions of the countryside in mid-nineteenth century France' in Simon Pugh (ed), *Reading Landscape: country - city - capital*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990; 161.

¹⁴² See François Caron, *L'Histoire des Chemins de Fer en France*, Vol. 1 '1830-1870', Fayard, Paris, 1997.

states and rival power groups¹⁴³ while in the USA the railway played a dynamic role in the expansion westward: there it was believed that landscape art could have the effect of easing acceptance of change and industrialization.¹⁴⁴ In all these countries and in diverse ways, the railway was a primary harbinger of modernity and developed a particular relationship with art but, due to specific historical circumstances, modernity itself held different meanings for varying social groups in different countries at different times.

In *Art in Bourgeois Society*, Hemingway and Vaughan acknowledge that they have concentrated on 'issues around metropolitan urban society' and that there remains a requirement for attention to be paid to 'the complex histories of provincial and rural bourgeoisies.' I, too, have blurred distinctions between these groups in this thesis but, perhaps more importantly, I have concentrated on the British experience. I do not seek to imply by this that the British experience was either unique or typical. The work undertaken begs further work on an in-depth international comparison which would clarify convergences and sharpen distinctions. The development of the bourgeoisie and of modernity itself took different paths in different countries, but 'bourgeois society is an inherently expansive and international phenomenon, and thus bourgeois culture needs to be studied internationally.'¹⁴⁵ This work is, therefore, a small part of a larger project.

In August 1858 *Blackwood's Magazine* demanded that a 'national art worthy of our nation, which assuredly we do not yet possess, must represent our glory, not our shame - our civilisation, our wealth, not our poverty and ignorance.' Only this would be 'commensurate with its material conquests or civilised mission.'¹⁴⁶ Depictions of the railway, in some form, would surely have filled this demand: as early as May 1833 the *Art-Union* wrote that from railways would come opportunities for 'the greatest works of international improvement.' Edwin Clark, the resident engineer for the construction of Stephenson's Britannia Bridge

¹⁴³ See Stefano Maggi, *Dalla Città allo Stato Nazionale*, Dott. A. Giuffrè Editore, Milan, 1994; Albert Schram, *Railways and the Formation of the Italian State*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

¹⁴⁴ See Susan Danly and Leo Marx (eds), *Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964; David Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996.

¹⁴⁵ Hemingway and Vaughan, *Art in Bourgeois Society*; xii-xiii.

¹⁴⁶ *Blackwood's Magazine*, August 1858; 188.

wrote in 1849 that the railway was ‘the most prominent embodiment of national energy and the fittest symbol of industrial progress; it [was] the most apparent and appropriate representation of the work of the nation.’¹⁴⁷ He was, of course, not unbiased, but even Ruskin, who made some memorably antagonistic remarks on the aesthetics of railways, developed the same nationalistic theme and acknowledged the possibility of the inclusion of railways in great art, writing, in 1843, of the need for a landscape artist to be immured from early childhood in the landscape that they painted: ‘whatever is to be truly great and affecting must have on it the strong stamp of the native land. ... ; if we are now to do anything great, good, awful, religious, it must be got out of our own little island, and out of these very times, railroads and all’.¹⁴⁸ In the following chapters I shall explore some reasons why, in the event, railways may not have been (openly) invited to the ball.

Chapter synopsis

The meaning of the railway to Victorian society has been examined by conventional histories, assessing its economic impact and its role in transport patterns and in the development of the city.¹⁴⁹ But little work has been done in Britain until quite recently to include the railway in the cultural history debates of the last 30 years. Cultural analysis of technology is now gaining in popularity. The ground had been laid in 1947 with Francis Klingender’s *Art and the Industrial Revolution* and Wolfgang Schivelbusch in Germany made a good beginning for railways with his *Railway Journey* in 1977 (translated in 1979) but his approach, despite generating considerable interest, had little follow-up. In the same year Hamilton Ellis published *Railway Art* which is a comprehensive survey of visual reactions to railways in a number of countries (with emphasis on Britain). In 1985 Nottingham Castle held an exhibition devoted to images of the railway in art, accompanied by Stephen Daniels’ short but insightful catalogue essay. In the last decade attention has begun to turn somewhat more towards the railways’ role in culture, starting with Jack

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Louise Purbrick, *Machines and the Mechanics of Representation: The display of design in mid nineteenth century Britain*, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1994; 120.

¹⁴⁸ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. I; 131-2. Only one year later Turner painted *Rain, Steam and Speed* which Ruskin dismissed as Turner’s attempt to see what he could do with a very ugly subject.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, John R. Kellett, *Railways and Victorian Cities*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979; Reed, *Railways in the Victorian Economy*.

Simmons' scholarly and extremely wide-ranging *The Victorian Railway* in 1991. Eight years later came Michael Freeman's lavishly illustrated book, *Railways in the Victorian Imagination* which has a chapter devoted to railways in art, and then, in 2000, Ian Carter's *Railways and Culture in Britain* which looks mostly at the railway's impact on literature although it has some interesting things to say about railway paintings.¹⁵⁰

Julie Wosk's *Breaking Frame*, published in 1992, is a fascinating analysis of cultural responses to technological change but, in looking at visual responses, its claim to assess how artists represented the feeling of 'breaking frame' is weakened, in my view, by her tendency to elide fine art with lithographs and with satirical cartoons. She discusses the differences between Daumier's cartoons and his oil representations of the railway without any speculation about varying social functions of different types of art; she makes a detailed analysis of Solomon's *First Class - The Meeting* as a painting in which travellers felt 'secure enough to engage in romantic flirtations' without any mention of the scandal caused by the original version of the painting which was rapidly withdrawn and reproduced in a sanitized version; and Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed* is mentioned a number of times as an unproblematic 'admiring view of England's Great Western Railway.'¹⁵¹ Wosk's is, however, a bold attempt to develop the lead given by Leo Marx's seminal work, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), which analysed the cultural impact of the railway in the United States where this rampant technology intruded into perfect nature, at a time when the American wilderness served many political and emotional needs as a vision of Arcadia. David Nye continued the project in 1996 with *American Technological Sublime* which looks at artistic responses to different stages of industrial development. However, no major work has addressed the discursive relationship between the railway and the landscape in Britain.¹⁵²

This thesis will look at the process of the intrusion of the railway on the working landscape of Britain, which had been constructed and reconstructed as Arcadia. It will attempt to

¹⁵⁰ Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*; C. Hamilton Ellis, *Railway Art*, Ash and Grant Ltd., London, 1977; Daniels, 'Images of the railway'; Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1991; Freeman, *Railways in the Victorian Imagination*; Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*.

¹⁵¹ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 63, 65 and 216.

¹⁵² This question has been addressed most effectively in an essay on Turner's work in Stephen Daniels' much larger work, *Fields of Vision*; Chapter 4.

interpret what artists' representations of the railway are able to tell us about the reaction of society to it and to technology in general, and about developments in that society during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century. It may be that through such a study 'the modernisms of the past can give us back a sense of our own modern roots.' The contradictions and dilemmas that are faced today have lost some of the starkness and clarity that they held in the nineteenth century so that, '[p]aradoxically, these first modernists may turn out to understand us - the modernization and modernism that constitutes our lives - better than we understand ourselves.'¹⁵³

To some extent the thesis will address the questions asked by Janet Wolff and John Seed in the introduction to their study of the middle class, *The Culture of Capital*: 'In what ways were some of the ideological presuppositions and social values of middle class men and women realized in cultural practices? Is it possible to identify a class project in ... institutions or in various forms of representation?'¹⁵⁴ Other writers have looked at the shift in patronage from the aristocracy to the middle class and shown how a study of art can reveal much about the development of class in a particular historical moment (e.g. Macleod) and others again have discussed attributes that the middle class were trying to develop or emphasize (e.g. Wiener,¹⁵⁵ Joyce) but this has not been looked at in the context of one of the main engines of the shift in wealth: the railway. In looking at the class basis of landscape representation, Bermingham states that it is essential to come to terms with 'the cultural mechanics whereby social and economic realities become inscribed in a medium intrinsically different from that of "lived experience"'¹⁵⁶ and Hemingway has called for analyses which investigate

both the functions which landscape painting served within the turbulent social order of early nineteenth century Britain; and how its practice involved an effort to produce forms of painting adequate to the cognition of the modern world - a world distinguished by "constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and

¹⁵³ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*; 35-6.

¹⁵⁴ Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: art, power and the nineteenth century middle class*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 13.

¹⁵⁵ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*, Pelican, London, 1985 [first pub. 1981].

¹⁵⁶ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 5.

I intend to build on this work with an analysis of the process by which the railway became inscribed in culture. The difficulties of my chosen task are summed up by David Fraser:

Towards the end of Turner’s life the railway replaced the cotton mill as the key symbol of industrial power and transformation. As [Joseph Wright of Derby] developed a style of landscape painting to represent the harnessing of this power in *Arkwright’s Mill by Moonlight*, so also did Turner in *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844). They were the only English painters to do so.¹⁵⁸

In order to have a basis for understanding what changes were going on in art and in representational forms after the arrival of the railway, in Chapter 2, ‘The Construction of the Landscape’, I will look at how the landscape came to be constructed in the way that it was, acquiring the role in itself of both referent and signifier, and the processes involved in representing it again on canvas. In reviewing the work of Ann Bermingham, John Barrell and others I try to determine what meanings the landscape held in its constructed forms and for whom. Chapter 3 turns to ‘The Destruction of the Landscape’, examining how modernity was accommodated in the painted landscape when artists addressed the city. In order to paint the city as a phenomenon in the landscape, a number of specific conventions were developed. When it came to the railway, these conventions were borrowed by the lithographic artists who depicted the railway so prolifically, but were not used in exhibited fine art where the challenge of the railway was generally ignored. Chapter 4, ‘Modernity Crosses the Divide’, looks at why this might be so, suggesting that the railway was not only ‘intrinsically at odds with the established order embodied in the rural landscape’¹⁵⁹ but also shattered the traditional physical, poetic and philosophical divide between city and country. It uses other media to look at how the railway became an essential part of the discourse of progress and takes a cursory look at how American artists were able to celebrate that discourse in a way that remained closed to British artists. The chapter ends with an analysis of Wordsworth’s attitude to the railway and modernity in an attempt to engage with the ambiguity felt even by a supremely Romantic poet in his response to technological change.

While exhibited art may have maintained a virtual silence, the railway was quietly finding

¹⁵⁷ Hemingway, *Landscape imagery and urban culture*; 300.

¹⁵⁸ David Fraser, ‘“Fields of radiance”: the scientific and industrial scenes of Joseph Wright’ in Cosgrove and Daniels, *Iconography of Landscape*; 137.

¹⁵⁹ Harrington, ‘Neuroses of the Railway’; 15.

its way onto canvas and in Chapter 5, 'An Enlightened Patronage', I will discuss the motivations of the patrons who commissioned paintings of the railway. Most of these patrons - or those that I have been able to locate - were the engineers of lines, or the owners of land through which a line passed, or the sponsors of particular routes; well known painters were brought in to represent 'their' railway in a picturesque landscape for display in their homes. This phenomenon must be assessed within the terms of the selective tradition as those paintings of railways commissioned for private consumption remained and, generally, remain absent from public spaces and have to be hunted down. A detailed case study of one family, the Trevelyans of Wallington Hall, seeks to shed a little light on the processes involved.

There were, however, a few exceptions to the policy of keeping the railway behind locked doors in the second third of the nineteenth century. Chapter 6 will look at how the 'technological sublime' supplied an opportunity for the railway to become part of artistic expression. This notion is developed in depth by David Nye in *American Technological Sublime*; British audiences responded differently to both technology and to the technological sublime but the concept retains explanatory power. One artist that took up its challenge was J.M.W. Turner, as we have seen, with *Rain, Steam and Speed*. In some senses, the existence of this painting is the main inspiration to look for imitators or fellow spirits and this chapter will join the lengthy debate on why Turner painted *Rain, Steam and Speed* and what he intended by so doing.

But it was the Impressionists who finally gave the railway a very public role in the painted landscape at a time when confidence had been built up enough to suggest a 'new hegemony of industrial capital'.¹⁶⁰ A full analysis of Impressionism has to stand outside the remit of this thesis as it was largely a development within the specific context of French art, but Chapter 7 will sketch out its emergence and assess its impact in Britain. It will also sum up the connections made between the social transformations of the nineteenth century, shifts in political power, a new consciousness of class identities, and artistic expression as evidenced in the railway's relationship to landscape art.

¹⁶⁰ Wolff and Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital*; 5.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

*There is an ideology of landscape and ... in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a class view of landscape embodied a set of socially and, finally, economically determined values to which the painted image gave cultural expression.*¹

In his book *Landscape into Art*, Kenneth Clark, citing the nineteenth century art critic John Ruskin as justification, claims that landscape painting ‘was the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century.’² W.J.T. Mitchell questions Clark’s historiography, pointing out a much longer genesis for landscape art than that allowed by Clark. However, given the emphasis applied to landscape art in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Mitchell does feel that ‘we need at least to explore the relevance of this cultural fact to the other “chief creation” of the nineteenth century - the system of global domination known as European imperialism.’³ This thesis suggests that we need to go further - or, rather, stay closer to home - and explore the relevance to yet another quintessential creation of the nineteenth century, a creation that became an unavoidable part of the landscape: the railway.

In order to be able to do that, this chapter will look at how the landscape becomes invested with meaning. It will set ‘landscape’ as a concept and as a construct in its historical and cultural context and will examine the creation of - and the meanings of - the specific landscape that the railway was to enter in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It will open with an overview of the origin of the term ‘landscape’ and an explanation of what is meant by ‘the construction of landscape’. It will then attempt to fit the artistic interpretation of landscape into its social and political milieu. Around the turn of the century the role of the artist in society was changing and the concept of the creative artist as ‘genius’ was gaining ground. This concept itself fed into the complex meanings of landscape. A variety of vested interests were served by different styles of landscape presentation and

¹ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: the English Rustic, 1740-1860*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986; 3.

² Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, John Murray, London, 1979 [first pub. 1949]; ix.

³ W.J.T. Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994; 10.

representation at different times and in this chapter I will seek to justify the suggestion that political and social problems as well as shifting ideologies can be revealed in landscape images.

The discovery of the landscape

The landscape as the object of academic study has been attracting an increasing amount of attention over recent decades in different but inter-linking academic fields. W.G. Hoskins' ground-breaking book *The Making of the English Landscape*, published in 1955, has inspired a number of studies, particularly in the field of cultural geography where both the social function and the social construction of landscape have been acknowledged. Archaeology, anthropology, cultural history and heritage studies have followed parallel themes. Since the late 1980s a number of political approaches to an understanding of landscape art have emerged from cultural history, the history of art and from sociology (e.g. John Barrell, Ann Bermingham, David Solkin, Janet Wolff).⁴

The word 'landscape' originated alongside the emergence of a particular style of painting in Holland in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Perspective had recently been introduced into art and Thomas believes that it had the effect of alienating land by placing the viewer, like the subjects within the picture, in a fixed relationship to the view, i.e. outside it. The land in a landscape is 'appropriated by the disengaged look' which is associated with a new politics based 'in the development of social relations which allowed land to be looked on as a commodity, disengaged from hereditary patterns of tenure, able to be bought and sold at will.' Like a number of other writers, Thomas states that 'landscape painting and the idea of landscape emerge hand-in-hand with capitalism'.⁵ Don Mitchell suggests that the specific

⁴ W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988 (ed. Christopher Woods), [first pub. 1955]; David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985; John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: the Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995 [first pub. 1986]; Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: the Landscape of Reaction*, Tate Gallery, London, 1982, *Painting for Money: the Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century England*, Yale University, New Haven, 1992; Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2nd edit., 1993.

⁵ Julian Thomas, 'The Politics of Vision and the Archaeologies of Landscape', in Barbara Bender
(continued...)

‘way of seeing’ required for the idea of landscape ‘has a history that is inextricably bound to the hypercommodification of land that came with the capitalist transformation in Europe.’⁶

Kenneth Olwig has traced the roots of the word landscape to the original Dutch meaning which was, roughly, a piece of land that had been adopted and used by a group of people, thus establishing its origins in both land ownership and the nascent concept of nationhood.⁷ It was in Holland, as merchant wealth rapidly accumulated, that the word was first applied to a particular style of painting in oils in the sixteenth century. The word was brought to England by the art connoisseurs who first imported landscape pictures. The word subtly expanded its meanings until it came to mean not only the ‘artistic symbol’ but also the ‘concrete world depicted in that symbol’.⁸ This reification of landscape developed as merchant wealth accumulated and property relations became pre-eminent. Kenneth Clark also notes that landscape painting in Britain reached its zenith at a time of rapid accumulation of wealth. The association, therefore, with the rise of capitalism is inescapable. Don Mitchell has emphasized this point, saying that the history of the idea of landscape ‘was inseparable from the construction of capitalist geographies based on the full commodification of the land ... and the subsequent need to represent ownership (or non-ownership) as a natural order of society.’⁹ This idea is explored in more detail below.

The meaning of the landscape

The art historian E.H. Gombrich has said that ‘[t]he first condition for a demand [for landscape paintings] arising is, of course, a more or less consciously aesthetic attitude

⁵ (...continued)
(ed), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, Berg, Providence, 1993; 22.

⁶ Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996; 26.

⁷ Kenneth Robert Olwig, ‘Sexual Cosmology: Nation and Landscape at the Conceptual Interstices of Nature and Culture; or, What does Landscape Really Mean?’, in Bender, *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*; 333.

⁸ Olwig, ‘Sexual Cosmology’; 318.

⁹ Don Mitchell, *Lie of the Land*; 4.

towards paintings and prints ... which prizes works of art for the sake of their artistic achievement rather than for their function and subject matter'.¹⁰ This view privileges the theory of art over transformations in the discourses of politics, religion, economics, society and the market. It is a view which still governs some debates within art history, but which in the wider field of landscape studies would now largely be considered outdated. Robert Clark's view of the same artistic development is starkly opposed to that of Gombrich: 'The discovery of aesthetic value in the landscape is fundamentally linked to the transformation of the earth into an investment whose profitability must be constantly assessed, a commodity whose utility as the supporter of the once-feudal community is now in antagonistic relationship with its exchange value in money.'¹¹

The deconstruction of the representation of landscape in paintings is complex because, insofar as the painting is representational, one is dealing with the meanings and subtexts of the original landscape as well as the process involved in its translation to canvas and the specific discourses of art and of the academy, all within a defined social, economic and political framework: the mutability of the concrete elided with the product of the imagination; reality and representation, mediated by power. To quote W.J.T. Mitchell again:

The familiar categories that divide the genre of landscape painting into subgenres - notions such as the Ideal, the Heroic, the Pastoral, the Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque - are all distinctions based, not in ways of putting paint on canvas, but in the kinds of objects and visual spaces that may be represented by paint. Landscape *painting* is best understood, then, not as the uniquely central medium that gives us access to ways of seeing landscape, but as a representation of something that is already a representation in its own right.¹²

Howkins offers the example of Petworth, the Earl of Egremont's estate in Sussex, where the park had been landscaped by Capability Brown and which was painted extensively by J.M.W. Turner. In this case the 'design was based on one of [Egremont's] own paintings, Claude's *Jacob and Laban* - nature mimicking art at the behest of a great lord. Turner's paintings of Petworth Park seem to take the process a stage further: they are art imitating

¹⁰ 'The Renaissance Theory of Art and the Rise of Landscape' in E.H. Gombrich, *Gombrich on the Renaissance: Vol I: Norm and Form*, Phaidon, London, 1985 [first pub. 1966]; 110. For a thorough critique of Gombrich's views see W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Gombrich and the Rise of Landscape' in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, Routledge, London, 1995; 103-118.

¹¹ Robert Clark, 'The absent landscape of America's eighteenth century' in Mick Gidley and Robert Lawson-Peebles (eds), *Views of American Landscapes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; 83.

¹² W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*; 14.

nature imitating art.’¹³ Turner’s *Petworth, Sussex, the Seat of the Earl of Egremont: Dewy Morning* (Fig. 8) is a classic example of this process. The tranquillity of the lake was created by Brown; Turner has fully naturalized it by peopling it with ‘contented’ rural characters engaged in ‘traditional’ country pursuits (in this case, fishing). He has reproduced Brown’s sleight of hand in the long vista of trees and hills (to the right of the house) which shows the extensiveness of the park, giving no sign of the intensive arable production on Egremont’s estates. It was ‘only the more distant and secluded sections ... that contained crops. In the vicinity of the mansion the agricultural use of the park was limited, by definition, to livestock. If the landscape of arable toil should here triumph over one of pastoral ease, then the park had ceased to exist.’ This had to be avoided in a situation where, despite society being ‘ever more dependent on commercial and industrial wealth, the ownership of land remained an immensely powerful symbol of social status. And nothing demonstrated land ownership so clearly, so visibly, as the landscape park.’¹⁴ Turner’s painting of the park contains a judicious selection of livestock within sight of the mansion. The livestock shown - on both sides of the hill to the left of centre, as well as on the flat grassland in front of the house - include sheep, probably some of Egremont’s ‘famous herd of South Down and black sheep’, which reveals his passion for agricultural improvement. But it also includes deer emerging from Brown’s carefully designed deer forests, the greatest symbol of idleness on land. This creates a tension between the regal (and wasteful) deer and the humble (but productive) sheep, a tension that Turner resolves (as does his patron in reality) in a ‘harmony, carefully achieved and delicately balanced. Egremont retains his park and his deer as the symbols of his old aristocratic power, modified, however, by the introduction of a prize breed of livestock, the symbols of a newer power.’¹⁵

Through its ability to carry complex meanings, landscape - both that which involves exposure to the elements and that which is contemplated in the warmth of an art gallery - has

¹³ Alun Howkins, ‘J.M.W. Turner at Petworth: Agricultural Improvement and the Politics of Landscape’ in John Barrell (ed), *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art 1700-1850*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992); 243. Or, from a recent theatrical analysis of many of the issues involved: ‘English landscape was invented by gardeners imitating foreign painters who were evoking classical authors. ... - Capability Brown doing Claude, who was doing Virgil. Arcadia!’ (Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*, Faber and Faber, 1993; 25.)

¹⁴ Tom Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1998; 123 & 113.

¹⁵ Howkins, ‘J.M.W. Turner at Petworth’; 247-8.

been used to establish a succession of different identities and subjectivities for groups and for individuals. Mitchell sees landscape as 'a process by which social and subjective identities are formed.' He sees it functioning as a cultural practice that 'doesn't merely signify or symbolize power relations; it is an instrument of cultural power.' Critically, he interprets landscape painting as having 'a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site.'¹⁶ Susan Ford develops this concept of power - evinced by the fixed relationship between observer and landscape - within feminist theories of the 'male gaze'. 'Looking at a landscape properly requires an adequate distance between the observer and that which is being observed. This distancing, the objectification of the prospect, facilitates a notion of possession and control. The English landscape garden was commissioned by rich and powerful men to aestheticise their landed fortunes.'¹⁷ I will not address here the questions she pursues of whether this 'convergence of aesthetic beauty and symbolic power' is phallogocentric, and the implications of that contention. There will be more than one level of interpretation for any particular landscape discourse but, I would argue, always fundamentally based on the social relations of the historical epoch.

David Matless states that a landscape appears as a given but what it is 'can always be subsumed in the question of how it works; as a vehicle of social and self identity, as a site for the claiming of cultural authority, as a generator of profit, as a space for different kinds of living.'¹⁸ Stephen Daniels has argued that landscape has great analytical potential precisely because of its 'duplicity' as 'a cultural term carrying meanings of depth and surface, solid earth and superficial scenery, the ontological and the ideological.' This applies, with differing emphases, in both the representational and 'natural' forms. As a concept, landscape straddles - and slides between - nature and culture perhaps more than any other. This duplicity gives landscape a particular power 'to give the impression that far from

¹⁶ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*; 1 - 2.

¹⁷ Susan Ford, 'Landscape Revisited: A Feminist Reappraisal' in Chris Philo (compiler) *New Words, New Worlds: Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography* (Conference Proceedings), St. David's University College, Lampeter, 1991; 151.

¹⁸ David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, Reaktion Books, London, 1998; 12.

being implicated in the commodification of land and any attendant class tensions, it represented a world of nature, or a world where land and life were in harmony. Landscape is an ideology, a sophisticated “visual ideology” which obscures not only the forces and relations of production but also more plebeian, less pictorial, experiences of nature.’¹⁹

The landscape, then, can be seen as a marker of the development of social history and as a contested site in struggles for power, both political and cultural: it is a text which can be read like any other and which bears powerful discourses, the content and control of which fluctuate to reflect changing social and political circumstances. Put another way, the landscape reflects the ideology of the dominant section of society in a country where status and power are often directly related to land ownership. The battle over the many aspects of landscape - its use, its display, its appearance, access to it, its ownership, its representation - have occurred throughout history but have perhaps intensified in the modern period.

Landscape - in its ‘natural’ and its painted versions - is, then, always a mediated *representation*. It is not, in itself, ‘owned’. Land in individual sections of a landscape may well be owned by one or more landowners or farmers, but only when those sections are put together to form a whole does the view become a ‘landscape’ which is, effectively, ‘in the eye of the beholder’, an interpretation placed upon the sum of the parts. The true form of the relations that went into the creation of the landscape - in all its manifestations - are denied. Marx showed that there is ‘a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things’ and this is how a landscape becomes a fetishized commodity, reified and available for consumption.²⁰ Despite being ‘the solidification of the work of people in society’, the landscape ‘represented as perspectival view ... lends the countryside the appearance of being *unworked*, a part of the order of nature, precisely at a time when the *social* relationships of human labor and life were remade

¹⁹ Stephen Daniels, ‘Marxism, Culture, and the Duplicity of Landscape’, in Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift (eds), *New Models in Geography*, Vol II, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989; 205-206.

²⁰ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, Penguin, London, 1975; 72. For Marx, ‘fetishism [is] peculiar to the capitalist mode of production from which it arises. This consists in regarding *economic* categories, such as being a *commodity* or *productive* labour, as qualities inherent in the material incarnations of these formal determinations or categories.’ [*Capital*, Vol I, Penguin, London, 1976 [first pub. 1867]; 1046]. In this way, the concept of landscape has become elided with the concept of nature and both its apparently ‘natural’ forms and the assumption of control over it make it emerge as fetishized. See also Ann Bermingham’s ‘Introduction’ in Bermingham & Brewer, *The consumption of Capital*; 7-8.

in the image of an incipient capitalism.’²¹

The social relations of landscape

The developing property relations of the mid eighteenth century were most clearly expressed in the structure of a landscaped park. Solkin suggests that, as a result of a combination of political events, there was an ‘aristocratic resurgence’ in England in the decades after the mid century and ‘to underline those qualities that distinguished them from their social inferiors, many landlords adopted a more conspicuously opulent lifestyle, which took on an especially monumental form in the tremendous vogue for those immense (and enormously expensive) landscape parks by ‘Capability’ Brown and his followers’²² and English versions of Arcadia (the supposed golden age of pastoral society in classical Greece) began to appear. Howkins, in his discussion of the Earl of Egremont’s transformation of the Petworth estate and Turner’s immortalization of the result, states that ‘a park was not only, or even mainly, a thing of beauty: it was the representation of power ... These great parks represented power and grandeur by their open display of conspicuous consumption.’²³

Ann Bermingham examines this process and finds that: ‘Whereas the formal garden had stood between art and nature, the landscape garden tended to collapse the distinction altogether. ... By conflating nature with the fashionable taste of a new social order, it redefined the natural in terms of this order, and vice versa.’²⁴ Land *became* a landscape and nature became a social construct. Olwig, in his analysis of the emergence of the concepts of landscape and nature, goes further, suggesting that ‘landscape as scenery’ eventually ‘colonised’ nature by means of the landscape gardening movement in which the landscaped garden was itself an art work and invited the same detached gaze as the landscape painting.²³ An extract from an enthusiastic description of one of Brown’s gardens - at Alnwick Castle -

²¹ Don Mitchell, *Lie of the Land*; 26.

²² David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: the Landscape of Reaction*, Tate Gallery, London, 1982; 57.

²³ Howkins, ‘J.M.W. Turner at Petworth’; 239.

²⁴ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 14.

²³ Olwig, ‘Sexual Cosmology’; 333.

will illustrate this point:

...an extensive Pasture ... on which flocks of Sheep and Herds of Cattle are grazing and which, rising with a gentle Accent is every where bordered by Plantations of wood; this Pasture ... has on it only a few Trees and some clumps serving at once to ornament the Land and occasionally shelter the Cattle feeding thereon. At a small distance down the Stream the River runs under a Bridge of one Arch ... which at once has a singular and beautiful Effect; near this Bridge is a Corn Mill built in the form of a Gothic cell and surrounded by a little Wood....²⁴

There were alternative landscaping styles which challenged Brown's 'unnatural' style and that sought to encourage imaginative engagement with the landscape, but Brown's aesthetic remained popular: Horace Walpole referred to Brown as 'Lady Nature's second husband' on his death in 1783.²⁵

Olwig believes that 'the reification of nature represented by the landscape park both naturalised a power relation and obfuscated the source of that power'.²⁶ In his recent work, that develops a 'labour theory of landscape', Don Mitchell explores the notion of landscape as a contested site. Its appearance at any one time is the result of a compromise between the various contenders, or a temporary victory for one or the other contending group: 'Landscape is a unity of materiality and representation, constructed out of the contest between various social groups possessing varying amounts of social, economic and material power.' He is in no doubt about the manner in which that power is expressed in the landscape. He criticizes a writer (Peter Jackson) who suggests that 'there are potentially as many ways of seeing as there are eyes to see' by saying that 'this ignores the fact that "landscape" is a relation of power, an ideological rendering of spatial relations. Landscapes transform the facts of place into a *controlled* representation, an imposition of order in which one (or perhaps a few) dominant ways of seeing are substituted for all ways of seeing and experiencing.'²⁷ In England this struggle and its resolution was critical in the emergence and the form of landscape painting which, in turn, served to strengthen the dominant political ideology.

²⁴ An account written by Peter Waddell in 1785, quoted in *Capability Brown and the Northern Landscapes*, published by Tyne and Wear Museums, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1983; 22.

²⁵ Quoted in Tyne and Wear Museums, *Capability Brown*; 35.

²⁶ Olwig, 'Sexual Cosmology'; 333.

²⁷ Don Mitchell, *The Lie of the Land*; 27-28.

It was during the eighteenth century that the English school of landscape painting came to the fore. In the book that David Solkin wrote to accompany the Tate Gallery's 1983 exhibition of Richard Wilson's work (from the second half of the eighteenth century), he sought to clarify the way in which culture and aesthetics can be explicitly used in class conflicts and in struggles over the exercise of power. To do this, he makes a study of the way in which the representation of landscape changed as the eighteenth century progressed. In the first half of the century English landscape painting was imitative of the classical style, following continental artists like Claude Lorraine and Nicholas Poussin who tended to depict Arcadia. These Virgilian pastoral scenes typically involve idealized landscapes with perfectly content peasants or shepherds in gentle work or casual relaxation. Peter Howard notes that, additionally, an 'evident pride in the works of man was a natural consequence of the Augustan ideals of the Age of Reason', shown by the inclusion of such things as stately homes, classical ruins and bridges.²⁸ Harmony of human life with nature and of all aspects and classes of human life with each other is critical. Solkin suggests that in eighteenth century England 'there was no social class of greater importance than the labouring poor; they were seen as the source of the nation's wealth, as the group to whom the rich were indebted for all the comforts and necessities of life. Hence the ruling minority wished above all to believe that their less fortunate subjects were essentially content with their lot in life.'²⁹

Leo Marx believes that artists

conceived of the very purpose of landscape painting - its essence - as the celebration of harmony between the worldly and the simple, the social and the natural, the present and the past ... the reconciling of those fundamental conflicts [was] at the heart of classic pastoral as exemplified, say, by the presence in the Claude [*Landscape with Merchants*, 1635] of the rich merchants and the castle ruins.

And, despite the fact that he disapproves of the 'left-wing' critique of the 'unreality' of the pastoral, he still concedes that 'one of the chief functions of the old pastoral was to promote the idea of class harmony'.³⁰

For Solkin, the ubiquity of this image 'suggests a certain element of defensiveness within

²⁸ Peter Howard, *Landscapes: The Artists' Vision*, Routledge, London, 1991; 26-28.

²⁹ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 26.

³⁰ Leo Marx, 'Does Pastoralism have a Future?' in John Dixon Hunt (ed), *The Pastoral Landscape*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992; 218 & 222.

the ruling élite'.³¹ As Harrison puts it: 'A strong police force may be employed to bolster a weak authority. That a given painting is powerfully convincing in its picturing of certain hierarchical relations is by no means a guarantee that what is being pictured is a securely established power.'³² Bermingham emphasizes the contradictions in landscape depiction of the late eighteenth century, a time when patriotism was beginning to require a particular view of the English landscape, underlying the other meanings and conflicts:

In the eighteenth century, enclosure radically altered the English countryside, suiting it to the needs of the expanding city market. ... [At the same time] with the 'discovery of Britain', the English saw their landscape as a cultural and aesthetic object. This coincidence of social transformation of the countryside with the rise of a cultural-aesthetic ideal of the countryside repeats a familiar pattern of actual loss and imaginative recovery. Precisely when the countryside - or at least large portions of it - was becoming unrecognizable, and dramatically marked by historical change, it was offered as the image of the homely, the stable, the ahistorical.³³

John Dixon Hunt, in an analysis of the pastoral, suggests that

the pastoral is constituted by tension: for the critic of texts this is a tension between imagery of peace, ease, and rural refuge and some internal ... or external ... threat to them; to the cultural historian the tension lies between the confident assertion of stability and the socio-economic climate in which it is uttered; each of these, in its turn, ensures another tension, an ambiguous response to the pastoral impulse.³⁴

A classical education - still almost exclusively reserved for the aristocracy - was, of course, required to understand the allusions to the Virgilian origins of nostalgia for a Golden Age of 'pleasure and idleness ... where action gives way to virtuous contemplation' - a 'blissful innocence' set up in contrast to the 'evils of a more complex reality identified either with the city, the court, or both.' Such pictures - generally considered to be most perfectly realized by Gaspard and by Claude in the seventeenth century - 'celebrated the power of art to restore man to the Golden Age, the capacity of civilisation to wrest beautiful order out of chaos. The civilised gentlemen of Britain arrogated the same role to themselves in the social arena.'³⁵ When British artists like Wilson began to copy this style their patrons 'wanted the kind of reassurances that were built into the landscape itself: above all, that the world - the

³¹ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 27.

³² Charles Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape', in Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power*; 214.

³³ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 9.

³⁴ John Dixon Hunt, 'Pastorals and Pastoralisms' in Hunt, *Pastoral Landscape*; 15.

³⁵ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 40.

world which they dominated - was perfectly ordered as it was, that its structure had been determined by God, and that it was fundamentally incapable of change.³⁶ The pastorals served to confirm the aristocracy's God-given place as rulers in society.

After the opening of the Royal Academy in 1768, the bourgeoisie became more active in the art market and many joined the traditional art connoisseurs in admiration of the pastorals. Solkin comments that 'classical pictures and poems could and did appeal to individuals who, though they may have possessed little in the way of education, wished to be seen as cultured members of society, and hence as deserving of a greater share in the exercise of power.'³⁷ A quote from the *Royal Magazine* of September, 1760, concisely summed up the morality that was expressed in the landscapes of the time: 'The necessity of being content with our condition, and not to exalt ourselves above the station in which Providence has thought fit to place us, is a moral that should be written, in indelible characters, on the hearts of children of men, of princes, and of the whole human race.'³⁸ This was, of course, a comfortable way of thinking for those who were in a position to be able to purchase art.

It should not be surprising if the bourgeoisie felt some discomfort with the paintings that they viewed in the mid eighteenth century: not simply because they lacked the education to understand them, but perhaps because they understood only too well, on some level, that the paintings were confirming their exclusion from power:

The complexities of Wilson's painting [*Destruction of the Children of Niobe*] went way over the heads of many visitors to the first Society of Artists exhibition, and were probably expected (if not actually intended) to do so. ... the patrician viewer could take some comfort from a perusal of Wilson's picture ... While reflecting intellectual honour on to the painter and his select public, at the same time the 'Niobe' implicitly denigrated the mental capacities of those who were incapable of understanding its various levels of meaning³⁹

- a situation that was openly mocked in the *Critical Review* of April 1760 which referred to a 'phlegmatic alderman' with whom 'vainly should we strive to give his tasteless soul a relish of the beauties, or convince him that genius ever existed out of the counting house,

³⁶ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 70.

³⁷ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 65.

³⁸ Quoted in Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 64.

³⁹ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 65.

or taste out of Billingsgate or Leadenhall market.’⁴⁰ This traditional prejudice has now been largely debunked, but it is a good example of the class basis of contemporary art criticism, not to mention the underlying tenets of classical art itself, described in great detail by Ruskin in *Modern Painters* a century later. Given the likely pursuits of the ridiculed ‘aldermen’ it is of interest that Ruskin insisted that a ‘sailing-vessel is hardly admissible in a classical landscape, because its management implies too much elevation of the inferior life’ whereas ‘a galley, with oars, is admissible, because the rowers may be conceived as absolute slaves.’⁴¹ With all aspects of wage labour rejected as ‘inferior life’ by this art, the aldermen, when confronted by it, could hardly escape awareness of their station in life.

Public and private virtue

John Barrell’s analysis in *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt* of the role that painting played in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century uses the concept of public virtue contained within the discourse of civic humanism, which is critical to an understanding of the ideological duplicity of landscape and its role as a ‘vehicle of social and self identity’.⁴²

Humanism has a long history, going back to Aristotle in ancient Greece and Cicero in Rome, and passing through a revival in Renaissance Italy in the late fourteenth century. Evolving from its original roots in republicanism, it was taken up again in Britain as a social theory in the early eighteenth century.⁴³ This is not the place to engage with the philosophy in detail, but an extension of Barrell’s particular use of it within the framework of the present

⁴⁰ Quoted in Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 65.

⁴¹ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* Vol. 5, Pt. 9, Chapter 5, in E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds), *The Works of John Ruskin* Vol. VII, George Allen, London, 1903-12; 317-8.

⁴² Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*; 12.

⁴³ See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics* (3 vols.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, esp. Vols. II & III for the contrasting forms of the debate that underlies Western political thought. See also James Hankins (ed), *Renaissance Civic Humanism: reappraisals and reflections*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000. For a concise overview of the concept of civic humanism see Paul Edward (ed), *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 4, Collier-Macmillan Ltd., London, 1967; 69-72.

work will be instructive, if occasionally contentious.⁴⁴ Civic humanism was associated with a revival of interest in classical art and architecture and was based on the notion of public virtue and on ideals of government derived from the texts from the same period. The educational discipline of the humanities was deemed to be the only avenue to the effective exercise of freedom. The concept of ‘the public’, and of who is a part of the public, was very precisely defined and ‘civic humanist considerations of virtue are directed towards describing and recommending those virtues which will preserve a civil state, a public, from corruption’.⁴⁵ The underlying assumption was that ‘the character of any society, and of any individual as a social actor, rests on property as its material foundation’; civic humanism ‘specifically describes land as the only possible basis for a truly virtuous polity, as the only sort of property that could guarantee its possessor true freedom of action and thought.’⁴⁶ The theory changed as the century progressed and as different class interests came to the fore but, for my purposes, a brief overview, largely derived from John Barrell’s work, will suffice.

Public virtue could not be aspired to by a man (women had no chance at all) who was engaged in commerce or a manual trade. Such a man would inevitably seek to promote the interests of his trade and this would ‘prevent him from arriving at an understanding of what is good for man in general, for the public interest, for human nature.’ Equally, trade and commerce are concerned with material objects which ‘do not offer the opportunity for exercising a generalising rationality: the successful practice of the mechanical arts requires that material objects be regarded as concrete particulars, and not in terms of the abstract and formal relations among them.’⁴⁷ However, if a man has independent means which do not depend on labour, he will have no private interest to obscure his vision of the public interest and he will thus be fitted for government.

David Hume rationalized this with an appeal to the division of labour as a philosophical underpinning. As summarized by Andrew Ballantyne, while Hume believed that tastes were

⁴⁴ For a critical review of Barrell’s work on this subject see Andrew Hemingway, ‘The Political Theory of Painting without the Politics’ in *Art History*, Vol. 10 No. 3, Sept. 1987; 381-395.

⁴⁵ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 10.

⁴⁶ David Solkin, ‘ReWrighting Shaftesbury: the Air Pump and the Limits of Commercial Humanism’ in Barrell (ed), *Painting and the Politics of Culture*; 84.

⁴⁷ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 7-8.

individual and subjective, nonetheless, some people's tastes had more prestige and importance than others. ... In a developed society people have their own varied specialisms, and do not all have the time or the sensitivity to develop a refined taste, and so in effect we delegate some members of society to do the investigation for us, and we accept their pronouncements on taste as more or less authoritative. That the members of society with the leisure and the ability to do this predominantly belonged to the wealthy and educated classes was theoretically incidental.⁴⁸

Landscape images were used regularly in the on-going debate. In 1742 Hume had written that 'the bulk of mankind' could not get beyond the 'particular judgment' if they tried. 'Their eye is confounded with such an extensive prospect': the long prospect was much admired in landscapes. Reynolds, in his later *Discourses*, referred to 'a hundred thousand near-sighted men, that see only what is just before them, [and that] make no equivalent to one man whose view extends to the whole horizon round him'.⁴⁹

It was an obvious truth that public taste was connected to public virtue and that insofar as painting adhered to the former it was instrumental in maintaining or furthering the latter. Civic humanism 'valued the various genres of literature and the visual arts more or less as they contributed to the education of citizens' as defined within the theory.⁵⁰ Only 'liberal citizens' and not 'unenfranchised mechanics' could possibly form a part of the 'republic of taste', a point emphasized by Edmund Burke in 1759 in his *Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, who stated that 'Taste [is] no other than a more refined judgment' which can only be acquired in 'the schools of philosophy and the world'.⁵¹

This made the status of artists themselves a problem. For if artists were employed in converting the materials of nature into material artefacts, just as happened in the mechanical arts, then painting could not be a liberal art and therefore could not be worthy of the attention of a 'gentleman citizen' whose patronage it required.⁵² The Platonic side of the

⁴⁸ Andrew Ballantyne, *Architecture, landscape and liberty: Richard Payne Knight and the picturesque*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997; 302.

⁴⁹ Both quoted in Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 79-80.

⁵⁰ John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1992; xiv.

⁵¹ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990 [first pub. 1759]; 22.

⁵² Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 12.

debate held that painting was a base art because it merely imitated material objects and therefore did not approach the truth. The refutation of this argument was exercised throughout the eighteenth century with the formulation that:

its true function was to represent, not the accidental and irrational appearances of objects, but the ideal, the substantial forms of things. Painting was thus a liberal art insofar as it was an intellectual activity, disinterested, concerned with objects which, because ideal, could not be possessed; it was an abuse of painting to practise it in pursuit of objects which, because actual, particular, material, could be made the objects of possession and consumption, and thus appealed to our baser, sensual nature ... [thus demonstrating that painting] respected the order of values by which the intellect, like the 'better elements' in a state, was maintained in a position of dignity above the lower elements in the mind and society alike, and that, therefore, the republic of taste did not threaten to invert the social distinction essential to the proper running of a state, but confirmed those distinctions by replicating them in itself.⁵³

Such beliefs contributed to the development of the concept of 'artist as genius' which placed the artist outside the everyday 'lower elements' of society and even implied a form of divinity in the source of their inspiration.

It is Barrell's contention that the cultural hegemony of this formulation was challenged by the growing influence of those who, increasingly as the eighteenth century progressed, held economic power but who were by definition excluded from political power. The writings of the political economists in mid-century, such as Adam Smith, asserted the 'necessity of acquisitiveness, of self-interest, to a modern mercantile economy', denying the possibility of a disinterested public spirit as defined by civic humanism. As a result, since

traditional humanism had no means of understanding trade and commerce except as destructive of the commonwealth, and of public spirit, it could not avoid recognising this economic discourse as a threat to its hegemony; and for the same reason, those who wrote as spokesmen for the mercantile interest had no means of developing their distinctively economic account of human nature and of social organisation, except in the form of a direct challenge to traditional humanism.⁵⁴

Such a challenge was not, however, mounted to the discourse of ethics of civic humanism which Barrell believes to have had an irrefutable authority. 'It was unnecessary, for it was open to [the writers] simply to appropriate the traditional discourse - to inject it with a concern for the private virtue of those who could not aspire to public office, while still asserting - though with considerable qualification - the value and necessity of public virtue' and besides 'properly adapted, the discourse could be used to distinguish a liberal middle-

⁵³ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 14.

⁵⁴ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 45-46.

class from its inferiors, in just such a way as, unadapted, it had distinguished a liberal ruling class from a middle class now claiming to be its equal in virtue.’⁵⁵ Elsewhere Barrell recognizes ‘the potential for this discursive conflict to be represented as a class conflict’ and indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, ‘the privilege of class was much more certainly the stake in the struggle ... not over the authority, but over the very ownership, of the civic discourse.’⁵⁶ In Gramscian terms, this was early days in the rebellion of a subaltern group that sought less to overthrow the dominant ideology than to subvert it and appropriate it to themselves.

This gives the lie to Martin Wiener’s well-known argument about the ‘peaceful accommodation’ reached in Britain as the culmination of its achievement of modernity, in which he interprets the discursive conflict as class collaboration.⁵⁷ In his view, the historic compromise between the aristocracy and the industrial middle classes, which was fostered by the public school, led to the ‘failure of industry to rise in status in Britain, as it did elsewhere’⁵⁸. Controversially, Wiener claims that the

image of an essentially rural, traditional England, and the distrust of materialism and economic change that went along with it ... kept alive a mental picture of modern, industrial England as a society of ‘dark, satanic mills,’ neither appealing nor quite legitimate as an expression of the English way of life. Social prestige and moral approbation were to be found by using the wealth acquired in industry to escape it.

The resultant diversion of ‘talent and energies from industry ... gave a particular gentry cast to existing industry, discouraging commitment to a wholehearted pursuit of economic growth’ in the later stages of the Industrial Revolution.⁵⁹ Interestingly, this echoes the views of the early political economists (Stuart, Smith, Hume - as interpreted by Barrell) that ‘an exclusive belief in public spirit as the ground of social affiliation would not only render a

⁵⁵ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 46.

⁵⁶ Barrell, *Birth of Pandora*; 15.

⁵⁷ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980*, Pelican, London, 1985 [first pub. 1981]; 7.

⁵⁸ Wiener, *English Culture*; 137.

⁵⁹ Wiener, *English Culture*; 126.

nation ungovernable; it would stunt the will to industry'.⁶⁰ The lack of a complete social revolution, as identified by Wiener, left industrialists 'striving to adapt their way of life to the canons of gentility', accommodating themselves 'to an elite culture blended of preindustrial aristocratic and religious values and more recent professional and bureaucratic values that inhibited their quest for expansion, productivity, and profit.'⁶¹ Those 'preindustrial values' included a residual belief in the powerful discourse that equated fitness to govern with possession of public spirit which was not seen (by them) as inconsistent with industrial as opposed to independent wealth. But Wiener misses the point that this ideology was not so much aspired to, unchanged, as subverted and remade in a new image.

Barrell explains that the authority of the discourse of civic humanism precluded the possibility of establishing an alternative system of ethics, so the writers of 'the middle station of life' subtly injected the importance of private virtue into the framework of public virtue, as if strengthening

the ethical ideas of traditional humanism ... when in fact they are changing the ethical priorities on which humanism is based. What seems to be happening is less a direct challenge than a quiet debate, the outcome of which, however, will determine which interest-group will inherit the discourse and the authority it embodies, and so whose interests it will express and serve.⁶²

In direct relation to art Barrell points out an interesting contradiction that emerged as a result of this 'quiet debate': the discourse of political economy 'threatens the consensus of taste essential to the marketing of art' but it also 'justifies the accumulation of wealth which makes possible the patronage of the arts', becoming an authority 'superior to the civic discourse which was the enemy of luxury'.⁶³ Indeed, the discomfort with the portrayal of luxury was problematic in the first half of the eighteenth century when artists were trying to introduce the 'conversation piece' (the portrayal of the patron and family or friends in a 'natural' group in their house or gardens) which had become popular when brought from overseas. Solkin points out that

most English patrons were as yet unprepared to countenance the idea that a life devoted to the

⁶⁰ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 48.

⁶¹ Wiener, *English Culture*; 127.

⁶² Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 46.

⁶³ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 52.

heedless pursuit of luxurious delight was ethically justifiable. ... Only with the removal of this external obstacle [the traditional discourse on luxury] could the portrayal of conversation proceed beyond the moral crossroads that described the situation of commerce itself, uneasily poised between virtue and vice and unsure of which path was truly its own.⁶⁴

The pressures for engagement in the emerging debate were, therefore, profound. Wiener ignores the subtleties of the ways in which the bourgeoisie appropriated the hegemonic discourse. The simplicity of his interpretation of the accommodation also ignores the other side of the coin, which was that the aristocracy was deeply involved from an early stage with both industry and the capitalisation of agriculture, as we shall see below.

The emergence of landscape art as an important artistic genre during the course of the eighteenth century and its popularity during the nineteenth century was facilitated by the debate over the civic humanist discourse. When the Royal Academy was established in 1768, there was a split between those artists and critics who supported it and those who remained loyal to the more informal and 'democratic' Society of Artists. The two sides in the early dispute seem to have adhered to either the earlier or later version of the civic humanism discourse. On the Royal Academy side, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Royal Academy's first President, emphasized the grandeur of history painting - until this time considered the highest of the genres - and a return to Shaftesbury's unadulterated aesthetic and ethical hierarchy. In the third of his renowned and influential 'Discourses,' delivered to members of the Academy in 1771, he remained convinced that the 'particular' and 'uncommon' must be excluded as 'the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists ... in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.'⁶⁵ This view was criticized in the *Monthly Review* - an influential magazine of art and literary criticism - in May 1771. The writer felt that Reynolds was wrong in holding his 'partiality to a particular walk of painting [history painting]. Though Hogarth's chief excellence consisted in the exhibition of familiar life, yet that surely is no reason why he should be entitled only to an inferior degree of praise. If Nature is strongly portrayed [*sic*] to us, and if it is common and unabstracted Nature, perhaps not the least useful end is

⁶⁴ David Solkin, *Painting for Money*; 77.

⁶⁵ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, (Robert R. Wark, ed), Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997 [based on edition of 1797]; 44.

obtained.’⁶⁶

In general, by the mid eighteenth century, according to Barrell, painting was seen to be

concerned with the promotion of what, from the viewpoint of traditional humanism, were private virtues [and to this extent] it was itself being ‘privatised’, was being invested with the task of teaching its spectators to take a private pleasure in alleviating the results of activities of which they were the economic beneficiaries, and, either more or less directly, the agents. A privatised painting is thus made complicit with a commercial system assumed to be outside the sphere of the moral, so that its function comes to be to clear up after the accidents ... which are the inevitable effects of commercial capitalism.⁶⁷

In the second half of the eighteenth century commercial capitalism in the form of the market system had invaded the art world. It had already corrupted that perfect Arcadian image of the landed gentleman and the harmonious social relations that surrounded him. For some time, in fact, the traditional character of the idle country gentleman had been a myth: large estates and houses were supported by profitable agricultural enterprises, destroying the supposedly disinterested relationship of the patrician to the public. The peasants of the Virgilian pastorals, who had probably rarely been as contented as shown, were now, in reality, to be found digging or ploughing but, equally likely, in a shattering of the harmonious social relations, they had been displaced by enclosures and were either landless day labourers or they had moved to the cities where manufacturing industry absorbed many of them.

The move away from traditional roles, the loss of social cohesion and the emergence of an ideology based on the centrality of individual autonomy led to a society that was ‘uniquely individualistic’. In the development of this new ethos, ‘of the many historical causes for its emergence’ two factors, namely ‘the rise of modern industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism’, are at least implicated.⁶⁸ Landscape art was the perfect cultural reflection - or deflection - of these profound social changes. In connection specifically with the landscaped garden, Pugh says that ‘[t]he evaluation of nature as an aesthetic object is an expression of the strengthening ideology behind liberal-democratic society ... the “natural” garden is a metaphor of a particularly pervasive kind, especially because it is powerful

⁶⁶ Quoted in Solkin, *Painting for Money*; 270.

⁶⁷ Barrell, *Political Theory of Painting*; 60.

⁶⁸ J. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1977 [first pub. 1957]; 53.

evidence of property, possession and individuality, and because it purports to be a copy of what it dominates.’⁶⁹

It is for these reasons that landscape art became increasingly important at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, ‘clearing up after the accidents of commercial capitalism’ referred to by Barrell above. In the next section I shall turn to a recent body of work that has sought to analyse in depth the function of dissemblance in landscape art of the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century.

Landscape and discord

In April 1766 a letter published in the *London Chronicle* referred to the

bad dispositions at present reigning in this country [which] render it the theatre of every barbarity which the wanton avarice of great monopolizers think fit to inflict. The extensive pasturages in the hands of engrossing farmers produce many inconveniences. Their artificial meadows feed our horses; but these artificial meadows raise a dearth in our markets. Farm laid to farm till whole parishes are depopulated, afford the landlord an increased rent, and an easy method of collection; but those extensive possessions held by a few, drive from our fields the many hands which formerly cultivated them, force their inhabitants into manufacturing towns, where they become consumers of those rural products which they formerly sold ... and thus with impunity [the farmers] may pillage and oppress at their pleasure. This is the true source of every calamity our poor has, with truth, complained of for several years backward. These great farmers and their artificial meadows are the bane of the kingdom.⁷⁰

This is typical of many contemporary complaints about the parliamentary enclosure movement that was pursued by many landowners with enthusiasm in the mid eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. Often this was part of the on-going agricultural revolution which sought to capitalize land and increase efficiency, and often it was simply in order for a landscaped park to be created around the house. In the latter case the ‘pillage’ and ‘oppression’ being wrought on the land and local people was actively disguised with an artificial construction of a ‘natural’ environment, with the ultimate illusion of the ha-ha to hide the join, or division, between the two worlds.

⁶⁹ Simon Pugh, *Garden - nature - language*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 13.

⁷⁰ *London Chronicle*, Vol. 19, 19-22 April 1766; 380.

In his book *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, first published in 1980, Barrell discusses one of the 'accidents' that the newly 'privatised painting' was clearing up, or at least clearing from view, in the form of the impoverished rural labourers. As we have seen above, landscape painting came to prominence as a contemporary of commercial capitalism. The idealized landscapes of the early period of landscape painting, with their long prospects and mythic figures had typically included contented and idle shepherds whose lives represented a carefree ideal. In the late eighteenth century landscapes became less idealized and more identifiably English. The peasants still often appeared in carefree, relaxed poses, and apparently well-fed, although some artists - like Gainsborough - included tattered clothes and work tools to distinguish these 'real' characters from their Arcadian forerunners, offering a 'reassurance that the poor of England were, or were capable of being, as happy as the swains of Arcadia, their life as delightfully simple and enviable.'⁷¹ As time went by the labourers were more likely to be shown engaged in work, although that work was not portrayed as unpleasant or exhausting. As Barrell puts it: 'For the most part the art of rural life offers us the image of a stable, unified, almost egalitarian society [such that] it is possible to look beneath the surface of the painting, and to discover there evidence of the very conflict it seems to deny.'⁷²

Barrell traces a transition in the landscape paintings of the eighteenth century reflecting a growing contradiction in the aristocracy's attitude to land between, on the one hand, a desire for display of wealth with no apparent limits and on the other a desire to preserve their estates assiduously for the sake of posterity. The former dominated artistic expression at the beginning of the century but the latter had come to dominate by the end - when, of course, the responsible creation of private wealth had insinuated itself into the primary theory of art as well as of social ethics. In 1748 - before the transition in attitude - Gainsborough painted *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews* (Fig. 9), a 'conversation piece' that has now, in the late twentieth century, become iconic to such an extent that it can be parodied in an artistic confrontation with the meaning of identity by Yinka Shonibare.⁷³ But at the time of its production it was exceptional because it portrayed the landed couple in front of their

⁷¹ Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*; 6.

⁷² Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*; 5.

⁷³ *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews without their Heads* by Yinka Shonibare, in the exhibition 'Dressing Down' at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, March 1999.

cultivated and fertile estate lands. This showed the source of their wealth and the skill of their husbandry - but the painting also made explicit the association of the gentry with manual labour - even if only indirectly through the obvious labour of absent others who had tilled the soil, harvested the wheat, built fences to secure the sheep. If gentry were portrayed out of doors they would normally be in a landscaped park - a 'countryside that is aestheticized as the labour-free "natural" garden.'⁷⁴ This couple is clearly proud of their espousal of modernity and their introduction of the latest agricultural improvements, evidenced by the dead straight lines of stubble in the foreground which could only be achieved with the new seed drills.⁷⁵ In a complex and detailed analysis of the painting, Ann Bermingham concludes that 'the Andrews portrait remained an unpopular anomaly, then, not because work was something the gentry did not do but because any suggestion of labor in the context of a leisured gentry was unacceptable.'⁷⁶ Gainsborough went on to a highly successful career as a portrait painter but never painted another setting of this type.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, one artist who exemplified Barrell's aesthetic transition in landscape painting was Turner, with his second series of paintings of Petworth, commissioned by the Earl of Egremont in the 1820s. In them he managed to 'both reflect and conceal changes in English rural society ... by representing an ideal and harmonized social order and celebrating agricultural improvement',⁷⁷ including an obviously celebratory painting of the Chichester canal, which had been inspired and largely financed by Egremont (Fig. 10; and see Fig. 8). At first sight *Chichester Canal* may seem like a normal tranquil river scene, but to its contemporaries the oddity of an ocean-going vessel in such a place would instantly reveal the 'improvements' that had taken place in this naturalized but very technological landscape. Due to Egremont's efforts, the River Rother had been rendered navigable and the view is in fact taken from near a lock at Sidlesham.⁷⁸ At the end of the eighteenth century, with the bourgeoisie well established in the centres of commerce as well

⁷⁴ Pugh, *Garden-nature-language*; 2.

⁷⁵ Elspeth Moncrieff, Stephen and Iona Joseph (eds), *Farm Animal Portraits*, Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., Woodbridge, 1996; 71.

⁷⁶ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 31.

⁷⁷ Howkins, 'Turner at Petworth'; 250.

⁷⁸ See Howkins, 'J.M.W. Turner at Petworth'; 233 & 245.

as operating as patrons of art, it would have been impolitic for a class that, it could be argued, had long lost economic hegemony to have continued to seek to display lavish unconcern with the production of wealth. This position was exacerbated by very real fears of radicalism in the wake of the French Revolution. As Barrell says:

the primacy of 'natural' property in land was being challenged by the more mobile power of money, the hierarchical coherence of 'paternalist' society by what is perceived as a 'new' economic individualism ... it [is] clear that an account of the ideal life which entirely ignored this awareness could no longer be plausible, and to cease to ignore it meant, inevitably, to admit some degree of concern for work, for the industriousness which was from now on to be regarded as chief among the virtues.

This involved 'exchanging the shepherds of Arcadia for the ploughmen of England, and [this] was bound to raise issues about their relation to the classes for whom that art was produced'. For painters - and poets - this presented a problem which had somehow to be resolved: 'more and more of the actuality of the life of the poor' had to be revealed but, as a result, it was necessary 'to find more effective ways of concealing that actuality'.⁷⁹

The discovery of the picturesque

The aesthetic of the picturesque allowed of one approach to the dilemma. First propounded by William Gilpin in 1782, theories of the picturesque excluded the depiction of the actual employment of rural labourers, but not necessarily their presence in the composition, as explained in the following quote from Gilpin's 1792 work:

In a moral view, the industrious mechanic is a more pleasing object, than the loitering peasant. But in a picturesque light, it is otherwise. The arts of industry are rejected; and even idleness, if I may so speak, adds dignity to a character. Thus the lazy cowherd resting on his pole; or the peasant lolling on a rock, may be allowed in the grandest scenes; while the laborious mechanic, with his implements of labour, would be repulsed.⁸⁰

This reveals the extent of the moral confusion evinced by the debate over civic humanism. Bermingham confirms that, in the 1790s, 'the aesthetically pleasing landscape was not the

⁷⁹ Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*; 15-16.

⁸⁰ From William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape*, London, 1792. Quoted in Barrell, *Birth of Pandora*; 97.

economically productive one.’⁸¹ In 1836 this view was still current in the American picturesque aesthetic. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: ‘Is not the landscape, every glimpse of which hath a grandeur, a face of [God]? Yet this may show us what discord is between man and nature, for you cannot freely admire a noble landscape if laborers are digging in the field hard by.’⁸² The rapid spread and popularity of Gilpin’s ideas led to frequent satirization of theories of the picturesque and its specific form of landscape construction. Lowenthal and Prince quote an example: ‘Criticized for a virtually unrecognizable landscape sketch, a character in a satire of the period retorts: “If it is not like what it *is*, it is what it *ought* to be. I have only made it picturesque.’”⁸³

Ann Bermingham may give a clue to the ideological defensiveness that inspired the satires when she surmises that ‘[i]n aestheticizing the natural and commonplace scenery of Britain, the Picturesque awakened a large segment of the population to the realisation that aesthetic judgement was not the gift of the privileged few but could be learned by anyone and applied to just about anything’.⁸⁴ Copley pinpoints the extent of the subversion of aesthetic morality as well as the moral dilemma itself in detailing a change in the theory of the picturesque aesthetic. He refers to Gilpin’s early tour of the Wye Valley where he enjoyed sights of ‘abbeys, castles, villages, spires, forges, mills and bridges’ which were all seen as ‘venerable vestiges of the past, or chearful [*sic*] habitations of the present times’ while he states that at Lidbroke Wharf ‘the contrast of all this business, the engines used in lading, and unlading, together with the solemnity of the scene, produce all together a picturesque assemblage.’⁸⁵ At this time, according to Copley, a ‘key trope [was one] in which economic provision and aesthetic pleasure are united within the terms of a discourse on morality’ - an aesthetic argument known as ‘*dulce et utile*’. The abandonment of this argument late in the eighteenth

⁸¹ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 66.

⁸² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Addresses and Lectures*, Henry Altemus, Philadelphia, 1899; 58.

⁸³ David Lowenthal and Hugh C. Prince, ‘English Landscape Tastes’, *The Geographical Review*, Vol 55, 1965; 195.

⁸⁴ Ann Bermingham, ‘The Picturesque and Ready-to-Wear Femininity’ in Stephen Copley (ed), *The Politics of the Picturesque*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; 87.

⁸⁵ Stephen Copley, ‘Tourists, Tintern Abbey and the Picturesque’, in Peter Hughes and Robert Rehder (eds), *Imprints and Re-visions: The Making of the Literary Text 1759-1818*, Gunter Narrator, Tübingen, 1995; 69. Quotes from William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc., relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (pub. 1782).

century

renders links between the economic, the socially ameliorative and the aesthetic problematic on several fronts. In particular, it leaves the claims of aesthetics at odds with the claims of morality whenever the benefits of cultivation, improvement and economic progress, and the moral values of industry, come into conflict with the aesthetic pleasures of the spectacle of wildness or decay.’⁸⁶

This will be critical for my argument in later chapters.

Despite this dilemma, many influential artists and critics adhered to the importance of landscape painting as a guardian of morality until well into the nineteenth century, although the meaning of the moral discourse was contested. John Ruskin, an ‘early socialist’, was adamant that ‘the artist had a responsibility to imitate the essential truths of society ... and not just the appearance of nature’ while Constable, a ‘Tory’, believed in the ‘moral and ethical responsibility of landscape painters’ and his large landscape paintings ‘were intended to carry the ideological burden of history paintings: they were to enshrine for future generations the conservative social vision of the class of industrious rural gentry to which the artist belonged.’⁸⁷

Bermingham explores the connections between developments in picturesque theory and specific political events and pressures - events which were to encourage the development of a sense of patriotism and, indeed, of national identity. This was consonant with an aesthetic theory that itself encouraged ‘picturesque tourism’ and an intimate awareness of the British countryside. The central point that she makes is that opposition to the tenets of the French Revolution focused on the revolutionaries’ assumption that government could be undertaken according to abstract principles rather than according to the complex predispositions of human nature. It is in this political argument that she locates the critique of Capability Brown’s work that emerged in the 1790s and that is most associated with Uvedale Price and Payne Knight. In their view, ‘landscape gardening and drawing were not ideologically neutral *techne*; rather, in their spatial strategies of composition and perspective, for instance, or, in the case of drawing, instructions as to how to delineate certain objects in a landscape, they actively inscribed or became the sites of specific ideological attitudes and

⁸⁶ Copley, *Politics of the Picturesque*; 48-50, including quote from William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*.

⁸⁷ Stephen F. Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art: a Critical History*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994; 188. (Political descriptions are Eisenman’s own.)

ambivalences.’⁸⁸

Price’s and Knight’s garden designs obscured Brown’s long prospects and smooth lines and replaced them with a more ‘natural’, more inclusive wildness, rejecting systematic forms of gardening and government alike. Price made the link between landscape and politics explicit in the following passage from 1797:

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 good government can be more exactly defined.⁸⁹

This approach had the subtle effect of maintaining distinction and variety in the aesthetic and, by association, in society, while simultaneously admitting an important role for every part that goes to make up the whole. Bermingham’s interpretation is that ‘against the levelling tendencies of the French Revolution, individual variety in the landscape came to stand for British liberty, a freedom presumably for the rich to be rich and the poor to be poor.’⁹⁰ Such an ordering of variety can also, of course, be seen as justifying and naturalising the division of labour that had come to impinge on most aspects of life, not only as a necessity of the new economic system, but also as the creator of an increased and unwelcome dependency among the poor. The naturalization of distinction was necessary because, as Price and Knight suggested, Brown’s landscapes were ‘not only wasteful, but ... its very conspicuous consumption separated men from one another and created social distance by upsetting the ‘natural’ order which saw the estate, the church, and the village in close physical harmony.’⁹¹ Humphrey Repton, a follower of Brown, defended Brown’s landscapes in a letter written to Price in 1794, using similar political language. He saw

great affinity betwixt deducing gardening from the painter’s studies of wild nature, and deducing government from the uncontrolled opinions of man in a savage state. The neatness, simplicity, and elegance of English gardening, have acquired the approbation of the present culture, as the happy

⁸⁸ Ann Bermingham, ‘System, Order and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795’, in Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power*; 78. See also Williamson, *Polite Landscapes*; Chaps. 6 & 7.

⁸⁹ Uvedale Price, *Thoughts on the Defence of Property*, London, 1797. Quoted in Bermingham, ‘System, Order and Abstraction’; 85.

⁹⁰ Bermingham, ‘System, Order and Abstraction’; 85.

⁹¹ Howkins, ‘Turner at Petworth’; 244.

medium betwixt the wildness of nature and the stiffness of art; in the same manner as the English constitution is the happy medium betwixt the liberty of savages, and the restraint of despotic government; and so long as we enjoy the benefits of these middle degrees betwixt extremes of each, let experiments of untried, theoretical improvement be made in some other country.⁹²

Society's discomfort with the rapid changes happening in all structures of life were inscribed in the picturesque. 'An appropriately elegiac background for the laborer dispossessed by the agrarian revolution was the picturesque landscape, whose preindustrialized character demodernized his plight and whose charms compensated him for it' (in the eyes of the viewer, of course, who was not likely to be that labourer!).⁹³ The central paradox of the picturesque is clear:

Although the picturesque celebrated the old order - by depicting a pastoral, preenclosed landscape - some of its features - the class snobbery, the distancing of the spectator from the picturesque object, and the aestheticization of rural poverty - suggest that at a deeper level the picturesque *endorsed the results of agricultural industrialization*. ... Moreover, the picturesque, like the political debates of the period about the problem of rural poverty, mystified the agency of social change so that fate, and not the economic decisions of the landowning classes, seemed responsible. In this respect, the picturesque represented an attempt to wipe out the fact of enclosure and to minimize its consequences.⁹⁴

David Matless also finds that the apparent 'conservative longing for a "rural idyll"' disguises a complex engagement with - rather than rejection or denial of - modernity,⁹⁵ while at the same time denying the necessity of taking responsibility for its effects. Don Mitchell reminds us that the loss of pastoral quietness would have, of course, other consequences: 'if *productive* landscapes are to be maintained under the conditions of inequality that make capitalism possible, then revolt must be minimized, and threatening social groups must be neutralized. Powerful social actors thus seek ... to reinforce the landscape as a representation of what is "natural".'⁹⁶ Lukacher may be correct in suggesting that, in Constable's famous 'six-footers' (for example, *The Haywain*, 1821; *Dedham Vale*, 1828) 'consciously or unconsciously' he 'sought to shore up an image of rural England during a period when social relations in the countryside were being strained by economic depression and civil unrest on the part of the agrarian working class' and that the paintings 'betray an ambivalent

⁹² Humphrey Repton, 'Letter to Mr. Price' in Uvedale Price, *Essays* Vol III, pp 10-13, quoted in Ballantyne, *Architecture, Landscape and Liberty*; 219.

⁹³ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 69.

⁹⁴ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 75. [My italics.]

⁹⁵ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*; 16.

⁹⁶ Don Mitchell, *Lie of the Land*; 31.

awareness about the difficult task of sustaining some quasi-empirical mythology of rural England'.⁹⁷ Looking at the *Haywain* (Fig. 11), painted in 1821, one could believe in a sense of nostalgia and fear of loss in its pastoral quietness if one remembers that it was painted shortly after serious unrest in the area (at its height in East Anglia in 1816) involving riots and arson. Unemployment was high with the return of militia after the end of the wars with France and this was exacerbated by the spread of the new threshing machines which provided a focus for anger.

Solkin comments upon the fact that the many disturbances of the eighteenth century were not represented in art. He takes the particular example of Wilson's *View from Moor Park, toward Cassiobury, Watford, and St. Albans*. This was painted between 1765 and 1767 for Sir Lawrence Dundas who invested much of the fortune amassed from profiteering in the army on the acquisition of the social status conferred by land ownership. He bought up or enclosed vast tracts of land, including Moor Park which boasted a large park created by Capability Brown. Dundas commissioned Wilson to paint three views of his estates, which he undertook to do at a time when there were violent riots in the countryside about food prices coupled with the beginnings of unrest about enclosures. In the view toward Cassiobury, Wilson 'described a world of order, peace, and prosperity for all; and a place, moreover, where fence-building peasants participate happily in the improvement of nature' - in other words, effecting the enclosures that would almost certainly deprive them of their livelihood. Solkin concludes that 'the pictures show one way of defusing the era's most explosive social problem: the disintegration of the bonds of paternalism and deference which had traditionally defined the interplay between rich and poor.'⁹⁸ Some 60 years later Constable was using his portrayal of the landscape to disguise and, perhaps, defuse equally explosive social problems in much the same way.

Art, meaning and the artist as genius

We have seen that the theorists of landscape gardening were open about the political import

⁹⁷ Brian Lukacher, 'Nature Historicized: Constable, Turner, and Romantic Landscape Painting' in Eisenman (ed), *Nineteenth Century Art*; 122.

⁹⁸ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 129.

in their constructions and rearrangements of the land. But it is important here to point out that, in the discussion above, Solkin does not suggest that either artists or viewers were necessarily aware of the full ‘meanings’ of the art that was produced. Hunt articulates the potential problems with extracting the metaphorical content from a picture. The insistence on the visual in a painting

may often distract a viewer ... we see the signifiers and not the signified. ... [W]hen pastoral painters in the Low Countries in the seventeenth century and in Britain during the eighteenth century gave a local habitation and a name to pastoral myth, there were many who simply enjoyed the medium’s power to represent their own local landscape without bothering about the conveyed message.⁹⁹

Solkin states, however, that ‘the fact that meanings may have been constructed and received on a largely unconscious level only makes an attempt to comprehend them all the more imperative.’¹⁰⁰ His view is that ‘the task of the poet or painter ... lay not in revealing conflict but in denying its very existence. His prescribed (if unspoken) aim was to present the *status quo* as an unimpeachable ideal, and to establish as broad a consensus of belief as possible in the values of the landed élite.’¹⁰¹ More recently, William Truettner has come to a similar conclusion, rejecting the idea of the artist as a passive ‘observer rather than an agent of a particular culture [floating] free of encumbering temporal issues’ which would imply that ‘the art produced ... has a more constant or fixed meaning ... emphasising what is essential and enduring about a given subject’. He suggests that an artist

‘claims’ a subject: a ‘real’ landscape becomes a painting after an artist has made it conform to laws governing the production of art at a particular time - after imposing on it a language understandable to a certain group of viewers. But an active art maker is never a totally independent figure. He or she is part of a culture and therefore subject to its beliefs and values. Those are shared with a wide range of peers (as well as a more narrowly focused group of patrons), and the art produced is deeply involved in framing and defining issues that are of immediate concern to the art maker’s peers and patrons.¹⁰²

So there appear to be a number of factors at work in the creation of a work of art: one is the artist’s vision and selection of subject; another is the need to please a market (the artist’s ‘peers and patrons’); another is the artist’s embeddedness, consciously or unconsciously, in

⁹⁹ Hunt, ‘Pastorals and Pastoralisms’; 15.

¹⁰⁰ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 115.

¹⁰¹ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 25.

¹⁰² William Truettner, ‘For Museum Audiences: The *Morning of a New Day*’, in Amy Henderson and Adrienne L. Kaeppler (eds), *Exhibiting Dilemmas: Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC, 1997; 34-35.

the culture of the time: the way the artist responds to or depicts cultural concerns is going to affect the marketability of a work of art, and the nature of the market is, in turn, going to affect the nuances of the artist's response. A fourth factor, linked to the artist's individual vision, is the artist's driving 'genius' - the artist-as-hero.¹⁰³ This has traditionally been the focus of a large body of art history, a focus that locates meaning in art almost exclusively in terms of an artist's biography, largely excluding his (heroes and geniuses are always male) historical and cultural context. As a result of this canonical view, the suggestion of a hidden agenda within art, especially in interpreting art that is not of our own time, can be contentious.¹⁰⁴

Although the artist as genius can be traced back to Pliny in first century Rome¹⁰⁵, it is Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, written in the mid sixteenth century in Italy, that underpins this form of art history. Janet Wolff showed in her work, *The Social Production of Art*, that 'the conception of the artist as a unique and gifted individual is an historically specific one, and that it dates from the rise of the merchant classes in Italy and France, and from the rise of humanist ideas in philosophy and religious thought.'¹⁰⁶ While Vasari hymned the knowledge and skills of the artist as well as his god-given genius, around 1800 'the emphasis shifted decisively away from the skill of the painter or sculptor to the exceptional personality of the creative artist' and, with the rise of romanticism in the early nineteenth century, to a 'concept of art as self-expression.' But in both cases, 'art was valued not just for its material value, function, or for the way it reflected a patron's requirements, but for the identity and skill of the artist.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See, for example, Griselda Pollock's detailed deconstruction of the creation of Van Gogh as heroic genius, and the way this has affected comprehension of his art, in 'Artists, mythologies and media - genius, madness and art history', in *Screen*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1980; 57-96.

¹⁰⁴ This tradition was challenged in the 1920s and 1930s, a challenge often associated with the Warburg Institute and Erwin Panofsky, Alois Riegl, Heinrich Wölfflin *et al*, but it held sway again after the second world war until it came under sustained attack from social historians and marxist art historians from the mid-1970s (Griselda Pollock, T.J. Clark *et al*). See Eric Fernie, *Art History and its Methods: a critical anthology*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 1995.

¹⁰⁵ See Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979, for a scholarly treatise on the emergence of the concept of artist-as-genius.

¹⁰⁶ Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*; 27.

¹⁰⁷ Emma Barker, Nick Webb and Kim Woods (eds), *The Changing Status of the Artist*, Yale
(continued...)

Immanuel Kant wrote in *Critique of Judgment* in 1790, 'genius is a talent for producing that for which no definite rule can be given; it is not a mere aptitude for what can be learned by a rule'.¹⁰⁸ It was in keeping with the celebration of individuality as the hallmark of the age that individual genius came to the fore as the moving force in art. Karl Marx subscribed to the same view: in an analysis of his few comments on art, Bermingham points out the contradiction in his thought. Despite an insistence that 'the forms of art are determined by history and social relations', Marx held 'the idealist notion of artistic creation in which the space of artistic production is imagined apart from that of commerce and alienated labor.' This has the effect of reproducing 'the notion of the artist's natural genius and originality'.¹⁰⁹

Gombrich locates a number of landmarks on the artist's road from craftsman to genius. One is the Reformation when the demand for religious art in churches was seriously reduced, meaning that painters and sculptors had to find new markets and new purposes for their work. Another was the establishment in the mid eighteenth century of artistic academies and regular exhibitions that created the clear distinction between Art and craft. A third was what he refers to as the break in tradition, or the Great Revolution, which he associates with the time of the French Revolution, when artists began to feel free to use self-expression in their art. The 'whole situation in which artists lived and worked' was changed.¹¹⁰ Terry Eagleton's take on the passage from craftsman to genius is opposed to that of Gombrich. He exposes a moment of degradation on the way:

In a notable historical irony, the birth of aesthetics as an intellectual discourse coincides with the period when cultural production is beginning to suffer the miseries and indignities of commodification. The peculiarity of the aesthetic is in part spiritual compensation for this degradation: it is just when the artist is becoming debased to a petty commodity producer that he or she will lay claim to transcendent genius.

The ideology of the aesthetic 'seizes upon the very functionlessness of artistic practice and

¹⁰⁷ (...continued)

University Press, New Haven, 1999; 9 & 250.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Catherine M. Soussloff, *The Absolute Artist: the historiography of a concept*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997; 7.

¹⁰⁹ Bermingham, 'Introduction' in Bermingham and Brewer (eds), *Consumption of Culture*; 9.

¹¹⁰ E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, Phaidon, London, 16th edn., 1995 [first pub. 1950]; 499-502.

transforms it to a vision of the highest good'.¹¹¹ This, coupled with the 'invention' of genius had the valuable effect of giving the artist a role in society at the moment when the market 'freed' them from traditional ties.

A recent work by Kay Dian Kriz picks up the idea of genius as a cultural construct, dating from the Renaissance, and finds that it had a particularly powerful relationship to landscape, national identity and political conflict. As the nineteenth century opened, 'certain qualities of the artist's character were seen to be embodied *in and through* the work produced' and the English school of landscape painting, distinguished in the eyes of many contemporaries, by 'originality and independent thinking', 'was usually portrayed as a cultural achievement which brought honour to Britain among its cultural and political rivals on the continent'¹¹² a fact which was of particular importance at this time of war with France, turning the artist into hero and directly linking the artist's role with the Englishness of the landscape he represented.

The specific association of landscape painting with genius allowed, according to Kriz, a linking of 'Englishness with intellectual prowess and creativity [which] enabled the dominant élite in England (from landowning peer to the middle class businessman) to validate its position as preserver of civilization, culture, and a market system dependent upon individual enterprise.'¹¹³ It also - and this has been the point of this discussion - presented the artist as a being above ideological concerns - just as the landscapes depicted were deemed to be.

The effect of debunking the ahistorical notion of 'artistic genius', and resiting it in a historicized analysis of the post-Renaissance transformation of the artist from skilled (and collective) worker to isolated genius, is to show that something more than individual inspiration is involved in the production of a work of art. To quote Kriz again:

The key to the native landscape genius's ability to function at one and the same time as an autonomous subject, insulated from the vitiation of a market-oriented society, and also as a social

¹¹¹ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990; 65.

¹¹² Kay Dian Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter: Genius as Alibi in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997; 6.

¹¹³ Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter*; 7.

subject who represents the ideals of that society, is contingent upon the way in which individual autonomy is socially regulated. The elision of the artist's character - his singular capacity to feel, to recognize, and to represent the essence of the landscape - with the symbolic character of the domestic landscape as the locus of individual and national freedom, fixes the individuality of the native genius firmly within the domain of social.¹¹⁴

This echoes Adorno's theorization of the artist's creation which, however 'itself unaware' and to whatever extent it 'breaks free', always originates in empirical reality. Or as the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl said: 'Geniuses do not stand outside their national tradition, they are an integral part of it ... The great artist, even the genius, is nothing but the executor, though the most perfect executor, the supreme fulfilment, of the *Kunstwollen* [will to art] of his nation and age.'¹¹⁵

The romantic landscape

It was artists and writers around the turn of the nineteenth century who 'were the first to set the highest value on imagination, originality, spontaneity, creativity, and self-expression.'¹¹⁶ The romantic movement is notoriously hard to pin down, both theoretically and 'politically'. Its aesthetic privileged the emotional and personal response to landscape. The academic in art was rejected - both in terms of hierarchies of genre and in terms of painting as a learned skill. The artist's inspiration was communicated with his or her public through the expression and eliciting of individual emotions. It was a reaction against the rules and formalism of the Academy and of classicism, a reaction that *might* be a deliberate decision by the artist or that, particularly in the case of England, was used descriptively, post-facto, by commentators on art: it was 'the middle of the nineteenth century before they were gathered into one band as the English Romantics' and the insistence on resemblances between the main poets 'dates only from about 1940.'¹¹⁷ The link between the romantics and the artist-as-hero described above and understood biographically is obvious: these artists are

¹¹⁴ Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter*; 141.

¹¹⁵ Alois Riegl, quoted in Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1984; 75.

¹¹⁶ Barker *et al*, *The Changing Status of the Artist*; 9.

¹¹⁷ Marilyn Butler, 'Romanticism in England' in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds), *Romanticism in National Context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; 37.

presented as ‘the heroic individuals who repudiated Mammon, and turned their backs on the philistine world of the bourgeoisie’; the ‘relation of such [painters and] poets - Wordsworth, Coleridge, and their contemporaries - to their society is seen as simple: they rejected it.’¹¹⁸ The actual complexity of their relation to society, at least in the case of Wordsworth, will be examined in Chapter 4.

Eric Hobsbawm suggests that ‘[p]recise social analysis was never the romantic forte, and indeed they distrusted the confident mechanical materialist reasoning of the eighteenth century ... which they rightly saw as one of the chief tools with which bourgeois society had been built.’ Romantic art ‘dominated neither the cultures of the aristocracy, nor those of the middle classes and even less of the labouring poor’ but Hobsbawm believes that ultimately the ‘approach to art and artists characteristic of romanticism became the standard approach of nineteenth century middle class society’.¹¹⁹ Vaughan tells us that romanticism was used ‘in an attempt to isolate the central concerns of the day’; he quotes the French novelist Charles Nodier who said that ‘romantic poetry springs from our agony and despair. This is not a fault in our art but a necessary consequence of the advances made by our progressive society.’¹²⁰ In this sense it can be seen as a reaction to the philosophy of the Enlightenment that had been so dominant and whose ‘cult of reason ... found its perfect aesthetic expression in Neoclassicism and its values of logic, harmony and proportion.’¹²¹ E.P. Thompson locates romanticism in ‘the moment when the received culture was challenged [when] all conventions were called into question, and the great humanist aspirations were abroad, but when sharp experience had shown that the periods of the philosopher were inadequate - it is exactly within this conflict that the great romantic impulse came to maturity.’¹²² The endless improvement in the human condition promised by the Enlightenment was now seen as wanting - in particular after the corruption of the French Revolution - and the focus of philosophical enquiry had itself moved from the objective to the subjective, with great

¹¹⁸ Porter and Teich, *Romanticism in National Context*; 1.

¹¹⁹ E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*, Abacus, London, 1996 [first pub. 1962]; 313, 317 & 326.

¹²⁰ William Vaughan, *Romanticism and Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994; 10 & 18.

¹²¹ David Blayney Brown, *Romanticism*, Phaidon, London, 2001; 9.

¹²² E.P. Thompson, *The Romantics*, Merlin Press, Woodbridge, 1997; 7.

interest in perception and emotion. For Wordsworth imagination 'is but another name for Reason in her most exalted mood.'¹²³ The term 'romanticism' came to be used 'to defend the free expression of imagination and association in the arts [and] those emotive extremes that lay beyond the proper sphere of the artist to depict.'¹²⁴ Ultimately, it was deemed to be a reaction against the formal expressions of the Enlightenment, but it does engage with modernity - just as the picturesque can be seen to do - although explicitly, through the medium of the emotions. Romanticism 'responded to, and created, the shock of the new.'¹²⁵ It is, then, not surprising that it is interpreted as both a positive and a negative expression of modernity.

The elusiveness of romanticism lies in this, and in the fact that during a period of revolution and social upheaval throughout Europe, it was a revolutionary art that could, at different times, in different places and in different individuals - and in the same individual at different times - be seen as either progressive or reactionary. Its actual content was deemed to be less important than its painterly ability to express emotion, although for some artists (like Turner) content remained critical. Baudelaire said that 'Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subjects nor in exact truth, but in a way of feeling.'¹²⁶ In many countries, including Britain, it was associated with 'resistance to the dominant political, religious or social ethos of the day and with dreams of national revival.'¹²⁷ Both Baudelaire and Stendhal linked romanticism to the epitome of modernity.¹²⁸ Stendhal wrote in his pamphlet *Racine et Shakspeare*, published in 1824 in opposition to the Académie's dictionary of art, that romanticism was the art of pleasing one's contemporaries whereas classicism was the art of pleasing one's grandfathers.¹²⁹ The influence of the romantic vision fluctuated as social,

¹²³ Walter Jackson Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, Harper and Row, New York, 1961 [first pub. 1946]; 186.

¹²⁴ Vaughan, *Romanticism and Art*; 13.

¹²⁵ Porter and Teich, *Romanticism in National Context*; 3.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Brown, *Romanticism*; 8.

¹²⁷ Brown, *Romanticism*; 12-13.

¹²⁸ See Vaughan, *Romanticism and Art*; 222 and Brown, *Romanticism*; 13.

¹²⁹ Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: the Mythology of Nineteenth Century Art*, Viking, New York, 1984; 18.

political and philosophical crises came and went; its primary period can be dated from 1798 when the German art critic Friedrich Schlegel used the word, in his journal the *Athenaeum* to describe a progressive form of poetry that rejected inherited forms, although the movement was already growing before then; Marilyn Butler points out that in England the relevant moments of innovation in literature and art had taken place in the mid eighteenth century.¹³⁰ Baudelaire pronounced it dead in 1846 but its influence continued long after that. A movement whose tenets can barely be defined is especially hard to date (and *vice versa*).

The 'heightened reality' that characterized romantic art brought a new appreciation of the use of light and atmosphere in landscape painting. The German artist, Caspar David Friedrich, working in the early years of the nineteenth century, is often considered the quintessential romantic painter, but earlier artists in England were seen as bringing that poetic vision into landscape: both Constable and Turner saw Richard Wilson and John Robert Cozens as pioneers. Subsequent writers have often seen Turner as Britain's greatest romantic artist, although it is unlikely that he would have referred to himself with that epithet. He was certainly, however, an exponent of the sublime in landscape. A category of romanticism, the sublime lent itself perfectly - in a way that at first may appear contrary to the romantic vision - to some of the more spectacular industrial paintings of the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century.

Landscape and industry

Industry in the late eighteenth century was still largely a rural phenomenon so its presence in the landscape challenged artists as much as did modern agriculture (and its discontents). A number of artists resolved this within the picturesque, following Gilpin's early view that 'forges' as much as 'abbeys and castles' could represent a 'picturesque assemblage'. William Williams was one, with his pair of paintings, *A Morning View of Coalbrookdale* (Fig. 12) and *An Afternoon View of Coalbrookdale*, both painted in 1777. Both pictures are panoramic, idealized landscapes, but both contain considerable industrial activity with lavishly smoking chimneys in the middle ground. None of this activity, however, appears to disturb the elegant figures in the foreground who are clearly uninterested in and

¹³⁰ Butler, 'Romanticism in England'; 38.

undisturbed by the scenes in front of them. Despite the presence of industry, which is unavoidable for the viewer, the overwhelming impression is one of peace and tranquillity.

However, Gilpin's change of heart regarding the inclusion of forges in the picturesque has been noted; Uvedale Price, in 1794, similarly wrote that 'nothing can equal [cotton manufactories] for the purpose of disbeautifying an enchanting piece of scenery'.¹³¹ Bermingham points out John Sell Cotman's *Bedlam Furnace, near Madeley* of 1802 - which shows appalling devastation around an industrial site, framed by blasted, dead tree stumps - and concludes that the intervening years had seen a radical change in the artistic approach to industry.

Romanticism and the sublime, however, provided an alternative aesthetic for such industrial landscapes. Arthur Young, on a visit to Coalbrookdale in 1785, recognized the awful contrast between the 'romantic' winding glen and the 'horrors' spread at the bottom of the valley, yet is still sensitive to how 'the noise of the forges, mills, etc. with all their vast machinery, the flames bursting from the furnaces with the burning of coal and the smoak of the lime kilns, are altogether sublime', although noting that they would unite better with 'craggy and bare rocks'.¹³² Edmund Burke distinguished the sublime from the beautiful by the fact that it engaged emotions of awe, fear or wonder. The sublime was espoused by the romantics as it was a powerful manifestation of the individual's reaction to landscape and nature. Waterfalls, mountain scenery, dramatic storms could all inspire awe and fear and encourage reflection and self-knowledge. Industrial processes could have the same effect.

In *Arkwright's Mill at Cromford*, painted in 1783 (Fig. 13), Joseph Wright of Derby depicted a cotton mill at night. It is set in a romantic wooded valley. It is a massive multi-storeyed building that dwarfs the huts - possibly workers' cottages - nearby. Every one of its many windows is lit brightly, contrasting the factory sharply with the dark hillsides, and dimming the light from the full moon that manages only to illuminate the clouds. This is a powerful image of human ingenuity challenging that of Nature. For Klingender, Wright was 'the first

¹³¹ Quoted in Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 80.

¹³² Quoted in Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 79.

professional painter directly to express the spirit of the industrial revolution'¹³³ and we have already seen, in the last chapter, his significance for David Fraser who said that he, along with Turner many years later, were the only landscape painters to develop a style able to represent the 'key symbol[s] of industrial power and transformation'. Fraser also tells us that Wright's paintings were aimed deliberately at the growing middle class market and were very popular.¹³⁴

In 1801 Philip de Loutherbourg used the same technique in his even more dramatic view of *Coalbrookdale by Night* (Fig. 14). This is Bedlam Furnace, again, only a year before Cotman's bleak version and a very different interpretation. The entire painting is infused with the red glow of the furnace and there is an urgency in the movement of men and horses in the foreground. Again, there is a full moon but this time it is edged off almost out of the picture to the right. A traveller, Richard Warner, wrote a description in 1797 of a scene that he saw that sounds very similar. It was

a scene perfectly new to us, highly gratifying to a warm imagination. Immediately opposite to the room in which we were lodged stands a large iron-forge, one among the many that are constantly worked night and day, in the valley of Tintern. This scene of bustle amidst smoke and fire, during the darkness and silence of midnight, which was only interrupted by the vibrations of the bar-hammer, produced a most impressive effect on the mind.¹³⁵

In a later work, Warner concluded that Coalbrookdale was 'as worthy of a visit from the admirer of romantic scenery no less than from the political economist.'¹³⁶ Daniels sees the painting as an 'apocalyptic, industrial vision', containing an 'imminent sense of collapse' inspired by the Napoleonic Wars, yet not entirely devoid of 'intimations of glory'.¹³⁷ This is the classic tension contained within the romantic philosophy.

¹³³ Francis Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972 [first pub. 1947]; 46.

¹³⁴ David Fraser, "'Fields of Radiancance": the scientific and industrial scenes of Joseph Wright' in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of Landscape*; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; 137.

¹³⁵ From Richard Warner, *A Walk through Wales in August 1797*, Bath, 1798. Quoted in Copley, 'Tourists, Tintern Abbey and the Picturesque'; 73.

¹³⁶ From Richard Warner, *Romantic and picturesque scenery of England and Wales*, published in 1805. Quoted in Vaughan, *Romanticism and Art*; 20.

¹³⁷ Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994; 70-72.

The sublime is used in a different way by William Havell in a commission, at the end of the eighteenth century, from the Earl of Anglesey to paint a scene at the copper mines on Parys Mountain - part of the Earl's estate. The picture, *The Great Opencast* (Fig. 15), still hangs in the family home on Anglesey. It is a startling, almost frightening, image of ant like men dangling on the end of ropes as they are let down steep jagged cliffs into a pit where many people work at a variety of arduous tasks. It reveals a fascinating contradiction inherent in this use of the sublime: despite the dramatic revelation of the control taken over the structures of nature, humans are reduced, dwarfed by the enormity and solidity of the rock surrounds. Awe is induced by the spectacular scenery, by the extraordinary power exercised over it *and* by the diminution of humanity.¹³⁸ The painting closely matches a description of the scene written by Henry Skrine after a visit in 1798: 'as a spectacle it is not a little striking to behold a large arid mountain entirely stripped of its herbage by the stream of the sulphur works, and perforated with numberless caverns which, opening under lofty arches one below the other, seem to disclose the deepest arcana of the earth.'¹³⁹

The sublime supplied a language for a number of such pictures at this time, placing industry on a level aesthetically with waterfalls, storms and volcanos. The industries in Coalbrookdale were a particular magnet for artists. Trinder suggests that the Iron Bridge became a symbol of the artistic interest in industry, and that it 'was built at a propitious moment in English history, when industrial development could be seen as bringing unalloyed benefits to the poor, and at the same time exalting the achievements of Englishmen over other nations, and of Man over natural forces.'¹⁴⁰ For these artists industry in the countryside was a part of the continuing *construction* of the landscape.

¹³⁸ David Nye discovers this same contradiction within the technological sublime, revealed in the experience of standing on a skyscraper and peering down at the street. See *American Technological Sublime*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996; 285. This is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.

¹³⁹ From Henry Skrine, *Two Successive tours through the whole of Wales with several of the English counties*, 1798. Quoted in Barry Trinder, 'Introduction' in Stuart Smith (ed), *A View from the Iron Bridge*, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Ironbridge, 1979; 8.

¹⁴⁰ Trinder, 'Introduction' in Smith, *View from the Iron Bridge*: 8-10.

Landscape and war

The representation of technology as sublime continued well into the nineteenth century (and will be picked up again in Chapter 6). But the general spirit of optimism of the latter part of the eighteenth century was sorely tested by the long wars with Napoleon in the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century. The aftermath of the Napoleonic war had a devastating effect on the English countryside. Corn prices fell and estates - often so recently enclosed partly with a view to increasing production in a war economy - fell into disrepair, rents could not be paid and the rural poor increased. William Cobbett (a reformist) held forth on the subject in his *Rural Rides* published in 1832. Writing from Petworth on 1 August 1823 he raged:

yet, at a season like this, the farmers are so poor, as to be unable to pay the labourers to work on the land! From this cause there will certainly be some falling off in production. This will, of course, have a tendency to keep prices from falling so low as they would do if there were no falling off. But can this *benefit* the farmer and landlord? The poverty of the farmers is seen in their diminished stock.

Cobbett was in no doubt where the blame lay. The landlords were suffering now but it was they who 'above all men living, deserve punishment'. It was they who 'put the power into the hands of Pitt and his crew to torment the people'. Indeed, the situation was 'the price of efforts to crush freedom in France, *lest the example of France should produce a reform in England*. These things are the price of that undertaking; which, however, has not yet been crowned with *success*; for the question is *not yet decided*.'¹⁴¹

Briefly, the costs of the war meant the imposition of heavy taxes at the same time that agricultural prices crashed. Wage bills rose but were far behind the rises in the cost of living. The cost of managing estates became prohibitive and many estates had to be sold, 'often falling to industrialists who had never managed an estate before and who had little patience for the genteel paternalism of their predecessors.'¹⁴² The upshot was an acceleration of the move of the middle classes into the countryside. Cobbett's belief in the need to punish landlords did not extend to such an extreme corrective measure. Writing in November 1821, while in Burghclere, he bemoans the cancellation of his intended fox hunting due to the

¹⁴¹ William Cobbett, *Rural Rides, 1821-1832*, Webb and Bower, London, 1984 [first pub. 1830 and enlarged 1853]; 74-5. [Italics in original.]

¹⁴² Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 88.

reduction in the number of local packs of hounds. In a classic example of the limits in the reforming zeal of many, he claims it is only a fool

who cannot duly estimate the difference between a resident *native* gentry, attached to the soil, known to every farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions are lost ... ; and a gentry, only now-and-then residing at all, having no relish for country-delights, foreign in their manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of speculation ... The war and paper-system has brought in nabobs, negro-drivers, generals, admirals, governors, commissaries, contractors, pensioners, sinecurists, commissioners, loan-jobbers, lottery-dealers, bankers, stock-jobbers ... You can see but few good houses, not in possession of one or the other of these.¹⁴³

Cobbett seems here to be suggesting that the pastoral Arcadia of the earlier landscape scenes was a reflection of reality and it is only the new 'gentry', the industrialists, who have driven out that perfect harmony. While his notes are a fascinating insight into contemporary life, it is difficult to feel confidence in the consistency of his opinions, and I am tempted to accept William Hazlitt's view that 'his principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies'!¹⁴⁴

After 1815, the countryside's economic influence diminished while the towns were gaining in importance. The top ranks of the middle classes were making their presence felt in the role of landowners and the dispossessed of the countryside were beginning to contribute to overcrowding in the towns; the post-war political situation was fragile. The heyday of the picturesque was over. As defined by Price and Knight, it had 'embodied the values and worldview of the wealthy landowning class'; other classes were now moving into the properties which were 'almost an ontological condition for the picturesque association of ideas',¹⁴⁵ but the aesthetic did not disappear and its discourse, giving primacy to nature and the supremacy of the nation, was regularly used for ideological purposes. Bermingham tells us that the 'anti-industrialism implicit in the picturesque grew out of the split between agrarian and industrial capitalism, which would widen considerably after the Napoleonic wars, and the nostalgia of the picturesque anticipated and compensated for the resulting shift

¹⁴³ Cobbett, *Rural Rides*; 35.

¹⁴⁴ From William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*, published in 1825. Quoted by Christopher Morris in the 'Introduction' to Cobbett, *Rural Rides*.

¹⁴⁵ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 83.

of power away from the countryside after Waterloo'.¹⁴⁶ However, this statement begs two questions: one regarding the nature of the 'split' between the two blocks of capital, and the other problematizing the relationship between political power, purchasing power and nostalgia. The economic and the aesthetic relationship between the industrial city and the country, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, will be developed more fully in Chapter 3 where some of the issues raised here will be addressed. As we will see, the picturesque aesthetic, despite being under challenge, proved to have the flexibility to accommodate the urban as well as the rural gaze. It was, perhaps, because of this very flexibility that the picturesque was - and remains - a politically and aesthetically contested discourse.

The long period of the Napoleonic wars, coupled with the parochial aesthetic theories of the picturesque, had given a whole new dimension to landscape painting and to nature itself as an expression of nationalism. 'The elision of the artist's character - his singular capacity to feel, to recognize, and to represent the essence of the landscape - with the symbolic character of the domestic landscape as the locus of individual and national freedom, fixes the individuality of the native genius firmly within the domain of social.'¹⁴⁷ The *London Chronicle*, in 1819, asserted in a review of Turner's watercolours, that 'the art itself is *par excellence* English, no continental pencil can come near the force, freedom, and nature of our professor.' National interests now, of course, included the capacity to make wealth, as we have seen above, and 'the notion of genius, even of the isolated genius, was not antithetical to those interests that actively promoted a capitalized market economy and the political forms which sustained it.'¹⁴⁸ The demand for patriotism and for a clear national identity served 'as a bandwagon on which different groups and interests leaped so as to steer it in a direction that would benefit them. Being a patriot was a way of claiming the right to participate in British political life, and ultimately a means of demanding a much broader access to citizenship.'¹⁴⁹ The search for national identity, and its association with landscape was not unique to Britain. David Lowenthal tells us that '[c]ountries commonly depict

¹⁴⁶ Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*; 83.

¹⁴⁷ Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter*; 141.

¹⁴⁸ Kriz, *The Idea of the English Landscape Painter*; 140, including quote from *London Chronicle*.

¹⁴⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, Vintage, London, 1996 [first pub. 1992];

themselves in landscape terms; they hallow traits they fancy uniquely theirs. Every national anthem praises special scenic splendours or nature's unique bounties.'¹⁵⁰

But another domestic feature of the Napoleonic war and of its aftermath was the impetus it gave to industrial development in an effort to recoup some of the losses of the war, and to the search for a solution to the problem of transport, given the shortage of horses during the war and the resultant high cost of fodder for those that remained. One result was the accelerated use of railways at industrial sites leading inexorably to the emergence of the public railway from 1830, finally destroying any possibility that the landscape and the world that it represented was 'fundamentally incapable of change'.¹⁵¹

Dominion over nature

In summary, dominance over and the transformation of nature is one of the great achievements of the Industrial Revolution. It is seen in both in the appropriation of nature for use in the means of production and - symbolically - in the construction and reconstruction of landscape. John Berger has stated, rather puzzlingly, that: 'Prior to the recent interest in ecology, nature was not thought of as the object of the activities of capitalism.'¹⁵² On the contrary, Marx, in the *German Ideology*, described human history as 'the story of how human beings have acted upon nature to modify it *and to modify themselves in the process*.'¹⁵³ Lowenthal says that this is particularly true of England where, '[m]ore than anywhere else in the Old World, the geography celebrated ... is what has been made and remade by many centuries of native folk.' He quotes Emerson's comment made in 1856 that 'nothing is left as it was made; rivers, hills, valleys, the sea itself, feel the hand

¹⁵⁰ David Lowenthal, 'European and English Landscapes as National Symbols' in David Hooson (ed), *Geography and National Identity*, Blackwell, London, 1994; 17.

¹⁵¹ Solkin, *Landscape of Reaction*; 70.

¹⁵² John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, BBC/Penguin, London, 1972; 104-105.

¹⁵³ Quote, paraphrasing Marx, from David Matless and Chris Philo, 'Nature's Geographies: Social and Cultural Perspectives' in Philo (compiler), *New Words, New Worlds*; 42. [Italics in original.]

of a master.’¹⁵⁴ For Marx, one of the bourgeoisie’s major achievements in the development of capitalism was the ‘subjection of Nature’s forces to man’.¹⁵⁵ And Marx was here merely reflecting a powerful strand of thought, or source of pride, that ran through the sections of society that supported the entrepreneurial spirit and the massive upheavals of the nineteenth century. The commodification of the landscape and the exercise of power over it was a well developed aspect of the new economic order. This was demonstrated by major engineering feats, such as proved necessary in canal building and then, to an even greater extent, in the construction of the railways, but, in a less acknowledged way, it had been a fact of life in agricultural developments for at least a hundred years. Landscape painting had, as we have seen in this chapter, developed complex ways of dealing with agricultural reality, ways which both disguised and subtly revealed it, celebrated the dominance of man while simultaneously expressing a nostalgia for ‘simpler’ times past. Robert Clark, writing about the landscape gardening movement, phrases the contradiction in slightly different terms:

The content of the categorical aesthetic division established by English eighteenth century writers of the beautiful and orderly from the sublime and wild is evidence of the economic split between a domain that had been brought into Reason, harmony and (agri)cultural control, and a more complicated domain which, while it reminded people of the intimate other that nature once was, set limits to Enlightenment’s dreams of total empire and indicated potentials yet to be harvested.¹⁵⁶

The railway age represented one of those potentials but perhaps presented a bigger challenge to the duplicity of the concept of landscape. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century a landscape had been constructed - physically, artistically, psychologically and politically - that would not easily accommodate the railway. In the next chapter I will look at how, before trying to do that, artists and aesthetic styles learned to cope with the impingement of urban centres and their associated industry on the presentation and representation of the landscape.

¹⁵⁴ Lowenthal, ‘European and English Landscapes’; 20, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1952 [first pub. 1848]; 48.

¹⁵⁶ Clark, ‘Absent landscape of America’; 84.

CHAPTER 3

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

The industrial landscape and the big city became during the earlier nineteenth century the two most potent visual symbols of the new economic order that was transforming the fabric of western European society.¹

This chapter will examine the nature of attitudes in the early nineteenth century to the emergence of what is now described as modernity and its main perceived locus, the city. With the relentless shift of economic power from the country to the city, the latter was discursively set up against the countryside as the bearer of all the ills and fears occasioned by the huge social changes taking place. This shift led to an association of those ills and terrors with a 'new' class of industrial bourgeoisie which was, in turn, ideologically set against the traditional, paternalistic, landowning aristocracy and gentry. Rural and urban life were constructed as opposites in terms of daily experiences, patterns of authority, class associations and morality. All of this found expression in aesthetics and artists representing the landscape found they needed to respond to the discursive conflict as well as to the growing incursion of modernity.

Philip Lowe believes that the time during which Turner produced *Rain, Steam and Speed* - the mid nineteenth century - was a turning point. There had been, for a hundred years, a 'rationalist, progressivist outlook deriving from the Enlightenment which, with its confidence in the perfectibility of all things, had looked always to the improvement of nature and society through the exercise of human reason.' By mid-century there was a 'profound shift of opinion, with its rejection of the imperative to improve. [which] arose from a reassessment of the social and economic changes of the nineteenth century, fuelled by moral and aesthetic reaction to the urban condition.'² We saw in Chapter 2 that, in the late eighteenth century, 'tourists, artists and writers ... marvelled at the discipline and order of Richard Arkwright's mills at Cromford or Josiah Wedgwood's pottery at Etruria, and were fascinated and awestruck by the terrifyingly dramatic sights of Coalbrookdale or Parys

¹ Alex Potts, 'Picturing the Modern Metropolis: Images of London in the nineteenth century,' *History Workshop*, no. 26, Autumn 1988: 28.

² Philip Lowe, 'The rural idyll defended: from preservation to conservation' in G.E. Mingay (ed), *The Rural Idyll*, Routledge, London, 1989: 115.

Mountain' and Barrie Trinder suggests that it was only 'in the 1830s and 1840s that industry came to be regarded with disgust, as something unworthy of the attention of cultivated people, as awareness spread of the squalor of working class districts in large industrial towns, and of the degrading conditions in which women and children were forced to work in mills and mines.'³ I will look, in this chapter, at how this change took place and at what basis there was in fact for the assumption - still widely held today - that there was a social, economic, philosophical and political divide between city and country life. Aesthetic conventions from early in the nineteenth century sought to manage that divide by emphasizing the possibility of separation. I will suggest that a powerful political imperative was at work in the philosophical and aesthetic construction of the city as the source of social disruption and distress.

This bifurcated construction of modernity ignored three essential factors. Firstly, that the new economic system had originated, in Britain, in the capitalization of agriculture; secondly, that swathes of the aristocracy and other landowners were intimately involved in the growing industrial capital of the cities; and thirdly - perhaps the most damaging ideologically - that a growing part of the teeming population of the cities originated in the rural population that had been cleared from the land or impoverished during the enforcement of the policy of land enclosures. As we have seen, this disruption of the traditional patterns of country life was effectively written and painted out of memory.

The relative merits of the city and the country were hotly debated and this is apparent in representations of the city within the landscape. I will discuss at some length the work of Caroline Arscott and Griselda Pollock which challenged, in its day (1988), the once canonical view that the city itself was largely ignored by artists - a view that has largely now been abandoned due to their, and other writers', efforts. But first, I will turn to the social construction of the dichotomy between city and country.

³ Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape*, Phoenix, London, 1997 [first pub. 1982]; l.

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³ Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape*, Phoenix, London, 1997 [first pub. 1982]; 1.

The city and the country

With the turn of the nineteenth century the new forms of industry tended either to become established in cities or were directly responsible for the birth and growth of cities.⁴ The growth in city dwelling in Britain in the nineteenth century was remarkable. One in five people lived in cities at the beginning of the century (compared to approximately one in ten in France and one in twenty in Germany). By 1850 half the population dwelt in an urban environment (roughly 14% and 10% in France and Germany respectively). By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century the relative population had reversed from the position one hundred years before, with one in five people now being country dwellers. In the same period the population had nearly trebled: see Table.

Table. *Increases in industrial production and urban drift 1801-1911*⁵

<i>Year (approx)</i>	<i>Production of pig iron (tons)</i>	<i>Output of coal (tons)</i>	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Urban dwellers - Britain</i>	<i>- France</i>	<i>- Germany</i>
1801				20%	8.8%	5.5%
1811	0.243m	13 m	10.16 m			
1851				50%	14.5%	10.8%
1881	2.4 m	159.4 m	25.97 m	66%		
1911				80%		

Key: m = million

Middlesbrough serves as an example to illustrate how spectacular the expansion in some areas was: it grew from one farmhouse in 1830 to a town of 50,000 in 1880.⁶

As early as 1807 Robert Southey, a 'Tory poet', very succinctly expressed the country dweller's fear of the city (after a visit to Birmingham) as 'a place of infernal noise and

⁴ See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 39:4, 1986; 512.

⁵ Sources: Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: museums and heritage in the post-modern world*, Routledge, London, 1992; 23. Lowe, 'Rural idyll defended'; 114. Continental comparisons from Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1991; 109. See Martin Daunt, *Progress and Poverty: an economic and social history of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995) for more detail.

⁶ See W.G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1988 [first pub. 1955]; 187.

infernal sights, occupying people in infernal employments, which so deracinated them that there was a fearful danger of social disorder and sexual demoralisation'. This was contrasted with the countryside which was a 'heaven of paternalistic and hierarchical social harmony'. Thomas Babington Macaulay, a 'Whig historian and politician', on the other hand, took issue with Southey's views in a response published in 1830 and gave support to the factory system which created a city 'wherein liberty, freedom and progress flourished and were embodied'.⁷ G.J. Marsh tells us that, as the process of urbanisation developed, '[i]n the iconography of the age, the city stood for misery and ugliness, the countryside for bliss and beauty. As the countryside became the source of all that was divine, so the city was seen as infernal, with all the potent imagery associated with hell.'⁸ Raymond Williams refers to the 'powerful hostile associations' that have developed between 'the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; [and] the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance, limitation.' In examining the particular hostilities of the nineteenth century it is useful to have the reminder that 'a contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times.'⁹ Williams traces the hostility back to turn-of-the-second-century Rome and the satires of Juvenal which include the words 'What can I do in Rome? I never learnt how / To lie.'¹⁰

With the rise of interest in a picturesque way of viewing things the apparent hostility between things of the country and things of the city intensified. Stephen Copley quotes from William Gilpin's writings about his 'picturesque tour' of the Lake District, undertaken in 1772. As London was approached on the way home, Gilpin was clearly affected by more than just the visual images that confronted him:

London comes on apace; and all those disgusting ideas, with which its great avenues abound - brick-kilns, steaming with offensive smoke - sewers and ditches sweating with filth - heaps of collected soil, and stinks of every denomination - clouds of dust, rising and vanishing, from agitated wheels,

⁷ From Robert Southey, *Letters from England*, 1807 and T.B. Macaulay, 'Southey's Colloquies on Society', *Edinburgh Review*, January 1830. Both quoted in Caroline Arscott and Griselda Pollock, 'The Partial View: the visual representation of the early nineteenth century industrial city', in Janet Wolff and John Seed, *The Culture of Capital: art, power and the nineteenth-century middle class*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 197.

⁸ From G.J. Marsh, *Back to the Land: the Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England from 1880-1914*, Quartet, London, 1982. Quoted in Lowe, 'Rural idyll defended'; 115.

⁹ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1973; 1.

¹⁰ Williams, *Country and City*; 46.

pursuing each other in rapid motion.¹¹

Copley goes on to add that this depiction of ‘London, as the city, and as the seat of luxury, corruption and contamination, serves as the antitype to the rural ideals discovered and celebrated in the Lake District.’ Significantly, Gilpin believed that

the simplicity of life enjoyed by Lake District villagers is protected by their isolation from the contaminations of luxury, and specifically by their distance from the roads which would bring trade and allow the development of a taste for luxury goods: ‘At a distance from the refinements of the age, they are at a distance also from its vices ... It is some happiness indeed to these people, that they have no great roads among them.’¹²

This sentiment was taken up again in similar terms by Wordsworth some 60 years later in his famous attack on the advent of the railway to the Lake District, as will be seen in Chapter 4.

The city was, however, not devoid of admirers of its aesthetic. In a series of articles in *Monthly Magazine* in 1814, William Taylor suggested that landscapes that show cities were a more advanced form of art than those that show rural scenes as they represented ‘the natural progress of the human mind.’ Using the discourse of association aesthetics, which had currency at the time, he condemned rustic art which only produced ‘the direct pleasures of art’ whereas appropriate townscapes ‘may probably excite, more completely than any other sort of scenery, the luxurious and agreeable ideas - of opulence, refinement, elegance, and enjoyment, being harboured in every dwelling, or scattered in every grove.’ His ideal would have been a view of London from Blackfriars Bridge from where he could

behold an immeasurably wider extent of builded space than elsewhere; houses rising above houses, streets stretching beyond streets, palaces, theatres, temples climbing from the endless mass of edifice further than the eye can trace in any direction, and beyond the majestic Thames, with the idea of a world-encompassing commerce and empire, which that winding forest of masts is adapted to excite; and all this, my countrymen, our own.¹³

¹¹ From William Gilpin, *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains, and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmorland*, London, 1786. Quoted in Stephen Copley, ‘William Gilpin and the black-lead mine’ in Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (eds), *The Politics of the Picturesque*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; 52.

¹² Copley, ‘William Gilpin and the Black-lead mine’; 54 including quote from Gilpin, *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*.

¹³ From William Taylor, ‘Outlines of a Discourse on a History and Theory of Prospect Painting’, *Monthly Magazine*, Vols 37 and 38, 1814. Quoted in Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; 73-74.

William Taylor's was not an isolated vision. Some years later a visitor from Saxony, Carl Gustav von Carus, a landscape painter, demonstrated that the aesthetics could survive without the patriotism and with a rather more dispassionate approach. He surveyed the city from London Bridge and found that the extraordinary jumble and variety of buildings 'almost all stacked together without rule and symmetry according to the practical needs of the moment, mostly blackened and dirtied by coal smoke ... [was] with all the filth and smoke and considerable wretchedness of detail, yet as a whole so magnificent and powerful.'¹⁴ Similarly, Charles Knight, a radical newspaper publisher, described the 'gorgeous scene now before us! The evening sun is painting the waters with glancing flames; the cross on the summit of that mighty dome of St. Paul's shines like another sun; churches, warehouses, steam-chimneys, shot-towers, wharfs, bridges - the noblest and the humblest things - all are picturesque'.¹⁵

It can be argued that, for the purposes of aesthetic appreciation, London, as a centre of finance and the grand capital of a growing empire, stood distinct from the industrial towns of the north. However, this is simplistic. We saw in Gilpin's feelings on approaching it that London had no special claim over other cities to pleasant living conditions. Gunn points out that '[i]ndustrialism was far from synonymous with large-scale production and the mass factory work force. Nineteenth-century London shared with Birmingham and Sheffield a concentration of small workshops and craft trades, with Liverpool, Manchester, and Glasgow a swelling casual labour market.'¹⁶ The London smogs caused by burning of both domestic and industrial fossil fuel had been the stuff of legend ever since the early modern period. Despite this, at the turn of the nineteenth century, controversies about the city tended to shift from a focus on London to a focus on the northern industrial cities.¹⁷ Londoners themselves held jaundiced views of life in northern towns, although an example exists of an individual's discovery that such a view was mere prejudice: a diary entry of one B.R. Haydon, who spent June of 1837 lecturing in Manchester, says 'I am not happy in

¹⁴ From Carl Gustav von Carus, *England and Schottland*, published in 1845 and translated into English in 1846. Quoted in Alex Potts, 'Picturing the Modern Metropolis'; 29.

¹⁵ Charles Knight, *London*, Vol. I, London, 1841; 15.

¹⁶ Simon Gunn, 'The "failure" of the Victorian middle class: a critique' in Wolff and Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital*; 23.

¹⁷ See B.I. Coleman, *The Idea of the City in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973.

Manchester. The associations of these hideous mill-prisons for children destroy my enjoyment in society. The people are quite insensitive to it.' But a couple of weeks later he writes 'This was imagination. I have since examined large factories - 2000 in one room, and found the children healthy and strong, and the room well aired and wholesome.'¹⁸ One has to wonder what he was used to in London.

There was support for urban life from other quarters as well. One reason for Karl Marx's admiration of the bourgeoisie was that it 'has greatly increased the urban population as compared with the rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life',¹⁹ a sentiment with which John Everett Millais would undoubtedly have concurred three years later after lodging in the country to paint from nature for his *Ophelia*. He wrote to a Mrs. Combe on 2 July 1851, describing his travails: 'The countryfolk here [Kingston, Surrey] are a shade more civil than those of Oxfordshire, but similarly given to that wondering stare, as though we were as strange a sight as the hippopotamus. My martyrdom is more trying than any I have hitherto experienced.'²⁰

Nonetheless, despite ample evidence of appreciation of the city, the hegemonic view is, as Ellen Meiksins Wood asserts, that 'British culture has been notable for its disparagement of urban life and its idealization of ruralism'.²¹ This is a paradox, given the highly urbanized nature of British society. But Wood suggests that it may have come about precisely *as a result* of the speed of that urbanisation. She contrasts attitudes in Britain with 'the neat antithesis of backward countryside and "modern" town' that was more prevalent in Europe where 'brutal and ignorant' was set against the 'urbane, cultivated and enlightened, or "rural idiocy" against urban progress.'²² It is her contention that British cities missed out on the late medieval development of burgher communes and autonomous urban trading communities 'descended from an economy of craft production' that so characterized European cities.

¹⁸ Quoted in Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium: The Coming of the Machine As Seen by Contemporary Observers*, Papermac, London, 1995 [first pub. 1985]; 205.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1952 [first pub. 1848]; 47.

²⁰ Letter quoted in Carolyn Hares-Stryker (ed), *An Anthology of Pre-Raphaelite Writings*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1997; 60.

²¹ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 109.

²² Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 113.

‘This kind of urban culture,’ she believes, ‘was overtaken very early in England by the growth of the national market centred in London [and] by capitalist imperatives of productivity’,²³ very largely due to the hugely advanced and profitable nature of agrarian capitalism in England. As a result, ‘[t]he pattern of English economic development left the culture of urbanism bereft of its central ideological premisses, so much a part of European culture elsewhere’.²⁴

The cultural particularity of English ruralism does not, however, ‘betoken an aversion to industrial capitalism or an attachment to some pre-capitalist stagnation’,²⁵ a point also made by Stephen Bending who affirms that, in fact, the ‘distinction between country and city, land and trade, was never as firmly established as literary writing might suggest.’²⁶ In fact it becomes clear that the impression given of a dichotomy between two distinct and separate places and ways of life is far too simplistic and obfuscatory for two primary reasons. First, there is no strict association of industry with the city rather than the country, as seen in Chapter 2 in the writings on and paintings of Ironbridge and Parys Mountain. Wood adds to this that anyway ‘excursions into the surrounding countryside made the rural landscape a part of the urban environment for workers in, for example, Manchester or Leeds.’²⁷ More to the point, cities or towns had always provided an essential market for country products, even if someone such as William Cobbett could complain in *Rural Rides* of people in the countryside starving as a result of all the produce of the land being sent to feed the cities.²⁸ It is true that ‘the traditionally fairly stable relationship between town and country was disturbed, as industrial towns grew massively in size and population’²⁹ but even this development was based on that interdependence as the factories absorbed country folk who were displaced from the land.

²³ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 108.

²⁴ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 113-115.

²⁵ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 110.

²⁶ Stephen Bending, ‘A Natural Revolution?: Garden Politics in Eighteenth Century England’ in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds), *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the Romantic Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998; 261.

²⁷ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 115.

²⁸ See Arscott and Pollock, ‘The Partial View’; 215-216.

²⁹ Arscott and Pollock, ‘The Partial View’; 216.

The second, and most important, basis for undermining the rural / urban dichotomy, is detailed by Williams, amongst others, in his descriptions of the long-standing, complex and intimate relationships between city and country, and

the regular, necessary and functional links between the social and moral orders which were so easily and conventionally contrasted. ... A large part of what is being passed across the exchanges [between country and city] is the surplus value of the unregarded labourers at home and, as trade developed, abroad. And as the moneyed order of the city extends in importance, where does much of the new capital go, but back to the land, to intensify the exploiting process. The greed and calculation, so easily isolated and condemned in the city, run back, quite clearly, to the country houses, with the fields and their labourers around them.³⁰

Williams is talking here about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, showing how long the process of intimate exchange between city and country had been fundamental. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was accelerating. It is of particular interest that Williams continues by emphasising that the exchange

is a double process. The exploitation of man and of nature, which takes place in the country, is realised and concentrated in the city. But also, the profits of other kinds of exploitation - the accumulating wealth of the merchant, the lawyer, the court favourite - come to penetrate the country, as if, but only as if, they were a new social phenomenon.³¹

This observation refers to the constant flow of newly rich city people purchasing - or acquiring through bankruptcy - the country estates of gentlemen who removed to the city. A further structural connection between town and country is pointed out by Edward Royle who found that an analysis of opposition among working people to exploitation reveals links between urban and rural workers: the union that was organized and famously banned in Tolpuddle, Dorset in 1834 was a branch of the London-based Grand National Consolidated Trades Union, suggesting that 'the interchange of ideas between town and country was not so improbable as the usual emphasis on the isolation of the rural worker might suggest.'³²

Bending has elaborated on the mutual dependence between city and country, reporting recent research on the late eighteenth century that has

illustrated the extent to which members of the great landowning families were themselves involved in the city and large-scale commercial activity. Far from shunning that world of commerce and

³⁰ Williams, *Country and City*; 48.

³¹ Williams, *Country and City*; 48-49.

³² Edward Royle, *Revolutionary Britannia?: Reflections on the threat of revolution in Britain, 1789-1848*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000; 86.

retreating to the doomed paradise of an outmoded country estate, many families were putting younger sons into the great commercial houses and reaping substantial financial benefits from that relationship to the point where 'city' money became a crucial means of supporting the 'landed' estate.³³

Cain and Hopkins analyse the traditional distinction between rentier wealth, based on landed property, and entrepreneurial wealth based on the creation of goods and services and on the profit motive in general. Political authority quite clearly came with the former, as we saw in Chapter 2, rather than with the latter. However, they assert that 'some forms of "entrepreneurial" wealth were closer to the gentlemanly ideal than others'. A distinction could be made between entrepreneurs

whose relationship with the productive process was direct and those whose involvement was only indirect ... although the City was a centre of "entrepreneurial" activity in Weber's sense, it rapidly became, in its higher reaches, a branch of gentlemanly capitalism ... [and] the fate of the City was entwined with that of the aristocracy in Britain after 1688 with all the expected consequences in terms of wealth, prestige and incorporation into the body politic. The great businesses of the City ... were conducted upon principles which were much closer to the ideals of gentlemanly capitalism fostered by the landed class and their supporters than to the mores of manufacturing.³⁴

The authors seek here to show the primacy of finance capital in the social hierarchy compared to industrial capital. The 'City' to which they refer is very much the City of London and its finance houses. However, they acknowledge that after 1800 and Britain's embroilment in the long wars with France, 'there was a growing awareness that Britain's ability to defend herself against larger powers depended critically upon the pace of economic development'.³⁵ They further acknowledge that, despite their 'indirect relationship with the productive process', gentlemanly capitalists benefitted 'from developments in which industrial capitalism was the most visible agent of change.' Indeed, they argue that 'gentlemanly culture' had become one which 'flourished upon capitalist wealth but derided the technology upon which that wealth depended'.³⁶ Aristocrats were more willing to be *seen* to be allied to financial activity, but the purpose of such alliances was investment in trade and, more and more frequently, profitable (or occasionally disastrous) speculation in industry. Cain and Hopkins tell us that investment 'notably in railways after 1830, provided a new basis for rentier fortunes as the eighteenth century edifice of public debt and patronage

³³ Bending, 'A Natural Revolution?'; 261.

³⁴ Cain and Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; 506-7.

³⁵ Cain and Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; 515.

³⁶ Cain and Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; 508.

withered away.’³⁷ Research undertaken by Geoffrey Channon has shown that the Great Western Railway steadily increased the numbers of its Board members who originated from the landed interest: one in the period 1833-35, five in the period 1836-55 (of whom three held titles), nine in 1856-75, and ten thereafter.³⁸ Other railway Boards had similar landed membership. So, while expressed attitudes and cultural products sought to maintain social distinctions, financially those distinctions were seriously compromised. Domestic industry, by the nineteenth century, was an important basis of finance capital and, increasingly, of supposed landed wealth.

While Cain and Hopkins may be right to assert that aristocrats had a preference to be *publicly* associated with finance rather than industrial capital, their argument that this is anything other than a façade cannot be maintained. David Spring demonstrates, in an article published in 1971, that ‘whatever the economic enterprise launched on English land - however remote it may have been from the cultivation of wheat and barley - it touched on the affairs of the landed aristocracy.’³⁹ This includes the construction of industry, the spread of cities and, perhaps more significantly, the ownership of mineral rights which had been finally settled, in the late seventeenth century, in the favour of the surface landowners; this ensured direct benefits from the ever increasing extraction of minerals for use in the developing industries. Simon Gunn describes the blurring of hierarchical distinctions between different forms of wealth that had accelerated and spread during the nineteenth century such that ‘the processes of capitalist development engendered a dense web of economic networks and social relationships which bound together different geographical and occupational groupings - manufacturers, bureaucrats, financiers, professional men, *rentiers* - in ever more complex and reciprocal ways.’⁴⁰ E.P. Thompson also described the development of these convoluted networks. The eighteenth century was the time when ‘agrarian capitalism came fully into its inheritance.’ But alliances with other blocks of

³⁷ Cain and Hopkins, ‘Gentlemanly Capitalism’; 517.

³⁸ Geoffrey Channon, ‘The recruitment of directors to the board of the Great Western Railway, Part II’, *Journal of Transport History*, 3rd series, 20/1, March 1999; esp. pp 1, 7, 13.

³⁹ David Spring, ‘English Landowners and Nineteenth-Century Industrialism’ in J.T. Ward and R.D. Wilson (eds), *Land and Industry: The Landed Estate and the Industrial Revolution*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1971; 16-17.

⁴⁰ Gunn, ‘The “failure” of the Victorian middle class’; 23-24. See also Peter Mathias, *The First Industrial Nation: an Economic History of Britain 1700-1914*, Routledge, London, 2nd. edit., 1983; 136-148.

capital were mutually beneficial: they were formed not only with finance and mercantile capital but also with sections of manufacturing industry ‘which still sought protection from the State. ... Ascendant agrarian capitalism involved not only rent-rolls, improvement, enclosures, but also far-reaching changes in marketing, milling, transport, and in the merchandising of exports and imports’.⁴¹ It is clear that the involvement of landed gentry in the development of manufacturing industry was critical, and they were an important impetus behind it. The city of finance was merely a front for the smokey industrial city; the nexus between city and country was complete.

Thompson acknowledged that there is an easy logic in seeing mercantile capital as the kernel of the ‘capitalist revolution’, but he asserted that if we ‘think rather of the capitalist mode of production, then clearly we must [see] the landowners and farmers as a very powerful and authentic capitalist nexus.’⁴² Wood, like Thompson, feels that the use of the word ‘revolution’, either in the context of capitalism or industry, is borrowed from the French model of change and is inappropriate to the British situation. Its use in relation to industrial development, she suggests, has led to a situation where the industrial revolution ‘typically appears in the dominant paradigm as if it took place outside the history of social relations, belonging instead to some kind of natural process, the impersonal evolution of technology, an autonomous technical development called “industrialization”.’⁴³ This fetishization of industrial development offers a powerful reason (then as now) for creation of the apparent split between city and country, for the ideological construction of the rural idyll threatened by the forces of modernity, for shifting the ‘blame’.

The extent of the dissimulation was shown by Marx in his explanation of primitive accumulation. He described the aggressive manner in which capitalist agriculture created the conditions that the bourgeoisie were able to use to advantage, with the ‘expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil [as] the basis of the whole process.’⁴⁴ He summed up the historical process of expropriation in categorical terms:

⁴¹ E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, Merlin, London, 1978; 252.

⁴² Thompson, *Poverty of Theory*; 250.

⁴³ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 6.

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, Penguin, London, 1976 [first pub. 1867]; 876.

The spoliation of the Church's property, the fraudulent alienation of the state domains, the theft of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of ruthless terrorism, all these things were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalist agriculture, incorporated the soil into capital, and created for the urban industries the necessary supplies of free and rightless proletarians.⁴⁵

This directly contradicts Cain and Hopkins' view that one of the reasons why aristocrats and the landed gentry maintained a distance from industrial capital in favour of finance capital was that '[i]ndustrialists were the shock troops of capitalism, and the hostility which they generated from the late eighteenth century onward undermined some of the authority which wealth would otherwise have given them.' They suggest that '[b]ankers, financiers and others in the commercial world shared with the landed interest and the more prestigious members of the service sector a relative immunity from the stresses of class conflict in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries';⁴⁶ but they ignore the landed interest's role in the vanguard of capitalism during the eighteenth century.

It must be admitted that Marx, too, attested to the intensification of exploitation in the nineteenth century with his acerbic comment that 'the eighteenth century ... did not yet recognize as fully as the nineteenth the identity between the wealth of the nation and the poverty of the people.'⁴⁷ He was, perhaps, a surprising ally for Lord Byron. Some 40 years earlier, in his maiden speech in the House of Lords, on 27 February 1812, Byron referred to the frame breakers in his Nottingham constituency, remarking sarcastically: 'In the foolishness of their hearts they imagined that the maintenance and well-being of the industrious poor were objects of greater importance than the enrichment of a few individuals by any improvement, in the implements of trade, which threw the workmen out of employment, and rendered the labourer unworthy of his hire.'⁴⁸

But what the nineteenth century saw was, in fact, intensification of an accustomed pattern: the 'shock troops' of capitalism had been and gone, having done most of their work in the preceding centuries. In the hundred years from 1730 to 1830, 6.3 million acres of land had

⁴⁵ Marx, *Capital I*; 895.

⁴⁶ Cain and Hopkins, 'Gentlemanly Capitalism'; 508.

⁴⁷ Marx, *Capital I*; 886.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium*; 132.

their use changed from communal to individual farming. This created an intense sense of loss and injustice among those people who managed still to survive in rural areas. Riots in the countryside were responsible for much of the pressure on the traditional hierarchy in the early nineteenth century. However, despite threats from rioters *and* from the middle-class incomers to the countryside, the 'established order' remained remarkably stable. Statistics from the New Domesday Book from the 1870s reveal that the landed aristocracy consisted of about 2,250 people and between them they owned almost half the enclosed land in England and Wales (and closer to four fifths of all land in Britain). This was relatively unchanging throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Sporadic rioting occurred in the countryside for most of the first half of the nineteenth century, yet memories were somehow shortened and attribution of unrest was placed elsewhere. Barrell concurs that the 'concern of the rich has shifted to the worker in industry; and it is he who seems to carry the burden of England's economic progress, and he who seems capable of threatening it by indiscipline, idleness and revolt', despite the reality of events in the countryside. He detects a shift at this time in the depiction of the rural poor in pastorals as 'the countryside comes to take on the simply negative virtue of not being the city. It is no longer a place of tension'. The countryside, in this view, is given a role as 'a place of refreshment and recreation, where we may recover the sense of our potential as sensitive individuals which is lost in the urban life of affairs'.⁵⁰ The success of the process of dissimulation was as complete as it was extreme. It was, perhaps, safer to shift the blame for all ills onto the city. The industrial, the urban way of life was newer and a relative unknown; therefore, it was easy to load economic and social problems, despoliation of the countryside, and incentives to disorder onto the idea of the city. The country was the traditional place of residence and source of sustenance for the governing class and, more critically, it metaphorically sustained, through landscape structures, its unassailable *right* to govern. Any intimation, therefore, of unrest in the countryside had to be suppressed, and the city, with its undeniable problems, conveniently offered itself as a putative locus of potential revolt.

There was, then, no ontological break between city life and country life, as there was not

⁴⁹ Spring, 'English Landowners and Nineteenth-Century Industrialism'; 17.

⁵⁰ Barrell, *Dark Side of the Landscape*; 32-3.

between agricultural and industrial capital. The relationship between the two was one of interdependence, as it had always been, although it was not always in balance and could be unstable.⁵¹ Bending contends that the reality of continuity between the two sites and the two ways of life stands in stark opposition to the typical historiographical account that looks for ‘neat oppositions’ within the ‘structural transformation of society from the feudal to the capitalist’.⁵² Wood sees this constructed ‘neat opposition’ as a retrospective ‘prism of ... self-congratulatory bourgeois ideology’,⁵³ an ‘ideological intrusion’ on history. There is still a powerful resonance to the argument that ‘the British, and more particularly the ruling class, ... in their attachment to some idealized vision of rural gentility, peace, stability and resistance to change, have tended to shrink from the vulgarities of industry and technical innovation’. But Wood avers that in this construction ‘the antithesis of urban and rural need not ... coincide neatly with the opposition of productivity and progress to stagnation and backwardness’ *except* - and this is the crux of her argument - ‘in the bourgeois paradigm’.⁵⁴

The bourgeois paradigm

Raymond Williams was one of the more prominent Marxist theorists who, in the 1960s, posited the bourgeois paradigm as a theoretical construct with the suggestion that ‘[s]omewhere in the nineteenth century (though there are earlier signs) the English middle class lost its nerve, socially, and thoroughly compromised with the class it had virtually defeated.’⁵⁵ This is the framework for Martin Wiener’s ideas that were discussed in Chapter 2. But the quintessential expression of the paradigm occurs in the articles by Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn on the historic failure of the British bourgeoisie. These articles appeared in *New Left Review* in 1964 but still wield political influence.⁵⁶ According to this formulation,

⁵¹ Arscott and Pollock, ‘The Partial View’; 217.

⁵² Bending, ‘A Natural Revolution?’; 261.

⁵³ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 4.

⁵⁴ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 109-110.

⁵⁵ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1961; 346.

⁵⁶ Perry Anderson, ‘Origins of the Present Crisis’, *New Left Review*, 23, Jan/Feb 1964; Tom Nairn, ‘The British Political Elite’, *New Left Review*, 23, Jan/Feb 1964; ‘The English Working Class’, *New Left Review*, 24, March/April 1964; ‘The Nature of the Labour Party’, Part I, *New Left Review*, 27, Sept/Oct 1964; (continued...)

the bourgeoisie had a historic role to play in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, a role normally assumed to be exemplified by the events of the French Revolution. In Britain, however, the bourgeoisie failed to mount a political and social revolution, left power in the hands of aristocrats and the traditional establishment, and proceeded to engage in a series of historic compromises with that establishment which has led to a serious weakening of Britain's industrial and economic strengths today.

Despite being quickly challenged by E.P. Thompson,⁵⁷ this view became, to a large extent, the accepted orthodoxy of a large part of the Marxist left in Britain. The idea was taken up and developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Even in 1998, in his interesting study of society and culture in the nineteenth century, Simon Dentith maintains the argument that, as the 'actual staffing of the high offices of state remained in the hands of the landed elite and its allies in the City throughout the nineteenth century [this was] sufficient to distort economic and social policy in a way that by the end of the century was already leading to relative industrial decline'.⁵⁸

Thompson noted a basic flaw in Anderson's original insistence that the industrial bourgeoisie lacked the 'courage' to confront the aristocracy after 1832: they did not need to. He asks, 'what need did these bourgeois have of courage when money served them better? Why should they take up arms against primogeniture when, with increasing rapidity, land was becoming only one interest beside cotton, railways, iron and steel, coal, shipping, and finance?' He also questioned the purpose of the mooted 'compromise' when

[a]dmission to the élite was not, in fact, within the gift of the aristocracy: the aristocracy, rather, registered those shifts and fluctuations of power which occurred elsewhere, and graced a "Society" which came into existence independently of its influence. They were like the staff at an elaborate and prestigious hotel, who could in no way influence the comings and goings of clientele, who or at what time or with whom, but could arrange the ball and appoint a Master of Ceremonies.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ (...continued)

'The Nature of the Labour Party', Part II, *New Left Review*, 28, Nov/Dec 1964.

⁵⁷ E.P. Thompson, 'The Peculiarities of the English', *Socialist Register*, No. 2, 1965. Reprinted in Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*; 245-301.

⁵⁸ Simon Dentith, *Society and Cultural Forms in Nineteenth Century England*, Macmillan, London, 1998; 7.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*; 261, 265.

A number of studies have now refuted the claim of ‘compromise’ inherent in the ‘bourgeois paradigm’. In her recent widely-researched book on the relationship of the middle class to art in the nineteenth century, Dianne Sachko Macleod argues that the middle classes of Manchester actively sought to define themselves as distinct and different from the aristocracy. She cites as evidence the rise of the many scientific societies in the first few decades of the century and ascribes their popularity to the fact that ‘Manchester’s rising middle class first felt more at ease with science as a mode of cultural self-expression because it was an area which had not already been dominated by the aristocracy.’⁶⁰ Davidoff and Hall endorse the search for distinction (rather than assimilation) among the middle classes, even claiming that their ‘type of housing ... [was] part of the bid for independence from traditional aristocratic dictates.’⁶¹

Robert Brenner has been prominent in recent fundamental challenges by economists to the pre-eminence of the bourgeoisie’s ‘historic role’.⁶² Working from within a Marxist theoretical framework, Brenner has established how it is that Marxists can hold such diametrically opposed views on something as fundamental as the role of the bourgeoisie in capitalism. In an article written in 1989, he pinpoints the difference between Marx’s early writings (pre-1850) on the transition to capitalism, and his later writings which include major works such as the three volumes of *Capital*.⁶³ Initially, both ‘[Adam] Smith and Marx saw bourgeois commercial and industrial classes as the bearers of progress over and against ... feudal agrarian classes who stood for the parasitism of the political on the economic.’⁶⁴ In the later works by Marx, however, he had realized that ‘the merchant class - which, in Smith’s theory, played the pivotal role in providing the stimulus for and actually organizing

⁶⁰ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; 95.

⁶¹ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class 1780-1850*, Routledge, London, 1992; 362.

⁶² See T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (eds), *The Brenner Debate*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985.

⁶³ Robert Brenner, ‘Bourgeois revolution and transition to capitalism’, in A.L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J.M. Rosenheim (eds), *The First Modern Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; 284. The distinction between Marx’s early and later writings has been made by a number of scholars for a number of themes. See, for example, Lawrence Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and its radical critics*, Polity Press, London, 1998.

⁶⁴ Brenner, ‘Bourgeois revolution’; 282.

the growth of the division of labour - was unable to find it in its interest to function in an economically progressive manner' and, indeed, given a variety of constraints, 'merchants played a central role in maintaining the entire socio-economic system.'⁶⁵ Critically, then, the point of departure for the development of political events in England from the early modern period onwards is not the growth of trade but 'capitalist development *within the framework of - and not in contradiction to -* aristocratic landlordism.'⁶⁶

Wood takes on the argument from a political and cultural point of view and reworks it, repositioning the emergence of British capitalism and the development of the bourgeoisie itself and removing from the latter the full weight of responsibility for the former. In the process she reveals the wealth of shared interest between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy and their mutual dependence as opposed to an assumed essential antagonism. She tells us that John Locke - despite fundamental differences in economic analysis - also believed that at the end of the seventeenth century there was, as a result of the progress of knowledge, an opposition between old and new 'not embodied in a class distinction between aristocracy and bourgeoisie, nor in the confrontation between town and country, agriculture and commerce'. Rather, it appeared in a distinction between 'the productive and the unproductive, between passive rentier property and agricultural "improvement"'. These criteria could be applied equally to landlord and town-dweller, aristocrat and bourgeois'.⁶⁷ Likewise, David Hume - also from a different economic point of view - saw no conflict between agriculture and commerce or rural and urban, but talked of a 'rising gentry, a dynamic agrarian class which, in contrast to the "ancient barons" who dissipated their fortunes, instead "endeavoured to turn their lands to the best account with regard to profit", and thereby increased the cities and enhanced the wealth and power of the "middle rank of men"'.⁶⁸ Commerce, whilst being associated by the late eighteenth century with ideas of progress, was seen as part and parcel of agricultural improvement, not an oppositional form.

In an analysis of the appeal of the rural, Wood asserts that there are 'different ways of

⁶⁵ Brenner, 'Bourgeois revolution'; 291.

⁶⁶ Brenner, 'Bourgeois revolution'; 274. [Italics in original.]

⁶⁷ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 4.

⁶⁸ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 5 including quotes from David Hume, *History of England*, Vol 3, London, 1773.

idealizing the countryside' and, although nostalgia can be one of them, 'British ruralism has not been unambiguously of this kind.' The logical extension of the long history of the development of capitalism in the landed estate is that:

The attractions of the English countryside owe a great deal to its long domination by concentrated wealth and agrarian capitalism ... The very possibility of idealizing rural life in the English manner presupposes the distinctive evolution of capitalist agriculture, its specific disposition of property and class relations and its dynamic productivity. *This particular idealization of country life, in other words, bespeaks not so much the backwardness of English culture as the dynamism and prosperity of English agriculture.* The most obvious point is that the wealth of English agriculture in the period of agrarian capitalism created a landscape pleasing to the eye. ... In agrarian capitalism, the impoverished farm or squalid village has withdrawn to the margins of the rural scene or disappeared altogether.⁶⁹

Once again, then, the 'rural idyll' is seen as an *engagement* with modernity. So we do not have an urban / rural class distinction or, indeed, a break in methods of support, profit or morals. But the bourgeois paradigm holds sway. It held sway - implicitly - when, in 1947, Francis Klingender insisted that art patrons avoided reminders of the social and technological change going on around them.⁷⁰ This was, it seems, so self-evident that the question of *why* that should be the case was not addressed (nor was the question of evidence to support the assertion).

The unacceptable face of capitalism

The rhetorical intolerance between two ways of life that were so intricately bound together begs the question of what other values are being expressed in the discourse, values that go beyond straightforward descriptions or experiences of the two places. At the end of the eighteenth century, differences in everyday activities and in life style assumed a moral dimension with 'a tendency to distinguish between traditional landed wealth and commerce as representing different (though perhaps equally necessary) moral qualities.'⁷¹ As time went by the *value* of the different morals changed in their literary and artistic expression, a change related to a debate between the primacy of progress or of tradition. Until the late decades of the eighteenth century there had been an inclusive humanism in philosophies of politics and

⁶⁹ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 110-111. [My italics.]

⁷⁰ Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972; 137.

⁷¹ Wood, *Pristine Culture*; 4-5.

of the economy. It had been comfortably assumed - by those who benefitted from them - that the 'improvements' in agriculture and the industrial results of scientific progress advanced civilization, and thereby served all members of the civilized society. As we have seen, however, reality was beginning to suggest something awry in the theories of general improvement. But just at the time when fears of political change, adjustment and even revolution were running high, Thomas Malthus came out with the perfect justification for what became known, many years later, as 'the unacceptable face of capitalism.'⁷² Put simply, Malthus explained that, mathematically, it was natural for population to increase beyond the ability of the increases in productivity to supply the necessities of life. As a result misery and vice were the inevitable experience of life for the majority of the population. Klingender quotes a chilling statement from Malthus' *Essay on the principle of population* which was first published in 1798: 'A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him.'⁷³ Better retrospective justification could not be found for the 'improvements' in the countryside and for the enthusiastic excesses of industrial development.

Robert Southey launched an attack on Malthus in 1812 for 'placing the blame for man-made evils not on man but on the system of nature.'⁷⁴ A severe tension was created: art had used the landscape to show the old social hierarchies as a natural phenomenon; now the 'new' economic order was deemed, by many, to be equally natural. Klingender believed that Malthus' 'perversion of science' alienated artists; he suggested that '[w]hen political economy abandoned the humanist standpoint for the defence of property the link between science and art was broken'⁷⁵ - and industry was, of course, on the side of science. Wordsworth recorded a change of heart towards industry in 1814 in a note relating to his

⁷² Prime Minister Edward Heath's reference to 'Tiny' Rowland, owner of Lonrho, after a particularly messy corporate scandal in 1973.

⁷³ From Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1803 (2nd edit.). Quoted in Klingender, *Art and the industrial revolution*; 99. Presumably, if the man had been born 180 years later, he would have been advised to get on his bike.

⁷⁴ From a review by Robert Southey, *Quarterly Review*, December 1812. The *Quarterly Review* shared Southey's views at that time. By 1817 the *Quarterly Review* had changed position on Malthus and thereafter published articles complimentary to his views.

⁷⁵ Klingender, *Art and the industrial revolution*; 100.

poem *The Excursion*: 'Truth has compelled me to dwell upon the baneful effects arising out of an ill-regulated and excessive application of powers so admirable in themselves.'⁷⁶ Artists shifted from a willingness to include science and industry in a romantic vision of Nature to a rejection of the excesses of the new technologies; I will return to the reflection of this in Wordsworth's work in the next chapter. As for art collectors, while many could take comfort from Malthus' writing in the real world, it was, nonetheless, more urgent to establish ideological distance from what had been constructed as the prime locus for the 'baneful' effects of the modern world.

As conditions in the cities received more critical attention, the notion of separateness between city and country ways of life was nourished. The developing conflicts were expressed in visual as well as in written art and were played out in political allegiances. In the end, this 'conflict of interest, between those settled on the land and those settled in the city, which continually defined itself in the shifting economy of the time, could be made the basis of an ideology, in which an innocent and traditional order was being destroyed by a new and more ruthless order.'⁷⁷ Artists and patrons colluded to establish the 'truth' of this ideology in a manner so powerful that it has largely held sway ever since. In the next section we will look at how artists managed the confrontation of the city with the landscape.

The city in prospect

The fact that the city contained the most obvious horrors of modernity as well as the brashest celebration of its triumphs made it a highly contentious space. Artists - visual and literary - did not ignore it but rather found a variety of ways of dealing with its problems, including both accommodation and conscious rejection. As Janet Wolff has pointed out: 'Unless the rules and conventions of literary and artistic production are very tightly defined and circumscribed, which is not the case in contemporary industrial societies, then texts will be the arena for the play of diverse, and perhaps conflicting, ideologies and voices.'⁷⁸ What is true for written texts - and she particularly mentions Charles Dickens' *Dombey and Son* in

⁷⁶ Quoted in Klingender, *Art and the industrial revolution*; 102.

⁷⁷ Williams, *Country and City*; 49.

⁷⁸ Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2nd edit., 1993; 125.

this context - is equally true for visual art.

Arscott and Pollock assert that: 'The city was the subject of a raging controversy which shifted over the century, as the social system which produced it became more and more entrenched and resistance less imaginable.'⁷⁹ Their study, undertaken in 1988, sought to correct the view then current that there were few representations of the city in art in the middle years of the nineteenth century.⁸⁰ They suggest that such a view ignored all but a narrow section of artistic production; it tended to reject artistic activity in the north of England as well as the production of prints which expanded massively in popularity during the period. They examine a number of representations of the city in the landscape which is where my main interest lies: paintings that straddled the divide (both physical and conceptual) between the city and the countryside, that explore modernity in the landscape and the confrontation between the two sides of the argument.

Arscott and Pollock's argument relies quite heavily on their 'discovery' of the many prints that depicted cities, making use of the new technology of lithography as well as older engraving techniques. They suggest that 'the supposed lacuna in images of the city is ... perhaps an art historical delusion, and a product of blindness to the necessary historical relations between many different forms of cultural production and its varied sites of consumption.' They criticize the traditional literature for erecting

a clear distinction between high culture and its few 'greatest artists', and low, or even sub-culture, with its second rate producers and apparently anonymous artisans, engravers and publishers ... [which] ... radically disfigures the historical material. Those cultural practices which had the broadest impact through widespread daily circulation and consumption in many sections of the population are downgraded in favour of the highly selective indices of responses to the city offered by individuals, canonised by art history, practising in limited arenas.⁸¹

This is an argument which has had wide currency in recent years with the 'rediscovery' by the academy of popular culture and the exposé of the class based nature of knowledge in general and art history in particular. It is an argument with much validity that has usefully

⁷⁹ Arcscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 197.

⁸⁰ See Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; E.D.H. Johnson, 'Victorian artists and the Urban Milieu', in H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973; Ira Bruce Nadel and F.S. Schwarzbach (eds), *Victorian Artists and the City: a Collection of Critical Essays*, Pergamon Press, New York, 1980.

⁸¹ Arcscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 192-3.

had the effect of expanding both art historical scholarship and cultural history, making them relevant to a far larger audience. However, in this instance I think that Arscott and Pollock have allowed the argument to encourage them to stray into realms where the opposite of their argument holds. They are correct to suggest that some important works of art by northern artists have been ignored by the southern establishment of art history, but by going further and conflating the two forms of artistic production - 'high' art and prints - they are themselves creating an art-historical delusion and are blinding themselves to the *specific* historical relations between different forms of cultural production. One may not be of more value than the other, but their individual functions and social relations cannot be ignored.

I would contend that it is precisely the difference in forms of cultural production and the variety of sites of consumption that are critical to an understanding of the varying roles of industrial representation in the competing narratives of the first half of the nineteenth century. Maidment has emphasized the distinction between the two representational modes, advocating different methods of reading images 'when you move away from oil paintings produced exclusively within middle class discourse to look at those images which sought to transmit or negotiate images and values between classes.' He identifies a clear difference in emphasis in 'those images beyond sophisticated oil painting where a less coherent, more polemical, socially interventionist set of images appear.'⁸² Indeed Arscott and Pollock themselves use an illuminating quote about the function of the different forms of artistic production from the *Art Journal* of June 1858 in a review of Augustus Egg's trilogy *Past and Present*, exhibited at the Royal Academy, which portrays events surrounding a wife's adultery: 'it is a subject too poignant for a series of paintings. We are saturated by the public prints with the details of such incidents, and would rather fall back upon the consoling influences of Art.'⁸³

⁸² B.E. Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints, 1790-1870*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996; 102-104.

⁸³ Quoted in Arscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 230 n4. It is of interest that this comment comes from the *Art Journal* which mounted a sustained attack on the Royal Academy for being behind the times and failing to express modern life in its selection of works for the Summer Exhibition. Typical was this polemic contained in their review of the 80th Royal Academy show in the issue of 1 June 1848: 'But it seems the boast of the Royal Academy, that when good sense, liberal sentiments, and enlightened principles, are making way into every other Institution of the Kingdom - of the world, indeed - it makes no move in advance; that, as it was yesterday, so it is to-day, and so it will be tomorrow; that, of themselves, its members will do nothing to harmonise with the spirit of the age.' (Vol X; 165).

In the realm of fine art, the authority of the Academic hierarchies ostensibly constrained subject matter, but I would agree with Arscott and Pollock's argument that the weight of evidence is 'against the contention that inherited artistic conventions placed a restraint upon the representation of northern industrial towns and cities'. The artistic conventions were reworked or transgressed often enough to demonstrate not only the possibility but also the acceptability of the representation of an industrial town. Arscott and Pollock robustly challenge 'the idea that standard representational formats inhibited artists in dealing with new kinds of city and their social processes'.⁸⁴ I am concerned to analyse the nature of any inhibitions that remained and the discourses that were employed by those who addressed the issue of the city. This will shed some light on the artistic fate of the railway.

In their research, Arscott and Pollock uncovered a number of paintings of northern industrial cities in prospect and I intend to concentrate my attention on these. One piece of evidence that they cite for the popularity of these works is particularly compelling. They found a number of references to what are clearly different versions of an oil painting, *View of Leeds*, by a local artist, Thomas Burras. There are reviews of his paintings from 1839, 1843, 1844 and 1854. From a sale price of 35 shillings for the earliest work the value of his city views rose to £210 in 1854. As Arscott and Pollock say, the 'general impression is of an artist catering for a demand among commercial and industrial local patrons, and able to command substantial and rising prices over the period for paintings of the city'.⁸⁵

The quantity of such paintings appears, of course, to be far fewer than the quantity of contemporary paintings of traditional countryside scenes. This has been interpreted elsewhere as either a lack of interest in, or a rejection of modernity by artists in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, I would like to suggest a possible alternative interpretation in line with Raymond Williams' 'selective tradition'. A number of the paintings that Arscott and Pollock trace are only extant in etchings of the originals, or their existence can be confirmed only by references in sales catalogues or the like. To judge from examples that do exist, the disappearance of these paintings cannot be attributed simplistically to an assumed lack of artistic merit. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the merits of Victorian painting in general - and the nineteenth century

⁸⁴ Arscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 196.

⁸⁵ Arscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 222-3.

landscape school in particular - were 'rediscovered' and it may be of value to speculate to what extent the process of rediscovery or even of preservation has been selective. Could it be that the depiction of a complexity of responses struggling to deal with the new visual phenomenon of modernity arouses *twentieth* (and twenty-first) century anxieties? If this is a possibility, we should be circumspect in our interpretations of the meaning of an apparent lack of nineteenth-century paintings of modernity, as well as in too readily interpreting the paintings that do exist as expressing an early nineteenth-century foreshadowing of those twentieth-century concerns. For my purposes here, I take on board the argument that forms of expression for the representation of the city did exist although they appear to have been used less widely in 'high' art than in more popular prints.

So what did artists do with the city? Within landscape art a convention of locating the city as a distant prospect emerged. The city - whether emphasizing elegant spires or smoking chimneys (or both) - would appear in the distance, perhaps partially hidden by a fold of hills. In the foreground there would typically be a classically pastoral scene with trees, or a stream, and a number of fields separating and protecting us, the viewer, from contact with the urban life which seemed to be locked away in that distant evocation. Safe within the foreground, some figures would be lazily loitering: perhaps a small group of leisured people chatting, perhaps a couple of contented farm labourers relaxing under a tree after their day's work. Sometimes the (supposedly) traditional social hierarchies would be emphasized by the depiction of the landowner on his horse stopping for a friendly chat with some of his hard-working tenants (whose feet would be firmly on the ground). Modernity, in the form of the city, loomed on the horizon, but it did not need to affect 'normal' life that continued unaffected in the foreground, a foreground within which the viewer is unequivocally placed. Simultaneously the preservation of the long prospect maintained the self-identity of the ruling classes.

William Wyld's *Manchester from Kersal Moor* (Fig. 16), painted in 1851, exemplifies this approach. In this painting, we see the city 'mediated not through a comforting image of productive agriculture and timeless rustics, but through the sublimity of nature.'⁸⁶ Arscott and Pollock see the intensity of the sunlight that bathes city and countryside alike as giving a unifying and transformative power. The composition of the painting is of particular

⁸⁶ Arscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 221.

interest. The city takes up the whole of the horizon, rather than just a part of it as is common, and it shows an exceptional number of smoking chimneys, resembling a forest of industry, while still allowing the cathedral and a number of other church spires to take a prominent position. While the cleared land in the middle foreground is possibly put to agricultural use, the land in the immediate foreground is wild and untamed. A small group of people sits on the raised land to the left, immediately in front of the viewer. I find it compelling to compare the way that the group is gazing towards the city, whilst being bathed in the intense sunlight that emanates from the direction of their gaze, with the paintings of scientific experiments and lectures by Joseph Wright of Derby in which the participants appear to be bathed in the light of knowledge emanating from the source of learning. (See, for example, Fig. 17.)

Wyld's painting was well-regarded by contemporaries. The *Art Journal*, which excelled in the polite put-down of such images of modernity, commented on the engraving of the picture (which, incidentally, shortened the chimney stacks of the oil original) in 1857: 'His view of Manchester has a Turner-like character, and considering the materials of the composition is most agreeable.'⁸⁷ It is, of course, hard to be precise about the meaning of the painting to its contemporary audience, but it is of significance that Wyld painted it in order to commemorate a royal visit to Manchester. Queen Victoria purchased the work and it is now held in the Queen's collection.

Arcott and Pollock see the city / country dichotomy as 'a persistent and powerful construct' which 'acted as a major structuring device for the prospects and overall views of Manchester and Leeds' that they unearthed. They detail a number of different ways that the artistic convention of placing the city in a distant prospect could be used, emphasising the ideological nature of the representation of the city and making it clear that: 'The city of industrial capitalism has to be broached in terms of its multiple social relations, processes and class formations.'⁸⁸ They illustrate this in an analysis of Henry Burn's *View of Leeds from near the Halifax New Road*, painted in 1846 in which they list the different social perspectives from which it could be viewed. The painting is a 'classic' distant prospect of the closely packed but shaded town, with factories and smoking chimneys clearly shown. In the foreground, there is a 'pleasant rural vantage point' for the viewer which contains a

⁸⁷ *Art Journal*, Vol. XIX, 1857; 207.

⁸⁸ Arcott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 228.

‘calm group of cows’, a smocked farm-hand, a woman and child. Arscott and Pollock go on to say:

From this vantage point the city is distanced and takes on a quality of fantasy. The darkened mound of factories could as well be a medieval castle on the hill. It serves to install the rustic figures in a feudal framework. They take on the character of a loyal and happy peasantry. A factory-owning viewer could position himself in the picture as lord of the castle in his surrounding lands. A Whig landlord devoted to improvements in agriculture and campaigning for repeal of the corn laws could see the town as the seat of a neighbouring ally. A Tory landlord could see it as a mercantile centre guaranteeing the sale of his produce, or alternatively as a slightly menacing but distant rival landowner’s castle.

They conclude that ‘[a]ll these hypothetical viewpoints have in common a historical transposition which makes economic relationships seem permanent and which posits a fixed boundary and relationship between the rural and the non-rural.’⁸⁹

Modernity on the brink

The convention of the distant prospect of the city could be adapted or subverted to encompass alternative discourses of modernity, frequently endangering the ‘fixed boundary’. Robert Buttery, in 1833, offers a different kind of access to the image of the city for the viewer with his *Leeds taken from Beeston Hill* (Fig. 18). The physical separation between city and country is clear, with the city buildings clearly defined in the background and the usual rustic pointers in the foreground. But prominently sharing that foreground are townspeople promenading along a lane from where they are enjoying the view of the distant town. Here the surrounding countryside is offered to the townsfolk as an area of recreation, transforming the split into a contrast between industry and leisure, ‘a phenomenon of the modern industrial social system’. Work and leisure are opposed - as are city and country - but that very opposition implies an interdependence such that this painting depicts not a rupture between city and country but a continuity.⁹⁰ The viewer is safely placed alongside the bourgeois spectators, at leisure, surveying the scenes of both country work and industrial work. The links and movement between the two spheres are emphasized by a railway (at a discreet distance), with a line of wagons carrying coal into the city. This painting is, therefore, notable as an early example of the use of the railway as an artistic icon of

⁸⁹ Arscott and Pollock, ‘The Partial View’; 219.

⁹⁰ Arscott and Pollock, ‘The Partial View’; 224-5.

modernity.

The world of work, rather than simply that of the city, is presented as other in Buttery's painting, not in the sense of an alien activity, but rather as one that gives definition to the foregrounded leisure. In a way that both weakened and entrenched the city / country dichotomy as the nineteenth century progressed, the countryside ceased to be a political 'other' for urbanites and became available to them for leisure. But this itself separated it in a new way from the working space of the city, as Barringer shows in his analysis of the process of appropriation of the country for recreation:

The countryside could no longer be considered as a distant, antithetical order in thrall to the aristocracy and the gentry, as it had been portrayed at times during the Corn Law Repeal agitation. On the contrary, it shifted towards being seen as a garden of pleasure which in effect constituted a commodified space which could be accessed by purchasing railway tickets and taking a picnic. ... Picture-buyers who were consumers of the countryside as a space for leisure activities, rather than investors in the processes of farming, were not directly involved in the realities of the processes of the rural economy. This very fact, indeed, contributed to the appeal of the countryside: nature could be set against towns which were the site of industry, labour and production, along with overcrowding, crime and pollution.⁹¹

In this process one can see a new urban audience for landscape art emerging, one result of which was that the rural vistas of 'improved' agricultural land that had surrounded the early prospects of cities began to be replaced by supposedly wild and untamed nature, a nature whose 'intrinsic appeal was built on *being* a visual, a pictorial commodity. Being in the country and viewing images of nature in paint or print were *equally* set up as a pictorial treat, to be pleurably consumed with the eyes.' Nature was now 'on offer to the urban consumer'.⁹²

A further destabilization of the conventions of the standard prospect was offered by Turner in his watercolour of *Leeds*⁹³ (Fig. 19) painted in 1816. The two separate realms of city and country are ostensibly retained but in such a way as to reveal a continuity between them.

⁹¹ Barringer, *Representations of Labour*; 112-114.

⁹² Nicholas Green, 'Rustic retreats: visions of the countryside in mid-nineteenth century France' in Simon Pugh (ed), *Reading Landscape: country - city - capital*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990; 170. [Italics in original.]

⁹³ Currently in the Paul Mellon Collection at the Yale Center for British Art. The painting was originally commissioned for the book of prints *Picturesque views of England and Wales*. The original was, however, sold through the dealers Christie and Manson in 1863 to Mr. Vokins on behalf of a Mr. Allnutt. The purchase price was 320 guineas which was a good price for a watercolour by Turner. Oils at the time varied between approx. 100 and 1000 guineas.

Stephen Daniels describes this as ‘an integrated, wholly industrialised landscape’.⁹⁴ In the rural foreground a number of people are employed in a variety of crafts and work. But they are not the typical agricultural tasks that might be expected: rather, there is a mix of jobs that service the activities of the city, alongside more typically rural occupations, for example: tentermen, clothworkers, milk carriers and mushroom pickers. This is emphasized by a busy lane on the right on which tradespeople, laden with goods, ply their way up and down the hill, to and from the city. Some workmen are constructing a wall along the edge of the road, and Arscott and Pollock suggest that ‘the strange and indeterminate space of the rural margins of the town is being made into the town proper: earth and stone become an urban thoroughfare.’⁹⁵ Maxine Berg places a more fundamentally theoretical interpretation on Turner’s depiction of *Leeds*. Such integration of city and country was the ideal economic model of growth and progress described by Adam Smith in 1776: ‘natural’ progress took place when ‘town and country grew together in a regional framework’ so for Berg *Leeds*, and a number of Turner’s other watercolours of cities (like *Coventry*, and *Dudley, Worcestershire*, both produced in 1832), are a ‘working out of the Smithian vision of industrial and agricultural growth through the emergence of a new type of industrial town integrated with its rural hinterland’ in which he shows the ‘cities spreading into the surrounding countryside and connecting outwards along their main roads to other cities.’⁹⁶

Leeds was undergoing an economic boom at about the time of the painting; two of the new mills stand out in the painting, and the expansion of the city is the dominant fact of the composition. There is no attempt to place the spectator in a safe and comfortable position; the usual high vantage point and physical distance in relation to the city pertains, but the viewer is unavoidably a part of - potentially engulfed by - the activity and bustle of the foreground. Daniels interprets the ‘political economy’ of the painting as deriving from Turner’s great optimism that ‘Britain’s economic advance’ was - and would continue to be - due to the mix of the skilled artisans’ craft and ingenuity ‘working in concert with advanced

⁹⁴ Stephen Daniels, ‘The implications of industry: Turner and Leeds’, *Turner Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 1, 1986; 12.

⁹⁵ Arscott and Pollock, ‘The Partial View’; 226.

⁹⁶ Maxine Berg, ‘Representations of Early Industrial Towns: Turner and His Contemporaries’ in Michael Rosenthal, Christiana Payne & Scott Wilcox, *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British Landscape, 1750-1880*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997; 118, 124 & 126.

technology'⁹⁷ although he also reads the painting as including the down side of this boom, indicated by the heavy toil of the workers in the foreground who 'do not regard the spectator at all ... This is hard work which takes its toll of those who do it as it enhances the fortunes of those who do not.'⁹⁸ It is Daniels' view that 'practitioners of the Picturesque could scarcely cope with industrialization. He mentions in particular the later practitioners like Humphrey Repton and Uvedale Price for whom 'textile mills were disturbing features in the landscape, storehouses of volatile social and economic energies which threatened landed interests and tastes.'⁹⁹ This is perhaps why T.D. Whitaker, who commissioned the painting along with many others of Yorkshire from Turner, did not include *Leeds* in his eventual *History of Leeds*. Daniels claims that Whitaker's text 'yearns for the more polite régime of the cloth industry a generation before when it was controlled and largely financed by Tory "gentleman merchants"' whereas what Turner has offered 'more clearly expresses the rising power of the Whig manufacturing interest in the city. It is the figurehead of this interest, John Marshall, whose flax mill is at the centre of the picture.'¹⁰⁰ As Arscott and Pollock are at pains to point out, Turner's depiction of a city, while not being exceptional in its compositional elements, remains 'exceptional in that it does not resolve the elements in the standard ways available'¹⁰¹ - an approach to conventionally conflicting elements that was not untypical of Turner's work, as will be seen in Chapter 6.

A similar distinction applies to the oil painting, also from 1816, of *Newcastle from Gateshead Fell* (Fig. 20), by Thomas Miles Richardson, Senior, a prominent artist in the thriving artistic scene of early nineteenth-century Newcastle. In this painting the viewer looks down on Newcastle in the distance from the height of the fell. The city is in some haze but there are no noticeable chimneys producing the smoke; indeed the elegant buildings of the city are quite discernible. In the foreground, on the fell where the spectator is placed, is a rather impoverished village around which a number of people are at work in a variety of tasks. A track on the right carries a number of carts which are almost certainly engaged in

⁹⁷ Daniels, 'The implications of industry'; 13-14.

⁹⁸ Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994; 123.

⁹⁹ Daniels, 'The implications of industry'; 16.

¹⁰⁰ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 123.

¹⁰¹ Arscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 226-7.

commerce with the city. No-one appears to pay the distant city any particular attention, but one does not get the feeling that this is because the city has no special effect on life or because it is well distanced by a pastoral barrier. Rather, there is an acceptance of the city as a fact of life. There is even a suggestion that the city, with its grand towers and apparent prosperity may be the preferable of the two ways of life shown. The viewer is placed uncomfortably in the position of having to make that judgement, with neither the protective barrier of timeless, contented rural existence, nor the comforting presence of members of the bourgeoisie with whom to share the contemplation of the city. The city threatens, but is not necessarily a bad thing.

These two paintings - Turner's *Leeds* and Richardson's *Newcastle from Gateshead Fell* - are of special interest here because both artists went on, some thirty years later, to paint a view of the railway, and in these two paintings they both already display a willingness to destabilize the conventions of the distant prospect of the city and operate within an alternative discourse of modernity.

In conclusion, we have seen in this chapter how the city and the countryside were ideologically constructed as opposites and how for many - although not for all - the city was made to bear the burden of the discontents of modernity. The countryside was presented as a haven of tradition, peace, social harmony and leisure in contrast to life in the industrial cities and artists colluded in the visual representation of this ideology. This was in spite of the complete interdependence of the two ways of life on many levels: economically, for trade and sustenance; financially, with essential investment money flowing in both directions; socially, with many people having investment as well as residential interests on both sides of the 'divide'; and structurally, with the city 'mopping up' the casualties of agricultural improvement. I have suggested that it was safer for the maintenance of the dominant ideology, which still relied on land ownership, to construct threats to the established hierarchy as coming from 'outside', from the focus of contemporary commentary on modernity - the city. Representations of the landscape continued to disguise the reality of modern rural life but began to take account of the cities growing on the pastoral horizon. Conventions were developed that rendered them safe and uncontaminating to traditional patterns of life. Some artists, like Turner and Richardson, began to transgress these conventions, for the encroachment of modernity no longer fitted as neatly as once it may

have done into visual representations of the city / country dichotomy.

But worse was to come which would smash the psychological separation of city and country as well as the obvious (if diminishing) physical separation. The construction of railway lines brought the labour, the noise, the dirt, the bustle, the movement, the stark reality of the city, the 'type of the modern'¹⁰² into the most remote regions of the rural landscape. This presented new problems and dilemmas and the next chapter will look at how these were dealt with by artists and social commentators.

¹⁰² Walt Whitman, 'To a Locomotive in Winter', in Peggy Poole (ed), *Marigolds grow wild on platforms: An anthology of railway poetry*, Cassell, London, 1996; 20. [Poem first published in America in 1855.]

CHAPTER 4

MODERNITY CROSSES THE DIVIDE

*But, hark! there is the whistle of the locomotive - the long shriek, harsh, above all other harshness ... It tells a story of busy men, citizens, from the hot street, who have come to spend a day in a country village, men of business; in short of all unquietness; and no wonder that it gives such a startling shriek, since it brings the noisy world into the midst of our slumbrous peace.*¹

A recent interpretation of J.M.W. Turner's painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* - exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844 - emphasizes the fact that the train in the painting is crossing Maidenhead Bridge in a westward direction, coming *out* of London, carrying with it all the noise, power and disturbance not only of the fiery, smoky engine but also of its provenance in the city. Ian Carter makes no bones about what he believes Turner's vision to have been: 'Turner's train forces its way through *Maidenhead*' past figures on the riverbank who could 'well be vestal virgins enjoying their last fling as the Great Western's express violates their temple.'² Virgins and violation: the railway, with all its city baggage, is ravishing the untouched landscape and shattering its undisturbed innocence. This is a contentious interpretation of this much debated painting and will be discussed further in Chapter 6. Leo Marx, who has written extensively about the iconology of the railway in the American landscape, originates from a culture that is much more able to put a positive spin on representations of technology and, in a discussion of *Rain, Steam and Speed*, he sees nothing virginal in the 'festive crowd waving' at the passing train from the riverbank!³ Nonetheless, virgins or not, it *is* significant that the train is tearing towards the viewer *out* of the city.

The purpose of this chapter is to look at how the railway broke the aesthetic barriers between the country and the city and at how the carefully constructed ideologies around both sites made the railway an uncomfortable subject for serious contemplation by landscape artists for over three decades. If the city had been problematic in representational terms, how much

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, New Haven, 1932. Quoted in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1964; 13.

² Ian Carter, 'Rain, Steam and What?', *The Oxford Art Journal*, 20:2, 1997; 5. [Italics in original.]

³ Leo Marx, 'The Railroad-in-the-Landscape: An Iconological Reading of a Theme in American Art', in Susan Danly and Leo Marx (eds), *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988; 205.

more so was the railway which breached all established boundaries? In artistic terms, the city could be made to hide many of its worst problems - or could at least be rendered safe from the viewer; agricultural 'improvements' could be resolutely ignored, or could be incorporated into a picturesque ideology. But the railway enforced confrontation, assaulting every sense. 'Along it flowed the forces of modernization'⁴ and it, more than other methods of travel, physically and conceptually breached the safe space of the distant prospect of the city.

The railway breached the barrier in another way as well: it took the city *out* into the countryside. Schivelbusch develops the concept of the railway station to include its role as a gateway between two very different worlds. It actively forms a link or a point of transition between the world of the city and the world of the country. Experientially and 'architecturally, these are two entirely separate worlds.' He suggests that from the 1850s (and the success of the Crystal Palace) there tended to be a 'utilitarian industrial construct of steel and glass ... and then the reception building, erected out of stone. The former faces the open country, the latter, the city. ... Thus, the station functions as a kind of gateway which has to connect two very different kinds of traffic and traffic space with one another: the traffic space of the city, and that of the railroad.'⁵

Raoul Balso describes the moment of breach. With the railway, he says, 'for the first time, the machine, until now captive in factories, achieved its liberty and roamed at large in the countryside which it traversed at speeds unknown to the animal kingdom: the familiar image of "the cow watching the train pass" is a perfect expression of these two worlds, rural and industrial.'⁶ Barrie Trinder refers to 'the railway which took the landscape of the industrial revolution to the remotest corners of Britain.'⁷ However far one lived from a factory or from a city one could no longer ignore the social and physical changes wrought by modernity.

⁴ John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983; 3.

⁵ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and travel in the nineteenth century*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980 [first pub. 1977]; 163-4.

⁶ Raoul Balso, 'Premières images du chemin de fer dans la société française de la Monarchie de Juillet et du Second Empire (1830-1870)', *Revue d'Histoire des Chemins de Fer*, no. 10-11, Spring-Autumn, 1994: 'Arts et Chemins de Fer'; 109.

⁷ Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape*, Phoenix, London, 1997 [first pub. 1982]; 154.

First, one's peaceful estate, field or village will have been upset by the engineers and gangs of navvies building the line and then affected forever by the 'shrieking engine [which] was to carry the riot of the town into the sylvan retreat of pastoral life; sweltering trains were to penetrate solitudes hitherto sacred to the ruins of antiquity.'⁸ In June 1841 the *Athenæum* bemoaned that the 'whole face of the Kingdom will be tattooed with those odious deformities' and in July 1845 *Punch* regretted the 'iron hand of Railway enterprise [that] is fast tearing up by the roots all the pastoral and poetical associations of our youth, and cottages near woods, as well as mossy cells or leafy nooks, are being superseded by Railway termini. Where the cow once lowed, the engine now screams.' The railway's triumph was declared in the architecture of its rural infrastructure just as it was in the city. Entrance portals to tunnels, magnificent bridges and viaducts all decisively insisted upon its presence.

Experiencing train travel blurred the boundaries of what *was* city and what *was* country. If one was in a railway carriage travelling through a rural landscape, was one *in* the country, a part of that landscape, or still a part of the city one had recently left or in which one would soon be deposited? A number of artists tried to express this paradox. One well-known example is Augustus Egg in his *Travelling Companions* (Fig. 21), painted in 1862, which shows two sisters in a railway carriage travelling through the south of France. There are a number of detailed readings of this painting, but the most obvious fact is that a beautiful, coastal landscape is passing by outside the windows and the girls are unaware of or uninterested in it. Are they part of it or of another world from which they are temporarily detached? The same is true of Abraham Solomon's *First Class - the Meeting* of 1854 (and 1855 - see Figs. 32 and 33). Again, there are several interesting interpretations of the social grouping inside the carriage, as will be seen in Chapter 5, but a blowing curtain cord draws attention to the window open to a beautiful hilly landscape to which no member of the group pays any attention. Miriam Levin notes a little known Daumier drawing (called *The Third Class Carriage*, not to be confused with the oil painting of the same name, also by Daumier) of an old man gazing out of the window at the passing scenery. He is paying attention to the landscape but is not part of it. Levin makes the point that he is travelling with his back to the direction of travel such that the 'man and the countryside separate and move away from each other'. She says that 'this drawing gives form to the process of both psychological and

⁸ Quote attributed to an unnamed Member of Parliament in C. Hamilton Ellis, *Railway Art*, Ash and Grant Ltd., London, 1977; 27.

physical distancing that is caused by the introduction of ... the railway [which] cuts off the individual from direct contact with the land. But the experience, as presented by Daumier, is neither positive nor negative, it is simply disturbing and a little sad.’⁹

In the last chapter I looked at how artists approached the city, especially as developed in the work of Arscott and Pollock. In this chapter I will contend that, despite the availability of appropriate artistic discourses, the railway remained problematic in landscape art because it broke the fragile representational barriers between city and country that had been constructed by the time of its first appearance. Artistic representations of the landscape were already balanced precariously on the edge of the conflict between the ideological construct and the harsh realities of life in the country and, as a result, the railway presented a unique problem to landscape artists as well as to the socio-political hegemony.

In order to put the response of artists in some context, this chapter will examine a variety of responses to the intrusion of the railway into both the city and the countryside using case studies from a number of different representational media. These will include architecture, newspapers and poetry as well as visual images in the form of lithographs and fine art. Both excitement and horror at the sheer scale of human achievement and at the audacity of the dominion gained over nature had formed part of the discourse of progress since the eighteenth century. The excitement was made explicit in the exuberant triumphalism of much station architecture in the cities. This same spirit informed newspaper coverage of railway construction and an examination of reports of events in the construction of the London and Dover Railway will elucidate the dissonances between the discourse of progress and that of landscape art. Alternative visions of landscape were available and I will look briefly at how landscape artists in America learned to accommodate narratives of progress and technology within representations of landscape, as well as at how artists producing lithographs for the mass market managed the problem. This will shed light on the problems experienced by *fine* artists in Britain. I will end with a case study of one of the more notorious detractors of the railway from the Romantic school: the poet William Wordsworth.

⁹ Miriam R. Levin, ‘Le chemin de fer dans le jardin français’, *Revue d’Histoire des Chemins de Fer*, no. 10-11, Spring-Autumn, 1994: ‘Arts et Chemins de Fer’; 46.

The railway and the city

The ideological association of the city with - and the concomitant dissociation of the country from - industry, capitalism, exploitation, dirt and poverty meant that the city became the locus of contests over modernity. Recent analyses of the experience of modernity tend to associate it with an experience of chaos. Berman talks of a 'maelstrom' and of 'agitation and turbulence'.¹⁰ Giddens characterizes modernity by the pace and scope of change epitomized by the functioning of the modern city compared to its precursor. A nineteenth century commentator, Karl Marx, ascribed these processes of modernity to the specific needs of capitalism and to the activities of the class that was gaining dominance in the city:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. ... Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.¹¹

The pace of change was most marked, perhaps, in the 'intimate connections between modernity and the transformation of time and space'.¹² The railway and steam traction were at the forefront of this transformation. *The Times* of 8 July 1808 carried a report about Robert Trevithick's 'Steam Engine' which was

now preparing to run against any mare, horse or gelding that may be produced at the next October Meeting at Newmarket ... the engine is the favourite. The extraordinary effects of mechanical power is [*sic*] already known to the world; but the novelty, singularity and powerful application against time and speed has created admiration in the minds of every scientific man.

When the railway first made its mark as a means of transport for passengers, people spoke of the 'annihilation of space and time'. In attempting to convey the incredible speed of a train - at 20 to 30 miles per hour up to three times the speed of a stagecoach - the *Quarterly Review* in 1839 wrote:

supposing that railroads, even at our present simmering rate of travelling, were to be suddenly established all over England, the whole population of the country would, speaking metaphorically, at once advance *en masse*, and place their chairs nearer to the fireside of their metropolis by two-thirds of the time that now separates them from it ... If the rate were to be sufficiently accelerated ...

¹⁰ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: the Experience of Modernity*, Verso, London, 1983; 15 and 18.

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1952 [first pub. 1848]; 45-46.

¹² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Polity Press, London, 1990; 6.

[a]s distances were thus annihilated, the surface of our country would, as it were, shrivel in size until it became not much bigger than one immense city.¹³

Walsh suggests that in fact '[t]he processes of modernity have been largely concerned with the domination of space, the development of processes which enhance the ability of capitalism to overcome the constraints of space. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, this constraint was increasingly mastered.' The railway was one of the main methods of mastery; Walsh sees the city as another, as 'a new form of concentrated space' representing 'the state's ability to organize and control the populace with hitherto unprecedented efficiency.'¹⁴

The railway and the city came together in an intimate and dynamic relationship. John Kellett notes that 'a major incident in the life of all British cities between 1830 and 1900 was the impact of railways upon the urban fabric and economy.'¹⁵ The impact of the railway on cities had varied and often extreme manifestations and equally varied - and extreme - interpretations. Lewis Mumford, in his wide-ranging study of *The City in History*, talks of the 'slatternly environment' of the railway and, as he sees it, from 'the eighteen-thirties on, the environment of the mine, once restricted to the original site, was universalized by the railroad. Wherever the iron rails went, the mine and its debris went with them. ... The rushing locomotives brought noise, smoke, grit, into the hearts of the towns: more than one superb urban site, like Prince's Gardens in Edinburgh, was desecrated by the invasion of the railroad.'¹⁶

Charles Dickens has given the classic description of the immediate effect on the vicinity of the construction of a railway in *Dombey and Son*, written in the mid 1840s. The 'great earthquake' which rents 'the whole neighbourhood to its centre' is a description of the construction of the cutting through Camden Town for the London and Birmingham Railway, which was completed in 1846.

¹³ Quoted in Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*; 42.

¹⁴ Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: museums and heritage in the post-modern world*, Routledge, London; 28-9.

¹⁵ John R. Kellett, *Railways and Victorian Cities*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979 [first pub. 1969]; 1.

¹⁶ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966 [first pub. 1961]; 513.

Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped ... enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood. Here a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together ... there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere ... Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height ... carcasses of ragged tenements ... There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. ... mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

Dickens sums up all this activity by saying: 'In short, the yet unfinished and unopened railroad was in progress, and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement.'¹⁷ (See also J.C. Bourne's lithograph of the construction of the railway in Park Street, Camden, Fig. 6.) This comment can be read as a positive affirmation of the role of the railway in the years to come. However, it can also be read as a bitterly sarcastic comment on the claims that the railway and its promoters made for it whilst creating such misery and destruction for so many people who were unlikely to benefit directly from its improvements. I do not intend to analyse in detail the effect of the railway on cities here. This has been done more than adequately by, among others, Henry Mayhew, contemporaneously, and, more recently, John Kellett, both of whom have described the misery caused by the evictions to make way for the tracks and the stations, as well as the way in which the chaos of the construction clung to the railway centres in cities in the form of poverty, squalor and prostitution.¹⁸ It is worthy of note that the adulterous wife portrayed by Augustus Egg in his trilogy, *Past and Present* (exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858), shows her fall from respectability to destitution, depicting her final destination to be life beneath the railway arches by the Thames.¹⁹

Lewis Mumford tells us that only

the hypnotism of a new invention, in an age uncritically enamoured of new inventions, could have prompted this wanton immolation under the wheels of the puffing Juggernaut. Every mistake in urban design that could be made was made by the new railroad engineers, for whom the movement of trains

¹⁷ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., Ware, 1995; 60. The novel first appeared in serial form in monthly parts between October 1846 and April 1848. It first appeared in book form in 1848.

¹⁸ See Kellett, *Victorian Cities* and Henry Mayhew, *Life and Labour in London*, London, 1850; *London Labour and the London Poor*, London, 1862.

¹⁹ Egg's trilogy did not receive critical acclaim, perhaps because it evinced sympathy for the wife. It remained unsold until after the artist's death. See Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Painting*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1993; 112-3.

was more important than the human objects achieved by that movement.²⁰

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, railway companies outdid themselves in the major cities in building what became known, in a phrase coined by Théophile Gautier in 1868, as ‘the new cathedrals of humanity’.²¹ Wosk believes that by ‘clothing the new technological archetype in traditional historicized forms, designers and architects were able to ease the introduction of the new steam-driven railroads and help familiarize them, while also establishing the prestige and legitimacy of the new means of transportation itself.’ Quite simply, the ‘railroad station with its neoclassical temple facade became an island of security and stability - a reassuring place of departure for those about to embark on a potentially explosive new experience.’²² But there was another agenda at work that went beyond the acceptance of the technology, or even the acceptance of the chaos created.

In London, Birmingham, Manchester and in a trail laid by imperialism across the world, the railway companies proclaimed their dominance and their supremacy - and, by extension, the supremacy of the British Empire - through the medium of grand railway stations. The list of such stations is long. Examples include the Ionic portico at Curzon Street Station in Birmingham, Brunel’s train shed at Paddington, officially opened in 1854 (and fashioned after Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace of 1851), Bristol Temple Meads, Huddersfield Station, Charing Cross, Cubitt’s Kings Cross, Scott’s Midland Grand Hotel at St. Pancras and, of course, Philip Hardwicke’s extraordinary Euston Arch which marked in Doric style the arrival of the normally ‘steady and prudent’²³ London and Birmingham line in the capital in 1838. The arch cost £35,000 - and was a pure monument to railways, being a gateway quite separate from the station buildings themselves, which were constructed later. In 1950 Christian Barman wrote:

The railway builders were moved by the spirit of the conqueror and nowhere is this spirit more clearly visible than in the portico of Euston. Moving southward for the attack on London we can see that they understood the greatness of their mission. And so when finally they had invaded the greatest city in

²⁰ Mumford, *The City in History*; 525.

²¹ Quoted in Steven Adams, *The World of the Impressionists*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989; 105.

²² Julie Wosk, *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1992; 192.

²³ Jack Simmons, *The Railways of Britain*, Book Promotions Ltd., Bristol, 3rd edit., 1986; 15.

the world, they built the portico at Euston to proclaim as a memorial their victory to posterity.²⁴

Nicholas Pevsner explains the arch as being the only architectural style that could express the railway line itself, 'one of the greatest achievements of the human mind'.²⁵ The conquering spirit took the builders on to Victoria Station in Bombay, stations in Madras, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo and many others. These stations overwhelmingly expressed the ideology of the economic system that was responsible for them. They were powerful arguments in the 'bitterly contested' meanings of the 'new forms of social life'. If 'representations of the city or town were indelibly ideological in the sense of struggling to define an historical process from partial and interested points of view',²⁶ the main railway stations were representations *in* the city of one side of that struggle. In 1850 Dionysus Lardner, describing the new railway termini in his book, *Railway Economy*, said: 'It is impossible to regard the vast buildings and their dependencies ... without feelings of inexpressible astonishment at the magnitude of the capital and boldness of the enterprise.'²⁷ For Nicholas Taylor these buildings were the 'architecture of rhetoric' whose sublimity held an 'emotional appeal embedded in ... rich glowing materials encrusted with symbolic statuary as a permanent harangue to the public.'²⁸

The relationship between architecture and political dominance is one that has been commented on a number of times. A recent article in the *Guardian* began by quoting Nietzsche on the subject: 'Architecture has always been closely tied to politics. In fact, architecture *is* politics - "a sort of oratory of power by means of form," as Nietzsche once said. It is a symbiotic relationship, with those in power seeking an expression of their

²⁴ Quoted in Jeffrey Richards and John MacKenzie, *The Railway Station: a Social History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986; 23.

²⁵ Quoted in Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1995; 32.

²⁶ Caroline Arscott and Griselda Pollock, 'The Partial View: the visual representation of the early nineteenth century industrial city' in Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: art, power and the nineteenth century middle class*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 197.

²⁷ Quoted in Steven Parissien, *Station to Station*, Phaidon, London, 1997; 8.

²⁸ Nicholas Taylor, 'The Awful Sublimity of the Victorian City: Its Aesthetic and Architectural Origins' in H.J. Dyos and M. Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, Vol. II, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973; 444-5.

authority in the massed volumes of bricks and mortar.’²⁹ In his review of how London was represented in images in the nineteenth century, Potts tells us that ‘[n]ew building and urban improvement ... staked out a city’s claim to be a centre of wealth and enterprise.’³⁰ In many northern towns, the construction of Town Halls in a grand gothic or classical style, were prime manifestations of civic pride. Many not only coincided with the dawn of the Railway Age - the Town Halls in Birmingham and Manchester were both begun in 1832 - but at the forefront of this visual celebration of modernity were, again, the railway companies. The authority of the railway companies and the power of capital in the mid-nineteenth-century economy were made crystal clear to anyone who entered one of the grand terminus stations.

Not everyone was impressed by this crude embrace of commercial values. John Ruskin, the art critic, mounted a superb critique of the cathedrals of steam in his book published in 1849, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*; it is an apposite comment on the process of glorification:

There never was more flagrant nor impertinent folly than the smallest portion of ornament in anything concerned with railroads or near them. ... Better bury gold in the embankments than put it in ornaments on the stations. Will a single traveller be willing to pay an increased fare on the South Western, because the columns of the terminus are covered with patterns from Nineveh? - he will only care less for the Ninevite ivories in the British Museum: or on the North Western, because there are old English-looking spandrils to the roof of the station at Crewe? - he will only have less pleasure in their prototypes at Crewe House. Railroad architecture has, or would have, a dignity of its own if it were only left to its work. You would not put rings on the fingers of a smith at his anvil.³¹

Ruskin was cautious about which of man’s works were acceptable alterations to nature and about the purposes to which they were put. He believed that the railway had no right to be appropriating art to its own glory, and was ambivalent about the inclusion of signs of modernity in art. However, the above tirade is not a condemnation of railways or railway stations *per se*; it is rather a condemnation of inappropriate artistic appropriation and a call for *relevant* architecture, design that is fit for purpose.

While the railway in the city created grandeur out of chaos, arousing a variety of responses, what of its arrival in the countryside, the main concern of this thesis? Before it became a part

²⁹ Mark Irving, ‘Now that’s what I call a city’, in *Guardian* 26 June 1999; 5.

³⁰ Alex Potts, ‘Picturing the Modern Metropolis: Images of London in the nineteenth century,’ *History Workshop*, no. 26, Autumn 1988; 36.

³¹ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Dover, New York (reproduced from edit. George Allen, Orpington, 1880), 1989 [first pub. 1849]; 121-122.

of the landscape, massive - often spectacular - engineering works had to take place. This could create heroes out of engineers (as happened to George Stephenson in the construction of the line, against all odds, across Chat Moss on the Liverpool and Manchester) but it also involved processes no less chaotic, and at least as dramatic, as those described by Dickens in Camden Town. For purposes of comparison it is worth a look at how the newspapers of the day reported the insertion of a railway into a pristine landscape.

The destruction of Round Down Cliff

In the countryside railway construction irrevocably altered the natural landscape, particularly where nature had not laid a convenient track bed for it in advance. Newspapers were often very critical of the railway companies and many of their actions during the mid nineteenth century, especially with regard to safety and financial issues. But when it came to reporting the engineering works the discourse of progress and improvement was embraced uncritically by almost all editors of the day. A very positive spin was put upon the trail of destruction in the name of civilization. The fate of Round Down Cliff on the London to Dover railway line was a case in point.

On 4 February, 1843 the *Illustrated London News* carried the following story:

we have lived to witness 'a mountain cast into the sea,' with as little apparent effort as the 'twinkling of an eye' - with the proverbial precision of an eclipse, and, at the same time, with a gentleness which, in its calm sublimity, is only comparable to 'the outgoings of the morning.' The glory of this miracle - its conception, its arrangement, its triumph - belongs to the celebrated engineer, William Cubitt; and the memorable locality in which it was performed is the proudest of those proud cliffs, whose 'high and bending heads look fearfully' in those narrow seas, of which we hold the perpetual sovereignty. ... The moment the headlong course of the chalk had ceased and the fruition of everyone's hopes accomplished, a simultaneous cry was raised of 'Three cheers for the engineer!' William Cubitt was then honoured with as hearty a huzza as ever burst from the lips of a grateful people. An epoch in our history had passed; a precedent had been established whose effects on future time no one could forebode; it had been demonstrated that the most powerful, the most mysterious, agency in nature was under computable regulations and the easiest control. The people felt this, and in their generosity called for 'one cheer more.'

The occasion that called forth this eulogy was the blasting away of a large section of the Round Down Cliff at Dover in order to make room for the London and Dover Railway to run along the foot of it above high water mark (see Fig. 22). In the late twentieth century land rearrangement by engineers is an everyday occurrence, but in the first half of the nineteenth century that was not the case. Engineers had performed some extraordinary feats

in canal construction but the railway was more prevalent, more public and more voracious. Lord Brougham spoke of seeing ‘the gigantic power of man penetrating through miles of the solid mass, and gaining a great, lasting, an almost perennial conquest over the power of nature, by his skill and industry.’³² The ability of engineers to change nature was both shocking and exciting and the writers and readers of the newspapers seemed keen to associate themselves with it. Hence, ‘we’ are now able, at long last to tame nature, to be no longer at its mercy, and the writer reminds us of many things held dear by ‘the English’: religion, discoveries about astronomy, poetry, the Empire and Britain’s naval supremacy. The writer is in no doubt that ‘an epoch in our history had passed’, nature was now entirely at our beck and call and future glories could not even be imagined. It is important to note that ‘the people’ were aware of this. The enormous destructive power of what had been observed is diminished by the reference to ‘gentleness’ and ‘calm sublimity’ (easing the terrors normally adduced to the sublime). The engineer is celebrated as hero in his ‘conception’ of the glorious ‘miracle’. He, and the event, are linked to the timeless grandeur and supremacy of the English nation with reference to the ‘proud’ cliffs which guard the narrow channel that separates England from its old (and defeated) enemy. The event reported enhances the grandeur and obvious power of the nation and makes it unimaginable that the supremacy could be anything other than ‘perpetual’.

It is particularly of note that such a positive report can be wrought out of such a violent change to this particular landscape: the white cliffs that have long represented English security and identity, a landscape that surely fulfills Daniels’ view that ‘landscapes ... picture the nation. As exemplars of moral order and aesthetic harmony, particular landscapes achieve the status of national icons.’³³ This is recognized in the *Illustrated London News*’s eulogy but the achievement of power over nature eliminates any place for criticism or fear of the destruction of such an important symbol. The fact that this event was expected to positively engage interest and emotion was recognized to the extent that ‘distinguished visitors’ were invited and, along with ‘directors and the scientific corps’ were

³² Quoted in Frederick S. Williams, *Our Iron Roads: Their History, Construction and Administration*, Bemrose and Sons, London, 7th edit., 1885 [first pub. 1855]; 24. Unfortunately the quote is from Lord Brougham’s eulogy to Huskisson who was killed at the opening of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway. He was in fact explaining why he could not cheer, as he would otherwise wish, such deserving achievements.

³³ Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Polity, Cambridge, 1993; 5.

accommodated in ‘a commodious pavilion erected near the edge of the cliff, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the point of explosion.’³⁴

The *Illustrated London News* tended to indulge an engineering aesthetic. Although the report of the ‘Great Blast on the London and Dover Railway’ is an extreme of the type it is far from an isolated example of this style of writing. Nor is the *Illustrated London News* itself isolated. Reports on railway matters, especially on the planning or the opening of a new line, concentrated on the technical details, including lengths of cuttings, heights of embankments, quantities of earth moved, numbers and weights of stones used, details of arches, spans and ribs in viaducts. This might be expected in the engineering journals, but reports in other ‘popular’ papers are no different. ‘One of the most important bridges on the line is the Wolverton viaduct,’ enthuses *The Literary World* in a headline article on 22 June 1839 about the London and Birmingham Railway, ‘of brick, with stone cornice and coping ... it consists of six semi-elliptical arches, each 60 feet span. The railway is elevated 50 feet above the natural rise of the ground.’ We are further informed that ‘The aggregate amount of excavation required on this railway was about 15,000,000 of cubic yards ... The stone blocks for the whole line may be estimated at 152,460 tons ... The total weight of iron used is 35,000 tons’. In a follow-up article two months later (24 August 1839) on the Nash Mill bridge on the same railway line: ‘This structure consists of six main ribs, being segments of circles of sixty-six feet span, with cross bracings and covering plates, the abutments and retaining walls being composed of brick.’ Given the content of the rest of the magazine it is hard to believe that a large proportion of the readership received much impression of the bridge from these details, although it may be that the take-up of self-improvement classes, and similar, in the period indicates an interest in how new inventions worked or were constructed. Perhaps acquisition of knowledge allowed a semblance of control over one’s life at a time of massive and unprecedented change. The newspaper offered increased reassurance about this huge bridge with the inclusion of a lithograph by J.C. Bourne. It was taken from his series produced for the London and Birmingham Railway and shows both the bridge’s structure and its setting in a tranquil valley where the life of the people and of the river below goes on undisturbed by this huge structure in their midst: the bridge blends elegantly into the scene.

³⁴ Williams, *Our Iron Roads*; 124.

The new abilities and processes are a source of wonder in themselves, at least as much as the practicalities of the end to which they are put. The *Illustrated London News* lost few opportunities to picture steam ships, buildings in design or construction, and major constructions on railways or canals, along with descriptions of the engineering process. The report on the destruction of Round Down Cliff goes further than perhaps most other articles in giving an explanation for this aesthetic. The respect of the editor for the scientific achievement is shown in the first paragraph of the write-up:

It has become the exclusive attribute of the modern engineer, to plan only that which his experience tells him to be practicable, and to bound his brightest fancies by the principles of working science. Hence, his movements, however far they may be in advance of customary labours, cease to bear the character of experiments. It is in this way we have lived to witness 'a mountain cast into the sea'.

What is newsworthy in all of this is the achievement, the massive and unprecedented engineering feat of creating such huge structures and moving so much earth. Indeed, *The Literary World* compares the building of the London to Birmingham with 'one of the largest works of the ancients, the great pyramid of Egypt', a comparison which

shews the pre-eminence of modern industry. Thus, the labour expended on the great pyramid was equivalent to lifting 15,733 million cubic feet of stone one foot high, and required 30,000 men, according to Diodorus Siculus, and 100,000 according to Herodotus, 20 years to execute it; whereas the labour expended in the construction of the Birmingham Railway is equivalent to 25,000 million cubic feet of stone raised one foot, and has been executed by about 20,000 men in 4½ years!³⁵

In the report on Round Down Cliff we are told that reporters from the *Illustrated London News* were present and 'were so charmed by the scientific victories of the day, that for the gratification of our "million" readers, we unhesitatingly went to the expense of having a series of drawings made for their exact, as well as pictorial, illustration.' The 'million' readers will not, however, have been a cross-section of society. At one point the writer refers to 'the lower orders of Dover' who were terrified of the anticipated destruction. It is unlikely that these lower orders who would be unable to understand the meaning of the event - who had so little appreciation of it that their main concern was for the windows of their houses in the blast - were among the paper's regular readership. It represented the school of thought that associated scientific and technological achievements with progress and that saw progress as not only inevitable but inevitably for the good and that, therefore, looked with great hope to the future. But while the *Illustrated London News* was devoting four (broadsheet) pages including graphic pictures and technical diagrams to this momentous

³⁵ *The Literary World*, 22 June, 1839.

event, it is worth looking at how other newspapers and journals represented the day.

The *Times* was impressed with the achievement, though less effusively so than the *Illustrated London News*. On 27 January (the day after the explosion) it devoted a column and a half to the event, closely packed with technical detail of how the explosion was brought about. Notably, it reported that:

There was no roaring explosion, no bursting out of fire, no violent and crushing splitting of rocks, and, comparatively speaking, very little smoke; for a proceeding of mighty and irrepressible force, it had little or nothing of the appearance of force. The rock seemed as if it had changed its solid for a fluid nature, for it glided like a stream into the sea ... As the chalk, which crumbled into fragments, flowed into the sea without splash or noise, it discoloured the water around with a dark, thick, inky looking fluid ... The first exclamation which burst from every lip was - 'Splendid, beautiful!'

In such peace, fluidity and beauty did 18,000lb of gunpowder destroy a landmark that 'everybody has heard of' and that 'no doubt a majority of your readers have seen' and that 'was, till this afternoon, of a singularly bold and picturesque character' and which, moreover, had 'defied the winds and waves of centuries'. The language minimizes the impact on the familiar and symbolic landscape of such a momentous feat of destruction while at the same time emphasizing the ease and control with which human beings can now dominate and redesign nature, using a power beyond anything seen to date.

The *Manchester Guardian*, on 28 January, devoted just 5 column inches to the event, sandwiched between 'Rural Police for Lanarkshire' and 'Extraordinary Suicide' in the column entitled 'Domestic &c'. It had not sent a reporter to the event and credited its story to the *Morning Chronicle*, an influential 'establishment' paper. The report is factual, praises the organisation of the event and is only mildly carried away by the identification of the cliff to be so effectively destroyed: 'The Rounddown cliff o'erhung the sea, close to the one whose fearful height is so graphically described in *King Lear*, and commonly known by the classic name of "Shakspeare's Cliff"' and by the serenity of the explosion: '1,000,000 tons of chalk were dislodged by the shock, and settled gently down into the sea below ... The sight was indeed truly magnificent.' Interestingly, exactly the same report was run, without accreditation, in both *The Examiner*, a radical newspaper owned by Leigh Hunt, and *John Bull*, a 'scurrilous' and very conservative paper, except that they both included a phrase left out by the *Guardian*, informing readers that the great blast 'has lately produced so great a sensation in the scientific world'. *John Bull* added, with characteristic sensationalism (and probably some accuracy), that the million tons of chalk were dislodged by a 'fearful shock'

and that its gentle settlement was into ‘the sea below, frothing and boiling as it displaced the liquid element, till it occupied the expanse of many, many acres, and extended outward on its ocean bed to a distance of perhaps 2,000 or 3,000 feet.’ *John Bull* consistently treated the railway with extreme cynicism, criticism or downright opposition, referring on 29 June 1840 to the ‘hurry-skurry smoke-steam and oil-smell style of travelling’ as opposed to ‘the good steady ten mile an hour pace of English travelling, which, with good English horses, and good English roads ... would send any man - except an escaping murderer, or a self-liberated felon - quite as fast across a country as he need desire to go’ and on 7 September of the same year to ‘those un-English and odious monopolies, the Railroads’. It is, in this context, surprising that it included any of the idealized language of the original report on Round Down.

Turning to the railway press, which represented the interests (in all senses) of those most involved in the incident which produced ‘so great a sensation in the scientific world’, we find a more muted and matter-of-fact response. The *Railway Times*, a weekly journal aimed at those especially interested in the progress of the railways (with an emphasis on business news), was oddly quiet about the event in the industry that it represented. The week before the explosion it gave notice, in 2 column inches, that it was to take place; in the issue immediately after the event it apologized for not yet having a decent report on it and referred readers to the *Times*; the following week it carried a copy of the letter from the Resident Engineer at Dover to the Secretary of the South-Eastern Company describing the successful execution of the work of demolition. *Herapath’s Journal and Railway Magazine*, a respected weekly railway journal, was even more cursory in its coverage of Round Down. In the edition of 28 January 1843 it mentioned the explosion in a short untitled paragraph in a ‘Railway Summary’ article in which it prosaically reports that ‘The projection of “Round Down Cliff”, on the Eastern Counties Railway [*sic*] was removed on Thursday last.’ Quite apart from the astounding fact that a specialist magazine named the wrong railway company,³⁶ the word ‘projection’ turns the cliff into a mere nuisance rather than a beautiful monument of great significance that, in other reports, ‘o’erhung’ the sea. A very few engineering details follow and readers are informed that ‘it was an extremely grand and splendid sight’ which is incongruous in the light of the cautionary note sounded at the end

³⁶ This is taking lack of interest too far! There were not too many cliffs requiring removal on the Eastern Counties Railway which served East Anglia.

of the paragraph: 'In an engineering point of view we can say little of the propriety of adopting this course, as the blast must necessarily disturb the neighbouring mountains, which probably may come down upon them at a future time.' The following week an even shorter (but titled) paragraph reports that 'a gentleman who was off a short distance in a boat ... saw this explosion. He describes [it] as one of the most beautiful phenomena he ever witnessed. ... The cost of this was under £1,000, and the saving has been, in mining, £9,000, and in time 18 months'. The latter discovery perhaps freed the paper to see the explosion in rather more glowing terms! but its willingness to criticize, in sharp contrast to the public press, is illuminating. One might have expected significantly more coverage in the industrial press of an event interpreted as so momentous by the *Illustrated London News*, and brought about entirely through the efforts of the railway entrepreneurs. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, as they were preaching to the converted, they had no axe to grind whereas the daily and weekly papers were mythologizing within the ideology of progress, in just the same way as the Euston Arch.

Significantly, the *Northern Star*, a weekly paper that explicitly supported the radical cause, did not report the event at all. This is perhaps an unfair test as the paper was based in Leeds and concentrated on northern news. Dover is - even in the days of railway travel - very far away from Yorkshire. It is perhaps purely by coincidence that, on the day the *Illustrated London News* reported this passage of an 'epoch in our history' (4 February, 1843), the *Northern Star* devoted four and a half (broadsheet) columns to a major article on the 'March of Machinery', calling on 'manufacturing operatives to be on the look-out! They have been kicked about in the world most unmercifully, in consequence of machinery having partially superseded their labour ... and what they have been forced to submit to and bear, in the shape of hardship and suffering from this cause, seems to be but the *beginning* of what they will have to submit to and bear'. The article goes on:

This question of machinery is a puzzler and a poser. It has already worked some most astonishing revolutions; changing the whole aspect of society and the relative position of entire classes towards each other; and it seems to be destined to work many more. It baffles the efforts of the Statesman; sets at nought the calculations and intentions of the Legislator; renders law abortive; annihilates custom; interferes with habit; and unsettles and unfixes all that is 'settled' and 'stable'. It is the innovator of the age; the 'leveller' which the 'constitutionalist' affects to dread; the destroyer of institutions; and the introducer of new habits and new feelings amongst all of society subjected to its influence.

The power with which the new inventions are imbued in this flight of rhetoric is undeniable; it is not unreasonable to read the same romantic awe in this reaction to modernity as that

evinced by the reporters of the *Illustrated London News*. The same narrative of progress is there but progress is understood to be serving some while it enslaves others.

This recognition of polarization in society compounded the need for compromise between progress and stability in visual records of this ‘puzzling’ world and yet the difficulties of achieving it increased daily with the growing overlap of city and country, industry and nature. Devotees of the sublime will have found inspiration in these newspaper reports but the railway was clearly going to be a problem in British landscape art. According to Cosgrove and Daniels, Ruskin sought in landscape ‘a stable ground in which a consistent order of divine design could be recognised ... [and] the reassurance of order in the face of the apparent chaos of industrialising Britain’³⁷ - something that would certainly no longer be found in the vicinity of Dover. Late in his life (1883) he commented on some watercolours by Kate Greenaway:

There are no railroads in it, to carry the children away with, are there? no tunnel or pit mouths to swallow them up, no league-long viaducts - no blinkered iron bridges? There are only winding brooks, wooden foot-bridges, and grassy hills without any holes cut into them! ... And more wonderful still, - there are no gasworks! no waterworks, no mowing machines, no sewing machines, no telegraph poles, no vestige, in fact, of science, civilization, economical arrangements, or commercial enterprise!!!³⁸

This apparent rejection of all forms of technology and modernity from a painted landscape differs markedly from what had been possible in a limited form in the late eighteenth century. It also differs from two other modes of expression of landscape art that were contemporaries of Ruskin: one was the formal landscape art of America and the other was lithographic art in Britain.

Alternative visions of landscape I: America

Leo Marx suggests that the railroad was also problematic in American art: ‘The received conception of the [pastoral] form was irreconcilable with the image of a landscape devastated by the new power, and indeed many artists - perhaps more on the other [eastern]

³⁷ Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, ‘Introduction: iconography and landscape’ in Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (eds), *The Iconography of Landscape*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; 5.

³⁸ Quoted in Scott Wilcox and Christopher Newall, *Victorian Landscape Watercolours*, Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1992; 39.

side of the Atlantic - regarded the appearance of the railroad as an announcement of the death of pastoral.' However, he goes on to tell us that Ralph Waldo Emerson, a cultural commentator with influence in America similar to that which Ruskin had in England,

looked to the work of writers and artists as a virtual means of resolving the specific opposition between technology and nature. ... Art, in other words, can help to overcome the dislocating effect of change by making available for society's emulation works that are, in effect, ideal symbolic reconstructions of reality. *Thus the painter of pastoral landscapes exemplifies the possibility of reconciling the new machine power with the natural order.*

Perfect examples of this symbolic reconstruction exist in Thomas Cole's *River in the Catskills* from 1843 (Fig. 23) and Thomas Doughty's *A View of Swampscott, Massachusetts* from 1847, both of which 'belong to a fairly large group of American landscapes of that era in which a minuscule but centrally located locomotive is made to blend more or less seamlessly into a pastoral scene' such that 'these artists seem bent on showing how easily and harmoniously it could be assimilated into the stock Claudian landscape.'³⁹

Marx refers to these works as sentimental pastoralism, "sentimental" in that it denies or masks the power of the hostile forces that would impede the realization of the pastoral ideal.' But he finds more interest in 'complex' pastorals that 'attempt to cope with, to represent the power of those antagonistic or destructive forces. In doing so they in effect adapted pastoral landscape painting to the discordant impact of the new technologies.' There are fewer of these complex works but the classic example is George Inness' *The Lackawanna Valley* from 1855 (Fig. 24). Ostensibly this painting, like others, assimilates 'the harsh utilitarian scene to the demands of the pastoral convention'.⁴⁰ This is all that Julie Wosk sees: 'Inness presents a relaxed observer in the field; the painting ultimately remains a commercial vision, taking a distant, idealized perspective of railroad travel in which the machine has little disruptive impact.'⁴¹ It is true that the Claudian structure is there, with a tall tree as repoussoir on the left, the contrasting horizontal tracks, the undisturbed cattle. But Marx points to the denial of this sentimentality in the menacing quality of the roundhouse, the jagged tree stumps, the severely denuded and yellowing ground. He sees Inness' ambivalent response to technology as capturing a 'poignant dissonance, a distinctive note

³⁹ Leo Marx, 'Does Pastoralism Have a Future?' in John Dixon Hunt (ed), *The Pastoral Landscape*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992; 215-8. [My italics in quote.]

⁴⁰ Marx, 'Does Pastoralism have a Future?'; 218.

⁴¹ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 34.

of foreboding intermixed with the idyllic'. The painting, more than most, 'exemplifies the adaptability of pastoralism to the conditions of industrialization that might seem to be inherently inhospitable to that ancient mode.'⁴² This head-on confrontation of landscape with technology, and the interpretative disagreements inspired by it, will be seen again in Chapter 6 with a discussion of Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*.

In the American context, therefore, a resolution of the conflicting images and ideologies was achieved, but, as Marx points out, there was greater opposition in Britain. While there were discontents with technology expressed in America there was a greater enthusiasm for all the advances and delights that modernity could bring, symbolized most perfectly by the railway's role in opening up the western frontier. Art patronage in America did not share the same dilemmas and ambiguities as nineteenth century patronage in Britain and enthusiasm for technology and modernity was much more generalized so it is likely that an artist would suppress any reservations he or she may have personally held. Aesthetic control at an institutional level was anyway almost completely absent in America until after the Civil War. Wallach has shown how 'the history of art institutions during the period 1800-1860 can be read in a series of contradictory and thwarted impulses towards the institutionalization of high art' and it was only 'during the post-Civil War period, as a national upper class took shape [that] the public art museum with its canonical histories of art and its more or less uniform esthetic criteria became ... given the class's new strength, a real possibility.'⁴³

Angela Miller points out, however, that there was an older patrician class in America which sought to position itself in isolation from the 'self-made men'. They identified with the loss of wilderness and the devastation of the forests - the railroads being one of the greatest consumers of America's ancient trees. Thomas Cole, in his *River in the Catskills*, pointedly removes all the trees that were in *Morning in the Catskills* that he painted at the same spot 6 years earlier, in pre-railroad days. Even in Asher B. Durand's celebratory *Progress (The Advance of Civilization)* from 1853 (Fig. 25), where 'Native American displacement ... is

⁴² Marx, 'Does Pastoralism have a Future?'; 219-221.

⁴³ Alan Wallach, 'Long-term visions, short-term failures: art institutions in the United States, 1800-1860' in Andrew Hemingway and William Vaughan (eds), *Art in Bourgeois Society 1790-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998; 306-9.

subsumed into a vision of expanding empire that is underwritten by nature’,⁴⁴ shattered trees share the foreground with those displaced people while a train puffs its way round the coast near the distant industry towards which the native Americans gaze. The loss and destruction in the name of progress are foregrounded but not necessarily condemned. Nonetheless, as in lithographs in Britain, many American painters tended to ‘minimize the disruptive presence of new industries and the railroad’ but rather than this being a way to suggest the continuance of stability and unchanging traditions, American artists were ‘suggesting the country’s commitment to technological progress and economic development’, especially as the ‘railroad became a valued means of forging national unity and fulfilling the nation’s wish to transform the wilderness.’⁴⁵ There were social tensions around the place of railroads in the landscape, but they came from a different starting point and the tensions were worked out as much in art as elsewhere: they were expressed, even if softened occasionally, rather than hidden as in Britain.

To some extent the rejection of the artistic doubts of the Old World was entirely conscious. In 1837 Emerson said that ‘We have listened too long to the courtly Muses of Europe,’⁴⁶ which succinctly locates those Muses in a class context as well as making a space for new ideas in a New World. In his essay ‘The Poet’, published in 1844, he emphasized the artist’s responsibility for changing simplistic attitudes to industrial change: ‘Readers of poetry see the factory-village and the railway, and fancy that the poetry of the landscape is broken up by these ... but the poet sees them fall within the great Order. ... Nature adopts them very fast into her vital circles, and the gliding train of cars she loves like her own.’⁴⁷ Miriam Levin, in an article about the French response to the railway in the landscape, makes reference to American artists’ accommodation in the nineteenth century to the changes in the landscape. She believes that, more than any other symbol, ‘the representation of the “iron horse” and of its kilometres of track allowed them, in effect, to give expression to the different methods

⁴⁴ Angela Miller, ‘Landscape taste as an indicator of class identity in antebellum America’ in Hemingway and Vaughan (eds), *Art in Bourgeois Society*; 354 & 348.

⁴⁵ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 13 and 56.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Ellman Crasnow (ed), *Walt Whitman*, Everyman, London, 1996; xiv.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 14.

by which human intervention could harmonize the machine and agricultural nature.’⁴⁸ Nye takes a similar line, comparing the British and American reactions: ‘The English were prone to view industrialization in terms of satanic mills, frankensteinian monsters, and class strife; the Americans emphasized the moral influence of steam, and often sought to harmonize nature and industrialization.’⁴⁹

In Walt Whitman’s ode ‘To a Locomotive in Winter’, written in 1855, the modernity of the locomotive is linked to the operation of the Muse: the railway is seen as separate but welcomed by nature:

...

Type of the modern - emblem of motion and power - pulse of the continent,
For once come serve the Muse and merge in verse, even as here I see thee ...

Fierce-throated beauty!
Roll through my chant with all thy lawless music, thy swinging lamps at night,
Thy madly-whistled laughter, echoing, rumbling like an earthquake, rousing all,

Law of thyself complete, thine own track firmly holding,
(No sweetness debonair of tearful harp or glib piano thine,)
Thy trills of shrieks by rocks and hills return’d,
Launch’d o’er the prairies wide, across the lakes,
To the free skies unpent and glad and strong.⁵⁰

In his later years Whitman talked about railways, telegraphs and the post office and ‘the whole of the mighty, ceaseless, complicated ... systems of transportation everywhere of passengers and intelligence. No works, no painting can too strongly depict the fullness and grandeur of these’.⁵¹

Many paintings were commissioned by the American railroads and artists were encouraged to include the railroad in the grand scenery - both tamed and wilderness - of America. The *Lackawanna Valley* was one such example. It was commissioned by the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad to advertise their new roundhouse and it is unusual in

⁴⁸ Miriam R. Levin, ‘Le chemin de fer dans le jardin français’, *Revue d’Histoire des Chemins de Fer*, no. 10-11, Spring-Autumn, 1994: ‘Arts et Chemins de Fer’; 44.

⁴⁹ David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996; 54.

⁵⁰ Walt Whitman, ‘To a Locomotive in Winter’, in Peggy Poole (ed), *Marigolds grow wild on platforms*, Cassell, London, 1996; 20-1.

⁵¹ Quoted in Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 71.

that they insisted on the prominence of the railway system in the landscape, against the artist's better judgement. In America, these 'publicity' paintings received as much prominence and attention as any other work of art. Such a commissioning process by railway companies took place in Britain as well; however, the majority of commissioned visual records of the railway in Britain were in the form of lithographs and these were very much for public consumption in the mass market.

Alternative visions of the landscape II: lithographs

The different social functions of prints and oil (or water colour) paintings was covered in Chapter 3. I quoted B.E. Maidment who differentiated prints from fine art as 'images beyond sophisticated oil painting where a less coherent, more polemical, socially interventionist set of images appear.'⁵² Books of commissioned lithographs were often published to coincide with the opening of a new railway line; they had the dual intention of publicizing the line's existence and of soothing concerns about both safety of the line and the aesthetic effects on the countryside. Having this as an express purpose, they did not dwell on tensions but resolved dilemmas through the use of established artistic conventions - often the 'sentimental pastoral' - to display an apparent certainty.

The first such book was *Coloured Views on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, issued in February 1831. The artist was T.T. Bury, a pupil of Pugin, and Klingender reported: 'To create the image of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway the directors were fortunate in enlisting the help of one of the greatest publishers of the day, Rudolf Ackermann ... famous for the splendour of his books of topography and travel.'⁵³ The book was enormously popular and went into several editions (with the original 6 prints increased to 13) over the next few years. Bury's illustrations have a naiveté about them; they simplify the structures of the railway and show it to be intrinsically safe in an almost childlike way. The picture of the train crossing Chat Moss is typical (Fig. 26): the engine is squat and 'friendly' and a man in top hat with a walking cane is inexplicably approaching the train on the embankment,

⁵² B.E. Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints, 1790-1870*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996; 104.

⁵³ Francis Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1968 [first pub. 1947]; 129-30.

apparently blissfully unaware of the danger of his position. All is presented as tame and safe. It is of note that the trains are on the wrong (right hand) tracks. Details of engineering and procedures were often incorrect in the early lithographs.

J.C. Bourne made few such mistakes when he began to sketch the engineering works along the line of the London-Birmingham Railway. He took obvious interest in precise details of excavations and constructions and produced beautifully delicate pictures that became a 'chronicle of order growing out of disorder.'⁵⁴ It was his sponsor, John Britton, who sent them to the railway directors accompanied by a note encouraging their use: 'Fully aware that we have jealous and fastidious critics to deal with, both in the houses of parliament, & out of them, I wish to remove, or at least to check, the tide of prejudice against us, & display our powers, capabilities, & efforts.' The railway company hung copies of the pictures in stations along the line; the book of 36 lithographs was first published by Bourne himself in four parts but the railway company took over publication (which was entrusted to Robert Ackermann) of a single volume publication, *Drawings of the London and Birmingham Railway* which came out in 1839. Bourne's interest was the extraordinary skill of the engineers but his record of the construction of the line was presented in a classically picturesque fashion, a style that was still familiar and popular (Fig. 27). This was the *dulce et utile* style of the early picturesque as the human works blended into, or supplemented the natural scene (see Chapter 2). Bourne's lithographs show that the railway has arrived in the landscape, created chaos but from that chaos a new beauty is formed. The *Spectator* enthused that the pictures offered 'new features of beauty to the English landscape painter' and the *Birmingham Journal* said that they deserved 'a favourable place in the library of the studious, as well as in the drawing-room of the idle.'⁵⁵

The picturesque was used to even greater effect by J.W. Carmichael in *Views of the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway*, published in 1836, the year before the railway opened, and commissioned by the railway company with an introduction by the line engineer. Here were views of stately homes in gentle valleys graced by elegant curves of railway tracks, scenes of country life with fox hunting, lazing peasants, and tall, stately viaducts towering over the ancient and peaceful life in the valley below. And in all of them, a tiny train puffs along, in

⁵⁴ Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; 135.

⁵⁵ Quotes from Britton and newspapers in Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; 135-6.

the distance or near at hand, but disturbing neither animals nor people, its smoke blending naturally with the clouds or the folds of the hill (see Fig. 28). William Rodner points out that Turner used a very similar style to soothe fears about another manifestation of modern technology in an 1834 publication of engravings of images of steamboats on the Seine: *Embouchure to Rouen*. Rodner describes how ‘the boats share attention with the beauty of the surroundings in a way that argues for an early nineteenth century form of landscape painting, one in which the clear presence of mechanization confirms the reality of a new human interaction with the environment.’ In *Caudebec* (Fig. 29) in particular, ‘Turner skillfully integrated [the steamer], as a harmonious rather than an intrusive element, in the pictorial environment: its smoke plume rises to meet the low-hanging clouds.’⁵⁶ The *Quarterly Review* of December 1846 claimed that this had been done in such a way that the steamer ‘appears only to have assumed its rightful position when seen amongst the simple and grand productions of nature.’

Apparently seeking to achieve this same discursive goal - public acceptance - a number of other books of railway lithographs were produced. Among the better known now are A.F. Tait’s of the Manchester and Leeds line, and Bourne’s of the Great Western. They all expressed an unquestioning ideology of progress and demonstrated the potential to ‘harmonize the machine and agricultural nature’. All proved popular but by the time Bourne’s magnificent *History and Description of the Great Western Railway* came out in 1846 it was too late and its sales suffered. The effect of the scandals associated with the great railway mania was becoming evident and enthusiasm for this type of depiction of railways waned for a while. The lithographs had served an explicit purpose of spreading knowledge about the railways and calming fears. The fears included the natural fear felt by all potential travellers on such a new-fangled means of transport as well as the fear felt by those for whom the landscape had a meaning that went far beyond being just the space between departure and destination station. The iconography used picked up on landscape discourses that confirmed old ideologies and old social hierarchies and in doing so sought to establish the acceptability of modernity as a non-intrusive presence, minimizing the effect of the breach of the divide between city and country.

⁵⁶ William Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997; 39-40.

The next section will look at how it was possible for artists to naturalize the railway into the landscape, *not* out of an attempt to obscure but in response to Romantic philosophy that ceded technology its 'rightful position ... amongst the simple and grand productions of nature'. William Wordsworth was one of the foremost poets in England throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and a review of his complex attitude towards the railway makes an interesting case study.

Nature's lawful offspring: the poetry of the railway

Walter Benjamin said that 'technology is not the mastery of nature but of the relations between nature and man'.⁵⁷ The way that the relationship between nature and people was changing and the role that technology played in some of those changes - and the complexities of the process - were perhaps most clearly expressed in some of Wordsworth's poetry.

As we have already seen, people wrote about the unnatural and often frightening relationship with nature created by the railway (for example, Thomas Carlyle's travelling 'on the Devil's mantle') as well as its thrilling and positive effects (as with Fanny Kemble 'really flying' at Rainhill). Karl Marx greatly admired the 'subjection of Nature's forces to man' brought about by the industrial revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie: 'what earlier century had even a presentiment that such forces slumbered in the lap of social labour?' But he rejected the *abuses* of man's power over nature, likening 'a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, [to] the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.'⁵⁸ There was a contradiction inherent in the domination of nature: 'All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force.'⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, edited by Peter Demetz, Schocken, New York, 1986; 93.

⁵⁸ Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*; 48-49.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx, in a speech at the anniversary of the *People's Paper*. Quoted in Lawrence Wilde, *Ethical Marxism and its Radical Critics*, Polity Press, London, 1998; 128.

Marx shared this objection to the abuses of something fine with Wordsworth, a Romantic poet who famously objected in verse to the construction of a railway in his back yard and who has gone down in history, erroneously, as being vehemently anti-railway.⁶⁰ This section will look in detail at his sometimes surprising and apparently contradictory reactions to the railway, technology and industrialization in general, during a time that encompassed both industry and the railway as magnificent 'productive forces' and their metamorphosis, for some, into producers of squalor and shocking financial corruption. Wordsworth is generally seen as a classic representative of the Romantic school in poetry, the defining feature of which was, perhaps, the worship of Nature and the attempt to express man's spirit in response to the natural world. He was part of a thriving intellectual community in the Lake District and, in relation to railways, he is best known for his disagreement with the Kendal and Windermere Railway Company. At the time of the disagreement he was Poet Laureate and therefore both representative of and influential with the Establishment.⁶¹

The very personal response of the Romantics to nature could logically create the expectation of an artistic rejection of railways in the landscape but, as we saw earlier, William Williams, Philip de Louthembourg and others successfully (and popularly) painted Romantic views of industry, often in Coalbrookdale. The Romantic approach to technology was complex and an examination of Wordsworth's shifting views on the railway will be instructive. Wordsworth, as a poet, perfectly 'exemplifies the possibility of reconciling the new machine power with the natural order' through art as anticipated by Emerson in America. The anti-railway reputation that Wordsworth retains today is undeserved and, moreover, says more about present-day relationships with, and needs of, the past than about nineteenth century responses to technology.

Long before the advent of the railway, Wordsworth was concerned about the technological changes that were affecting society so rapidly. His concerns - and confusions - are set out in his long poem, *The Excursion*, which was first published in 1814 and dedicated to his

⁶⁰ A recent example of this misreading contrasts Turner's 'excitement about the present' to the most obvious example of 'his generation - ... the poet Wordsworth - [who saw] the coming of the machine age as an unmitigated disaster.' See William Vaughan, *The Golden Age: from Hogarth to Turner*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1999; 246.

⁶¹ See Marilyn Butler, 'Romanticism in England' in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, *Romanticism in National Context*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988; 53-56, for a discussion of Wordsworth's changing politics from 'Jacobin' to 'Burkean'.

friend and benefactor, the Earl of Lonsdale. In a Preface to the poem Wordsworth stated that the purpose of the work was for the 'Author ... [to] take a review of his own mind' resulting in a decision to 'compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society', the resultant poem being 'biographical'.⁶² The poem takes the form of a number of long discussions with a variety of characters with whom the Author falls in during the course of an excursion. Early in the work the Wanderer puts forward a jaded view of current 'scientific' endeavour:

Ambitious spirits -
Whom earth, at this late season, hath produced
To regulate the moving spheres, and weigh
The planets in the hollow of their hand;
And they who rather dive than soar, whose pains
Have solved the elements, or analysed
The thinking principle - shall they in fact
Prove a degraded Race? and what avails
Renown, if their presumption make them such?
Oh! there is laughter at their work in heaven!⁶³

The Wanderer goes on to address the destructiveness of the development of industry:

I have lived to mark
A new and unforeseen creation rise
From out the labours of a peaceful Land
Wielding her potent enginery to frame
And to produce, with appetite as keen
As that of war, which rests not night or day,
Industrious to destroy!

and then airs his views of the cities that serve them:

Meanwhile, at social Industry's command,
How quick, how vast an increase! From the germ
Of some poor hamlet, rapidly produced
Here a huge town, continuous and compact,
Hiding the face of earth for leagues - and there,
Where not a habitation stood before,
Abodes of men irregularly massed
Like trees in forests, - spread through spacious tracts
O'er which the smoke of unremitting fires
Hangs permanent, and plentiful as wreaths
Of vapour glittering in the morning sun.⁶⁴

⁶² William Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1936 [first pub. 1904]; 591.

⁶³ Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*; 636-7.

⁶⁴ Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*; 682-3.

In brief, what liberty of *mind* is here?⁶⁶

This radical attack on the ills of contemporary rural life shows that while Wordsworth saw the problems that industry and the city could bring, he was keenly aware that the reality of the alternative was far removed from its usual presentation as idyllic. He had no illusions about how ill-used the rural population had been and he knew that the contented hierarchy of the traditional pastoral was a sham. Commentators are often selective in their use of Wordsworth's poetry, finding it convenient to quote his seeming opposition to the development of industry - as expressed by the Wanderer above - rather than paying attention to the very balanced nature of the argument in *The Excursion*. Wosk, for example, directly quotes the Wanderer's views on the destructiveness of industry *as* Wordsworth's views and sets them against Erasmus Darwin's earlier poetry expressing more positive views in an attempt to show how attitudes had changed in the intervening 20 years;⁶⁷ this is a misrepresentation. Wordsworth was adamant that he bemoaned only the *excesses* of technological development. This shows that more recent comments on the period by, for example, E.D.H. Johnson, miss the mark in assuming a basis in reality for an expressed nostalgia that was in fact fantasy. Johnson's comment that '[t]he initial optimism born of mastery over productive processes gave way to an awareness that the resulting economy had replaced hereditary ways of life with a wholly new and alien social environment'⁶⁸ did not resonate even with the leading Romantic poet of the day, which must lead us to question some recent interpretative structures.

Wordsworth's view of perfect Nature included, from an early stage, the 'art of Man'. The mastery of nature - so much a part of the Enlightenment project - was seen as a natural phenomenon, as beautiful and as worthy of admiration as any other. This view emerged as the railway age dawned. It is expressed in his poem *Steamboats, Viaducts and Railways*, written in 1833 and published in 1837:

Motions and Means, on land and sea at war
With old poetic feeling, not for this,
Shall ye, by Poets even, be judged amiss!

⁶⁶ Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*; 685-6.

⁶⁷ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 10.

⁶⁸ E.D.H. Johnson, 'Victorian artists and the Urban Milieu' in H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City*, Vol II; 450.

Nor shall your presence, howsoe'er it mar
 The loveliness of nature prove a bar
 To the Mind's gaining that prophetic sense
 Of future change, that point of vision, whence
 May be discovered what in soul ye are.
 In spite of all that beauty may disown
 In your harsh features, Nature doth embrace
 Her lawful offspring in Man's art; and Time,
 Pleased with your triumphs o'er his brother Space,
 Accepts from your bold hands the proffered crown
 Of hope, and smiles on you with cheer sublime.

In this poem, technological developments and change fit comfortably into the Romantic vision and the changing relationship of human beings with nature is seen as a wonder in itself. Crucially, the railway, as a creation of man, is a 'lawful offspring' of nature. The excitement in this vision of the technological future is palpable. In *Nunnery*, written in the same year, he gently assessed the progression, over the centuries, of change in the use of the landscape that he knew and loved so well, anticipating - perhaps with anxiety but not with outright rejection - that technology would inevitably come to make its mark:

The floods are roused and will not soon be weary;
 Down from the Pennine Alps how fiercely sweeps
 Croglin, the stately Eden's tributary!
 He raves, or through some passage creeps
 Plotting new mischief - out again he leaps
 Into broad light, and sends, through regions airy,
 That voice which soothed the Nuns while on the steeps
 They knelt in prayer, or sang to blissful Mary.
 That union ceased: then, cleaving easy walks
 Through crags, and smoothing paths beset with danger,
 Came studious taste; and many a pensive stranger
 Dreams on the banks, and to the river talks.
 What change shall happen next to Nunnery Dell?
 Canal, and viaduct, and Railway, tell!⁶⁹

However, in 1844 a new railway company - the Kendal and Windermere Railway - was formed with the purpose of connecting Kendal to the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway at Oxenholme. The proposal was to extend the line from Kendal through to Windermere. Wordsworth was outraged and famously sent a sonnet followed by two furious letters to a newspaper - *The Morning Post* - as well as writing to the President of the Board of Trade (Gladstone), whose job it was to decide on railway Bills, and to anyone else who would listen. Being Poet Laureate at the time Wordsworth could reasonably guarantee an audience. The letters sent to the papers were subsequently issued in pamphlet form, published in

⁶⁹ In Wordsworth, *Complete Poetical Works*; 374.

London, and - on sale at 4 pence - had a wide circulation.

The first communication with the paper included the following sonnet entitled *On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway*:

Is then no nook of English ground secure
From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown
In youth, and 'mid the busy world kept pure
As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,
Must perish; - how can they this blight endure?
And must he too the ruthless change bemoan
Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?
Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orrest-head
Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:
Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,
Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
And constant voice, protest against the wrong.⁷⁰

As one who had so recently believed that however the railway might 'mar the loveliness of nature' it would still convey 'that prophetic sense of future change', Wordsworth added what cannot help but appear to be a disingenuous explanatory footnote to this poem:

The degree and kind of attachment which many of the yeomanry feel to their small inheritances can scarcely be over-rated. Near the house of one of them stands a magnificent tree, which a neighbour of the owner advised him to fell for profit's sake. 'Fell it!' exclaimed the yeoman, 'I had rather fall on my knees and worship it.' It happens, I believe, that the intended railway would pass through this little property, and I hope that an apology for the answer will not be thought necessary by one who enters into the strength of the feeling.

In his second lengthy letter to the newspaper there was another sonnet in which Wordsworth has moved even further in his criticism:

Proud were ye, Mountains, when, in times of old,
Your patriot sons, to stem invasive war,
Intrenched your brows; ye gloried in each scar:
Now, for your shame, a Power, the Thirst of Gold,
That rules o'er Britain like a baneful star,
Wills that your Peace, your Beauty, shall be sold,
And clear way made for her triumphal car
Through the beloved retreats your arms enfold!
Hear YE that whistle? As her long-linked Train
Swept onwards, did the vision cross your view?
Yes, ye were startled; - and, in balance true,
Weighing the mischief with the promised gain,

⁷⁰ Published in *The Morning Post*, 16 October 1844. The pamphlet containing all the letters was published in 1845 as *Kendal and Windermere Railway. Two letters reprinted from the Morning Post. Revised with additions*, by Whittaker & Co. and Edward Moxon, London and R. Branthwaite & Son, Kendal.

Mountains, and Vales, and Floods, I call on you
To share the passion of a just disdain.⁷¹

But was this a Romantic objection to the despoilment of Nature, of landscape? Was it a rejection of modernity, a horror of its chaos and insecurities? Was it even a bad case of nimbyism? I do not believe that it was. I think that Wordsworth gets a bad press today over his protests: I suspect that he would get a lot of support nowadays for the practical grounds of his complaint - that plenty of other railways came within only 4 or 5 miles of the area that would be served by the proposed railway and that in such a peaceful beauty spot it was sensible to maintain its beauty and to expect those who were keen to see it to take a coach or even walk those final few miles. In the first letter he asked:

What can, in truth, be more absurd, than that either rich or poor should be spared the trouble of travelling by the high roads over so short a space, according to their respective means, if the unavoidable consequence must be a great disturbance of the retirement, and in many cases a destruction of the beauty of the country, which the parties are come in search of? Would not this be pretty much like the child's cutting up his drum to learn where the sound came from? ⁷²

In the second letter he emphasized, despite at one point referring to railways as 'these pests', that he did not oppose railways *per se*: 'Once for all let me declare that it is not against Railways but against the abuse of them that I am contending.' He insists that 'the plea of utility ... more than justifies the labours of the Engineer.' However, in the Lake District, 'an intermediate [railway line] is ... to say the least of it, superfluous.' It must also be remembered, in his defence, that earlier that same year he had encouraged a publisher (Edward Moxon) to publish a Railway Guide. In a letter dated 30 September 1844 he asked him:

Is there in existence a Railway Guide, to answer the purpose of Paterson's Book of Coach Travel? If not, I think it might answer for you to publish one ... It ought to express by small drawings the object signified, a Church, a Castle, a Gentleman's Seat, a conspicuous hill, brook or river, or any other prominent object, marking its distance from the line.'⁷³

So - both a railway enthusiast and a nimby? He believed that the proposed railway would disturb the peace of his place of 'retirement', asking how the Poet Gray would 'have lamented the probable intrusion of a railway with its scarifications, its intersections, its noisy

⁷¹ Published in *The Morning Post*, 20 December 1844.

⁷² Published in *The Morning Post*, 11 December 1844.

⁷³ Quoted in William Wordsworth, *Collected Works*, Vol II, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1936; 358.

machinery, its smoke, and swarms of pleasure-hunters'.⁷⁴ But unfortunately for Wordsworth, although indicative of his philosophy, he placed the last of this list at the core of his argument. He feared that '[w]e should have the whole of Lancashire, and no small part of Yorkshire, pouring in upon us to meet the men of Durham, and the borderers from Cumberland and Northumberland. Alas, alas, if the lakes are to pay this penalty for their own attractions!'⁷⁵ He goes on to give a chilling account of what effect the railway might have on small rural communities, bringing all these 'humbler classes' from the cities:

for the profit of the [railway] shareholders and that of the lower class of innkeepers, we should have wrestling matches, horse and boat races without number, and pot-houses and beer-shops would keep pace with these excitements and recreations ... The injury which would thus be done to morals, both among the influx of strangers and the lower class of inhabitants, is obvious; and ... there cannot be a doubt that the Sabbath day in the towns of Bowness and Ambleside, and other parts of the district, would be subject to much additional desecration.

His objections now - like his acceptance before - were explicitly based on a Romantic view of the appreciation of beauty, a view that harked back to the patrician viewers of Wilson's art encountered in Chapter 2. This view was clearly expressed in his first long letter to the paper:

Rocks and mountains, torrents and widespread waters, and all those features of nature which go to the composition of such scenes as this part of England is distinguished for, cannot, in their finer relations to the human mind, be comprehended, or even very imperfectly conceived, without processes of culture or opportunities of observation in some degree habitual.

For 'a vivid perception of romantic scenery is neither inherent in mankind, nor a necessary consequence of even a comprehensive education ... it must be gradually developed both in nations and individuals.' Thus, 'the imperfectly educated classes are not likely to draw much good from rare visits to the Lakes',⁷⁶ unlike, of course, those of 'studious Taste' who were readily accepted into Nunnery Dell in the sonnet quoted above.

Unlike the *Critical Review* of 1760, one could no longer get away with such contempt for the 'imperfectly educated classes'⁷⁷ and Wordsworth's vehemence on this point fatally

⁷⁴ *Morning Post*, 20 December 1844.

⁷⁵ *Morning Post*, 11 December 1844.

⁷⁶ *Morning Post*, 11 December 1844.

⁷⁷ One cannot help but wonder whether the 'imperfectly educated classes' might have anything in common with the *Illustrated London News*'s 'lower orders of Dover' who were equally unable to appreciate (continued...)

weakened his case. He met strong opposition, distracting attention from his practical objection to the need for the new line. A sonnet appeared in *The Whitehaven Herald* in response to the publication of Wordsworth's first protest sonnet ('Is then no nook of English ground secure..') which included the lines:

And Thou, the Patriarch of these pleasant ways,
Cans't hardly grudge that crowded streets send out
In Sabbath glee the sons of care and doubt,
To read these scenes by light of thine own lays.⁷⁸

More crucially, the Board of Trade report on the proposal for the railway - which was favourable - took the unusual step of addressing Wordsworth's personal views (without naming him):

We must therefore state that an argument which goes to deprive the artisan of the offered means of occasionally changing his narrow abode, his crowded streets, his wearisome task and unwholesome toil, for the fresh air, and the healthful holiday which sends him back to his work refreshed and invigorated - simply that individuals who object on the grounds above stated may retain to themselves the exclusive enjoyment of scenes which should be open alike to all, provided the enjoyment of them shall not involve the infringement of private rights, appears to us to be an argument wholly untenable.⁷⁹

The same argument for egalitarianism came, perhaps not surprisingly, from across the Atlantic. In 1851, at the jubilee celebrations to mark the opening of the Boston to Canada railroad, the orator Edward Everett explicitly responded to Wordsworth, saying (to the accompaniment of great cheering):

The beauty of a few spots may be disturbed but a hundred quiet spots are rendered accessible. The bustle of the station house may take the place of the Druidical silence of some shady dell; but Gracious Heavens? Sir, how many of those verdant cathedral arches, entwined by the hand of God in our pathless woods, are opened to the grateful worship of man by these means of communication! [even if this includes] the great mass of the population, who have senses and tastes as keen as the keenest. You throw it open, with all its soothing and humanizing influences, to thousands who, but for your railways and steamers, would have lived and died without having breathed the life-giving air of the mountains.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ (...continued)

the blast at Round Down cliff. The reference to the *Critical Review* is to a quote given in Chapter 2 about a 'phlegmatic alderman' for whom it would be vain to 'strive to give his tasteless soul a relish of the beauties'.

⁷⁸ 'Projected Railways in Westmoreland. In Answer to Mr. Wordsworth's Late Sonnet', by 'R.M.M.', published in *The Whitehaven Herald*, 30 November 1844.

⁷⁹ *Reports of the Railway Department of the Board of Trade on Schemes for Extending Railway Communication, and on the Amalgamations of Railways*, Sess. 1845, pub. London, 1845; 220-1.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 63-4.

Wordsworth lost his argument through his emphasis on the undesirability of the riff-raff in beautiful and hitherto secluded places. The long cherished belief of the Romantics and of 'cultured' people in general that only the right sort of education and background could open the doors of understanding to both art and natural beauty had lost its power. Access to both was not only now expected but had been appropriated by the lower orders.

I have quoted from Wordsworth at some length as I think that the debate elucidates some of the social and philosophical problems, confusions and contradictions that were caused by the railway - more than by other forms of industry - as it breached the divide between country and city, repose and industry, shattering landscape conventions as it went. The belief that the contemplation of nature should be reserved for certain classes of people inevitably created an additional tension when the railway, with its democratization of travel, intruded into the landscape. But there were contradictions for many in society between, on the one hand, an unreserved enthusiasm for technological advances and the concomitant improvements to life - not to mention wealth - that these would bring, and on the other hand, the inevitable loss of exclusivity accompanied by the 'blight' and the 'thirst of gold' that were now thrown into 'paternal fields'. The issues raised about access to, ownership of and, more fundamentally, the meanings of the landscape reflected issues over economic and political control. Many of the issues regarding the countryside, the economy and politics remain unresolved to this day.

Whose rural idyll?

In examining present-day attitudes to the countryside, David Lowenthal relates them to Wordsworth's exclusivity, 'coupling landscape heritage with elite taste'. He quotes the poet's words in *A guide through the district of the lakes*, where he described the area as 'a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive'. Lowenthal points out that 'such an eye was formed only at the court of cultivated taste' which is why, 'having earlier sought to preserve the Lakes *for* visitors (then a few gentry) Wordsworth ended by protecting them *against* visitors'. Lowenthal's point is that then, as now, the great landowners were seen as the natural guardians of the landscape. 'An axiom of such control is that the elite knows best; it can be trusted to cherish splendour and

stability.’⁸¹

The contradictory aspect of the stability is, of course, the fact that the English landscape is ‘not natural but crafted’: ‘More than anywhere else in the Old World, the geography celebrated in England is what has been made and remade by many centuries of native folk.’ On a visit to England from America in 1856 Emerson said that ‘nothing is left as it was made; rivers, hills, valleys, the sea itself, feel the hand of a master.’ Lowenthal reiterates that from at least the eighteenth century up to the present day, English landscape has been constructed and ‘enhanced’, but only, of course, by the ‘landed elite. Landscape control is rural paternalism.’⁸²

Jack Simmons develops the point that what was special about English landscape in the 1830s was its planned nature, that the 1830s and 1840s ‘were the years in which England attained its greatest physical beauty. By 1830 the work of the eighteenth century landscape artists had had time to come to maturity: the trees they had planted had grown, and all the changes they had made had mellowed.’ He refers to the ‘millions of pounds [that] had been invested, altogether, in this improvement.’ He points out that the landscape had been disturbed by the building of the canals which had aroused opposition but, while canals ‘undeniably disturbed the landscape, ... when they were completed they settled into it very well in time, appearing in the distance as no more than ribbons of placid water’ whereas railways ‘were operated by steam locomotives, which were bound to be prominent in the landscape at all times; they emitted foul smoke and made a noise that was alarming to animals and disagreeable to human beings; their fixed equipment was conspicuous; there were more of them, and they occupied more room than the canals, often in good agricultural land.’ He believes, therefore, that ‘[w]e cannot be surprised ... that the cutting of railways through a landscape so recently brought to perfection was vigorously opposed.’ However, Simmons emphasizes, ‘[a]bove all they were the instrument of the urban, the commercial, part of the community, the symbol of its successful and continuing assault on the ancient

⁸¹ David Lowenthal, ‘European and English Landscapes as National Symbols’ in David Hooson (ed), *Geography and National Identity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994; 27.

⁸² Lowenthal, ‘European and English Landscapes’; 20-23 including quote from Emerson.

dominance of the landed interest.’⁸³

This chapter has looked at how the railway changed the relationship between the city and the country. It breached the fixed aesthetic boundary and thus threatened the entire fragile construction of separation between the two. All the ills of the modern city and of industry - that had been made to bear also the transposed ills of the countryside - were now dragged noisily and dirtily - unavoidably - into almost every area of rural retreat. This created conflicting reactions. Much ‘popular commentary’, like newspapers, gloried in the progressive aspects of the railway and set up a discourse that transformed its literal destruction of the landscape into something relatively negligible (however dramatic) and even beautiful in its own right. Lithographers colluded (often sponsored by railway companies) in this illusion, miniaturizing railways in the landscape, to the point of suggesting that they improved upon it. In America, on the other hand, artists often used the ‘technological sublime’ within a pastoral idiom to confront railways quite directly: they were not hidden and were only sometimes tamed. More often than not they were deftly used in the very powerful discourse of nation building. British fine artists had a harder task, one from which they mostly turned away. The particular predicament for Romantic artists is exemplified in Wordsworth’s poetic admiration for technology and industrial development, and his horror at their excesses (both actual and perceived). In the next two chapters we will look at those artists (and patrons) who faced up to the challenge.

The maintenance of the hegemony of the landed interest was shaken by the onslaught from the railways. Hence the dilemma for landscape artists. The questions were left in the air: for whom had the landscape been ‘brought to perfection’? who had benefited from the ‘improvement’? The meaning of the landscape’s beauty as well as the meaning of its ‘desecration’ would be radically different for different groups in society: the controversial nature of painting a landscape containing a railway for a traditional art buyer would not necessarily be a problem for other groups. This is what we will now turn to in the next chapter which looks at the private patronage of such paintings which were often not meant for public consumption.

⁸³ Simmons, *The Railways of Britain*: 81.

CHAPTER 5

AN ENLIGHTENED PATRONAGE

Commissioned projects - whether by the Pharaohs, the Medicis, the popes or the French kings - always require the artist's subordination to the values and publicity needs of the patron.¹

It has been assumed in the literature that nineteenth-century purchasers of fine art, of whatever class, did not want representations of railways on the walls of their houses.² Similarly, it is claimed that artists, after the first decade of the century, did not find industry and technology to be inspiring topics (and rather the reverse). Close examination, however, reveals that, in the privacy of a patron's own home, the railway does not seem to have been a problematic subject. The nineteenth century was a time when the extent of an artist's individuality or subordination to the whims of a patron were being negotiated anew.³ Inevitably this led to tensions as well as some long and mutually fruitful collaborations, as we will see in this chapter.⁴

Gombrich describes the situation as artists lost the 'feeling of security' that came from painting works in a limited range of styles:

Now that this unity of tradition had disappeared, the artist's relations with his patron were only too often strained. The patron's taste was fixed in one way: the artist did not feel it in himself to satisfy that demand. If he was forced to do so for want of money, he felt he was making 'concessions', and lost his self-respect and the esteem of others. ... The artist who sold his soul and pandered to the taste of others was lost. So was the artist who dramatized his situation, who thought of himself as a genius

¹ Camille Paglia, 'Art of the Obsolete', *Guardian*, 9 October 1999.

² See Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972 [first pub. 1947]; 137.

³ See, for example, John Pye, *Patronage of British Art: an historical sketch, etc.*, Cornmarket Press, London, 1970 [first pub. 1845]; John H.G. Archer (ed), *Art and architecture in Victorian Manchester: ten illustrations of patronage and practice*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985.

⁴ These tensions had existed at least since the Renaissance, as alluded to in Chapter 2. Cunningham and Woods quote a pertinent admonishment given to Benvenuto Cellini by the French king Francis I after Cellini had been working fruitfully for him in the early 1540s: 'There is one very important thing ... that you artists, talented as you are, must understand: you cannot display your talents without help; and your greatness only becomes perceptible because of the opportunities you receive from us.' Colin Cunningham and Kim Woods, 'Benvenuto Cellini and the salt-cellar' in Emma Barker, Nick Webb and Kim Woods, *The Changing Status of the Artist*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999; 97.

for no reason other than that he found no buyers.⁵

Yet patronage continued to flourish and prominent artists could rely on direct commissions. This resulted in some close relationships between patron and artist. This chapter will look closely at one example of artistic creation which has inspired comments from its contemporaries as well as from recent art historians to the effect that the ‘Victorian rich had an heroic view of their labours in the light of history’⁶ and that the result was ‘one of the earliest works in which industry is taken seriously and recognized as the nineteenth century’s contribution to civilization.’⁷ Its story will shed light on a number of issues including: the vexed question of whether artist or patron is responsible for the content of a work of art; on Klingender’s influential assumption that the nineteenth century bourgeois sought nothing more than to turn their backs on modernity once they got home at night; on the ideologies of art historical interpretive structures; and on the risks inherent in undertaking such interpretation at all. It also happens to be a work of art, prominent in its day, that placed railways centre stage (although in a stylized cityscape rather than a landscape). The work in question is *Iron and Coal: the Nineteenth Century*, one of a set of eight paintings produced by William Bell Scott for Sir Walter and Lady Pauline Trevelyan at Wallington Hall in Northumberland. In this chapter the detailed story of its production will be interwoven with events and paintings elsewhere - including those owned by Robert Stephenson - in order to compare and contrast other examples of art and private patronage that had the railway as its subject.

Wallington Hall I: Decorations

In 1856 Lady Pauline Trevelyan began negotiating with Scott, a leading local artist, for a series of paintings to decorate a new room that she had created from an open courtyard in the centre of her house, Wallington Hall, near Morpeth, in Northumberland. The room, now known as the Central Hall, was used as a family room as well as a reception room for their

⁵ E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, Phaidon, London, 1995; 502.

⁶ E.D.H. Johnson, ‘Victorian artists and the Urban Milieu’ in H.J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds), *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1973; comment on plate no. 330.

⁷ Robin Ironside, ‘Preraphaelite paintings at Wallington: Note on William Bell Scott and Ruskin’, *Architectural Review* Vol. xcii, Dec. 1949; 149.

many guests. She asked that he create scenes showing great events and achievements of Northumbrian life. Roundels were to be added above the main paintings showing worthies who had helped to make Northumberland what it was. Shortly afterwards Thomas Woolner, one of the seven founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, was commissioned to create a sculpture as a focal point for the room, drawing the images of progress together and crystallizing the essence of modern civilization. The result, according to the National Trust guide book to Wallington Hall, was 'one of the most ambitious and successful of mid-Victorian decorative schemes.'⁸

The estate at Wallington had a long history, going back at least to the Norman conquest, and featuring in a number of tales recounted in border ballads. Wallington Hall was constructed on the site of an original border castle in 1688 by the Blckett family who had made their fortune in the coal and lead industries in Newcastle in the course of the seventeenth century. A baronetcy had been conferred in 1673. Wallington was a large estate of some 13,000 acres - enlarged in the 1850s to 22,000 acres - including moorland, agricultural land, mineral deposits and a number of villages. John Cornforth describes it as 'a model estate and the house one of the finest in the country.'⁹ By the nineteenth century the family lived on income from the estate which had lucrative sources of coal and ironstone.¹⁰

Residents of Wallington Hall traditionally took a great interest in politics and in local affairs and had gained a reputation as philanthropic landed gentry. Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan, who inherited the baronetcy in 1846, and his wife Pauline made Wallington Hall their home in 1849. In 1850 Sir Walter became High Sheriff of Northumberland. The Trevelyans were well known in intellectual and artistic circles. Almost as a caricature of his times and his class, Sir Walter is described in the National Trust guide book as having 'a relentless thirst for knowledge - progress of any description, scientific or philosophical, appeared to magnetise him'. He was particularly noted as a geologist and botanist and was active in 'good causes' such as state education (including for girls), pacifism, opposition to capital punishment, alcohol and tobacco. He was an agricultural improver and developed the

⁸ Raleigh Trevelyan, *Wallington, Northumberland*, National Trust, London, 1994; 57.

⁹ John Cornforth 'Wallington, Northumberland - I', *Country Life*, 16 April 1970; 854.

¹⁰ A branch of the Blckett family still owned Wylam Colliery where George Stephenson first worked with railways and where Puffing Billy achieved fame as an early locomotive.

intensive cultivation of the lands on his estate, using whatever new machinery became available. In 1856 Sir Walter began to be involved in the development and construction of a railway line to run through his estate from Morpeth to Redesmouth - the Wansbeck Valley Railway. By this time, such involvement was not unprecedented for a landowner. F.M.L. Thompson remarks that landowners already had experience of the benefits brought by canals and 'did not in fact take long to appreciate the greater benefits which railways might bring.'¹¹

Sir Walter saw the railway as progressive and he believed it offered the same improvement to the estate and boon to his tenants as his attempts to develop modern farming methods. At a public meeting held in Morpeth on 25 October 1858 he announced to the assembled landowners that 'the principle advantage of this railway would be to the district it traversed rather than the dividends they might expect from it'. The Earl of Carlisle, another of the principle investors in the line and across whose land it ran, disagreed: 'He did not pretend to have any such romantic views of public spirit as to be willing to embark in any undertaking which he did not think would be fairly remunerated' - an approach that was greeted with "'Hear, hear" and applause'.¹² In fact, early assessments of rent changes during the nineteenth century showed that for 'practically all landowners railways, the great symbol of the age, had been more efficacious in increasing farm rents than had improvement outlays themselves' - increases in rental being in the region of 7% for land within 5 miles of a railway, according to a Lords' enquiry in 1863, or, from an extensive survey undertaken in 1868, the 'consensus of opinion among the land agents ... consulted was that the coming of a railway increased the letting value of farm land by 5 to 20 per cent according to the proximity of a station.'¹³

Few records remain of the reaction of the supposed beneficiaries of the railway who lived on the Wallington Estate, and no doubt a variety of views were held. But one, an elderly woman, expressed her view of the line - and of her benefactors - in the following poem published in a local newspaper:

¹¹ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963; 257.

¹² Quotes from a report of the meeting in *The Morpeth Herald* of Saturday, 30 October 1858.

¹³ F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society*; 256.

The Railway's coming now,
'Tis neither good for horse nor cow,
Nor lambs nor ewes,
That feed about the fairy knowes.
Man, one lives to see strange things,
Man and horses fly on wings,
And they make a singing din,
And how they rattle as they rise.
Eh! and they whistle by the fell,
If ye were here, ye'd hear yoursel',
But what it is I cannot say,
Because they fly so fast away.
They just gaun where'er they like,
Through a garden, field, or dyke,
Ye must not say they're doing wrang,
And yet they act like civil men.¹⁴

It can be conceded that it may not be easy to win over one's older tenants to such modern schemes.

Lady Pauline Trevelyan, who was the 'intellectually precocious daughter of a cultured but impoverished Suffolk parson',¹⁵ shared her husband's interest in and knowledge of sciences and philosophy (they met at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science) and she was equally respected in learned society. She was an amateur artist, contributed articles of art criticism to *The Scotsman*, strongly influenced the purchase of Old Master paintings for the family's collection, became a close friend of John Ruskin and had many other good friends amongst artists and writers. Macleod states that 'although she had not been educated in the aristocratic manner, she quickly rose to the occasion by developing definite views on what she conceived to be the duty of a patron.' She believes that 'Pauline Trevelyan's middle-class origins suggest that her acts of patronage were a means of legitimating her position as chatelaine of two imposing houses'.¹⁶ Although she did little more than many another culturally 'precocious' middle-class family, her gender singles her out to some extent: Macleod lists 143 of the main bourgeois collectors of art in the nineteenth century and Pauline Trevelyan is one of only 5 women included in this (not

¹⁴ Published in a local newspaper on 5 March 1864, on the occasion of the hundredth birthday of the poet, Alice Brown. Trevelyan Papers; clipping in a scrapbook, ref. WCT 296.

¹⁵ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class: Money and the making of cultural identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; 170.

¹⁶ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 171. Ownership of the two estates was split on Sir Walter's death in 1879 when, having no children of his own, he left Nettlecombe to his nephew and Wallington to his cousin.

exhaustive) list. When, in 1856, Lady Pauline decided to commission an artist to undertake the main theme of her new room she chose someone who had become a friend and who she felt needed the work.

William Bell Scott was a prominent artist in the lively Newcastle art scene where he was Director of the government-sponsored School of Design. He was also associated with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in which Pauline Trevelyan took a great interest. She had written an important review for *The Scotsman* of Ruskin's pamphlet *Pre-Raphaelitism* in 1852 in which she empathized with their rejection of 'conventional falsehood' and their search for the truth 'such as nature paints on the face of creation'.¹⁷ In the late 1840s, when the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood emerged, their avowed aim was to portray reality. In the *Germ*, the short-lived journal of the movement, John Tupper argued that for 'Art to become a more powerful engine of civilization, assuming a practically humanizing tendency (the admitted function of Art), [it] should be more directly conversant with the things, incidents, and influences which surround and constitute the living world of those whom Art proposes to improve.'¹⁸ There were, however, few Pre-Raphaelite works that picked up physical - as opposed to moral - aspects of modern life. A prominent Pre-Raphaelite, Edward Burne-Jones, reportedly explained this later to Oscar Wilde with the comment: 'The more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint; their wings are my protest in favour of the immortality of the soul.' He even said, in direct contradiction of what Tupper had believed to be the tenets of Pre-Raphaelitism, that 'I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be - in a light better than any light that ever shone - in a land no one can define, or remember, only desire.'¹⁹ Tupper did not, then, speak for all Pre-Raphaelites: in the same article he also said that 'many are attracted to the poetry of things past, yet impervious to the poetry of things present. But this retrograde movement in the poet, painter, or sculptor, ... if not the result of necessity, is an error of judgment or a culpable dishonesty.' Scott and his friend Ford Madox Brown were unusual, in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, in their desire to paint the constitution of the living world. Brown was developing his ode to modernity *Work* (Fig. 30) between 1852 and

¹⁷ Pauline Trevelyan, quoted in Wallington Hall guide book

¹⁸ John L. Tupper, 'The Subject in Art', *Germ* no. 3, 1850; 122.

¹⁹ Quotes taken from notes at 'Burne-Jones' exhibition at City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, December 1998.

1865. It is a busy and detailed scene of a road excavation in Hampstead. He and Scott closely followed each other's progress on their simultaneous commissions.

The production of *Work* serves as an example of the involvement patrons could still have with the content and meaning of a work of art. The painting was commissioned by Thomas Plint, a Leeds businessman whose life, according to Macleod 'highlights the contradictions and tensions inherent in the myth of modernism's cult of progress',²⁰ a tension which we shall see repeated in the Trevelyans' relationship with Scott. Brown shared with Plint a support for Christian Socialism and the contemporary enthusiasm for self-help. The concept for the structure of the painting was, therefore, shared between artist and patron. One of Brown's proposed four fashionable young ladies was turned into a 'quiet, earnest, holy-looking one' at Plint's request, and the two 'brainworkers', standing on the right, were also included at the latter's suggestion although Brown traded Thomas Carlyle and the Rev. Frederick Maurice (the latter being the founder of the Workingmen's College where Brown taught art classes) for the requested pair of Carlyle and Charles Kingsley.

Brown was keen to produce a didactic work, a 'celebration of the Protestant work ethic', treating 'with equanimity and dignity the range of mental and physical activities required to make society flourish'²¹, as made clear by Brown in a text accompanying the 1865 exhibition of the painting, where he explained that the navy, the 'outward and visible type of *Work*' is contrasted with 'the ragged wretch who has never been *taught to work*' and with the 'brainworkers' who 'are the cause of well ordained happiness in others'.²² In his overview of art of the period Treuherz describes *Work* as a 'social statement on an epic scale'. He makes reference to Brown's debt to Hogarth's depictions of contemporary morality which specifically contrasted industry with idleness,²³ and he sees the painting as 'an allegory, a modern history painting, arising directly from the social and political ideas of its time.' He

²⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 179.

²¹ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 182.

²² From the catalogue to the 1865 exhibition, quoted in Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 181-2.

²³ At the National Exhibition of Works of Art held in Leeds in 1868, the painting was displayed under the title *Group of Workers and Idlers near Hampstead Heath: Portraits of Mr. Thos. Carlyle and Rev. F.D. Maurice to the right*. See National Exhibition of Works of Art - Official Catalogue, published by the Executive Committee, printed by Edward Baines and Sons, Leeds, 1869; 86. Catalogue entry no. 1483.

goes on to say that the ‘only contemporary picture like it, also an allegory in realistic guise, is Bell Scott’s *Iron and Coal* ... an amalgam of Tyneside industry which represents the nineteenth century in the mural cycle at Wallington.’²⁴

Lady Pauline’s conception for the decoration of the Central Hall at Wallington Hall included a cycle of historical scenes of Northumberland life depicting heroes from Roman times to the present day ‘to illuminate the history and worthies of Northumbria’.²⁵ The negotiations for the commission were extensive. There was a mostly weekly exchange of letters between patron and artist developing the ideas for the paintings over the next five years. There are six volumes of correspondence from Scott alone archived in Britain; Lady Pauline’s correspondence has been saved with slightly less consistency and is largely archived in the United States.²⁶ The majority of the letters to which I have had access are those that were received by Lady Pauline and so give a clearer view of the artist’s perspective than that of the patron, but the latter can often be deduced from the response elicited. As Scott lived nearby a lot of the negotiations were undertaken face to face of which no record exists.

Writers on the Wallington cycle of history paintings have typically assumed that there was a unifying theme which was explicitly to demonstrate one of the dominant discursive themes of the nineteenth century - the progress made in society - in this case Northumbrian society - culminating in the great contributions made by the North-East to the industrial revolution. It is spelled out in the records that the celebration of Northumbrian achievements was the theme but the discourse of progress was not introduced by the commissioning patrons. Reference to the need for such a theme, or an ‘intention’, was made by Scott in his first letter to Lady Pauline after he received the commission during a visit made to Wallington in the company of his wife at Easter 1856:

I have begun to realise the full meaning of our conversations at Wallington since returning to the cool regularity of Newcastle, and to feel more and more delighted with the idea of the great histories and decorations you have proposed ... The scheme of the whole saloon in arrangement of colours and

²⁴ Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Art*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1993; 87-88.

²⁵ Unattributed quote in Wallington Hall guide book; 56.

²⁶ Correspondence received by Lady Pauline is held as part of the Trevelyan Papers in the University of Newcastle. Letters written by her, as well as her diaries, are held variously in the Troxell Collection at Princeton University and in the University of Kansas archives. I am grateful to Margaret Sherry, the archivist at Princeton University, for making much of their material available to me [Box 32, Folder 14 of C0189].

intentions of pictures must be cleared up first thing.²⁷

In the letter Scott wrote to Ruskin to ask for his view of the plan (at Lady Pauline's insistence), he made no mention of any theme beyond the depiction of history. All he says of the main cycle of pictures is:

You probably recollect that the lower parts of the two sides of the Hall are pannelled [*sic*], the two ends are open arcades like the upper portion all round. These pannels are to be occupied by pictures, the lunettes above them by landscapes. The pictures are to be four historical (Northumbrian) subjects and four Northumberland Heroes exhibited in some event of their lives. The landscapes to have relation to the histories.²⁸

Nine months after the original plans had been developed with Scott, the Trevelyans commissioned Thomas Woolner to create a marble statue as the centrepiece of the room. In December 1856 Lady Pauline wrote to inform Scott of this in terms that confirm that the pictures are telling a unified story - although there is no particular clarity about what that story expressed. The letter incidentally confirms also that there was no provision in the original plan for a central signifier of the theme:

Sir Walter has settled to give up having plants in the hall, and we are to have a bit of sculpture there, which we have asked Mr. Woolner to undertake. We have laid our three heads together about a subject, but quite in vain ... It must be so definite and so complete in itself ... It ought to make a crown and centre of all that the pictures tell.²⁹

The theme was still not clear to Woolner in February 1857 when he wrote to Lady Pauline that he had 'no end of ideas and that it is not the want of ideas that is the trouble, but knowing what is the characteristic one that ought to be selected'.³⁰

After completion of the works, in a speech to the Royal Institute of British Architects on 2 December 1867, Scott emphasized the unifying theme, without - again - specifying what it was: 'To complete this comprehensive scheme Mr. Woolner was engaged to work out a

²⁷ Trevelyan Papers; Scott to Lady Pauline, 27 March 1856.

²⁸ Quoted in Virginia Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship: John Ruskin's Letters to Pauline Trevelyan 1848-1866*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1979; 275.

²⁹ Troxell Collection; Lady Pauline to Scott, December 1856.

³⁰ Trevelyan Papers; Thomas Woolner to Lady Pauline, February 1857.

group that would embody or at least indicate the result of the whole'³¹ and even later, in his autobiography, he said that Woolner's group 'was to carry out, express, or typify in some manner, the result of all the history I was then painting round the walls.'³²

In the end, and after long discussions between artists and patrons, the chosen title for Woolner's work was *Civilization*. In Woolner's own description of the work he said that: 'The idea of the group was to embody the civilization of England ... to give the contrast between our primitive habits and the ideal aims of our modern life ... A woman has been chosen as teacher, in preference to a man, because the position of women in society always marks the degree to which the civilization of the Nation has reached.'³³ The juxtaposition of this statue with the cycle of paintings is what gives thematic value to the decoration of the room and provides a discursive interpretation of the art. Scott's pictures appear to show how society has progressed from Roman times through to the extraordinary achievements of modern life while the ideal essence of modern life is itself crystallized by the depiction in marble of civilization itself arising out of the barbarism depicted in bas relief on the statue's plinth. Woolner's statue was not completed until November 1866, 7 months after Lady Pauline died. But the apparent theme and purpose of the art commissioned for the Central Hall at Wallington was set.

In a major article reviewing Scott's pictures 3 months after their completion in 1861 (and 6 years before completion of Woolner's sculpture), a writer in *The Critic* stated categorically that: 'For the central position in the Hall, a commission was given to Mr. Woolner for an important group typical of the progress of civilisation; a group which promises to be one of the noblest and most significant in modern sculpture.' Another newspaper at the same time ran an article on 'Mr. Woolner's Studio' which contained the following information: '[Scott's] pictures form, we understand, a sort of series, the object of which is to trace the course of our civilization. Mr. Woolner's group is intended to mark that which may be

³¹ Trevelyan Papers; from official record of the proceedings contained in a Scrapbook, WCT 296.

³² William Bell Scott, *Autobiographical Notes from the Life of William Bell Scott*, Vol. 2, AMS Press Ltd., New York, 1970 [first pub. 1892]; 33-34.

³³ Quote displayed in Central Hall of Wallington Hall.

regarded as at once the most spiritual, and the most tender, point in that progress.’³⁴ The intentions, then, of artists and patrons, and their attitude to the progress of civilization, appeared to be clear to their contemporaries and have remained unchallenged to this day. This is why I originally chose the Wallington Hall cycle of history paintings for closer study, as a means of accessing the views of enlightened patrons such as the Trevelyans. I shall return to this point later. In the next section I will look briefly at how the different classes of patrons were popularly regarded at this time and will briefly assess the accuracy of perceptions.

A question of taste

In his novel, *A Rogue's Life*, Wilkie Collins stated: ‘Traders and makers of all kinds of commodities have effected a revolution in the picture-world, never dreamed of by the noblemen and gentlemen of ancient lineage, and consistently protested against to this day by the very few of them who still remain alive.’³⁵ The Trevelyans, as landed gentry, straddled the divide between the aristocracy and the new middle classes. Many writers have suggested that interest in modern artists was the preserve of the middle-class industrialists who followed the advice contained in *The Builder* in 1853 that ‘fine art is becoming an essential, and pictures much safer investments than some railway shares’.³⁶ This imputed class distinction in the purchase of works of art is what Collins was satirizing in his 1856 novel. After explaining that in earlier years the only purchasers of art were ‘a few noblemen ... who, in matters of taste, at least, never presumed to think for themselves’ and therefore purchased Old Masters wholesale, he describes the new collectors of art:

They wanted interesting subjects; variety, resemblance to nature; genuineness of the article, and fresh paint; they had no ancestors whose feelings, as founders of galleries, it was necessary to consult; no critical gentlemen and writers of valuable works to snub them when they were in spirits; nothing to lead them by the nose but their own shrewdness, their own interests, and their own tastes - so they

³⁴ Trevelyan Papers; both newspaper quotes contained in cuttings in Scrapbook WCT 296 (second newspaper not identified).

³⁵ Wilkie Collins, *A Rogue's Life: from his Birth to his Marriage*, Peter Fenelon Collier, New York, 1879; 59. Serialised in Charles Dickens' *Household Words* from 1 to 29 March, 1856.

³⁶ From *The Builder* of 7 May 1853. Quoted in Colin Trodd, ‘The Authority of Art: Cultural criticism and the idea of the Royal Academy in mid-Victorian Britain’, *Art History*, vol. 20 no. 1, March 1997; 4.

turned their backs valiantly on the Old Masters, and marched off in a body to the living men.³⁷

As there was an inevitable shortage of Old Masters available for sale, the noblemen were kept happy by a few philanthropic artists who made a few extra pounds by faking the great dead painters.

Give them a picture with a good large ruin, fancy trees, prancing nymphs, and a watery sky; dirty it down dexterously to the right pitch; put it in an old frame; call it a Claude; and the sphere of the Old Master is enlarged, the collector is delighted, the picture-dealer is enriched, and the neglected modern artist claps a joyful hand on a well-filled pocket.³⁸

This position is confirmed in a rather more positive manner by Christopher Wood who assigns a central role to the middle class patrons of art in the Victorian era:

All this expansion of the art world was made possible by one very important person - the Victorian patron. It was the new middle classes, merchants, bankers and industrialists, who were the buyers of Victorian art, and who provided the economic foundations on which the Victorian art world was built. From the start, they distrusted Old Masters as an aristocratic preserve and too prone to fakes and false attributions. They preferred to buy modern works, preferably by British artists ... Although dealers were important in Victorian times, patrons preferred to deal with the artist direct.³⁹

In 1823 the *Literary Chronicle* was equally positive in paying tribute to

the honour, probity, spirit, and enterprise of her merchants [for which] is Great Britain indebted, in a great measure for that rank which she holds in the scale of civilized nations. ... If the arts were indebted for their revival in Europe, to the merchants of Florence, with justice may it also be said, that to the English merchants are the arts indebted in this country.⁴⁰

But the distrust of Old Masters and the revival of British art were among factors that, according to Reitlinger, meant that 'it was not only the nouveau riche who began to turn to contemporary paintings, but the nobility as well, and that the 1830s were the beginning of the heyday of the patronage of living British artists.'⁴¹

³⁷ Collins, *A Rogue's Life*; 57-60. The view of Dutch painting expressed was shared by John Ruskin.

³⁸ Collins, *A Rogue's Life*; 53-4.

³⁹ Christopher Wood, *Victorian Painting*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1999; 11.

⁴⁰ *Literary Chronicle*, no. 195, 8 February 1823.

⁴¹ Quoted in Lyndel Saunders King, *The Industrialization of Taste, Victorian England and the Art-Union of London*, UMI Press, Ann Arbor, 1985; 25. William Bell Scott - a Pre-Raphaelite by inclination and something of a cynic by nature - wrote to Lady Pauline about 'the men who "got on" - and you will remember the purchasers of pictures were of the same kidney, indeed there is no example of a collector of living artists being a man of any standing or mark ... the new movement brought up an entirely different class [of artists].

(continued...)

Whilst insisting that the aristocracy took no interest in modern art, Gordon Maas acknowledges that Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were ‘good patrons of art’. He states, however, that their ‘interest in modern art came too late to induce the aristocracy to emulate them’ although what ‘too late’ means is not made clear, given their ‘practice of commanding that certain pictures of the moment should be dispatched to the royal apartments for a leisurely appraisal ... [which] had an obvious publicity value, not lost on those concerned’.⁴² Nor are we told what *would* have been necessary to enable the aristocracy to emulate the Queen’s commissioning practices.

In 1851 Queen Victoria visited Manchester and probably saw William Wyld’s watercolour *View of Manchester from the Cliff, Higher Broughton*, which he had painted in 1835.⁴³ She commissioned Wyld to paint a watercolour view of Manchester for her which he duly completed late in 1852. This was *Manchester from Kersal Moor* (Fig. 16) which remains in the Queen’s collection.⁴⁴ The painting was discussed in Chapter 3 as an example of the ways in which artists dealt with industrial cities in the landscape. For the purposes of the present discussion it is important to note two particular aspects of the work: one is the nature of the commission from the patron (the Queen) and the other is the approach taken by the artist. This illustrious patron chose to commission a representation of the largest manufacturing city in the world, at the time the reputed centre of all the evils of industrial development. The Queen noted in her diary in October 1851, after her visit to Manchester, the ‘extraordinary number of warehouses & manufactories that it contains, & what a size the town is.’⁴⁵ She was confident enough to pay Wyld in advance of commencement of the commission. In April 1852 he received a total of £73.10s for the view of Manchester along with another

⁴¹ (...continued)

Every day makes the difference more marked. An artist may have more good purpose in his art now without being cast: nay he will find that purpose acknowledged.’ (Trevelyan Papers; 23 January 1862.)

⁴² Jeremy Maas, *Gambart: Prince of the Victorian Art World*, Barrie and Jenkins, London, 1975; 18.

⁴³ In Manchester City Art Gallery.

⁴⁴ In the Prints and Drawings Room at Windsor Castle. See the catalogue entry in Delia Miller, *Victorian Watercolours and Drawings in the Collection of HM The Queen*, Philip Wilson, London, 1995; 942.

⁴⁵ From *Journal, II*. Quoted in Miller, *Victorian Watercolours and Drawings*; 942.

work, *Liverpool: St. George's Hall*.⁴⁶

Marcia Pointon tells us that Wyld 'knew how to work within a market where business interests, agencies and salesmanship were as important as the older patterns of aristocratic patronage', but she sees these two watercolours as 'part of a carefully orchestrated and politically effective royal private life, a series of images that reinforced royal conviction and could be called upon in the interests of the publicity machine when needed.'⁴⁷ With this commission, the Queen could hardly have given a clearer lead to the aristocracy, not only to patronize living artists but also to commission works depicting modern life - as she did again 2 years later when she purchased Frith's *Ramsgate Sands* from the Royal Academy exhibition in 1854.

Controversy over the class basis of patronage and over appropriate subject matter for art reflect a fundamental debate that ran - and runs - through the art world once a challenge has been mounted to traditional views: this debate concerns the question of who has the right to determine the aesthetic and artistic value of a work of art and who controls its content and ideological import. Martin Hardie characterizes the mid nineteenth century as witnessing 'a barely concealed struggle for power between the Academy, representing the profession, and the main body of connoisseurs and patrons.'⁴⁸ More isolated struggles between individual artists and patrons went on every day and the next section looks at some contemporary examples of how an artist's work could be directly influenced - or changed - by a patron or 'the public'.

A question of control

David Solkin suggests that when painters entered a commercial free-for-all it could no

⁴⁶ This was a fairly good price for an established artist. Wyld was a prominent artist even though he spent almost all his time in France and was better known there. David Cox - an extremely popular watercolourist at this time - was getting in the region of £45 for his major works. (Ref.: Notes accompanying exhibition of David Cox Watercolours from the Whitworth Gallery at York City Art Gallery, 12 February - 26 March 2000.)

⁴⁷ Marcia Pointon, *Bonington, Francia and Wyld*, B.T. Batsford, London, 1985; 68, 77.

⁴⁸ Martin Hardie, *Watercolour Painting in Britain*, Vol. III, B.T. Batsford, London, 1968; 270.

longer 'be easily believed that artists or critics spoke on behalf of a public, which expressed its voice through their work; cultural producers driven by venal motives could not be presumed to speak for any constituency larger than themselves, or for the amoral mechanisms of commerce.'⁴⁹ It is hard, however, to imagine an artist, with an eye to the market, not at least attempting to pick up the *zeitgeist* of his/her target audience. Macleod points out that the 'transfer of power from patron to artist was to occur gradually as artists rose in the social scale.' She believes that the 'early Victorian period, because of its simultaneous dependency on the aristocratic model and the newer forms of patronage, is most appropriately viewed as a time of transition in the artist-patron relationship.'⁵⁰ In the hegemonic struggle as the nineteenth century progressed, the vaunted independence of the artist was only a part of a complex interplay of influences. It will be seen below how this could be played out in practice and how it affected the content of art at Wallington Hall.

As Wolff has said, in the 1850s the 'direct influence of patrons on the work of painters was surprisingly common in a century when the ideology of the free, creative artist was developing.'⁵¹ Thomas Plint's direct involvement in the content of Brown's painting, *Work*, has been mentioned. Another well-known example is Thomas Fairbairn's influence on William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* which was completed in 1854. Fairbairn was the owner of an engineering company in Manchester and a leading light in bourgeois art collection in the town. In this case he gave Hunt an open commission for a painting, having been impressed by his work at the Royal Academy exhibition the previous year. As it was an open commission, the subject matter of the painting and its means of expression were determined by the artist - who knew that it would be controversial. The painting, of a 'fallen woman' rising from her lover's knee in apparent realization of the error of her ways, was exhibited at the Royal Academy in May 1854. There were considerable critical complaints - about its structure, content, style, use of iconography, positioning of the viewer, vulgar subject matter, ugliness of the woman's face. Comments on the latter led to Fairbairn asking Hunt to repaint the woman's face, which Hunt eventually did in 1856. This

⁴⁹ David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: the Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century England*, Yale University, New Haven, 1992; 274.

⁵⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 36.

⁵¹ Janet Wolff, 'The culture of separate spheres: the role of culture in nineteenth century public and private life' in Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds), *The culture of capital: art, power and the nineteenth century middle class*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 123.

surely changed Hunt's intention in the painting, or at least the intensity of it.⁵² Arscott points out correctly that this story reveals the 'possible incoherencies' in interpretations of works of art, given the complexities in the relationship between patron and artist.⁵³

Another example of the continuing pressures of patronage and the market exerted on artists concerns a painting with a railway theme, this time painted without a patron in mind. A narrative painting that used the railway as the background for the depiction of modern life was Abraham Solomon's *First Class - the Meeting: 'And at first meeting loved'* (Fig. 31) which was exhibited at the same Royal Academy exhibition, in May 1854, as Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience*. The painting elicited similar accusations of vulgarity of subject, despite praise for its technique. It shows the interior of a first class railway carriage where a languid young man is engaging a young woman with downcast eyes in conversation while an older gentleman - presumably the woman's father or chaperone - is slumped in the corner of the carriage having fallen asleep over the newspaper that is held on his lap. This broke the bounds of social propriety and the *Art Journal* commented: 'As a picture it is executed with great knowledge and power, but it is we think to be regretted that so much facility should be lavished on so bald - or vulgar - a subject.'⁵⁴

The criticism was such that the following year Solomon painted a new version of *First Class - the Meeting* (Fig. 32) in which the young man - now converted into a smart naval officer rather than a man of leisure - and the older man are seen deep in conversation while the young woman takes the corner seat and regards the officer demurely from a distance - although the safety afforded by the distance does enable her to look directly at him, unlike in the first version. The same point about the inevitability of chance encounters and even about opportunities for flirtation was made, but without the potential for debauchery and

⁵² An interesting reading of both the painting and of the critical storm that it aroused suggests that the storm was stirred up by John Ruskin's unprovoked letter of support for the painting that appeared in *The Times* on 25 May 1854. See Caroline Arscott, 'Employer, husband, spectator: Thomas Fairbairn's commission of *The Awakening Conscience*', in Wolff and Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital*; 159-190. See also Caroline Arscott, *Modern Life Subjects in British Painting 1840-1960*, unpublished thesis, University of Leeds, 1987, Chapter 3 for an analysis of how Ruskin's very specific moral interpretation of the painting was just one of many possible appropriations of the subject within topical debates.

⁵³ Arscott, 'Employer, husband, spectator'; 187. In her unpublished thesis, Arscott also makes an interesting argument relating Fairbairn's response to the painting to his precise position in the industrial bourgeoisie of Manchester: see Arscott, *Modern Life Subjects*; 122-3.

⁵⁴ *Art Journal*, Vol. XVI, 1854.

scandal suggested in the first version. Threats to the morality of young ladies travelling was a common criticism of the railways at this time, a fact to which Solomon was making reference.⁵⁵ (See Fig. 33 for a *Punch* cartoon from 1864 on the subject.)

In this case, however, the original work still exists intact, unlike the original incarnation of Hunt's painting, and was almost certainly purchased by George Briscoe and resold with his collection in 1860.⁵⁶ The revised version was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1855 and this time it was paired with *Second Class - the Parting* (Fig. 34) which very poignantly tells the tale of a widowed mother bidding farewell in a train compartment to her young son who is bravely leaving to become a sailor. In subsequent engravings of the pair - executed by William Henry Simmons and published by Gambart in 1857 - the pairing was reversed and they were sold as *The Departure* and *The Return*, adding a very different dimension to the narrative, suggesting that the young sailor boy has, through hard work, transformed himself into a respected naval officer and lodging the pair of paintings in the 'comforting notion of virtue rewarded by social advancement'.⁵⁷ The second painting - *Second Class - the Parting* - was considered far worthier by the critics and was purchased at the Royal Academy exhibition by the Marquess of Lansdowne for 250 guineas - despite the extreme modernity of its subject matter and the placing of the subjects in railway carriages which emphasized this fact. None of the three original paintings appears to have ever been exhibited again in the nineteenth century, although copies as well as the engravings of the second pairing were enormously popular.

These stories are evidence that, despite Solkin's view, artists still lacked freedom to flout either public taste on the open market, or the private taste of a patron: the individual genius was far from shaking free of the shackles of the craftsman. The development of the cycle of history paintings at Wallington Hall provides further evidence of the ways in which artist

⁵⁵ A House of Commons committee report in 1865 stated: 'There has been, indeed, a panic amongst railway passengers. Ladies, unable, of course, to discriminate at the moment between those whom they should avoid and those who should be their protectors, shun all alike'. Quoted in Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1980 [first pub. 1977]; 86-88.

⁵⁶ The original version of *First Class - the Meeting* is currently in the National Gallery of Art in Ottawa. I am grateful to Michael Patuzzi, Curator of European Art, for provenance information. The revised version is in the National Railway Museum in York.

⁵⁷ *Solomon: A Family of Painters*, catalogue to 1985 exhibition at Geffrye Gallery and Birmingham City Art Gallery, pub. Inner London Education Authority, 1985; 15.

and patron could work problematically yet intimately together in the creation of a work of art.

Wallington Hall II: A celebration of local history

The eight pictures in the cycle of history paintings in the Central Hall at Wallington were finally agreed as: *Building the Roman Wall, King Egfrid and St. Cuthbert, The Descent of the Danes, The Death of Bede, The Spur in the Dish, Bernard Gilpin, Grace Darling and Iron and Coal: the Nineteenth Century*. William Bell Scott was also commissioned to paint eighteen roundels higher up the walls of the Central Hall, depicting the heads of men of note in the history of Northumberland and Wallington Hall. These include: Emperor Hadrian, Nicholas Ridley (Bishop of London), Sir Walter Calverley Beckett, Admiral Lord Collingwood, Thomas Bewick, Earl Grey. There is just one engineer - a group of men often presented at the time as the greatest heroes of the nineteenth century - who wins representation in this array: George Stephenson who was (as he often still is) credited with being the 'father' of the railway. As it happened he had direct connections with the Trevelyan / Blckett family through his connections with Wylam Colliery which was owned by the Blcketts and which itself had contributed not only to the early riches of the Wallington estate but also to 'progress' in the north east. Scott does not sound inspired by the inclusion of Stephenson in a letter to Sir Walter on 16 May 1857, rather seeming to regard his inclusion as inevitable: 'George Stephenson is the latest deceased among the worthies, and I suppose will be properly introduced', a tone which suggests the influence of the patron at work.

The commission caused a lot of interest in the art world, being reported in various newspapers that then followed its development in a generally complimentary manner, and exciting comment from other artists, especially after photographs of the early completed works began to circulate. Dante Gabriel Rossetti wrote enthusiastically to Scott of the photograph of 'St. Cuthbert' that he had seen, saying that:

I had not, in the state of sleepy worry in which one lives here, woke up to the consciousness that such things were being done, and it came to me as a most delightful surprise ... I suppose it is the only picture existing as yet of so definitely 'historical' a class, in which the surroundings are all real studies from nature.

He continued that ‘one of the future subjects, “Barnard [*sic*] Gilpin taking down the Gauntlet” should inspire you; it will be a glorious opportunity for a stirring work.’⁵⁸ Clearly, any intimation of the progressive theme in the cycle had either passed the artistic community by or left them uninspired, unlike the novelty of history paintings taken from nature, an aspect of the work that did, in fact, obsess Scott. Thomas Woolner verified Rossetti’s statement and went further in a letter to Lady Pauline on 10 February 1857:

I need not say how pleased I am to find that good old WB’s picture is so satisfactory to you in every way; here Gabriel Rossetti and Ford Brown are wildly enthusiastic about it; Brown said that he had always considered Scott one of our greatest poets, but now he sees clearly that he is to be one of England’s greatest painters: these are his words exactly, and considering how choice he is of his applause, and what an eminently correct judgement he has, this is no small praise for W.B. and I may add, most thoroughly does he deserve it.

Scott’s commitment to the integrity of painting his histories from nature is clear throughout his correspondence on them. In April 1857, while working on *The Building of the Roman Wall*, he writes to tell Lady Pauline about ‘Mr. Clayton at Chester, whence I have now received a good fresh sample of the Wall to paint into the foreground’, showing a tremendous respect for detail if rather less for conservation. He took the heads on Roman coins found in the area as models for the Roman soldiers. When working on the background for *Grace Darling* in March 1858, Scott rented rooms in Tynemouth overlooking the sea and wrote to Sir Walter that ‘the East wind in this bayed-window room has been actual suffering to me at least painting at the window, though I am glad to say had some advantages in making foaming tides which I think are better on the canvas than the still flow of ripples I intended to have painted.’⁵⁹ When the painting was completed and ready for exhibition in 1860, he knew that he had produced ‘the best sea-storm ever painted’ according to his own (sincere) estimate.⁶⁰

For all his apparent conceit, Scott was very anxious about his patrons’ opinion of him and his work. He was made very nervous by the receipt of some poor reviews for the early exhibitions. On 8 December 1856 *King Egfrid and St. Cuthbert*, the first picture in the

⁵⁸ Quoted in Raleigh Trevelyan, *A Pre-Raphaelite Circle*, Chatto and Windus, London; 35-36.

⁵⁹ Trevelyan papers WCT 74; Scott to Sir Walter 6 March 1858.

⁶⁰ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Lady Pauline 11 June 1860.

history cycle to be exhibited⁶¹, was hung in the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society. In advance of the exhibition Scott sent a letter to Lady Pauline describing details of the picture and concluded: 'You will think I say a great deal about this picture, but in truth I am anxious that both Sir Walter and yourself should think it a good reading of history, and as a picture worthy of being placed in the hall, most especially so, as it is the first of the series and so much depends on it to me.'⁶²

There is nothing at this stage to suggest that the Trevelyans were not content at least with the quality of the work produced by Scott. Lady Pauline wrote proudly to Scott that 'Mr. Egg' (the painter of *The Travelling Companions*) had shown a calotype of 'St. Cuthbert' to a Mr. Philip and he had 'great admiration' for the work: 'It is rather good to see people of such an opposite school so delighted with your doings.' In April 1859 she was 'delighted with the new picture [*The Spur in the Dish*].'⁶³ But they - and particularly Sir Walter - never gave him his head as regards subject matter and even detailed content; the creative relationship was far from smooth, although there was always give and take. After a number of problems with subject matter, in May 1859 Scott complains to Lady Pauline in a note that gives more idea of theme that 'Sir Walter spoke seriously of throwing Grace Darling out of the series. If so who is to be in her place, and how are the four goodly characters with their beatitudes, to balance the four epochs with their mottoes?'⁶⁴ I am unable to ascertain why it is that Sir Walter was opposed to Grace Darling's inclusion. As she appears in the series one may assume that Lady Pauline intervened to save Scott's plan on this occasion, although she had obviously not been *entirely* convinced herself as we see in her response to the finished painting: 'I like *Grace Darling* and it isn't nearly so ugly as I expected - I think it is one of the best of the lot in point of composition and I think both the sea and the sky are

⁶¹ The National Trust guide book to Wallington dates the pictures incorrectly, making *The Descent of the Danes* the first one completed in June 1856 (p.58). As this painting was not even suggested until February 1857 (see below) this cannot be right, quite apart from Scott's reference quoted in this paragraph to the fact that *King Egfrid and St. Cuthbert* is the first. The guide book dates the receipt of the commission in 1855 (p.26), whereas in fact it was at Easter, 1856 (see above).

⁶² Trevelyan papers; Scott to Lady Pauline 30 November 1856.

⁶³ Troxell Collection; Lady Pauline to Scott 6 January 1857 and April 1859.

⁶⁴ Trevelyan Papers; Scott to Lady Pauline 31 May 1859

capital.⁶⁵

The relationship between Scott and Sir Walter Trevelyan shared a number of aspects of that between Ford Madox Brown and Plint during the painting of *Work*. Both patrons sought thematic as well as detailed control of the content of the paintings, and both artists experienced problems with money. Unlike Brown's disagreement with Plint, Scott did not appear to dispute the agreed sum of money, but had regular cash flow problems - as, for example, detailed in a letter to Sir Walter on 5 June 1857 when he urgently needed £50 for - appropriately enough - the purchase of shares in the 'Carlisle railway'! The relationship hovers uneasily somewhere between a straightforward commercial arrangement and the dependency of patronage, between the inspiration of the individual artist and the need to fulfill the requirements of the customer. Scott's dependence on the Trevelyans' patronage and his lack of independence in the creative process - coupled, however, with his willingness to argue strongly for his point of view - locates the process of creation of the paintings at Wallington Hall within Macleod's categorisation of the mid nineteenth century as a time of transition in artist-patron relationships. This theme will be developed further below in relation to the 'railway painting' in the cycle. But first I will turn to the issue of the extent to which the railway was selected as a subject by other patrons of fine art.

The railway as inspiration

Despite the problematic nature of placing a railway in an artist's landscape, even for the Pre-Raphaelites, Scott was in fact far from the first to pay homage to structures of modernity, and to the railway in particular, in a commissioned work of art. But he was one of the first to do it in a commission that eventually became so public. Previous examples tended to be kept in the privacy of the owner's home. Nearly 20 years before Scott undertook his work for the Trevelyans, and at the other end of the country, another landowner from a long established family was inspired by both the practicalities and the aesthetics of the railway in an almost iconic story of nineteenth-century enterprise.

The Treffrys are an ancient and prominent Cornish family that dates back to Celtic times.

⁶⁵ Troxell Collection; Lady Pauline to Scott, undated, probably December 1860.

They have been landowners, continuously resident at the family home, 'Place' near Fowey, since either the late thirteenth or early fifteenth century (depending on choice of family historian). Among appearances in national history, residents of Place have held important social positions locally such as Havener (tax collector) to the Duchy of Cornwall and High Sheriff: the first - but far from the last - Treffry to be High Sheriff of Cornwall took office in 1483.⁶⁶ They had been successful merchants and ship owners from the fourteenth century and influential at Court and in politics through to the middle of the eighteenth century when the estate went into temporary decline.

The decline was halted in no uncertain terms by Joseph Thomas Austen Treffry who gained control of the estate in 1808. After a classical education at Oxford and the traditional grand tour he became the epitome of the energetic and inventive nineteenth-century industrial magnate. He built up his agricultural estates during the Napoleonic wars and developed the tin and copper mines on his land which became very profitable after the wars. By 1848 he was the biggest employer of mine workers in the West of England.⁶⁷ The majority of his mines were in the St. Austell area and the ore was taken by wagon to the port of Fowey on the south coast. To avoid congestion in the town Treffry built a new harbour at Par, just south of Fowey. This required a '12,000 foot breakwater sited on the then notorious Spit Reef'.⁶⁸ None other than Isambard Kingdom Brunel assured Treffry that the breakwater could not be built but Treffry 'replied that "impossible" was a word not in his vocabulary.'⁶⁹ He proceeded - with some difficulty, it must be said - to successfully construct the breakwater himself and to develop the port for 50 vessels. Not surprisingly, he became interested in railways and was Chairman of the Cornwall Railway from the early 1840s. The first and most noteworthy railway line that he constructed was in 1839 when he deemed it to be an efficient and economic way to take the ore and, later, china clay, from his mines and quarries out to the harbour at Par. This line required the construction of a massive viaduct across the Luxulyan Valley, and again Treffry undertook the work without professional

⁶⁶ David Treffry, 'Place and the Treffrys', *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, 1997; 11.

⁶⁷ Adelaide Rideout, *The Treffry Family*, Phillimore & Co., Chichester, 1984; 79.

⁶⁸ 'Cranstar Leisure Group Cranstar's Historical Cornwall' at <http://www.cranstar.co.uk/treffry.htm>; 20 April 2000.

⁶⁹ Rideout, *The Treffry Family*; 79.

assistance.

The Luxulyan Viaduct (often also known as the Treffry Viaduct) is in fact a combined viaduct and aqueduct, running water below the track bed to turn a water wheel which hauled returning empty wagons up the 1 in 10 Carmears incline out of Fowey. Its tail waters also provided power to the Fowey Consols and to other Treffry mines down the valley. Beyond the rope up the incline, the line was horse powered because Treffry calculated that, for his usage, horses would cost 75% of the cost of a locomotive. The viaduct was completed in 1842 and the resultant construction 'has left what is probably the single most interesting and spectacular monument of Cornwall's 19th century industrial development .. [and] .. is almost certainly the largest structure in the country for this dual purpose.'⁷⁰ The railway operated for 30 years until, in 1874, a line linking Par to Newquay was put through the valley, passing under the viaduct. The line over the viaduct continued to be used by one quarry until 1927. The aqueduct is still in operational condition. The whole structure is 700 feet long and rises to 100 feet above the valley in 10 arches - 2 or 3 of which at each end are now obscured with overgrowth. Barrie Trinder states that this structure on the 'most ambitious of the Cornish lines ... [which] ... in some respects can be classed as a hybrid line ... is more in keeping with the age of main line railways.'⁷¹

Treffry's attitude to constructing the 'magnificent' viaduct was never purely utilitarian; he was well aware of the significance of what he was doing. When he built the Trenance Viaduct on the line from his mines in north Cornwall out to Newquay in 1849, he is quoted as having 'regretted that the Trenance Viaduct could not be "done for posterity" like Treffry Viaduct'.⁷² The import of Treffry's work was recognized by others as well: the local Press reported the opening of the northern section of track with the words: 'This vast undertaking, of almost national importance, has been effected, we need scarcely observe, by the liberality

⁷⁰ John Stengelhofen, *Cornwall's Railway Heritage*, Twelveheads Press, Truro, 1989; 11.

⁷¹ Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape*, Phoenix, London, 1997 [first pub. 1982]; 146.

⁷² David St. John Thomas, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain*, Vol. I 'The West Country', David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1973; 149.

of a single individual, that spirited capitalist, J.T. Treffry, Esq. of Place.’⁷³

Treffry chose to record the significance of the construction by commissioning a painting of the viaduct from Robert Whale, a local artist who had gained a considerable reputation painting portraits, still lifes and landscapes to order.⁷⁴ He later (in 1852) emigrated to Canada where he played a major role in developing a national school of landscape art. His painting of the Treffry Viaduct is a fairly typical picturesque view (Fig. 35). The severe, but elegant lines of the viaduct blend well with the relatively bleak rocky landscape. The prominence of the rocks on the valley side enable a certain organic feel to the viaduct which appears to have grown out of the earth’s own produce. The view is softened by low bushes and trees on the slope of the valley on the left, as well as by the shapes of clouds above the viaduct. The massive size of the structure is conveyed by the inclusion of tiny figures close to one of the piers. A person is also seen descending the right hand rocky slope, similarly dwarfed by the size of the natural rocks. The enormity of the construction is evident. The picture, probably painted in 1842, was hung by Joseph Treffry in his house, Place, where it hangs to this day. Treffry later commissioned Whale to paint a picture of the house itself when he had completed major reconstruction there. At some stage Whale also did a portrait of Joseph Treffry himself in which he is shown with an engineer’s dividers in his hand, a picture of a high viaduct in the foreground and a scene outside the window that includes a water wheel. All three pictures still hang at Place.

It can be readily deduced that Treffry’s pride in his achievement led to his enlightened patronage of this view of a railway feature in the landscape, but there is no way of knowing for sure how many other such pictures from the period fit into this category for the picture was commissioned only for private consumption and never - as far as I know - put on public display.⁷⁵ Others may still be undiscovered in private homes. The *Luxulyan Viaduct* is certainly not the only one.

⁷³ Quoted in Thomas, *Regional History*, Vol I; 150.

⁷⁴ Jack Simmons attributed the work, putatively, to Ambrose Johns and believed it to be the first ever oil painting of a railway scene. (See Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1995 [first pub. 1991]; 53, fig. 10n.) I am grateful for information from David Treffry, the current occupant of Place, who is able now to correctly attribute the work as the result of information that has recently come to light. [Letter, 14 December 1999]

⁷⁵ Also the view of David Treffry in letter, 14 December 1999.

Another is a similarly grand and classically picturesque painting of a railway viaduct, *The Braes and Bridge of Ballochmyle* (Fig. 36), painted by David Octavius Hill in 1848. This painting is a little better known, partly because, unlike Whale who is now remembered only in Canada, the artist spent all of his career in Britain - largely in Scotland - building up a good reputation as an oil painter of landscapes and portraits and also as a prolific engraver. He produced one of the very early books of lithographs in celebration of the opening of a railway line - *Views of the Opening of the Glasgow and Garnkirk Railway* - in 1832 (the year after the line opened), depicting the technical details with considerable precision. He is particularly remembered as a pioneer of photography, using calotypes from the mid 1840s to produce images from which he developed his paintings, both landscapes and portraits.⁷⁶

Hill used this method to produce at least three oil paintings of Ballochmyle Viaduct. It is possible that John Miller, a friend of Hill's and the engineer of the Glasgow, Paisley, Kilmarnock and Ayr Railway (which merged with the Glasgow, Dumfries and Carlisle Railway in 1850 to form the Glasgow and South Western Railway and on which the Viaduct stood), urged Hill to paint the viaduct that took the line over the gorge of the River Ayr. One of the paintings produced was probably given to Miller and one was certainly for William Maxwell Alexander, the Laird of Ballochmyle Estate on whose land the viaduct stood. Alexander was an architect himself and it is believed locally that he refused to grant wayleave to the railway company unless he could approve the bridge design which he insisted must be of architectural interest, and it is even suggested that he designed the bridge himself.⁷⁷

The viaduct was at least as worthy of record as the Luxulyan Viaduct. The gorge on the River Ayr at that point is 'one of the most spectacular river scenes' in Scotland. The

⁷⁶ Hill was also, as it happens, a friend of the Trevelyans. He intervened, with Ford Madox Brown, to have one of Scott's pictures, *The Death of Bede*, moved to a better position in an exhibition at Edinburgh where its initial inferior position had seriously upset Scott. [See Trevelyan papers; Scott to Sir Walter 22 February 1858. Troxell Collection; Lady Pauline to Scott, undated, probably Feb/March 1858.]

⁷⁷ Sir Claud Hagart Alexander is the current owner of the painting. For the detail of Alexander's relationship to the viaduct I am grateful for information received from Sir Claud. He is unfortunately unable to provide documentary evidence as family papers have largely been destroyed. He also supplied information that another version of the painting is held in Railtrack's Glasgow headquarters. See also Sara Stevenson, *David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson*, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1981; 24 - 26. In actual fact Alexander's powers of veto would have been very limited, as by now railway companies had powers of compulsory purchase.

structure spanning it remains the highest railway bridge in Britain, with a height of 51.5 metres, and has the longest span, at 55 metres, of any masonry arch railway bridge in Britain. Unusually, the arch forms a complete semi-circle and for 50 years it remained the largest masonry arch in the world (and is believed to be again now after the destruction of its Austrian rival in the second world war).⁷⁸ According to the Scottish tourist board the viaduct is still an impressive and ‘graceful structure’⁷⁹ so, when it was completed in 1848, it must have been a dramatic sight and an extraordinary achievement for the engineer (and architect). So, whatever role the Laird played in its construction, he would have had a considerable interest in the finished article; although he had a different relationship to the viaduct than Treffry had to his, the two landowners shared an appreciation of their viaducts’ aesthetic qualities. The painting of the Ballochmyle Viaduct has remained in the Alexander family until the present day.

In these examples something very special in terms of size, originality, economic importance, or symbolic achievement was being celebrated in and by means of art. Members of both the aristocracy (as we saw in Chapter 2 with the Earl of Anglesey’s commission to William Havell) and of the gentry were keen to commission paintings of their successful or ground breaking industry or industrial construction, and to hang them in their homes. For the Stephenson family artistic representation went further and was used to celebrate both a dynasty and an era, as we shall see in the following section..

The Stepbensons as patrons

When Robert Stephenson died he left a number of works of art that he had collected over the years. Some were ‘traditional’ collectors’ items which showed artistic discernment, such as Landseer’s *Twins* which hung in the dining room of his house. It is said that ‘[o]n this picture Stephenson set great value. An opulent gentleman, breakfasting with him one morning, offered him £5,000 for it. “But,” said the owner, repeating the circumstances of the offer to his friends, “he stood a worse chance of getting it by setting so high a value on

⁷⁸ Martin Smith, *British Railway Bridges and Viaducts*, Ian Allan, London, 1994; 45.

⁷⁹ Website <http://www.tour-britain.com/scotarea1.html>; 20 April 2000.

it, as I knew him to be an excellent judge.”⁸⁰ Stephenson also had a sizeable collection of paintings that reflected and celebrated his own and his father’s work as engineers.

A little like the Trevelyans with Scott, Robert Stephenson developed a long-term relationship with the artist John Lucas. He - and his friends - commissioned a number of paintings from Lucas, most of which were designed to reflect Stephenson’s or his father’s achievements. The relationship began in 1845 when a shareholders’ committee of the London and Birmingham Railway commissioned Lucas, an established and popular portraitist of aristocracy, to make a portrait of Robert Stephenson which they wished to present to him as a ‘fitting mark of their appreciation of his services’. Robert was depicted sitting at his desk, displaying a drawing of a 2-2-2 long boiler locomotive (Fig. 37). Portraits of the time typically contained details that were significant to the sitter’s life, their identity or their work. As these portraits were normally prominently displayed in the sitter’s living space and were designed to show - indeed, flaunt - the association between, on the one hand, industry and technological progress and, on the other, both the individual and the family, it weakens further the case for the bourgeoisie turning its back on domestic reminders of the modern world. The portraits of the Stephensons painted by Lucas follow this tradition. Much of their careers can be found depicted in the backgrounds of the portraits, and the choice of detail suggests reference to some interesting stories. Lucas, or his patrons, seemed to specialize in including contentious details that related to recent power struggles between engineers or companies. The 2-2-2 long boiler represents a victory for Stephenson engine design over those of his rival Bury.⁸¹

An agreement was made that the painting of Robert would be held in the possession of George Stephenson for his lifetime and pass thereafter to the ‘Philosophical Institute, Newcastle-on-Tyne.’⁸² The painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1846. Robert was so pleased with it that he commissioned a portrait of his father. In 1847 Lucas painted *George Stephenson on Chat Moss* in which George is shown standing on the Moss (Fig.

⁸⁰ J.C. Jeaffreson, *The Life of Robert Stephenson*, Vol. 2, Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, London, 1864; 160.

⁸¹ See Michael Bailey, ‘The Mechanical Business’ in Michael Bailey (ed), *Robert Stephenson: The Eminent Engineer*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., Aldershot, 2003 (forthcoming).

⁸² Arthur Lucas, *John Lucas - Portrait Painter 1828-1874*, Methuen & Co., London, 1910; 52.

38). The railway line cuts diagonally across the flat expanse of the marsh and a diminutive - but minutely detailed - train approaches from the distant horizon. The identification of the locomotive pulling the train is again significant. It is almost certainly the first ever 3 cylinder engine, which was developed in 1847 for the York and Newcastle railway, and which was the last patent that George Stephenson took out (in conjunction with his colleague William Howe). The engine was ahead of its time and at the time of the painting of the portrait it may not yet have been known that the prototype was not destined to be successful, although a second version, produced in 1852, was. The construction of the section of the Liverpool and Manchester railway line across Chat Moss was an extraordinary engineering feat in 1829 and was - and is still - seen by many as George's 'principal achievement in civil-engineering.'⁸³ The painting became well-known through an engraving that was made of it and the statue of George Stephenson that was placed in the Great Hall of Euston Station in 1854 was based upon Lucas' painting. Robert's secretary wrote to Lucas to inform him that his employer had 'no objection to your portrait of his father being sent to the Institute for the Conversazione tonight. I am also desired ... to express Mr. Robert Stephenson's unqualified approval of the picture as a likeness and as a work of art, and his sense of obligation to you for the infinite pains you have taken with it.'⁸⁴ An 1850 portrait of Robert by Lucas shows him outdoors as part of the background scene but rather more traditionally isolated from it by a rocky alcove within which he stands, with the Britannia Bridge across the Menai Straits in the distance. As with George and Chat Moss, the Britannia Bridge is considered by many to be one of Robert's finest achievements - indeed, according to Lucas' son Arthur, it 'was then regarded as the most stupendous feat of engineering ever attempted.' John Lucas recorded that this picture was produced after 'nine sittings [had] been received in unusually quick succession.'⁸⁵

The engineering contractor, Samuel Morton Peto, who had enjoyed a long - and very lucrative - working relationship with Robert Stephenson, now became involved in the developing relationship between the Stephensons and Lucas and himself commissioned paintings to present to the Stephensons as well as copies of the portraits of George and

⁸³ Lucas, *John Lucas*; 52.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Lucas, *John Lucas*; 52.

⁸⁵ Lucas, *John Lucas*; 64 and 113. The two portraits currently hang in the Great Hall of the Institution of Civil Engineers in London.

Robert to keep for himself. Peto had started in contracting work at a very young age. His past achievements included the construction of Nelson's Column. He was awarded a baronetcy in 1855. In 1843 Peto had purchased Somerleyton Hall in Lowestoft and proceeded to turn it into a magnificent country home (whilst developing Lowestoft from a fishing village into a thriving port and seaside resort).⁸⁶ The 1853 *Handbook to Lowestoft* informed the visitor that in Somerleyton Hall there were two portraits, in a single long frame, of George and Robert Stephenson hanging over the fireplace.

In 1848 Peto commissioned a painting of the two Stephensons together. The painting was completed in 1851. As George died in 1848 we do not know if the commission was taken out before or after his death, but it must be a largely posthumous portrait. This painting was *George Stephenson and his son, Robert*.⁸⁷ It shows Robert seated with a locomotive plan spread on his lap, and George, to his left, standing looking over his shoulder with a hand placed on the back of the chair. It is a very sympathetic painting of two eminent men, with poses and expressions revealing an affection between them. Of particular interest is that on the table to Robert's left is a model of a locomotive. The model is a Great 'A' locomotive which was not a state-of-the-art 1848 locomotive, which one might expect to find in such a portrait. One can speculate on why a locomotive that was famed two years earlier was chosen. 1846 was the year of the 'Battle of the Gauges' and the Great 'A' was the locomotive used in the gauge trials for the standard gauge (or 'narrow gauge' in contemporary nomenclature) camp against the Ixion of Daniel Gooch's Firefly class which was used on the broad gauge. The promoters of the standard gauge therefore trumpeted the virtues of the Great 'A' as being at least as good as Ixion, even though it, in fact, had a number of serious deficiencies. It was a long-boiler passenger locomotive and a particular problem that it had was a tendency to hunt down the track at speed due to a lack of stability provided at the rear by the 4-2-0 wheel arrangement. The Stephensons had championed the long-boiler locomotive so the need for a rear axle was a great embarrassment and could not be admitted (although a 4-2-2 model was developed later which was very successful). The

⁸⁶ For details of Peto's life and career see Dr. Edward C. Brooks, *Sir Samuel Morton Peto Bt. 1809-1889*, Bury (St. Edmond) Clerical Society, 1996 (private circulation). J.A. Francis, *A History of the English Railway: Its Social Relations and Revelations 1820-1845*, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1967 [first pub. 1851]; 266-273.

⁸⁷ The painting is in the Institution of Civil Engineers. I do not know whether it was initially retained by Peto or whether he presented it to the Stephensons.

choice of the model in the painting, then, may have been part of the battle of the gauges - crowing the triumph of the standard over the broad gauge (despite the relative merits of the specific engines), especially given that a painting of Daniel Gooch, the great opponent in the broad gauge camp, showing him accompanied by a model of a Firefly class locomotive, had been completed in 1845 (before the eclipse of the broad gauge in the trials the following year).⁸⁸

Who chose to put the Great 'A' into this painting? One theme of this chapter is control over the content of a painting: does a picture represent the patron's concerns - either as demanded by that patron or as interpreted by the artist? Or does the artist's vision and genius dominate? At Wallington Hall a process of negotiation between patron and artist took place with interesting repercussions, as we shall see. In this case, I suspect that it was Peto, the patron, who determined the details. There is no hard evidence, but John Lucas does not come across in his biography, written by his son, as a creative artist in terms of the contents of his paintings. While clearly appreciated by contemporary society as a gifted and sympathetic portrait painter, the imaginative, visionary side of his art appears to have been constantly frustrated by the demands of his highly successful career as a portrait painter. His son tells us that he wrote in his diary of

his firm resolve to make no further sacrifice of his time in painting aristocratic beauties, and his determination to gratify his hitherto balked ambition to make a fair trial of his strength in the ideal walks of Art. 'IN THIS I AM RESOLVED,' he writes with emphasis, begotten of the enthusiasm with which the mere prospect [of a particular new commission] had stirred his artistic soul. The very next entry he made records his acceptance of an important commission for a full-length military portrait, from the Marquess of Londonderry, to be *completed within a twelvemonth*. So are our ambitions made the sport of circumstance!⁸⁹

He appears to have been an artist who sought always to please his sitters; his son certainly points out no principles or politics that he might have sought to further in his portrait paintings. Peto, however, would have had a particular interest in the Great 'A' and in the gauge trials themselves. But it is more likely that he sought to flatter his business benefactors by making reference to what was seen as a significant victory. The painting is not listed by Jeaffreson as having been in Robert Stephenson's possession at his death, so Peto may have

⁸⁸ I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. Michael Bailey, for suggesting some of the possibilities raised by speculation on the inclusion of the Great 'A' (as well as for the identification of the model).

⁸⁹ Lucas, *John Lucas*; 86-7. [Italics in original.]

kept it for his own home - and flattered himself by association - or he may have given it directly to the Institution of Civil Engineers, where it now hangs, as a public celebration of the Stephenson's' achievement. The commissioning of this - and other paintings - by Peto for the Stephenson's may be seen as the nineteenth century equivalent of the boxes of wine given now to consulting engineers at Christmas by the contractors who hope to continue - or begin - to work with them the following year. E.L. Betts, a contractor associate of Peto's, similarly commissioned portraits of both George and Robert Stephenson (the latter in 1849) from Lucas which he kept for himself (unexhibited) in his home at Preston Hall near Maidstone in Kent.⁹⁰

In 1851 Peto initiated a commission for another celebratory painting - this time to commemorate the construction of the Britannia Bridge on the Chester and Holyhead railway line. This was to be *Conference of Engineers at Britannia Bridge*. A group of 'professional friends and colleagues of Robert Stephenson projected the idea of painting an historical group of engineers and others who were concerned with him' in the construction. Peto 'voluntarily undertook the financing and collection of the funds from the group of men immediately interested.' In the event, however,

[i]t is typical of Stephenson's high sense of honour, that so soon as he learnt what was afoot - which was not until the picture was well advanced - he intimated that he could not, consistently with his position, permit himself to accept the proposed gift; but he adopted responsibility for the picture, and threw himself heartily into facilitating its completion.⁹¹

The *Conference of Engineers at Britannia Bridge* was a straightforward celebration of the joint human effort that made the 'finest of all the early engineers' creations, the Britannia Bridge that massively and, as it seemed, inevitably spanned the Menai Straits.'⁹² In an unpublished doctoral thesis, Louise Purbrick tells us that this conference of the engineers

was the final, formal and ceremonial conclusion to the construction of the bridge. Whether ordinary or extraordinary, this occasion, according to Lucas' patrons, required recording in a form that could ensure its survival as a historically significant moment; it required a form that was more grand and more solemn than either lithography or photography. They chose oil paint.⁹³

⁹⁰ Lucas, *John Lucas*; 113.

⁹¹ Lucas, *John Lucas*; 64, 66.

⁹² Michael Robbins, *The Railway Age*, Mandolin, Manchester, 1998 [first pub. 1962]; 53.

⁹³ Louise Purbrick, *Machines and the Mechanics of Representation: the display of design in mid-*
(continued...)

At the very least, this painting stands as an extraordinary historical record of a major engineering event - 'one of the very greatest engineering advances of the nineteenth century'⁹⁴ - and it served equally as a worthy and valuable means of celebrating that achievement and of congratulating its main architect.⁹⁵ The men in the painting were themselves acutely aware of the importance, both in real and symbolic terms, of the work that they were carrying out. Edwin Clark (shown in conversation with Robert Stephenson) was the resident engineer for the construction of the Britannia Bridge and he wrote the story of its building in 1849:

The present age is remarkably distinguished from all that has gone before it, by the extraordinary energy manifested during it in all regions of thought and action. ... In Britain ... energy synonymous with industrial progress, rather than political revolution, ... resides in material and mechanically it is represented through machinery and, in particular, the new transport technology: the railway ... [which is] the most prominent embodiment of national energy and the fittest symbol of industrial progress; it is the most apparent and appropriate representation of the work of the nation.⁹⁶

It is no coincidence that the dress and bodily attitudes of the figures depicted enable them to 'function ... as realistic representations of the ideal, industrious, bourgeois man.'⁹⁷ This painting picked up and represented in a powerful form all that was seen as best and as desirable in the emerging middle class identity: the ideological nature and function of the painting are clear.

The next record that we have of Stephenson commissioning a work from Lucas is in 1855 and is particularly intriguing. Thomas Jeaffreson recorded, in his inventory of Stephenson's paintings at his death, a work that he called *The Stepping Stones*. It was, he said, 'painted at Robert Stephenson's order' and it represents a girl carrying a child over a stream in Wales.

⁹³ (...continued)

nineteenth-century Britain, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 1994; 130.

⁹⁴ R.J.M. Sutherland, in the entry for 'Britannia Tubular Bridge' in Jack Simmons and Gordon Biddle (eds), *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997; 54.

⁹⁵ The members of the group are Robert Stephenson, Joseph Locke, Isambard Brunel, Edwin Clark, Admiral Moorsom, Latimer Clark, Frank Forster, G.P. Bidder, Mr. Hemmingway, Capt. Claxton, Charles H. Wild, Alexander Ross. Notable exclusions are William Fairbairn and Eaton Hodgkinson who are entirely unacknowledged, having fallen out with Stephenson at an early stage of the project. The painting hangs in the ICE, having been presented by George Robert Stephenson, who inherited Stephenson's paintings, in 1886.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Purbrick, *Machines and the Mechanics of Representation*; 120.

⁹⁷ Purbrick, *Machines and the Mechanics of Representation*; 131.

The Britannia Bridge is seen in the distance.’⁹⁸ No other details are provided. I believe that this painting must be the ‘ideal picture’ referred to by Arthur Lucas as *Crossing the Brook* ‘wherein a rustic youth is shown carrying a child across a stream.’ It was commissioned in May, from a ‘most attractive sketch [that] had knocked about the painting-room a couple of years or more’ and was required ‘to fill a panel in the drawing-room of Stephenson’s house, 34 Gloucester Square, Hyde Park.’ This was the commission whose receipt ‘was evidently so gratifying to the painter’ that he swore to renounce the painting of ‘aristocratic beauties’ for its sake. Unfortunately, already in 1910 when Lucas’ son was writing, despite ‘considerable pains to discover’ it, the painting had disappeared.⁹⁹

Lucas, *films*, tells us no more about the nature of the painting, not even the detail recorded by Jeaffreson, that the Britannia Bridge is in the background; but I believe that the brief detail of the action in the painting is so similar in the two men’s descriptions that *The Stepping Stones* and *Crossing the Brook* must be one and the same. What is of particular interest here is that the sketch had ‘knocked about’ for a number of years before Stephenson - presumably having seen it in Lucas’ studio - commissioned it as an oil painting. This suggests that more of Lucas’ own personal creativity as regards subject matter may be involved. His son has told us how frustrated he felt by the constant portrait paintings and that this opportunity to develop his own ideas in an ‘ideal’ painting excited him. Yet the painting appears to serve as a further homage to Stephenson and picks up again on the specific and powerful symbolism of the Britannia Bridge. But was the bridge present in the original sketch? Was it something Lucas himself felt to be worthy of further treatment? Or did the fact of Stephenson’s patronage inspire him to add the bridge? Or did Stephenson specifically ask for it to be included?

On an altogether more speculative - and tantalising - plane, did Lucas intend this painting to be an explicit homage to J.M.W. Turner? Quite apart from the identical title, the narrative description of the painting unavoidably calls to mind Turner’s earlier (1815) oil painting, *Crossing the Brook*, described briefly in Chapter 1 (and in more detail in the next chapter). James Hamilton’s interpretation of the painting was discussed there in which he equates the

⁹⁸ Jeaffreson, *The Life of Robert Stephenson*; 160.

⁹⁹ Lucas, *John Lucas*; 83.

myth of the girls crossing into womanhood to a hope of Britain's re-emergence into prosperity and an industrial future at the end of the wars with France. In his own *Crossing the Brook* did Lucas intend to pick up on this allegory in repeating Turner's narrative?¹⁰⁰ Two young people cross a stream in the foreground and in the background is a bridge which is still recognized, even in the late twentieth century, as having 'moved from a semi-empirical art to a science' the design of bridges and other structures in Britain.¹⁰¹ Was Lucas alluding to the great technical leap forward made by the Britannia Bridge and, using the same patriotic idiom as Turner, constructing a hope of renewed industrial vigour and progress to come after a period of economic gloom? Such an association being made with Stephenson's work makes the homage to the engineer plain whilst at the same time being a marvellous mid-century reference to Turner's pean half a century earlier to the industrial age. Like Turner's painting, it may be a powerful evocation of industrial achievement and an equally strong statement of how hope and progress can emerge from difficult times. There is no hint in his son's account of how well Lucas knew Turner nor how he responded to his art. However, I find this speculation involving a dual homage to be a peculiarly seductive interpretation of an unseen painting.

Robert Stephenson commissioned a further painting from Lucas in 1857 which explicitly honours his family and particularly the achievements of his father. Arthur Lucas tells us that the commission was for 'a quasi-historical picture which should focus, as it were, upon one canvas, the achievements of his father - of whom he was so justly proud.'¹⁰² Stephenson paid £350 for it and, although the painting was never exhibited, suggesting it was intended only for private consumption, Lucas did sell the copyright of the painting to an engraver (Henry Graves & Co.) for £200. It was engraved by Francis Holl and Charles Mottram for publication in a number of limited editions, but not until 1862, after Robert's death. The importance of the homage Robert is paying to what he sees as his father's primary achievement is made obvious, if in no other way, by the original title given to the finished

¹⁰⁰ Turner had himself borrowed the title from an even earlier work (1803) by Henry Thomson, ROYAL ACADEMY.

¹⁰¹ Sutherland, in the entry for 'Britannia Tubular Bridge' in Simmons and Biddle (eds), *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History*; 54.

¹⁰² Lucas, *John Lucas*; 86.

work - *Birthplace of the Locomotive*¹⁰³ - which perhaps makes it odd that the picture was never exhibited. But, equally, there is something very personal and intimate about the details of this unusual picture which was in Robert's collection at his death.

The engraving bore an inscription which read:

It represents George Stephenson's Cottage and the Colliery wherein he was many years employed, during which time he devoted his powerful mind to the construction of the Locomotive Engine and the Railway on which it runs.

In the distance is seen the North-Eastern Line to Scotland - thus shewing the commencement and complete development of that mighty railway system which, 'with unparalleled rapidity, has induced the most wonderful effects, not only in this country, but throughout the world.'

In the foreground of the Picture the Villagers are supposed to be discussing the works of George Stephenson (amongst others his invention of the 'Geordy' Lamp), suggested to them by the perusal of a brief history of his life, recorded in one of the periodicals of the present time.

A more detailed reading than this reveals that 'the villagers' consist of likenesses of George Stephenson, his son Robert, his father (also Robert), his mother, and his two wives. George holds a 'Geordie' miners' safety lamp which he invented at about the same time as Humphrey Davy invented his slightly different version: there has always - to this day - been a sense of grievance in the north-east that George Stephenson lost out on the claim to that invention.¹⁰⁴ George's son Robert is dressed as a miner in the group and he also appears as a village child. In the background is a single track colliery waggonway with an early locomotive puffing along it which appears to be an artistic mix between a Blucher and a Wellington, although the artist's son believed it to be 'Puffing Billy'. In the centre background is Dial Cottage which was the Stephenson family home in Killingworth for nearly twenty years and where Robert was born. There are various colliery details which have led to debate about whether they represent Killingworth or Wylam Colliery. Arthur Lucas (and Jeaffreson) were in no doubt that it was the former. The picture obviously meant a lot to the family: in 1861, two years after Robert Stephenson's death, his cousin George Robert Stephenson, to whom Robert had bequeathed all his art works, commissioned the artist's son, William Lucas, to paint a copy which is almost exact to the original, only a little smaller.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ This is almost certainly the painting that is listed as *Killingworth Colliery* in Jeaffreson's list of Robert's pictures at his death.

¹⁰⁴ This is discussed in more detail below in a resumé of the details of *Iron and Coal*.

¹⁰⁵ The copy is currently in the Science Museum in London while the original is in Chesterfield Town
(continued...)

Researchers at the Science Museum in London have suggested that such an allegorical figure grouping is extremely rare in English art. The painting contains a representation of the three ages of man (Robert as a small boy, as a young man, and his father in old age) and the composition suggests a quasi religious grouping in a secular landscape. They propose that just as ‘artists of the mid-Victorian period echoed the compositions of High Renaissance art in religious paintings and in commissioned scenic emblems for trade societies and unions, Lucas pays homage to the Stephenson family with a *conversazione* altarpiece.’¹⁰⁶ Stephenson must have made a major contribution to the narrative detail but, in this case, it is reasonable to assume that Lucas chose the artistic method of composition and the specific allegorical overtones. Patron and artist shared responsibility for the celebratory approach to industry. This analysis of *Birthplace of the Locomotive* renders more compelling my theory about *Crossing the Brook* as it demonstrates Lucas’ willingness to use allegory along with earlier artistic traditions to convey powerful concepts about modernity and historical continuity.

The linking of modernity to visions of both continuity and change is reflected in a painting by another artist that was owned by Robert Stephenson. This was *Excavations for the Railway at Newcastle* (Fig. 39) by Thomas Miles Richardson. Richardson was a prominent local - Newcastle based - artist who, throughout the 1820s and 1830s, was a leader in the successful movement to encourage the development and the exhibition of the arts in the North-East, a move which was associated with a strong sense of pride and involvement in Newcastle’s central place in the modern world. By the early 1840s, in a process that draws together a number of themes of this chapter,

it was all too apparent that Newcastle as a town was economically depressed and fast becoming a backwater through lack of a direct rail link to the south. The prosperity and pride which had underpinned Richardson’s institutions in the 1820s, the feeling that the town was emerging as ‘the Metropolis of the North’ had vanished. The Friends of the Arts continued to believe that art exhibitions had a civilising role to play - but that was not enough to sustain the annual exhibitions.

It was, as it turned out, ‘left to the North of England Society’s classes under their Drawing

¹⁰⁵ (...continued)

Hall.

¹⁰⁶ From the Science Museum’s Picture Gallery Bulletin No. 4, October 1996, ‘Homage to an Engineer’, published by The National Museum of Science and Industry. This leaflet goes into great detail about the composition and interpretation of the painting.

Master, William Bell Scott, ... to become the new engine of art activity in Newcastle'¹⁰⁷ at the time when Newcastle was acquiring its first railway.

Richardson was essentially a painter of modern life. We saw in Chapter 3 how his *Newcastle from Gateshead Fell* in 1816 showed the interaction of the city with the country. In his 1839 book of lithographs, *Views of Newcastle*, there were two drawings of railway viaducts: *Willington Dean Viaduct* and *Ouseburn Viaduct*,¹⁰⁸ and it is in keeping with his interests that he would produce a major oil painting of the arrival of the railway in Newcastle. But more than this, it marks the advent of the railway age in a city where its lack had been perceived as the cause of the loss of Newcastle's glory in which Richardson had always taken a keen personal interest.

The painting's provenance records that the original owner was Robert Stephenson, but no known documentary evidence to this effect exists. However, in his brief list of Stephenson's paintings at his death, Jeaffreson records one by Richardson that he calls *Railway Arch at Newcastle-on-Tyne*. I can find no other record of such a painting (unless it is an original for one of the lithographs mentioned above, but this seems unlikely) and it is possible that Jeaffreson heard the painting described as 'Excavations for the High Level Bridge in Newcastle' - a name it still occasionally goes by - and, without seeing it or remembering it clearly, gave it what he believed to be a descriptive title (although unfortunately *Excavations* contains no arches).

It is a curious painting. It dates from 1848 when Stephenson was starting work on the High Level Bridge across the Tyne and the painting's inspiration and its subject is clearly the new railway. But at first glance it is not obvious in what way. The painting is largely in shades of brown. Characteristically for Richardson's scenes of Newcastle, we are placed in a street scene surrounded by old cottages and tenements from whose windows people lean out to watch events. Small children are playing in the street and, in the midst of this scene of almost timeless street life, on a small rise in the ground in the middle distance, the viewer

¹⁰⁷ Paul Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle: Thomas Miles Richardson and the Newcastle Exhibitions 1822- 1843* (catalogue of exhibition at Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 11 Oct - 2 Dec 1984), Tyne and Wear County Council Museums, 1984; 26.

¹⁰⁸ Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*; 76-7. The original plates are held in the Laing Gallery, Newcastle.

can just make out three or four men wielding picks. This is the beginning of the excavations for the construction of the approaches to the bridge which would in time necessitate the destruction of many of the buildings that we see around, displacing some 650 families. The roughness of the foreground area may indicate that some buildings have already been cleared.

In Usherwood's catalogue of the 1984 exhibition he says that *Excavations* is a 'relaxed, benign treatment of the preparations for the building of the High Level Bridge and the Central Station'.¹⁰⁹ If Richardson's response is 'relaxed' and 'benign' then that will be because, I believe, he must, in this work, be celebrating these very small beginnings of what he hoped would radically change Newcastle's fortunes for the better, alleviating the poverty that is depicted. But I feel that the painting also conveys a sense of awareness of the irrevocable change, loss and destruction that would engulf the local community. I have no evidence as to whether Stephenson commissioned the painting or bought it from the artist when it was completed. (Again, the painting does not appear to have been exhibited.) It fitted with his collection of paintings that were often (though not exclusively) artistic tributes to his own and his father's work.

Stephenson did commission a picture of the High Level Bridge, from J.W. Carmichael, in 1846. The artist had completed it, along with a copy, before 1 May 1847 (when the *Illustrated London News* printed an engraving of it), well before completion of the bridge, so he must have worked from the plans. Carmichael was well-known in the north-east, not only for his book of lithographs of the Newcastle-Carlisle railway line but also for his paintings of marine subjects. The fate of Stephenson's painting is not known but George Hudson and his fellow directors of the York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway Company commissioned the copy of the painting for the railway's offices. (It is in fact this painting which is reproduced in the *Illustrated London News* which reports that, while 'a repetition', the painting varies 'in effect and in the arrangement of the foreground' from the original.) The painting of the bridge is a view from Gateshead on the south bank of the river and the train crossing the bridge, travelling south, can scarcely be seen through the bridge structure. Much industrial development can be seen through the bridge's arches and fevered construction work is taking place in the foreground on the south bank. The medieval bridge

¹⁰⁹ Usherwood, *Art for Newcastle*; 62

is shown in the foreground crowded with pedestrian and carriage traffic and the grand buildings of Newcastle are portrayed at the far end of the bridge - the cathedral, the castle, the Town Hall and a very prominent depiction of the statue commemorating the Reform Bill. The references to modernity, to economic prosperity and to political progress - and their link to the railway - are obvious, flattering both patrons. Hudson's painting hung in the railway company offices until it was donated to the University of Newcastle where it remains hidden from public view in a senior academic dining room.

Stephenson, then, is the perfect example of a person who was involved in the creation and the promotion of technology and industry, and of the railway in particular, and who, like Treffry and Alexander, commissioned a visual record of his work. The association with progress and modernity, celebrated in these works of art that were hung in the place of residence formed part of the affirmation of self-image and identity. After this long foray into the homes of other, earlier, patrons of railway art, I will now return to Wallington Hall to explore how the Trevelyans, who have gone down in history as being very much a part of that affirmation of an identity associated with progress, negotiated their relationship with the art that they had commissioned and, in particular, with Scott's railway painting, *Iron and Coal*.

Wallington Hall III: 'The "Nineteenth Century" is drawing to a close'

On 12 May 1861, 11 months after completing *Grace Darling*, the seventh of his eight large history murals for Wallington Hall's central courtyard, William Bell Scott wrote to Lady Pauline Trevelyan with some good news:

The 'Nineteenth Century' is drawing to a close. Heaven knows whether it is the best or not: I hope it is. The canvas is as full as it can hold. Everything of the common labour - life and applied science of the day, is introduced somehow, besides a mottled sunbeam done so realistically that the flies are beginning to buzz in my studio.

He adds a post script in an attempt to temper his characteristic boastfulness:

P.S. I know you will punish me for my 'conceit' about the sunbeam. One must have one's joke even

if one has to pay for it.¹¹⁰

Iron and Coal: The Nineteenth Century (Fig. 40), the last in the series of murals illuminating ‘the history and worthies of Northumbria’, was, by this time, seen by Scott as the culmination of his great work, the moment in history and the ultimate achievements to which all the other paintings had been leading, the one that he hoped was the best. The presence of Thomas Woolner’s sculpted group (Fig. 41), undertaken in response to the theme of the cycle of history paintings, and that depicts humanity’s rise from barbarism to ‘civilization’, appears to give context, definition and unmistakable meaning to Scott’s *Iron and Coal*. A reporter for an unidentified newspaper described the base of Woolner’s group, which he had seen in the studio, in the following terms:

This pedestal, by way of carrying out and completing the significance of the group ... is treated as one of those Roman altars which have been found on the site of the legionary camps in Northumberland, and bears 3 spirited designs, illustrating those savage manners and delight in blood and ravage which characterise the other extremity, if we may so call it, of English civilisation.¹¹¹

The quote from Woolner now displayed in the Central Hall and quoted above states that he has used a woman in his sculpture ‘because the position of women in society always marks the degree to which the civilization of the Nation has reached.’ It is unavoidable, therefore, to make the connection between this beautiful and graceful sculpture and Scott’s picture that shows all the ‘life and applied science of the day’, and which also uses the figure of a girl to make a point about education and the advanced role played by his patron in modern civilization.

It would be of great interest to this study to be able to examine the process of development of the subject matter of *Iron and Coal* to the same extent as can be done for several of the other paintings in the series through perusal of the exchange of letters between Scott and Lady Pauline and, in some cases, Sir Walter. Scott tended to discuss plans for future paintings while earlier works were still in progress; once started on a painting he discusses every detail with the Trevelyans - problems with models, precise locations, what other people think, how he feels about its development etc. However, with two notable exceptions (that will be discussed below), he does not mention his ideas for *Iron and Coal* in advance;

¹¹⁰ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Lady Pauline, 12 May 1859.

¹¹¹ Trevelyan Papers; unidentified newspaper cutting in Scrapbook WCT 296.

he completes *Grace Darling* and sends it out to Wallington in December 1860; announces on 15 December that 'the last picture is now beginning' - and then there is an unprecedented gap in the archived correspondence - which had, on average, been weekly up to that point - until Scott's announcement 6 months later that he is nearly finished. I have no explanation for the gap in the archives. There certainly is no indication in the letter of 12 May 1861, or in any other correspondence, that there had been an interruption to his intimacy with Lady Pauline.¹¹²

So how did Scott see fit to portray the zenith of all that history and, more particularly, the north-east had achieved at the year 1861? Each of the paintings carried a biblical motto painted on the stone above them and incorporated a small explanatory text below them. In the case of *Iron and Coal* both text and motto were chosen by Lady Pauline. The text below reads:

In the NINETEENTH
CENTURY the Northumbrians
show the World what can be
done with Iron and Coal.

The biblical quote above explains how they have done this:

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do do it with thy might

although for the latter Scott himself would have apparently preferred Robert Browning's 'Knowledge it seemed and Power and Recompense'.¹¹³

Iron and Coal went on display - as a single painting - at Mr. Hare's Gallery in Grey Street, Newcastle, between 8 and 15 June 1861. Tickets for the exhibition of 'Mr. Scott's The Tyne in the Nineteenth Century: Iron and Coal' were sent out accompanied by an 'Explanation' which describes the main features of the painting as seen by perhaps the artist himself or at

¹¹² I suspect that the hiatus is a pure accident of collecting and/or archiving. The letter of 12 May 1861 was itself misfiled with 1859 correspondence (Scott omitted to include the year in the date) so other letters from the period may have, for some reason, not been saved by the family, or may be wrongly located. It is harder to make deductions from Lady Pauline's letters as so many are undated and simply missing (from the section of the archive that I have seen).

¹¹³ Paul Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*: northern readings', in Jane Vickers (ed), *Pre-Raphaelites: Painters and Patrons in the North East*, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, 1989; 55 n25.

least by a contemporary responsible for the exhibition (the document is unsigned):

The picture represents the active life of our own day in this locality. It has been studied on the Quay of Newcastle, in Messrs. Stephenson's, and Messrs. Hawks, Crawshay, and Son's factories. In the foreground is the Labour characteristic of the district, in the middle distance the Commerce, and beyond the scientific result in the shape of Railway and Telegraph.

An old varnished working drawing of a locomotive lies in the corner, beside which the master or engineer has thrown his newspaper, letters, etc. Behind is the air pump of a marine engine, an anchor, the Armstrong Shell and Great Gun, on which the child with its father's dinner waits till 12 o'clock: its school book in its lap. Behind the three 'Strikers' is a Pit Boy - a 'Driver' - with his Whip and Davy Lamp, and coming through the arch of the Old Bridge and indicating the staple trade in coal, is a loaded 'Keel': a fine mouthful of Newcastle smoke also escapes from the funnel of the Tug-Steamer on which some enthusiastic admirer of boat-racing has scrawled the name of 'Harry Clasper'. On the Quay are to be seen - fish women, fisherman, milk girl, job porter, fashionable ladies, photographer, merchants.

Other incidents in the Picture of more importance than some of those mentioned, it is to be hoped speak for themselves.¹¹⁴

The central image of the painting is of four workers in a heavy engineering workshop, three of whom are hammering an iron wheel into shape on a forge. The evidence of the 'painting from life' is clear in the holes in the workshop roof that have been included. Stephenson, in common with other manufacturers of the time, never spent enough on maintenance. The workers are muscular and idealized. According to the Wallington guide book, the 'left-hand worker is a portrait of Charles Edward Trevelyan, the future heir to Wallington' and Sir Walter's cousin. Given Scott's penchant for using his patrons and their family and associates in his paintings, this would be expected and there is a resemblance between this worker and the portrait of Sir Charles Trevelyan by Eden Eddis.¹¹⁵ In a letter that Scott wrote to Sir Charles himself much later he describes the painting and explains that 'the three strikers in the last picture, (which is perhaps the best) were from Northumbrians in Stephenson's works, selected as noble specimens'.¹¹⁶ Eighteen years on Scott remembers that he saw that picture as his best work (of the cycle); it does not seem likely that he would have forgotten whom he used as models, although the imposition of a (southern) Trevelyan face on a Northumbrian body is not impossible.

The idealization of the workers is obvious: the original Explanation claimed 'Labour characteristic of the district' as one of the three main themes, a point emphasized by the

¹¹⁴ Trevelyan papers; documents contained in Scrapbook WCT 296. No attribution of authorship.

¹¹⁵ This portrait is at Wallington Hall and is reproduced on p. 33 of the National Trust Guide Book. Sir Charles Trevelyan was not informed that he was to inherit Wallington until 1863.

¹¹⁶ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Sir Charles Trevelyan, 5 August 1879 (WCT 78).

biblical text. It is also noteworthy that the work of hammering the iron, painted ‘from life’ in the factory, is being carried out by hand: Stephenson’s had used small steam hammers since the 1840s and in 1861 (too late for the painting) a large steam hammer was introduced. Industrialists tended to view the new steam hammers with considerable pride; Scott therefore must have made a deliberate choice to represent the old way of working by hand, emphasizing the skill and the industriousness of the Northumbrian workers, picking up on the powerful bourgeois morality of the work ethic as exemplified in the choice of biblical text by Lady Pauline. Ann Bermingham has pointed out that *Iron and Coal* is a classic example of a mid-Victorian ‘allegorical model of the organic society, in which all classes worked in harmony according to a plan that tended naturally toward the greatest good for the greatest number.’ She argues that this model was normally represented in genre scenes set in the countryside, but Brown’s *Work* and Scott’s *Coal and Iron* [sic] stand out as urban versions.¹¹⁷ It is not hard to see how this could be taken as the dominant theme of the painting, and an underlying purpose of the historical cycle in its entirety.

Whilst all aspects of the picture are drawn from life studies, as ever, the composition is not a realistic scene, but rather a compilation - ‘an allegory in realistic guise’ as Julian Treuherz has put it¹¹⁸ - that juxtaposes a number of the significant recent industrial achievements of Newcastle and the north-east in what is, nonetheless, a recognizable corner of Newcastle. In Stephenson’s workshop Newcastle had the foundation of what became the modern railway, the fabled ‘home’ of the ‘father of the railway’ - George Stephenson - and his son. Robert had only recently died, in October 1859 and he had received a public funeral, worthy of a national hero, with hundreds of thousands of people following the coffin. The funeral procession had unusually been given permission by Queen Victoria to cross Hyde Park and Robert Stephenson remains one of only two engineers to be buried in Westminster Abbey. The iconic message in the depiction of Stephenson’s workshop was clear but the fact that railways form the central image of the painting is of especial significance in the context of this thesis. In this celebration of a wide variety of nineteenth-century achievements, Scott selected railways as the dominant theme. It may be possible to discern here the influence of his famously progressive patron, Sir Walter, who had spent a lot of time, energy and money

¹¹⁷ Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: the English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986; 191.

¹¹⁸ Treuherz, *Victorian Painting*; 88.

on the development of the Wansbeck Valley Railway line.

The 'old varnished working drawing of a locomotive' (which, whilst 'in the corner', in fact takes a prominent place in the foreground), has been very perfectly copied by Scott from the original engineer's drawing - but it is far from old. The name and address of 'Rob Stephenson and Co., Engineers' is stamped on it and the drawing is clearly labelled as engines nos. 1272 and 1273. No. 1272 left the factory on 4 April 1860 and 1273 left on 30 April 1860 - less than 8 months before Scott began work on the painting. Scott has chosen not only a very modern engine, but also one that caused quite a stir at the time of its manufacture in and around railway circles because of its size. It was a 4-4-0 and was the biggest engine yet built for the British market (although similar engines had gone to Turkey and Nova Scotia). Nos. 1272 and 1273 were destined for the Stockton and Darlington Railway - which of course held significance as the first ever mainline railway in the world, built by George Stephenson.¹¹⁹ In the painting, the rear wall of the workshop is removed and we have a view of the quayside, the river and the bridges outside. The 1791 road bridge, that replaced an original medieval bridge, is shown carrying horses and carriages across the Tyne, but towering over it and crossing the whole of the top section of the painting is the cast-iron High Level Bridge, designed by Stephenson and opened in 1849, and, in a nice note of symmetry, steaming across the bridge is engine no. 1273. Under (and beyond) the High Level Bridge can be seen the cone of a Gateshead glass works and the smoking chimney of, perhaps, a chemical factory.

The other 'scientific result' that is displayed is the telegraph whose wires run across the top of the picture above the High Level Bridge. This appears to be the odd one out in that the telegraph has no obvious connection with the north-east - and, indeed, no telegraph wires ran along the Newcastle quayside. However, William Fothergill Cooke, one of the two people, with Charles Wheatstone, credited with turning telegraph into a practical possibility, was brought up and went to school in Durham, which may have created a local connection. Perhaps Scott was making a claim for an adopted local son, especially as Cooke and Wheatstone were in dispute over who deserved the greater credit for the invention. It was Cooke who was largely responsible for the early negotiations with railway companies that

¹¹⁹ I am again indebted to Dr. Michael Bailey for information he was willing to share from his researches in the Stephenson archives.

ensured that the telegraph's early development was closely associated with railways, having been tested first on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1836, with a trial installation on the London and Birmingham Railway in 1837, finally having a successful installation on the Great Western out of Paddington in 1839.¹²⁰

Returning to the foreground workshop area, besides Stephenson, three other major Tyneside employers and manufacturing industries are represented. Just in front of the workmen lies an anchor - a symbol of trustworthiness reflecting on the workers - but this, along with the ship's air pump next to it, will have been made by Hawthorn's, a local manufacturer of marine engines and anchors. The girl in the left foreground is sitting on the barrel of a 100-pound 7-inch breach-loading gun made by Sir William Armstrong of Cragside's engineering works at Elswick, further up the Tyne. Armstrong's was, 'by general acknowledgement the industrial and commercial success story of the age',¹²¹ and was the biggest munition makers in the country in the 1860s, having recently secured the contract to make all the big guns for the navy. Shells for the gun lie near the girl, inscribed 'EOC' and '12p^d SECMT. SHELL'. The connection of the company to the state, as providers to the Royal Navy, is indicated by a 'VR' logo and 'Dieu et mon Droit' stamped on the gun barrel. On the anvil above the engineering drawing lie 2 envelopes, the top one of which is addressed 'Messrs. Hawks, Crawshay and Sons, Newcastle'. This was an older company than Stephenson's, dating back to the late eighteenth century, and one of the largest employers in Tyneside. It made steam engines for collieries and was one of the two contractors responsible for building the High Level Bridge. Their company band played on the train at the inaugural crossing of the bridge.¹²² On the envelopes Scott has carefully depicted the postage stamps, with Queen Victoria's head, thereby celebrating the figurehead of the age as well as the introduction (in the 1840s) of the postal service, another of the great nineteenth-century innovations in communication (along with telegraph and railways).

A pit boy, standing at the rear of the workshop gazing down onto the quay, continues both the theme of coal mining and of north-eastern inventiveness. He is carrying a whip and a

¹²⁰ See Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*; 75-6.

¹²¹ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 45.

¹²² *Illustrated London News*, 9 September 1848; 149.

miner's safety lamp. This latter shows Scott's immersion in local activities as well as the public importance of every industrial development at that time. A controversy had raged in scientific circles ever since 1815 as to whether Humphrey Davy or George Stephenson invented the first miner's safety lamp. Davy always received the public credit but, in the north-east, this was hotly disputed in favour of Stephenson's rival claim for the Geordie Lamp. A recent paper by W.F. Watson proves finally the accuracy of this claim.¹²³ The lamp in the painting, however, is not a Geordie Lamp, but a Clanny Lamp, as revealed in its very precise shape and construction. Dr. William Reid Clanny was also a north-easterner, from Bishopswearmouth. After the Felling Pit disaster of 1812 which killed 90 men and boys, caused by a build-up of methane gas, he began work on a safety lamp, the successful outcome of which was reported to the Royal Society in 1813. Both Davy and Stephenson developed their own lamps as improvements on Clanny's pioneering work. Clanny continued his work, covering many aspects of mine safety, ultimately developing a further version of the lamp that incorporated his own, Stephenson's and Davy's work. This lamp was 'the forerunner of all later lamps'¹²⁴ and is the one depicted by Scott.

The young girl sitting on the gun barrel is dressed in what appears to be the uniform of a charity school. On her lap is 'its father's dinner' as well as 'its school book'. What can be read of the book's title is '*First Book of Arithmetic for*'. The edge of the sunbeam, of which Scott was so proud, reflects up on to her face: once again it may recall the light that shines on the faces of people at scientific demonstrations in Joseph Wright of Derby's paintings a century earlier.¹²⁵ The presence of the girl, with her school book, has to be a reference to Sir Walter's keen interest in the provision of state education, particularly for girls. Scott had occasionally given drawing lessons in the school established by Sir Walter at Cambo on the Wallington Estates. The Stephensons equally had an interest in education and the company had made significant donations to charity schools. Company records show annual

¹²³ W.F. Watson, 'The Invention of the Miners' Safety Lamp: A Reappraisal', *Transactions of the Newcomen Society* Vol. 70, 1998-9; 138.

¹²⁴ Watson, 'The Invention of the Miners' Safety Lamp'; 140. Watson includes diagrams of the Geordie, Davy and the later Clanny Lamp, which facilitates the identification of the one held by Scott's pit boy.

¹²⁵ A less convincing interpretation of the sunbeam, for which Scott had expressed such fondness, comes from Paul Usherwood who suggests that it emerges from the shell, and is used in 'a witty way ... shooting diagonally across the picture to suggest the function of this new-fangled weapon'. (Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 46.)

subscriptions of between one and ten guineas paid to a number of schools including a 'Girls' Ragged School' and occasional donations - such as £200 - to a 'Vicars School'. Edward Pease, who was one of Robert Stephenson's partners and a major original investor in the Stockton and Darlington Railway (as well as being a staunch Quaker) records in his diary for Wednesday, 29 November, 1854: 'The £500 we [Robert Stephenson & Co.] have given for the establishment of schools at Newcastle on the broadest and most tolerant religious principles, seems to me will be got hold of by the never satisfied grasp of the Church of England.'¹²⁶

A fascinating detail in the painting is a newspaper whose corner hangs over the engineering drawing. The paper is dated 11 March 1861 and is called *The Northern ...* with 'Newcastle' written under the name. Usherwood speculates that this must be either the *Northern Daily Express* or the *Northern Weekly Standard*. As a description given of the former's front page suggests that it regularly fitted the pattern depicted of juxtaposed advertisements, then the *Northern Daily Express* seems likely, and this is confidently supported by David Cannadine.¹²⁷ The rest of the name is obscured by a red flower - a wild rose - which rests on the envelopes on the anvil and covers that part of the masthead. The very first items shown on the front page of the paper are three small advertisements about lending and borrowing money. One is headed 'Money' and another 'Money, Money'. A notice at the top of the second column is headed:

Newcastle School of Art and North of England Society for Fine Art
Exhibition of Students' Work
W.B. Scott, Director

A prominent advertisement in the first column of the paper is about a 'Grand Panorama!!!' celebrating Giuseppe Garibaldi's victory at Caserta and his entry into Naples in the 'Struggles for Freedom' in the battle for the unification of Italy. There are two links giving Garibaldi his place in this painting: first, the Trevelyans travelled a good deal before they settled at Wallington and they had spent two years in Rome where Lady Pauline 'was at the

¹²⁶ Quoted in Sir Alfred Edward Pease (ed), *The Diaries of Edward Pease: the father of English Railways*, Headley, London, 1907; 323.

¹²⁷ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 46; David Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan: A Life in History*, Harper Collins, London, 1992; 66.

centre of expatriate intellectual life.’¹²⁸ Italy was held high in the affections of upper-class English people at this time and the fight for unification found a ready sympathy among English liberals. The Brownings, who lived in Italy and were enthused by Garibaldi’s campaign, had certainly visited Wallington Hall before the end of 1859 and Scott had met them.¹²⁹ Second, Garibaldi was particularly close to Northumberland: he had visited Newcastle in March, 1854 on his way to Italy from America. He had been ‘rapturously received’ and ‘had been presented with a sword and a telescope which had been bought with subscriptions made by the working men of Tyneside.’ The reference in the painting is, then, Scott’s ‘salute’ to a local hero.¹³⁰ The red flower is more enigmatic, but probably serves to make more prominent the link to Garibaldi: a single red rose is claimed to represent simplicity, apparently one of Garibaldi’s most striking qualities.

Out on the bright quayside and on the river, in the middle distance of the painting, a whole different world thrives. A modern steam ship and an old schooner are tied up and are being loaded or unloaded. A keel - a traditional sail driven boat used for moving coal downstream for transshipment to bigger ships further out in the estuary - passes under the old bridge. Coal, coke and lime merchants proclaim their presence at the dock. A notice on a hut (also burning coal, to judge from its smoking chimney) says ‘Steamers for London twice ...’ and another advertises ‘Cheap Just Arrived - Prime Rotterdam Hay’. Scott is drawing attention to the frequency of the modern steamer trips to the south of the country as well as to the international trade conducted on the Tyne. Two plump gentlemen discuss business, well-presented women are working or collecting goods, a workman stands with his hands in his pockets beside some packages. There is even a photographer plying his very new trade.

Newcastle is shown complete, with all its inter-related industries and, as a result of them, as a centre of trade and commerce, dependent in turn on all the modern methods of transport and communication. The painting picks up themes of progress, science, industriousness, railway construction and the revolution in communications, the extraction, use and power of coal and iron, education, international travel and trade, and liberal sentiments. The links

¹²⁸ Wallington guide book; 23.

¹²⁹ Raleigh Trevelyan, ‘Thomas Woolner and Pauline Trevelyan: Letters to Ruskin’s “Monitress - Friend”’, unpublished paper supplied by Ashmolean Library, Oxford, c. 1979; 13.

¹³⁰ Cannadine, *G.M. Trevelyan*; 66.

between these themes and the identity that the Trevelyans had established for themselves in the world were undeniable. While the painting celebrated regional achievements - as flattery to its regional patrons - it quite explicitly also extolled the achievements and interests of the family itself. It was clearly an unrestrained celebration of the identity that the family had carved out for themselves - especially remembering that the picture was designed to be in a room that would be seen by everyone who visited the family.

And this is the spirit in which it was approached by critics when the Wallington paintings were put on display. The cycle of paintings of historical achievement, culminating in *Iron and Coal* and, specifically, its commissioning by the Trevelyans, fitted perfectly the narrative of Britain as world leader in manufacture, in civilization and in riches. Ford Madox Brown and Gabriel Rossetti both encouraged Scott to think of exhibiting the paintings publicly as a group before they went to their final home - an idea that predictably pleased Scott enormously:

Such an exhibition I am vain enough to think, would be of great service to my character as an artist. Indeed, being disinclined to struggle among London influences for a conspicuous place in art circles (supposing I had the power to take one) such an exhibition offers me the only chance of making myself known. Advantageously known, if the opinions of artists who have seen either the pictures or the photographs from them have not been amiably insincere.¹³¹

Rossetti suggested that Ernest Gambart 'would be possibly disposed to take the exhibition as a speculation' - which proved to be the case. Gambart enthusiastically took up the opportunity as soon as *Iron and Coal* was completed, in June 1861. The deal struck was that Gambart would stand the cost of (his own) gallery rental - £100 per month - and Scott would stand the incidental costs - which included adverts at £5 per week, hanging costs between £5 and £25, packing costs of between £2 and £5, and pay for each of three attendants at £2.10s per week. One shilling entry was to be charged to the exhibition and if there were a profit, Gambart and Scott would split it equally.¹³²

The cycle of paintings duly went on show in Gambart's French Gallery in Pall Mall in July 1861 to enormous critical acclaim. Despite an early review, in the *Daily News* on 8 July 1861, to the effect that Scott's drawing was 'everywhere defective, and the more so, of

¹³¹ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Sir Walter, 7 October 1860.

¹³² Trevelyan papers; Ernest Gambart to Sir Walter, 19 June 1861.

course, as the scale approaches that of life. Some of the larger heads are, indeed, ridiculously caricatured', such negative comments were rare. Before the exhibition opened the *Times* critic had spoken to Scott who reported his words to Sir Walter: 'Taylor [of the *Times*] was very demonstrative and strong about the expediency of bringing such a series of pictures before the public as an example of the sort of commission that vitalizes art and brings it out of the artificial Exhibition room limits.'¹³³ He later told Lady Pauline that 'Gambart goes so far as to say that the *Times* could make the success of the Exhibition.'¹³⁴

The *Illustrated London News*, on 13 July 1861, found *Iron and Coal* to be a very successful picture: 'the industry and enterprise of the nineteenth century are happily commemorated in a striking picture in which coal, iron, electricity, and their marvellous results are skilfully brought into assemblage.' *The Critic* published a major article by Alexander Gilchrist. His view of the cycle was that 'these pictures ... are not only infinitely the best [Scott] has produced, showing at last the full power and scope of his mind, but (we say it advisedly) among the noblest - in aim and fulfilment - which our day has produced.' He goes further: 'despite much that is naïf, much often that is almost archaic, we feel while we look at these pictures as if we were amid a clearer and rarer spiritual atmosphere than we can often climb to in modern art.' His praise for *Iron and Coal*, despite some minor criticism of overcrowding of detail, knows no bounds and he shows a fine understanding of its meaning within the cycle:

'Iron and Coal' is an original and stirring invention (a term it truly deserves), in a different class, in which action is made symbolic and suggestive of many things, and signally of the labour, commerce, and applied science, which now characterise the 'North Countree' and make it a power on the earth. The stalwart grimy sons of toil in the foreground, who with sinewy arms wield their uplifted hammers to good purpose on the malleable iron, are admirable in character and energy, and typify honest labour in a noble and ideal, as well as honest, manner. ... On the whole, however, this concluding scene of bloodless strife is a noble and suggestive complement to the solemn dignity of those which typify the earlier ages, and to the picturesque animation of those which represent the middle period of Border history.

Significantly, the art critics and commentators went further than simple praise (and occasional criticism) of the artist, his vision and his technique. The praise for the actions of the patron (Sir Walter in contemporary eyes) was unstinting. Even in 1856 when the first painting to be completed, *King Egfrid and Saint Cuthbert*, had been exhibited in Newcastle,

¹³³ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Sir Walter, 29 June 1861.

¹³⁴ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Lady Pauline, 8 July 1861.

a local paper said: 'Of the enlightened munificence of Sir Walter, we cannot say anything too laudatory.'¹³⁵ When the full historical cycle went on display the London papers were united in their praise for a patron who wished to commission historical works and who wished to use that commission to celebrate modern life. Even the *Daily News*, which was critical of Scott's artistry, joined in the praise for Sir Walter. Scott complained to Lady Pauline: 'Is not the "Daily News" curious. It seems I began late in life. Sir Walter gets the unqualified praise, I come in for the mixed.'¹³⁶ On 20 July 1861 the *Illustrated London News* said:

The circumstances under which these pictures have been produced are highly creditable to the discrimination and spirit of the gentleman who commissioned their execution, and, if we might hope to find his example followed, would hold out a cheering prospect for English historical art ... our artists might fearlessly claim the very highest rank amongst the schools of Europe.

On the same day the *Literary Gazette* spoke of the cycle's 'value as works of art, the historical interest they represent and the new field which opens up to other county gentlemen, in following the wise and patriotic example of Sir W.C. Trevelyan, encouraging high Art in a most practical and interesting method.' In similar vein, a week earlier, the *Athenaeum* stated that the 'works being commissioned by [Sir Walter] to illustrate the history of the border counties, afford an example which many of our noblemen and gentlemen might worthily follow, - of having large, boldly executed, and characteristic pictures placed in their houses.' The *Morning Herald* made the same point: 'if noblemen and gentlemen exercised the spirit and liberality displayed by Sir W.C. Trevelyan we might have more native talent developed as meritorious at a future period as it has been unexpected on the present occasion ... these pictures by Mr. Bell Scott are worthy of marking an epoch in modern art.' In his *Critic* article in August, Gilchrist 'congratulate[d] Sir W.C. Trevelyan on the result of his liberal and intelligent commission in having secured a series of historical pictures of such rare merit as decorations for his Hall.'

Ten years later this view of the critics still held, but hopes for change in the habits of patronage had been dashed. The *Times* ran an article on 15 May 1871 that included the following lament:

¹³⁵ Trevelyan papers; unidentified newspaper cutting in Scrapbook WCT 296.

¹³⁶ Trevelyan papers; Scott to Lady Pauline, 8 July 1861.

At present art patronage means the purchase of popular pictures for private galleries. ... A better example has been set by Sir W. Trevelyan's commission to Mr. W.B. Scott for the decoration of his hall at Wallington with pictures from the history of Northumberland. ... Till we have something of the kind, painters in England who would fain be historical must be content to paint historic anecdotes in battle for private patrons, and no large, noble or national school of history can find employment here.

Contemporary reviewers, then, enjoyed the artist's creation and, on the whole, his skill and technique and - usually - his style. They relished the whole idea of such a major project and they understood and valued the meaning in the cycle and in *Iron and Coal* in particular. They saw the importance of such a celebratory display of modernity and they enjoyed the exuberance of the celebration. Is there even a sense in which the reviewers themselves feel their lives and the life around them to be validated by Scott's expression in *Iron and Coal*? The wording of the reviews and the exhortations to other 'gentlemen and noblemen' suggests to me that they found a powerful affirmation of a sense of identity. What is quite clear is that they do not waver in their belief that the cycle of pictures is an 'ideological work', that the ideology is 'independent of its quality' and that the ideology expresses the 'particular vision' held by the patron of himself, his class and of the 'historical "moment"' - as theorized a century later by Nicos Hadjinicolaou.¹³⁷

Wallington Hall IV: Modern views of 'The Nineteenth Century'

Mid- to late-twentieth-century reviewers of Scott's cycle of paintings have taken this approach on board, perhaps feeling their own historical views of Victorian triumphalism to be validated by the notion of this liberal and discriminating Victorian gentleman who believed passionately in progress, in technology and in the many diverse achievements of the nineteenth century. Robin Ironside, writing in 1942, believes that the 'historical significance of [*Iron and Coal*] lies in the fact that it is one of the earliest works of art in which industry is taken seriously and recognised as the nineteenth century's contribution to civilisation.' On the artistic qualities of the cycle of paintings, however, he refers to Rossetti's praise of the works and states that 'we can now, with confidence, reject his praises. The Wallington paintings are period records of considerable interest, but they fail as works of art,' although he relents to the extent of saying that *Iron and Coal* 'is one that

¹³⁷ Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, Pluto Press, London, 1978 [first pub. in French 1972]; 102.

can also be appreciated from an aesthetic point of view - and in this it stands apart from the others', noting 'fresh observation ... care and simplicity ... a curious potency ... a precious characteristic of the mid-Victorian Pre-Raphaelite vision.'¹³⁸

Most commentators of the late twentieth century suggest that Scott was directly influenced by Ford Madox Brown's *Work*, which is one of the few other mid-Victorian paintings that celebrate manual work, and which is much better known than Scott's *Iron and Coal*. Allen Staley says that Scott's 'composition depends upon Ford Madox Brown's *Work*' while Ironside asserts that the 'little girl in the foreground is of evident Madox Brown descent.' Klingender believed that it was '[u]nder the influence of Ford Madox Brown [that] a section of the Pre-Raphaelites, especially in the provinces, turned to contemporary reality for their inspiration' - to good effect, according to E.D.H. Johnson, who judges that 'Bell Scott scores heavily in industrial realism compared with the much better known picture of "Work" by Ford Madox Brown'. Usherwood, on the other hand, takes relish in dismissing such comments as 'recent metropolitan accounts' and pointing out that no contemporary review made the comparison with Brown - hardly surprising as *Work* did not go on show until two years after *Iron and Coal* - nor did contemporaries refer to the way that Scott manages to show 'the full impact of the industrial revolution' as Staley does amongst others¹³⁹ - equally unsurprising as, before the present day, revolutions rarely identified themselves by name while they were in progress.¹⁴⁰ There must have been a mutual influence between the various artists of the Pre-Raphaelite school, Scott and Brown being no exceptions. But there is nothing at all in the researched correspondence to indicate that Scott was influenced in any way by *Work*. He refers occasionally to Brown, and to Brown's positive comments about the developing cycle of paintings, but he never mentions *Work*, even though Lady Pauline knew Brown and had visited his studio (although, as mentioned above, there is a gap in the archived correspondence covering the period of development of *Iron and Coal* so I lack

¹³⁸ Ironside, 'Pre-Raphaelite Paintings at Wallington'; 148.

¹³⁹ Allen Staley, *The Pre-Raphaelite Landscape*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973; 91. Ironside, 'Pre-Raphaelite paintings at Wallington'; 149. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; 155. Johnson, 'Victorian Artists and the Urban Milieu'; Pl. 330 a. 449. Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 40.

¹⁴⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary attributes the first usage of the phrase 'industrial revolution' to James Stuart Mill in *Principles of Political Economy* published in 1848 and the second printed usage to Arnold Toynbee in 1884. It is unlikely, therefore, that the phrase was in common use in 1861. [*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edit., Vol. VII, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.]

direct evidence on this point).

Usherwood's relatively recent (1989) attempt to disparage 'metropolitan' reviews - both modern and contemporary - of *Iron and Coal* is intriguing as well as being, peculiarly, a failure. In his article for the Laing Art Gallery in 1989, he contends that there is a distinction between the way in which southern critics read *Iron and Coal* and the way it was read in the north. He believes that 'southerners' tended towards a 'disinclination to see the picture as in some respect an allegory: that is, a work which functions like an enigmatic script in need of deciphering and supplementing by an involved, active reader' and this disinclination leads to a concentration on the picture's formal aspects: 'figure drawing, which they tend to see as faulty, and composition, which they tend to see as clumsy.' It is true that one unidentified critic noted the dire danger in which the smithies stand from each other's hammers and *The Critic* said that Scott lacked style, but it is more than a little petulant to suggest that *The Critic*, on 3 August 1861, is expressing southern prejudice by referring to Scott's workmen as 'stalwart grimy sons of toil'!¹⁴¹ He even seizes on Ruskin's comments made to Lady Pauline on 'the unnecessary bits of ugliness and vulgarity' in the whole series of paintings as a 'standard southern view of the picture [*Iron and Coal*].'¹⁴² Usherwood's belief that 'metropolitan writers past and present' have treated '*Iron and Coal* as a faithful record of a particular scene' is not only untenable in the light of the reviews that I have quoted above, but says more about a trading on a putative late-twentieth-century north-south divide than any contemporary 'survey [of] the scene from on high with a lordly - or is it a southern tourist's? - gaze.'¹⁴³

'[L]ocal viewers would have had no choice but to approach the picture differently', claims Usherwood, because 'an allegory must of its very nature be a picture composed of images appropriated from, and meaningful within, a public discourse ... [making *Iron and Coal*] a work which is best understood in relation to other public texts produced in Newcastle at the time.' He observes that '[a]pproaching the picture in this way, what surely emerges

¹⁴¹ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 40, 45 & 54n 7.

¹⁴² Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 54. Ruskin quote from Troxell Collection; Lady Pauline to Scott, August 1863. Lady Pauline admitted, now the series was complete, that she was 'annoyed' even more 'cruelly' by these aspects of the paintings than was Ruskin. Scott, in an undated letter, dismissed Ruskin's view, saying he 'somehow or other identified labour with squalor and ugliness'.

¹⁴³ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 40 & 45.

straightaway is that *Iron and Coal* can be seen as part of a discourse of civic pride, part of a rhetoric of the early 1860s celebrating the town's new-found industrial strength'. However, even the most die-hard Londoner would be hard pressed to avoid this conclusion, even if the immediate sense of local pride was lacking, and even if s/he had to read the text given below the picture to get the idea.¹⁴⁴ It is much the same as Gilchrist had to say in the *Critic* in 1861, perhaps in more restrained language. Unfortunately for the north-south divide, no 'northern' review of the exhibition of *Iron and Coal* in Newcastle makes any more of the allegorical detail and the civic discourse than the later southern reviews, a fact acknowledged by Usherwood: 'In themselves then these [local] reviews are not very useful.'¹⁴⁵

Among a number of factors that contribute to the peculiarity of Usherwood's 'northern reading' of *Iron and Coal*, is a detail which relates directly to his understanding of the role of the patron. First, his interpretation of the little girl is eccentric. He sees her as deliberately idle, an island of 'domesticity in a dark sea of bustle' whose function 'is to affirm the essential masculinity of modern industrial work'. I am aware of no contemporary discourse that questioned the masculine essence of modern industrial work, at least in the realm of heavy engineering, so such an affirmation would be unlikely to have occurred to Scott. Despite Usherwood's admonition to the reader to 'observe her clothes - they are outside clothes' he does not consider the possibility of those clothes being those of a charity school (rather than the clothes a factory worker's daughter might normally be expected to wear) and he thereby completely ignores the emphasis given - along with the arithmetic book - to education and the *allegorical* role played by the girl in relation to the interests of the patron.¹⁴⁶

In fact, despite his commitment to the allegorical nature of *Iron and Coal* and to the manner of the creation of discourse within art, Usherwood specifically dismisses any function for the role, whether active or passive, of the patron. He raises it as being appropriate to look beyond the intentions of the artist and wonders: 'should we not try to identify the attitudes of Scott's patrons, the Trevelyans? After all Sir Walter and Lady Pauline were clearly people

¹⁴⁴ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 47.

¹⁴⁵ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 40.

¹⁴⁶ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's's *Iron and Coal*'; 50-1.

of strong, not to say eccentric views, something which we would gather, if from nothing else, from the fact that, despite being members of the landed gentry, they saw fit to commission a picture of modern industry.' He decides that '[u]ndoubtedly there is a story to be told here' yet concludes that, in deciphering the allegorical meaning of this unusual painting, it 'is doubtful, however, whether such information is particularly useful to us in our present task'.¹⁴⁷ I have discussed Usherwood's views in some detail because it is one of the more recent commentaries on *Iron and Coal*; because it is antithetical to my own view; and it is, I feel, a good example of an ideological *misreading* of a painting.

Wallington Hall V: Dénouement - patronage and the 'absurd'

And so, the paradox of the Trevelyan's 'enlightened patronage' must now be revealed and the irony of the fact that so many commentators, both contemporary and modern, *appear* to have taken the Trevelyans as patrons into account. In her discussion of Brown's *Work* and his relationship with Plint, Macleod points out that 'a complete meeting of minds is rare in the history of Victorian patronage. Few artists were fortunate enough to encounter a sponsor who encouraged their loftiest intellectual and moral ambitions'¹⁴⁸ and, despite assumptions and expectations, it turns out that Scott was not one of those lucky few.

I have quoted above the enthusiastic praise heaped on Sir Walter by reviewers during and after the exhibition at the French Gallery for his and his family's desire to live, in their most public room, with this celebratory view of modernity. Among the recent commentaries, Usherwood and E.D.H. Johnson both acknowledge the importance of their wish to commission a picture of modern industry, the latter using his analysis of *Iron and Coal* to sum up the situation very precisely and succinctly: 'The Victorian rich had an heroic view of their labours in the light of history so that even a country squire, Sir Walter Trevelyan, and his wife Pauline, close friends of Ruskin, could commission a local Pre-Raphaelite from Newcastle, William Bell Scott, to celebrate "Iron and Coal on Tyneside in the nineteenth

¹⁴⁷ Usherwood, 'William Bell Scott's *Iron and Coal*'; 47.

¹⁴⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 182.

century” as the last in a series of murals’.¹⁴⁹

This is the ‘obvious’ reading of the approach of the patrons in the light of the history cycle that culminates in *Iron and Coal*. One is persuaded to the correctness of that reading not only by the many direct references to the patrons contained within the painting, but also by Lady Pauline herself in her review, published in *The Scotsman* on 3 January 1852, of Ruskin’s pamphlet *Pre-Raphaelitism* where she complained of the ‘unenlightened patronage of a large proportion of those who purchase pictures.’ She went on to praise the tenets and the courage of Pre-Raphaelite painters in the following terms: ‘A few young but determined minds have risen up to do battle with conventional falsehood, resolved to have truth only, whatever it costs them - copying no pictures, but such as nature paints on the face of creation, and not heeding any rules, but what they can read in her works.’ A writer with such views would surely be bound to encourage the painting of everyday industrial reality.

It comes, then, as a surprise to read Scott’s response, on 5 December 1857, to a letter from Lady Pauline. A few brief pleasantries are followed by:

But I must tell you, indeed this letter is for that express purpose, - what inarticulate astonishment you threw me into. *You don’t believe in the 19th century?* How is it possible that you should not believe that the latest is best? I have been trying to work out this question, with your character my dear Lady Pauline for basis, ever since your note reached me and I quite give it up. As for myself I am an egotist on the subject of development or progression, of course, - have I not written a splendid poem to show how it all is? A monomaniac I used to be, only I have been cured by avoiding it, and by finding it (on better experience) to be nearly universal and at the basis of all modern speculation and work, so that missionaries are unnecessary. Change without growth or succession without progression is not found in nature at all - not to believe in the 19th century, one might as well disbelieve that a child grows into a man, or a sketch into a picture, that we get experience as we grow old or that the fruit falls when it is ripe. Without that faith in Time what anchor have we in any secular speculation - or indeed in religion either, - why not knuckle down before St. Januarius’ bottle [not clear], or indeed keep a fetish at once? It is common I know to admit the rule of development in scientific accumulation, and of progression in the physical world, as geology exhibits it, but to deny the law to mental and moral human nature - that telegraph and chemistry cannot alter one fibre of the man - as man. And generally when this assertion is made the argument drops, people unite in shaking their heads and saying ‘very true’. But it is not true, except that we have no more fingers and toes than a savage and still only 5 senses. The savage and the 19th century Christian it is supposed are the same in species, but how different is the life, the consciousness? And then you know we celebrate every year an advent and we look for another - tho’ we may fashion different images of that according to our training.¹⁵⁰

The passionate language and the abrupt ending reveal the urgency of Scott’s message and one can only speculate about the depth of disillusionment with the whole concept of progress

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, ‘Victorian Artists and the Urban Milieu’; pl. 330 a.449.

¹⁵⁰ Trevelyan Papers; Scott to Lady Pauline, 5 December 1857. [My italics.]

and the experience of modern life that Lady Pauline must have conveyed in the letter that elicited this response. In reply she chose to ‘postpone the fight about your absurd nineteenth century till we can sit down by the fire at Wallington and have it out.’¹⁵¹

The contents of *Iron and Coal* must have been in discussion long before the work was commenced in December 1860 - especially in the light of the above - despite the lack of detailed correspondence on the subject. What snippets I have found are enough, however, to give a very different narrative to that espoused by the critics. It was not only Lady Pauline with whom Scott had trouble. In March of 1860, nine months before he began the final work, Scott responds to a letter from Sir Walter, who must, by this time, have seen an early sketch for the painting:¹⁵²

And about the Armstrong gun and shell. Do you think there is a true analogy between these and a gin palace as you hint? The gin palace is by no means characteristic of the Tyne. If a painter were illustrating low life in London he could not ignore the gin palace, the same as in illustrating the manufacturing industry of the Tyne, we cannot ignore the ironworks and inventions, especially the latest invention. If you were writing or having written a History of England would you omit the greater part of it? If so, what would be the result? The united action of men in the shape of war is no doubt a legitimate outcoming of human nature, part of the necessary experience and education of Man in Time, which no doubt he will outlive and it is to be hoped he will not need many more centuries to do so. But to ignore anything is not to annul it, to ignore facts seems to me to be shutting one's eyes against so much more knowledge necessary to make up our judgement correctly. Fortitude, endurance, heroism, self sacrifice, and so on, are no doubt parts of war as well as the destructive passions, and the Armstrong gun and shell are simply engineering inventions.¹⁵³

At that stage Scott's argument won the day but, even after *Iron and Coal* had been completed, exhibited and paid for Sir Walter still raised objections to the gun, even, it seems, to the point of asking for alterations to the finished work. In a letter of 10 March 1862, accompanying a receipt for the £100 for the picture, Scott wrote:

But about the great gun and shot in the last picture. - Are you serious in speaking of doing away with them? I quite agree it is a pity we have to introduce them, but as they are (strange to say) characteristic of the present years and of the locality I fancy we must not shut our eyes to them. Besides they are in their own way triumphs of engineering. By the late discussions in Parliament, as far as I could make out, the expense already incurred by the establishment and maintenance of works for the new ordinance has been over half a million. The movement is so remarkable that I fancy it ought to be represented quite as prominently as it is in the picture.

¹⁵¹ Troxell Collection, Princeton University; Lady Pauline to Scott, 23 December 1857. The letter to which Scott responded has not been located.

¹⁵² Asa Briggs uses a watercolour sketch for *Iron and Coal* as an illustration in *Iron Bridge to Crystal Palace: Images and Impact of the Industrial Revolution*, Book Club Associates, London, 1979; pl. ix. The watercolour is held in Thames and Hudson Ltd. archives.

¹⁵³ Trevelyan Papers; Scott to Sir Walter, 28 March 1860.

Sir Walter was a notoriously avid campaigner against alcohol and an untiring advocate of pacifism. He believed that ‘having what is reckoned an efficient army and navy too often leads into unjustifiable, unnecessary and costly war’ which would ‘have no other end than to hasten our downward course to that ultimate ruin, which must, and deservedly, be the fate of that people which adopt it.’¹⁵⁴ It must have been anathema to him to have to live with Scott’s glorification of the invention of the means of modern warfare - and to have to acknowledge the local associations. Most curiously, however, in this instance Lady Pauline decidedly did not share her husband’s views, or at least she did not at the time of the Crimean War. She wrote to Ruskin from Wallington on 11 December 1854:

I hope you are insane about the Crimean war, you are perverse enough to say you don’t care about it just out of malicious wickedness, pray don’t. It is such a wonderful thing, and will do everybody such a quantity of good and shake up the lazy luxurious youth of England out of conventionalism & affectation into manhood and nobleness. Oh what a comfort it is to find that people have not degenerated after all, and that no one has yet succeeded in ‘laughing England’s cavalry away’. Whatever comes of it we may be thankful for ever, for Alma and Balaclava.¹⁵⁵

It is possible that, as with *Grace Darling*, Lady Pauline helped Scott win the argument with Sir Walter.

The Trevelyans, the perfect example of enlightened bourgeois patrons from the mid nineteenth century, absorbed all the praise without revealing to the public at large just how dismayed they were with the inspiration of most of it. Between them they opposed details of Scott’s final painting and the portrayal of modernity itself - giving grist, perhaps (at last), to Klingender in his argument that the bourgeoisie wanted nothing more than to turn their backs on images of modernity. This is an example of a case where the artist’s views prevailed but where the assumptions about the production of works of art - despite the growing discourse of individual genius - led all reviewers to presume that the patrons had exercised control. Fyfe has said that, in the traditional aristocratic collection, ‘[v]isitors are presented with the viewpoint of the patron’; Hadjinicolaou agrees that ‘in all societies up to our times the history of the production of pictures is the history of ruling class visual

¹⁵⁴ Letter in *Herald of Peace*, 19 May 1868.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Surtees, *Reflections of a Friendship*; 92. The battle of Alma had been won in September 1854 and the battle of Balaclava, which was the stage for the charge of the Light Brigade, had taken place in October of the same year. Presumably detailed news had not yet been released. Surtees notes Lady Pauline’s misquote of Byron who said that Cervantes ‘smiled Spain’s cavalry away’ in *Don Juan C.* xiii, xi.

ideologies. Pictures are often the product in which the ruling classes mirror themselves.¹⁵⁶ The *apparent* truth of Hadjinicolaou's position has been well upheld by those who saw *Iron and Coal* in the mid nineteenth century and found it to reflect their own view of life and by those who have commented on the painting more recently and assumed that this was its function. But closer examination reveals that:

Whatever the degree of precision with which the patron's class position is defined, it is too limiting to read a picture exclusively in terms of its owner's assumptions, views and interests. One result of this method of analysis is to see pictures as invariably confirmatory. It does not allow for any differentiation in the role of the picture. There are shifting relationships between patron and painting when, in one case, a painting is simply aligned with a patron's viewpoint, in another it actively confirms the position of the patron, or, in a third case, it reformulates a position. ... To posit a unitary meaning which the picture, or any text, has, is to impose from outside a coherence which takes no account of different strands, breaks and contradictions which the work may encompass.¹⁵⁷

The contradictions between ideology of patron and painting, the tensions between creative artist and patron and, critically, between the public understanding of a painting and the reality of its production, as evidenced in the case of *Iron and Coal*, are almost complete, despite the affirmation of identity, life style and choices that a detailed reading of *Iron and Coal* appears to suggest.

Railways and patronage

This chapter shows that there *were* art patrons who chose fine art representations of the railway, including depictions of the railway in the landscape. It has gone into considerable detail of some examples in order to gain some understanding of the processes involved. In following the development of the paintings for Wallington Hall, it has drawn out the detailed background to the relationships involved and the arguments between artists and patrons, so that the rather surprising *dénouement* can be clearly understood. Some other examples of patronage have been examined for purposes of comparison and in order to illuminate points made. As a result, the chapter has strayed from landscape into portraiture and into what may be termed a form of modern history painting (e.g. *Conference of Engineers, Iron and Coal*).

¹⁵⁶ Gordon J. Fyfe, 'Art exhibitions and power during the nineteenth century' in John Law (ed), *Power, Action and Belief*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986; 25. Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, Pluto Press, London, 1978 [first pub. 1972]; 102.

¹⁵⁷ Arscott, 'Employer, husband, spectator'; 159.

It is not surprising that portraits of railway engineers should be rich in depictions of railways and engines as portraiture was a *genre* that traditionally displayed in the background artefacts related to the subject's life. Lucas' work with the Stephensons is interesting: the selection of artefacts for the backgrounds of the portraits seems to have very carefully focused on things and events that represented personal triumphs. The art was tightly bound in with current events and 'political' statements in the competitive world of railway engineering. The question arises of the extent of control by patron or artist: was the patron promoting himself or was the artist flattering the subject? In this case I have only been able to speculate but one is left in no doubt that a strong sense of personal identity was being fostered. Some of the portraits were publicly exhibited, but on the whole the paintings were intended for hanging in the home.

The Trevelyans' histories of Northumberland also contained personal tributes and, in this case, they seem to have been mostly inserted on the insistence of the artist to flatter his more diffident patron. The concept, however, of a cycle of history paintings showing local achievements up to the present day - a concept which was the patrons' own - dramatically associates the family with an Enlightenment narrative of progress - not least because the cycle 'culminated' in the marble statue called *Civilization*. The paintings were intended for private consumption - in a house that had regular visitors from the intellectual and artistic élite of the day - although in the event they were widely exhibited before final installation. And at those exhibitions the critics all picked up on the association between the patrons and the narrative of progress - especially in relation to the painting of the railway and other technologies, *Iron and Coal: the Nineteenth Century*. It is especially noteworthy that this association was universally praised.

But this is precisely where we find a cautionary tale. The details I have given establish exactly what went on behind the scenes before the paintings were presented to public view. The effect has been to reveal the pitfalls and subtleties of interpreting social attitudes from paintings, however 'obvious' they seem to be. Almost all of the paintings discussed in this chapter were commissioned and it is therefore very easy to draw conclusions about the extent to which the patrons sought to claim an identity through the medium of the paintings they hung in their homes. I believe the patron's role to be critical in the understanding of a work of art, as I have made clear in the discussion of Usherwood's work but, in *Iron and*

Coal in particular, we see that there is a negotiation between patron and artist - which may be public and artist in other circumstances. Taking into account Holman Hunt's experience with *Awakening Conscience* and Solomon's with *First Class: The Meeting - 'And at first meeting loved'*, as well as Scott's with the Trevelyan's, it is clear that the outcome of the negotiations is not pre-determined. Any interpretation of the final result must be highly nuanced.

This applies also in the case of Alexander's and Treffry's commissioned paintings of the Ballochmyle and Luxulyan viaducts respectively. The very choice of fine art as a medium for the display is indicative of their confidence in their place in both culture and the modern world. Both wanted conventional landscape paintings with the railway, modernity, inserted boldly into them. But was there a limit to their boldness? These paintings, while proudly displayed in the home for all to see, were intended for private consumption and not for public exhibition - like (as far as we know) the *Elephant* in the early years of the century. In the next chapter we will see that when J.W. Carmichael exhibited a picturesque landscape with a prominent railway viaduct (*London Road Viaduct on the Brighton, Lewes and Hastings Railway*) at the Royal Academy in 1848 (the same year that Hill completed *The Braes and Bridge of Ballochmyle*), he received a very rough ride from the art establishment. The critical response could not have been more different from that given to *Iron and Coal*. There was, then, something unequivocal in the commissioning of a *landscape painting* containing a railway. A landscape in the home of a landowner still carried a wealth of meanings associated with power, wealth, status: to place modernity at its centre challenged the increasingly fragile stability established by generations of landscape painters. I will now turn to those artists who mounted the challenge publicly, and I will also engage at some length with the debate over the most memorable of these: Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*.

CHAPTER 6

THE RAILWAY IN THE PUBLIC LANDSCAPE

In no other developed country were traces of the past and apprehensions of the future to be experienced so closely together; and it was still far from clear which would gain the greater hold on the national consciousness.¹

If, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the display of modernity had been treated with some ambivalence, that all seemed to change in 1851 when Britain put itself and its lead in industry and technology on spectacular display in the Great Exhibition. In its exhibits and in the mounting of the exhibition, Britain irrevocably identified itself in the eyes of the world as an industrial powerhouse and the arbiter of modernity.

This was not necessarily the way the promoters of the exhibition saw it in advance; there were divisions of opinion amongst organizers and there was a huge amount of opposition or simply apathy to be overcome. But in the event the exhibition was hugely popular with all classes of society - and, incidentally, gave the railway an opportunity to prove its strategic worth as a mover of massive numbers of people.² The exhibition gave space for a debate between the two aspects of industrial production in Britain - craftsmanship (associated with quality) and machine production (associated with quantity) - and while 'the exhibition was too big, too amorphous, too decentralized for its lessons to be clear' it remains the case that 'it defined Britain as an industrial nation.'³ It promoted a very specific narrative of life in Britain. 'World's fairs,' David Nye tells us, 'like museums, integrated artefacts into coherent ensembles and interpreted them according to overriding themes. They marketed the idea of progress itself, providing an overall impression of coherent historical development.' The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first such fair and it presented the latest products and inventions 'in a harmonious display' inside the Crystal Palace, 'a new architectural form [that] announced the triumph of new technologies.' To ensure that this discourse was not

¹ David Blayney Brown, 'Rule Britannia? Patriotism, Progress and the Picturesque in Turner's Britain' in Michael Lloyd (ed), *Turner*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1996; 51.

² See Jack Simmons, *The Victorian Railway*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1995; 275-6.

³ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999; 127.

lost on any part of its audience, ‘world’s fairs exploited every form of the man-made sublime.’⁴

The association between the sublime and industry continued from the late eighteenth century to the Great Exhibition and beyond. One year after the newspapers used a rhetoric of the sublime to describe the destruction of Round Down Cliff, J.M.W. Turner used the same aesthetic to extraordinary effect in the most famous railway landscape picture, *Rain, Steam and Speed: the Great Western Railway*.⁵ This chapter focuses on the debate about the meaning of *Rain, Steam and Speed* that began when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844 and continues apace to this day. It sets it in the context of some of Turner’s other paintings and it will also look at the few contemporary artists who also positioned railways in landscapes that were intended for public consumption at the art gallery and on the art market (unlike the paintings surveyed in the previous chapter). These include John Martin’s *The Last Judgement*, another complex use of the sublime; John Carmichael’s picturesque *London Road Viaduct on the Brighton, Lewes and Hastings Line*; and David Cox’s wistful *Wind, Rain and Sunshine*. All these paintings follow on from Turner’s lead and appear in the decade running up to the Great Exhibition. First, I will look briefly at how the relationship between the sublime and technology has been theorized.

Technology and the sublime

As discussed briefly in Chapter 2, the ‘sublime’ was defined for the eighteenth century by Edmund Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, first published in 1759. ‘Beauty’ was pleasing and gentle while ‘sublimity’ was intense, aroused terror and awe, astonishment: ‘The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is

⁴ David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996; 205 & 199.

⁵ It may not be an exaggeration to say that it is the most famous railway landscape painting in the world. A recent book on artistic representations of transport, published by Italian State Railways, has *Rain, Steam and Speed* on its dust jacket. (Ferrovie dello Stato, *L'uomo e il movimento*, Leonardo International, Milan, 2002.)

that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.’⁶ This experience of the sublime overwhelmed reason briefly but was swiftly recontained by it. Burke’s writings led to much debate on whether sublimity was an intrinsic quality of the object of contemplation or whether it was the state of mind induced by the object. Immanuel Kant, who developed Burke’s aesthetic theory, resolved that sublimity resided in the mind, the result of a dialogue between the individual and the object, ‘a function of the extreme tension experienced by the mind in apprehending the immensity or boundlessness of the grandest conceptions.’⁷ It created a consciousness ‘of our superiority over nature within, and thus also over nature without us’. The ‘feeling of the sublime’ is a pleasure because of the power of ‘the checking of the vital forces’. This, however, cannot be ‘united with sensuous charm’ so, ‘as the mind is alternately attracted and repelled by the object, the satisfaction in the sublime implies not so much positive pleasure as wonder or reverential awe, and may be called a negative pleasure.’⁸

Increasingly, the communication between the individual and nature that formed the root of the sublime came to include that between the individual and non-natural phenomena - what David Nye has termed the ‘technological sublime’. This is an interesting adjustment of the theory as, from being a reaction of awe to the works of God that cannot, by their nature, be understood through reason, it becomes a reaction to a manifestation *of* human reason.⁹ This, as we saw, was the reaction to which the industrial sublime appealed as expressed by artists such as Joseph Wright of Derby, Philip de Loutherbourg and Turner himself (who, as a youth, was an enthusiastic disciple of de Loutherbourg¹⁰). Their candle-lit factories in the moonlight and flaming furnaces of Coalbrookdale challenged God’s creation with the constructions of human reason (see, for example, Figs. 10 and 11). These scenes aroused awe and wonder but also a consciousness of human superiority over nature in two ways: one,

⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990 [first pub. 1759]; 53.

⁷ Andrew Wilton, ‘The Sublime in the Old World and the New’ in Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer (eds), *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820 - 1880*, Tate Publishing, London, 2002; 13.

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952 [first pub. 1790]; 504.

⁹ See Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 60.

¹⁰ See Eric Shanes, *Turner’s Human Landscape*, Heinemann, London, 1990; 156.

in the awareness of the ability for reason to overcome our fear and two, in the depiction of the conquest of nature itself. It is significant that the meaning of the natural sublime relates to eternity (God's time) while that of the technological sublime relates to the future (the achievements and *progress* of the human race).

Nye describes how, in the eighteenth century, Burke was reviving a concept that had been in existence since antiquity and he suggests that the 'history of the sublime ... shows, if nothing else, that, although it refers to an immutable capacity of human psychology for astonishment, both the objects that arouse this feeling and their interpretations are socially constructed.' He seeks to 'stress the historicity and politics of sublime experiences, presenting them as emotional configurations that both emerge from and help to validate new social and technological conditions'¹¹ - in an echo of Ralph Waldo Emerson's hopes that we encountered in Chapter 4, from one and a half centuries earlier, that art might offer 'the possibility of reconciling the new machine power with the natural order.'¹² Nye looks at the 'emergence of new forms of the sublime, considering them not as absolute categories of aesthetic experience but as contingent categories within social and political systems.'¹³

This underlies the differences between British and American art of the period. While British art remained resolutely discreet on the subject of technology, 'the American sublime embraced technology. Where Kant reasoned that the awe inspired by a sublime object made men aware of their moral worth, the American sublime transformed the individual's experience of immensity and awe into a belief in national greatness.' In the specific socio-political circumstances of America, the 'dynamism of the railroad made it possible to merge westward expansion and Manifest Destiny with the sublime' with the result that 'engineering projects took increasingly prominent places in landscape paintings.'¹⁴ What has been dubbed the 'machine aesthetic' took hold, romanticizing both the railroad and the engines that plied

¹¹ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 3.

¹² Quoted in Leo Marx, 'Does Pastoralism Have a Future?' in John Dixon Hunt (ed), *The Pastoral Landscape*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992; 216.

¹³ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; xvii.

¹⁴ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 43 & 59.

it.¹⁵ In Britain, where ‘moral worth’ was indistinguishable from a proper sense of patriotism and national identity that had long been openly linked with England’s landscape heritage, which in turn was linked to the ruling ideology, the railway and other forms of the technological sublime were still unsure of themselves at mid century.

Even in America there was a dual perspective. The ‘pervasive belief in Manifest Destiny tended to conceal the contradictions between the need for economic growth and an aesthetic desire to preserve the natural landscape’.¹⁶ For many, a ‘railroad, a skyscraper, or a hydroelectric dam proclaimed the ever-increasing power of technicians, demonstrating their ability to disrupt what had become normal perception.’ In this understanding of the sublime there is a similarity with Julie Wosk’s description of the experience of nineteenth-century developments as ‘breaking frame’. This disruption, ‘this radical break in experience became a necessary epiphany; it reinforced the sense of progress.’ But for others, the sublime response to the dominance of technology involved different emotions: ‘the skyscraper destroyed the scale of the city and reduced the citizen to a stick figure, a featureless pedestrian seen from a great distance.’ Nye offers this as an unresolved contradiction within the technological sublime: ‘This opposition suggests a contradiction at the heart of the technological sublime that invites the observer to interpret a sudden expansion of perceptual experience as the corollary to an expansion of human power and yet simultaneously evokes the sense of individual insignificance and powerlessness.’¹⁷ The on-looker is amazed at the human achievement, but diminished by its overwhelming size or power; in the natural sublime this feeling was more comfortable because the contrast was between human powerlessness and God’s omnipotence. If the omnipotence appeared to belong to humanity, therein lay the contradiction. But, although it could not fully erase the ‘fracturing that haunted the nineteenth century’s surface rhetoric of progress’,¹⁸ the sublime offered a way of coping positively with the new technologies.

¹⁵ See Susan Danly, ‘Introduction’, in Susan Danly and Leo Marx (eds), *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988; 8.

¹⁶ Susan Danly, ‘Introduction’; 16.

¹⁷ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 285.

¹⁸ Julie Wosk, *Breaking Frame: Technology and the Visual Arts in the Nineteenth Century*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1992; 4. (See Chapter 1 of the present work.)

In Britain there was a very different rhetoric of patriotism and without the passion of the construction of the new nation there was much more to be lost in the disruption of 'what had become normal perception.' In the early nineteenth century the technological sublime was able to evoke pride in the expansion of human power but by the time the railway spread round the countryside the sense of 'powerlessness' that the sublime reaction could convey was politically threatening. Nye sums this up: 'One can either be outside, terrified by the speed and noise of the railway, or riding triumphantly over the landscape.'¹⁹ Inside or outside - the position taken was based on social and political factors and conflicts that were reflected in cultural choices. The promoters of the Great Exhibition themselves made a powerful political choice in allying Britain's national identity to the technological sublime.

The sublime in British landscape could never be as natural or as central as it was in America. Sublime paintings of Swiss mountains and Scottish waterfalls were popular but the natural landscape did not offer the same sublime opportunities as the American wilderness - and it was the gentle, pastoral nature of British landscape that defined Englishness rather than the pioneering spirit that came to define America's 'Manifest Destiny'. This increased the problems for British artists in introducing the technological sublime to a British landscape. John Ruskin believed anyway that, by the mid nineteenth century, the sublime as a useful aesthetic concept was passé. It had been through various definitions and for Ruskin 'anything which elevates the mind' or that has 'the effect of greatness upon the feelings' is sublime.²⁰ Nonetheless, the sublime that inspires awe or fear had not been abandoned as a style. In Turner's search for a 'modern concept of the sublime'²¹ he explored both natural and technological inspiration. He invested scenes with an intense personal involvement and managed to encourage an imaginative engagement from the viewer, both deemed to be crucial aspects of the sublime experience. His 'quest for insight into the dominance, beauty and destructiveness of nature, his interest in scientifically conceived forces, and his program of expressing in art the root potency of such phenomena all became salient features of his

¹⁹ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 285.

²⁰ Quoted in William Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997; 14.

²¹ Giuseppe Gatt, *Turner*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1968; 38.

romanticism.’²² We will now see how this was used in his railway painting, starting with a survey of some of the contemporary reviews.

A railway in the landscape

When *Rain, Steam and Speed* (Fig. 42) appeared in the Royal Academy’s summer exhibition in June 1844 it caused a sensation. Here was the railway taking its defiant place in a publicly exhibited landscape, and put there by the greatest landscape artist of the period. And his painting caused shock, horror, fear, some admiration and a lot of confusion: the latter is still very evident today. Nye comments that a ‘volcano, unlike a painting, can kill the observer. An eruption can cause the terror that lies at the core of Burke’s philosophy of the sublime’.²³ It could be said that the metaphorical effect of *Rain, Steam and Speed* on its early viewers gave the lie to the first part of that statement. William Makepeace Thackeray, reviewing it in *Fraser’s Magazine*, wrote: ‘there comes a train down upon you, really moving at the rate of fifty miles an hour, and which the reader had best make haste to see, lest it should dash out of the picture, and be away up Charing Cross through the wall opposite.’ The *Morning Chronicle* reporter, on 8 May 1844, agreed that Turner ‘actually succeeds in placing a railroad engine and train before you, which are bearing down on the spectator at the rate of 50 miles an hour.’ The *Critic* of 15 May 1844 deemed this reality to make one ‘absolutely almost afraid to stand before the advancing train.’ Turner knew well that ‘the efficacy of the sublime sensation is intensified by the close proximity of the viewer with the threatening object’²⁴ and this is precisely the effect that he achieved for contemporary viewers.

Opinions were divided on the painting, but confusion was perhaps the most prominent reaction. The *Spectator* deplored the ‘laxity of form and licence of effect ... greater than people will allow.’ The *Morning Chronicle* began its review with ‘“Speed, Steam and Rain” [*sic*] is perhaps the most insane and the most magnificent of all his prodigious compositions’

²² Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 14.

²³ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; xx.

²⁴ Gerald Finley, ‘Turner and the Steam Revolution’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, Vol. 12, 1988; 26. These effects were achieved despite the painting not being especially large - 35¾ x 48 inches - and being surrounded by the normal ‘chaos’ of the display at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.

and ended: 'How these wonderful effects are produced it is beyond the power of man to say.' Thackeray comprehensively damned the painting with faint (very faint) praise: 'As for Mr. Turner, he has out-prodigied all former prodigies. He has made a picture with real rain' but the rain 'is composed of dabs of dirty putty *slapped* onto the canvas with a trowel ... And as for the manner in which the '*Speed*' is done, of that the less said the better ... he world has never seen anything like this picture.' The *Times* of May 8 is measured, if undecided:

The railways have furnished Turner with a new field for his eccentric style. His 'Rain, Steam and Speed' shows the Great Western in a very sudden perspective, and the dark atmosphere, the bright sparkling fire of the engine, and the dusky smoke, form a very striking combination. Whether Turner's pictures are dazzling unrealities, or whether they are realities seized upon at a moment's glance, we leave his detractors and admirers to settle between them.

It is of note that it is the style of the painting that brings forth most comment, as well as its sublimity. None criticize the choice of subject; indeed, the *Times* seems perhaps impressed by the novelty. While few seemed to know what to make of it at the time (Ruskin commented on Turner's attempt to see what he could do with an ugly subject) it has managed to lead to only greater confusion as the years have gone by. Thirty years after it appeared, the demonic aspects of the sublime were still dominant for Théophile Gautier who wrote in *Histoire du Romantisme* that *Rain, Steam and Speed*'s was 'a real cataclysm ... You would have said it was the setting for the end of the world. Through all this writhed the engine, like the Beast of the Apocalypse, opening its red glass eyes in the shadows, and dragging after it, in a huge tail, its vertebrae of carriages.'²⁵ A year later, Cosmo Monkhouse had begun to suspect there was something else behind the sublime presentation. In a collection of engravings that included the picture in 1878 he wrote that 'some persons see a deeper meaning in this picture, something analogous to that of the *Téméraire* - the old order changing, the easy going past giving way to the quick-living future.'²⁶ Individual views of the painting perhaps reached an extreme with P.G. Hamerton who wrote a monograph on Turner in 1889 and gave the following curious description: 'It is interesting to see how Turner has got round the highly unpoetic aspect of a locomotive, rails and a viaduct. ... The picture answers well to its title: it gives the idea of rain, steam and speed, but the railway is

²⁵ Théophile Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 3rd edit., Paris, 1877; 371.

²⁶ From Cosmo Monkhouse, *The Turner Gallery*, Vol. III, (n.p.) London, 1878, quoted in John Gage, *J.M.W. Turner: 'A Wonderful Range of Mind'*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987; 234.

given as little prominence as possible.’²⁷ Another French writer, J. Leclercq, in 1904 in a discussion of *Rain, Steam and Speed* and *Snowstorm: Steamboat off a Harbour’s Mouth* commented that ‘we get the idea that Turner’s great strength was his complete lack of prejudices, in an age when artists, more than today, were full of them.’²⁸ This is an interesting remark: it can easily be argued that, as far as subject matter for art was concerned, Turner had no apparent prejudices. But what political prejudices did he hold, if any? What was his approach to modernity and technology? Was he on the train, riding triumphantly over the landscape, or outside it, terrified? Different commentators have had a lot to say in answer to these questions but, before I turn to them, I will briefly discuss the feasibility of placing interpretations on Turner’s paintings.

Interpreting Turner

Turner left no explicit clues as to the intentions or meanings of his work. Unlike so many painters he did not, as far as is known, discuss what he was trying to achieve with his work in letters to friends or in diaries. As he did much of his later work without patronage external influence is less direct and provides clues only by inference. Eric Shanes quotes A.G.H. Bachrach: ‘To discover [Turner’s] symbolism is an undertaking as delicate as it is risky. The Turner admired by the twentieth century is not the Turner admired - or spurned - by his own time, nor the Turner he admired himself.’²⁹ In Chapter 1 the dangers were addressed of making interpretations in the present day of paintings where contemporary comment differed significantly or was effectively absent. Turner’s *Crossing the Brook* was the example used: James Hamilton’s view of it as a comment on the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the opportunities for British industry was contrasted with the comment from Turner’s contemporary, John Ruskin, that ‘it is an agreeable, cool, grey rendering of space and form’.³⁰ Michael Rosenthal goes so far as to state that Turner uses *Crossing the Brook*

²⁷ P.G. Hamerton, *Turner*, Paris, 1889; 94.

²⁸ J. Leclercq, ‘J.W. Turner’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 3. Ser., Vol. 32, 1904.

²⁹ Quoted in Shanes, *Turner’s Human Landscape*; 9.

³⁰ John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. I, George Allen, London, 1900 (3rd edit.); 180. Also see James Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*, Tate Gallery Publishing, London, 1998.

specifically to make a point about paintings being unable to sustain the comment on reality required of them in wartime and he sees it as a reference ‘to the ideal of beauty realized by Claude ... form was significant, but there was no content’.³¹ However, another of Turner’s contemporaries, Thackeray, in reviewing *The Fighting Téméraire* for *Fraser’s Magazine*, said that Turner ‘makes you see and think of a great deal more than the objects before you’³² and Ruskin himself actually supported the notion of ‘hidden meanings’ when he said in 1856 that there was ‘something very strange and sorrowful in the way Turner used to hint only at these under meanings of his; leaving us to find them out, helplessly, and if we did *not* find them out, no word more ever came from him. Down to the grave he went, silent. “You cannot read me; you do not care for me; let it all pass; go your ways.”’³³ Shanes insists on the need for interpretation of Turner’s work, arguing that Turner studied and used associative images extensively in an effort to stimulate the imagination; he ‘realised that verbalisation would diminish the imaginative impact of his pictures ... he knew that a viewer receives an imaginative charge by making his own connections, and metaphorical enhancements would be completely lost if the artist enforced associations on our behalf.’ It is important now to retrieve and unpick these metaphors as there is a danger of ‘los[ing] sight of Turner’s historical and aesthetic context’ such that ‘literalism prevails, blocking realisation of the more subtle dimensions of Turner’s art.’³⁴

Turner was highly skilled in his use of painting conventions, and it was perhaps this that facilitated his transgressive approach to the accepted discourses of landscape. Even his use of association imagery was transgressive and Shanes bases his analysis of Turner’s art on his knowledge of the use of association in the art of his predecessors: ‘Turner did not use association in a cultural vacuum but as part of a long and well-hallowed tradition in landscape painting’. Yet he broadened that tradition by using associations undreamed of

³¹ Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, Phaidon, Oxford, 1982; 112.

³² *Fraser’s Magazine*, June 1839; 744.

³³ Quoted in Shanes, *Turner’s Human Landscape*; 339.

³⁴ Shanes, *Turner’s Human Landscape*; 23 & 38. He is wise enough to apologize in an Afterword for having trodden on the artist’s toes in undertaking an ‘explication of his work’ thereby ‘subverting the artist’s stated intentions’ (p 339).

either by historical figures (for example, Claude Lorraine) or, on the whole, by his peers.³⁵ In his many works for his regular patron, Lord Egremont, Turner, in painting the Petworth Estate, would include some aspect of the agricultural improvements that Egremont had instituted (and of which he was proud), breaking the code on the inclusion of evidence of labour in an estate landscape. The fact that Egremont purchased all these paintings and continued to encourage Turner to paint at his estate suggests that this approach suited Egremont well. It seems probable that this was an example of patron and artist in amicable agreement, although, with the case of the Trevelyans in mind, caution must be urged. Turner was obviously not shy about confronting modernity, but the difficulties of interpreting what he felt about it will be seen later in this chapter in the discussion about *Rain, Steam and Speed*. First, that discussion needs to be set in the context of his other paintings of modernity.

Turner and modernity

Turner's transgression of the convention of showing the city in a distant prospect was discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to his 1816 watercolour of Leeds (Fig. 19). He painted the countryside and the city together as 'an integrated, wholly industrialized landscape.'³⁶ In another townscape, *Dudley, Worcester* (Fig. 43), the town is shown on a distant hill but its industry has spilled down in a sublime, glowing chaos of mills and lime kilns to fill the banks of the river that flows in the foreground and that has itself become part of the industry of the city, crowded, as it is, with barges transporting goods and raw materials. Fewer people are shown working but the evidence of hard labour is unavoidable. The town basks in prosperity on the hill but the sense of transience of all human constructs is made clear in the ruined feudal castle and the priory that dominates the town at the top of the hill. This picture led Ruskin, who had owned the painting for a while, to comment many years later that he saw its smoke shrouded church spire as a premonition of 'what England was to become'; but whether he meant that it was a premonition for him, or that, for once, he imputed this

³⁵ Shanes, *Turner's Human Landscape*; 338.

³⁶ Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994; 119.

premonition to Turner's intended meaning is not made clear.³⁷ Ruskin, like many other commentators since, 'used Turner's art to illustrate his own critique of industrialism, of the smoke-darkened skies which symbolized the nation's corruption.'³⁸ In a foretaste of the disagreements about Turner's meanings that we will encounter below, Shanes describes *Dudley*'s 'new moon [that] rises above a bleak scene of industrial activity and "urban blight"'³⁹ while Rodner sees it as a 'positive view of Britain's expanding economy of the 1820s and 1830s ... an analytical and imaginative commentary on manufacturing technology and its relationship to the traditional landscape' as well as having significance for its 'romantic suggestion of power and energy beneath the surface of the observed industry.'⁴⁰ From the aesthetic point of view, Andrew Wilton believes that Turner found industrial scenes exciting and 'immensely stimulating', expressive of 'his sense of the intrinsic grandeur of man and his affairs' and *Dudley* represents 'the most complete of Turner's essays in the "Industrial Sublime"'.⁴¹ Rodner itemizes the ways in which *Dudley* represented the epitome of the industrial revolution for Turner: it was believed at the time that iron was first smelted in *Dudley* (incorrectly, as it happens, although it was not far behind Coalbrookdale); Thomas Newcomen's first ever steam engine was developed to pump water from a coal mine near *Dudley Castle* in 1712; and, while the ruined castle might suggest the victory of the new economic and social system over the ancient feudal lords, in fact the aristocratic family that had owned the castle for generations was one that had enthusiastically embraced industrialization from early days and had sponsored enclosure bills, bought up mineral rights, financed canal construction and generally made the most of modern opportunities.⁴² There is, therefore, an ambivalence in the painting; it describes contradictions that operate on many different levels.

In his paintings for Lord Egremont, Turner seemed to show his patron's 'improvements' in

³⁷ Quoted in William S. Rodner, 'Turner's *Dudley*: Continuity, Change and Adaptability in the Industrial Black Country', *Turner Studies* Vol. 8 No. 1, Summer 1988.

³⁸ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 139.

³⁹ Shanes, *Turner's Human Landscape*; 108.

⁴⁰ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 107 and 117.

⁴¹ Andrew Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime*, British Museum Publications, London, 1980; 97 & 169.

⁴² Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 108-9.

a positive light. But he also produced pictures that questioned the enthusiasm for agricultural improvement. We have seen how landscape conventions sought to disguise or naturalize the changes in agriculture that had led to the impoverishment of much of the population of the countryside. The tensions created and the breakdown of the supposed social harmony of traditional country life were obscured. With *Ploughing up Turnips, near Slough* (Fig. 44), exhibited in 1809, Turner presents weary peasants working in turnip fields with Windsor Castle hovering as a misty presence in the distance. To one side an overseer has dismounted from his horse and is regarded with suspicion by a woman seated on a log nearby. Most present day commentators have read this painting as a classic example of Turner's patriotism: turnips were a new crop, part of the modernization process of agriculture, that could be nutritiously fed to the animals grazing in the newly enclosed fields. The picture thus shows the progressiveness of English agriculture while the presence of the overseer amongst the labouring peasants shows co-operation between the classes. This is emphasized by the inclusion of Windsor Castle which associates the King (himself an enthusiastic agricultural improver) with the scene, at a time when Britain not only had to work as hard as possible to produce food, but also needed to operate in close harmony as a society to defeat the common enemy, Napoleon.

But a close reading by Michele Miller casts doubt on this interpretation. The striking modernity of the image of the cultivation of turnips eradicated 'any sense of the timeless continuity of British Civilization' which landscapes had typically used to evoke patriotism. Miller also sees that the presence of the overseer, presented apart from the workers and dressed in bright white, unlike their dull clothing, 'confirms that these laborers are employed on someone else's land' and that he is checking up on them. Even the presence of Windsor Castle had, according to Miller, the effect of reminding the viewer of King George III's enthusiasm for enclosures and modern farming, an association that was often popularly ridiculed. It emphasized further the separation, rather than co-operation, between the great wealth of the landowners and the impoverishment of agricultural labourers. Indeed, Miller concludes, '*Ploughing up Turnips* challenges the fundamental assumptions on which the existing social order was built.'⁴³ It does this by not only presenting modern agriculture so directly, but also by showing the conflict underlying social relations in the countryside. Just

⁴³ Michele Miller, 'J.M.W. Turner's *Ploughing Up Turnips, near Slough*: The Cultivation of Cultural Dissent', *Art Bulletin*, 77, April 1995; 576-7, 583.

as in *Leeds*, the heavy toil of the workers is prominent, and this 'is hard work which takes its toll of those who do it as it enhances the fortunes of those who do not.'⁴⁴

It has already been mentioned that Hamilton sees *Crossing the Brook* (Fig. 45) as a straightforward hymn to modernity after the wars with the French: an encouragement to the enhancement of industry and thus of the fortunes of the nation as a whole. It was, perhaps, the moment when society stood on the threshold of dominance by industrial capitalism. It was painted in 1815 and exhibited at the Royal Academy in that year.⁴⁵ At first sight the painting appears to be a classic Claudean landscape - indeed its composition is almost identical to Claude's *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel* (Fig. 46). Turner has replaced the classical figures by the foreground brook with two young women and a dog, all framed by tall trees. A beautiful landscape recedes into the distance, but it is not a mythic landscape; it is a recognisable Devonshire scene, with Calstock Bridge over the Tamar (replacing Claude's bridge from antiquity) in the middle ground. Rather more unexpected is the fact that, unobtrusively scattered over the low rolling hills beyond, there are a number of the recently developed tin and copper mines with their associated industrial structures.

Hamilton's reading of this painting tells us that, in classic legend, the act of crossing the brook, undertaken in the painting by one of the young girls in the foreground (identified by a contemporary as Evelina, Turner's daughter, who was at that time a young teenager), is a symbolic act of the passage from girlhood to womanhood. The rather romantic depiction of the industry in the landscape beyond reveals a mood of optimism which leads Hamilton to interpret the two planes of the painting as a 'graceful depiction of parallel change within woman and within the nation' as the chance emerged, at the end of the twenty two years of the Napoleonic Wars, for Britain to develop into a mature industrial power - 'a nation making its own crossing in peacetime to an industrial economy.'⁴⁶ This interpretation of the painting has resonance because it fits with other writers' comments about both Turner's patriotism and, again, his ability to subvert artistic conventions whilst remaining within the standard discourse. In a further foretaste of the potential for disagreements about Turner's

⁴⁴ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 123.

⁴⁵ Now in the Turner Collection at the Clore Gallery at the Tate in London.

⁴⁶ James Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*, Tate Gallery, London, 1998; 92.

intentions, Shanes, in a remarkably subtle and detailed analysis of the foreground activity in the painting, cites associative images of puberty, menstruation, vaginas and phalluses; he totally ignores the background detail of mills and factories.⁴⁷

The ambivalence shown in *Ploughing up Turnips* and the city paintings is perhaps more typical of Turner's views of modernity than the straightforwardly optimistic view apparently contained in *Crossing the Brook*. It emerges starkly (if also obscurely) in what is almost certainly the first painting by a prominent artist that includes a railway subject: *Shields, on the River Tyne* (Fig. 47), a watercolour painted in 1823 for inclusion in *The Rivers of England* series. Turner had journeyed through the north-east of England in 1822 making sketches for the book. Hamilton tells us that Turner absorbed information avidly during his journeys and made many written notes on events along with the drawings in his sketch books.⁴⁸ He will almost certainly have known how the trade of the keelmen, whose work is portrayed vividly in *Shields*, was under threat from the development of railway technology for industrial uses. The colliers that transported the coal from the Northumberland and Durham coalfield out of the Tyne to London and elsewhere, were unable to sail upriver beyond Newcastle. The keelmen, in their flat bottom boats, had traditionally monopolized the movement of coals from the point of origin to the colliers. Partly in order to break the stranglehold of the keelmen, and partly for improved efficiency, colliery owners began to experiment with horse drawn waggonways to remove the coal directly from the pits to the collier vessels. There were a series of riots associated with the construction of such railways. The following report is of one such riot on the Wear in 1815:

1815 (March 20) - In the afternoon, a number of misguided persons, principally keelmen and casters on the river Wear, assembled in a riotous manner near Sunderland, and determined to pull down the bridge which had been erected across Galley's gill, near Bishopwearmouth, for the purpose of conveying the coal-waggons belonging to Messrs. Nesham and Co. to the staites below. They then proceeded to their work of destruction; and having entirely pulled down the bridge, set fire to the staites at the head of the bridge, and burnt all the machinery which was erected there for the purpose of conveying the waggons down the inclined plane to the spouts, where the coals were put on shipboard without the intervention of keels. ... These tumultuous proceedings originated in an idea, that other similar staites were about to be erected upon the Wear, in consequence of which, there would not be so much employment for keelmen and casters. The injury done was estimated at

⁴⁷ See Shanes, *Turner's Human Landscape*; 229-238. In fact, despite the title of Shanes' book, none of the paintings that he discusses in extraordinary detail is an image of industry or technology. With the exception of *The Fighting Téméraire* and *Crossing the Brook*, none of the paintings that I have selected for discussion are given a mention.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 95.

The Tyne was the scene of many similar riots and protests and of keelmen's strikes. In 1822, the year of Turner's stay in the area, there had been a riot when a Wylam locomotive was adapted as a steam tug to tow the keels. He will have been well aware of what a politicized subject keelmen represented.

Shields, on the River Tyne is ostensibly a harmonious and atmospheric night-time painting with a full bright moon in a darkened sky with patches of cloud that mingle with smoke from tugs, from braziers that light the keelmen's work and from nearby industry. The moon shines a clear path on the rippling blue/grey river and illuminates a solid church tower on the distant bank. A few shadowy vessels are in sail on the left of the painting but the main action takes place in the right-hand half of the picture where a number of men are working, some with shovels, transferring coals by the light of a brazier to the colliers tied up to the quay. This is a busy traditional scene. But, poised above the activity at quay side and behind the masts of the loading colliers, Turner has included a waggonway protruding from the top of the high bank and on it a waggon poised to tip coals into a collier: high above the 'timeless' activity of the river, a poignant sign that this particular aspect of the river life is threatened and, indeed, doomed by this modern invention. Again, one detects ambivalence in the face of change: the new technology will be beneficial to all this busy trade but it cannot be incorporated without exacting its price.

That Turner was interested in technology and modernity in all its manifestations, there can be no doubt. Whether he was a supporter or a critic is a harder question to answer and has led to an on-going debate. I would suggest that he saw its benefits and extolled Britain's lead but he was equally fascinated by the problems it caused and the losses that it implied. Like Wordsworth, he both admired much of what the modern world offered but had a keen awareness of its negative aspects. Many of his paintings recorded change, suggested the imminence of change or commented on the threats implied by change. Turner's interest in technology *per se* is demonstrated not only by his willingness to include it in paintings but also by his attendance at the soirées of the Royal Society which were intended to encourage

⁴⁹ M.A. Richardson, *The Local Historian's Table Book of the North East*, Vol. III, n.p., 1843; 148.

the 'useful intercourse of wealth and talent of men of rank and men of genius'.⁵⁰ He was commissioned on a number of occasions by G.W. Manby, an inventor, to illustrate his projects for marine life-saving devices, notably *Life-Boat (and Manby Apparatus) Going Off to a Stranded Vessel Making Signals (Blue Lights) of Distress*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1831. Even in this painting, the optimism engendered by the invention of the Manby Apparatus is tempered by Turner's portrayal of the very human emotions of distress and uncertainty in figures waiting on the beach.⁵¹ Another similar work was *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to Warn Steam-Boats of Shoal Water*, an image of new technology being used to save steam boats from the perils of shallow waters and rocks. It 'reflects upon new marine safety measures successfully deployed. ... [S]team ... has finally taken over from sail'⁵² - a message most famously and poignantly put forward by Turner in *The Fighting Téméraire Tugged to her Last Berth to Be Broken Up, 1838* (Fig. 48).

This picture, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1839, has been almost as hotly debated as *Rain, Steam and Speed*, with views of its meaning ranging from an outright critique of the ugly new technology that is replacing the splendour of old forms of transport, through a warning about the utilitarianism of the new society compared to the aristocratic grandeur of what was passing, to a positive extolling of the power of the new and the need to erase the old. The painting is of a magnificent sailing ship, one of the last remaining of Nelson's fleet at Trafalgar, being towed upriver to her demise by a tiny and smoky tug. Thackeray took the view that it was a rejection of technology, referring to the 'little, spiteful, diabolical steamer' and its 'foul, lurid, red-hot, malignant smoke'.⁵³ Defence for this view - the end of an era - is found in the fiery sunset in which the scene is set and to which many contemporary reviewers referred.⁵⁴ Among present-day commentators, Daniels upsets this structure by pointing out that, if the ship is being towed to Rotherhithe to be broken up, the sun is in the

⁵⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 3 May 1834; 540.

⁵¹ See Gage, 'a Wonderful Range of Mind'; 229-233.

⁵² Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 91.

⁵³ *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1839; 744.

⁵⁴ Most recent commentators have tended to describe the *setting* sun. For example, see Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 52-53.

east placing the scene in a glorious sunrise, which makes for a very different allegory.⁵⁵ Hamilton sees the painting as giving ‘equal prominence both to sail and to steam, and [casting] both ships in heroic roles - the large, slow, quiet, pale wooden ghost is tugged to the breakers by a noisy little nippy iron workhorse with another job to do tomorrow. Times change; life moves on.’⁵⁶ Shanes also notices that the sun was setting in the east (indeed, it was first noted in 1877 in a letter to the *Times*) but believes that a sunset is still the most likely interpretation of the blazing sky. He suggests that a sunset in the east is not to be taken as a problem within Turner’s *œuvre* as he frequently rearranged landscape features to suit his composition or his meaning, having a ‘total disregard for topographical accuracy’. The masts on the *Téméraire* and the smokestack on the tug have themselves been rearranged in order to crystallize the relationship between the two craft. Shanes makes much of the crescent moon on the left of the picture, whose light shines a path on the river to rival that of the dying sun; he contends that Turner associated the setting sun with death and the rising moon with the calm after death in a number of works at this time.⁵⁷ The tug is dark in the picture, a thing of the night, perhaps, and it, like the moon, has a clear path to take into the future and maturity. Rodner sees the painting as ‘prophetic’ and one whose message can be taken either way. In particular he sees it as evidence that ‘[c]hange and the passage of time preoccupied the artist at this moment’. The painting ‘struck a responsive chord with the public and quickly became the artist’s most popular canvas.’⁵⁸

Of the main present-day writers discussed, Hamilton’s take on Turner’s approach to technology assumes a level of optimism that, to my reading, is a shade exaggerated. Shanes, in an otherwise remarkable exegesis of Turner’s ‘human’ landscape work and his meanings, manages to ignore any depiction of or interest in industry, technology or modernity itself (with the one exception of *The Fighting Téméraire*). Rodner gives what seems to be a balanced view of Turner’s specific interest in modernity, demonstrating Turner’s personal involvement in the subject as revealed through the romanticism of his work and his dilemma, often expressed through use of the sublime, regarding the relationship of human

⁵⁵ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 132, including Thackeray quote.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 74.

⁵⁷ Shanes, *Turner’s Human Landscape*; 40-41.

⁵⁸ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 52.

endeavour to nature. It is remarkable how, even today, analysts of Turner's work can, while often being in sympathy with each other, give diametrically distinct readings. We have seen how Shanes fails to notice the industry in *Crossing the Brook* while Hamilton makes so much interpretative use of it. Hamilton and Rodner both pay most attention to Turner's industrial and technological images and they devote a chapter each to his paintings of steamboats. Rodner declares: 'Advances in the development of steam technology had not been achieved without attendant disasters and loss of human life ... Turner would have known of such calamities, and he was especially attracted to those in which modern steam technology succumbed to the fury of nature. Some of his most provocative steamboat paintings probed this theme.'⁵⁹ Hamilton, meanwhile, in his steamboat chapter, tells us that there 'are no wrecked steamships in Turner'. He acknowledges that this 'runs against the pattern of events' and agrees that 'Turner will have known about all that, and perhaps experienced accidents.' However, in his reading of the same works that Rodner has analysed, he concludes that 'the absence of trouble in his depiction of the steamship directs us to the view that Turner regarded steam as a manifestation of security, human endeavour and hope.'⁶⁰ I tend to agree with Rodner that 'the twin aspects of Turner's romantic vision [reflect] the vitality of early nineteenth century technology while insisting on nature's grandiose terror - a trait that could oppose and overwhelm all human invention.'⁶¹

Turner keeps the positive and negative aspects of modernity in balance; while he seems to symbolize the ascendancy of the new, there is an awareness of loss or threat accompanying the inevitability of change in individual lives and in society in general. This is shown to perfection in *Rain, Steam and Speed*. Here, various commentators' selective observation, partial analysis and partisan interpretation also all come to the fore. The image of the train, pictured with such elemental power, rushing towards the viewer across the heavy diagonal of Brunel's bridge is an icon of the 'railway age' and remains an artistic icon of modernity to this day. But, just as Turner has caused lasting controversy and debate with most of his other images of technology and modernity, *Rain, Steam and Speed* is, unsurprisingly, no exception. Given its popularity in the twentieth century and its iconic status it has perhaps

⁵⁹ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 61.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 74.

⁶¹ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 71.

caused more of a stir than most.

‘That icon of the railway age’⁶²

Contemporary reactions to the painting were discussed above. Critics were unsure what to make of it but, significantly, none questioned the subject matter. Rodner asserts that ‘the art establishment gathered at the Royal Academy was prepared to receive such a novel subject’.⁶³ If Kostal’s comment, quoted in Chapter 1, is correct - that ‘by 1844’, the year of the exhibition of *Rain, Steam and Speed*, ‘railways had captured the imagination of the English propertied classes like no industrial enterprise had ever done’⁶⁴ - one might expect such an acceptance. But it did not prove to be a blanket acceptance of the subject. Carmichael’s fate four years later differed markedly when he exhibited a classic picturesque view of a railway. The subject was condemned out of hand by the critics, as we shall see below. Rodner points out that Turner’s painting ‘seemed to attract as much attention for its affective qualities as for its subject matter.’⁶⁵ It is precisely the affective qualities of the painting that tended to be ignored by later commentators but that, more recently, have come to the fore and have led to many of the debates over the painting’s meaning.

As seen in the contemporary reviews, the painting caused the ‘astonishment’ with ‘some degree of horror’ prescribed by Burke for sublimity and, in many senses, the viewer’s mind, especially a contemporary viewer, was ‘alternately attracted and repelled’ as Kant later required of the sublime experience. It is possible that for us some of the original drama of the painting has faded, not just because of familiarity with the subject, but quite literally. When P.G. Hamerton wrote his biography of Turner in 1889, already he bemoaned the fact that the ‘wonderful sky’ of *Rain, Steam and Speed* had faded, along with the vividness of

⁶² Gage, *a Wonderful Range of Mind*; 234.

⁶³ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 147.

⁶⁴ R.W. Kostal, *Law and English Railway Capitalism 1825-1875*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994; 28.

⁶⁵ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 147, 149.

the white puffs of smoke from the engine that contribute to its impression of speed.⁶⁶ All the significant details of the painting over which so many critics have argued may have been far more vivid in their day; one could perhaps have discussed the precise pose of the notorious hare, instead of the precise location of the relevant smudge. (And anyone who has only seen the painting in reproduction will have no idea to what the detailed discussions of the hare refer.)

The painting's central image is of the heavy red brick buttresses of Brunel's Maidenhead Bridge slashing straight across the Thames and on the diagonal across the canvas. It carries a train of passenger carriages pulled by a Great Western Firefly class locomotive. The far end of the bridge is obscured by the swirling clouds of a rainstorm; the nearest archway, in the bottom right-hand corner of the painting is clear and assertively painted. On the left-hand side of the painting, receded from the viewer around a bend of the river and taking the opposite diagonal to the railway bridge the ghostly arches of the late eighteenth century road bridge are shown. On the river, between the two bridges, is a small fishing boat in which sits an artist sketching, protected from the rain by a black umbrella. On the riverbank not far from the boat is group of figures largely clad in white. On the far right of the painting, to the right of the railway bridge, is a lone figure working a plough. And, on the railway bridge, a hare runs toward the viewer away from the speeding train. Most of the canvas is partially obscured by swirls and streaks of cloud and rain; this diminishes toward the left of the canvas where the old road bridge appears to be bathed in a shaft of gentle sunlight.

For some present-day reviewers the painting is simple: John Walker wrote in 1989: '[Turner] admired modernity. *Rain, Steam and Speed* states emphatically that a railroad train crossing a bridge is beautiful.'⁶⁷ as Rodner points out, '[h]istorians of technology and culture have approached the work in a ... straightforward manner, seeing it essentially as a key early document on the rise of steam industrialism.' He includes Nicholas Pevsner, Francis Klingender and Lewis Mumford in this group. Pevsner noted Turner's 'delight' in mechanization while for Mumford the painting 'saluted with admiration the locomotive, that

⁶⁶ Hamerton, *Turner*, 92.

⁶⁷ John Walker, *Turner*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989: 118.

symbol of the new order in Western society'.⁶⁸ Klingender, in a remarkably short reference to the painting, dubbed it 'one of the great tributes of the Victorian age to steam.'⁶⁹ More recently, Julie Wosk has seen it as 'an iconic statement of the nineteenth century's sense of technological imperative' in which 'the locomotive's smokestack alone is endowed with clarity and definition, lending legitimacy and authority to the speeding new technology.'⁷⁰ John Gage states that 'it was typically left to Turner to celebrate the achievements of Brunel's Great Western in that icon of the Railway Age, *Rain, Steam and Speed*'. However, while he does acknowledge that Turner did not 'simply report and applaud', he sits on the fence as to which way Turner's 'richness of meaning' should take us, seeing a 'light-heartedness' in the imagery' alongside its 'romantic horror'.⁷¹

For me, there seem to be two modes of looking at *Rain, Steam and Speed*. Viewed in some moods, the swirls and streaks of wind-blown rain and cloud assail the vision, as noted, again, by some of those contemporary critics, notably the *Morning Chronicle* that described the 'whirlwinds, cataracts, rainbows ... spattered over the incomprehensible canvas' and Thackeray in *Fraser's Magazine* with his 'real rain ... composed of dabs of dirty putty *slapped* onto the canvas with a trowel'. The effect visually combines the elemental power of nature with the power of human intervention. In other moods, it is the bridge, and the engine, that leap out at the viewer, as also reported by several of the contemporary critics.

The first way of seeing the painting engages with the first part of its title - '*Rain, Steam and Speed*.' In this mode it resembles the vortices that Turner used on a number of occasions to great effect in depicting human inventions in the grip of the forces of nature. A classic example appeared two years earlier in *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the 'Ariel' left Harwich* (Fig. 49). This is a painting in which the artist's personal involvement in the drama seems obvious, even without the apocryphal story attached to it,

⁶⁸ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 148-9, including quotes.

⁶⁹ Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972 [first pub. 1947]; 134.

⁷⁰ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*; 34.

⁷¹ Gage, *a Wonderful Range of Mind*; 234.

and dismissed by Hamilton, that Turner was on the 'Ariel' and asked to be tied to the mast in order to experience the storm to the full. The 'vortex acts like a focus of intensity' linking all the forces of nature together, centring on 'the steamer's battle with nature'. While having that visual metaphorical effect, the vortex has a literal basis in the contemporary scientific thinking on weather patterns and the structure of storms which had recently been described by Sir William Reid as 'rotary movements of atmosphere'.⁷² Hamilton suggests that he is also giving graphic expression to the new discoveries in magnetism and electricity. Mary Somerville had recently said that a ship 'ought to have electric currents running directly across the path of her motion' and Hamilton claims that, in *Snow Storm*, 'Turner subtly links the imagery of iron filings on paper in an invisible magnetic field with energised sea water surrounding and acting upon a magnetic iron ship.'⁷³ Michel Serres, a historian of physics, has called Turner 'an intuitive "genius of thermodynamics"'. He does not just illustrate the power of the railway, he reconstitutes it.'⁷⁴

Rodner describes how Turner uses the vortex in *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* to unite 'the individual forces of wind and water into one comprehensive configuration of sea, spray, snow, cloud, and smoke, an integration that creates systems new and more powerful than their separate, individual components.' For Rodner, this shows Turner's 'belief in nature's incomprehensible supremacy over humanity' such that '[b]efore such a configuration, humanity becomes more helpless than ever.'⁷⁵ Hamilton, of course, sees the steamboat 'paddling away bravely, and ... methodically ... with every likelihood of a safe landfall', steamboats being, for Turner, a 'manifestation of his excitement about and support for devices that would make seafaring safer.'⁷⁶ So the work of technological intervention is caught up in the full power of the vortex of nature but through ingenuity of invention and skill of handling, it will overcome the destructive force.

⁷² Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 78, 83.

⁷³ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 128.

⁷⁴ Stephen Daniels, 'Images of the railway in nineteenth century paintings and prints' in *Trainspotting: Images of the Railway in Art*, Nottingham Castle Museum, Nottingham, 1985; 8.

⁷⁵ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 63, 83.

⁷⁶ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 82, 84.

Here, between the two commentators, lies the essence of the contradiction that is at the heart of Nye's technological sublime. For Rodner, nature will always win; for Hamilton it is humanity that is learning to get into balance with nature and defeat the worst terrors. Danly says of Thomas Cole that he was happy to 'show man living in unison with nature. In such a world the railroad posed no threat. It was only where ... man-made structures threatened to overwhelm those of nature that Cole suggests the human race has overstepped its bounds.'⁷⁷ This chimes with Turner's depiction of the inevitability of change (as in *Dudley*) and the need for great skill if humanity is to live in balance with nature (as in the *Snow Storm*). The critical aspect of Turner's work, in this context, for Shanes is that he made people 'understand that man is as much a phenomenon of the natural world as are mountains, fields and oceans. He painted the face of the earth as it was, inhabited by men, tended, feared, exploited and changed by men. ... The sense of the immanence of man and his works in nature is as important to Romanticism as any sense of an immanent God.'⁷⁸ This again recalls Wordsworth's words: 'Nature doth embrace / Her lawful offspring in Man's art'. The vortex in *Rain, Steam and Speed*, then, emphasizes the combined power of nature's elements which appear, for the moment, to embrace the new power of technology while acknowledging a sense of mutual challenge.

The other mode of looking at the painting is to engage with the subject of the painting's subtitle - '*The Great Western Railway*'. The GWR became, in 1844, the railway company with the longest main line in Britain when Exeter terminus was opened to traffic on 1 May. John Francis' history of the railway written in 1851 described the Great Western railway as 'the most gigantic work, not only in Great Britain, not only in Europe, but in the entire world.'⁷⁹ Its socially diverse range of shareholders included Turner. So, in *Rain, Steam and Speed*, the harmony between the elemental forces of wind, rain and steam, is contrasted with something defiant about the bridge - the physical manifestation of the railway itself - which stands so solidly astride the river, dominating the lower right quarter of the painting and breaking the bounds of the picture's frame. Ian Carter observes poetically that '[l]andscape forms wend,

⁷⁷ Danly, 'Introduction' in Danly and Marx (eds), *The Railroad in American Art*; 4.

⁷⁸ Eric Shanes, *Turner's Picturesque Views in England and Wales 1825-1838*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1979; 9.

⁷⁹ John Francis, *a History of the English Railway: its social relations and revelations 1820-1845*, Vol I, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1967 [first pub.1851]; 213.

river-rounded'⁸⁰ against which the bridge's dead straight lines are a shocking contrast. Like Joseph Wright of Derby's brilliantly illuminated factories under a night sky, Turner's railway uses the sublime for dramatic pictorial presentation but also to reveal a sort of 'unease': both saw that 'industrial [or technological] activity is unrelated to the rhythms of nature.'⁸¹

Maidenhead Bridge was unique. In order to avoid obstructing navigation Brunel had to use only one central pier (notably unlike the adjacent road bridge, a fact that is particularly clear in J.C. Bourne's 1846 lithograph of the bridge⁸² - Fig. 50) and he built the bridge using two elliptical arches that were longer and flatter than any yet constructed in brickwork. What Rodner now sees as a 'majestic stone [*sic*] bridge' was described by an earlier writer (Cosmo Monkhouse) as 'the ugly form of the railway bridge' and contrasted with 'the beauty and peace of the old bridge and the landscape'.⁸³ Hamilton sees the bridge as 'narrow' which 'emphasises the speed of the train'.⁸⁴ Few people believed the bridge was strong enough to carry the railway and certainly not to withstand storms; they were proved spectacularly wrong. Hamilton may be right when he claims that by 'choosing to depict a steam engine passing both along Brunel's line *and* over his Maidenhead Bridge *and* in a violent storm, Turner is allying himself directly with the engineer, and publicly applauding his triumph.'⁸⁵ Stephen Daniels, on the other hand, suggests that the 'suspended viewpoint and foreshortening render the bridge more precipitous, the central pier seems to bulge under the weight of the train and dissolve in the river. ... Turner seems to re-open disputes about the bridge'.⁸⁶ There is an energy in the painting of the railway bridge which does contrast with the tranquillity of the road bridge - which is, of course, also a relative newcomer, a reminder

⁸⁰ Ian Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2001; 53.

⁸¹ Finley, 'Turner and the Steam Revolution'; 20-1.

⁸² Bourne's lithograph, from *History and Description of the Great Western Railway* (1846), shows the railway in the conventional style for a promotional book, with the bridge's architecture solid yet elegant and with a diminutive train puffing across it, causing no disruption to the timeless scene.

⁸³ Quoted in Gage, *a Wonderful Range of Mind*; 234.

⁸⁴ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 103.

⁸⁵ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 103.

⁸⁶ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 128.

of the last major transport revolution in the country, the expansion of the turnpike network in the late eighteenth century - but to me that energy competes solidly with the elements of nature that swirl around its piers - I am tempted to say, its monstrous feet - and I wonder to what extent it is quite deliberate that the road bridge's many arches are shown in order to emphasize the extraordinary skill in the engineering of this new bridge using just two. In the light of the much reported Thames Commissioners' injunction for Brunel not to impede navigation on the Thames, which led to the bridge's radical design, I also wonder why no-one has commented on the fact that no such injunction seems to have been served on the road builders 50 years earlier. Did times change? or was there friction between the Thames Commissioners and the railway builders?

The bridge is there both literally and metaphorically to carry the main focus of the picture - the train. A jet black engine comes towards the viewer, almost head-on, its smoke stack standing tall and clear above the boiler and emitting a steady stream of small puffs of white smoke that blow back above the train of indistinct open carriages, crowded with people, that it pulls. It travels squarely and comfortably (and unrealistically) in the centre of the bridge deck. The engine is generally identified as one of the 'Firefly' class, a modern engine built between 1840 and 1842 and the first designed by the GWR engineer Daniel Gooch. This may not be a correct identification as, in such a 'free' rendition of the engine, it looks very like a number of other engine types in use at the time and it lacks the fluted top to the chimney that Fireflies had (and that the Leo class, for example, did not have). However, the Firefly was the 'workhouse' of the line until 1846 and Turner will have had less interest in spotting the correct engine detail than in giving the viewer an approximate impression of the sort of engine seen there. The aspect of the painting that has caused perhaps the most debate is the front of the fire box where it appears that a fire is blazing, open to the elements, or that the heat of the fire has made the front metal panel red, and even white hot. Some have suggested that Turner did not understand how the engine worked; others have suggested that this emphasizes the energy of the engine and gives a feel for the speed at which it must be travelling. McCoubrey sees the fire as one of the elements essential to the process of achieving the speed, as indicated by the title of the painting: 'water in the rain, fire shown where it should not be visible, and fueled by the energy of earth to produce, by air and water

commingled, the driving force of steam, and thus finally steam.’⁸⁷ Daniels suggests that the furnace is seen ‘analytically, not realistically, *through* the front of its boiler’⁸⁸ while it also alludes to contemporary explanations of how locomotives worked in ‘drawings in popular books on engineering which displayed blazing fireboxes in cross-section’.⁸⁹ Rodner, however, interprets the firebox as an aspect of Turner’s romanticism:

the frontal luminescence ... testifies to the artist’s need to convey and amplify special features that give the scene its special, dazzling power. The romantic artist, more than his sublime predecessors, delved inward, into his own responses, or the motive underpinnings of the subject, to suggest, without slavish regard to constraints of naturalistic convention, what he saw and felt to be the source, the essence, of the reality he chose to depict.⁹⁰

Other writers have become anachronistic in their attempts to explain this inexplicable part of the painting. Carter tells us that the ‘big splodge of flake white’ on the smokebox front is an ‘echo’ of George Cruikshank’s cartoon *The Railway Dragon* (see Fig. 4) in which steam gauges do for eyes and the firebox door is a ravening mouth as it seeks to destroy a family sitting down to dinner. Daniels also makes the detail an allusion to Cruikshank’s ‘firebreathing monster’. Gage suggests that the painting is - like Cruikshank’s cartoon - a comment on the railway mania and its financial speculation. Carter refers to this suggestion as ‘perceptive’.⁹¹ Peculiarly, were these writers to be right in their interpretation, Turner would be the perceptive one. *Rain, Steam and Speed* was exhibited in May 1844 and had obviously been worked on for a while before then. The height of the railway mania was 1844-47 - so it was hardly off the ground by the time Turner exhibited his painting. And Cruikshank’s cartoon did not appear until 1845 so could not have been ‘echoed’ in Turner’s earlier work. Rodner, for whom the crucial patch of paint is gold, makes the same comparison but suggests it was ‘a popular 1840s habit of rendering locomotives as fire-breathing monsters’; however, the only example given is, again, Cruikshank’s (acknowledgedly) later work. Rodner also quotes contemporary observations of approaching trains in which the observer has the impression that it travels ‘by the light of the fire and

⁸⁷ John McCoubrey, ‘Time’s railway: Turner and the Great Western’, *Turner Studies* (6), 1986; 35.

⁸⁸ Daniels, ‘Images of the Railway’; 8.

⁸⁹ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 128.

⁹⁰ Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 151-2.

⁹¹ Carter, *Railways and Culture*; 64, 61. Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 128. John Gage, *Turner: Rain, Steam and Speed*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1972; 22-26.

smoke which it vomits forth' and he concludes that while 'Turner presented a locomotive fully glowing with heat, reminiscent of the emotional responses of contemporary witnesses, he also enlarged upon verifiable fact to reveal the temper of steam locomotion.'⁹²

Carter has a far more imaginative interpretation to offer:

that white splodge becomes the key to Turner's entire painting: the modest space into which a doomed old world must place its head so that Dr. Guillotin's machine - that epitome of enlightened rationality ... may do its fatal work. Form follows function. This rational machine, this Jacobin machine will, indeed, mean the end of civilisation as those who viewed Turner's painting at the 1844 Royal Academy exhibition had known it. No wonder, perhaps, that *Rain, Steam and Speed* disturbed that audience, fifty years after the Terror.'⁹³

'Perhaps', indeed. Carter's argument pivots on the audience's ability to link two Cruikshank cartoons - *The Railway Dragon* and an earlier one of a Jacobin monster breathing fire. The trouble is, as already noted, Cruikshank had yet to produce one of these cartoons, making association in this case hard. Did *Rain, Steam and Speed* recall the Terror to British audiences in 1844? I doubt it. Did it record the end of civilization as people knew it? Probably not - *transformation* of civilization, maybe, just as many of Turner's works recorded change, loss and future possibilities, but not an 'end'. It is of interest to note that, in one of Turner's Lucerne notebooks, a rough sketch is entitled *The Rockets: Coming Events Cast Their Lights Before Them*. This sketch was done early in 1844, the same year as *Rain, Steam and Speed*, and it is tempting to think that its title was in Turner's mind as he equipped the front of his speeding engine with light that it seemed to cast before it.⁹⁴

Carter's flights of associative fancy take him yet further. He tells us that 'Turner exults in the power and novelty of Daniel Gooch's engine, even as it rapes a classics-based culture and destroys a landscape crammed with classical allusions.' Carter's rapacious metaphor has a much more literal basis, which was briefly mentioned in Chapter 4: having reminded his reader that Kant associated the sublime with masculinity and beauty with femininity, he asks: 'Why has nobody thought it worth commenting on the fact that Turner's train forces its way through *Maidenhead*? ... His virile machine is enveloped fully by his fecund female

⁹² Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner*; 144-5.

⁹³ Carter, *Railways and Culture*; 65-6.

⁹⁴ 'Lucerne Sketchbook' is in Tate collection; exhibited at 'The Sun is God' exhibition at Tate, Liverpool, 1999.

garden'.⁹⁵ Again, perhaps. But if Turner wanted to paint a train on a bridge over a river - a significant bridge over a significant river on the GWR route - where could he choose if not the bridge at Maidenhead? Daniels tells us that it is 'hard to overestimate the significance to Turner of the River Thames. ... In English writing and painting the Thames and its scenery had long signified the nation's condition and power.'⁹⁶ Would Turner wish to show the railway as raping the nation? With the evidence of his other 'industrial' pictures, I cannot think so. In Turner's tradition, if the name of the town were important to understanding the picture it would almost certainly have appeared in the title. I am sure that Eric Shanes would defend Carter's right to take association to extremes - and it may well be that Turner did have an impish awareness of the meaning of the town's name - but I do not believe that the painting would have been different had the town at the river crossing been called 'Wolverhampton' or 'Reading'. What *is* important - and here I agree with Carter - is that the train is coming *out* of London into the countryside, bringing the smoke and noise and dirt and speed and modernity of the metropolis to the rural fastnesses of south west England, very vividly crossing the conventional divide. Daniels extends the role of the train's departure point comparing it to the way Dickens makes 'the railway system and its construction a metaphor for the metropolis and its energy' in *Dombey and Son*. London's energy for Turner, according to Daniels, was 'both explosive and implosive, creative and destructive, noble and base, and in *Rain, Steam and Speed* Turner shows the exact place at Maidenhead Bridge where the capital's main arteries can be seen [river, road and rail] ... for Turner a driving but duplicitous force of history.'⁹⁷ The riverside scene is not, then, presented, even in its pre-railway existence, as a haven from the material world but as an avenue of it.

A tiny detail that generates perennial debate is the famous hare that runs in front of the engine. Finley says that Turner 'has created a dynamic dialectic between nature and the

⁹⁵ Carter, *Railways and Culture*; 63 & 55. It is interesting that Turner's work inspires both Shanes and Carter to such flights of sexualized rhetoric. They are *possibly* lent some credence by the evidence of Turner's great interest in sex that is revealed in the story of the graphically sexual sketchbooks found by Ruskin in Turner's studio at the time of his death. Ruskin, shocked, proceeded to destroy them. A few sketches of genitalia remain in notebooks in the Clore Gallery at Tate Britain.

⁹⁶ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 130.

⁹⁷ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 136-7.

machine by showing a hare running ahead of the locomotive.’⁹⁸ Hamilton sees the ‘hare running for its life along the track’;⁹⁹ Cosmo Monkhouse pitied the ‘poor hare, who will surely be overtaken and crushed in an instant.’¹⁰⁰ Popularly, the presence of the hare may have recalled the competitions held between mechanical and natural power; Trevithick sponsored one of the first in 1808, issuing entry tickets that read ‘mechanical power subduing animal’. It may also have recalled an ‘involuntary’ race between a racehorse and a locomotive at Ware, Hertfordshire in which the horse was run down and killed as reported by the *Times* on 18 March 1844.¹⁰¹ Most commentators, then, have assumed that the presence of the hare indicates the great speed of this new form of power as compared to one of the fastest animals in nature. Graham Reynolds, however, interprets the presence of the hare as ‘a characteristically playful touch indicating the *limits* on the engine’s speed.’¹⁰² For Gage the question is left open. In *Turner: Rain, Steam and Speed* he suggests that the engine depicted may not have the speed to run the hare down - although the point here may be that the hare can only maintain its top speed for short periods, unlike the engine. In *Turner: a Wonderful Range of Mind* he asks if maybe the engine is supposed to be ‘the locomotive “Greyhound” which was working on this line at the time.’¹⁰³ The Greyhound was a Firefly class engine that was delivered to the GWR in January 1841 (where it stayed in service until July 1866).¹⁰⁴ While the engine is not an exact portrait of the ‘Greyhound’, it seems likely that Turner was aware of its existence. The association of a greyhound with the hare would suggest that a demonstration of the engine’s speed rather than its limitations was intended. Hemingway traces hares in Turner’s work as a symbol of death,¹⁰⁵ and McCoubrey quotes

⁹⁸ Finley, ‘Turner and the Steam Revolution’; 25.

⁹⁹ Hamilton, *Turner and the Scientists*; 103.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Finley, ‘Turner and the Steam Revolution’; 25.

¹⁰¹ See Gage, *Turner: Rain, Steam and Speed*; 27.

¹⁰² Graham Reynolds, *Turner*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997 [first pub. 1969]; 197. [My italics]

¹⁰³ Gage, *Rain, Steam and Speed*; 33. *A Wonderful Range of Mind*; 234.

¹⁰⁴ See *R.C.T.S. Locomotives of the G.W.R.*, Part II ‘Broad Gauge Engines’, RCTS, London, 1952; B4, B13-4. I am greatly indebted to John Wardle for engine identification details and for his inexhaustible knowledge of the engines’ technical workings.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape imagery and urban culture in early nineteenth century Britain*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992; 78.

a contemporary who commented on the hare in *Rain, Steam and Speed* saying that ‘he is almost inconspicuous; the little beastie and the puffing iron horse, the morn as lovely as a dream of youth, life, fate and God somewhat antithetically put. In the old proverb to see a hare running before you denotes calamity.’¹⁰⁶ This picks up what others have said about the destructive imagery of the engine, ‘a train of death, symbolizing on the one hand the close of Turner’s life and on the other the potentially destructive power of railroad technology, akin to the cataclysms of nature.’¹⁰⁷ I find this fanciful; if death is suggested I prefer to see it as Turner’s dialectic between the death of the old ways and the rebirth of the new, or the renewal that tends to come after any cataclysm, natural or otherwise: in other words, a further statement of his ambivalence in the face of modernity.

Exact details of the landscape and events away from the train are indistinct. Daniels points out that this difficulty in ‘recognizing anything but traces or notations of objects in an evanescent landscape was one described by early rail travellers’¹⁰⁸ - suggesting, by this, that we are receiving a dual perspective, both from outside, looking at the train, but also from inside, experiencing the landscape as those people in the coaches are experiencing it. Is Turner deliberately placing us ‘outside, terrified by the noise and speed’ as well as inside ‘riding triumphantly over the landscape’ and forcing the viewer to choose their position? From what one can make out of the ploughman to the right of the railway bridge, he appears to be undisturbed and peacefully going about his work. This is part of the world and the ‘routine pastoral conventions’ that Carter sees are about to be destroyed, and Finley believes that the ‘minute, frail ploughing figure ... was probably intended by Turner as a faint nostalgic image of the agrarian age of the past’.¹⁰⁹ But it could equally be, like *Leeds*, a reminder of the interlinked lives of city and country: the railway blasts the city world into the country, but it serves to enhance a symbiosis that already exists. It has been suggested that the ploughman is critical to the title of the painting: Turner had apparently been struck,

¹⁰⁶ William Ellery Channing, quoted in McCoubrey, ‘Time’s Railway’; 35.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999; 226.

¹⁰⁸ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 126.

¹⁰⁹ Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*; 53. Finley, ‘Turner and the Steam Revolution’; 24.

during a recent trip to Northampton, by a banner that read 'Speed the Plough':¹¹⁰ the ploughman's presence could partially be an ironic comment on this slogan. The initially 'obvious' depiction of speed in the painting thus gradually dissolves as one gets closer.

To the left of the bridge, standing on the riverbank, is a small group of people largely dressed in white. For Leo Marx this is a 'festive crowd waving',¹¹¹ as they are for John Gage - 'a crowd of waving figures' - who comments on how it was normal to wave at passing trains.¹¹² This is the more obvious interpretation of the figures: they are local people celebrating this exciting technology. But an alternative view, which Turner may have meant to be available in this shifting, dialectical vision of technology in nature, is that they are 'naiads - nymphs of the flowing Thames' or 'dancing maidens'.¹¹³ Carter, in his rapine vision, suggests they might even be 'vestal virgins enjoying their last fling as the Great Western's express violates their temple.'¹¹⁴ McCoubrey offers the idea that they may represent Diana and her nymphs disturbed while bathing in a stream by the hunter Actaeon who was, as a result destroyed by his own hounds; this leads him to another possibility for the identification of the engine based on a *Times* report about a locomotive called 'Actaeon' running the length of the Great Western line.¹¹⁵ The trouble is that this report appeared two days before the exhibition. Are we to believe that, like the hare, Turner inserted the pale figures only on varnishing day? There is no evidence for this (unlike for the hare). It is equally hard to believe that Turner saw the railway as heading for its own imminent destruction.

The final small detail of the landscape stands out more clearly than the others - and that is the small boat on the river between the two bridges. One of the two figures in the boat

¹¹⁰ See Gage, *a Wonderful Range of Mind*; 234. A banner inscribed with the slogan is seen in Turner's *Northampton Election*.

¹¹¹ Leo Marx, 'The Railroad-in-the-Landscape: An Iconological Reading of a Theme in American Art', in Danly and Marx (eds), *The Railroad in American Art*; 205.

¹¹² Gage, *Rain, Steam and Speed*; 33.

¹¹³ Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*; 53 and Andrew Wilton, *Turner in his Lifetime*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987; 216.

¹¹⁴ Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*; 55.

¹¹⁵ McCoubrey, 'Time's railway'; 38.

appears to be sketching, sheltered from the rain by a black umbrella: Turner was known for his permanent attachment to his umbrella and few commentators doubt that this a self-depiction of the artist. Turner thus directly associates himself with the events in the painting *and* with whatever interpretation the viewer cares to put upon them. Just as he has placed the viewer both inside and outside the speeding train, he has placed himself both inside and outside the frame as simultaneous subject and painter.

Arscott and Pollock were quoted in Chapter 3 as saying that Turner's depiction of the city in *Leeds* was 'exceptional in that it does not resolve the elements in the standard ways available'.¹¹⁶ In *Rain, Steam and Speed* he succeeded in having the art establishment accept his very unconventional subject matter and yet he resolved none of the massive contradictions created by his graphic depiction of modernity. He appealed, first, to an emotional rather than an intellectual response and, rather than answering the dilemmas raised, he leaves the viewer only with questions. As they individually determine, they can find either a balanced exposé of the issues raised or passionate support for their own particular view, whether that be for technological change or against. In sum, if one tries to force an interpretation onto it, the painting remains an enigma. It can be seen as for the modern world or against it; it can be seen as an expression of all different opinions in balance with each other. It is the perfect example of Nye's historicized sublime, an 'emotional configuration that both emerge[s] from and help[s] to validate new social and technological conditions.'¹¹⁷

The painting can also be seen as a supreme statement of reality: technology was putting life into a state of flux; change was inevitable and change brings loss, but the advantages and disadvantages of that change are also in balance. As change is inevitable, dialectics must tell us that further change will come. However great the human challenge to the power of nature, the way change is used, and how successful it proves to be depends on the manner of human intervention and control which must be undertaken with respect for and in conjunction with nature: nature's power may be eclipsed but it is not defeated. Equally undefeated, in *Rain*,

¹¹⁶ Caroline Arscott and Griselda Pollock, 'The Partial View: the visual representation of the early nineteenth century industrial city' in Janet Wolff and John Seed, *The Culture of Capital: art, power and the nineteenth century middle class*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 227.

¹¹⁷ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*; 3.

Steam and Speed, are the possibilities for human reason. This is a triumph, but its image is terrifying: the very heart of the contradiction in the technological sublime.

Politics in *Rain, Steam and Speed*

Daniels raises a wider issue: the ‘great railway companies were seen to represent a new political-economic order. For better or worse this new order would vanquish the power of the landed gentry, and the inequalities of a property-based culture.’¹¹⁸ This was the hegemonic view and it underlies my argument that artists were nervous of including railway scenes in their landscapes and underscores everything that has been said about Turner’s willingness to transgress conventions. Carter, of course, having told us that the engine ‘rapes a classics-based culture’ goes on to tell us that ‘[t]hrough this action it also destroys national political control by a landed aristocracy living off its rent roll’. He suggests that it was critical to the painting that the GWR was the railway that served Oxford, the source of ‘an education rooted in the study of classical languages and classical authors’, implying that the advent of modernity meant that ‘[a]ll would be lost for Oxford, but also for England’. He insists that, ‘at the deepest level that is what *Rain, Steam and Speed* shows us.’¹¹⁹ This does not ring true; it fits the contemporary ideology that has excluded railways from the artist’s landscape (although no critics referred to it at the time), but Turner would know, as a shareholder if nothing else, that many of the aristocracy were massively committed to it financially and, especially in the case of the GWR, in providing Board members. He showed his awareness of the connections between aristocracy and modernity in paintings like *Dudley* and *Ploughing up Turnips*: modernity did not, for Turner, imply a threat to the established order; rather, he saw the established order for what it was. *Rain, Steam and Speed* holds perhaps a suggestion of this reality - for it consciously breaks all the conventions that normally concealed it in art.

Turner appears to have been optimistic about the potential for an increase in prosperity in Britain offered by the new technologies, as we saw in other paintings. He will have

¹¹⁸ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 126.

¹¹⁹ Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*; 62-3.

understood that any ‘new order’ facilitated this potential. Was the painting associated with the possibilities opened up by the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, and by the relative peace of the couple of years that had passed since a peak of Chartist activity in 1842 - just as Hamilton claims that *Crossing the Brook* was painted to show the possibilities for British industry in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars? That may be a speculation too far. But certainly communication networks were vital to economic development. On 26 June 1841 the *Athenæum* declared that, because of railways, ‘dissension, discord, division, dismemberment, must become less and less possible’. Daniels makes the conjunction of the GWR and the Thames critical in his analysis of *Rain, Steam and Speed*. It ‘marks the conjunction of major routeways. Neither was merely a line of linkage, but a system with regional, national and international dimensions. The Thames was long established as the main artery of State power, and is affirmed as such in Turner’s art; the Great Western offered a new prospect of State power.’¹²⁰ I agree with Daniels that there is no essential criticism of that power implied in the work.

Finally, despite his more fanciful ramblings, it is hard not to agree with Carter’s suggestion that all ‘these warring [interpretative] camps are right, and [all] wrong. *Rain, Steam and Speed* is about loss, but also about progress. To be more precise, it is about the casualties of progress and the impossibility of not changing. The radical instability of Turner’s image is its most enduring feature.’¹²¹ Leo Marx makes a comment, in his analysis of Inness’ *The Lackawanna Valley*, that applies equally to *Rain, Steam and Speed*: ‘it captures the most subtle and profound aspect of its subject: the moral ambiguity, the intertwining of constructive and destructive consequences, which are generated by technological progress.’¹²² And Berg’s summary of a discussion of *Dudley, Worcestershire* is perhaps apposite: ‘Who can say whether Turner loved or hated the industrial scene he painted; but as a picture it brings us immediately into the smoke, fire, and action along a Black Country canal’¹²³ - or a Great Western railway bridge.

¹²⁰ Daniels, *Fields of Vision*; 126.

¹²¹ Carter, *Railways and Culture in Britain*; 52.

¹²² Marx, ‘Does Pastoralism have a Future?’; 221.

¹²³ Berg, ‘Representations of Early Industrial Towns’; 129.

After Rain, Steam and Speed

Gage states that Turner ‘was not the painter to invent a subject if he could borrow one from another artist, and the isolation of his railway theme among British landscapes of the period is remarkable.’¹²⁴ However, although its sublime insight was not repeated, *Rain, Steam and Speed* did not remain entirely alone as a vision of the railway in the landscape. The painting was admired by Turner’s contemporary David Cox. He was an enormously popular artist and in 1846 he exhibited at the British Institution what has often been described as a ‘tribute’ to *Rain, Steam and Speed*, an intriguing oil painting called *Wind, Rain and Sunshine* or *Sun, Wind and Rain* (Fig. 51). The overwhelming feeling of this now little known but rather beautiful painting is nostalgia, however. It is like the final statement of that old order that Turner’s new order is replacing. There is not necessarily any expression of regret but the old order is, peacefully, moving away from the viewer. As suggested by the title, the weather is paramount in the painting and is unchallenged by any unnatural power. On a wet, windy day that is turning to sun (just like *Rain, Steam and Speed*) a plump couple, heavily wrapped up and with an umbrella, sit astride an equally plump pony, with drooping head and tail, which, placed centrally on the canvas, walks away from us along a country lane, lined with blowing trees, that takes the opposite diagonal to that of Turner’s railway bridge. They seem to huddle against the wind and rain but stoically and silently wend their way into the perspectival recession. Cox painted a number of scenes of country lanes and people travelling on them, but the difference in *Wind, Rain and Sunshine* is that in the far distance, on the horizon on the left hand side of the picture - away from the direction of travel of the pony - a tiny engine pulling a line of carriages can be seen puffing towards the edge of the canvas. The train is ignored by the central figures but seems to gleam in sunshine and makes the continued exposure of the couple to the elements more poignant. The painting is almost the opposite side of the coin to Turner’s work. It foregrounds what is going to be lost and hints at positive aspects of the change, rather than foregrounding the agent of change and hinting at the possibility of loss.

At the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1848, four years after *Rain, Steam and Speed* appeared there, another painting of a railway scene was exhibited: John Carmichael’s

¹²⁴ Gage, *Turner: Rain, Steam and Speed*; 14. It could be argued that Turner gave us more than enough to think about with his painting.

London Road Viaduct on the Brighton, Lewes and Hastings Railway (Fig.52). It is a beautiful painting in the classically picturesque style. The viewer is given a high viewpoint and looks down over a gentle valley crossed by the massive but elegant curve of the many-arched viaduct. A tiny train puffs its white smoke behind as it quietly crosses the viaduct. Through the arches one can see the beginnings of the outskirts of Brighton. In the foreground, on the road in the valley bottom and on the hill, elegant people wander at ease or sit picnicking while country folk go about their business or sit relaxing. A 'traditional' representation of the railway in which people remain undisturbed and the railway's infrastructure appears to add definition to the beauty of the scene, Carmichael had produced such pictures many times before in his popular railway lithographs. But this was an oil and it was at the Royal Academy and its reception, despite its adherence to the conventions of coping with modernity in the landscape, was very different to the reception of *Rain, Steam and Speed*. Most critics ignored the painting entirely. The *Art-Union* dismissed it with: 'rather an engineering watercolour subject, than suitable for an oil picture' although they did begrudgingly acknowledge that 'it is, however, as agreeably painted as the material will admit.'¹²⁵ Turner's complex emotional response to the railway aroused no such criticism of the chosen subject. But Carmichael's use of Leo Marx's 'sentimental pastoralism' - the technique established for popular prints of blending the railway safely into the landscape - enabled the subject to be rejected *per se*. His painting assumed the aesthetic argument of *dulce et utile*, the early version of the picturesque whose abandonment - as discussed in Chapter 2 - rendered 'links between the economic, the socially ameliorative and the aesthetic problematic on several fronts' especially where 'the benefits of cultivation, improvement and economic progress, and the moral values of industry, come into conflict with the aesthetic pleasures of the spectacle of wildness'.¹²⁶ Carmichael's painting paid the price for creating that conflict without the romanticism of Turner's harsher but more complex vision. The representation of the fact, the acceptance of modernity was shocking in a way that Turner's sublime and questioning reaction to it was not. While the subtler points of the engine class and the virginity of the waving crowd may have passed by the contemporary viewers, Turner offered a cathartic outlet for the fears and hopes of a society confronted by

¹²⁵ *Art Journal*, 1 June 1848, Vol X; 165-168. This is somewhat ironic since, in the same review, several column inches were used to criticize the members of the Academy for doing 'nothing to harmonise with the spirit of the age.'

¹²⁶ Stephen Copley, 'William Gilpin and the black-lead mine' in Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (eds), *Politics of the Picturesque*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994; 48-50.

change. Carmichael, on the other hand, worked within the conventions - within the ideology - but offered no escape from the reality, however idealized.

A more famous 'railway painting' that has been described as 'the grand finale of the age of the sublime and the picturesque'¹²⁷ is John Martin's *The Last Judgement* (Fig. 53), painted in 1853, one of his apocalyptic trilogy along with *The Great Day of His Wrath* and *The Plains of Heaven*. The railway is only a small symbolic part of a much larger story. In a key to the painting published in 1885 Martin described 'the railway by which are arriving the succours to the enemies of Christendom, who are besieging the Holy City. The earthquake having rent the valley in twain, the foremost train and the van of the hosts of Gog and Magog are impelled headlong down into the abyss.'¹²⁸ Michael Freeman adds that the train is on 'the bridge that Satan built over Chaos, to last for all time, [which] is collapsing'.¹²⁹ When the paintings were first exhibited the establishment art press were equivocal. In July 1853 the *Art Journal* wrote: 'There is a grandeur in the composition that must strike the most casual observer, but there are also portions of it which, however well-meant, seem to us to border on the ridiculous.' By July 1855, when the paintings went on tour, the same journal wrote of 'these nondescript works of Art ... Surely there is something unhealthy in this exhibition of the public taste' while on 7 July the *Athenæum* described *The Last Judgement* as 'full of feeble and mannered drawing'. However, the popular press was full of praise. The *Oxford Journal* enthused: 'An opportunity is here afforded the public ... of viewing 3 of the most significant paintings which have, perhaps, ever been submitted to lovers of the fine arts.' The *Birmingham Mercury* had no doubt that: 'Among the many mighty spirits that England has produced, none have surpassed the transcendent genius of John Martin.'¹³⁰ The paintings were enormously popular and drew huge crowds, 'so completely did Martin express the mood of his time'.¹³¹ Detailed analysis of the painting seems to have been thin on the ground and the railway train did not enter any contemporary

¹²⁷ William Feaver, *The Art of John Martin*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975; 199.

¹²⁸ Quoted in John Gage, 'Gautier, Turner and John Martin', in *Burlington Magazine*, cxv, 1973; 393.

¹²⁹ Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*; 226.

¹³⁰ *Oxford Journal* and *Birmingham Mercury* quoted in Mary L. Pendered, *John Martin: Painter*, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1923; 254.

¹³¹ Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*; 107.

descriptions that I have found. However, recent commentators have sometimes claimed a significance for the railway that I do not believe it has.

The minute, apparently engine-less train is at the centre of the canvas, part of the destruction and chaos all around. It is falling down a huge chasm opening in the ground. With a powerful magnifying glass (which, in most lights, is necessary for seeing the train at all) one can make out that each carriage has the name of a different capital city written on its side (London, Paris, Rome etc). Freeman manages somehow to see that the carriages are 'filled with troops'. He suggests that the city names on the train are 'powerfully symbolic of the railway's time-space transformations.' Martin may well have 'thought of railway speed as almost infinite' but, given the lack of prominence given to this train I doubt if any such symbolism was intended: more likely is the desire to show that the hosts of Gog and Magog can come from all the 'civilized' cities of the world - and the railway, as a mass transport method, can facilitate their movement.

Freeman expands his interpretation of this painting - which, as a railway painting, must be described as minimalist - by saying that it was also 'a disturbing reminder to Victorian observers of the way railroad accidents were commonplace in the first decades of operation, some with horrific outcomes for human life.'¹³² It is true that a crashed train, particularly one that had fallen down an embankment or off a bridge, was a familiar sight to people from engravings published in newspapers of the time (see Fig. 5). Such an image was used a few years later, in 1862, with polemical intent as a tiny incident in Cruikshank's huge canvas, *The Worship of Bacchus*, which was a passionate diatribe against the evils of drink: a train has crashed and overturned, presumably after being driven by a drunk engine driver. Martin's train seems to lead a procession of many horses followed by a couple of elephants. Rather than a comment on the railway, it is possible that he is referring to the progress of civilization and the fact that, despite all our progress, we are still condemned. For Martin was enthusiastic about technology and the manifestations of modernity. Mary Pendered quotes a letter that he sent to the *Illustrated London News*: 'Among the other proposals I have advanced is my railway connecting the river and docks with all the railways that converge from London, and apparently approved by the Railway Terminus commissioners.' He developed plans for, amongst other things, lighthouses, ventilation for coal mines, a

¹³² Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*; 226-7.

water supply system for London, and an underground railway, which were 'all conducing to the great ends of improving the health of the country, including the produce of the land and furnishing employment for the people in remunerative works.'¹³³ He was a great friend of Brunel and was invited for a ride with him on the footplate in 1841. In the section of *The Last Judgement* that appears to be heaven, on the left, are the good people, clothed in white; they are painted very clearly and identifiably. The selection included would suggest that modernity and technology were not evils to be condemned to the abyss: sitting alongside Wyclif, Dante, Luther, Milton and Shakespeare, are Newton, Galileo and, in particular (in this context), Watt, credited with the invention of the steam engine.¹³⁴

Modern writers on the railway in fine landscape art in this period of the nineteenth century can, perhaps, be forgiven for reading everything possible into the presence of a railway or a train, however minor, in a painting, as they have so few opportunities to get their teeth into a serious analysis. Perhaps the main present-day function of *Rain, Steam and Speed* is to fulfill this need in people, but the opening that it presents should not be allowed to spill over into too many other lesser examples, however tempting.

By the mid-1850s the vogue for narrative painting was in full swing and paintings showing city life (it was the 1851 census that first revealed that over half the population now lived in cities) began to appear as did paintings detailing the social effects of the railway. William Frith's *The Railway Station* (Fig. 54), set in Paddington Station, is perhaps one of the best known. An article in *Queen* on 26 April 1862 said that 'the picture tells its own tale - it is one of the most stirring novels of the day, full of life and character, and it will be read as the best piece of railway literature of the picturesque style that has ever been done.' Even here the viewer is kept safe from the apparent chaos of the crowd and the various 'types' depicted. The 'viewer is kept at a discrete distance from this motley crowd by the band of empty street in the foreground' while the 'pictorially constructed order makes acceptable the greater mixing of the social classes.'¹³⁵ Carriage scenes in Britain were also popular, notably Charles Rossiter's *To Brighton and Back for 3/6*, painted in 1859, and we have already seen

¹³³ Quoted in Pendered, *John Martin: Painter*; 197.

¹³⁴ See Feaver, *The Art of John Martin*; 192.

¹³⁵ Arscott and Pollock, 'The Partial View'; 210.

Abraham Solomon's *First Class - The Meeting and Second Class - The Parting* from 1855 (Figs. 33 and 35). Daniels suggests that railway carriages, unlike the station platform, 'condensed conditions that fascinated Victorians about their cities, notably the divisions of social classes into separate spaces and the contrasting lifestyles within.'¹³⁶

The railway, then, became, in the 1850s and 1860s, a popular image in narrative paintings. As an integral part of the picturesque countryside it had been popular in lithographs since the 1830s and in the intervening years it had appeared in some privately commissioned fine art landscapes. But the railway continued to prove elusive, as a feature of the landscape, in publicly exhibited art. Turner demonstrated a clear direction that railway landscapes could take, using a variety of the technological sublime as the mediating aesthetic. But such a stark vision of modernity in the artist's landscape remained too unsettling. It was not until twenty years after the Great Exhibition and nearly thirty years after Turner's vivid representation, romantic and affective, that the railway seriously reappeared in a public landscape, unembarrassed, an essential part of the Impressionist vision, as we will briefly see in the next chapter.

¹³⁶ Daniels, 'Trainspotting'; 10.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: THE STEAM ARISTOCRACY

*The progress of machinery has been so rapid ... [that] it is not to be wondered at if the social rank of the money mongers becomes equal to their possessions; and if ere long we find that general, which has been progressive, namely a complete change of situation between the steam and landed aristocracy of the country.*¹

The coming triumph of the steam aristocracy, resulting from the rapid progress of machinery, was predicted by the *Northern Star* in 1839. This thesis has, in part, examined the accuracy of the prediction by focusing on the representation of one form of machinery - the railway - in landscape art during the nineteenth century. Locating its argument in theories of landscape painting dating from the eighteenth century, it has suggested that landscape art functioned on one level as an expression of ideology for the ruling class. The nineteenth century was a time when the economic hegemony was changing rapidly and I wanted to look for the traces of similar change in cultural forms, although acquaintance with Gramsci's theory of subaltern groups would suggest the potential for inconsistencies in the results of such a search.² Insofar as paintings of the railway in the landscape may have echoed such changes, I have located a significant discrepancy between economic and cultural forms. My argument has been based on marxist views of class formation in specific economic circumstances. In recent years theories have emerged that present social identity as a form of individually chosen narrative;³ this is often presented as opposed to marxist versions of class formation. However, if used selectively, the notion of individual narratives about position in society serves to enhance the collective aspects of class formation: it facilitates engagement with the subjective aspects of social development. In an analysis of cultural consumption this has proved to be of value.

I have suggested that the railway, as a physical presence and as a symbol of modernity had a greater effect on the landscape than many other forms of machinery. The land, and

¹ From *Northern Star*, 16 March 1839.

² Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1978; 53-55.

³ See, for example, Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: the Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994 (and discussion in Chapter 1 of the present work).

structures of landscape, had a significant bearing on ideas of power - directly through ownership and indirectly through associations with an aristocratic right to govern: land represented distance from taint of labour or financial need. Changes in either the status or the structure of the land risked posing a threat to landed and - by extension - political rights. Through a variety of conventions, landscape painting reflected this situation. David Solkin has shown that it provided reassurance that 'the world - the world which they dominated - was perfectly ordered as it was, that its structure had been determined by God, and that it was fundamentally incapable of change.'⁴

Those conventions were adapted as the 'agrarian revolution' grew and land became a major wealth earner as well as a marker of status. Results of the capitalization of agriculture were disguised in landscape, both in sculpted parks and in painted representations: landscape took on more directly an ideological role in 'recasting or spuriously accounting for realities which prove embarrassing to a ruling power.'⁵ Towards the end of the eighteenth century an interest in the sublime from the Romantic movement produced some dramatic - and popular - paintings of industry in the landscape, but such images largely disappeared after the early years of the nineteenth century. At this time pressures for social and political change had built up and the landscape's ideological value became more important in displayed art, representing a vision of stability in an eternal rural order. The distress in the countryside was hidden and cities and industry, along with their manifestations, were constructed as the source of chaos and unrest. As cities grew rapidly in size and in economic importance, artistic conventions developed to deal with it, acknowledging its presence while keeping it at a distance: countryside traditions were safeguarded. Few artists transgressed the separation of city and country; among those who did was Turner who, in a number of paintings of cities or towns, showed the economic and social links between the activities of the two. But with the advent of the railway the zone of safety was physically - and irrevocably - breached: the railway was 'the instrument of the urban, the commercial ... the symbol of [the city's] successful and continuing assault on the ancient dominance of the

⁴ David H. Solkin, *Richard Wilson: The Landscape of Reaction*, The Tate Gallery, London, 1982; 70.

⁵ Terry Eagleton (ed), 'Introduction' in *Ideology*, Longman, London, 1994; 8.

landed interest.⁶ It made it hard, henceforth, to insist on the fundamental immutability of landscape.

From the time of the Liverpool and Manchester line (1830) lithographs of the railway in the countryside were prolific. They provided a strong narrative of progress and modernity, rendered safe by the stability of the landscape conventions that surrounded the railway. But these were ‘socially interventionist’ images that deliberately ‘sought to transmit or negotiate images and values between classes.’⁷ It is clear from my research that the role of fine art was very different. Its purchasers were now as likely to be middle class industrialists as the aristocracy and gentry who had at one time been the primary patrons. Private patronage from both classes flourished while, by the early nineteenth century, a public market for art had been well established at exhibitions and through dealers. Meanwhile, the artist had been raised from the status of craftsman through a consolidation of the concept of the artist’s independent genius. This means that any analytical interpretation of paintings has to involve a matrix of the artist’s intentions, the patron’s desires and the pressures of the market; identification of a challenge to the cultural hegemony is, therefore, complex. From the 1830s there was a slow shift of political power towards the middle classes, many of whom soon owed much of their wealth to the railways (as, indeed, did many members of the aristocracy). It is hard to detect a reflection of this shift in representations of the railway in landscape art.

The three anchors of the art that is central to this thesis are the *Elephant, Rain, Steam and Speed* and *Penge West*. It began with the *Elephant* in c.1815, an image in oils of the latest ‘prize animal’ in the industrial stable of (probably) the owner of the land and home shown in the background. It is not known if this painting was ever exhibited publicly but I suspect that it was not: it was a symbol, for display in the home, of the owner’s pride in this new wealth creator and in his association with this pristine talisman of modernity. *Rain, Steam and Speed* appeared in mid century, just when the railway had firmly established its presence in the countryside. It was produced by Britain’s foremost living artist, acknowledged as the

⁶ Jack Simmons, *The Railways of Britain*, Book Promotions Ltd., Bristol, 3rd edit., 1986 [first pub. 1961]; 81.

⁷ B.E. Maidment, *Reading Popular Prints, 1790-1870*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996; 102-104.

country's greatest landscape painter, and was created for display in the most prestigious exhibition of art - the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy. It is not possible to be sure about Turner's intentions in this painting. What *is* clear, however, is that he confronted modernity, the railway, head-on; and the debate that he initiated continues unabated. He used the established discourse of the sublime and yet surrounded his subject with the iconography of traditional landscapes. Whatever his views of modernity or of the railway in the landscape, he established an aesthetic for dealing with its existence. He argued for a form of landscape painting, in which the 'presence of mechanization confirms the reality of a new human interaction with the environment.'⁸ Despite this, in between the *Elephant and Rain, Steam and Speed*, and then for another thirty years, until *Penge West*, there is an apparent dearth of fine art paintings of the railway in the landscape.

Yet the dearth may be more apparent than real and involve questions of Raymond Williams' 'selective tradition' as well as issues of public versus private display. The railway should have come into its own as the ideal choice of personal narrative, serving the creation of a social identity, and there are enough known examples of patrons who commissioned paintings with a railway theme to suggest that there may be more. Portraits and other paintings collected by the Stephensons (for example) reveal a decisive adoption of a narrative of technology, of modernity in the establishment of their public identity. In the case of the Trevelyans, a family of landed gentry who were taken to have very publicly selected the same narrative of modernity, it emerges, despite the conclusions of all previous research on the Wallington Hall paintings, that the analyst has to take great care in identifying 'whose narrative?' as, in this case, the artist was hugely more in favour of 'progress' than his patrons. Even though they had intense involvement in the development of the content of the paintings, the artist's views prevailed. There were other patrons, however, who very much wanted to tie their identity to modernity through the paintings displayed in their home. A number of prominent landowners commissioned well-known artists to produce paintings of the railway in the (industrial revolution) landscape. I cannot say how many there were, because my evidence suggests that such paintings tended not to go to exhibitions, being produced purely for home consumption, and they probably still hang where they were first displayed. In the two examples that I examined, Treffry in Cornwall and Alexander in

⁸ William Rodner, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997; 39-40.

Scotland (see Figs. 36 and 37), their pride in their association with the railway was obvious. Because of the weight of cultural meanings associated with landscape art, the choice of it as a medium for display of the railway is a particularly powerful statement of identity. It is significant that these paintings were destined for private consumption in the home where it was 'safer' to indulge resistance to 'institutional and social coercions'⁹ towards tradition; it was less blatantly transgressive of the increasingly threatened hegemony. I have little doubt that there were - and are - other such paintings in country houses. But they were not, and are not, destined for public view, whether due to choice of their owners, to neglect caused by the 'selective tradition' (whether of the nineteenth or twentieth century) or to ideological discomforts that continue into the twenty-first century.¹⁰

Patrick Joyce has suggested that being 'engaged in providing and receiving culture and cultivation ... was already to be set in movement as a subject by a story': the collection and patronage of art fulfilled this role for many of the middle classes, the professionals and the industrialists. But the narrative of self was much stronger if one could be 'part of the particular story of "culture" [and] be drawn into subjectivity in a particularly compelling way, as an agent of history and not as its object.'¹¹ Treffry and Alexander realized this and so perhaps did those members of the audience for *Rain, Steam and Speed* who, 'in the crowds of passengers and spectators, ... were invited to recognise themselves. Turner had given them a conspicuous stake in their own landscape.' But it required the advent of a new art movement, three decades later, before the 'linking of the landscape and modern life would be so vividly depicted again.'¹² This is where we come to *Penge West*, and Impressionism, which supplies a conclusion to the railway's problematic journey through the artist's landscape.

⁹ Ann Bermingham, 'Introduction' in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds), *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text*, Routledge, London, 1995; 11.

¹⁰ See David Lowenthal, 'European and English Landscapes as National Symbols' in David Hooson (ed), *Geography and National Identity*, Blackwell, London, 1994.

¹¹ Joyce, *Democratic Subjects*; 172.

¹² David Blayney Brown, 'Rule, Britannia? Patriotism, Progress and the Picturesque in Turner's Britain' in Michael Lloyd (ed), *Turner*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1996; 50. Brown adopts a purely celebratory interpretation of the technology in *Rain, Steam and Speed*.

The landscape of *Penge West*

The Impressionists in the 1870s took modern life as their subject and used middle class subjects as actors in their depictions of the countryside. Placing this 'modern' class in landscapes laden with all of its cultural associations of national identity, history and power, dramatically made them agents of their own history and linked them - and the landscape - unequivocally to a narrative of progress. *Penge West* was an early Impressionist work and the first to depict a railway. It is the final anchor-point of this thesis and it is, technically, outside the scope of the work. For it is a French artist who has brought us here. He was born, appropriately enough, in 1830 at the same time as the Liverpool to Manchester railway, but he emerges from a different art historical tradition than the one that I have examined. In looking at the contrast between British and French modern art, Macleod rejects making a comparison precisely because they were so different: they had different roots and English art evolved 'according to a selection process that was determined by an inherently different set of cultural values than those which constructed French modernity.'¹³ So this section is a brief - and somewhat speculative - excursus included to round off the story so far - and justifiable to the extent that the first Impressionist railway landscape was an English one.

Camille Pissarro, along with a number of other French artists, took refuge in London from December 1870 to June 1871 to escape the siege of Paris during the Franco-Prussian war.¹⁴ In that short period of time he painted thirteen pictures, took part in two exhibitions and had two canvases rejected by the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. One of his paintings, from spring 1871, was *Penge West* (Fig. 3). Pissarro was a central member of the group of artists who would, in 1874, become known as Impressionists. Monet's paintings of Gare St. Lazare in 1877 are often remembered as the Impressionists' response to the railway (see Fig. 55¹⁵),

¹³ Dianne Sachko Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class: Money and the making of cultural identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996; 147.

¹⁴ Strictly speaking, Pissarro was not French. Born in the Caribbean, he had Franco-Spanish-Creole parentage and Danish nationality. He moved permanently to France when he was 25 but never took French citizenship.

¹⁵ Many writers have referred to Monet's homage to Turner in his paintings of Gare St Lazare and to the 'pictorial dynamism' and 'visual ambiguity' in the steamy atmosphere of the train shed. Pool recounts a story Renoir told in later years about Monet's annoyance 'when critics of his pictures said that fog was not a suitable subject for a painting. So he decided to execute a painting with a subject foggier than any he had used before [and] he finally decided on a view of St. Lazare, "with smoke from the engines so that you can hardly
(continued...)

but it was Pissarro who was the first of the group to depict one.

Pissarro's track curves through a suburb south of London, a quintessentially modern location, where a small village had developed as an extension of London. For the first half of the nineteenth century country dwelling for city workers had been restricted to the wealthy who could use horse and carriage; with greater railway penetration the 1870s began to see the creation of 'country-village satellites' to the big towns, especially in the case of London¹⁶ and it is this supremely middle class phenomenon that Pissarro is observing. The structure of the painting appears to be based on a harmony of curves - that of the railway reflecting that of the hillsides and of the distant road approaching the village on the centre left, while the white smoke puffing from the engine as it accelerates away from the station forms a gentle arc up towards the white clouds. Linda Nochlin describes the tracks as cutting 'a path through the bosom, as it were, of nature', but Pissarro's view of the railway 'is not visionary and excited like Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed* ... but direct, vivid, matter of fact ... this is not horrific or menacing, but part of the modern given, how things are in the industrial world.'¹⁷

In *Penge West* nature has been dissected and constrained and, at least in the form of the trees on the left, confined behind a fence; yet the sense of peace and acceptance are undeniable. For John Russel Taylor, Pissarro's attitude to the railway as well as to industry has none of Turner's 'industrial romanticism' but rather was 'as dispassionate as his views of local woods and streams and peasant cottages: it is all there, has an equal right to be there and an equal right to be painted, if and when the artist finds it interesting enough to paint, neither sanctified nor excluded by its modernity or its perenniality.' Indeed, 'he seemed most interested in finding an overall balance of tones and unifying the whole painted surface into

¹⁵ (...continued)

see a thing". Phoebe Pool, *Impressionism*, Book Club Associates, London, 1975 [first pub. 1967]; 161-164. See also Eric Shanes, *Impressionist London*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1994; 36-40 for the more traditional view.

¹⁶ F.M.L. Thompson, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain*, Vol. I: 'Regions and Communities', Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990; 73. See also Colin Divall and W. Bud, *Suburbanizing the Masses*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003 (forthcoming).

¹⁷ Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1991; 64.

one satisfactory and coherent harmony.’¹⁸ Miriam Levin sees Impressionism, and Pissarro and Monet’s railway paintings in particular, as not simply recording changes in the countryside but rather presenting ‘negotiated accommodations between the technological universe and nature, accommodations in which the railway is “naturalized” while the environment becomes an artifice created by man.’ They moved away from any previous representations of the railway and were able to ‘tightly link technology and countryside in a new vision which offered to the bourgeois citizen of the industrial age an ordered environment that responded to his idea of nature.’¹⁹

It is hard to avoid the reminders of Turner’s earlier work, but after a book was produced in 1904 suggesting he was following an English style, Pissarro reacted indignantly. He rejected the notion of the influence of Turner, and pointed to the explicit influence of Claude Lorraine on both the Impressionists and on Turner’s ‘English’ style.²⁰ However, he was a signatory, along with Monet, Degas, Morisot, Renoir and others, to a letter sent to the owner of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882 which set out the Impressionists’ aesthetic beliefs and emphasized that, as a group, they ‘cannot forget that it has been preceded in this path by a great master of the English School, the illustrious Turner.’²¹

Pissarro’s railway landscape bears witness to the continued power of the technology but suggests that it is now entirely tamed and accepted. The train journeys *out* of London, like Turner’s engine, but it gives life to these new suburbs rather than threatening death. The fire breathing monster has been domesticated and there is no longer any question, for the artist, that modernity is here to stay. A sublime response to railway technology and its place in the landscape is no longer appropriate. The ‘cultural and political meaning’ of the sublime has moved on and the ‘emotional configuration’ of sublimity is no longer necessary to ‘validate

¹⁸ John Russel Taylor, *Impressionist Dreams*, Grange Books, London, 1993; 90-91.

¹⁹ Miriam R. Levin, ‘Le chemin de fer dans le jardin français’, *Revue d’Histoire des Chemins de Fer*, No. 10-11: ‘Arts et Chemins de fer’, Spring-Autumn 1994; 50.

²⁰ See Bernard Denvir (ed), *The Impressionists at First Hand*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987; 193-4.

²¹ Quoted in Shanes, *Impressionist London*; 21. It must be admitted that the letter was a plea for an exhibition at the prestigious gallery in London and the connection with the English School may have been played up a little.

[the] social and technological conditions' of the railway.²² As with other 'discreet encroachments of industrialization' in his paintings, 'Pissarro sees them neither as dark satanic mills nor as harbingers of technological progress, but simply as elements, neither denied nor unduly emphasized'.²³

There is a 'sense of class' in the paintings that is, for Clark, 'basic to bourgeois ideology, ... a contrary imagery would have to be based on some form of identification with the interests and values of other classes in capitalist society.' The Impressionists were not only 'bourgeois artists; it needs stressing, rather, that their practice as painters - their claim to be modern - depended on their being bound more closely than ever before to the interests and economic habits of the bourgeoisie they belonged to'²⁴ and whose everyday lives they painted. Denvir comments that the group reflected 'the society in which they lived deliberately, and depict[ed] it as a matter of conscious aesthetic policy rather than as part of that inescapable reflex which links all artists with their own age.'²⁵ In Pissarro's own words, written to his son Lucien, also an artist, in 1898: 'one can only work by observing nature with our own modern temperament. ... It is a serious mistake to think that art is not closely tied to a specific epoque [*sic*].'²⁶

Paris had emerged after the mid nineteenth century as 'a gleaming, visually harmonious European capital adapted to the demands of modern commercial life' - the only European city at that time to move so decisively away from its medieval roots.²⁷ Yet for much of the nineteenth century it was still the case that, for 'foreigners ... a visit to Britain was a voyage

²² David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996; xvii. (See Chapter 6 of the present work.)

²³ Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision*; 63.

²⁴ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, Thames and Hudson, London, revised edit., 1999 [first pub. 1984]; 260.

²⁵ Denvir, *The Impressionists at First Hand*; 8.

²⁶ Quoted in Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision*; 63.

²⁷ Belinda Thomson, *Impressionism: Origins, Practice, Reception*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2000; 20.

into the future'²⁸ and as a result, when looking for 'appreciation' outside France, 'the Impressionists placed special faith in England, and it was in that country that they suffered their greatest disappointment.'²⁹ While exiled in England, Pissarro and Monet, in spring 1871, 'had the idea of sending our studies to the exhibition of the Royal Academy. Naturally we were rejected,' as Pissarro put it in a letter to a friend.³⁰ Pissarro was disillusioned with almost every aspect of the artistic life in Britain. During his sojourn in London in 1871 he wrote to a friend: 'Here there is no art; everything is a question of business.'³¹ It was in England, in 1870, that Pissarro met the gallery owner Durand-Ruel, also in temporary exile in London, who was to remain influential in his life and that of the other Impressionists for many years to come. In May 1871 Durand-Ruel persuaded the International Exhibition of Fine Art in Kensington to include Pissarro's *Penge West* and *Lower Norwood: Snow Effect*. In general they were ignored by the critics although a lone and belated voice in the *Art Journal* in September of that year said that one of Pissarro's paintings at the Kensington exhibition held 'much natural truth'.³²

The extraordinary popularity today of Impressionist paintings makes it easy to forget that the style struggled for general acceptability in its early years. Kenneth McConkey suggests that it was not until 'the Paris International in 1900 [that] French Impressionism was at last wholeheartedly approved' in France while 'British painters, if not the British public, had reconciled themselves to Impressionism.'³³ There was, in fact, a sizeable group of Impressionists working in Britain. Whistler (an American living and working in London) had been invited to exhibit in the first Impressionism exhibition held in Paris in 1874. He

²⁸ Brown, 'Rule Britannia?' in Lloyd (ed), *Turner*; 51.

²⁹ Pool, *Impressionism*; 251.

³⁰ Quoted in John Rewald, *The History of Impressionism*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1973; 258.

³¹ Letter to Théodore Duret, June 1871. Quoted in Bernard Denvir, *The Chronicle of Impressionism: An Intimate Diary of the Lives and World of the Great Artists*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2000; 71.

³² See Denvir, *Chronicle of Impressionism*; 70. Cooper suggests that the painting identified by Denvir as *Penge West* was *Upper Norwood* and Shanes agrees that 'two snow scenes' were exhibited. Douglas Cooper, *The Courtauld Collection: A Catalogue and Introduction*, The Athlone Press, London, 1954; 22n.1. Shanes, *Impressionist London*; 19.

³³ Kenneth McConkey, *British Impressionism*, Phaidon Press, London, 1998; 139.

declined as he was about to hold a one-man show.³⁴ Durand-Ruel persevered with exhibitions in London but to little avail. In the 'early 1880s ... a contributor to *Punch* wrote that he had been urged by a friend to look in because it was so "horrid funny".³⁵ In 1888 the artist William Frith saw the 'craze' for Impressionism as 'dangerous', even more so than the 'Pre-Raphaelitic'. He feared that it 'may do much damage to our modern school, the effects of which may be disastrously permanent' but he was confident that 'the craze itself will assuredly pass away as everything foolish and false does sooner or later.'³⁶

And yet, similar to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood twenty years earlier, while the art was rejected by the academy, it did manage to find a few wealthy adherents in the middle classes. During Pissarro's exile in England when he painted *Penge West*, he also painted a number of views of the Crystal Palace. One of these was purchased by Charles John Galloway, a steam engine manufacturer from Manchester and art collector who also owned a Degas.³⁷ Samuel Barlow, the owner of a bleaching factory in Lancashire, bought four of Pissarro's works in the early 1870s, probably from Durand-Ruel.³⁸ A Captain Henry Hill of Brighton, variously described as a tailor and as a quartermaster, owned seven paintings by Degas, a number of which were purchased from Durand-Ruel when he closed his Bond Street gallery in 1875.³⁹ Samuel Barlow tried to sell Pissarro's 1871 *Village Street, Louveciennes* at

³⁴ McConkey, *British Impressionism*; 13. John Ruskin's response in 1877 to Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, is the stuff of legend. He accused Whistler of 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face' which was 'cockney impudence'. Whistler sued for libel and won but was awarded only one farthing in damages and no costs. He was bankrupted but became something of a folk hero for fighting for the artist's right of expression. A number of artists in Britain in the 1880s and 1890s were either dubbed Impressionists or had strong links to the movement, including Walter Sickert, Philip Wilson Steer, John Sargent, Henry La Thangue and George Clausen. A group, associated with the New English Art Club (founded in 1886), and led by Sickert, staged an exhibition of their work in 1889 under the title 'The London Impressionists'.

³⁵ Pool, *Impressionism*; 251.

³⁶ Quoted in Denvir, *Impressionists at First Hand*; 165.

³⁷ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 418-9. Unfortunately, as far as I can ascertain, Galloway's steam engines, that were exported all over Europe, were not steam *locomotives*.

³⁸ Pool, *Impressionism*; 251-2. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 388.

³⁹ Cooper, *Courtauld Collection*; 60. Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 429. Pool, *Impressionism*; 251.

Christie's in London in 1882, and was forced to buy it in at 21 guineas.⁴⁰

The association of the style with the bourgeoisie was explicit early in its life. On 30 September 1876, *The Monthly Review* in London published an article by Stephen Mallarmé, the French poet and great friend of the Impressionists in Paris, in which he attempted to explain and defend the techniques and the meanings of Impressionism. Stephen Eisenman reads two primary messages in the article: on the one hand Impressionism 'affirmed and paid homage to the mode of vision of a new and surging working class ... the vision and voice of an increasingly self-conscious and confident proletariat' while on the other it was one of the 'early manifestations ... of the emergent culture of commodity capitalism.'⁴¹ Mallarmé saw Impressionism as the artistic parallel of the 'participation of a hitherto ignored people in the political life of France'. He emphasized the original name of the group of painters which was 'Intransigents' 'which in political language means radical and democratic.'⁴² For Mallarmé this gave the art 'truth, simplicity and childlike charm'.⁴³ He believed that painting the truth of nature would enable 'the public ... to see the true beauties of the people, healthy and solid as they are, [also enabling] the graces which exist in the bourgeoisie ... to be recognized and taken as worthy models in art, and then will come the time of peace.'⁴⁴ Taken together, the 'modern worker' and the bourgeoisie are the fundamental expression of modernity and are united, for Mallarmé, through Impressionism. Bridget Fowler also sees the link in Impressionism between the two 'new' classes of capitalism: 'Impressionism's depiction of the bourgeoisie at leisure also encapsulates some of the working class's aspirations towards free time.'⁴⁵ It is in the conflicting concepts of the work ethic and of leisure that we begin to find some more detailed clues about the acceptability of Impressionism in Britain.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Conran, 'Art Collections' in John H.G. Archer (ed), *Art and Architecture in Victorian Manchester: Ten illustrations of patronage and practice*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1985; 77.

⁴¹ Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art*; 252.

⁴² Quoted in Stephen F. Eisenman, *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994; 250.

⁴³ Quoted in Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*; 268.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Denvir, *Impressionists at First Hand*; 107.

⁴⁵ Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory: Critical Investigations*, Sage Publications, London, 1997; 117-8.

As early as 1874, some British critics were willing to take the art seriously, even if they were negative about it. A review of one of Durand-Ruel's exhibitions, in *The Times* of 27 April 1874, wrote of a 'harshness in the juxtaposition of tints ... what seems a studied avoidance of delicate workmanship'. Monet and Pissarro, along with a couple of others, are selected as illustrative of a lack of 'reverence for completeness and thoroughness of workmanship'. The writer concludes: 'One seems to see in such work evidence of as wild a spirit of anarchy at work in French painting as in French politics.' Henry James reviewed an exhibition mounted in Paris in 1876 for the *New York Tribune* and he made much of this lack of 'workmanship'. In 'the divergence in method between the English Pre-Raphaelites and this little group' he saw 'the moral differences between the French and English races.' The Pre-Raphaelites

purchase forgiveness for their infidelity to the old more or less moral proprieties and conventionalities, by an exquisite, patient, virtuous manipulation - by being above all other things laborious. But the Impressionists ... abjure virtue altogether, and declare that a subject that has been crudely chosen shall be loosely treated. ... The Englishmen, in other words, were pedants, and the Frenchmen are cynics.⁴⁶

The question of 'finish' in an art work was important. Macleod argues that in England the contested nature of attitudes to progress, and 'nationalist views on work and leisure' combined with 'criteria internal to artistic practice' to make acceptance of Impressionism difficult.⁴⁷ Finish was valued in Victorian art and demonstrated that artists were worthy contributors to the prosperity of the country: evidence of dedicated labour could be considered a measure of a successful painting. Despite identification of artists as 'geniuses', proof of craft skill was still required and was itself elevated to an almost spiritual level with the Victorian obsession with the work ethic, becoming a 'pertinacious preference in Victorian painting.'⁴⁸ For bourgeois patrons, artists needed to show their commitment to the ethic that had made the country rich while still pleasing more traditional patrons with evidence of the genius that had inspired them to undertake their sacred labour. The Impressionists' freedom of structure and construction were, therefore, capable of outraging English sensibilities. After all, in France as well as in England, a 'threat to an established

⁴⁶ Quoted in Denvir, *Impressionists at First Hand*; 103.

⁴⁷ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 147.

⁴⁸ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 149. See also Dianne Sachko Macleod, 'The Dialectics of Modernism and English Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 35 no. 1, January 1995.

historical pattern was much the same whether it occurred in art or in politics.’⁴⁹

Another difficulty for English audiences was the primary iconography of Impressionism - that of leisure. Macleod suggests that this ‘had no place in the English lexicon until the 1880s and 1890s’;⁵⁰ but this statement needs some mediation. What is critical is that the leisure shown in Impressionist works was that, on the whole, of the middle classes. Leisure was not by any means a stranger to English art. As we have seen, all signs of work had traditionally been excluded from landscape paintings (and landscape gardens), leisure being an essential attribute of a member of the ruling class who must be uninvolved in the grubby business of making a living. Gainsborough’s *Mr. and Mrs. Andrews* (Fig. 9) was used in Chapter 2 as an example of a complex breaking of this rule. In the first half of the nineteenth century leisure had been used in the landscape as an indicator of safety, occupying the space placed around ‘dangerous’ subjects such as the city or railway tracks. The symbolically idle figures would be, for example, gentry on horseback, strolling middle class ladies and perhaps resting peasants, but they were part of the iconography of the genre, not the subjects of the art. In the mid-Victorian period, narrative paintings such as Frith’s *Derby Day* and *Ramsgate Sands* had been extremely popular (the latter being purchased by the Queen). They depicted chaotic leisure scenes in an ‘all human life is there’ style with the contest for space between the different classes clear for all to see. For the first time, however, they provided a social discourse of relaxation for the middle classes, although the compositions evinced an underlying concern and discomfiture about the breakdown of traditional structures of life, developed further in *The Railway Station* (Fig. 54). This same discomfiture with the spread of leisure outside the educated classes had been expressed by Wordsworth in 1844 in his opposition to the Kendal and Windermere Railway line. Leisure itself, and control of pastimes that had been the preserve of the upper classes, were in contention, exacerbated to no small extent by the opening of the railway network.

In Impressionism, leisure was removed decisively from being the preserve of one class, and it became the apparent focus of art. It was no longer used in landscape as merely a symbolic indicator, nor was its classlessness depicted with any form of discomfort; it was presented

⁴⁹ Joshua C. Taylor (ed), *Nineteenth Century Theories of Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989; 355.

⁵⁰ Macleod, *Art and the Victorian middle class*; 150.

with a confident and self-conscious challenge to the viewer. Monet was very deliberate about this with his first railway picture. *Train in the countryside* (Fig. 56), from 1872, offered a diminutive elevated railway, partly obscured by foliage, passing by a public park where middle class people strolled. The railway embankment delimits the view on the left-hand side and there is no sign whatsoever of the agricultural land normally associated with the countryside. Herbert points out how three of the figures in the park in the foreground stand still in the sun deliberately gazing out of the canvas at the viewer.⁵¹ Neither the train in the landscape nor the middle class at leisure is considered problematic: control of the open space has been wrested away from the more properly 'leisured classes'. As much as industry and the railway, leisure and idle pleasure were intrusions of modernity encroaching on the countryside and Impressionist landscapes seemed deliberately to show this.⁵² A year after *Train in the Countryside*, Monet moved to Argenteuil, a small industrial town just outside Paris, and produced the first of several striking images of the new railway bridge there, *The Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil* (Fig. 57). The railway brought obvious advantages for industry but also served the Parisians' desire to pursue leisure activities. (It also, of course, enabled Monet to live outside Paris, giving an easy commute into the city.) Sailing boats are shown on the river under the bridge - Paris's main yacht club was at Argenteuil - and a couple of people watch them, chatting. The heavy iron bridge controls the centre of the painting; two trains cross it in opposite directions. The weight and dominance of the bridge is reminiscent of Turner's Maidenhead Bridge; unlike Turner's train, Monet's most prominent engine, puffing huge clouds of steam, is heading *into* the capital. The painting 'is a homage to the railway' but also to the successful local industry (a local ironworks had built the bridge), as well as to the accessibility of leisure activities: it 'aligned [Monet] with the progressive elements of the middle class'.⁵³ Fowler suggests that rather than 'an unfortunate intrusion into the picturesque, the uncompromising concrete [*sic*] bridge and revolutionary communications implicit in the train it bears are revealed as the *condition* for the bourgeois

⁵¹ Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure and Parisian Society*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988; 220.

⁵² Clark, *Painting of Modern Life*; 186.

⁵³ Herbert, *Impressionism*; 220 & 222. These pages contain a detailed description and interpretation of the extent of the homage and how the 'composition has the framework of modern engineering.'

leisure of yachting.’⁵⁴

In this context, Fowler emphasizes the important function of placing the old alongside the new in the landscape: ‘Impressionism was not simply relaying bourgeois discourses or ideologies about leisure ... [it was] an ironical and critical discourse, not least through its juxtaposition of the old with new, often ugly modern objects so as to undermine any simple romantic myths, for example those of the countryside.’⁵⁵ Klingender reminds us that Turner also did this: he quotes a note from Ford Madox Brown’s diary in 1856 about ‘a scene such as Turner has so often depicted with satisfaction to himself and others, of Old England and New England combined.’ Klingender goes on to point out that ‘in this respect the attitude both of Turner and the French Impressionists, who shared his view, was opposed to the conception of art prevalent in Victorian England.’⁵⁶ Locating the new in the midst of the old or the timeless, the Impressionists defiantly claim the right of the middle classes to be at ease in the countryside, often celebrating, along the way, the transport system that enabled them to be there. So Macleod is wrong to suggest that leisure itself was outside the English art lover’s lexicon; it was the claiming of leisure space for an exclusively middle class pleasure seeker that was new.

To reprise Joyce, a narrative underpinning was provided by this art for a powerful bourgeois subjectivity, placing the middle class quite openly ‘as an agent of history and not as its object’. But in Britain those middle classes who had been placed centre-stage by Impressionism not only still chose to keep the cultural boat steady, but also - when ‘industriousness was ... now ... to be regarded as chief among the virtues’⁵⁷ - they could be alienated by these paintings, due as much to the lack of finish in their production as to the excessive indulgence in leisure in their conception. Ironically, then, the very narrative that professed to establish a self-identity for the classes hitherto ignored by art was not only

⁵⁴ Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*; 124. [My italics.] The railway bridge at Argenteuil was, in fact, made entirely of iron.

⁵⁵ Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory*; 117-8.

⁵⁶ Francis D. Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Paladin Press, London, 1972 [first pub. 1947]; 90.

⁵⁷ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The rural poor in English painting 1730-1840*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980; 16.

counter to art's moral purpose but also an excessively dangerous challenge to the cultural hegemony. Despite the real, if slow, progress of democratic reform in Britain, a delicate political balancing act was held in place. There was no question of a revolutionary change in the political structures such as had happened in France, but there was a continuing concern about unrest. Edward Royle interprets a 'Liberal consensus of the mid-Victorian years' as a consciously contrived compromise which avoided any continuation of class conflict.⁵⁸ Throughout the nineteenth century, capitalism in Britain had continued to thrive within the framework of the aristocracy, as Brenner has shown it had always done.⁵⁹ But by the 1870s it was 'clear to politicians that the old political structure could be maintained only if it came to terms with middle class expectations'.⁶⁰ Theodore Koditschek, in his study of nineteenth-century Bradford, found that the putative 'New Regime' was 'not so urgently needed' after 1850 as 'the Old Regime was willing to govern in its name.'⁶¹ The fragility of the tried and tested landscape ideology in such circumstances is obvious: the wholesale abandonment of the rural idyll or the complacent placing of modernity in the landscape served nobody's interests. The 'Old Regime' clung to belief in itself and its traditional values, while seeking ways for the 'New Regime' not to feel excluded from cultural expression. If the shift of political power was slow and piecemeal and always far from complete, the representation of the railway in landscape art was also piecemeal (at best). The traces of change in cultural forms that I set out to find appear to have followed more closely the subtle changes in *political* hegemony than the more obvious changes in economic hegemony. Throughout the nineteenth century, '[l]and and its changing role in defining relations of power are at the centre of the political conflict; representations of the land are increasingly used to contest or reconstitute a national symbol.'⁶² Acceptance of an

⁵⁸ Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A social history 1750-1997*, Arnold, London, 2nd edit., 1997 [first pub. 1987.]; 127.

⁵⁹ Robert Brenner, 'Bourgeois revolution and transition to capitalism' in A.L. Beier, D. Cannadine & J.M. Rosenheim (eds), *The First Modern Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; 274.

⁶⁰ H.C.G. Matthew, 'The Liberal Age (1851-1914)' in Kenneth O. Morgan (ed), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992 [revised edition]; 466.

⁶¹ Theodore Koditschek, *Class formation and urban-industrial society: Bradford, 1750-1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990; 20.

⁶² Elizabeth K. Helsinger, 'Land and National Representation in Britain' in Michael Rosenthal, Christiana Payne and Scott Wilcox, *Prospects for the Nation: Recent Essays in British Landscape, 1750-1880*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997; 26.

Impressionist landscape, peopled with the middle classes at leisure and traversed by a railway line was, therefore, not easy for any part of the British art establishment and, in 1905, 30 years after Pissarro's London exile, Durand-Ruel mounted an exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London containing 305 of what are today considered some of the finest Impressionist works. Eleven thousand people attended (despite it being a relatively small gallery), but not one painting was sold.⁶³

After Penge West

The discussion here about Impressionism is necessarily brief. I have not traced it as a French art historical event: I have addressed the movement only in so far as it impinged on the British audience as a radical change to representations in art. It rounds off the response to the questions posed by Wolff and Seed, and quoted in Chapter 1: how were ideological presuppositions and social values of the middle class realized in cultural practices? and is it possible to identify a class project in institutions or in forms of representation?⁶⁴ A focus on the railway in the landscape - a particularly brash expression of modernity - and the particularities of its representation in fine art has gone some way towards locating ideological assumptions in cultural practice and towards engaging with just such a class project. It has also, however, opened up the need for more wide-ranging studies.

The overview of art in nineteenth century America in earlier chapters shows the potential value of a comparative study of the representation of technology and modernity in art in the precise historical and social circumstances of another country. Just as responses to technology will differ across national borders, so also is landscape embedded in national cultures in different ways. A major contribution to such work is contained in the book accompanying a recent exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London. Tim Barringer's essay compares the sense of national identities as evinced through landscape painting in Britain and America in the middle of the nineteenth century. He begins with the contrast between

⁶³ Denvir, *Impressionists at First Hand*; 90, 199; Kate Flint, *Impressionists in England: the Critical Reception*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984; 23.

⁶⁴ Janet Wolff and John Seed (eds), *The Culture of Capital: art, power and the nineteenth century middle class*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988; 13.

Constable in Britain and Durand in America, both of whom ‘adhere to the traditions of the Picturesque, yet each enshrines a distinctive national myth, rooted in the local landscape.’⁶⁵ A cross-cultural study of the impact of the railway on different countries in Europe, and elsewhere, as demonstrated in their art might shed light not only on attitudes to technology in contrasting economic and political environments but could also sharpen insights into class development in a variety of modes of capital accumulation. This type of study may have impact on areas of interest quite distant from cultural and art history. Berman has said that coming to terms with the specificity of ‘the modernisms of the past can give us back a sense of our own modern roots, roots that go back two hundred years [and] can help us connect with the lives of millions of people who are living through the trauma of modernization thousands of miles away, in societies radically different from our own’.⁶⁶

Broadening the study internationally is not the only need identified. Extending the timespan into the twentieth century could deepen insights into the nuances of the use of the railway as a modern icon as well as clarifying attitudes to developing technology and social change. The optimism of Impressionism in the face of progress was not long in turning to disillusionment for many. The early twentieth century saw a succession of art movements with very different approaches to the modern world; significantly, however, the railway retained its role as a primary indicator of modernity and of what were often now its discontents. Giorgio de Chirico is an example of a Futurist who frequently used a railway in the periphery of his canvases, hinting somehow at alienation. He presented the speed and power of the modern mechanical world as a subversion of classical beauty and in his brief Metaphysical stage (1912-1915) he ‘combined in a single composition scenes of contemporary life and visions of antiquity, producing a highly troubling dream reality’⁶⁷ (see, for example, Fig. 58). Carlo Carrà’s *Stazione a Milano* from 1909 (Fig. 59) has a dominant engine seen head-on surrounded by bent, harassed, almost faceless people. It seems to

⁶⁵ Tim Barringer, ‘The Course of Empires: Landscape and Identity in America and Britain, 1820-1880’ in Andrew Wilton and Tim Barringer (eds), *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States 1820-1880*, Tate Publishing, London, 2002; 39-40.

⁶⁶ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience Of Modernity*, Verso, London, 1983; 35.

⁶⁷ Wendy Beckett, *The Story of Painting*, Dorling Kindersley, London, 2001; 668. De Chirico had grown up among classical antiquities in Greece where his father was an engineer working on railway construction so it is not surprising that his ‘scenes of contemporary life’ frequently consisted of an incongruous train puffing by.

express the oppression of the modern world; yet, in his Futurist manifesto of 1910, Carrà called on artists to ‘breathe in the tangible miracles of contemporary life [such as] the iron network of speedy communications which envelops the earth’.⁶⁸ A late Viennese Expressionist, Otto Rudolf Schatz, seems also to have expressed the heavy and destructive oppression of the modern world in *Kai* in 1929 (Fig. 60) where weary and dispirited workers trudge along a quay below a looming engine high on an embankment above them. Its weight, its latent power and its implication of speed appear as the quintessential manifestation of the crushing dominance of industrial culture. The railway continued to appear frequently in modernism, symbolizing modernity, apparently equally comfortable as an emblem of the triumphs as well as of the disappointments of intensifying capitalism. A future study could place the railway, as a constant theme in these art movements, in the specific social and cultural milieu and pinpoint convergences and conflicts in an explanation of changing class structures and social adaptations. Such a study could also draw out links with recent studies of newer icons of the modern age. Sean O’Connell, for example, has looked at different modes of representation of the motor car and how it too came to reflect varied approaches to technology as well as aspects of class conflict. Just as I have found with the railway, he found that ‘images of the car and motoring often had a political purpose’ and, again in an echo of my findings, when ‘depicted by enthusiasts, the car could become an emblem of the freedoms and liberties of modernity’ while, simultaneously, it was ‘a ready-made metaphor for critics of early-twentieth-century materialism’. Inevitably, like the railway, this involved it in ‘long-running cultural clashes between various societal groups.’⁶⁹

It is ironic that the representational value of a train in a landscape has come full circle in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Views of a powerful engine pulling a train through a classic landscape, such as Terence Cuneo’s *The Duchess of Hamilton* of 1978 (Fig. 61) are very popular.⁷⁰ These paintings, neither highlight nor disguise an intrusion or an ideological conflict; they make the train powerfully dominant, using it as a gateway to

⁶⁸ *Manifesto of the Futurist Painters* by Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, Luigi Russolo, Giacomo Balla and Gino Severini, 11 February 1910, from <http://www.futurism.fsnet.co.uk/manifestos/manifesto02.htm>, 3.2.2003.

⁶⁹ Sean O’Connell, *The Car and British Society: Class, gender and motoring 1896-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998; 186.

⁷⁰ Strictly speaking, I would not normally classify these paintings as ‘fine art’, as defined in this thesis. But, for at least fifty years, they have been a very familiar form of representation of the railway.

nostalgia for a lost stability, a certainty in some golden era, the Arcadia that the railways originally threatened to destroy: the aggressor has become victim and therefore toothless, overwhelmed by new forces, newer technologies. The railway seems at last to have lost its power to represent modernity and, paradoxically, has come to stand for the supposedly idyllic world before the chaos of the times we live through now.⁷¹ Susan Danly has found the same nostalgia in modern American railway art which expresses ‘a sentimental longing for an era when technology and the land seemed to coexist in a harmonic balance.’⁷²

The railway is especially apt as a focus for accessing the processes behind the social effects of modernity because of the nature of its radical invasion of Arcadia and ‘precisely because it raises issues so vital to both our economic growth and cultural consciousness [and thus] has remained a powerful image.’⁷³ This thesis has examined the power of that image in the context of both the economic growth and the changing cultural consciousness of an increasingly confident middle class. During the course of the nineteenth century the optimism expressed by the *Elephant* had passed through the doubts and confusion of *Rain, Steam and Speed* but, with *Penge West*, a new form of confidence was on the verge of emerging; it was clear that the railway and the modern age had arrived to stay.

⁷¹ Or should it be said that it still does represent modernity and that we gaze back with nostalgia from what some would call post-modern times?

⁷² Susan Danly, ‘Introduction’ in Susan Danly and Leo Marx (eds), *The Railroad in American Art: Representations of Technological Change*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988; 47.

⁷³ Danly, ‘Introduction’ in Danly and Marx (eds) *The Railroad in American Art*; 47.

ILLUSTRATIONS

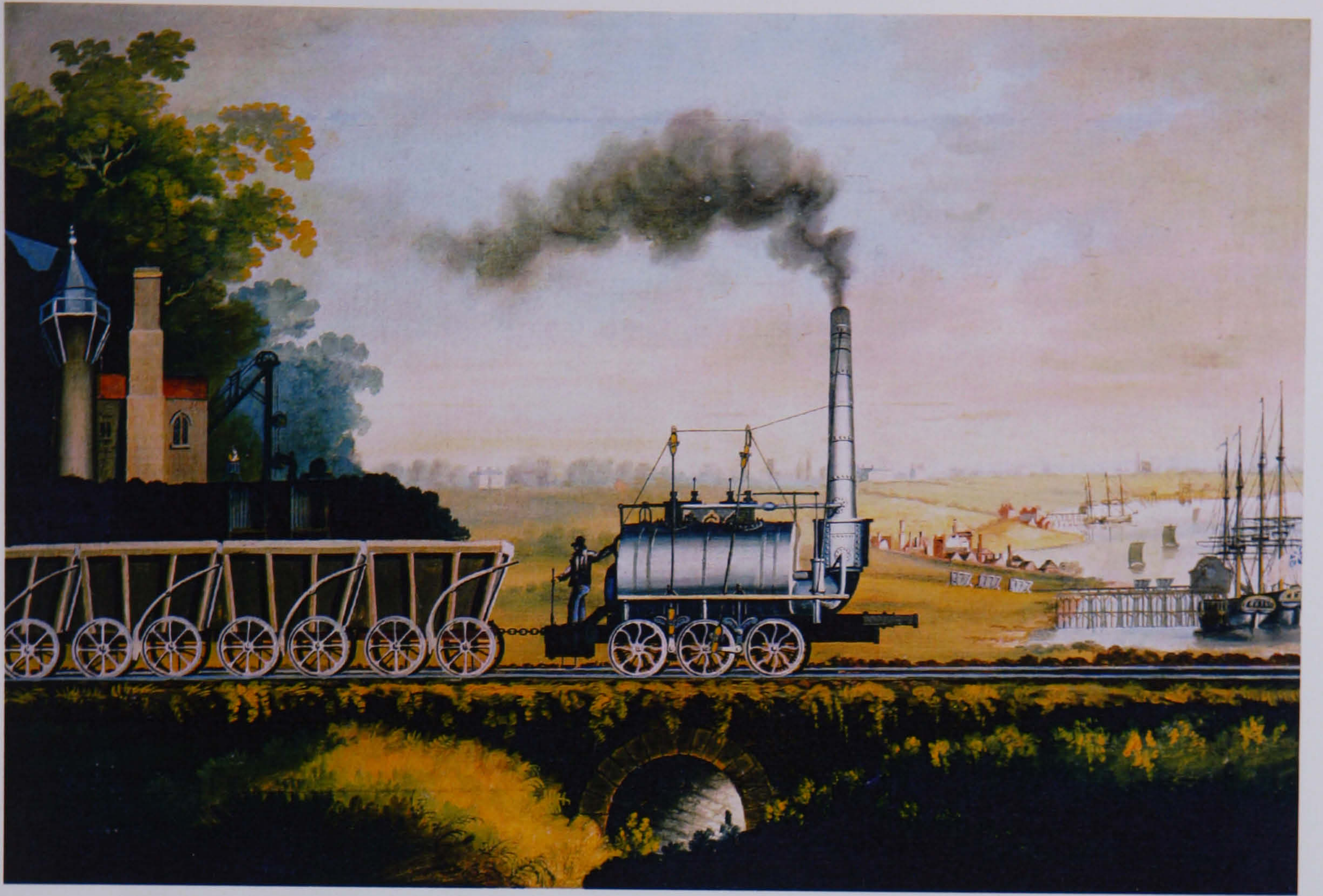


Fig. 1 Anonymous, *The Elephant*, c. 1815, Beamish Open Air Industrial Museum



Fig. 2 John Boulton, *The Durham Ox*, 1802, Althorp, private collection



Fig. 3 Camille Pissarro, *Penge West [Lordship Lane Station]*, 1871, Courtauld Institute, London



Fig. 4 George Cruikshank, *The Railway Dragon*, 1845 (cartoon), *Omnibus Magazine*

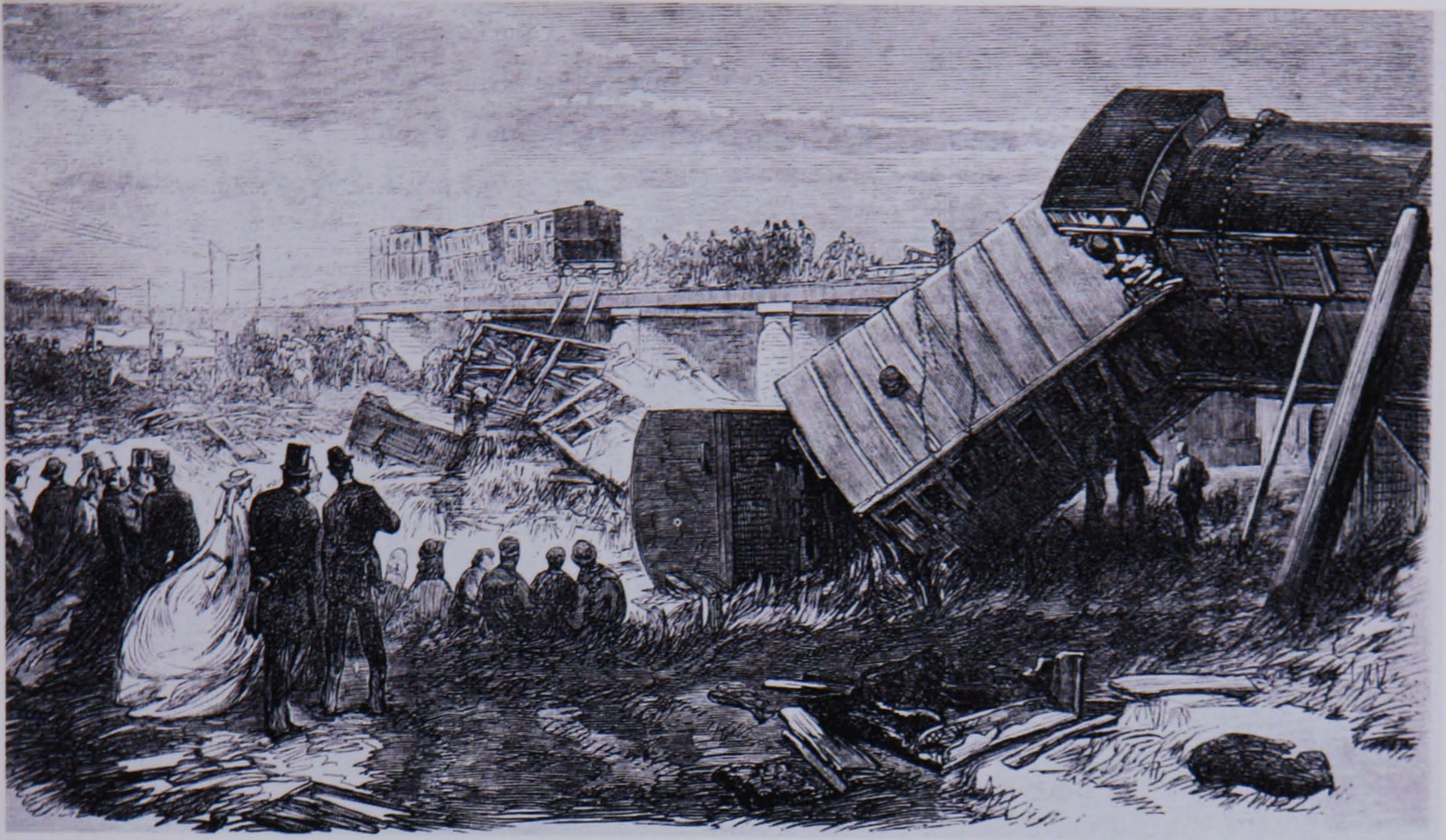


Fig. 5 The Staplehurst train crash, 9 June 1865, *Illustrated London News*

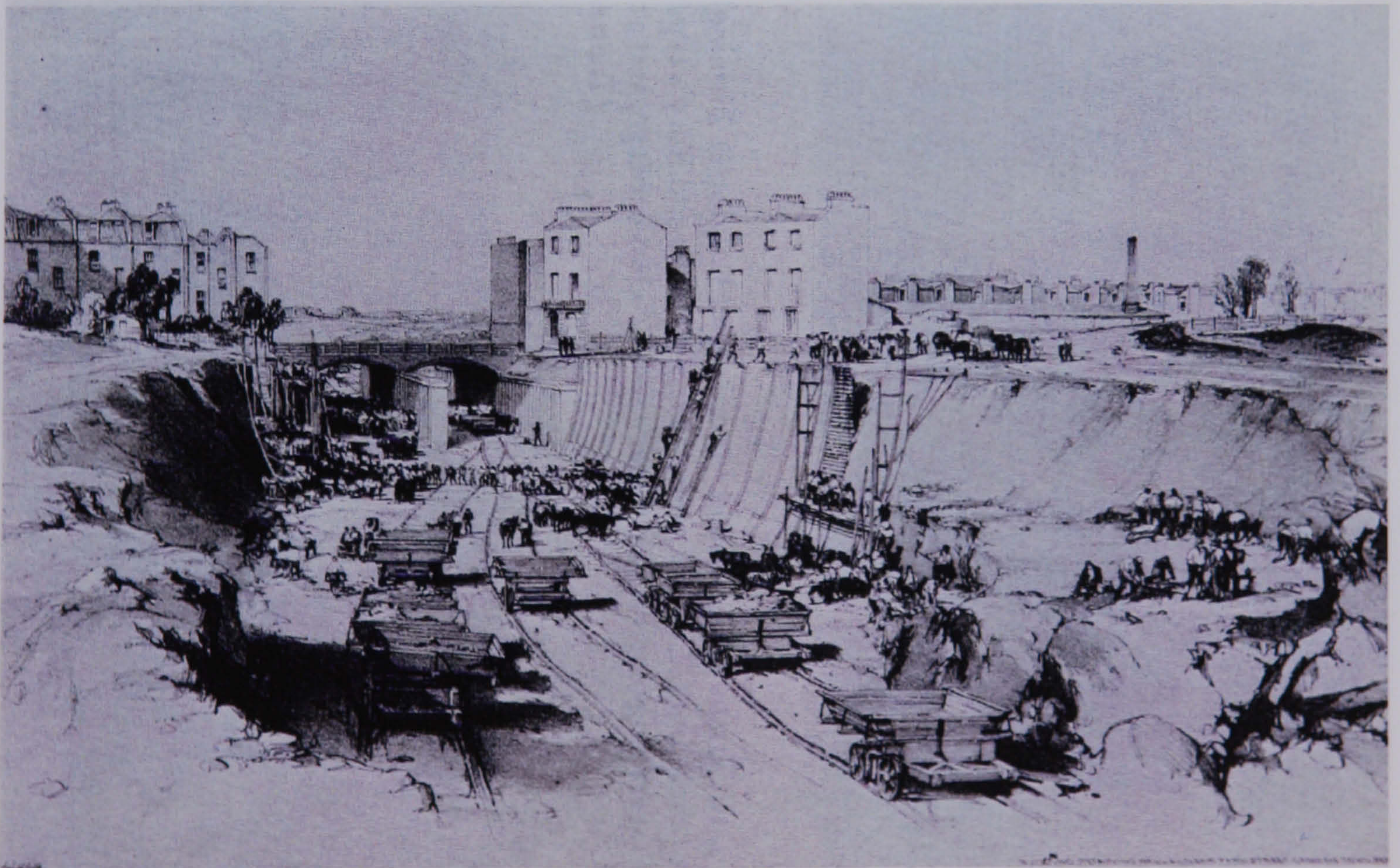


Fig. 6 J.C. Bourne, *Park Street, Camden*, 1839 (lithograph), *Drawings of the London and Birmingham Railway*, pub. Robert Ackermann, London



Fig. 7 Charles Keene, *A Pretty Prospect*, 1860 (cartoon), *Punch* Vol. 39



Fig. 8 J.M.W. Turner, *Petworth, Sussex; the Seat of the Earl of Egremont: Dewy Morning*, 1810, Petworth House (National Trust)



Fig. 9 Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Andrews*, 1748, National Gallery, London



Fig. 10 J.M.W. Turner, *Chichester Canal*, 1831, Tate Britain, London



Fig. 11 John Constable, *Haywain*, 1821, National Gallery, London



Fig. 12 William Williams, *A Morning View of Coalbrookdale*, 1777, Ironbridge Gorge Museum



Fig. 13 Joseph Wright of Derby, *Arkwright's Mill, Cromford*, 1783, private collection



Fig.14 Philip de Loutherbourg, *Coalbrookdale by Night*, 1801, Science Museum, London



Fig. 15 William Havell, *The Great Opencast*, c. 1799, Earl of Anglesey (private collection)



Fig. 16 William Wyld, *Manchester from Kersal Moor*, 1851, Queen's Collection



Fig. 17 Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Philosopher giving that Lecture on the Orrery, in which a lamp is put in place of the Sun*, 1766, Derby Museum and Art Gallery



Fig. 18 Robert Buttery, *Leeds taken from Beeston Hill*, 1833, Thoresby Society



Fig. 19 J.M.W. Turner, *Leeds*, 1816 (watercolour), Paul Mellon Collection



Fig. 20 Thomas Miles Richardson, Sr., *Newcastle from Gateshead Fell*, 1816, Mansion House, Newcastle



Fig. 21 Augustus Egg, *Travelling Companions*, 1862, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery



Fig. 22 George Childs, *Shakespeare Cliff*, 1850 (watercolour), National Railway Museum, York



Fig. 23 Thomas Cole, *River in the Catskills*, 1843, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Fig. 24 George Inness, *Lackawanna Valley*, 1855, National Gallery of Art, Washington



Fig. 25 Asher B. Durand, *Progress (Advance of Civilization)*, 1853, The Warner Coll., Gulf States Paper Corp., Alabama



Fig. 26 T.T. Bury, *Chat Moss*, 1831 (lithograph), *Views on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, pub. Robert Ackermann, London



Fig. 27 J.C. Bourne, *Berkhamsted*, 1839, (lithograph), *Drawings of the London and Birmingham Railway*, pub. Robert Ackermann, London



Fig. 28 John Carmichael, *Ridley Hall*, 1836, *Views on the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway*, pub. Frank Graham



Fig. 29 J.M.W. Turner, *Caudebec*, 1834 (lithograph), Paul Mellon Collection



Fig. 30 Ford Madox Brown, *Work*, 1865, Manchester City Art Galleries



Fig. 31 Abraham Solomon, *First Class: The Meeting - 'And at first meeting loved'*, 1854, National Gallery of Art, Ottawa



Fig. 32 Abraham Solomon, *First Class: The Meeting*, 1855, National Railway Museum, York

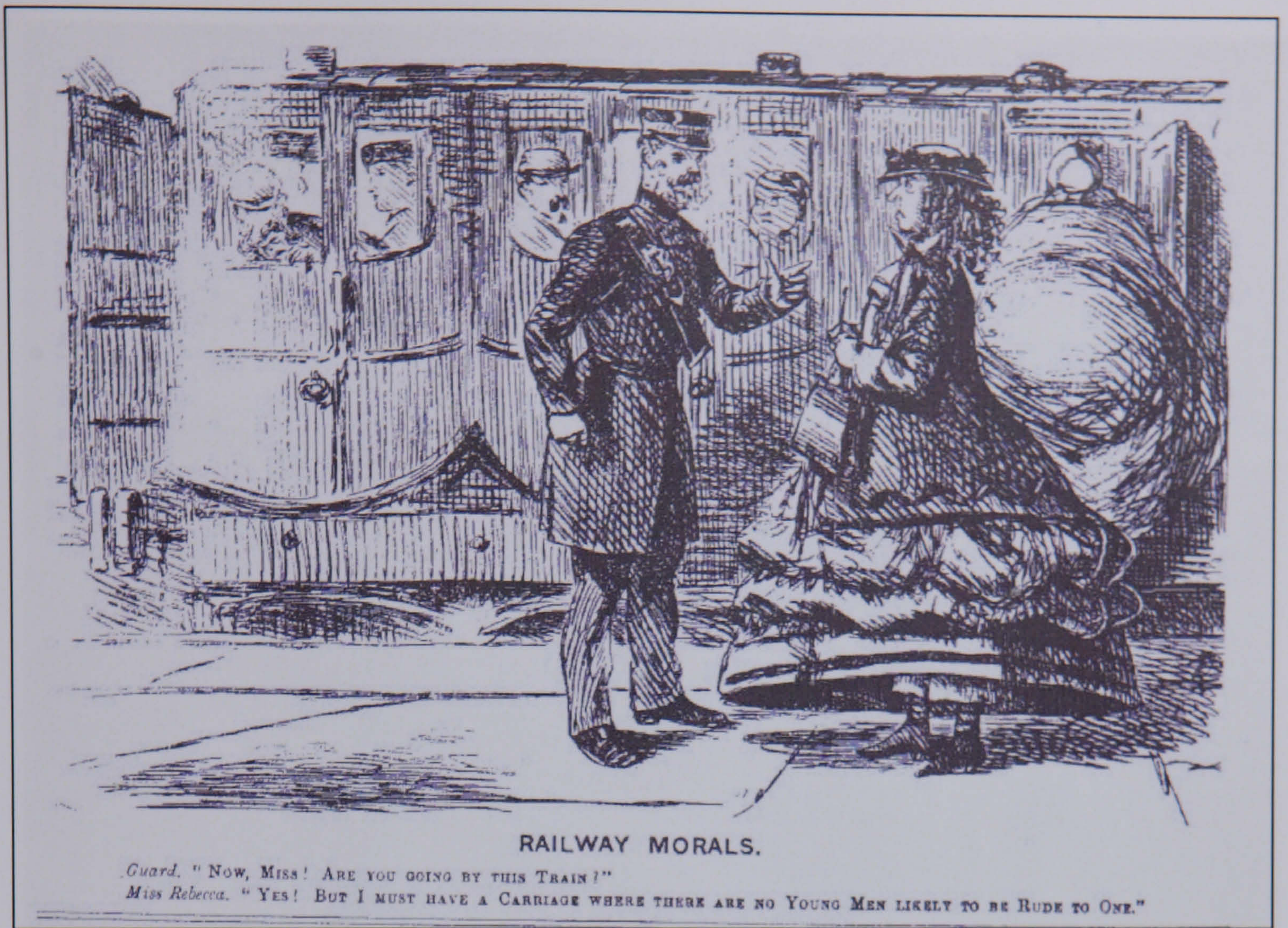


Fig. 33 Anonymous, *Railway Morals*, 1864, *Punch* Vol. 43



Fig. 34 Abraham Solomon, *Second Class - The Parting*, 1855, National Railway Museum, York



Fig. 35 Robert Whale, *The Luxulyan Viaduct*, 1842, Place, Fowey (private collection)



Fig. 36 David Octavius Hill, *The Braes and Bridge of Ballochmyle*, 1848, Ballochmyle Estate (private collection)



Fig. 37 John Lucas, *Robert Stephenson [with 2-2-2 locomotive]*, 1845, Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society

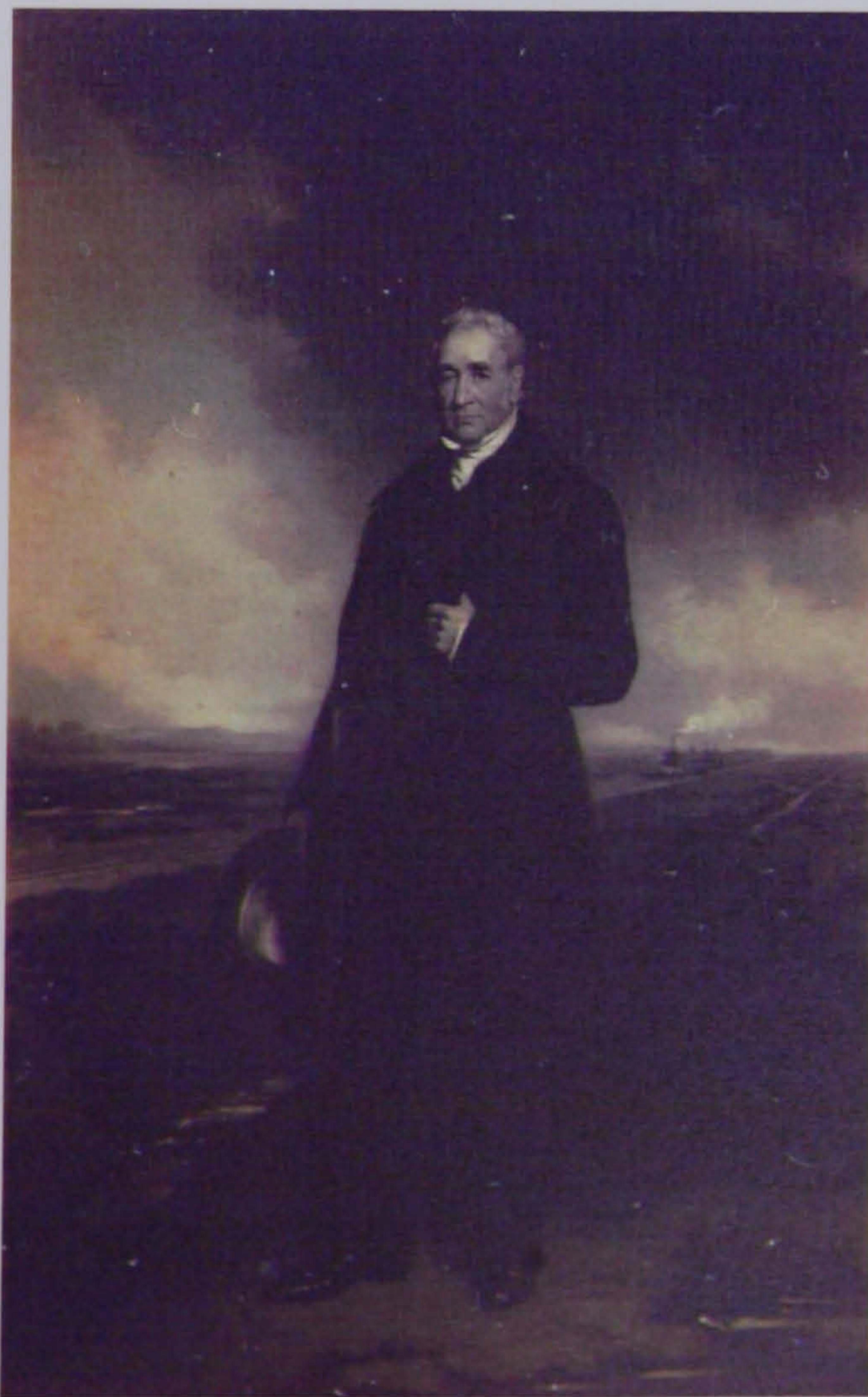


Fig. 38 John Lucas, *George Stephenson on Chat Moss*, 1847, Institute of Civil Engineers, London



Fig. 39 Thomas Miles Richardson, *Excavations for the Railway at Newcastle*, 1848, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle



Fig. 40 William Bell Scott, *Iron and Coal: the Nineteenth Century*, 1861, Wallington Hall (National Trust)



Fig. 41 Thomas Woolner, *Civilization*, 1867, (marble group), Wallington Hall (National Trust)



Fig. 42 J.M.W. Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed: the Great Western Railway*, 1844, National Gallery, London



Fig. 43 J.M.W. Turner, *Dudley, Worcs.*, 1832, (watercolour), Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight



Fig. 44 J.M.W. Turner, *Ploughing up Turnips, near Slough*, 1809, Tate Britain, London



Fig. 45 J.M.W. Turner, *Crossing the Brook*, 1815, Tate Britain, London



Fig. 46 Claude Lorraine, *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*, 1646, National Gallery, London



Fig. 47 J.M.W. Turner, *Shields on the River Tyne*, 1823, (watercolour), Tate Britain, London



Fig. 48 J.M.W. Turner, *The Fighting Téméraire Tugged to Her Last Berth to be Broken Up*, 1838, National Gallery, London



Fig. 49 J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the 'Ariel' left Harwich, 1842*, Tate Britain, London



Fig. 50 J.C. Bourne, *Maidenhead Railway Bridge, 1846*, (lithograph), *Description of the Great Western Railway*, pub. Robert Ackerman, 1846



Fig. 51 David Cox, *Wind, Rain and Sunshine*, 1846, Sunderland Art Gallery



Fig. 52 J.W. Carmichael, *London Road Viaduct on the Brighton, Lewes and Hastings Line*, 1848, National Railway Museum, York



Fig. 53 John Martin, *The Last Judgement*, 1853, Tate Britain, London



Fig. 54 William Frith, *The Railway Station*, 1862, Royal Holloway College, London



Fig. 55 Claude Monet, *La Gare St. Lazare*, 1877, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Fig. 56 Claude Monet, *Train in the Countryside*, 1872, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Fig. 57 Claude Monet, *The Railroad Bridge, Argenteuil*, 1873, private collection

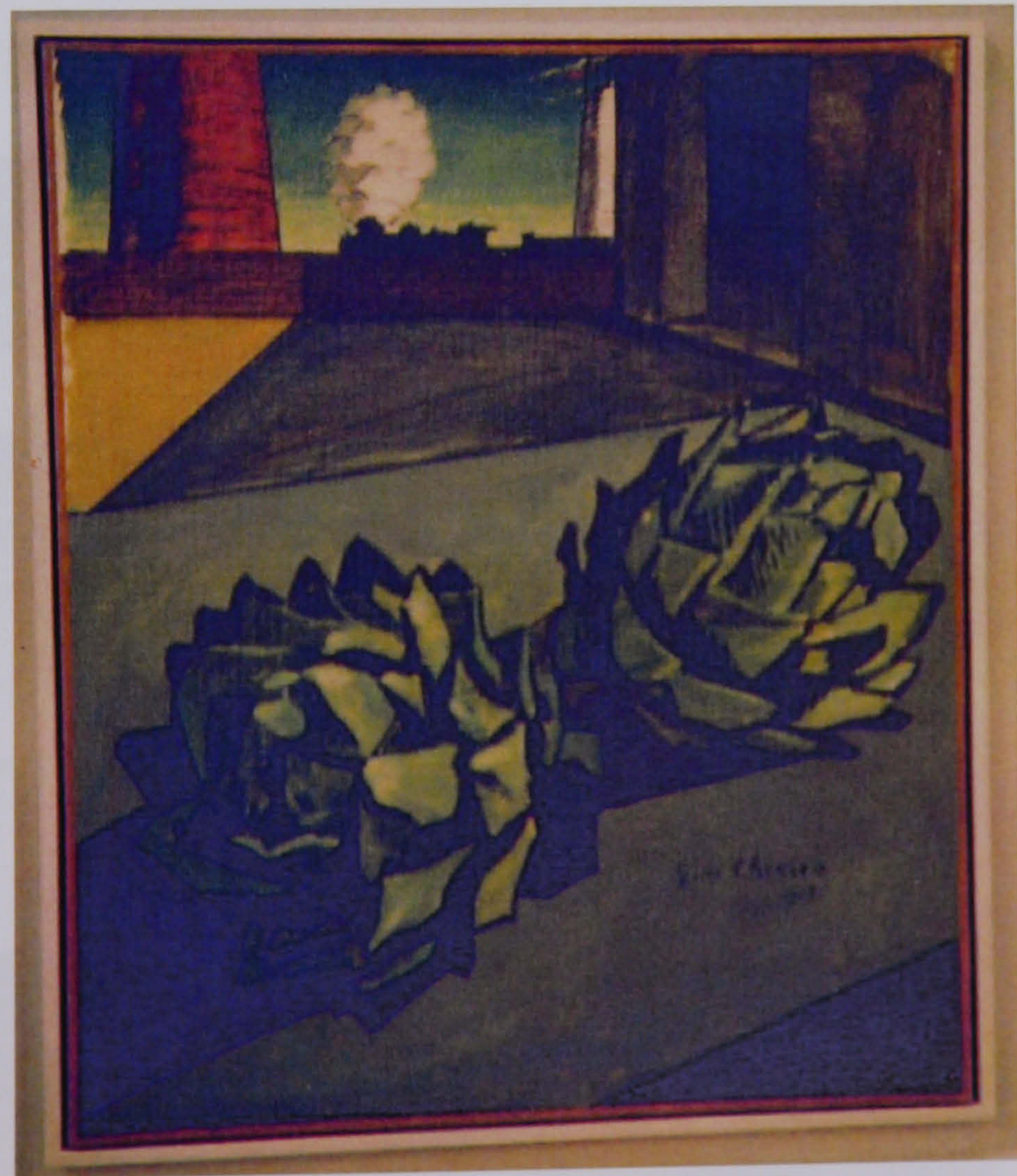


Fig. 58 Giorgio de Chirico, *Conquest of the Philosopher*, 1912, Art Institute of Chicago

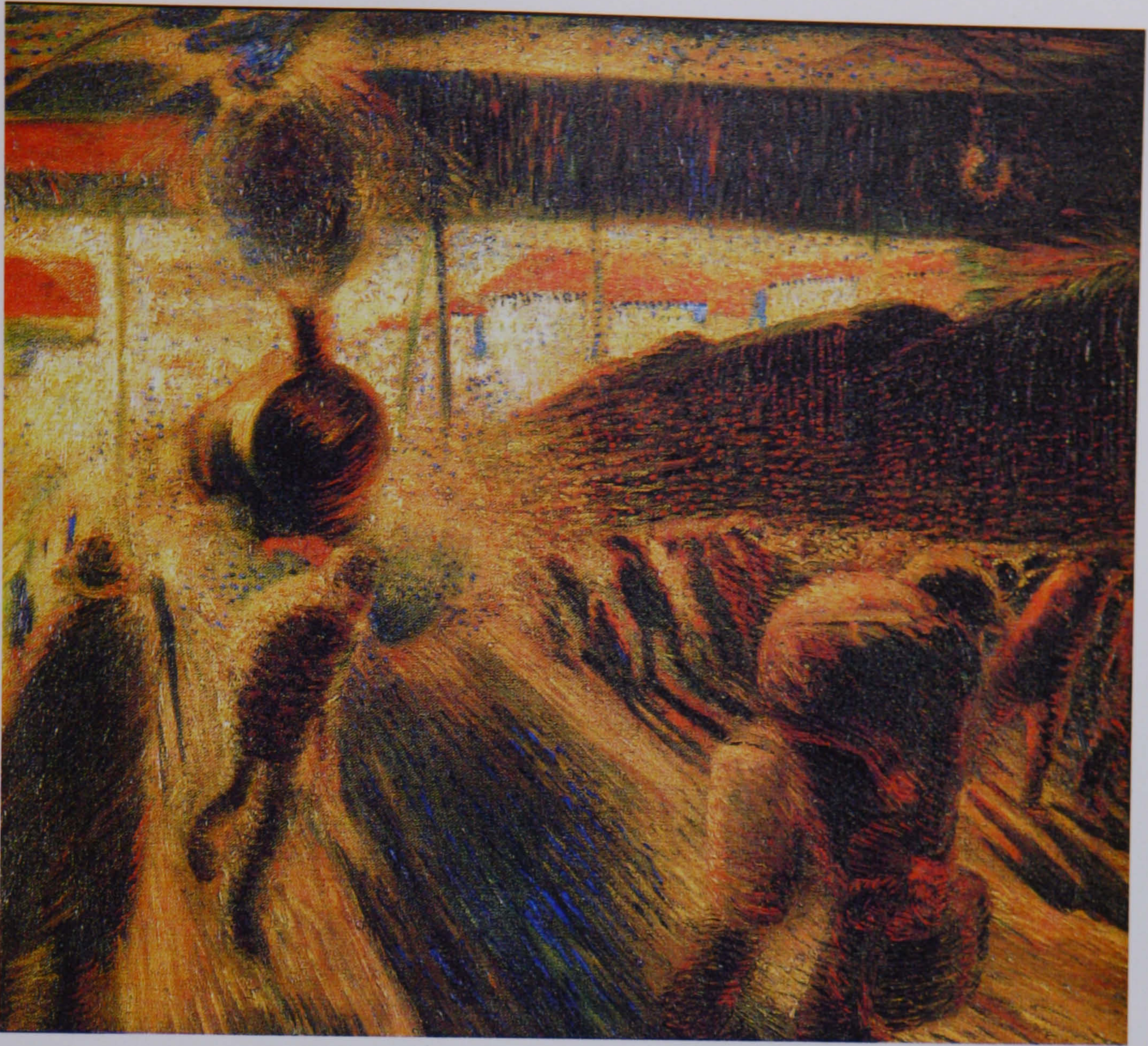


Fig. 59 Carlo Carrà, *Stazione a Milano*, 1909, private collection



Fig. 60 Otto Rudolf Schatz, *Kai*, 1929, Vienna (private collection)



Fig. 61 Terence Cuneo, *The Duchess of Hamilton*, 1978, private collection

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