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by

Aram Park

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History, Hunter College The City University of New York

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May 2, 2019 Susanna Cole
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................................................. ii

List of Illustrations................................................................................................................................................ iii

Introduction............................................................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Rise of Landscape.................................................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 2: Landscape in England with the Grand Tour.......................................................................................... 17

Chapter 3: William Hogarth (1697–1764) and English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth Century......................................................................................................................................................... 24

Chapter 4: Italian Landscape in Arthur Devis’s (1721–87) Conversation Pieces......................................................... 41

Chapter 5: Dutch Landscape in Johan Zoffany’s (1733–1810) Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson (1769–70)............................................................................................................................................. 66

Conclusion................................................................................................................................................................. 85

Bibliography............................................................................................................................................................... 87

Illustrations................................................................................................................................................................. 91
Acknowledgements

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1 Jan Van de Cappelle, *A Calm*, 1654, 110 x 148.2 cm, oil on canvas. National Museum Wales

Figure 2 Johan Zoffany, *Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson*, 1769–70, 101.5 x 127 cm, oil on canvas. The Marquess of Zetland

Figure 3 Arthur Devis, *Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull*, 1747, New York University Institute of Fine Arts, 107.3 x 87 cm, oil on canvas. Conservation Center Study Collection

Figure 4 Simone Martini, *Title Page of Petrarch’s Virgil*, 1336, 29.5 x 20 cm, illumination. Biblioteca Ambrosiana

Figure 5 Titian, *St Niccolò ai Frari* Altarpiece, sixteenth century, 388 x 270 cm, oil on wood transferred onto canvas. Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome

Figure 6 Titian, *Saint Sebastian*, sixteenth century, 190 x 96 cm, oil on canvas. Private Collection

Figure 7 Jacob van Ruysdael, *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Fields*, 1670–75, 62.2 x 55.2 cm, oil on canvas. Kunsthauß Zürich, Zurich

Figure 8 Upper Rhenish Master, *The Little Paradise Garden*, 1410–20, 26.3 x 33.4 cm, mixed techniques on oak. Städel Museum, Frankfurt

Figure 9 Giovanni Bellini, *St Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy*, 1480, 124.4 x 141.9 cm, tempera and oil on poplar panel. The Frick Collection

Figure 10 Follower of Giorgione, *Homage to a Poet*, early sixteenth century, 59.7 x 48.9 cm oil on wood. The National Gallery, London

Figure 11 Andrea Previtali, *Scenes from Tébaldeo’s Eclogues*, about 1510, 45.2 x 19.9 cm, oil on wood. The National Gallery, London

Figure 12 Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with Apollo and the Muses*, 1652, 186 x 290 cm, oil on canvas. Scottish National Gallery

Figure 13 Studio of Richard Wilson, *On the Wye*, mid-eighteenth century, 25.4 x 31.1 cm, oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London

Figure 14 Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. Andrew*, 1750, 69.8 x 119.4 cm, oil on canvas. National Gallery, London

Figure 15 William Hogarth, *A Harlot’s Progress*, Plate I, 1732, 31.3 x 38.4 cm, etching and engraving on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 16 William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness*, Plate 1, 1747, 26.2 x 34.6 cm, etching and engraving on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Figure 17 William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness*, Plate 4, 1747, 26.2 x 34.6 cm, etching and engraving on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 18 William Hogarth, *Industry and Idleness*, Plate 5, 1747, 26.2 x 34.6 cm, etching and engraving on paper. The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 19 William Hogarth, *Marriage a-la Mode: 4, The Toilette*, 1743, 70.5 x 90.8 cm, oil on canvas. The National Gallery, London

Figure 20 William Hogarth, *The Strode Family*, 1738, 112.6 x 117.5 cm, oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London

Figure 21 Titian, *The Pastoral Concert*, 1509, 105 x 137 cm, oil on canvas. Louvre Museum

Figure 22 Jean-Antoine Watteau, *L’Enseigne de Gersaint*, 1720–21, 163 x 308 cm, oil on canvas. Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin

Figure 23 Philippe Mercier, *1st Viscount Tyrconnel with his family, at Belton House*, 1725–26, 648 x 757 mm, oil on canvas. Belton House, Lincolnshire

Figure 24 Arthur Devis, *The John Bacon Family*, 1742–43, 76.2 x 131.1 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 25 Arthur Devis, *Figure Children in an Interior*, 1743, 99.1 x 126.4 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 26 Arthur Devis, *Hoghton Tower from Duxon Hill, Lancashire*, 1735, 101.6 x 127 cm, oil in canvas. Private Collection

Figure 27 Peter Tillemans, *Uppark, West Sussex*, 1725, 41.27 x 90.17 cm, oil in canvas. Private Collection

Figure 28 Arthur Devis, *Self-Portrait*, 1737, 68.58 x 57.15 cm, oil in canvas. Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston

Figure 29 Arthur Devis, *Breaking-up Day at John Clayton’s School in Salford*, 1738–40, 120.7 x 174.6 cm, oil in canvas. Tate Gallery, London

Figure 30 Arthur Devis, *Mr. and Mrs. Hill*, 1750–51, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 31 Arthur Devis, *Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dashwood*, 1750, 111.8 x 96.5 cm, oil in canvas. Private Collection

Figure 32 Arthur Devis, *Roger Hesketh and his Family*, 1742–43, 101.6 x 127 cm, oil in canvas. Roger Fleetwood Hesketh, Lancashire

Figure 33 Gawen Hamilton, *Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford, and his Family*, 1732, 93.4 x 83.8 cm, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Canada
Figure 34  Arthur Devis, *The Reverend Streynsham Master and his Wife, of Croston, Lancashire*, 1743–44, 103 x 121 cm, oil on canvas. Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston

Figure 35  Arthur Devis, *William Atherton and his Wife, Lucy, of Preston, Lancashire*, 1742–44, 92.07 x 127 cm, oil on canvas. Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

Figure 36  Arthur Devis, *Leak Okeover, Rev. John Allen and Captain Chester at Okeover Hall, Staffordshire*, 1745–47, 97.8 x 123.2 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 37  Arthur Devis, *Robert Gwillym of Atherton and His Family*, 1745–47, 101.6 x 127 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 38  Arthur Devis, *Sir George and Lady Strickland, of Boynton Hall, Bridlington, Yorkshire*, 1751, 88.9 x 111.8 cm, oil on canvas. Ferens Art Gallery, City of Kingston upon Hull

Figure 39  Arthur Devis, *Edward Gordon, His Sister Mrs Miles, and Her Husband in Their Garden at Bromley*, 1756, 67 x 102.2 cm, oil on canvas. Leicester Museum and Art Galleries, Leicester

Figure 40  Arthur Devis, *The Duet*, 1749, 115.57 x 103.50 cm, oil on canvas. Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 41  Arthur Devis, *Edward Parker and his Wife, Barbara, nee Fleming, on the Terrace at Browsholme Hall, near Clitheroe*, 1757, 127 x 101.6 cm, oil in canvas. The Leger Galleries Ltd., London

Figure 42  Arthur Devis, *Richard Lowe, Esq., of Denby and Locko Park, Derbyshire*, 1761–62, 76.2 x 60.96 cm, oil on canvas. Captain P. J. B. Drury-Lowe, Locko Park, Derbyshire

Figure 43  Johan Zoffany, *The Farmer’s Return*, 1762, 101.6 x 127 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 44  Johan Zoffany, *George, Prince of Wales and Frederick, Later Duke of York*, 1764–65, 111.8 x 127.9 cm, oil on canvas. Royal Collection

Figure 45  Johan Zoffany, *Queen Charlotte with her Two Eldest Sons*, 1764–65, 112.4 x 129.2 cm, oil on canvas. Royal Collection

Figure 46  Johan Zoffany, *Edward Shuter, John Beard, and John Dunstall by Isaac Bickerton’s “Love in a Village”,* 1767, 130.2 x 165.1 cm, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art

Figure 47  Johan Zoffany, *Edward Shuter, John Beard and John Dunstall by ‘Love in a Village’ by Isaac Bickerstaffe*, 1767, 101.7 x 125.7 cm, oil on canvas. Holburne Museum, Bath

Figure 48  Johan Zoffany, *The Portrait of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771–72, 100.7 x 143.3 cm, oil on canvas. Royal Collection
English conversation pieces of the eighteenth century could be understood as a modern version of what is commonly called portraiture. In traditional portraiture, a sitter is the protagonist of the painting and everything else is there to benefit the sitter’s identity. Various attributes in portraiture are usually meaningful in relation to their sitter. According to Kate Retford, however, English conversation pieces in the 1720s and 1730s represented a crucial break from traditional portraiture. Conversation pieces from the 1720s started to show diminutive figures spaced laterally rather than centrally on the canvas. The stiff and self-conscious figures are engaged in either a conversation or some sort of genteel pastime. These pieces still incorporate some attributes, but they say less about the figures and in a very ambiguous way. With this shift in modes of portraiture, it is significant then to think about the many interior backdrops and domestic surroundings, which are either identical or very similar to one another in Arthur Devis’s conversation pieces. The ambiguous features of the sitters are generic, typical objects, such as Turkish carpets, porcelains, and nonspecific Italianate landscapes in standard rococo frames, and are seen repeatedly throughout most of the artist’s indoor conversation pieces. These generic attributes in Devis’s conversation pieces reflect the common interests of a particular class or society rather than represent the individual characteristic of a specific sitter or family. The domestic surroundings in Devis’s conversation pieces seem to be less significant than the ones in traditional portraiture in terms of telling their stories. They are sparsely distributed and relatively small in size. Nonetheless, this break in the genre is overt in one feature—the inclusion of framed Italian landscape behind the sitters.

Devis’s early conversation pieces of the 1740s, particularly indoor pieces,

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consistently included one or two framed Italian landscapes behind the sitters. In the 1750s, most of his outdoor conversation pieces illustrated sitters in a Claudian landscape. Whether Devis consciously or unconsciously adopted the period’s interest in the Italian landscape convention, it is an undeniable phenomenon throughout his conversation pieces. This indicates that both established artists and ordinary portraitists such as Devis himself tried in their own ways to subscribe to current academic theory by adapting the Italian landscape convention to their work. It is indisputable that English conversation pieces had their foundation in foreign influences, such as Dutch genre paintings and French rococo. However, through the very act of assimilating Italian landscapes into their portraiture by the hands of English artists, English conversation pieces of the eighteenth century were able to achieve a legitimate status as English art. English artists’ conscious choice of integrating Italian landscapes into their art distinguished these conversation pieces into a category of their own right.

If the first half of the century reflected a desire to establish an elevated status in terms of art by adopting foreign elements, such as the Italian landscape convention, into English portraiture, the second half of the century was marked by a revived interest in Dutch seascape. The latter period was marked by a preoccupation to establish a unified national identity by reconciling three internal identities—the English, the Welsh, and the Scots—as opposed to the concerns of other nations at this time. Conforming to the second period’s fixation on redefining the national identity, the British opened a new path toward imperialism. As trade became an imperative sector of the British economy by the 1750s and induced the government to invest in naval power and imperialism,² there was a growing interest in marine

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paintings, especially Dutch seascapes. The inclusion of Jan Van de Cappelle’s (1624–79) *A Calm* (1654) (fig. 1), along with the patron’s rich Dutch cabinet, in Johan Zoffany’s (1733–1810) conversation piece *Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson* (1769–70) (fig. 2) exemplifies the interest in Dutch paintings at the time. Zoffany incorporates the seascape by Van de Cappelle, known as the most important Dutch marine painter of the seventeenth century who “immortalized the Netherlands as a land of water,” as if presenting an homage to the Dutch Golden Age, which alludes to the great maritime power of the Dutch during the seventeenth century.

In addition, Linda Colley remarks that from the second half of the century, “Scotland was coming to be seen by those in power as useful, loyal and British.” Scotland’s laborforce was highly effective, and as a result, more Scots came to London to seek opportunities and power. Lawrence Dundas was one of the ambitious Scots who eventually acquired tremendous wealth and status as a member of the British upper class. Zoffany’s conversation piece presents Dundas as a prestigious British elite whose possessions represent his wealth, class, and taste in Dutch paintings. The conscious choice to include a Dutch cabinet and a seascape as the backdrop of the painting demonstrates not only the period’s attention to international trade and imperialism, which were then feasible through voyages, but also the patron’s and artist’s personal trajectories. By the time the conversation piece of Dundas was completed, Dundas “invested in at least seven East India Company ships between 1763 and

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6 Colley, *Britons*, 120.
his death in 1781” and Zoffany was dreaming of joining scientific voyages of exploration. It is interesting to note that each period’s interests are reflected through the use of landscape in eighteenth-century English conversation pieces.

The popularity of eighteenth-century conversation pieces was not solely England’s creation. In the 1720s, English conversation pieces were initially based on Dutch genre paintings but were also largely influenced and modified by French rococo artists such as Watteau and Mercier. What makes examining English conversation pieces worthwhile, however, is their testament to the period’s national interest in establishing high art by encouraging new art variants to thrive in their dominant genres. In the case of the eighteenth century, the genre was conversation pieces. Unlike other European countries, such as France and Italy, whose various arts had flourished well enough to proudly represent their nationalities, England traditionally had strong dominance sorely in portraiture, most often at the hands of foreign artists, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By examining the early stages of development of English landscape in eighteenth-century English conversation pieces, we can understand how English art acquired its legitimacy and authenticity and how its landscape achieved its place as the national art of Britain.

Devis’s inclusion of Italian landscape paintings in his indoor conversation pieces in the 1740s and early 1750s indicates the initial popularity of landscape during this period. In contrast, the representation of Claudian landscape in many of Devis’s outdoor conversation pieces in the 1750s and 1760s affirms the actual application of the foreign landscape.

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convention in English portraiture. Zoffany also typifies the period’s current trend in consciously incorporating Dutch seascape. Unlike the representation of landscape in traditional portraits alluding to a specific sitter’s estate and wealth, the inclusion of landscape in eighteenth-century English conversation pieces reflects something beyond individual possessions. Both the Italian landscape in Devis’s art and the Dutch seascape in Zoffany’s were inevitably chosen to reflect each period’s interest in foreign nations, but through the genre of landscape. While Devis’s inclusion of Italian landscape reflects the first half of the eighteenth century’s fascination with international travel, Zoffany’s selection of Dutch seascape is an example of the second half’s investment in imperialism via sea power. Eighteenth-century English minds were consumed with seeking new opportunities beyond their native country, and the portraiture of this period exemplifies this new sense of Britons’ places in the world.

In this thesis, I examine the use of landscape paintings embedded within English conversation pieces of the eighteenth century and explore the way they influenced the development of an English school of painting during this century. In chapter 1, I explain how landscape emerged as a complete genre and attained widespread popularity in eighteenth-century England. In chapter 2, I address some contributing elements that allowed for the rise of this genre in eighteenth-century England. I also discuss the English reception of foreign art here. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the English began to travel to foreign countries with growing interest in the Grand Tour. Naturally, writing related to traveling and appreciating foreign art followed. The English perceived foreign art chiefly in two categories: The first is the art of historical subjects, and the other is landscape. Historical subjects and landscape were applied to English conversation pieces in different ways. However, the artists in both divisions had the same aim—to transform the genre of portraiture to the level of history painting. In chapter 3, I discuss the development of English conversation pieces from
the 1720s to the 1750s, focusing on the artwork of William Hogarth (1697–1764), one of the most influential figures in the development of English conversation pieces and the English school of art. In chapter 4, I analyze the meaning of Italian landscapes in Devis’s conversation pieces from the 1740s to the 1750s. *Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull* (1747) (fig. 3) is one of Devis’s works that I discuss in this chapter, as an example to reflect the period’s interest in Italian landscapes. Devis introduced Italian landscape into his conversation pieces as a way to make his art applicable to the polite culture of the eighteenth century. Finally, in the last chapter, I examine *Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson* to discuss how next-generation artists, such as Zoffany, continued to advance the conversation piece in the second half of the century. The inclusion of Dutch seascape in the conversation piece of Dundas reflects both the patron’s and the artist’s taste in Dutch marine paintings. Zoffany’s conversation piece of Dundas not only manifests the process of reconciliation in seeking a new, united nationality during the age of Enlightenment but also demonstrates the national aim to promote global trade and maritime power. Lawrence Dundas, an ambitious Scotsman, came to London for better opportunities and transformed himself into a member of the British upper class through his newfound wealth. His conversation piece portrays him no longer as a Scottish merchant but instead as a prestigious, upper-class British man whose new trajectory is personified through the Dutch seascape in his portraiture
Chapter 1
Rise of Landscape

The emergence of landscape painting as a distinct genre was thus a contemporary phenomenon, associated in particular with the Dutch and their development of an art market.

–Vittoria Di Palma, *Is landscape painting*?^{11}

The contemporary recognition of landscape painting as a complete genre is an extraordinary development in the history of art and raises the question: Does landscape have a beginning? While the art of painting in general (in the Western context) has possible Greek or Roman roots, finding the concrete beginning of landscape is a rather complicated issue. Edward Norgate explains that landscape was traditionally used “as servant to their other pieces, to illustrate or set off their *Historicall* painting, by filling up the empty Corners, or void places of Figures, and story, with some fragment of Landscape in reference to their Histories.”^{12} In association with Dutch art in the seventeenth century, however, landscape went through a dramatic transformation and generated various discussions. Ann Jensen Adams defines landscape as “a ready, unclaimed site that is potentially open for political, economic, and religious dispute.”^{13} Interestingly, landscapes were in great demand not only in the seventeenth century but also in English culture in the eighteenth century, where they were used to represent political identities. This repetitive yet relatively modern phenomenon opens a discussion on how landscape emerged as a complete genre and achieved wide popularity in eighteenth-century England.

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When people look at naturalistic landscapes, they often think that a place such as the one in the painting must exist somewhere. In the world of landscape, the relationship between the actual scene and its representation is so proximate that viewers may find it difficult to infer what is not real. The scene represented in landscape art is so naturalistic that one can hardly imagine there would be an idea of some kind hidden behind the scene, influencing viewers’ perspectives. In early medieval art, however, the paintings’ appearances had surprisingly little relation to the existence of natural objects. As Kenneth Clark suggests, “why they satisfied the medieval mind is a question to which we must give some answers if we are to understand the beginnings of landscape.”

Medieval audiences never questioned the actuality of a represented natural object. They understood the symbols that each object signified because they were taught how to faithfully perceive them according to their interpretation of the Bible. They did not have to travel to appreciate a place. However, people were gradually tempted to explore nature and express the emotion on which the existence of landscape painting is based. According to Clark, in Simone Martini’s (1284–1344) *Title Page of Petrarch’s Virgil* (1336) (fig. 4), Petrarch is illustrated as a modern man who enjoys being in nature for its own sake. He was known as the first man to climb a mountain, just to enjoy the view from the top. Nature was being seen as a place that no longer needed to be feared, as medieval poets such as Dante had described. This was a significant shift in the understanding of English landscape. The English during the eighteenth century began to comprehend landscape by experiencing the lands through actual travel. This made English

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16 After the Peace of Utrecht in 1715, English gentlemen went on the Grand Tour as the ultimate goal of their education. Stephanie Ross explains that “the scenes they viewed there and in crossing the Alps made them newly receptive to the landscape paintings of the French and Italian masters.” Stephanie Ross, “The Picturesque: An Eighteenth-Century Debate,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 2 (1987): 272. It was the act of traveling itself that aspired the English to be amateurs of the arts or men of taste.
landscape paintings distinct. Scenery was not just a feature that artists could paint. The establishment of the English landscape was associated with people’s actual travels and exploration of lands and nature.

After people became increasingly interested in exploring nature, aristocratic landscape paintings of hunting became popular in the courts of France and Burgundy around 1400 and quickly spread to Italy. However, people at that time were no longer satisfied with painting fragments of nature as decoration, and the scientific minds of the period began to generate new ideas regarding space and the perception of light. Clark claims that Flemish and Italian art during this time simultaneously manifested this new recognition of space and light. As a result, the needs of naturalistic paintings had to be met. The mathematically focused Florentines of the fifteenth century treasured realistic depictions in their art, and landscapes began to be illustrated as realistic backgrounds in Italian art. The Italian definition of reality was based on the scientific understanding of space, but, according to Clark, one thing was not fully understood: the abstract quality of the sky. Recognizing the limitations of the scientific approach in realistically rendering the sky, some Italian artists of the fifteenth century did not even attempt to paint the sky but instead painted the space in monochrome.

Although the Quattrocento Florentines were not overly concerned with having the sky painted realistically in their landscapes, Italian landscape continued to grow in popularity, to the point that the English of the eighteenth century could understand what Italian landscape was like. The rich and naturalistic backgrounds of Giorgione, Titian, and Veronese suggest that these painters were utilizing landscape settings beyond their previous role of just filling a void space. David Rosand extends the discussion on the prominence of landscape in

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17 Clark, *Landscape into Art*, 12–14.
18 Clark, *Landscape into Art*, 20–21.
19 Clark, *Landscape into Art*, 25.
sixteenth-century Venetian art with a particular focus on Titian’s Saint Sebastian. In comparing Titian’s *San Nicolò ai Frari* Altarpiece (sixteenth century) (fig. 5) with *Saint Sebastian* (sixteenth century) (fig. 6), Rosand states that in the latter, Titian not only succeeded in developing Saint Sebastian as an independent subject apart from “the compositional context of the altarpiece and its architectural setting,” but also empowered the natural setting to have a more significant role. Titian in *Saint Sebastian* clearly gave more attention to the landscape than the figure, which is only a replica of Saint Sebastian in *San Nicolò ai Frari* Altarpiece. One can sense an interesting replacement of a biblical setting with a landscape setting. To liberate the saint from the religious context and appreciate him as an independent subject, the landscape was required to carry “full conviction in both conception and execution.” Titian’s conscious choice to replace a biblical setting with a landscape setting signified the beginning of landscape painting as a genre. The natural setting was about to embrace its own significance as comparable to a biblical setting.

According to Rosand, Saint Sebastian, as an independent subject invented by Titian, enjoyed fame for representing the male nude. Meanwhile, the Renaissance’s fascination with the human body resulted in weakening biblical connotations, instead encouraging the creation of counterfeit religious settings. It was landscape that responded to the call, with much more advanced pictorial space this time. It was rich enough to accommodate literary association. Venetian masters of the sixteenth century sought to bring out literary associations through landscape’s dramatic effect. Clark explains that this Italian sense of linking nature

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23 Rosand, “Titian’s Saint Sebastians,” 29.
with literature at this time, however, unfortunately was soon grounded by the dominant fashion of the high Renaissance style, which focused on the subject’s moral or historical importance, and, later, the elaborate mannerism fantasies of the late sixteenth century that included “high view-points, a range of craggy mountains and a distant prospect of river and sea coast.”

In the following century, it was the Dutch who had a growing interest in landscape. Allan R. Ruff explains that the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century had experienced “fundamental changes in the Dutch landscape.” The country’s towns and cities were rapidly expanding due to improvements in agricultural production, along with growing success in world trade. Accordingly, the growing desire to recognize their rapidly developing country followed, which eventually manifested as the rise of Dutch landscape in the seventeenth century. Dutch landscape began to comprise a significant part of English art collections from the seventeenth century and on, and English taste for Dutch art lasted well into the eighteenth century in spite of the dominance of Italian landscape during this period. Jacob van Ruysdael’s (1628–82) paintings—for example, View of Haarlem with Bleaching Fields (1670–75) (fig. 7)—eventually became the model for the East Anglian school of landscape painting.

Clark claims that the great skies of Holland gave Dutch landscape a new way to

24 Clark, Landscape into Art, 26–27.
26 Ruff, Arcadian Vision, 53.
27 Clark, Landscape into Art, 29.
28 Clark, Landscape into Art, 32. The term East Anglian school of landscape painting refers to the Norwich school, which was formed by a significant group of English regional-landscape painters. It was established in 1803 as the Norwich Society of Artists and flourished in Norwich, Norfolk, in the first half of the nineteenth century. The leaders of the group, John Crome and John Sell Cotman, were inspired by Dutch landscapists such as Ruysdael and English painter Thomas Gainsborough. Britannica Academic, s.v. “Norwich school,” accessed September 1, 2018, https://academic.eb.com.
illustrate light. The wonderful mixture of layers of clouds and their shadows floating above the horizon creates the dynamic movement of the skies of Holland, allowing a vibrant portrayal of light. The sky inspired Dutch painters of the seventeenth century to focus on landscapes as their whole subject. Aelbert Cuyp (1620–91) and Van de Cappelle achieved radiant atmospheres by painting the sky reflected in the water. The sky was the center of the sentiment of Dutch landscape. Clark’s understanding of the skies of Holland in relation to the rise of Dutch landscape, or rather seascape, coheres to the nation’s maritime status of the period. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch became the dominant nation in international marine trade and transport, as well as military power at sea. Moreover, the Netherlands, “with more than six hundred miles of continuous coastline and estuaries, a series of major rivers, and countless canals and waterways,” is a country “defined by water.” The country’s geographic conditions, along with its maritime power during that period, inspired artists to paint the sky, reflected in water, in such an amazing quality. Artists like Cuyp and Van de Cappelle depicted Dutch maritime powers in their marine paintings.

Dutch sentiment, expressed through the sky and water in the landscape, however, did not evoke English artists’ attention at the beginning of the eighteenth century when they first began practicing the landscape convention. The English minds of that time were preoccupied with the idealizing aspect of Italian landscape, and Dutch landscape was, consequently, less favored than the Italian one. As Elizabeth Wheeler Manwaring suggests, the English saw Dutch landscape as too literal and truthful compared to Italian landscape. The new vogue in

29 Clark, Landscape into Art, 31.
Italian landscape among the English during the first half of the eighteenth century naturally generated a hierarchy within the category of landscape, which brings about an interesting view in terms of interpreting Van de Cappelle’s seascape *A Calm* (fig. 1) in Zoffany’s *Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson* (fig. 2), which was executed between 1769 and 1770. Jackson-Stops explains that interest in Dutch pictures revived during the second half of the century. In Zoffany’s conversation piece, Dundas is portrayed with his exquisite Dutch cabinet with Van de Cappelle’s seascape at the center and the top. It is not entirely clear who decided to position *A Calm* at the center of the conversation piece, but this selection reflects the second half of the century’s revival of interest in Dutch landscape, particularly Dutch seascape.

Before I discuss English interest in Italian landscape in the first half of the eighteenth century, it is imperative to understand the origin of this Italian landscape convention and how it developed art historically. As discussed earlier, Italian artists—especially Venetians such as Bellini, Giorgione, and Titian—paid special attention to landscape while developing the notion of painting as poetry. An early example of poesis was seen in Frankfurt in 1410. In *The Little Paradise Garden* (1410–20) (fig. 8), the figures, surrounded by flowers and trees, sit on the grass. One woman bends to draw water from a fountain while another picks fruit from a tree. In spite of its sacred subject, the whole scene suggests a kind of rhythmical sentiment that is almost music-like. Similarly, Ruff states that Bellini established the idea of “the religious pastoral” by placing his biblical subject in the natural setting seen in *St Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy* (1480) (fig. 9). The natural setting composed by the landscape embraces

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34 Clark, *Landscape into Art*, 55.
the space around the saint rather than acts as the figure’s backdrop.\textsuperscript{35}

Following Bellini, Giorgione continued this pastoral tradition, but not through the depiction of religious scenes. Giorgione’s paintings captured Jacopo Sannazaro’s interpretations of the pastoral world depicted in the poem of Arcadia, which was written in the 1480s. The poem translated “the classical vision of Arcadia into contemporary life” while offering descriptions of the natural world. Giorgione, who was largely influenced by the pastoral poets, established “the Arcadian landscape”\textsuperscript{36} by illustrating the pagan world of Theocritus, Virgil, and Sannazaro.\textsuperscript{37} This association of Arcadian poets with pictures is also well illustrated in Homage to a Poet (early sixteenth century) (fig. 10), which was painted by a close follower of Giorgione. The illustration portrays an Arcadian poet enthroned in the landscape. Other examples that indicate a direct connection with this circle of poets are the four little scenes of Andrea Previtali (1480–1528) (fig. 11), who was directly influenced by Giorgione. These scenes sketch an eclogue by Ferrarese Tebaldeo (1463–1537).

The scenes depicting the story of Damon’s love for Amaryllis show the fundamental structure of the new Arcadian landscape. Clark claims that this composition, in which the dark areas of the tree and rock frame either side of the painting, creating almost a theatrical stage and leaving the center of the picture empty, would have been the basis of Claude Lorrain (1600–82).\textsuperscript{38} In comparison with his Landscape with Apollo and the Muses (1652) (fig. 12), Claude seems to follow the integral structure of the Arcadian landscape, which has three distinguishable layers: the foreground with the figural subjects, the middle ground generated by dark areas from the shadows of trees and bushes, and the background in the

\textsuperscript{35} Ruff, \textit{Arcadian Vision}, 35.
\textsuperscript{36} Ruff, \textit{Arcadian Vision}, 36–37.
\textsuperscript{37} Ruff, \textit{Arcadian Vision}, 38.
\textsuperscript{38} Clark, \textit{Landscape into Art}, 57–58.
distance. Although each of Previtali’s scenes fulfills their role in illustrating the whole story, Claude’s landscape painting succeeded in establishing its status as a complete genre by incorporating the pastoral tradition of idleness framed by beautiful scenery.

Claude Lorrain, a successor of Giorgione’s poetic landscapes, was fully appreciated by the English of the eighteenth century throughout his lifetime. Every element of his landscape was drawn from studies and sketches based on his observations of nature. He made these sketches from nature in anticipation of using them as part of a whole composition for pictures. In the end, they all harmoniously surrendered to the overall sentiment of the poetry. One of the crucial elements that drew the English of the eighteenth century to Claudian landscape was his consistent usage of fundamental layout in his compositions: The shadow of the dark masses on one side takes the first plane of the foreground; the middle plane comprises a large central feature, usually a group of trees; and the background contains two planes, one behind the other, with the second at a farther distance from the viewer. Claude also achieved a recession effect by inserting bridges, rivers, and cattle fording a stream to make every plane parallel to each other and create balanced silhouettes. 39 The clear order of Claude’s composition must have been seen on an intellectual basis upon which the native school could build. 40 Although England had its initial contact with various sorts of permitted foreign arts through the Grand Tour, there was a major issue in terms of appreciating religious art, especially the ones with Catholic subjects. 41 This may explain why the English artists who had visited Italy did not reflect their new experiences in their art beyond landscapes.

Tracing the development of landscape from the medieval period to the eighteenth century shows how a natural setting as a piece to fill the empty space of a subject has evolved

39 Clark, Landscape into Art, 62–64.

40 Clark, Landscape into Art, 70.

into a complete genre. This now leaves another category to clarify: Italian landscape in eighteenth-century England. In the next chapter, I will discuss how Italian landscape made its way to the English art of the eighteenth century by examining some of the social circumstances that allowed it to rise in England.
Chapter 2

Landscape in England with the Grand Tour

In her essay *Is Landscape Painting?*, Vittoria Di Palma suggests that the images of Italian and Italianate landscapes had become available to England as a result of the Grand Tour.\(^42\) For eighteenth-century England, unlike its foremost enemy, France, Italy was not a political threat and was considered a friendly nation. Travel to Italy was therefore permitted,\(^43\) and the Grand Tour developed the market for tourist art to fulfill the demand for souvenirs. For instance, imitators of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa produced paintings for this purpose. Some identifiable Italian monuments and scenes were created as result of this demand, and their depictions functioned as portable souvenirs that could be brought home. This portability spread the conventions of Italian landscape throughout English society. The conventions of idealized landscape were then spread even further geographically, whether directly through visits to Italy or indirectly through the collection of portable objects made as tourist art. This eventually evolved into the further development of English landscape.\(^44\) By comparing Lorrain’s *Landscape with Apollo and the Muses* to *On the Wye* (fig. 13), which was produced in Richard Wilson’s (1714–82) studio, Di Palma points out that the “painterly conventions of landscape representation had permeated British culture by this time.”\(^45\) *On the Wye* follows the basic structure of Claudian landscape of having three layers: the foreground with the figures and the animals, the dark middle ground with the trees, and, finally, the far ground with the mountains and the sky. It is interesting to note, however, the literary

\(^{42}\) Di Palma, “Is Landscape Painting?,” 51.


\(^{44}\) Di Palma, “Is Landscape Painting?,” 51.

\(^{45}\) Di Palma, “Is Landscape Painting?,” 52.
connotation that Lorrain incorporates into his landscape painting was abandoned in Wilson’s painting, which was titled after the River Wye, one of the longest rivers in England. English landscape painters, such as Wilson, adapted the Italian landscape convention to their own versions.

The Italian landscape convention was introduced to eighteenth-century England through the Grand Tour and the appetite of traveling abroad in general. This drive for travel became a vehicle to bring foreign content into England and thus improve English art. Manwaring explains that “when, soon after the Peace of Ryswick in 1697, the Grand Tour became part of a gentleman’s preparation for life, pictures, prints, and drawings collected by many a tourist began to pour into England.”46 A number of landscape painters, mainly foreign artists, were already painting in England in the last years of the seventeenth century.47 More prospective travelers were becoming familiar with what they would likely see on their travels. Simultaneously, guidebooks that gave practical advice were being written for the travelers. The second edition (1698) of an early guidebook, Italian Voyage (1670) by Richard Lassels, elaborates on typical English opinions of Italy. Lassels compared Italy to nature itself and enjoyed the views from places such as the suburbs of San Pietro in Genoa or the Carthusian Monastery in Naples. Although the book contains few comments on painting and almost nothing on landscape painting, it describes the beautiful scenery of Italy48 through the author’s experiences of the country’s lands and nature, which is the main subject in landscape painting.

English travelers’ interest in painting in general and landscape painting in particular increased from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the eighteenth century.

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46 Manwaring, Italian Landscape, 7.
47 Manwaring, Italian Landscape, 7. Henry Dankers, the Dutch topographical artist, had studied in Italy and was employed by Charles II. John Loten, a Dutch imitator of Salvator, practiced and died in London around 1680.
48 Manwaring, Italian Landscape, 9.
William Bromley’s (1663–1732) *Travels* (1702) made various comments on landscape painters such as Salvator Rosa, Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, and Paul Bril. Manwaring asserts that the few letters Bishop Berkeley wrote on his impressions of Italy in 1714 not only show his appreciation of scenery but also prove the fact that “Berkeley developed something like a painter’s eye.” Such descriptions of English travelers such as Berkeley’s must have been influenced by the desire to find beauty in a particular kind of landscape, or, more specifically, the landscapes of seventeenth-century Roman landscape painters, which were “wide-spread, greatly diversified, and having classical associations.” This is noteworthy because this shows that early travelers had reached a point where they linked their travel experiences to Italy with Italian landscape paintings. The English people’s initial receptive attitude toward traveling advice had consequently transformed into an attitude in which they, in contrast, instructed how foreign art should be received and appreciated.

After the death of Godfrey Kneller (1646–1723), Jonathan Richardson (1667–1745) became one of the most important portraitists of the period and was a great collector of drawings and prints. Richardson begins *The Theory of Painting* (1725) with a declaration that pictures serve humankind beyond their decorative purpose, that pictures are “one of the means whereby we convey our ideas to each other,” that “[they] must be rank’d” with respect, “not only as an Enjoyment, but as another Language, which completes the whole Art of communicating our Thoughts; one of those particulars which raises the Dignity of Human

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50 Manwaring, *Italian Landscape*, 12.


52 Manwaring, *Italian Landscape*, 18.
Nature.” Richardson here not only reckons the usefulness of pictures as a liberal art, which improves and eventually elevates the virtue of human minds, but also raises the status of artists by saying that “Language is very Imperfect” to express “an infinity of other Ideas which has no certain Words universally agreed upon as denoting them; whereas the Painter can convey his Ideas of these Things Clearly, and without Ambiguity; and what he says everyone understands in the Sense he intends it.” The painter Richardson further advocates the supremacy of painting over words by remarking that painting “Pours Ideas into our Minds,” whereas “Words only Drop’em,” reinforcing the notion of a rivalry between painting and poetry.

The parallel was initially stimulated by Horace’s De Ars Poetica as a form of guidance of literacy criticism for writers on art. The English during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries began to appreciate painting that was mainly bound to a literary association. Poetry was understood as “a speaking picture,” and pictures began to be appreciated as an equivalent of poetry. In 1668, Roger de Piles translated the Latin poem De arte graphica by Charles Alphonse du Fresnoy into French. John Dryden then translated de Piles’s book into English in 1695. Through the translations of du Fresnoy and de Piles, a “long-lived esthetic theory founded upon the proposition Ut picture poesis” was introduced to the English of the seventeenth century, and the following century continued to support the idea and elaborate it further into a rivalry between painting and poetry. Davies explains that “painting was found to resemble poetry in having definite ‘fables’ or thoughts to convey to

54 Richardson, An Essay on the Theory of Painting, 3.
the intellect” and it was “the fashion… to find literary characteristic in painting.”

Consequently and frequently, this fashion created confusion on the functions of poetry and painting, and the comparisons between poets and painters followed. The art of the landscape painter was compared to the poems of the pastoral poet; this made the popularity of Claude, Salvator, and Poussin—whose landscapes were associated with literary conceptions—understandable. It would not have been difficult for the pastoral landscapes of Claude, the true heir to the poetry of Giorgione, to remind viewers of Theocritus and Virgil.

Art in eighteenth-century England reflected a desire to establish something similar to the art of Italian masters by incorporating poetry, “which comes nearest to the remembrance of Nature.” This explains the initial popularity of Italian landscapes; English artists who were dominant in portraiture must have later wanted in some way to transform their art, which, I argue, was feasible by assimilating foreign art into their portraiture, such as conversation pieces. As travelers in eighteenth-century England liked to be instructed, particularly in terms of understanding foreign lands and their art, the English must have felt the prevailing sense of establishing something better for the sake of their nation. The parallel between poetry and painting elevated painting to the level of liberal art while perhaps predicting the national rise of landscape by next-generation artists, such as William Turner (1775-1851) and John Constable (1776–1837). However, before that happened, English artists of the early eighteenth century had to determine how to revamp their current art. English artists undertook the tasks of not only assimilating foreign art into their dominant genre of portraiture but also giving up their old style and taking up a new form without

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58 Davies, “Ut pictura poesis,” 160.
59 Davies, “Ut pictura poesis,” 163.
60 Manwaring, Italian Landscape, 20.
61 Manwaring, Italian Landscape, 16.
debasing the English people’s self-confidence and national pride. Thomas Gainsborough’s (1727–88) *Mr. and Mrs. Andrew* (1750) (fig. 14) is an early example of the period’s interest in English portraitists using landscapes. James Thomson’s (1700–48) poetry reinforced and raised the esteem of landscape, and Gainsborough’s and later Constable’s landscapes elaborated upon Thomson’s vision of the ideal landscape. Gainsborough regarded himself as a portrait painter by profession but wished that he could just paint landscapes. Susan Sloman notes that based on the letter that Gainsborough wrote to his friend James Unwin on May 25, 1768, “he was often still resident in Bath during the summer, making local excursions to satisfy his hunger for landscape.” This story demonstrates in part that the attention of English portraitists was moving toward landscape. The artists showed this attention by either combining portraiture and landscape as in *Mr. and Mrs. Andrew* or including one or two framed, miniature Italian landscape pictures to their conversation pieces as in Devis’s *Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull*. This English interest in landscape during the eighteenth century is due to the fact that “the English saw their landscape as a cultural and aesthetic object.” Ann Bermingham argues that as imperialism and mercantilism in the late seventeenth century became influential, “the need to fashion an agrarian countryside to serve the expanding markets of the towns and colonies became more obvious.” Naturally, as “a cultural and aesthetic object.”

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63 Sebastian Mitchell, “James Thomson’s Picture Collection and English History Painting,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 23, no. 1 (2001): 127–28. James Thomson incorporated the painterly analogy of seeing into his poetry to convey the visual power of his verse, and English artists were inspired by and drew upon his verse. The best known artists to do so are Gainsborough, Stubbs, Constable, and Turner. Turner’s Thomson’s Aeolian Harp (1809) sets the Thames and a distant London in the same way that an Italian landscape would. Thomson’s final poem, The Castle of Indolence (1748), inspired Turner’s The Fountain of Indolence (1834).


landscape became the dominant subject in the context of eighteenth-century English art, and many of the conversation pieces of the time “not only [expose] the ideological preconditions of the genre” but also “illuminate the economic root of this ideology.” 68 If Devis’s growing tendency to incorporate landscape in his conversations pieces exemplifies the general interest in landscapes, Gainsborough’s Mr. and Mrs. Andrew “reveals the [Andrews’] particular economic relationship to the land.” 69 By pointing out that the figures in Gainsborough’s portrait of the Andrews “do not dominate the composition but share it with the landscape elements,” 70 Birmingham claims that “man and nature partake of one another in an equilibrium”; men being producers of nature and nature being an organism that “bears the mark of human nature, cultivation,” 71 granting the prominent reason why Gainsborough had transformed himself into a landscape artist. Landscapes were considered equally valid as the figural subject.

So far, I have discussed how Italian landscape came to England and gained popularity, as well as the process of elevating English art to high art through the incorporation of foreign elements into conversation pieces. In the following chapter, I will discuss the development of English conversation pieces from the 1720s to the 1760s, demonstrating how foreign elements, either history painting or Italian landscape, began to be practiced in English conversation pieces during that time.

67 Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, 9.
68 Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, 28.
69 Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, 29.
70 Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, 28.
71 Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, 29.
Chapter 3

William Hogarth (1697–1764) and English Conversation Pieces of the Eighteenth Century

Between the 1730s and the 1790s, the English experienced radical transformations in the social, cultural, and intellectual milieus of their lives. These are the years of the High Enlightenment. In addition to the popularity of print culture in the public sphere, the rise of the middle class was an influential factor in shaping elite identity. Simultaneously, the focus on philosophy, literature, and the arts, known as polite learning, became essential to proper behavior and representation. English conversation pieces developed so much during these years that the genre unquestionably reflected the radical transformations happening during this time in England. In examining the development of English conversation pieces, we can visualize how foreign art was assimilated into English art. By breaking the established formula of a historical-subject painting into its individual components and rearranging them in English conversation pieces, English art was able to defy a traditional hierarchy. In other words, through this process of reassembling various elements of foreign art, the English succeeded in reconstructing their own perceptions, which led to a reevaluation of what defined national art.

Historical subjects and landscape, the two elements discussed previously regarding foreign art, were gradually incorporated into English conversation pieces. This can be first seen in William Hogarth’s (1697–1764) conversation pieces, which began to incorporate the elements of a history painting into contemporary English scenes. Hogarth’s attempt to create his own genre of a comic history painting paralleled that of Joshua Reynolds (1723–92).

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Their art is characterized by eclecticism based on “the allusive use of the past.” Both artists chose to bring historical elements into their art as a way to elevate the status of portraiture, the traditional English-art genre. As early as the 1710s, however, artists were urged, chiefly by the influence of an English journal, *The Spectator*, not only to give up “the old iconography of Greek gods and heroes and their pursuit of nymphs” but also to establish “a relevant modern moral subject.” As *The Spectator* “conditioned Hogarth,” as Levey describes, he faithfully responded to its call by combining traditional subjects with contemporary scenes, emphasizing and reflecting modern life.

In *A Harlot’s Progress* (1732) (fig. 15), Hogarth’s first print cycle, he presents an appropriate theme for a history painting—“the choice between paths of virtue and vice”—not in a mythological scene but in a contemporary English context. The cycle illustrates the life of Moll Hackabout, a fictional London prostitute who, in the first scene, arrives in London looking innocent and modestly attired. As suggested by Christine Riding, Moll’s scissors and pincushion seen below her right arm indicate that she is seeking a conventional job in this scene; ultimately, however, she chooses the path of pleasure when she accepts an alternative career that Mother Needham has in mind for her. According to Paulson, by placing the subject of a history painting in a familiar environmental setting that was known to his

73 Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 94. Reynolds desired to raise and improve his subject by borrowing classical elements—such as a particular thought, action, attitude, or figure—and transplanting them into his work. This is termed as eclecticism, the elegant arrangement of known elements to make up a subordinated version of those elements. Artists and connoisseurs of the time evaluated Reynolds’s *Garrick between Comedy and Tragedy* (1761) and conceded that the artist’s mastery gave the painting the status of a liberal art. Reynolds presented Garrick choosing between Comedy and Tragedy to parody the classic story of Hercules choosing between Pleasure and Virtue. By using the supplements of history painting on a portrait of a contemporary person, he showed what he could do with the marriage of history painting and portraiture. Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 81, 86, 92.


contemporaries, Hogarth succeeded in establishing his own iconography in which his moral subject continues to refer to art history and literature.78

In *A Harlot’s Progress*, Hogarth translated the traditional iconography of a history painting into contemporary terms, which were applicable to his modern history painting. Hogarth’s art was responding to the rising middle class of eighteenth-century England, whose interests were now on reflecting modern life.79 This, in other words, indicates that for the first time in the history of English art, the elements of contemporary English life were being used in the context of history painting. English art was about to rupture a traditional hierarchy by disrupting the conventional formula of valuing historical subjects. In doing so, it was stimulating the attention of a new rising public. Hogarth was not the only one to respond to the interest of the rising middle class. The works of renowned English writers, such as Shaftesbury and Addison, became more approachable to this “new reading public.”80 In line with Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury’s (1671–1713) suggestion that “the fewer the objects are, besides those which are absolutely necessary in a piece, the easier it is for the eye, by one simple act and in one view, to comprehend the sum or whole,”81 there was growing emphasis on the “readable” aspect of a picture.82 Joseph Addison (1672–1719), a writer, also praised the superiority of images that could immediately convey the artist’s narrative intent, promoting a shift from the “Men of greater Penetration” to the “ordinary Reader.”83 Both Shaftesbury and Addison were against traditions in which the audience had to be educated to

correctly interpret the work and moved instead toward the virtues of simplicity.\textsuperscript{84}

Hogarth’s twelve plates of \textit{Industry and Idleness} (1747) began to reflect the shift in aesthetics of that time. The prints were much smaller, and the visual image was simpler than the ones from Hogarth’s earlier series. Instead of reaching the story’s climax through “the complex reading structure of allusions, puns (both visual and verbal), parallels, and contrasts,” \textit{Industry and Idleness} recounts the simple stories of two apprentices named Francis Goodchild and Tom Idle. It presents and reinforces “the simple pattern of morality—right and wrong, reward and punishment, and action and consequence.”\textsuperscript{85} If a break from tradition and divergence from a chronological order was a principle of Hogarth’s earlier cycles, Hogarth’s new works focused on simplicity to make another break from sophisticated, contemporary academic art. He was able to escape the stereotypes of academic art while turning to a more popular audience by using “simpler and more elemental forms, themes, and emotions.”\textsuperscript{86} In this way, Hogarth was able to respond to the censure of rococo art and, at the same time, to the “too-difficult reading structure” of academic art.\textsuperscript{87}

The development of Hogarth’s art not only reflects a general tendency of that particular time to simplify morality into a choice between virtue and vice\textsuperscript{88} but also points out some significant issues in relation to Devis’s conversation pieces that warrant further discussion. Riding explains that in \textit{Industry and Idleness} (fig. 16), both apprentices are compared in relation to their choices. Francis Goodchild, who makes virtuous choices, is

\textsuperscript{84} Paulson, \textit{Emblem and Expression}, 55. Based on my interpretation, Paulson’s understanding of the term \textit{simplicity} indicates that art at this time was being urged to use simple and straightforward terms that any ordinary individual could understand, rather than using the traditional iconography that only the educated class would have known how to read.


\textsuperscript{86} Paulson, \textit{Emblem and Expression}, 64.

\textsuperscript{87} Paulson, \textit{Emblem and Expression}, 64.

\textsuperscript{88} Paulson, \textit{Emblem and Expression}, 73.
presented as a good apprentice whose attire and demeanor are orderly and gentlemanly, whereas Tom Idle, who makes vicious choices, is illustrated as a bad apprentice whose features become contorted and grotesque. Their corresponding environments also explain the status of each apprentice. Throughout the story, Goodchild always stays “within the structured, orderly world of the polite, dutiful and successful middle class” (fig. 17), but Idle is seen in rather untidy and disorderly compositions (fig. 18), such as a graveyard, the sea, a garret, or a night cellar. Hogarth, by characterizing the structured and solid space as a space of virtue or vice, depending on the subject, imposes the peculiar meaning of “the closed room: its comfort and security.” Hogarth eventually claims interiority as virtue. The significance of Hogarth’s implication of interiority with security and virtue influenced contemporary English artists. In consequence, portrayals of a couple in an orderly, structured interior space emerged in several conversation pieces of this period.

Many of Devis’s conversation pieces depicted their sitters in an orderly and static indoor environment. The room is enclosed, though some works have an open doorway, and the sitters, often placed in the center of the interior space, are protected by sturdy architectural elements. Given the fact that Devis used the same or at least similar interior scenes for his different sitters, the interior scenes in his conversation pieces do not seem to directly reflect the actual interior of the sitters but rather an imaginary setting that Devis created. If the artist designed and set up the interior scene, each object cannot be regarded as meaningless, random artifacts. The degree of interiority encapsulated in Devis’s conversation


91 Ellen D’Oench explains that “restrained and harmoniously organized, the Athertons’ interior (fig. 38) appears to suggest a visual equivalent to the ordered family structure of its inhabitants.” Ellen G. D’Oench, *The Conversation Piece: Arthur Devis & His Contemporaries* (New Haven, CT: Yale Center For British Art, 1980), 13.
pieces especially cannot be missed. Devis must have been aware of the current tendency to move toward simplicity and the virtue of interiority examined in Hogarth’s work. Devis, who had a studio in London, tried to reflect the metropolitan fashion in his art even though most of his sitters belonged to the middle class in his hometown Preston.92

It is uncertain if Devis actually intended to emphasize interiority, but the audience can feel a high degree of it in his works.93 In Devis’s conversation pieces, the artist centers the English sitters in the indoor environment with a few domestic surroundings. Although the interior objects in these pieces are so sparsely distributed that the overall effect of the portrait seems ambiguous, the message that both the artist and the patrons intend to deliver is rather clear: metropolitan fashion, or the learned fashion or polite culture of that time. Regardless of whether the artist did so due to financial reasons or lack of artistic skill, the ultimate consequence of his work reflects the period’s perception of a picture. The audience is able to effortlessly infer the polite code of conduct that the sitters represent in their setting.

Hogarth’s shift toward simplicity not only reflects the period’s attention to the new public but also anticipates the relationship between the middle class and Italian landscape, which is exemplified in Devis’s conversation pieces. Hogarth denounces aristocrats’ improper dilettantism, which is exhibited in their mindless collection of art and antiquities, and instead associates Italian landscape with the middle class as a modest art genre to represent the class. Jason M. Kelly elucidates that it was not coincidence that Hogarth highlighted the art collection and antiquities in *The Toilette* (1743) (fig. 19), a panel in *Marriage A-la-Mode*, a

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93 Paulson points out the relationship between the portrayal of a middle class family and an indoor setting. An indoor setting is “more conducive to the portrayal of a middle-class family and exact socio-personal definition,” while an outdoor setting “displays an aristocratic family, garden imagery, and symbolism relating art and nature.” Outdoor settings were fitting for aristocratic families because this type of setting requires large expanses of space to link the family and their property. In contrast, the indoor scene tends to convey more religious concerns, such as the Holy Family. Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 123.
six-scene morality fable of a young heir and heiress who receive their inheritance. The couple is shown to be uninterested in the antiquities and the old master paintings surrounding them. Kelly explains that Hogarth maneuvered the antiquities and art in the scene to imply improper dilettantism.\textsuperscript{94}

The early to mid-eighteenth century witnessed a radical shift in the standards of gentlemanly conduct. A newly risen middle-class aesthetic transformed the expectations of aristocratic honor and virtue. The ideal of the middle class, so-called polite sociability, refused social rank given by birth.\textsuperscript{95} With it, individuals from the middle class could redefine themselves by participating in polite sociability. Lawrence E. Klein claims that “the most important component of the meaning of politeness” was “consciousness of form, a concern with the manner in which actions were performed.”\textsuperscript{96} Because individual improvement was mainly considered the ultimate purpose of dilettantism, which was eventually intended to improve society as a whole, knowledge sought by society was an important tool for establishing a moderate character.\textsuperscript{97} Through the act of polite learning, which was rooted in “the courtly literature of the early modern period and the classical models of virtu,”\textsuperscript{98} sociable

\textsuperscript{94} Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 26–28. The Society of Dilettanti was founded in 1732 and transformed the practice of English classical archeology. The members of the society, often called either connoisseurs or dilettanti, were interested in collecting art or demonstrating a certain taste in art, particularly in antiquities. When the Stuart Court, after the Restoration in 1660, enforced continental sensibility, the Grand Tour quickly became the learning course of the English, Scottish, and Irish elite. As a result, a cosmopolitan air gradually emerged in aristocratic life. Most dilettanti belonged to an elite social group, whose travels gave them cosmopolitan credentials. The members of the Society of Dilettanti traveled the continent and experienced the pleasures of Italy. They gained first-hand knowledge and appreciation of modern Italian art, music, and painting, as well as classical sculpture and architecture. Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 9, 12–13.

\textsuperscript{95} Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 19.

\textsuperscript{96} Lawrence E. Klein, “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,” The Historical Journal 45, no. 4 (December 2002), 874.

\textsuperscript{97} Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 21–22.

\textsuperscript{98} Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 19.
individuals learned to control their emotions and manners. In the same light, the process of polite learning, which is to seek knowledge, worked as an alternative way for the middle class to reach the standards of gentlemanly behavior, which had been traditionally expected of aristocrats.

On the other hand, there was a raised concern about the dangers of indiscreet dilettantism of the aristocracy in particular and English society overall in association with the growing taste for dilettantish interest. In this sense, according to Riding, Hogarth’s references to foreign culture, seen through the display of antiquities and art in the series Marriage A-la-Mode, indicate “an unremitting attack on the absorption by the social elite of foreign and in particular French luxury goods, cultural values and lifestyle.” The setting of The Toilette not only reflects the adaptation of the toilette, a French aristocratic custom of having visitors in the bedroom or boudoir while dressing up, but also infers “a gendered and sexualized atmosphere.” By exhibiting the foreign pieces by Italian and Dutch Old Masters, as well as French furnishings and oriental decorative art, in the woman’s bedchamber rather than in a library or gallery, Hogarth tactfully depreciates foreign culture and criticizes “the unrestrained dilettantish acquisition.” In The Toilette, Michelangelo’s Rape of Ganymede is hung on the left wall, aligned with the portrait of Silvertongue, the

100 Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 29.
101 Hallett and Riding, Hogarth, 142.
102 Hallett and Riding, Hogarth, 149.
104 Hallett and Riding, Hogarth, 142.
countess’s lover, above it, as if alluding to the nature of sensuality depicted in Michelangelo’s work. On the right wall, Correggio’s Jupiter and Io and Bernardo Cavallino’s Lot and His Daughters, two images of irregular sexuality, are hung above the countess. The room is also replete with statues and paintings of naked figures, which were often “subjects to the sexualized gaze of the dilettanti,” creating an erotic air among the figures in the scene.

Through the portrayal of improper dilettantism in The Toilette, Hogarth suggests a reevaluation of the meaning of polite learning. As Kelly remarks, this was not coincidental. Hogarth clearly “links the excesses of aristocratic collecting” with “the excesses of aristocratic sexuality.” Aristocrats were infatuated with being fashionable and with their superiority over the middle class; in a way, they had less restrictions on keeping a proper code of conduct in regard to dilettantism. In the middle class, however, things were different. The elite and the middle class of the eighteenth century maintained their own versions of dilettante culture. The social code of conduct, learned through polite learning, manifested as a way for people in the middle class to legitimize their right to become part of the elite.

Middle-class men, therefore, had to keep themselves from falling into improper dilettantism. They “regulated the boundaries of proper dilettantism” though the “polite code of conduct” and “the rationality to control their gaze.” This explains why most of Devis’s portrayals of middle-class sitters in his indoor pieces do not include any other genres of art beyond landscape. By including a landscape painting, the sitters could acquire an elegant status as a connoisseur without being criticized as a mindless collector of foreign masterpieces with


109 Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 34.

110 Kelly, The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology, 34.
immoral subjects.

This distinction was first seen in the case of William Strode, a founding member and middle-class member of the Society of Dilettanti. Strode was the son of a wealthy broker whose fortune was made with the South Sea Company. Strode wanted to elevate his status by joining the elite, so he pursued one way for middle-class men to achieve a higher social status: He traveled to Italy with his tutor Arthur Smyth. His Grand Tour and his embrace of social norms facilitated his desire to elevate his status, which is encapsulated in Hogarth’s *The Strode Family* (1738) (fig. 20). Strode is surrounded by his tutor, Arthur Smyth, to the left and his servant, Jonathan Powell, to the right. On the right side of the painting, Lady Anne Cecil, his wife, and Col. Samuel Strode, his brother, are included. Kelly claims that the book to which Strode points, the one on Arthur Smyth’s lap, signifies that his connoisseurship is moderated by his polite education.\(^{111}\)

Unlike Kelly, who interprets Strode’s gesture of pointing to Smyth’s book as an action to highlight his polite education, other scholars like Elizabeth Einberg and Mark Hallett offer alternative interpretations. In Einberg’s analysis, “Strode is telling him firmly to put always his book and to take a cup of tea” as “breakfast at this time denoted an informal coming together of family and visitors.”\(^ {112}\) Hallett states that Strode is asking Smyth “to abandon his admirable but rather pedantic and anti-social activity of reading” and to “pull over his chair and join in with his more socially elevated companions in the convivial pleasures of conversation and tea.”\(^ {113}\) However, the facts that Smyth accompanied Strode on his Grand Tour from 1730 to 1734 as his tutor and that this scene is set in a library, as noted by the

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111 Kelly, *The Society of Dilettanti Archaeology*, 34.
massive ranks of books on the library shelves,\textsuperscript{114} illustrate that Strode values polite learning as equally as the pleasure of conversation and tea. Strode’s one hand points at the book while the other hand invites both Smyth and the audience right into their informal gathering. As the viewer follows Strode’s invitation, suggested by his open left palm, the viewer’s eyes naturally pause on three Italian views that Hogarth incorporated: a large landscape after Salvator Rosa and two smaller pictures of Venice, perhaps by Francesco Guardi.\textsuperscript{115} The \textit{Strode Family} conveys the importance of polite learning through the book on Smyth’s lap, the library setting, the pleasure of conversation and tea, as invited by Strode himself, and, finally, a taste of Italian landscape.

Considering that Hogarth had painted \textit{The Strode Family} between 1736 and 1738\textsuperscript{116} and \textit{Marriage a-la-Mode} between 1743 and 1744,\textsuperscript{117} it can be assumed that the polite education of middle-class men, as conveyed in Strode’s portrait, must have given Hogarth some sort of idea on how to portray the improper dilettantism of aristocrats in \textit{Marriage a-la-Mode}. Hogarth chose to paint a young couple whose corrupted morality is accentuated by sexually provocative paintings, while he painted Italian landscapes behind Strode’s group. Hogarth’s inclusion of Italian landscape in his conversation pieces is a significant step forward in the overall development of English conversation pieces. It could be speculated that Hogarth selected a landscape painting to accentuate the polite code of conduct for middle-class English men. Italian landscape was perhaps seen as an appropriate genre for middle-class men to represent their elevated social statuses. There is a sense of a relationship between the polite culture of middle-class men and Italian landscape, a trend that can be seen

\textsuperscript{114} Einberg, \textit{William Hogarth}, 182.
\textsuperscript{115} Einberg, \textit{William Hogarth}, 182.
\textsuperscript{116} Einberg, \textit{William Hogarth}, 182.
\textsuperscript{117} Einberg, \textit{William Hogarth}, 256.
throughout many of Devis’s conversation pieces. By including Italian landscape, middle-class men can be freed from criticism on their improper dilettantism, for which aristocrats were often condemned.

Lastly, Paulson addresses an interesting issue in examining Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness*: The work reflects an important transformation of the time—morality to picturesque. This was a complete shift in aesthetics. The concept of being idle, which was regarded as a moral vice, had the potential to be seen as good in the new aesthetic of picturesque. Addison in *The Spectator* personified the Dutch School by using the concept of industry—specifically, its laboriousness and mechanical ingenuity. In the words of Addison, he notes, “Not far from this artist I saw another of a quite deferent nature who was dressed in the habit of a Dutchman, and known by the name of Industry. His figures were wonderfully labored: if he drew the portraiture of a man, he did not omit a single hair in his face; if the figure of a ship, there was not a rope among the tackle that escaped him.”

Given *The Spectator*’s heavy influence on Hogarth, the characterization of the Dutch School with industry must have shaped Hogarth’s mind when he associated industry with Francis Goodchild. However, although he illustrated Tom Idle’s idleness as being bad and a vice, *The Spectator*, interestingly, saw idleness as a potential for good.

There are, indeed, but very few who know how to be idle and innocent, or have a relish of any pleasures that are not criminal; ... A man should endeavor, therefore, to make the sphere of his innocent pleasures as wide as possible, ... We might here add that the pleasures of the fancy are more conductive to health, than those of the understanding which are worked out by dint of thinking, and attended with too violent a labour of the brain. Delightful scenes, whether in nature, painting or poetry, have a kindly influence on the body, as well as the mind, and not only serve to clear and brighten the imagination but are able to disperse grief and melancholy, and to set the

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118 Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 75.


120 Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 75.
animal spirits in pleasing and agreeable motions.121

This new aesthetic captured idleness as a way to find innocent pleasures. Addison suggests that innocent pleasures can be found in appreciating delightful scenes from nature, a painting, or poetry. This new mentality will eventually correlate with the concept of the picturesque. William Gilpin (1724–1804), who perceived Tom’s idleness as potentially good, writes that “in a moral view, the industrious mechanic,” such as Francis Goodchild, is a good figure but “in a picturesque light.” Tom Idle is the ideal figure “allowed in the grandest scenes”; he is “the lazy cowherd resting on his pole.”122 In terms of Gilpin’s account of what is picturesque, Paulson reinterprets this to mean that people should be doing what they should not be doing in their real life—being idle.123

Although Hogarth created a modern version of history painting from the late 1740s to 1750s, he adhered to the popular moral subjects of Roman and Greek art, corresponding to the movement of so-called neoclassicism.124 However, in the meantime, others saw this as a possibility to remove morality and reduce iconographical meaning, instead finding the picturesque. In a way, they suppress the existing hierarchy to create their own aesthetic styles. The hierarchies of virtue over vice, industry over idleness, and labor over pleasure were ruptured, a consequence of which resulted in the picturesque. This newly established hierarchy within eighteenth-century English art may explain the one in the category of English landscape as well: Italian landscape over Dutch landscape. It also explains the early popularity of Italian landscape in England.

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123 Paulson, Emblem and Expression, 78.

124 Paulson, Emblem and Expression, 78.
So far, I have explained the emergence of foreign art in English conversation pieces by beginning with a discussion on some of Hogarth’s works of art. As discussed, Hogarth’s works raise three issues. First, by placing a virtuous figure in an orderly, structured interior in *Industry and Idleness*, Hogarth presents the virtue of interiority. Hogarth’s emphasis on interiority as a virtue would have been a significant influence for contemporary English portraitists, including Arthur Devis. As in most of Devis’s conversation pieces, we note the high degree of interiority delivered through either vertical or horizontal picture plains rendered by architectural elements. The interior creates a strong sense of security and order; in consequence, the sitters can also become a part of the orderly world—so-called polite society. Secondly, the inclusion of framed Italian landscapes in Hogarth’s *The Strode Family* suggests that middle-class men regarded Italian landscape as an appropriate genre of art to represent their elevated social statuses. Unlike aristocrats whose improper dilettantism was largely excused, middle-class men had to regulate their behavior rigorously because polite learning was a way to elevate their status. By participating in their own Grand Tours, they were able to access polite learning. Out of all the art forms that they learned through the Grand Tour, the genre of landscape was moderate enough to represent them, and *The Strode Family* successfully encapsulates this. Lastly, the fact that the evil figure, Tom, is later seen as potentially good signifies the transformation to a new aesthetic form by rupturing an existing hierarchy while creating an English version of a hierarchy within the categories of English art in general and English landscape.

Hogarth’s comparison of industry and idleness presented contemporaries with the eminent need to rupture existing hierarchies. As a result, idleness and pleasure surprisingly came first, followed by industry and labor. Also, the Italian perception of a pastoral and ideal landscape came before the Dutch perception of truth and literalness. With an emphasis on idealizing certain aspects of Italian landscape, Dutch landscape, with its literalness, became
less favored. In conclusion, Hogarth played a crucial role not only in advancing English conversation pieces but also in prefiguring the advent of a new aesthetic concept in the English school of landscape in the late eighteenth century: the picturesque.

Before moving on to the next chapter for my discussion on Italian landscape in Devis’s conversation pieces, one more aspect needs to be discussed to fully understand the development of English conversation pieces: the foreign influences committed to the formation of the genre. The birth of English conversation pieces is substantially related to foreign influences of the time, such as those in the work of Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), one of the most important artists to English painters of the Hogarth generation and after. Levey recounts on “the international aspect of Watteau’s fame” by pointing out England as the first respondent to Watteau’s art during and continuously after his lifetime. Watteau was greatly appreciated and “better understood” outside his native country. Gainsborough, as well as Reynolds, was known to be a great admirer of Watteau. Watteau’s fête galante “claimed complete freedom of subject-matter for the painter” while focusing on “human nature as psychologically as the novel was to do.”

To delineate the very aspect of human nature without having any subject matter, Watteau explored the aesthetic of being idle. One of the prototypes of this concept, that Watteau had known about and influenced, is Titian’s The Pastoral Concert (1509) (fig. 21), which celebrates “the freedom given by nature,” with a group of people who “dare to do nothing.” By representing leisure in the pastoral painting tradition, Watteau was able to invent a new category of painting, one that was completely free from academic art, which was mainly concerned with historical subjects, moral judgment, or a philosophical statement. In L’Enseigne de Gersaint (1720–21) (fig. 22), he painted

recognizable things and people in the shop of his friend Gersaint.\textsuperscript{128} Paulson claims that, “Watteau replaced allegories with a new form of iconography while changing the structures of meaning in genre painting,” giving “a new twist to genre painting by generating a kind of conversation piece that could flourish in the literary context of England.”\textsuperscript{129}

Through the works of Watteau, Mercier, and their followers, the advent of conversation pieces arrived in England in the early 1720s. Watteau’s \textit{fête galante} approach was translated into portraits by Philippe Mercier (1689–1760),\textsuperscript{130} who came to England in the mid-1720s. By exemplifying Mercier’s \textit{1st Viscount Tyrconnel with His Family, at Belton House} (1725–26) (fig. 23), John Hayes discusses that Mercier had reinterpreted Watteau’s \textit{fêtes galantes} into the familiar language of portraiture. Although the figures in a semi-arcadian landscape are gracefully rendered in a Watteaesque style with the inclusion of a favorite rococo subject of the swing, the nature of portraiture dominates the overall impression of the painting. Hayes claims that Mercier’s Belton Family was meant to be the earliest English conversation piece, as well as be the prototype for a conversation piece applying landscape settings.\textsuperscript{131}

If the art of French rococo played a major role in popularizing conversation pieces in eighteenth-century England, it was Dutch genre painting that built the foundation for the growth of conversation pieces. The country house portraits of Metsu and de Hooch were popular among bourgeois groups in seventeenth-century Holland. These portraits showed family groups posed informally either indoors or outdoors. Although it is questionable, as Hayes remarks, if Dutch artists who settled or worked in England during the seventeenth

\textsuperscript{128} Levey, \textit{Rococo to Revolution}, 77.

\textsuperscript{129} Paulson, \textit{Emblem and Expression}, 104.

\textsuperscript{130} Paulson, \textit{Emblem and Expression}, 125.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Polite Society}, 13.
In the following chapter, I discuss the development of Devis’s conversation pieces with an emphasis on how these pieces manifested the period’s new vogue on Italian landscape.

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132 Polite Society, 13.
133 Polite Society, 14.
134 Polite Society, 15.
Chapter 4

Italian Landscape in Arthur Devis’s (1721–87) Conversation Pieces

The English middle class of the seventeenth century purchased art mainly to decorate their houses so that there was less attention on acknowledging the instructive function of an artwork. People, therefore, obtained art with little regard for its genre. As Carol Gibson-Wood declares, however, two of the most renowned English writers, Shaftesbury and Richardson, had shifted the traditional way to appreciate pictures in the early eighteenth century. They condemned the period’s emphasis on pictures’ decorative uses over their instructional quality. Many people before the eighteenth century overlooked the instructional aspect of art and merely consumed pictures to embellish their homes.135 As the middle class began earning more income from the late seventeenth century, they began to desire material goods, such as “mirrors, clocks, Turkish carpets, porcelain, musical instruments and paintings,” which were mostly available in London by that time. This part of society, often called the middle class or the trading class, was composed of merchants, shopkeepers, tradesmen, artisans, lawyers, and physicians, comprising almost 20 to 25 percent of London’s population.

Gibson-Wood’s study on “a set of one hundred household inventories from the City of London from 1694 to 1713” shows that a large number of middle-class Londoners had pictures in their houses. Interestingly, however, the paintings were listed and described in the inventories, not with any particular information regarding their creators or subject matter, but with minimal descriptions about their sizes, akin to “the other furnishings listed, such as ‘old,’ ‘small,’ or ‘large,’”136 demonstrating the period’s understanding of pictures primarily as


Simultaneously, from the late seventeenth century onward, picture auctions became popular in both the middle and upper class. Sales catalogues of picture auctions\textsuperscript{137} often provided brief descriptions on where to hang each painting in a house—for instance, “large pieces fit for Halls,” “small pieces for Ladies Closet,” and “others suitable for chimneys, overdoors, halls and staircases.” In addition, these catalogue collections included not only historical subjects, landscapes, portraits, genre, and still lifes but surprisingly a large number of religious paintings as well.\textsuperscript{138} Considering that pictures in the late seventeenth century of England were initially purchased for decorative reasons, it can be assumed that the English perceived these paintings not as religious subjects to admire but as objects to decorate their homes, just like other domestic surroundings.

Lorna Weatherill explains that the meaning of consumption in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, besides justifying “new habits and new goods,” also recognizes the influence of “established patterns.”\textsuperscript{139} Because people recognized that “social life could be linked to consumption patterns,” purchasing luxuries, such as art for instance, was associated with their ability to demonstrate their ranks and thus “communicate social position in a non-verbal way.”\textsuperscript{140} Therefore, displaying art in their homes not only flaunted its

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item “Public art auctions originated in the Netherlands early in the seventeenth century, and the first such sale recorded in England was held in 1674. They seemingly became popular quite quickly, for by 1690 picture auctions took place almost weekly in London, usually at coffeehouses, taverns, or one of the exchanges, London’s mercantile centers, which included galleries of small shops. The area around Covent Garden, Charing Cross, and the New Exchange in the Strand were popular sites for art auctions, as was the Royal Exchange in the City.” Gibson-Wood, “Picture Consumption,” 493.
\item Gibson-Wood, “Picture Consumption,” 494.
\item Weatherill, “The Meaning,” 207.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
decorative purpose but also further indicated “a desire to look beyond the immediate household or location to other people and places.”

The social reference linked to art consumption became more significant as it prevailed among the middle class from the late seventeenth century onward. With the growth of the middle class’s economic capacity to purchase luxury goods, such as pictures, they were looking beyond their current social status by using “established patterns,” which, in this case, were traditionally allowed to the upper class. This may explain why people in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries bought art regardless of its genre. To their minds, especially of the late seventeenth-century middle class, the instructional quality of art was not a concern yet. It was understood mainly as a way to elevate their status. Art was, therefore, consumed as a type of luxury item to legitimize their new elevated status.

Gibson-Wood’s study presents an interesting aspect that the picture consumption of the middle class in a wide range of subject matters was not reflected in the eyes of Devis. Devis’s indoor conversation pieces included only framed-landscape-over-chimney pieces. Luxury items such as Turkish carpets and porcelains that the middle class purchased since the late seventeenth century are reflected in Devis’s conversation pieces, but the pieces do not indicate if Devis’s sitters once had historical or religious paintings in their houses. The seventeenth-century pattern of consuming various genres of art has now entirely disappeared from the English domestic scene. The only genre that persisted into the mid-1800s is Italian landscape. As pictures’ instructive aspect was gradually acknowledged and even encouraged, framed-landscape-over-chimney pieces, which had settled in the domestic space of the middle class, began to be perceived beyond their decorative quality. This can be seen in Hogarth’s conversation piece of Strode, who possessed a middle-class background but aimed

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to go beyond his birth status. By including an Italian landscape painting in the piece, the genre of landscape had begun to be seen as a part of polite learning.

In *Portraying Politeness*, Ching-Jung Chen writes that in the eighteenth century, “commercialization and urbanization opened up new avenues for acquiring wealth and respect.”143 The elite of the eighteenth century was not claimed by birth but by “outward forms,” such as “defined manners, agreeable conversations, and wealth filtered through taste,” and taste was manifested by “the consumption of fine material possessions,” including picture consumption.144 In other words, what they possessed constituted in part who they were. Chen explains that English conversation pieces from 1730s reflected “the value of the middle class,” thus identifying the genre as “art of the middle class.”145 This association between middle-class patronage and the genre allows for the interpretation of Italian landscape in conversation pieces as an element to define the tastes of the middle class. If the conversation pieces were to define the status of the middle class, every object comprising the genre should also be considered as part of the definition. The prominent inclusion of the Italian landscape paintings in Devis’s conversation pieces demonstrate that the landscape genre played a role in formulating both the tastes and identity of the English middle class.

Examining the identity of eighteenth-century England first requires an understanding of some of the social circumstances in the first half of the century. Identity during this period was mostly established in relation to the political and religious stance of England, which was embroiled in a succession of wars with France.146 Linda Colley claims that people of the first

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144 Chen, “Portraying Politeness,” 207.


146 There were wars between 1689 and 1697; in 1702, 1713, 1743, 1748, 1756, 1763, 1778, 1783, 1793, and 1802; and, finally, between 1803 and 1815. Colley, *Britons*, 1.
half of the century tended to “define themselves against the French,” the world’s foremost Catholic power. The English understood themselves chiefly as Protestants. National identity during this period was initially defined by “who and what they were not.” For one, they were not Catholics. Naturally, Protestantism affected the way the English “approached and interpreted their material life.” Beginning in the seventeenth century, the English middle class had purchased various types of paintings, and in the eighteenth century, many began to visit foreign countries. However, the art and culture they encountered outside of England were maybe things they could admire but not necessarily like. Catholicism was thought to create “misery, poverty, clerical rule, and oppression.” Therefore, it instigated fear or unease among the English. The definite distinction of their religious stance helped the English perceive other countries and their art as foreign.

Adams calls landscape “an unclaimed site,” which is not bound to any biblical connotations but retains “the idea of philosophical retreat,” a concept that eighteenth-century writers often associated with the imagery of a solitary hermit meditating to the surrounding landscape. Given this connotation, there was perhaps nothing but landscape that the Anglican English could claim to like. Referring to a part of Thomas Warton’s poem

147 Colley, Britons, 5.
148 Colley, Britons, 6.
149 Colley, Britons, 18.
150 Black, The English, 217.
153 Adams, “Competing Communities,” 65.
154 John Dixon Hunt, The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 1.
155 Hunt, The Figure in the Landscape, 1–2.
Pleasures of Melancholy (“Thro’ silent church-yards, where the sable yews / Spread kindred gloom, and holy musings raise”),

John Dixon Hunt states that “the hermit, in short, becomes just another element of church-yard scenery” and claims that “the role that these allusions to hermits and their traditional landscapes are intended to play in this kind of poetry.”

Hunt links the hermit’s surrounding landscape with its philosophical reference, indicating the potential of landscape to embody not only literary but also philosophical or even religious associations. Eighteenth-century English people must have seen this potential power of landscape, and without realizing it, the genre became reflective of their lives. And, most importantly, it could be conveniently assimilated into their traditional portrait art.

Despite embarking upon the Grand Tour, the sitters in Devis’s conversation pieces are conclusively portrayed in constrained domestic surroundings that fit Protestant material life; Italian landscape painting, on the other hand, intimates their philosophical beliefs.

Devis joined the milieu that was largely influenced by French rococo, and his portraits distinctly demonstrated a stylistic difference from those painted in the seventeenth century, as seen in the portrayal of his minute figures. Stephen V. Sartin in Polite Society explains that English portraitists in the time of Kneller followed the baroque conventions that had succeeded through the art of Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641). Unlike Kneller, whose portraits manifested “a more prosaic tradition” by adopting the baroque convention, Devis’s portraits were initially in response to the influence of French rococo and the inclinations of “a lively middle-class public for literature, theater, and the visual arts.”

Many of his conversation pieces, particularly indoor conversation pieces, hardly

156 Hunt, The Figure in the Landscape, 6.
157 Hunt, The Figure in the Landscape, 6.
158 Polite Society, 12.
include children, instead usually depicting a couple, a wife and husband.  

Devis’s *The John Bacon Family* (1742–43) (fig. 24) is a rare case in which children were included with their parents in their residence, and his *Children in an Interior* (1743) (fig. 25) is an even more rare painting that portrays children only. In contrast to many of Devis’s outdoor conversation pieces, in which the sitters and their children are situated in landscape settings, his indoor pieces tend to portray just a couple. A full analysis of this tendency would require questioning the economic flexibility of middle-class patrons who commissioned the portraits of an entire family, especially in consideration of the fact that each figure and each object only added to the cost of the portrait. However, aside from this question regarding the sitter’s financial ability, the fact that Devis’s indoor conversation pieces frequently portrayed a husband and a wife in a secure, domestic environment raises the question whether Devis was also drawn to the period’s new interest in the family unit and interpersonal relationships.  

By ambiguously placing a couple in a sparsely furnished domestic space, Devis spotlights the meaningful presence of each figure in his indoor pieces. Unlike the traditional portrayal of a family in which a couple with their children are positioned mostly in a triangular composition, with a religious reference to the Holy Family, Devis’s portraits of couples break the conventional formula of painting family members as a whole unit. His portraits focus on each figure’s own being and their interpersonal relationships with each other by inserting ambiguous space in

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159 A portrait of a couple could be made only on the celebratory occasion of their marriage and when commissioned by their patrons. *Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull* is an example of this case. Katharine Baetjer and Josephine Dobkin, “Mr. Devis and Mr. Bull,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 45 (2010): 205.  

160 Paulson proposes that Hogarth shifted the focus on the hero to an individual or unit of family. To produce a modern version of history painting, as Hogarth intended, he gave up on the basic structure of history painting—of a hero on a pilgrimage enduring hardship and finally reaching the highest virtue. Instead, he went for an antiheroic theme. The modern moral subject still falls within the realm of conversation pieces, but his character is not a hero, but an individual whose family tries to keep him at home to protect him from the chaotic world that threatens him. Consequently, the family became a secure world for the character. Hogarth’s antihero does not have to be out on the road or on a pilgrimage. His moral choice is to stay safe at home. Hogarth shifted the genre’s infatuation with the single hero to the family unit. Accordingly, the setting is reduced to the family’s country estate, such as a small town of London, and focuses on interpersonal relationships rather than morals. Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 128, 130. Devis then joins this milieu in his active years during the 1740s.
between the figures.

Although Devis’s indoor conversation pieces reveal much about the French rococo aesthetic seen in the diminutive gentle figures posed elegantly in their courteous costumes, many of his outdoor pieces, especially the ones that are set outside country houses, illustrate Peter Tillemans’s (1684–1734) influence. In comparing one of Devis’s earlier works, *Houghton Tower from Duxon Hill, Lancashire* (1735) (fig. 26) with Tillemans’s *Uppark, West Sussex* (1725) (fig. 27), Devis had adopted his master’s seventeenth-century topographic convention in which “the spectator is elevated above the site and shown the house and property with graphic clarity.” Ellen D’Oench remarks that Devis gave increasing attention to representing landscape in his outdoor conversation pieces due in part to his earlier training as a view pointer and topographer. D’Oench also urges that this aspect of Devis’s contribution to the traditions of English conversation pieces requires further study because “it prefigured trends in the later eighteenth century.” His dedication to the representation of landscape is manifest not only in many of his outdoor pieces but also through his choice to insert framed Italian landscapes in his indoor pieces. Simultaneously, his earlier topographical landscape convention gradually disappeared from his outdoor conversation pieces in the 1740s.

Devis adopted the Italian landscape convention in his later works during the 1750s.

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162 D’Oench, *The Conversation Piece*, 8. Tillemans came to England from Antwerp in 1708 via Mr. Turner, a London picture dealer, who employed him as a copyist of battle scenes, landscapes, and interior views. Tillemans had a studio at 34 Gerrard Street, in the parish of St. Margaret’s Westminster. Various paintings, including battle pieces, still lifes, Italianate views, and mythological scenes, were displayed there. The contents of his London studio in Tillemans’s sales catalogues of 1733 included listed works in his collection by his assistants or students, along with nine pictures by Arthur Devis. Given that his work was advanced enough to be in a public sale, he must have had several years of prior training. Ellen D’Oench. “Arthur Devis (1712-1787): Master of the Georgian Conversation Piece” (PhD diss., Yale Univ., 1979), 23-24. Tillemans’s topographical landscapes are best known to English patrons who wanted to record their country seats, hunting scenes, and horse racing. *Polite Society*, 39.

His sitters are frequently portrayed in a natural setting that could be referred to a Claudian landscape. Like many of the English artists who painted conversation pieces at some point in their careers to make their reputations, Devis too was actively engaged in painting conversation pieces. As D’Oench indicates, “his use of the conversation piece tradition” served as “a vehicle for expressing the milieu of his society,” where to express a landscape painting was to be a part of the polite culture of the middle class. Despite the fact that Devis did not fully consider himself a landscape painter, such as Richard Wilson, who originally began his career in portraits but then abandoned this practice and became a landscaper painter, his conversation pieces definitely reflected the period’s preoccupation with Italian landscape.

The pastoral quality in Claude’s landscape was greatly admired among the English before the 1750s. Claude Lorrain evoked “the world of classical antiquity” through “the establishment in his pastorals of a mood that recalls Virgil’s bucolic poems and the recreation of a heroic, antique landscape in his scenes based on the Aeneid.” Deborah Howard claims that the English passion for Claude was “conditioned only vaguely by a nostalgia for the beauty of the Italian countryside.” The earliest English imitators of Claude, such as John Wootton and George Lambert, initially learned about Claude’s style from his

164 Polite Society, 7.
166 Polite Society, 9.
168 Claire Pace, “‘Paise antique’: Claude Lorrain and Seventeenth-Century Responses to Antique Painting,” Artibus et Historiae 36, no. 72 (2015): 305.
paintings and engravings. The copies they produced at this time were driven by their knowledge of Claude’s paintings, not by directly sketching and “visiting the places which had inspired Claude a century earlier.” English landscape painters of the mid-eighteenth century, such as Alexander Cozens, Richard Wilson, and Jonathan Skelton, who studied and worked in Rome from the late 1740s, began to encounter “the tradition of sketching in the Campagna inherited from the seventeenth century.”

Wilson, for instance, is known as the English landscaper who “most successfully understood and revitalized Claude’s example and set it in the context of the eighteenth century.” He spent much of his time sketching from nature in Italy and also studied Claude’s landscapes in Roman collections. By adapting the landscape tradition into one that demands sketching directly in nature, the English landscape painters began to understand not only how to produce a landscape painting but also how to visualize their own English views. As scenery of the English countryside gained greater appreciation, more artists saw the potential for their own view to become the subject of their paintings. In the cases of Arthur Devis and Richard Wilson, both applied this new finding into their portraiture. The landscape representations in Devis’s outdoor pieces embraced the Claudian convention, but the view itself was intended to be English.

Devis’s training with Tillemans was specifically in landscape painting, based on evidence of nine pictures by Devis that were included in the sales catalogue of Tillemans’s London studio in 1733. Devis produced numerous copies of Italianate views, particularly

those of Marco Ricci (1676–1730), Pieter van Bloemen (1657–1720), and Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691–1765). Many of these landscape copies, in fact, reappeared in his indoor conversation pieces as framed Italian landscapes hung on a wall behind the sitters.

Although he had not received any training in portrait painting, presuming that more success ensued with portraits, he began his career as a portraitist in London, specifically with conversation pieces, the most fashionable form of portrait painting of the time. Devis may have been inspired by the prolific activities of other portraitists. For instance, Mercier introduced Watteau’s *fête galante* to England in the form of a conversation piece. Hubert Gravelot (1699–1773) collaborated with Francis Hayman (1708–76) from the mid-1730s to the 1740s, designing and engraving the plates for *Pamela*, Samuel Richardson’s (1689–1761) first illustrated edition of his novel. Joseph Highmore (1689–1780) also made a series of twelve pictures based on the novel’s main stories. As Sartin points out, it was “the greater flexibility” that Devis saw in such a genre that allowed him to gradually incorporate landscape representation into his work. As a trained artist in landscape painting, Devis did not waste the opportunity to show his landscape paintings within this genre.

Devis’s early self-portrait (fig. 28), dated in 1737, reflects “some ability as a colorist and technician” but indicates a deficiency in portraiture training. Although Devis manages to render each feature of his face with Flemish detail, the spatial relationship between each feature of the face is lacking. The rest of the figure is drawn insensitively in relation to the face, along with a lack of anatomical detail. In *Breaking-up Day at John Clayton’s School in*

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175 Devis’s *Classical Ruins after Pannini* (1736) is the only known example that Devis executed as an assistant to Tillemans, exemplifying that Devis was a competent copyist. D’Oench, *The Conversation Piece*, 8.


177 Polite Society, 21.

Salford (1738–40) (fig. 29), painted in the following year, Devis reduces the sizes of the sitters, “placing them in the contexts of their surroundings.”179 Devis is now more concerned with establishing a world for the sitters than with “capturing a perfect representation of the physiognomy of the sitters.”180 The overall effect is so convincing that it would almost make the sitters believe that they actually existed in that world.181 Devis, understanding his limitations in executing portraiture that requires perfect delineation of the physiognomy of the sitters, establishes a partially artificial, but perfectly ideal, space in which his new diminutive figures could mingle. In comparison with Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull, painted in 1747, Devis reduces the number of objects even more and minimizes the architectural structures in his later piece, Mr. and Mrs. Hill (1750–51) (fig. 30), to seek the perfect setting for his sitters. In the piece featuring the Hills, the artist eliminates doorways, which can still be found in the portrait of the Bulls, while maximizing the flatness of the wall, created by the strong verticality of the architectural plane. Doing so creates more emphasis on the framed Italian landscape painting hung on the wall.182

Upon examining Mr. and Mrs. Richard Bull and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dashwood (1750) (fig. 31), Kate Retford conjectures that “such minute representation of rooms, furniture and objects, almost tangible in their meticulous depiction, seems to provide a rich,
immediate source of evidence for discussions of the eighteenth century English interior.”183 However, Retford also claims that creating a direct relationship between the representation of ‘rooms, furniture and objects’ and what is actually represented in the conversation piece is quite problematic, as “the explicit referentiality of the painted figures in these portraits can only occasionally be extended to their environs with confidence.”184 Susan Steward, in her book On Longing, points out that according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the meaning of longing “experience[d] a split in the eighteenth century.”185

The Oxford English Dictionary defines longing as “the condition or fact of feeling strong desire; yearning. Formerly also: sorrow, distress, anxiety (obsolete).” Among the references the dictionary provides as examples, longing was used to mean sorrow in Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667), whereas it meant desire in J. Addison’s play Cato (1713).186 This transformation in the meaning of the word in the eighteenth century, according to Steward, represents the period’s “structure of desire, a structure that both invents and distances its objects and hereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified,” indicating “the social disease of nostalgia.”187 As an example, Steward then refers to Anson’s voyage in 1748, “Our native country, for which many of us by this time began to have great longings.”188 What made the period preoccupied with this strong desire is a big question to

183 Retford, “From,” 292.
184 Retford, “From,” 293.
185 Susan Steward, On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), preface, ix.
188 George Anson, A Voyage Round the World, in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV. By George Anson, Esq; Commander in Chief of a Squadron of His Majesty’s Ships, Sent upon an Expedition to the South-Seas. Compiled from Papers and Other Materials of the Right Honourable George Lord Anson, and Published under his Direction, by Richard Walter, M. A. Chaplain of his Majesty’s Ship the Centurion, in that Expedition, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Alex. Chapman, 1796), 278. Eighteenth Century Collections Online - Gale. New York Public Library.
answer here, but at least for our discussion of Devis’s creation of diminutive worlds in which his sitters could be satisfied with or pleased to be a part of, we know that this desire to create a nostalgic or ideal world is being accomplished through the idea of miniatures. “Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experiences.”\(^{189}\) By creating the perfect interior with minute objects, which the sitters could perhaps not afford to possess in reality, Devis captured the period’s enthusiasms and longings.

The interior setting that Devis introduces in the portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Bull, who lived at Ongar in Essex, is almost identically repeated in the one of Mr. and Mrs. Dashwood, who lived in Stamford Park, Nottinghamshire. Devis has been accused of having several canvases with the same interior and “superimpos[ing] the faces of different sitters” on them.\(^{190}\) According to Retford, Devis perhaps used this practice to fulfill “demands of speed, convenience and expense,” as most of his conversation pieces were produced in the studio.\(^{191}\) Devis charged his conversation pieces by the figure\(^{192}\) and may have added the domestic objects per “a sliding scale of charges.”\(^{193}\)

Devis’s method to create the composition for his conversation pieces allowed his sitters to be painted with generic and typical objects, such as nonspecific classical landscapes in standard rococo frames, despite the fact that both the Bulls and the Dashwoods had individual possessions and items with particular meanings that they might have wished to be painted with. Retford explains that these painted rooms were not intended to represent the


\(^{190}\) *Polite Society*, 48.

\(^{191}\) Retford, “From,” 296.

\(^{192}\) Retford, “From,” 293.

\(^{193}\) *Polite Society*, 48.
sitters’ actual living environments but instead reflect the “abstract virtues” of the respectable and polite class.\textsuperscript{194} When an individual character is reduced through the generalization of his or her attributes, portraits no longer convey the identities of individual sitters but rather the collectivity of particular classes.

The portraits of the Bulls and the Dashwoods are almost the same size. In addition, the domestic objects of the interior, such as the Italian landscape painting over the fireplace, the busts, the painting over the doorway, and the view through the hallway, provide almost identical impressions.\textsuperscript{195} Some minor developments, however, can be seen. For instance, the carpet that was included in the Bulls’ portrait is gone, along with the porcelains used to decorate the mantelpiece. Interestingly, however, by removing the carpet, Devis was able to decrease the size of the foreground in the Dashwoods’ picture, focusing the viewer’s eyes to be drawn inward. Without the carpet, there is less of a sense of decoration but more emphasis on the middle ground, where the sitters are placed with an Italian landscape painting behind them. The ceramics are also gone, and this allows the viewer’s eyes to move directly from Mrs. Dashwood to the Italian landscape painting. The removal of more objects perhaps allowed Devis to practice a lesson from Shaftesbury: the fewer objects there are, the better it is for the eyes to read a picture, and a picture should be read in a simple, single view.\textsuperscript{196}

Whether Devis intended this or not, the Italian landscape painting in the portrait of the Dashwoods receives more attention. The landscape in the Dashwoods’ conversation piece seems to possess more of a pastoral sense and is closer to the Claudian convention of having a dark foreground created by objects in the middle ground, and, finally, a sense of distance in the background.

\textsuperscript{194} Retford, “From,” 296.

\textsuperscript{195} Retford, “From,” 295.

\textsuperscript{196} Shaftesbury, \textit{Second Characters}, 56.
The development of Devis’s conversation pieces is divided into three phases: in his earliest conversation pieces in the 1730s and early 1740s, an archaic portrayal of figures in monumental settings; in the 1740s and early 1750s, an intimate portrait style of figures in their surroundings, including one or two framed Italian landscape paintings; and, finally, in the 1750s and 1760s, an individualized portrait style of figures with a focus on representing a Claudian-convention landscape. Sartin maintains that these stylistic developments in Devis’s art not only demonstrate that Devis was sensitive to the current trends of his day but also show that his art reflects an originality of ideas, which later generations of artists would exploit. Three examples of his earliest conversation pieces, *Roger Hesketh and his Family* (1742–43) (fig. 32), *The John Bacon Family*, and *Children in an Interior*, show figures in monumental settings with a dramatic use of light, which reminds one of paintings executed in the 1730s by an older generation of artists, such as Gawen Hamilton’s *Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford, and his Family* (1732) (fig. 33). Devis followed the traditional composition of placing sitters at the center of a monumental space, embellished by a variety of architectural décor, including having drapery on the side in the baroque style. Unlike Devis’s later conversation pieces, particularly the portrait of the Hills, in which the sitters are in a completely enclosed interior space with no ceiling or hallways, *Children in an Interior* reveals the archaism of an older generation, which was probably outdated in London by the beginning of the 1740s. Devis quickly abandoned the style and moved to a more intimate portrayal of figures in their surroundings.

In *The Reverend Streynsham Master and his Wife, of Croston, Lancashire* (1743–44) (fig. 34), we no longer find a recessional space behind the sitters created by layers of architectural structures as seen in the three examples of Devis’s earliest conversation pieces.

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197 *Polite Society*, 31.
Sartin explains that the portrait of the Reverend Streynsham Master and his wife “developed a more static composition.”198 It does not appear to have moved entirely away from the earlier style, as it still has a theatrical sense accentuated by a baroque-style curtain. The space, however, is more enclosed by situating the couple in a cornered space surrounded by two complete walls. The recessional space has moved to the side of the painting, and this provides a greater sense of interiority and security to the couple while removing the sense of theatricality that the earlier works possessed. In this composition, Devis secures an entire wall behind the sitters that he could furnish per his own choice. The wall behind the couple contains two portraits, whereas the other wall is furnished with an Italian landscape painting in a frame over a mantelpiece. Less attention is given to the Italian landscape painting, as it is only partially seen through its placement on the left wall; however, this composition is soon to be changed. The entire left wall, which contains the framed Italian landscape over the mantelpiece, is finally going to be placed behind the sitters.

From this point, Devis began to utilize “a more intimate architectural scale” with “a less dramatic use of light,” as analyzed by Sartin.199 In the portrait of the reverend and his wife, we no longer see the sense of movement that was derived from a diagonal shadow across the composition, as seen in Roger Hesketh and his Family and Children in an Interior. Devis established a more static composition structured with strong horizontals and verticals by eliminating the use of light and shadow. Sartin remarks that the domestic surroundings in the painting were the couple’s actual possessions, as it is assumed that Devis actually went to Croston to draw the church as seen through the window.200 The fact that Devis visited Croston to draw a landscape is significant in terms of understanding Devis’s gradual interest

198 Polite Society, 31.

199 Polite Society, 47.

200 Polite Society, 47.
in painting landscapes. Devis had already abandoned the monumental setting style and, in its place, executed a static composition in the portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Atherton (fig. 35), which was painted in 1742, a year prior to painting the portrait of the reverend couple. Although the former slightly demonstrates a diagonal division by the use of light, the overall compositions of both portraits are almost identical. Devis first removed the monumentality in the Athertons’ picture, then he tilted the composition clockwise to place the sitters in an enclosure while acquiring sufficient space to include an actual landscape.

During this journey of discovering his own composition style, which started from imitating the old styles of Hogarth and Hamilton to produce a more static composition of his own, Devis discovered the possibility of accommodating space for Italian landscape in his portraits. At the same time, some of his indoor conversation pieces during this period lost the personal attributes of the sitters and finally arrived at a style that created a rather generic and unspecific setting, as seen in the portraits of the Bulls, the Dashwoods, and the Hills. In comparing these with the portrait of the Bacon family, Devis may have intentionally and increasingly abandoned the traditional convention of having personal attributes signify the identity of a sitter, in addition to moving away from the baroque style. The room of the Bacon family features scientific instruments, including a telescope, to reflect Bacon’s status as a fellow of the Royal Society. On the wall behind the sitters, the four medallion portraits of John Milton, Alexander Pope, Sir Francis Bacon, and Isaac Newton reflect Bacon’s interest in learning poetry and philosophy. Theatricality, rendered by including red baroque drapery on the right side and a recessional space seen through the hallway to another room, is still there in this portrait.

Devis, by gradually removing baroque elements and the sitter’s individual

\[^{201}\textit{Polite Society}, 43.\]
possessions, intended perhaps “to form a lucid and hermetic structure of absorptive relations;” in the words of Michael Fried, “lucid in that almost every feature of the principal figures . . . has a meaning that can be read,” and “hermetic, in that the structure that results is self-sufficient, a closed system which in effect seals off the space or world of the painting from that of beholder.” As a result, the painting itself becomes “a piece of deliberate artifice,” which one can completely possess or have absorptive relations with instead of being invited to behold. Moving toward the last years of the 1740s, Devis’s conversation pieces became more absorptive by removing all theatrical elements. By the time Devis painted the composition of the Bulls, he had rotated the earlier composition even further and placed the sitters in front of the landscape over the mantle. Matthew Craske calls conversation pieces with a group gathered around a chimneypiece, “hearth conversation portraits.” Craske explains that the chimneypiece had been the center of domestic morals in the eighteenth century, and the fact that Devis situates Mrs. Bull in front of the Italian landscape painting over the chimneypiece signifies the entrance of the complete genre of Italian landscape in the English domestic space. He proportioned the Italian landscape painting to be as equally large as the female sitter in relation to the overall picture surface.

While Devis drew attention to Italian landscapes in his indoor conversation pieces from the late 1740s to early 1750s, his outdoor conversation pieces were also going through a transitional phase. In some of his outdoor conversation pieces from the 1740s, it has been remarked that Devis followed the convention of the country house portrait, adopting the topographical landscape convention in which the viewer has a bird’s-eye view of the estate

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202 Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 64.


and focus is placed on the house.\footnote{Polite Society, 12.}

The landscapes that Devis represented at this time are similar to those landscape paintings produced by Tillemans in the 1730s, such as *Hoghton Tower from Duxon Hill, Lancashire*. Devis’s *Leak Okeover, Rev. John Allen and Captain Chester at Okeover Hall, Staffordshire* (1745–47) (fig. 36) can be compared to Tillemans’ *Uppark, West Sussex* in terms of the location of the house in the far background, a largely proportioned middle ground to show the features of the countryside, and, finally, the figures and animals in the foreground. In addition, around the same years, Devis painted *Robert Gwillym of Atherton and His Family* (1745–47) (fig. 37). Despite the fact that the background landscape still follows the seventeenth-century topographical landscape convention, Devis portrays the Gwillym family as an informal group engaged in a family activity in the foreground, which is not much different from his indoor-figure portrayals. This indicates that Devis was attempting to combine portraits with landscape, for which he was initially trained.

Unfortunately, by this time, the English were preoccupied with Italian landscape, and the painterly conventions of Italian landscape representation had already permeated to British soil,\footnote{Di Palma, “Is Landscape Painting?,” 52.} as we previously examined in Di Palma’s comparison of Lorrain’s *Landscape with Apollo and the Muses* with *On the Wye*, which was produced in Richard Wilson’s studio.\footnote{Di Palma, “Is Landscape Painting?,” 51.} D’Oench points out that Devis, “offered his sitters portraits that incorporated, to an unusual degree, convincing views of landscapes,”\footnote{D’Oench, *The Conversation Piece*, 18.} and from the late 1740s, his outdoor conversation pieces started to show a similar spatial awareness to that in Lorrain’s landscape.

D’Oench, in describing *Sir George and Lady Strickland* (1751) (fig. 38), states that,
“the middle distance incorporates the slow curve of a river which draws the eye across the immediate foreground to a far prospect, in this case the sea.” D’Oench, The Conversation Piece, 19.

The painting exemplifies Devis’s attempt to broaden the scope of his landscape beyond the topographic tradition and instead move toward the Claudian convention. In one of Devis’s greatest works, Edward Gordon, His Sister Mrs Miles, and Her Husband in Their Garden at Bromley (fig. 39), painted in 1756, Devis introduces a classical element inspired by the paintings of Claude Lorrain. He places Mr. and Mrs. Miles on a terrace before their house at Bromley in an open landscape with “classical overtones.” Considering the topographical landscape that he painted in the 1740s, just about a decade prior, Devis without a doubt succeeds in dramatically transforming his representation of landscapes, demonstrating his ability to paint a classical landscape on a larger scale. We already examined Devis copying Italian landscapers, such as Ricci and Panini; many of the copies he painted as an apprentice often appeared in his indoor conversation pieces, such as those of the Bulls, the Dashwoods, and the Hills, as framed landscapes.

Moreover, The Duet (fig. 40), painted in 1749, adds an interesting perspective to our discussion here. The wall behind the couple and its Palladian window illustrate the latest architectural fashion. The landscape representation viewed through the window is harmoniously combined with the framed landscape paintings through their similar greenish palette. Although it has been suggested that the setting, with its detailed walls and the view though the fashionable Venetian window, may be based on a real house, the fact that this


was painted in the last year of the 1740s, the period when Devis was trying to find the right composition of his indoor conversation pieces to accommodate space for landscapes, suggests that he might have attempted to combine the elements of indoor and outdoor conversation pieces in the same picture. This attempt, on the other hand, could be interpreted as Devis interchangeably using the elements of indoor and outdoor pieces.

The remarkable conversion from a topographical landscape to a Claudian landscape in Devis’s outdoor pieces raises the question whether this change is by the artist himself or is a consequence of working with another landscape painter, such as Devis’s half-brother Anthony Devis (1729–1816). In considering Devis’s capacity to render Italian landscape paintings in his indoor portraits, however, the credit of incorporating a Claudian landscape in outdoor pieces should be entirely given to Arthur. Sartin justifies Anthony’s possible role as Arthur’s landscaper, stating that Anthony’s rare landscape paintings in oil show similarities with the landscape backgrounds in some of Arthur’s work. Furthermore, there are no paintings ascribed to Anthony from 1742 to the early 1760s, which were the active years of both painters’ careers.

Anthony was “recorded in the Preston Guild Merchant roll of freemen as early as 1742, *Anthony, his (Arthur’s) half brother, of London, Painter,*” and he was “awarded in 1763 the Free Society’s third premium of ten guineas for landscape painting.” Given that it was a common practice at that time in England to hire another artist to paint landscapes, Sartin’s suggestion that Arthur employed Anthony as his landscaper deserves further examination.

However, because Arthur was a meticulous artist who not only continuously practiced his art

213 *Polite Society*, 35.

214 Anthony was in London by 1742, at the age of thirteen. However, where he lived in London from 1742 to 1762 is unclear. At this time, Arthur was living at Great Queen Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields. *Sydney H. Pavière, The Devis Family of Painters* (Great Britain: F. Lewis Publishers, 1950), 73–74. In addition, given the fact that there are no paintings ascribed to Anthony from 1742 to 1760, some speculate that Anthony lived with Arthur and helped him with landscape representation. *Polite Society*, 35.
with the period’s fashion but also demonstrated compositional alterations throughout the
development of his indoor conversation pieces, it can be concluded that Arthur finally found
a way to include the period’s interest in Italian landscape into his art. In D’Oench’s photo
studies in 1980, a few landscape paintings, which D’Oench ascribed to Arthur Devis, also
show an amazing pastoral quality and his ability to execute a complete classical landscape on
a larger scale.

Devis’s inclusion of one or two Italian landscape paintings in his indoor pieces
demonstrates the first half of the century’s vogue in traveling foreign lands and general regard
for the genre as a collectible item for decoration. The representation of Claudian landscape in
Devis’s outdoor pieces from the 1750s, in contrast, indicates the artist’s own understanding of
landscape art and exemplifies Devis’s attempt to assimilate the foreign convention into his art.
Another outdoor piece that Devis painted in 1757, Edward Parker and his Wife, Barbara, nee
Fleming, on the Terrace at Browsholme Hall, near Clitheroe (fig. 41), in which the artist has
enlarged the sitters, is a masterly example of Devis’s incorporation of the Claudian landscape
while establishing an “English version of a classical landscape.” Beyond the sitters, a tree
frames the middle ground, which includes a river valley with a waterfall and a church, and
creates with the tree’s shadow the foreground, where the sitters are standing. A mountain
range in the far background produces an illusion of great distance. In the early 1760s, Devis
further monumentalized the sitter, as seen in Richard Lowe, Esq., of Denby and Locko Park,
Derbyshire (1761–62) (fig. 42). In it, there is “a sense of spatial awareness,” the “dramatic

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215 The Frick Photoarchive Collection has assembled artist files including black and white photographs,
reproductions from books, and auction catalogues. According to the Frick Library Reference, 166 images of
Arthur Devis’s works appear to have been gifted by Ellen D’Oench on November 9, 2001. Arthur Devis, artist
file containing study photographs and reproductions of works of art with accompanying documentation, 1920–
2000, Frick Photoarchive Collection.

216 Polite Society, 59.
use of light and shade,” as well as “a grace and dignity.”

Devis’s conversation pieces at glance seem to be static, particularly with its archaic portrayal of figures in sparsely distributed domestic surroundings. One may easily give less attention to hearing the story that Devis’s English sitters would like to tell. However, the development of the genre itself reveals one of the most dynamic stories of art that eighteenth-century England experienced. Although Devis’s conversation pieces evolved due to foreign influences, by being modified by the hands of the English, the pieces could embrace the concept of Englishness that was formulated in the first half of the century—identity not based on who the English are but on who they are not. At this time, the English could not define themselves with what they had in art, as much of English art was created by foreign hands. Gradually, however, in virtue of not only eliminating foreign influences but also infusing a sense of autonomy in allotting their own contributions, English art of the eighteenth century, especially Arthur Devis’s conversation pieces, evolved to the point where the English could be fully represented in their own way. Devis’s indoor conversation pieces went through meticulous compositional changes to obtain the right space to include a landscape painting in the eighteenth-century English domestic scene, whereas his representation of landscape in his outdoor conversation pieces shows a significant transformation from its old topographical convention to the new Claudian convention.

The foreign, collectible landscape paintings that were produced mostly before the 1740s and were reflected in Devis’s indoor pieces, were to be translated through his understanding of the genre into his outdoor pieces of the 1750s. The landscape convention from this point on could no longer be classified as foreign. The incoming generation of artists must have seen the possibility of developing their own landscapes through Devis’s works. Furthermore, by the hands of English landscape masters, such as Turner and Constable of the

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217 Polite Society, 63.
nineteenth century, English landscape acquired its title as a complete genre that was finally representative of English nationality.
Arthur Devis’s increasing attention on representing landscape in English conversation pieces allowed the next generation of English artists, particularly landscapers of the late eighteenth century, to develop the genre of landscape even further. However, the story of English conversation pieces does not end here. The genre continued to evolve. In this chapter, I will discuss how English taste in the second half of the century had transitioned from Italian landscape to Dutch seascape paintings. This transition is reflected in the Dutch seascape painting embedded in Zoffany’s *Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson*. Although the inclusion of Italian landscape paintings in Devis’s conversation pieces represents an integral element symbolizing the taste of the middle class in the first half of the century, the choice of Dutch seascape in Zoffany’s conversation piece reflects the nation’s passionate aim to explore the world through maritime voyages rather than representing a particular class’s interest. In examining Zoffany’s conversation piece of Dundas and his use of Dutch seascape imbedded in the painting, I argue that the painting concretizes the revived interest in Dutch pictures, in particular Dutch marine paintings, in the second half of the century. Before moving on to discuss the conversation piece of Dundas, I begin this chapter by explaining some of the social and cultural aspects of the time that had shaped the renewed interest in Dutch seascape.

In 1707, the Parliament of Westminster passed the Act of Union, which integrated the Welsh, Scots, and English into “one united kingdom by the name of Great Britain” and ruled that the three distinct entities were to be regulated under the same legislature and system of free trade. The nationality of the English, or now the British, needed to be redefined. The

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motivation to seek a new national identity that embraced these three was, however, not a pressing task in the first half of the century. Great Britain, even after the Act of Union, still experienced numerous threats of invasion by Catholic powers not only from abroad but within the nation.\textsuperscript{219} With this prevailing fear of Catholic powers, in 1714, Parliament finally obtained a Protestant successor, George Lewis of Hanover, who was most importantly not Catholic.\textsuperscript{220} Despite the British succeeding in establishing this new Protestant monarch, according to Colley, the Act of Union and the Hanoverian dynasty were still so recent in the first half-century that no significant change regarding the perception of British identity had happened yet.\textsuperscript{221}

By the second half of the century, however, a series of significant events had come about to change the perception. One of the events that had altered “the course of European imperial expansion around the globe” was the Seven Years’ War (1756–63).\textsuperscript{222} Britain’s victory in the Seven Years’ War had granted the British economic dominance in competition for overseas trade.\textsuperscript{223} The tremendous scale of the territorial gains of the Seven Years’ War had created “the challenge of securing the British empire from further intrusion,”\textsuperscript{224} while “a maritime empire of trade” started to be conceived as “new territorial imperatives.”\textsuperscript{225} “The

\textsuperscript{219} Colley, \textit{Britons}, 72. In 1708 and 1715, Scotland was invaded in support of James Edward Stuart, James III, and the uprising in 1715 broke out in parts of Scotland and the north of England. In 1718, the Spanish government sponsored another invasion of Scotland. In 1745, the last and most serious of these invasion attempts was launched by Charles Edward Stuart, who marched into London.

\textsuperscript{220} Colley, \textit{Britons}, 46.

\textsuperscript{221} Colley, \textit{Britons}, 55.

\textsuperscript{222} Frans De Bruyn and Shaun Regan, eds., \textit{The Culture of the Seven Years’ War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 3.

\textsuperscript{223} De Bruyn and Regan, \textit{The Culture of the Seven Years’ War}, 7.

\textsuperscript{224} De Bruyn and Regan, \textit{The Culture of the Seven Years’ War}, 25.

\textsuperscript{225} De Bruyn and Regan, \textit{The Culture of the Seven Years’ War}, 26.
British Dominion through every part of the Atlantic Ocean” occupied “a Grand Marine Empire.” In addition, colonial imports into Britain had significantly increased by the 1750s. Re-exports of colonial goods comprised almost 40 percent of total British exports and were distributed to both continental and domestic markets. Colley explains that this was the most important consequence of imperial trade; it impacted “the perceptions of commerce and empire at home.” The British in the second half of the century were now preoccupied with international trade, which resulted in intense attention on imperial growth and establishing naval power. Simultaneously, there was growing interest in patriotic matters and discussions of national identities, not only in Great Britain but also in numerous European nations, such as France, Spain, Russia, Holland, and Germany. The second half of the century bestowed Great Britain an imperative task—to establish a strong sense of nationality through the unification of three internal parties and the domination of European imperial trade.

After the Seven Years’ War, the British Empire became considerably large, as it now included Quebec and large parts of Asia. By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Colley claims that the Britons had “the problem of having . . . too much power” over too many people and “too quickly.” It was around this time that the Scots were coming to be seen differently, not as an old enemy but as a new and useful British power. Scotland’s workforce and loyalty allowed more Scots to have increased opportunities, power, and access to Great Britain. As “Scottish collaboration in warfare and empire-building” were largely


227 Colley, Britons, 69.

228 Colley, Britons, 85.

229 Colley, Britons, 102.

230 Colley, Britons, 103.

demanded, talented men from the north came south to London to seize jobs and opportunities. Some of the Scots went back home, while others stayed to take advantage of their new surroundings and reconcile “their Scottish past with their English present” by maneuvering themselves as British.

This is well elaborated in Zoffany’s portrait of Sir Lawrence Dundas. Both the patron and the artist of the work are unusual figures. Dundas was an ambitious Scot who was opportune and talented enough to acquire considerable wealth by responding to the period’s demands. And Zoffany was a foreign artist who came to London to look for better opportunities for his career and life. Zoffany, despite possessing training in various art fields (e.g., late baroque, rococo, early neoclassicism, and Dutch genre painting), decided to pursue conversation pieces, the most popular fashion in London at the time, when he decided to advance his career in the capital of Great Britain. In his conversation piece of Dundas, he portrays Dundas as a prestigious upper-class member who succeeded in reconciling his old Scottish past with his new British present. Lawrence Dundas (1710–81) was a wine merchant in Edinburgh before 1745. During the Jacobite rising of 1745, however, he became engaged in supplying the military as a contractor and commissary and worked in various foreign countries, such as Flanders from 1747 to 1748 and Germany from 1759 to 1762.

G. E. Bannerman indicates that although Dundas had no significant military contracts from 1748 to 1756, by moving to London in 1751, he was able to maintain contact with people who lived in London, such as George Ross, the influential solicitor and regimental

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232 Colley, Britons, 124.

233 Colley, Britons, 125.

234 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 1.

agent. By residing in London, Dundas was better informed of any opportunities arising from pending contracts. Therefore, how he presented himself in London society must have been significantly related to how he was going to secure his future employment. In 1759, he supplied the allied army in Germany and the Hanoverian corps. The scale of operations in Germany was vast, thus making him extremely wealthy.

Dundas’s career in the military supply sector ended with the end of the war in the 1760s, and he became occupied with presenting himself in a more compatible atmosphere with his new wealth. He continued to obtain property as a way to show “wealth and upward social mobility” of the time. Moreover, in 1764, his son Thomas Dundas (1741–1820) married Lady Charlotte Fitzwilliam (1746–1833), a niece of the marquess of Rockingham. This marriage proved that Dundas desired his family to be merged into aristocratic circles. It should be noted that in Zoffany’s conversation piece, Dundas is portrayed, not with his son or wife, but instead with his grandson, young Lawrence Dundas (1766–1839). This may indicate that the true and legitimate heir to his wealth was his grandson. The portrait declares that his new wealth shall be inherited by a legitimate, well-born offspring, born from a prestigious marriage, the rightful heir to carry the name of Dundas. As Caddy Wilmot-Sitwell explains, the house on Arlington Street, where Dundas’s portrait was framed, was especially commissioned to exhibit his new wealth.

The house on Arlington Street was originally built for Lord Carteret in the 1730s but

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236 Bannerman, “The ‘Nabob’,” 111.
238 Bannerman, “The ‘Nabob’,” 118.
239 Bannerman, “The ‘Nabob’,” 118.
was purchased by Dundas in 1763. This was one of “his show homes in London,” reflecting his political and social ambitions. Dundas and his wife employed the finest cabinet makers of the time, including Scottish architect Robert Adam (1728–1802), who supervised the interior decorations and furnishings. Zoffany’s portrait of Dundas with his grandson captures these extraordinary interior furnishings. The scene for the picture is set in Dundas’s dressing room located next to Green Park. Zoffany faithfully shows seven of Dundas’s eight antique figures on the mantelpiece, a figure of Bacchus, and eleven Dutch paintings. Both Dundas’s portrait and Van de Cappelle’s A Calm included in the piece belong to the Zetland Collection. According to Jackson-Stops, “the careful symmetry of the hanging” suggests that one of Zoffany’s concerns was to create a decorative effect.

However, the fact that either the artist or Dundas’s deliberate choice to include some of the pictures hung in the other rooms in the portrait raises the question whether any other

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241 Wilmot-Sitwell, “The Inventory,” 73.
242 Clifford, “‘Conquests’,” 132.
243 Wilmot-Sitwell, “The Inventory,” 75.
244 Wilmot-Sitwell, “The Inventory,” 78. The room has always been identified as the pillar room or library on the first floor of the house, but Wilmot-Sitwell suggests that the inventory of 1768 showed that it was actually the dressing room located next to Green Park.
245 Wilmot-Sitwell, “The Inventory,” 79. Over the chimney piece is Van de Cappelle’s A Calm. This is flanked on either side by, from the top, Cuyp’s Inside of a Farm House, with Sheep, Goats and Figures and Ditto with Figures, Cattle, Vegetables and Farming Implements; Van de Velde’s A Fresh Breeze with Shipping and a Ditto Ditto; Pynacker’s A Beautiful Warm Landscape with a Ferry Boat and Figures Crossing a River; and Cuyp’s A View in Holland with a Boy Tending Sheep. The pair of copies of Christ and the Apostles and Madonna and Child with Saints and Donors are believed to be by Veronese. On the right wall is Teniers’s A Corps de Garde, and below is his Journeymen Carpenters. Jackson-Stops, The Treasure Houses, 356. Webster in 2011 pointed out that the copies of Christ and the Apostles and Madonna and Child with Saints and Donors are, in fact, Netherlandish copies. Webster, Johan Zoffany, 159.
246 Lawrence Dundas possessed the earldom of the Orkneys and the lordship of Zetland. Bannerman, “The ‘Nabob’,” 121.
247 Jackson-Stops, The Treasure Houses, 355. The manner in which pictures and objects from different rooms are shown in one painting was used again when Zoffany painted Tribuna of the Uffizi from 1772 to 1778. Jackson-Stops, The Treasure Houses, 357.
intention beyond a decorative concern existed for choosing and arranging them.

In comparison with Devis’s conversation pieces, Zoffany’s portrait of Dundas has a similar structure in that the sitters are located in front of a chimneypiece while small objects are arranged to decorate the mantle; however, the two artworks differ in their goals. Devis’s, whether consciously or not, was to reflect the first half of the century’s general inclination toward Italian landscape, whereas Zoffany’s was to consciously infuse his own statement through the Dutch seascape. Above the mantelpiece, Zoffany paints a large-scale Dutch seascape, instead of the Italian landscape seen in many of Devis’s conversation pieces. This transition from Italian to Dutch landscape reflects a revival of interest in Dutch pictures in the mid-eighteenth century. Although seventeenth-century Dutch paintings had long been loved by the British, the first half of the century’s Palladian taste, with its focus on Italy, made it less popular. In the second half of the century, however, largely thanks to the patronage of John Stuart, third earl of Bute (1713–92), Dutch paintings began to be collected and regain widespread attention. Lord Bute owned numerous Dutch masterpieces. His particular interest in Dutch painters was shared with the duke of Bedford; Dundas; Sir George Colebrooke, the East India Company director; and other Scottish members.  

Lord Bute was one of the most powerful men in Great Britain from the late 1750s to 1763. As young George III’s tutor in 1755, he not only had a substantial influence on him but also became his friend and mentor. And he was a Scot.  

It was a natural choice for Dundas, who had a relationship with Bute, to ask Zoffany, whom Lord Bute greatly patronized, to paint his remarkable Dutch collection. The painting showcased Dundas’s taste for the Dutch

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250 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 125.

251 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 154.
masters, which was “comparable in many ways with that of Lord Bute’s.” This work embodied Dundas’s desire to be declared a member of the prestigious British upper class like Lord Bute, who also possessed Scottish lineage but became the most influential man in Britain.

Apart from Lord Bute’s influence on reviving interest in Dutch painting, it is probable that Dundas himself had established his own interest in collecting Dutch seascapes. By the 1750s, imperial trade significantly affected the British economy and, as a result, the government invested in naval power and imperialism. The interests of trade were equivalent with the interests of the national state by this time, and trade was feasible through maritime voyages. Given that Dundas’s active military contracting business ended by the 1760s, he developed a wide range of economic interests, such as investments in shipping, government finance, and the East India Company. Clifford explains that “although Lawrence Dundas was never a ‘servant’ of the East India Company, recent research has revealed that ‘he particularly interested himself’ in its affairs,” as he invested in several East India Company ships between 1763 and his death in 1781.

In the European campaign for Eastern trade, the Dutch were renowned for their success in the seventeenth century. The Dutch excluded all other European nations from trade through their dominant sea power and succeeded in limiting supplies while maintaining their prices. The Dutch were not only “knowledgeable in oceanic affairs and oriental trade” but

252 Jackson-Stops, The Treasure Houses, 357. In Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed, Retford also states that Zoffany’s training in Netherlandish tradition commended him to important early patrons such as the earl of Bute and Sir Lawrence Dundas, whose collections favored that school. Martine Postle, ed., Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 105.

253 Colley, Britons, 70.

254 Colley, Britons, 99.

255 Bannerman, “The ‘Nabob’,” 118.

256 Clifford, “‘Conquests’,” 125.
also “formidable as seamen and as fighting men.”

This explains why Dutch marine paintings were so admired in Britain, as the British became more engaged in Eastern trade from the second half of the century. It is not coincidental that Dundas was portrayed with his remarkable collection of Dutch marine pictures in 1768. He was also projecting his new interests in trade and voyages, which were compatible with the nation’s. Due to his close attachment to Lord Bute, Dundas became an early collector of Dutch paintings, and his investment in the East India Company and the period’s interests in trade and imperialism likely shaped Dundas’s taste in Dutch marine paintings as well. By privately collecting pictures that speak to the particular interests of the period, one is able to not only express their individual identity but also merge into a larger character, which, in the case of Dundas, was national identity.

If his taste in Dutch seascape insinuated his business pursuits, then the inclusion of seven Zoffoli bronzes spoke to his qualification as a cultured man. All of the bronzes in the portrait are from the foundry of Giacomo Zoffoli (1731–85) in Rome. Zoffoli was famous among English Grand Tourists in the late eighteenth century for his bronze reproductions of classical statuary. Dundas was elected as a member of the Society of Dilettanti in 1750. Although it is not certain if Dundas went on a Grand Tour to Italy, being painted with seven Zoffoli bronzes on the mantle practically qualified him as a connoisseur. By showing his tasteful possessions that any British Grand Tourist would have likely recognized, Dundas clearly desired to pronounce himself as a member of the British upper class. Being painted in his own residence surrounded by some of these expensive Grand Tour souvenirs testifies to

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his capacity to be considered a member of the elite without having to embark on a trip to
attain the same esteem. As an ambitious Scottish man, he not only sought business
opportunities but also pursued a new social status as a member of the British upper class, and
Zoffany painted him exactly how he wanted to be remembered.

Dundas, without doubt, had played a significant part in executing his portraiture. He
was painted in one of his show houses in London, with his grandson, whom he may have
regarded as the legitimate heir to his new wealth. He is shown as a prestigious upper-class
British man, and no trace of his Scottish lineage can be seen. In this portraiture, he is defined
based not on who he was in the past, but on who he was at the time this was painted.
Dundas’s portrait is a clear statement of his identity and interest in trade through voyages. In
the following part, I will examine Zoffany’s conversation piece of Dundas from the artist’s
standpoint. As a German artist who came to London in the 1760s, his aim was not so different
from that of Dundas—to seek better opportunities, make his mark in Great Britain, and
become a “naturalized Briton.”

Zoffany left Germany and arrived in London in the second half of the 1760s. He then,
according to Webster, quickly learned “an English naturalness and informality in portraiture”
and developed it into a “more naturalistic and imaginative form” while still retaining some
late baroque elements, such as curtains and pillars. Zoffany was highly admired by
numerous British patrons, including Lord Barrington and David Garrick, the greatest actor
of the age, as well as wealthy Scottish patrons such as Dundas and Richard Oswald. Over

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262 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 2.

263 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 68. Lord Barrington was a leading politician of the time. He was one of the royal
supporters known as the King’s Friends. The group included Robert Price, Benjamin Stillingfleet, Richard
Neville Aldworth, Robert Marsham FRS, and John Christopher Smith, from whom Zoffany received all his
eyearly commissions. Lord Barrington showed his portrait by Zoffany to his friends, and they all became
Zoffany’s early patrons.
time, he soon gained royal patronage. Although he had accomplished a successful career in London, Zoffany was eager to gain new experiences for his intellectual curiosity. A year after completing Dundas’s portrait, Zoffany’s patron Joseph Banks (1743–1820), who had sailed on Captain Cook’s first voyage, proposed Zoffany become an official artist on Cook’s second voyage to the South Seas. He enthusiastically agreed to join. However, when Banks and his party withdrew from the voyage in 1772, Zoffany also gave up on this voyage but instead focused on working on the Queen’s commission for Tribuna of the Uffizi (1772–78) in Italy.264 His enthusiasm for maritime opportunities at this time may explain Zoffany’s careful selection of Dundas’s marine paintings, which were possibly projecting his own desire. In the words of Catherine Roach, “recreating the work of another artist, in miniature, and inserting it into one’s own work is a deliberate statement.”265 By taking artistic liberties to choose and insert Van de Cappelle’s Dutch seascape in Dundas’s conversation piece, the piece became not only the patron’s but also “the artist’s polished reflection” of his own desire.266

Zoffany initially became a drapery painter for Benjamin Wilson (1721–88), a highly fashionable portrait painter.267 Through him, Zoffany was introduced to lead painters of the time, such as Hogarth, and, most importantly, to David Garrick, who was an old friend of Wilson’s. Encouraged by Garrick, Zoffany began painting theatrical conversation pieces and portrayed Garrick in a scene from The Farmer’s Return, which Garrick first performed on March 20, 1762. This picture, which was showed at an exhibition held by the Society of Artists in May 1762, propelled him to instant success.268 From the mid-1760s, he

264 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 3.
265 Roach, Pictures-within-Pictures in Nineteenth-Century Britain, 2.
266 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 5.
267 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 62.
268 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 65–68.
concentrated on producing conversation pieces and the theatrical paintings by which he made
his reputation.²⁶⁹ His success with The Farmer’s Return (1762) (fig. 43) attracted Lord Bute’s
attention, and his patronage made Zoffany one of the most famous painters of the 1760s and
later introduced him to the royal family.²⁷⁰

Zoffany first painted two indoor conversation pieces for the king and queen. One is a
conversation piece of the two eldest sons of the royal family, Prince George of Wales, later
George IV, and Prince Frederick, later Duke of York (fig. 44). The other depicts Queen
Charlotte at her dressing table with the same two little princes (fig. 45).²⁷¹ Webster claims
that the domestic nature that Zoffany reflects in these paintings is “an assemblage of the real,
the borrowed, and the invented.”²⁷² In a scene in the picture George, Prince of Wales and
Frederick, Later Duke of York (1765), Zoffany introduces the portrait of Charlotte, which
seems to come from Queen Charlotte with her Two Eldest Sons, which was started in late
1764, and a portrait of George, which appears to be taken from a miniature. None of the
portraits were in the room in real life. Zoffany chose to include the portraits of the king and
queen in this painting to allude to their “protective parental love” for the young princes.²⁷³

Above the portraits, Infant Christ, which was painted by a follower of Maratti, can be seen. It
was originally hung in another room, which serves to “sanctify the scene.”²⁷⁴

Zoffany must have carefully selected and borrowed these paintings to create the
perfect domestic setting for the young princes, referring not only to the parental protection

²⁶⁹ Webster, Johan Zoffany, 96.
²⁷⁰ Webster, Johan Zoffany, 125.
²⁷¹ Webster, Johan Zoffany, 132.
²⁷² Webster, Johan Zoffany, 133.
²⁷³ Webster, Johan Zoffany, 133.
but also divine guardianship. Zoffany also included two works by Van Dyck, *Lord George and Lord Francis Villiers* and *Three Children of Charles I*, which are “known to have hung in the room” possibly to show the royal lineage of the princes and, at the same time, establish a historical lineage for himself as Van Dyck’s legitimate successor.

Although no visual or literary evidence says as much on how deeply “preliminary interplay between patron and painter” would have been involved in the event of redesigning a room to meet the wishes of the patron or of Zoffany himself, it can be assumed that the artistic liberty taken by Zoffany must have been highly respected as he was given full credit in satisfying his patrons’ wishes. The interesting question here, then, is how to interpret the artist’s selection of certain artifacts, such as Zoffany’s reuse of Van Dyck’s *Three Children of Charles I* in his theatrical conversation piece of three popular comic actors for the ballad opera *Love in a Village*, one of the most popular theatrical pieces of the day. In *Edward Shuter, John Beard, and John Dunstall by Isaac Bickerton’s “Love in a Village”* (1767) (fig. 46), the picture behind the actors is the *Judgment of Solomon*. However, in a second version (fig. 47), the picture on the wall changed to Van Dyck’s portrait of Charles I’s children, which Zoffany would have been familiar with through his work on his earlier royal commission, *George, Prince of Wales and Frederick, Later Duke of York*. Penelope Treadwell, remarking that “the significance of this change is not easy to weigh,” suggests *Three Children*

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275 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 133.

276 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 142.


278 Webster, *Johan Zoffany*, 201.
of Charles I could refer to “Shuter’s own encounter with the royal household” when the two princes visited the theatre.279

Considering that the second version was included in a special exhibition assembled by the Society of Artists in September 1768 to celebrate the visit of King Christian of Denmark, George III’s brother-in-law280 to London, it can be presumed that Zoffany consciously replaced the Judgment of Solomon with Van Dyck’s portrait of the children of Charles I to make a more suitable version for the special exhibition, perhaps to show the king of Denmark the art of Great Britain. The painter consciously chose certain artifacts to subtly express his statement. By changing to Van Dyck’s portrait of the children of Charles I, which was once introduced in a royal conversation piece, Zoffany showed his loyalty to the king, while transforming a theatrical conversation piece into a national painting. Given that Love in a Village was performed 183 times, from its first performance in 1762 to its final run in 1776, it contributed to the popularity of Zoffany’s painting;281 thus, the scope of Zoffany’s artistic liberty should not be underestimated, as his painting must have been shown to large audiences during the performance all while declaring the artist’s statement.

In The Portrait of the Academicians of the Royal Academy (1771–72) (fig. 48), Zoffany’s reuse of certain artifacts can be traced once again. George III commissioned this portrait to commemorate his achievement of establishing the Royal Academy. Webster explains that the painting highlighted the primary function of the academy as a teaching institution and was exhibited at the Royal Academy’s fourth annual exhibition in 1772. Zoffany used a trapezoidal shape to secure an entire view of the room, beginning from the wall on the left with a shelf displaying small casts of antique sculptures, to the wall in the

279 Treadwell, Johan Zoffany, 94.
280 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 199.
281 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 200.
center with a shelf exhibiting a reduced plaster version of the Mercury of Giovanni Bologna (1529–1608), and to the wall on the right with two female academicians’ portraits.\textsuperscript{282} This creates a triangular composition from the head of Mercury to two figures in each corner who, from their similar sitting positions, seem to look directly at Zoffany in the left corner and a nude figure in the right corner. Zoffany had already composed a triangular composition in the portrait of Dundas and his grandson by positioning the bronze statue of Mercury at the highest point and three other statues on each side of the center of the painting to crown Dundas and his grandson. Instead of positioning Mercury to face the front as in the portrait of Dundas, Zoffany positions Mercury facing the left, showing its whole posture, in the portrait of the academicians. The intention of including Zoffoli’s classical statuary reproductions, and Mercury, in Dundas’s portraiture, accentuated the fact that the sitter, for even possessing them in his house, was highly cultured. By placing the statue of Mercury at the highest position of this triangular composition in the piece of Dundas, and reusing it in the portrait of the academicians in a similar way, Zoffany clearly makes his own statement on the significance of knowing classical art and antiquities. Moreover, Zoffany dramatically increases the size of Mercury in the portrait of the academicians, whereas the bronze statue of Mercury in Dundas’s portrait is relatively small, perhaps to signify “British interest in antique statues . . . in the eighteenth century and for much of the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{283} Zoffany was, correspondingly, creating his own iconography through the repeated use of certain artifacts.

By examining how the artist repeatedly used certain artifacts, it has come to note that Zoffany utilized this repetition mostly in his works from the late 1760s to the early 1770s. This period marked the prime years in which Zoffany had established his reputation and

\textsuperscript{282} Webster, Johan Zoffany, 252–53.

\textsuperscript{283} Webster, Johan Zoffany, 285.
enjoyed fame. At the same time, it must have been a difficult time for the artist, as he had to choose between his own creative pursuits and the nation’s calling. Since 1762, Zoffany had exhibited his portraits and theatrical pictures, including Farmer’s Return, at the Society of Artists. Zoffany owed much of his earlier recognition to the Society and was even elected as director of the Incorporated Society of Artists in 1769. Two or three weeks later, the king nominated him to the position of royal academician.

According to the Instrument of 1768, the constitution of the Royal Academy forbade academicians from being “members of any other society of artists established in London.” Therefore, to accept the royal nomination, Zoffany would have had to resign from the Society. Webster describes Zoffany’s attitude toward the Royal Academy and to the Society of Artists between 1768 and 1769 as “ambiguous”; probably due to being pressured in the 1760s to enact a proper public school of art, he appeared to have been passively engaged in establishing the academy. In Webster’s opinion, his passive attitude on this matter could be interpreted as Zoffany already thinking of taking a journey abroad. In a letter that Zoffany wrote in November 1769 to Joshua Kirby, one of the society’s directors, the artist excused his resignation from the society by mentioning that he would soon leave England.

Unlike Webster, who interpreted the letter as Zoffany’s intent to resign from the position and express his real aim to go abroad, perhaps recalling Banks’s offer in 1771,

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284 Treadwell, Johan Zoffany, 163.
285 Treadwell, Johan Zoffany, 165.
286 Treadwell, Johan Zoffany, 165. The Society of Artists was known as the Incorporated Society of Artists of Great Britain since 1765.
287 Treadwell, Johan Zoffany, 169.
288 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 248.
289 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 247.
290 Webster, Johan Zoffany, 248.
Treadwell saw it simply as a way to withdraw from the Society.\(^\text{291}\) With special consideration to the timeline—the king appointed Zoffany to royal academician around mid-November 1769 and the letter was written on November 22nd—seeing this letter as a simple way to resign from the Society to join the Royal Academy may be the most appropriate interpretation. However, in another timeline—Captain Cook’s first voyage took place from 1768 to 1771 and Zoffany painted Dundas’s portrait from 1769 to 1770 with the inclusion of Dutch seascape—one can speculate that Zoffany’s desire to go on an expedition would have been present already by the time he wrote the letter. Furthermore, Zoffany stated, “My business requires me, very soon, to leave England for some time”\(^\text{292}\); the artist must have taken into account that he would go on a journey abroad.

Before 1768, Zoffany had joined a club of scientific men where he engaged with Joseph Banks.\(^\text{293}\) In the 1760s, the governments of Britain, France, and Spain invested in scientific voyages of exploration. In Britain’s first voyage of 1768, Banks accompanied Captain Cook and returned to England in 1771 “after a successful voyage of exploration, survey, and observation of the South Seas.” Four months later, Commander Cook was to lead “a second voyage of exploration and circumnavigation.” Banks was again in charge of the scientific side of the expedition and wanted to include Zoffany as chief artist.\(^\text{294}\)

Unfortunately, Banks’s expedition did not proceed as planned because the ship did not have enough room for scientific work. Accordingly, Zoffany’s desire to travel went

\(^{291}\) Treadwell, Johan Zoffany, 169.

\(^{292}\) Zoffany to Joshua Kirby, November 22, 1769, SA/36/1, Royal Academy archives, https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/search/archives.

\(^{293}\) Webster, Johan Zoffany, 268–69.

\(^{294}\) Webster, Johan Zoffany, 270.
unfulfilled at this time.\textsuperscript{295} His expectation of joining an expedition during these years could explain his passive attitude toward the Royal Academy and the Society of Artists in 1768 and 1769, as well as his choice to create Dundas’s cabinet of Dutch seascapes in 1769 and 1770. Aside from the fact that Dundas was a collector of Dutch paintings, the artist himself also had his reasons to admire marine paintings at this time. It was the artist’s liberty in part that “transformed a room intended for books into the cabinet of an amateur of the arts” with Dutch marine paintings.\textsuperscript{296} Zoffany’s interplay in Dundas’s conversation piece implies an element of self-portraiture that subtly recounts the artist’s own story. In other words, Zoffany uses Dundas to reflect his own story.

The conversation piece of Dundas and his grandson was painted during the years Zoffany dreamed of going on a voyage. Simultaneously, the Royal Academy was established in 1768 and his nomination as an academician followed the next year while he was still engaged with the Society of Artists. The year 1769 marked a turning point in Zoffany’s career in Britain. The scientific expedition planned by Banks on Commander Cook’s second voyage unfortunately fell through in 1771, so Zoffany’s career in Britain continued to advance as the favorite painter of the royal family and an academician of the Royal Academy.

When Zoffany was working on the conversation piece of Dundas from 1769 to 1770, he faced ambiguous circumstances in which he wanted to achieve his personal pursuit to explore the world but had to acknowledge the state’s conflicting expectations of him. The commission to work on the portrait of Dundas must have felt like a sort of escape from all the choices that he needed to make because it was associated with neither the Society of Artists nor the Royal Academy. Perhaps by ambitious selection of Dutch seascape, the artist succeeded in referring not only to the identity of his patron but also his own desire to be

\textsuperscript{295} Webster, \textit{Johan Zoffany}, 271.

\textsuperscript{296} Webster, \textit{Johan Zoffany}, 155.
enlightened through the period’s vogue in great expeditions. The conversation piece of Dundas and his grandson creates a wonderful harmony of three parties’ wishes—those of the patron, the artist, and the new United Kingdom.
Conclusion

To the minds of the eighteenth century, the genres of portraiture and landscape were still considered beneath history paintings, despite numerous English portraitists attempting to elevate the status of portraiture by incorporating not only the elements of history paintings but also the literary associations of classical landscape, which had been recognized through the establishment of the classical world in Claude’s landscapes. The amazing aspect of portraiture in the history of English art is that “portrait often runs into history, and history into portrait, without our knowing it.” This may explain why, in examining and researching these works, it has felt almost like reading a beautifully illustrated history book, but instead of a book, the examination has been of the development of English conversation pieces of the eighteenth century. In Roach’s words, “British artists often turned to portraiture . . . since portraiture had long been a lucrative genre and thus one of the historic strengths of the nation’s art.” However, the fact that, “the prevalence of portraiture coexisted uneasily with the hierarchy of genres, which valued history painting above all else,” must have urged British artists to create something equivalent to that of history painting, ultimately choosing the landscape genre, which was an “unclaimed site” that had the power to incorporate literary aspects, as well as religious and philosophical elements. Surmising the possibility of what the genre of landscape could do, English portraitists began to apply the genre to their dominant genre of portraiture, which was conversation pieces in the case of the eighteenth century.


299 Adams, “Competing Communities,” 65.
Arthur Devis reflected on the period’s interest in Italianate paintings as collectable items by embedding a framed Italian landscape painting within his indoor conversation pieces. He then showed growing interest of that time in representing Claudian landscape in his outdoor pieces from the late 1740s. From this time, the birth of English landscape in the nineteenth century was being anticipated through the process of English portraitists assimilating the foreign landscape convention into English conversation pieces. The search for a national identity in English art of the first half of the eighteenth century was made possible through the portraitists’ tentative steps to learn about, select, and customize novel methods to traditional portraiture. During the second half of the century, defining identity was no longer feasible by passively adopting the new. The three internal identities of the English, Scottish, and Welsh had to unite in pursuit of greater opportunities for the sake of their one nation, Great Britain. The glory of the Enlightenment was not to be found at home. The virtue of interiority seen in Devis’s indoor conversation pieces was no longer valued in the second half of the century. The inclusion of a Dutch seascape within the portrait of Dundas is interpreted as the artist’s own statement on the period’s trajectory to expedite the world through maritime voyages. This statement corresponds to both the interests of Dundas, the sitter, as well as of Great Britain in the late eighteenth century. Zoffany’s conversation piece of Dundas and his grandson, and its inclusion of the Dutch seascape, suggests where and how new nationality could be sought. The eighteenth century was characterized by attempts to form one united nationality, by reconciling three internal ones, and a fascination with world expeditions.
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Illustrations


Figure 2. Johan Zoffany, *Sir Lawrence Dundas with His Grandson*, 1769–70, oil on canvas, The Marquess of Zetland, Zetland Collection.
**Left**

Figure 5. Titian, *St Nicolò ai Frari Altarpiece*, sixteenth century, oil on wood transferred onto canvas, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome.


**Right**

Figure 6. Titian, *Saint Sebastian*, sixteenth century, oil on canvas, private collection.

Figure 7. Jacob van Ruysdael, *View of Haarlem with Bleaching Fields*, 1670–75, oil on canvas, Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland, http://www.kunsthaus.ch.


Figure 10. Follower of Giorgione, *Homage to a Poet*, early sixteenth century, oil on wood, the National Gallery, London, https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk.


Figure 25. Arthur Devis, *Figure Children in an Interior*, 1743, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, https://britishart.yale.edu.
Figure 26. Arthur Devis, *Hoghton Tower from Duxon Hill, Lancashire*, 1735, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

Figure 27. Peter Tillemans, *Uppark, West Sussex*, 1725, oil on canvas, private collection.
Figure 28. Arthur Devis, *Self-Portrait*, 1737, oil on canvas, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston.

Figure 30. Arthur Devis, *Mr. and Mrs. Hill*, 1750–51, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, https://britishart.yale.edu.


Figure 33. Gawen Hamilton, *Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford, and his Family*, 1732, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Canada, https://www.gallery.ca.


Figure 43. Johan Zoffany, The Farmer's Return, 1762, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, https://britishart.yale.edu.

Figure 45. Johan Zoffany, *Queen Charlotte with her Two Eldest Sons*, 1764–65, oil on canvas, Royal Collection. Image Source: Mary Webster, *Johan Zoffany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 136, fig. 126.
Figure 46. Johan Zoffany, Edward Shuter, John Beard, and John Dunstall by Isaac Bickerton’s “Love in a Village,” 1767, oil on canvas, Yale Center for British Art, https://britishart.yale.edu.

Figure 48. Johan Zoffany, *The Portrait of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771–72, oil on canvas, Royal Collection.

Image Source: Mary Webster, *Johan Zoffany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 252, fig. 204.