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The Art of Cognition: British Empiricism and Victorian Aesthetics

Rachel Kravetz

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THE ART OF COGNITION:
BRITISH EMPRICISM AND VICTORIAN AESTHETICS

by

RACHEL KRAVETZ

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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2017
The Art of Cognition: British Empiricism and Victorian Aesthetics

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Rachel Kravetz

This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The British are credited—or charged—with establishing empiricism, the view that all knowledge is embedded in sense experience. My project argues for and describes an undercurrent of idealism within British empiricism: the writers of my study investigated modes of thinking that transform sensory experience. To see their idealism at work, it is necessary to look closely at how they conceived of ideas in the mind as pictures. Given that the term “picture” was used to refer to both inner ideas and actual paintings, it is not surprising (though rarely noticed) that when empiricists wanted to consider how the mind shapes ideas, they turned to the history of painting. Painting theory has long manifested a sharp tension between the ambition to reproduce observation and the drive to transform what the eye sees. For this reason, it has been a congenial medium for thinkers unwilling to give up the authority of sense experience but unsatisfied with its yields. I set nineteenth-century texts against foundational Enlightenment works to show how that later age worked within and against the tradition known as British empiricism. My argument centers on British figures who were compelled to revise the empiricism they inherited from the eighteenth century. Constrained as they were within their empirical moment, they found empiricism too rigid to accommodate their own modes of thought, the cultural products they encountered, and future imaginaries. I examine how a range of authors
imported artistic concepts and images into theories of mind in texts of various genres: the philosophy of John Locke and the Earl of Shaftesbury, the art criticism of John Ruskin, the fiction of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, and the anthropological scholarship of J.G. Frazer. They represent a spectrum of views about the relationship between empiricism and idealism, and degrees of skepticism about the relative explanatory power of either.

Poised at an intersection of literary studies, intellectual history, and the history of art, this project turns on two pictorial paradigms: the ideal landscape and the grotesque figure. Framing my accounts of Victorian idealism are two skeptical accounts of the mind, by Locke and Frazer. Their texts fret over the mind’s ability to imperil knowledge by producing grotesque—unnatural, fantastic—images derived from data of the external world. Idealistic accounts of the mind by Ruskin and Eliot theorize its ability to form scenic views superior to any offered to sight. Works by Hardy and Frazer elegize the disappearance of such scenes, marking the disintegration of the project of an empiricist idealism at the end of the nineteenth century. This project is at base a defense of the humanities. To read philosophies of mind through the lens of aesthetics is to better understand how major British writers invested in ideas, and how they confronted the problem of knowledge and its limits.
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Introduction

Images in Philosophies of Mind

The paintings that appear in Victorian writing—as the subjects of criticism or in allusive passages of description—easily lead out in the material world of Victorian life, where so much scholarly energy has been spent. This world can to the twenty-first-century reader seem laden with objects awaiting analysis. In a field strongly influenced by the orientation and methods of cultural studies, Victorianists have treated the artworks in Victorian literature as portals into the Victorian art world. This dissertation has a different response to why these artworks feature in literature, finding in them a path not outward into the social world but inward, into the mind. The mind’s ability to derive knowledge from sense experience was strongly in question during my period of focus, when the mind becomes the locus of both anxiety and hope. My dissertation proposes that each impulse finds expression through artistic paradigms, reapplied to the mind. While the history of ideas is inseparable from cultural history, this project is affiliated primarily with the former.

Central to my project is an understanding of how Victorians inherit and transmute questions about image and knowledge raised in British Enlightenment philosophy. Connecting the works in this study is the tradition known as empiricism, which, broadly speaking, claims that all concepts and knowledge are derived from sense experience.\textsuperscript{1} British empiricism was criticized in the twentieth century by theorists who saw in it a naïve and dangerous confidence in observation.\textsuperscript{2} Locke’s metaphor of the mimetic painting for the idea in the mind and Ruskin’s conflation of observed image and truthful painting would seem to support such a position.\textsuperscript{3} I continue to use the term “empiricist” to describe the figures I examine because each of them, including Locke and Ruskin, upholds experience, in particular visual experience, as a basis for
knowledge.⁴ The term is not exactly a misnomer. Yet my subjects usually do not treat experience as a transparent record, as is sometimes claimed. Examining the place of artistic paradigms in British accounts of the mind shows a preoccupation with the mind’s constructive and destructive powers during the Enlightenment and nineteenth century. In philosophy and literature, the painting stands for observational intake, and also for ideas that depart from sensory impressions. While my subjects reject the notion of innate ideas, they find experience to be a fluid, unstable medium. Empiricism thus entails theories of skeptical distortion and idealizing emendation as well as accurate registration.

My project proposes that classical artistic paradigms become a groundwork for British empiricists, who conceptualize the mind’s contents as images. Although or perhaps because Greek painting did not survive antiquity, accounts of its triumphs have captivated readers. The enterprise of mimesis has been questioned; an art image cannot, in truth, replicate vision. Yet mimesis has been a powerful aspiration, and it is as an aspiration that I treat it. Vitruvius, who wrote the only “extant ancient treatise that deals directly and exclusively with art,” believed that artists should be “reproducing clear images of the familiar world.”⁵ Pliny included the story of a painting of grapes so realistic that it attracts birds in his Natural History. In the empirical tradition, the mimetic painting tends to represent the sensory idea faithfully recorded by the mind. Always in tension with mimesis are methods of altering observed images. My project examines ways in which pictorial paradigms—specifically, the ideal landscape and the grotesque figure—shape accounts of how the mind interacts with sensory input.

The framing chapters propose that the grotesque mode expresses skepticism towards the mind’s ability to produce knowledge in the respective masterworks of Locke and Frazer. If the grotesque figure represents the mind’s destructive potential, the English tend to conceive the
ideal through landscape scenes that begin in observation but are generated in the mind. The English term “landscape” referred to painted scenes before it came to refer to natural scenes, and its origin as a term of art indicates its liminal quality. My dissertation focuses on five treatments of the landscape, by the third earl of Shaftesbury, Ruskin, Eliot, Hardy, and Frazer, respectively. I treat art historical terms of landscape painting—such as “ideal,” “heroic,” and “picturesque”—as the literary terms they are, employing them to show how I believe my subjects (themselves interdisciplinary) understood and refined existing pictorial genres. The landscapes of these writers, not merely settings, contain questions and propositions about the mind’s potential to improve on the observed images the eye takes in.

Part of my premise is that the tradition of empiricism is carried on in the Victorian period with more intensity, and in more ways, than is generally believed. The Victorians of my study are often said to perpetuate associationism, the empiricist concept that the mind forms lasting connections between sensory ideas it receives simultaneously or successively. Mentioned by Locke but most influentially theorized by Hume, it was the core of the purest formulations of empiricism in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* formed a template for nineteenth-century philosophies of mind, along with Hartley’s influential *Observations on Man*, which seeks to give associationism a physiological basis. James Mill’s *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* is an extension of Hartley’s philosophy of mind (1829). In the *System of Logic* (1843), J.S. Mill writes that he “derives all knowledge from experience” or “experience and association” (171-72). In his *Autobiography* (1873), he names his affiliation as the school of “Experience and Association” (202). My studies of Victorian texts support Cairns Craig’s assertion that associationism was both a strong standard and provocation in the Victorian period. Ruskin, Eliot, and Frazer find association both
unavoidable and unsatisfactory. Aesthetic models allow them to conceptualize alternatives to the empiricist train of associated ideas.

**An Idealism Within Empiricist Philosophies of Mind**

This project aims to understand how Victorian empiricists seek ideals through sensory perception—or, at the end of the century, regret the inaccessibility of such ideals. When the term “British idealism” arises, it is generally with reference to two small movements, one in the mid-seventeenth century and the other in the late nineteenth century. The Cambridge Platonists distinguished themselves from empiricism, holding that moral principles are innate in the mind. The British idealists took cues from their German predecessors and maintained that we have access to the Absolute. The long period these movements frame is regularly associated with what is considered a native and much more major tradition of British empiricist thought. My dissertation proposes that there is an idealism within empiricism, characterized not by innate or eternal ideas, but assembled by the perceiving mind. Visual aesthetics bring the idealist strand in British empiricism to light.

The generalization that the English tend towards the empirical is at least in part an invention of the Victorians themselves. As David Carroll points out, George Eliot has German characters critique the naïveté of English culture in her novels, while Germans combine largeness of conception with the thorough investigation of facts (10). Writing of Mackay’s *Progress of the Intellect*, Eliot writes of the “solidity and directness of the English mind” and Carroll identifies her hope that British empiricism will assimilate German thought (11). The Eliot’s debts to German thought are beyond my scope, but this does not prevent me from arguing that in writing her nationalistic last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), she seeks a British basis for idealism, and grasps for it in the history of British art. Shaftesbury, Ruskin, and Eliot each use
classical paradigms of art to work through the question of how the mind refines images produced through the sense of sight.

While my main subjects were all English, this dissertation is transnational in the sense that it seeks to unsettle the national affiliations of modern philosophical concepts. When scholarship uses the term “idealism” with reference to the nineteenth century, it customarily turns to Kant and the tradition of German idealism. While it is perhaps pointless to pursue an ultimate origin for nineteenth-century idealism, it is worth noting that German *a priori* philosophy was strongly influenced by English philosophy, in particular that of Shaftesbury. Kant wrote directly in response to Hume and thus in a sense belongs to the empiricist tradition even as he pivots away from it. His term “the transcendental aesthetic” demonstrates his aim to yoke idealism to the senses. G. H. Lewes, a highly representative Victorian, saw Kant as one of his own school. He traces two lines of thought in modern philosophy, and groups together Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant as figures who analyzed the “nature of Perception,” looking only at the “subjective aspect of phenomena” and merging the physical in the mental. “Matter and its qualities...were now viewed as creations of mind.... The Cosmos, instead of presenting a problem of Mechanics, now presented a problem of Psychology,” he writes.

While Lewes places emphasis on the mind, British philosophy has come to be distinguished by confidence in the senses. This raises the question of whether the course of the twentieth century has inflected our understanding of Enlightenment and Victorian thought. Perhaps because empiricism issued into experimental science in the later nineteenth century, British philosophies of mind, including Locke’s, are now commonly treated as part of the history of the science of psychology and seen to prefigure or contribute to its rise. Victorian ideas are commonly assigned a source in scientific developments, with empiricism, natural philosophy,
and realism—conjoined philosophical, scientific, and artistic modes—representing the pursuit of objective knowledge. The humanities have been finding new ways to study (and mimic) the sciences, and there is a contemporary tendency to grant scientific developments priority in the history of ideas. Readers will notice that my study does not seek to link its philosophies of mind to cognitive science of the nineteenth or twenty-first centuries, and this is deliberate. This project is in part an attempt to restore balance, by showing how artistic ideas shape texts during a period when ideas moved more freely among modes of inquiry now considered to belong to different disciplines. While it is common to view my period of focus through the lens of the scientific revolution—which is to see it as a prelude to our scientifically oriented culture—I portray its philosophies of mind as an extended coda to the classicizing turn that begins with the Renaissance.

The Art Historical Context of Classicism

If Mill has been taken as the primary exponent of Victorian empiricism, Walter Pater is the period’s theorist of classicism, as he follows the footsteps of Matthew Arnold. Just as my texts are not all obvious places to seek philosophies of mind, they do not all explicitly engage classicism. I use the term “classical” to refer to Greek and Roman culture and its afterlife, including Renaissance painting and its theory, and images in painting and literature that look back to the Renaissance. I reserve the term “neoclassical” for the more codified set of strictures developed in France, which had a strong influence in England in the second half of the eighteenth century. Erwin Panofsky has argued that the notion of the “idea” is central to Renaissance art theory as a meeting ground between naturalism and an aversion to natural models. Plato’s Ideas, antithetical to material art, are transmuted to ideals located in the artist’s mind that are usually said to derive from observation. David Summers shifts the emphasis,
countering that in Renaissance art theory, Platonic characteristics were “realized in deep accommodation” with more Aristotelean characteristics. He affirms that the design of an artwork is an idea in the mind, but emphasizes that it is kindled by sensation (284-304). The Aristotelean principle that all thoughts come with mental images in fact justified “the magnification of the visual arts to a new prominence and cultural significance” (311). The rise of aesthetics came to England at the end of the seventeenth century, which with more widespread collecting brought interest in and knowledge about painting (Pears 157, 205). To me, it is no coincidence that this process coincides with the deployment of aesthetic paradigms in philosophies of mind. As philosophy informed art theory, art theory informed philosophy in turn.10

The empiricist sensory idea finds a parallel in artistic naturalism, yet aesthetics is also central in formulations of the skepticism we know exists in modern empiricism and the idealism that has been harder to see.11 This project revolves around two pictorial paradigms that date to antiquity: the grotesque figure, expressing anxiety about the stability of the human figure, and the ideal landscape, around which possibilities of repair cluster. I propose that the grotesque centaur represents Locke’s skepticism about the mind’s powers. Shaftesbury provides an early example of what I have come to see as a particularly British stand of idealism, which seeks to reach the ideal through empirical data, and situates the ideal in the landscape. Part I involves ways that paintings and ideas stand in for one another, and argues that the Victorians Ruskin and Eliot draw on the landscape paintings of J.M.W. Turner in their respective theories of the ideal. Part II proposes that at the end of the nineteenth century, Hardy and Frazer impart the loss of idealism, also through the aesthetics of landscape.

The term “grotesque,” originally grottesco, first referred to the ornamental designs of Nero’s Golden House of the first century A.D., located in the heart of ancient Rome and
unearthed at the end of the fifteenth century. The hitherto unknown style of fantastically mixed forms quickly spread across Europe.\textsuperscript{12} Initially considered a “classical refinement,” the designs took on negative connotations with oversaturation and neoclassicism, famously critical of aesthetic mixtures. Vitruvius had protested against the fashion of covering the walls with monstrous forms and their confusion of heterogeneous elements, and a Neo-Vitruvian academy found the designs of the Golden House to be “products of a decadent culture and manifestations of a decline in Roman art.”\textsuperscript{13} The notion that the style signified irrationality and immorality spread to northern Europe, merged with Puritan tendencies, and became attached to “fear, shame and sin” in England (where it was called the “antique”) by the Elizabethan period.\textsuperscript{14} While the style persisted, the British had a special aversion to the ornamental and the unnatural or “false.”\textsuperscript{15}

This dissertation proposes that the grotesque appears in Locke’s \textit{Essay Concerning Human Understanding} (1689) in the recurrent idea of the centaur, which represents the mind’s dangerous ability to alter sensory ideas. Mikhail Bakhtin sees the mode as always referring to the body and its processes.\textsuperscript{16} Lee Byron Jennings notes that the term most traditionally and properly applies to figures in which human features are mingled with those of animals, plants, and objects. He could be describing Locke’s account of the mind forming the idea of a centaur as he writes that the original is not so much distorted as it is “destroyed and rebuilt along new lines. There is a recombining of the elements of experienced reality to form something alien to it.” The human form undergoes change, and the force that alters it is primarily not nature but “the activity of the human imagination.” In the grotesque, the “deepest foundations of our being are interfered with: the stability and constancy of the human form,” and the grotesque figure expresses Locke’s anxiety over the definition of man.\textsuperscript{17} In \textit{The Golden Bough} (1980-1915), a fin de siècle text that evidences the strength of empiricist notions about the mind, the grotesque appears not within
static forms but across time, when humans, animals, and inanimate objects are believed to effect magical transformations. The mode expresses Frazer’s fears about the mind’s ability to forge irrational links of causality.

British empiricists inclined towards the ideal situate it in landscape scenes that have various classical models. The taste for landscape painting grew in England during the eighteenth century with increasing contact with the continent through travel and prints. I call landscapes by Shaftesbury and Ruskin “ideal,” also use the term “ideal landscape” more conventionally to refer to the influential French landscapes of the seventeenth century that art history also describes as “classical.” I find elements of such landscapes featured in works by Eliot, Hardy, and Frazer, always in relation with questions about the mind’s ability to form ideals. Eliot models ekphrastic landscape images in _Daniel Deronda_ on paintings by Turner that in turn quote the classical landscape. Yet by the middle of the nineteenth century, the British had lost their taste for this style of landscape. The change must partly have been due to the influence of Ruskin, who decimates the classical landscape in _Modern Painters_. In novels of the second half of the nineteenth century, pastoral landscapes are the scenery for deluded idealism. At the end of the century, the landscapes of Hardy’s novel _The Woodlanders_ (1887) dramatize the breakdown of (classical) linear perspective and the related device of the grid. Frazer’s scenes of violent ancient ritual stand in tension with the classically inflected landscapes that frame them.

While the main thread I follow through the Victorian period is the British idealism this project seeks to define, I have found that it is inseparable from shifting attitudes towards classicism as a tradition. Ruskin reacts against a specific classical paradigm, Eliot preserves a classical type of landscape image, Hardy signals the unavailability of a classical vantage, and Frazer laments the loss of the classical as an ideal. In looking at the place of classical aesthetics
in Victorian philosophies of mind, I seek to disturb the classic-to-romantic framework that has structured criticism on Victorian aesthetics, presented as a reaction against or combination of these precedents. George Landow focuses on how Ruskin renovates neoclassical theories of the sister arts and the categories of the sublime, beautiful, and picturesque established in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} He generally attributes departures from tradition to the influence of romanticism.\textsuperscript{23} Robert Hewison treats Ruskin’s first encounter with a Turner sketch from nature as marking “the shift from a classic to a Romantic point of view.”\textsuperscript{24} While the question of how Romanticism influences my Victorian thinkers is large and outside of my focus, I have found that Ruskin and Eliot anticipate and caution against linear readings of aesthetic development.\textsuperscript{25} Ruskin’s theory of the “imagination associative” revises both eighteenth- and Romantic aesthetics. Eliot enjoys double-meanings and seems to present one when she writes, “To say that Deronda was romantic would be to misrepresent him” (205). She destabilizes the conventional opposition between the classic and romantic when she refers to his “classic, romantic, world-historic position” (746). Several years before, Walter Pater had pressed against the same opposition (originally French, and specific to a French context) by presenting the romantic as a quality found throughout the history of art in his essay “Romanticism.”

My project suggests that a territory often claimed as belonging to the Romantics is broader. It is not unusual for Romanticism to receive credit both for bringing the Enlightenment orientation towards the natural world to fruition and for transfiguring the world of appearances and theorizing the active powers of the mind. The Romantics are credited with developing the visionary and ideal, especially with regard to landscape, and the grotesque.\textsuperscript{26} Without denying their originality and influence, my study of empiricism (which precedes and follows Romanticism) suggests that the Romantics are not as anomalous as scholarship tends to say.
Overview

My first chapter looks at how classical aesthetic concepts move into Enlightenment philosophies of mind. Art collecting and art theory rose in England at the end of the seventeenth century. In my view, it is by no means coincidental that philosophy adopts aesthetic paradigms at this time. In his enormously influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Locke compares sensory ideas to paintings, claiming that the senses produce reliable records of the outside world. Yet the paradigm of pictorial composition undermines this argument. The mind can break apart and re-combine its images, and this is a liability for Locke. The recurring grotesque image of a centaur figures the mind’s tendency to reconstitute its images. The threat of the centaur—for Locke a symbol of defective ideas of the physical world—leads him to divide untrustworthy ideas of the physical from moral ideas. These, he claims, are not based in the senses but are original to the mind. If the grotesque figure represents the mind’s destructive potential, the British tend to conceive the ideal through landscapes that begin in observation but are generated in the mind. Locke’s pupil Shaftesbury reacted against him, holding that the physical world provides all necessary knowledge but (paradoxically) that we must generate ideal scenes. He champions the mind’s ability to combine, or “compose,” observed images. I suggest that in *Characteristics* (1711), he transfers a model of painterly idealism from the figure to the landscape. A legend greatly popular in the Renaissance tells that a Greek artist painted the ideal woman by combining the best features of multiple models. Shaftesbury portrays a novice philosopher who learns to join the individual “beauties” of an Arcadian landscape. The ideal landscape he constructs initiates an image of social concord.

The idealism I find in Victorian literature is bound up with shifting attitudes towards classicism in art, especially landscape. John Ruskin, the most important nineteenth-century
British writer on art and the subject of my second chapter, reacts against neoclassical idealism. But his defense of J.M.W. Turner in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (1843) fails to distinguish between the effects of natural scenes and painted landscapes, and thus carries on a neoclassical tendency to render the painting redundant. In recognizing this, I argue, Ruskin rewrites the ideal landscape. In *Modern Painters III* (1856), he explains that Turner’s superior pictures consist of imperfect, but perfectly complementary, parts. The “imagination associative” is Ruskin’s term for the artist’s composing faculty, and this concept is commonly seen as a debt to the empiricist notion of association. Locke proposed, David Hume greatly developed, and in the nineteenth century J.S. Mill repeated the notion that ideas which follow one another in experience remain linked (or associated) in the mind. But Ruskin tends to take up old terms to supplant them. My argument is that his criticism does not simply borrow from empiricist philosophy; rather, it undertakes a radical revision. In fact, the term “imagination associative” is meant to replace the notion of passive association with active composition. Turner’s paintings model the intellectual gift that allows him to grasp nature as one whole.

The understudied lines of aesthetics in intellectual history run through the medium of fiction in the nineteenth century. My third chapter shows that in *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot sets a degenerate English world against a visionary Jewish realm, and each has its painterly model. Eliot critiques what the genre of landscape known as “classical” or “ideal” had become in the eighteenth-century by setting the English in such gauzy scenes. She repeatedly alludes to painting in passages where the grounds of stately English homes represent a false Arcadia. The river landscapes of the Jewish realm are a locus for propositions about how the mind anticipates the future through prophecy. The glowing skies represent a way for Eliot to make visionary thought empirically concrete. They gesture to the extrasensory, but have an aesthetic and
material correlative in Turner’s paintings. That is, in a novel with no major exemplary English character, an exemplary English artist stands behind the prophetic landscapes. Like the sunsets in Turner’s paintings of the fall of empires, the apocalyptic sunsets of *Daniel Deronda* intensify the sense that an empire and an era are declining. Eliot’s allusions to Turner form part of her effort to address the larger question of nationhood in this novel. The nation comprises a group too large to be perceived directly—or represented fully in fiction. The didactic writer wants to evoke a social body encircled by the mind and apprehended in its visionary capacity. Her gold skies direct attention to the edges of perception, pulling the reader’s gaze into a vivid distance to discern the ideal she cannot discern. While she does not paint a better nation, she describes mental processes that may allow the English to conceive it. In my reading, Eliot uses the arched bridge—a motif of classical landscape painting and of Turner’s classical, Claudean mode—to revise the major empiricist concept of inference. In empiricist philosophy, the bridge is a metaphor for inference, a method of predicting future events by observing that certain experiences routinely follow others. Eliot transmutes the shape of the arched bridge into a symbol for prophetic thought that links the future intuitively rather than through the associative mental operation of inference.

Several of my key texts demonstrate a rising tension between empiricism and idealism in the late nineteenth century. Empiricism began to take the form with which we identify it today: an epistemology that treats the mind as a receptacle for stable observations that may become the data of scientific study. A British school of idealism, on German models, arose in response. I consider these developments in a range of works, including fiction by Thomas Hardy in which the tension plays out both in the representation of character and through descriptions of landscape. My fourth chapter proposes that Hardy’s novel *The Woodlanders* (1887) dramatizes
the divide between empiricism and idealism by splitting a character in two, reversing his worldview and aptitudes midway through the novel. The novel thus enacts the breakdown of form, which also becomes a theme through Hardy’s depiction of the woodland landscapes. These landscapes gesture to the disintegration of classical aesthetic conventions that once ordered such scenes. Represented as a deteriorating grid of vertical and horizontal lines, the woodlands evoke the breakdown of the stable vantage and ideal order modeled by classical linear perspective.

In closing the project, I turn to J.G. Frazer, a figure who holds an unusual status—well known but rarely read—and whose masterwork, The Golden Bough (1890-1915), is generically unlike any text familiar to our time. While he considered it anthropology, it is above all a massive compilation of accounts of ritual. Frazer became part of the vanguard of a critical view of the ancients: Locke’s fears of the grotesque reemerge as Frazer describes “primitive” magical thought. I argue that his images of ritual participate in the grotesque tradition, updated for the fin de siècle. Rather than forming hybrid figures, like the centaur, Frazer proposes that the ancient mind linked unrelated creatures and objects through perversions of the timeless empiricist laws of association. Framing the rituals are highly conventional landscape images that derive from the classical landscape genre. However imperfectly, this painting genre continued to operate as a model for writers who wished to supplement empiricist modes of apprehension. The first sentences of The Golden Bough describe a Turner landscape, and Frazer (like Eliot) looks to the painter’s classical style. In my reading, Frazer’s ideal landscapes reveal his conflicted stance towards antiquity. Such landscapes, which had lost their purchase on the English imagination by this time, recall what the classical past once offered: a golden age. Juxtaposed with alarming rituals, they become an elegy for the Renaissance and its long afterlife, for a time when Europe could still idealize antiquity and hope to reanimate it. Frazer elegizes not a pre-modern
worldview, but a more recent and acute loss: an image of antiquity that Britain had sustained into the nineteenth century.

My conclusion briefly traces the shift from philosophy of mind to the science of psychology in the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, I discuss what I see as two models of or approaches to improvement. Science provides optimism in progress, which is with us, fitfully, in the present. Lost is pictorial idealism, the attempt to create a mental or physical image of something better than what surrounds us.

Modern British philosophy and literature, especially Victorian literature, is rightly considered to be preoccupied with ethics. Yet placing Victorian texts against Enlightenment philosophies of mind makes a different pattern appear. My subjects tend to postpone the project of ethics to focus on sentience, claiming that before a social morality may be established, the mind must be plumbed. Locke expects his Essay to serve as a foundation for a future science of ethics. His thesis is that certain knowledge is possible in ethics. “Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct,” he writes (58). But he does not seek to achieve ethical knowledge; this was a complaint of some of the Essay’s first readers. Requisite to ethical knowledge is an understanding of how the mind forms the signs that are ideas and how the signs of language convey ideas to others. Eliot looks ahead to an improved society whose contours remain undistinguished. Frazer, a very late Victorian and my final figure, expresses hope that the plethora of facts he has collected “may perhaps serve as materials for a future science of Comparative Ethics” in his preface to Part II of The Golden Bough (3rd, 3.viii). Their questions regarding the mind gesture to the moral and social, indicating the difficulty of producing a stable definition of man and of situating the social world in the natural world, for example. Yet ethics is deferred, a dream reserved for the future.

More recently, Lorraine Daston and Peter Gallison’s influential study *Objectivity* finds the main intellectual preoccupation of the later nineteenth century to be the “empirical, mimetic capture of objects” (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 318. But Christopher Herbert’s *Victorian Relativity* notes that “objectivity” was highly debated (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), xiv. Garratt instructively examines “empiricism’s surprising potential for arriving at uncertainty, contradiction, and absurdity,” and its tendency to “reflect on the conditions of its own possibility,” pointing out that it is in fact this instability that “lends the scene its legitimacy.” The instability stemmed from the view that “the contingent self was conceived simultaneously as the route toward knowledge and its obstacle.” *Victorian Empiricism*, 15. See his introduction to for a fuller account of contemporary critical responses to empiricism.

Scholars including Theodor Adorno, M.H. Abrams, and Richard Rorty have focused on Locke’s use of the mirror as a metaphor for the mind. Yet he easily switches out the mirror for a painting, a type of image more subject to alteration.

Jules David Law calls the central tenet of empiricism the claim “that the world as we ‘see’ it is actually flat: that what we really see when we look at the world is a two dimensional arrangement of color, light, and figure, which only inference, habit, or association can convert into an impression of three dimensional space.” *The Rhetoric of Empiricism: Language and Perception from Locke to I.A. Richards* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3-4. He notes an array of figures who have seen Ruskin’s theory of perception as the culmination of a tradition that begins with Locke (22). Finding an empiricist tendency to conflate visual and mental phenomena through rhetoric, Law writes that this conflation “finds its exemplary analogue in the tradition of (representational) painting” (235). Conversely, the painting is considered to be like an idea. As Garratt suggests, Ruskin’s art theory “encourages the view that the flat painted surface of a canvas constitutes an ideational structure.” *Victorian Empiricism*, 98.


Cairns Craig has noted that while J.S. Mill finds association to be at the center of the crisis he experienced in his youth, this is not evidence that associationism was obsolete. Critics have seen his crisis as the “overthrow of associationist psychology” and the point when Romantic developments supplant it. Yet the vitality of associationism can be seen both in his account of his recovery, which he attributes to the effects of poetry through the workings of association, and in his own philosophy of mind, which remains firmly committed to associationist psychology as “the one which provided the most scientific—and therefore also the most modern account of the mind.” Associationism remained a “vigorous, influential, and productive” element in British thought throughout the nineteenth century. *Associationism and the Literary Imagination: From the Phantasmal Chaos* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1-8. Craig finds that it has been “written out of the development of British literature since romanticism” (38).
David Summers also notes that Kant’s notion of taste “articulates the adaptation of the language of sense to the problem of aesthetic judgment that had begun in the Renaissance.” The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 107. My project only touches on the enormous aesthetic questions of taste and judgment, in chapter 4. Rather, I focus on how aesthetic concepts subtend accounts of the mind’s ordinary acts of cognition in response to the outside world, not art.

A prominent example of scholarship that employs cognitive science is Vanessa Ryan’s Thinking Without Thinking in the Victorian Novel (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).


While aesthetic theory, the philosophical examination of art or beauty, is not my focus, it is worth noting that modern aesthetics grew out of the science of sensuous knowledge, as developed by Alexander Baumgarten in his Aesthetica (1750-58). According to Summers, the mechanical arts were associated with the lower faculties of the senses before the Renaissance, when they did not simply become liberal, but “rose to find a new relation with pure, speculative intellect.” Judgment of Sense, 235. In other words, “art is aesthetic” (309).

Summers considers naturalism the central artistic paradigm of the Renaissance and writes that it refers to painting in particular, “the elements of which are presumed to coincide with the elements of optical experience,” including contrast and color. Judgment of Sense, 2-3. He also notes that naturalism evolved in relation to other modes, writing, “As the art most completely articulating the fit between sense and the world, painting was inevitably the carrier of the demand for faith in things unseen and of skepticism, the agent both of indoctrination and doubt” (315-16).


As Margarethe Lagerlöf writes, the term “ideal landscape” is “employed in the literature of art history on the basis of an implicit but vague agreement as to what is strictly meant.” She provides a useful overview of various definitions of “ideal,” “heroic,” “classical,” and “historical” landscape. Ideal Landscape: Annibale Carracci, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 17-20. These Italianate landscapes were popular in eighteenth-century England, and a debate emerged over the question of whether English scenery should be treated in the same manner in the late eighteenth century. See David Solkin, Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 77; and Elizabeth Manwaring, Italian Landscapes in Eighteenth Century England: A Study Chiefly of the Influence of Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa on English Taste, 1700-1800 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925).
Kathleen Nicholson finds that as early as the 1770s, the classical landscape was assailed by both naturalism and history painting, in *Turner’s Classical Landscapes: Myth and Meaning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 19. Dehn Gilmore refers to a reviewer for *Blackwood’s* who writes in 1863 that the art of “Claude...Poussin, Wilson, and even of Constable has gone out. The high stately style of the old masters is extinct.” Quoted in *The Victorian Novel and the Space of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 132.

But Ruskin’s aversion may also be seen as part of a shift in progress. Classicism was already losing its resonance as Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight sought to shift the notion of the picturesque away from its classicist models at the end of the eighteenth century. Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740-1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 79-80.

I have found apposite a distinction the intellectual historian George Stocking makes between a “paradigm” and a “tradition.” A paradigm is transhistorical, an idea “abstracted from the flow of intellectual debate.” It emphasizes the synchronic or disjunctive as such features succeed one another at various historical moments. The “grotesque” and “ideal” are paradigms in this sense. A tradition emphasizes the diachronic or continuous, and I treat empiricism and classicism as traditions. *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), xiv.

Burke, Gilpin, Price, and others reified terms that were already applied to pre-existing motifs. John Dixon Hunt writes that the terms “beautiful” and “sublime” were already circulating before Burke made them definitive in 1756. *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 171.


Lee Byron Jennings, with a focus on German Romantic and post-Romantic literature, writes that the disintegration of institutions in the early nineteenth century was conducive to the grotesque mode. *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Past-Romantic Prose* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 28-29.
Chapter 1

Locke’s Centaur: Aesthetics in Philosophies of Mind

The reception of Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) has been strongly shaped by Book I, which proposes that the senses are the grounds of knowledge. It is this book that has sealed Locke’s reputation as the founder of British empiricism. His proposition that ideas are formed through the senses was “so dominant” that for a century, there was a tendency to “interpret Locke as advocating a simple sensationalism,” and scholars across the disciplines continue to accept this interpretation.¹ Yet since the middle of the nineteenth century at least, readers have observed that the *Essay* does not permit such a reading.² As he begins, Locke rejects the notion of divinely implanted knowledge and finds a strong alternative to innate ideas in the senses and especially sight, considered the most reliable and representative sense in antiquity and in the early modern period.³ Locke compares the understanding to the eye in the second sentence of the *Essay*, and describes sight as the God-given faculty that allows us to receive ideas “by the eyes, from external objects” (1.2.1). Yet he develops anxieties about the mind’s perception of the physical world that cause him to repeatedly propose and retreat from his initial position.⁴ To look at the *Essay* as a whole and understand the precarious role of the senses in its theory of knowledge is to obtain a different view of Locke’s place within the empiricist tradition and of that tradition in general. In my reading, the *Essay* demonstrates a tension in Locke’s treatment of empiricism, in which Locke wants to make sensory experience the basis of knowledge, yet finds it too inherently limited and too vulnerable to imaginative distortion. The stakes are high for Locke, as he saw his philosophy of mind as a necessary preparation for an ethical philosophy to come.
Scholars have noted that Locke relies on metaphor to describe the mind and its ideas.\(^5\) This chapter looks at the way that Locke uses image\(^6\) and word, painting and print, to stand in for ideas.\(^7\) He relies on them so heavily that they almost cease to become metaphors at all, as if he believes that ideas actually inhere in these form. While these habits were not original to him, I argue that together they have a special significance in his masterwork in that they display his stance towards empiricism. The competing metaphors of painting and print evoke broad cultural attitudes about the two media. The *Essay* participates in a Christian debate about the educational potential of image and word, portraying a contest between the observed image, conceptualized as paintings in the gallery of the mind, and nonempirical ideas, represented by printed words on paper. At first, the painting tends to stand for the simple idea reliably acquired by the senses, but tension appears in discussions of the “complex” ideas (his term) the mind constructs. The metaphors of image and word become a means for him to divide our deficient ideas of the physical world from the moral ideas he wishes to shield as nonempirical. He develops the view that moral concepts are independently generated by the mind, and gives them the form of language. The metaphor of printed text that Locke uses in relation to moral ideas helps to stabilize his trust in moral progress.

Locke’s relationship to images in the development of his philosophy of mind took place against the background of the sixteenth-century Protestant iconoclasm.\(^8\) Thomas More had debated the pedagogic advantages of images and words, and Erasmus had claimed that written descriptions surpass any artistic delineation.\(^9\) The *Essay* compares men’s unexamined principles to idols taken for “the Images of the Deity, and the Workmanship of his Hands.”\(^10\) Locke later expresses an iconomachist stance in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695): The New Testament calls Jesus the “Image of the invisible God,” he states, explaining that “invisible
seems put in, to obviate any gross Imagination, that he (as Images use to do) represented God in any corporeal or visible resemblance." Margaret Aston has shown that English iconoclasts sought to efface not only the physical images on church walls but the images within minds. She writes that the iconoclastic movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were novel in their concern with “attitudes as well as objects. They wanted to obliterate—mentally and physically.” The iconoclasts’ revolutionary “hatred of the past” may be hard to reconcile with the Essay in tone, yet Locke has a characteristically modern mistrust of past authorities. Beneath the cool argument against innate ideas lies a powerful drive to efface what are really historically mandated ideas, buttressed by claims that they are innate. Iconoclasm’s whitewashing and the Essay’s notion of the mind as a blank surface are conceptually related, the first expressing the desire for a world uncontaminated by history and the second, the desire for a mind untouched by it. While the expression tabula rasa does not occur in the Essay as it was published, Locke writes that it is probable that the mind is at first “rasa tabula” in ‘Draft A’ and ‘Draft B,’ where the phrase’s presence recalls its lineage in the thought of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Descartes. Locke modernizes the metaphor in the finished Essay, where the blank slate becomes pristine “white paper.”

The metaphor of the mind as paper competes with the metaphor of the mind as a space that holds images. Locke’s shift from image to text, I will suggest, turns on the figure of the centaur. The references to the centaur are curious since Locke tends to avoid overt classical allusions in the Essay. Yet he perpetuates a classical tradition that considers the mind’s contents to be images, and conceptualizes mental images through artistic paradigms. A paradigm of plastic composition, the centaur, stands for the mind’s tendency to tamper with the senses’ work. A precedent for the Essay, in this regard, is the discussion of sensation in Book IV of
Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. In Lucretius theory, the surfaces of objects throw off likenesses which move through the air and into human eyes and minds. But “images of things/Many tin many modes wander about/In all directions, thin, and easily/Unite when they meet in the air…. Centaurs and mermaids in this way we see” (IV.724-32). For Locke, such unions take place in the mind. Locke introduces the figure of the centaur at two crucial points in the *Essay*, when he considers the reality of ideas and the truth of propositions. He designates certain complex ideas and truths as “chimerical.” The term refers to the incongruity of the ideas combined, and alludes to the hybrid creature of Greek mythology. In Locke’s scheme, such creatures, most consistently the centaur, exemplify chimerical ideas of the physical world. The centaur represents the mind’s worrying ability to break apart observed images and recombine them to produce unnatural, fantastic images. The result of a process that is out of our conscious control, and potentially indistinguishable from ideas that accurately represent the outside world, the idea of the centaur fatally corrodes Locke’s trust in empirical knowledge.

The most popular composite creature from Greek mythology as a vehicle for metaphor, centaurs have since antiquity been thought to represent the “struggle between civilization and barbarism, reason and chaos”—and the impossibility of dividing the two. The centaur also relates to a debate on the artist’s liberty, for the composite figure has represented both excessive license and positive intellectual liberty in the Western tradition. At the beginning of the *Ars Poetica*, Horace describes a painted figure with a human head, a horse’s neck, a women’s torso, a fish’s tail, and haphazardly placed feathered limbs as an object of ridicule. The opening lines are effective as an affront because painting has always had particular difficulty disengaging itself from imitation. Acknowledging a traditional license granted to painters and poets, Horace sets limits on this right, urging the poet to follow tradition or innovate with consistency for the sake
of unity and authenticity. Early in the fifteenth century, Cennino Cennini dignified his art by asserting that the painter shares the poet’s freedom of composition, and uses the centaur to illustrate this idea. Yet centaurs were also frightening, having most commonly been portrayed in art and literature as lawless, violent, and sensual, famously in the many ancient works with the subject of the Centauromachy. Their “duality of both form and character” had made them “a potent symbol of man’s divided nature.” Thus in the title-page woodcut of his Book against the Barbarians (1493), Erasmus depicted himself as Hercules defeating the centaurs. In Locke’s time, John Dryden’s translation of the twelfth book of Ovid’s Metamorphoses describes the battle between the Lapiths and the centaurs, started by the “brutal” and “lustful” centaur Eurytus, and pursued by the “brutal brood” or “double race.” A contemporary treatise on painting, William Sanderson’s Graphice (1658), warns against displaying pictures of centaurs in the home. It is best to “forbear those obscene pictures; those Centaures, Satyrs Ravishings, Jupiter-Scapes in severall Shapes, though often done by rare Artists.”
Two Metaphors for the Idea

Locke’s early description of the mind as an “empty Cabinet” furnished by ideas admitted by the senses has provoked many compelling interpretations that find economic and juridical dimensions in Locke’s spatial treatment of the mind, but “cabinet” idiomatically refers most commonly to a space designed to house art objects and curios (1.2.15). In the Renaissance, Italian collectors began to build such rooms to hold their natural and artistic valuables. While the word “collection” was first used to describe groups of texts, writers began to refer to collections of objects in about 1650, twenty years before Locke began preparing the Essay. It is at this time that Thomas Hobbes used “cabinet” in the sense of “a room dedicated to the arrangement or display of works of art and objects of vertu; a museum, a picture-gallery, etc.”

![Figure 2. The Green Closet at Ham House, Richmond-upon-Thames, 1637-9](image)

In his “Answer to Davenant’s Preface to Gondibert,” he writes that the poet must use words as carefully as colors are chosen for a painting, “which, if not done nicely, will not be worthy to be plac’d in a Cabinet.” Hobbes also uses the term this way in the 1676 preface to his translation of the Iliad. While Locke uses the metaphor of the camera obscura for the mind, he decides his scheme is more apt when the pictures in the dark room are compared to physical objects. “Would
the the Pictures coming into such a dark Room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion,” he writes “it would very much resemble the Understanding of a Man, in reference to all Objects of sight, and the Ideas of them” (2.12.17). Locke’s numerous references to ideas as paintings in the Essay, many of which I will examine below, suggest that his use of the word “cabinet” corresponds most closely to its sense of a proto-museum.28

While The Courtier of Baldassare Castiglione, a work Locke owned, declares that a gentleman must not neglect to cultivate the “knowledge of how to draw and an acquaintance with the art of painting,” Locke cautions against teaching painting to gentlemen in Some Thoughts Concerning Education, averring that he would be “for” the skill if there were not solid reasons against it. He writes, “Ill Painting is one of the worst things in the World; and to attain a tolerable degree of skill in it requires too much of a man’s time.”29 Despite his admonition, Locke’s views obliquely reflect an interest in drawing and painting that had been growing in England since the early sixteenth century, interrupted by the Civil Wars.30 It was driven by an acquisitive energy among the English aristocracy, best exemplified by the Earl of Arundel, who began to import ancient art objects in the early seventeenth century. English collecting, accompanied by an interest in writing on art, was interrupted by the Civil Wars, but reemerged with the Restoration.31 In the decades Locke worked on the Essay, a debate over Neoplatonism presented the mind as a room hung with pictures.32 The “cabinet picture” genre was common from the fifteenth century on, and one in which Dutch artists were prolific in the seventeenth century.33 Perhaps Locke became familiar with it during his years in the Netherlands, where he for a time had letters sent care of a painter.34

Locke states that simple ideas cannot be broken down and defined, and describes them through figurative language, as Paul de Man notes.35 In the first sentence of the Essay’s first draft
(1671), which asserts that “all knowledge is founded on and ultimately derives it self from sense,” “Images” acts as an appositive to “simple Ideas.” Yet Locke incessantly moves between metaphors. He at times compares the newly formed mind to a surface ready to accept images, and at times a surface for words in the Essay as it was published. In the first chapter of Book II, “Of Ideas,” he posits, “Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any Ideas; How comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store, which the busy and boundless Fancy of Man has painted on it, with almost endless variety?” The answer is “Experience: In that, all our Knowledge is founded” (2.1.1). First, the mind is paper ready to receive what are apparently letters. Once “characters” are replaced with “ideas,” the mind becomes a surface for images. The fancy “paints” on it. The words “furnished” and “store” recall the cabinet, a space that holds objects of art. While Locke writes that ideas are “painted” on the mind, he soon warns against considering perceptions to be “exactly the Images and Resemblances of something inherent in the subject.” Certain properties are not “the likeness of something existing without us,” but rather the effect of an external object (2.8.7; 2.30.2). Yet when he moves from the painting metaphor to a mirror metaphor, he confers a mimetic quality on sense perceptions, though he does not use the term. He writes that the understanding generally cannot fail to accept simple ideas any more than a “mirror can refuse, alter, or obliterate the Images or Ideas, which, the Objects set before it, do therein produce” (2.1.25). The passage confirms the fidelity of the senses to the outside world. Locke explicitly associates painting with imitation when he defines a painter, in the earliest known draft of the Essay, as “one that by exercise has got the power or skill to make the resemblances of things.” In the published Essay, a blind man exclaims that a painting must be a “divine piece of Workmanship, which could represent to them all those Parts, where he could neither feel nor perceive any
thing” (3.4.12). He characteristically introduces subtexts through examples, and suggests that a “Painter or Dyer” has simple ideas “clearly, perfectly, and distinctly in his Understanding.” Still, when Locke next compares ideas to paintings in Book II, it is to show the limited role of perception in knowledge. A colored globe produces an idea of a “flat circle variously shadowed,” and only when judgment acts on the idea do we perceive “a convex figure, and an uniform color; when the idea we receive from thence, is only a plain variously colored, as is evident in painting” (2.9.8). The suggestion is that the sensory image is meager without the mind’s contribution.

But the mind is apt to damage sensory ideas. While Locke makes the mirror a metaphor for the fidelity of the mind, he has already doubted that a mirror-like surface will retain images, comparing the dreaming mind to a mirror “which constantly receives a variety of images, or ideas, but retains none” (2.1.15).” In a journal entry from 1678, he lays out a series of fraught possibilities in the mental capacities of memory and imagination. He describes an idea in the memory as a painting, writing that it “is always the picture of some thing the idea whereof hath existed before in our thoughts as near the life as we can draw it.... And here it may be observed that the Ideas of memory like painting after the life come always short, i.e., want something of the original.” The mind holds an imperfect image, for “some of the traces are always left out, some of the circumstances are forgotten, and these kind of pictures like those represented successively by several looking glasses, are the more dim and fainter the farther they are off from the original object.” Locke returns to the painting metaphor to express the destructive effect of time on memory: “For the mind endeavoring to retain only the traces of the pattern, losing by degrees a great part of them and not having the liberty to supply any new colors or touches of its own, the picture in the memory every day fades and grows dimmer and is oftentimes quite lost.” He also begins a chapter on memory in the Essay by figuring ideas as paintings, with the
memory a “Store-house.” He here discovers new confidence, for he declares that in fact perceptions can be revived as paintings are restored. Locke writes that “there is an ability in the Mind, when it will, to revive them again; and as it were paint them anew on it self, though some with more, some with less difficulty; some more lively, and others more obscurely” (2.10.2). Yet he finally uses the painting metaphor to strongly express his misgivings about memory, writing, “The Pictures drawn in our Minds, are laid in fading Colours” (2.10.5).

Locke employs the metaphor of print as he seeks to compensate for the shortcomings of painted images. While he assails the notion that ideas have been imprinted on the mind at birth, he turns to metaphors of print when he wishes to claim that the mind may be trusted to preserve simple ideas.\(^{42}\) The printed word was surely seen as the medium of knowledge in seventeenth century England, for as several scholars have noted, it is associated with the pervasive conviction Locke assails, that knowledge is innate.\(^ {43}\) “Not on the mind naturally imprinted, because not known to children, idiots, etc.,” reads a section summary near the beginning of the Essay. “It is evident that there are no such impressions,” he writes of innate ideas (1.2.5). As Walker writes, “A discourse of characters, stamping, impressions, and imprinting...dominates Locke’s entire presentation of innatist doctrine in Book I.”\(^ {44}\) Yet Locke refers to sensory ideas as impressions as well, as Hobbes did before him.\(^ {45}\) Finding himself in competition with arguments that men have “original characters, stamped upon their minds,” Locke adopts their metaphor.\(^ {46}\) Just before he compares the mind and its ideas to a mirror and its images, he states that the understanding cannot “blot out” simple ideas that have been “imprinted” (2.1.25). Even the idea of the “flat circle,” very like a painting, is “imprinted” on the mind (2.9.8). While Locke regularly refers to ideas in memory as “dormant Pictures,” he with equal regularity writes that the ideas were
“formerly imprinted” and compares the sense organs to wax that takes the impressions of objects (2.10.7; 2.29.3).47

While Locke is content to vacillate between the metaphors of painting and print in his discussion of simple ideas, he delineates two kinds of complex idea and tends to assign them different formats. The term he uses for the process of combining simple ideas into complex ideas, “composition,” has a history in both the art of rhetoric and the closely allied art of painting.48 To say that Locke borrows a term of the arts may be to undervalue its shaping role in this thought. Paul de Man writes, with regard to another set of metaphors, that Locke’s metaphors raise the question of “whether the metaphors illustrate a cognition or if the cognition is not perhaps shaped by the metaphors.”49 The analogy between composition and complex idea raises this question. Locke taught Greek and rhetoric at Oxford in 1661 and 1662,50 and the Essay’s division of ideas into simple and complex mimics an organizing principle of ancient and humanist rhetoric and logic.51 Locke seems to transfer rhetoric’s model of complexity constructed out of small, simple units to psychological composition. This is the operation whereby the mind “puts together several of those simple ones it has received from Sensation and Reflection, and combines them into complex ones” (2.11.6). The term’s mixed history in rhetoric and painting is an advantage, allowing him to give complex ideas visual or verbal form. Locke repeatedly uses the term to describe the mind’s ability to repeat and join simple ideas, as the orator composes a sentence and the painter composes a figure or a history.52

Locke calls the main kinds of complex idea “complex ideas of substances” and “mixed modes.” He usually refers to complex ideas of substances, ideas of the external world, as images. For example, he writes that “collective complex ideas of substances,” like those of an army or a city, may be considered as “one Representation, or Picture” made through the mind’s powers of
composition (2.24.1-2). He links mixed modes with text, as when he writes that they “have not so much any where the appearance of a constant and lasting existence, as in their Names: which are therefore, in these sort of Ideas, very apt to be taken for the Ideas themselves” (2.22.8). As Locke progresses, it grows clear that visual compositions disturb him and verbal compositions give him courage.

**The Secure Moral Idea**

The category of complex “mixed modes” includes moral ideas, and are therefore the basis of the science of ethics which Locke hopes to provide. His examples of mixed modes include: gratitude, murder, theft, obligation, drunkenness, a lie, hypocrisy, reprieve, triumph, justice, glory, sacrilege, adultery, parricide, incest, stabbing, and temperance. To list all of them, Locke writes, “would be to make a Dictionary” of most words used in “Divinity, Ethicks, Law, and Politicks” (2.22.12). As he begins Book II, he grounds mixed modes in experience, reiterating that sensation and internal reflection provide the “only originals” of ideas (2.1.4). He specifies that modes “contain not in them the supposition of existing by themselves, but are considered as dependences on, or affections of substances” (2.12.4). But these claims precede an elaborate inquiry into complex ideas of substances, where a persistent and growing skeptical strain conflicts with the empirical confidence with which Locke sets out. It becomes important to portray ethical ideas as invulnerable to the perils of the senses, and he argues that there are moral ideas wholly original to the mind, though ambiguities remain. To distinguish mixed modes from complex ideas of substances, Locke calls them “combinations of simple ideas, as are not looked upon to be characteristic marks of any real beings that have a steady existence, but scattered and independent ideas, put together by the mind.” He conceives ideas that do not
produce the anxiety that comes with a gap between external original and internal sign. The tone is typically uncommitted, yet a shift is clear:

If we attentively consider those Ideas I call mixed Modes...we shall find their Original quite different. The Mind often exercises an active Power in making these several Combinations. For it being once furnished with simple Ideas, it can put them together in several Compositions, and so make a variety of complex Ideas, without examining whether they exist so together in Nature. And hence, I think, it is, that these Ideas are called Notions; as if they had their Original, and constant Existence, more in the Thoughts of men, than in the reality of things (2.22.2).

The phrase “the reality of things” recurs throughout the Essay, with “things” sometimes referring to the outside world, and sometimes to immaterial ideas. While “the reality of things” here refers to the outside world, Locke soon finds a way to call independently generated ideas “real.”

Increasingly, Locke divides mixed modes from a basis in the senses. In a chapter on “Real and Fantastical Ideas,” he attempts to escape representation altogether. Mixed modes are “real” because they are not representations. Locke writes, “These Ideas, being themselves Archetypes, cannot differ from their Archetypes, and so cannot be chimerical” unless they are jumbled (2.30.4). To be real, they must simply be capable of existing. He slips and calls them copies, certifying them as “adequate” because they are not “intended for Copies of Things really existing, but for Archetypes made by the Mind” (2.31.3). But after characterizing simple ideas as “Ectypes” that reliably correspond to external objects and complex ideas of substances as partial copies, he again asserts that mixed modes “are Originals, and Archetypes; are not Copies” (2.31.12-14). Later, Locke calls mixed modes the “Workmanship of the Mind,” pure “Creatures of the Understanding” (3.5.4-5). Mixed modes are moral ideals that may crucially exist in the mind without existing on earth.

In Book II, Locke tends to assign mixed modes and their constituent simple ideas the form of words. Idea and name are inseparable in the claim that when men combine words for
simple ideas to form mixed modes, the “mark of this Union, or that which is looked on generally
to compleat it, is one name given to that Combination.” Mixed modes thus collapse into their
names; idea and name are inseparable. Locke further asserts the interdependence of idea and
name when he states that mixed modes are generally only formed with the end of language
(2.22.4-5). Committed to language as a means of conveying moral ideas, he writes that the usual
way we form these ideas is through explanations of their names and the names of their simple
ideas (2.22.9). Associating them with language, he disassociates them from sight. A man may
acquire “the Idea of Sacrilege or Murther, by enumerating to him the simple Ideas which these
words stand for, without ever seeing either of them committed” (2.22.3). Mixed modes may
represent “Actions we never saw, or Notions we cannot see” (2.22.9).

If the Essay’s doubts proliferate around ideas of sensation, its hope is in mixed modes
and the words that convey them. Locke did not originally intend a full treatment of language, and
his decision to write Book III, “Of Words,” perhaps relates to his decreasing confidence in the
senses as the foundation of knowledge (2.33.19). The book begins with the declaration that God
meant language to be the “common Tye of Society,” and Locke sets out to show how this
intention might be realized in the second half of the Essay (3.1.1). He first returns to the starting
point of each prior book by linking the senses and knowledge. It may “lead us a little toward the
Original of all our Notions and Knowledge,” he writes, “if we remark, how great a dependence
our Words have on common sensible Ideas; and how those, which are made use of to stand for
Actions and Notions quite removed from sense, have their rise from thence” (3.1.5). But words
can “signify nothing but the Ideas, that are in the Mind of the Speaker,” and this is a privilege
with regard to the possibility of knowledge (3.2.4).
Print strongly connotes transfer, and it is largely through printed text, metaphorical and literal, that Locke conceives the possibility of a shared ethics. As he invests hope in language in Book III, he reintroduces the metaphor of print for idea: “impressions, objects themselves make on our minds, by the proper inlets appointed to each sort.” As he writes of “applying” objects to the senses as plates are pressed against paper, he stresses the close connection between simple ideas and their names (3.4.11). The print represents the complex idea that has been accurately conveyed among men through language as Locke writes, “It is in the power of Words, standing for the several Ideas, that make that Composition, to imprint complex Ideas in the Mind, which were never there before, and so make their Names be understood” (3.4.12). In Book IV, he makes his own printed text a metaphor for knowledge, writing, “If there be Sight in the Eyes, it will at first glimpse, without Hesitation, perceive the Words printed on this paper, different from the Colour of the Paper: And so if the Mind have the faculty of distinct Perception, it will perceive the Agreement or Disagreement of those Ideas that produce intuitive Knowledge” (4.2.5).57

Locke’s ambition to provide a basis for ethics through language is, finally, not sustained. It is undercut by his increasing sense that most men will not “be able to search into their own and others’ moral duties” though they were born with the intellectual capacity required. Locke presents the possibility of an ethical system in “increasingly bleak terms.”58 His subsequent turn from a new science of ethics to theology in The Reasonableness of Christianity might be seen as a final act of giving up. Yet in the Essay, Locke’s hope is in mixed modes and the words that transmit them. He raises “problems associated with the use of words” to propose methods of reform.59 His “remedies” for the “imperfections” and “abuses” of language involve ensuring that words clearly correspond to ideas in the mind and establishing that our names for ideas are
consistent and match those of others. In practice, reform takes places through conscientious self-examination and discourse. Confident that morality is demonstrable in oral and written language, Locke presents a definition of “man” that “concerns not” the definition of man as a substance and restores reason as an integral quality. “Moral man” is defined by his reason; he is “a corporeal rational Being” (3.11.16). Language represents socially beneficial ideas that are independent creations of the mind and makes them clear and communicable.

The Corrupt Physical Idea and the Centaur

As Locke uses the painting to portray sensory ideas, he uses the painting to stand for their corruptibility. For him, our ability to construct complex ideas of the physical world is a liability. Locke never doubts that our minds take in “something” that exists “without us,” as later British philosophers would (4.11.2). However, by the end of Book I, he has concluded that the word “substance” signifies “nothing,” representing merely an “uncertain supposition of we know not what” (1.4.18). We simply notice that a limited number of simple ideas appear together and presume they “belong to one thing.” While we cannot doubt their existence, our senses otherwise leave us “in the dark” with regard to them. His illustration carries extra weight: When he writes that the idea of the sun is just an aggregate, he casts uncertainty on the enterprise of human knowledge, with the sun an ancient metaphor for its source (2.23.1-6). He obsessively returns to the flaws of complex ideas of substances. His main concerns are that they are necessarily incomplete and that they may be deformed. He compares them to painted images as he writes that we generally attend to only two qualities, shape and color, as “in a good Picture, we readily say, this is a Lion, and that a Rose...only by the different Figures and Colours, represented to the Eye by the Pencil.” Even when we have “copied Nature” by correctly observing which simple ideas appear together, we produce a copy that is “very imperfect,” and mistaken conclusions
result (3.6.28-29).\textsuperscript{60} When a child first forms an idea of a man, “it is probable, that his Idea is just like that Picture, which the Painter makes of visible Appearances joyned together.” Locke presents the mimetic simple idea as an unreliable basis for knowledge when he writes that because one constituent idea of man is “White or Flesh-color in England,” the child believes that “a Negro is not a Man” (4.7.16). Because ideas of physical substances are always incomplete, the painting becomes the metaphor for what is basically inscrutable.

While the child may correct this particular error, the passage quoted above is only one in which man is apprehended as the physical substance that is his body. The question of whether man is to be defined by his body or mind runs through the drafts and editions of the Essay. ‘Draft A’ contradicts the scholastic assumption that man is by definition rational, pointing out that children and some men are not as rational as a horse or dog.\textsuperscript{61} He writes that a child’s idea of “man” is likely “just like that picture which a painter draws of the visible appearances, joyned together.” Locke conjectures that the child will mistakenly consider whiteness a constituent element in man (S28). In the first sentence of the finished Essay, Locke asserts that “it is the Understanding that sets Man above the rest of sensible beings” (1.1.1). As often in the Essay, the literal and metaphorical follow closely on one another, and Locke uses the painting to exemplify artificial substances and men to exemplify natural ones (2.26.2). Treating man as a physical substance later, he finds that the body “would, I guess, to every Body, determine the Man” (2.27.15). The idea of man is “the vital union of Parts in a certain shape,” a definition that leaves no approach to consciousness (2.27.29). Again considering “man” as a substance in Book III, Locke writes that while the word tends to signify a combination of “Animality and Rationality,” the “outward shape” is the “leading Quality.” In terms of art, the body is merely a “Frontispiece”
His iterations of the definition of “man” display his apprehensiveness over the senses, and his drive to circumvent their limits.

Locke is most troubled by our propensity for composing complex ideas of substances that do not correspond to objects in the outside world. In the journal entry already mentioned, he writes that when we “join several Ideas together which we never observed to exist together we call it imagination.” Imagination is “a picture drawn in our mind without reference to a pattern.” He continues,

The imagination not being tied to any pattern but adding what colors, what Ideas it pleases to its own workmanship, makes originals of its own which are usually very bright and clear in the mind and sometimes to that degree that they make impressions as strong and as sensible as those Ideas which come immediately by the senses from external objects, so that the mind takes one for tother its own imagination for realities, and in this (it seems to me) madness consists and not in the want of reason. 62

Locke’s uneasiness with images is nowhere more apparent than in this passage, where the mind paints fanciful images so vividly that it loses its ability to distinguish between what exists in the external world and what does not.

Locke relays his skepticism about visual ideas of the physical world through the figure of the centaur, which exhibits their corruptibility. A visual form composed of incongruous parts, the centaur becomes an emblem of the misleading imaginative license he is anxious to control through reason. Locke first introduces the centaur in his chapter on “Real and Fantastical Ideas.” Complex ideas of substances are “real” if their combinations of simple ideas are really united in nature. They are fantastical or chimerical when they are “made up of such Collections of simple Ideas, as were never really united, never were found together in any Substance; v.g. a rational Creature, consisting of a Horse’s Head, joined to a body of humane shape, or such as the Centaurs are described” (2.30.5). Locke repeatedly places “Man” and “Horse” first in lists of examples of complex ideas of substances. 63 The combination of the two, the idea of the centaur,
comprises copies of real substances but defies the aspiration to represent them with accuracy. A creature part man and part animal is especially worrisome because Locke has already determined that we perceive men and animals in a similar way, identifying both by shape (2.27.6). Both ‘Draft A’ and ‘Draft B’ claim that the distinction between man and beast has not been established. The figure of the centaur breaks down the distinction between them. In a chapter that comes soon after, “Of True and False Ideas,” Locke writes that the idea of a centaur has no falsehood in it, since ideas themselves cannot be false, but only the mind’s judgments on them (2.32.3). Only the judgment that a centaur is a real substance would be false, and a threat to knowledge (2.32.5). Such passages call on us to recognize discrepancies between ideas and the outside world. Yet this resolution does not fully reassure Locke.

When he considers the implications of his theory of ideas for the extent of knowledge in the Essay’s final book, “Of Knowledge and Opinion,” he stresses that ideas such as the centaur do not jeopardize knowledge. Yet his agitation of the question, considered together with his early claims for the senses, suggests doubt. After defining knowledge as “nothing but the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas,” Locke anticipates dissatisfaction with this definition, in a chapter on the “Reality of Our Knowledge” (4.1.2). The first section summary reads, “Objection, Knowledge placed in Ideas may be all bare vision,” and the empiricist in Locke expresses his recurrent fear that a reader may find he has built a “Castle in the Air,” that he may consider “knowledge placed in ideas” to be “all bare vision.” He imagines a dialogue with a reader who objects, “That an Harpy is not a Centaur, is by this way as certain knowledge, and as much a Truth, as that a Square is not a Circle. But of what use is all this fine Knowledge of Men’s own Imaginations, to a Man that inquires after the reality of Things?” (4.4.1). It is a serious objection, since Locke has expressed the hope that his
treatise “might be of some use to others,” of “some service” in the Epistle to the Reader. In response, Locke assures the hypothetical reader of the reality of both mathematical and moral knowledge (4.4.6-8). Complex ideas of substances may also be the basis for “real knowledge” about the physical world, but this knowledge “will not be found to reach very far” (4.4.12). He seems to gain some relief, since he now suggests that the idea of a man without reason is distinct from that of man or beast (4.4.13-16). Yet the reader gestures towards the worth of knowledge of substances in a chapter on “Truth in General,” suggesting that truth can have little value if it is “no more than the conformity of Words, to the Chimaeras of Men’s Brains,” and “as much concerns Harpies and Centaurs, as Men and Horses.” Locke simply distinguishes “real Truth from chimical,” or “only Verbal,” truth. When he writes that truths are real when they may existence in external nature, the “real” slips away from the mental world and returns to the physical world it never ceased to connote (4.5.7-8). Since he has not altered his position on truth, is questionable whether this answer would be satisfactory, but Locke abandons his interrogator. His anxieties dissipate once he leaves the subject of empiricism, and the visual ideas that underlie our knowledge of the external world. When he turns to ideas created completely within the mind, he no longer has to worry about the mind’s tendency to rearrange what it takes in from outside.

In his “bold” claim that archetypal mixed modes provide the basis for a demonstrable moral discourse, Locke favors the word (3.11.16). But to say that the Essay shifts from image and painting to word and printed text would be inaccurate. Historians have warned against seeing a pure shift in allegiance from image to word in the early modern period. Close to the end of the text, Locke again links sight to knowledge and compares surveying the world to opening “a Book containing Pictures, and Discourses” (4.13.1). Unwilling to relinquish the concreteness of
the material world, he throughout blurs image and word through metaphor. The conviction that sight is the means to knowledge informs his argument even as he proposes verbal processes for establishing virtue. He describes virtue as “visible” (1.3.6; 2.28.11). “Perception” is a faculty of both the eye and the understanding, and by repeatedly using the words “clear” and “obscure” for moral ideas he, like Descartes, associates them with the authority of sight. He describes flawed language through the visual metaphor of mist. Knowledge is tied to the mimetic image through the painting metaphor; its association with print comes with the advantages of durability, reproducibility, and religious sanction.

**The Aesthetics of the Essay**

Concepts of classical art theory thus underlie arguments both for and against the senses’ reliability in the *Essay*. There is a small body of scholarship that treats the work in relation to the following centuries’ energetic aesthetic thought. This chapter has looked at ways in which paradigms of art theory enable Locke’s philosophy. As he begins by presenting the senses as the source of knowledge, he uses the painting as a metaphor for ideas acquired through the senses. A visual concept of mimesis that suggests correspondence between the external world and ideas in the mind is central to Locke’s epistemology. Yet the figure of the centaur, a paradigm of plastic composition, reflects his growing misgivings over sensory images. Losing confidence in the epistemological potential of the senses and the image together, he theorizes ideas original to the mind that have the form of language, and the metaphor for the reliable idea shifts from painting to print, an ancient technology with a strong association with the word since the invention of the letterpress. While some may find John Dryden’s nearly contemporary translation of Charles du Fresnoy’s *De Arte Graphica* (1695) a more likely place to find art theory in England in the late seventeenth century, I have sought to show that the *Essay* relies on it.
On one register, the *Essay* upholds the values of neoclassical art theory, which considers history painting the highest genre in its ability to emulate dramatic poetry by depicting heroic acts. Locke explores how ideas, rather than art images, may represent virtue by depicting men in action. He specifies that simple ideas related to action are among those most modified (2.22.10). He repeats that certain ideas represent men’s voluntary actions, making the ethical valence explicit when he writes that actions are subject to a rule enforced by reward and punishment (2.28.5). With his reference to the portrait of Caesar, a quintessentially neo-classical subject which David Hume later takes up in his philosophy of mind, the eminence of history painting enters empiricist philosophy (2.29.8). While historical art was upheld in English theory, however, it did not really take in England. The objects that arrived at Oxford in 1685 to form the Ashmolean Museum’s early collection might be taken as a symbolic inventory of Locke’s preoccupations. With a mass of portraits came a group of medallions, including an onyx cameo incised with a picture of a centaur aiming his bow and arrow at an armed man, as well as the painting thought to be the earliest known landscape by an English-born painter, Sir Nathaniel Bacon. While the centaur symbolizes Locke’s final mistrust of experience, his attention to how we represent what we see might be said to anticipate the arrival of landscape painting and its theory in England. In the first chapter of Book II, Locke writes that one will not have “all the particular *Ideas* of any Landscape...who will not turn his Eyes to it, and with attention heed all the Parts of it” (2.1.7). His thought provides both for purer versions of empiricism and for the survival of idealism in responses to the question of what we may make of the world outside.

**Shaftesbury’s Ideal Landscape**

Locke’s contrary pupil, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, takes up the project of grounding ethical knowledge in experience. For him, the minds power of composition, its ability to
combine observed images, represents not corruption but potential. Art historians consider him a founder of English neo-classicism because he explicitly introduces ideas of classical and Renaissance art theory into his philosophical works. He was exceptional in his devotion to the ancients in a time when antiquity was rarely “freshly studied,” having long been part of the furniture of the educated mind. In my reading, he uses a classical notion of the ideal image to theorize a mental image of perfect social concord. Greek and Roman texts describe how a painter crafts an image of the ideal woman or goddess by combining the best points of five living models, and the Renaissance zealously revives this paradigm. Art theorists discuss it with regard to the composition of individual figures, and then apply it to the full pictorial field as this concept emerged. Before about 1700, the concept of composition refers to the arrangement not of the whole field, but of individual figures or “the narrative unity of the historia as it is enacted by human bodies in movement.” Puttfarken suggests that the absence of thought about overall effects in painting comes from the focus on the human body, the paradigm of order and perfection. It is this, he believes, that “renders the implied analogy between pictorial and

Figure 3. Casa Vasari, 1548
rhetorical composition incomplete and limits its critical usefulness.\textsuperscript{72} I will suggest that the neoclassical notion of ideal composition underlies Shaftesbury’s claim, in The Moralists, that a scenic view may be the starting point for an ideal image of society.\textsuperscript{73}

The title of his compilation \textit{Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times} (1711) establishes a connection between ethics and visual aesthetics, with “character” referring to man’s moral aspect and to a symbolic form.\textsuperscript{74} The treatises react against Locke’s reliance on the afterlife as the best guarantee of moral behavior and seeks to move the foundation of morality from heaven to earth.\textsuperscript{75} Shaftesbury seems to have in mind Locke’s attempt to make the “real” an attribute of ideas, writing that the “realist” in regard to virtue “endeavors to show that it is really something in itself and in the nature of things, not arbitrary” in the treatise The Moralists (266). He writes in his notes for the art treatises in \textit{Plastics}, “Hobbes, Locke, etc. still the same man, genus at the bottom. ‘Beauty is nothing.’ ‘Virtue is nothing’ (178). His famous notion of a moral sense, able to directly apprehend a natural “system,” allows him to argue that the sight of nature immediately produces virtue.\textsuperscript{76} He articulates this theory most completely in his first treatise, \textit{An Inquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit}. There, Shaftesbury brings the concept of an aesthetic whole into relation with the social whole. The later editions of the Inquiry state, “The case is the same in the mental or moral subjects as in the ordinary bodies or common subjects of sense. The shapes, motions, colours and proportions being presented to our eye, there necessarily results a beauty or deformity…so in behavior and actions” (172).\textsuperscript{77} Shaftesbury suggests that we apprehend the whole through simple perception. But as an apparatus to support morality, his philosophy belies this proposition.\textsuperscript{78} He seeks a method of mentally constructing the whole, and turns to classical idealism.
Xenophon is the earliest writer known to have described artistic idealization “by a rational process of selection and combination of its most perfect parts.”

Book III of the Memorabilia tells of an exchange between Socrates and the painter Parrhasius, who states that the painter makes whole bodies appear beautiful by bringing together the most beautiful parts of various forms. Versions appear in countless Renaissance and neoclassical texts, and the legend enters English painting theory in The Painting of Ancients (1638), the first theoretical English treatise on painting, translated from its original Latin by its author, the scholar Franciscus Junius the Younger.

Shaftesbury transfers the principle from art images to mental images repeatedly in texts of 1709 and 1710. The mental image is at times an image of a perfect individual character, at others, an image of a beautiful society or universe. “It is from the many objects of nature, and not from a particular one, that those geniuses form the idea of their works,” Shaftesbury writes of painters in Sensus Communis, which calls on men to emulate the painter (66-67). Shaftesbury also recommends the painter of ideal forms as a model to the writer who wishes to “describe a perfect character.” The “true and natural” style “represents the real beauty and Venus of the kind.” He asks the reader’s pardon for his “frequent recourse to the rules of common artists, to the masters of exercise, to the academies of painters, statuaries, and the rest of the virtuoso tribe” (148). An undated note assumes men are seized with admiration for excellent works of art, and then shifts in scale to describe the various arts as discrete beauties. He instructs the reader to “join all these together” to prepare for the topic of the social whole. In another note, after affirming that a painting’s beauty is in the whole design rather than a stroke or an inch, Shaftesbury asks of the art of painting, “To what does this refer? How stands it in the larger piece? How in the whole? What part is it?”
The title of the compilation of treatises he wrote to instruct artists, *Second Characters*, designates its contents as “under-parts” meant to support the “higher” priority of ethics (3-4).\(^4\) The program of these treatises repeats conventional ideas of the French classical tradition, which systematized the developments of the Italian Renaissance. Within this tradition, Shaftesbury discusses painting mainly through concepts associated with poetry and history. A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgement of Hercules (1712) contains his directions to the painter Paolo di Matteis for a history painting, an allegorical commission based on an episode in the Memorabilia, in which Hercules turns from Virtue towards Pleasure.\(^5\) Shaftesbury determines that the landscape background should include no architecture or landscape ornaments, which “would prove a mere incumbrance to the eye, and would of necessity disturb the sight, by diverting it from that which is principal, the history and fact.” He writes, “As for what relates to the perspective or scene of our historical piece, it ought so to present itself, as to make us instantly conceive that it is in the country, and in a place of retirement, near some wood, that this whole action passes.”

Like this painting, The Moralists offers a scene of Arcadian retirement as the setting for a moral dilemma and epiphany.\(^6\) The Horatian epigraph reads, “To search for truth among the...
groves of the Academy,” and the interlocutors Theocles and Philocles meet in the woods at
sunrise and walk through the countryside in the evening. Erwin Panofsky credits Virgil with first
framing the idealized pastoral landscape with elegy for its loss, and identifies elegaic sentiment
as the central quality in the Renaissance pastoral. “One step,” he continues, “and this
nostalgic...longing for the unbroken peace and innocence of an ideal past was sharpened into a
bitter, personal accusation against the real present” (303-4). Shaftesbury assigns this attitude to
the novice of The Moralists, Philocles, who laments the “state of mankind.” For Shaftesbury,
social concord depends on the belief that the universe is orderly and good. He projects the
perfect social state into the future, adopting the classical idea that the universe is striving to reach
perfection.87 No longer a metaphysical given, in Shaftesbury’s thought it is based in a mental
image that has to be newly built by everyone.

In The Judgement of Hercules, Shaftesbury indicates that a “piece must by no means be
equivocal or dubious; but must with ease distinguish itself, either as historical and moral, or as
perspective and merely natural,” and di Matteis produced a landscape background
of supreme plainness (53). But the philosopher differs from the connoisseur.88 In The Moralists,
Theocles identifies the dialogue’s analogical genre in painting as “philosophical portraiture,”
wondering “what sort of picture” he and Philocles are “like to prove and how it will appear”
(234-35). Yet the landscape is not a backdrop; the figures turn toward it and it contributes to
Philocles’ progress. Shaftesbury directs the reader’s attention away from human nature, which
his characters acknowledge can only appear deranged. When Philocles accuses nature of “erring
in thy chief workmanship,” Theocles responds, “But it was not the whole of creation you thus
quarreled with nor were you so out of conceit with all beauty. The verdure of the field, the
distant prospects, the gilded horizon and purple sky formed by a setting sun, had charms in
abundance and were able to make impression on you.” The landscape represents not only a retreat but the starting point for an orderly social scene Theocles instructs Philocles to compose mentally. Its elements initiate a vision of universal order. Shaftesbury again turns to classical idealism. As Theocles proceeds with his argument for a universal harmony, he describes a process of idealization that expands from the sight of the landscape. He says, “Nor is the enjoyment of a single beauty sufficient to satisfy such an aspiring soul. It seeks how to combine more beauties and by what coalition of these to form a beautiful society,” and an even nobler whole that comprehends all mankind (244). The friends repeat the process as they admire plants that grow “to perfection” on an evening walk (273). On their next walk, Theocles bursts into his famous hymn to nature, praising the fields and woods and moving out to the celestial bodies, before Philocles, persuaded, implores him to return to more sociable places (313).

The Moralists asserts that we instantly sense order as it simultaneously suggests that the perception of order requires the mind’s effort (274). The moral sense seems to spring from an impulse Shaftesbury shares with Locke, to obviate a reliance on the sign in the pursuit of knowledge. As Locke cannot relinquish the notion that the outside world affects thought, Shaftesbury cannot commit to his contrary claim that the sight of the outside world is all that is necessary for moral understanding. Sight surely did not generally and immediately produce the idea he most wished readers to hold, the idea that the universe is orderly and good. Shaftesbury is compelled to locate his ideal of total harmony, his version of the state of nature, in the mind and the future. He bequeaths a paradox to the following century: Nature displays knowledge perfectly, but the mind must rework it.

2 For other readings that notice this, see Hans Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History*, which notes that Thomas Webb’s *The Intellectualism of Locke* (1857) presents Locke’s empiricism “as a fable” (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 138. James Gibson shows that Locke did not free himself from the tradition of a priori knowledge in *Locke’s Theory of Knowledge and Its Historical Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1917). Pringle-Pattison warns in 1924 that to read Locke’s theory as a step towards Hume’s “sensationalistic scepticism” is to misread it according to distinctions that emerged later (xviii).

3 Martin Jay has traced a tension in Western thought between the idea that sensory sight supplies the materials for knowledge and the idea that the mind possesses a faculty of vision that is in competition with sensory sight. Locke seems to wish to draw on the advantages of both traditions. When he compares the understanding to the eye at the beginning of the Epistle to the Reader and of Book I, he grants prestige to sight but also places the two faculties in competition (1.1). The Neoplatonic “candle, that is set up in us” places emphasis on the role of the mind (1.1.5). Locke’s relationship to the Cambridge Neoplatonism has been debated. It is known at least that Locke encountered Neoplatonic ideas during the years he lived in the house of Damaris Masham, Ralph Cudworth’s daughter and herself a theologian (Marshall 6). A “Christian Platonist” appears in the *Essay’s* pages (2.27.14).

4 Rosalie Colie notes that in Locke’s time, the word “essay” customarily meant an informal, discursive piece of writing, perhaps in progress. In exchange for frankness and liveliness, the essayist was permitted “certain liberties from logical rigour” (237-38).


Elizabeth Eisenstein emphasizes that print and especially printed text supplanted imagery in churches and the “less-tangible” images of the mind in the early modern period (39). Both divines and philosophers came to see it as a device which “overcame ignorance and superstition...and in general brought Europe out of the Dark Ages” (165-67). The humanists of the German Reformation presented printing as “proof of cultural and spiritual superiority,” and Protestants of Elizabethan England took up this theme.


Locke, *Drafts*, S2; S17. The tabula rasa famously appears in Book VI of *The Republic*, where Socrates says that philosophers would refuse “to have anything to do with any individual or city, or draft any laws, until they were either given a clean slate or had cleaned it for themselves.” The tablet is where laws are recorded and a metaphor for the city and the “character of human beings” (206). Plato compares the lawmaker who starts from new concepts to an artist who paints on a clean surface. Locke, like Plato, presents the blank slate as the site of social reform, seeing the mind as the most meaningful repository for human laws.

In Book I, he compares children’s minds to “white Paper.” 1.3.22. See also 2.1.2.

Eva Keuls has shown painting concepts appear throughout the Western text most famously hostile toward painting, *The Republic*. See her *Plato and Greek Painting* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978).

Lucian is the extant source of a painting of a female centaur with her young; in the essay “Zeuxis,” he uses the centaur to stand for the quality of novelty in art, a quality that obscures skill.


Jonathan Crary focuses on the single metaphor of the *camera obscura*, suggesting that to be “in camera” was to be “within the chambers of a judge or person of title” and that the metaphor serves to give the mind a self-legislative function. See *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990). William Walker
relates the mind’s room to a discourse of property in *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

23 The impulse to collect antiquities arose in northern Italy from roughly the 1460s to the 1530s (Arnold 14). The English followed the Italian pattern, accepting collecting as an activity worthy of the nobility and then the state (Chaney 25).


28 In his 2015 book *The Mind is a Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), Sean Silver links Locke’s use of the term “cabinet” to the period’s pervasive tendency to deploy metaphors of spaces that hold collections for the mind. He considers Locke’s cabinet to be a library. Yet Silver’s evidence—Locke’s “lifetime habit of collecting, organizing, and collating books”—is to me less persuasive than the internal evidence of the text, where the space of mind is regularly filled with paintings (22-37).


30 It is exemplified by Thomas Elyot’s bid to make drawing a noble pursuit in The Boke Named the Governour (1531), the first English book to urge art education, and Henry Peachum’s *The Art of Drawing* (1606) (MacDonald 149). Iain Pears notes that with the reappearance of collecting in the 1680s came an interest in methods of training artists in painting and viewers in its appreciation (1-3).

31 The Reformation, particularly the course it took in the 1640s and 50s, seriously damaged and delayed the development of English classicism, but the collecting impulse was “strong enough to survive occasional bouts of Puritanism” (Chaney 20-23). The first important English collections were formed in the early seventeenth century, notably by the Duke of Buckingham, Charles I, and the Earl of Arundel, as the upper classes made continental travel a habit (Arnold 14-16).


33 The “cabinet picture” genre was common from the fifteenth century on, and one in which Dutch artists were prolific in the seventeenth century. Locke surely became familiar with it during his five years in the Netherlands. By the time Hazlitt produces his philosophical works in the early nineteenth century, he firmly associates the mental gallery with sensory images in particular. He describes the “old story of sensation” as one in which the mind is an “inner room where the images of external things like pictures in a gallery are lodged safe” (200). The story is
as old as the Aristotle interpreter Themistius, who adds to his paraphrase of De Anima the notion that the mind can store images based in sensory perceptions (Plett 43).

35 See “Epistemology.”
36 Nidditch and Rogers, 1.1.
37 Jules David Law identifies “a mutually defining relationship between language and image” in empiricism, noting that visual perception is explained with reference to language; language, with references to vision (ix; 12). He writes, “Locke’s account of knowledge and experience relies alternately on two radically different accounts of cognition: one modeled on visual perception and the other on the structure and effects of verbal language.” Marshall also points out that empiricist epistemologies, including Locke’s, refer to “images, representations, copies, pictures, and painting, as well as imprinting, inscriptions, impressions and writing” (689).
38 David Marshall points to empiricism’s “preoccupation with acts of imagination, mimesis, and representation” in “Ut Pictura Poesis,” 687-89.
39 Locke, *Drafts*, S22.
40 Locke at times uses “imagination” in the conventional Enlightenment sense, simply to refer, interchangeably, to the faculty that produces images in the mind and those images themselves, as when he refers in Draft A to “imaginations which...objects when they affected our senses caused in us” (S1).
45 Hobbes and Descartes revive the ancient debate over innatism in terms of the print: Hobbes characterizes simple sensory ideas as “impressions” in his empiricist psychology; Descartes compares the mind to wax as he holds that God has marked it with ideas. Richard Kroll proposes that English thought after 1650 is in general marked by metaphors of print that “emphasize the materiality of words.... The printing culture is pandemic.” *Material Word*, 20-21. He finds that print culture becomes an instrument of a skeptical, empirical view of knowledge by about this time (184).
46 Walker argues that Locke consistently displaces the metaphor of print by figuring the mind as a space or room, yet the text does not bear this out. Law writes that “Locke is generally far more comfortable with a characterization of ideas...as impressions or imprints rather than images” (78). While “the print wears out” just as “imagery moulders away,” images are more often shown as transient, and printed characters, as intelligible (2.10.5).
47 In *De Anima*, Aristotle likens the sensory idea to a seal made on wax with a signet ring; Locke more skeptically describes a situation in which “the Organs or Faculties of Perception, like Wax over-hardened with Cold, will not receive the Impression of the Seal” (2.29.3).
48 Painting theory developed “close ties” with the “literary and rhetorical disciplines” in Greek and Roman times, ties not shared by any other visual art (Keuls 61). The humanist Alberti makes the concept of pictorial composition central to painting theory in 1435 (Baxandall vii).
Marshall (31). In the early sixteenth century, for example, Melanchthon divides themes into simple and complex (Mack 262). A century later, Bartholomaeus Keckermann outlines a model of logic involving simple and complex thoughts (187). Both de Man and Rosalie Colie have noted that though Locke overtly repudiates rhetoric, he uses it to “insinuate right ideas” (Yolton 239-40). He also seems to use its concepts as models.

Thomas Puttfarken persuasively argues that Alberti, who introduces the term in 1435, uses it to denote the construction of an individual object or human figure and that it is only later applied to the total visual field. Discovery, 49-55. Caroline van Eck has demonstrated a seventeenth-century English tendency to adapt Renaissance concepts and terms of art to political and social ends (94). The literary scholar Richard Kroll, citing J.G.A. Pocock on the “migration” of terms, writes that “the age could not invent a stable vocabulary for signs out of whole cloth, and it consequently struggled with terms borrowed from inherited vocabularies.” Material Word, 62.

Steven Forde writes that “moral modes are essentially, even radically, nonempirical” and identifies Pufendorf as the main source of Locke’s concept. The sense of modes as “arbitrary mental constructs,” according to Forde, had become “common currency among modern, anti-scholastic thinkers” who seek to replace the scholastic moral system grounded in universal natural categories. While modes that relate to objects, such as ideas of number and motion, have a “straightforward relationship to material reality,” moral modes, representing “relations among human beings,” are “much more a free creation of mind” and may be “imposed or superimposed on material reality by mind.” He points out that Pufendorf claims that our knowledge of them “stems, at least indirectly, from empirical observation...of human nature and human society,” concluding that such a position is tenable only through a belief that empirical facts “are signposts or indications of divine intent.” See “Mixed Modes in John Locke’s Moral and Political Philosophy,” The Review of Politics 73 (2011), 581-608.

Robert McRae has traced the seventeenth-century conception that an idea is an object to Descartes.

Hans Aarsleff writes that Locke’s arguments about language were “aimed at the most widely held seventeenth century view of the nature of language,” best designated “Adamic language.” Its proponents maintained that modern languages contain elements of the original perfect language created by Adam. For Locke, language is manmade and conventional (25-27).

Locke associates certainty with his own written language in ‘Draft A,’ stating, “I can noe more doubt whilst I write this that I see white & black & that they realy exist then that I write, which is a certainety as great as humane nature is capable of concerning the existence of any thing but a mans self alone, this being according to Des Cartes to every one past doubt that whilst he writes or thinkes that he writes, he that thinks, doth exist” (S10).

See John Marshall, John Locke, 453.

Ibid., 353.

This assertion may be related to the Cartesian theory of vision. Like many others, Descartes draws an analogy between seeing the world and seeing a picture of it. His notion is that “an image need only resemble its objects in a few respects,” and he uses the case of engravings to demonstrate this principle.

Locke, Drafts, S13.

Locke, Early Draft, 104.

For examples, see 2.23.3; 2.23.6; 2.24.1; 4.7.15.
64 The effort to distinguish men from animals runs through the drafts of the Essay. In ‘Draft A,’ Locke writes that “even that species which we may be supposd to know best & cal man is not soe readily distinguished from beast” (S2). Later, he finds that a definition that includes rationality is not suited to “the knowldge of things existing in rerum natura,” since children and some men are not as rational as a horse or dog (S13). In ‘Draft B,’ he insists that it is “far yet from being certainly determined” what qualities distinguish man from beasts (S78).

65 Locke, Drafts, S2; S78

66 Aristotle uses the centaur an example in section 2.1 of the Posterior Analytics as he discusses the truth of propositions.

67 John Anstey has discussed the place of such statements, expressing “skepticism about our ability to know to the natural of material body and its qualities, as well as a deep skepticism about the prospects of natural philosophy,” within Locke’s broader attitude towards natural philosophy. He traces a contemporary distinction between two contemporary methodologies, experimental national philosophy, based in observation, and speculative natural philosophical systems, arguing that he in the Essay maintains the utility of the former. Anstey refutes the “almost universally” held view that “amongst Locke’s aims in penning the Essay was that it should stand in a very positive relation to the new natural philosophy of his day.” See John Locke and Natural Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially 1-13. Anstey adds that Locke was more pessimist about the potential of natural philosophy as a science than many proponents of the new experimental philosophy (29). In fact, Anstey considers him “unduly pessimistic about the prospects of natural philosophy,” since “within one hundred years of the publication of his Essay, significant advances were to be made in chemistry that would deliver quantitative results. Therefore Locke should not be regarded as a modern when it comes to empirical explanation: he should not be regarded as pioneering, providing, or even adumbrating a promising new approach to the acquisition of natural philosophical knowledge,” though he never considered a science of nature impossible (168).

68 This idea has greater prominence in “Draft B,” where Locke claims in the first sentence that “it is the Understanding that sets man above the rest of sensible beings” (S1).

69 Aston charts the continuous push and pull of English iconoclasts and the conservers who resisted them. Eisenstein writes that while “it may seem plausible to suggest that printing fostered a movement from ‘from image culture to word culture,’” the cultural changes produced by printing are more complex. In making possible an abundance of texts, printing allowed for the simultaneous release of “different spirits from different times” (128). Denys Hay also warns against conflating the rapid spread of print technology with the early modern period’s more gradual and partial shifts in attitude (xxii).

70 Jerome Stolnitz proposes that in briefly presenting “beauty” as manmade rather than given, Locke makes way for an autonomous aesthetic realm. David Marshall notes that Locke was important to eighteenth-century aesthetics partly “because of the centrality of the status of images to Enlightenment epistemology.” Ernest Tuveson studies the continuities between Locke’s epistemology and the Romantic imagination. Jules David Law locates continuity between empiricist philosophy and literary and art criticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the rhetorical figures of reflection, surface and depth.


72 Puttfarken, Discovery, 58-59.

73 A.O. Aldridge, who charted Shaftesbury’s influence, calls Characteristics “one of the most widely read and influential books of the eighteenth century.” He finds that for most readers The
Moralists was particularly appealing, especially the rhapsody to nature. “Shaftesbury and the Deist Manifesto.” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 41, no. 2 (1951): 297.

References to the treaties of *Characteristics* appear in the text and are to the version edited by Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Thus, while Shaftesbury is well known to have been influenced by Neoplatonism, his thought may also “be called a kind of empiricism” because it depends on “experience and verifiable observation.” Dabney Townsend, “Shaftesbury’s Aesthetic Theory.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 41, no. 2 (Winter 1982): 207.

The notion of a cosmic system “was common property,” appearing in “a number of ancient cosmologies which persisted into the Renaissance.” Voitle, *Third Earl of Shaftesbury*, 140. In Shaftesbury’s notes, it is strongly associated with the writings of Marcus Aurelius.

Garland Brooks points out that “the significant differences between the 1699 and 1711 editions of the Inquiry attest to his increasing interest in aesthetics.” *Shaftesbury and the Psychological School of Ethics.* *Dalhousie Review* 60, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 438.

He also at times suggests that sense is inadequate, as when he writes that knowledge of the common good requires reason (174-78).


Pliny and Cicero provide the earliest extant accounts of the painting said to achieve this, reporting that Zeuxis painted a perfectly beautiful woman by combining the best features of five models.

For a history of the notion, see Elizabeth Mansfield, *Too Beautiful to Picture: Zeuxis, Myth, and Mimesis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). She credits Alberti as the first Renaissance theorist to adopt the legend (from Cicero) (40). She writes that Vasari, who also paints the story, brings it “fully into the service” of art theory. For him, it includes the selection of the best forms in nature and art (43; 87). The legend first reached a wide English readership through translations of Castiglione, Velerius, and Pliny. Junius repeatedly refers to the legend, and calls “this most absolute sort of imitation” the basis of all the plastic arts (14-15).


He writes in a letter that he turned to the study of art objects, “antiquities, medals, and chiefly drawings and pictures,” only when the poor health that took him to Italy prohibited reading. Rand, *Life*, 468. In the same period, he also produced his own designs for illustrations to *Characteristics*.

The painting would become “eighteenth-century Britain’s most celebrated emblem.” Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 63.

The pastoral tradition was alive in England by at least the early sixteenth century (Weiss 117). The neo-classicists considered landscape painting valid only in association with the poetry of Milton, Thomson, Virgil, and Ovid. Ann Hope, *The Theory and Practice of Neoclassicism in English Painting: The Origins, Development, and Decline of an Ideal* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), 137. Shaftesbury’s pastoral scenes are consonant with Sarah Lambert’s view that the English pastoral field in particular is a place from which the moral order can be seen. *Placing Sorrow: A Study of the Pastoral Elegy Convention from Theocritus to Milton* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976) 134. A portrait Shaftesbury commissioned of himself and his brother reworks “the familiar Horatian topos of virtuous rural retirement.” Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 6. It is part because of his Arcadian ideal that
Shaftesbury’s social thought has been criticized as a paternalistic defense of the landed aristocracy. Solkin writes, “Shaftesbury describes his ideal society as a hierarchical republic ruled by a disinterested elite of male citizens, autonomous men of public virtue who stand above and apart from the interdependent world of corrupt and commercial modernity” (4).


88 Tuveson suggests that Shaftesbury, like Addison, in remaining a “theoretical neoclassicist,” does not recognize what is aesthetically revolutionary in his thought. Ibid., 93. R.L. Brett points out that the extreme neo-classicist is mainly a fiction of textbooks, and that Shaftesbury is most neoclassical as a critic of artworks. The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 127; 157.

89 Richard Kroll has proposed that the English philosophy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries values contingency and skepticism, accompanied by the notion of mediate perception, as an alternative to “dogmatic” epistemologies that present perception as “immediate” and knowledge as intuitive. While Locke and Shaftesbury defy dogma, they express desire for absolute knowledge and anxiety over the contingent. Material Word, 50-55.
Chapter 2

John Ruskin’s Ideal Landscape

The Earl of Shaftesbury and John Ruskin frame a British tradition that places aesthetics in the service of natural theology. Each looks to the landscape for evidence of divine intent and at times suggests that the sight of the landscape is sufficient to faith. Yet in each case, an appeal to aesthetics—more specifically, the mind’s composing faculty—comes with the suggestion that pure sight alone is insufficient. Shaftesbury’s image of the ideal landscape derives from and resembles nature but is assembled as a painted image is. His aesthetics were taken up on the continent before they were “imported back to England from Continental writers who had first learned them from Characteristics.” Characteristics was in Ruskin’s library, and Modern Painters (1843-60) asks to be read against the tradition of artistic idealism Shaftesbury brought to English thought and applied to the landscape. Rejecting neoclassical idealism, Ruskin defends J.M.W. Turner’s landscapes as superior in their fidelity to nature in Modern Painters I. As the first book of the Essay has misled readers of Locke, however, the first volume of Modern Painters has given Ruskin too secure a position as a naturalist. Ruskin comes to recognize that Modern Painters I, in moving indiscriminately between descriptions of natural landscapes and Turner’s painted landscapes and their effects on the viewer, renders the painting superfluous. In this sense, he perpetuates a tendency of neoclassical art theory. The neoclassical idea that the best painting reproduces nature accompanies the idea that painting is inferior to poetry because it is capable of replication alone. An argument for naturalism thus could not be a strong defense of painting. The previous chapter focused on the competition between image and word. This chapter looks at another contest, between nature and art. If Ruskin is to demonstrate that the landscape painting has special value, he must make special claims for it. To do so, I argue, he
crafts a theory of artistic idealism in Modern Painters II and III. His response to classical idealism becomes, at least temporarily, not naturalism but a new theory of ideal composition. Ruskin’s idealism appears not in his discussions of individual form, where he has a great interest in preserving the particular, but in his extended contemplations of the total field. That is where the superior artist combines and idealizes, as several scholars have noted.

While several scholars have recognized Ruskin’s theory of ideal composition, his presentation of the artist’s composing faculty, the “imagination associative,” has not been adequately understood. The premise of this chapter is that Modern Painters, this project’s only work of aesthetics proper, responds to the tradition of British empiricism, and not only because Ruskin refers explicitly to Locke in his classification of ideas. Scholarship tends to assign the mind’s “associative” operation an origin in eighteenth-century empiricism, and present the intuitive “imagination” as a debt to romanticism. In my reading, the full term “imagination associative” represents a revision of both the path Locke’s theory of association took in the eighteenth century, and the romantic backlash against it. While Cairns Craig explores efforts by associationists to challenge the notion of the mind as a “passive receiver,” and the notion that beauty is subjective, they did so with difficulty. The romantics tend to exalt the mind’s active powers. By joining antithetical terms, Ruskin maintains a tension inherent in the classical notion of idealism. The image of the ideal woman is based in observation and may be mistaken for a copy because it blends its models seamlessly. Ruskin also mends mimesis and composition in his conception of the ideal, and the contest between art and nature thus ends in another truce.

Yet Ruskin’s theory of ideal composition appears to be the last of its kind, resting as it does in the creed of natural theology. After Darwin published Origin of Species (1859), three years after Modern Painters III, it was a difficult creed to hold; Ruskin described himself as its
last defender (4:xlviii). This chapter will suggest, finally, that Ruskin’s well known enmity towards Darwin may in part be related to hitherto unnoticed ways that Darwin treads on the traditional meeting ground of natural theology and aesthetics.⁹ Among the ideas that Darwin fatally damaged was that of a whole composed of harmonious parts.

**Ruskin on Ideal Form**

The title of Ruskin’s treatise demonstrates his vexed relationship to the classical art theory Shaftesbury helped introduce to England.⁹ French classicism invents the contest between the ancients and moderns, the latter being the inferior painters of the Renaissance.¹⁰ Ruskin adopts the format, but redefines the parties in the battle. The “ancients” are not Greeks and Romans, but the classicists who mistakenly believe they uphold ancient principles. Ruskin seeks to free English landscape painting from the influence of the seventeenth-century classical landscapists Claude Lorrain and Gaspard Dughet, called Poussin, and the British theorists of the eighteenth century, in particular Sir Joshua Reynolds (83).¹¹

Ruskin traces their offenses to the well known legend of the perfect figure. By the early seventeenth century, Henry Peachum advises landscapists to draw according to their “invention.”¹² In 1875, Alexander Cozens, a British painter of Italianate landscapes, writes that the “composition of landscape by invention...is concentrating in each composition the beauties, which judicious imitation would select from those which are dispersed in nature.”¹³ The theorist William Gilpin writes, “In judging of a tree, or a mountain, we judge by the most beautiful forms of each, which nature has given us.” He analyzes the forms of trees, considering shape and other features, identifying the characteristic shape of the boughs, and illustrating his comments with diagrams. Because nature “is seldom correct in composition,” the artist must learn to produce invented views (103). He defines “composition” as “the art of uniting various parts of a
landscape in a pleasing manner.”

Declaring that “Greek idealism is dull,” Ruskin assails the legend as applied to both individual form and full field. He refutes an Italian art professor who had lectured on “how Apelles painted a perfect girl by putting the head of one on the shoulders of another, and the legs of a third” (4:351). Ruskin suggests the principle remains prevalent when he writes that “there is explanation enough in all treatises on art” (4:112). The method is most harmful as a principle of composing the full field, rather than the individual figure. Ruskin locates the “false” idealism of classical landscape in its corrupt, clumsy, artificial, absurd, disorganized “arrangement.” He writes that what is “commonly called an ‘ideal landscape’” comprises “a group of the artist’s studies from nature, individually spoiled, selected with such opposition of character as may insure their neutralizing each other’s effect, and united with...unnaturalness and violence” (3:xxvi). To him, the “cause of the evil” in landscape painting lies “deep-seated in the system of ancient landscape art,” which comes from the “remarks of historical painters on landscape” (3:xxix). His account of Claude’s “‘ideal’ alterations” describes a process by which Claude eliminates all awful, painful, and unpleasant parts of the scene, rendering it inexplicable in terms of narrative and unafflicting (5:42-43).

Ruskin’s discussion of “modern” landscape painting suggests that the method of classical idealism continues to ruin English works of the genre. He describes a process of error that derives from this method in sporadic accounts of the nineteenth-century ideal landscapist at work. Ruskin tends to name high targets as his opponents, such as the neoclassical theorists Sir Joshua Reynolds and Dugald Stewart. Behind these denouncements seems to lie a reaction against the translation of neo-classical concepts into practical principles. Ruskin repeatedly refers to “conventional” principles of Italianate landscapes, to “known and constant laws of
composition,” to the contemporary “conventional teaching” behind them and the critics who enforce “rules derived from consecrated blunders” (3:619). He describes a painter who composes by making each part “as beautiful as he is able.” Because “a small proportion” of forms will “reach his standard,” the result is “a sickening repetition” (4:230-38). He implies that he responds to the landscape drawing and painting manuals that proliferated before and in his time when he mentions “interesting and popular treatises on the art of drawing, which tell the public that their colours should neither be too warm not too cold” (6:366). Mid-nineteenth-century treatises commonly advise landscapists that unity is established through the distribution of light and shade and warm and cool colors. Examples include manuals and treatises by Frank Howard, John Wood, John Burnet, Thomas Hatton, and T.R. Guest. Frank Howard’s 1837 “Sketcher’s manual” may be an example of the type of instruction he opposes. Howard sees the “great means” of producing unity as graduated lights and shadows incorporated within one another and thus diffused (4-8). John Wood’s 1850 treatise also links “pictorial effect” to distributing light and shade and warm and cool tones while establishing principal and subordinate masses to maintain “breadth” (32-33). Burnet writes that it allows for the proper effect of light and shade and an agreeable disposition of color (7). Ruskin considers the common instructions on distributing lights and darks in contemporary landscape painting manuals to be a means of concealing repetition. In his narrative, the artist selects one perfect part at a time, inserts it into a composition, and tries another if it does not please him.

Ruskin dismisses the pursuit of perfect forms, deriving his notion of “ideal form” out of a notion of the species that developed in Enlightenment philosophy and continued in natural science. Locke presents species as mental constructions “with a foundation in the similitude of things” (3.3.13). In a process he calls “abstraction,” the mind focuses on shared features or strips
an object of contingent features to form a “General Idea.” Locke models the process of identifying species on the experience of looking at a painting when he writes that we commonly base ideas of species on two qualities, figure and color, as “in a good Picture, we readily say, this is a Lion, and that a Rose” (3.6.29). Mental and artistic images have a reciprocal relationship in British thought, and Locke’s theory of general ideas informs Reynolds’ notion of “general form.” Yet when Reynolds “invokes abstraction in the Lockean sense, he does so with a significant difference.” Hazard Adams has noted that he attempts to force the general idea to meet the Platonic idea. His artist strips away not the contingent, but “deficiencies” and “deformities.” Ruskin distinguishes “right” from “vulgar” generalization to point out that Reynolds has perverted Locke’s notion of the general idea. Classicists overgeneralize, painting trees “of no particular species” in large masses (4:173-74). It is to Reynolds’s notion of general form that Ruskin opposes his claims about “ideal” or “generic” or “specific” form. His interchangeable use of these terms is a subversive claim that the ideal is in the natural.

Ruskin was not first to encourage artists to study the particulars of nature. Since the end of the eighteenth century, manuals on drawing and painting landscape give injunctions to reproduce the particular, though these often hybrid texts also offer contradictory imperatives, as Reynolds had. Although W.M. Craig, for example, draws the epigraph of his 1793 “Essay on the study of nature in drawing landscape” from Reynolds’ Discourses, he asserts the “impossibility of painting abstract and general resemblances of nature.” He accepts the method of the Helen painting as a “collection of individualities,” but ridicules the principle behind the “present prevailing mode of drawing,” which attempts to paint a tree that “shall possess everything that trees have in common with each other without being oak, ash, beech....” He writes that practitioners of “general imitation” employ signs for natural elements to which they have no
resemblance, spreading a “disease of the pencil.” He singles out writers of picturesque tours, including Gilpin, as the culprits (7-10). Yet others continue to promote general form. John Burnet upholds its importance in 1845 and 1849 landscape manuals, writing that generalizing, “the principle by which the historical painter acquires perfect forms,” is of the greatest importance, though he is uncertain whether the landscapist can “aspire so far as to reject what the painters call accidents of nature” (53-54).

Ruskin writes in *Modern Painters I* that the truly ideal landscape “is the expression of the specific—not the individual, but the specific—characters of every object” (3:25-38). The volume rejects neoclassical idealism, but perpetuates this sense that painted and natural images have the same value, despite Ruskin’s insistence that classical “illusion” differs from Turner’s “truth.” In spite of its idealism, neoclassical art theory tends to regard painting’s highest effect as akin to that of nature. During the Renaissance and after, theorists locate the value of painting in its likeness to nature. When painting was given an advantage over poetry, it was that of the immediacy of illusion. Shaftesbury calls painting a “completely imitative and illusive art” to differentiate it from other arts. He writes in *Second Characters* that painting’s “chief province” is “the specious appearance of the object she represents” (54). In thus identifying the special capability of painting, Shaftesbury renders it redundant. Aristotle’s notion, in the *Poetics*, that man takes pleasure in resemblance comes to define what painting offers. Addison calls the resemblance between nature and painting a “secondary pleasure,” and Hutcheson calls it “relative beauty.” When Addison focuses on the mind’s requirement for something more perfect than the eye has seen in nature, he turns to the poet’s capability to mend it. Burke also writes that the art image mainly differs from the natural image in that it offers the pleasure that comes with illusion, and ends with a clear statement of language’s advantages over pictures.
Reynolds writes of poetry’s power to engage curiosity in an event, with no equivalent in painting in the Discourses (129). According to Christopher Braider, the concern of the *ut pictura poesis* was never truly external nature, but human nature as it should be. While writers were instructed to emulate painting’s immediacy, the influence operated in the reverse direction in practice.24 Ernest Tuveson writes, “Painting is in an anomalous position in eighteenth-century aesthetic theory...it does not possess the capabilities for new creation that language does.” Addison is representative in his preference is for art that is “least literal, as opposed to literally representative.”25 Elizabeth Helsinger has found that romantics including Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Wordsworth extend the “antipictorial approach.”26 Ruskin requires a theory of the ideal to defend painting’s value.

In his 1844 preface to the second edition of *Modern Painters I*, Ruskin writes, “The picture taken as a substitute for nature had better be burned” (3:12). However, while he titles his first section “Ideas Conveyable by Art,” Ruskin does not discuss ideas conveyed by art. He discusses nature.27 Amid long descriptions of natural phenomena, Ruskin concludes that nature produces “scene after scene...of the most perfect beauty” (3:343). Chapters follow a pattern in which detailed descriptions of nature are followed by discussions of the accuracy of Turner’s “record” (3:435). Ruskin repeatedly claims that at the sight of a Turner, the mind perceives truths “just as it would on revisiting a natural scene” (3:492). The painting “invites the same ceaseless study as the work of nature herself” (3:544). While he dismisses classical landscapes as “monotonous transcripts,” he claims that Turner is “the only man who has ever given an entire transcript of the whole system of nature” (3:168-69; 3:616). Graham Hough points out that most of *Modern Painters* “is not about painters at all, but about what the natural world really looks like.”28 Francis Townsend writes that the first volume is mainly “a description of nature, with
occasional references to the way one painter or another has depicted it.”

Gary Wihl writes that though Ruskin “would like to dismiss the concept of mimesis” from his aesthetic theory, he remains entangled with it. Tim Hilton calls “the major intellectual difficulty of his earlier life...the fact that nature is one thing and art another.” Jules David Law writes that “descriptions of particular landscape paintings merge into descriptions of the landscape itself, and at times it is difficult to tell whether Ruskin is focusing on a canvas or beyond it.” Rachel Teukolsky affirms that there is “no epistemological distinction between nature and its representation” in Modern Painters I.

Readings of Modern Painters tend to emphasize this demand for accuracy to nature in the first volume. Yet even there, Ruskin shows he is interested in idealism by using the term “ideal form” in an approving way. When Ruskin calls natural specimens “ideal,” he not only elevates the natural, but expresses a desire for representation that exceeds it. He also advises that the study of nature is preliminary, and that the achievement of “truth” does not constitute Turner’s gift. The qualities that contribute to truth “are such as any artist of ordinary powers of observation ought to be capable of rendering. It is disgraceful to omit them; but it is no very great credit to observe them” (3:609). Ruskin later writes of the first volume, “Having to oppose the conclusions of a criticism entirely based on the realist system, I was compelled to meet that criticism on its own grounds” (4:164-65). He writes, in his 1883 epilogue to Modern Painters II, “The public estimate of me, so far as it is wise at all, and not grounded merely on my manner of writing, is, I think, chiefly as an illustrator of natural beauty. They had as much illustration of it before as they needed, one would have thought” (4:354-55). The beginning of Modern Painters II suggests its corrective to neo-classicism will be different. Ruskin decides that accuracy and beauty are not equivalent. “I am at a loss to know,” he writes, “how any so untenable position
could ever have been advanced; but it may, perhaps, have arisen from some confusion of the beauty of art with the beauty of nature.” It is as though Ruskin is instructing himself not to continue to participate in such confusion.

**Ruskin on the “Imagination Associative” and Ideal Composition**

In *Modern Painters II*, Ruskin shifts his attention from the ideal form to the ideal field to redress his failure to differentiate nature and art. Gesturing towards a culture that values and expects realism, Ruskin determines not to address “things outward, and sensibly demonstrable” (4:25). He promises a detailed natural history, in a subsequent volume, of how his “types” of beauty appear in every part of nature (4:76). Near the close of *Modern Painters III*, he reiterates this plan (5:384). And in volume IV, he cycles back to the project of volume I, to further examine Turner’s “representations of the facts of nature” (5:410). But in volumes II and III, Ruskin trains his attention away from the outside world (4:142-43). He distinguishes two senses of the term “ideal” in the second volume. There is the ideal that exists in reality, in the sense of the “assemblage of the all the characters of a species in their perfect development.” It would be better, he writes, to call it “characteristic or general, and to reserve the word Ideal for the results of the operation of the imagination. Nevertheless, the word Ideal has been so long and universally accepted in this sense, that it becomes necessary to continue the use of it, so only that the reader will be careful to observe the distinction in the sense, according to the subject matter under discussion.” (4:166-75). It is not until this point, when he is halfway through *Modern Painters II*, as he notices, that he is able to distinguish artistic and natural images. He writes that “by certain operations of the imagination upon ideas of beauty received from things around us” we are able to conceive “a beauty in some sort greater than we can see” (4:209). He determines to treat only aspects of beauty “which are to be found, or feared, in painting.”
It is as this point in the development of his thought that Ruskin shifts to the analysis of the imagination. He places the operations of the imagination in three categories, calling the faculty of genuinely ideal composition the “imagination associative.” The empiricist concept of “association” appears in the writings of Aristotle, and the term is Locke’s. The Essay identifies a “Connexion of Ideas wholly owing to Chance or Custom; Ideas that in themselves are not all of kin” but “come to be united in some Mens Minds, that ‘tis very hard to separate them” (2.33.5).

Association signifies the mind’s tendency to form lasting connections between ideas it receives simultaneously or successively. The concept is marginal in the Essay, an afterthought. Locke added a single chapter on it to the fourth edition, asserting that associations may be formed voluntarily or involuntarily and thus contributing to his argument on the power of habit. Association belongs more to the following centuries. It has a central part in the philosophy of Hume and Hartley, and became a principle of aesthetic judgment in the writings of Shaftesbury’s principal follower, Francis Hutcheson. It became a central component in British aesthetics of the later eighteenth century, for example in works by Alexander Gerard and Archibald Alison. Alison centers his aesthetic theory on the principle, proposing the perception of beauty was triggered by natural phenomena, but was really in the trains of pleasurable ideas that they recalled, from life, history, and art. By the nineteenth century, art theory and criticism that relied on associationist principles were commonplace. The use of the term “association” grew in the 1830s and 1840s.

Ruskin explicitly attacks the associationist aesthetics of Alison and Dugald Stewart in Modern Painters. Critics often read his concept of the imagination associative as an extension of associationist aesthetics, however, and thus as a contradictory element in an oeuvre famous for contradiction. In such accounts, the imagination associative becomes part of the return of
associationism after 1820, following a romantic rejection (Reed 60). This framework tends to obscure Ruskin’s tendency to assign terms radically new meanings. In volume I, for example, Ruskin distinguishes “right generalization” from Reynolds’ “vulgar” sense of the term. His second term for the faculty of composition, “invention,” seeks to supersede a long neoclassical tradition. Helene Roberts has written that while associationist art criticism influenced nineteenth-century art critics, they did “change definitions” and “shift emphases” (91). While Ruskin’s use of the term “associative” looks back to eighteenth century aesthetics, and the term “imagination” gestures to romanticism, he wishes to revise both sets of predecessors.

In Ruskin’s account of Turner’s process, Turner alters natural scenes, removing some “component images” and rearranging the whole (5:xvi-xvii). As scholars have noted, Ruskin presents ideal composition not as a collection of perfect parts, but as complementary imperfections perfectly conceived.37 For “immediate and close illustration” of a composition bearing “distinct evidence of the simultaneous conception” of parts, he chooses Procris and Cephalus from Turner’s Liber Studiorum (4:171), shown below. This is a version of the idea,

![Image of Procris and Cephalus](image)

Figure 5. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Procris and Cephalus (Liber Studiorum)*, 1812
found in the writings of Pseudo-Aristotle and Marcus Aurelius and influential in ancient art theory, that the perfect whole has contrast in the balance of inferior and superior elements. Ruskin establishes a hierarchy that exalts the truly ideal painting, places the topographical “transcript” second, and ends with classical idealism (5:188). Ruskin, like Locke, brings the reader into his study. Locke focuses on the white paper in front of him. Ruskin looks at the pictures on the walls. He writes, “If it were offered to me to have, instead of them, so many windows, out of which should see, first, the real chain of the Alps,” and then other scenes, “I would very unhesitatingly change my five pictures for the five windows,” for man’s works are necessarily inferior to God’s. But “the picture would be a serious loss; something gone which the landscape could never restore, though it might give something better in its place.” Ruskin’s windows refer to the master myth of painterly mimesis. Alberti, grounding the painter’s intellectual claim in the mathematical skill of perspective in Della Pittura, compares the picture plane to “an open window through which I see what I want to paint.” In 1856, the year Modern Painters III was published, a manual on the use of perspective in landscape uses the terms “picture, “perspective plane,” and “transparent medium” interchangeably as the author, Newton Fielding describes an artist who traces a form on a windowpane “exactly as it is seen through it” (8). Ruskin distinguishes Turner’s paintings from landscapes that “imitate windows,” finding the intellectual basis of painting in the faculty of composition, the imagination associative.

Studies of Ruskin’s aesthetic thought by George Landow and Elizabeth Helsinger argue that Ruskin maintains the eighteenth-century tradition of associationist aesthetics. In my reading, Ruskin values association decreasingly over time as an aesthetic faculty, and the “imagination associative” cannot be understood as an extension of associationist aesthetics.
The Poetry of Architecture (1838), he writes that mountain scenery suffers from the absence of human associations (1:79-80). In Modern Painters I, truth depends on “keen sensibility, combined with high powers of memory and association” (3:614). In volume III, he contemplates the associative power of ruins. Especially famous is the garland metaphor, in the same volume. Ruskin describes the typical process in which men admire what is beautiful and then lose themselves in an individual “train of thought.” The man who “has most the power of contemplating the thing in itself” groups and fastens his associations around the object, which remains at the center. Ruskin explicitly proposes the “subordination” of dim thoughts. “If the thoughts were more distinct, we should not see so well,” he writes, elevating the beauty of the object over the richness of mental associations (5:284). As Roberts, Helsinger, Hewison, and others have noted, he refutes the associationist account of aesthetic value for its implication that beauty is subjective. Hewison writes that Ruskin had “a serious problem” in dealing with the notion that “it was not the object itself that was beautiful, but what one subjectively associated with it,” that beauty is determined through “chance connections.” Modern Painters II is intended to prove that beauty is “independent of anybody’s taste” (4:4). There, Ruskin insists that beauty is universal, timeless, and discoverable by reason (4:62-63). Hewison, in agreement with Landow, finds that Ruskin holds the position that beauty is objectively in nature as long as possible, examining the complex account of beauty in the first two volumes of Modern Painters. Ruskin there suggests that association may be an aid to duty but also may obstruct the theoretic faculty (4:63-64). Cook and Wedderburn’s appendix to volume 2 has a chapter “Of False Opinions Held Concerning Beauty,” which includes the widespread opinion that it is dependent on association.
Because Ruskin strongly qualifies his appreciation for association, scholars have had difficulty accounting for his theory of the imagination associative. Hewison recognizes that “by ‘associative’ Ruskin meant no more than bringing the separate parts of a picture or poem together,” and sees the word “as a poor choice, for at first glance it suggests a connection with the theory of the association of ideas.” I believe that while Ruskin’s use of the term may be misleading, but it seems to be deliberate. He adopts the term in order to supplant the former sense of “association” with his own.

Ruskin’s “imaginative associative” is the mental faculty that allow the painter to compose images that convey religious truths. His theory of ideal composition thus underlies not only an attempt to differentiate paintings from nature, but also an effort to raise Turner’s landscape paintings above poetry, as well as the neoclassical paintings that were said to approach poetry, as the following chapter will show. Neoclassical art theory holds that poetry is superior in its ability to depict human action, and that the highest art depicts the great events of classical history and the Bible. Ruskin claims the “ranks” of poetry and painting must be reversing since modern man has shown landscape to be his main interest, and the painter is best able to represent it. While most modern landscape paintings display a corrupt love of the material, looking to “merely to bring out the form of a white cloud” in the sky rather than a divine light, the landscape painting that interprets nature rightly is thus of “real importance.” To contribute to the prestige of painting over poetry, Ruskin raises Turner above the writer considered the nineteenth century’s greatest literary artist of history, Sir Walter Scott. Dividing human history into Greek, medieval, and modern eras in Modern Painters III, Ruskin describes the modern temper to be one in which faithlessness is combined with the promising qualities of attention to nature and love of liberty (5:327). Scott, the “greatest literary man” of the age, is representative in his
“faithlessness,” he inability to believe in anything consistently (5:339). Yet Ruskin finds weakness where others see Scott’s achievement, in the historical aspect of his writing. Critics had hailed his incorporation of accurate historical detail into romance. Ruskin considers Scott representative in his “habit of looking back, in a romantic and passionate idleness, to the past ages, not understanding them all the while, nor really desiring to understand them.” His historical novels are “the best of the kind that modernism made, but still successful only so far as Scott put, under the old armour, the everlasting human nature which he knew.” The excellence of Scott’s work is in proportion to the degree in which it sketched from the present (5:336-337). Ruskin selects Scott’s poetry, not his novels, as his finest work, and in particular his treatment of landscape in poetry.

Ruskin thus sets up a competition between Scott and Turner as landscape artists (5:244). Claiming that “scenes” teach us more than “events,” Ruskin finds that Scott’s poetry displays an animation in nature that signifies the divine. Scott does not project his feelings onto nature, as the romantics tended to, but represents nature “as having an animation and pathos of its own,” to which he defers.45 This is the modern “instinctive sense which men must have of the Divine presence, not formed into distinct belief” (5:340-41). Scott is thus cast as Turner’s forerunner: his landscapes anticipate the landscapes of prophetic history that are realized by the painter (5:384). Ruskin then returns to the task of demonstrating Turner’s fidelity to nature, devoting the hundreds of pages of volumes IV and V to the subject.

**Darwin and the Destruction of Ideal Composition**

The two central concepts of Darwin’s evolutionary theory, variation and selection, each had a long history within the aesthetics of natural theology. Natural variety, for Ruskin and prior natural theologians, is evidence of God’s goodness, and British landscape painting had long
reflected this world view. Darwin alludes to the tradition that holds both individual species and the natural system to be “perfect” and “beautiful” by using these terms. He upholds “the beautiful and harmonious diversity of nature” (169). Yet his notion of species as evolving renders them radically imperfect in their instability. Softening a chapter on the “struggle for existence,” he writes that “we see beautiful adaptations everywhere.” But perfection becomes relative in the statement that selection “tends only to make each organic being as perfect as, or slightly more perfect than, the other inhabitants of the same country with which it has to struggle” (201).

The term “selection” is fundamental across aesthetic theories of composition, and a remnant of these theories appear in Darwin’s idea of natural selection. He writes that natural selection is as “immeasurably superior to man’s feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art” (61). While art here refers to manmade selection or breeding, Darwin places his argument within the context of the longstanding competition between nature and art. For him, it is nature that meaningfully selects. Shaftesbury and Ruskin present the artistic whole and the social whole as analogous in their interdependence of parts. Darwin seems to maintain the notion of a perfectly whole natural order as writes, “How infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life” (80). Yet these statements become embellishments when he writes that “the instinct of each species is good for itself, but has never, as far as we can judge, been produced for the exclusive good of others” and that species take advantage of the weaknesses of others (210-11). He continues to offer a superficial imitation of natural theology as he insists that nature displays “one great system.” He makes the famous argument that descent is “the hidden bond of connexion which naturalists have sought under the term of the Natural System.” But first, he
outlines the various beliefs naturalists have held regarding this system. Darwin does not explicitly reject the belief that this system “reveals the plan of the Creator,” but he makes his appraisal of deism clear when he writes that without further demonstration, “nothing is thus added to our knowledge” (413). With the publication of Origin of Species came the century’s most decisive turn away from theology, as Ruskin recognized. The investigations of knowledge that followed, however colored by a theological vocabulary, as Darwin’s was, would require different grounds.

George Eliot, the subject of the next chapter, suggests that the analogy between natural and painted whole no longer holds in her first published writing, a series of sketches called “Poetry and Prose, from the Notebook of an Eccentric” (1840). The text begins with the death of an invented author who is an attenuated version of Shaftesbury’s contemplative. In this case, the friend figure is the editor who brings his works together, since the age forces the genius “not above, but simply out of, the sphere of his fellow men.” His “sensitiveness” to “the beautiful” is “morbid,” with his ideal acting constantly to reveal the “absence of artistic harmony in the details of outward existence.” In this case, his love for certain natural elements—“the blue sky, the stars, the clouds, the sea, mountains, rocks, and rivers”—relates to his repulsion for living things. He delights most in the “destructive power of the elements.” The first collected piece of the genius, titled “How to Avoid Disappointment,” recounts time spent in a French painter’s studio, where, as in Shaftesbury’s notes, the artist’s steady work towards a pictorial whole provides a model for life. “I say to myself,” ‘Macarthy’ writes, “this is an image of what our life should be,—a series of efforts directed to the production of a contemplated whole.” Yet in his model, purpose is directed not towards a common good, but away from transient human society towards the abstract good, beautiful, and true. While the piece cannot be said to represent Eliot’s views, it
suggests that the notion of composition no longer served, as least for her, as analogous to and generative of communal feeling. The following chapter will examine the revisions of empiricist philosophy she undertakes at the end of her career as she pursues a different conception of the social whole.
4 Ruskin draws both on Locke’s empiricist side and on Plato in *Modern Painters*. Cook and Wedderburn note that Ruskin was reading Plato every day as he wrote the first volume’s passages on ideal form, and Sara Atwood traces his debts to Plato in “Imitation and Imagination: Ruskin, Plato, and Aesthetics,” *Carlyle Studies Annual* (2010).
5 Robert Hewison writes that while Ruskin had to countenance the romantic role of the emotions in the link between the mind and the outside world, he prefers and stresses “the older visual theory” of the mind as a reflection of the world. He writes, “The concept of the imagination as a predominantly visual faculty came down to Ruskin through the psychology of Hobbes and Locke...and through the popularization of their views by Addison and Johnson. The eye was regarded as the chief source of information to the brain, and so ideas tended to be treated as visual images.” *John Ruskin*, 70-71. Peter Garratt places Ruskin within a Victorian mode of skeptical empiricism. As he writes, “critics have tended to lodge *Modern Painters* in one of two incongruous regimes of thought: either inside a fading era of English romanticism, or instead within a rhetorical counter-paradigm of scientific fact and objectivity.” However, Ruskin’s theory of knowledge disowns “inherited romantic tropes” of the transcendental and critiques “imitation, verisimilitude, and objectivity.” *Victorian Empiricism*, 71-74.
6 He notes that critics have seen association as passive, constrained by impressions from the outside world on one side and by laws of association on the other. The consequence is that the cause and effect of beauty are seen as unnecessary to one another. In his account of associationist psychology, however, ideas achieve a level of complexity that transform the passive recipient into an active subject. He finds evidence in the writings of Hartley, Priestly, and Alison, and Reid. See *Associationism*, 16-23.
7 Coleridge, well known to have embraced and then turned against Hartley’s associationism, at times presents association as the mind’s ability to actively forge links between sensory ideas, but sees this process as unimaginative. He assigns the operation to the fancy, dividing it from the imaginative faculty, which he grants access to a more cohesive unity.
While the publisher George Smith wrote the title *Modern Painters: Their Superiority in the Art of Landscape Painting to the Ancient Masters*, the idea of the contest is in Ruskin’s original title, *Turner and the Ancients*.


While England began the seventeenth century with a taste for northern as well as Italianate landscape, the latter came to receive an “unquestioned preference” later in the century before its vogue in the eighteenth. H. and M. Ogden, *English Taste in Landscape in the Seventeenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955), 34. Elizabeth Manwaring examines the transmission and extent of this taste, and the various forms it took in *Italian Landscapes*.

“Invention” is another term drawn from the vocabulary of ancient rhetoric, for the selection of subject matter. It was transferred to painting in antiquity by such writers as Cicero and Quintilian and became ubiquitous in Renaissance art theory. H. and M. Ogden, *English Taste*, 7.

Shaftesbury writes that invention involves the conception of an ideal image in Plastics. *Second Characters*, 141-43. Reynolds defines a painting’s invention as “little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory” in his Second Discourse. Ruskin uses the term in his own theory of ideal composition.


Many have pointed out that Reynolds’ Discourses are a hodgepodge, and Damrosch notes that Reynolds “invokes the whole range of meanings for the general that eighteenth-century critics had canvassed, seldom with any indication that they might not be entirely synonymous.” “Generality and Particularity” in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 4: The Eighteenth Century (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 387. Reynolds was not the first art theorist to be influenced by the Essay; there is a long history. Elizabeth Helsinger points out that Jonathan Richardson, “England’s first important art critic,” uses Locke’s language to describe how the mind apprehends paintings. *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 175.


Damrosch writes that generality “became a problem—in Britain far more than on the continent—when it became entangled with the issues of empiricism. It was because empiricism stressed the radical individuality of perception that aesthetics needed to reinvent a basis on which to invent a basis for collective categories.” Ibid., 382.

Ruskin’s objection to overgeneralized form had been rehearsed in British art manuals. See, for example, W.M. Craig’s 1793 “Essay on the study of nature in drawing landscape,” which ridicules the principle behind the “present prevailing mode of drawing,” which attempts to paint a tree that “shall possess everything that trees have in common with each other without being
oak, ash, beech.” Yet others continue to promote general form. John Burnet upholds its importance in 1845 and 1849 landscape manuals, for example; however, he is uncertain whether the landscapist can “aspire so far as to reject what the painters call accidents of nature” (53-54).

20 Uttara Natarajan links Ruskin’s notion of ideal form to Hazlitt’s, arguing that Ruskin draws on Hazlitt’s attempt to reconcile the empirical and the imaginative, with Hazlitt the crucial figure between Reynolds and Ruskin. “Hazlitt, Ruskin, and Ideal Form.” *Philological Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (Fall 2002). My view is that both form part of a broader tension which unfolds in criticism and art manuals, alongside a parallel impulse in philosophy. William Wright writes that while Hazlitt and Ruskin both voice “dissent from the critical values of Reynolds and the Academy,” both “were probably more indebted to Reynolds than either cared to admit.” “Hazlitt, Ruskin, and Nineteenth-Century Art Criticism.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 32, no. 4 (Summer 1974): 510. “Each sought a via media, a means to reconcile the representation of diverse and specific forms of nature with the attainment of a higher truth” (513).

21 Close to the same time, in 1842, he notes that a piece of ivy around a stem is “not ill ‘composed’” and that the branches of an aspen tree “‘composed’ themselves.” In Francis Townsend. *Ruskin and the Landscape Feeling* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1951), 10. He in *Modern Painters I* at first suggests that the ideal form is “hinted at by all, yet assumed by none,” but after by the second volume consistently states the ideal is in every specimen with all characteristics of the species (3:146).

22 Bermingham notes that if the ideal landscape exists in nature, art becomes secondary and superfluous. *Landscape and Ideology*, 65-66.


26 *Ruskin and the Art*, 51-52.

27 Gary Wihl points out that though Ruskin borrows several categories of ideas from Locke, they do not include the categories of imitation and truth. *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 2. The establishment of the new categories read as an attempt to distinguish the two, as Ruskin emphatically seeks to differentiate classical “illusion” from Turner’s “truth.”


29 *Ruskin and the Landscape*, 12.


32 *Rhetoric of Empiricism*, 225.

33 *Literate Eye*, 42-45.

34 While he first decided not to reprint this volume “except the pieces relating to natural history,” he in the 1883 edition identifies its main value as its discussion of the Greek term “theoria.” The theoretic faculty replaces the “aesthetic” faculty and the tradition that presents beauty as an “operation of sense” (5:35). Alexander Baumgarten adapted the ancient Greek word “aesthetics,” which had meant “sensation.” Since, according to Tuveson, Baumgarten was influenced by Shaftesbury and Addison, Ruskin seems also to revise his English predecessors. *Imagination*, 110. Ruskin usurps the authority of Reynolds, who in 1779 painted a ceiling in the Royal
Academy library with an allegory of Theory holding a scroll saying, “Theory is the knowledge of what is truly nature.”

Brooks writes that while Hutcheson adopts Shaftesbury’s idea of innate moral and aesthetic sensibility, “formed as to respond naturally to specific features of the world,” he also stresses the “learned, and therefore idiosyncratic, component.” “Shaftesbury,” 439. Craig notes that association forms part of Hutcheson’s explanation of the “failure of individuals to have appropriate experiences of the beautiful.” But “the priority that association theory gave to the imagination—as well as to the passions—made it rapidly appealing in discussions of the origins and effects of art.” The improvement of taste was said to involve casting off accidental conjunctions, but it could be difficult to define the accidental. Associationism, 11.

For an overview of associationist aesthetics and its influence in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Helene Roberts, “‘Trains of Fascinating and of Endless Imagery’: Associationist Art Criticism Before 1850.” Victorian Periodicals Review 10, no. 3 (September 1977). Among the critics who adopted the idea were Anna Jameson and William Thackeray.

At various points, and increasingly in the later volumes, Ruskin asserts a traditional response to natural imperfection, that it exists “as a foil or contrary” to expose the beautiful (5:59-60; 6:57; 7:416; 8:265).

Hewison, citing Landow, John Ruskin, 103-8. George Landow has found that the notion that beauty depends on association remained popular in the Victorian period, and argues that as Ruskin’s focus shifts from God to man, he increasingly finds importance in association in our responses to nature. Elizabeth Helsinger states that Ruskin countenances the idea that association strongly affects the experience of nature and art and thus extends the associationist tradition. See Ruskin and the Art, 190.

Van Akin Burd argues that it was on his trip to Italy between volumes I and II that Ruskin realized “that the painter must not allow himself to mistake the feelings of association for insight into beauty.” “Ruskin’s Quest for a Theory of Imagination.” Modern Language Quarterly 17, no. 1 (March 1956): 69.

The main cause, demonstrated by Alison, is the syllogism that because both beauty and association produce pleasure, they are equivalent. He examines how association affects the apprehension of beauty, and states that its great use is to support duty or to “add force to Conscience.” Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (London: Hildescheim, 1968), 70-73.

Writing on Bain’s psychology, J.S. Mill speculates that Ruskin would be “much astonished were he to find himself held up as one of the principle apostles of the Association Philosophy in Art,” though he interprets a passage in Modern Painters II as associationist. Craig, Associationism, 74. Henry Ladd strenuously detaches Ruskin’s theory of ideal composition from the term. He notes that Ruskin breaks through “Hellenic theory concerning the beautiful” with a theory of composition in which each part is a realistic fact. The Victorian Morality of Art: An Analysis of Ruskin’s Aesthetic (New York: R. Long & R.R. Smith, 1932), 73-75. But, focused on Ruskin’s rejection of associationist aesthetics, he proposes that the imagination associative is identical to prior notions of the fancy and is the lowest imaginative faculty for Ruskin. When he includes a long quote on the imagination’s ability to unify imperfect parts, he suppresses Ruskin’s comment that he has defined this power “at great length, and with great pains...in the chapter on Imagination associative.” Ladd strenuously links composition to the imagination’s contemplative and penetrative faculties, though Ruskin treats the imagination associative first, and explicitly privileges it (250-53). Patricia Ball believes that Ruskin “exists on a plane of

43 *John Ruskin*, 73-74.

44 Painting was said to be like poetry in that both imitate life in the specific sense of “plot and character” (van Eck 11). The eighteenth century requirement that all art be instructive often comes with the notion that the greater the action portrayed, the greater the piece (Manwaring). Iain Pears writes that “English artists steadfastly subscribe to the notion that the prime purpose of painting was its educational role” (x).

45 Mill seems to accept this scheme but come down on the side of Wordsworth when he writes in his Autobiography that Scott as well as “a very second-rate natural landscape” portrays a beautiful piece of natural scenery than Wordsworth, but that Wordsworth’s poems are the “culture of the feelings” in expressing states of feeling and thought “under the excitement of beauty” (121).

46 Gillian Beer writes of “Darwin’s struggle to find a language to think in. He was working in a milieu where natural theology had set the terms for natural historians.... How to think against the grain of the language available? One means was to invent a phrase poised on the edge of metaphor...that alluded to its predecessor, even as it undermined it.” *Darwin’s Plots*, xviii. Robert Young affirms that Darwin “retains the anthropomorphic conception of selection, with all its voluntarist overtones” in *Darwin’s Metaphor: Nature’s Place in Victorian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 87. Even as he freed himself from “belief in the static, designed adaptation which he had found so appealing in his reading of William Paley as an undergraduate, Darwin retained the rhetoric of deliberate, piecemeal design,” which led to misconceptions of his theory (97-101).

47 Ruskin recasts his theory of composition in the fifth volume as the “law of help,” defining composition as “the help of everything in the picture of everything else” (5:205).

Chapter 3
The Radiant Tableaus of Daniel Deronda

In her last novel, Daniel Deronda (1876), George Eliot is preoccupied with the question of how to conceptualize the social beyond one’s personal experience. She anticipates Benedict Anderson’s famous argument that the nation is “an imagined political community,” imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Anderson considers a community to be a “creation” that distinguishes itself by the “style” in which it is imagined. Daniel Deronda examines similar questions of how the mind represents the nation in images, and how print may conjure them. The novel anticipates the possibility of the demise of social coherence in scenes that serve to stimulate correction, and summons the possibility of social renewal. Eliot contrasts the coming of age of Daniel, who progresses towards knowledge of his Jewish ancestry, an enabling marriage, and a Zionist vocation, the movement of Gwendolen, an Englishwoman with whom he continuously crosses paths, towards a crippling marriage and uncertain future. While the novel also alludes to larger potential entities, it presents the nation as the largest arena for action in the present. I argue that Eliot’s energies address a problem that underlies both nationalism and transnational projects, that of grasping the contours of a group too large to be perceived. This essay proposes that Daniel Deronda’s strained solution to that problem is represented by ekphrastic landscape images. While criticism on Eliot’s didactic ambitions tends to focus on her statements that realist fiction extends a reader’s sympathy, my essay looks at how her social concerns in fact lead her to turn from the moral concept of sympathy to images that are in dialogue with empirical philosophy and the history of art.
This essay first looks at Eliot’s engagement with the empiricism Britain inherits from the eighteenth century, in particular its role in the ethical program and realist form she at times advocates for fiction. I then argue that John Ruskin’s attention to J.M.W. Turner in Modern Painters (1843-60) comprises a second important context for the novel that, once seen, reveals the import of the prophetic landscape image. Eliot sets Gwendolen in landscapes in the depleted neoclassical tradition, while the Jewish prophets Daniel and Mordecai occupy Turnerian landscapes with golden skies and arched bridges over water. Finally, I argue that these classically inflected landscapes are meant to compensate for the failures of literary realism: realism may create sympathy but now Eliot shows that sympathy cannot push beyond the known community to broader social entities.

In my reading, Daniel Deronda seeks a different basis for social community, one not forged by bonds of sympathy but encircled by the mind and apprehended in its visionary capacity. The novel revises the empirical philosophy of mind that subordinates the ethics and aesthetics of sympathy to theorize how the mind grasps what is peripheral and even out of sight. Alongside corresponding essayistic passages, descriptions of landscape scenes depict mental processes that may allow the English to conceive the nation. The novel thus shows Eliot reaching beyond realism and what can be represented in a novel, in an effort to draw the mind past experiential knowledge. Eliot’s sense of fiction’s social purpose in her last novel is very provisional. The glowing images that produce visionary thought in her final novel comprise an attempt to direct the reader’s gaze to a vivid distance to discern the ideal Eliot cannot apprehend.

Eliot’s Theory of Realist Fiction and the Legacy of Empiricism

Eliot had before Deronda been more conventional in the ethical rationale of her novels. Critics have long discussed her “aesthetic of sympathy,” which she ties to the realist mode in
early essays and her first novel. In the doctrine of literary realism, contact with fictional characters supplements direct experience. She explains this in “The Natural History of German Life” (1856), writing that the “greatest benefit we owe the artist” is the “extension of our sympathies.” Eliot suggests in “Worldliness and Other-Worldliness” (1857) that sympathy is infinitely extensible: “Through my union and fellowship with the men and women I have seen, I feel a like, though fainter sympathy with those I have not seen, and I am able to live in imagination with the generations to come,” she writes. Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede* (1859) famously draws an analogy between realist fiction and Dutch genre painting’s “faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence.” The outcome Eliot expects for the reader or viewer of realistic art is, as she repeatedly states, an expansion of sympathy. Yet critics have tempered these assertions. Fionnuala Dillane has recently argued that these early mandates intentionally articulate the values and expectations of contemporary editors and readers, and appear ambivalent when read in context. By *Middlemarch*, Eliot presses against the limits of the moral idea of sympathy. The closing statement that Dorothea’s effect on those around her was “incalculably diffusive” is colored by the doubt expressed the word “incalculably,” the definition of “greatly” shadowed by the definition of “uncertainly.” The extension of sympathy through representation continues to operate in *Daniel Deronda*. Gwendolen draws Daniel’s interest because her acts imply “a nature liable to difficulty and struggle…. Persons attracted him…in proportion to the possibility of his defending them, rescuing them, telling upon their lives with some sort of redeeming influence” (297). After he chastises Gwendolen’s “want of ideas and sympathies,” the novel shows that his sympathy is effective on her and helps her to develop this trait (421). Yet Eliot presents sympathy as a preliminary merit. As David Marshall finds, the novel’s investigations of sympathy “look back to the eighteenth century…as if Eliot were
declaring her novel to be a continuation or a commentary” on its ideas. He notes that the novel is often read as a warning against excessive sympathy, with Daniel’s “many-sided” sympathy described as too “reflective and diffuse,” and a danger to the development of purpose (335-36). Eliot’s idea that she has a “fainter” sympathy with those unseen remains troubling. She here seems to doubt that sympathy can travel to the edges of the nation and into the future.

Sympathy, the centerpiece of morality in British empiricism, was said to derive from the mind’s processes of association. In the first book of the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738-40), David Hume identifies three universal laws of association: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. His account of the understanding prepares for his discussions of the passions and morality, where he suggests that the laws of association impose moral limits. Hume remarks on our “remarkable” propensity, due to the importance of contiguity, “to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments.” Yet “the sentiments of others have little influence, when far remov’d from us” (207). The imagination is not engaged by what is “remote” (250). Considering the implications of our partiality for ourselves and our families, Hume deems us nearly unfit for society. Leslie Stephen attests to the ongoing dominance of David Hume’s philosophy of mind in the opening pages of his *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876), published in the same year as *Daniel Deronda*. Stephen considers Hume the latest “turning point in the history of thought.”

Constrained as she was within her empirical moment, Eliot finds empiricism too rigid to accommodate the creative modes of thought she perceived in herself and others, and the demands of the future she saw on the horizon. While she is unable to reject empiricism, Eliot is in my reading revising a major empiricist concept, that of inference, a method of making predictions. Hume states that we learn to predict the future through experience, by observing that
certain occurrences routinely follow others (50-55). This concept of inference remains central in Victorian philosophies of mind. The introduction of J.S. Mill’s *System of Logic* (1843) closely conforms to Hume’s account of inference. Eliot’s partner, George Henry Lewes, places himself in the same school in *Problems of Life and Mind* (1879), another text which conforms to the outlines of classical empiricism. To pursue the repeated aim of bringing empiricism and idealism together, he simply applies the language of idealism to empiricist concepts; for example, he uses the terms “idea” and “ideal” interchangeably. The notion of inference has particular potential to be treated as idealist, since causation is the single relation “that can be trac’d beyond our senses” in Hume’s account of the mind (53). Lewes writes that the work of science with symbols “enables us to foresee results,” a process he calls both “inference” and “prevision,” which is a key word in *Daniel Deronda* (I, 78-93). The novel is saturated with the vocabulary of empiricism, and assigns Gwendolen and Daniel opposite problems in its terms. The quintessentially empiricist word “impression” appears throughout as Eliot presents varieties of perception. The narrator discloses Gwendolen’s inaccurate surmises about Grandcourt’s thoughts in a series of parenthetical “pauses” in a conversation between them (98-100). There is an ironic play on an empiricist term when the narrator states that Gwendolen is “busy with her small inferences of the way in which she could make her life pleasant,” inferences which are then called “blind visions.” The novel pursues an alternative way of conceptualizing the future. The Turner-like landscapes of *Daniel Deronda*’s Jewish realm are a locus for propositions about how the mind anticipates the future through prophecy rather than inference.

**The Historical Art of Daniel Deronda**

With an orientation towards the future, Eliot tests a new approach to historical art. *Daniel Deronda*, the only novel Eliot set in the contemporary period, contains both a theory and an
example of historical art, starting with the epigraph to the first chapter. Eliot’s original epigraph announces that that “men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning” because “no retrospect will take us to the true beginning” (7). This statement may be read as the novel’s *ars poetica*. In an undated note titled “Historic Imagination,” among the “Leaves from a Note-Book” published after her death, Eliot presents a method of “historical picturing” that applies to her first six novels. She demands “veracious imagination,” defining this as the “working out in detail of the various steps by which a political or social change was reached.” The epigraph in *Daniel Deronda* reads as self-revision, a correction to such an empirical approach to history. Hume’s *History of England* begins by declaring that it will neglect “all traditions or rather tales concerning the more early history of Britain” and hastens to the history of civilized Britain, presumed to be of more interest to civilized readers. *Daniel Deronda* frames the historical past and present with a legendary past and a visionary future. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s patriotic *History of the Kings of England* provides the main model for Gwendolen Harleth, a legendary queen, and a model of history that is also romantic fiction and prophecy. The characters Kate and Mab Meyrick, who have learned “world-history” through the engravings that hang in their home, describe this kind of history as “history brought near us with a strong telescope,” alluding to the novel’s preoccupation with bringing the remote near. Mab comments, “I don’t care what you call it. Call it a Chapter in Revelations,” noting Western literature’s main model of prophetic history and anticipating the title of a later section of the novel (166).

Eliot aligns herself with Ruskin by jettisoning the kind of historical image that had been preeminent. On the first page of *Daniel Deronda*, and at other points, Eliot affirms Ruskin’s assessment of neoclassical history painting. The first scene takes place in a fashionable casino on the continent, with “gilt mouldings, dark-toned colour, and chubby nudities” (3). The art
historian Ellis Waterhouse calls neoclassical painting on walls and ceilings “decorative history.”19 With the ironic comment that the casino’s décor has a source in the “enlightenment of ages,” Eliot links the neoclassical cherubim to the contemporary philosophical movement. The ironic commentary on the Enlightenment continues when Eliot writes of the various Europeans who are gambling, “Here certainly was a striking admission of human equality,” their equality in their “uniform negativeness of expression” (4-5). The novel thus begins by suggesting that the main philosophical and artistic traditions of the eighteenth century are exhausted.

The decorative allegorical art in England’s grand houses, such as the “ceilings painted in the Italian style” at Grandcourt’s estate Ryelands, on which “Spring was shedding painted flowers, and…foreshortened Zephyrs were blowing their trumpets,” is a mockery of allegory (284; 329). The English are throughout shown to be inept with the historical mode of allegory. In Book I, Gwendolen, who characteristically sees herself as a painter’s model, places herself in a portrait in the neoclassical style, saying, “I will be Saint Cecelia: some one shall paint me as Saint Cecelia” (22).20 She reads her own allegorical significance wrongly, miscasting herself as the patron saint of music. Meanwhile, she remarks that Catherine Arrowpoint “would make quite a fine picture in that gold-coloured dress,” adding, “Well, perhaps a little too symbolical—too much like the figure of Wealth in an allegory” (86). But Catherine is musically and morally superior and would make the better model for Saint Cecelia, while Gwendolen represents materialism and chooses “puerile” music” (39).

The novel’s painter, Hans Meyrick, Daniel’s friend at Cambridge, is a mixed character who has begun his career with the mistake of deciding to paint histories in the grand style. The narrator implies that he has artistic potential by imparting that he was “daringly christened after Holbein,” who represents a bridge between medieval religiosity and modern humanism (165).
Ruskin wrote an essay on “Sir Joshua and Holbein” in 1860, the comparison reflecting favorably on the “unaffected resoluteness” of the latter’s portraits and biblical scenes (XIX, 1-16). The Meyricks, a family with partly foreign origins, has been successfully transplanted. In naming Hans after the brilliant foreigner who established portraiture in England, Eliot reinforces the idea that a foreign idea may be a national resource if properly reconceived. Yet while Hans believes his history paintings demonstrate that “the seed of immortality has sprouted” within him, Daniel tells him that one painting requires a neoclassical scroll, “else people will not understand” the story, since “you can’t tell that in a picture.” Daniel also knows that the Jewish woman he rescues, Mirah, would not be a willing or good model for the historical Berenice, who attaches herself to her people’s enemy (426-28). Daniel’s uncle, Sir Hugo, at times speaks wisdom unwittingly, and Hans interprets Sir Hugo’s advice that he abandon history painting as a judgment that his efforts in this genre “are simply pitiable” (600).

Eliot’s historical art in this novel participates in the rhetorical tradition of *ekphrasis*, the description of artworks, which was understood to have the capacity to evoke images of the past or future. Yet before she describes the visions of the Jewish realm, Eliot prepares the readers to find prophecy in painting through a scene in which Gwendolen’s reacts to a painting in her temporary home of Offendene. Just after Gwendolen arrives and finds the drawing-room a suitable background for her portrait, her sister finds a painting of “an upturned dead face, from which a figure seems to be fleeing with outstretched arms” inside a hinged panel of the wainscot. Gwendolen’s silent “shudder” and angry determination to lock the panel indicate a reaction more profound than distaste (22). As readers have noticed, the Englishwoman is receptive to prophetic inklings, which prophecy doom because she ignores her better instincts out of self-interest. Soon, as she plays the statue of Hermione in a tableau based on *The Winter’s Tale*, the panel springs
open, causing her to let out a “piercing cry” and her expression to change to “frozen terror” (54). In ironic contrast with Shakespeare’s comedic ending, her disturbance prefigures the death of the husband she has not yet met, a death which symbolizes the death of the old aristocratic order in England. The novel goes on to suggest that the source of Gwendolen’s turpitude is an English tendency to idealize the world in an outdated mode.

The English Landscape and the Jewish Landscape, with a Philosophy of Mind

In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot sets a degenerate English world against a visionary Jewish realm, and each has its painterly setting. There is a symmetry in the novel’s landscapes, with two landscapes framing the English in a style of the past, followed by two Jewish landscapes with a contemporary model. The term “landscape” referred to painted scenes before it referred to natural scenes, placing the genre in a liminal zone between nature and art. In a genre called “ideal” or “classical” or “pastoral” landscape, which peaked in the seventeenth century, painters sought to elevate landscape to the status of history painting by placing scenes of biblical or mythological history in the foreground to convert the natural setting to one of the legendary past. Covering only a fraction of the painting’s surface, the figures were essential in allowing the painting to share the moral dignity of history painting. The scenes of two archery meetings, where Gwendolen is courted by her disastrous mate, Grandcourt, are described as the mythological landscape paintings on which the upper classes modelled their parks and gardens. Eliot repeatedly alludes to painting in these passages. She critiques what the ideal landscape had become over the course of the eighteenth century—that is, thin and deeply conventional—by setting the English in such gauzy scenes.22

Eliot presents the grounds of English stately homes as a false Arcadia.23 The setting of the first archery meeting has a “gentle” recession into the distance, a castle “full of lights and
shadows” on a hill, and “green slopes” above gleaming water. Masses of trees break up the composition in an orderly way, and the archery hall “showed like a white temple above the greenery.” “What could be a better background for the ladies?” the narrator asks, drawing the allusion to painting. The classical landscape had become formulaic and cloying, and an appropriate setting for Eliot’s vain, vacuous cast of English characters. Examples by English painters such as George Lambert and James Wootton bear the generic title Classical Landscape, at times joining classical conventions to rustic English scenery. The figures in Daniel Deronda are compared with irony to the creatures of myth who occupy such landscapes: Gwendolen is an exceptionally lovely “Calypso among her nymphs” (89-91). The reader is able to picture her posed with her bow as Diana in an English portrait, such as the one by Gainsborough below. Sir

![Figure 6. Thomas Gainsborough, A Lady as “Diana”, Walking in A Landscape, 18th century](image)

Hugo later calls her “the Leubronn Diana,” with reference to the German town where Daniel first meets her (269). The goddess Diana has an ironic association with a number of characters in late-century novels, including Isabella Castlewood of Thackeray’s History of Henry Esmond (1852); the misguided Isabel Archer of Henry James’s Portrait of a Lady (1881), whose
surname marks the allusion; and the title character of George Meredith’s *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), who describes Italy as an Arcadian paradise while in the grip of a destructive love affair. Gwendolen is among this company as she is awarded the winning gold star. “The perfect movement of her fine figure was a thing to behold in the clear afternoon light,” and she becomes “the central object of that pretty picture” (96).

Gwendolen and Daniel both meet their future spouses in Book II, “Meeting Streams,” and the landscapes anticipate the promise of each relationship. At a second, roving archery meeting, where Gwendolen anticipates Grandcourt’s proposal, she feels herself “moving about like a wood nymph.” The group meets in a grassy spot called “Green Arbour,” and the main competition is again reserved for the “exquisite lights of the afternoon” that typically fill the idyllic scenes of neoclassical landscapes. The narrator again alludes to painting, writing that “a painter would have been glad to look on” (130-31). This idealized scene is disturbed by the appearance of Grandcourt’s mistress.

In fact, the two English landscapes in the mode of outworn neoclassicism occur, in the chronology of events, after the prophetic moment when Daniel rescues Mirah, which is presented several chapters later. The movement back in time allows Eliot to portray the debased English world first, and allows the reader to recognize the landscapes of the Jewish realm as of another order. Victorian readers and more recent ones have noticed that these scenes on the Thames are “Turneresque,” but in an unexplored way. To allude to Turner was to allude to *Modern Painters*. While Eliot praises Ruskin’s call for accuracy in an 1856 review of the third volume of *Modern Painters*, calling him a “prophet for his generation” in his doctrine of truth to nature, she here looks to Ruskin for a theory of historical art that presses against realism. Ruskin’s well-known tenet of mimetic accuracy is in tension with other aspects of his thought, even though
scholars have stressed the relationship of *Modern Painters* to natural history.\(^{27}\) When Ruskin considers artists as natural historians of the contemporary landscape, he writes that the topographical landscape painting may usefully record the present for posterity.\(^{28}\) But such landscapes are of secondary importance; he later writes that the unimaginative painter is to dedicate himself to the topographical landscape (VI, 28-31). The other main branch of history painting, neoclassical painting of biblical or classical events, has in Ruskin’s view entirely failed, though the genre was at the time held to be highest for its ability to depict human action.\(^{29}\)

In order to usurp the place of history painting in the grand style, Ruskin theorizes Turner’s landscapes as history in its high mode of Christian prophecy. In *Modern Painters I*, he argues that no painter before Turner depicted receding space well. The tonal system of the old masters “compelled them to give up all real relations of retirement, and to represent a few successive and marked stages of distance.” While their paintings are like a history that omits most parts, Turner’s are like a history that gives “all its parts abridged in the order of their importance” because his approach to tone allows him to capture a gradual recession (III, 259-67; III, 319-22). Ruskin praises Turner for, “without one break in the magnificent unity of progress,” carrying the viewer’s eye “up towards the heaven” (III, 467). In emphasizing the sky, he gives the distance a Christian emphasis traditional among painters and critics of landscape art.\(^{30}\) Turner’s spatial progressions convey historical knowledge as Ruskin understands it from the Bible (III, 130; III, 585; III, 163). Rather than painting biblical scenes, Turner portrays nature in a way that evinces God’s providence. At the end of the volume, as Ruskin calls for didactic landscapes, he credits Turner as a painter who “looks back over the the universe of God and forward over the generations of men. Let every work of his hand be a history of the one, and a lesson to the other. Let each exertion of his mighty mind be both hymn and prophecy” (III, 625-
31). Eliot transposes the idea that the landscape image can evoke prophecy to the secular world, with the exempla of Turner’s paintings.

In the first of *Daniel Deronda*’s two primary scenes of vision, Daniel rows on the Thames, passing under Kew Bridge at sunset:

It was his habit to indulge himself in that solemn passivity which easily comes with the lengthening shadows and mellowing light, when thinking and desiring melt together imperceptibly, and what in other hours may have seemed argument seems to take on the quality of passionate vision. By the time he had come back again with the tide past Richmond Bridge the sun had was near setting, and the approach of his favourite hour—with its deepening stillness, and darkening masses of tree and building between the double glow of the sky and the river—disposed him to linger as if they had been an unfinished strain of music. He looked out for a perfectly solitary spot where he could lodge his boat against the bank, and throwing himself back with his head propped on the cushion, could watch out the light of the sunset and the opening of that bead-roll which some oriental poet describes as God’s call to the stars, who each answer, “Here am I.” He chose a spot in the bend of the river just opposite Kew Gardens, where he had a great breadth of water before him reflecting the glory of the sky” (172-73).

The gold skies are a way for Eliot to make visionary thought empirically concrete. Eliot seems to conceptualize visions in the classical sense of *visiones*, imaginary scenes with rhetorical potential. 31 Margaretha Lagerlöf points out that though landscape images are “far removed” from the rhetorical emphasis on action, they could “satisfy another of the key requirements of rhetoric, namely the demand for the concrete and actual.” 32 *Daniel Deronda*’s prophetic landscapes gesture to the extrasensory, but have a concrete aesthetic and material correlative in Turner’s paintings. The Thames scene above strongly alludes to Turner, for whom the golden sky was a signature. 33

In fact, it is curious that in a novel with no major exemplary English character, an exemplary English artist stands behind the prophetic landscapes. 34 Although Eliot gives only Jewish characters the faculty of vision, she grounds hope for the English in her allusions to Turner’s landscapes. Writing on Ruskin’s lectures in 1854, Eliot repeats his entreaty that the
English appreciate the “treasures of their own hearts and minds.” She states, “That Turner was a great artist, we hope and believe few will now be found to question.” Daniel Deronda links England’s national fate to its fine art through a reference to the National Gallery. The visionary Jewish nationalist Mordecai, for whom a section of the novel is named, visits the museum to look for portraits that will nourish his hope of passing his ideas on to a similar Jewish visionary, searching unsuccessfully for “grave and noble types of the human form, such as might well belong to men of his own race” (440). Founded in 1824, the museum realized a long effort on the part of British art theorists to connect the concept of the British nation to the fine art it appreciated, collected, and displayed. For Ruskin, Turner’s horizons contain are theologically inflected; they are where the earth meets the heavens. The sunsets of Daniel Deronda conjure the sense that an earthly order, rather, is deteriorating, but may rise again. Eliot’s Turner-like scenes correspond to Turner’s paintings of the fall of empires. We know that Turner conceived his enterprise in relation to, and competition with, the classical landscape tradition. When the National Gallery opened, Claude was by far the best-represented artist. At his request, Dido Building Carthage (1815) was hung beside a Claude in the National Gallery. Turner here adopts Claude’s soft light effects and sense of peaceful order, though unlike Dido, Claude’s Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba (1648) gives the viewer ground to stand on. The companion piece to Dido is The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire. It has a similar structure. But the sunset is fierce and tumult spills across the foreground. In Ovid Banished From Rome, the setting sun signals Rome’s decline. The Fighting Temeraire, with another setting sun, represents the weakening of British naval power. Like the skies in Turner’s paintings, the sunsets of Daniel Deronda intensify the sense that an empire and an era are declining.
The glowing skies brighten and intensify the distance that Hume had presented as dim and insignificant. To Hume, distant objects “appear in a weaker and more imperfect light,” affecting the imagination, will, and passions less (274). Daniel Deronda describes prophetic thinking, or “precious seeing,” as the “bathing of all objects in a solemnity as of sunset-glow, which is begotten of a loving reverential emotion” (538). Eithne Henson notes that Eliot’s scenes on the Thames are “barely described,” yet the reduction of a scene to its main elements gives them symbolic weight. John Kearney objects that while such a passage may have been able “to convert a hostile public to one of Turner’s late seascapes,” it was unreasonable to expect it “to stand on its own as the vehicle for depicting the mysterious providence in the religion of humanity.” However, Eliot does not seem to expect it to stand on its own. Eliot’s description of the light at sunset forms part of an effort to describe how the mind moves away from its immediate circumstances and into more far-reaching thought.

The bridges in the novel’s river scene form a metaphor for prophecy. Eliot’s account of prophecy begins with a vignette in which Daniel at thirteen intuits that his ancestors are not those he has believed them to be. His imagination “suddenly rushed towards his own history and spent its pictorial energy there, explaining what he knows, representing the unknown.” He is possessed by “new images.” He at this young age tends to draw connections mistakenly, “making conjectures about his own history, as he had often made stories about Pericles or Columbus, just to fill up the blanks before they became famous” (152-53). The question of how to fill in blanks was a preoccupation of Eliot’s. Her note on historic imagination instructs the artist to use “all extent evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation.” In chapter 9 of Middlemarch, Dorothea “filled up all the blanks” in her thoughts of Casaubon “with unmanifested perfections” (68). Eliot writes of Daniel’s first prophetic experience, “There came
back certain facts which had an obstinate reality, — almost like the fragments of a bridge, telling you unmistakably how the arches lay” (140). The fragment is for Eliot and Lewes a metaphor for empirical fact. The novel suggests that vision must be reached through experience, including the experience of reading prose. The newspaper placards with which the narrator says prophecy may begin are significantly located on a “bridge beyond the cornfields” (319). What is metaphor in philosophical passages becomes a concrete representation of visionary thought that is able to link the past and future through means other than inference. Daniel Deronda shows the influence of German thought in its romantic nationalism and its emphasis on intuition. But Eliot takes an empiricist route by revising the construct of the train of thought. For her, sense impressions become the supports of vision.

The bridge metaphor in Daniel Deronda relates to Lewes’s description of the “visionary hypothesis” as a “bridge” over gaps in observation in Problems of Life and Mind. Since we observe the processes of nature in fragments, he proposes, we must “imagine what we cannot see, and link the fragments into a whole,” making visible to the mind “what is invisible in the facts presented.” He writes, “There is a gap to be filled up. How? Not by direct vision. Then by indirect vision.” An inference “is placed under, and supports the observed facts; it is the imaginative arch thrown over the gap which we may traverse like a bridge.” Many visionary hypotheses are no better than the arch of a rainbow, beautiful but impossible to walk upon (I, 288-89). Lewes theorizes the bridge as the path of knowledge, with inferences “welded” by sensible accompaniments (I, 321). In the 1855 essay “The Future of German Philosophy,” Eliot had similarly praised Ludwig Feuerbach because he renounces “the attempt to climb to heaven by the rainbow bridge of ‘the high priori road’, and is content humbly to use his muscles in
treading the uphill a posteriori path.” In Daniel Deronda, the route to knowledge is neither arduous trail nor rainbow bridge, but a material bridge seen in a certain light.

The image of a ruin of an arched bridge in the scene of Daniel’s premonition recalls a motif of classical landscape painting, transmuting its shape into a symbol for thought that rises above experienced fact. It is the bridges of Eliot’s visionary landscapes that make them a clear allusion to Turner’s classical, Claudean mode. In this sense, Eliot departs from Ruskin’s model. Ruskin praises certain Turner landscapes with classical themes, such as “Ulysses deriding Polyphemus,” yet he depreciates those which conform to Claudean formats. Even as Turner captured the effects of nature along the Thames, he sought out motifs that would link the landscape to the tradition of seventeenth-century classical landscape painting. The arched Ponte Molle, a bridge over the Tiber at the entrance of Rome, was painted by Poussin, by Claude regularly, and by their English admirer Richard Wilson, the first major British painter to concentrate on landscape, who trained in the classical landscape tradition in Rome. After his return, Wilson painted English scenes, including scenes with arched bridges and of the Thames under a large, bright sky. As a link between the Italianate and the English landscape, he affirmed that a foreign influence could be naturalized in England, as Eliot might wish with regard to Jewish nationalism. Turner followed in the footsteps of Claude and Wilson to make a watercolor and graphite sketch of the Ponte Molle in 1819. His numerous images of London’s similarly shaped bridges transfer the motif to contemporary England, though only some share Claude’s idyllic tone. The images below show a drawing by Claude with the Ponte Molle and a similar composition by Turner. Eliot takes up the same motif of classical landscape, transmuting its
shape into a symbol for prophetic thought. The apocalyptic tone of “The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire,” rather than a pastoral calm, infuses the river scenes of Daniel Deronda. Eliot would never go as far as Turner did in his two paintings titled The Burning of the Houses of the Houses of Lords and Commons (1835), which join the arched bridge motif to an apocalyptic fire that figures destruction in England. While Turner produced these paintings during the
volatile years of the early 1830s, Eliot’s late-century images light up a calcified decline.

Eliot paints the novel’s second and central visionary landscape from Mordecai’s point of view, which allows her to frame Daniel more clearly as the hero he is becoming. The previous scene where he meets Mirah suggests that he is receptive to “vision,” yet he is passive. He forgets everything but the view “in a half-speculative, half-involuntary identification of himself with he objects he was looking at, thinking how far it might be possible to shift his centre till his own personality would be no less outside him than the landscape” (173). This ability to desert himself is portrayed as a virtue but only insofar as it allows him to sympathize with others; it is a virtue that he transcends to discover national purpose. His visionary thought has to develop out of experience since he does not naturally tend to “second-sight” (438). In the case of Mordecai, Eliot gives the ideal priority over the empirical, and shows the reader the prophetic vision he sees. She writes that his “yearnings, conceptions—nay, travelled conclusions—continually take the form of images which have a foreshadowing power: the deed they would do starts up before them in complete shape, making a coercive type.” The statement that his mind “wrought so constantly in images, that his coherent trains of thought…resembled dreams in their way of breaking off the passage from the known to the unknown” announces Eliot’s revision of the traditional empiricist notion of a train of thought, which follows patterns laid by observation or departs with dangerous irrationality (439-41). Mordecai generates visions by going to London’s bridges at dawn and sunset. The symbolic bridges in Eliot’s prophetic landscapes—Kew Bridge, Richmond Bridge, and Blackfriars Bridge—were all painted by Turner. In a scene on the Thames at sunset about halfway through the novel, Mordecai recognizes Daniel as the incarnation of his prophecy. Eliot is thus able to indicate that Daniel will fill the role of a national redeemer without having to show him occupy it. The moment of recognition takes place as Mordecai
stands at sunset on Blackfriars Bridge and Daniel rows towards him:

It was half past four, and the grey day was dying gloriously, its western clouds all broken into narrowing purple strata before a wide-spreading saffron clearness, which in the sky had a monumental calm, but on the river, with its changing objects, was reflected as luminous movement, the alternate flash of ripples or currents, the sudden glow of the brown sail, the passage of laden barges from blackness into colour, making an active response to the brooding glory.

The scene then shifts to Daniel’s point of view, allowing him to take in the prophetic sight of Mordecai’s brightly lit face and spiritually emaciated body. The text returns to the perspective of Mordecai, who recognizes Daniel’s face as the face of prior visions. His prophecy is fulfilled: “The prefigured friend had come from the golden background, and had signalled to him: the rest was to be” (459-60). Yet Eliot’s new didactic approach comes with complications.

**The Problems of Eliot’s New Didactic Approach**

The recurrent image of Mordecai’s visions, a figure “darkly painted against a golden sky,” is, in my reading, Eliot’s version of a heroic landscape for the nineteenth century (441-42). Classical landscapes are sometimes described as “heroic” for their scenes of legendary history. Eliot superimposes an idealized human figure against a charged sky to produce a contemporary heroic landscape. Yet a fracture opens between foreground and background, which represent competing ideas about the source of idealism. The prophetic scenes of *Daniel Deronda* contain different accounts of how national identity is produced. One inheres in the figure of Daniel; the other is represented by the glowing river scene behind him. The idealized figure has been more discussed: centered in it is Eliot’s consideration of hereditary identity, perpetuated through Darwinian descent. The novel suggests that it is Daniel’s pedigree that makes him a fit leader for his people. Pulling against this idea is the notion that national identity is an effect of one’s environmental and cultural surroundings and a Darwinian adaptation to habitat. I find in Eliot’s
last novel an early version of the argument about the import of heredity, centered in the portrait of Daniel, and of environment, contained in the novel’s landscapes.

Eliot’s idealized portrait of Daniel relates to the neoclassical idea that history painting addresses the viewer rhetorically through vivid images of heroic men. Yet the figure of Daniel stands in uneasy relation to the tradition of neoclassicism since Eliot omits its most elevated subject, heroism in action. Daniel goes on to spend more time with Mordecai and Mirah, and finally to discover his Jewish heritage and realize Mordecai’s hopes. Yet the figure remains problematic at the end of the novel, as Daniel prepares to leave England with uncertain plans. As readers have noticed, the possibility of action on a public scale is postponed. It is impossible to know what Daniel and Mirah, his bride, do in the East. In any case, he is able to serve as a model for the English in a limited way because Eliot portrays his nationalism as at least in part a racial trait. Once he decides to go to the East, his attention is divided between Gwendolen and his new sense of unspecified vocation. Suzanne Graver writes that this diminishment of sympathy constitutes a “heresy” for Eliot, “an unorthodoxy in violation of her own credo” (146). Yet Eliot seems to purposefully revise her earlier views, presenting sympathy as an initial virtue that is ultimately unable to produce the sense of social wholeness that is her focus in this novel. Daniel has “the stamp of rarity in a subdued fervour of sympathy,” and under his direction, Gwendolen becomes more sympathetic towards her family, remaining indifferent to all that does not involve her directly until the very end (149). She continually worries that he will be remote from her. “Will you sit near me?” she asks after Grandcourt drowns (588). She insists, “You must be near” (590). Daniel delights in “meeting the wish of beings near to him,” but he tires of Gwendolen (628). He looks “miserable” as he promises to visit her (649). His departure does not harm the novel’s moral program, because his instruction in sympathy is only a partial education, and
Daniel learns to devote himself less to it. When he tells Gwendolen he plans to depart, it is a new sense of her distance from him that gives her a sense of a larger world.

In a letter Eliot wrote two years after *Middlemarch* was published, she describes herself as an “aesthetic teacher” with the aim of making “mankind desire the social right.” Throughout the novel, Eliot plays on the common etymological root of “novel” and “newspaper,” with her newspapers allowing her to present a theory of the novel’s place in the social world. Various characters model ways of reading the news in England. Mrs. Meyrick, whose parlor on the Thames becomes a “temple” when the sun is on the river, is a “great reader of news” and has a refined ethical and aesthetic sensibility (194; 675). The complacent Gascoignes, in contrast, fail to see to trouble before them as they sit “running their eyes over the Guardian or the Clerical Gazette” (59). Vignettes in which visionaries read newspapers by implication confer value on novels. Mordecai is reading “yesterday’s *Times*” with a “physiognomy as that might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile” when Daniel first sees him in a London bookstore (356). As Daniel becomes “a part of her conscience,” Gwendolen finds him “looking over a newspaper” (386). *Daniel Deronda* suggests that the modern British nation has failed to cohere and thus brings its own worth into doubt, since print has proven to be an inadequate social bond. Yet Eliot maintains the claim of prose to social utility even as she articulates its limits. The narrator challenges readers to look for prophecy in prose, writing, “To glory in a prophetic vision of knowledge covering the earth, is an easier exercise of believing imagination than to see its beginnings in newspaper placards” (352). This passage seems to allude to the novel’s prophetic passages, claimed to be capable only of sparking a perception of social unity. The narrator also remonstrates that prophetic prose is often ignored when, at the close, she proposes that “the larger destinies of mankind” have “lain aloof in newspapers and other neglected reading” (747).
Daniel Deronda’s philosophy of mind begins (and ends) Eliot’s search for a supplement to sympathy, a broader mental perspective. The novel ends without a mechanism of social binding comparable to sympathy, but seeks to provide a conceptual framework for its discovery. Despite its idealism, the novel is in a sense Eliot’s most skeptical work, both in its dark portrayal of England and in its unfinished, imperfect quality, which suggests growing uncertainty about the claims of fiction itself. Eliot expresses her uncertain hopes through a final sunset image with Daniel and Gwendolen in Genoa, midway between western European England and Daniel’s future home in the East. In this scene, Gwendolen’s own frightening recurrent prophecies are fulfilled with the drowning of her husband. As she is pulled from the water, Daniel walks by, having just met his mother and learned the fact about his ancestry that will allow him to marry Mirah and dedicate his life to “some effort” at “restoring a political existence” to the Jews (746-47). Behind Gwendolen, “the sun had set behind a bank of cloud, and only a faint yellow light was giving its farewell kisses to the waves, which were agitated by an active breeze” (638). Turner made a watercolor of Genoa with a lemon sky over the sea, among other images of the Italian city. This last sunset in Daniel Deronda, however, calls to mind one of many Turner paintings of disaster at sea, a late landscape with a pale yellow sky, The Morning After the Wreck (1835-45). While Turner’s morning setting suggests renewal, Eliot’s fading sunset represents the moribund Europe she hopes the future will bring back to life.
6 U.C. Knoepflmacher points out that Eliot’s (and Lewes’s) statements on realism should not be strictly applied to her artistic practices in George Eliot’s Early Novels: The Limits of Realism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 12. David Carroll argues that “it is the purpose of Adam Bede to revise radically” the “vivid and crusty rustic realism” praised by reviewers. See George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 84. Ruth Yeazell finds that Eliot focuses on “the commonplace and the local” in Adam Bede as a “way of forestalling” the “impulses toward idealization” that increasingly emerge in her fiction. See Art of the Everyday: Dutch Painting and the Realist Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), xviii.
12 Eliot spent six months preparing this work for publication after Lewes’s death. K.K. Collins has suggested that her contributions to the text show that she “clearly felt that Lewes had misrepresented the situation by coming down too firmly on the side” of the a posteriori and made adjustments. See “G. H. Lewes Revised: George Eliot and the Moral Sense,” Victorian Studies 21 (1978): 22.
Kegan Paul, 1983), 169. She writes, “The problem which presented itself with compelling complexity was that of the future within a fiction... The future is, properly, indescribable.” She then examines how it is implied through plotting (172-73).


18 One of Eliot’s notebooks refers to a legendary queen called Gwendolen. After she is deserted by her husband, she destroys him and drowns his mistress and her child. The modern Gwendolen feels remorse after she displaces Grandcourt’s mistress and fails to save him from drowning. See *George Eliot’s ‘Daniel Deronda’ Notebooks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 446.


20 Witemeyer notes that Kneller and Reynolds made portraits of wealthy women as Saint Cecelia in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, 95.


22 For reference, see such generically named landscapes such as George Lambert’s *Classical Landscape* (1745), at the Tate Gallery, and the various paintings of the same time by John Wootton.

23 Eliot previously used the conventions of mythological landscape to represent false idealism; in *Adam Bede*, Hetty occupies such a landscape during a moment of major error. Witemeyer calls the Fir-tree Grove “a Claudian mythological landscape...a symptomatic product of a mind that avoids reality to indulge in fantasies of self-gratification” in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, 149-50. Eithne Henson describes the same landscape as one of “‘innocent’ sexuality—that of the classical golden age” in *Landscape and Gender in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy: The Body of Nature* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 97.

24 Elaine Scarry has pointed out that Esmond on three occasions satirizes the painting by Sir Peter Lely that shows her as the huntress Diana. *Resisting Representation* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 105.


29 In spite of its rising popularity, landscape had not been able to rise above second place in eighteenth-century British art theory. Jonathan Richardson praises Claude Lorrain, Gaspard Poussin, and Salvator Rosa, with a caveat that landscape is lower than history painting. See Elizabeth Manwaring, *Italian Landscapes in Eighteenth Century England: A Study Chiefly of the


31 Plett, Enargeia, 9.


33 John Gage writes that yellows were throughout Turner’s career “the largest proportion of colors in his pigment range,” and yellow became for him and his critics “the hallmark—almost the objective—of his art as a colorist.” See Gage, Color in Turner: Poetry and Truth (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), 19-20.

34 Henson has noted that the novel sharply divides “the park landscapes of a conservative England, and the visionary Thames” of the Jewish realm. See Landscape and Gender, 82; 115.


36 The solar cycle is an ancient source for the belief in resurrection, and Daniel’s identity as an Englishman is waning and dying in the far west of Europe, but he will relocate to the East and be reborn as a Jew.


38 In their catalogue of Turner’s works, Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll note that the verses Turner wrote to accompany this painting emphasize the metaphorical setting sun. They also quote John Gage’s observation that “such comparisons of the rise and fall of empires, and their application to the contemporary situation, were a commonplace in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.” See The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 89. Leo Costello traces the preoccupation with empire in Turner’s works, as well as the painter’s ambivalent commitment to a national school of art, in J.M.W. Turner and the Subject of History (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).

39 See Landscape and Gender, 121. Peter Garrett presents Eliot’s imagery and symbolism as the “vehicle for the fundamental organizing concepts” that form frameworks in her novels in Scene and Symbol from George Eliot to James Joyce (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 33-35. Garrett calls the symbols of Deronda’s visions “vague” in their attempt to “lend conviction to the birth of a vocation which can only be expressed symbolically because because it has no realistic counterpart” (45).


41 George Eliot, Essays, 447.

42 The fragment metaphor returns as the narrator suggests that Daniel “might receive from Mordecai’s mind the complete ideal shape of that personal duty and citizenship which lay in his own thought like sculptured fragments certifying some beauty yearned after” (476).

David Hill writes that for years Turner shaped “the Thames observations into grand classical daydreams.” He was in numerous studies “synthesizing his Thames experience with the poetic world of the ancients,” and adopting Claude’s devices. See *Turner on the Thames: River Journeys in the Year 1805* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 26-27; 54-57. James Hamilton affirms that Turner makes Italy and England “indivisible” in his Thames views in *Turner and Italy* (National Galleries of Scotland), 30. The arched bridge remained a favorite motif.

The Ponte Molle, an economically and strategically important bridge in the era of the Roman Empire, had religious and nationalistic connotations that would have been appealing to Eliot at this time. See Helen Langdon, *Claude Lorrain* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1989), 77.

Patricia Likos Ricci has pointed out in a personal note that Eliot may allude to an important event in the history of the Jews in England. The bridge is named for Dominican monks, known as black friars for their black and white robes. The Dominican friars objected when, in 1255, English Jews were scapegoated for the death of a child. See Joseph Jacobs’ “Little St. Hugh of Lincoln” in *The Blood Libel Legend: A Case-book in Anti-Semitic Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 41-53. Eliot emulates the thirteen-century friars in defending the Jews.


The Genoese setting may be seen as a tribute to the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, who was born in Genoa and whose Young Italy movement found a center in Genoa after his exile. Eliot saw Mazzini speak in London, where he spent his later life, and commissioned articles by him for *The Westminster Review*. Daniel refers to Mazzini at the meeting of The Philosophers club, asserting that he held prophecy even when all seemed against him. See Alison Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2009), 83-93.

Costello describes the “subject” of many of Turner’s history-related works as “the very process of obscuring, or even destruction.” In both history and painting, Turner saw “dynamics of formation, disintegration, and reformation.” See J.M.W. *Turner and the Subject of History*, 5.
Chapter 4
The Collapse of Framework in *The Woodlanders*

Previously, I compared Locke’s account of his study, where he looks down at the page, to Ruskin’s gaze at the walls of his study, hung with pictures. Relevant to this chapter is the attention Ruskin and Thomas Hardy pay to carpets on the floor. Textiles have been a metaphor par excellence for patterns in art. In describing his austere upbringing in his autobiography, *Praeterita*, Ruskin writes that at age five or six, he could occupy himself “contentedly in tracing the squares and comparing the colours of my carpet…. The carpet, and what patterns I could find in bed-covers, dresses, or wall-papers to be examined, were my chief resources” (12). Ruskin thus invents the child who prefigures the aesthetically gifted adult. In the autobiography *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (1928), Hardy conceives a balance between nature and invention through the following metaphor for artistic work: “As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result…is purely the product of the writer’s own mind” (198).¹ This chapter proposes that a crucial pattern in *The Woodlanders* (1887) is, paradoxically, the breakdown of design.² *The Woodlanders* displays this breakdown in Hardy’s treatment of the character Edgar Fitzpiers, and thematizes fracture in the wooded landscapes.

The doctor Fitzpiers is a character whose fictional life lacks design; he is, in fact, two significantly distinct characters under one name. The man who returns to the wife he abandoned, Grace Melbury, is fully a new character, and there are cues that we are meant to read him in this way. He begins the novel as an idealist in the German style. His second incarnation is a figure of
shrunk empiricism. Through this character, I argue, Hardy represents a splitting between empiricism and idealism that took place in British intellectual culture from about the 1860s on. The division in Fitzpiers’s character is, in my reading, Hardy’s skeptical response to the mid-Victorian drive to bring empiricism and idealism into accord. Hardy’s own highly empirical approach to life and art is rarely in question. He states in a note, sounding very much like Hume, “I have no philosophy—merely what I have often explained to be a confused heap of impressions.” Most scholars agree with Francis O’Gorman that for Hardy, “empirical, experienced, terrestrial existence was the only reality,” and the narration of The Woodlanders reflects this, with its attention to appearances and the limits of their legibility.

The Woodlanders expresses a profound mistrust of the aspiration towards an empiricism that could accommodate ideals. I argue that Hardy depicts how aesthetic frameworks that had been built to organize experience were breaking down through the geometry, and especially the lines, of the novel’s settings. A highly visual novelist, as has been noted many times, Hardy refers to two related ways of structuring drawn and painted images, that of classical perspective and the grid. Traditional means of achieving order, Hardy makes these conventions shatter in his images of the woodland landscape. As Victorians had turned to aesthetic paradigms to give ideal shape to experience, as I have argued with regard to Ruskin and Eliot, Hardy deploys aesthetic paradigms to present the disintegration of form.

Before proceeding to my reading of The Woodlanders, it is necessary to draw the outlines of a particular ongoing tension between empiricism and idealism in the late nineteenth century. While Ruskin and Eliot—as well as Mill—had sought to reconcile this tension, the party lines had been drawn decades earlier with Mill’s essays on Bentham and Coleridge, as A.M. Quinton and Rick Rylance point out. The school of experience faced the school of intuition, which was
also represented by the Scottish common sense philosophers and Kant. Both Quinton, writing on idealism, and Rylance, focused on the science of psychology, portray the late-century iteration of the contest as largely provoked by the remarkable scientific developments taking place after mid-century in Britain. Beginning in the 1860s, the philosophical tradition known as British idealism arose in the tradition of Kant and Hegel within academic circles. Rylance characterizes the attacks of idealists such as T.H. Green on such scientifically minded thinkers as Herbert Spencer and G. H. Lewes as a response to the event that the “refurbished realism promulgated by Spencer and others, flowing with the general scientific tide, was bidding powerfully for the current of mainstream opinion, including that of liberally minded religious thinkers.”¹⁰ Empiricism had since Locke at least, and especially in the case of Hume, led to fears of a godless materialism among the devout. Nineteenth-century scientific empiricism triggered such fears, which again found an outlet in anti-empirical philosophy. Kant and especially Hegel, newly available, seemed to show the way to an alternative.¹¹

In the later nineteenth century, then, empiricism became a scientist empiricism, and idealism became the province of academic philosophy, and took the purer German form, with its notions of the a priori and the Absolute.¹² According to Quinton, the first major works of this strand of idealism were published in the mid-1870s and at that time entered a vigorous competition with scientific psychology. The movement of idealist theory was the “short-term victor” against psychology and the tradition of British empiricism, yet experimental science was the “mainstream development in the long run.”¹³ While I will return to the competition between idealism and the science of psychology, science is represented by medicine in The Woodlanders.

As Tabitha Sparks shows in her study The Doctor in the Victorian Novel, the doctor represents “the empirical mindset” in Victorian literature. She treats the “doctor-character as a
human index of modern material and physiological knowledge.” Novelists tend to choose the
doctor over the scientist because the former has to approach natural knowledge through
individual human cases, and thus indicates the “usefulness, authority, and application of
naturalistic knowledge.” Sparks outlines a revolution in Victorian medicine in the middle of the
nineteenth century, which “instituted an epistemological shift...and embraced, or at least
confronted, a newly rational and empirical consciousness.” In the second half of the century, and
particularly after 1870, the scientific doctor’s authority is seen to come at the cost of isolation
from society and morality.\textsuperscript{14} The best known doctor in Victorian fiction, \textit{Middlemarch}’s Tertius
Lydgate, represents a talented scientific mind that comes to nothing because he fails to read the
character of the woman he marries. In my reading, Fitzpiers’s plot ironically reverses this
storyline. First, he is an idealist unsuited to his occupation. His rebirth as an empiricist brings
him into accord with his wife and surroundings, but this is not, Hardy suggests, a great success.

\textbf{Fitzpiers, the Idealist}

Through most of \textit{The Woodlanders}, Fitzpiers is a country doctor with a tiny practice and
strong philosophical leanings. He is described as philosophical a number of times. First, Grace’s
father, George Melbury, responds to superstitious claims by neighbors that Fitzpiers has
bargained with the devil and practices black arts. Melbury responds, “He’s only a gentleman
fond of science, and philosophy, and poetry, and, in fact, every kind of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{15} The
doctor’s experiments reflect the route empiricism took into the sciences in the late nineteenth
century, and Hardy here sets up a conflict between the intellectual pursuits of science and
philosophy that will emerge. (I will return to his interest in poetry at the end of this chapter.)
After Grammer Oliver, Melbury’s servant, describes Fitzpiers to Grace, the young woman
“allowed her reasoning fancy to play in vague eddies that shaped the doings of the
philosopher…. It was strange to her to come back from the world to Little Hintock, and find in one of its nooks, like a tropical plant in a hedgerow, a nucleus of advanced ideas and practices which had nothing in common with the life around. Chemical experiments, anatomical projects, and metaphysical conceptions had found a strange home here” (51). Again, science and philosophy are placed side by side, but uncomfortably joined because Fitzpiers is shown to have an aptitude for only one at a time.

Once he appears, and through most of the novel, Hardy assigns Fitzpiers an anti-empirical, metaphysical mindset that is atypical for a doctor in a Victorian novel. His approach to scientific thought seems to be pseudo-scientific, with poor results. Grammer’s account of him includes one example: he has rationally but inauspiciously chosen a location for his practice by using a technical drawing instrument (a significant object in this novel, as I will show). After marking the practices of four other doctors on a map, Fitzpiers then “took a pair of compasses, and found the exact middle of the country that was left between these bounds” (50). The novel also implies that he is a poor doctor precisely because he is not an empiricist. The narrator states this judgment explicitly: “His eyes were dark and impressive, and beamed with the light either of energy, or of susceptivity—it was difficult to say which; it might have been chiefly the latter. That quick, glittering, empirical eye, sharp for the surface of things if for nothing beneath, he had not. But whether his apparent depths of vision were real, or only an artistic accident of his corporeal moulding, nothing but his deeds could reveal…. His presence bespoke the philosopher.” When the narrator comments that Fitzpiers “was a rare kind of gentleman and doctor to have descended, as from the clouds” onto Little Hintock, the reference is both to his prestigious status and to his orientation away from the earthly (99). Right after this passage, the doctor is called to the house of John South, whose health has apparently been damaged by his
fear that a swaying tree will crush his house. This is one of only two highly contrasting scenes that shows Fitzpiers at work as a doctor; one precedes his departure for the continent, and the other follows. Fitzpiers at this point demands that the tree be felled, and South dies the next day. While there may or may not be a connection, Fitzpiers believes his cure killed John South.\(^\text{16}\) He certainly did not understand South’s case.

Soon, Fitzpiers is representing himself as an idealist. On a ride with the woodsman Giles Winterborne, who shares Grace as an object of affection, the doctor describes love as “joy accompanied with an idea which we project against any suitable object in the line of our vision, just as the rainbow iris is projected against an oak, ash, or elm tree indifferently.” (This is one of the novel’s clear parallels between the verticals forms of human and tree.) He declares, “I am in love with something in my own head, and no thing-in-itself outside it at all,” showing that he is familiar with Kant’s ideas. When Winterborne asks whether it is “part of a country doctor’s duties to learn that view of things,” Hardy has the opportunity to emphasize, through his response, that it is not (113-114). The narrator implies he is a better empiricist than Fitzpiers through his analysis of character. He states that “Miss Melbury’s view of the doctor as a merciless, unwavering, irresistible scientist was not quite in accordance with fact. The real Doctor Fitzpiers was a man of too many hobbies to show likelihood of rising to any great eminence in the profession he had chosen, or even to acquire any wide practice in the rural district he had marked out as his field of survey for the present.” He is fickle, but “had lately plunged into abstract philosophy with much zest” (118-19). When Grace has an errand as his house soon after, she finds him sleeping and stands “gazing with much embarrassment at the reclining philosopher.” She is a “sensitive” beholder but her experience is insufficient to assess him. She understands his rarity, but “the occasions on which Grace had observed men of this
stamp were when she had been far away from Hintock; and even then such examples as had met her eye were at a distance” (122). Assuming that he had saw her in a dream, while he actually glimpsed her reflected in a mirror, he reports that he thought, “What a lovely creature!—the design is for once carried out. My thoughts ran in that direction because I had been reading the work of a transcendental philosopher last night; and I dare say it was that dose of Idealism that I received from it that made me scarcely able to distinguish between reality and fancy” (125). He will go on to project ideals onto her, and then onto their neighbor Felice Charmond.

Before Grace leaves his house, Fitzpiers has her look in a microscope at a sliver of John South’s brain. He says he is “endeavoring to carry on simultaneously the study of physiology and transcendental philosophy, the material world and the ideal, so as to discover a point of contact between them” (125-27). This declaration stands as a précis of a major Victorian ambition. By placing it in the mouth of a dilettante, Hardy casts a look of skepticism at this aspiration; it is simply modish. In fact, Hardy splits the two world-views of transcendental idealism and empiricism across Fitzpiers’s character. By this point in the century, science and metaphysics had split into specialized and separate pursuits. Fitzpiers may believe that he is equally committed to empiricism and idealism, but he has so far been shown to be an idealist. He is superficially scientific: at the beginning of the next chapter, the narrator says he is scientific in the sense that he is “ready and zealous to interrogate all physical manifestions; but primarily he was an idealist. He believed that beyond the imperfect lay the perfect.” Hardy plays on a philosophical term when he has Fitzpiers say of Grace, “This phenomenal girl will be the light of my life while I am at Hintock.” In Kant’s scheme, phenomena are the appearances that constitute experience, and this line suggests that the disciple of Kant will experience her according to pre-
existing mental schema. Hardy reiterates her status as “an object of contemplation” (128). The references to Fitzpiers as a philosopher then end, and the novel moves into its marriage plot.

The doctor’s thoughts of Grace are consistent with his detachment from the sensible world. As “he dreamed and mused till his consciousness seemed to occupy the whole space of the woodland round,” he thinks of living a calm, content, domestic life with Grace in Little Hintock (134). As the summer progresses, he continues to be “enchanted enough to fancy” that “the Idea had for once completely fulfilled itself in the objective substance—which he had hitherto deemed an impossibility” (137). But after he marries Grace and meets Mrs. Charmond, the latter becomes the subject of his daydreams. She is vividly present to his mind as he speaks to Grace, and his memories of several days they spent together long ago “opens up all sorts of imaginings.” Mrs. Charmond participates in “ picturing the possibilities of that time,” and asks him not to “spoil the picture.” The narrator writes that they turned the short span into “a canvas for infinite fancies, idle dreams, and pretty alluring assertions that could never be proved or disproved” (181-83). Grace discovers him looking in the direction of Hintock House, his lips moving “as on some impassioned visionary scheme” (189). She had idolized him, and he has a new idol: this is Hardy’s depiction of idealism in the novel. As Fitzpiers’s passion for Mrs. Charmond continues, and Grace begins to idolize Winterborne as the “fruit-god and the wood-god” (258), Fitzpiers makes a raving speech that indicates a shift in his world-view. “I used to read more in metaphysics than anybody within fifty miles: and since I gave that up there’s nobody can match me in the whole county of South Wessex as a scientist,” he claims (236). The reader learns then that he has given up metaphysics to concentrate on science, though his idealism continues to rule and disrupt his life. But after he and Mrs. Charmond flee, he returns to Little Hintock a different man. I will return to this new character.
Geometry and the Breakdown of Perspective

The characters of *The Woodlanders* are continuously shifting in position and viewpoint, and the natural world around them is constantly changing in appearance, sometimes gradually and predictably and at other times with surprising violence. Embedded in this narrative of metamorphosis are allusions to artistic methods of ordering and stabilizing images of the world, yet they will not stay in place. Scholarship has long noted the prominent allusions to paintings and painting styles in Hardy’s novels, and associated *The Woodlanders* with European Impressionism. Alastair Smart finds that Hardy first refers to Impressionism in 1886, when a society of painters who introduced French Impressionist principles to England was founded and he visited their exhibitions. In Smart’s reading and in others, Impressionist painting is a relevant analogy to the prose of *The Woodlanders*. Smart writes that a description of the girl Marty South makes use of “one of the principal canons of Impressionist theory—that all forms lying outside the immediate focus of the gaze are inevitably blurred and indistinct, and that it is therefore legitimate for the painter, having selected his focal point, to treat them as such” (278-79). The novel also dismantles the notion of the stable vantage offered by linear perspective. Given his architectural training, Hardy would have noticed that Impressionists were abandoning and distorting the laws of linear perspective, still taught in European academies. Scholars have pointed out that the novel is marked throughout by abrupt shifts in vantage, but without mentioning the echoes of the language of perspective, which register the loss of one world-view as Hardy puts forward his own.

Pertinent to my argument is the architectural training Hardy glossed over in *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy*. He became apprenticed to an architect who specialized in church restoration in 1856, and spent four years in training. In the chapter “Early Life and Architecture,”
he writes that he spent more time reading than drawing. Despite the greater demands of “surveys, measurements, and sketches of old churches,” he reports, he maintained his interest in the classics. He discusses only literary acquaintances. Dividing his life into three parts: “the professional life, the scholar’s life, and the rustic life,” he gives the first little attention (40-41). In a chapter on “Work in London,” he writes of beginning work as an architect’s assistant, a position in which he remained for five years, in an office specializing in the design and restoration of churches, usually in a Gothic Revival style. He felt that “architectural drawing in which the actual designing had no great part was monotonous and mechanical” and “reverted to the literary pursuits that he had been compelled to abandon” (61). Some readers have followed Hardy’s lead, and consider his practice of architecture a burdensome necessity, obstructing his true literary affinities. Yet the Life inadvertently points out the skills he developed in his early professional life, and the amount of time he spent employing them. While the previous chapter lights up the persistence of the classical tradition in the nineteenth century, arguing for the existence of a “classical” Eliot interested in the rhetoric of ekphrasis, the tradition overall was in decline. Hardy dramatizes its inaccessibility in Jude the Obscure, as the province of a small circle of professional academics in rarified spaces. Yet in the perspective drawing that was part of architectural training, craft meets the classical tradition.

Hardy compares the town of Sherton-Abbas to an architectural drawing in the market scene that comes early in The Woodlanders: Winterbourne “drove on ahead into the streets, the churches, the abbey, and other mediaeval buildings on this clear bright morning having the linear distinctness of architectural drawings, as if the original dream and vision of the conceiving master-mason were for a brief hour flashed down through the centuries to an unappreciative age. Winterbourne saw their eloquent look on this day of transparency, but could not construe it.”
Momentarily, Hardy imagines the stable design of a higher intelligence outside of human life. As David Summers writes, artistic naturalism implies “universality of audience based on presumed universality of a certain structure of perception” inherent in the viewer, and perspective is the most generalized and abstract form of naturalism (316-17). Samuel Edgerton notes that while perspective was a tool for accuracy, the order of the perspectival setting was also a “visual metaphor” for a “superior existence.” But the structural design breaks down or dissolves, in a variety of ways, over the course of Hardy’s novel. Here, he immediately turns the notion of a masterly point of view on its head by suggesting that the most accurate perspective is none at all. The narrator introduces Grace by stating, “From the highest point of view, to describe a human being…how impossible.”

Perspective was a central skill in English art instruction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Ruskin provides a Victorian treatment of this skill. He published The Elements of Perspective, “arranged for the use of schools” and intended to meet a “want, among students of Drawing, of a written code of accurate Perspective Law,” in 1859. It consists mainly of a series of technical problems, with an introduction. Hardy shows his familiarity with such guides in The Well-Beloved, whose protagonist Pierston looks at a road “tapering to a vanishing point, like a lesson in perspective” (108). As I have shown, Ruskin’s voice can change drastically when he is instructing students rather than evaluating known artists. While Modern Painters dismantles the belief that a superlative landscape resembles a scene framed by window, his perspective manual opens with that very idea. He begins with an optical experiment of the type one finds throughout Modern Painters:

When you begin to read this book, sit down very near the window, and shut the window.... Whatever the view may be, we shall find enough in it for an illustration of the first principles of perspective (or, literally, of ‘looking through’). Every pane of your window may be considered, if you choose, as a glass picture; and what you see through
it, as painted on its surface. And if, holding your head still, you extend your hand to the
glass, you may, with a brush full of any thick color, trace, roughly, the lines of the
landscape on the glass.  

In *The Woodlanders*, Hardy uses windows, and the views in and out of them, to dramatize
destabilizing shifts of perspective in space. Scholars have pointed out his tendency to draw, and
disrupt, frames in his novels. The first window of *The Woodlanders* is drawn for a “spectator”
behind a van that picks up a visitor to Little Hintock in the first scene. This spectator, says the
narrator, would be able to see “through its interior, a square piece of the same sky and landscape
that he saw without, but intruded on by the profiles of the seated passengers” unaware that “their
mannerisms and facial peculiarities were sharply defined to the public eye” (7). Hardy seems
hyperconscious of this public eye throughout the novel, and to be endeavoring always to prevent
it from resting for long at any vantage. In a notable scene already mentioned, Grace looks out of
her window at night to see the light from Fitzpiers’s window, its position directly across from her
creating the sense that she is parallel to him. Winterbourne, on the contrary, looks up at Grace
through her window (55). He and Fitzpiers together see her pull her curtains (115). Later in the
novel, Grace and Winterbourne interact through his window when he gives her shelter, and
Grace throws gravel at the windowpanes of her father’s house to summon Fitzpiers to
Winterbourne’s aid.

In the introduction to *The Elements of Perspective*, Ruskin explains the technique of one-
point perspective, which fixes the sizes of objects by “absolute mathematical law.” To employ
perspective, an artist must occupy a fixed position and expect the same of the viewer. Ruskin
tells the reader to hold his head very still and shut one eye, since “perspective can...only be quite
right, by being calculated for one fixed position of the eye of the observer.” The artist must
establish the “Sight-Line,” representing the level of the eye of the observer, the “Station-Line,”
the line on which the observer stands, and the “Station-Point,” that distance at which the picture is meant to be seen (235-246).  

Hardy eradicates the stationary point of view in his novels, with the point one geometrical motif related to perspective in *The Woodlanders*. Criticism has used the term “point of view” to refer to the metaphorical outlooks of fiction but also to the visual vantages which so often represent them in Hardy’s fiction. The narrator mocks Grace, who daydreams of the continent, when he comments that “the homely farmsteads did not quite hold their own from her present twenty-year point of survey” (44). Fitzpiers’s point of view swings dramatically. After re-encountering Mrs. Charmond in Little Hintock, he “found himself regarding that hamlet in a new way—from the Hintock house point of view rather than from his own and the Melburys” (180). The notion of a point of view recurs with skepticism about its reliability and finality. Points indicate not only station-points where characters stand, but what what could be called vanishing points, taken not in the technical sense of a point on the horizontal line, but as the most distant point visible to a character. They tend to appear in moments related to error, as though characters simply cannot see far enough. The “point of light” that shines in Fitzpiers’s window draws Grace’s attention (49). From Grace’s perspective on the ground, Winterborne in a tree becomes “a dark gray spot on the light grey zenith” (92). Points of other kinds indicate the limits of human judgment. Fitzpiers has chosen Little Hintock by pinpointing the locations of four other doctors on a map (50). Winterborne decides he must “bring matters to a point” with Grace (67). There is the point of contact Fitzpiers hopes to discover between the material world and the ideal (127).

A Collapsing Grid
While the Impressionists who influenced Hardy during this period built up paintings through patches of color, often producing them through small strokes that just touch brush to canvas, *The Woodlanders* is a novel filled with lines. Light creates its own lines: “Pencils of light streamed out of the windows” of the Melbury house (46). The moon’s rays touch the houses of Little Hintock (68). Characters becomes their outlines, seen or unseen: The narrator calls Grace a “conjectural creature who had little to do with the outlines presented to Sherton eyes: a shape in the gloom” most clearly apprehended through fragmentary elements by an astute observer (39-40). The unreliable outline relates to the theme of the unfixedness of line. As Joan Grundy writes, the “firm outline” is rare in the novel, for forms dissolve and lose solidity (59). Later, the narrator notes that Winterbourne recognizes Mrs. Charmond less by her outline than by her groom’s dress (55). Grace and Marty see her in outline with her false hair (95). Hardy uses language related to line, literal and metaphorical, to arrange the marriage plot; it is especially prominent in the scenes that set it up. He uses it with reference to the paths the characters take: Winterbourne, Grace, and Marty have “converging” destines when they meet on a road (46). There is the “line” of Winterbourne and Grace’s course through the woods, and the “line” of Mrs. Charmond’s path as it meets Melbury and Grace’s (52-55). The curved paths of the woodlands contribute to disorientation in a number of scenes where characters get lost.\(^{31}\)

However, straight lines comprise the scaffolding in the novel I wish to discuss. In the description of the landscape at the beginning of chapter 7, overloaded with the imagery of lines, “angles were taking the place of curves, and reticulations of surfaces—a change constituting a sudden lapse from the ornate to the primitive on Nature’s canvas, and comparable to a
retrogressive step from the art of an advanced school of painting to that of the Pacific Islander” (52). The comment is ironic, since the novel represents the acquisition of culture—in Grace, Fitzspiers, and Mrs. Charmond—as destructive. The reticulated surfaces relate to a device used to render drawings in perspective. Albrecht Dürer illustrated the device in a woodcut showing how the human figure can be drawn in perspective by the use of a framed net between artist and subject.  

The paper before the artist is marked with a grid, and the artist transfers the images seen in the squares of the net onto the corresponding squares on the paper. Horizontals and verticals also comprise the majority of lines in several kinds of architectural drawing in which perspective plays no role. The collection of architectural drawings by Hardy held at the University of Texas at Austin mainly include floor plans and scaled drawings of the sides of churches viewed head-on, which do not require perspective. In addition to floor plans, there are exterior views, labeled “north elevation,” “south elevation,” etc. There are also interior views, such as one labeled “Transverse section looking east,” and working drawings for masons. A number of scenes in The Woodlanders take the grid as an antithetical form.

Figure 9. Albrecht Dürer, Painter's Manual (1525)
In the landscapes of the *The Woodlanders*, horizontal and vertical lines in motion depict the loss of stable lines within any single vantage. Hardy is, I believe, especially concerned to include verticals, which are fewer in country landscapes, for the sake of creating a grid pattern. So while the roads and paths conspicuous in many of his novels cut across landscapes, he finds a means to upend the road in the first sentence of *The Woodlanders* by situating it geographically and arranging it north to south; it runs “almost in a meridional line.” *The Woodlanders* is special among Hardy’s novels in its condensed forest scenery, which serves in part to establish a pronounced vertical axis, together with the more diminutive and fragile humans who live in the woods.\(^{33}\) The reader is repeatedly reminded of the verticals of the trees, hemming in the characters and obstructing their vision and movement. Hardy also draws horizontal branches, with the lower limbs in the same passage “stretching over the road with easeful horizontality, as though reclining on the insubstantial air” (5). The emphasis will be repeated; later, Marty looks at “the bare bough of a tree stretched horizontally” at sunset and Winterborne and Fitzpiers pass under a “horizontal limb” (68, 112). These linear patterns form a grid, but the design is unfixed.
When Winterbourne travels to the market to sell apple trees and cider, a tree is “tied across the gig.” This image forms part of a pattern in the novel in which lines rotate in orientation: it is an image of changeability. Hardy then emphasizes the horizontal branches again, the gig moving “under the boughs” (35). The tree is righted again as Marty South sees Winterbourne in the marketplace, “holding the tree like an ensign” amidst other sellers with boughs rising above their heads (38).

The scenes of John South’s illness and death are structured around such rotating lines. The man fixates on the idea that the tall tree growing in front of his house “will blow down and kill us,” as Marty reports. When Winterborne comes into the room, South is “pillowed up in a chair between the bed and the window, opposite the latter, towards which his face was turned.” Facing the tree that consumes his thoughts, he is poised between an upright and a flat position. He says of the tree, “He’ll come down upon us, and squat us dead,” his “illusion” based on an image of instability. When Winterborne follows his gaze, he sees the tree rocking in the wind. Winterborne’s solution is to cut off the lower branches. The destruction is meant to calibrate the relation between John South and the tree: the bare vertical line will stand more stably. The narrator describes the scene in detail, and its lines move violently: Winterborne “with a ladder climbed into the lower part of the tree, where he began lopping off…the lowest boughs. Each of these quivered under his attack, bent, cracked, and fell into the hedge. Having cut away the lowest tier he stepped off the ladder, climbed a few steps higher, and attacked those at the next level. Thus he ascended with the progress of his work far above the top off the ladder, cutting away his perches as he went, and leaving nothing but a bare stem below him” (89-91). This is one of the novel’s several vivid images of branches falling.
A shift-of-vantage scene follows, in which Grace breaks her engagement to Winterborne. She passes below the tree and looks up at him, and Winterborne mechanically moves higher into the fog, until “he could only just be discerned as a dark grey spot on the light grey zenith; he would have been altogether out of notice but for the stroke of his bill-hook, and the flight of a bough downward, and its crash upon the hedge at intervals” (92). The symbolism of the scene is multifold, even with regard to what it suggests about vision alone: it is in the obscurity of the fog and the positions of the two characters, with Grace’s upturned face an ironic reversal of how they stand in relation to each other in the social world. The crash of the branches is analogous to Grace’s severance of the engagement, but also has a place in a broader pattern of moving lines in the novel. The crash underscores that lines appearing secure are easily detached and displaced. The point is made more forcefully when Fitzpiers orders of the tree, “Down with it.” Keeping John South’s blind “down” as well, several men saw through the trunk. The next day, they lower the tree, and Hardy again makes the parallel between tree and man explicit. He writes, in the novel’s central image of dismantled form: “It was a business difficult to do quite silently; but it was done at last; and the elm of the same birth-year as the woodsman’s lay stretched upon the ground. The weakest idler that passed could now could now set foot on marks formerly made in the upper forks by the shoes of adventurous climbers only, once inaccessible nests could be examined microscopically, and on swaying extremities where birds alone had perched the bystanders sat down” (100). Tree and man are analogous, and both stand for a larger natural process of disintegration. Into the nineteenth century in Britain, many continued to believe the world was of God’s design. *The Woodlanders* is a world in which one can only watch the patterns of nature develop but mostly disintegrate. The suggestion is that Fitzpiers is mistaken in his orders to fell the swaying tree because to erase the world of contingency is to erase the world.
The cumulative effect of the novels rising, rotating, shifting, and falling lines is that of a diagram disintegrating. Later, Fitzpier’s view of woodsmen “dragging away a large limb which had been snapped off a beech tree” instigates a bout of dissatisfaction with the world of Little Hintock (205). The process his affair sets in motion leads to a confrontation between Grace and Mrs. Charmond on one of the novel’s weaving paths, after which Grace finds she is lost. The narrator describes the unfamiliar elements she sees around her as alterations in line: “the transformation of outline had been great; old trees which were once landmarks had been felled or blown down, and the bushes which had then been small and scrubby were now large and overhanging” (225). Previous verticals have become horizontal, and there are new verticals. The theme reappears as Grace experiences a violent storm while she stays in Winterborne’s hut, in flight from Fitzpiers after his return. “The next morning Grace was at the window early,” and the windows of the hut frame views of disarray. “Dead boughs were scattered about like ichthyosaurs in a museum, and beyond them were perishing wood-bine stems resembling old ropes. From the other window all she could see were more trees” and “more trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured” (288). The narrator compares the setting to an exhibit in a natural history museum, but what is visible to Grace is a framed image of collapsed lines. Winterborne has also been left horizontal, lying on hay where Grace finds him, and then in bed.

**Fitzpiers, the Empiricist**

The treatment of Fitzpiers at the end of the novel may be read as a portrait of an empiricist without stable structures for experience. The scene that follows Grace’s discovery of Winterbourne outdoors is the first that shows Fitzpiers after he returns to England and comes into the vicinity of Little Hintock. Before turning to this scene, it is necessary to move back to
the moment in the novel when Fitzpiers meets Grace. Once he sees her, his attention moves from “objects of the inner eye” to the outside world, and he “walked from one window to another” (120). This moment marks a shift towards empiricism, and brings out the theme that empirical condition involves a shifting perspective. Although, as I have shown, he continues to tend very strongly towards idealism during his courtship and after he marries Grace, the marriage plot sets him on a path towards empiricism. Soon after he learns of her existence, he watches her through the window, walking to his house and passing through the “garden-door” (123). Hardy’s fallen garden is one in which the ideal is unavailable but, I will suggest, very missed. J.B. Bullen places the novel in the tradition of pastoral elegy, writing that *The Woodlanders* “resembles an act of mourning for some kind of loss…it is the loss of a simple, primitive mode of perception—for a change which has come over the face of nature” (175-85). I find the same elegiac tone in the tone, but see its object slightly differently. To me, Hardy elegizes not the primitive mode of perception he assigns Winterbourne and Marty in contrast to an introspective, subjective modern view of the world, but a more historically available ability—the ability to aesthetically frame an orderly nature.

Later, after Grace finds Winterborne gravely ill, she asks where to find “a medical man, competent and near.” Previously, Fitzpiers was portrayed as incompetent professionally, poorly suited to his medical work. But the next paragraph declares, “There was one such man and only one, within accessible distance.” The narrator continues,

One speciality of Fitzpiers was respected by Grace as much as ever: his professional skill. In this she was right. Had his persistence equaled his insight instead of being the spasmodic and fitful thing it was, fame and fortune need never had remained a wish with him. His freedom from conventional errors and crusted prejudices had indeed been such as to retard rather than accelerate his advance in Hintock and its neighborhood, where people could not believe that Nature effected cures, and that the doctor’s business was only to smooth the way” (292).
Suddenly, the novel provides a new assessment of his aptitudes. Somehow, between his departure from England and his return, he has become a highly skilled doctor, and his ability seems to be based on a newly empirical nature. When Grace takes him to Winterbourne’s sickbed, Fitzpiers’s “inspection was concluded in a mere glance.” He provides a precise synopsis of Winterborne’s condition and its progress up to that moment. He then draws an “inference” about Grace and Winterborne, provides Grace with a medicine to safeguard her, and departs (298). At the beginning of the next chapter, the drops cure Grace’s fever, and she remarks, “How clever he is!...Why could he not have had more principle so as to turn his great talents to good account! Perhaps he has saved my useless life” (305). In a few pages, Fitzpiers has become an empiricist who gives evidence of his gifts to affect the material world.

In my reading, Hardy means us to understand the world of *The Woodlanders* as incoherent, and the a novel itself as lacking form, with his treatment of Fitzpiers drawing an intentional fissure. Hardy’s novels tend to describe obstacles to love and marriage, yet Fitzpiers and Grace remain married and seem to suit each other. They also suited each other early in the novel. Representing their minds in the geometrical terms that are so significant in the novel, the narrator says that Winterbourne immediately notices a “curious parallelism between Mr. Fitzpiers’s manner and Grace’s” (114). After Winterborne’s death, Grace approaches Fitzpiers with a bad conscience about her possible role. His efficacy is again emphasized, by now to the point of farce: “The relief of consulting a skilled mind, the one professional man who had seen Giles at that time, would be immense” (311). Fitzpiers provides the precise yet uncertain empirical response that she is unlikely to have contributed, but the question is unanswerable. He then declares that he loves her in a new way, not related to her “material conditions,” but to her character “as revealed by closer observation” (315). Fitzpiers is led through observation to
accurate, if qualified, inference. Yet Hardy’s focus at the end of the novel is not the question of knowledge. He has already gone over this treacherous territory. Rather, the reader is in the realm of taste. This, Hardy suggests, is what is left to guide us.

Grace and Fitzpiers are moderns, the doctor finally the representative of scientific empiricism, and the pair a portrait of where the empirical condition places its occupants. As Summers finds, the modern notion of taste descends from the Renaissance belief that judgment originates in the senses, and thus in the particular intellect (319). Taste is in a sense an alternative to knowledge, as represented by a fixed perspective. It is a concession to the sense of relativity produced by an empirical world-view that sees every mind as essentially self-contained. Grace marries Fitzpiers for the possibility he offers of a “refined and cultivated inner life, of subtle psychological intercourse” (156). The suggestion at the end is that she has this. “The tastes she had acquired from Fitzpiers had been imbibed so subtly that she hardly knew she possessed them till confronted by this contrast” of a tavern she visits with Winterborne. “How could she explain in the street of a market-town that it was her superficial and transitory taste which had been offended?” (264-65). Yet her taste is her most stable aspect. Fitzpiers describes his love a second time through a quotation, and Grace recognizes it as a line from Measure for Measure. There is then yet another “crash of a felled tree in the depths of the nearest wood” (315). Their reconciliation is stalled, but seems to in fact be assured from the moment Grace recognizes Shakespeare’s line. Fitzpiers tells her he will come “look at your window” every two weeks, placing her firmly in his line of focus. Once they decide to resume life as husband and wife, they agree to meet at the hotel she favors, though she worries, “I haven’t a brush or a comb or anything!” He may not value her for her material exterior, but she must be well groomed, and they will travel in style. The end of the novel establishes Marty as Winterborne’s “true
complement,” sharing a capacity for “intelligent intercourse with Nature,” but they are obvious exceptions in the world of *The Woodlanders* (306). While the novel ends with Marty at Winterborne’s grave, Grace is the center of interest, and the novel is primarily a comedy, but a bitter one. The ending of the novel suggests that judgment established through fashion is unappealing but perhaps inevitable.
While the autobiography was published under the name of Hardy’s wife, Michael Millgate has shown it to be his own work. This passage comes from 1882. J. Hillis Miller takes the passage as Hardy’s definitive statement of an art that is at once “objective and subjective” in *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 258. As Peter Garrett notes, empiricism is a “subject-centered philosophical position,” and empiricist debate was reinvigorated in the nineteenth century by an “understanding of the subject at the center of it” as unfixed and mutable. *Victorian Empiricism,* 32. These ideas are reflected in criticism on Hardy. J.B. Bullen writes that Hardy raises questions about the relation of eye and mind, related to the subjective nature of experience. His narrators draw attention to the fact that the eye is “fallible,” “distorts what it sees,” and “tends to observe parts rather than wholes” *The Expressive Eye: Fiction and Perception in the Work of Thomas Hardy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 11-12. He connects the theme to the empiricist tradition, pointing out that Hardy’s notes show the “ultimate sources” of his ideas on sight are Locke, Berkeley, and Hume (66-79). Sheila Berger argues that “as an empiricist, he stressed the senses—primarily the visual sense—as the basis for knowledge,” in spite of his skepticism, but she conflates “knowledge” and individual “meaning” as the fruit of “subjective perception” *Thomas Hardy and Visual Structures: Framing, Disruption, Process* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 11. Peter Garratt remarks that the tendency of Victorian empiricists to reflect on “the problematic construction of reality” affects the texture of their narratives, “destabilizing narrative forms.” Texts dramatize the principles of limitation and provisionality. *Victorian Empiricism,* 21.

Bullen finds a similar theme in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), with Jude shifting between the ideal and real and unable to reconcile them. *Expressive Eye,* 241. This chapter suggests Hardy was ruminating on the problem a decade earlier.


Bullen writes that Hardy’s pictorialism is in the service of symbolism. It is an “anti-naturalistic device. For Hardy, the literal transcription of the physical world was uninteresting.” *Expressive Eye,* 6. Michael Irwin considers Hardy’s ability to create an illusion of the physical world through description to be central to his fiction, but adds that the landscape constitutes a “conceptual background” that should be read metaphorically. *Reading Hardy’s Landscapes* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), ix; 14.

Penelope Vigar finds that Hardy “employs techniques comparable to those of the painter—chiaroscuro, perspective, effects of distancing and balance” in *The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality* (London: Athlone Press, 1974), 15. Bullen compares Eliot and Hardy, writing that she is a “conceptualist” and he is a “technist,” “more engaged with the technical means of creating images. He employs terms of painting and art criticism such as “line,” “perspective,” “foreground,” and many color words. *Expressive Eye,* 7. Alastair Smart and Joan Grundy also make note of the technical language of painting in his novels. See “Pictorial Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy.” *The Review of English Studies* 12, no. 47 (Aug. 1961): 271; and *Hardy and the Sister Arts* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979), 19.

Grundy notes that ‘Form’ is among Hardy’s Muses in the poem “Rome: The Vatican: Sala delle Muse.” Ibid., 177. Berger writes of Hardy’s work, “We are shown what has been lost; the frames of monistic and universal truths about life and about narratives.” In *The Woodlanders* “Older
forms, frames, exist in mind and memory but inevitably they collide with new structures.”

Thomas Hardy, 108-11.

9 See A.M. Quinton’s article “Absolute Idealism” in Rationalism, Empiricism, and Idealism, ed. Kenny, 124-50; and Rick Rylance, Victorian Psychology.

10 Ibid., 241-42.

11 The Scottish philosopher William Hamilton introduced Kant to Britain as early as 1836. Garratt, Victorian Empiricism, 45-46. To explain why Hegel took so long to have an impact, Quinton notes that his works became available much later than Kant’s.

12 Garratt, tracing various definitions of empiricism, notes that it is with regard to science that the term means “objectivity,” denoting the “rigorous pursuit of exactitude, descriptive purity, or a neutral and final description of reality-as-given.” Victorian Empiricism, 23.

13 Rylance, Victorian Psychology, 312.

14 See 2-7.


16 Andrew Radford describes Fitzpiers’s act as a misunderstanding of the “intricate mechanisms and agencies of the irrational and the inspirational.” See “Dethroning the High Priest of Nature in The Woodlanders,” Companion to Thomas Hardy, 317.

17 Levine reads Fitzpiers as a parody of the bohemian intellectual, and Levine claims that Fitzpiers’s ideas about subjectivity are not far from Hardy’s own, made ridiculous in their formulation and context. See The Woodlanders and the Darwinian Grotesque in Thomas Hardy Reappraised: Essays in Honor of Michael Millgate (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 189-90. Levine connects Hardy’s commitment to subjectivity to his idealism rather than his empiricism (179). Because Fitzpiers’s enterprise is so close to Lydgate’s, “it is hard not to think of this as something of a parody of George Eliot, herself; but in any case, it is a parody of ideas that Hardy takes with the greatest of seriousness and that are central to the novel.” He affirms that the novel “is thick with the ironies of the incompatibility between consciousness and matter…. The contrast between the material and the ideal is strikingly present even in the smallest of details.” “The Woodlanders,” 191.

18 In The Well-Beloved, serialized in 1892 before it was published as a book in 1897, the narrator calls the Well-Beloved of the Platonic idealist Jocelyn Pierston, an intangible ideal that migrates from woman to woman, “a subjective phenomenon” (11).

19 Scholars have especially connected Hardy’s novels to the “low” school of Dutch painting and genre painting generally. See Grundy, Hardy, 28-40. Ruth Yeazell writes that Hardy’s rustic images owe much to Eliot’s precedent of taking Dutch painting as a model. Art of the Everyday, xviii. While Eliot’s representations of rural subjects concentrate on the figure, Hardy’s “rural painting of the Dutch school,” Under the Greenwood Tree, “occupies a more ambiguous place between genre and landscape” (138).

20 Alastair Smart’s “Pictorial Imagery in the Novels of Thomas Hardy” is a foundational study in this regard. He quotes a journal entry by Hardy that states, “The impressionist school is strong. It is even more suggestive in literature than in that of art…. Their principle is, as I understand it, that what you carry away from a scene is the true feature to grasp.” Vigar expands on this connection, calling The Woodlanders the most static and pictorial of Hardy’s novels and writing that the background has a special importance because of its “illusive, kaleidoscopic quality.” Novels, 25-26. Bullen also links the significance of Impressionist technique to the novel’s presentation of a “subjective response to visual stimuli.” Expressive Eye, 182. Yeazell writes that
while Hardy never abandons the Dutch model, his taste would move towards Turner and the impressionists. She especially notes the influence of contemporary painting on *The Woodlanders*, which shows a “radical impatience with daily appearances.” Art of the Everyday, 153-59. I find a parallel to Hardy’s woodlands in Paul Cézanne’s fractured forest scenes.


22 Bullen notes his multiple angles or “perspectives,” and his tendency to stress various modes of perception and interpretations of optical images. *Expressive Eye*, 62; 70. He sees *The Woodlanders* as a departure, in which Hardy’s interest shifts from physical attributes, presented as psychology externalized, to mental attitudes. “Gone is the stable, substantial world of appearances, which provided a “stable frame of reference for the characters within it; instead change and flux prevail in the woodlands” (170-71). Berger echoes this idea, and emphasizes the non-authoritative, multi-perspective, sometimes contradictory points of view in Hardy’s fiction. *Thomas Hardy*, 17, 25, 105.

23 Hillis Miller, however, sees his architectural training as highly relevant to the structuring of the novels, writing that when “seen from a distance, as a spatialized form,” they “reveal themselves to be constructed like a well-designed building. They are organized around symmetrical recurrences of theme and event, each prominent motif balancing another one in another part of the book.” Miller credits Proust with recognizing these “parallelisms.” *Thomas Hardy*, 206-07. Grundy asserts that “the architectural features of Hardy’s art derive more from his experience of actual buildings than from his experience at the drawing board.” *Hardy*, 178-79. Bullen contrasts the technical architectural drawing Hardy had to perform with a genuine, lifelong interest in drawing and painting. *Expressive Eye*, 15-16. He argues that while Hardy was uninterested in “technical detail,” architecture has a symbolic role in *A Laodicean*, where *ekphrasis* is used to express an apparent conflict between the traditional and the modern, which are in fact both part of the eclectic romantic spirit (118-136). Timothy Hands traces the many points at which architecture informs the content of Hardy’s works, and suggests ways in which Victorian writings on Gothic architecture inform his literary style. “Hardy’s Architecture: A General Perspective and a Personal View” in *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Phillip Mallett (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

24 The ancient Greeks and Romans used perspective, and it reappeared in Florence in 1425 when Brunelleschi used a mirror to demonstrate he had managed to determine the complex geometry needed to render space. He passed the skill on to painters. Ten years later, Alberti approached perspective in theoretical terms in *De Pittura*. The concept of perspective was applied to landscape spaces, as Vasari attested in the sixteenth century, writing that “we apply it not only to the lines of buildings...we also represent landscapes.” Puttfarken, *Discovery*, 118. According to Edgerton, the purpose of perspective was to square “what was seen empirically with the traditional medieval belief that God spreads his His grace through the universe according to the laws of geometric optics.” *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 162.

25 Ibid., 30-41.

26 The 1768 instrument that established that Royal Academy in England provides for a Professor of Perspective and Geometry to instruct students on “propositions of Geometry, and principles of Lineal and Aerial Perspective.” Instruction in perspective formed part of the educational program Ruskin established at Oxford a century later.
Elizabeth Helsinger notes that *The Stones of Venice* also “censures Renaissance pride in perspective, denying the rationalization of space” can provide accuracy to perception. *Ruskin and the Art*, 196.

Perspective is continually associated with images of pure clarity. In the nineteenth century, the manuals of Francis Nicholson, William Orme, and Newton Fielding, for example, draw a correspondence between a picture that employs linear perspective and an accurate tracing of a landscape through a windowpane. Yet perspective also sharpened awareness of the limits of ordinary vision. The anonymous writer of a 1690 British manual on the “geometry of landscapes” writes that perspective renders “distinct and compleat” what would appear “obscure and confused” in a “real view.”

See Berger, *Thomas Hardy*, 13-14, and her chapter “Framed Images.” She writes that “framing is a fictional enactment of Hardy’s empiricism and his aesthetics, the exchange between external stimuli and creating perception, the image and the eye” (56). The “ultimate frame is subjective perception” itself. She finds that in Hardy’s writing, frames exist to be disrupted (90-92).

The art historian Svetlana Alpers notes that with regard to the picture as Alberti conceived it, “the viewer, rather than the world seen, has priority,” which relates to Hardy’s preoccupation with subjectivity. See “Art history and its exclusions: the example of Dutch art,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Harper & Row, 1982), 185-87.

Berger points out that the characters often walk in circles. *Thomas Hardy*, 56.


Bullen writes that in the mind of the narrator, trees are “not just trees: they are transformed into quasi-human presences.” *Expressive Eye*, 172.

Social status forms one vertical axis in the novel, and is connected, sometimes ironically to physical positions. Repeated reference is made to Grace’s social “level,” to her rise and potential fall back to the common “plane” of the town (79, 83, 85). Berger points out that Hardy often arranges characters along vertical lines in space, and their constant movement signifies the inescapability of change. *Thomas Hardy*, 146-47.

Grundy identifies the “decay” in the forest of *The Woodlanders* as a new element in Hardy’s treatment of landscape. *Hardy*, 57. Irwin also writes that Hardy “savors” decay. He writes that nature is shown to be “self-destructive, endlessly wearing itself out,” referring in particular to this scene. *Reading*, 94-99.

Hume contrasts reason and taste, the latter being the subjective realm. See Summers, *Judgment of Sense*, 323.

Levine also reads the ending as a comedy, calling it a “farcical anticlimax” and “bathos.” He connects it to Darwin, referring to Dwight Culler’s argument that the “essential form of Darwin’s argument is comic” in its rhetorical inversions of the traditional arguments of natural theology. “The Woodlanders,” 179, 185. Levine sees the “double and (bitterly) ironic vision” at the end of *The Woodlanders* as Darwinian in that it breaks down categories, juxtaposing the comic with pastoral elegy (185-86).
**The Golden Bough: The Grotesque Against the Picturesque**

J.G. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) is often referenced but rarely read. The text is generically unfamiliar to our time, based as it is on an outdated methodology, the comparative method, which takes the present world to contain all the gradations of human progress.¹ The text is above all a compilation of accounts of ritual presented in great detail, its examples drawn from histories of the distant past and from accounts of ‘primitive’ people living in Frazer’s time, with so-called primitive culture then the province of anthropology.² Yet its main predecessor in the field is less difficult to situate. Edward Tylor begins *Primitive Culture* (1871) with a definition of culture as comprehending “knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society,” and then clearly presents the “great principles” of scholars of society: human nature has a “uniformity” that ensures similar responses to similar influences, but the speed with which cultures move through “stages of development or evolution” depends on their distinct histories. These “definite laws” allow him to claim that the study of human life may proceed with as much certainty as physical science (1-4). *The Golden Bough* offers the reader no such scientific signposts. Instead, Frazer begins, “Who does not know Turner’s picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi” (1:1).³ That is, Frazer begins with an *ekphrastic* image of a classical landscape. While Hardy dismantled the conventions that ordered the ideal landscape, it is intact in *The Golden Bough*.

The opening, where an “enchanted landscape” precedes the “mystery of the Nemian grove,” is the first sequence in a pattern of an “idyllic picture” followed by a nightmare.⁴ This chapter will suggest that *The Golden Bough* contains two stances towards antiquity, each
associated with a pictorial mode that has classical origins. The mode of the grotesque governs Frazer’s presentation of figures performing acts of ritual, and Frazer’s landscapes participate in the pictorial mode of the picturesque. By the fin de siècle, the grotesque was associated with the ‘low’ forms of popular comedy and caricature, while the picturesque had become a ‘high’ but nearly obsolete mode of landscape art and description. Yet certain the grotesque had been an aspect of the classical, though Victorians articulated a “battle between the Grotesque and the Classical.” In my reading, for Frazer, trained as a classicist, each aesthetic mode retains the dignified position it held in the Renaissance, whether he combines them wittingly or unwittingly. A revision of a classical mode defined by the mixing of heterogeneous elements, the grotesque elevates scenes of savagery by conferring a gravity on them. The implication is, then, that the classical serves as a guide for the modern, even as Frazer censures the ancients. Each mode is linked with a different understanding of the myth of the golden bough. Frazer’s title has a double meaning, alluding to a passage in the Aeneid and referring to the murderous ritual of succession that, in his view, lay below the classical myth.

It is well known that his account of antiquity would alter the image of classical culture. Frazer’s biographer Robert Ackerman calls The Golden Bough a large step in the “process, which began at the end of the seventeenth century and gathered force throughout the Enlightenment, to dethrone the cultures of classical antiquity from the privileged position they had enjoyed since the Renaissance.” Frazer’s golden bough represents access to an ancient world of irrational violence, produced by a mindset terrifying both in its difference and its similarity to the modern one. Frazer suggests he is aware of his possible effect on the prestige of classical antiquity when he writes that there is “little danger of undervaluing” its contributions to progress (3.421). Later, he refers to “people of fastidious taste” who may “object that the Greeks
could never have conceived Demeter and Persephone to be embodied in the form of pigs.” He quotes Pausanias on a picture in the “cave of Phigalia in Arcadia,” where the “Black Demeter was portrayed with the head and mane of a horse on the body of a woman” (7.21). He thus in miniature inscribes an archetypal grotesque image, combining man and animal, within a cave in the part of Greece most associated with scenic purity since Virgil. I will propose in this chapter that his account of the primitive mind updates the grotesque mode for his time.

Frazer replaces the golden bough of antiquity with the “golden key” of modern science. He presents himself as a scientist and proponent of science, writing,

The abundance, the solidity, and the splendour of the results achieved by science are well fitted to inspire us with a cheerful confidence in the soundness of its method. Here at last, after groping about in the dark for countless ages, man has hit upon a clue to the labyrinth, a golden key that opens many locks in the treasury of nature. It is probably not too much to say that the hope of progress—moral and intellectual as well as material—in the future is bound up with the fortunes of science (11:306-07).

Frazer identified his subfield as “mental anthropology,” a science that would trace the evolution of the mind. With his theories discredited, Frazer has tended to become, to Victorianists and historians, a figure in the history of science. For certain literary scholars, such as Angus Fletcher, *The Golden Bough* retains the value it held for such moderns as Sigmund Freud, T.S. Eliot, and W.B. Yeats. These readers grant Frazer insight into how the mind works with symbols, even though his conclusions about the ancients are false. Others have admired *The Golden Bough* for so-called “literary” or “artistic” or “imaginative” qualities, which are seen as the means by which it attracted subsequent more eminent writers to its analysis of magical thought. Such readings perpetuate the notion that the style is best treated in isolation from the erroneous findings. I find that the aesthetic modes of *The Golden Bough* give access to a late-Victorian ambivalence towards the question, never directly addressed by Frazer, of what the past has to offer the present. In one sense, *The Golden Bough* offers assurance that the present is better off. Yet both
primitive and modern culture appear pale in comparison to an image of antiquity that was once held. The ancient past had offered early modern and modern Britain more than science could in its images of a golden age.

To Ackerman, Frazer’s idealized descriptions of the landscape are decorative. He calls them self-contained “set pieces” and “special effects” with that implication. In characterizing these descriptions as ornamental, Ackerman follows Frazer’s lead. Frazer gives a practical rationale for these passages: they are an attempt to make his text more palatable, more appealing to a broader audience. “By discarding the austere form, without, I hope, sacrificing the solid substance of a scientific treatise,” he states in the preface to the third edition, “I thought to cast my material into a more artistic mould so as to attract readers, who might have been repelled by a more strictly logical and systematic arrangement of the facts. He conceives of the text as a painting, a “gloomy canvas,” referring in particular to his decision to place “the mysterious priest of Nemi, so to say, in the forefront of the picture...because the picturesque natural surroundings of the priest of Nemi among the wooded hills of Italy, the very mystery which enshrouds him, and not least the haunting magic of Virgil’s verse, all combine to shed a glamour on the tragic figure” (1:vii). What does “glamour” mean in the context? Frazer later suggests that the classical age throws a cloak of “glamour” over barbaric antiquity. The glamour seems to be the lure of the classical age itself.

When Frazer calls the Italian landscape “picturesque,” he takes up a term that is sometimes used to denote a particular kind of landscape favored by late eighteenth century aesthetic theorists, and which in its most basic sense it refers to a landscape worthy of being pictured. The British picturesque tradition reaches back towards seventeenth-century classical landscape painting and the Renaissance and classical pastoral poetry that informed it. Thus
Frazer, like George Eliot, looks to the classical side of Turner that Ruskin could not tolerate in his opening passage. Ruskin writes with reference to Turner’s painting of The Golden Bough that “though Turner had now broken through accepted rules of art, he had not broken through accepted laws of idealism.” When Ruskin wrote, the taste for ideal landscape had been pervasive in England for more than a century. By Frazer’s time, this had changed. The unspoiled landscapes of The Golden Bough represent a ruin in toto, standing for the vision of the classical world that the text goes on to demolish. Placed against scenes of violent, irrational ritual, Frazer’s landscapes gesture to what antiquity had been to modernity, from the beginnings of humanism until the nineteenth century. Landscapes of the seventeenth century conjure a golden age, and Frazer conveys the loss of Europe’s idealization of the ancient world by framing grotesque rituals with such idealized landscapes, though the precise significance of the contrast is not stable. At moments when Frazer expresses faith in scientific modernity, he sounds a death knell for the belief in a golden age. When he loses this faith, his contrasting modes read as an elegy for the aspiration to revive it.

The contrast between an idealized classical world and a barbarous ancient world reflects Frazer’s ambivalence about the standing of the classics. The Golden Bough thus asks to be situated within the history of the disciplines as they developed in the late nineteenth century. The obscure status of the text reflects its disciplinary entanglements. Anthropology grew out of the antiquarian tradition that had existed in England since the sixteenth century. The science Frazer practiced incorporated philology, the source of the comparative method, and what may be characterized as a humanist aesthetics that finds models in the classical world. The very competition that Frazer establishes between antiquity and modernity may been seen as a legacy of humanism. The Golden Bough continues an an eighteenth-century debate, or cluster of
debates, about the status of various intellectual pursuits. The question of whether modernity was superior to antiquity took its modern form in seventeenth-century France, and was a preoccupation of eighteenth-century England, as is well known. As the guiding concept of Modern Painters attests, the question remained vital in the nineteenth century, which kept it alive and shaped it as the modern academic disciplines emerged. Matthew Arnold famously defended the value of antiquity in Culture and Anarchy (1869), and soon after, Walter Pater sought to redefine modernity in The Renaissance. Frazer’s desire for an affiliation with “science” perhaps shows a desire to share in the growing prestige of the social sciences in the late nineteenth century. Yet in Frazer’s time, the term “science” could refer to any rigorous, systematic pursuit, and could be applied to any discipline.24 Still, Frazer’s use of the term seems to denote more than an appeal to legitimacy on the grounds of method. His contrast between modern science and ancient magic places The Golden Bough within a realm of discourse that was already more than two centuries old, the battle between the ancients and the moderns, and within this context Frazer appears as a late humanist rather than an early scientist.25

The Dissonance in the Opening of The Golden Bough

The text begins with the ritual of the golden bough, though, as scholars have noted, it has a “very minor role” in the larger work.26 Frazer links the golden bough to a murderous ritual of succession, with the theory that Greek priests of a “barbarous age” had to guard a sacred tree. If a runaway slave was able to break off a branch—the golden bough in myth—he could challenge the priest to mortal combat for his role. In Frazer’s interpretation, the priest of Nemi was considered the incarnation of plant life, which thrives or fails as he does. He must be killed in his prime and replaced so his soul will be transferred to a successor and nature will be renewed (4:205). The golden bough was a totem believed to contain the priest’s soul. In presenting
examples of “killing the god” among the “semi-barbarous Latins” of the Arician grove and other inhabitants of Italy, Frazer undermines the British regard for ancient Rome as the epitome of classical refinement (9:273-74).27

Yet, in my reading, Frazer looks back to what the golden bough had been with ambivalence. The opening passage refers to a painting Turner exhibited in 1834, its title taken from Christopher Pitts’s translation of the Aeneid.28 In Book VI, Aeneas passes into the sacred grove of Diana and meets the Sibyl. She tells him, in Pitts’s translation: “A mighty tree, that bears a golden bough,/Grows in a vale surrounded with a grove,/And sacred to the queen of
Stygian Jove./Her neather world no mortals can behold,/Till from the bole they strip the blooming gold” (*Aeneid*, VI.133-39). For Virgil, the magical key to the underworld represents heroic access to knowledge. After Aeneas plucks the golden bough, he passes into an underworld with realms of torment and happy peace and liminal stasis. He in Elysium meets his father, who assures him that the Trojans will reach Italy to found a new kingdom. He foretells the history of Rome, culminating with the rise of Caesar Augustus, who will “bring back the Age of Gold.” Virgil thus praised the age in which he lived. For Turner, influenced by the landscapes of the seventeenth century, the story, with the “archetypal pastoral elements” of grove and pool, represents access to an idealized classical world.29 Perhaps the early nineteenth century could not believe with the Renaissance that classical antiquity could be recreated on earth, but Turner’s age could still believe at least that it could be revived in art.30

Immediately after describing Turner’s mythological scene, Frazer offers a brief description of the contemporary setting that is equally idealized. “No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it,” he writes, going on to mention the “characteristic” villages and palazzo on its banks. There is the insistence on familiarity of Turner’s scene, with Frazer’s assumption that everyone knows it, and on the indelible quality of the natural scene, though Frazer himself had not seen it.31 The “sylvan landscape” that begins the next paragraph may refer to either scene or both scenes (1:1). There is a sense in which the two are interchangeable, both as familiar as the ideal landscape in the collective memory of Britain. Yet even by mid-century, classicism and the classical landscape in particular were losing favor in Britain. Frazer’s landscape becomes a way of contemplating the idealism of the Renaissance as it waned.
Classical landscape paintings typically set heroic legendary or historic events within the idealized scenery, and a landscape was rendered paradise by the presence of divinities. But in *The Golden Bough*, as Frazer himself emphasizes, the “natural beauty of the spot and the dark crimes” that took place at Nemi are inextricable; the violent ritual is an effort to promote natural regrowth. The beautiful landscape is impetus for the “strange and recurring tragedy” that takes place before it, with a “grim” figure hunting another strange figure (1.1; 1.8). Frazer writes that the sight of the priest “might well seem to darken the fair landscape, as when a cloud suddenly blots the sun on a bright day.” He first offers the elements of an ideal landscape, “the dreamy blue of the Italian skies, the dappled shade of summer woods, and the sparkle of the waves in the sun.” He then replaces the sunlit landscape with the wilder, gloomier type associated with Salvator Rosa, also a part of the picturesque tradition, with the implication that this setting is more consonant. “We picture to ourselves the scene,” Frazer encourages, a “somber picture,” with “the background of the forest shewing black and jagged against a lowering and stormy sky.” He includes a pale moon and matted bough (1:9). He then portrays the ritual as an interruption of, or rather irruption into, an Italianate landscape that in fact resembles an English landscape. Frazer states, “No one will probably deny that such a custom savours of a barbarous age and, surviving into imperial times, stands in striking isolation from the polished Italian society of the day, like a primeval rock rising from a smooth-shaven lawn” (1:10). Frazer thus reverses the scheme of Wolfgang Kayser, who is the pioneer of scholarship on the grotesque but who touches little on English literature scheme. Kayser describes the grotesque as the “dark and sinister background of a brighter and rationally organized world.” Frazer places the grotesque in the foreground.
**The Ancient Mind and the Grotesque**

A brief account of the nineteenth-century history of the term “grotesque” will provide context for Frazer’s grotesque. In the nineteenth century, Jean Paul believed the English had a special gift for the grotesque in literature, while early Victorians often associate it with German culture. Scott associated it with the Romantic and German in his 1827 essay on E.T.A. Hoffman. He writes that in this genre, “all species of combination are attempted and executed without scruple,” including mixed creatures such as centaurs, griffins, sphinxes, and chimeras.

*The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) and *Modern Painters III* both distinguish a “noble” Gothic grotesque from an “ignoble” grotesque associated with Roman and late Renaissance art. Ruskin claims that a laudable griffin or centaur is produced when the artist renders a composite form perceived whole in the imagination.

Yet a figure nearly contemporary with Frazer suggests the fin de siècle was moving away from a definition based in the hybrid form. The Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana proposes in *The Sense of Beauty* (1896) that mixed forms are not timelessly grotesque. We easily assimilate or “accept” such forms, and that once we stop focusing on the “divergence from the natural” or the “incongruity with the conventional type,” the form ceases to be grotesque. That is, grotesque forms themselves may become conventional, and cease to be disturbing. Santayana declares that “what was impossible and ridiculous at first takes its place among recognized ideals. The centaur and satyr are no longer grotesque; the type is accepted.”

In *The Golden Bough*, Virgil’s underworld, “the world immersed in the misty depths of earth,” becomes the buried ancient world (VI.306). With Frazer’s theories based in large part on reports of archeologists working in the Mediterranean, the unearthed image remains linked to the grotesque in his text. The grotesque of *The Golden Bough* is located not in incongruous
forms, but irrational notions of cause and effect, for Hume the “most extensive” associative operation (1.1.4). Like other Victorians, such as Herbert Spencer, Frazer marries the concept of evolution to associationism. While Ruskin and Eliot reworked Hume’s associationism in the nineteenth century, Frazer strictly upheld Hume’s laws of association as the basis of all thought and used them to explain the psychology behind ritual. Frazer’s conviction that the laws of the mind are static contributes to his uncertainty about modern progress. The “fundamental conception” of sympathetic magic is “identical with that of modern science.” Both assume that the succession of natural events is regular and certain, and that those who discover knowledge of causes can control effects (1:220-21). Frazer writes that “our resemblances to the savage are still far more numerous than our differences from him.” Our fundamental ideas were developed in antiquity, and the ancients’ “errors were simply hypotheses” that were justifiable and later proven inadequate (3:422). “Magical ceremonies are nothing but experiments which have failed” (4:269). As Robert Fraser writes, Frazer found a “kernel of empiricism” in magic. Christopher Herbert, conversely, writes that the “magical character of comparatist study is plainly enough insinuated in Frazer’s own text,” where the law of similarity clearly operates. Put another way, the form of The Golden Bough itself is grotesque, with disparate rituals from distant periods yanked together in illogical units.

To Frazer, ancient and modern man apply the principles of association differently: “Legitimately applied, they yield science; illegitimately applied, they yield magic” (1:222). He contrasts his systematic scholarship with “art” of the primitive cultures he studies. Because the magician “never analyses the mental processes on which his practice is based, never reflects on the abstract principles involved in his actions,” magic to him is always “an art, never a science; the very idea of science is lacking in his undeveloped mind.” Although “art” here refers to
practices unguided by theory, Frazer’s distinction echoes evokes the centuries-old idea that the faculty of reason governs science while the distinct faculty of imagination guides less developed pursuits. It is up to the modern “philosophic student” to trace the “train of thought” underlying ritual to “disengage the abstract principles from their concrete applications; in short, to discern the spurious science behind the bastard art” (1:53). It is the false science of the ancient mind, its faulty inferences, that Frazer presents as grotesque. Philip Thomson’s claim that the grotesque “derives at least part of its effect from being presented with a realistic framework, in a realistic way,” affirms that the grotesque can fit within a work of scholarship.

Walter Scott had introduced a type of grotesque combination that is relevant to The Golden Bough: “Sudden transformations are introduced of the most extraordinary kind, and wrought by the most inadequate means.” To Frazer, the ancients attempted such transformations through magic.

Frazer describes how the primitive mind broke down the boundaries between humans, other living things, and inanimate objects in its understanding of cause and effect. His notion of “sympathetic magic,” with its two principles of “imitative” and “contagious” magic, is derived from two of Hume’s principles of association, resemblance and contiguity. Magic rests on the belief that “things can physically affect each other through a space which appears to be empty” (1:54). Magical practices come down to what Frazer calls “action at a distance through a secret sympathy” or “mistaken notions of cause and effect.” The magician believes that things that resemble each other are the same, and he can through “imitative” or “mimetic” or “homeopathic” magic produce an event by imitating it. An example of mimetic magic is the effort to harm a person by making and destroying an image of him, such as a likeness drawn on the ground, an effigy, or a carving on a tree (1:51-55). It is possible to inflict harm by trampling on, striking, or stabbing a shadow, regarded as a man’s soul (3:77-78). Primitive man believed that by a secret
sympathy “the little drama which he acted...would be taken up and repeated by mightier actors on a vaster stage” (4:266). “Contagious” magic is based on the assumption that things that have once been in contact are always in contact (1:52-53). An object a man has touched may be used to harm him. The savage believes he acquires physical, moral, or intellectual characteristics of the animal, man, or god he eats (8:138). Such practices link objects and events known by modern man to be disconnected.

Frazer’s commentators suggest that his image of antiquity as confused and base draws on the grotesque tradition by echoing the language that has been used to describe the literary genre, though they do not name it. Scholars of the grotesque have found a through line in the of violation of natural order. Wolfgang Kayser describes the mode as the “expression of estrangement and alienation which grips mankind when belief in a perfect and protective natural order is weakened or destroyed.” It is an unfamiliar world where the “realm of inanimate is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings.” Arthur Clayborough writes that the term is generally used to describe “that which is not congruous with ordinary experience.” It rejects the natural order and refers not to what is strange but to what is “abidingly strange.” Clayborough, Jennings, and Thomson point to the particular combination of the “ridiculous and repulsive” or “ludicrous and fearsome” or “ludicrous and terrible,” a formulation that corresponds to Frazer’s mixed attitude of dread and derision.

Ludwig Wittgenstein notes that Frazer tells the story of the King of the Wood at Nemi “in a tone which shows that he wants us to feel that something strange and dreadful is happening.” Frazer’s protégé Bronislaw Malinowski writes that Frazer was “passionately devoted to all that was strange, usual and exotic in humanity.” Ackerman writes that Frazer rhetorically “heightens the strangeness and otherworldliness of what took place.” Herbert find that Frazer’s
interpretation of ancient culture “has as its chief characteristic its astonishing power of metamorphosis.” Completely unbound from the physical world, it “constructs its own autonomous world in the medium of fantastically exfoliating symbolic imagery, where tree-spirits, shape-shifting goddesses, sacred plants and animals, and priestly kings and queens freely transform themselves into one another.” Characterizing these descriptions as “grotesque” allows Frazer’s deep, ongoing engagement with the classical tradition to appear. Placed against one another, the two classical aesthetic modes that control the text display Frazer’s stance towards the ancient past, and one perspective on how the nineteenth century experienced the fading of the classical.

Looking Back to the Ideal

The contrast between grotesque foreground and pastoral landscape refuses the possibility of rest in the notion of either an inferior or superior antiquity. The text evokes the ideal through the landscape, while signaling that it is unavailable. For Frazer, as for Hardy, the ideal landscape belongs to the past. Frazer begins his engagement with the picturesque in his edition of Pausanias’s Description of Greece (1898), a “guide-book to travelers” (xxiv). This Greek text from the Roman period is the “only extended example of periegesis to survive into the Renaissance,” and had become a locus of attention for those interested in landscape style. Jaś Elsner notes that a major theorist of the picturesque, Uvedale Price, published an anthology of “picture-postcard views” from the Description. The first complete English translation was produced by an English Platonist, Thomas Taylor, and offers an “idyllic Greek landscape,” and the English artist Joseph Michael Gandy captures and reifies this version of the text in pictures after this translation. Frazer’s translation and commentary is “in certain respects” a “rationalizing correction” of Taylor’s, marking an effort to master not only antiquity but its interpretation.
Frazer also displays an idealizing tendency in the landscape descriptions of his edition, with its connections to the modern travelogue. As Frazer notes, Pausanias omits landscape, with mountains, plains, and seas appearing only for their religious or historical interest (xxv). John Vickery writes that Frazer’s style is marked by its “concreteness,” its quality of “presenting the external world in all of its sensuous immediacy.” Ackerman notes the diary Frazer kept as he followed Pausanias’s path in Greece displays a modern tendency to focus on landscape description, and finds that Frazer embellishes his landscapes in a way foreign to Pausanias. Fraser similarly writes that Frazer “embellished” a landscape he derived from Turner, Macaulay, and Roman poetry. Sabine MacCormack writes that Frazer is “captivated” by nature in his commentary.

In coming to write *The Golden Bough*, Frazer was in fact mistaken about the setting of Turner’s painting. Yet in choosing Lake Nemi as the setting of the first scene, he selects one of the sites “most celebrated in Rome’s history,” where the nymph Egeria was said to have mourned her husband Numa, a legendary king of ancient Rome. Lake Nemi had been painted and idealized by many painters, including Claude. Seventeenth-century classical landscape painting “crystallizes complex reactions to a world which is full of the remains of a great but vanished age,” and the landscapes of Claude, especially, were seen to capture the peaceful spirit of Virgil’s *Eclogues* (39-38 BC). His landscapes proved that “the artist can actualize our dream of presence in times past.” The landscape below is one of many examples. As the third chapter
notes, landscape painting in England was strongly influenced by the ideal landscape tradition.\textsuperscript{69} Richard Wilson, who said he “rivaled Claude,” turned to landscape after he moved to Italy in 1750, applying the conventions of ideal landscape to scenes of both Italy and England.\textsuperscript{70} Predictably, Ruskin believes that “English artists are usually entirely ruined by residence in Italy” (3:231). After describing Wilson as the “connecting link” between Italianate and English landscape, Ruskin asserts that he remained the model for English landscapists in the nineteenth century (3:189). In a 1878 note, he writes that he has given Oxford a landscape sketch by Wilson “to show the state of landscape art just before Turner broke into it with a new light.”\textsuperscript{71} Yet Turner was strongly influenced by Wilson\textsuperscript{72} and followed his path to Lake Nemi, the setting of Wilson’s “Lake Nemi and Genzano from the Terrace of the Capuchin Monastery” (1756-57) and “The Lake of Nemi, with Diana and Callisto” (1758).

The goddess Diana, a quintessential pastoral figure, figures in\textit{ The Golden Bough} because she was worshipped at Nemi. While chapter 3 has shown that she is associated ironically with a number of characters in late-century novels, when Frazer frames his text with an image of a landscape dedicated to Diana, “the ideal embodiment of the wild life of nature,” it is a cue that the landscapes to follow are ideal scenes (1:35).\textsuperscript{73} The opening scene described above is one of a
number of examples. Frazer frames a chapter on tree worship with the statement that in Greece “beautiful woods...still linger on the slopes of the high Arcadian mountains, still adorn with their verdure the deep gorge through which the Ladon hurries to join the sacred Alpheus (2:7-8). This passage conjures a pastoral landscape with a sublime gorge. Also in the volume entitled The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings, Frazer includes an ekphrastic description of atmospheric perspective, the characteristic means of depicting a distant view in classical landscape painting. As the landscape recedes from the viewer, the contrast decreases, along with detail. The colors become paler and closer to the background color, which is usually blue. In a passage based on Theophrastus’s description of the “woods of Latium,” he writes, “The purple Apennines, indeed, in their eternal calm on the one hand, and the shining Mediterranean in its eternal unrest on the other, no doubt looked then much as they look now, whether bathed in sunshine, or chequered by the fleeting shadows of clouds; but instead of the desolate brown Campagna...the eye must have ranged over woodlands that stretched away...till their varied hues of green or autumnal scarlet and gold melted insensibly into the blue of the distant mountains and sea” (2:188).

In the same volume, Frazer refers to the neoclassical, Zeuxian method of idealism to describe his method of collecting eye-witness accounts of the places he has not visited and then painting “composite pictures.” He similarly writes in the preface of the fifth volume, Adonis, Attis, Osiris, that because he has not been to the East, he has “sought to remedy the defect by comparing the descriptions of eye-witnesses, and painting from them what may be called composite pictures of some of the scenes on which I have been led to touch.” He hopes to thus convey a notion “of the scenery, the atmosphere, the gorgeous colouring of the East” (5:v). Soon after, he describes the site of a temple to Adonis as a sublime “wild, romantic, wooded gorge.” He writes, returning to the sublime mode, “The hamlet stands among groves of noble walnut-
trees on the brink of the Lyn. A little way off the river rushes from a cavern at the foot of a mighty amphitheatre of towering cliffs to plunge in a series of cascades into the awful depths of the glen. The deeper it descends, the ranker and denser grows the vegetation.” He continues,

Figure 13. Gaspard Dughet, *The Falls of Tivoli*, 1661

“There is something delicious, almost intoxicating, in the freshness of these tumbling waters, in the sweetness and purity of the mountain air, in the vivid green of the vegetation.” Ideal landscapes often include classical ruins, and Frazer describes “the temple, of which some massive hewn blocks and a fine column of Syenite granite still mark the site.” In this “magnificent prospect,” the viewer looks “across the foam and the roar of the waterfalls...up to the cavern and away to the top of the sublime precipices above.... Seaward the view is especially impressive when the sun floods the profound gorge with golden light, revealing all the fantastic buttresses and rounded towers of its mountain rampart, and falling softly on the varied green of the woods which clothe its depths” (5:28). The same picturesque styling appears in the reference works on which Frazer relied.⁷⁴
An image of Cappadocia is conceived as an ideal landscape familiar to a European.\textsuperscript{75} This scene makes the “traveller” feel that “he has passed out of Asia, and that the highroad to Europe lies straight before him.” Again, there is the movement from dramatic mountains in the background to, through broken, crossing lines, halcyon greenery in the foreground. The scenery is of the “grandest Alpine character. On all sides the mountains tower skyward, their peaks sheeted in a dazzling pall of snow, their lower slopes veiled in the almost inky blackness of dense pine-forests, torn here and there by impassable ravines, or broken into prodigious precipices of red and grey rock” (5:120).

Framing grotesque scenes, these landscapes cannot be read purely as an extension of the picturesque tradition. Combined with grotesque imagery, they point to a loss, not of a classical golden age, but of the Renaissance and its long afterlife, which could still have an idealized view of antiquity and hope to revive its culture. Frazer demonstrates his attraction to the Renaissance when he writes that the “anthropologist of to-day resembles in some sort the position of classical scholars at the revival of learning.” The so-called “prospect” or Claudian landscape becomes a metaphor: the difficulty and novelty of anthropology comes with the charm of the “intellectual prospect which suddenly opens up before us whenever the mist rises and unfolds the far horizon.”\textsuperscript{76} Frazer claims to hold an advantage over the humanist, devaluing classical learning: “To us moderns a still wider vista is vouchsafed, a greater panorama is unrolled by the study which aims at bringing home to us the faith and the practice, the hopes and the ideals, not of two highly gifted races only, but of all mankind, and thus at enabling us to follow the long march, the toilsome ascent, of humanity from savagery to civilization” (1:xxiv-xxvi). But in the second volume, the prospect has been obscured. Frazer writes that “it is unlikely that the student’s search-light will ever pierce the mists that hang over these remote ages. All that we can do is to
follow the lines of evidence backward as far as they can be traced, till, after growing fainter and fainter, they are lost altogether in the darkness” (2:323). In a later volume, Frazer writes that primitive culture is “still to a great extent a trackless wilderness, a tangled maze, in the gloomy recesses of which the forlorn wanderer may wander for ever without a light and without a clue” (8:47). The extreme skepticism he develops would with reason produce a longing for a time still convinced that “two gifted races” could provide ideals.

Scholars have heard an elegiac tone in The Golden Bough. John Vickery sees the essential insight of classical anthropology as an awareness that a sense of loss may be engendered by whole cultures, historical ages, and concepts, and The Golden Bough as a lament for the loss of certitude and futurity.77 The landscapes of the elegiac text may be read within the tradition of pastoral elegy. Frazer’s landscapes make apparent the loss of Turner’s mythology, which gestured to the loss of the Renaissance—and its longing for a classical age. The elegist traditionally wins consolation and renewal.78 In Virgil’s fourth eclogue, whose singer is identified as Virgil, the poet asks the goddess Lucina to look favorably on a newborn “by whom/The Age of Iron gives way to the Golden Age,” during which the need for labor and war will eventually vanish.79 The endless consuming work that went into The Golden Bough granted Frazer only the unstable expectation that science offers future progress.80 He anticipates that his work will retain its value merely as a collection, writing in the preface to the second edition, “It has been my wish and intention to draw as sharply as possible the line of demarcation between my facts and the hypotheses by which I have attempted to colligate them. Hypotheses are necessary but often temporary bridges built to connect isolated facts. If my light bridges should sooner or later break down or be superseded by more solid structures, I hope that my book may still have its utility and its interest as a repository of facts” (1:xix). He has at times been “brought
to the edge of some yawning chasm,” and can only point it out and hope others will bridge or fill it (1.xxiv). He thus expresses despair even as he outlines his hope for the “utility” of The Golden Bough, adopting the empiricist metaphor of the bridge for inference but imagining that his own inferences will be dismantled.

In the final volume of the third edition, after comparing science to a golden key, Frazer more skeptically calls the “laws of nature” mere “hypotheses devised to explain that ever-shifting phantasmagoria of thought which we dignify with the high-sounding names of the world and the universe.” Science may be superseded by “some totally different way of looking at the phenomena—of registering the shadows on the screen—of which we in this generation can form no idea.” Frazer implicitly reduces all possible knowledge to phenomenal knowledge, confining humanity to the cave of phenomenal flickering from which Plato sought an exit. The ephemerality of thought is the consolation Frazer offers: “The philosopher,” he writes, “may console himself by reflecting that these gloomy apprehensions...are only parts of that unsubstantial world which thought has conjured up out of the void, and that the phantoms which the subtle enchantress has evoked today she may ban tomorrow.”

The famous close, with the tolling of the bells of St. Peter’s, has a parallel in Claude’s Landscape with an Imaginary View of Tivoli (1642), though without the painting’s sense of peaceful order. In the painting, the tiny dome of St. Peter’s appears on the skyline. In the foreground, travelers cross a bridge that stretches across the canvas horizontally, making their destination unknown. Frazer paints a scene of climbing the slope of the Appian Way and seeing
the sun set over St. Peter’s, and turning away to look down on the lake of Nemi. Although the
temple and priest are gone, “the place has changed little since Diana received the homage of her
worshippers in the sacred grove…. Nemi’s woods are still green, and as the sunset fades in the
west” the bells sound. The final lines, “The king is dead, long live the king! Ave Maria!” place
the eras of magic and religion in parallel, the belief in reincarnation placed alongside the belief in
resurrection, and both consigned to the past (11:306-08). Only the landscape, with its
associations, remains.

Frazer’s “phantasmagoria of thought” gestures laterally to Swann’s Way (1913), where
the projected images of a magic lantern intended to release the character Marcel from insomnia
have the opposite effect by de-familiarizing the bedroom. Marcel Proust crafted a happy ending
out of the idea of shifting ground. But Frazer, and also Hardy, find the notion that reality consists
of ever-shifting images of thought more destabilizing. This notion may be said to characterize
modernity, and Hardy suggests this is so, because it is precisely when Giles Winterbourne loses
his land that he has the curious “sense that the paths he was pacing, the cabbage-plots, the
appletrees, his dwelling, cider-cellar, wring-house, stables, weather-cock, were all slipping away
over his head and beneath his feet as if they were painted on a magic lantern slide” (89). Hardy also refers to the “phantasmagoria of experience” in his 1891 essay “The Science of Fiction.”

For both Hardy and Frazer, only an empirical mindset is tenable. But the shifting images of the mind give each a sense of dread. The loss of the classical in their works reads as the loss altogether of the capacity to idealize. In addition to representing a condition in which form breaks down, each looks back towards the aspiration to arrive at ideal images through the empirical. The titles of *The Woodlanders* and *The Golden Bough* carry a tone of elegy, and both works treat the loss of a mythical stance towards nature. Malinowski is one among at least several scholars who have found Frazer’s presentation of the ancients to be, at times, romantic.

But in my reading, both Hardy and Frazer elegize primarily not the disappearance of pre-modern beliefs, but a more recent and acute loss. The project of producing stable ideal scenes is seen as having been given up.
The historian of science George Stocking dates the comparative method to the mid-eighteenth century. *Victorian Anthropology*, 14-15. James Turner also discusses this method, and the rise in evolutionary social thought, in *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 167. Frazer calls his text a comparative anatomy of the ancient mind (11:v). It was his method that led anthropologists to dismiss his work before it was complete. See Christopher Herbert on this “voluminous literature” in *Victorian Relativity*, 181. *The Golden Bough*’s generic affiliation with the compilation became more pronounced as it swelled with facts. T.S. Eliot wrote, on the publication of the 1924 abridgment, “With every fresh volume of his stupendous compendium of human superstition and folly, Frazer has withdrawn in more and more cautious abstention from the attempt to explain.” See “A Prediction with Regard to Three English Authors.” *Vanity Fair* (February 1924), 97. Herbert writes that cultural imagery opens onto “chains of correspondences” rather than “referents in the world of external reality.” Frazer proliferates “meaning almost uncontrollably along ever lengthening chains of symbolic imagery.” Besides creating “ever-more-tenuous structures of analogy,” he increasingly qualifies his claims. See “The Golden Bough and the Unknowable” in *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 195. Robert Ackerman also notes that Frazer’s “vast masses of data” have “only a minimal structure to organize them.” By 1921, he “seems to abandon any hope of making worthwhile sense of the fantastic diversity of myth and ritual he has so successfully displayed.”

Turner writes that “the line between civilized people and their primitive opposites grew brighter after 1850” in the English-speaking world. The effect of developments in classical scholarship was to make Greece and Rome “less familiar, sometimes alien—in a few erudite depictions even alarmingly savage.” For centuries, they had furnished values for contemporary life, but now anthropology especially began to explore barbaric rites that in ‘classical’ cultures and the cultures from which they arose. See *Philology*, 274-75.

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5. Amigoni et al. note that competing definitions and a variety of exempla appeared in the Victorian period. Presenting Hood, Rossetti, Dickens, Dove, and Beardsley as its well known figures, and monster literature and caricature as well known manifestations, they note the appearance of the genre in the popular culture of the lower and middle classes. See *Victorian Culture and the Idea of the Grotesque* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999).


7. Mary Beard has noted “the lack of any firm basis for equating the branch of Nemi with Virgil’s Golden Bough.” Tracing Frazer’s strenuous effort to forge the connection, she suggests that though he apprehended the problem “at some level,” he gave prominence to Nemi and “its Virgilian associations” because “in the Victorian world in which the classics remained at the center of traditional intellectual endeavor.” The allusion conferred “respectability” on his project. But more importantly, “the identification of the branch of Nemi with the Virgilian Golden...

8 J.G. Frazer, 63. Turner notes that the classical curriculum broke down in the late nineteenth century in Philology, 233.


10 Frazer delivered a lecture on “The Scope and Method of Mental Anthropology” in 1921.


14 J.G. Frazer, 236-37. Robert Fraser writes that Frazer’s “refinements are more than mere scene-painting,” reading figures of pathos as Frazer’s religious anxiety. Making, 10.

15 He writes that the “the glamour which Greek poetry threw over the figure of Dionysus” could not “conceal or erase the deep lines of savagery and cruelty imprinted on features of barbarous deity” (7:33).

16 The aesthetic theorists of the later half of the eighteenth century reified the categories of the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime. But the terms were freely mixed before and after. Hugh Honour calls ideal landscapes “attempts to recreate the literary landscape” sketched by Homer, Theocritus, and Virgil, and elaborations by poets of the Italian and English Renaissance, though Margaretha Lagerlöf writes that “it would be unfair to these paintings to see them as purely an offshoot of a literary tradition” (159-60; 13). The French ideal landscapists were the common models for the picturesque sensibility. Ann Bermingham points out that it was mainly Gilpin, the original popularizer of picturesque, who defined the picturesque as “a model of the
older prospect landscape” of Claude, Gaspard Dughet, and Rosa. Price and Knight sought to redefine the genre so that it referred decreasingly to the Claudian prospect. See “System, Order, and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795” in Landscape and Power, ed. Mitchell, 79-87. Gilpin also moves away from “an academic picturesque,” in John Dixon Hunt’s phrase, to accommodate the “the vague, the local, the sentimental and subjective.” The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820, ed. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 128.

Frazer suggests he is familiar with Ruskin’s ideas when he uses the term “pathetic fallacy” to explain the ancient notion of the scapegoat (9:v). John Vickery connects Frazer’s visual, pictorial elements to Ruskin and other Victorians. Literary Impact, 32. He writes that Frazer “thought of his book almost exclusively in pictorial terms” and links his study to painting “in both conception and execution” (115-19).

He expands, focusing on a mill among the ancient ruins to point out that mills were at the time “necessary and orthodox in poetical landscape, being supposed to give its elements, otherwise ethereal and ambrosial, an agreeable earthy flavour, like truffles in a pie.” He finds a “curious sign of the remaining influences of the theories of idealism on Turner in the treatment of the stone pines,” the rule of the time beings that trees and all other imperfect elements of the landscape are to be idealized, with idealization consisting in “the assemblage of various natural beauties into a whole, which was to be more beautiful than nature” (13:132-33).

Claire Pace writes that the early nineteenth century prized Claude’s paintings for crystallizing “the most idyllic aspects of the classical past, epitomizing a specific Golden Age, an accessible arcadia,” and points out that Reynolds praises Claude for transporting the viewer to Arcadia. “Claude the Enchanted: Interpretations of Claude in England in the Earlier Nineteenth-Century.” The Burlington Magazine 111, no. 801 (Dec. 1969): 733-34. Lagerlöf writes that “classicism generally espouses an idealistic vision, a belief that an ancient classical style and ancient objects could express in concrete form eternal ideas and a perfection that is eternal and outside time,” associating a particular historical period with eternally valid models. Ideal Landscape, 166. Jane Brown writes that the pastoral landscape and ruins of Claude’s Landscape with Abraham expelling Hagar and Ishmael “express nostalgia for a golden past that one has missed—perhaps by a hair’s breadth, perhaps by millennia.” “Claude’s Allegories and Literary Neoclassicism.” Symbolism: An International Journal of Critical Aesthetics 8 (2008), 22.

Stocking traces the emergence of anthropology out of antiquarianism. Victorian Anthropology, 53-54. Turner points out that Frazer oscillated between classical philology and anthropology and that The Golden Bough “remained tightly linked to classical studies” through its title, references to Pausanias, and descriptions of Greeks and Romans. Philology, 294-95.

For a treatment of the history of philology and its relationship to antiquarianism and then anthropology, see Turner, Philology.

The quarrel is a site at which the modern distinction between the arts and sciences emerged, according to Douglas Patey. By 1700, nearly all granted the moderns superiority in science, as it was understood at the time, and the arts were ceded to the ancients. The concept of the “aesthetic” emerged correlatively with modern conceptions of “science.” “Ancients and Moderns,” 33-39.

that Frazer’s theory rests on a very slim evidence, the only source ancient source connecting the
golden bough and the rite in Servius’s fourth-century commentary on the Aeneid.
27 Ackerman, J.G. Frazer, 236-37. See Norman Vance, The Persistence of Rome: The Victorians
and Ancient Rome (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997). Fraser explains how Frazer came to see in the
archaeological evidence from Nemi a religious tradition perhaps older than but lasting into Roman
civilization. See Making.
28 Fraser notes that at the time, only Pitt’s translation mentions a “golden bough.” Making, 190.
Turner first painted a Virgilian subject in 1798 and chose the Aeneid for his last exhibits at the
Academy in 1850.
29 Claire Pace, “The Golden Age... The First and Last Days of Mankind”: Claude Lorrain and
Classical Pastoral, with Special Emphasis on Themes from Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses.’” Artibus et
30 David Hill writes, “In the last years of the eighteenth century when Turner’s imagination was
formed and even” in the early nineteenth century, “it was possible to believe in the classical
idyll, but...in the years after Waterloo, it was dead, a casualty of the war.” See Turner on the
Thames, 52. Turner’s paintings of classical subjects convey a range of attitudes about antiquity.
Certain painting evoke a golden age, and others emphasize human fallibility.
31 Frazer based his theories on the often crude reports of explorers, missionaries, and traders, and
had never visited Italy when he wrote the visionary opening scene that alludes to Turner’s
painting. Ackerman, J.G. Frazer, 1; 137; 174.
32 “An idea or event was felt to have some distinct correlation to where it took place,” writes
John Dixon Hunt. The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening During the
Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 43; 69.
33 Stanley Hyman sees the work as a tragedy, comparing it to tragic drama in particular. Tangled
Bank, 202-04; 254.
34 There is a precedent for this jarring scene in Thomas Carlyle’s Past and Present. Scholars
have written that in the Victorian period, grotesque forms represent “destabilizations of the
panoramic picturesque gaze.” See Amigoni et al., Victorian Culture, 9. The “Victorian grotesque
was born,” according to Paul Barlow, when “Carlyle’s ‘Picturesque tourist’ finds his view
interrupted by the alienated presence of the unemployed.” Barlow writes that Charles Dickens and
Ford Madox Brown saw in him “an assault on the passive picturesque gaze by which social
experience is rendered spuriously harmonious.” “Thomas Carlyle’s Grotesque Conceits,” in
Victorian Culture, Amigoni et al., 39.
36 Much English writing on the genre “derives from the influence of German philosophy and
critical theory, which sought to incorporate the grotesque into Romantic aesthetics.” See
Amigoni et al., Victorian Culture, 8.
37 See Kayser, The Grotesque, 10.
38 Ruskin approves of Dante’s Chiron, declaring that “the real living centaur trotted across
Dante’s brain” (3:115). Ruskin’s most famous passage on the grotesque compares Roman and
Gothic griffins, and argues that the former is composed “by line and rule” (5:140-41). His
account of the noble grotesque performs a neat appropriation of the Renaissance notion that the
ideal form exists in the artist’s imagination before the artist renders it by referring to multiple
models. While Ruskin’s treatment of the grotesque was the most prominent of the Victorian
period, scholars have also found it in the fiction of Thomas Hardy. See J.B. Bullen, Expressive
Eye, 99, 185; Sheila Berger, Thomas Hardy, 118. Penelope Vigar and Michael Irwin see the
imagery of the post-storm forest scene in *The Woodlanders* as grotesque (*Novels*, 49-51; *Reading*, 105). George Levine finds a particularly Darwinian grotesque in the novel’s mix of generic modes. See “The Woodlanders.”


40 T.S. Eliot writes that Frazer “has extended the consciousness of the human mind into as dark and backward and [sic] abyss of time as has yet been explored.” “A Prediction,” 29. Marty Roth presents Frazer’s project as the rehearsal of the hero’s descent into the underworld in classical epic in “Sir James Frazer’s The Golden Bough: A Reading Lesson” in Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text, ed. Marc Manganaro (Princeton University Press, 1990), 70-71.

41 The idea that there is a “generic human nature” was common since the Enlightenment, accompanied by the notion that human differences can be explained through the idea of uneven progress among the societies of the world. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 17. This idea developed most clearly in the social sciences in France, from Condorcet to Saint-Simon and Comte (25). It came to largely supplant the idea of cultural diffusion, instead proposing that repeated events are governed by laws (77). In Britain, this idea took the form of an “evolutionary associationism” that emerged in the 1860s, in which fixed relations in the environment produced fixed relations in the mind, and the effects of repeated associations were transmitted to the next generation (134). This notion of sociocultural evolution was part of a broader evolutionary movement and is thus “better thought of as ‘Darwinistic’ rather than ‘Darwinian’” (146). “Basic human rationality” was the mechanism of social evolution, so allowing moderns had to posit a rationalistic savage (155). *The Golden Bough* is a “relatively pristine” version of this viewpoint, long after reactions to it had begun (287).

42 According to Leslie Stephen, Hume’s skepticism is his main bequest to the nineteenth century. Hume at first writes that an inference can be based on “such a multitude of experiments, that it admits not of the smallest doubt” (1.3.8). Yet he goes on to undermine this claim for knowledge. He writes that assurance “is perceptions.” “How must we be disappointed,” he writes, “when we learn, that this connection, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind nothing but the addition of new probabilities,” all uncertain. “The only existences, of which we are certain, are perceptions” immediately present (1.4.2). He famously goes on to call every connection formed through association a “fiction.” The mind is “nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions” (1.4.7). What was skepticism in Hume becomes despair in Frazer.

43 Hyman calls primitive men “proto-scientists” in that they produce myths as hypotheses. *Tangled Bank*, 240. Ackerman writes that magic and science share an important similarity in that both strive to master nature. *J.G. Frazer*, 158. Stocking points out that sociocultural evolutionism reiterated themes of utilitarianism in finding progress in the production of new and better ideas, making the progress of science and culture identical. The task was to explain how irrationality had existed in the first place, and the answer expounded was that what seemed irrational and purposeless was in fact utilitarian and progressive. *Victorian Anthropology*, 311-12.

44 *Making*, 121.

45 *Victorian Relativity*, 200.

46 Patey, “Ancients and Moderns,” 42.


Ackerman writes that he would not give up his “conception of the physical universe as regulated by exact and absolutely unvarying laws of nature” for conceptions of physicists that threatened this belief by eliminating causality. Frazer’s idea that the mind is an “equally ordered, comprehensible, and describable ‘place’ with its own development and operation” was analogous. J.G. Frazer, 14-15.

Stocking and Fraser both point out that Frazer’s notion of the relevance of association to magic comes proximately from Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*, *Victorian Anthropology*, 154; *Making*, 19. Fraser also notes that this scheme was not fully worked out until the third edition. Ibid., 122-23.

See the first edition, 1:9.


*Scientific Theory*, 181.

J.G. Frazer, 102.

*Victorian Relativity*, 47.

Frazer produced the translation and commentary between 1884 and 1897. MacCormack writes that his “work on his *Pausanias* was thus intertwined with work on *The Golden Bough* almost from the beginning,” each referring to the other at multiple points. “Pausanias and His Commentator Sir James George Frazer.” *Classical Receptions Journal* 2, no. 2 (2010): 305.

“Introduction,” 159-63.

Stanley Hyman states, “If Frazer imposed one deliberate organization…it is that of a travelogue,” with the style sometimes pure travelogue. *Tangled Bank*, 264.


J.G. Frazer, 111.

*Sir James Frazer*, 3.

“*Pausanias*,” 289.


Langdon, *Claude Lorrain*, 141.

Lagerlöf, *Ideal Landscape*, 177; 183.

Lagerlöf gives a useful historiography of the term “ideal landscape.” She finds the main commonalities in this tradition to be biblical and mythological subjects in an ancient setting, and a rational, structured, pictorial space. Ibid., 17-20. Langdon characterizes classical landscape by balanced, structured vistas, where the “splendor of classical remains recalls those great myths and legends of Roman Antiquity.” *Claude Lorrain*, 8-9.


The note is among his revisions to the Rudimentary Catalogue to the art collection he gave Oxford, a guide for the instruction of beginning students. Ruskin continues, “Wilson is a thoroughly great painter and the drawing is not to cast contempt upon him, but upon the kind of teaching which Landscapists received in the eighteenth century.”

According to Elizabeth Manwaring, Wilson, himself strongly influenced by Claude, was “the strongest influence on Turner in his early work, but soon gave place to Claude, long Turner’s chief model” and “finally his rival.” *Italian Landscapes*, 74. The primacy of Virgil as poetic
model and Claude among painters was shown by an 1850 suite on the theme of Aeneas’ stay at Carthage, affair with Dido, and abandonment of her. Claude painted two scenes from the Aeneid early in his career and six that scrupulously followed the text at the end of his life (145). His painting “Coast Scene with Aeneas and the Cumean Sibyl” is lost, but there is his drawing that records it. Elizabeth Helsinger writes, “While Turner produced works that participate fully in the European tradition of historical landscape painting, he presented them as English challenges to that tradition.” “Turner and the Representation of England,” in Landscape and Power, ed. Mitchell, 104.

73 Lagerlöf writes that “the Arcadian trail does not run parallel with the development of landscape painting.” Ideal Landscape, 7-8.

74 They include Edward Robinson, Biblical Researches in Palestine; W.M. Thomson, The Land and the Book; E. Renan, Mission de Phenicie; G. Maspero, Histoire Ancienne; Sir Charles Wilson, Picturesque Palestine.

75 David Bunn writes that colonial landscapes “came to be perceived as a repositories of romantic subject-matter.” The landscapes of the empire “is displayed as though already ordered to European conventions of taste.” “Our Wattle’d Cot’: Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle’s African Landscapes,” in Landscape and Power, ed. Mitchell, 128-29.

76 Ann Bermingham notes that the expansive prospect landscape was traditionally associated with “certain mental faculties,” and was in particular “equivalent to philosophical speculation.” Landscape and Ideology, 84.

77 See “Frazer and the Elegiac: The Modernist Connection” in Modernist Anthropology, ed. Manganaro. Vickery writes that Frazer looks forward to modernist literature in his statements of misplaced effort. “Out of that irresolution, inconclusiveness, and uncertainty stems the attendant pathos that classical anthropology felt for human history and the individual self seeking to comprehend it.” Literary Impact, 53; 67.

78 Scholars note that Frazer’s research gave rise to a new theory of the pastoral elegy, now largely discredited but still strong. Peter Sacks refers to this theory when he writes that the vegetation god is “the predecessor of almost every elegized subject and provides a fundamental trope by which mortals create their images of immortality. This is not a new field,” Sacks writes, “having been studied by many scholars since the time of Frazer.” The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 26. He calls “martyred vegetation deities” the “original subjects of the elegy” (265). See also Sarah Lambert on the theory that the pastoral elegy descends from ancient vegetation rites. Placing Sorrow, xxix-xxii.


80 Christopher Herbert places Frazer in the context of the “discourse of the Unknowable” in the second half of the nineteenth century. He writes of a late Victorian sense that it may be impossible to “know or understand key elements in one’s domain of study.” While this doctrine is not theorized in The Golden Bough, Frazer practices an empirical science in which gathering data is fundamental yet which starts “from the presupposition that its object is closed to view, incurably ambiguous, and conceivable only as a complex of parallelisms and analogy.” Victorian Relativity, 190.

81 See Vigar, Novels, 20.

82 Malinoski refers to Frazer’s “beloved savages,” writing that he “delighted in their pranks and pleasures.” A Scientific Theory, 186. Lionel Trilling claims Frazer had a “doubleness of mind,” writing that “if he deplores the primitive imagination, does not fail to show it as wonderful and
beautiful.” “On the Teaching of Modern Literature,” in Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), 15. Craig writes of Frazer’s acceptance that progress may be an illusion and science may be “another error…which he will be happy to dispense with, since the world that science offers us is a bleak and painful one compared to the riches of the magical world.” Associationism, 191.
Conclusion

Forms of Improvement: Optimism and Idealism

The task of understanding the mind shifted from philosophy to the science of psychology in the second half of the nineteenth century. In conclusion, I wish to ask, what was the loss? There is a urge among Victorianists to recuperate the period as one of relevance for us, leading to engaging scholarship that shows us ways in the Victorians anticipate modernism and postmodernism. I would like to consider something that was lost with the period, with the premise that what we have lost can help to show what we have.

I return to G. H. Lewes, representative if not riveting, for a temperature of the British intellectual climate in the 1870s with regard to the study of the mind. Both contemporary historians and Victorian commentators see this decade as a turning point in the transition to scientific definitions of psychology. The final volumes of Problems of Life and Mind show a strongly scientific orientation, the “second series” titled “The Physical Basis of Mind” (1877), and the “third series,” “Psychology: Its Object, Scope, and Method” (1879). In the four essays of the second series, Lewes gives an overview of topics in physiological research that are relevant to psychology, combined with his own assessments and theories. Lewes seeks to place man within his “material” or “biological” conditions, finding in biology the “true notion of causality” within the organism. The text provides a window onto the tension between science and metaphysics that existed at the time. In his typical fashion, Lewes seeks a compromise between a “metaphysical” view divorced from science and the “materialist” or “mechanical” view that examines the organism in a laboratory, yet his allegiance is to the latter. The ongoing pull towards metaphysics is evident in James Wards’s seminal article on “Psychology” for the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica (1885), which was to become an “intellectual landmark.”
of Victorian culture.⁵ Rick Rylance calls Ward the most important voice of “idealist” psychology in Britain.⁶ Ward takes a Kantian approach, arguing that the mind has a constitutive function as it constructs the outside world and that “association, at least as a mechanical process, was wholly inadequate to describe, much less explain, any so-called higher mental functions” (Ackerman 40). Ward’s argument for the a priori displays the strong influence of German idealism on psychology, but scientist empiricism eventually proved the winner.

However, it had to supersede not only metaphysics but also other elements within empiricism. Lewes outlines competing methods in the empirical approach in his third series, identifying three lines of thought. One rests on “introspective analysis”—this is the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Condillac, Hartley, James Mill, and J.S. Mill. Recent physiologists, including Canabis and Gall, address the physiological aspect. A third group, including Lotze, Wundt, Bain, Spencer, and Taine, seek to combine the two approaches.⁷ Lewes hopes to establish accord with regard to method, arguing for a place for the “Introspective Method” in the new science of psychology, which relies “solely on Observation of external appearances.”⁸ While elements of empirical philosophy of mind, including the method of introspection and associationism, became controversial, they continued to inform the new science of psychology.⁹

Although experimental psychologists were still attached to philosophy departments at the end of the nineteenth century and finding it difficult to break away, science was ascending, and the British thinkers who were interested in the new psychology attended closely to developments in its centers, Germany and America. According to Rick Rylance, the modern form of scientific psychology that we still recognize emerged during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. The field underwent a rapid period of professionalization, with the “main agent” in the change to an academic and scientific discipline the “fundamental reorientation of psychology’s methods
and outlook created by the new Experimentalism of the 1890s and beyond.” An “Experimentalist revision of history” treated philosophy of mind with scorn. The historian of science Kurt Danziger affirms that “most psychologists have been taught to characterize their own scientific activity in terms of a framework that is derived from nineteenth-century physical science,” even though there are crucial differences, primarily related to the social aspect of psychology. He adds, “Contrary to [Wilhelm] Wundt’s inception, the new psychology did not prosper through the links with philosophy, linguistics, history, and anthropology that he had tried to forge. Instead, it shifted its weight to the other foot, as it were, and based its claims for recognition entirely on its affiliation with the natural sciences. In this it was greatly encouraged by a swelling tide of scientism during the closing years of the nineteenth century.” The distinctively British contribution to the study of the mind came to an end.

Remaining is the question of the relevance of empiricist philosophy of mind to us. This project has sought to trace the contours of how certain British writers conceive ideals constructed by the mind out of the materials of experience. Drawing from art theory and its perpetual negotiations with the empirical, Shaftesbury, Ruskin, and Eliot consider ideals that are expressed in images. At stake for my set of thinkers is the question of where the ideal can be located. Ultimately, my subjects crave an earthly ideal. Unable to see it anywhere, they consider the mind’s powers to construct ideal mental images—though, as I have tried to show, Hardy and Frazer contemplate the difficulties of this project. Because my main subjects conceive of ideal images through art images, they suggest that artworks are the only concrete representations of the ideal to be found.

The long quarrel between science and art has continued into our century, and recently within literary studies, science has been gaining ground. I would like to consider, finally, what I
have come to see as two alternate forms of the hope for improvement. Since its beginnings, modern science has offered optimism, the hope that its methods will lead to discoveries that improve human life. In certain ways, this hope has been realized. Moreover, scientific confidence in progress offers a powerful antidote to particularly modern fears of decay. The Victorian notion of degeneration can be seen equally clearly in Hardy, usually considered a pessimist, and Frazer, a self-proclaimed but ambivalent optimist. An optimism that was largely attached to the sciences, social and natural, grew in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and remains alive in the present. Yet, as George Stocking notes, history provides few grounds for a belief in progress.\textsuperscript{13} Those who basically hold to an empirical world-view seem to be left with the alternatives of scientific optimism or a pessimism based on historical events. Yet British empiricism once held out another possibility, that of the idealism within it. This native tradition of idealism aspired to show that a better world can be not predicted or anticipated but beheld. While the solace offered by images is limited, it is at least a relief that does not have to be deferred.
Tracing the complexities of Victorian psychology, Rylance identifies four main strands of a “disorderly debate.” Victorian Psychology, 21. The “discourse of philosophy,” or philosophy of mind, is in this scheme the dominant one, divided into the schools of innatism and experience. It existed along with discourses of the soul, of physiology, and of medicine. Rylance points out, with regard to the example of Herbert Spencer, that scientific does not necessary mean experimentalist, but involved looking to contemporary theories of scientific explanation, including evolution (203).

1 Ibid., 70.


3 Ibid., v-vi.

4 Craig, Associationism, 181.

5 Rylance considers Ward’s article an intervention against the idea that psychology can be exclusively considered a science. To Ward, psychology is philosophical, and philosophy is metaphysical. Victorian Psychology, 322.


7 Ibid., 82. Lewes also anticipates Sigmund Freud and the emergence of psychoanalysis. The second series contains a chapter called “Consciousness and Unconsciousness.” In the third series, Lewes writes of unconscious processes that “lie outside the range of Introspection” but are “observable in their results.” Problems of Life and Mind, 3rd Ser., 90-94.

8 Craig notes the great contribution of associationism to scientific psychology in the later nineteenth century, as seen in the work of Bain, Spencer, and Galton. It was also the “principal theory from which later psychological developments had to distinguish themselves.” Associationism, 31. Its operations had to be incorporated even by those who wanted to resist them, like William James and Henri Bergson (39). Kurt Danziger notes that when psychology became an autonomous field, it took over methods and concepts from existing fields including physiology and philosophy. He describes the controversy over introspection. Philosophy of mind had appealed to the subjective self-awareness of readers, without any special methodology to distinguish psychology from philosophy. This approach went back to Locke’s notion of reflection, and was subjected to severe continental critique. Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17-20.

9 Victorian Psychology, 1-6.

10 Constructing the Subject, 1-2.

11 Ibid., 41.

12 George Stocking describes the eighteenth-tension background, a tension between a progressivist, optimistic tradition of positivism that runs from Locke into French thought, and more traditional schemes of degeneration with a basis in the classics or the Bible. Victorian Anthropology, 16-17.
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