**Vile Things: William Gilpin and the Properties of the Picturesque**

[please supply abstract]

This essay explores the picturesque writer William Gilpin’s problematic relationship with English gardens. While his earliest works seem to champion the landscape garden as a great national art, the manuscripts for his picturesque tours are full of sharp criticisms and withering insults aimed at both gardens and their owners. Set alongside the published tours, a close reading of the deletions and rephrasing in these manuscripts helps us to see both Gilpin’s desire for landscape as a cue for imaginative reverie and his unease about a landowning vision of nature. Gilpin’s writings are often caricatured as the visions of a dissociated traveller, but his manuscripts insist on the immediacy of shifting emotional states.

Keywords: eighteenth-century English gardens; gardens as symbols of self; Blenheim; Park Place; The Rookery; Thomas Whately; emotion; deletion; manuscripts.

Debates about William Gilpin’s writings have tended to center on what has been seen as the uncomfortable relationship between his aesthetic agenda and the moral concerns he expressed outside of his works on the picturesque. The most useful attempt to date to resolve this apparent problem has been Robert Mayhew’s powerful account of Gilpin’s Latitudinarian position, one that routinely takes the physical world as an opportunity for moral reflection and as a demonstration of God’s designing presence. Crucial to that Latitudinarian vision is the recognition of the limits of the human perspective on Creation, and the concomitant recognition that the picturesque was not an attempt to better God’s design but to make it visible from the inevitably partial and undoubtedly limited human viewpoint. As Mayhew notes, what we might loosely term spiritual anecdotes and analogies appear frequently throughout Gilpin’s picturesque tours —and are therefore not so much oddities and anomalies as only the most obvious and overt articulations of a Christian viewpoint. In other words, to define Gilpin’s picturesque as insistently formal is to misrepresent Gilpin’s understanding of form.

While Mayhew has done much to make sense of Gilpin’s “moral picturesque,” my concern is with a slightly different problem, his apparent hatred of landscape gardens; or—to use language with which he might have been more comfortable—his dislike of ornamental scenery close to the house.[[1]](#footnote-1) Drawing on the widely circulated and strikingly variable manuscript versions of the picturesque tours, and focusing on the insistent language of disgust so noticeably present in, but ultimately deleted from, those manuscripts, I will argue that the shifting representations of personal response reflected in Gilpin’s revisions articulate a wider dilemma: that the immediacy of an emotional response to landscape is almost as immediately confronted by alternative—and less welcome—perspectives that crowd in.[[2]](#footnote-2) Thus, while Mayhew rightly stresses Gilpin’s Latitudinarian vision, in this essay I will explore some of the ways his understanding of the garden confuses that vision, and raises for the popularizer of the picturesque not only questions of creation and imagination but also of property and wealth.

I have called attention to Gilpin’s dislike for manmade scenery, but the early pages of his second major tour, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . on several parts of England; particularly the mountains and lakes* (1786), would suggest that I have misrepresented him quite wildly. Here he writes:

Among the peculiar features of English landscape, may be added the embellished garden, and park-scene. In other countries, the environs of great houses are yet under the direction of formality. The wonder-working hand of art, with it’s regular cascades, spouting fountains, flights of terraces, and other atchievements, have still possession of the gardens of kings, and princes. In England alone the model of nature is adopted.

This is a mode of scenery intirely of the sylvan kind. As we seek amongst the wild works of nature for the sublime, we seek here for the beautiful: and where there is a variety of lawn, wood, and water; and these naturally combined; and not too much decorated with buildings, nor disgraced by fantastic ornaments; we find a species of landscape, which no country, but England, can display in such perfection: not only because this just species of taste prevails no where else; but also, because no where else are found such proper materials.[[3]](#footnote-3)

For all the apparent delight to be found in embellished gardens “intirely of the sylvan kind,” however, Gilpin is hard-pressed to discover any when he actually visits designed landscapes. His picturesque tours, from the Wye Valley to the Lake District, and from the west to the frankly unpromising eastern counties, record the disappointments to be found in such scenes or, as I will show, are silently omitted from the final publication. If embellished gardens and park scenes are a peculiar glory of England, they are peculiarly difficult to find. Indeed, for all the praise of these beautiful landscapes, Gilpin in fact saves some of his strongest invective for them. He terms them “vile,” “puerile,” “trifling,” and “absurd,” language that appears more frequently in his accounts of gardens than in any other portions of his works, and in some cases persists, even after his friends advised him to remove it from manuscript versions, which circulated widely.

The use of such negative description may itself seem an oddity, for in Gilpin’s first published work, on the gardens at Stowe, he observed the many pleasures to be had from their perusal. Unlike the numerous guidebooks appearing from midcentury, with their carefully detailed accounts of inscriptions, paintings, statues, and structures, the *Dialogue upon the Gardens . . . at Stow* (1748) presents an insistently moral experience: it is far less concerned with the details of Stowe’s famous iconography than with the moral reflections to which Gilpin’s characters assume such features are an invitation.[[4]](#footnote-4) Certainly Stowe’s physical landscape brings its own particular pleasures to the eye, but the crucial experience of the garden is as a topos, where the physical object is subordinate to, and primarily important as an invitation to, moral reflection.[[5]](#footnote-5) Two immediate consequences are worth noting: the focus on moral interpretation is also a focus on individual visitors; and the responses of such visitors need not be trammeled by the designing intentions of owners. Indeed, the *Dialogue* insists on the genteel understanding of the *viewer,* at times in the face of the owner and designer’s agenda: for example, those moments when the *Dialogue* engages with Stowe’s more risqué elements (the smutty rhymes, the louche paintings, the party politics), yet insists on a genteel view of them, can be read as a means of asserting the viewer’s, rather than the owner’s, vision. Gilpin’s two visitors can quite literally turn their backs on these elements and look for something else. One further consequence is that the moral status of the garden is itself brought under scrutiny. Posing a question to which he already knows the answer, Gilpin’s Polypthon asks if gardens are not merely wasteful, eliciting the expected response: gardens, like other luxuries, not only circulate money through the economy but also—in the case of Stowe at least—help to reform the national taste, and in so doing help to reform the nation’s virtue. That the moral status of such ventures can be questioned, however, is itself important. While the *Dialogue* would seem to support the moral value of the garden quite firmly, I will go on to suggest that in the dialogic exchange between Gilpin’s two speakers we see a tension—between wealth and taste, owning and understanding, pleasures physical and moral, virtues public and private—which would be played out more thoroughly, and at the same time more uneasily, in the singular voice of Gilpin’s picturesque tours.

**In the Wrong Garden**

Given all the pleasures of Stowe, why the later criticism of so many other gardens? The *Dialogue* seems to suggest—as my quotation from *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* apparently confirms—that the new style of gardening in England is both natural and morally admirable. The *Dialogue* also suggests that Stowe’s value lies in its provocation of thoughts beyond itself and beyond the merely physical; it is praised, and prized, for its unusual insistence on its status as an object inviting moral contemplation, as a garden that invites its visitors to think about gardens generally—and therefore to think about nature, culture, the Creation and man’s place in it. This is precisely the aspect that compels the speakers in Gilpin’s dialogue to move from the physical to the intellectual and the moral: the garden’s physicality is to be valued insofar as it invites one to be elsewhere and to explore a world beyond itself. If that sounds like a fundamental defense of the garden, similar to the one Shaftesbury offered half a century earlier, it also presents a means of questioning the need for such physical cues. In what I would suggest is a characteristic uncertainty in responses to the garden, Shaftesbury’s now famous rejection of “the formal mockery of princely gardens” in favor of “things of a natural kind” is itself qualified by the far more radical response to gardens in his *Philosophical Regimen*, where he stresses that the important action in life takes place in the “garden and groves within.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Here, too, Shaftesbury acknowledges the seductive power of the garden, its ability to represent “things deeply natural,” and at the same time its potential to mirror the rational beauties of the mind. But against all this he insists that such potential is rarely fulfilled, that gardens are like the foolish playthings of a child, no more than the distractions of a luxury-obsessed elite:

What are gardens, what are houses of show?—What are those the children make? What are dirt-pies? or where lies the difference? in the matter or in the minds thus employed? Is it not the same ardour and passion? the same eagerness and concern? the same falling out and in? angry, and friends again, in humour, crying to get; then weary and then crying again, when the same thing is parted with or the time comes to leave the play. But those are but rattles and little playthings.—Right: and these are great ones. What is a rattle?—a figure, colours, noise? And what are other noises? what are other figures and colours?—a coach, liveries, parterre and knolls? cascades, *jets d’eau*?—How many rattles?

Even if gardens can successfully represent the abstract beauties of nature, Shaftesbury asks, what should we make of the owner’s urge to construct and create: “what is there like to this in the minds of those who walk here, and are the possessors of all this? What harmony?—None, for if there were, there would be no need of this exterior sort.” The radical charge of Shaftesbury’s stance is that beautiful gardens signal rational failures, that the landowners who create them have lost sight of true beauty.[[7]](#footnote-7) For Shaftesbury, of course, that beauty is defined in terms of something close to deism, but we can see that same discomfort over the pleasures and dangers of physical (as opposed to textual or sacred) gardens in the Christian writings of Gilpin’s close contemporary, John Wesley. When visiting Piercefield in south Wales, Wesley offered a characteristic juxtaposition: after a detailed account of the landscape gardens full of appreciation for their beauties, he continued: “And must all these be burned up? What will become of us then, if we set our hearts upon them?”.[[8]](#footnote-8) Just as Shaftesbury acknowledged the pleasures of the garden while questioning the motivation, even the rationality, of those who create gardens, so Wesley struggled with a sense of delight and disdain, challenging the spiritual worth of the garden even as he recorded his own sense of pleasure.[[9]](#footnote-9) As Wesley is acutely aware, the problem for Christians is that they will always be in the wrong garden: failing—inevitably—to recreate the Garden of Eden, mankind’s attempts can only be a poor imitation of God’s work, or worse, a misguided obsession with the sublunary world.

It may be, then, that Gilpin is simply in the wrong garden—although all gardens are “wrong” because they draw attention to the wrong objects of contemplation—but his praise of gardens of the sylvan kind, and his obvious approval of Stowe, suggest otherwise. Here, however, we should also recognize the changes in garden design that occurred during the period in which Gilpin was writing. His praise of sylvan gardens comes two decades after the *Dialogue*, when that landscape style had spread widely and the emblematic features for which Stowe was known were falling out of fashion.[[10]](#footnote-10) In the *Dialogue* and in the picturesque tours, that is, Gilpin praises two quite different attributes of the English garden. While he appears to champion the English garden in the tours for its closeness to “nature,” in the *Dialogue* Stowe is praised not for being “intirely of the sylvan kind” but instead for its insistence on the necessity of interpretation— that the garden is a site of representation, not of an untouched “nature” to which rational contemplation is irrelevant. If that seems like a paradox, I will go on to suggest that these two attributes are ultimately quite similar, and that their similarity rests upon Shaftesbury’s understanding of nature as representation.

***Landscape Painting Loves to Have Her Things Rumpled about Her***

The problem of representation is of course as old as representation itself, but for Gilpin it arises at a peculiar moment in garden history. John Dixon Hunt has argued that the late eighteenth century was something of a watershed in the understanding of garden design—that the rise to dominance of the natural garden should be recognized not as a mere matter of style but as creating a fundamental shift in understandings of the garden. Hunt argues that up until this period—for those with the leisure to visit them at least—there was a common recognition that the garden necessarily used artifice *in order* to interpret nature; with the rise of “natural” gardening in Europe, however, the well-understood distinction between representation and things represented could all too easily collapse into an apparently undifferentiated “nature.”[[11]](#footnote-11) Whether we commit to such a chronology or not, Hunt’s emphasis raises questions about experience and use. Confronting their visitors with claims of non-representational naturalness, landscape gardens inevitably raise the question of what one should do with them, of how one should be in them; and it is this problem that Gilpin’s apparently wayward responses to the garden address. Part of Gilpin’s difficulty, I would suggest, is that he confronts gardens in terms of a rhetoric of nature rather than of representation.

As David Marshall has noted, the picturesque comes with its own quite peculiar agenda when it seeks to define the natural. Gilpin got close to hand-wringing on this score, and while historians of the picturesque have turned most frequently to his *Three Essays* (because they appear to offer his most coherent account of the term), it is well to recognize his striking uncertainty about such theorizing as expressed in his private letters. Thus, while Gilpin did define it as “that which would look good in a picture,” anything more robust is oddly lacking.[[12]](#footnote-12) As Marshall notes, the theorizing of the picturesque articulates a “paradoxical grounding of nature in aesthetic experience” even as “artifice” is apparently being rejected: **“**The natural is simultaneously valued for its avoidance of the artful or artificial and its resemblance to art. The juxtaposition of originals and copies in the representations of nature as well as the representations of the imagination creates a double landscape in which the lines between art and nature are increasingly blurred.” This formulation of the problem seems right, but Marshall’s concern with the picturesque and its relation to ideas of art leaves out the messier experience of the visitor in the garden. I am less concerned with these knotty formulations than with what Gilpin thinks his picturesque judgment is actually *for*.

When Gilpin attempts to theorize he undoubtedly ties himself in the very knots Marshall points to, yet Gilpin is not a theorist, and his tours do not engage with the picturesque as a narrowly aesthetic problem. When he enters a garden, Gilpin’s picturesque vision leads to a confrontation with moral questions: the status of property owning, the individual’s place in the natural order and the role of the garden as a representation of that order. What makes his position so confusing, however, is that he addresses these issues—initially at least—in what look like formal aesthetic terms. Thus, while Horace Walpole famously claimed that the great garden-designer William Kent “leaped the fence and saw that all nature was a garden,” Gilpin tends to approach from the other direction, to look over the fence and back into the garden. From that perspective, things look rather different.[[13]](#footnote-13)

If we return, then, to my opening question, why Gilpin doesn’t like landscape gardens, there is an obvious “aesthetic” answer: as Gilpin repeatedly insists, the smoothness of garden scenes rarely appeals to the landscape painter because it is instead roughness that provides interest to the eye. With an apt metaphor, William Mason, a gardener and poet who was Gilpin’s friend and correspondent through the 1770s and 1780s, defined the appeal of such roughness:

But I am well aware that you and I shall never agree in these Matters for our two Arts, as much as I have endeavord to bring them into sisterhood, are but really half blood. Gardening when one has made her as natural and as degagéé as one can, has a certain neatness about her, which makes her chuse always to appear in her starched Apron, & Ruffles; whereas Landscape Painting loves to have her things rumpled about her, and her hankerchief hardly pinned to her Stomacher.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Like Mason, Gilpin repeatedly insists on this distinction, and repeatedly turns to matters of formal composition; but in doing so he also insists that the formal concerns of composition are not ends in themselves.Thus, when describing his favorite landscapes of the Lake District he writes:

No tame country, however beautiful, however adorned, can distend the mind, like this awful and majestic scenery. The wild sallies of untutored genius often strike the imagination more, than the most correct effusions of cultivated parts. Tho the eye therefore might take more pleasure in a view (considered merely in a picturesque light) when a little adorned by the hand of art; yet I much doubt, whether such a view would have that strong effect on the imagination; as when rough with all it’s bold irregularities about it; when beauty, and deformity, grandeur and horror, mingled together, strike the mind with a thousand opposing ideas; and like chymical infusions of an opposite nature, produce an effervescence, which no harmonious mixtures could produce.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Yet this stress on the importance of the personal imaginative response gives a different and striking cast to Gilpin’s concern with composition. Indeed, his bias toward the sublime rather than the beautiful (and his awareness of Burke’s distinctions and their corollaries) shows the scope of his concern with form, his fusion of form and its interpretation: the roughness of scene he admires produces a similar roughness of response, the “effervescence” of “a thousand opposing ideas.”

Where matters of composition do reduce themselves into mere form, however, is in the landscape garden. We can see the disappointments of a slump into the merely formal if we turn to Gilpin’s description of Piercefield, the landscape garden created within sight of Tintern Abbey. He first describes the natural scene around the estate, remarking, “Little indeed was left for improvement, but to open walks, and views, through the woods, to the various objects around them,” and the analysis that follows is undoubtedly concerned with compositional effects:

Sometime a broad face of rock is presented, stretching along a vast space, like the walls of a citadel. Sometimes it is broken by intervening trees. In other parts, the rocks rise above the woods; a little farther, they sink below them: sometimes, they are seen through them; and sometimes one series of rocks appears rising above another: and though many of these objects are repeatedly seen, yet seen with new accompaniments, they appear new. The winding of the precipice is the magical secret, by which all these inchanting scenes are produced.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Here the scenes are “romantic” rather than picturesque because the view is presented from too high a position, is not marked with enough “character,” or simply would not look good on paper or canvas. These scenes in fact share with the picturesque a quality associated with the sublime, which sets loose “the most pleasing riot of imagination.” Such riot, however, seems imaginatively impossible in the more neatly kept spaces of the garden, and when Gilpin reaches the artificial scene of the shrubbery he is left with little to say. The ground, he finds, takes on “a more civilized form. It consists of a great variety of lawns, intermixed with wood, and some rocks; and, though it often rises, and falls, yet it descends without any violence into the country beyond it.”[[17]](#footnote-17) A sense of the garden as anything more than a set of formal constraints would seem to be entirely absent, its value to be judged wholly in terms of compositional possibilities. Whereas nearby Tintern Abbey offers grounds for anecdotes and digressions that might secure the visitor in a historical sense of location, here the garden is treated as an ahistorical product of art, dissociated at once from nature and from a historically defined society. The shrubberies and small-scale planting introduced by the owner may be appropriate close to the house or “as the ornament of little scenes,” but serve only to highlight the *littleness* of such art, and its inability to produce the heightened emotional effects Gilpin so admires.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Gilpin is concerned with form here, certainly, but rather with the failures of form when it does not move beyond self-concern and the limited vision of the landowner. Instead of offering nature, the natural garden offers ownership; instead of God’s creative vision, it offers little scenes. If this seems to base a large claim on a small episode in one of Gilpin’s many publications, I want now to turn from the published tours to the manuscripts on which they were based. It has long been recognized that the picturesque tours continued a much older tradition of circulating works in manuscript—that they were handed around among the great and the good, including the royal family, and that various excisions were made prior to publication in order not to offend the living (though the dead, Gilpin noted, were another matter).

SUGGEST NEW SECTION, WITH TITLE, HERE

***Not the last mark of a spade***

Quite reasonably, critical attention has tended to focus on the published versions of Gilpin’s *Three Essays* and *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*. Accounts of his picturesque agenda have mostly been framed in terms of an emphasis on form, a Shaftesburean desire to see virtue in beauty, and—as we have seen—with an attempt to set formal analysis and picture-making in the context of a mainstream Christian exegesis of the Creation. A more complex agenda emerges, however, when we add to these published tours the various manuscripts from which they were derived. That agenda is more unsettling and more politicized than prior critical accounts of Gilpin as dissociated aesthetic traveler; and it becomes most apparent when we turn our attention to the deletions and suppressions, the rewriting and translating, reflected in the surviving manuscripts.

Gilpin’s manuscripts for the tours take various forms, and in this essay I will be working primarily with the initial notebooks and subsequent fair copies now housed in the Bodleian Library. Along with what we might consider the side notes appearing in various letters (especially those to his close friend William Mason), Gilpin’s manuscripts offer us extraordinary access to his process of composition, both visual and verbal.[[19]](#footnote-19)

While of course we would expect revisions in any manuscript—especially in notebooks that are among this material—Gilpin’s tell us much about what was at stake for him in his picturesque vision of the landscape, and they do so because we can trace in the deletions, cancelations, and replacements not only the transformation of immediate recollections into written notes but also the ideological weight of particular word choices. Words that come immediately to mind must be removed or replaced by a differently nuanced, if apparently synonymous, term, revealing the suppressions and elaborations required for the production of fair copies intended for his most immediate friends and trusted critics. Finally, in the copy-text for the published version, we can pinpoint deletions of anything from over-sharp phrasing to entire garden descriptions.

The deletions and revisions in Gilpin’s manuscripts are telling, I will suggest, because in them we see the desire for an immediacy of response to “nature,” which might in turn be represented as “natural.” But in examining these changes, we must also recognize that the alterations were inevitably mired in a complex of cultural assumptions and expectations. As we move from traveling notebooks to circulating and fair copies, the singular voice comes under pressure as it attempts to translate immediacy of response into the shared voice of a published text, which must necessarily suppress some of its sharper and more immediately felt reactions—a text that must repress, that is, the “natural” reactions it seeks to champion.

We can see something of this dilemma if we turn to one of the most famous gardens for which Gilpin can express some admiration, Blenheim, near Oxford. Like all gardens, Blenheim was a palimpsest of designs and fashions from previous generations. With Vanbrugh’s monolithic style having been the subject of much criticism by the middle of the century, along with his magnificent single-arched bridge that spanned a tiny stream in a steep-sided valley, the gardens had been transformed by “Capability” Brown by the time Gilpin paid a visit in the early 1770s. Most dramatically, the construction of a massive dam and the subsequent flooding of the valley created a huge river-like lake that not only gave to the oversized bridge a more appropriate scale but also allowed Brown to lay out “riverside” walks about which Gilpin would claim (in the published tour, at least), “the banks of the Wye scarce exhibit more romantic scenes.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Work was still underway during Gilpin’s visit, however, with islands and planting in particular continuing to take shape, and with the signs of large-scale earth-moving still very much in evidence. It is in this context—the making of a natural landscape—that the manuscripts’ changes of phrasing, claims about what is natural, and admiration for picturesque effects become particularly significant.

Of the numerous changes in the manuscripts, a number are worth exploring because they help us to understand what might be at stake when Gilpin attempts to match verbal and visual representations of a landscape at once natural and made—picturesque, but only like a picture when appropriately processed and re-formed. Perhaps the most obvious difference between manuscript and published accounts of Blenheim, however, is that many of the more straightforwardly critical comments are simply missing. In the published tour the description of the flooded valley begins with the scene below the bridge, which is described as “the most beautiful part”; in the fair copy manuscript of the Lakes tour, titled “Tour through England,” however, this is preceded by a judgement upon the upper lake concluding: “There is a sharpness in the lines, wh. is rarely seen in nature. The knoll near the bridge, with the large tree upon it, is particularly formal. ~~In many parts~~ Part of the banks & a new-made island or two, are planted; but the effect will not be seen these 50 years.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Such deletions, as we will see, are commonplace in the manuscripts of Gilpin’s tours; more interesting, however, are shifts in language about the “natural.” Where the published tour offers us the lower lake as “the most beautiful part,” the “Tour through England” manuscript claims that it is “perfectly natural,” while in the earlier “Wye Tour” manuscript notebook that same scene “is very fine. It ~~gives the idea of~~ appears to be a noble bay, formed by a creek, running up a woody country; and several ~~little~~ light skiffs upon it impress the idea. On every side, the ground falls easily; ~~& in nature~~ all is pure nature; not the least mark of a spade is left.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In the published account of Blenheim, that is, Gilpin has backed away from the claim that the landscape is natural; but in the manuscripts we see him struggling with the problem. The change in the phrase “It ~~gives the idea of~~ appears to be” is minor in some respects, but it points to the problem at the heart of Gilpin’s picturesque vision: while the first phrase acknowledges the associationism of that vision, the second attempts to suppress the mechanics of association in favor of the immediacy of vision, but then falls back into the language of impressing ideas; and this is then followed by Gilpin’s acknowledgment of artifice only as absence (“not the least mark of the spade is left”) and consequently by a vision of “pure nature.” In the movement between vision and revision, Gilpin’s picturesque waivers between acknowledging the contingency of a culturally constructed “nature” and a desire for it to be the object of unmediated appreciation.

One reason for deleting some of the more direct criticism of Blenheim was no doubt Mason’s championing of Brown; but another is that Gilpin was concerned to offer Blenheim as a fit landscape for national self-representation. For all its faults—largely suppressed in the published tour—Blenheim’s grandeur, even its departures from “nature,” can be justified because the landscape speaks to the public and to the nation: in the published tour—though not in the notebooks—Gilpin goes out of his way to praise the Parliamentary inscription on the column recording the gift of the estate to a grateful nation: with its mixture of artifice and nature, of the beautiful and the “noble” (another word repeatedly marked by deletion or replacement), Blenheim allows Gilpin to construct a suitably national vision of nature and a natural vision of nation underpinned by a martial aristocracy and a sovereign Parliament. [Should the inscription be quoted?]

The small-scale suppressions and deletions at Blenheim help us to see how such national landscape might be championed, and here we might set Gilpin in the tradition of a recognizably Addisonian vision of landscape as Whig history. That not all landscape gardens—not even famous landscapes gardens—should be given the benefit of the doubt, however, or accepted as suitable symbols of national taste, becomes apparent if we turn to another garden on the tourist circuit, William Shenstone’s Leasowes. Here, while once again Gilpin acknowledges the beauties of what he sees, in the manuscript he first “laughed at [the] inscrip[tion] inviting the naiids to bath” in Shenstone’s notoriously scant and murky waters. Only later is that response smoothed into something more polite, as Gilpin adopts a more carefully worded discussion of why the inscription, by a muddy pool, might appear “ludicrous.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Socially aspiring, poor, and dead, Shenstone makes for an easy target, but the laughter highlights for us the confrontation that repeatedly takes place when Gilpin enters a garden, between the desire for an apparently unmediated account of nature and his disappointment with a language of design that is inevitably representational and contingent.

More telling even than laughter at the Leasowes, however, are those moments where criticism is so marked that garden descriptions must be entirely excised, and conversely, where gardens appear to offer the very unmediated nature that Gilpin apparently seeks: in both cases the criticism that appears and disappears in the various states of manuscript and final publication suggests a less neatly Addisonian vision of democratized landscape, a vision which instead finds itself continually struggling with the power—and the value(s)—of the small (and in some cases not so small) landowners Addison assumed were the markers of national progress.

***Deleted Landscapes***

On rare occasions—as with parts of Blenheim—Gilpin encounters a landscape garden almost “purely picturesque.” Notebook 5 of “Wye Tour” (“Pict. Views &c through Monmouthsh. & Carmarth”), for example, includes no fewer than four attempts to sketch the seventeenth-century landscape park and the medieval castle at Dinefwr, in south Wales. Part of Dinefwr’s attraction for Gilpin is that he cannot see the manmade interventions though he knows they were carried out. Thus, while in the published account we’re told that the ground “is so beautifully disposed, that it is almost impossible to have bad composition,” the notebook version continues, “& yet no ~~sort~~ pain seems to have been taken to introduce any view. Indeed if any art has been used in this whole piece of scenery, it is exquisitely hid.”[[24]](#footnote-24) More often, however, the misguided interventions of the landowner are all too obviously on display, and are singled out in the language of disgust. Nowhere is this more the case than at Park Place, near Henley, the large Berkshire estate of General Henry Seymour Conway, a cousin of Horace Walpole.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Park Place was a significant enough estate to appear in two of Gilpin’s published tours—first in the Wye and then in the Lakes tour—but its appearance was nothing if not ghostly. In the published version of the Wye tour the description reads: “Henley lies pleasantly among woody hills: but the chalk, bursting every where from the soil, strikes the eye in spots; and injures the landscape.”[[26]](#footnote-26) No description at all: Gilpin’s response to Park Place becomes apparent only when we turn to the manuscripts, where, instead of the brief references to the ugliness of chalk—or, in the published *Observations on the Lakes*, to its too frequent appearance in “unmeaning patches,” which “never fails to disturb the landscape”—Gilpin offers one of his most sustained assaults on a garden, in fact a garden belonging to the relative of a friend. Ultimately, in accordance with the view—which he shared with others—that the gardens of those still living required careful treatment, he entirely excised Park Place from his publications. The heavy corrections and deletions of the manuscripts perhaps show more clearly than anywhere else Gilpin’s struggle with the clash between “natural” and made landscapes, between property and his own sense of propriety, between form and his expectations of what form might, or should, mean.

Ghostly cyphers aside, Park Place appears in a heavily reworked form first in “Wye Tour,” notebook 8 (“Pict. Views &c thr. Berksh. & Buckingh,” 1770), then, having been rejected from the Wye tour, as a fair copy in volume 1 of the “Tour through England” manuscript (1772)—only for this also to be rejected from final publication.[[27]](#footnote-27) Part of the problem, as Gilpin recognized, is that he was visiting Park Place on his return from the Wye, and “~~After seeing the grand works of nature, the most polished piece of made-ground is an assemblage only of primping ideas. Under this impression I probably thought worse of Gen. Conway’s than I otherwise might have done.~~” Probably—but in fact the long list of deleted expletives is quite in keeping with Gilpin’s more general views on the failure of landowners to appropriate the picturesque qualities of nature. Some aspects of the landscape garner mild praise: the lawn “~~I thought beautiful~~” (but not so beautiful that this wasn’t then crossed out and replaced with “a pleasant cheerful area tho there is no play in the ground”); the beech grove too is “pleasant ~~enough~~”; but “this is all . . . that is agreeable.” The “Tour through England” manuscript’s (relatively) fair copy then reads:

From this thicket we enter a valley, adorned with a profusion of chalk-ruins at one end; and a bridge at the other. The chalk-ruins are disagreeable enough, bearing the marks neither of design, nor of composition. They resemble the ruins of nothing: & the very idea of bringing such a glare of chalk above ground, in a country, wh. is discovering it in every crevice, ~~& which above all things you would wish to conceal~~, is ~~very~~ disgusting.

From these ruins we descended along the valley, wh., without break or variation, is a mere blanket held at the 4 corners. The farther end of it is graced by a bridge, ~~which runs~~ running parallel with the Thames, which flows a few yards from it. It was necessary, it seems, to carry a road across ~~that~~ this part of the garden: but a bridge, so near a great river, with which it has no connection, is the last species of architecture one would have chosen. Through the arch of the bridge we were carryed to see a piece of rock-scenery, consisting of half a dozen large stones brought together ~~than which~~ Nothing can be more absurd. They neither give any idea of what they ~~mean~~ were intended to represent; nor are they suited to the country, in which they are introduced. They are heterogeneous ornaments.[[28]](#footnote-28)

But to get to this, Gilpin has had to struggle hard in the original “Wye Tour” manuscript, where the deletions and corrections speak eloquently of both his disgust and his attempt to record an immediate aesthetic—but also emotional—response to Conway’s garden. Here, the “disagreeable” chalk ruins start life as “~~vile things~~”; so much chalk above ground may finally be “~~very~~ disgusting”; but in the Wye tour “disgusting” is a replacement for “~~abominable~~”. The bridge “wh. runs parallel with the Thames” requires a double deletion as it is “~~beyond ridicule~~” before it is “~~an absurdity certainly to be avoided~~“; the more abstract “it was necessary, it seems, to carry a road” is a replacement for “~~he wanted~~ to carry a road,” with its much clearer stress on the personal desires of the landowner; and while it “~~is amusing, that men of any taste can be guilty of such absurdities~~” as imitated ruins, it is not so amusing that Gilpin doesn’t then go on to write (and inevitably partially delete) the following reflection:

to ~~make~~ attempt a mountain, or a valley, or a rock, or any of the immensities of nature, ~~is impossible where we have no encouragement from the ground, is impossible~~ is ludicrous and yet this piece of rock~~y~~-scenery ~~tho it~~ was probably the most expensive part of the garden, ~~(~~as the carriage of one stone, we were informed, cost 20L~~)~~ ~~is after all, instead of being an object of the imagination, an unmeaning, affected trifle~~. [[29]](#footnote-29)

Combined with the claim in the Lakes manuscript that Conway’s ruins “neither give any idea of what they ~~mean~~ were intended to represent. . . . They are heterogeneous ornaments,” these last deleted phrases from the Wye manuscript are most helpful in making sense of Gilpin’s agenda here. They also form part of a conversation about ruins with his friend Thomas Whately, author of the hugely influential *Observations on Modern Gardening* (1770), a work published in the same year that Gilpin was touring the Wye. Whately would write in the *Observations*:

All remains excite an enquiry into the former state of the edifice, and fix the mind in a contemplation on the use it was applied to; besides the character expressed by their style and position, they suggest ideas which would not arise from the building, if entire . . . and certain sensations of regret, of veneration, or compassion, attend the recollection. . . . Whatever building we see in decay, we naturally contrast its present to its former state, and delight to ruminate on the comparison.

For Whately, ruins, even if fabricated, stimulate to some extent the same sensations and reflections: “It is true that such effects belong properly to real ruins . . . [but] they are produced to a certain degree by those which are fictitious; the impressions are not so strong, but they are exactly similar; and the representation, though it does not present facts to the memory, yet suggests subjects to the imagination.” Whately then concedes that “in order to affect the fancy, the supposed original design should be clear, the use obvious, and the form easy to trace; no fragments should be hazarded without a precise meaning, and an evident connection.” Gilpin, in turn, thought this could be achieved in theory but rarely in practice. In a letter to Mason (another champion of fabricated ruins) he wrote:

I once was as great a friend of fictitious ruins, as you are now. I remember beseeching Tom Whately with great earnestness, to use a heap of old stone & rubbish, of wh. he had the command, in something of this kind, when he had laid out the gardens at Nonsuch. But I had not then seen, what I since have seen, so many awkward, ridiculous, hideous attempts. I conceived, as you do, the beauties of old disjointed, moss-grown stone, formed into time-struck abbeys; but I never once saw it executed; and therefore (on a subject, where we know our bounds) I think we may fairly reason, with the philosophers, from a nunquam factum to an impossibili factu.—[[30]](#footnote-30)

It is Park Place’s failure to produce subjects for the imagination, instead offering unmeaning trifles, to which Gilpin particularly reacts. As Whately would write, “Conjectures about the form, raise doubts about the existence of the ancient structure; the mind must not be allowed to hesitate; it must be hurried away from examining into the reality, by the exactness and the force of the resemblance.”[[31]](#footnote-31) It’s easy, of course, to focus here on the language of association or the practicalities of design, and thus to read both Gilpin’s and Whately’s accounts of meaning in the landscape in just those terms. What is stressed even more in these passages, however, is that association is to be valued only insofar as it produces sensation. For Whately, “the art of gardening aspires to more than imitation: it can create original *characters*, and give expressions to the several scenes superior to any they can receive from allusions,” and while Gilpin might not agree that gardens can actually achieve this, he shares that desire for the mind to be “hurried away” and not allowed to hesitate.

For Whately, “Certain properties, and certain dispositions, of the objects of nature, are adapted to excite particular ideas and sensation: many of them have been occasionally mentioned [in the *Observations*]; and all are very well known: they require no discernment, examination, or discussion, but are obvious at a glance, and instantaneously distinguished by our feelings.” His expressive landscapes are not, then, about rejecting the associationism of earlier English gardens; rather, association is both required and required to drop away from view as it produces affects in the viewer. As we have seen, Gilpin—like Whately—recognized the associational qualities of the “nature” he admires and desires, and, as with Whately, what is valued is the ability of features in the landscape to generate “ideas and sensation.” For Whately, those ideas and sensations are to be valued because they are “instantaneously distinguished by our feelings”; but the demonstration of this in the *Observations* is possible only in the form of carefully rehearsed reveries that shore up the cultural values into which Whately has been educated, and on which his own position depends.[[32]](#footnote-32) Ultimately, what is valued, then, are those moments when the culturally learned collapses into an imagining of the authentically natural, because that imagining of the natural is an imagining also of one’s own place in and vision of the world.

In Whately’s account of the instantaneously felt, the moment of sought-after pleasure is the moment of ideological collapse, and Gilpin’s manuscript outrage at Park Place reiterates that same point. The vile, the absurd, and the disgusting prevent Gilpin from being “hurried along,” prevent the imagining of nature as something other than ideology, the imagining of ideology as no ideology at all. As Whately’s culturally conditioned reveries suggest, the sensational affects both writers prize are inevitably articulated by narrative—in particular, narrative that can align itself with larger cultural narrations of religion, nation, and property.[[33]](#footnote-33) The last, however, remains problematic for Gilpin. If he values with Whately the ability of landscape to transport one beyond the immediate, Gilpin is far less certain that this is possible in a landscape garden, because precisely what makes it a garden—the intervention of the landowner—entirely prevents this. Thus, while there was a ready language for landowners to adopt—that the landscape garden was an image of their own right to rule—it is the landowner’s vision, or lack of vision, that repeatedly draws Gilpin’s most violent criticism. At Park Place, Conway’s landscape does not simply fail to offer cues for the kind of imaginative reverie Gilpin desires, it offers the disruptively trifling vision of the small scale and the trivial, demonstrating the landowner’s inability to see the greater composition of which they are a part. Gilpin’s Latitudinarian vision of landscape means that when he enters a garden he expects to find in it a smaller image of God’s creation: instead he finds a larger vision of the landowner’s self-concern.

**What Nature Herself Might Be Supposed to Create**

What, then, of the “scenery intirely of the sylvan kind” apparently championed in the opening pages of *Observations on the Lakes*? Gilpin may find glimpses of it at Blenheim or Dinefwr, but what’s wrong with gardens is the very thing that makes them gardens. Even at Hackfall, in Yorkshire, where Gilpin delights in the distant views from Mowbray Point and can “scarce remember any where an extensive view so full of beauties, and so free from faults,” it is the marks of design, the marks of the owner’s vision, which confound the desired affect. Both in the published *Observations on the Lakes*, and—inevitably—more pointedly in the Lakes manuscript, Gilpin’s praise for Hackfall is outweighed by his pity that “in a scene like this, ~~so many awkward buildings shd. be introduced, wh. appear like a burlesq upon it~~ the hand of art has been so unhappily introduced,” and that “amidst all this profusion of great objects, amidst all this grandeur of design (for nature has not only brought the materials together, but has composed them likewise) the eye is every where called aside from the contemplation of them by some trivial object—an awkward cascade—a fountain—a view through a hole cut in a wood, or some other ridiculous specimen of absurd taste.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

There is one garden, however—at least in the manuscripts—that is almost entirely free from such criticism. At the Rookery, the home of Thomas Malthus, near Dorking, in Surrey, Gilpin finds “the purest nature I ever met with” in a (recognizably emblematic) landscape garden. According to Gilpin, Thomas Malthus (father of the more famous Robert) “has litterally done nothing but ~~assist nature by~~ remove~~ing~~ deformities, and add~~ing~~ variety.” In contrast to Stowe, Kew, and Painshill, where “you see the greatest profusion of expence. you everywhere see the hand of art,” at the Rookery, “in all ~~this endless variety of~~ the beautiful sylvan scenes here exhibited, nothing is introduced, but what nature herself might be supposed to create.”[[35]](#footnote-35) More striking in Gilpin’s description of the Rookery, however, is that the scenes he singles out for particular praise are almost all given their “character” by an emblematic feature in the landscape. The “purest nature” in which Gilpin delights is more clearly here than anywhere acknowledged to be the product of a literate and literary culture. Thus, while Gilpin delights in the lake, but not in the temple of Venus (because it is “in itself no beautiful object, & besides ill-adapted), elsewhere, his attention turns to the temple of Pan (“another very beautiful scene”), the temple of Sylvanus (“still more picturesq than the last”), and the hermitage “another very beautiful scene, & wholly different from any of the others”). At each location, it is the opportunity afforded to imagine a mythic scene of ‘nature’ which is most prized; but as his response to these temples suggests, it is here too that the frailty of any distinction between nature and culture becomes most apparent. The temple of Pan, Gilpin writes,

is admirably well adapted to the situation; wh. is just such a retreat, as a shepherd might be supposed to ~~bring~~ choose for his flock at noon, or evening, affording both pasturage, & shelter. The building . . . is wholly artless, & simple. It is indeed an imitation of Grecian architecture: but Pan himself, it might be supposed, or some of his rustic worshippers might have seen the form, & imitated it with such materials as they found upon the spot. Had it been constructed of hewn stone it had ~~been absurd~~ lost it’s simplicity.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Of the temple of Sylvanus, which might all too easily be ridiculed as old-fashioned and artificial, he writes: “The place naturally suggests the idea of a wild wood-god, just peeping out to take a distant view of the world, & darting instantly into his thicket, if any thing alarms him. His habitation is properly furnished, with bows & arrows, oaten-pipes, & instruments of husbandry.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

If these emblematic structures are not problematic (or absurd), it is because they recognize the representational nature of nature, acting as the cue for the kind of culturally reinforcing reverie both he and Whately desire. Gipin’s “nothing . . . but what nature herself might be supposed to create”—for all his apparent dislike of garden structures—becomes hard to distinguish here from Whately’s more open acknowledgement that manmade garden features can produce the affect of nature. Confronted by a rather less forcibly emblematic temple of Pan at Enfield Chase, Whately stresses the power of designed structures to produce these pleasures of reverie, translating the physical into the mythic, the cultural into the natural. Hidden away in a wood, “no one,” Whately argues, “can wish it to be brought forward, who is sensible to the charms of the Arcadian scene which this building alone has created.”[[38]](#footnote-38) At the Rookery’s temple of Pan, as at Enfield’s, the intellectually and emotionally educated viewer is invited to recognize its representational status even as the surrounding landscape is to be experienced as untouched “nature.” The beauties of nature become most apparent in those moments when a familiar story can be told, when the teller of that story can place themself within a larger narrative.

As Mayhew notes, Gilpin’s picturesque engagement with the landscape offers an account of the natural that endorses physical and social harmony but also valorizes the position of Gilpin himself, which urges the importance of the imaginative individual’s engagement with nature rather than the landowner’s reconstruction of nature in his own image.[[39]](#footnote-39) The Rookery is one of those rare instances for Gilpin where nothing is introduced into a garden, but “what nature herself might be supposed to create”; repeatedly, however, the manuscripts must instead record his immediate confrontation with what the owner has created. As the Rookery and those distant views at Hackfall suggest, Gilpin does not imagine himself an enemy to gardening, but to gardens that are the wrong kind because they make physical the landowner’s image of themself. Trapped in their own littleness and localness, they fail to fulfill the moral usefulness Gilpin had praised in his first published work, the *Dialogue on Stowe.* Gilpin therefore raises the question ofwho properly owns the landscape—the legal proprietor, or the picturesque traveler freed from the pettiness of ownership to see the larger picture.[[40]](#footnote-40) In the manuscripts and in the published tours, then, we may read a continuation of the dialogue mounted in Gilpin’s account of Stowe, which focused at once on the physical structures of landscape and on their moral interpretation, and also, therefore, on the usefulness—or otherwise—of gardens. As the *Dialogue* insists, this raises questions not only of wealth, gentility, and taste, but also of virtue: in the manuscript and published tours the focus for that debate becomes the gardens of private individuals. And while properly national gardens such as Blenheim can lay claim to a form of public virtue that Gilpin more usually associates with wild “nature,” most of the gardens he visits do not. Instead they seem to speak of waste and foolishness, of an emphasis on self, and a misunderstanding of one’s place in the Creation and in the nation.

John Macarthur, drawing on the language of Kant, situates “disgust” in a way that sheds aesthetic light on Gilpin’s response: “While the sublime has something to tell us of reason, and beauty of morality, disgust, in which the gut can spasm in relation to an idea, tells us of the imagination.”[[41]](#footnote-41) In the revisions to Gilpin’s manuscripts we see that imagination under pressure from the weight of those cultural contradictions that inform it; and while disgust has the potential to articulate a sense of taste as culturally shared, Gilpin’s disgust is repeatedly associated with the class most insistent on their right to own that language. Thus, in the picturesque tours that finally appear in print, Gilpin offers his readers the polite language of the agreeable, the disagreeable, and the deleted. Characteristically, on entering the gardens of the great, he offers, too, a turn to aesthetic criticism and attention to the formal that we might also now read as a means of diffusing a more radical attack on a landowning vision—even as the rhetoric of nature appears to support the dominance of that class. However, what the published texts so often occlude, I have been arguing, is the immediacy of the manuscripts’ sheer disgust when confronted by the very things that make a garden a garden—which for Gilpin can only be expressed (initially at least) in the language of the vile, the primping, the abominable, and the absurd, language that articulates more clearly than anything just what it is Gilpin wants, and finds wanting, in made scenery.

If there is still that tendency in modern discussions to stress dissociation as crucial to the picturesque, what the Gilpin manuscripts offer is, on the contrary, a clear sense of an emotional reaction that must then be recast for public consumption. While we might say that the reworking of manuscript notes for a polite audience inevitably precludes the more visceral language of outrage, I am suggesting that such an explanation underplays the significance of the struggle between immediate response and mediated revision. Alongside the aesthetics of dissociation, what we find in the manuscripts, I have been arguing, is an emotional aesthetic reacting against landowners and their overweening self-importance, an aesthetic that looks to the ideal, the general, the characteristic, and that recoils from the localism and lack of vision of those whose property rights are thought to give them also the right to change the shape of the land.

It is often noted (quite rightly) that Gilpin does not want to see fences and boundaries in his picturesque views, but the manuscripts show something more: a discomfort with the landowner’s urge to insist on the centrality of their desires. Thus, while we might set Gilpin’s understanding of nature within Barthes’s larger account of a bourgeois use of cultural myths to turn a historically specific class-culture into a universal nature, that effort would underplay Gilpin’s resistance to the otherwise normative vision of the landowning class of which he was a part. His pleasure in viewing a landscape where “a probable nature is not exceeded” is continually confronted by landowners who do exceed it, and what appears repeatedly in his manuscripts is a troublesome alignment between landowners and the unnatural. Whately might avoid this by offering his own carefully constructed reveries, but for Gilpin such reveries become impossible precisely because of the unmeaning affected trifles produced by landowners. In his account of his sketching, Gilpin consistently stresses the power of the picturesque sketch to transport its viewer elsewhere.[[42]](#footnote-42) His disappointment with gardens—most forcibly articulated in the manuscript tours—is that so often they don’t. Instead, they trap their visitors within the littleness and localness of a landowner who fails to see beyond themself; and while made landscapes have the potential to produce the pleasures of the Rookery, more often they result in the (suppressed) horrors and abominations of Park Place.

At the beginning of this essay I noted the remarkable changes in landscape design across the second half of the eighteenth century and the implication of such changes for encounters with “nature.” What we might recognize, too, is that while design undoubtedly changes, the urge to read gardens as a symbol of oneself, in the broadest sense, remains. This is not simply because gardens insistently invite a confrontation with the metaphysical, but also because they inevitably draw attention to acts of making that are economic quite as much as they are aesthetic. Thus, while I have suggested that Gilpin’s “attack” on the garden is an attack on the vision of those who own, there is a perhaps more threatening possibility: that this “landowning aesthetic” is finally an externalizing of the desire to reshape the Creation in one’s own image. In turn, we might read the figure of the wealthy landowner and their lack of taste (made iconic for the eighteenth century by Pope's Timon) as a convenient foil for one’s own unsettling urge to remake the landscape in the shape of one’s own desires. Gilpin’s manuscripts offer us a recognizable cultural dilemma: Outcries about misuse of wealth are not simply an attempt to distance oneself from the money that makes the leisured production of landscape possible; they may also be understood as part of a larger attempt to inhabit nature as at once emptied of its ideological charge and a product of that ideology. In this sense, Gilpin’s crucial act of dissociation is not from the physical world through which he moves—despite those easy metaphors of the Claude glass and absent labor—rather, the dissociation is from desires that must be at once distanced and owned in order to create the pleasures of unmediated nature.

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1. Robert Mayhew, “William Gilpin and the Latitudinarian Picturesque,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 349–66; but see also Kim Ian Michasiw, who characterizes Gilpin’s interest as being “in those who are transient presences in the landscape, whose separation from any agency in it is everywhere apparent. His project is to instruct these aliens on how best to see, appreciate, and horde up in memory a fleeting acquaintance with a scene that is not their own”: Michasiw, “Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque,” *Representations* 38 (Spring 1992): 76–100 at 82. For other attempts to theorize Gilpin and the picturesque, see Stephen Ross, “The Picturesque: An Eighteenth-Century Debate,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46, no. 2 (Winter 1987): 271–79; Malcolm Andrews, *In Search of the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760–1800* (Aldershot, U.K., 1989); *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770*, ed. Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (Cambridge, 1994); Dabney Townsend, “The Picturesque,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 365–76; David Marshall, “The Problem of the Picturesque,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2002) 413–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As Carl Paul Barbier notes in *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teachings and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford, 1963), Gilpin “recorded his impressions in little notebooks, many of which have survived . . . these notebooks in which he jotted his ‘rough thoughts’ together with early drafts of the *Tours* . . . contain many ‘off the record’ impressions which years later were carefully excised or attenuated before publication” (p. 41). For Gilpin’s life, see also William D. Templeman, *The Life and Work of William Gilpin (1724–1804), Master of the Picturesque and Vicar of Boldre*, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 24, nos. 3–4 (Urbana, Ill., 1939); and, for the significance of disgust in relation to taste and the picturesque, see John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . on several parts of England; particularly the mountains and lakes*, 2 vols. (London, 1786), 1:9–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gilpin, *Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (London, 1748). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ThusPolypthon says of his companion: “what a happy Man you are, thus to find an Opportunity of moralizing upon every Occasion! What a noble View you have displayed before me; when perhaps if I had been alone, I should have entertained myself no otherwise than in examining the Busts”; Gilpin, *Dialogue*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. John M. Robertson, 2 vols. (Indianapolis and New York, 1964), 2:125; and his *Life, Unpublished Letters and Philosophical Regimen*, ed. Benjamin Rand (London, 1900), 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For Shaftesbury’s attempt to resolve that problem in his own garden, see David Leatherbarrow, “Character, Geometry and Perspective: The Third Earl of Shaftesbury’s Principles of Garden Design,” *Journal of Garden History* 4, no. 4 (1984): 332–58. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Journal entry for Friday, 25 August, 1769, in Nehemiah Curnock, ed. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., sometime fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, enlarged from original mss., with notes from unpublished diaries, annotations, maps, and illustrations*, 8 vols. (London: Charles Kelly, 1909-16) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. Gilpin’s questioning of his own delight in the physicality of the creation: in a letter to William Mason, he writes, “Pray are you casuist enough to inform me, whether it may not be as immoral to admire the objects we find on the surface of the earth, as those we dig out of its bowels? I assure you I sometimes take myself to task on this subject; and think myself, that in our case we admire the works of God; in the other, we [administer] to a dirty fashion. But I know not whether this is sound logic,” Gilpin to Mason, Cheam, May 6, 1775, in Mason–Gilpin correspondence, 1772–1797, Gilpin Papers, MSS. Eng. Misc. d. 570–71, Bodleian Library, Oxford [hereafter Mason–Gilpin correspondence]. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Of course it was not quite this neat, and as Tom Williamson has demonstrated, “emblematic” gardens with a large number of structures, statues, and inscriptions continued to be among the most famous even if they were increasingly seen as old-fashioned. See Williamson, *Polite Landscapes: Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London, 2000), 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See, for example, Gilpin to Mason, Cheam, May 3, 1776, Mason–Gilpin correspondence: “I much doubted my theory because I had mentioned it to Sir Jos. Reynolds at Xtmas; and he did not seem to conceive any distinction between beauty, & picturesq beauty”; or Gilpin to Mason, Vicars Hill, February 12, 1784, Mason–Gilpin correspondence, where he admits, “I am so attached to my picturesq rules that if nature gets it wrong, I cannot help putting her right.—Now I beg you will not go, & tell that silly speech to any body; but keep it to your self.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Horace Walpole, ‘On Modern Gardening’, in his *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 4th edition (London, 1796), vol.4, p.289. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Mason to Gilpin, January 5, 1782, Mason–Gilpin correspondence. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty … [in] Cumberland and Westmoreland*, 1:121–22. {I think it would be better to use the formal title for the printed volume and “Tour through England” for the manuscript to avoid confusion} [ok, but several of Gilpin’s volumes use this formulation for the start of the title – so it needs the bit I’ve added on the end] [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. William Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye, and several parts of South Wales, &c relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (London, 1782), 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Gilpin, *Observations on the River Wye*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For this essay I draw predominantly on Gilpin’s manuscript tours: “Wye Tour,” MS. Eng. Misc. e. 486 (1-8) {should the range of notebooks be given here as with the others?}; “A tour through England; more particularly through the mountainous parts of Cumberland, and Westmoreland: with a view to illustrate the principles of picturesq beauty in landscape” (1772), MS. Eng. Misc. e. 488 (1–8), hereafter “Tour through England” {I think it makes more sense to abbreviate the actual title that to supply a different one [e.g. Lakes tour]; OK?YES]; “Western Tour,” MS. Eng. misc. f. 192 (1–15); and three notebooks: “Particular Parts. Hagley & Leasowes,” MS. Eng. misc. f. 179 (2); 'Particular Thoughts', 'Rough Thoughts', &c MS. Eng. misc. f. 180 (1-15) {Correct that this one does not have a title? Also, does it have a range of notebook numbers? notebook 1 is cited below, suggesting there are more than one?}; and “Miscellaneous notes,” MS. Eng. misc. e. 522 {I was confused here re: the notebooks about which MS title goes with which shelfmark. I’m guessing based on what follows, clustering the titles and shelfmarks and separating them with semicolons. Please confirmYES}. All Gilpin Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Gilpin, *Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty*, 1:30. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Gilpin, “Tour through England,” notebook 1, fol. 20. {Here and hereafter I’m using the title of the ms if one exists rather than the shelfmark, as more readable. I’m guessing that the parenthetical number refers to the notebook where there are multiple notebooks in an ms, under one shelfmark; if that’s not correct, please explain what that number is.} [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Gilpin, “Wye Tour,” notebook 1, fol. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. MS. Eng. misc. f. 180, notebook 1, fol. 11; and “Particular Parts. Hagley & Leasowes,” MS.Eng. misc.f.179(2) fols. 44–54**.** In Eng.Misc.e.488 (1), f.83, the much grander scale of nearby Hagley, the estate of George, Lord Lyttelton, fairs no better, appearing as trifling, and “below criticism.” {supply folio # for this quotation?} [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Observations on the River Wye*, 106; and “Wye Tour,” notebook 5, fols. 103–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For Barbier’s account of Gilpin at Park Place, see *William Gilpin*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Observations on the River Wye*, 99; the full description in *Observations on the Lakes*, first edition, 1:21, reads: “Henly lies pleasantly at the bottom of woody hills, on the banks of the Thames: but the chalk bursting every where from the soil, is disagreeable. When a white spot has a meaning, as in a wicket or a seat, if it be only a spot, it may often have a good effect; but when it forces itself on the eye in large unmeaning patches, it never fails to disturb the landscape.” [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In “Wye Tour,” along with the various deletions and corrections in almost every line, the entire passage is then deleted, with vertical lines crossed through it (notebook 8, fols. 162–70). In the “Tour through England” manuscript, the fair copy follows the corrections made in “Wye Tour” {meaning the manuscript, correct? YES} fairly closely (notebook 1, fols. 3–7). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. “Tour through England,” notebook 1, fols. 4–6; cf. Walpole, “This is by far the finest place upon the Thames. Nature and art have both worked well on it, and with a boldness, not elsewhere to be found in this neighbourhood of London. The hills indeed rise as steep, though they do not swell as high, as in landscape ground of the first character. . . . The cottage has a pretty room in it and exquisite scenery from the three sides. On one side, Henley Church; on a second, the meanders of the river; and in front, the river again, glittering through the foliage of a steep woody glen, almost equals Wales in its sweetest manner,” in *Anecdotes of Painting in England (1760–1795): With Some Account of the Principal Artists and Incidental Notes on Other Arts,* ed.Frederick W. Hilles and Philip B. Daghlian (New Haven, Conn., 1937), 171–72. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “Wye Tour,” notebook 8 (“Pict. views &c thr. Berksh. & Buckingh.”),fols. 162–69; cf. Walpole, “The enormous stones facing [the rocky bridge], and with such noble effect, were brought from fourteen different counties. The iron clamping them together, weighs two tons. The expense was 2000 l.” [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gilpin to Mason, Vicars Hill, June 5, 1783, Mason-Gilpin correspondence. While living in Cheam, Gilpin had been a close neighbor and regular visitor to Nonsuch Park. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Whately, *Observations on Modern Gardening* (London, 1770), 131–32. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Thus Whately writes, “such is the constitution of the human mind, that if once it is agitated, the emotion often spreads far beyond the occasion; when the passions are roused, their course is unrestrained; when the fancy is on the wing, its flight is unbounded; and quitting the inanimate objects which first gave them their spring, we may be led by thought above thought, widely differing in degree, but still corresponding in character, till we rise from familiar subjects up the sublimest conceptions, and are rapt in the contemplation of whatever is great or beautiful, which we seen in nature, feel in man, or attribute to divinity”; *Observations*, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Hence Whately’s claim that reflections on ruins will turn from change and decay to more general thoughts of melancholy, that a beautiful cultivated landscape will lead eventually to “every benevolent feeling,” and thus that “the mind is elevated, depressed, or composed, as gaiety, gloom, or tranquillity, prevail in the scene; and we soon lose sight of the means by which the character is formed; we forget the particular objects it presents; and give way to their effects, without recurring to the cause, we follow the track they have begun, to any extent, which the disposition they accord with will allow,” *Observations*, 155–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Gilpin, *Observations on the Lakes,* 2:194–96, and for these quotations, "Tour through England,” notebook 1, fols. 703, 707. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Gilpin, Description of “The Rookery near Dorking in Surrey,” in “Miscellaneous notes,” fols. 103–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Gilpin, “Miscellaneous notes,” fols. 9–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Gilpin, “Miscellaneous notes,” fols. 10–11. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The temple of Pan at Enfield was of stone, with Dorick columns without bases, and with the limited ornamentation of “a crook, a pipe, and a scrip, and those only over the doors”; Gilpin, *Observations*, 130 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See also Tim Fulford’s account of Gilpin, which argues persuasively that one element of Gilpin’s tours is the repeated destabilizing of polite “authority” with the use of oral history and local anecdote; Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge, 2006), chap. 3. See also Michasiw, who aligns Gilpinian landscape with the fading power of the gentry, and which is characterized by the paradox of being “inviolable except ideationally and as such . . . asserts its identity and integral otherness as preconditions to the traveler’s picturesque pastimes. At the same time, however, picturesque practice simulates a control beyond that practicable for the most ambitious landowner”; “Nine Revisionist Theses,” 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Cf. Michasiw’s claim, in “Nine Revisionist Theses,” {supply p. #?), that the travelling Gilpin is constantly seduced by scenes, whether those of “wild” nature or of the “tasteful proprietor” and that the relish of picturesque experience is to be found in the lack of control; but also Macarthur’s suggestion that the disgusting is almost inevitably larger or smaller than it should be (*The Picturesque*, 62). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Macarthur, *The Picturesque*, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. See, for example, Gilpin’s late comments on the importance of imaginative transport in his “Instructions for Examining Landscape,” “When we see a pleasing landscape in *nature*, we not only wish to enjoy it; but we are incited by the beauty of what we see, to proceed in the same direction in search of scenes of the same kind, which we suppose it may lead to. It should be thus in artificial landscape. When we see a pleasing scene, we cannot help supposing, there are other beautiful appendages connected with it, tho’ concealed from our view. If therefore we can interest the imagination of the spectator, so as to create in him an idea of some beautiful scenery beyond such a hill, or such a promontory, which intercepts the view, we give a scope to a very pleasing deception. It is like the landscape of a dream. The mind naturally runs on with an idea, which had long possessed it. When slumber shuts the senses, after seeing a fine view, the idea often continues—somewhat faded indeed, but strong enough to preserve a very amusing picture”; quoted in Barbier, *William Gilpin*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)