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THE WORK OF CECILY BRENNAN AS A COUNTERPOINT TO IRISH LANDSCAPE TRADITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Is it not mere coincidence that a growing number of Irish women artists now work directly or indirectly from landscape. What I want to argue in this thesis, with particular reference to the work of Cecily Brennan, is that a concern with landscape rather than appearing regressive and anchronistic may prove an attempt to negotiate a different kind of space, especially for women artists. It may provide an alternative to the representations of landscape examined here in the historical sections.

I will examine the history of Irish Landscape painting and indicate that Cecily Brennan, a young contemporary painter, acts as a counterpoint to the prevalent landscape painters of the past centuries and in some respects invokes Romantic Traditions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

CHAPTER I

CECILY BRENNAN

Cecily Brennan's drawings and paintings have always been derived from landscape, landscape not as wilderness, but in some way cultivated whether by agriculture, forestry or horticulture. While at college (1974-1978) she was inspired by the market gardening, the tulip farms of North County Dublin and the town of Rush where she grew up. The tulip farms consist of rigidly planted fields of flowers, the overall effect is a patchwork of bright colours. Her work at this stage is mostly drawing, echoing the rigid patchwork of the farms in graphite, cross hatching and splashes of colour. The only hints of painterliness are to be found in the tiny tapestries she wove which are richly textured, padded, predominantly green, with notes of vivid colour. These tapestries are based on little gardens, prefiguring her later, more intensive involvement in the subject of the garden. These works constituted her Diploma Show of 1978.

Her move to Wicklow after she left college stimulated an interest in it's landscape. As much as the mountainsides and lakes around Roundwood, the forestry, plantations, the harnessing of nature in the rigid regimented rows of firs and conifirs attracted her interest. She also included the lakes such as Lough Tay and the dramatic deliberate fires, the burning off of deadwood and heather. Small works, executed in watercolour and ink, provided foundation work or studies for the large drawings which constituted her first one-person show in the Project Arts Centre in 1982 and launched her professional career.

Fig.1 <u>Forest & Firebreak</u> by Cecily Brennan

The Project show was composed of huge drawings mostly graphite on immense sheets of white paper. The organization of nature was a key element in the work. Landscape was depicted from a high, all-encompassing eye which seemed to survey and map. The treatment of the graphite varies from spare, gestural calligraphic to area of dense shiny hatching. She continued her interest in the mark of the firebreak, the scorching of the earth, the shape of the flame.

The huge drawing Forest & Firebreak (fig.1) - combines the intense hatching of graphite evoking the rows of trees in the lower part of the drawing to the whiter more expansive area at the top, where a vertical wavering line of firs are depicted in calligraphic strokes. The large works are predominantly black and white. Rigid patterning and organization is combined with the short linear strokes of graphite much more diffuse and broken, see Ditch and Barley (Fig.2) The line breaks down when evoking the elements of fire or weather, whereas it tends to be much more hatched and intensive when delineating the rows of trees in plantations.
The Wicklow drawings revive the soaring bird's eye view and topographical descriptive qualities of mapping, of the eariest Prospects and portraits of houses. The mountain sides of Wicklow have been planted by conifer plantations, cultivated by State Forestry.

The delineation and parcelling up of nature, the importance of distance, the separation of the viewer from the landscape, provide a God's Eye, an all seeing view. The prospect or map is the most easily controlled view of landscape. This detached view affords linear inspection from above, and this first stage of landscape is based on organization, gaining information, and marking civilized areas (1).

Fig.2 Ditch and Barley by Cecily Brennan

The period between the show - which was greeted with critical acclaim and public enthusiasm - and her second solo exhibition, in the Taylor Galleries in 1985, she sees as transitional.

This period seems to be tentative and indecisive, indicating her anxiety about the direction her work was to take. She describes herself as floundering. Having moved from Wicklow back to Dublin, there was a corresponding shift in subject matter, leaving the panoramic vistas of mountain and organised acreage of forestry behind, she now began working from an urban, formal garden. Her source of imagery was derived from the Iveagh Gardens, behind St. Stephens Green, laid out in Victorian times, but now rather dilapidated.

Brennan at this time was trying to move away from the wide expansive mountainsides to a more enclosed private space. Allied to the change in subject matter was an experimentation with different media. The small works based on the Iveagh Gardens are executed in graphite and oil. The only work she feels is quite successful from this period is a drawing of a pathway and an enclosure in the garden.

However, the transitional period also displays the main problem with this phase of her development which was, that while striving towards a more confined, smaller landscape, she tried to maintain the device of the ariel view. While this vantage point had worked successfully when surveying distances, it was now inappropriate to landscape "close up".
The next garden was the public rhododendran gardens in North County Dublin, returning to the area where she had grown up. The initial drawings from there were again transitional and experimental which reflect the problems encountered in dealing with a new medium and a different landscape.

The fluid and malleable qualities of oil paint are in complete contrast to the dry, sparce and flat graphite and acryllic surfaces of Wicklow works. It indicates her aim to stretch her capabilities, to expand from black and white and flat, shallow planes, to colour, texture and depth. Oil paint offered greater possibilities but also posed technical problems and risks as well as less control and certainty.

The plan of the rhododendron gardens, unlike the box-like organization of the tulip forms or the Wicklow plantations is based on the spiral. A series of pathways lead up the hill and *through the garden rather than stretching* across the mountains as the Wicklow pathways had done.
The rhododendrons themselves are pruned to grow over the archways which vault over the pathways. The garden is planned as a series of enclosures, gateways and openings. The visitor does not survey the overall plan all at once, but rather is led by degrees along a series of circuitous routes, glimpsing the garden, piecemeal, in small areas. The motifs *pathway, archway, gateway / entrance* inspired in Paintings from the garden, which formed the basis of her second solo exhibition in the Taylor Calleries in June 1985. These large paintings follow the transitional drawings.

The use of oil paint is more assured and at this stage she felt confident in addressing the themes which interested her without having to grapple with the technical difficulties of a new medium. The paint is thinly brushed on in areas of flat colour. This colour alternates between dark and light, but there are no hard edges separating the forms.

The initial impression is of fluidity and bright colour, forms merging and lambent. The painted areas are often worked into later with graphite or crayon. These gestural feathery lines echo the main forms of the painted areas and serve to bring them into focus.

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For Brennan, drawing into the painting is a means to anchor the flux and movement of the forms which tend to tilt and unbalance the overall structure unless checked.

However, there is an increasing abandon of rigid compositional organization certainly in marked contrast to the pattern, definition and stasis of the Wicklow drawings. Instead the garden paintings exploit swirling movement over the picture plane in the flame like shapes, or use the recessive or vortex image lead the eye inwards creating interiority and depth, rather than drawing the eye across and over the landscape. The great distance, restraint and expanse of the Wicklow drawings appear to have been bridged. There seems to be less actual description, less reliance on topographical, recognizable features.

The brightest paintings in the show included, Summer Blooms, Pathway in Springtime, Flower Covered Archway. Reds, oranges, pinks, yellows predominate in these pictures which rely in the surface effects of hot colour, the explosive flame like forms and lack the differentiation provided by darker or more contoured areas.

There is a move from the explosive vibrant colour of these flower painting to the cooler greens and more organized focused composition in Garden Clearing, where the eye lingers on the central circular area near the bottom left hand side. The eye explores the feathery graphite lines which lie buried within the soft green. Unlike other paintings which evoke movement, restlessness, growth and expanse beyond the picture plane, this work allows a self-contained enclosed area, based on one of the clearings in the garden.

The feathery lines were, again, added right at the end, to curtail the movement of the composition. Quite the largest, most ambitious and challenging as well as the most worked picture in the Taylor Galleries show was the huge rectangular Pathway. Its composition is as fluid as the others but much more restless and agitated. It's complex swirling movement leads the eye in and out, up and around, displaying a frantic energy, suggesting a journey of exploration that has not been resolved. Perhaps the tension of this swirling quality constitutes its very strength. It combines the dark recessions of other pictures, the vortex and also the flowing ribbons of bright colour which were more explosive and exuberant in other pictures, e.g. Summer Blooms. In Pathway coiling shapes of red and yellow twist around the entire surface of the canvas while the recession with its enclosing, vaulting shape lures the eye inwards and around.

This picture lacks any centralised focus such as was given in Garden Clearing. It retains the bright colour while also attempting to lead the eye in to a greater extent. There is a sense of travelling inwards but also of re-emergence and then again probing back in extending beyond the edge of the canvas . The movement of the ribbons of red and yellow are reminiscent of molten lava, and the only relatively flat area in the painting is the grey rock-like mass which protrudes through the bottom centre of the canvas and which also appears in Garden in Autumn. Garden Clearing was the first canvas painted for the exhibition. The rest of the pictures seem much more explorative and agitated, particularly those based on archways and pathways which suggest the idea of a journey into the interior, just as the overall plan of the garden itself lures the visitor inwards.

One of the pictures Garden in Autumn is based on the view from the top of the garden looking down on its spiral plan, and in this sense it echoes the approach of the Wicklow works. However, this view from above is not as obvious or as strong a motiviation as in the earlier drawings. Overall the attention and interest is directed much more into the forms. For instance, the triptych Ground Painting exhibited in the Arts' Council Bursary Show in 1986 suggests a burrowing into the source of growth, the roots of the flowers, perhaps the earth itself. It is a dark diffuse image, displaying the by now characteristic wavering taper forms which spread over the canvas. The focus of the picture is the very bright area in the second and third panel, a crocus-like shape of yellow shot with sap green and pink and painted with thicker, richer pigment than the rest of the canvas. It acts as a half glimpsed, half articulated island in the serpentine movement of colour. Yet there is nothing dense or massive about this grey mass, it is more tentative and subtle. Perhaps because Brennan used liquin - a synthetic glaze medium - it is as thinly painted as the richer more glowing colour.

The images of pathway, archway, entrance emerged from this exhibition and dominate Brennan's current work. These drawings however are bereft of the bright colour, the lambent forms of the paintings. The interest has shifted from colour, life and energy of foliage and blooms to explore the stiller, darker recesses of the archway.

The paintings Flower Covered Archway and Pathway with Red Flowers retained bright colour encircling the archway, but in the most recent drawings the world of sense impressions and horticultural growth is left behind.

What emerged as an awning background, secondary motif in earlier pictures, now forms the focus of the work. In fact the next theme she is thinking of exploring is the underground cave or cavern, which is a further image of recession. In formal terms she says she is trying to retain the energy and exploration of the garden paintings while reasserting the definition and structure of the earlier Wicklow drawings. However, she admits not being able to imagine working in the distant restrained approach of her debut drawings. Moreover, these most recent drawings are in charcoal and charcoal's softer, grainier qualities are in complete contrast to the spiky jagged linear effect of graphite. It is crumbling and soft yet much blacker. Graphite, thickly applied gives a shiny polished surface - as in the dense hatching of the plantations. Charcoal yields a black recessive depth, a matt interiorty.

The paintings based on the archway image are confined to a narrow range of dark earth colours and blacks and the paint is applied more heavily and much thicker. They are still extremely large but appear much more vertical. The grey mass emerges as a predominant motif, rising upwards, above the composition. But as soon as the eye begins to follow the expansion of these vertical promontory forms it is drawn inexorably back downwards into the dark recessive area of the arch. This black vaulting shape recurs in most of these paintings and drawings. The aloof distance, ariel view and the descriptive, topographical surveying quality of the Wicklow drawings are left far behind.

There is a much greater involvement in the medium of the paint itself which is used to build up less defined non-specific vertical forms. Physical features of the landscape of the garden itself are increasingly abandoned, less recognizable and more imaginative.

In her earlier work, Brennan employed a limited range of formal and compositional devices. There is a sharp linear organization of the picture surface. Graphite is the main medium used, she shied away from the less controllable non-fluid medium of oil paint and the complication of colour. Drawing on paper, making direct marks is immediate and a tactile assertion of control. Furthermore the rutting and scouring of machines on the mountainsides echo the activity of drawing. The marks of the tractors that plough before tree planting exert the same gonging effect, reflected in the scouring of line on paper. A basic drive in landscape has been identified as the organization of refuge, enclosure, escape routes, the most basic category in landscape painting is biological / physiological, and psychological (2). This draws attention to the human need to organize nature into refuges or enclosures as well as escape routes, by both formal patterns and associations of ideals. At a fundamental level the eye is also attracted to diversity and exploration.

The prospect of panormaic mountainsides is juxtapositioned with the possible escape routes of the pathways. Brennan contrasts the emphatic delineation, the dense patterning of the regimented rows of conifers, forest divided by pathways with less negoitable terrain, expansive areas of white, sparsely marked.

The high view from above enables participation in the scene without foresaking analytic detachment: the feeling of depth and distance of "standing on one mountainside and looking across to another" (3). Tension is created between cartography and perceptual space: maps or prospects do not recede or withdraw into the distance, do not employ a vanishing point, but spread, web-like, across the picture plane.

The eye explores the patterned surface finding ways in and around, up and down. Unlike the garden paintings which lure the eye inwards, these drawings are dominated by expanse, distance, prospect.

The cultural aspect of the prospect refuge theory takes the form of translating the landscape into patterns of knowledge and information (4). The pathways of the Wicklow drawings, their patterned surfaces, plot the series of routes from one part of the landscape to the next and make sense of the scale and panorama of the mountains. Brennan has said that the inner drive to control and master predominates in these drawings.

The aeriel surveying view and the immediacy and limitation of drawing is an assertion of this. She approached them primarily as exercises. What exploration, knowledge and control of the terrain provides is knowledge, especially when other areas of life are less negotiable and controlled. Human relationships are less predictable and lack this prior knowledge and preparation. These drawings provided a bedrock of control, organization and security.

Brennan's Wicklow drawings can be compared to late 18th century paintings of Wicklow and landscape painting generally. They also relate to the earliest, naive prospects or maps and to late 18th Century categories of the sublime and beautiful and picturesque. The earlier landscapes also emphasised contrast and juxtaposition as well as intricacy and detail. The following chapters discuss the development of landscape painting in Ireland which are followed by a comparison of Romantic precepts in Brennan's work.

FOOTNOTES

1. For greater discussion of this, see Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, Page 35.

2. IBID p.6

3. Quoted in John Meany "An interview with Cecily Brennan" Circa No. 14 Jan/Feb 1984 pp. 6-11.

4. See discussion of organization of landscape, Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, p.6

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

A basic human impulse is to control and organise nature, whether by the farmer gardener or artist. The environment is planted and ordered. The content of landscape combines the physical features of the terrain and the mark of man. Landscape painting by the very fact that it is painted, rests on art / nature oppositions. Nature is mediated by sets of cultural conventions. Thus a basic motivation in landscape is ordering and making sense of the natural, to order it in human terms. Several vocabularies of order can be used: technical, metaphorical, allegorical and so on. All are various means to control and interpret the landscape whether at the most instinctive level or with conscious recourse to cultural or literary frameworks, e.g. biblical, classical or indeed nationalist motifs. Landscapes suggest the organization of nature into fields, farms or gardens, developing into representations of it, in pictures (1).

John Berger cites the first pure landscapes as those of the 17th century Dutch realist painters, in particular Ruysdael and Hobbema (2). They were topographical views devoid of literary or emblematic connotations. He asserts that landscape painting began as a relatively autonomous activity whch grew to become the major source of innovative change within the visual arts.

Furthermore, if we examine the status of landscape painting within the categories of the visual arts, i.e. the hierarchy of genres, it occupied a subservient position in the 17th century to history painting.

History paintings were large scale pictures, composed in the studio, the subject matter deriving mainly from classical mythology, which claimed major significance or even national import. History paintings were destined for public exhibition in the salons and were awarded greatest prestige

Ronald Paulson has stated that the major change in 18th century English art was from history painting to landscape painting as the main vehicle for artistic expression. Echoing Berger's emphasis on the expressive potential and iconoclastic function of landscape painting, Paulson claims it displaced portraiture "disguised as history painting to landscape disguised as history ", developing into pure landscape. In the late 18th century landscape painting was at a watershed, dispensing with the "literary baggage of historical landscape, the idea of in pictura poesis" (3) The transition was to a more expressive, individualistic pure landscape.

A basic impulse towards landscape seems to be the organization of the terrain and exertion of control. The various strategies used can be seen as progessively more sophisticated methods of mastery. From knowledge and mastery as walking surveying to socio economic mastery. Land as property, owning the land itself or representations of the land, in the earliest prospects, Dutch Realist scenes. Furthermore, the person who acquired a topographical landscape symbolically appropriated the property it described. (5)

The history of landscape painting can be said to have developed from a topographical descriptive function exerting control over all towards a less topographical and less substantial approach culminating in "landscapes of the Mind" (6).

The late eighteenth century seems to have been a critical juncture when landscape painting retained certain conventions and categories, but was opening up a new conceptual framework for artistic practice. At the far reaches of this development was modern landscape, exemplified in Constable's cloud studies, Turner, Monet and later the skeins of Pollock (7). And within the structure of landscape is located a subtext: struggles for power, need for prospect refuge, escape or protection, plots of desire. The representation of landscape proceeds from a need to gain knowledge, to organize and comprehend, translating nature into cultural models from the simplest surveying devices, maps or Dutch topographical views or the elaborate structures of neo-classicism, or later, the Picturesque and the Sublime and the Beautiful.

The British Isles the late 18th century is a transitional, formative period. The genre of landscape painting was becoming increasingly important, at the same time the countryside itself was undergoing profound changes. Although artists were still dependent on the patronage of the landowners, they were also catering to the rising middle class and indeed becoming aware of their own professional status.

Broadly speaking from the 1750s onwards, a bias in favour of neo-classicism or historical landscape nurtured by the aristrocacy, gradually merged with the growing preference for straight forward Dutch landscape associated with the rise of the middle classes. This reinforced the trend towards a more credibly realistic representation of the native countryside. The expanding middle class contributed to the establishment of public exhibitions and the proliferation of prints. Landscape paintings were bought and sold and were no longer confined to private commissions hanging in drawing rooms of the gentry.

The pictorial devices of Claude and the Conventions of the Pastoral seemed to yield to a greater realism with the appropriation of certain features of Dutch realism. In fact, according to John Barrell (8), the abstract ideals of neo classicism withered under the glare of the reality of estate management and the countryside itself. Landscape painting continued to present a palatable version of the power wielded by the aristocracy and to bolster the pride in landownership.

This version of landscape depicted "The Happy Rural Life", (9) passed on the ideals of the Georgics (10) the morality of landownership and agriculture stemming from an impeccable Classical pedigree. Gainsborough's Mr. & Mrs. Andrews presents the proud landowner and his wife with his cultivated fields and cornfields stretching away to the distance (11).

David Solkin has argued that with the increasing depiction of uncivilized nature, one myth was effectively substituted for another. Nature increasingly depicted in its wild state was classified according to aesthetic theories, whether Sublime or Beautiful or Picturesque, which acted as a bridge between the two. Aesthetic theories and guide books, itineraries of sights, equipped the growing numbers of upper and middle class tourists who were taking to the hills in ever increasing numbers (12)

The growing appreciation of depopulated nature and by those leisured and erudite enough to appreciate its scenery was a far cry from earlier times, when mountains harboured real danger and aroused feelings of incomprehension or distaste.

However, it was a vision of the countryside fundamentally unthreatening, with its wilder aspects alleviated by the concept of the beautiful. The picturesque, bridging the gap between the wild and the cultivated appeared rather more dishevelled in appearance than potentially disruptive. The sublime and beautiful dictated that opposites should be presented only to be reconciled, a facet of the concordia discors, a philosophical model for reality (13).

The picturesque provided aesthetic criteria for landscape based on formal pictorial devices. Thus the visual merits of the scene were emphasised, rather than its actual content, i.e. any human figures were rustic types, which contributed to the irregularity, along with crumbling walls, raggedness, etc. The landscape was robbed of real potential and appreciated as quaint and charming.

As the countryside became a place which the tourist or artist visited and admired, participation in agriculture or daily knowledge of nature became increasingly peripheral. The landscape was simultaneously becoming more accessible, but also more remote. Our modern urge "to get away from it all" could be said to originate in the late eighteenth century. Certain ideas about the countryside, such as the aesthetically uplifting and emotionally stimulating aspects of wild nature, its inhabitants as somehow simpler, more authentically natural, stem from this period. The notion of a rural retreat, away from the crowded social bustle of the imperfect civilization of the cities and towns, gained in attraction and importance. Sublime scenery in this period at least aroused an excitment in nature far from the burgeoning Industrial Revolution.

Irish landscape painters such as George Barrett shed the conventions of neo classicism, and responded with greater individuality to particular scenes. Natural phenomena such as mountains, lakes, forests, waterfalls, sanctioned by aesthetic theories, opened up a new aspect of nature to appreciation.

A more credible myth based on native scenery replaced the happy rural life. A painting such as George Barret's Powerscourt Waterfall to be discussed in the next chapter is populated only by rustic peasants although by their physical presence, at home in the countryside, they share their enjoyment of this dramatic natural scene with the more genteel tourist or indeed the modern spectator. Here the importance of the individual, as against that person's position in society in terms of class, is emphasised. The continued existence of a social hierarchy is played down: the landlord, the Earl of Powerscourt, is nowhere to be seen, but his influence invisibly prevails, the waterfall is situated within his demesne, those relaxed rustic remain his peasants.

According to Solkin (14) the overall change in society from an older feudalistic order to modern capitalism was precipitated by the Industrial Revolution and while this had not yet come to Ireland, artistic forms were nevertheless guided by the English example. The concept of the individual assumed increasing importance within society fuelled by the growth of private property and the spread of Protestantism. Within the visual arts, landscape painting developed as the primary vehicle for artistic personality and innovation, as the emphasis on the particular rather than the ideal eventually prompted an increasing variety and originality of approach. There was a shift in emphasis from the social consensus to the individual and an emphasis on subjectivity.

The increasing interest in wild scenery recognized nature as man's "Other, difficult, if not impossible to control" (15). The representation of landscape was increasingly drained of the mark of man. From the rural labourers of the Georgic, and the neo classical swains of the Pastoral, only a few spectators lingered in the pictures of sublime or picturesque scenery, to enhance the spectacle of raw nature or act as surrogates for the viewer. In the early nineteenth century, only the solitary male hero remained standing on the threshold of sublime, depopulated nature.

The most radical aspects of the landscapes of the early nineteenth century included the depiction of pure landscape without figures or scenes of rugged unspoiled scenery where man's influence is absent or minimal.

Landscape painting itself took on an increased burden of significance within the visual arts. The most radical exponents of landscape strove to allow the elements of nature alone to carry full significance achieving the epic significnace previously afforded to history painting. When the rhetoric and paraphenalia of neo classical or picturesque landscape was abandoned the symbols of nature themselves become the focus of the painting.

The dramatic change in landscape painting can be seen in Caspar David Friedrich whose pictures epitomise, the approach to nature as a thing in itself. Frederich, a devout Protestant pronounced that "the artists will is law" (16), and shared in the "Weltanschaung" or world view of German Romanticism in the priority given to the individual imagination.

Frederich Schegel pronounced that "through the artist, mankind becomes individual", (17)). Goethe's exclamation, "how yearns the solitary soul to melt into the boundless whole" (18) seems to aptly describe Frederich's famous painting, The Monk by the Sea.

Here a tiny figure is depicted in the beach, looking out at the expansive reaches of sea and sky. Frederich painted the sea and sky as symmetrical and boundless, devoid of human presence. The tiny figure, isolated and prominent contemplating the boundless sublime owes nothing to the inset tableau foreground scene of Claude. Pure landscape evoked intensity of feeling and stimulated the emotions. It released what Schegel referred to as "der Bergeelung"" or an inner light, or Wordsworth's description of, "those unlit caverns deep within which the sun could never penetrate" (19) Frederich's landscapes are iconolclastic: in 1808 he caused a furore with The Cross on the Mountain, or the Tetschen Altarpiece. The frame, designed by Fredrich, includes traditional signs of an ear of wheat and wine branch, which clearly define the picture as an altarpiece. But the crucifix in the landscape is obviously no such traditional symbol. Because it is depicted as a wayside crucifix, silhouetted against the skyline, it is almost a part of nature itself, with ivy growing over its stem. In later paintings the crucifix is not depicted as a motif as such, but is displaced in the shapes of trees in isolated Alpine scenery (figs.3&4).

The attempt to afford to landscape painting the seriousness and import held previously by history painting had an ideological purpose directly related to the destruction of traditional religious and political values at the end of the eighteenth century.

Another German artist, Phillip Otto Runge articulated the concerns of the age in 1802: "With us again something is perishing, we stand on the brink of all the religions which sprang up out of the Catholic one.... everything presses towards landscape art....They grasp mistakenly at historical painting....Is there not surely something in his new art; - landscapery if you like, - a higher point to be reached?" (20)

Fig.3 Cross in the Mountains by Caspar David Friedrich

Fig.4 The Solitary Tree by Casper David Friedrech

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The radical theory, the transcendental impulse in pure landscape is a product of the main European cultural centres. Landscape assumed tremendous significance, the scene surveyed assumed an emotive and visionary aspect epitomised in Fredrich's artistic asceticism, and his recommendation to "Shut your corporal eye so that you see first your picture with your spiritual eye. There bring to light that which you see in darkness that it may reflect others from the outside to the inside." (21).

The contemporary developments in England, with Constable and Turner as the leading figures, proceeded in a less spiritually charged and more empirically based atmosphere with the scientific bias displayed, for instance, in Constable's cloud studies, as a way of investigating nature. But significance and importance awarded to landscape was not diminished. At the very time that romantic poetry and painting were flourishing in England and Germany, those societies were becoming more industrialised and urbanised.

Even Edmund Burke himself whose enquiry categorised nature according to its characteristics, was forced to see society being transformed in the excesses of the French Revolution when he wrote in 1797:

"All the little quiet rivulets, that watered an humble, a contracted but not unfruitful field are to be lost in the waste expanse and boundless barren ocean of the homicide philantrophy of France" (22)

In the early 19th Century the representation of romantic landscape, bereft of social presence, often concealed the extent to which that society was undergoing profound and often turbulent social change.

Depopulated landscape offered not only an alternative but also a radical spiritual antidote to the less palatable, ugly and crowded urban and industrial environment.

This model is simply not applicable to Ireland. The late landscapes of O'Connor are the nearest we get to the representation in Irish painting of wild nature and a romantic sublime which flourished elsewhere. Ireland remained a peripheral isolated Colony languishing in an economically and culturally retarded position. The dominance of the landlord meant that the issue of ownership, possession of the land itself, would become fundamental in the struggle for political sovereignty.

As will be discussed in Chapter VI in relation to the Celtic Revival, another form of an idealization of landscape developed from the late 19th century in Ireland, but one which emanated from the Anglo-Irish - at least initially. However, the emphasis was in an idealization of rural society rather than nature and the fostering of a national identity. The forces of burgeoning nationalism and patriotism were galvanised. Myth and legend were resurrected to bolster the depiction of the Irish countryside as Gaelic and native.

Aesthetically the natural world, in particular the West of Ireland in contrast to remote or wild landscapes, becomes inextricably linked with nationalism. Emblematic mythical images of rural community constitute the typical representation of landscape in Ireland.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ronald Paulson Literary Landscape p.7
2. John Berger Ways of Seeing p.105
3. Ronald Paulson Literary Landscape p.172
4. For greater detail on "landscape as the formulation of nature into a scene beginning as the arrangement of ground" etc. see Ronald Paulson Literary Landscape p.7
5. See discussion of Dutch inspired topographical views in David Solkin Richard Wilson, p.29.
6. See John Berger, Ways of Seeing, p.105.
7. Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape , p.172.
8. John Barrell The Dark Side of the Landscape Introduction p.10.
9. Title of first chapter in David Solkin, Richard Wilson, Catalogue p.17.
10. The Georgics will be discussed in greater detail in chapter on Barrett, but for the fullest account see Michael Rosenthal, British Landscape Painting , p.28.
11. This painting is examined in detail in John Berger, Ways of Seeing, p.106.
12. See his discussion of Wilson in the chapter "Historic Britain" also will be discussed in chapter on Barrett. David Solkin, Richard Wilson, p.110.
13. The concordia discors will be discussed in reference to George Barrett, but for greater detail see Solkin IBID p.70.
14. See IBID p.110.
15. Quoted IBID p.110
16. Quoted as part of discussion on Sublime in Hugh Honour, Neo Classicism, p.146.
17. Quoted Charles Rosen, Romanticism and Realism, p.55.
18. IBID p.56
19. IBID p.57
20. IBID p.51
21. IBID p.52
22. Edmund Burke quoted in Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, p.148

CHAPTER III

EARLY IRISH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

FROM THE PROSPECTS TO GEORGE BARRETT

Landscape painting developed slowly and late in Ireland. Apart from some surviving fragments of maps, only two oil paintings survive, the first was inspired by the Battle of Kinsale of 1601 and the second dated 1699 is A View of Dublin by Thomas Bate. Many of these Prospects were connected to the Williamite Campaign, for example a view of Donor Hill, one of the sites of the Battle of the Boyne.

The 17th Century in Ireland was rent by rebellion and unrest. The Battle of Kinsale already mentioned, precipitated the Flight of the Earls, the old Gaelic aristocracy, whose leading lights, the O'Neills and the O'Donnells, fled to Paris and to Rome. Then, after the defeat of the Jacobites, any hope of a Catholic on the throne of England was quenched with the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic Stuart James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. A new social order was established, a Protestant aristocracy and a professional class composed mainly of settlers. These assorted planters, soldiers of fortune and Williamite supporters were granted the confiscated Jacobite estates, and indeed the earliest "Prospects", hybrids of cartography and landscape, surveyed and recorded the extent of colonization.

The twenty five years of relative stability and calm, provided by the Restoration stimulated the establishment of at least a rudimentary framework for a cultural apparatus.

Furthermore, the first Viceroy appointed was James Butler, the Duke of Ormond, who cultivated a keen interest in the arts and was responsible for introducing English or Continental artisans and styles into Ireland, having seen at first hand the European prototypes while in exile with Charles II.

Organisations such as the College of Physicians were established in 1667, the philosophical society in 1687, while artists or rather artisans, found their niche in the collective body, the Guild of Cutlers, Painters, Steyners and Stationers founded in 1676 (1).

The seat of the Duke of Ormond was Kilkenny Castle and a fine Prospect of it survives, executed by Francis Place, perhaps the finest of the early topographical draughtsmen who travelled around the country, measuring and recording with great accuracy and detail the country estate or garrisons such as Charlesfort in Kinsale, or the expanding ports and towns such as Drogheda, Waterford and Dublin. In these early Prospects a bird's eye view is adopted, to fully scan and survey the panorama of settlement. (2).

The <u>View of Kilkenny</u>(fig 5) depicts the central house, occupying the centre, overlooking the expanse of gardens, enclosures and buildings with rows of trees and roadways radiating from it. The mark of the coloniser is still raw and recent with the rigid rows of saplings and orchards, and the sharp blocks of buildings rising from the plain.

In the <u>View of Stradbally House</u> (fig.6) again the house is the sun, at the hub of the composition. From this core of order, the landscape is rigidly divided.

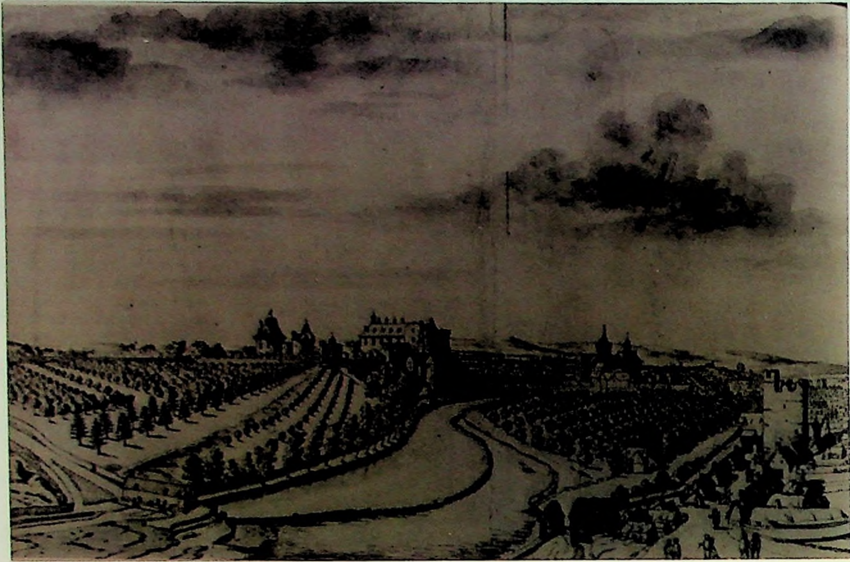

Fig.5 View of Kilkenny by Francis Place

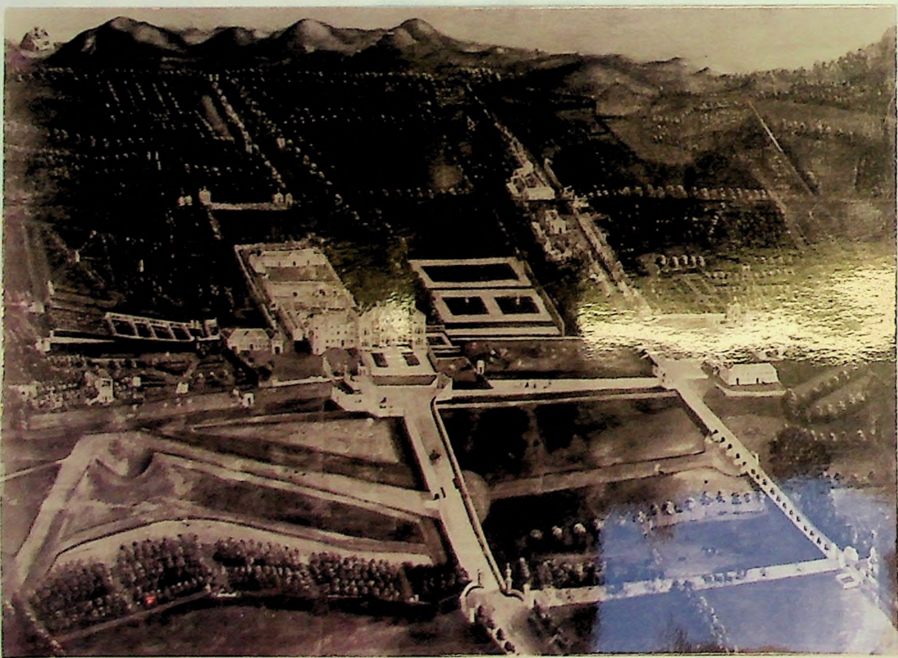

Fig.6 View of Stradbally Anonymous

The Prospects combine distance and detail in the formal gardens and lawns pan out from the house, we can even spot temples, stables and a gazebo. On the long avenue, is the artery that connects the outlying buildings and village, tiny figures some on horseback, are depicted going industriously about their business.

These Prospects lay no claim to high art, but reflect and record the pride displayed by the Irish gentry in the extent and size of their estates, with their rigid box-like organization of the landscape. Uncultivated and distant phenomena as hills and mountains are consigned to the periphery of these maps and vaguely indicated. It is the mark of a man which merits the most attention.

The first important artist to emerge in Irish landscape painting was a Dutchman, William van der Hagan, who flourished around the 1730s (3) and produced a variety of work, again depicting scenes of ports, towns and estates as well as neo classical pastiches, imaginary landscapes and so on. He painted scenes from the Williamite campaign for the House of Lords and birds eye views of Howth Castle, Carton House, as well as supplying decorative schemes for over mantels in country houses, for instance a view of Drogheda for Beaulieu House, Co. Louth.

Van der Hagan was obviously catering to the tastes of the gentry who desired either portraits of their houses or pastoral scenes. In this they can be said to share the cultural bias, nursed also by the English gentry for neo-classical landscape epitomised by Claude Lorrain, Gaspar Poussin and Gaspar Dughet. To own an original master purchased as a result of a Grand Tour was prized above all, the ultimate status symbol for the aspiring young nobleman (4).

The ideal landscapes of Claude were derived from the Roman Campagna and based on the Pastoral, of Virgil the Roman Poet. Landscape was approached with a priori conventions and a typical Claude contained a detailed tableau foreground, populated with figures from the Bible or mythology or a non-specific Pastoral swain.

This stage set foreground was bordered or framed by trees, acting as "coulisses" or wings, while the middle ground usually includes a Classical ruin or two, a bridge over a meandering stream, devices which lead the eye over the landscape to the hazy undulating contours of distant hills. The whole scene is bathed in a suffused golden glow (5).

These pictorial devices were appropiated by imitators, catering, like Van der Hagan, to a demand for Italianate scenery, in view of the prohibitive expense of the original. These copyists could never of course emulate the masters. In Ireland the father and son team of Richard and Robert Carver produced such work and in England George Lambert and John Wootan (6) were the main figures.

Later, even George Barrett produced imaginary scenes, as did Thomas Robert and William Ashford, the other two well known landscape specialists in Ireland towards the middle and late 18th centruy.

The years after the 1740's witnessed a greater development and consolidation in landscape painting in both Ireland and Britain. The key factors are the expanding cultural apparatus, the greater emphasis on training and organisation the changing taste of the gentry and the rising middle class.

This taste was admitting a greater realism, displayed in the purchase of Dutch works and moving away from a rigidity in the landscape itself, evidenced by the decline of the formal thematic garden that we saw in the Stradbally Prospect for instance, and the rise of the landscape park.

In Ireland a particular expansion of landscape painting occurred in mid century, around the 1740's. The dearth of patronage and training had been alleviated by the establishment of the Dublin Society Schools, which had been encouraged by reformers such as Bishop Berkely who had lamented that our "country is the least furnished with cognoscenti". The society aimed to foster a spirit of appreciation and refinement among the gentry, to promote standards of excellence in the proper education of artists (7).

A Drawing School was established and an annual premium for landscape was awarded from the 1740's onwards. The winning of this award launched many successful careers, including George Barrett's, who won it in 1747.

In terms of the market for landscape the taste for neo classical, italianate works expanded to include Dutch cabinet paintings of the late 17th century. In common with their British counterparts, the Irish gentry began to buy works by Breughel Ruysdael, Hobbema and Cuyps. A landscape such as The Obelisk in Memory of the Battle of the Boyne (fig.7) painted by Joseph Tudor in 1746, displays the subdued colouring and horizontality of the Dutch work applied to the flat plains of County Meath and an emphatically Williamite subject. At least one Irish example of a largely Dutch collection still survives (8).

Allied to this change in taste was the increasing appreciation and awareness of art displayed by the middle class. Their tastes coincided rather than clashed with the gentry (9).

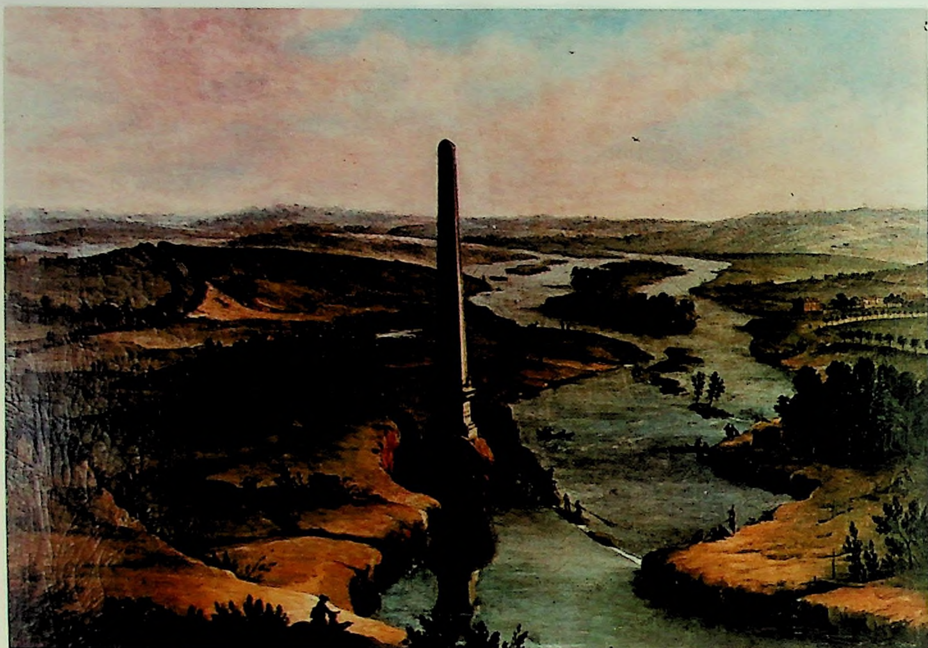

Fig.7 The Obelisk in memory of the Battle of the Boyne by Joseph Tudor

Fig.8 Upper Lough Erne by Thomas Roberts

Furthermore, landscape painting was no longer confined to private patronage and commission, although this was still very important. From the 1740's onwards, the public could visit exhibitions of the prize winning works of the sudents in the Dublin Society Schools, which were held in the foyer of the Bank of Ireland, College Green. In Britain the public could visit the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy funded in 1768 (10). In Ireland the Royal Hibernian Academy was inaugerated in 1823 and held its first exhibition in 1826 (11).

With the transition in taste, and the growing consolidation of educational and organizational structures, landscape painting was at a watershed in its development in the 1760's.

There was a move to a less intellectually taxing and more topographically based landscape painting. Drawing in the example of the Dutch, both Irish and English landscape painting was taking root rather than relying on portraits of seats (as in the Early Prospects) or neo-classical pastiches. With the appearance of Thomas Gainsborough, a major figure had arrived in landscape painting in these islands. (In his picture "Cornard Wood" of 1718 he successfully exploits the influence of Ruysdael in an English (Topographical setting (12)). Gainsborough's Mr. and Mrs. Andrews of 1748 provides visual evidence of the link between landscape painting and private property (13). The double portrait of the proud landowner and his wife occupy half the foreground while the rest of the picture represents the extent of their well tended cornfield and farmland stretching away in the distance. The less well known picture The Montagu Family at Sandleford Priory painted by Edward Maytley in 1744 (14) provides another example of the social hierarchy presented within the pictorial composition, the leisured landowning family at play in the foreground while their tenants labour in the background fields.

These two paintings depict a content and cultivated countryside. In examining this kind of image as epitomising the "Happy Rural Life", David Solkin has discussed an ideal of human existence located within the countryside specifically within the private estate (15).

This ideal can be traced back to Virgil as expressed in the Georgics where the benefits and virtues of practical agriculture were expounded and the morality and harmony of cultivated nature is opposed to the uncivilized and untamed. Reaping the bounty of agrarian activity was considered infinitely superior to the subsistence of animals or hunters, with nature running wild and the whole of society prospers as a result (16).

The ideals of the Georgic were a persistent image in painting and poetry. The profitable management of the private estate with tenants labouring industriously in the fields was not only morally desirable but boasted an impeccable antique pedigree. The landlord himself overseeing his labourers, was the embodiment of virtue in authority.

The private estate was represented as some kind of Elysium. A rage for landscape parks flourished around the middle years of the century (17). The park in effect created a vast illusion contriving to blend nature and art, to design and mould the landscape to resemble the untilled unploughed campagna of a Claude. Lakes and hills contrive to appear natural, but were in fact probably the result of entire communities uprooted, valleys flooded, arable or pasture land sacrificed. This kind of social upheaval wa immortalised in Goldsmith's book The Deserted Village.

David Solkin has explained that these vast grandoise schemes of Capability Brown, William Kent and so on were part of a massive gesture by the aristocracy asserting their inherited property, cultural superiority and right to govern. (18).

In Ireland, the pitures of Thomas Roberts, who flourished in the 1770's, exemplify estate portraiture in his idyllic scenes of the gentry strolling in their parks (19). A picture such as Upper Lough Erne(fig.8) depicts a genteel couple strolling in the foreground, while a flat rolling landscape, composed mainly of the placid reaches of still lake, is bathed in a golden Claudean glow and stretches away to the undulating hills of the blue yonder. No hint of cultivation or agriculture is given, apart from the scattered sheep grazing on the meadow-like foreground, while only a boating party glides over the water.

Roberts painting of Lucan House and Demesne is depicted from the characteristic high vantage point, exerting control over what is surveyed. The mansion rises above the landscape with its outlying fields and cottages spreading out from it. Labourers toil in the foreground, in the road that runs beside the river and is joined to the house via a bridge. All activity and features of the landscape are connected to the house. Its prominence, situated in the middle of the picture on a central plateau radiating scenes of harmony, work and order, amplifies the earlier and much less sophisticated conventions of the rudimentary Prospects where the house is the civilizing "sun" of the composition.

Roberts' career was brief (he died in 1778 at the age of thirty) but successful and prolific. His oevre combined estate portraiture, or scenes of its demesne, and imaginary landscape, subjects that were characteristic of the representations of landscape produced in the late 18th Century. He produced a set of paintings for Earl Harcourt Viceroy of Ireland between 1772 and 1777, which also feature ruined abbeys and round towers. They are however suffused with a golden Italianate light and by placing them on hills, mountainsides, unlikely and improbable positions for abbeys or monasteries, they serve more as homegrown motifs to replace the classical ruins of Claude. Rarely does Roberts include more turbulent subject matter. A Wind Blown Landscape is an exception and is more ruffled than stormy.

Although serving as pleasing pictorial motifs, Roberts' inclusion of Irish ruins and artifacts reflects the growth of interest not just in antiquities but in native scenery in general. The middle class in particular cultivated a spirit of enquiry and there was a boom in travel and excursions to the countryside. The native scenery was increasingly visited and admired and its representations purchased. The historical artifacts of the countryside also attracted interest. Books of engravings disseminated images of the landscape, predominantly to the middle class public. Aesthetic theories and guide books proliferated.

The taste in antiquities, was part of the overall interes in travel and native scenery. Among the first and most famous of the antiquarians was the Hugenot, Gabriel Beranger, who came to Ireland in 1750 to draw and record antiquities.

This precipitated a more widespread project. Francis Grose's Antiquities of Ireland published in the 1790's was a book of engravings after drawings by Roberts as well as Jonathan Fisher and William Ashford. Books such as this and John Milton's "Collection of Select Views from the Different Seats of the Nobility and Gentry in the Kingdom of Ireland" were important in circulating images of the Irish Landscape in the cheaper form of engravings. Purchased mostly by the middle classes, they depict the landscape in terms of natural scenery lakes, ruins and mountains, increasingly lacking in human presence (20). The countryside is not depicted as agricultrual productive and was usually located within the demesnes or estates of the gentry or nobility. For instance, the scenery of the Wicklow mountains the Dargle, the Powerscourt Waterfall, etc. were to be found on the property of the Earl of Powerscourt.

This interest could scarcely differ more from the views entertained by earlier travellers. One of the earliest and most intrepid was Samuel Johnson, who disparagingly commented that the Giants Causeway was worth seeing but not worth going to see. In 1742, the Dublin Society School awarded the first of its annual premiums for landscape to Susannah Drury for her detailed gouache of the Causeway (fig.9). Johnson, in his Journey to the Western Isles of Scotland, had also prosaically described a mountain as "no more than a considerable protuberance and Inverness in the remote Highlands as a wide extent of hopeless sterility" (21). Daniel Defoe echoed these sentiments when he complained in 1724 that the Welsh Mountains were "barbarous" (22).

Fig.9 The Giants Causeway by Susannah Drury

Fig.10 Tourists Visiting Cloughoughter Castle by William Ashford

Mountains were seen as remnants of the primeval earth, they were impediments to travel, inhospitable and distasteful.

However, these opinions had been under increasing pressure ever since the end of the 17th Century when a succession of writers had challenged these previously held opinions (23). Edmund Burke's essay of 1756 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful amplified and organized the shift in ideas. He singled out the wilder scenery of nature, mountains ravines cataracts (or waterfalls) valleys, lakes, as uncultivated depopulated dramatic therefore sublime and to be particularly contrasted with the beautiful. This contrast between the two is at the heart of Burke's theory and his own words extend the contrast between "vastness" and "smallness", between "rugged greatness" and "smooth polish", between "massive solidity" and "light delicacy".(see 24)

The Rev. William Gilpin's "Picturesque" theory bridged the gap between these opposites. Whereas Burke had categorised the "characters of nature" according to their inherent qualities and the emotion aroused in the spectator, Gilpin perceived the landscape in forms of painting. The "Picturesque" meant literally, "like a picture". He defined it as a mixture of "varied rudeness, simplicity and grandeur....roughness forms a most essential part of difference between the beautiful and the picturesque as it seems to be that quality which makes objects chiefly pleasing in painting."(25)

These aesthetic theories opened up an uncultivated face of nature to appreciation. The visual merits of the scene increased according to its dramatic or irregular qualities.

The feelings aroused by sublime scenery were, according to Burke delightful horror, a sort of "tranquility tinged with terror". Whereas in previous ages travellers had avoided encountering such terrain, now more daring travellers, including artists actively went in search of such thrills.(26) However, as indicated by the existence of theoretical explanations, the danger is more intellectual than real. Travellers set out on fashionable excursions forearmed with knowledge of the effects of nature.

Evidence of the great popularity and success of Burke's theories was that his essay first published in 1756 had reached its fifth edition by the late 1760s.

The expansion in landscape painting in Ireland in the mid century obviously reflected the growing interest in sublime, uncultivated native scenery. William van der Hagan, was mentioned previously as the first important name in landscape. His output mostly consisted of new classical pastiches or view of Estates but his last recorded painting was a View of Powerscourt Waterfall (27).

By far the most well known landscape painter of the late 18th Century in Ireland is George Barrett. He not only painted sublime scenery but his career was bound up with Edmund Burke himself. He preceeds Thomas Roberts in terms of estate portraiture, later William Ashford who had the longest career of any Irish Landscape painter, working from the 1760s onwards and dying in 1824. (A minor figure is Jonathan Fisher, an example of an avid traveller, who visited the far reaches of the country particularly Killarney.)

Apart from the uncharacteristic Thunderstorm of 1780, the sedate Ashford did not usually tackle sublime or picturesque scenery, while Roberts excelled in idyllic scenes of estates. Ashford's Tourists visiting Cloughoughter Castle (fig.10) does however depict the rage for touring but in general he stayed within the environs of private estates or cities and towns (28). Barrett's career was much more chequered and varied. His early pictures, particularly those of Wicklow, provide us with the most interest. At this stage he was still based in Ireland and under the guidance of Burke.

Barrett was born in 1728 and began his career colouring prints.However he won a Dublin Society prize for landscape derived from neo Classical imaginary landscape, such as his Italianate landscape of 1755, which was destined as mantle piece decoration in Lord Russborough's drawing room. This Claudean style changed, apparently due to the influence of Edmund Burke who was still a student in Trinity College.

Burke encouraged Barrett to visit the scenery of Co. Wicklow and introduced him to the Earl of Powerscourt who became his patron.

Barrett was never short of patronage throughout his career and his paintings remained in great demand, he often produced copies of the same picture, for instance several versions of Powerscourt Waterfall exist. His View of Powerscourt House combines an estate portrait with the Sublime subject of the mountain.

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The painting of Powerscourt Waterfall(Fig.11) abandons the view of the big house and concentrates on the landscape itself. The viewer share the vantage point of the group of small figures, relaxed rustics placed at the foot of the waterfall looking up. The gushing torrent itself is lit by bright sunshine in contrast to the dark spreading foliage. Behind the forested mountainside a golden sky introduces a Beautiful feature.

Instead of the horizontal and stage set foreground, the coulisses and undulating hills of a Claude, Barrett's composition is based on dramatic verticals and angles. The sharp diagonal of the waterfall the focus of the scene, cuts across the picture plane, framed by the tall spindly trunks and heavy leaves of the trees in the foreground, which anchor the top to the bottom of the picture.

A contemporary critic writing in 1775 said "The Waterfall among the rocks in this piece has a very sublime effect in comparison to the gloom that surrounds it" (29). Barrett's dense and heavy foliage and vigorous style and brushwork in these Wicklow paintings were described as "spinach and eggs" by Richard Wilson. In fact Barrett came increasingly under Wilson's influence and has been classified as another follower. His later painting, became much lighter and thinner. He left Dublin in the 1760's apparently after failing to get a book of engravings published.

He carried out a number of commissions for the English gentry in the late 1760s and 1770s but much of this work seemed to have been routine, executed in a rather uninteresting fashion and usually in collaboration with other painters (30).

Fig.11 Powerscourt Waterfall by George Barrett

Fig.12 Stormy Landscape by George Barrett

Edmund Burke himself lamented over the amount of potboilers he churned out: "Barrett.....has fallen into the painting of views.....It is the most called for and the most lucrative part of his business".(31)

His views included the landscape of North Wales. He was among the first artists along with Paul Sandby and Richard Wilson, to paint representations of Wales and thus he can be regarded not only as pioneering Burke's theories in the Irish or at least Wicklow landscape, but as also opening up the frontiers of Snowdonia in the mid 1760's.

In spite of his consistent popularity he fell into debt and into quarrels with his contemporaries.(32) However he was involved in founding the Royal Academy in 1768 and later diversified into landscape murals, an interior decorative scheme for a patron. Like Richard Wilson however he fell increasingly on hard times. Wilson was rescued from penury "by being appointed librarian in the Royal Academy" (33) and Barrett was similarly salvaged by his mentor Edmund Burke. Burke was appointed Pay Master General in 1782 and installed Barrett as official painter to the Royal Hospital Chelsea, with which he was associated only two years before Barrett died.

Barrett's career spans a transistional and formative period in landscape painting. The genre finally took root in both Britain and Ireland after a long period of dependence on Continental Models.

Broadly speaking a bias in favour of neo-classicism or historical landscape gradually merged with growing preference for topographical Dutch landscape models of the late 17th century and bolstered the trend towards a more credibly realistic version of the native countryside.

The changing taste of the aristocracy more or less coincided with the expanding middle class. The audience for it helped precipitate the establishment of educational structures and public exhibitions and the proliferation of prints. Pictures were bought and sold and reproduced in books and were longer confined to gentlemen's drawing rooms, although the patronage of the gentry still held sway. A greater status and professionalism was awarded to the role of the artist. Native scenery exercised an ever increasing attraction depicted in its non agricultural wild state and these natural phenomena were classified according to aesthetic theories, whether Sublime or Beautiful or Picturesque.

The beautiful seemed epitomised in Cladean landscape with its rolling contours and golden light. Salvator Rosa supplied the appropiate devices for depicting the sublime, as we shall see in reference to Barrett. These pictorial models supplied a pictorial format for representing landscape in its supposedly wild state. Barrett's great popularity stemmed from the fact that his depiction of Sublime scenery chimed with the taste of the public. The directness and concentration of the Powerscourt Waterfall could scarcely be in greater contrast to the placid Pastoral landscape and aloof or intellectual aura of a neo classical picture.

The abstract, timeless and distant landscape has been transformed into a close-up view of nature scenery. In Powerscourt Waterfall the vantage point from the foot of the waterfall tilts the eye upwards.

We are confronted immediately with the grand dimensions of the scene, while the cluster of tiny figures define the imposing scale, rather than spreading contours and distance of a Claude.

Barrett abandons the horizontal emphasis and recessive distances of a Claude. Instead of framing Coulisses, the trees tower above their spindly trunks and heavy foliage in the foreground anchor the top to the bottom of the picture, and frame the sharp diagonal of the waterfall's descending rush. The cluster of figures serve to define the scale and dimensions of the scene, as spectators.

(In comparison Richard Wilson under whose influence Barrett came after he left Ireland, maintained Claudean symmetry even when confronted with a perfect example of the Burkean sublime, the famous Cader Idris gorge in North Wales. Wilson managed to incorporate a foreground stage repoussiers and a golden sky to soften the jagged precipice (34). But Wilson also had to accomodate the changing taste.)

Even the founder Joshua Reynolds of the Royal Academy and foremost arbiter of standards was criticised for his bias in favour of the ideal, rather than a "more accessible pleasurable painting of common unabstracted nature" (35).

Wilson failed to achieve widespread popularity for in his attempt to impose Claudean order on uncultivated scenery and failed to change the hierarchy of genres in his efforts to marry "high" style ie. "Neo classicism or the Grand Manner to "low" subject landscape painting (36). A more fundamental change was needed.

In Barrett's pictures nature scenery is presented with a greater variety and contrast. Even a "Wilsonian late picture" such as the Welsh view, Early Morning in LLanberis with Mists dispersing effectively varies the atmosphere within the picture from the beautiful, golden sky in the background to the scudding wisps of cloud hovering around the craggy peaks. The scene is bereft of figures, apart from the mountain goats huddled in a rock in the left foreground and conveys a particular sense of remoteness and isolation.

In most of his pictures the Sublime is alleviated by some Beautiful element. Shadows and darkness are contrasted with sunlight and wild scenery, such as Powerscourt Waterfall, is there to be admired and enjoyed. A central sunlit area or locus amoemus (37) of rest is provided. The scales of the beautiful and sublime maintain their equilibrium. It was a categorical and schematic approach to nature. Even when the Sublime, more threatenting aspects of nature predominate, Barrett appropriates the devices of the Italian painter Salvator Rosa.

Rosa's pictures of Banditti in storm tossed rocky dramatic scenery constituted the recipe for the sublime "Precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings, Salvator Rosa!"(38).

These motifs were copies in much the same way that Claudean motifs were copies in neo classical pastiche (39). Barrett's <u>Stormy landscape</u>(fig.12) with its barren mountain scene and tree struck by lightning painted in 1756 probably derives from a Rosa original.

The potential of the sublime is defused at least during the 1760s proceeding in Barretts pictures according to pictorial models and aesthetic theories. The balance of the Beautiful and the restraint and distance maintained by the artist is all important. Burke's theories, as well as the categories of the Picturesque, allowed for opposition and contrast to be presented and reconciled within the picture. Barrett's <u>Powerscourt Waterfall</u> presents an image of the landscape which is a far cry from the earliest Prospects when mountains were ignored and attention is concentrated on the portrait of the big house and geometry and order, the mark of man upon the terrain, civilizing and improving. By the 1760s Barrett could depict the already famous well known tourist attractions of Wicklow, located within the demesne of the Earl of Powerscout and be assured of an appreciative audience. However, as yet, the beautiful balances the sublime.

Burke's therories extend the concordia discors philosophical concept rooted in Pythagorean thought - like the Georgic, it boasted an Antique pedigree. It allowed for opposites to be presented but reconciled and served as a model for perfect harmony throughout society (40). This formulae approach to nature insulated artists and genteel tourists against any possible disruptive or threatening aspects of the Sublime.

Furthermore according to Michael Rosenthal (41) the sublime exerted its attraction by arousing a safe excitement in nature for away from the city and the early stages of the Industrial Revolution.

Such places as Powerscourt Waterfall assumed the aura of shrines, places of public pilgrimmage. And in fact the well worn routes of the sublime and picturesque itinerary of scenery and their schematic depiction in painting had charged from "exciting and grand" to "quaint and charming" by the end of the 18th Century (42). The visual merits of landscape increased according its Sublime or Picturesque qualities In particular, the picturesque, by classifying landscape including its inhabitants in terms of its rustic charm and pictorial qualities , shifted the emphasis away from actual subject matter and content (43).

FOOTNOTES

1. For greater detail see Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glen The Painters of Ireland, p.19

2. Other names include the Dutchman Wenscelaus Holler and Gaspar Huberti, as well as Thomas Phillips IBID, p.53

3. His background is obscure and he seems to have produced a variety of work both in Ireland and England as well as on the continent. IBID, p.55

4. For a detailed discussion on the presige value of neo classicism and how it was gradually diluted by Dutch realism, see John Barrell The Dark Side of the Landscape, pp.7-9
also see David Solkin, Richard Wilson, pp.22-50

5. Examples include Hagar & the Angel and Juno & Lo by Claude Lorrain both in the National Gallery of Ireland.

6. They produced portraits of seats, neo classical landscapes and interior decoration in following the typical career pattern of a landscape painter of the mid 18th Century see Michael Rosenthal, British Landscape Painting, pp.34.

7. For a greater discussion of its development and the role of Bishop Berkeley and other reformers, see Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, The Painters of Ireland, chp.4.

8. Namely the collection formed by Matthew Pilkington the rector Dundalk and author of A Dictionary of Irish Artists 1795 IBID p.111

9. The mid 18th Century saw the rise of an acquisitive managed class who may have made a fortune in trade or commerce. In Ireland a prosperous merchant class flourished in the wealthy ports of Dublin, Cork, Waterford. Like their counterparts in England, they profited by the British Empires lucrative colonies. They were anxious for the cultural trappings that went with success while the aristocracy were not averse to marrying rich bourgeoise heiresses:
"Throughout the 1740's, the middle and upper classes put forward a united front. In art both gentry and middle class enjoyed 17th Century Dutch realist scenes"
David Solkin Richard Wilson pp.22-50.

10 The establishment of the Dublin Society Schools had been preceeded in London in the 1730's by the opening of the St. Martins Lane Academy in 1735, due mainly to the efforts of William Hogarth. Exhibitions extended to the Vauxhall Gardens and eventually the foundation of the Royal Academy in 1768.
Michael Rossenthal British Landscape Painting pp.28-45

11. Peter Harbison, Jeane Sheehy, Homan Potterton, Irish Art & Architecture, p.188

12. Michael Rosenthal, British Landscape Painting pp.45.

13. This painting is examined in these terms in John Berger Ways of Seeing pp106-107

14. Discussed in David Solkin, Richard Wilson, pp.23.

15. "The Happy Rural Life" was the title of a verse published in "The Gentlemans Magazine" of 1738. This poem is quoted at length and depicts the countryside as a place of rural harmonious society in Comparison to the evil and vice of the city,IBID, pp28

16. The Georgics were written by the Roman Poet Virgil during the reign of Augustus and dealt with agriculture in great detail. The Georgics were a persistent and influential image in 18th Century poetry and painting in particular, James Thompsons "The Seasons", a poetry cycle of 1735 Michael Rosenthal, British Landscape Painting, pp. 16-18

17. Capability Brown and William Kent were flooded by commissions IBID p.45

18. Solkin elaborates on the resurgence of the "ancien regime" after the Seven Years War and the antagonism existing between city and country. David Solkin, Richard Wilson, pp.16-18.

19. For a detailed analysis of Robert's career see Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin., The Painters of Ireland p.119.

20. For a detailed discussion of antiquarian studies, the proliferation of books of engravings and touring in the Irish Countryside, IBID pp.62,63,64.

21 Samuel Johnson quoted in Margaret Drabble, A Writers' Britain: British Landscape in Literature through the centuries, p.112.

22. Defoe quoted as part of a detailed discussion on the intellectual renaissance of Wales in the 18th Century David Solkin, Richard Wilson, p.86.

23. For a detailed development of the "upgrading" of mountains and uncultivated scenery from Thomas Barrett's "Sacred Theory of the Earth" of 1684 to the architects of the Sublime ie Shaftesbury Addison, Thompson and Burke, see John Hutchinson, James Arthur O'Connor, pp.17/18.

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24. The word Sublime itself, which had originally been used to describe an oratorical style was applied by "Longinus" transferred to the visual arts and natural phenomena in the late 18th century. It generally signified an emotion of awe, bordering on terror inspired by natural phenomena. The various literature on the Sublime and Beautiful is immense and can be seen as attempt to categorise nature. The contrast between the Sublime and the Beautiful was understood thus: "Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparitivly small beauty should shun the right line yet diverge from it insensibly. Beauty ought not to be obscure, the great ought to be dark and gloomy, beauty should belight and delicate, the great ought to be solid and even massive". Quoted in Edward J. Nygren James Ward's Gordale Scar : An essay on the Sublime p.26.

25. From the definition of "The picturesque" given in Reginald C. Haggar, A Dictionary of Art Terms, p.215.

26. Michael Rosenthal refers to such paintings as Phaeton in a Thunderstorm by James Caesar Ibbletson which had a label on the back saying it was a "record of a true adventure".
Michael Rosenthal British Landscape Painting p.60.

27. For a fuller account of Van der Hagen's career see Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, The Painters of Ireland, pp.57-62

28. For a detailed discussion of William Ashford, Johnathan Fisher and other minor figures, IBID, p.136.

29. Quoted in IBID, p.119.

30 These included Sawray Gilpin, Reinangle and Cifriani. His patrons included the Duke of Portland, the Duke of Buccleugh, Lord Dalkeith. IBID, p.117.

31. Edmund Burke quoted from a letter he wrote to the Irish History painter, James Barry in 1767. IBID p.116

32. Namely Stubbs, Wright and Hamilton. IBID p.119

33. Wilson stopped producing work and drifted further into debt and alcoholism David Solkin, Richard Wilson, p.21

34. For a detailed discussion of this and other pictures, see Solkin's discussion of Wilson's depiction of 1) Twickenham, where Pope had a Palladian Villa and 2) Wales, which in the 1760's was in the throes of an antiquarian enquiry ad intellectual rediscovery of its Celtic past. Both sites were suitable for aggrandisement. IBID pp.77-110

35. For discussion of this criticism of Joshua Reynolds, IBID, P.98.

36. Wilson endeavoured to impose the Grand Manner on native British Scenery but they ultimately proved incompatible and too italianate for most tastes. But Wilson never jettisoned his academic training in Rome. IBID p.112.

37. For a detailed discussion of the locus amoemus, a sunlit, beautiful area lodged in a sublime landscape, see Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape: Turner and Constable p.15

38. Horace Walpole's description of his journey through the Alps in 1739. David Solkin Richard Wilson p.67.

39. For a detailed discussion of Wilson's picture 'The White Monk' as combining the devices of Salvator Rosa and Claude, IBID.

40. The idea of the concordia discors was particularly important during the 1760's as social discord between town and country, increased IBID p.70.

41. They were sites of sublime scenery that dwarfed man. Michael Rosenthal British Landscape Painting p.70.

42. The relapse into cliche and the jaded formula of the sublime and beautiful and picturesque: for greater detail IBID p.80.

43. "The Picturesque was process of aesthetic laundering....allowing artistic acceptability to a mass of material which would not otherwise have had it". Michael Rosenthal, quoted in John Hutchinson, James Arthur O'Connor, p.19.

CHAPTER IV

JAMES ARTHUR O'CONNOR - THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUBLIME

James Arthur O'Connor emerged as one of the principal figures in Irish landscape painting in the early 19th Century. The others included George Petrie and Francis Danby and this trio can be seen as filling the vacancy left when Barrett, Roberts, his younger brother Thomas Sautelle, and William Ashford passed away as the leading lights in landscape. O'Connor, Petrie and Danby began their careers making sketching tours to Picturesque and Sublime scenery in the by now well established and much frequented routes, most notably Wicklow, Killarney, Antrim and so on (1).

Petrie (2) is notable mainly for his antiquarian interests while Danby spent most of his colourful career abroad and in the development of his so called "poetic" style of landscape he is not generally considered as Irish (3). Indeed O'Connor spent most of his career either abroad or travelling, although he maintained an important connection with Ireland. He is recorded as self taught, but probably spent some time at the Dublin Society Schools as George Barrett had done previously, although his student career lacked the panache and successful debut of Barrett. Thomas Bodkin refers to the early landscapes O'Connor executed as unpromising (4).

He quit Dublin in 1813 for Bristol in the company of Petrie and Danby. But whereas Danby stayed on, O'Connor returned home and by 1819 was working for the gentry, painting representations of property in the tradition of estate portraiture previously exemplified by Thomas Roberts and William Ashford.

Despite the patronage of the Marquesses of Sligo and Clanricarde he departed again in 1822, apparently seeking greater fame and fortune much as Barrett had done previously in the 1760's. Though he continued to paint Irish subjects he travelled widely in Britain making sketches.

He first went to Belgium in 1826 - 27 and later on visited Paris and the Rhine Valley in 1832 - 33. He also returned to Ireland on several occasions in the 1820's, when he revisited the mountain scenery of Wicklow. O'Connor exhibited frequently with the Royal Academy in London but showed only once in the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1840. He had returned to England in 1830 where he was increasingly afflicted by failing eyesight. Like Barrett before him he was also plagued by severe financial problems. But O'Connor was not saved by the helping hand extended to Barrett by Edmund Burke and died penniless leaving his wife destitute. (5).

O'Connor's painting developed slowly. As mentioned above, his student work has been described as showing little promise while his portraits of seats commissioned between 1818 and 1819 break no new ground, being in the same mould as earlier models.

For instance his Westport House and Clew Bay employ the characteristic high vantage point in portraying the panorama of the estate. This establishes the control, of the landlord with the estate cast in the best possible light with the invisible benevolent landlord presiding over all (6).

O'Connor also adopted the motifs of the Picturesque in A Wooded River Landscape or Landscape with Girl in a Park, River Ruins and Bridge, both from 1823. Both paintings display the appropriation of Claudean devices, for example the "coulisses" or meandering stream, undulating distant hills, as well as the influence of the Dutch topographical, realist style of Hobbema and Ruysdael. This merging of neo classical and Dutch features is retained by O'Connor even in the 1820's.

This style also progressed during this period however, certainly stimulated by the thriving state of landscape painting in England, with Constable's and Turner's paintings being exhibited in the Society of Artists which had been established in 1824. English Landscape painting of the 1830's was considered to be in the vanguard of European developments. Furthermore the Society of Artists was founded and run by artists themselves, marking a turn away from established schemes of patronage and commission. The tradition of estate portraiture itself was vanishing as the countryside itself began to change under the influence of capitalist agricultural economics (7).

O'Connor's painting, The Gathering Storm of 1826 displays his gradual discarding of the schemata and motifs of the picturesque and his move towards the depiction of a wilder depopulated landscape. This picture places two small figures in the foreground, backs turned to the landscape. They seem unaware of the gathering thunder clouds over dark distant hills.

In Barrett's painting of Powerscourt Waterfall as we have seen the golden Claudean sky alleviates the darker Sublime elements.

The Ford - a Landscape with Wagoner, Three Horses and a figure was painted in 1830 and depicts a tiny figure dragging a reluctant horse and cart across a stream. All around him are massed the forces of nature, which rise up vast and looming. The rock to the right of the figure seems particularly threatening, a great jutting slab. The figure or the social element has disappeared completely from A View of the Devils Glen where more jutting precipices of rock and mountain rise sheer and vertically, great dark shapes. There is a distinct lack of foliage and all is dark, menacing and gloomy. The figure is reintroduced in The Glen of the Rocks also from 1830 in which an armoured figure recoils from an unearthly light.
Apparently the inspiration for this painting derives from Salvator Rosa, the painter of the sublime par excellence (8).(As mentioned previously George Barrett's Stormy Landscape of 1756 was probably a direct pastiche of a Rosa.)

Among O'Connor's most famous paintings of this late stage in his career are The Eagles Rock, Killarney of 1831 and A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner of 1832.(figs. 13 & 14)

Fig.13 The Eagles Rock Killarney by James Arthur O'Connor

Fig.14 A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner
by James Arthur O'Connor

The first depicts a lonely figure standing on an outcrop or platform of level rock in the foreground of the picture. On all sides rise dark shapes of twisted foliage, rock and mountain behind and surrounding him, while below him yawns a deep ravine of great darkness and thus incomprehensible depth. In the distance, storm clouds gather in the dark blue sky. In contrast the foreground rocks are built up in ochre impastured paint, as is the gnarled tree to the left of the solitary figure. The figure although tiny in comparison to the looming forms of nature provides the fulcrum of the picture. The sharp light defines him as a hunter, holding a gun and a dead bird. He is portrayed with his back to the landscape and directly facing the viewer of the painting.

Similarily in A Thunderstorm, the frightened Wagoner, arms outstreched, and brandishing a long pole is the focus of the painting, depicted in the centre. His pitching wagon and rearing horse are just behind him and these dramatic events are spot lit by the jagged bolt of lightning that flashes through the dark clouds behind the background mountain. A large tree frames the composition, not the delicate foliage of a Claudean coulisse, but a towering, windswept twisted trunk with a crown of blown leaves.

It is an arresting effective picture in which the spectators eye is drawn to the focus of the central action with the horse rearing back from the churning waves which lash the edge of the road. The Poachers of 1835 acts as a foil to these two paintings. This tiny panel is better known and also less dramatic. The landscape is flat and horizontal. Here again the figures form the centre of interest. The isolated trio framed by a clump of trees to their left, stand with their backs to the spectator turning towards the landscape.

The moon, encircled by clouds, sheds light on the scene. The sensitive handling of this light with its patina of delicate ochres and silvery blues unites this composition while the tension is created by the isolation of the figures set in the landscape.

The paintings of O'Connor's late period are inspired by the "wild and grand scenery of Ireland" (9) to which he had returned in 1829 to revive his flagging spirits. He was living in extremely straitened circumstances, experiencing severe financial hardship with of lack of sales of his pictures and failing eyesight. These pictures are also dominated by Sublime elements, stormy, brooding skies, craggy peaks, plummetting ravines threatening and dramatic. According to John Hutchinson the darkness, gloom and threatening features probably stem from his inward despair, and psychological struggle, as well as the insecurity in society generally, especially among the Ascendancy, following the Napoleonic Wars (10).

As we have seen, the brakes of the beautiful are applied to sublime in the late 18th Century. The rigid Augustan Society of which Barrett and Burke were a part emphasised symmetry balance. A golden sky alleviates the sublime forest and mountainside in Barrett's painting Powerscourt Waterfall and sheds light on the central rushing torrent, providing a locus amoenus or sunlit area of repose.

The Sublime is contained and poses no real threat or danger, but instead inspires Burke's "delightful terror" in the relaxed admiration in the lounging rustics within the picture. In contrast O'Connor's late pictures the restraint and distance , the detachment of artist, spectator and landscape is replaced by a much greater degree of involvement, feelings and personality.

Instead of a sunlit central area, a dark chasm plummets to unimaginable depths (11) as in The Eagles Glen . However, O'Connor's landscape remains grounded in naturalistic elements: "the wild and grand scenery of Ireland." In contrast, the so called "Apocalyptic" or Daemonic sublime (12) was a much more fantastic, imaginative version of landscape epitomised in the cataclysmic and spectacular pictures of Mad John Martin. In literature the Gothic novel presents a similarily heightened frenzied version of landscape. The Irish writer Charles Robert Maturin created such images but the power of his evocation of landscape (13) redeems the gothic from self indulgent excess(14).

Maturin's novels set man against the forces of nature but his characters seem bereft of the saving tools or resolute stance of O'Connor's figures, and furthermore they are pitted, not against a naturalistic landscape but rather are at the mercy of an omniscient and all emcompassing force.

It is there to stimulate the emotions arousing fear and tension or functioning as an extension of the characters inner conflict. Oppressive dialogue excludes light relief, there is no escaping the strong and divisive natural elements (15).

In O'Connor's painting of the Eagles Glen the tiny hunter stands resolute on the threshold surrounded by sublime nature. In Maturin, the soul trembles on the verge of the "unlawful and the unhallowed",(16) more hellish and horrifying sight.

Maturin's characters are isolated, separated, adrift in unchartered territory. He also explores areas of sexual repression manifested in religious excess or erotic fanticism. Maturin an Anglican Minister, identified the Roman Catholic church as a repressive reactionary force, also the extremes of Calvinistic Evangelicism. His female characters suffer as a result of these forces, one for instance (17) rejects profane love and bodily urges and channels this energy into descriptions of nature and religious poetry which manifests a displaced eroticism.

O'Connor and Maturin both depict sublime landscape, the first returning in a naturalistic setting, the latter creating an extreme fantastic environment. Man and nature are juxtaposed to a dramatic extent.

The realm of landscape is uncivilised, threatening, grand and imcomprehensible, upon which ones experiences, despair or fears can be projected. This projection of the imagination leads up and out onto the landscape (into the mountains and skies of The Eagles Glen or the Thunderstorm) and correspondingly, down and to the self. Inner struggle is externalised in the landscape which is threatening, inhospitable, sublime.

But apart from these two figures and some other writers we look in vain for evidence of versions of landscape produced in Ireland similar in barren effect.

O'Connor progressed from the schematic and aesthetic categories of the Augustan age, echoing Turner's development from his initiation into landscape painting on picturesque sketching trips (18). Turner and Constable are identified as contributing to a vision of nature (particularly Constable's cloud studies and Turner's seascapes) based on the English landscape (19) and in Germany a characteristic image of nature emerged epitomised in the expansive sublime images of landscape of Friedrich or Runge.(20)

Little evidence of similar flourishing of landscape painting occured in Ireland. O'Connor may have portrayed its "Wild and Grand Scenery" in dramatic personalised images, but he remained virtually the only exponent (21), at least in painting of this version the Irish landscape as wild, barren depopulated. Irish romanticism (22) failed to take hold of the Irish peoples own attitude to nature. Hutchinson quotes Patrick Raifrodi (23) as saying that in the beginning at least what served the romantic cause in Ireland was the desire at least in the ruling class to imitate England. In the version of landscape that will be considered in the next chapter what was at stake was not the desire to imitate England but the assertion of a nationalist gaelic version of a landscape. And in considering the revival and embellishment of this version of landscape, the role of the Ascendancy is vital. Many of the architects of the Celtic Revival which fostered this version of landscape were drawn from a class which at that period were losing their grip in the ownership of the land itself.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Scenery was contemplated as a series of painterly motifs....scenes that previously had been charming were now 'horrible'". Touring was satirised in the character of Elizabeth Bennett in 'Jane Austen''s pride and predjudice' for instance.
   Michael Rosenthal British Landscape Painting pp78-84.

2. For greater detail, see Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin Painters of Ireland, p211.

3. For the fullest account of Danby's career, see Eric Adams biography, Francis Danby: Varieties of Poetic Landscape.

4. Thomas Bodkin, Four Irish Landscape Painters, p40.

5. For greater biographical detail, see John Hutchinson James Arthur O'Connor p.21.

6. The Happy Rural Life , David Solkin, Richard Wilson p.28.

7. For discussion of Constable's move from his Georgic naturalism of the 1820's and Turner's development from early topography and incipient naturalism to a more imaginative style, both amplifying a changing vision of the English countryside, see John Hutchinson James Arthur O'Connor p.23.

8. For detailed discussion of this picture, IBID p.167

9. Lines quoted from a letter O'Connor wrote to a wealthy businessman friend, John Gibbons in August 1830. IBID p.151

10. IBID p.24.

11. "The sublime landscape blocks access to the sunlit valley". For greater detail on the physiological and psychological categories as translated into aesthetic categories, see Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape: Turner and Constable, p.11.

12. For discussion of this version of the sublime, see James B. Twitchell, Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850 pp.60-85, also pp.109-136.

13. "When he is describing the emotions of horror and fear and the realm of the unknown and supernatural....his language is strong, fast moving and imaginative".

    Robert E. Lougy Charles Robert Maturin p.20.

14. John Martin's theatricality fell into kitsch...."a visual hoax of the imagination."
    James B. Twitchell Romantic Horizons p.113.

15. "The landscape of the Family of Montorio advances the plot, oceans exist to create tidal waves and storms, mountains for showing disasterous consequences of earthquakes and rivers for flooding." Robert E. Lougy Charles Robert Maturin p.19.

16. Maturin quoted in the preface to The Milesian Chief. IBID, p.20.

17. The character of Rosolia di Valozzi in The Family of Montorio, IBID, p.23.

18. "Turner....exploited the potential of watercolour in his picturesque sketching trips....by not detailing the size of mountains....creating a sensation of vastness". Michael Rosenthal, British Landscape Painting p.80.

19. For greater detail on Cotman, Gilpin, as well as Constable and Turner, as contribution to the development of British Landscape painting, see IBID, p.74-98.

20. For general discussion of the development of European styles see Hugh Honour, Romanticism, p.13

21 For greater detail on the less important and auxillary figures in 19th Century Irish Landscape painting see Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, The Painters of Ireland chp.11.

22. Apart from the paintings of O'Connor, and the novels of Maria Edgeworth, Lady Morgan, or Charles Maturin, there is little evidence of Irish romanticism. John Hutchinson, James Arthur O'Connor, p.20.

23. Rafroidi was discussing literary developments and Hutchinson extends this to the visual arts. IBID, p.21

CHAPTER V

THE SUBLIME AND THE WICKLOW DRAWINGS

Brennan's drawings of Wicklow combine the promise of distant expanses with the mastery of line. In the 18th century the artist also enclosed and immobolised, imposed clearly outlined shapes on all within his field of vision. The separation of the painter from the landscape represented is reflected in the choice of titles: views, prospects, scenes. Nature is something out there to be looked at from a distance, in one direction only. But with the relaxation of formal enclosed nature and the increasing attention paid to sublime scenery the landscape painter's eye veered heaven wards, towards the horizon. The scenery of mountains, skies seemed to require a greater expansiveness, and led away from property possession, the exertion of control.

In the late 18th century and early 19th century mountainsides seemed perfect vehicles for sublimity. In Barrett,the Sublime is offset and balanced by the Beautiful but for Byron's Childe Harold "High mountains are a feeling" (1) as indeed they also were for James Arthur O'Connor who depicted a tiny figure perched on a foreground promontory contemplating the distant, threatening shapes of mountains and sky. John Ruskin exclaimed of Turner, Cozens and their contemporaries "There is something strange about these people ! Nobody ever cared about blue mountains before!" Ruskin also pronounced "Anything that elevates the mind is sublime....it is....the effect of greatness upon the feelings"(2).

In the 1760s Barrett remained lodged in the categories of Burke's theories because of the importance of equilibrium in the Augustan age. In Barrett's painting the sky is golden, Claudean, but for later artists it would become the focus of sight and nature would become boundless realm unto which the imagination was projected, while simultaneously the inner vision went downward, inward.

In Brennan's Wicklow drawings the eye is certainly directed to the expansive vistas of Wicklow but depicted from on high, from above, rather than from below, looking up. Instead of towering above, mountainsides and forests are reduced in size and can even be read as abstract patterns. The dizzy height does not inspire terror or fear of sudden descent or fall but rather attempts cartographic mastery. The forests of Brennan's Wicklow may be dense and dark but they are not the "waving blackness of the forests of pine and oak" in which travellers lose their way such as Emily did, the heroine in Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel of 1794, The Mysteries of Udolpho: "One moment the forests are at Emily's feet...its'blackness' defy limitation and perspective...the sublime landscape seems to enclose and surround, "falling, waving, dashing" (3).

According to Burke, the huge and dark is chaotic, irregular and therefore sublime while the beautiful is small, light delicate, "smooth and polished" (4). In Brennan's drawings the huge and dark is regular forests planted in regimented rows, also smooth and polished by shiny graphite. The sublime is not threatening brooding and oppresive as in O'Connor's late paintings mountains are unfathomable, unscaleable, apart. Brennan renders them from above with analytic detachment and line.

Brennan's separation from the landscape as maintaining distance, attempting to retain and control, precludes the emotional involvement necessary to a greater emotional involvement with the landscape. This separation of artist and scene of the more easily managed prospect from the more disorderly foreground, the maintenance of the sublime and beautiful, echoes the situation in the late 18th century. As James B. Twitchell has said:

"The artist needed to stop climbing those distant hills, in search of the downward prospect, needed to stop sweeping the horizon from a commanding height"(5)

But even if control is relaxed and disruptive nature enters some of the drawings in the fractured line and expanses of white paper in Forest and Firebreak and Wind and Rain, the far reaches of the mountainsides and skies are not pursued. Contemplation of the horizon,the dividing line between earth and sky directing attention to what lay beyond, seems to be the early 19th century threshold of the sublime, opening up the field of vision.

Burke's theories depended on constant balance and equilibrium, the beautiful alleviating the sublime (a variation on the concordia discors). Barrett's Powerscourt Waterfall is dominated by symbols of refuge, richly inviting foliage, sunlit valley or locus amoenus (6) lodged in the sublime mountain. Hazard symbols are reduced to a minimum. The eye is attracted to the reposeful area in the centre which also shelters lounging rushes, surrogates for the spectator.

In both Barrett's painting and Brennan's drawing , Wicklow forest and mountainside feature. In Barrett's painting they are presented as sublime. They are in fact arranged according to aesthetic categories, a series of picturesque motifs.

The tall spindly pines which frame the prospect of the waterfall and provide refuge for the figures, were probably planted by Lord Powerscourt to enhance the view and are further embellished by Barrett. Human presence lingers on although presented on the periphery, and the beautiful controls the sublime.

In Brennan's drawings the mark of man is brought into the mountainsides and forest. It is controlling but not benign or tasteful. The mark of man's machines has transformed the appearance of the terrain, scarring the earth, planting trees in rigid rows, rather than depicting them in artful groves. The sublime mountain scenery of Barrett's painting omits the world of work, the mark of agriculture and scenes of rural labour. Earlier, as we have seen, the mark of labour entered the landscape through contrasts of work and idleness. The benefits and virtues of practical agriculture were propogated.

The morality of agriculture can be traced back to Virgil and the Georgic's where the benefits of cultivated nature are opposed to uncivilised and untamed nature running wild.

The big house was the core of order most graphically illustrated in the earliest prospects where it is the sun, the core of order, radiating geometry and cultivated gardens and farmlands. Mountains are relegated to the distant reaches of the picture, inhospitable incomprehensible. But as discussed previously the closing decades of the 18th century witnessed a growing interest in, and depiction of, wild mountain scenery, prized for its primitive aspects, by rustic peasant and genteel tourist alike.

In Brennan's drawings forestry is imprinted on sublime scenery of the mountainsides. Agriculture is by no means presented as Georgic as a benign harmonious force. The forests have been scarred rutted, exploited and harvested. Tractors gouge the earth, trees are felled, fires are set to scorch and burn the earth. Man has encroached upon the sublime and cultivated the wilderness.

In Brennan's Wicklow drawings the high vantage point of the earliest prospect is adopted not to depict the orderly geometry of houses and gardens but to survey the cultivation of mountainsides, previously considered beyond the control of man, beyond enclosure.

In the 18th century, the civilizing force emanated from the landowner. The high vantage point of the earliest prospects and portraits of houses is revived by Brennan to exercise an all encompassing view and exertion of control and mastery.

The high vantage point combines distance and detail. In the early Prospects for instance we can spot tiny figures on horseback and architectural details, control is exerted over all.

But in the 18th century mastery as surveying became mastery as power, ownership and possession. Order, presence and possession is represented in oil painting which were in themselves possessions. The journeymen draughtsmen of the early 18th century mapped the extent of a small universe of order, geometry and division with everything and everybody in its place. The landowner was the focus of society and the artist reflected this.

Later the means became rather more subtle and sophisticated and the estate was seen not just as the civilizing core, but represented as the equivalent of an earthly paradise. The social hierarchy is presented as an integral and harmonious part of the landscape itself.

The ideal pastoral landscape of Claude was also seen from on high, not the surveying bird's eye view of surveying but high enough to achieve tremendous recession and depth. The ideal campagne of neo-classicism which had never known the plough served as a model for ideal perfect nature, from the tableau foreground, inset scenes of figures from Classical or Biblical mythology, to the undulating distant hills of the Background.

As we have seen Barrett dispenses with the Claudean conventions, blocks the recession and depth of great distance and places the spectator at the foot of sublime landscape while O'Connor places a figure on the threshold. The view is lifted upwards it is not looking downwards.

Brennan manages to twist conventions, she adapts the high vantage point of the earliest Prospects not to depict the cultivated geometry of houses gardens and farm land but to survey the scarred mountainsides and forestry plantations, landscape previously prized for its desocialized, uncivilized qualities.

Sublime scenery was previously depicted from below exciting awe and admiration. Brennan adopts a bird's eye view surveying it from above. If in Barrett, the beautiful is lodged in the sublime, then in Brennan's drawings the mountainsides themselves are bounded, distant and spacious.

In Barrett, the sublime poses not real hazard as the social element lingers on and the entire scene is alleviated by the beautiful. In the late 18th century landscape was still very much a matter of taste and balance, the sublime scene is located within a private demense.

But in O'Connor, sublime scenery is much wilder and remote. The forces of nature are unleashed, the emotional involvement heightened and even Barrett in his Stormy Landscape depicted landscape lashed by the elements. Even when possessed of the urge to order and control nature, to balance prospect and refuge, to explore the terrain and provide escape routes, to balance the sublime and beautiful, the fact remains that no landscape is completely tameable. Brennan herself acknowledges the disruptive potential of storms and weather.

The final drawing Wind and Rain (fig.15), the graphite is not hatched and dense but applied sparingly even tentatively. The structure is diffuse, unsure, further a note of colour is introduced in flashes of ochre.

The mark of mark becomes increasingly fractured as the controlling line of these drawings breaks down. Brennan adopted the high vantage point of the earliest prospect to apparently combine the security of enclosure with geographical distance and panorama. But instead of providing by those earlier artists who were reflecting the only view possible of the landscape, all seeing and all controlling i.e. the view of the landowner, Brennan's maps become disorientating and fragmentary.

They reject the illusionistic conventions of landscape painting where the picture was a window, a small easel painting furnished with the controlling motifs of Claude or balancing the sublime and beautiful, leading to a vanishing point.

Fig.15 Wind and Rain by Cecily Brennan

Instead they rise up vertically spreading over the picture plane, in a linear network. They are huge drawings limited to graphite, occasional areas flat colour and white paper.

Brennan has asserted the motivating force in these drawings is control. In the final drawings, there is an increasing acknowledgement of the impossibility of order, a move away from the regimented rows of forestry plantations.

In Forestry & Firebreak and Wind and Rain pathways divide the mountainsides, apparently enclosing them. They can provide surveying mastery of the terrain but the scarred rutted marks of pathways are also the routes for firebreaks and flash floods. In Brennan's work Pathways provides more than direction and delineation. In the later Garden paintings they yield a vein of exploration into enclosed spaces, but as yet, in the Wicklow works they traverse the mountainsides. Pathways are scars left by the socializing mark of man, they are visible for all to see. After the development of naturalism in the late nineteenth century, actual perceptions are recorded in painting. Brennan's view invokes the Romantic tradition but there are traces of the dominant artistic forces of the past century. In the following chapters the relevant influences in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries will be examined.

FOOTNOTES

1. Quoted James B. Twitchell Romantic Horizons p.11.
2. IBID p.12.
3. Quotation from Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, p.13.
4. For a comprehensive and detailed account of the development of the sublime and the contrast between it and the beautiful, refer back to Footnote No.24 Chapter III.
5. Quoted in James B. Twitchell, Romantic Horizons, p.19.
6. For discussion of locus amoenus, or sunlit area of repose lodged in the sublime landscape, see Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, p.11.

CHAPTER VI

IRISH NATIONALISM AND LANDSCAPE PAINTING

The view of landscape which derives from the closing decades of the 19th Century is quite different from that nurtured in Romanticism. And whereas the reaction to the extremes of Romanticism elsewhere manifested itself in Realism, Ireland lacked a cosmopolitan intelligentsia or radical constituency, as indicated previously . In mid 19th century France the visionary, elevated imagination of Romanticism was renounced to embrace instead everyday, genre subjects of contemporary life. The modernity and theoretical radicalism of Proudons manifesto, of 1855, Courbet's paintings or Flaubert's writing (1) are inconceivable within the peripheral, isolated position of Ireland in the late nineteenth century. In examining the view of landscape formed from the Celtic Revival onwards the emphasis is not on individualism with a radical and ideological base but rather one derived from folklore, myth., rural community and nationalism.

Furthermore in Ireland the struggle for ownership of land itself, was intense during the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and crucial in the rise of nationalism and the movement for political sovereignity.

A "pure" vision devoid of the imprint of man was nurtured instead more by visitors, particularly the influx of travel writers from abroad, who were lured to Ireland in the late nineteenth century and especially towards the horizons of the Western seaboard.

The unbroken vistas of mountain, ocean, and lakes were captured by the cameras of turn of the century tourists. For instance the selective vision of William Lawrence's photographs of Irish scenery from around this time, focus on the landscape itself, rather than its inhabitants. The photographs were hand tinted, whereas the incidental figures remained in their original black & white (2).

But the writers and artists of the Celtic or Literary Revival were attracted to the Western Seaboard not as elemental desocialised nature, but for its ethnic customs and sense of community, the rural Gaelic native tradition. They sought to capture and celebrate it before it was overwhelmed by the "filthy modern tide" (3) in the words of W.B. Yeats, one of the movements leading figures. The apparently Gaelic nationalist priorities and objectives of the Revival were expessed in the manifesto of the newly established Abbey Theatre, the National Theatre of Ireland. It aimed to "build up a Celtic and Irish School of drama....we will show that Ireland is not the home of bufoonery and easy sentiment .....but the home of an ancient idealism".(4)

With similar fervour, the young W.B. Yeats described his iniation in the movement, occured after his seminal meeting with the Fenian leader John O'Leary and the writer Standish O'Grady, when Yeats was twenty one.

According to Yeats, "I turned my back on foreign themes, and decided the race was more important than the individual, and began The Wanderings of Ossian (5). This poem was emphatically Gaelic in inspiration, no doubt influenced by the books of Standish O'Grady. Thus in the Celtic Revival, Ossianic romanticism became a vehicle for Irish nationalism. Previously it had played a part in German romanticism.

Although it had nationlist overtures,as used in Wagner's operas, it strove to bring Homeric poetry closer to nature, freed from its cultural ties. (6).
But in the Celtic Revival, its cultural ties were strengthened. O'Grady resurrected Irish legends in somewhat cavalier fashion, embellishing the chivalry and adventures of Celtic heroes, a kind of Irish Sparta given narrative form. Allied to this revival of Celtic history was the revival of the Irish language, the recording of the oral tradition, the tales of the seanachai, which precipitated the founding of the Gaelic League in 1893 by Eoin Mac Neill and Douglas Hyde.

It is a curious paradox however that the leading lights in this interest in rural Gaelic Ireland were members of a class who at that period were losing their grip on the ownership of the land itself. The 1880's was a period of agitation for land reform and tenants' rights.

This period encompassed the so called Land Wars and the campaign of the powerful Land League which orchestrated the withholding of rent, protests petitions the famous "boycotting" tactics and so on. The Ashbourne Land Act of 1880 granted the "Three F's" while the Land Purchase Acts of 1885 and 1887 culminating in the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 advanced the tenants the money to buy out their land. Thus the closing decades of the century witnessed the gradual dismantling of the country estates - many of them run by absentee landlords, bought out by the tenants themselves (7).

Many of the major figures in the Celtic Revival were, however, drawn from the landowning class, loosely called the Anglo Irish Ascendancy.

Lady Gregory, for instance, an avid collector of folklore and legends and one of the founders of the National or Abbey Theatre in the early years of the century belonged to a wealthy Persse family who owned large estates in Galway. The Yeats family although based in London, came from Sligo, and William and Jack Butler Yeats were sent there during the summer holidays to stay with their grandparents, the Protestant Polloxfens who owned large mills and a shipping business (8). In addition, the so called "Irish Impressionists" (9) were predominantely upper or middle class. William Orpen, the academic virtuoso and famous portrait painter who later taught Sean Keating came from a wealthy Dublin Protestant Solicitor family.

And, Paul Henry, who more than any other artist concentrated in the scenery of the West of Ireland and is considered the quintessential Irish artist, was originally from a Belfast Protestant background

The playwright J.M. Synge, another leading figure in the revival, visited the Aran Islands and Connemara frequently around the turn of the century, once in the company of Jack B. Yeats. What attracted and inspired him was the character, speech, customs and oral traditions of these communities. Along with the Blaskets, these remote outposts, the western seaboard were perceived as havens of authentic Irish Culture. In the Preface to his most famous play, The Playboy of the Western World of 1903, Synge contrasted the "rich and living language" and the "wildness of the peasantry" to the more stilted, "elaborate language and literature" of the city, far away from "the profound and common interests of life". (10) In reality they were part of the congested districts, the countryside was clogged, the landscape overpopulated and impoverished.

In the play, the landscape acts as a foil for the action. It sets off the characters and events: the potato field where Christy Mahon, the leading male character, supposedly kills his father, or the strand upon which he triumphs in the donkey race.

But the earthiness, and the apparently unbridled passion and language of the drama proved too much for the Abbey audience. Synge's version of the West as an inbred corner of Mayo, jarred with the idealistic version of the noble peasant or heroic Gael. The outraged audience rioted when it was first performed on the Abbey stage, while the critics condemned it as a "slander on the fair name of Ireland" (11).

However, the heroic status of the inhabitants of the West of Ireland was reinstated and enhanced in the years following Independence, in 1921, in the paintings of Sean Keating. Keating, like Synge, was a frequent and devoted visitor to the Aran Islands. Unlike Synge he had a much more nationalist, propogandist, idealist vision to impart. His tightlipped static figures seem incapable of either "uproarious elequence or crepuscular blather" (12) and are carefully poised participants in tableaux of peasant life. The landscape functions as a backdrop and provides the props, as it does in the lesser known pictures of Charles Lamb, a painter cast much in the same mould, such as Dancing at a Northern Crossroads of 1920 (fig.16)

Sean Keating was born in Limerick and had first visited Aran in 1914, when he was twenty four. While still studying in the Metropolitan School of Art he had been taken under the wing of William Orpen. Keating sent in his first contribution to the R.H.A. annual exhibition, in 1915.

Fig.16 Dancing at a Northern Crossroads by charles Lamb

Fig.17 Night's Candles are Burnt Out by Sean Keating

The picture was Men of the West inspired by his trip of the previous year. The figure of the Aran fisherman personified courage and resilience against the odds of inhospitable terrain, dangerous ocean and infertile land. For Keating he signified moral fibre and the survival of an unsullied Gaelic tradition. It is this stoic rugged figure which predominates in Keating's pictures. Earlier Paul Henry had presented the West in a repetoire of emblematic images, the typical format being thatched cottage, creels of turf and so on, dwarfed by the background bulk of mountains and sky. The inhabitants sometimes form the main subject, for instance in his early pictures of women working. The Potato Figures and The Turf Carriers, both from his Achill period of 1913 / 1920. The image of the currach that fragile but buoyant craft occurs in the pictures of Keating as well as those of Jack B. Yeats and Paul Henry who depicted the boat being launched.

Keating however concentrated on the figure of the fisherman creating an heroic type. The double portrait of The Aran Fisherman and his wife of 1916 is a monumental image, with the male standing upright and resolute, clasping a pole, while his wife sits beneath him. Most of his pictures are sited on the shoreline, near the village. The pictures Vanity of Vanities shows a man and woman sitting on a beach, seperate and aloof, while in A Bold Peasant Emigrates the man clasps his wife in a final embrace while the other two male figures wait beside a rowing boat looking out to sea where the emigrant ship lies waiting.

Keating's characteristic use of sharp profile, the head, turned upwards or sideways, concentrates the viewer's interest on the face. This heroic portrait with its rugged features and determined expression, indicates "humility and reverence -..... noble reticence in simple people" (13). An interesting deviation from the Keating Schemata is in the picture Holy Joe on the Mountains of 1926. The figure is shown dramatically animated. But this expressiveness stems from his eccentricity and superstition. Holy Joe is an aberration, ostracised from the rural community, taking refuge in the mountains.

Keating became the unofficial painter of the War of Independence in the years up to 1922. In 1929 he expanded the narrative vein in the curious allegorical picture Night's Candles are Burnt Out.(fig.17) This painting stemmed from his commission to record the massive enterprise of the building of the huge Ardnacrusha hydro electric scheme on the river Shannon in the late nineteen twenties. In this large work the turretted walls of the huge power station replace the Aran landscape as backdrop. The foreground figure looks down disdainfully at the rather decrepit looking veteran of the Civil War, who a few years previously had been glorified in Keating's pictures. To the right front sits a priest engrossed in his missal. Hanging from the background wall is a skeleton and an old fashioned oil lamp.

This picture records a certain transistional stage in Ireland's history. The country was emerging from an underdeveloped and backward country to a more economically progressive nation. The construction of a power station was part of the Free State government's drive to provide an energy source for industry in an attempt to expand the economy from a predominantly rural agricultural base.

Out of a population of almost three million over two million lived in the countryside. However, during the thirties and forties, Keating continued as visual propogandist for the de Valera government whose policies reversed rather than increased the momentum of urbanization and industrialisation.

DeValera's rural idyll was expressed in 1943 as, "a land whose countryside of fields and villages ....would be bright with the sounds of rural industry"(14). Keating propagated this vision during the years of isolationism, perpetuated in art through the vehicle of the RHA and its dominance of art and art education during the opening decades of the Free State.

The Irish Times art critic reviewing the RHA annual exhibition in 1932 praised Keating as the foremost exponent of the national school "the only school that really matters". (15) In the same year the playwright G.B. Shaw defended his self imposed exile in these terms on the grounds that an artist must have a "metropolitan domicile" and "international culture" and so his "first business...was to get out of Ireland."(16)

The dominance of the visual arts by the RHA was finally broken with the establishment of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in 1943, set up by those artists who had returned from abroad. These included Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone who had studied Cubism in Paris under Albert Lothe. The event that precipitated this foundation of the Living Art was the rejection of Louis le Brocquy's picture Spanish Shawl. Le Brocquy had previously exhibited with the RHA. (17)

But consideration of the landscape painters who emerged in the post war years reveals that the so called "maverick moderns" (18) of the late 1940s onwards were essentially conservative, and most continue a non intellectual, mythic approach to a rural background.

There has been the identification of a "consistent poetic response to landscape" or "poetic genre" (19) displayed to varying degrees in the work of Patrick Collins, Tony O'Malley, Colin Middleton, T.P. Flanagan and more recently, Barrie Cooke, Patrick Hickey, Sean MacSweeney and others.

For Patrick Collins and Tony O'Malley at least, the formative influence was de Valera's Ireland: "that mixture of introspection and stagnation, vitality and smugness, thwarted ambition and emigration" (20). De Valera himself had finally stepped down in 1959, with the country teetering on economic collapse.

Images of the Irish countryside, narrative, nostalgic in effect and domestic in scope predominate. They are not as propagandist or crude as Keating's icons of peasant life but many continue in the same vein: a version of landscape imbued with folklore and rural community. Certain themes predominate. Stylistically, Paul Henry had derived his version of the West from late Impressionism with veils of pale colour reminiscent of Whistler. Keating had clung to the rigid academic life room draughtsmanship of Tonks and Orpen and the turn of the Century Slade School. A kind of "Orpenage" continued, likened to the painting of Royal Mail Letter boxes from red to green" (21).

The post war landscape painters evolved a kind of organic abstraction, small scale oil paintings exploiting texture, muted colour, glazes of subdued colour, presumably evocative of the soft light and misty climate. Certain themes and motifs recur in the work of these painters, what seems to attract them is what is embedded in, or what is assocatiated with, the landscape.

The Irish countryside, scarred with the the past, had previously exercised an intense fascination in the late 18th Century as discussed previously, in the rage for antiquities.

The idea of the past as emerging organically from the landscape continues. The northern artist Colin Middleton echoed Standish O'Grady who wished his historical epics to draw their life "from the soil like a natural growth".(22) when he referred to the stones as "talking...our kith and kin." (23). Patrick Collins, growing up in Sligo, was surrounded by the prehistoric remains at Carrowmore and Carowkeel and overshadowed by the bulk of Benbulben(24). His oeuvre includes many paintings of Celtic remainssuch as Field of Old Stones and the Menhir paintings of the early sixties.

In his most recent solo show in November 1986 , the pictures included Holy Well and Celtic Cross(figs. 18&19). Tony O'Malley also displays an interest in myth, carvings, antiquity in pictures based on the ruins of Jerpoint Abbey and Caher Island (figs.20&21). Louis Le Brocquy has based work on Clonfert Abbey, while his Tain Tapestries(fig.22) and Tain drawings are derived from the epics which Standish O'Grady helped resurrect.

Fig.18 Holy Well by Patrick Collins

Fig.19 Celtic Cross by Patrick Collins

Le Brocquy explains his fascination with the head image as continuing in the Celtic tradition of the head as the box containing the spirit. His interest in so-called tinker paintings based on travelling people, has also exercised a sentimental attraction for Jack B. Yeats and more recently Paddy Collins.

When not working from the such consciously mythic themes, a rural upbringing in Sligo is evoked in Collin's pictures. These pictures are derived from memories of the small farms subsistence and agrarian economy of the west of Ireland. For Collins, landscape is "the field I plough. I have nothing else" (25). Such pictures as Small Holding on a Mountain, (fig.23) Fields on a Mountain of Mountain Landscape and so on, with their grid like fields, exemplify this. Thus Memories of the de Valera era are inescapable in Collin's work, as well as reminding one of the struggle for ownership of the land itself in Irish history.

The bog is perhaps the most potent and characteristic symbol of the inescapability of the past in this version of Irish landscape. This preserving, organic layer accumulates history within itself and the eye is drawn inwards, into the soil. To quote Seamus Heaney:

"Everywhere the eye concedes to
Encroaching horizon....Our unfenced Country
Is bog that keeps crusting between the
sights of the sun"(26).

The strata of peatland hoards the relics of antiquity, the partially decomposed residue of past ages, often dramatically pickled.

Fig.20 Ancient Carvings

by Tony O'Malley

Fig.21

Irish Inscape with Ghosts

by Tony O'Malley

Barrie Cooke has been attracted to the organic remains of the bog, in particular the bog bodies. They form part of his subject matter of lake, river, and his themes of fertility and natural growth.

Collins also produced a series of paintings based on this subject, the bog, after digging drainage ditches in Connemara in 1970: Bog Country and Bogland for example.

Cooke has also been attracted to the specific mythic legendary figures such as the Sheila-na-Gigs. They are startling, crude carvings of female sexuality derived from pre Christain fertitlity rites hidden in the crevices of churches and graveyeards. In his pictures based on the legend of Sweeney, Cooke shares this fascination with Brian Bourke, and the poet Seamus Heaney, among others. Sweeney is forever doomed to flit through the landscape "through branches and rainclouds of the skies, trespassing and wayfaring from peak and summit and glens". (27). These peaks or mountains are themselves enshrined in myth and ritual, Croagh Patrick provides the setting for the annual enactment of Catholic ritual, at its summit is found a tabernacle or Mass rock. Lough Derg, or Station Island is another site for penance, ritual, self mortification. In Sligo, Ben Bulben, mentioned earlier is wrapped in myth and legend. (It provided the final resting place for the lovers for instance in "An Toraiocht" the Celtic Myth of Diarmaid and Grainne.) In addition it is enmeshed in memories of the more recent past, as in Tony O'Malley's Croaghmor Cliara. (fig.24)

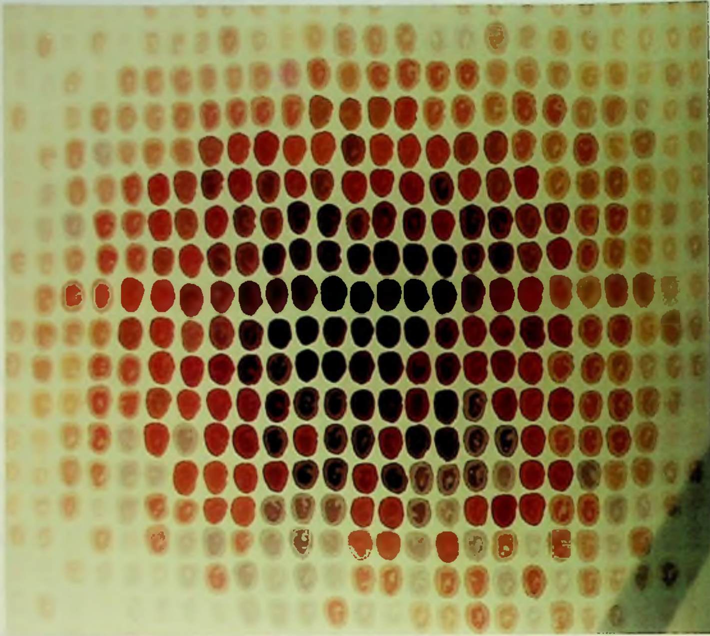

Fig.22 Tain Tapestry by Louis le Brocquy

Fig.23 Small Holding on a Mountain by Patrick Collins

The ancient "dindshenchas", or place lore, mythical narrative, was revived during the Celtic Revival. The notion of the dindshenchas can be said to characterise this version of the landscape - as mediated by the past, myth, memory. The emphasis is on ruralism, genius locus, or sense of place. Collins in particular displays little interest in international events and hankers after "an unmuddied stream of Irish Art" (28).

But this version of landscape nurtured by this generation with its echoes of isolationist nationalism seems to exercise a limited direct influence and lacks widespread credibility among younger artists, Cecily Brennan included, (although she admits to particularly admiring Sean MacSweeney's work). There was a particularly violent reaction to the academicism and stage Irishness of Keating, the dominance of the RHA in the College of Art in the nineteen sixties and seventies for instance. G.B. Shaw, quoted earlier, had acidly commented as early as 1896 "that to an Irishman with any sort of social conscience the conception of Ireland as a romantic picture, background formed the lakes of Killarny by moonlight, a round tower or two .... whilst every male....is a "bhroth of a boy" and every female ....is a colleen in a crimson Connemara Cloak ...is ...exasperating". (29)

The isolationism of the de Valera era was broken in the sixties when the country was effectively mobilised in industrial terms.(30) The agrarian backward subsistence enconomy of the West has declined steadily and agriculture has become big business, bolstered by the influx of EEC funds.

The improving standard of communications has resulted in a proliferation of the mass media. Irish artists are aware of international trends and do not suffer the enforced isolationism of earlier decades. Internationial styles are assimilated and interpreted.

Landscape painting in this century has been identified as "the single most national characteristic, a moderate modernism tempered by personality and tradition" (31). Modernism as such, never really took root in Ireland. The Irish Exhibition of Living Art for instance, came to share the same stable of artists with the RHA and Collin's view of Irish as unmuddied, is largely mythic.

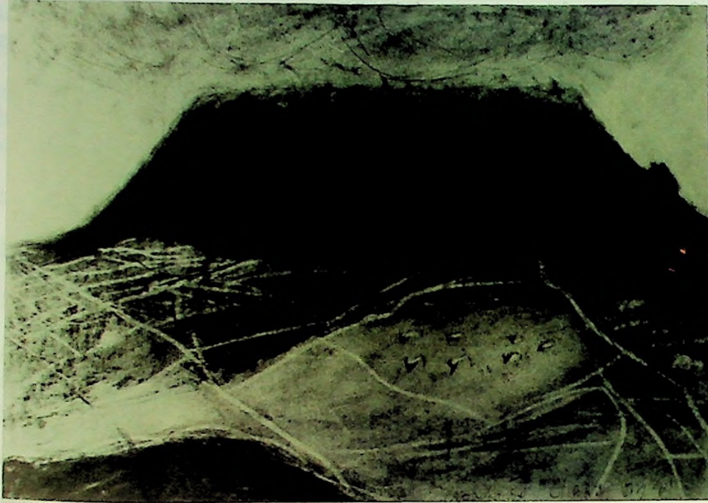

Fig.24 Croaghmor Cliara by Tony O'Malley

FOOTNOTES

1. For discussion of the reaction to Romanticism in the REalism of Courbet, Proudhon, Flaubert etc., see Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, Romanticism and Realism, pp. 131-181.

2. For discussion of foreign photographer s' views of Ireland, see Luke Gibbons, "Alien Eye Photography and Ireland", Creative Camera, no 12, December 1986, pp.10-11.

3. Yeats quoted in Christopher Fitzsimon, The Irish Theatre, p.134.

4. IBID p.135.

5. IBID.

6. For greater detail and discussion of Ossianic poetry and the cult of Ossian particularly in reference to Germany, see Charles Rosen, Romanticism and Realism p.61.

7. For greater detail on this crucial period in Irish History see F.S.L. Lyons, Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, p.15.

8. Also see the discussion of the leading figures in the Celtic Revival and the foundation of the Abbey Theatre in Christopher Fitzsimons, The Irish Theatre, p.135.

9. "The Irish Impressionists" as included int the National Gallery of Ireland exhibition of Summer 1984 were Walter Osborne, Nathaniel Hone, Aloysius O'Kelly, W.J. Leech, Roderic O'Connor among others. Most came from an upper or middle class background. They studied in Continental ateliers, eg. Verlat in Antwerp or the Academie Julien in Paris, followed by a period spent painting in the French countryside. Many returned home and exhibited with the RHA. They combined "plein'airist" techniques underpinned by a strong academic draughtsmanship.
For the most comprehensive account see Julian Campbell, The Irish Impressionists: Irish Artists in France and Belgium, 1850 - 1914.

10. From J.M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World, p.6.

11. For greater detail on the critical and public reaction to this play, see Christopher Fitzsimon, The Irish Theatre, p.144.

12. Virginia Woolf's description of the Irish peasantry, their capacity for "soft cadence", quoted by Seamas Deane, A Sense of Ireland, p.37.

13. Description of Keating's figures taken from James White, Sean Keating Retrospective, p.9.

14. De Valera quoted in Fintan O'Toole, A Fair Day: Photographs of Martin Parr, p.21.

15. Quoted as part of a discussion of the RHA and its fostering of a national art "the entire thrust...looked to the West as somehow purer and more honest." Brian Kennedy, "R.H.A., Modernism, and Living Art", Circa No.14, January/February 1984 pp.27-29.

16. Shaw quoted in A Sense of Ireland, (Various Authors), p.141.

17. The I.E.L.A. was however, held in the same premises as the R.H.A. and both came to share the same stable of artists. Brian Kennedy, "RHA, Modernism and Living Art", Circa No.14.

18. Description in Frances Ruane,The Delighted Eye, p.6.

19. For greater detail on this generation, IBID, pp.6-20.

20. Description of this era given in Brian Fallon, Tony O'Malley, p.18.

21. IBID p.14

22. Quoted in Luke Gibbons, "Lies that Tell the Truth: Maeve, History and the Irish Cinema", The Crane Bag Vol.7, No.2, 1983, pp.149-154.

23. Middleton quoted in Frances Ruane The Delighted Eye p.12

24. "Collins sees the rocks, earth and bogs of Ireland as a physical link with the past that unit es Collins with his youth as well as the contemporary Celt to the ancients". Frances Ruane Patrick Collins p.85.

25. IBID p.37

26. Heaney from Bogland, A Sense of Ireland, p.53.

27. Description of Sweeney in Flann O'Brien, At Swim Two Birds, p.102.

28. Collins quoted in Frances Ruane, Patrick Collins, p.48.

29. Shaw quoted in A Sense of Ireland (various) p.73.

30. Furthermore a bedrock of folksy homespun images was maintained. In the early sixties, during the period of industrial expansion and economic optimism, Time Magazine featured Ireland as a cover story, "Europe's most profitable location for American Investment"in 1963. The picture of one of the I.D.A.'s new model factories was draped by Shamrock spangled curtains held aside by a leprachaun. See Fintan O'Toole, "Going West: The City Versus the Country in Irish Writing" The Crane Bag, Vol.9,No.2, 1985, pp.111-117.

31. Quoted in Frances Ruane, The Delighted Eye p.11.

CHAPTER VII

FROM THE MALE TO THE FEMALE

The dominant representations of the Irish landscape in the 20th century have been of the ilk of Keating and Collins, tinged with a narrow male nationalist perception. Collins conveys strong nationalist sentiments. He ran errands as a boy in Sligo during the Civil War, and as we have seen the Civil War was celebrated in Keating's heroic images. In 1967, Collins painted Homage to Paul Henry, who "threw away everything ...he painted a thing so bloody romantic you could'nt take it....painted Ireland like an Irishman"(1). Collins maintains a consciously isolationist stance, continuing a mythic narrative in a nostalgic vein.

In the revival of the heroic legends of Ireland Standish O'Grady recreated an Irish version of Sparta. But in the legend of the Tain Bo Cualigne, one of the most important and famous of these ancient epics, he was however confronted with the character of Queen Maeve who occupies a dominant role. O'Grady subdued her pride, fierceness and promiscuity (2) because this matriarchal figure did not square with the ideals of the Celtic Revival, cultural nationalist version of Irish history which has pervaded since.

The female figure is part of the residue of the past, associated with the landscape or else acting as ideal figureheads in contrast to the startling sexuality of the Sheila-na-Gigs.

Fig.25 Cottage in the Country by Patrick Collins

For W.B. Yeats, Kathleen ni Houlihan was identified as Ireland herself, but again the image is mythic, legendary, embedded in the landscape. She appeared to him in "a dream as distinct as a vision of a cottage". (3) Images of this cottage are pervasive in Collin's pictures (fig.23 & 25)

In Keating's pictures, women are confined to the domestic space, the handmaiden to the male, who dominates the public and political sphere.

They perform supporting roles and are placed in a subservient position to the male as in Aran Fisherman & his Wife or Das Obermann (fig.26) or feature in the background as in Mending a Currach on a West of Ireland Beach.(fig.27).

Keating omits the leading role played by the Countess Markievicz , from his version of the armed struggle. It was the assertive female characters in Synge's Playboy of the Western World, the independent spirit of Pegeen Mike and the amorous stratagems of the Widow Quin which particularly incensed the Dublin critics and audience when it was first performed.

Collins devotes the greatest attention to nostalgia using agricultural or Celtic motifs and omits women altogether. This is a male version of landscape which has embellished myth and folklore and given a narrative structure in which women play no part or else are assigned a peripheral or token position. It is rooted in a nostalgic view of a rural past in which the community, ritual, story telling take precedence. No images display this with such a blatant heavy handed way as the academic icons of Sean Keating.

Fig.26 Das Obermann by Sean Keating

Fig.27 Mending a Currach on a West of Ireland Beach by Sean Keating

Whereas James Arthur O'Connor had place a tiny male hunter endowed with a gun on the threshold of turbulent landscape, Keatings's heroes are the subject for aggrandisement and the landscape becomes the proving ground for their masculinity. The rugged and resolute features of the Aran Fisherman were transferred to the group portraits of the young freedom fighters who are cast much in the patriotic ideal of Padraig Pearse. In the picture Men of the South members of a flying column prominently display their weapons, holding rifles and other guerilla paraphenalia. After the struggle for independence is over, women play no part in building the new Ireland - see The Key Men (fig.28) or Nights Candles are Burnt Out (fig.17)

The landscape also provides the setting for religious ritual and penance as discussed in the previous chapter. Keating recognizes the primacy of the Catholic Church in pictures such as Goodbye Father (fig.29) where the participants are entirely male. The Church as particularly repressive of women was recognised even in the Gothic novels of Charles Maturin.

Nationalism, with its preoccupation with violence and heroism, is a male domain. In Ireland landscape painting had become tainted with nationalism. The landscape, inscribed with emblematic motifs is received as the prevailing view.

Scarred by memories of the distant or more recent past, the images produced are characteristically of the West of Ireland.

Fig.28 The Key Men by Sean Keating

Fig.29 Goodbye Father by Sean Keating

Cecily Brennan is only one of an increasing number of Irish women artists (for example Gwen O'Dowd, Alanna O'Kelly, Jackie Cooney, Aileen MacKeogh) whose work in different media is concerned with a response to landscape. Brennan's strategy is not to consciously engage or appropiate elements from tradition. She does not so much confront it as choose an alternative route. There is no question of Brennan adopting the assertive role required by the nationalist tradition, with its associations of community ritual or violence, the repression of women, and its reliance on mythic motifs. Her work is concerned with negotiating and exploring a different kind of landscape and in so doing offsetting the images of Keating and Collins.

Female sexuality is introduced in her work, repressed or ommitted in the male dominated tradition. Rather than landscape being associated with nationalist identity, it inspires a work concerned with recovering a female identity. Any journey inward previously tended to mean the eye being sucked back into the past. But Brennan's inward probing is not an archaelogical search.

The tradition of the femininity of landscape, of seeing the body of woman in nature has traditionally provided control - mastery (4)See Barrie Cooke's Woman in the Burren (fig.30) The effect of Brennan's work is quite different and can be seen as an alternative to the male dominated tradition previously discussed.

In Forest and Firebreak(fig.31) twin areas of hatched graphite are seperated by a narrow band of white paper and penetrated by a wavering plume of calligraphic lines.

Fig.30 Woman in the Burren by Barrie Cooke

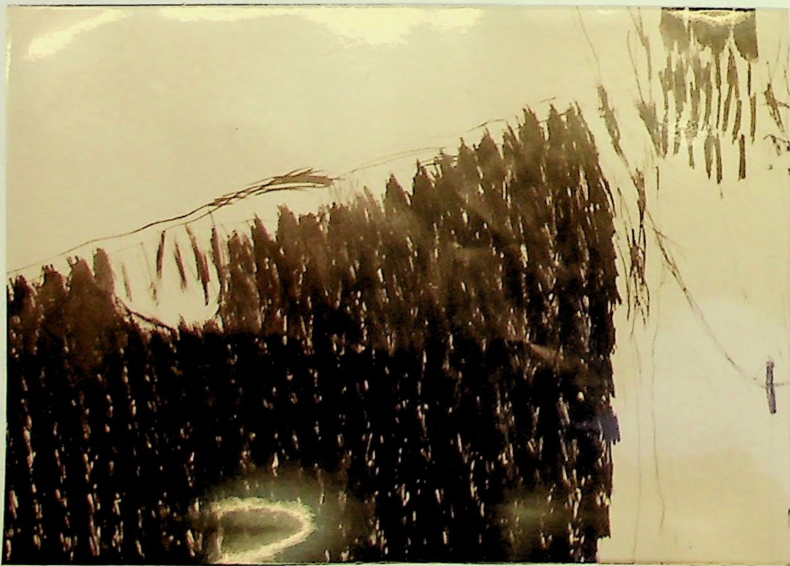

Fig.31 Forest & Firebreak (detail) by Cecily Brennan

The points of intersection in landscape which recall the imagined areas of the female body should yield passivity, submission, fulfillment. These feminine areas should be beautiful, accessible. For instance the breast should provide repose, rest, nourishment or the womb escape, regression, safety.(5)

But Forest and Firebreak introduces the uncontrollable and disorderly elements of nature while in Wind and Rain the drawing is broken up by the weather. These works initiate the fracturing of form and the greater sexuality of the Garden paintings. The garden should epitomise the submissive femininity of landscape. The confinement of nature in its enclosures were traditionally verdant edenic enclosures where "one must penetrate into the recesses of those sacred shades": Alexander Pope elaborated that these recesses should contain a pliant welcoming nymph or naked goddess (6).

In Brennan's Garden paintings the gratification expected is witheld. The soothing enclosures traditionally feminine areas are transformed. The largest painting Pathway (fig.32) leads the eye in and around the composition through an archway shape, painted in vaulting flame like shapes of glowing red. But the agitated movement fails to provide a comforting womb like space and denies the eye rest. Only in the painting Garden Clearing (fig.33) is there a locus amoenus or area of repose provided, a kernel of green femininity.

The repetition of oval and circular imagery were emphatically defined as feminine characteristics, princiapally by feminist artists and critics in the early seventies.

Fig.32 Pathway by Cecily Brennan

Lucy Lippard has drawn up lists of female imagery, while Judy Chicago actively stresses the central core of cavity in her work (7). In this kind of work the constant repetition of these motifs seem to be stressed for their own sake, while the space created may be already marginal and subjective.

However, Brennan maintains that the evocative organic imagery in her work is quite unconscious and unpremediated. (The womb like shape in Pathway for instance was first commented on by a woman doctor). The effectiveness of this imagery lies in retrieving the power and energy previously attributed to the Sublime.

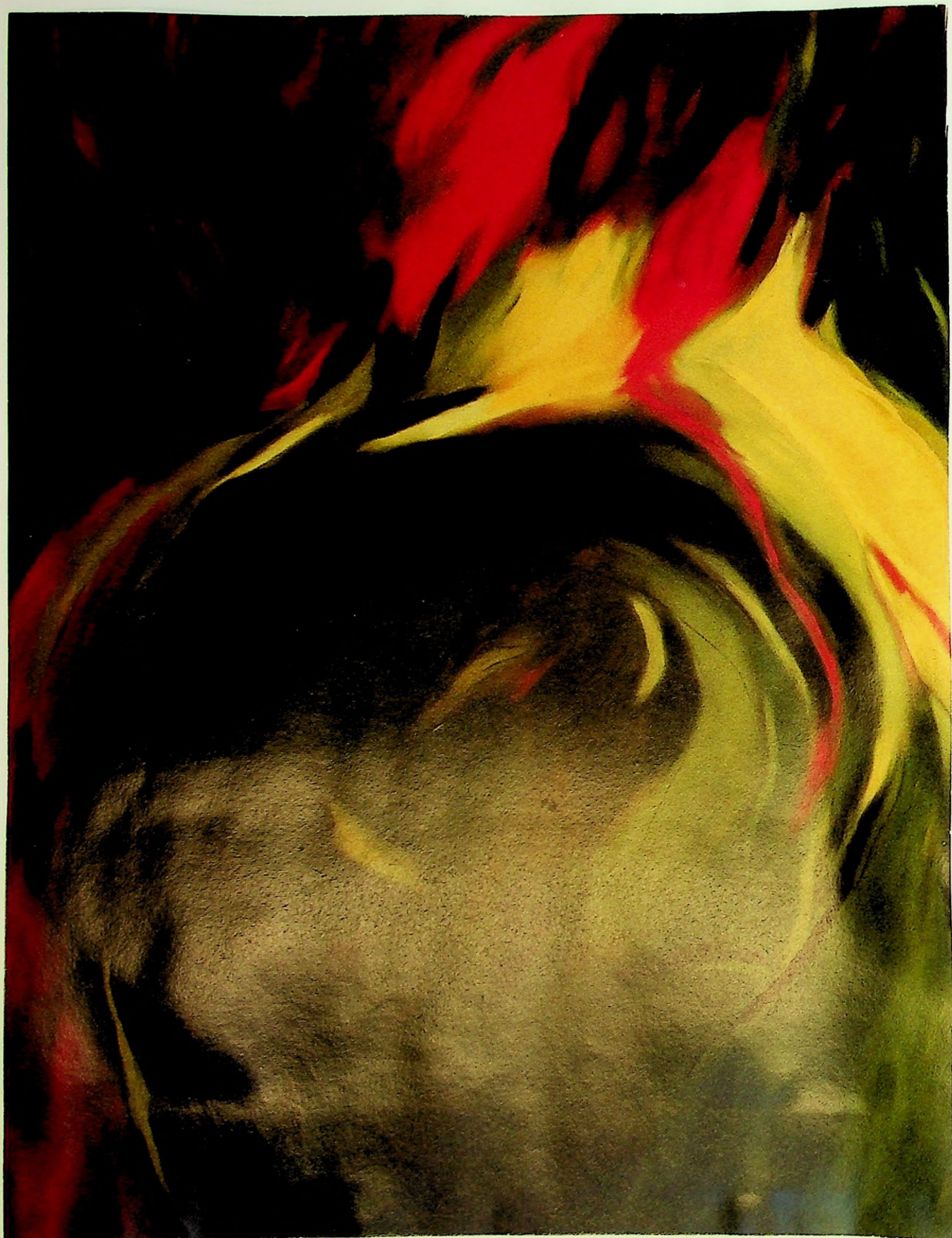

Fig.33 Garden Clearing by Cecily Brennan

FOOTNOTES

1. Collins quoted as part of a discussion of his art: "his style has changed over the years, but his intent has remained fixed...an art that reflects the nuances of Celtic Life...recording the surfaces so frequently identified with the archaelogical remains of the Celtic past....a fascination with the mythical, a fix on the past, a sense of isolation and love of the land....particularly Irish" Frances Ruan, Patrick Collins, p.28/29

2. See discussion of Queen Maeve in Luke Gibbons, "Lies that Tell the Truth: Maeve, History, and the Irish Cinema", The Crane Bag Vol.7,No.2,1983. pp.149-154.

3. Yeats quoted in Christopher Fitzsimon, The Irish Theatre, p.135.

4. "Mastery of landscape in the sexual sense.....to see as well as feel and explore the ways in, out, and around the landscape". Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, P.10

5. "The beautiful landscape renders the mother available and easy "For greater detail see IBID p.11. Also Burke himself described woman as epitomising the beautiful:
"Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is most beautiful, about the neck and breasts, the smoothness, the softness, the easy and insensible swell"
Quoted in William Pressly, James Barry p.36.

6. For discussion of the garden as epitomising the yielding feminity of landscape, see Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape, p.39

7. Lucy Lippard's lists of "female" imagery were drawn up between 1968 and 1972 and include:
"repetition of curvilinear lines.....looseness in handling... characteristic use of a parabolic shape or "bag" that turns in on itself....etc". For greater detail see Judy Loeb (Ed). Feminist Collage p.163. Also see Lippard's discussion of gardens in Lucy Lippard Overlay p.179. For detailed discussion of Chicago's emphatic use of the "central cavity" and "an abundance of sexual forms" as asserting female sexuality, see Judy Chicago, Through the Flower, pp. 142-145.

CONCLUSION

CECILY BRENNAN'S GARDEN

The formal garden,horticulture taming nature,seems to be the antithesis of the primitive desocialized landscapes, the earlier location of the sublime. In the earliest prospects as discussed previously the geometrical plan fanned out from the big house. Within its symmetrical patterns, pathways, bowers and glades, the garden insulated the landowner from uncouth rural life. Nature in the early eighteenth century was divided into the earthly paradise of the private estate, With mountain scenery, peripheral incomprehensible, and unkept, as Stephen Switzer expressed it in the late 18th century:

"Paradise properly signifies Gardens of Pleasure modell'd and prepar'd for the sweet reception and happy enjoyment of felicities" (1).

This statement invokes the original mythic source of the garden in Eden where all was fertile perfection and harmony until woman tempted by the serpent incurred God's wrath by stealing the forbidden fruit and Adam and Eve were cast out into the inhospitable barren earth where they had to toil and labour. The early nineteenth century American or Hudson Valley painter Thomas Cole, depicted Adam and Eve being cast out from a green verduous world through a cleft in the rock with a tempestuous archetypal, sublime landscape of mountainous barren terrain and craggy peaks. ..
(2).

Thus in a sense, all gardens retain echoes of Genesis. Certainly in the eighteenth century, husbandry of nature and horticulture not only boasted Georgic morality and a Classical pedigree, but also retrieved the original paradisal perfection.

Chinese gardens too carried divine overtures and were another ideal of timeless perfection. Its motifs were borrowed in the 18th century English garden in mock pagodas, chinoiserie summer houses (3). This garden is also nature (fig.34) enclosed within tight spaces, courtyards, intricate rockwork rather than grassy areas. Again, to quote Alexander Pope:

"Near the bounds of gardens, the Trees unite themselves more closely together and cover the hedges with a thick shade which prevents all prying from without and preserves the privacy of the interior parts....on every side you look, behold the wall!"(4).

The garden seems to prevent expanse, to create enclosure and seclusion. The wall, a grove of trees, a clump of shrubbery, and ornamental walks define nature and entices the visitor within.

These formal or public gardens, such as the Rhodedendron Gardens in Howth seem to be completely ordered at first sight. As mentioned previously the Howth gardens are based on a spiral plan of pathways and archways. Expanse and panoramic vistas are not found in this type of garden but rather in the landscape parks of Capability Brown or Willan Kent who flourished in the late 18th century. Kent, as Horace Walpole put it, "leaped the fence and saw all nature was a garden" (5).

These gardens sweep uninterrupted to the horizon, a view based on the rolling vistas of Claude. The landscape park appears to be uncultivated and creates a vast illusion of rolling campagne, diminishing and reducing the human figure.

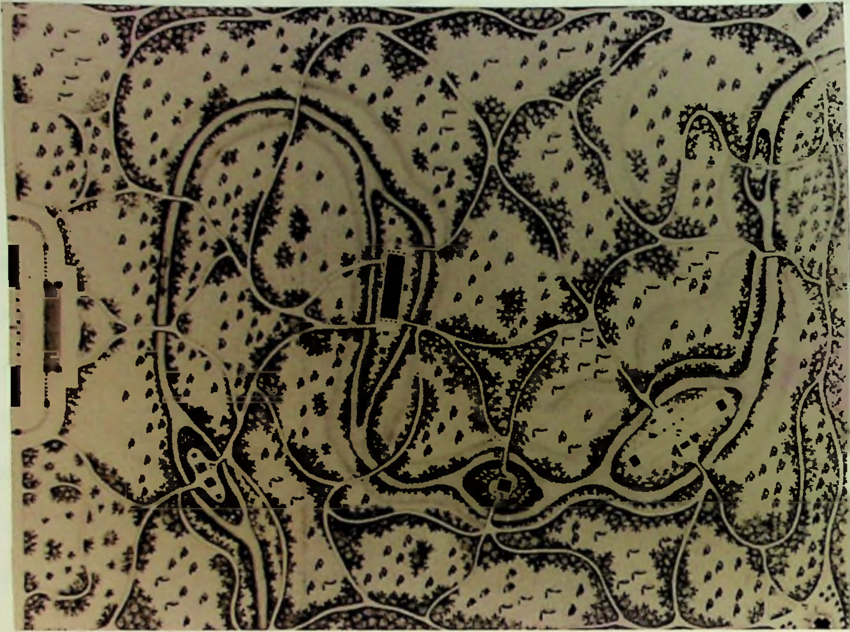

Fig.34 Plan of Chinese Garden by Cecily Brennan

Fig.35 Pathway with Red Flowers by Cecily Brennan

(It was in fact a fantasy of the ruling class, a version of Eden controlled without work on the part of the labouring people. Goldsmith's <u>Deserted Village</u> indicates the facts of vast social and geographical upheaval and expense of the landscape parks (6).

In the rolling expanses of the park these gardens attract the eye to the horizon. But as we have seen Brennan's view is not directed skywards, instead she abandons the aeriel view completely and enters the bounded space of the formal garden. If the garden seems to offer the perfect recipe for beautiful nature (accessible, enclosed, small, delicate, artifical and so on) then the overall effect of Brennan's paintings is quite different.

Whereas the elements in the Wicklow drawings emphasise separation distance and control, the initial impression of the Garden painting release. There is a loss of self consciousness and an increasing involvement with, and entry into the forms of the garden. The angularity, graphite line and pattern of the scarred terrain and pathways are transformed by fluid oil painting and swirling flame like shapes. The garden seems to offer cultivated manicured nature, in which nature is yielding, feminine accessible, nourishing, reposeful. But the enclosure offered by the spiral plan of the rhododendron garden never seems capable of containing the movement.

In Brennan's pictures, flowers bloom and explode over archways and the ornamental walks become flowing ribbons of colour like molten lava. In the huge <u>Pathway</u> (fig.31) painting, as in the earlier, correspondingly immense drawing <u>Forest and Firebreak</u> there is a restless movement outwards, traditionally, enclosed walks and discreet boundaries of the

garden insulated the visitor - usually leisured and privileged - from inhospitable terrain and the realities of everyday life.

Gardens provided refuges and escape. In Brennan's pictures there is an exploration of its plan and layout which is restless, dissatisfied and rarely yields the contemplative repose usually associated with gardens. The growth of nature in the foliage of the flowers flows into the formal walkways rather than being confined as in Pathway with Red Flowers (fig.35) Garden in Autumn (fig.36). And as discussed previously the basic human impulse is to organize nature into enclosures and refuges. In the Pathway paintings the eye is provided with movement through the landscape but is offered no respite, refuge or escape.

Only in the picture Garden Clearing (fig.33) the first painting encountered upon entering Brennan's exhibition in the Taylor Galleries is there refuge and respite. Here the beautiful seems lodged in the sublime. In Barrett's painting Powerscourt Waterfall the locus amoenus attracts and shelters balancing richly inviting foliage, sun and golden sky against any possible hazardous sublime elements. Exploration of the cross valley intersection is allowed,whereas in O'Connor's late landscapes, the intersection is encroached upon by towering mountains or plummets to a dark chasm.

In sense Brennan's Garden Clearing yields a circular restful green area in which the eye settles and inside this clearing feathery graphite lines are buried in the areas of green and ochre, detailing the circular forms. But in Brennan's other paintings the eye is drawn inwards, and there is an increasing use of the dark recessive shapes of the archway.

Fig.36 Garden in Autumn by Cecily Brennan

In Pathway the movement of the eye is still encouraged along ribbons of colour as well as introducing a flat area of grey also in Garden in Autumn. This protruding platform or island recalls the use of a foreground promintory on the edge of the sublime as in O'Connors Eagles Rock and more prominently and importantly in Thomas Cole's painting Sunny Morning on the Hudson River. The existence of a sublime Garden, although considered impossible to create in late 18th century and early 19th century Europe, was considered as possible in the New World in particular the landscape of the Catskills mountains and Hudson Valley such as were painted by Cole (7). In Cole's picture rather than coiling serpentine pathways, wisps of mist lead the eye over the sublime, obstructive shape of the middle ground mountain to the beautiful spot of rest in the background. But Cole also depicted Adam and Eve being cast out of the paradisal and verdant Eden through a cleft in the rock and across a ravine into a desolate barren landscape. In Brennan's garden,the upheaved terrain of the sublime and the image of resistance of rock,if not its barreness and aridity,is brought into the restless ribbons of Pathway.

For Pope and in the earliest Prospects the enclosed complete manicured world of the garden is scrupulously separated from the messy rural world of the outside (a painting by Jan Siebrecht opposes a walled formal garden and the big house to foreground farmyard scenes where humans figures and animals are depicted active and busy and a bull copulates with a cow.) (8) The movement and colour of Brennan's garden paintings evoke a similar sense of the tangled growth and flux of generative wild nature brought back over the wall into the garden. If Kent leaped the fence to see all nature as a garden then Brennan exploits the images of pathway enclosure to see that nature's abundant growth can never be contained by a garden.

The Pathway and the Arch are man made but nature grows over and through or else lures the eye inwards into darkness. The images of entrance, archway predominate in the current work, the charcoal drawings rather than the curvilinear ribbons of colour or its grey mass. The eye is lured inwards, rather than around or over.

The motifs of archway and also cave as interior vision also occur in the early 19th century in particular in Joseph Wright's Cavern Paintings or Wordsworth's cave poems(9). Indeed Wordsworth's poem Yew Trees contains lines which could be applied to Brennan's Pathway painting "intertwisted fibres serpentine upcoiling and inveterately convolved"(10)

Central to the experience of sublimity was the idea of the threshold or the brink. The image of archway is impulsive, looking into rather than expansive looking away to the horizon as discussed previously. It channels movement between the inner and outer, the light outside the dark inward, illusion and reality. In Pathway with Red Flowers (fig.35), light, vegetation and brightness predominate.

In contrast the triptych Ground Painting (fig.37) suggests burrowing into the earth itself. As the eye is drawn over the dark flat areas to the bright focus of a yellow crocus shape, there is a sense of being inside looking out to the abrupt flame of colour a sudden shift from dark space to light.

In Brennan's most recent works the archway is a dark recessive image as the brightness and colour are abandoned particularily in the black charcoal drawings (fig.38). She has said she is trying to evoke mystery in the arch, using it as an unsettling image.

Fig.37 Ground Painting by Cecily Brennan

Fig.38 Garden Drawing by Cecily Brennan

The eye is tempted inside by the possibility of discovery, perhaps at the cost of leaving what is known and obvious behind. From the descriptive knowledge and mastery of the terrain, such an overriding concern in the initial Wicklow drawings, Brennan has moved almost to the other extreme. Pathways in these drawings offer no knowledge of the route or the next stage while the archway frames what is perhaps a black void. Furthermore, there is a presence hovering around the gateway, the sense of a sentinel who guards and obscures.

To move from one world to another means passing under the archway, through the pathway is Garden at Night (figs.39 & 40) a hazardous mysterious passage between reality and illusion, conscious and unconscious. Again to return to Wordsworth:

"The curious traveller who from open day
hath passed with torches into some huge cave,
Looks around, and sees
widening on all sides, sees, or thinks he sees,
Erelong the massy roof above his head,
Substance and shadow, light and darkness, all
commingled...of shapes and forms....
that shift and vanish, change and interchange
Like spectres....
Busies the eye with images and forms....
her is shadowed forth
from the projections, wrinkles, cavities,
a variegated landscape - there the shape,
The ghostly semblance of a hooded monk"(11)

Fig.39 Garden at Night 1 by Cecily Brennan

The archway, which had appeared as a blue background feature in the earliest garden pictures now dominates the work and the subterranean depths of the cave is the next source of imagery she wants to explore. In Garden at Night (fig.41) behind the white narrow vertical soft keyhole like opening, a slim black taper hovers, reminiscent of a hooded figure.

In this drawing the red membrane like walls and lambent shapes of the earlier paintings are replaced by a skeletal web of black vaulting tapers. These drawings evoke a sense of striving to reach beyond the aperture, tempered by a presentiment of mystery. The archway is like the mouth of a tunnel away from the outside, sensuous, tactile, colourful world. Leaving the vegetation and flowers of the garden behind it is on the threshold of altered consciousness. The provisional title of these drawings is Where Reason Sleeps, Garden at Night perhaps faltering before an inner entrance, whose darkness and mystery engender a sense of the sublime.

Brennan's archways transform the erotic and yielding enclosures of Pope's garden into an unsettling darkness gathering around an organic cavity. It fails to provide succour or retreat a locus amoenus or a secluded haven. Instead a sense of the sublime, previously associated with the chaotic and desocialized landscape is here evoked in the formal man made archways of the garden. Moreover, the sublime landscape previously discussed was preoccupied not only in framing encounter but in challenging and transcending the turbulence of nature. Brennan's archway paintings suggest vunerability and absence, the eye looks into the void, it is a perilous passage not yet embarked upon.

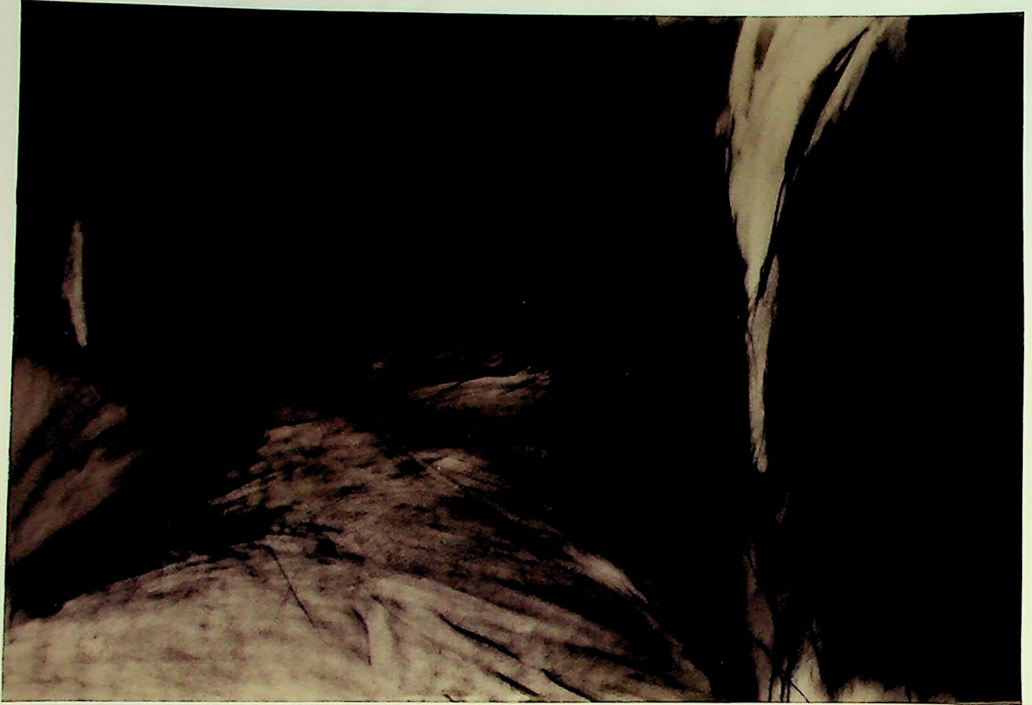

Fig.40 Garden at Night 2 by Cecily Brennan

The most recent paintings remind the viewer of empty vessels, in their yawning blackness. They are much darker and more recessive than the earlier works. The probing tunnelling movement inward leads to this dark cavity, as the recognizable forms of nature are left behind and there is a gradual emptying out of landscape imagery.

These paintings lack the movement and activity of earlier works they are stiller and much more vertical rather than being derived from distinct locations, they lack topographical definition and convey a greater sense of interior involvement . They suggest desire rather than fulfillment. In luring the eye inward yet blocking exploration, they withold the gratification and the femininity previously associated with gardens.

The beautiful hitherto feminine world of the garden is infused with the darkness mystery and energy of the sublime, rather than the sublime being tempered or alleviated by the beautiful as before. Her work is concerned with female identity, rather than woman being subject in landscape. It owes nothing to the cultural nationalist male tradition, but reclaims landscape from these dominant representations of Keating and Collins rather than consciously engaging in that tradition. Inward space is created, which displaces the control and mastery previously striven for in landscape. The features of the sublime, traditionally considered a visual bastion of male supremacy (12) are exploited in landscape imagery produced by a woman. Thus the male domination in the Irish landscape nationalist traditon is undermined.

Fig.41 <u>Garden at Night 3</u> by Cecily Brennan

FOOTNOTES

1. Stephen Switzer, from his preface to Ichnographia Rustica, the Nobleman, Gentleman, and Gardeners Recreation quoted as part of a discussion of the eighteenth century garden in Max F. Schultz, Paradise Preserved, p.18.
*
3. See discussion of Chinese gardens in IBID p.16, also Edward Hyams, The English Garden, p.37.

4. Pope quoted in Ronald Paulson, Literary Landscape p.39.

5. Horace Walpole, quoted as part of discussion of the "ha-ha" or eighteenth century fence between garden and park. James B. Twitchell, Romantic Horizons p.11. Also see Paulson, Literary landscape, p.39.

6. Goldsmith discussed in Max F. Schulz, Paradise Preserved, P.6.

7. For discussionof the sublime garden as considered possible in the New World, see James B. Twitchell Romantic Horizons p.39 for greater detail on Sunny Morning on the Hudson River its foreground promontory, see Ronald Paulson Literary Landscape p.11. Also see Brian Jay Woolf, Romantic Revision, p.186.

8. For discussion of Siebrecht's picture, see Max F. Schulz, Paradise Preserved, p.17.

9. For discussion of Joseph Wright of Derby's pictures, A Cavern Evening and A Cavern Morning also Wordsworth's poetry. "the vision into the cave is the vision into the buried self....the dark world of dreams" see James B. Twitchell, Romantic Horizons, p.74.

10. Quoted as part of a discussion of Wordsworth's "trip to the brink" beyond "sensible perception", IBID.

11. From Wordsworth's "The Prelude" of 1850, quoted in IBID p.75.

12. In reference to the sublime as challenging, masterly I am thinking of the English artist Therese Oulton, whose work is also derived from landscape imagery, who has said:
"For me the sublime was not in bowing to the grandeur of nature. The nineteenth century was well ont he way to subduing nature. One could almost say that there would have been no sublime without the urban. In a Turner what is most overwhelming for me is the power of Turner's own grandeur rather than that of nature" from Sarah Kent,"An interview with Therese Oulton" Flash Art Jan/Feb '87, p.44.

See also discussion of visual motifs of mastery:
"all linear in shape....ax....rifle...pole....or artist's brush...small in relation to their world but designed to conquer the forces of wilderness around them" This applies also to James Arthur O'Connor's pictures: the wagoner brandishing his pole in A Thunderstorm, the hunter and his gun in The Eagles Rock. Brian Jay Woolf, Romantic Revision, pp.182-183.

*2. See discussion of Cole's Expulsion from Eden 1827 in Max F. Schultz, Paradise Preserved, p.17.

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