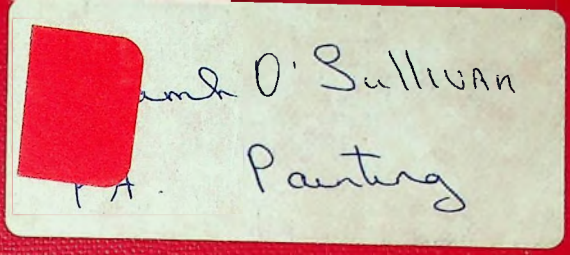

Frederic Edwin Church and George Inness - From Diversity Of Context To Harmonisation Within A Larger Romantic Frame'

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'Frederic Edwin Church and George Inness - From Diversity Of Context To Harmonisation Within A Larger Romantic Frame'

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.

This study, in examining the paintings of Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900) and George Inness (1825-94), is not an attempt to analyse comprehensively the work concerned. It is directed rather towards initially establishing a sense of the diversity which characterised their separate enterprises. Ultimately though, despite the differences that are outlined, the essay unfolds towards a conclusion of harmonisation rather than division, in the sense of shared spiritual involvement in the process of Romanticising the world.

Chapter Two, 'A Contextual Reference - Transcending Tradition', represents a setting out of the context which combined to create the appearance and meaning of their art. In this section, I attempt to point out that while these issues may provide the basis for comprehensive study and analysis in themselves, my purposes in this essay lie elsewhere. In providing a summary data comprising historical perspective, theoretical influences, and stylistic form, I stress that this simply serves as an introduction to the main theme. I suggest that preoccupation with the complexities of these factors ultimately distorts the significance of Church and Inness in a wider Romantic context.

Chapter Three, 'Towards a Sacred Geography', specifically relates to the manifestation of geography or landscape in their art. Despite the arguments, outlined here, for and against the means and approaches employed towards fulfilling their aesthtic and spiritual goals, their paintings essentially amount to a similar meditation of spiritual experience in the face of the natural world.

Chapter Four, 'The Invisible Cathedral', is an examination of the reasons why Church and Inness cannot be interpreted in terms of specific religious doctrine. In a sense this section stands for all those factors of context which, in my opinion,

prevent a wider meaning of their art from emerging. In looking at the Romanticising process itself, I attempt to characterise the indefinable and unknown qualities and potential, which essentially oppose and subvert the finality of a purely contextual understanding. Romanticism here defies historical analysis.

In concluding, Chapter Five, 'Beyond Aesthetics', continues to explore this Romantic significance, and extends to an appreciation of the spiritual dimension of creativity. I attempt to show why a purely humanistic/secular reading of the paintings of Church and Inness, and all Romantic art, will fail to deliver a more complete picture of their meaning and relevance, since it ignores the 'infinite' element of what essentially is an infinite/finite, divine/human process and activity.

The main motivation for the theme of this discussion derives from the theory put forward by Robert Rosenblum in his study Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition (1). In its contention of contunuation and revitalisation of Romantic experience in 20th Century art it unearths connections and coincidences with early Romanticism which help bridge the divide between almost two hundred years of artistic practise. It observes the concern and effort, concerted through all these years in diverse experiments and appearances, of a consistent desire to reveal the sacred in the secular world. Rosenblum concludes that such correspondences point to a tradition in art history which has thus far been ignored in conventional readings of that history. The story of Modernism, for example, has been shaped by a pattern of stylistic progression and advancement. It entertains a vision of continued stylistic flourishings and outmodings, each transitory development ultimately embracing a specific historical niche, their artistic purpose and appearance reflecting a relevance and claim linked only to their particular historical location and reference. The purpose of this discussion and study is not to disregard the reality of such distictions in the unfolding of Modernist art. The purpose rather is to assert the belief that

persistence of Romantic interests across the chronological and stylistic map, overwhelm and transcend the structures of division imposed and encouraged by Modernist thinking. Divisions and distinctions do of course relate to and define many of the purely secular Modernist experiments, but where Romanticism is concerned with its spiritual connotations, a philosophy of steadfast and eternal truths opposed to vacillating and shifting philosophies, establish a unifying bond or strand that defies secular inspired distinctions and conducts a harmonisation between seemingly separate enterprises.

The subjects of this discourse, Frederic Edwin Church and George Inness, I would argue, are victims of this categorisation. The Modernist canon, is emphasising and deifying novelty and progression, in effect, discard past artistic achievements to, at best, a role of historical importance. The conventional readings and assessments of these artists underlines in my opinion the Modernist prejudice in action. They emphasise the culminatory significance of both Church and Inness in the sense of their attaining the highest point of expression for particular historical times. Church thus becomes 'the pictorial spokesman for the era of Manifest Destiny' (2), while Inness, the epitome of the 'mystical antinatural school of art' (3), in the era of uncertainty and disenchantment of post-Civil War America. In applauding their qualities as leaders in the field, conventional assessments implement correct and accurate judgments. Behind the applause however is , in effect, a process of simultaneous elevation and denigration. Since the designation is one of historical importance and value there is an immediate consignment of outmodedness to the particular style beyond its specific societal reference. Its function becomes simply documentary.

The ultimate Romantic ambition to create a symbolic language independent of tradition, and free from the compartmentalisation of which I have spoken is, however, contrary and inconsistent with this Modernist judgment. Rather than originating a new tradition, which would simply fossilize into

an arbitrary, autocratic system, the Romantics envisioned the need for a natural symbolism in their art which would remain eternally new. In this way, the artists within the Movement sought in effect to disengage the latent meaning of the natural elements and reveal the hidden significance of nature herself. Having said this however, the Romantics were very aware of the limitations within which they worked, the aesthetic or stylistic limitations which would ultimately confine their enterprise within a specific period in history. In this way, 'they counted on our sense of their art going beyond what was possible, only to find it once more reintegrated into a purely pictorial or musical form' (4). But for observers to become preoccupied with this ultimate reintegration and inevitable failure, which in fact the Romantics were conscious of, would be to miss the essential point of the works themselves, their effectiveness and strengths. In noting/accepting their reintegration into a tradition or system, one must be equally aware that judgment should not and cannot be conducted in the sense of attempting to reveal some systematic doctrine which might herald the key to that tradition. Romanticism as a whole resists the possibility for such translation, even rejecting the notion that some general code or structure can be found for a personal or individual anthology. 'The interpretation of each work can never be imposed from without, even by means of a generalization about the artist's total style; it must begin again each time from within' (5).

Undoubtedly external factors combine to create the appearance of the whole, but nevertheless, when Romantic paintings are separated from their original context, while maintaining obvious links with their tradition, they transcend, in their isolation, their presentation of natural forms, to a new realm. Their meaning ultimately comes from the emotional response of a purely visual experience, a meditative/contemplative procedure, when natural sumbols are reflected through the individual consciousness. Contemporary assessments stress the quality of momentary illumination in the paintings of Church and Inness,

but I prefer to uphold their timeless quality and appeal, which ultimately reflects the infinity and mystery they attempted to evoke. In the final analysis, they are religious meditations and, in this sense, their effect is one of harmonisation rather than division, revitalisation rather than confinement to some remote historical past.

* * *

CHAPTER 2. A CONTEXTUAL REFERENCE - TRANSCENDING TRADITION.

Frederic Edwin Church and George Inness were contemporary artists, born within a year of each other, but despite their contemporaneous position,their artistic enterprises developed separately and distinctly. Their importance and achievement relates to specific periods in American cultural life. Church's relevance, on the one hand, is broadly contained within the artistic and social climate and atmosphere of pre-Civil War America, the late 1840's to the early 1860's, while Inness's importance is generally regarded to occupy to period of about 1870-94. My proposition is that despite our ability to locate both within specific, clearly defined categories in terms of social, artistic and ethical traditions, Romantic precepts demand a further reading outside of those traditions. If one imposes a Modernist/humanist interpretation on their art, the resultant logic will inevitably be one of distinction and division between them. It will also amount to an understanding of their art in terms of historical importance rather than ongoing potential and relevance. In many ways, this chapter is a humanist interpretation and reading for it represents a setting out of the contextual factors which combined to create the appearance and contemporary meaning of their art. In providing this basis therefore, I am also establishing the reintegrating factors with tradition that Romanticism attempts to transcend. The best way to approach this section is to see it as a prelude to the greater theme of the essay developed further on - that which relates to the Romanticising process and the spiritual in art. My argument that their painting has a significance and shared purpose beyond the context from which they were made, emerges from the belief that they represent religious/spiritual meditations - but in the sense of not belonging to any specific doctrine or belief. In my opinion, their art goes beyond aesthetics to point to a fuller religious/spiritual form. Because of this, we as spectators must withdraw somewhat in order to observe or

contemplate at a distance. Ultimately, we must avoid becoming too involved in the complexities of those traditions or contexts outlined here, in order not to falsify their art or their religious/spiritual meaning.

* * *

Landscape painting of the 19th Century epitomised the essential expression of the Era, engendering the most active period of landscape painting in history. It saw the mobilisation of the Hudson River School in America, Barbizon and Impressionist in France, the Dusseldorf School in Germany, the Macchiaila in Italy and the Heidelberg in Austria. It harvested such giants as Turner and Friedrich. In philosophical and art historical terms the American landscape tradition was associated and allied to Western concepts of nature - German idealism, American transcendentalism, attitudes towards the ideal and picturesque, and the notion of empiricism or experience. While America was fully involved in this broad Western enterprise it evolved in a distinctive way which reflected specifically American nature and country. Unlike the French emphasis on method and means the American approach looked towards ends. While the Germans used the sense of feeling, the Americans initially incorporated a kind of essence unrelated to artistic personality. In America, empirical observation resulted in images simultaneously incorporating physical reality and spiritual essence, unlike in France, where positivism and pragmatism prevailed. Much more than in the European experience, American painting especially through qualities of light and atmosphere, transformed nature into God and, in this way, the paintings thus came to assume 'proto-icon' significance.

Thomas Cole (1801-48) was perhaps the major figure behind the emergence of a native school of landscape painting in mid-19th Century America. That development, which became known as the Hudson River School, displayed the new cultural

(fig. 1) Thomas Cole, 'Schroon Mountain, Adirondacks', 1838.

Oil on Canvas, 39⅜ x 63in.

The Cleveland Museum of Art.

(fig. 2) Asher B. Durand, 'Interior of a Wood', ca. 1850.

Oil on Canvas, 17 x 24 in.

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy,

Andover, Massachusetts.

maturity of the nation and also reflected and embodied the important concerns of Americans at the time. Art issues were here allied to the larger human concerns of God, nature, the future of the country, management of resources, social stability, and so on. It was generally optimistic and supportive of the American way of life.

Cole's landscapes, beginning in the mid - 1820's were the first recognisable images of America in art terms (fig.1). His faithfulness to an astute observation of nature plus the expression of high ideals, became the key components of American landscape painting of the mid-century. He directed his attention to the creation of 'lanscapes of high moral purpose devoted to the exploration of ideas as much as to the representation of natural features'(1). John Ruskin (1819-1900) the most important art writer of the English speaking world during this time, reinforced such beliefs and extended their influence. In his book 'The Stones of Venice' (1851-3), for example, he recognised that 'the whole function of the artist ... is to be a seeing and feeling creature'(2), and that the excellence of art, though reached through nature is independent of representation. He also believed in a God who was close at hand, in the sense of being cognisant of the human need for signs and symbols, and therefore dispensing of such meanings through nature. Such belief in the revelation of God through nature, was 'simply confirming habits of religious imagination that were ingrained in Romantic Christian consciousness'(3). Together perhaps, both Cole and Ruskin, inspired in the United States a course for direct observation, painting as a moral enterprise, importance of composition, and the formal elements suited to the character of American scenery - detail, Claudean space, panorama, and atmosphere. They rejected the notion of placing the artists feelings above the accurate depiction of nature.

Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) introduced into the American landscape tradition a new attention to light and larger,

panoramic scale. Durand was the first American artist, beginning in the 1840's, to recognise that nature, with careful selection, could achieve the high moral ground of history painting without the use of iconographic and symbolic detail and reference. '[His] imitative power and crisply focussed technique, enabled him to endow with visual interest humble pieces of forest scenery, in which he actively felt the presence of the Creator' (4) (fig.2). Durand's style influenced American landscape painting in the direction of nature and away from man, producing a realism that would prove a major contribution to the development of the Hudson River School.

Church's paintings of the early 1850's display strong parallels with the established precedents of Cole and Durand- familiar sub ect, careful composition and execution, associational meaning, panoramas filled with light and atmosphere, America as the New Arcadia, optimism and strength, the wilderness aesthetic (figs. 3 & 4). The arcadian view and the wilderness scene comprised the majority of Hudson River paintings during this time and critical encouragement along these lines was very much towards creating a new vision of America in a unique American style. Church's series of national images 1849-60 are specifically linked to the US. Nation, but they differ from their contemporaries in two ways. First, they deal with subjects of deeper historical and allegorical meaning and, second, they possess a greater breadth and scope. They reflect a unity of the real and the less concrete higher qualities of art, in the sense of presenting recognisable images as physical fact in themselves, but also providing implicit emblematic references which might suggest a deeper level of meaning and possibility. Franklin Kelly insists that Church's paintings must be viewed in terms of them being didactic, possessing meanings relevant to his contemporaries. This strong cultural tie is undoubted. Barbara Novak describes him as a 'paradigm of the artist who becomes the public voice of a culture, summarizing its beliefs,

(fig. 3) Frederic E. Church, 'Above the Clouds at Sunrise', 1849.

Oil on Canvas, 27 x 40 in.

The Warner Collection of Gulf States Paper

Corporation, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

(fig.4) **Frederic E. Church, 'New England Scenery', 1851 .**

Oil on Canvas, 36 x 53in.

George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum,

Springfield, Massachusetts.

embodying its ideas, and confirming its assumptions' (5). David C. Huntington calls him ' the pictorial spokesman for the era of Manifest Destiny, a New Adam who both explored and interpreted the New World Paradise' (6). Kelly also insists on Church's position as the true successor to Thomas Cole, his paintings representing a fusion of realistic landscape with deeper meaning, succeeding to blend the real and the ideal where Cole had failed.

> By the late 1850's & 60's, Church had [extended his geographical range & interest beyond the United States, perfecting] his brand of scientific realism fused with epic scope and exotic [South American] subject matter, and was creating some of the most ambitious landscapes of the 19th Century (7), (fig. 15).

Church's style was highly realistic , his paint smoothly applied and refined to a level where the brush stroke was indiscernible. With great thought, deliberation, and a photographic execution he created landscapes that were essentially parables in paint. Church's Puritan background and the general atmosphere of the time forced him to search for parable and prophecy in nature. Paramount in the thinking of this tradition was a subordination of self to the Church community and a looking ahead to the ultimate fulfilment of history with the advent of the Kingdom of God. The Puritan code encouraged close observance to contemporary events and developments. In this way, 'rather than fossilizing and becoming irrelevant the Puritan ethos proved to be extraordinarily responsive to circumstances of the moment and capable of assimilating the new. The historical process was itself the revolution by means of which the world would be redeemed' (8). The titles of Church's early paintings reflect the prophetic typology of Puritanism, drawn from the Bible but also from contemporary life, and even into the larger typology of national and natural history. For Huntington, Puritanism inspired Church's content and style, and there can

be no separating the works from his beliefs. In this way Church, as prophet ' ... arrived at a way of representing natural features that incited - even demanded - the pondering of the cosmic truths of which his painted scenes are so obviously emblematic' (9).

Just as God, man and nature were central to 19th Century thought in their threefold association or unity, there was another trinity which served in the illumination of Nature- art, science and religion. 'Nature's truths, as revealed by art, could be further validated by the disclosures of science, which revealed God's purposes and aided the reading of his natural text' (10). The German Naturalist, Alexander Von Humboldt (1769 - 1859) exercised great influence over this generation of artists and scholars. But his primary influence was on Church who, unlike other American artists who toured Europe, went to South America and the Arctic in direct response to Humboldt's writings and experiences. Humboldt's five volumn series which comprised 'Cosmos' was the most important work of popular science ever published and remains perhaps the greatest testament to the essential humanism of science. The aim of 'Cosmos' was essentially to 'comprehend the phenomenon of physical objects in their general connection, and to represent nature as one great whole, moved and animated by internal forces' (11). It put forward the belief that 'nature is a unity in diversity of phenomena; a harmony blending together all created things, however dissimilar in form and attributes; one great whole animated by the breath of life' (12). Humboldt's vision was ' ... based on the union and positive interaction between feeling and analysis, sentiment and observation' (13).

During the period of Church's reign there was this allignment between scientific, artistic and religious aims. Influence by Humboldt, Darwin had arrived at a theory of natural selection that would challenge God and the idea of nature as God. But Humboldt's science, for Church, was simply another pointer that further revealed God in nature.

(fig. 5) Frederic E. Church, 'The Andes of Ecuador', 1855 .

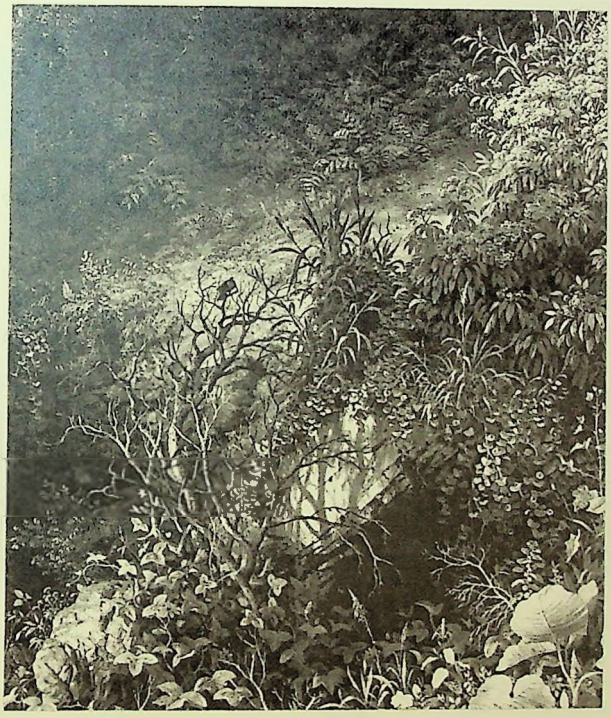
Oil on Canvas, 48 x 78 in.

Reynolda House, Museum of American Art,

Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

> Church's strivings after sublimity could only have received further confirmation , if not indeed their initial impulse, from Humboldt's observation that "everywhere the mind is penetrated by the same sense of grandeur and vast expanse of nature, revealing to the soul, by a mysterious inspiration, the existence of laws that regulate the forces of the universe" (14).

The accuracy of Church's studies reveals a scientific descriptiveness and realism verging on the encyclopaedic (fig. 6). His handling and choice of subject displays an approach similar to that of an amateur scientist/geologist in their continued observance and recording of the natural world (15). Like Humboldt, Church blends the real with the ideal by combining elaborate detail and panoramic scope to heighten the sense of exalted grandeur of the works of creation (fig.7). But Church's sensational reputation and theatrical associations because of this cannot detract from his real concern, that of a spiritual quest. Both Darwin and Church were similarly involved in a quest for truth which might reveal creation. But whereas Darwin was willing to embrace whatever results logic and intelligence dictated Church, for Novak, remained somewhat idealised since he 'encouraged truth to reflect a spirit he refused to doubt [and] used science and observation wherever they could serve this purpose' (16). But this is simply the Humboldtian vision in practise, the 'positive interaction between feeling and analysis, sentiment and observation', that was central to Humboldt's scientific approach and thought. Stephen Jay Gould says that Darwin's alternative vision should have been as equally ennobling as Humboldt's, instead of '[plunging] many votaries of the old order into [the] permanent despair' (17), that ensued. Humboldt's concern for a balance between detail and general effect echoed then the aesthetic that dominated the age. While many of Church's paintings may stress detail over effect, he eventually evolved a more synthetic approach in the sense of introducing a greater all-consuming light and atmospheric



(fig.6) Frederic E. Church, 'Heart of the Andes', 1859 (detail).

Oil on Canvas, 66⅛ x 119¼ in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

(fig.7) **Frederic E. Church, 'Heart of the Andes', 1859.**

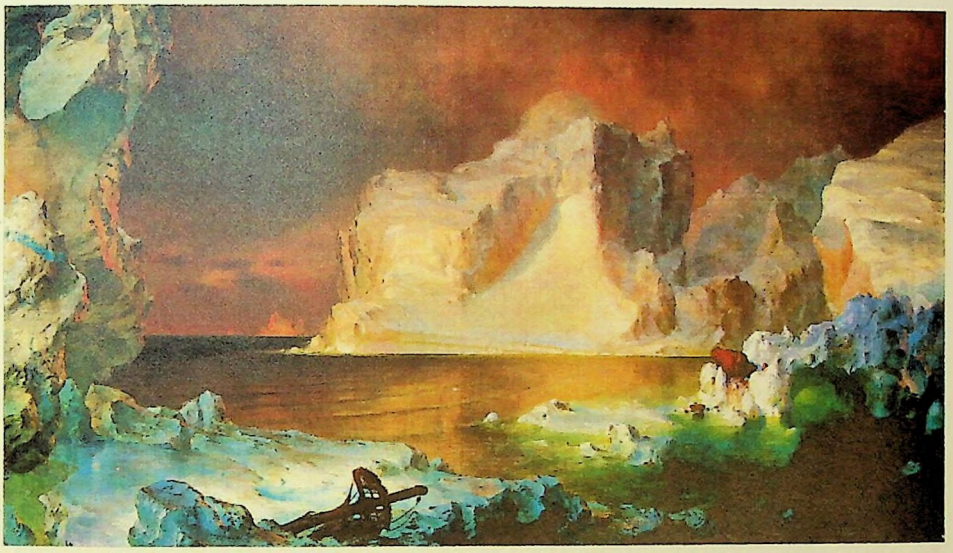
Oil on Canvas, 66⅛ x 119¼ in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

coherence, in his evocation of Divinity (fig. 8).

> Church simply found in science and idealism, in pragmatic relativity and absolutism, the elements of his world view. His sensibility was that of the grand synthesizer. For all his partiality to detail, he wanted Humboldt's "greater masses" to be "better seen". His art can be seen only in terms of sublime unities, with light, the great organiser, the measure of his grand ambition. It is the prime example of the last concerted effort of an artistic community to preserve the idea of a privileged nature - reflecting divine truth, bearing lessons, healing the spirit. He was thus, at that time, the "National" painter, offering in the accomodations and reconciliations of his art a rare embodiment of the public concerns of his society - seeing in the alliance between art and science an opportunity to follow the "progressive" disclosure of his soul (18).

In style, subject-matter and philosophy the Hudson River School represented a mirror to an Age, epitomising American values and concerns prior to the Civil War. It's greatest achievements lay within the decades of 1840-60, it's most eloquent practitioner, Church. However, a wave of antagonism towards the Tradition, developed in response to increasing cosmopolitan tastes and attitudes in America during the 1860's and '70's. Barbizon landscape painting, technical skills inspired by the Munich School, French academic training and interest in the figure, plus popularity for the British Aesthetic Movement completely transformed the American scene. For example, American art schools expanded their academic programmes in response to the French initiative, while many students travelled, especeally to Paris, to seek a European training. In this way, figure painting assumed major importance during the 1880's in America. English Decorative styles too swept the country, beginning in 1882, and had widespread influence in the sense of introducing a strong consciousness of pictorial geometry and construction. The geometrical concern and awareness however, was not derivative solely from



(fig.8) Frederic E. Church, 'The Icebergs', 1861,

Oil on Canvas, 64 ¼ x 112 ¼ in.

Dallas Museum of Art.

(fig.9) William Merritt Chase, 'A Friendly Call', 1895 .

Oil on Canvas, 30⅛ x 48¼ in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington , D.C.

Whistler in England, but was more a concerted European development, finding contemporaneous expression in Germany in the work of Hans Von Mare s, and in Jules Bastien-Lepage's art in France, even before its major advancement and exploration in Post-Impressionism and Cubism in the coming decades. William Merrit Chase's (1849-1916) painting, 'A Friendly Call' (1895) (fig. 9), is just one American example of the combined interest in the figure and an underlying structure that pervaded the art scene during this period.

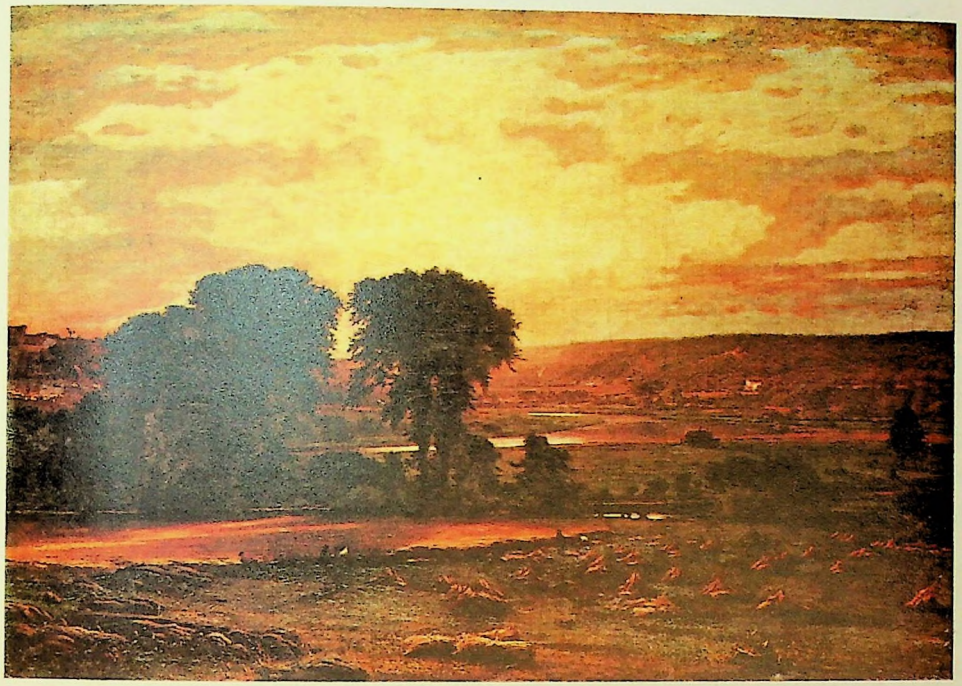
The 1870's were the crucial transitional years in their delineation of the juncture between old and new artistic interests and approaches in American art. The Hudson River paintings came to be seen as increasingly dull and intellectually monotonous in the repeated use of old formulae. The new attitude and philosophy was that study and appreciation of nature were possible without depicting every detail, which in fact only prevented the essential poetry and feeling of nature from emerging. Preoccupation with fact and detail and the elaboration entailed, elicited comparisons with advances in photography. The camera's ability to seemingly capture and render nature in her truest form possible, left Hudson River painters open to accusations of exaggeration and hyperbole. The new generation of painters were more interested in the art of painting, on execution, whereas the old school gave 'precedence to the man who [conceived] nobly and purely, rather than the one who executes admirably' (19).

Church and Inness illustrate well the juncture here described. As Franklin Kelly observes in comparing Church's 'Twilight in the Wilderness' (1860) (fig. 10) and Inness's 'Peace and Plenty'(1865) (fig. 11) - they 'not only bracketed the years of Civil War, but also marked the waning of one style of landscape and the rise of another'(20). Inness's subjective and subtly spiritual view of nature seemed to eschew the kind of detailed realism exemplified by Church's art.

(fig.10) Frederic E. Church, 'Twilight in the Wilderness', 1860.

Oil on Canvas, 40 x 64 in.

The Cleveland Museum of Art.



(fig.11) George Inness, 'Peace and Plenty', 1865.

Oil on Canvas, 77⅝ x 112⅞ in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Ctiy.

> He quickly came to be seen as a "modern" artist in post-Civil War America, someone to be championed by critics and connoisseurs who had grown disenchanted with the insular, nationalistic character of earlier artists. The old landscape art that had taken for its foundation the ideals and beliefs of the nation in [the optimism and confidence of the pre-Civil War period] no longer had [relevance] in a land that had violently changed. Something more meditative and more evocative was needed, and Inness was the artist who found it (21).

Matthew Baigell notes that no one style dominated the confused post-War period of 'determined materialism' (22), a plurality of stylistic choice prevailed. It seemed one could stagnate by perpetuating older styles, or approach superficiality in capitulating to the tastes of the rich by transforming sentiment into sentimentality. Or perhaps one could escape into the mystical world of art or religion. For Baigell, Inness's approach effected one of the greatest achievements of the period, in its consolidation of the difficulties of the new artistic climate. In his recourse to the imagination, and interest in subjective values over descriptive detail, Inness best reflected the new mood of society. He was, like Church before him, the right man, in the right place, at the right time.

Inness's artistic progression was marked by its embrace of experimental ideas and its diversity but also by its contrariness especially in relation to contemporary practise. When others minutely imitated nature, Inness attempted to depict art, 'when they painted nature's sublime vastness, Inness painted with poetic intimacy. When they painted tightly, he painted broadly. When they were most intensely American he went to Italy and France and fell under the spell of foreign art' (23).

By far the most important of those foreign styles was French Barbizon painting. This School whose chief figures

(fig.12) Jean-Baptist-Camille Corot, 'Ville d'Avray', ca. 1870.

Oil on Canvas, 21⅝ x 31½ in.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

(fig.13) George Inness, 'The Monk', 1873.

Oil on Canvas, 38½ x 63 in.

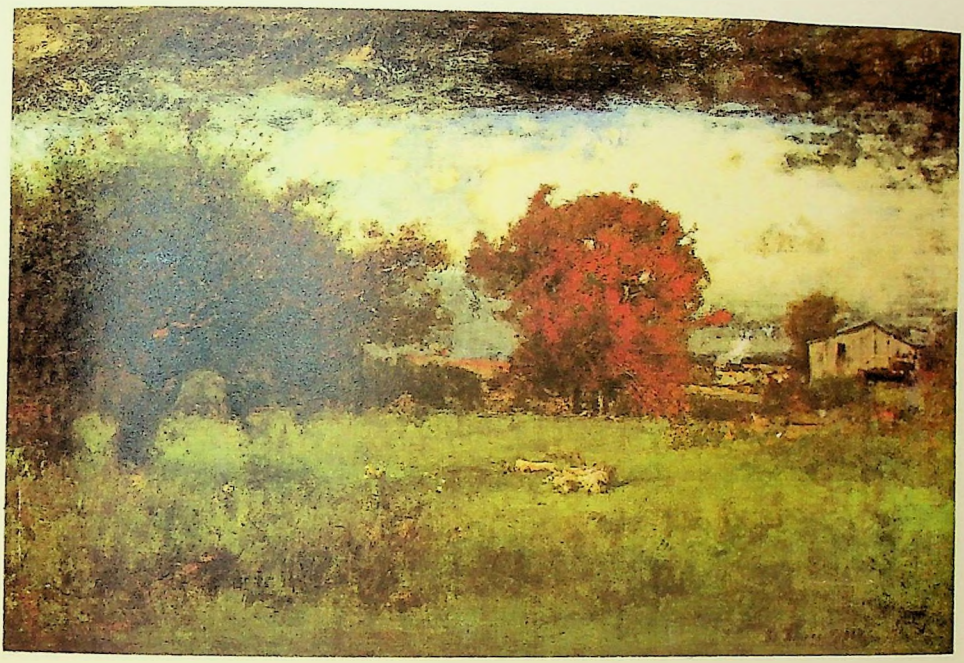
Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy,

Andover, Massachusetts.

were Millet, Rousseau, Corot and Daubigny, emerged in the 1830's/'40's as a realist movement opposed to the academic classical tradition (fig. 12). Barbizon artists 'focused their attention on atmospheric effects and subordinated form and detail to a subtle and harmonious tonal arrangement'(24). Barbizon philosophy proposed a more spontaneous response to nature and underlined the importance of natural experience in the inspiration of landscape painting. It comprised humble subjects and informal compositions, and designated the artists role as nature's interpreter, in subjectively experiencing and communicating the emotions evoked through her forms. The artist had thus become a poet who could reveal the mysterious beauty that was lacking in literal/photographic objectivity and representation. This was the most significant lesson handed down to Inness and the late - 19th Century American art world, since it encouraged a recourse to the imagination. Changes in subject matter and approach directly developed from such a shift towards subjective interpretation. Civilised landscapes and humble unassuming corners of nature became the augmented themes, while the savage, untamed picturesque of a dissipating Hudson River School was overthrown. Glazing, scumbling and impasto techniques reflected the primacy now given to paint manipulation and brushwork, in contrast to the invisible style or the old order. The painted surface engendered a meaning and significance almost on a par with the subject itself. The context of American art of the last quarter of the century was coloured too with a preoccupation with more abstract concerns - geometric surface design, consciousness of structure, unifying colour, patterning and a use of opposite masses of light and dark. These were universal concerns and were the most important aspects perhaps of the period. Its inspiration in America was primarily derived from the English Decorative Style, Whistler and the Aesthetic Movement, and French Post-Impressionism. The period's sense of geometric structure is obvious too in the paintings of Inness (fig. 13).

Inness's initial rejection in the American art world at a time when Church and his fellow Hudson River painters were lauded and praised, was transformed, during the period from 1870 to his death in 1894, into admiration and respect. He ultimately came to assume the title once held by Church, the mantle of 'greatest living landscape painter in America'. The art world eventually perceived the precocity of his vision, (his early proclaimation of Barbizon painting in America), as the growing popularity for the style unfolded. Only in this modern climate of the later century did Inness's modern logic come to be properly understood and perceived. This new atmosphere was more appreciative and receptive of his vision, he epitomised the spirit of the age.

While the period still reflected a belief in public morality, the fact that 'Inness could say that the purpose of a work of art was to awaken an emotion akin to one in the artist rather than appeal to the intellect or to instruct [the moral imperative of Church], American art had travelled far in a relatively short period of time' (25). This observation alludes to a supposed disolution of the commanding tone of the Christianised sublime. But Barbara Novak would argue that teleology remained remarkably intact despite the shock waves invoked by Darwin and the Civil War. The reverential tone that had characterised the American tradition from its outset, the sense of national purpose and destiny were not to be twarthed by the growing scepticism and uncertainties unfolding. Indeed, Michael Quick in a contextual essay on Inness, insists that his civilised landscape subject in fact appealed in a patriotic way to its audience, and in contemporary reactions to them one can find a national sentiment. The implication here is that there was an imperative in his work just as there had been in Church. In describing places or sites with a history, not in the explicit and specific sense of Church's 'West Rock, New Haven' (1849), for example, but in a more general way, founded on common and everday human interaction with and shaping of the land, Inness represents a landscape



(fig.14) George Inness, 'Early Autumn, Montclair', 1888.
Oil on Canvas, 30 x 45 in.
Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey.

(fig.15) George Inness, 'October', 1886.

Oil on panel, 20 x 30 in.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

that is recognisably rooted in the national identity.

> Some persons suppose that landscape has no power of communicating human sentiment. But this is a great mistake. The civilized landscape peculiarly can; and therefore I love it more and think it more worthy of reproduction than that which is savage and untamed. Every act of man, everything of labor, effort, suffering, want, anxiety, necessity, love, marks itself wherever it has been' (26) (fig. 14).

Another point is made of identifying Inness in terms of Swedenborgian philosophy. Just as Church is seen in some quarters to be representative of a kind of 19th Century Puritan baroque, Inness is often perceived to be the pictorial equivalent of Swedenborgianism. Although Inness may have sought to discover an artistic form for his beliefs, the mood and appearance his landscapes share with Swedenborgan descriptions of the spiritual world fit just as comfortably into the general artistic currents of the time. The blurring of contours, softening of figures and objects, the dreaminess and detachment that are characteristic of his work, were prevalent in the American art world from the 1880's to the early 1900's, especially in the Tonalist Movement. Inness, as Church before him, simply adopted the style appropriate to his times (fig. 15).

* * *

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the context in which both artists were involved. Its primary aim has been to emphasise the contextual tie and association which is an inevitable fact. Church and Inness's involvement and identification with particular traditions in some ways highlight and crystallise their achievement within a specific historical and cultural framework. It seems to weaken and limit their relevance in terms of wider, spiritual, geographical and

historical readings. Having established this contextual basis however, I intend to show why a reading in this perspective alone, (which characterises the divisions and distinctions between them), must also be allied to the perspective of wider Romantic understanding (the harmonising element in the diversity of their art). The inevitability of their ultimate tie or reintegration is, as we have already seen, acknowledged in Romantic theory. But that theory also proposed a disengagement from any form of tradition or compartmentalisation. We should reject therefore the temptation to allow judgment encourage the growth of such arbitrary systems. The all-portant natural symbolism that Romanticism engendered aspired to be eternally new, transcending such contextual boundaries while also reflecting the eternal truths of a metaphysical/ divine order. It was an aspiration for revitalisation rather than fossilization. The true meaning then of these paintings can only emerge after reflection through an individual consciousness, a consciousness removed from the complexities and peculiarities of the particular traditions of Church and Inness, or any traditions.

> Nature [here is] seen at once diffused with feeling and at a distance - the distance [frees] the senses from the distortions of a particular moment and makes the significance of the work general and even universal in range (27).

* * *

CHAPTER 3. TOWARDS A SACRED GEOGRAPHY.

One of the dividing characteristics of Church and Inness, which is closely connected to the contexts of traditions from which they both emerged, is the manifestation of their geography. I use the term 'geography' rather than landscape, for it seems to incorporate a wider understanding of what their art entailed. Church, for example, goes beyond simply a sense of the land to embrace a comprehensive geographical range (Arctic & South American scenery), ultimately to achieve a cosmic dimension and experience. But what Church does in terms of physical breadth and scope in attaining universality and timelessness, Inness does in a more subtle and unpretentious way. The comparing of Church and Inness in this respect therefore draws a picture of deep polarity and opposition. On the one hand, we perceive a vision of grand panorama, the exotic, the faraway, and on the other, the civilised landscape, the common and familiar. But inherent in both visions is identification of God with the universe, of God as nature. Perhaps it could be said that Church and Inness symbolise the two poles of landscape painting in 19th Century America - the former belonging to the tradition of large scale, popular works, the latter to the more modest expressions of the later century. Despite their ability to mirror or reflect their contemporary aesthetic however, which incorporates geographical preferences, they also in my opinion, mirror and reflect the ongoing spiritual process of Romanticising the world. It is a process of harmonisation within diversity.

The complexities of Church's perception of landscape in terms of the nation, science and religion distorts the kind of harmonisation that I speak of. Because of this I prefer to view such factors as secular influences or possibilities which are distinct from the Romanticising process.I believe also that the religious factor (the specifically Protestant tradition) should be combined with the national question since

its inherent moral imperative has more in common here that with the higher spiritual or romantic understanding that I am relating. Such understanding can only be perceiced if we understand the Romanticising process itself. The act of Romanticising the world is the ultimate harmonising factor between Church and Inness's art. In this Romantic context, there are no completions or definitives, since Romanticism's very essence is an open-ended, indefinable and ongoing potential. 'Romanticising means simultaneously reading the world as if it were a book and imagining or writing a book that would be consubstantial with the world' (1). It is an attempt to render the world readable in it's infinity, and it thus remains indeterminate and unknown. It is like writing a book that can vie with scripture in the sense of revealing the text of nature. But it will always remain pure project and incomplete. 'Romanticism inhibits [the] space between immense ambition and slight achievement, between hyperbolic aims and ever reduced means' (2). Inness's work fits more readily into the Romanticising process outlined here simply because it is free of the national, scientific and religious (moral) functions of Church's art. Inness's role was straightforwardly to evoke emotions in the viewer akin to that of the artist's experience. In a sense it by-passes the distortionary factors which may initially inhibit a wider appraisal of what Church encompassed in his art.

* * *

One factor which we must consider in understanding Church's geography is the artist's attachment to the 18th Century sublime. That sublime with its emphasis on fear, gloom and majesty, coerced the spectator towards insignificance and a humility that induced awe and reverence. Such sublimity 'provoked intimations of infinity and thus of Deity and the divine' (3). In incorporating this sublime tradition therfore, it is natural to apprehend the factors behind his geographical vision. Church thus searched for monumentality and grandeur, flamboy-

ance and spectacle in the natural world and created 'tours des forces' in which the sentiment of awe and subliminal imagery were combined (fig. 16). The transference of the concept to 19th Century America was suitably propagated initially by the uncultivated wilderness of the East, and later by the pioneering of the Western territories. In Church's case it was also projected, in response to Humboldt's directive, onto the South American ans Arctic landscape. The emphasis on wilderness and the unknown, the constant link with danger,had always been synonymous with the sublime concept from the beginning, but the introduction of a sense of the aural and visual drama of the experience, the difficulties and hazards in its attainment, began to incorporate a new moral significance that signalled a Christianisation of the concept. In Novak's view, Church was a principle protagonist in this deviationary process whereby the sublime became more religious and specifically Protestant in nature. In such paintings as 'Cotopaxi' (1862) (fig. 17) for example, 'the senses are blurred in a paroxysm of activity. Cotopaxi erupts. Sourds fill the air... The tumult [engendered] corresponds to the moment of destruction in the Apocalypse and the moment of conversion in revivalism. Here sublimity overwhelms with a deafening roar' (4). Novak's interpretation however of such paintings is more a reflection of the society from which they emerged rather than the paintings themselves. The Puritan church did not prescribe a definitive interpretation - the painting might suggest anything. The fact that it could invoke Genesis simply underlines the Biblical awareness in the thinking of the age.

One of the most radical features of Romanticism was its attempt to replace history painting (historical , mythological and religious scenes) by the landscape subject. It was an attempt to infuse the landscape with the heroic and epic significance of history painting, to make the elements of nature alone carry full symbolic meaning. It was a direct result of the destruction of traditional, religious and political values at the end of the18th century. This transfer of the rhetoric and aims of history painting to landscape was brought about in

(fig.16) **Frederic E. Church, 'Niagara', 1857.**

Oil on Canvas, 42 ⅛ x 90 ½ in.

The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

(fig.17) Frederic E. Church, 'Cotopaxi', 1862.

Oil on Canvas, 48 x 85 in.

The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan.

America initially by Cole, and explored further by Church. Both careers coincided with the discovery of the American landscape as a substitute for the missing national tradition. The irony was in America's simultaneous quality of being both old and new.

> Once this landscape had become a respoitory of national pride, the cultivation of the landscape experiment... was one of the key preoccupations of the Age... The nature experiment was considered a crucial amenity for the moral man, ... and was readily accepted by society as a religious alternative. Elevated by such moral projections, it was easy for landscape to assume the mantle of history painting. But there is a certain irony in the democratisation of the elitist Grand style as it was transformed into landscape art. The most ennobling of experiences very readily became the most widely disseminated form of popular entertainment (5).

Part of the cause of inducing this populist susceptibility was the dialectic of Church's paintings which comprised both detail and effect. It is a dialectic which provokes some observers to consider their ultimate flamboyance and superficiality, their negation as high art. 'Light and atmosphere, ... often succeeded in establishing a unity through what might be termed "excessive" effect, disarming judgment with a dazzle of colour that masked compositional inadequacies' (6). Church is also criticised for creating a false unity in his pictures, a unity which is simply created through the cumulative effect of a multiplicity of detail finding their own cohesion. Ultimately many would agree with James Jackson Jarves' view of Church when he says -

> Who can rival his wonderful memory of detail, vivid perception of colour, quick, sparkling, though monotonous touch, and indescent effects, dexterous manipulation, magical jugglery of tint and composition, picturesque arrangements of material facts and gerneral deverness? With him colour is an arabian nights entertainment, a pyrotechnic display, brilliantly enchanting on first view, but leaving no permanent satisfaction

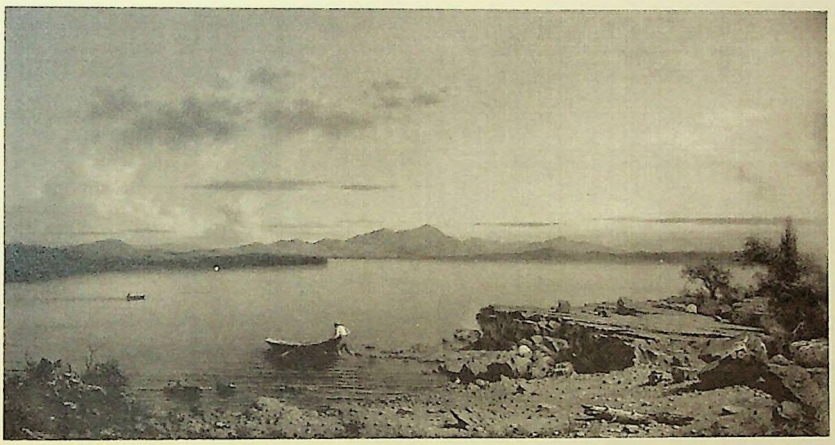
> to the mind, as all things fail to do which delight more in astonishing than instructing (7).

Barbara Novak also extinguishes any claims that Church's interpretation of the American landscape was somehow and original approach. She states his debt to the European conventions of Claude and Turner for his compositional, lighting and atmospheric effects. He did not, in her view, create new conventions for his vision of the American scene but instead engendered a mixture of history painting, 18th Century concepts of the sublime, the compositions of Claude and Turner, so that the result was less American and increasingly baroque. In this way she highlights his unsuitable imposition of a European formula in the rendering of the myth of a pristine nature - in her view, it is simply an unconvincing and shallow representation of the geography concerned.

Novak's discourse concludes that Luminist paintings (fig. 18) were in fact the most original and effective expressions of the American landscape, in terms of reflecting its physical and spiritual associations. In comparing Church with the Luminists, she underlines the difficulty she perceives with his large scale works, and distinguishes between failure and fulfilment in terms of achieving a more complete aesthetic and religious form.

> If the larger paintings [of Church] utilized a baroque rhetoric, the smaller paintings [of Luminism] employed the frugality of classic understatement. Both modes can be said to rely on detail and effect - but with a considerable difference. Detail in the larger paintings often elicited awe. But ... the "artists labor trail" remained, and this painterly reminder of the artists presence - a testament to his impressario - like sublimity - interposed itself between the spectator and the painted object (8).

In this reading, Luminism's dissolution of stroke, transforms atmospheric effect from an active painterliness into a pure



(fig.18) Martin Johnson Heade, 'Lake George', 1862.

Oil on Canvas, 26 x 49 in.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts.

and steady light, creating a lucid transcendentalism, and in effect, destroying the ego of both artist and spectator.

Here then is the kernel of the problem identified by Novak in relation to Church, that of an anthropomorphic tie to the ego in the midst of spiritual experience, that refuses total obliteration of self, and thus maintains an inevitable distance from deity. Although he may extend the aesthetic towards a religious attitude, it is the essential activity of his paintings which impede consummation of complete unity with Godhead. A true spiritual mediation is destroyed, in effect, by his exaggerated and theatrical associations which primarily derive from the 18th Century gothic.

Unlike Novak, David C, Huntington argues that the non-style of Luminism is in fact echoed in Church, and that he too was successful in surrendering himself in the process of recording the natural world. Novak's interpretation of Church therefore, if Huntington's argument is to be believed, amounts to a misunderstanding of his artistic process and achievement. For Huntington, 'Andes of Ecuador' (1855) (fig. 5.) was the first painting to present and achieve a unity of light and faith that would infuse the artist's mature creations. For Huntington, the effect of 'Andes' is akin to an awakening at the dawn of creation to the beauty of the earth. 'Yet this first awakening into a higher consciousness, which is the consciousness of a soul reborn in Christ, as with fresh eyes "he sees all things new"' (9). Like Novak, Huntington is very aware of the new spiritual role of light which draws Church to the Luminists and divides his generation from previous painters who saw atmosphere as simply an agent of sentiment. But Huntington contends that Church went further than the Luminists in the sense of reaching towards a celestial and cosmic order, which embraces a 'Humboldtian comprehensiveness [and] ... God-like scope of time and space' (10). And unlike Novak, he rejects the idea that the activity of Church's light could somehow weaken a unity with Godhead. In paintings such as 'Twilight in the Wilderness' (1860) (fig. 10), for example, Church 'successfully transferred

to canvas the vanishing forms and tints and shadows thrown upon his eye, unaffected by the medium through which they have passed' (11), thus avoiding a human interposition.

If Church's early works display the percetion of various parts of a picture, not in harmony, but as autonomous and seperate units fitting into a whole, this later changed to the rendering of nature's whole in terms of light effects on earth, sky, and water. This concern with atmosphere and obliteration of self, can be interpreted as an attempt to achieve a unity in art akin to the unity of nature. As we have already seen, Novak believed that Church's paintings display a false unity through excessive atmospheric effect and detail. But Huntington argues that Church's belief in the reality of the spiritual dimension of atmosphere induced him to genuinely seek a manifestation of God in nature. For Church, 'the material and immaterial, the flesh and the spirit, the natural and the divine had become one in God' (12).

Huntington sees the essential distinction between the approach of Church and Luminism to be located in the concept of 'gradation'. For the Luminists, gradation applied primarily to the objective and in the optical perception of nuances of tone. With Church it was no less objective, but his concern was rather for nuances of expression.

> Painting in the era of Luminism it was the perception and spiritual comprehensiveness of his atmosphere, the urge to encompass every last atom, every last word of the firmament of nature's Bible - indeed, the instinct to see all of God's "design" with "intelligence" - which makes Church unique. The eye of the classic luminist, ... looks not to interpret God's handiwork, but to merge with a nature which is itself God. For Emerson, gradation exemplified the self-contained system of the universe. For Church, gradation articulated the typology of creation. The one accords with the ways of the over-soul, the other with the ways of the Almighty (13).

There is a passivity in Luminism which contrasts with Church's conception of light as an expressive character, or a sign of the supernatural. Church's nature speaks of God, directing Man, the divine creature, and agent of his will - the spectator here thus becomes protagonist. Luminist nature on the other hand, encourages man to become part and parcel of nature, inducing an Emersonian evaporation of the self, since, unlike in Church's Puritan/Calvinist discipline, there is no lesson or message behind the face of nature to be unveiled. But despite the moral imperative inherent in Church's work, Huntington is satisfied that the artist achieved a complete repression of himself, that ultimately prevented his ego from imposing itself between the viewer and God's nature.

The landscapes of Inness and his choice of geography and subjects were directly influenced by the external changes that we have looked at in Chapter Two. Social, historical and artistic developments brought about new attutudes towards art and nature, and what their meaning and purpose entailed. The Hudson River School of Church had recreated the natural wonders of Niagara, Yosemite and the Andes, but the new landscapists were expected to depict the common and familiar in a new way. They were a reflection of personal, intimate encounters with nature. But nature in this new situation was now not necessarily the subject of the painting, but rather a means/source whereby the human quality or emotion could be expressed. Many believed the elaborate detail of artists like Church to be a distraction in this process. Inness himself believed the criticisms that we have looked at in this Chapter, in relation to Church, inevitably prevents a fuller religious form from emerging, a belief I do not share.

> It is true that scenic art can never assume to be a representative of the higher forms of mind ... Yet it may become a very beautiful representation of one of the various forms of culture which lead mankind from the lower into the higher types of life (14).

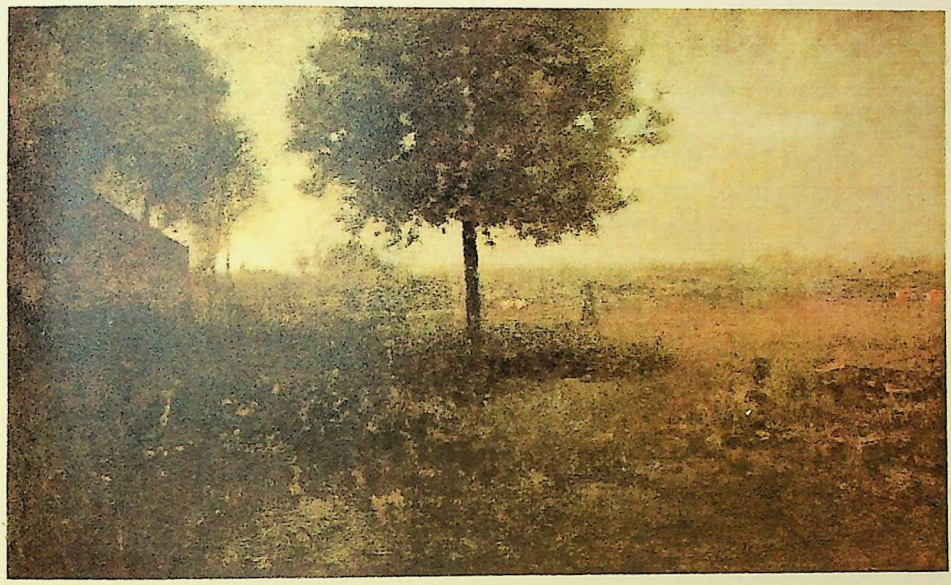
Art here remains a form of popular entertainment, provoking

fascination and awe perhaps, but little else besides.

For Inness the idea of painting what he saw in the real world would be to paint with the physical eye only. He believed rather in following the promptings of feeling and not the strict requirements of fact and, in this way, was somehow able to engage the true artistic impulse, the spirit, which was divine. Allowing himself the right of invention, the freedom to obey feelings guided by the science of art, he believed he could attain the divine essence of nature, as no exact imitation of its appearance could (fig. 19).

'In the mind of Inness', wrote critic Charles De Kay, 'religion, landscape and human nature mingle so thoroughly that there is no separating the several ideas' (15). Inness believed landscape to be abiding in divinity, which he saw in terms of emotion, impression, idea, creative source, the subtle essence of landscape but also as existing in its form and structure. Thus, the pictorial form of his late work, principally colour and construction, can be seen as an embodiment of spiritual meaning. His paintings of 1890-94 seem natural, yet unnatural - they don't simply depict separate objects in various aspects but rather something that contains them (fig. 20). The objects of these paintings seem like ghostly immanences, expressive of some inner landscape and mystery. Unlike the Hudson River paintings of dramatic picturesque vistas, his paintings encompass intimate fragments of nature - forests, marshland, farm yard scenes - where all details are softened and obliterated as in a dense mist or fog. Rather than standing in awe of nature, Inness's figures stand immersed in themselves, solitary and brooding. The objects of his paintings appear quite normal, except for their unnatural colouration, while the lack of drama plus self-immersion of the figures distils a mood of quiet, and the all-enveloping mist creates a strange remoteness.

> Not only does what we see in these ... landscapes seem like the reflections, the spectral afterimages of another, more sharply etched landscape - and that is, because of the mist and



(fig.19) George Inness, 'Misty Morning, Montclair', 1893.

Oil on Canvas, 30 x 50 in.

The Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio.

> the softening of forms - but the strange remoteness is produced by something else, which is a bit harder to get at when we try to put our finger on it. And that is the sense of measured cadence; even more than that, it is as though this painted world operates through some slowed-down pace, through some frame of reference that is alien to ours (16).

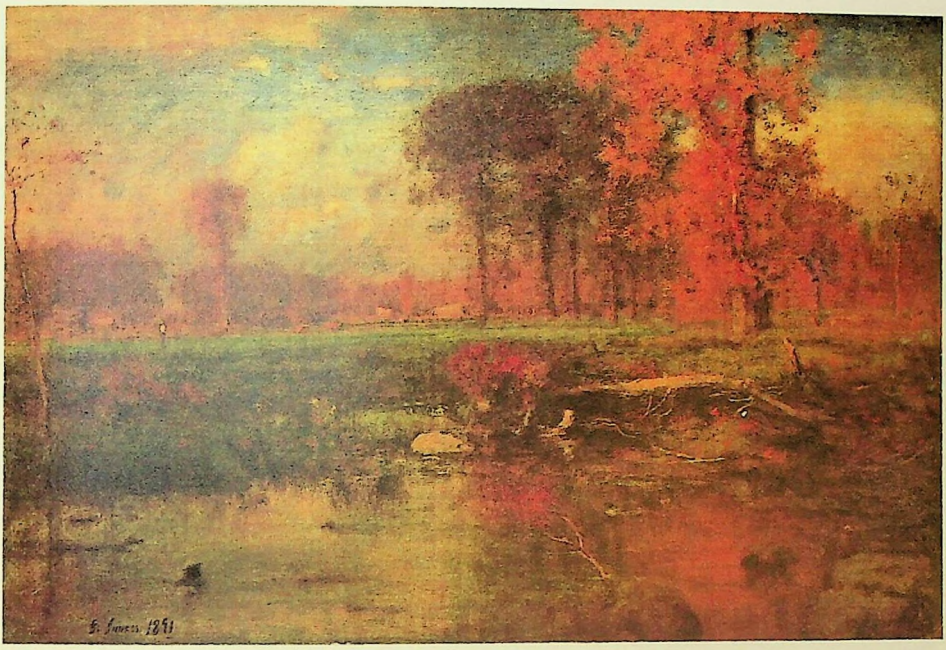
Romantic inspiration was not only confined to the drama and excitement of the unique phenomenon of nature, but was equally moved by the uncommon stillness and silence that is to be found in the cultivated landscape.

There is perhaps a certain eccentricity as regards the character of Inness and his absoption in Swedenborgian philosophy. Swedenborg believed, for example, that there exists a spiritual, invisible world, fundamentally different from, yet resembling the world perceived by the senses. His beliefs point to a curious mix of Christianity and spiritualism, which is perhaps echoed in what we know of Inness's life. But as we have already seen, the images that Inness created fit comfortably into the general current of artistic style and appearance. They do not inevitably equate a pictorial equivalent to Swedenborgian beliefs, or at least do not demand a reading solely in this context.

> What Inness's late paintings contain - what they are as objective fact - is a world, more metaphysical than physical, in which metaphysical laws are expressed and tangibly embodied in art as rules of pictorial form. Metaphysics and aesthetics, religion and art, are one and the same. Pictorial design, colour and construction are the elements of metaphysical order, pictorial form is the means by which that highest order and higher beauty are "fitted to material comprehension". This is how and where Inness hid his religion in his art (17), (fig.21).

* * *

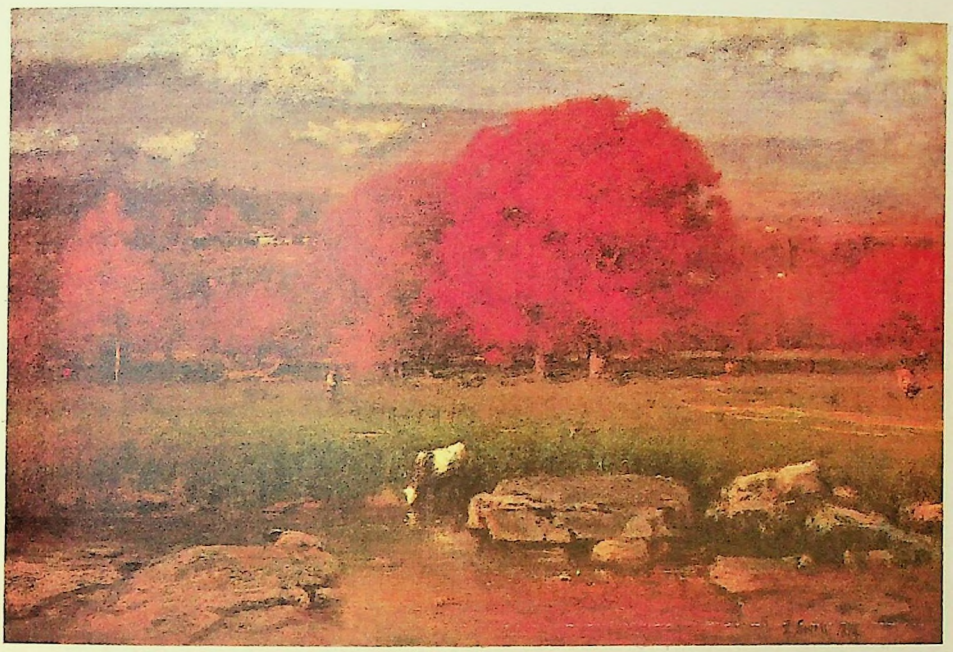
The paintings of Church and Inness represent, for me, their emotional response to particular natural experiences. Despite an alliance perhaps with moral aims, an over attention or



(fig.20) George Inness, 'Spirit of Autumn', 1891.

Oil on Canvas, 30 x 45 in.

Private Collection.



(fig.21) George Inness, 'Morning , Catskill Valley (The Red Oaks)' 1894.

Oil on Canvas, 35⅛ x 53¼ in.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California.

under attention to detail, absorption in specific religious ideologies etc, the original expression of emotion, in my opinion, remains intact. The emotions which both displayed were similarly related to an invocation of divinity, a mediation of spiritual experience in the face of the natural world. Both Church and Inness created pictures of essence, focussing our attention on the contemplation of carefully structured images, which take on the significance of altars of the natural world. In this way, rather than enacting a placement of the viewer, they embrace him - the image becomes a frame of reference for the spectator's gaze - the image becomes an natural alterpiece with the individual as the single/sole consecrated object. The symmetry and construction of the paintings display a kind of order out of chaos, in which the apparent disorder of nature is replaced by a fixed, emblematic order which may elucidate an eternal truth. Both painters distil a feeling of intense harmony between the most untouchable of nature's phenomena - light, colour, and atmosphere - and create a symmetry which provides the viewer with a maximum empathy which draws and absorbs him/her into the image presented. Their intense focussing endow their images with a momentous significance. As one writer said of Friedrich -

> This significance eludes you and you stand before the pictures as before answers for which the questions have been lost. They are fragments of an experience of nature elevated to the level of a revelation, a revelation however, whose agent and whose content have long since dissappeared (18).

* * *

CHAPTER 4. THE INVISIBLE CATHEDRAL.

> [In these paintings] the visible Church is dead, only the invisible church, in the heart or revealed through Nature, is alive... [it has become] a personal religion that refuses all outward forms, all doctrine (1).

This statement, which specifically refers to Friedrich, can also be applied to Romanticism in general. The designation of labels on works of art in terms of specific religious manifestations is contrary to the nature of Romantic symbolism. The principle behind that symbolism works on the basis that meaning can never be separated from its symbolic representation, that the image can never be reduced to a word. The interpretations therefore which locate both Church and Inness in various religious modes are in fact acting out this process. It is a process whereby the artists are treated as enemies whose code must be broken. Only then can their strategy be discovered. But in fact there is no code, or dialect, or private language in these paintings which demands such deciphering or translation. The finality of analysing Church and Inness in specific religious terms in fact amounts to a reduction to a word, a translation where translation cannot be achieved. Such a process makes the paintings appear to convey some systematic doctrine, whereas they clearly reject religion as dogma. In these paintings, the forms of nature speak directly, their power released by their ordering within the work of art. They transcend a mediation through identifiable or translatable doctrine or belief.

Those judgments which conclude an embodiment of religious meaning in the paintings, especially in relation to Church, in my opinion, emerge out of a reading or understanding of the temporal moment of their conception. Such judgments in their conclusions are external to the significance of the

images themselves. They amount to a translation or at least interpretation of factors extraneous to the individual nature of the painted canvas. But as we have already seen interpretation should never be imposed from without, but must take place each time from within, that generalisation of an artists total style has a falsifying effect. By individualising therefore and separating each art-work from another one might expect only further division and distinction rather than the greater harmony and association that I claim. But, in fact, the exact opposite is the case. In the situation whereby we are confronted by an isolated image of the natural world, our consciousness cannot possibly conclude in terms of the categories usually applied. The natural symbolism of the paintings create feelings and emotions which evoke of something indefinable. Our distance from the context and intimate relation to the image enacts a liberation from the factors of their particular moments in history which are ultimately distortionary. Rather than directing a response to Puritanism or Swedenborg, to Hudson River or Barbizon styles, they mediate the experience of confronting an infinite and unrepresentable God. Such mediation does not invoke the visible church since such equation would need some outward form. Since these paintings function in the sense of turning the landscape back on the viewer and locating us in our subjectivity as their true point reference, religion becomes invisible and personal in its revelation through the subjective, emotional response. There are no outward forms or doctrines here to be deciphered or translated.

The forces which identify Church and Inness in specific religious terms are the same forces which impose divisions where they are less important than the similarities. The highlighting of stylistic deviation, for example, is one related factor in the categorisation process. In effect, Church's style and meaning are judged as being symbolic of a certain period, before being deemed outmoded in the new context, Inness then is elevated to a comparative position for

a different period, only to suffer the same fate as his predecessor. Their importance becomes historical, representing fragments from a different age. But this judgment and reading ignores the nature of Romaticism, and its spiritual implications. Romanticism is essentially the indefinite, it cannot be trully defined or even described. Frederic Schlegel's words in reference to Romantic poetry underlines this very indefiniteness and unknown potential -

> The Romantic kind of poetry is still in a state of becoming; in fact that is its real essence: that it should externally be becoming and never be completed. No theory can exhaust it, and only divinatory criticism would dare attempt to characterise its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free...(2)

Romanticism or the process of romanticising the world is never really completed as object or event. It sets out to defy historical analysis. It is formulated not as finished product but as future process, not as historical achievement but as active imperative. The finality of translating Church and Inness into historical and religious categories therefore is directly contrary to the Romanticising process they were involved in. It is an open-ended process where all divisions and contrasts of style, history or religious outlook belong essentially to the same project and ambition. Ultimately all such yearnings are thematised and fused into one constellation, and transcend the barriers that we have encountered. Their paintings must remain 'open-ended, if only because they presuppose, from the start and for the epoch which we too inhabit, that the operation which shall interpret them is still unknown' (3).

* * *

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION - BEYOND AESTHETICS.

My examination and interpretative path has not been intended to present a comprehensive study of Church and Inness, or indeed a detailed comparison between them. What I have attempted to present however, is a case for the essential harmonisation between distinct art practices when they are involved in the Romanticising process. In this sense, I hope my selected comparative passages have sufficiently extablished the distinguishing styles and concerns which locate and reintegrate both artists within their specific traditions or contexts. But in doing this to underline Romanticisms refusal, unlike other traditions to be reduced/defined in such a conclusive and crystallising way. In accepting Church and Inness's reintegration into traditions,in the sense of their reflecting the life of a people in terms of their ethical, political and religious concerns, I also comprehend a further significance. This further meaning has to do with the Romanticising process which is the harmonising and concerting factor in the diversity of their art.

All Romantics explore the strange, enigmatic depths of their souls. The act of Romanticising displays a kind of introspective process, in the sense of man looking into himself in terms of revealing an infinite, hidden world. This introspection of the individual involves a subconscious attempt to establish the religious significance of experience. Romantic art is an art that emerges from and is an expression of such experience - the transposition of the experience by the artist and the audience encounter with the work of art as their experience. Romanticism though can only be possible after the historical immersion of the human spirit through Christianity, for it is here that man becomes the most profound expression of the meaning of divinity, of God as spirit. It is this disclosure of spirit in its true form that Romantic art attempts to bring about although in the realisation that the demands of aesthetics may not allow for the fulfilment of the task. In

Romantic art we experience a transition beyond art, where art in fact points beyond itself to a significance calling for a fuller religious form. It is what Hegal calls - 'the self transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself' (1). In other words, art itself sacrifices its own exclusively aesthetic form to open out upon fuller religious aspects and meanings.

The most sufficient/adequate religious representations dont try to locate the divine in terms of a sensuous externality but rather direct towards the spirit in terms of feeling, representing the divine as in-being or in-dwelling. The purpose is to represent spirit not through the depiction of an external divinity but, rather by actively taking part in the process of painting itself. As Jacques Maritain says - the artist is not just copying creation but is continuing creation. It is possible to assert man's creativity while viewing it in the context of a creativity beyond man's limitations, more ultimate than man. The contrast then that I perceive between the aesthetic and spiritual readings of these paintings is ultimately the reason Modernist categorisation and judgments of them are so wrong. In the aesthetic realm, man is involved in an imaginative dialogue with self - man is the speaker, the spoken and the listener - it is ultimately a humanistic conversation. In the spiritual realm, man hears himself but within the context of a conversation going beyond the limits of his finite self. The aesthetic reading, which is the primary Modernist view-point, does not deliver the full picture of the human and divine association. In religious terms, God is at work in the artist. Therefore the creative power of art displays the complex, simultaneous happening of self-activity and receptivity to achieve an ultimate or absolute; in other words, the depiction of the union between the human and divine. The humanist/Modernist interpretation, in effect, makes man foreign to the divine and this has a falsifying effect. As William Desmond says - ' ... the language of religious representation, in its acknowledgement of both the infinite and the finite is ultimately more adequate to the absoluteness of [spirit], than

is the humanistic interpretation' (2).

The ultimate conclusion to be drawn from the combined anthologies of Church and Inness should not therefore replicate the essentially humanist / Modernist misconception which encourages divisional and conflictional values. Rather it is only in their underlying sympathetic impulse, their unconscious complicity within a much larger Romantic and spiritual frame, which transcends the limitations of a purely contextual reading, that we can begin to encompass the 'true' meaning and potential of their art.

N O T E S

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION.

1. Rosenblum, 1975.
2. Kelly, 1988, p. viii.
3. Ibid, p.125.
4. Rosen and Zerner, 1984, p.70.
5. Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO. A CONTEXTUAL REFERENCE - TRANSCENDING TRADITION.

1. Roque, in 'American Paradise', 1987, p.30.
2. Quoted in the 'Thames and Hudson Dictionary of Art and Artists', 1984, p.293.
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23. Cikovsky, in 'George Inness', 1985, p.12.
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CHAPTER THREE. TOWARDS A SACRED GEOGRAPHY.

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2. Ibid, p.25.
3. Novak, 1980, p.34.
4. Ibid, p.37.
5. Ibid, p.20.
6. Ibid, p.25.
7. Ibid, pp.26, 27.
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12. Ibid, p.176.
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14. Avery, in 'American Light', 1987, p.5.
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18. Koerner, 1990 , p.9.

CHAPTER FOUR. THE INVISIBLE CATHEDRAL.

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2. Koerner, 1990 , p.24.
3. Ibid, p. 28.

CHAPTER FIVE. CONCLUSION - BEYOND AESTHETICS.

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2. Ibid.

ILLUSTRATION SOURCES

Fig. 1. 'American Paradise', 1987, p. 134.
Fig. 2. Ibid, p. 112.
Fig. 3. Ibid, p. 239.
Fig. 4. Ibid, p. 242.
Fig. 5. 'Frederic Edwin Church', 1988, p.85.
Fig. 6. 'American Paradise', 1987, p. 74.
Fig. 7. 'Frederic Edwin Church', 1988, p.109.
Fig. 8. Ibid, p.111.
Fig. 9. 'George Inness', 1985, p.59.
Fig. 10. 'American Paradise', 1987, p.251.
Fig. 11. 'Inness-Landscapes', 1977, p. 35.
Fig. 12. 'American Paradise', 1987, p. 77.
Fig. 13. 'George Inness', 1985, p.125.
Fig. 14. Ibid, p.179.
Fig. 15. Ibid, p.169.
Fig. 16. 'Frederic Edwin Church', 1988, p. 90.
Fig. 17. 'American Paradise', 1987, p.255.
Fig. 18. Ibid, p.166.
Fig. 19. 'George Inness', 1985, p.199.
Fig. 20. Ibid, p.187.
Fig. 21. Ibid, p.201.

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