

'the finest poetic descriptions'

In his 1711 publication *Characteristics of Men and Manners* the Earl of Shaftsbury proposed the following dictate for the well-bred connoisseur,

"The merely natural," he wrote, "must pay homage to the historical and moral...nothing is more fatal, either to painting or the other arts than this false taste, which is governed rather by what immediately strikes the senses, than by what reflection pleases the mind and satisfies the thought and reason."

The naturalism implicit in such theory was that of a Virgilian idyll, a visual parallel of which is Mia's oil painting by Claude Lorrain of 1638 acquired on the grand tour a bit later by the Irish Earl of Leitrim. For Shaftsbury, and other Enlightenment theorists, beauty and virtue were synonymous; hence it was the artist's duty to impose order on nature, beauty being an ideal distillation of the physical world. As in this work by Claude, whose vision would inspire artists for three centuries, the landscape painter reinforced the pastoral view of a benign, static existence, familiar from classical poetry.

Eighty years later William Wordsworth nailed shut the coffin lid on this claim to an absolute standard of taste governed by rational rules, with the publication of his *Lines Written a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, in which he attempted an experiment to see how far the public taste would endure poetry written in a more natural and simple style, totally discarding the artifices of poetical diction and employing only those words and incidents as were common in the most ordinary language and habitual experience.

In one of the most moving passages in English poetry, Wordsworth described the bittersweet transcendence of having learned,

“To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
 The Still, sad music of humanity,
 ...And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains, and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.”

Bruce Dayton, Louis Martz, Maynard Mack, Chauncey Tinker

This meditation on the meaning of transient existence, this call for the dynamic interaction between an individual mind and an observable but protean world, defines the new naturalism of Wordsworth's generation. At once more scientific and more sensate, it was a sensibility from which flowed the premise that the poetry of landscape painting as a high art resided primarily in the artist's ability to communicate his or her subjective experiences before the phenomena of nature. As argued by JMW Turner's greatest apologist, John Ruskin in 1875, the year incidentally when he accused James Abbott

McNeil Whistler of flinging a pot of paint in the public's face, when he exhibited this nearly abstract oil *Falling Rocket*,

“Representation of scenery for a good account of things, without emotion or definite purpose of expression is surveyor's work. Landscape painting shows the relation between man and nature; and, in the finest work, a particular tone of thought in the painter's mind.”

The significance of this distinction between the **representation** of scenery and the **art of landscape painting** becomes clearer if we contrast this *Warwick Castle* by Canaletto with this near contemporary painting by John Robert Cozens of 1780, *Sunset near the Grande Chartreuse*. The Canaletto is what we would classify as vedute or topography; it is concerned with the transcription of verifiable and measurable facts and scarcely the imponderable natural forces at work around us. Cozens's interests are decidedly on another plane as he assaults, with gusto, a monolithic outcropping unadorned by any artifacts of human intrusion, ancient or modern. The subject may yet have topographical interest for anyone unfamiliar with the site, but that is clearly subordinate to the artist's principal concern for conveying a particular impression of nature, at a particular moment in time, and in a highly personal and technically sophisticated way.

Venerable from antiquity, Shaftsbury's anthropocentric idea of nature as something subordinate to human cognition and rational enterprise was redefined over the course of the 18th century to account for a far deeper appreciation of the physical conditions appointed for human activity. This radical shift to a mode of landscape representation that sought to involve the spectator in the very drama of existence required a major shift in attitudes toward nature and toward the status of landscape painting, and a dramatic sophistication of its technical means. Ironically, the virtuosity of execution required of an artist to achieve such Ruskinian poetry would become valued equally as an end in itself, thus threatening the very representational function of painting with an art-for-art's-sake cult of individual bravura. This egocentric fascination with process, which would eventually culminate in abstraction, was intrinsic to Romantic theory, irrespective of

Ruskin's crusade to prove that all landscape painting was a moral act carried out from a sense of duty to God's creation.

Today I intend to briefly survey aspects of the development of the modern landscape aesthetic from the perspective of four British artists, JMW Turner being foremost among them. Modern art history has perpetuated the fiction that modern painting commenced in France in 1863 with the special exhibition of works by Edouard Manet and others who had been refused admission that year to the state-sponsored Salon exhibition in Paris. Yet the principal characteristics invariably associated with Modernism - namely, the artist's self-conscious rejection of conventional methods of representation in search of more vital forms of personal expression, and the exploration of the aesthetic autonomy of the means of representation, without regard to any subject represented – these fundamental manifestations of artists grappling with novel responses to ever changing social, economic and intellectual conditions in their milieu were in evidence from the end of the eighteenth century. This is especially true in the theory and practice of British, and subsequently, French Romanticism.

The philosophical support for this evolution/revolution was embedded in the writings of various authors on the aesthetics of the **sublime**, which preoccupied theorists like Edmund Burke during the last decades of the century. His thesis, *An Enquiry into the origins of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful*, was crucial. The complexity of what the notion connoted to the 18th century sensibility was expressed succinctly by the poet Thomas Gray during a trip through Switzerland:

“I do not remember going ten paces without an exclamation that could not be restrained: not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument.”

Poetic beauty, religious ecstasy, fear for one's safety, the thrill of teetering on the brink of annihilation, are all elements of a new receptivity to nature, as was the notion that

landscape painting could and should inspire in the beholder a strong emotional response ranging in degree from simple awe to sheer terror in the contemplation of nature's capricious powers.

The first artist to grapple effectively with the implications of sublime theory on **pure landscape painting**, and the first of the quartet with whom I am primarily concerned today, was John Robert Cozens. Cozens made his public debut at the Royal Academy in London in 1776 with an oil painting of *Hannibal crossing the Alps*. It is now untraced but undoubtedly shared with other history paintings the pathos required of an elevated historical landscape. Cozens would not pursue this tactic of introducing subjects from antiquity into idealized landscape settings; rather, after crossing the Alps himself later that year and again in 1782, he subsequently devoted his life to the watercolor depiction of actual Swiss and Italian scenery. Like the Cozens I showed earlier, this *Pays de Valais* is sublime in its suggestion of an infinite void, virtually uninhabited, seductively still yet vibrating with light and richly atmospheric; a place of spiritual surrender. It was painted for William Beckford, one of history's most sublime creatures – author of the first gothic novel *Vathek* and designer of Fonthill Abbey.

No less moving are this view of the *Lake of Albano* of 1785 of which eight other versions exist, or this later view near *Arqua*, which suggests a breathtaking expanse, even within its modest 8 x 10 inch format.

Cozens brings to such mature works a compelling elegaic sensitivity and an innovative painting technique which, when in concert, produce the first landscapes that can claim to be personal meditations, to possess, in Ruskin's words, that particular tone of thought uniting both noble interests and profound passions. This presence of the artist as a consciousness before nature, whose superior sensibility and mastery of craft make us participants in a lyrical adventure of self-discovery, was an utterly new phenomenon in European art.

The revolutionary nature of Cozens's painting technique can best be seen in this comparison of his *Lake Nemi* with this view in the English Lake District by his

contemporary Francis Towne. Towne deploys the traditional skills of topography exquisitely – the delicate pen lines and the gray wash shading, for instance - but the inadequacy of those methods in depicting such intangible properties as vastness and atmospheric recession are obvious. Towne is not interested in representing the air which surrounds his mountains, whereas Cozens sees color and form only through an intervening atmosphere. Line is suppressed and the individual washes that tend to sweep across the Towne are completely and minutely fragmented by Cozens into individual strokes of pure color which give the work its vibrant texture, its diaphanous allure, and its extraordinary sense of scale.

Cozens would die insane in 1797, but by that date his innovations had been thoroughly absorbed and amplified by the two artists of the next generation who would overshadow the course of landscape painting in England for the next forty years - I am speaking of Thomas Girtin and J M W Turner. London born in the same year of 1775 and trained as topographical watercolorists, both artists rapidly developed bold and original styles that departed as radically from traditional practice as had Cozens, whose works they assiduously copied in the private academy of Cozens' psychiatrist, Dr Thomas Monro. One example. With Turner, in these instances, probably responsible for the monochrome washes and Girtin for the graphite outlines.

But Girtin's *View of Jedburgh* of 1800 or *Morpeth Bridge* of 1802 are audacious in their broadly applied and richly layered tints. The forms are modeled in pure colors with no grey underpainting as we saw in the Towne. This layering of tints on the paper to produce a specific color, rather than the pre-mixing of that color as might be done in oil painting, accounts for the noticeably greater purity of hues in watercolor painting and the great appeal of that medium to landscape painters. Girtin's palette is more varied than Cozens's but still rather subdued, although this is typical of the period, reflecting the bias of Sublime theorists and the lingering prejudices of certain traditionalists who preferred the yellowing varnish of old master paintings to the full coloring of nature.

Girtin's uniquely personal response to nature and his often bold compositional invention are perhaps best evidenced in such Dutch-inspired panoramas as this *Estuary of the river Taw* of 1801. The view was painted on the spot and is radical in its complete renunciation of picturesque organization. It conveys the same sense of an emotion strongly felt as one finds in Cozens, but remarkably it does so with the sparest of means. As in all of Girtin's last works, this is not the bombastic sublime of Thomas Gray or Edmund Burke, nor the often sullen introspection of Cozens, but rather that bitter-sweet transcendence of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*.

In 1802, the year of his premature death, Girtin took advantage of the brief Peace of Amiens to visit Paris. His friend and colleague J M W Turner went farther afield and visited Switzerland. Prior to this date, Turner was forced to depict the monuments and terrain of his own country, content to develop a style of watercolor painting at times boldly reminiscent of Cozens, but generally in keeping with his ambition to become a painter of epic landscapes in oil. Turner, moreso than Girtin, would remain indebted to Cozens's example. Among the numerous landscapes resulting from this first of many visits to the continent is the extraordinary watercolor *Glacier and Source of the Arveron*. The *Mer de Glace* as it is called measures 30 x 40 inches - the dimensions of a good sized oil painting. These earliest Swiss views are not only technical tours de force of watercolor painting, but also some of the most perfectly conceived evocations of the sublime in British art. This composition, based on a smaller sketch drawn on the spot, is a textbook of sublime incident and artifice. Storm clouds and craggy peaks are shrouded in frigid vapor. The jagged projections of the glacier suggest a force both uncommon and perilous. Nimble goats graze in this wasteland otherwise devoid of life, although their safety is never certain and a snake of exaggerated size coyly reminds us of their and our vulnerability. Now, none of this clever contrivance would be convincing were the depiction not absolutely riveting in its realism; a quality that need be attributed directly to Turner's virtuosity and to his considerable powers of observation. Examine the way in which the glacier is painted and recall Camille Pissaro's admiration for Turner's ability to paint snow: the blues have been laid in and then taken out in a variety of ways from scraping to abraison. The net effect is a very convincing representation of

frozen water as it refracts and tints lights. His palette is muted in keeping with the sublimity of the scene, but the tonal shifts are numerous. The overall coloring is in fact similar to what he is employing in his oils of this period but the watercolor has brilliance owing to the transparency of its pigments that is difficult to duplicate in the oil medium, as his 1805 oil of *Bonneville* demonstrates.

Turner exhibited his Swiss paintings at the Royal Academy in 1805 to a public astounded as much by their technical sophistication as by their naturalism. Their enthusiastic reception was abetted by two other major event that also helped propel Romantic landscape painting to the forefront of public interest – the founding of the Society of Painters in Watercolor in opposition to the Royal Academy, and the publication in 1805 of Richard Payne Knight's *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, which revised all previous aesthetic categorizations. Knight, who was a staunch patron of Cozens, argued persuasively against the threadbare notion, earlier promulgated by Sir Joshua Reynolds in his *Discourses* to the students of the Royal Academy in the 1770s, that the art of painting had an ethical or civic-minded mission; to quote Knight

"as if men ever applied to such sources of information for directions on how to act in the moral or prudential concerns of life, or ever looked at pictures for anything but amusement."

Accordingly, the pleasures afforded by painting were the physiological pleasures of sight, which had little to do with cognition, ethics, or received notions of what was beautiful in nature or appropriate to paint. It was the purely visible, formal properties of painting that gave pleasure - the myriad colors and tints and play of light and shade. Implicit in such thinking is what Ruskin found most disturbing in Whistler's brand of aestheticism. With this line of reasoning, the traditional hierarchy of genres that valued history painting over landscape painting became indefensible. Another tenet of Knight's thesis significant for landscape painters was that the crucial involvement of the spectator was enhanced to the extent that a representation was not static in its

execution, thus seducing the viewer into more imaginative participation. A principle that was as important to Turner as it would be to Eugene Delacroix. That notion introduced what would become one of the more contentious aesthetic arguments of the 19th century. The **sketch versus finish** debate, as we now refer to it, pitted a romantic fascination with virtuosity, individuality and spontaneity against a traditional respect for craftsmanship, lengthy apprenticeship and reflective composition making, it pitted the French against the British, Delacroix against Ingres, and eventually Ruskin against Whistler and the Impressionists against their Pompier contemporaries like Adolphe Bougereau. The larger issue was whether art could be taught at all. In this context it is interesting to note an entry that the Royal Academician Joseph Farington made in his diary in 1799:

“Mr Lascelles and Lady Sutherland are disposed to set up Girtin against Turner, who they say effects his purpose by industry – the former more genius – Turner finishes too much.”

That Turner, who is now generally likened to the Impressionists, might be considered heavy handed, is to us amazing, but in juxtaposition with Girtin, his work could well seem effortful to a connoisseur of Payne Knight's persuasions. But Turner himself acknowledged “If Tom Girtin had lived I would have starved.

In truth, Turner actually transcended these dichotomies by his rare ability to describe nature in all of its grandeur, its moods, and its minute abundance with whatever medium was within hand's reach. He was well-versed in 18th century academic theory and its demands for elevated subject matter, but equally driven by a passion to record the most mundane natural effects, which he did with disarming realism. Whereas Girtin and his later imitators offered a moment frozen for all time, nature reduced to its poignant essentials by the broad sweep of a brush, Turner gives us perpetual flux. It is a dynamic nature that Turner essayed, and it is an equally dynamic painting technique that enabled him to achieve this. A point well-illustrated by this watercolor of *Vesuvius in Eruption*, which shows Turner at his most theatrical. The sky above and to either side of

the spouting cone has been literally plowed up with a wide blunt instrument leaving behind chunks of tinted paper protruding from the surface, palpably reinforcing the illusion of explosive destruction. Or in this oil *Avalanche, Aosta* where areas of heavily impasted lead white float over and under the most transparent oil glazes. If this isn't throwing a pot of paint in the public's face what is?

Like Cozens before him, Turner accepted the traditional relationship between the sketch and the finished work as one of analysis and synthesis; that is, as a process of refinement, or enlargement if you will, that would guarantee the proper mediation of his own experience. Consequently, there exist two distinct categories of work in Turner's oeuvre – the myriad studies intended for personal use only, generally painted outdoors, and the less numerous examples worked-up in the studio and intended for public consumption. However, the objective of Turner's finishing techniques was not precisely delineated forms or an encyclopedaic representation of leaves and blades of grass, but rather a scrupulous fidelity to such riveting phenomena as distant objects dissolving in mist or the reflective and prismatic action of still water. In other words, to seize on the visually engaging details without sacrificing the beauty of the general impression. I show a highly finished watercolor of the 1820's, *Whiting Fishing off Margate*. I doubt that anyone ever painted reflections in water with such depth of feeling. The surface of the paper has been saturated and abused to the extent that fibers and pigments have merged into an opalescent film. The foundation of all Turner's finished landscapes is an armature of color or tonal blocks broadly laid onto the support. With those color beginnings in place, he works the surface to completion with ever smaller washes or touches of pigment - a la Cozens - and with a plethora of tricks for which there are often no precedents - scraping out to reveal highlights, sponging out wet colors to reduce the depth of tone, saliva spit onto the damp surface, a thumbprint to add texture.

Gradually, and primarily after his first Italian trip in 1819, Turner's palette lightened. Traditional notions of chiaroscuro, of alternating bands of light and dark earth colors, as we saw in the Bonneville view, gave way to compositions orchestrated in brighter hues, as in the Getty's magnificent *View of Rome*. Here the various colors move throughout the composition almost at will, without respect for the forms they describe but in perfect

balance. In the studies of this later period, such as this Swiss lake view of 1840, he ceaselessly explored particular effects or unusual color juxtapositions. In this instance, he introduces black, the most shunned pigment of the colorist's palette, to make an approaching electrical storm all the more ominous. And with a fingernail, said to resemble a talon and grown specifically for the purpose, he gently scraped out a spear of lightening. The effect on one's senses is that of a nail scraping across a blackboard. The pages of scores of sketchbooks, like this example used during a vacation on the channel coast in the 1840s with its recipient Sophia Booth, testify to a juvenescent spirit still intoxicated by the nuances of nature even as he approached his 70th birthday. These are more likely imaginative sketches for this oil of Whalers. One of the late paintings derided by the critics as "Soapsuds and whitewash". Story of sketchbook.

I will move along from Turner with these views in Scotland or Switzerland executed on commission at the end of his life, in which, by dint of unparalleled originality the vast gulf that separates Cozens from Whistler is ingeniously straddled. In such conceptions, natural forms occupy an uncertain place between concrete reality and total dissolution by light into the colors and images of what Claude Monet admiringly called the "exuberant romanticism of Turner's fancy." Proportions are intentionally distorted and the color schemes are almost brazenly artificial, but somehow we are prepared to accept the fundamental truth of this vision; to accept its faith in the supreme forces of nature, in the spiritual enrichment to be gained from their contemplation, and in the artist's preeminence as the mediator of that experience.

The isolation of English artists from the continent during the Napoleonic wars had the effect of generating on both sides of the channel the conviction that naturalistic landscape painting was a peculiarly British preoccupation. In France, the Davidian taste for large neo-classical pictures and strict hierarchical distinctions between works in different media or between a sketch and a finished work reigned throughout the first quarter of the new century. The ideal of the powerful Ecole des Beaux-Arts demanded careful descriptive execution. Uncompromising legibility meant that the planes of recession in a landscape had to be clearly distinct and logically ordered, the objects

within those planes precisely defined and detailed, and the perspective illusion entirely dependent on diminution in scale. Picturesque effects resulting from the bravura manipulation of color or chiaroscuro must be suppressed because they excited the senses and distracted from the **narrative subject** introduced into the landscape. The lack of edifying subject matter and the imagined laxity of execution that actually gave British pictures their optical veracity were cited by the French as signs of a depraved indifference to the public's right to a painstaking demonstration of skill. Tradition and craftsmanship, not empiricism, were the aims of the French pedagogic machine, but that program would be seriously undermined after the celebrated Salon of 1824.

A sizeable English participation in that annual Paris exhibition, which is usually credited with having altered the course of French painting, was largely from professional watercolorists, foremost among whom were many of Girtin's contemporaries. In addition, John Constable, whose surfaces are always alive with incident, but not finished details, and Richard Parkes Bonington were awarded gold medals in the landscape category amidst a torrent of both critical abuse and adulation. Eugène Delacroix's initial response to Constable and his consequent retouching of his *Massacre at Scios* in 1824 is the stuff of legend. "Constable and Turner," he later wrote, "were veritable reformers. They escaped the rut of the antiquated landscapists. Our school, which now abounds in men of talent in this genre, greatly profited from their example." Nevertheless, he would also recall receiving Turner in his Paris studio once in 1832 writing, "He made a mediocre impression: he had the air of an English farmer, rather gross black habit, large shoes and a hard and cold demeanor."

But the dominant force in this unlikely realm of Anglo-French rapprochement was Richard Parkes Bonington. Although English by birth and temperament he passed his brief working career between 1817 and 1828 in Paris. Bonington's persona was that of the quintessential romantic casualty - a melancholic and untutored genius, solitary, haunted, irrationally yet inevitably destroyed at the peak of his youthful promise by a hyperkinetic creative faculty. He was that prototypical hero of so many French novels who dreamed in the 1820s of destroying the classical tradition, whose pictures were

constantly mistaken for the works of Titian, whose tastes, like Turner's, were exclusively for nature, the poetry of Lord Byron, and the romances of Sir Walter Scott. Turner, who envied no one, greatly admired his talent. For Constable, he was an undisciplined prodigy. For Charles Baudelaire, and a host of other French luminaries on down to Marcel Proust, Bonington was not only the equal of Turner and Constable, but also, with Delacroix and Theodore Gericault, one of the pillars of modern sensibility, an exquisite colorist and technician whose affinity with nature made his works emotional as well as painterly events of the highest caliber. Bonington never sought, like Turner or his friend Delacroix, to depict the sublime events of nature or human history, and he was more inclined to the pictorial than the theoretical. But his sensibility was respected on both sides of the Channel as no less uplifting for its discretion.

Bonington's earliest works, like those of Cozens, Girtin and Turner, were watercolors, such as this view of Boulogne harbor - remarkably close in spirit and in ease of execution to the works of Girtin. It was precisely this type of Bonington drawing of which Camille Corot later said:

"I discovered in them a rare sincerity that reproduced for the first time things which always moved me when I observed them in nature, but which were never attempted by our landscapists."

He also allowed that he decided to become a painter upon seeing Bonington's works in the window of the first commercial gallery in Paris, that of Madame Hulin in 1822.

This next comparison relates an oil painting in the Wallace Collection, one of several exhibits that garnered the 21 year old Bonington his gold medal, to the plein-air watercolor sketch from which it derives. Bonington's preparatory work was almost always in watercolor and the oil then done *a la prima*. Unlike French practice. This study of Venice of 1826 in the Huntington reveals the impact of Italian light on Bonington's palette, an impact that can also be traced in the works of scores of other English artists, including Turner, who flocked to Venice in the 1820s. And this late view at Dieppe, which betrays Bonington's self-proclaimed infatuation with Turner, an infatuation that actually compelled him to seek out the senior artist in 1825, when he, Delacroix and a

group of younger French painters travelled to London to experience British culture at first-hand. During that visit he examined, among many other works, the *Whiting Fishing Off Margate*, which I show again or this oil of Newark Abbey in the Stafford Collection. These immediately inspired atmospheric series of river scenes and beach scenes in which the rich color mixing in the sky and water, with their thick striations of ochre, sienna, blue, pink, yellow, and impasted white, and the wispy cloud formations tinted by this mélange are overtly Turnerian. These I would compare to contemporary works by the great French romantic landscape painter Paul Huet, whose infatuation with Turner at this time was no less marked but whose knowledge of Turner's works derived second hand from acquaintances like Bonington. And one final comparison between Turner's *Folkstone* of 1827 with its strong diagonal slashes of blue in the sky reinforcing an otherwise unpaintable idea of wind, which Bonington is likely to have seen during his second London visit, and the very last work of art produced by Bonington, this *Undercliff* of August 1828. In both there is a brilliant exploitation of forced color arrangements and of totally random accidents of technique that are the hallmarks of Turnerian Romanticism.

Paul Huet described Bonington as possessing the genius of perception and touch - an extraordinary ability to precisely represent, with a minimum of effort and material, the most powerful and varied naturalistic effects, as in this open-air oil sketch at Rouen, the work of about 30 minutes. Such virtuosity fascinated Delacroix, who also marveled at how Bonington's pictures were able to express a beauty that was independent of any subject or representational quality - the beauty of what Delacroix called "the abstract side of painting" - organization, light, color, and a facility that was inimitable but not mannered. To a great extent, this is also what fascinated the French most about British watercolor technique in general – take for instance Theophile Thore's observation on the eve of the first Impressionist exhibition:

“Most British watercolorists, and Turner especially, possessed an extraordinary fluidity, a clarity of light, which well suited landscape and which diffused atmosphere around

their objects. How freely one breaths on their beaches, how one's gaze is borne into the distance, how fresh is the day and how diaphanous the atmosphere!"

And it was the translation into oil painting of those effects thought to be the unique province of watercolor that would become a preoccupation of French landscape painters during the second quarter of the century, just as it had been and would continue to be an ongoing concern of the British school. In this oil of *Verona*, the very last that Bonington painted, glazing techniques have been employed to perfection over a surface prepared with brilliant white gesso in an effort to rival the limpidity of watercolor washes. Bonington's, and I must add Turner's, supreme virtue was that they were masters of this interplay between the media, each in their unique way giving their oils the translucency, breadth, and immediacy of touch of their watercolors. Bonington's further historical importance is that, as a British artist in Paris, he was in the right place at precisely the right moment to drive home this important lesson.

As English painting was being celebrated at the 1824 Salon, the great French literary critic, Amadee Pichot, was touring the British Isles. In 1825 he published in France his *Historical and Literary Tour of Great Britain*, which contains, among other surprising reading, the most sensitive appreciation of Turner's works, in any language, prior to Ruskin's defense in *Modern Painters* nearly two decades later.

Pichot especially praised the sublimity of Turner's vision in such works as *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* and *The Deluge*,

"One of our painters," he wrote, "in imitation of Poussin, has attempted to give an idea of the *Deluge* by the agony of a single family on the point of being swallowed up. Turner has represented the whole spectacle of the inundation of the earth. In Girodet's episode we tremble for a few solitary victims; in Turner's picture we behold the danger of the whole human race..."

But he also concluded from a careful study of British watercolors that,

“To produce varied and powerful effects of perspective and of light and shade, while at the same time due attention is paid to the minutest details, appears to be the secret of the English landscape painters. The eye dwells for a moment on their foregrounds...but the wonderful effects of their distances and skies rivet attention, and seem to realize the finest poetic descriptions.”

In his cogent analysis of British landscape painting, Pichot formulated explicitly an opposition - political, moral, and aesthetic - between a natural art based on experience and an artificial art generated by academies. In Pichot's view, British artists from Cozens to Turner, who had struggled to represent the physical world in its complexity came to understand that world and themselves much better than their French colleagues who simply regurgitated the tired studio recipes of traditional art or clung desperately to the prejudices of their antecedents. It would not be an immediate conversion, but eventually Pichot's view and the example of the British school - the example of relearning how to see nature - would carry the day in Paris.