

OBSERVATIONS ON WILLIAM GILPIN'S CRITICISM
OF LITERATURE AND THE VISUAL ARTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is essentially concerned with analyzing William Gilpin's criticism and relating it to the critical ideas of his age. Gilpin was a man of taste who lived during a significant transitional period in the history of criticism. His criticism is rooted in the classical tradition and centered around classical principles. But many of his ideas, values, and tastes are radically different in emphasis from, or directly opposite to, those of classical theory.

Gilpin, in his criticism of literature, subscribes to the theories that literature imitates nature, that it imitates the ideal rather than the actual, and that it must appeal to the reason. He stresses the objective aspects of literature and asserts the importance of such classical principles as decorum, unity, simplicity and clarity. But his interest in the sensational aspects of literary pictorialism, his non-humanistic concern with landscape poetry, his interest in intuitionism, his defence of sublime obscurity, his occasional delight in emotions for their own sake, all reveal a turning away from classical values. Gilpin makes little effort to reconcile the inconsistencies and self-contradictions in his literary criticism.

In his criticism of painting Gilpin is strongly influenced by the classicism of contemporary British painting.

Again he advocates the imitation of ideal reality. He believes that the image is all important in painting and that it must be a generalized representation of the ideal central form of an object. He also believes that painting must appeal to the reason, and he usually treats the perceptive imagination as an essentially rational faculty. Occasionally he acknowledges painting's ability to cause emotional transport. Of the painter Gilpin requires knowledge of objects and of the rules of art. The painter's knowledge and technical skill are, however, useful only if they are directed by genius. Gilpin judges paintings by the principles established by the Roman school--design (decorum), composition, harmony, simplicity, exactness--and discusses these principles in an essentially classical manner. But he uses them to praise the Venetians, the Baroque masters, and landscape paintings. His criticism of painting has many inherent contradictions but is superficially fairly coherent.

Sculpture is treated only briefly by Gilpin. He believes in idealization and praises simplicity, grace, proportion. But he opposes the rigid neo-classicists of his day by praising animation and even recommending strong action and emotion in sculptured figures and groups.

Gilpin has high praise for the classical tradition in English architecture, especially for Burlington-Palladianism. And his criteria of architectural judgement--symmetry, proportion, simplicity--are essentially those of the classical

tradition. He is concerned with formal rather than associative architectural values, and he is insistent that architecture be intellectually satisfactory and not only visually effective. He defends the Gothic, especially late Gothic, by attempting to prove its conformity to classical principles. The defence is not very successful, but his appreciation of the Gothic is obviously sincere. He discusses in terms of picturesque or associative values only such minor architectural forms as cottages and ruins.

Gilpin defends and evaluates the natural garden in terms of essentially classical principles. The garden is nature methodized, and the method is selection and arrangement according to the rules of art. But Gilpin's acceptance of irregularity, his concern for purely visual values, and his praise of wild nature are in conflict with his basic critical attitude to the garden.

Gilpin, in his criticism of the fine arts, attempts to reconcile various conflicting critical attitudes and principles. He is not always successful, but his attempt is an interesting example of late-eighteenth-century eclectic criticism.

PREFACE

This thesis was originally intended to be a consideration of the Reverend William Gilpin's interest in natural scenery and his search for the picturesque. I soon discovered that this aspect of Gilpin's work had already received a far more thorough study than I would be able to give it.¹ But C.P. Barbier's comment that Gilpin's criticism of painting had received but scant attention² suggested that Professor Templeman and he had not said quite everything that was to be said about the "Master of the Picturesque."³ And I quickly became convinced that there was still a great deal to be said about Gilpin's work. His criticism of painting had indeed received but scant attention. His criticism of literature, of sculpture, of architecture, and of landscape gardening had received almost none. This study is an attempt partially to remedy the situation.

Gilpin's critical comments on the arts are numerous

¹Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927); William Darby Templeman, The Life and Work of William Gilpin . . . (Urbana: Univ. Illinois Press, 1939); Walter John Hipple Jr., The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957); Carl Paul Barbier, William Gilpin . . . (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

²Page 49.

³This title was conferred by Professor Templeman.

and occur both in his published tours and in his theoretical essays, though the latter are more exclusively concerned with picturesque beauty. From these comments I have attempted to infer Gilpin's premises, canons, and criteria, first as they are related to the art form under discussion and then to art in general. I have also attempted to relate his criticism to the critical ideas of his age. My decision not to discuss his attitude to music or the dance is easy to justify: Gilpin rarely mentions either of these art forms, apparently having little interest in or knowledge of them. On the other hand, he often discusses the laying out of grounds and accepts the eighteenth century's classification of gardening as a fine art. I thought it therefore only reasonable to consider his evaluation of gardens as part of his criticism of the visual arts.

Gilpin's criticism of painting is the only area that posed a major problem of selection. I rather arbitrarily rejected those of his comments which are primarily concerned with the sketching of landscape and those specifically relevant to the judging of prints. These comments are often technical, and, even when not, seem to me to be of specific rather than of general importance. My analysis of his criticism of painting is based on his general pronouncements on the art of painting, his directives and suggestions to the painter, his stated critical criteria, and his critical evaluations of certain specific paintings.

This thesis is primarily an analysis of critical premises, attitudes, and criteria. The terms of reference are essentially those established by W.J. Bate and A.O. Lovejoy. The problem of "classicism" and "romanticism," nebulous and muddled enough as it is, would be hopelessly so but for their studies on the subject.⁴ I am also much indebted to Dr. Ian Ross, in whose seminar I and other graduate students argued about, and learned about, some of the complexities of eighteenth-century critical thought.

My special thanks are due to Professor C. Tracy, who has made several helpful suggestions apropos of this thesis, and to Professor S.E. Read, who has supervised and guided me in the preparation of the thesis.

⁴Walter Jackson Bate, ed., Criticism: the Major Texts (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952); W.J. Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Harper, 1961); Arthur O. Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: Putnam's, 1960).

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CHAPTER I

GILPIN AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

The eighteenth century was the great age of English civilization. It was the age of taste, when it was requisite for the gentleman to be interested in, and knowledgeable about, the fine arts.¹ Lord Burlington and Horace Walpole were preëminent, but not exceptional, men of their time. For if ever there was one, theirs was the golden age of connoisseurship. Of course, there had always been in England a fair amount of intelligent appreciation of literature, but the eighteenth century saw an unprecedented flowering of intelligent appreciation of painting, sculpture, architecture, and landscape gardening. And the end of the century saw the establishment of an appreciation, not always so intelligent, of the beauties of wild nature.

That the eighteenth-century interest in the arts was more than superficial "fashion" is proven by literary evidence. The eighteenth-century man wanted to understand the nature of art and to know the criteria of artistic excellence. As R.S. Crane has pointed out, "in the period from Dryden to the end of the eighteenth century . . . the criticism of poetry,

¹John Steegman, The Rule of Taste: From George I to George IV (London: Macmillan, 1936), p. 28.

painting, and the other fine arts became, for the first time in English literature, an important branch of learning, considered worthy of cultivation . . . by some of the most distinguished minds of the time."² And most of these minds were concerned with teaching what Johnson says Dryden taught us--"to determine upon principles the merit of composition."³ The connoisseur was especially interested in these lessons. He wanted to know the principles by which he could correctly judge the work of art.

An important early result of the new interest in criticism was the reiteration and codification of the academic rules evolved (in many ways and from many sources) in sixteenth-century Italy and seventeenth-century France.⁴ Crane lists as one of the major types of neo-classical critical writing that which is mainly concerned with reducing "to some kind of method the rules or precepts peculiar either to one of the various arts considered as a whole or to some one of its branches or genres. . . ."⁵ And in some to the writings of this type, the rules are considered not as guides but as precepts of universal rational law, part of an infallible

²"English Neoclassical Criticism: An Outline Sketch," Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern, ed. R.S. Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 372.

³Samuel Johnson, "Dryden," Lives of the English Poets, ed. George B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), I, 410.

⁴Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 27.

⁵Page 372.

system of order.⁶ The critic could therefore judge correctly in proportion to the extent he knew and applied the rules. This rigid, rule-ridden form of neo-classicism was never very strong in England. None of the major English critics subscribed to it. But it did have its English supporters; Bate mentions Charles Gildon's work as an example of English rule-mongering.⁷ And, in general, the connoisseur utilized the rules more and longer than did the artist or the philosophical critic. As Steegman has noted, the rules may not have been valid, but they were easy to follow; the connoisseur who relied on them might not recognize the beautiful, but he would always recognize the correct.⁸

But the most important critical thinking in England during the eighteenth century is skeptical of the authority of hard-and-fast rules. Bate says that the major critical work of the century has "a breadth of outlook that is in some ways reminiscent of the large openness and sincere grasp of essentials that characterized the start of the classical tradition in ancient Greece."⁹ Certainly the great critics, Pope, Johnson and Reynolds, all attempt to isolate essential principles from arbitrarily established canons. And there is

⁶Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 32.

⁷Ibid., p. 35.

⁸Page xii.

⁹Criticism: The Major Texts (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 11.

in their criticism a concentration on the central principles of the classical tradition. They accept the theory that art imitates general nature, or "nature methodiz'd"; they believe that man's reason is his means of artistic perception; they are concerned with such ideals as unity, order, and decorum. And they all assert that great art goes beyond what can be explained by a codified system of critical laws.

But the eighteenth-century return to the basic classical concepts and ideals is, as Bate points out, interrelated with "the most complete single transition in the history of criticism. . . ." ¹⁰ For the attempt of the most distinguished minds of the day to determine the principles of artistic judgement led not only to the liberal interpretation of classical theories, but finally to the undermining of the entire classical critical system.

R.S. Crane is of course quite right in his statement that the changes in English critical theory from Dryden to the death of Johnson, and the conflicts of doctrine and taste that separate various critics, can be seen as shifts of emphasis rather than radical differences in theory. ¹¹ And certainly the transition from "classicism" to "romanticism" was slow, subtle and complex. There are in the works of most eighteenth-century critics foreshadowings of the romantic aesthetic attitude. Pope's praise of a "grace beyond the

¹⁰Ibid., p. 269.

¹¹Page 374.

reach of art", Addison's interest in the imagination and his consequent critical subjectivism, Reynolds' belief that there are artistic values which the reason cannot comprehend, all these are ideas which the romantics later develop. Other critics have even more significantly "romantic" tendencies. The Earl of Shaftesbury, for instance, writes that man is endowed with an innate moral sense which directs itself toward the good. This, says Bate, was interpreted to mean that "man reacts to what is good, including beauty, through feeling."¹² Hogarth, according to Christopher Hussey, "in his denial of beauty to symmetry, simplicity and distinctness . . . foreshadows the coming revolt from classicism."¹³ And Burke proves that art affects the passions through the senses. As Hussey says:

. . . it was Burke who sponsored passion and emotion as the products of aesthetic perception. It was this substitution of emotion for reason, and of passion for decorum that made possible the great poetry and vile architecture of the nineteenth century. He loosened emotion from the corsets of the intellect.

He made all emotion instinctive, eliminating mental processes all together. Emotive qualities were confined to objects. These, perceived by one or other of the five senses, instantaneously affected one of the two passions, through the imagination.¹⁴

¹²Criticism: The Major Texts, p. 269.

¹³The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927), p. 55.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 57.

Accordingly Burke rules out all criteria which are dependent on intellectual examination. And so it goes. Throughout the century critics discuss, and often accept, non-classical theories of art and critical criteria. But they usually manage to retain at the same time a great many of the premises, theories, and criteria of the classical tradition.

The changes are subtle and complex, yet it is impossible to deny Bate's contention that there was between the beginning and the end of the eighteenth century a major change in critical theory and artistic taste.¹⁵ He defines the change as "a turning away, in whatever direction, from the classical standard of ideal nature, and of the accompanying conviction that the full exercise of ethical reason may grasp the objective ideal."¹⁶ And he explains that the emergent romanticism

substitutes for these premises the beliefs that such truth as can be known is to be found primarily in or through the particular, and that this truth is to be realized, appreciated, and declared in art by the response to that particular of some faculty or capacity in man which is imaginative and often emotional rather than "rational," and which therefore inclines to be somewhat individualistic and subjective in its workings.¹⁷

Certainly there is by the end of the eighteenth century an increased interest in external nature as it is rather than as

¹⁵Criticism: The Major Texts, p. 269.

¹⁶Classicism to Romanticism, p. 94.

¹⁷Ibid.

it should be. There is an increased faith in genius, the passions, emotions, and the imagination. And there is an increased love of irregularity, variety, and surprise. But there is also a continuing devotion to the classical tradition.

The connoisseur, who was usually neither an aesthete nor a thorough critic, had many problems with which to cope in the latter part of the eighteenth century. He needed the security of principles and rules; he was aware that his was an age of changing critical principles and criteria, as well as of changing taste. How was the man of taste to be certain that his taste was "correct"? There were various possibilities: one was conservatively to follow the neo-classical rules; another was to try to judge by general principles; a third was to bring the new taste into accord with the old rules; another was to subscribe to the new taste and establish a new set of rules; and yet another was to say "I do not profess to understand these matters but I know what pleases me."¹⁸ The usual solution to the connoisseur's problem was a compromise which utilized several of these answers.

The connoisseur's problem was the Reverend William Gilpin's. For in spite of his importance as the first to explore the aesthetic problems of the picturesque, Gilpin was essentially a man of taste rather than an aesthete. Even Hipple, though he analyzes Gilpin's aesthetic theory, admits that in his theoretical writings "Gilpin is least

¹⁸Quoted from Steegman, p. v.

impressive,"¹⁹ Gilpin was perpetually a man of taste, but he was an aesthetician only by chance.

Born of good family in 1724, William Gilpin grew up in an atmosphere of artistic appreciation and intellectual concern. For the Gilpins of Cumberland were more than ordinary country gentry: they were a family noted for their service in the law, the church, and the military; and they were a family with a tradition of interest in the fine arts. Gilpin in his career as teacher, scholar, social worker, and churchman carried on the family tradition of service. In his avocation as connoisseur he carried on the tradition of taste. But his role as man of taste was hedged with more difficulties than his father's had been.

Gilpin's interest in the arts began early (there is a record of his having done sketches at the age of six)²⁰ and continued until the end of his life. To his interest in the arts he added an unusually sensitive appreciation of the beauties of wild nature, especially of the mountains and lakes of his native Cumberland. In order to exercise his aesthetic appreciations Gilpin did a considerable amount of travelling during the years 1768-1776. While on his travels he visited natural "beauty spots"; he also visited cathedrals, castles

¹⁹Walter John Hipple, Jr., The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), p. 193.

²⁰See Carl Paul Barbier, William Gilpin . . . (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 16.

and great houses, looked at collections of painting and sculpture, saw the "improvements" and newly-created landscape gardens of the nobility and gentry. Therefore, when his tours were published, the books contained not only discussions of the picturesque and descriptions of natural scenery, but also specific comments on, and general discussions of, architecture, painting, sculpture, and landscape gardening. They also contained discussions of literature; these were usually inspired by scenes of nature or a discussion of one of the other arts. In his theoretical writings Gilpin also considered various of the arts.

Gilpin's interest in the arts was great, his appreciation catholic, and his taste sound (i.e., it agrees with my taste). His interest and perception do not mark him a man of his age, for there are interested and perceptive people in every period. What marks him as an eighteenth-century man of taste is his awareness that his is an age of change, and his intense desire to reconcile the divergent aspects of his taste to some sort of fixed standard of judgement. Whenever possible he justified his taste by an appeal to the academic rules. Generally he relied on the broad principles of classical criticism to defend his taste and judgement. Occasionally he created completely new rules. But he did believe that "in arts, we judge by the rules of art."²¹ And it is fascinat-

²¹William Gilpin, "Essay I. On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, on Picturesque Subjects; with a Poem on Landscape Painting (London, 1808), p. 34.

ing to watch him try to integrate the classical and romantic aspects of his criticism into one coherent system with a clearly formulated set of principles.

It is a mistake to class Gilpin too simply as a "pre-romantic". There is a good deal of the romantic in his make-up. But Gilpin's critics have generally, I think, paid too little attention to the solidly classical aspect of his criticism. Like all of his generation, he is strongly devoted to the classical tradition. His taste is in many respects conservative; his critical principles are often classical; his aesthetic theorizing is, in spite of its messiness, built around philosophical concepts that are essentially classical. I do not want to minimize the romantic aspects of his criticism, but I do want to point out that in his attempt to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of classicism and romanticism, Gilpin is more willing to decrease the proportion of romanticism than to risk dangerously reducing the amount of classicism.

CHAPTER II

GILPIN'S CRITICISM OF LITERATURE

Gilpin's literary criticism, though often delivered en passant, cannot be passed over. Gilpin fails to discuss the problems of criticism of literature as he discusses the problems of criticism of the other fine arts. This omission indicates not less interest but greater certainty. He knows that his principles of literary criticism are sound: to discuss them is unnecessary; to use them is sufficient.

It is important to remember that Gilpin's professional career, as well as his avocational one, was largely literary. Having been trained in the classical languages and literatures, Gilpin taught these to his pupils; requiring money to repay a college debt, he wrote the first of his several biographies; gaining from his clerical occupation a knowledge of theology and scripture, he published several sermons and a modernized version of the Bible. These achievements were not belle-lettristic, but they were literary all the same. Gilpin thus was immediately knowledgeable about literary matters, and his knowledge was both theoretical and practical. He is, therefore, quite sure of himself when discussing principles and criteria of literary criticism. And though his criticism of literature is no less confused than that of any other art, Gilpin is less concerned with explaining away the inconsis-

tencies. His are all valid principles; that they do not form a coherent system he either does not know or does not care.

The strength of the tradition of literary classicism in England, plus the thoroughness of his early training, caused Gilpin to retain throughout his life a devotion to the traditional concept of art and to many classical values. He has especial admiration for Virgil and Pope. And the classical tradition affects even his appreciation of picturesque poetry, sublime poetry, and folk literature.

Implicit in nearly all Gilpin's literary criticism is the theory that art is an imitation of nature. Explicit is the thesis, central to classicism, that poetry imitates what M.H. Abrams calls ideal reality--". . . not the actual, but":

selected matter, qualities, tendencies, or forms, which are within or behind the actual--veridical elements in the construction of the universe which are of higher worth than gross and unselected reality itself.¹

Gilpin states in Five Essays his rejection of the actual as the object of artistic imitation. "Where is the story in real life," he asks, "on which the poet can form either an epic, or a drama, unless heightened by his imagination?"²

¹The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 35.

²"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, on Picturesque Subjects . . . (London, 1808), p. 128n.

and in another place he substantiates his claim for heightened imitation by quoting Du Bos and Aristotle, who defend poetry as more philosophical and universal than history. The poet does not imitate "real nature":

"The poet's art," says the abbé Du Bos, "consists in making a good representation of things that might have happened, and in embellishing it with proper images."

Du Bos speaks after Aristotle, whose principle it is, that the poet is not required to relate what has really happened, but what probably might happen. . . .³

Gilpin believes that the real object of imitation is pure nature--nature at her most beautiful, or, better still, an ideal archetype synthesized from parts found separately in nature:

Some artists, when they give their imagination play, let it loose among uncommon scenes--such as perhaps never existed: whereas the nearer they approach the simple standard of nature, in its most beautiful forms, the more admirable their fictions will appear. It is thus in writing romances. The correct taste cannot bear those unnatural situations, in which heroes and heroines are often placed: whereas a story naturally, and of course affectingly told . . . , tho known to be a fiction, is considered a transcript from nature. . . . The marvellous disgusts the sober imagination; which is gratified only with the pure characters of nature.

-----Beauty best is taught
By those, the favoured few, whom heaven has lent
The power to seize, select, and reunite
Her loveliest features, and of them to form,⁴
One archetype compleat, of sovereign grace.⁴

Though the object of artistic imitation is the imaginary

³"Essay II. On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, p. 163.

⁴"Essay II. On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 52.

rather than the actual, the classicist's object of imitation is always external. The imitation is of something outside the artist's own mind. And, as Bate says, ". . . the classical attitude has always meant a comparative lack of interest, therefore, in the artist himself . . . especially in his own subjective feelings."⁵ Proof that this is Gilpin's attitude is his belief that descriptive writing must be objective. External reality is of primary importance. The accurate description must convey everything; there is no value in enthusiastic raptures:

The account I have here given of the forest-vista is the sober result of frequent examination. A transcript of the first feelings would have been a rhapsody; which no description should indulge. The describer imagines that his own feelings . . . can be conveyed by warm expressions. Whereas nothing but the scene itself can convey his feelings. Loose ideas . . . is all that verbal description pretends to convey; and this is not done by high colouring; but to be aimed at by plain appropriate, intelligible terms.⁶

This sounds rather like T.S. Eliot, and is obviously the classicist rejecting the presentation of the feelings of the artist in favour of the delineation of the object of experience. On another occasion Gilpin defends high colouring but makes his objective attitude even clearer:

⁵Walter Jackson Bate, Criticism: the Major Texts (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 3.

⁶Remarks on Forest Scenery and Other Woodland Views . . . , 3rd ed. (London, 1808), II, 69-70.

By high colouring is not meant a string of rapturous epithets, (which is the feeblest mode of description) but an attempt to analyze the views of nature--to open their several parts in order to shew the effect of the whole--to mark their tints, and varied lights--and to express all this detail in terms as appropriate, and yet as vivid, as possible.⁷

Further proof of Gilpin's devotion to the theory of imitation is his acceptance of the epic as the greatest genre.⁸ This adulation of the epic reveals a primary concern with things "out there" as the objects of artistic attention. The epic "imitates" external characters and events; it contrasts to the subjective lyric, which consists of the thoughts and feelings of the poet. The romantics considered the lyric the grandest production of literature because the lyric is essentially subjective.⁹ But the vision of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is not Gilpin's.

His reverence for the epic also proves Gilpin's concern for the ideal. Neo-classicists generally regarded the epic as the noblest kind of poetry. According to Bate, this opinion was founded on the thesis that the actions and characters of the heroic poem present "that ideal perfection

⁷Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland [abbreviation: Northern Tour] (London, 1786), I, xix.

⁸Ibid., II, 12n.

⁹See Abrams, pp. 84-88.

of which, in a degree varying according to his own character, [a man] as a particular is only a faulty image."¹⁰ Wimsatt and Brooks cite as proof of the relationship between ideal imitation and epic Sidney's statement that the epic "doth not only reach and move to truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth."¹¹ Gilpin echoes this statement. "Nothing exalts the mind so much, as to see the great actions of our fellow creatures brought before the eye."¹² And, as I pointed out earlier, Gilpin believes that the material of literature is not mere actuality but heightened reality. But the reality of an epic is so elevated that the genre is extraordinarily demanding: ". . . tho the literary world abounds with admirable productions in the lower walks of poetry, an epic is the wonder of an age."¹³

Various of Gilpin's rules of literary art stem from his belief that art is to present in pure form what is most essential in nature. The primary of these rules is decorum. All that offends decency or fitness is to be excluded.¹⁴

¹⁰Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 10.

¹¹William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, Literary Criticism: a Short History (New York: Knopf, 1957), p. 196.

¹²Northern Tour, II, 12n.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴J.W.H. Atkins, English Literary Criticism: 17th and 18th Centuries (London: Methuen, 1951), p. 12.

Propriety is for Gilpin an important criterion of literary excellence. That he sees the relationship between the theory of ideal imitation and the rule of decorum is evident from his statement that in the natural scene, "Whether it be sublime, or beautiful, there is generally something mixed with it of a nature unsuitable to it."¹⁵ And the unsuitable must never be allowed. For instance, Gilpin criticizes Tacitus for failing to observe the rule that: "A Roman should speak like a Roman; and a barbarian like a barbarian."¹⁶ Tacitus allows a barbarian chief to speak with elegance, perspicacity, and coherence of argument. This impropriety would not have occurred if he had followed the "admirable rules with regard to propriety of character"¹⁷ formulated by Horace:

Si discentis erunt fortunis dicta
Romani tollunt equitas, peditesque cachinum.¹⁸

If the language of a dramatic character varies
from his situation in life the absurdity will be
received with contempt.¹⁹

¹⁵"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 128n.

¹⁶Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of Great Britain; Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland [abbreviation: Scottish Tour] (London, 1789), I, 105.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, I, 106.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*, II, xiv.

Gilpin even accuses Homer and Virgil of impropriety in giving their heroes unsuitable weapons:

The earliest impropriety of this kind we find in Homer, who adorned the shield of his hero with the richest sculpture; and in this he was followed by another great poet. I should allow a little sculpture on the mail and helmet: but the shield, which was to defend them,--which was to offer itself to every brunt, and of course to be often defaced, had certainly nothing to do with ornament.²⁰

Gilpin's insistence on structural unity is another logical result of belief in ideal imitation. The concern for unity is really a concern for harmonious order, for an integrated ideal synthesis of the facts of actuality. If all the parts are harmoniously subordinated to, but contributing toward, a unified whole, the result is an "imitation" of the fundamental order and decorum of the universal.²¹ Thus

'Tis not the lip, or eye, we beauty call,
But the joint force and full result of all.²²

Gilpin insists that it is a great error "to be more attentive to the finishing of parts, than to the production of a whole."²³

²⁰Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Southern Tour] (London, 1804), p. 22.

²¹Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 19.

²²Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," ll. 245-246. Pastoral Poetry and "An Essay on Criticism," ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, 1961), pp. 267-268.

²³Forest Scenery, I, 260.

In another instance he substantiates this thesis by citing Virgil:

. . . those things which produce a whole, are of course the principal foundation of beauty. So thought a great master of composition. With him no man was entitled to the name of artist, who could not produce a whole. However exquisitely he might finish, he would still be defective.

Infelix operis summa, quia ponere totum²⁴
Nesceiet. -----

And Gilpin even subscribes to the dramatic unities,²⁵ as rules contributory to the final end of a unified and coherent work of art.

Gilpin also insists on simplicity in literary composition. This criterion was, according to Lovejoy, the sacred catchword of the eighteenth-century classicist.²⁶ It too reflects a belief in the order of the universal. And simplicity has to share with unity Gilpin's praise of the principal foundation of beauty. Gilpin asserts that there are various kinds of simplicity: ". . . the simplicity of the familiar letter differs from the simplicity of history; and the simplicity of a poem, from the simplicity of both. . . ." But, "Simplicity, no doubt, is the foundation of beauty in every

²⁴An Essay on Prints, 5th ed. (London, 1802), p. 14.

²⁵Essay on Prints, p. 2; Five Essays, p. 106.

²⁶Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: Putnam's, 1960), p. 143.

species of composition. . . ."27

The classicist's insistence on unity and simplicity indicates not only his belief in the essential order and harmony of the universe; it also indicates his belief that art's function is to afford knowledge of the essential nature of reality. And this knowledge is knowable only by man's reason. The reason is the faculty which distinguishes man from the lower creation; it is identical in all men, and it is the faculty which allows insight into universal truth. To this reason the artist must appeal.²⁸ Therefore, truth must be presented in terms of clear and distinct ideas. The neo-classicist's dislike of multiplicity and complexity is thus based on his confidence in reason.

The reliance on reason also results in an emphasis on clarity. If art's function is to afford knowledge, then the work of art must communicate lucidly and immediately.²⁹ The concern of Restoration and eighteenth-century critics with clarity of expression is well-known. And Bate cites as proof of this preoccupation the couplet stating that:

. . . Phoebus touch'd the Poet's trembling Ear
With one supreme Commandment, Be thou Clear.³⁰

²⁷Northern Tour, I, xviii.

²⁸Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 22.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 8.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 38.

This commandment Gilpin reiterates. "A writer should treat his subject clearly, though he write upon obscurity."³¹

Gilpin, in fact, advocates a literary style so clear that the style is totally subsumed into meaning. "If indeed, either in literary or in picturesque composition you endeavour to draw the reader, or the spectator from the subject to the mode of executing it, your affectation disgusts."³² You must be equally careful, however, not to execute in a slovenly manner.

Language, like light, is a medium; and the true philosophic stile, like the light from a north window, exhibits objects clearly, and distinctly, without soliciting attention to itself. In subjects of amusement indeed, language may gild somewhat more, and colour the dies of fancy. . . . [But] the stile of some writers resembles a bright light placed between the eye, and the thing to be looked at. The light shews itself; and hides the object.³³

The matter is all-important; the manner is only the means.

The author must not be obscure; therefore, the critic must not be an obscurantist. Gilpin shares Dr. Johnson's faith in common sense. He has no patience with far-fetched interpretation. Commenting on Virgil's description of the herd of deer Aeneas sees in Africa, Gilpin praises the effective visual imagery of the clearly detailed scene. Virgil

³¹Essay on Prints, p. 9.

³²"Essay I. On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, p. 18.

³³Ibid., p. 18n.

. . . introduces the herd, just as a painter would have done. From the larger group he detaches a subordinate one:

-----Tres litore cervos
Prospicit errantes; hos tota armenta sequenter
Atergo,-----

I need not conceal, that some commentators have found in these three stags that the herd followed, the poet's inclination to aristocracy; and others have supposed, he meant a compliment to the triumvirate. It is the commentator's business to find out a recondite meaning: common sense is satisfied with what is most obvious.³⁴

It is quite clear that Gilpin believes the most obvious meaning is the most important one. The work of art must communicate readily to all men. Virgil, if he is any good, may be expected to abound with what Dr. Johnson requires--"images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo."³⁵ For, as Johnson says, ". . . by the common sense of readers uncorrupted by all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning must finally be decided all claim to poetical honours."³⁶ The recondite interpretation is invalid because it is extraneous to the function of poetry and irrelevant to the evaluation of poetic merit.

His critical comments on Virgil's imagery reveal not only Gilpin's belief in clarity and common sense, but also his attitude toward literary pictorialism. This parson is

³⁴Northern Tour, II, 266.

³⁵Samuel Johnson, "Life of Gray," Lives of the English Poets, ed. George B. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), III, 441.

³⁶Ibid.

"in search of the picturesque" wherever it may be found. And he can often find it in literature, especially in the works of Virgil, Thomson, Dyer, and Gray, but also in the writings of Homer, Pindar, Milton, and Pope. By far the greatest part of Gilpin's criticism is related in some way to the concept of picturesque poetry. And it is in this area of literary criticism that his principles become most entangled.

In some respects, Gilpin's interest in pictorial clarity and composition of imagery is typically neo-classical. Jean H. Hagstrum has devoted an entire book to the tracing of the tradition of literary pictorialism from classical antiquity to the eighteenth century, and proving its strong effect on neo-classical poetry and criticism.³⁷ This study is proof that Gilpin's concern with the picturable image is not only a result of his interest in the picturesque (in Hussey's sense),³⁸ but also of his oneness with a venerable classical tradition.

First, it must be noted that the interest in the clearly delineated pictorial image is a corollary to the concept of art as the imitation of external reality. As Hagstrum has shown, neo-classical literary pictorialism has its roots in the ancient and Renaissance concept of art as a mirror

³⁷The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958).

³⁸Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927), p. 4.

(rather than a lamp) and the ancient critical concept of enargeia or lifelike vividness.³⁹ Pictorial and graphic arrangement of detail are obviously means by which literary art can hold a mirror up to nature. Gilpin is aware of this function of pictorial imagery:

Mr. Gray has given us a very picturesque view . . . in describing the march of Edward I.;
 As down the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side
 He wound with toilsome march his long array.
 Stout Glouster stood aghast in speechless trance:
 To arms! cried Mortimer; and couched his quivering lance.
 Through the passage in the mountains we see the troops winding round at a great distance. Among those nearer the eye, we distinguish the horse and foot; and on the foreground, the action and expression of the principal commanders.⁴⁰

Virgil has given us the idea with great strength of expression.

-----Spumea circum
 Saxa fremunt; laterique illisa refunditui alga.
 The pencil could not give the idea so precise. The pencil gives only form and colour: Virgil's description gives motion.⁴¹

Gilpin's awareness of this imitative value of imagery is not unique. There was in his day a great deal of iconic poetry (that is--poetry in which the presentation of details is guided by an imagined picture), and a great deal of criticism which concerned itself with the pictorial analysis of literary

³⁹Page 129.

⁴⁰"On Landscape Painting," Five Essays, pp. 137-138n.

⁴¹Scottish Tour, II, 45.

composition. His awareness is shared with Dryden and Pope.⁴²

The critical belief in pictorial poetry was also supported by the neo-classical belief in the essential sisterhood of the arts. The Abbé Batteaux proves this sisterhood by reducing the fine arts to one principle: "'La Nature, c'est-à-dire tout ce qui est, ou que nous concevons aisément comme possible, voilà le prototype ou le modèle des Arts.'" ⁴³ He uses this thesis to prove the interrelationship of poetry and painting and to justify (indeed to demand) pictorial poetry. All poetry must be "'une image artificielle, un tableau, dont le vrai & unique mérite consiste dans le bon choix, la disposition, la ressemblance: ut Pictura Poesis.'" ⁴⁴ As a result of such a belief there was in the eighteenth century, as Hagstrum says, "a determination of poet and critic alike to act upon the Horatian phrase ut pictura poesis as though it were a command."⁴⁵ The deliberate analogizing between the arts we have already seen Gilpin display. On another occasion he indicates even more clearly his belief in the essential "sameness" of some aspects of poetry and plastic art. He refers to the patriarchal head with the furrowed forehead, prominent cheekbone, and austere brow of Homer's Jupiter,

⁴²Hagstrum, pp. 173-242.

⁴³Quoted Hagstrum, p. 134.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 134-135.

⁴⁵Page 131.

"which he had probably seen finely represented in some statue. . . ." ⁴⁶ And Gilpin goes on to explain that poets must frequently copy sculptors. "It is much more probable that the poet copied forms from the sculptor, who must be supposed to understand them better, from having studied them more; than that the sculptor should copy them from the poet." ⁴⁷ He seems in this instance to see no essential difference between the type of imitation suitable to the poet and that suitable to the plastic artist. He is clearly in the tradition of William Whitehead, who asserted that "the 'pencil' was the proper test of any 'piece of poetry' whatever." ⁴⁸ And of Joseph Warton, who believed that Dryden's song for St. Cecelia's day would form an admirable drawing for the wall of a drawing room. ⁴⁹ The poet and painter both create imitations of the ideal central forms of external nature. Their materials are different, but the final imitations are essentially the same.

This close interrelationship between the arts Gilpin makes even more explicit in his discussion of a Biblical image:

⁴⁶"On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 10n.

⁴⁸Hagstrum, p. 131.

⁴⁹Ibid.

We have a striking picture of a morning sun . . . in the short account given us of Lot's escape from Sodom. We are told, The sun was risen upon the earth, when Lot entered into Zoar. Descriptive poetry and painting must both have the objects of sense before them. Neither of them deals in abstracted ideas. . . . I believe every picturesque object is capable of shining as a poetical one. The passage before us is both poetical and picturesque. A relation of the plain fact would have been neither.⁵⁰

But this passage, typical of Gilpin's comments on poetry, has in it some fifth-column workers against the neo-classical premises and, therefore, criteria. These are the indications that, in Gilpin's opinion, art appeals to the senses rather than to the reason. Descriptive poetry deals with objects of sense, not with abstract ideas. The attitude here is that which Hussey describes as pre-romantic:

The reason wants to know, not to experience sensations. The romantic movement was an awakening of sensation, and, among other sensations, that of sight required exercising. Thus the picturesque interregnum between classic and romantic art was necessary in order to enable the imagination to form the habit of seeing through the eyes.⁵¹

Gilpin's attitude is a reflection of this turning away from the conviction that the exercise of reason in order to grasp truth is the primary duty of the viewer or the reader of the work of art.

Also, this passage, like most of Gilpin's criticism, has a non-humanist orientation that is in sharp contrast to

⁵⁰Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Western Tour], 2nd ed. (London, 1808), p. 270.

⁵¹The Picturesque, p. 4.

classical concepts of literature. Gilpin's attitude seems to be part of what Wimsatt and Brooks call the "general movement of human nature (toward landscape) which was in progress throughout the 18th century, a substitution of landscape for the older ethical structure of values as the objective counterpart of human emotions."⁵² Gilpin is, generally, concerned with literature which imitates landscape painting rather than that which imitates history painting. There are exceptions, some of which I have discussed, but the majority of his picturesque images are images paralleling the paintings of Claude or Salvator Rosa. Fittingly enough, this is especially true of his comments about the "landscape poets". He praises Thomson for his picturesque delineation of the beautiful view from Enville:

I cannot describe this distance better, than in the words of Thomson, who . . . seems to have collected all the ingredients of this landscape from some hill in the neighbourhood.

Mean time you gain the height, from whose fair brow
The bursting prospect spreads immense around:
And snatch'd o'er hill and dale, and wood and lawn,
And verdant field, and darkening heath between,
And village imbosomed soft in trees,
And spiry towns by dusky columns mark'd
Of rising smoak, your eye excursive roams.⁵³

He criticizes Dyer because "his distances . . . are all con-

⁵²Literary Criticism, p. 266.

⁵³Scottish Tour, II, 186.

fusion, and indeed not easy to separate from his foregrounds." And in many other respect Dyer does not compose "so good a landscape as might have been expected."⁵⁴ But Gilpin also makes many remarks about Virgil's landscapes. "It is remarkable," he says in the Northern Tour, "that we find scarce any disposition of ground that belongs to mountain scenery, of which Virgil has not taken notice."⁵⁵ And it is his picturesque landscapes that chiefly please Gilpin. There is a similar concentration on the landscape pictorialism in his criticism of Milton, Pope and Gray. I do not mean to suggest that Gilpin believes the landscapes the most important parts of these poets' works, but only that he is especially interested in landscape pictorialism and considers literary landscapes worthy of serious and extensive analysis. His attitude is in contrast to that displayed in such typical neo-classical statements as these of Du Bos and Johnson: "The finest landscape, were it even Titian's or Caraccio's does not affect us. . . ." and "A blade of grass is always a blade of grass. . . . Men and women are my subjects of enquiry. . . ."⁵⁶ The strict classicist was only interested in moral knowledge, and

⁵⁴Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Wye Tour] (London, 1782), pp. 60 and 59.

⁵⁵II, 79.

⁵⁶Quoted Bate, Classic to Romantic, pp. 2-3.

this is to be gained from human action.⁵⁷ Gilpin is interested in landscapes, even if they have no proven relevance to the human condition.

Actually, Gilpin's unconcern with the function of the poet as teacher is a significant indication of romantic orientation. For the classicist literature must amuse and instruct; art must develop man's capacity to react vitally and sympathetically to the truth;⁵⁸ good writing must be founded on moral learning.⁵⁹ These concepts, based on the belief that man's reason is capable of comprehending the ideal that comprises both the true and the beautiful, led by the eighteenth century to the frequent emphasis, in poetry and criticism, on purely didactic values.⁶⁰ Pope's use of the verse essay and Johnson's demand for poetic justice are indications of the interest in literature's instructive function. But Gilpin seems not at all concerned with literature's power to please by instructing. He is interested only in its power to please by raising pleasurable sensations. His attitude is, no doubt, partially the result of the new empirical and psychological orientation in criticism. British empirical philosophy, especially that of Hobbes, Locke and

⁵⁷Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 3.

⁵⁸Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts, p. 7.

⁵⁹Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 7.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 6.

Hume, had proven that all knowledge comes from sense experience. A question that consequently arose was whether we could know any reality except our feelings. One of the results of the negative answer was an increased critical attention to the pleasurable sensations stimulated by works of art. And Gilpin's attitude suggests that what Wimsatt and Brooks say about the last half of the eighteenth century is true, that

. . . both feeling and the act of valuing were theoretically detached from a certain something--an Aristotelian structure of ideas, a substantive belief about God, man, and the universe--and were left either floating free of reference or were attached to another area of experience provided or newly emphasized in another vision of reality --the new vision of the empirical and the sensational.⁶¹

Such an attitude, where the greatest artistic values are pleasurable sensations, is romantic in that it is a turning away from the conviction that the full exercise of reason can grasp the objective ideal that is the true material of art.⁶²

Correlated to this turning away from the reason is the increasing interest in the imagination--some sort of faculty of spontaneous suprarational perception--as the faculty capable of the most satisfactory aesthetic response. Gilpin frequently refers to the perceptive imagination, but like most of his contemporaries he is not quite sure what it is.

⁶¹Page 253.

⁶²Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 94.

Often Gilpin seems to conceive of the imagination as an image-making capacity. This is a concept that is essentially classical and quite different from Wordsworth's view of it as an intuititional creative faculty. Gilpin says of the advantages of the poet over the painter:

[The poet] knows his advantage. He speaks to the imagination; and if he deal only in general ideas, . . . every reader will form the phantom according to his own conception. But the painter, who speaks to the eye, has a more difficult work. He cannot deal in general terms: he is obliged to particularize. . . .⁶³

But even here the imagination is depicting ghosts, phenomena which men rarely encounter; so clearly the imagination is not, as Wimsatt and Brooks say it was in earlier criticism, "centered in sober literalism of sense impressions and the survival of these in the memory."⁶⁴ It is evidently an intuititional faculty of conception, not a process of rational deduction.

The anti-rational orientation of this imagination is clearly revealed by Gilpin's relating it to the sublime. The sublime is one of Gilpin's great literary interests: it appeals to the imagination; it takes the imagination by force. And Gilpin's sublime is decidedly non-rational.

One of Gilpin's most interesting statements draws a distinction between the grand and the sublime. This distinction, which gives the laurels to the sublime, is quite out of

⁶³Wye Tour, p. 98.

⁶⁴Page 385.

keeping with neo-classical criteria:

. . . when the mind can so far master an image, as to reduce it within a distinct outline; it may remain grand but ceases to be sublime, if I may venture to suggest a distinction.⁶⁵

This distinction is implicit in all Gilpin's criticism of the sublime. And it is completely at variance with the attitude of such a neo-classic critic as Isaac Hawkins Browne, who believes the true sublime exists only when the harmonious order of an object is apparent and when the object, though grand, is comprehensible to the viewer.⁶⁶ If these conditions are not present the sublime reverts to the chaotic. The judgement must be satisfied even by the sublime.

Gilpin totally rejects judgement as a response to the sublime. If an image, however grand, is open to full comprehension, "it then comes within the cognizance of judgement, an austere, and cold faculty; whose analytic process carrying light into every part, leaves no dark recesses for the terror of things without a name."⁶⁷ The sublime succeeds by appealing to the imagination:

If the artificial representation of every subject seems rather to require a balance of shade, in sublime subjects it is still more required. All writers on sublime subjects

⁶⁵Scottish Tour, II, 63-64.

⁶⁶Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime: a Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1935), p. 66.

⁶⁷Scottish Tour, II, 64.

deal in shadows, and obscurity. The grandeur of Jehovah is commonly represented by the Hebrew writers behind a cloud. The imagination makes up deficiencies by grander ideas, than it is possible for the pencil to produce. Many images owe much of their sublimity to their indistinctness; and frequently what we call sublime is the effect of that fear and fermentation which ensues in the imagination from its ineffectual efforts to conceive some dark, obscure idea beyond its grasp. Bring the same within the compass of it's comprehension, and it may continue great; but it will cease to be sublime.⁶⁸

These comments on the sublime and the imagination reveal Gilpin's reliance on what Bate calls "the premise of feeling."⁶⁹ Gilpin's sublime is a "suggestive" thing. Its function is not to disclose the formal quality of an object, but to "awaken an inference or feeling of the undetermined and undeclared."⁷⁰ It thus attempts to appeal to the feelings of the beholder as the vehicles of aesthetic response. Gilpin at one point states his interest in the feeling of sublimity; when the sensitive man is confronted by the sublime, "the mind startled into attention, summons all her powers, dilates her capacity, and from a baffled effort to comprehend what exceeds the limits of her embrace, shrinks back on herself with a kind of wild astonishment, and severe delight."⁷¹ The sensation of the excitement of the imagination is seen as a valid aesthetic

⁶⁸Forest Scenery, I, 262-263.

⁶⁹Classic to Romantic, pp. 129-159.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 156.

⁷¹Scottish Tour, II, 63.

response. And Gilpin's statement that you must handle the sublime image with care--"Bring the same within the compass of it's comprehension and . . . it will cease to be sublime."⁷² seems to foreshadow Kant's making the sublime a purely subjective concept, "not a quality residing in the object, but a state of mind awakened by an object."⁷³

Also, Gilpin's interest in sublime poetry which deal with stormy nights, ghosts, graveyards, and images of desolation may indicate a belief in poetry's ability to awaken agreeable sensations. It certainly suggests that he finds most sensations agreeable.⁷⁴ And his critical comments on Ossian all suggest a delight in the emotions, both fearful and tender, excited by such "sublime" poetry.

The unquestioning faith and delight in Ossian indicate Gilpin's acceptance of "the second of the two main things which English criticism made of the Longinian sublime--a philosophy of untrammelled great 'genius.'"⁷⁵ Gilpin explicitly states his preference for "the works of a great literary genius, which contain greater beauties, though perhaps blended with greater defects, than the laboured work of a less exalted, tho more correct writer."⁷⁶ In this statement there is nothing

⁷²Forest Scenery, I, 263.

⁷³Monk, p. 8.

⁷⁴See Bate, Classic to Romantic, pp. 129-131.

⁷⁵Wimsatt and Brooks, Literary Criticism, p. 289.

⁷⁶Forestry Scenery, II, 229.

that Dryden would have denied, but Gilpin applies the principle to particulars much more liberally than does Dryden. And Gilpin never suggests that Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare, whom he praises, would benefit from "improving" or that they would have been better had they lived in a more correct age. He likes them as they are, imperfections and all.

Gilpin does, in fact, occasionally reveal a certain amount of critical primitivism. It is evident in his comments on Ossian and Burns. Recognizing Burns's abilities, he stresses the "child of nature" and the "sensitivity" aspects of his work. Gilpin seems to believe that Burns is at an advantage because he is straight from the plow. But this primitivism, like the other romantic elements in Gilpin's work, is integrated with classical thought. Burns may be straight from the plow, but the real basis of his greatness is that his images are "caught from nature".⁷⁷ The imitation of nature is still the basic criterion; the poet is secondary to the mimetic poem.

Indeed the tradition of literary classicism has marked Gilpin for its own. Gilpin does accept (sometimes unknowingly) romantic premises and romantic criteria. But when he knows the two sets of criteria are in conflict, he tries to justify the romantic by the classical. The picturesque is presented

⁷⁷Scottish Tour, I, 215.

as an aid to the poet in his imitation of nature; the imagination is proven important as an image-making capacity; the primitive is praised as drawing images from nature. The man of taste is defending his taste as best he can with the traditional weapons of aesthetic battle.

CHAPTER III

GILPIN'S CRITICISM OF PAINTING

Gilpin's critical attitude to the art of painting is undoubtedly strongly influenced by the fact that his mature critical work is coeval with what Ellis Waterhouse calls the Classical Age of British painting.¹ This period, initiated in part by the patronage of George III, saw the foundation of the Royal Academy, the fruition of the Grand Style of Reynolds, the appearance of Wilson's Italianate landscapes and West's heroic historical compositions.

The age's theory of, and taste in, painting owe a great deal to the work of the Italian Renaissance. Waterhouse states:

Reynolds, and Richard Wilson at the same time, went to Italy with a different kind of inquiring ambition [than the earlier travellers']. The light of the Mediterranean world and its rich visual tradition broke over them, and they were incomparably enriched. Something of the same kind had happened in the field of architecture thirty years earlier to Lord Burlington. We may fairly say that the plant of British painting, which had long been slowly maturing, suddenly ripened into flower about 1750 under the warmth of the Italian sun.²

The result was the importation of Renaissance standards and an almost universal acceptance of the values that grand period

¹Painting in Britain 1530-1790 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953).

²Ibid., p. 164.

believed in. These are evident in the enormously important Discourses of Reynolds, which Waterhouse calls "the theoretical background against which the painting of the classical age must be considered. . . ."³ And certainly Gilpin is profoundly aware of the canons which the Discourses establish and the artistic values they laud.

Primary to Gilpin's criticism of painting, as to his criticism of literature, is the principle that art is an imitation of nature. Of course, as anyone who has read Professor Lovejoy knows, the principle of "imitating" or "following" nature could mean almost anything. It was the maxim of neo-classicism and of nearly all forms of revolt against that creed.⁴ As it applied to theories of painting, however, the principle of imitation of nature had one fairly clear implication. Painting was conceived of as a mimetic rather than an abstract art. As Robert R. Wark has commented, it was required to have a "direct and immediately preceivable point of contact with the world around us";⁵ its central element was the image. Gilpin certainly accepts this concept. He is interested in composition, harmony, light and shade, colour, and other abstract elements, but he believes the raison d'être

³Ibid., p. 158.

⁴Arthur O. Lovejoy, "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm," Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: Putnam's, 1960), pp. 69-70.

⁵"Introduction," Discourses on Art by Joshua Reynolds, ed. Robert R. Wark (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1959), p. xviii.

of a painting is its resemblance to the external world. As he says on one occasion, ". . . a picture is not an object itself but only the representation of an object."⁶ The statement is obviously an exaggeration, but it does show that Gilpin believes painting to be almost entirely representational in function.

It is important to note, immediately, that Gilpin is not only concerned with painting that depicts natural scenery. Scenery tends to monopolize his attention because the representation of natural scenes is his own hobby. But he is also interested in art that represents still life, or animals, or that represents the appearance of men, the manners of men, or the passions of men. "A painter's nature is whatever he imitates. . . ."⁷ Van Huysum's flower pieces are copies of nature;⁸ Snyder's "The Wolf and Dogs" is bad because everything is strained and unnatural;⁹ Vandyck's Earl of Denbeigh

⁶Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland [abbreviation: Northern Tour] (London, 1786), II, 16.

⁷"Essay I. On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, on Picturesque Subjects; with a Poem on Landscape Painting (London, 1808), p. 27.

⁸"Observations, on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex . . . ," Observations on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales. . . . [abbreviation: Eastern Tour] (London, 1809), p. 54.

⁹Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty. . . . [abbreviation: Southern Tour] (London, 1804), p. 118.

"looks up with a countenance so full of nature, and character, that you are amazed the power of colours can express life so strongly."¹⁰ Gilpin objects to Sarah Young in "The Rake's Progress" because her fidelity to the man who has discarded her is "rather unnatural."¹¹ But he praises Annibal Caracci's "Dead Christ":

This is an admirable picture. The dead figure is lying on the lap of the Virgin, who is fainting over it. Both these figures are happily conceived, especially the dead one; the anatomy of which we particularly admired; its pallid hue also, and the stiffness of the limbs. Over the dead body is kneeling another female figure, the attitude, and expression of which are among the best passages in the picture. The drapery is but indifferent. Near this figure is another in strong agony, divided between an attention to the dead body and the Virgin. . . . The whole is a scene of nature and expression.¹²

Moreover, Gilpin believes that the painter, like the poet, must imitate the empirical ideal. The painter's aim must be a just representation of general nature.

One aspect of this theory is that the artist should choose as his subject matter only those things which are normal, usual, ordinary. Gilpin frequently states this canon, and makes it most explicit in Five Essays:

¹⁰Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of Great Britain; Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland [abbreviation: Scottish Tour] (London, 1789), II, 59.

¹¹An Essay on Prints, 5th ed. (London, 1802), p. 162.

¹²Southern Tour, pp. 119-120.

The curious, and fantastic forms of nature are by no means the favourite objects of the lover of landscape. . . . The lusus naturae is the naturalist's province, not the painter's. The spiry pinnacles of the mountain, and the castle-like arrangement of the rock, give no particular pleasure to the picturesque eye. It is fond of the simplicity of nature; and sees most beauty in her most usual forms. The Giant's causeway in Ireland may strike it as a novelty; but the lake of Killarny attracts it's attention.¹³

Beauty is found in those things which are consistent with the general pattern of nature, not in any aberration from it.

Gilpin, like Horace and Buffier, believes in the beauty and truth of the general order of the universe.¹⁴

But even those things which are suitable for artistic representation are not to be copied with photographic realism. Gilpin says: "Yet still in copying the several objects, and passages of nature, we should not copy with that painful exactness, with which Quintin Matsis, for instance, painted a face. This is a sort of plagiarism below the dignity of painting."¹⁵ By copying nature Gilpin means capturing that central form which in the individual is imperfectly or incompletely realized. I suggested in the preceding chapter that Gilpin believes poetry imitates an empirical ideal. He believes this also of painting, and explains the belief in much greater detail. The central form, generalized from many

¹³"Essay II. On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 43.

¹⁴See Walter Jackson Bate, Criticism: the Major Texts (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 4.

¹⁵"Essay II. On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, p. 163.

particulars, Gilpin equates with both truth and beauty. The equation is one with a tradition going back to Aristotle (or the platonizing critics of Aristotle).

Gilpin states that the central form is the essential truth of an object: "He who has seen only one oak-tree, has no compleat idea of an oak in general: but he who has examined thousands of oak-trees . . . obtains a full and compleat idea of it."¹⁶ It is this full and complete idea that is to be conveyed by painting: "These discriminating features the painter seizes; and the more faithfully he transfuses them into his work, the more excellent will be his representation."¹⁷ The painting which does fix this central form "may even be called more natural than nature itself. . . ."¹⁸ These statements are all implicitly based on the concept of nature as an immanent force, or, as Hussey describes it, a force "always striving to produce perfection of form, but always deflected from perfection by evil 'accidents' until enabled to do so by man's divinely ordered rational faculties."¹⁹ The purpose of art, then, is "to realize the ideal beauty which we only glimpse in nature as she actually is."²⁰ As Gilpin explains:

¹⁶"On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 51.

¹⁷"On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, pp. 160-161.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁹Christopher Hussey, "Introduction," in Capability Brown by Dorothy Stroud (London: Country Life, 1950), p. 15.

²⁰R.L. Brett, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: a Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), p. 203.

There are few forms, either in animate, or inanimate nature, which are completely perfect. We seldom see a man, or a horse, without some personal blemish: and as seldom a mountain, or tree, in its most beautiful form. The painter of fictitious scenes therefore not only takes his forms from the most compleat individuals, but from the most beautiful parts of each individual; as the sculptor gave a purer figure by selecting beautiful parts, than he could have done by taking his model from the most beautiful single form.²¹

He here seems to be a firm believer that the models and forms for artistic imitation are not the objects of external nature but forms selected and abstracted from the objects of sense-perception.²² The "nature" of artistic imitation is a composite ideal, synthesized from parts found separately in nature. The world around us is a brazen world; the artist's is a golden one, for it is, according to Gilpin:

One archetype compleat, of sovereign grace.
Here nature sees her fairest forms more fair;
Owns them as hers, yet owns herself excelled²³
By what herself produced.

Gilpin also insists that the artist ignore minute details and concentrate on reproducing the prominent and characteristic elements of form. This dictum is not in conflict with the theory of the synthetic ideal; it merely suggests

²¹"On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, p. 161.

²²See M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Norton, 1958), p. 36.

²³"On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 53.

that the "archetype," though perfect, is not a detailed but a generalized form. Gilpin states that the artist who does depict minute detail "instead of gaining the character of an exact copier of nature by a nice representation of such trifles . . . would be esteemed puerile and pedantic."²⁴ He explains that "at a little distance you can easily distinguish the oak from the beech. _It is this general form, not any particular detail, which the artist is instructed to get by heart. The same holds with regard to other parts of nature."²⁵ Gilpin quotes Dr. Johnson in support of this contention:

--The following remark I found in a work of Dr. Johnson's; which I transcribe, not only because it is judicious, and may be introduced here in place, but because it affords a new argument to shew the resemblance between poetry and painting. Johnson was a critic of the former; but I never heard, that he was a judge of the latter. His opinion therefore in a point of this kind was unbiased.--"The business of the poet, says he, is, to examine--not the individual, but the species--to remark general properties, and large appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades, in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit, in his portraits of nature, such prominent, and striking facts as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness."²⁶

As I have presented it thus far, Gilpin's is a coherent,

²⁴Remarks on Forest Scenery and Other Woodland Views
 . . . , 3rd ed. (London, 1808), I, 231.

²⁵"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays,
 p. 123n.

²⁶Forest Scenery, I, 232-233.

classical theory of painting. Painting is mimetic; its beauty and truth are the result of a just representation of general nature; nature is the generalized and idealized form, abstracted from, but superior to, actual individual forms. But the coherence is rather the result of my selectivity of quotation than Gilpin's systematization of theory. Although the theory outlined above does seem to be the real basis of his criticism of painting, Gilpin nowhere states the system in an organized manner and nowhere investigates the validity of its principles. Moreover, he often makes statements which seem completely incompatible with this classical theory.

One contradictory principle is that the painting's role is merely to excite in the imagination the idea of the scenes it represents. This doctrine may seem to be an extension of Dr. Johnson's statement that an image must recall the original to every mind, but it has different implications. As Professor Lovejoy has pointed out, Dr. Johnson is concerned that the work of art have universal appeal;²⁷ Gilpin occasionally states that its only appeal is its ability to recall the original. The painter must present only the prominent and characteristic aspects of form, says Gilpin, because "the picture is not so much the ultimate end, as the medium, through which the ravishing scenes of nature are excited in

²⁷"The Parallel of Deism and Classicism," Essays in the History of Ideas, p. 91.

the imagination."²⁸ He applies this principle to history painting, portraiture, and landscape painting, coming finally to the conclusion that art, especially the landscape painter's art, is only a poor imitation of the real thing. As ". . . the utmost the landscape painter can do, is to excite the ideas of those delightful scenes which he represents, it follows, that those scenes themselves must have a much greater effect on the imagination. . . ."²⁹ He says in one of his essays: "The more refined our taste grows from the study of nature, the more insipid are the works of art. Few of it's efforts please. The idea of the great original is so strong, that the copy must be pure, if it do not disgust."³⁰ It almost sounds as if ordinary nature is preferable to the "archetype compleat, of sovereign grace" and "nature's fairest forms more fair."³¹

Undoubtedly this confusion of principles is partially due to the conflict between Gilpin's romantic taste and classical training, between the love of wild nature and the theoretical need to correct it, improve it, raise it to the human

²⁸Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Western Tour], 2nd ed. (London, 1808), p. 176.

²⁹Ibid., p. 177.

³⁰"On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 57.

³¹Ibid., p. 53.

mind. But the confusion is also due to Gilpin's reliance on both the mimetic and pragmatic theories of art,³² and his failure to clarify their provenance and inter-relationship.

Essentially, Gilpin thinks of art as mimetic, an objective imitation of nature; but he frequently utilizes the concept that art is to be evaluated in terms of its effect on the viewer. He says, for instance:

. . . when it finds the characteristic touches of nature, the imagination immediately takes fire; and glows with a thousand beautiful ideas, suggested only by the canvas. When the canvas is therefore so artificially wrought as to suggest these ideas in the strongest manner, the picture is then most perfect.³³

This passage indicates the inter-relationship of the mimetic and pragmatic theories. And it thus explains, if only by implication, the grounds for reconciliation between the statements that art forms the perfect archetype and that art's only purpose is to recall the original, which is often more pleasing than the copy. The key term is "imagination".

The imagination that the painter here rouses is much like the image-making capacity that Gilpin's poet appeals to. It is neither a photographically reproductive nor an irrational creative faculty. It is a supra-rational, abstracting, synthesizing, idealizing faculty. That the imagination creates images is indicated in this quotation from the Northern Tour:

³²As differentiated by Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp, pp. 8-21.

³³Northern Tour, II, 13.

--But all this, all that words can express, or even the pencil describe, are gross insipid substitutes of the living scene. We may be pleased with the description, and the picture: but the soul can feel neither, unless the force of our own imagination aid the poet's, or the painter's art; exalt the idea, and picture things unseen.³⁴

In a footnote Gilpin tries to reconcile this statement with the theory of ideal imitation:

This is not at all inconsistent with what I said in the 119th page. . . . The nearer we approach the character of nature in every mode of imitation, no doubt the better: yet still there are many irregularities and deformities in the natural scene, which we may wish to correct--that is, to correct, by improving one part of nature by another.³⁵

But the concepts remain tangled. Their inter-relationship is explained a few pages further on:

. . . a picture is not an object itself; but only the representation of an object. We may easily therefore conceive, that it may fall below it's archetype; and also below the imagination of the spectator, whose fancy may be more picturesque, than the hand of the artist, who composed the picture.³⁶

This statement explains a good deal. Art is primarily mimetic, and it does attempt to represent an archetype, a synthetic ideal. But the ideal can never be perfectly realized in art; it exists in the mind. The artist must do his best to raise

³⁴Ibid., pp. 10-11.

³⁵Ibid., p. 11n.

³⁶Ibid., p. 17.

the idea of this perfect form in the mind of the observer. Therefore, Gilpin says, "when the canvas is . . . so artificially wrought, as to suggest these scenes in the strongest manner, the picture is then most perfect."³⁷ Also, the real scene may more effectively excite the imagination to form the ideal than does the work of art. The imagination "has the power of creating something more itself."³⁸ I do not suggest that this theory explains away all the inconsistencies; but the seemingly contradictory statements, if reconsidered with this theory in mind, do make much more sense. It is, however, notable that the coherence relies on a subjective aesthetic, where the value of a work is dependent on its effect on the mind of the observer.

But I must temporarily suspend discussion of the imagination and consider some other of Gilpin's ideas about painting's relation to its audience. Prominent among these is the theory that painting must address itself to a nearly universal audience. The fact that he quotes Dr. Johnson's dictum about not numbering the streaks of the tulips suggests his acceptance of the principle of aesthetic uniformitarianism. This principle, that the aim of the artist is to express that beauty which will be comprehended and appreciated by everybody, is called by Lovejoy "pure neo-classic doctrine."³⁹ It is an

³⁷Ibid., p. 13.

³⁸Ibid., p. 16.

³⁹"Deism and Classicism," Essays, p. 92.

extension of the concern for general truth, that which is fundamental and constant. Gilpin indicates his acceptance of this theory in ways other than merely quoting Dr. Johnson. For instance, he argues against the painter's copying nature's uncommon appearances. An overcast day produces colours of deep blue and rich purple even in near objects; the effect is very beautiful. But:

. . . I should be cautious in advising the painter to introduce it with that full strength, in which he may sometimes observe it. The appearance of blue and purple trees, unless in a very remote distance, offends: and tho the artist may have authority from nature for his practice; yet the spectator, who is not used to such effects, may be displeased.⁴⁰

For though the painter should avoid such images as are trite and vulgar, ". . . yet he should seize only those, which are easy and intelligible."⁴¹

But purpose of the work of art in being intelligible is to please all men, not to instruct them.⁴² Gilpin's attitude to painting, like his attitude to literature, is influenced by empiricism. Thus he is concerned with the pleasing sensations aroused by the painting. He believes that even history painting, which has the power to exalt the mind, is primarily a pleasing genre because the exaltation of the mind

⁴⁰Forest Scenery, I, 247.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 275.

is a pleasing sensation.⁴³ But painting can be "improving" because a love of art has a "tendency to meliorate the heart."⁴⁴ Gilpin here seems to accept a Shaftesburian equation of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. He quotes Gregory's Comparative View:

"An intimate acquaintance with the works of art and genius in their most beautiful and amiable forms, (says an agreeable writer,) harmonizes and sweetens the temper, opens and extends the imagination, and disposes to the most pleasing view of mankind and Providence. . . ."⁴⁵

Obviously Gilpin is interested in the effects of art on the feelings. His attitude is obviously related to what Bate calls "the great wave of conscious sentimentality that moved through the eighteenth century."⁴⁶

Finally, an aspect of Gilpin's subjective aesthetic of painting that must be noted is his belief in the value of emotional transport. I do not want to over-emphasize this belief. Generally Gilpin's comments suggest that the painting appeals to the essentially "rational" part of man's make-up. He suggests that a painting be judged "by its approach to nature, or its conformity to the rules of art."⁴⁷ He asserts that "picturesque pleasure arises from two sources--from the beauty, and combination of the objects represented; and from

⁴³Northern Tour, II, 12n.

⁴⁴Western Tour, p. 320.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Criticism: the Major Texts, p. 269.

⁴⁷Eastern Tour, pp. 67-68.

the exactness of representation."⁴⁸ And though he frequently says that the true value of a picture lies in its ability to rouse the imagination, the perceptive imagination is usually conceived of as a sort of speeded up process of ratiocination.⁴⁹ But occasionally he gives high praise to the painting which causes emotional transport. Sometimes, he says, an object

. . . strikes us beyond the power of thought--when the vox faucibus haeret; every mental operation is suspended. In this pause of intellect; this deliquim of the soul, an enthusiastic sensation of pleasure overspreads it, previous to any examination by the rules of art. . . . Here and there a capital picture will raise these emotions. . . .⁵⁰

"In general however," he later says, "the works of art affect us coolly; and allow the eye to criticize at leisure."⁵¹ And he seems to think that emotional transport is a reaction more appropriate to the works of God (nature) than to the works of man (art).

This discussion of transport brings us to the one aspect of Gilpin's "philosophical criticism" that remains to be considered: the nature and role of the artist and the creative process. Is Gilpin's artist a victim of the furor poeticus or is he a rational, workmanlike "maker"? In spite of his occasional statements to the contrary, Gilpin believes

⁴⁸Forest Scenery, I, 275.

⁴⁹See Northern Tour, II, 17.

⁵⁰"On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, pp. 49-50.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 50.

almost as strongly as Reynolds that the creative act is deliberate and conscious, operating according to a rational and discoverable pattern.⁵²

Knowledge is the artist's first requisite. In order to create artificial scenes, whether of history, still-life, or landscape, the painter must have "the correct knowledge of objects" and a thorough knowledge of the rules of art.⁵³ The correct knowledge of objects must be his first concern. Before the artist can hope to produce a good composition, he must be "well versed in copying the parts of nature."⁵⁴ Great application is required; for instance, ". . . the science of anatomy, even as it regards painting, is with difficulty attained; and few who have studied it all their lives, have attained perfection."⁵⁵ And knowledge is essential to greatness; the most perfect paintings are generally done ". . . by little labour, and great knowledge. It is knowledge only which inspires that free, and fearless, and determined pencil, so expressive in a skillful hand."⁵⁶

Knowledge of the rules is equally important. Gilpin so strongly believes in them that he writes an extremely long

⁵²See Wark, "Introduction," The Discourses of Reynolds, p. xxi.

⁵³"On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 52.

⁵⁴"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 93.

⁵⁵Essay III, "On the Art of Sketching Landscape," Five Essays, pp. 89-90.

⁵⁶Northern Tour, II, 13-14.

and incredibly dull poem in which he sets forth all the rules of art essential for the landscape painter to observe. I expect that the painter's gratitude was less than overwhelming. These rules, involving such standard neo-classic precepts as simplicity, unity of subject, balance of parts, and harmony, I will discuss later because they are also Gilpin's criteria for evaluating a painting. But that knowledge of them is as important, in Gilpin's eyes, for the painter as for the connoisseur proves that Gilpin does not believe in the "inspired idiot"⁵⁷ as painter. The artist must have a thorough knowledge of the principles of his craft.

One of the ways to knowledge that Gilpin recommends is study of the great masters. "In every part of painting, except execution, an artist may be assisted by the labours of those, who have gone before him."⁵⁸ The antique or classical models are especially valuable. They teach simplicity, composition, and elevation. Gilpin criticizes Rembrandt for having scorned the study of antique models; that scorn is the reason for his tendency to awkwardness and meanness.⁵⁹ Gilpin also recommends the study of Raphael and Michaelangelo: a knowledge of their work is the foundation of a "most accurate

⁵⁷The phrase is Kenneth Clark's. See Landscape into Art (London: John Murray, 1949).

⁵⁸Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Wye Tour] (London, 1782), p. 21.

⁵⁹Essay on Prints, pp. 59-60.

taste".⁶⁰ But he does not restrict the student to these great masters:

Thou who wouldst boldly seize
Superior excellence, observe, with care,
The style of every artist;⁶¹

However, Gilpin warns against slavish imitation: ". . . yet disdain/ To mimic even the best."⁶² The true artist will not be a mere copyist; he will learn from others only in order to improve his own creative powers. And he will not study the masters to the exclusion of nature.

Gilpin also insists that the one thing the artist cannot learn from models--ability in execution--is extremely important. By this he does not mean only that just as the writer must be able to formulate a correct sentence so must the painter be able to capture a likeness. Gilpin wants the painter to have ease of execution. "A certain heaviness always follows, when the artist is not sure of his stroke, and cannot execute his idea with precision. The reverse is the case, when he is certain of it, and gives it boldly."⁶³ This ease can only be acquired by long and careful practice.

But knowledge and skill are only prerequisites for the

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 48.

⁶¹"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 117.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Essay on Prints, p. 21.

real act of creation--"the judicious selection and arrangement of the parts of nature,"⁶⁴ the creation of a perfect whole, the just representation of general nature.

This creative act, though presented as a function of the imagination, is clearly a rational process with clearly comprehensible patterns. It is based on knowledge and operates as selection and arrangement. Gilpin states that there are two ways in which the creative process can work. The artist can copy directly from nature, improving as he goes, correcting faults in individual details, using his knowledge and skill to create a well composed whole, while still retaining the character of the subject. However:

There is still another amusement arising from the correct knowledge of objects; and that is the power of creating, and representing scenes of fancy; which is still more a work of creation than copying from nature. The imagination becomes a camera obscura, only with this difference, that the camera obscura represents objects as they really are: while the imagination, impressed with the most beautiful scenes, and chastened by the rules of art, forms it's pictures, not only from the most admirable parts of nature; but in the best taste.⁶⁵

The history painter is forced to use his imagination:

. . . the history painter . . . in all subjects, taken from remote times, is necessarily obliged to his imagination, formed as it ought to be, upon nature. If he give such a

⁶⁴"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 128n.

⁶⁵"On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, p. 52.

character to the hero he exhibits, as does not belye the truth of the story, as agrees with the times he represents, and with the rules of his art, his history piece is admired, though widely different, in many circumstances, from the real fact.⁶⁶

And the landscape painter is wise if he uses his:

. . . he who works from imagination--that is, he who culls from nature the most beautiful parts of her productions--a distance here; and there a foreground--combines them artificially, and removing every thing offensive, admits only such parts as are congruous and beautiful; will in all probability, make a much better landscape than he who takes all as it comes. . . .⁶⁷

From these statements it is obvious that the creative imagination, like the perceptive imagination, is really a faculty of recollection, improvement, and combination. The imagination seems to be only the faculty of reason working at a rapid rate and by means closely related to the process of deduction.

However, Gilpin, like almost all eighteenth-century critics, is aware that artistic creation involves something that is impossible to explain in purely rational terms. He believes in the power of genius:

But if true genius fire thee, if thy heart
Glow, palpitate with transport . . .

Haste, snatch thy pencil, bounteous Nature yields
To thee her choicest stores; and the glad Muse
Sits by assistant, aiming but to fan
The promethean flame, conscious her rules
Can only guide, not give, the warmth divine.⁶⁸

⁶⁶"On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, p. 162.

⁶⁷Northern Tour, I, xxvi-xxvii.

⁶⁸"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 68.

Here Gilpin is obviously referring to an irrational force. But his comments about genius are few indeed. It is not a force with which he feels at ease; one suspects that he thinks it not quite "respectable". Even when he is talking about the most elevated species of painting, Gilpin is loath to mention the need for genius:

History-painting is certainly the most elevated species. Nothing exalts the human mind so much, as to see the great actions of our fellow creatures brought before the eye. But this pleasure we seldom find in painting. So much is required of the history painter, so intimate a knowledge both of nature and art, that we rarely see a history piece, even from the best masters, that is able to raise raptures.⁶⁹

An "enthusiastic" response may be roused in the spectator, but what the painter requires is a knowledge of nature and art.

It is interesting to note, by the way, that Gilpin does subscribe to the standard neo-classical evaluation of the genres. The different types of painting are "placed" in a rigid hierarchical order. Gilpin places them thus (in descending order of precedence): history, portrait, landscape (and seascape), animal life (including sporting pictures), and still life.⁷⁰ I do not know quite where he places the "low-life" picture, the conversation piece, or various other types, but he quite clearly does accept the theory of the hierarchy of genres.

⁶⁹Northern Tour, II, 12n.

⁷⁰See, for example, Eastern Tour, p. 38.

But it is time to turn from Gilpin's "philosophical criticism" to his practical and specific criticism. His aesthetic theorizing, after all, is only an attempt to justify his applied criteria of judgement. It is the evaluation of particular paintings that is his basic interest. He wishes to know and to teach a sound system of critical values and criteria. As I suggested in the introduction, Gilpin's real concerns are those of the connoisseur. And though his aesthetic theorizing has been the despair of his commentators, his specific criticism has elicited their praise.

Gilpin was, I think, aware of his relative superiority as a connoisseur. When Mason had the bad taste to suggest that Gilpin's comments on painting "will bring upon you much, & I fear some well-deserved Criticism from Real Connoisseurs,"⁷¹ Gilpin defended himself with vigour:

--But now give me leave to tell you, that I differ very much from you in thinking my judgement cursory, with regard to pictures. To tell you the real truth, I have as good an opinion of it, as the judgement of any person I know: but then, (as your Scotchman premised, that he liked his grapes sour, before he asserted, that he had eaten them in the highest perfection in Scotland;) I must tell you, that I form my judgement very differently from the judgement of the generality of people. I hold cheap, masters; & hands; & first manners; & second manners; & this mode of colouring; & that. I judge merely by my own ideas of composition, effect, harmony, character, & expression. --I assert, moreover, my own competency in judging even from a slight view: for it is one of my rules, that if a picture does not strike the eye at once, it is defective.⁷²

⁷¹A personal letter from William Mason to William Gilpin, 8 June 1784; cited from Carl Paul Barbier's William Gilpin . . . (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 73.

⁷²A personal letter from Gilpin to Mason, 25 June 1784; cited Barbier, p. 74.

Similarly, when he is discussing Lord Orford's pictures, he prides himself that his evaluations are not based on prejudices but on the pictures' approach to nature and conformity to the rules of art.⁷³ And in many respects his is a true statement of his method of evaluation. But the criteria that he so objectively applies prove, more than any other aspect of his criticism of painting, that he is the heir of the Italian Renaissance and English neo-classicism.

The first things that Gilpin considers when criticizing a painting are those which relate to the production of a whole. "The production of a whole is the great effect that should be aimed at in a picture."⁷⁴ For in the painting, as in the poem, ". . . those things, which produce a whole, are of course the principal foundation of beauty."⁷⁵ These statements are in the tradition of Raphael and Leonardo. As Professor Artz explains, a distinguishing feature of the art of the High Renaissance is that "details are submitted to one central idea,"⁷⁶ and "the beauty . . . lies not in the details but in the dovetailing of all the elements; each detail is designed with its effect on the whole kept clearly in view."⁷⁷

⁷³Eastern Tour, pp. 67-68.

⁷⁴Essay on Prints, p. 14.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁷⁶Frederick B. Artz, From the Renaissance to Romanticism: Trends in Style in Art, Literature, and Music, 1300-1830. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 117.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 72.

Gilpin's criteria relate to this tradition, which prized artistic order above all and which demanded from the artist that intellectual superiority that could control the elements of experience and fuse them into a perfect totality.

Design is one of the first factors that Gilpin evaluates when considering a painting. By this term he means unity of subject. The principle is really one of decorum: all that is unsuitable or irrelevant to the central idea must be removed. The artist must pay "his first attention to design, or the bringing together of such parts, as are suited to his subject; not mixing trivial objects with grand scenes; but preserving the character of his subject, whatever it may be."⁷⁸ And as aspects of good design Gilpin lists, among others, a proper time, proper characters, and proper appendages:⁷⁹

With regard to proper time, the painter is assisted by good old dramatic rules; which inform him that one point of time only should be taken--the most affecting in the action; and that no other part of the story should interfere with it.⁸⁰

With regard to characters, the painter must suit them to his piece. . . .⁸¹

⁷⁸"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 93.

⁷⁹Essay on Prints, p. 2.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 3.

The last thing included in design is the use of proper appendages. By appendages are meant animals, landscape, buildings, and in general, whatever is introduced into the piece by way of ornament. Everything of this kind should correspond with the subject, and rank in proper subordination to it.⁸²

A particular example of a well-designed picture is Salvator's "Democritus":

The laughing philosopher is brought at length to serious contemplation. . . . Notwithstanding the merriment he had always indulged about human affairs, the painter supposes him at last brought to serious contemplation. The moral is good, and the tale well told. The variety of objects about him which are subject to the decay of time; the contemplative figure of the philosopher; the dark and gloomy tint which prevails over the picture, in short the whole solemnity of the scene, and every part of it, contribute to strike that awe, which the painter intended.⁸³

But the principle is, for Gilpin, as applicable to landscape as to history painting:

A landscape may be rural, or sublime--inhabited, or desolate --cultivated, or wild. Its character, of whatever kind, should be observed throughout. Circumstances, which suit one species, contradict another. Now in nature we rarely see this attention. Seldom does she produce a scene perfect in character.⁸⁴

It is clear from these statements that what Gilpin is recommending in painting is adherence to the principle of decorum. The aim of the painter must be a faithful adherence to truth,

⁸²Ibid., p. 4.

⁸³Southern Tour, pp. 122-123.

⁸⁴"On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, p. 164.

yet a deepening, clarifying and purifying of the essential nature of what is being represented.⁸⁵

Equal in importance to good design is good composition. By composition (or disposition--Gilpin uses the two terms interchangeably) he means the manner in which the various parts are arranged and combined. Composition he distinguishes from design as being a purely objective visual matter, based on the effect of the painting on the eye rather than on the mind. The qualities he demands of composition are clarity ("confusion in the figures must be expressed without confusion in the picture."),⁸⁶ pleasing form ("The triangular form MICHAEL ANGELO thought the most beautiful. And indeed there is a lightness in it, which no other form can receive."),⁸⁷ and unity (the parts must combine so as to "appear as one object").⁸⁸ The last is the most important principle, and the one Gilpin applies most often in his specific criticism. He says of West's "The Resurrection of Lazarus" for instance: "The composition did not please me. The whole is divided formally into three parts, with too little connection among them."⁸⁹

⁸⁵See Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Harper, 1961), pp. 14-18.

⁸⁶Essay on Prints, p. 9.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 6.

⁸⁹Western Tour, p. 49.

And the desire for compositional unity is the basis of his famous comment that two cattle will always be unpleasing, but three will form a group.⁹⁰ He says in justification of his demand for compositional unity that "the eye on a complex view must be able to comprehend the picture as one object, or it cannot be satisfied."⁹¹ But the statement is clearly false. The eye can be pleased with mere vibrant colour; it is the intellect that demands comprehensible order and subordination.

That Gilpin is not really a sensationalist is also proven by his devotion to harmony. He says: "An attachment to colour, as such, seems to me, an indication of false taste. Hence arise the numerous absurdities of gaudy decoration."⁹² True taste "considers the beauty of all colouring, as resulting not from the colours themselves, but almost entirely from their harmony with other colours in their neighbourhood."⁹³ Harmony he discusses as essentially a unifying principle:

The effect of every picture, in a great measure, depends on one principal and master tint; which, like the key-tone in music, prevails over the whole piece. Of this ruling tint, whatever it is, every object in the picture should in a degree participate. This theory is founded on principles of truth; and produces a fine effect from harmony, in which it unites every object.⁹⁴

⁹⁰Northern Tour, II, xii.

⁹¹Essay on Prints, p. 6.

⁹²Forest Scenery, I, 100.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 89-90.

⁹⁴Essay on Prints, pp. 11-12.

Leonardo would have endorsed such a statement; Delacroix would have damned it as destructive of the beauty of pure colours and dramatic contrast.

Gilpin also attaches great importance to the proper handling of light and shade. Again the reason is unity: "Nothing however tends so much to produce a whole as a proper distribution of light, and shade. . . ." ⁹⁵ He requires that light and shade be well balanced, and that light fall in large masses. The hoped-for result is a feeling of repose and a unification of diverse elements. But Gilpin is not always so strictly classical in his handling of these criteria; he frequently suggests that light be used in a dramatic, Baroque manner:

¹⁵ But the great deficiency of this picture[Rubens's "Daniel in the Lions' Den"] is in the distribution of light. No design could possibly be adapted to receive a better effect of it. As the light enters through a confined channel at the top, it naturally forms a mass in one part of the cave, which might gradually fade away. This is the very idea of effect. The shape of the mass will be formed by the objects that receive it; and if bad, they must be assisted by the artist's judgement. Of all this Rubens was aware; but he has not taken the full advantage which the circumstances of his design allowed: a grand light falls beautifully upon his principal figure, but it does not graduate sufficiently into the distant parts of the cave. The lions partake of it too much. Whereas, had it been more sparingly thrown upon them; and only in some prominent parts, the effect would have been better; and the grandeur, and horror of the scene, more striking. Terrible heads standing out of the canvas, their bodies in obscurity, would have been noble imagery; and left the imagination room to fancy unpictured horrors. ⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Forest Scenery, I, 261.

⁹⁶ Scottish Tour, II, 62-63.

But notice that even here he is concerned with balance and simplicity of light, however dramatic the light may be.

Simplicity is closely related to all the above principles, but Gilpin frequently states it as a criterion in its own right:

For even Variety itself may pall,
If to the eye, when pausing with delight
On one fair object, it present a mass
Of many, which disturb that eye's repose.
All hail Simplicity! To thy chaste shrine,
Beyond all other, let the artist bow.⁹⁷

He generally associates simplicity with the antique and Renaissance styles. "After all, however, they, whose taste is formed on the simplicity of the antique, think Guido's air, in general somewhat theatrical,"⁹⁸ And Gilpin praises the "noble simplicity of the Roman school."⁹⁹ Classical simplicity he sees as one of the great virtues of Poussin. "The great beauty of this picture ['Scipio's Contenance'] consists in the chasteness, and classical purity of its style. We admire the elegance, and simplicity of the whole."¹⁰⁰

Of Gilpin's criteria that are concerned with the parts rather than with the whole, drawing is especially important. By this term he means "the exactness of outline."¹⁰¹ And he

⁹⁷"On Landscape Painting, a Poem," Five Essays, p. 105.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 140n.

⁹⁹Essay on Prints, p. 47.

¹⁰⁰Eastern Tour, pp. 63-64.

¹⁰¹Essay on Prints, p. 15.

is always ready to praise the just delineation of the human figure or of the forms of nature.¹⁰² This concern is perhaps a reflection of the neo-classic concern with form rather than expression. Without good drawing the objects of representation are imperfectly imitated and the painting ceases to be a just representation of nature. For Gilpin, the painting is faulty if the forms, however expressive and suggestive, do not objectively mirror the forms of nature.¹⁰³ And he praises the work of the Roman school for its "chaste, correct outline!"¹⁰⁴

Gilpin does not ignore expression, however: he in one place calls it the "life and soul of painting."¹⁰⁵ But by expressiveness he does not mean, as Sypher says the romantics do, the quality whereby the painting becomes a "'hieroglyph' for a mood, feeling, or 'dream'."¹⁰⁶ He uses the word "expression" in its Augustan sense:

It implies a just representation of passion, and character: of passion, by exhibiting every emotion of the mind, as outwardly discovered by any peculiarity of gesture; or the extension, and contraction of the features: of character, by representing the different manners of men, as arising from their particular tempers, or professions.¹⁰⁷

This echoes Jonathan Richardson's statement:

¹⁰²See for example Eastern Tour, p. 62.

¹⁰³Essay on Prints, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰⁶Wylie Sypher, Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 81.

¹⁰⁷Essay on Prints, p. 16.

. . . a good portrait [is one] from whence we conceive a better opinion of the beauty, good sense, breeding and other good qualities of a person than from seeing themselves, and yet without being able to say in what particular it is unlike; for nature must be ever in view.¹⁰⁸

Gilpin's "expression," though less concerned than Richardson's with ideal beauty, is still closely related to the theory of ideal imitation. Gilpin wants the artist to heighten nature, to clarify the essential qualities of the object, while retaining the likeness. He praises Holbein's portrait of More because "the judge is marked with the character of a dry, facetious sensible old man."¹⁰⁹ And he says, in discussing Hogarth:

Of his expression, in which the force of his genius lay, we cannot speak in terms too high. In every mode of it, he was truly excellent. The passions he thoroughly understood; and all the effects which they produce in every part of the human frame: he had the happy art also of conveying his ideas, with the same precision, with which he conceived them. . . .--But the species of expression, in which this master perhaps most excels, is that happy art of catching those peculiarities of air, and gesture, which the ridiculous part of every profession contract; and which, for that reason, become characteristic of the whole. His counsellors, his undertakers, his lawyers, his usurers, are conspicuous at sight.¹¹⁰

Gilpin is also concerned that the parts of a painting have "grace". This criterion applies only to figures, and by grace is meant such an arrangement of the parts of the figure

¹⁰⁸Cited Waterhouse, Painting in Britain, p. 49.

¹⁰⁹Wye Tour, p. 3.

¹¹⁰Essay on Prints, pp. 123-124.

as forms it into an agreeable attitude. The sources of grace are contrast and ease. Gilpin gives as an example Raphael's St. Paul in "The Sacrifice of Lystra".¹¹¹

Finally, Gilpin considers execution. Here his requirements are spirit and freedom. His opinions about execution I have already discussed.¹¹² They can be taken, partially at least, as proof of his acceptance of Reynolds's theory that good artistic work is the result of sound knowledge and thorough training.

But although these principles that Gilpin uses to judge a painting are, as we have seen, pronouncedly classical in orientation, they are frequently used to praise paintings not generally considered classical. This paradox is perhaps the most distinctive thing about Gilpin's criticism of painting. It proves not only that his taste is different from what his criteria would suggest, but that he does try to judge objectively and ignore schools and names.

Many of his critical principles are those of the High Renaissance and are justified by appeals to the authority of the Roman school. It is therefore remarkable that Gilpin praises so few paintings of the grand classical school of Raphael. He has, moreover, some definite criticisms of the school in general: ". . . the masters of the Roman school were more studious of those essentials of painting with regard to

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹²See page 56.

the parts; and the Flemish masters, of those, which regard the whole. The former drew better figures; the latter made better pictures."¹¹³ And Raphael himself, to whom the neo-classicists accorded almost universal adulation¹¹⁴ was not exempt from Gilpin's unfavourable criticism. He says of the "Holy Family":

If it be examined by the rules of painting, it is certainly deficient. The manner is hard, without freedom; and the colouring bleak, without sweetness. Neither is there any harmony in the whole. . . . Nor is the deficiency in colouring, compensated by any harmony in the light and shade.¹¹⁵

Gilpin also, of course, frequently praises the Roman school and Raphael. But he certainly does not hold them in as high an esteem as Reynolds does.

The Venetian school, with its tendency to the rich and sensational, Gilpin occasionally praises. His approval is stated in terms of classical criteria. He praises Titian's "The Cornaro Family" for its chaste simplicity, calling it the first family picture in England.¹¹⁶ And he commends the Veronese altar-piece at Burleigh for its classical quality, but condemns its faulty composition.¹¹⁷ Though the Venetian

¹¹³Essay on Prints, pp. 47-48.

¹¹⁴See Jean H. Hagstrum, The Sister Arts: the Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 163.

¹¹⁵Northern Tour, II, 235-236.

¹¹⁶Ibid., I, 32.

¹¹⁷Scottish Tour, I, 8.

school is not his favourite, Gilpin never says that it is inferior to the Roman. This failure to state a neo-classic popular opinion is perhaps significant.

But far more significant, and surprising, than his praise of certain Venetian works is Gilpin's great enthusiasm for the Baroque paintings of the seventeenth-century masters. This aspect of his taste is further supporting evidence for Wylie Sypher's claim that the picturesque phase through which all the arts of England passed was a "Baroque afterpiece".¹¹⁸ Gilpin, the founder of the picturesque school, is a devotee of the real Baroque. The painters that he especially admires are Guido Reni, the Carracci, Salvator Rosa, and Rubens. These are all artists who reacted against the calm, harmony, and proportion of the High Renaissance. Their distinguishing traits are restlessness, complexity, theatricality, and emotionalism.¹¹⁹ And though Gilpin tries to appreciate them on the basis of their classical qualities, his obvious preference of them to Raphael proves that he is not so devoted to the Roman virtues as he would have us believe. I have already quoted his comments on Annibal Carracci's "Dead Christ" and Rubens's "Daniel in the Lions' Den". His love of the emotional and theatrical is extremely evident in these discussions. It

¹¹⁸"Baroque Afterpiece: the Picturesque," Gazette des Beaux-Arts, XXVII (1945), 39-58.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 39-41; see also James Lees-Milne, Baroque in Italy (London: Batsford, 1959); H. Gerson and E.H. Ter Kule, Art and Architecture in Belgium 1600-1800 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960).

is also evident in his comments on Rubens's "Mary Magdalen Washing the Feet of Christ":

This picture is one of the noblest monuments to the genius of Rubens, that is to be seen in England. . . .--The point of time seems to be taken, just after Christ had said, Thy sins be forgiven thee. An air of disgust runs through the whole table. The expression in Simon's face is admirable. With whatever view he invited his divine guest, it is very evident he was disappointed. . . . Our Saviour's face has great sweetness, grace, and dignity. . . . The Magdalen is the worst figure in the picture. . . . but her passion is well expressed. A penitential sorrow, beyond the sense of anything but its own unworthiness, has taken possession of her. Her eyes are finely coloured with high swoln grief. Among deceptions, we seldom see a better, than the watery hue of that tear which is nearest the eye.¹²⁰

And Gilpin praises Salvator's "Bellisarius", an extremely theatrical painting:

It is a very noble picture. . . . The unfortunate chief stands resting against a wall. . . . A blind figure, squalid, tho dressed in rich armour--discovering great dignity of character; both in his own appearance, and from the distant respect shown him by the spectators--¹²¹ leads the memory easily to recollect Bellisarius. . . .

On one occasion he criticizes Guido for not being dramatic enough.¹²² Considering the melodramatic character of Guido's work, this seems hardly a fair comment. But it proves Gilpin's interest in Baroque qualities. His frequently pejorative use of the word "formal", and his use of the term "spirit" for

¹²⁰Eastern Tour, pp. 46-47.

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 34-35.

¹²²Ibid., p. 55.

high praise, also indicate an interest in non-Roman qualities.

Gilpin's preference for the Baroque in spite of his classical criteria is an example of his difficulty in reconciling his taste and his theoretical knowledge of the classical tradition. And it puts him amongst those who Sypher sees as carrying the torch from the Baroque which lit the fires of Romanticism. There are obvious affinities between the Baroque and the Romantic, especially the tendencies to prize variety and emotionalism. Certainly Romanticism has more affinities with the Baroque than with the Neo-classical. I cannot accept Sypher's statement that:

The Augustan "propriety" and "justness" that set in during the XVII Century and evidenced themselves diversely in the formal garden, the Burlington revival of Palladian architecture, the chilly scheme of "rules", the balanced couplet of Pope's metrical essays, the monumental order of Dr. Johnson's standards, and Sir Joshua Reynolds' professed devotion to regularity, appear to be a wide but rather hasty academic excursion from a Baroque tradition maintained from the XVII Century to the XVIII in sundry forms . . . ; this tradition, with "romantic" deviations, was transmitted to the XIX Century in the stormy egoism of Byron, the heavy rhetoric of Keats, the sentimentalized "picturesque" of Ruskin, the explosive eccentricities of Carlyle, and the grotesquerie of Browning.¹²³

But clearly Gilpin's appreciation of the Baroque does show an appreciation (perhaps unconscious) of values which were not prized in the classical period of British painting, and which were to be capitalized on by the romantics.

¹²³Pages 45-46.

Another aspect of Gilpin's "pre-romanticism" is his taste for pure landscape painting. Like his taste for landscape poetry, this is a deviation from the humanistic orientation of the classical tradition. Bate asserts:

The absence or the depreciation of landscape in Greek and Roman art is no historical accident: whether the classical artist sought to portray physical or moral beauty, his attention was directed to its existence and its ideal potentiality in the human being. Similarly, to Michelangelo and Raphael, and to the enormous group of artists which pivots about them, the landscape was merely of complementary interest.¹²⁴

The development of landscape into an independent and acceptable genre of painting is an extremely complex matter, impossible to discuss here. It is related to the rise of empiricism and the consequent interest in the material, sensational aspects of reality, the whole world of sense experience. It is related to Shaftesbury's deism, which saw the world as uncorrupted by the fall of man. But whatever the causes of its development were, landscape painting developed, as Kenneth Clark says, "in spite of classical traditions and the unanimous opposition of the theorists. . . ."¹²⁵ And it became the distinctive genre of the English romantic school.

Gilpin, like many of his contemporaries, is delighted by landscape painting. And he judges it by classical criteria. Therefore, he particularly appreciates the work of Claude,

¹²⁴Classic to Romantic, p. 2.

¹²⁵Landscape into Art, p. xviii.

Poussin, and Salvator Rosa; these painters combined the landscape genre with the formal, classical qualities of balance, harmony and repose. He contrasts them favourably with the Dutch landscapists because "the beauty of their extensive scenes depended more on composition, and general effect than on the exact resemblance of particular objects."¹²⁶ But even they are not exempt from his criticism by principles. A painting by Claude, for instance, "describes a pleasing country: but, for want of good composition, all its beauteous tints, and hues of nature, can scarce bring the eye to it with pleasure."¹²⁷ However, his demands for classical compositional qualities in landscape paintings do not cancel the fact that this genre, about which Gilpin is so concerned, is outside of the classical tradition.

Then too, as Hussey has shown, Gilpin's preferences in subject matter for landscape painting are significantly pre-romantic. Gilpin states that roughness and ruggedness are the qualities that make objects pleasing in painting.¹²⁸ As examples of picturesque objects he lists "the bark of a tree . . . the rude summit and craggy sides of a mountain."¹²⁹ He admires paintings which depict such objects, especially the work of Salvator. The delight in the qualities of roughness

¹²⁶Forest Scenery, I, 225.

¹²⁷Eastern Tour, p. 65.

¹²⁸"On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, p. 6.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 7.

and ruggedness is a delight in irregularity, and is therefore non-classical. But the real significance of these qualities is that they are purely sensuous. An interest in them indicates not a delight in beautiful form, but in qualities purely visual and especially suitable for painting as a visual art. Gilpin states in an essay:

We inquire not into the general sources of beauty, either in nature, or in representation. This would lead us into a nice, and scientific discussion, in which it is not our purpose to engage. The question simply is, What is that quality in objects, which particularly marks them as picturesque?¹³⁰

And his answer is that roughness is more "painterly" than any other quality. It is the most visually interesting. Christopher Hussey explains the historical importance of this attitude:

When painters, then, ceased to look at nature, in Reynolds's phrase "with the eyes of a poet," they looked at her, as he said of Gainsborough, with the eyes of a painter. They looked for qualities in objects that were asking to be painted; that were, in fact, picturesque. The chief qualities they selected were the crumbling and decayed. These they found in the objects now known as picturesque: sandy lanes, dock leaves, gnarled trees, hovels, donkeys, and ruins. Their brushes were attracted to the rendering of these qualities, because they were well suited to paint. No moral feeling entered into the business. . . . But there was a great deal of sensuous feeling for texture.¹³¹

This interest in the visual he says is:

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 4.

¹³¹The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927), pp. 245-246.

. . . the transitional stage between intellectual, classic art that, generally speaking, stimulates the mind, and the imaginative art of the nineteenth century that interested itself rather with emotion or sentiment. Classic art makes you think, imaginative art makes you feel. But picturesque art merely makes you see. It records without contemplating.¹³²

The landscape art that Gilpin admires and the quality of roughness that he appreciates are "transitional" in this way.

But occasionally Gilpin reveals a more romantic attitude to landscape painting, seeing it as stimulating emotion and sentiment. "There is still a higher character in landscape, than what arises from the uniformity of objects--and that is the power of furnishing images analogous to the various feelings, and sensations of the mind."¹³³ This statement takes him beyond picturesque attitudes to the subjectivism and emotional intensity of the romantic reaction to nature.

But such statements are rare. Gilpin's criticism of landscape painting, as of other genres, is essentially "transitional" in nature. His criticism is strongly rooted in the classical tradition. His aesthetic premises, his theoretical principles, his practical criteria, and his taste, all contain elements which foreshadow the coming artistic and critical revolution. But Gilpin is a progressive conservative, not a revolutionary.

¹³²Ibid., p. 245.

¹³³"On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays, pp. 164-165.

CHAPTER IV
GILPIN'S CRITICISM OF SCULPTURE

Gilpin has a high regard for the art of sculpture: "A fine statue I have often thought one of the greatest efforts of human art."¹ But he makes relatively few critical comments on this art form. The reason is simply that on his tours he saw few pieces of sculpture, whereas he saw thousands of paintings and hundreds of architectural works. However, the comments that he does make are interesting because they often clarify and extend theories and attitudes expressed less fully in his criticism of literature and painting.

Gilpin's theory of ideal imitation is expounded with admirable directness in his discussion of sculpture. The sculptor, he says, chooses for representation the most beautiful aspects of actuality. And, like the painter, the sculptor "not only takes his forms from the most compleat individuals, but from the most beautiful parts of each individual;" he thereby creates "a purer figure than he could have done by taking his model from the most beautiful single form."² This

¹"Observations, on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex . . .," Observations on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales . . . [abbreviation: Eastern Tour] (London, 1809), p. 11.

²"Essay II. On the Principles on Which the Author's Sketches Are Composed," Five Essays on Picturesque Subjects; With a Poem on Landscape Painting (London, 1808), p. 161.

is a clear statement of the classic and neo-classic theory of the artistic composite ideal.³ Professor Abrams, discussing this theory's place in neo-classical aesthetics, says:

Proponents of this . . . doctrine of the composite ideal refer with a unanimity which makes indifference to boredom the sine qua non of research, to the old story of the painter Zeuxis who (in Pliny's version), when he desired to represent Juno, 'had the young maidens of the place stripped for examination, and selected five of them, in order to adapt in his picture the most commendable points in the form of each.' While 'history represents what has really happened in nature,' says the writer of an essay sometimes attributed to Oliver Goldsmith,

the sculptor or statuary composed the various proportions in nature from a great number of different subjects, every individual of which he found imperfect or defective in some one particular, though beautiful in all the rest; and from these observations, corroborated by taste and judgement, he formed an ideal pattern, according to which his idea was modelled, and produced in execution.

Everybody knows the story of Zeuxis, the famous painter of Heraclea. . . .⁴

Gilpin does not refer to "the famous painter of Heraclea," but he tells the same story, substituting Rysbrack and Hercules for Zeuxis and Juno:

Rysbrack . . . executed this statue as a proof of his skill. He composed it from the selected limbs of six or seven of the heroes of Broughton's amphitheatre; a scene of diversion, at that time, in high repute. The brawny arms were

³M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Norton, 1958), pp. 35-42.

⁴Ibid., p. 37.

taken from that chief himself, and the chest from the coachman, a champion well known in his day by that appellation; and the legs from Ellis the painter, who took more delight in Broughton's amphitheatre, than in his own painting room.⁵

To be fair, however, I am quite sure that Gilpin likes the "Hercules" because it is a fine work of art rather than because it illustrates a particular theory of mimesis.

This theory of ideal imitation is purely neo-classical. And often the criteria Gilpin uses in appraising a work of sculpture are those of the academic tradition. He admires simplicity, grace, and proportion.⁶ These are characteristics of the "Medici Venus", the "Apollo Belvedere", and Michelangelo's "David", as well as of Canova's "Aphrodite".

But Gilpin's attitude to sculpture is not that of the strict neo-classicists. The neo-classical school of sculpture, of which Canova was the headmaster, attempted to return to the pure style of ancient classical sculpture. Professor Artz states: "The aims set were repose of body, impassivity of countenance, and simplicity of composition."⁷ The works of this school display beautifully idealized form and absolute

⁵Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Western Tour], 2nd ed. (London, 1808), pp. 121-122.

⁶See for instance: Western Tour, p. 20; Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Southern Tour] (London, 1804), p. 126.

⁷Frederick B. Artz, From the Renaissance to Romanticism: Trends in Style in Art, Literature, and Music, 1300-1830 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 234.

stability. In a way, they achieve the formal perfection for which classicism was always striving. Gilpin, however, sees repose and passivity, so deliberately achieved by the neo-classicists, as limitations rather than excellencies. He desires some movement and expression in sculpture and justifies his desire by referring to classical examples. He argues very strongly for the beauty of:

. . . some easy action, or expression, in opposition to none at all; as in the Venus, the Belvidere Apollo, the listening slave, or the Farnesian Hercules, resting from one of his labours. All these gentle modes of action or expression are certainly much more beautiful than the uninteresting vacancy of a consul standing erect in his robes.⁸

In this defence of movement and expression Gilpin is merely attacking the values of a very rigid and narrow sort of classicism by appealing to the broader and more liberal classical tradition. But he frequently goes beyond this position and indulges in what W.J. Bate calls arguing neo-classicism out of existence on classical grounds.⁹ Gilpin says, for example:

It is true, we are better pleased with the usual representations of the human form in a quiescent state, than in an agitated one; but this is merely to our seldom seeing it naturally represented in strong action. . . . But when the anatomy is perfectly just, the human form will always

⁸Western Tour, p. 21.

⁹Walter Jackson Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1952), p. 11.

be more picturesque in action, than at rest. The great difficulty of representing strong muscular motion, seems to have struck the ancient masters of sculpture: for it is certainly much harder to model from a figure in strong, momentary action, which must, as it were, be shot flying; than from one sitting, or standing, which the artist may copy at leisure. Amidst the variety of statues transmitted from their hands, we have only three, or four in very spirited action. Yet when we see an effect of this kind well executed, our admiration is greatly increased.¹⁰ Who does not admire the Laocoon more than the Antinous?¹⁰

He does not seem to think it possible that the ancients preferred the body in its quiescent state. The body is, to him, most beautiful when "it is agitated by passion, and it's muscles swoln by exertion. . . ."¹¹ This defence of agitation, passion, strong action, and the praise of the Laocoon, contorted and writhing as it is, reveal an attitude almost diametrically opposed to that of Canova. Gilpin probably would have appreciated the work of a romantic sculptor like Rude, whose work is characterized by great animation and strong movement.

Moreover, Gilpin occasionally stresses emotion in sculpture. He praises the theatrical work of Roubillac, a sculptor that Sypher classes a post-baroque/pre-romantic. "The good bishop Hough's monument, by Rubilliac [sic], is a masterly work. The figure of the bishop, clasping his hands,

¹⁰"Essay I. On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, pp. 12-13.

¹¹Ibid., p. 12.

and looking up, in a strong act of faith, deserves any praise. I have no idea of more in sculpture."¹² The sculpture has obviously captured the truth of the human heart, albeit melodramatically.

It is apropos of this monument that Gilpin makes his most distinctively romantic comment about sculpture. He says:

An animated form, however fair, is a meagre work of art; compared with a figure, characterized like this. The lines of an elegant human body are highly beautiful; but still they affect the eye only: when character and expression are added, they affect the soul.¹³

Gilpin is here elevating the emotional response to the position of first importance, choosing the heart rather than the head as the vehicle of aesthetic perception.

¹²"Observations on Several Parts of North Wales . . .," Observations on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales . . . [abbreviation: North Wales Tour] (London, 1809), pp. 202-203.

¹³Ibid., p. 203.

CHAPTER V
GILPIN'S CRITICISM OF ARCHITECTURE

Gilpin's criticism of architecture is rather different from his criticism of the three image-making arts. It is less concerned with theoretical matters like idealism, imagination, and genius. Gilpin concentrates on discussing criteria of excellence and passing judgement on particular styles and specific buildings. Therefore, in attempting to establish where and how Gilpin is classic or romantic, I have had to judge solely on the basis of his criteria, taste, and their aesthetic implications. My judgement is, however, that his criticism of architecture has the same basically classical orientation as his other criticism. Also, it is similarly full of contradictions which he is anxious to reconcile.

Gilpin has an intelligent appreciation of the classical tradition in English architecture. He greatly admires, for instance, the work of the Carolingian classicists, as is proven by his statement that in the reign of Charles I architecture was "at a hight never exceeded,"¹ by his frequent references to the "great Inigo Jones,"² and by his acceptance of the garden front at Wilton as exceptionally fine architecture.³

¹Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Western Tour], 2nd. (London, 1808), p. 325.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid., p. 97.

Gilpin's taste is, in this respect, in complete accord with that of the most academic and classical English school--the Burlington-Palladian. In 1717 Colen Campbell, a typical Palladian,⁴ asserted that the good judge would find in Inigo Jones "all the regularity of the former [Palladio], with the addition of Beauty and Majesty. . . ."⁵ He also commented that the garden front of Wilton House is "one of the noblest architectures yet produced."⁶ Inigo Jones, of course, was the first English architect to work in a purely classical style. And Wilton House is one of the great triumphs of the classical school.⁷ Its absolute symmetry, austere simplicity, and vital equilibrium (resulting from the tension of horizontal and vertical forces) make it one of the architectural masterpieces of England.

Gilpin also admires Augustan classicism: he has the highest regard for the Burlington Palladians. He comments favourably on almost all the examples of their work he encounters, even on what Summerson calls "tepid abstraction[s] from Palladio and Jones"⁸ (Stourhead for example).⁹ He praises

⁴Doreen Yarwood, The Architecture of England (London: Batsford, 1963), p. 282.

⁵Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect . . . (3 vols.; [London, 1717-1725]), I, 2.

⁶Ibid., II, 5.

⁷John Summerson, "Wilton," Great Houses of Europe, ed. Saxeveirell Sitwell (London: Putnam's, 1961), pp. 140-142.

⁸John Summerson, Architecture in Britain 1530 to 1830 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 201.

⁹Western Tour, p. 118.

Keddleston,¹⁰ Mereworth,¹¹ Wentworth House,¹² and Foots-Cray.¹³

He positively raves about Lord Tilney's house at Wanstead:

. . . perhaps of all the great houses in England, [this] answers best to the united purposes of grandeur and contrivance. . . . It is difficult to say, whether we are better pleased with the grandeur and elegance without, or with the simplicity and contrivance within.¹⁴

It is significant that Gilpin does not often go out of his way to defend the Palladian style. He simply states that it is excellent, admires examples, and mentions specific beauties. He apparently expects universal concurrence in the admiration of architecture so obviously "correct" and beautiful. But his few general comments about it, and the descriptive adjectives he employs in its praise, are supporting proof of his classical orientation. In his essay "On Picturesque Beauty" he mentions as an example of the (unpicturesque) beautiful a piece of Palladian architecture, drawing special attention to

¹⁰Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland [abbreviation: Northern Tour] (London, 1786), II, 238-239.

¹¹Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Southern Tour] (London, 1804), p. 131.

¹²Northern Tour, II, 208.

¹³Southern Tour, p. 119.

¹⁴"Observations, on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex . . .," Observations on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Eastern Tour] (London, 1809), pp. 2-3.

"the proportion of it's parts--the propriety of it's ornaments --and the symmetry of the whole. . . ." ¹⁵ He constantly uses these and similar criteria in order to praise the "Grecian" style of architecture. ¹⁶ Kedleston has simplicity and good proportions. ¹⁷ The saloon at Houghton is "simple, and elegant." ¹⁸ The Grecian style is excellent for private dwellings because of the propriety of its proportions and ornaments. ¹⁹ Grecian architecture has utility, symmetry, proportion, and elegance. ²⁰

The criteria of judgement are obviously those of the classical tradition. The term "elegant" is perhaps too vague to be indicative of aesthetic principle. But it does carry connotations of polish and refinement, qualities prized by the Palladians. The other criteria--symmetry, proportion, simplicity, and utility--are the ones Gilpin lists as the rules "necessary to confine architecture." ²¹ It is these he refers

¹⁵"Essay I. On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, on Picturesque Subjects; With a Poem on Landscape Painting (London, 1808), p. 7.

¹⁶By this term Gilpin does not mean Greek Revival but merely "classical" architecture of the Jones-Burlington type. He uses the term "Roman" interchangeably with it.

¹⁷Northern Tour, II, 238-239.

¹⁸Eastern Tour, p. 42.

¹⁹Western Tour, p. 127.

²⁰Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . , on Several Parts of Great Britain; Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland [abbreviation: Scottish Tour] (London, 1789), I, 5.

²¹Western Tour, p. 63.

to in his statement: "We criticize a building by the rules of architecture. . . ." ²² And these are the rules traditional and central to architectural classicism.

Gilpin's praise of symmetry in architecture contrasts sharply with Walpole's delight in "Sharawadgi, or Chinese want of symmetry in buildings," ²³ with Price's attempt to suggest an alternative rationale to symmetry, ²⁴ and with Knight's praise of buildings which possess "the beauty of various tints and forms happily blended without rule or symmetry." ²⁵ These latter statements reveal what Miss Addison calls a pre-romantic reaction against classical canons. ²⁶ Gilpin's acceptance of symmetry as necessary to architecture indicates his faith in the canons. Vitruvius invariably designed symmetrical elevations; Palladio insisted on symmetry even in room arrangement; and the English Palladians so desired absolute symmetry that they frequently used sham windows to maintain the balance of voids in the facade. ²⁷ Moreover, symmetry

²² Remarks on Forest Scenery, and Other Woodland Views, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . 3rd ed. (London, 1808), II, 262.

²³ Quoted from Summerson, Architecture in Britain, p. 243.

²⁴ Uvedale Price, "On Picturesque Beauty," Sir Uvedale Price on the Picturesque . . . , ed. Thomas Dick Lauder (Edinburgh and London, 1842), p. 368.

²⁵ Richard Payne Knight, Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste (London, 1805), p. 128.

²⁶ Agnes Eleanor Addison, Romanticism, and, the Gothic Revival (New York: Smith, 1938), p. 3.

²⁷ See B. Sprague Allen, Tides in English Taste . . . (New York: Pageant Books, 1958), I, 67.

is essentially classical because of its aesthetic implications. As Dagobert Frey points out in his article "On the problem of Symmetry in Art," symmetry signifies ". . . rest and binding, . . . order and law, . . . formal rigidity and constraint."²⁸ Thus the belief in the necessity of symmetry implies the belief that art works according to fixed laws, principles, and forms, a belief that is central to the classical aesthetic.

Also, Gilpin's definition of symmetry shows that he means by the term more than mere bilateral equation (though he does mean that as well). The definition, "the general purity and sameness of the style,"²⁹ is vague in the extreme, but it is clearly related to such definitions as : ". . . something well proportioned, well balanced, . . . that sort of concordance of parts by which they integrate into a whole."³⁰ As Professor Lovejoy has pointed out, this larger concept of symmetry was prevalent in the eighteenth century and related to the desire for order, harmony, and decorum: "The demand for symmetry in architecture thus expressed the same fundamental psychological theory as the insistence upon the unities in drama and the disapproval of the mixture of genres."³¹

²⁸Quoted from Herman Weyl, Symmetry (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952), p. 16.

²⁹Western Tour, p. 63.

³⁰Weyl, p. 1.

³¹Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: Putnam's, 1960), p. 146.

Gilpin's rule of just proportion is a reiteration of a rule of the classicists. Rudolph Wittkower, in Architectural Principles of the Age of Humanism, states that the concept of just proportion is absolutely central to the classical system of architecture. The conviction that ". . . architecture is a science and that each part of the building has to be integrated into one and the same system of mathematical ratios, may be called the basic axion of Renaissance architects."³² It is also the basic axion of the English Palladians, who became obsessed with problems of proportion. They involved themselves in all sorts of architectural gymnastics (such as giving rooms absurdly high ceilings) in order to preserve ideal proportions. Robert Morris even compiled a handbook listing the proper proportions for all the parts of a building --windows, doors, fireplaces, wainscoting, mirrors.³³ Gilpin shares this interest, if not the obsession. But again it is not merely Gilpin's using a rule of Palladio or Morris that marks his classical orientation. His concern with the just proportion of masses, of interior space, and of parts in relation to the whole,³⁴ proves that he views architecture with full consideration for its three dimensional qualities and considers it as an art with its own abstract aesthetic

³²(London: Tiranti, 1962), p. 101.

³³Lectures on Architecture (London, 1734).

³⁴See his comments on Lord Petre's house. Eastern Tour, pp. 91-92.

principles. This attitude is in marked contrast to those of later theorists, who developed purely picturesque and/or romantic attitudes to architecture. Knight declared that proportion "depends entirely upon association of ideas, and not at all upon either abstract reason or organic sensation."³⁵ In this spirit he and others began to view architecture entirely in terms of its superficial scenic effect. As Hussey says, the building was to "compose picturesquely into masses suggested by the buildings in the backgrounds of Italian pictures."³⁶ The desired qualities became "the contrast of light and shade, variety of forms and richness of texture."³⁷ An even more radical rejection of formal considerations is evident in Wyatt's work (at Fonthill) and Ruskin's criticism (of "Christian" architecture). There the demand is, according to Talbot Hamlin for "expressive" architecture, which "aim[s] definitely at expressing specific emotions. . . ."³⁸ Certainly Gilpin, with his concern for just proportions in all the parts, is far removed from such an attitude. He is in agreement with the classicists, who saw the clear and rational handling of formal elements as the essence of the architect's art.

³⁵Inquiry, p.169.

³⁶Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927), p. 218.

³⁷Christopher Hussey, English Country Houses: Mid Georgian, 1760-1800 (London: Country Life, 1956), p. 23.

³⁸Architecture Through the Ages, rev. ed. (New York: Putnam's, 1953), p. 581

Gilpin does, however, reject the extreme aspects of the classical theories of proportion, those that related architectural proportion to the Pythagorean-Platonic concept of absolute harmonics. There was a strong classical tradition in which the rules of proportion were considered God-ordained laws of mathematical ratios.³⁹ Vitruvius and Palladio both believed that certain dimensions and ratios were somehow bound up with cosmic order, and therefore necessary for good architecture. Inigo Jones founded his theoretical deliberations on a metaphysical belief in the efficacy of numbers. Robert Morris's arbitrary system of proportions was based on the newly discovered (by Morris, naturally) secrets of proportion held by the ancients. Gilpin, however, says:

We are fettered also too much by orders, and proportions. The ancients themselves paid no such close attention to them. Our modern code was collected by average calculations from their works; by Sansovino particularly, and Palladio. But if these modern legislators of the art had been obliged to produce precedents; they could not have found any two buildings among the ruins of ancient Rome, which were exactly of the same proportions.

I would not, by any means, wish to shake off the wholesome restraint of those laws of art yet . . . the mind recoils with disdain at the idea of an exclusive system.⁴⁰

He rejects the idea of absolute laws of proportion, but he recognizes the value of Palladio's rules.

³⁹Wittkower discusses this tradition at length. Gilpin refers to it disparagingly in "On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁰Northern Tour, I, 26-27.

Gilpin also recognizes the importance of simplicity in architecture. Lovejoy sees "simplicity" as part of the sacred aesthetic of the eighteenth-century classicist: "To want simplicity was to fail in 'conformity to nature.'"⁴¹ Certainly the term is constantly used in neo-classical criticism of architecture. And W.J. Bate lists simplicity as one of the distinctively classical aesthetic values, contrasting it to "the romantic cherishing of the surprise in variety."⁴² Gilpin's statement that simplicity is a rule necessary to confine architecture⁴³ opposes Reynolds' revolutionary statement: "Variety and intricacy is a beauty and excellence in every other of the Arts which address the imagination; and why not in Architecture?"⁴⁴ It was this latter concept which inspired Price, Knight, and a host of other designers of "picturesque" architecture; their mode involves the conscious use of irregularity"--produced by breaking the skyline, variegating the windows, and contrasting bastion-like projections and shady recesses; variegation of colour and texture in surface. . . ."⁴⁵ Gilpin, though he likes picturesque variety

⁴¹"The First Gothic Revival," Essays, p. 143.

⁴²From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Harpers, 1961), p. 8.

⁴³Western Tour, p. 63.

⁴⁴Joshua Reynolds, "Discourse XIII," Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1959), p.243.

⁴⁵Hussey, The Picturesque, p. 218.

and irregularity in landscape, does not consider these qualities suitable for architecture.

The remaining of Gilpin's rules--utility--is not so clearly indicative of aesthetic orientation. As Geoffrey Scott has pointed out, buildings are nearly always constructed for the purpose of satisfying some external need.⁴⁶ Function and utility must be considered by every architect, as theorists of all schools have acknowledged. The concern for utility may be indicative of a classical regard for rationally handled space (rather than "expressive" or "suggestive" qualities). But it should be noted that Richard Payne Knight praises convenience as vigorously as Sir Henry Wotton praises commodity.⁴⁷ It should also be noted that the Palladian architect, with his use of concealed chimneys (at Mereworth, where the fireplaces smoke) and windowless private chambers (at the Duke of Argyle's house), often disregarded utility as completely as did Wyatt at Fonthill. So it seems to me that Gilpin's rule of utility indicates not aesthetic bias but common sense.

However, the general tendency of Gilpin's rules is to the classical. And many of his uncoded pronouncements on architecture are similarly oriented.

Gilpin does not, for instance, approve of the "mixed" style of architecture. In this he is opposed by Knight, who

⁴⁶The Architecture of Humanism, 2nd ed. (London: Constable, 1924), p. 3.

⁴⁷See Scott, p. 1; Hussey, The Picturesque, pp. 211-212.

derides the pedantic insistence on purity of style; buildings which mix Gothic and Grecian elements Knight says are convenient, picturesque, and suited to English landscape.⁴⁸ Certainly mixtures of all sorts, some of them successful, were erected during the first third of the nineteenth century. The proponents and practitioners of mixed architecture were not interested in pure style; they were not really concerned with "style" at all. Their interest was in the visual effect of masses and motifs, and in the associations roused by certain decorative elements (by a "baronial" drawing room, for instance). Thus the mixed style reflects the breakdown of classicism. It appeals to sensational and emotional responses; it is in revolt against classical conventions and intellectual discipline. Gilpin's rejection of mixed architecture and his insistence on pure style is therefore significant. He criticizes the combination of turreted and modern styles at Lord Breadalbin's seat;⁴⁹ he objects to the confusion of ancient and modern forms at Inverary Castle.⁵⁰ And he objects particularly to the modernizing of ancient structures. Knight is extremely fond of "the fortresses of our ancestors transformed into Italianized villas and decked with porticos, balustrades and terraces of Inigo Jones and Palladio."⁵¹ But Gilpin views

⁴⁸Inquiry, p. 157.

⁴⁹Scottish Tour, I, 157.

⁵⁰Ibid., I, 185.

⁵¹Inquiry, p. 158.

such transformations with violent disapproval:

A mixture of old buildings and new reminds us of the barbarous cruelty on record of uniting living bodies to dead. . . . Only here the injury is greater. The barbarian, of whom this fact is related, only injured the living, but the modern barbarian injures both the living and the dead.⁵²

Knight sees the mixture as visually effective; Gilpin sees it as intellectually unsatisfactory, as "uniting modes of architecture, which are in themselves distinct. . . ."⁵³

Similar considerations of style are the basis of Gilpin's dislike of the Tudor, a type of architecture favoured by Price and beloved by Robinson.⁵⁴ Gilpin uses the words "heavy" and "awkward" to describe Knole;⁵⁵ he says apropos of Nonesuch: ". . . our ancestors . . . conceived beauty to reside chiefly in the expensive conceits and extravagancies of art; in which this palace particularly abounded."⁵⁶ In comments on Longleat he clarifies his attitude: "The style, however, of Longleat has more a cast of the Gothic, than that of Somerset-House, which makes a nearer approach to Grecian architecture. Neither possesses enough of its respective style, to be beautiful in its kind."⁵⁷ Again Gilpin uses the intellectual con-

⁵²Southern Tour, p. 51.

⁵³Western Tour, p. 100.

⁵⁴See Hussey, The Picturesque, p. 226.

⁵⁵Southern Tour, p. 134.

⁵⁶Western Tour, p. 2.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 125.

cept of pure style as an important criterion of excellence.

Besides being concerned with purity of style, Gilpin is insistent on unity of architectural form, on the natural and harmonious adaptation of the parts to the whole. In comments on Wilton House he says:

The apartments of a noble house should not suffer their ornaments to obtrude foremost upon the eye. Each apartment should preserve its own dignity; to which the ornamental part should be subordinate. In every work of art, and indeed in nature also, it is a breach of the most express picturesque canon, if the parts engage the eye more than the whole.⁵⁸

W.J. Bate has explained how this thesis is part of the classical attempt to imitate or duplicate in art the ordered nature of reality.⁵⁹ And certainly one of the major concerns of the Palladians was the harmonious adaptation of the parts to the whole. The portico, for instance, was always kept proportional in size and splendor to the rest of the complex. They thought it should assert the central axis but not overwhelm the larger composition. Gilpin in his dogmatic insistence on harmonious subordination shows complete acceptance of yet another Palladian standard.

I do not, however, wish to convey the impression that Gilpin's attitude toward architecture is that of a rigid Palladian theorist. Gilpin's taste is actually fairly liberal

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁹Classic to Romantic, p. 8.

and catholic. He does have several points of agreement with the proponents of picturesque architecture. And many of his theories and evaluations do reflect the post-Palladian breakdown of rigid classical aesthetics.

Gilpin, like Price and Adam, is fairly appreciative of the English baroque. He admires Wren's architecture. Kings House at Winchester, he says, had it been completed, "would have been perhaps one of the grandest palaces in Europe."⁶⁰ And he gives high praise to St. Paul's cathedral. Wren, with his freer handling of the classic motifs, his rejection of the geometric academic system, and his general tendency to freedom in composition, was an architect that the Palladians violently rejected.⁶¹ They were trying to combat his influence and lead architecture back into the path of rectitude. And they thought Vanbrugh's work was appalling. But Vanbrugh also receives Gilpin's approval. Blenheim he says has been too severely criticized:

Vanbrugh's attempt . . . seems to have been an effort of genius: and if we can keep the imagination apart from the five orders, we must allow that he has created a magnificent whole; which is invested with an air of grandeur, seldom seen in a more regular style of building. It's very defects, except a few that are too glaring to be overlooked, give it an appearance of something beyond common. . . .⁶²

⁶⁰Western Tour, p. 51.

⁶¹Summerson, Architecture in Britain, pp. 197-198.

⁶²Northern Tour, pp. 27-28.

But, he admits, if "the eye is at leisure to contemplate parts, [it] . . . meets with frequent occasion of disgust."⁶³ Gilpin displays neither the contempt of the Palladians nor the enthusiasm of later critics. He does not particularly admire the broken lines, the multiplied projections and varied planes. These were the qualities praised by those who developed the canons of picturesque architecture.⁶⁴ Gilpin is free of Palladian rigidity, but he has no new criteria by which to defend Vanbrugh from academic criticism.

Gilpin is, however, interested in the "picturesque" relationship between a building and the surrounding natural setting, a consideration which the Burlington school tended to ignore. He does view Blenheim in relation to its setting.⁶⁵ He also recognizes Adam's success in correlating a building to its setting:

Hopton-house is the next great object we meet. The first view of it from the road, at a distance, over the bay of Forth is very picturesque. . . . The horizontal lines of the house, and the diverging lines of the hill, accord agreeably.⁶⁶

⁶³Ibid., I, 58.

⁶⁴See Allen, Tides in English Taste, p. 60.

⁶⁵"Observations on Several Parts of North Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . ," Observations on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: North Wales Tour] (London, 1809), p. 206.

⁶⁶Scottish Tour, I, 68.

He objects to white houses because white accords ill with the colours of nature.⁶⁷ As Hussey comments, this concern for the correlation of house to setting was the aspect of the picturesque attitude to architecture which had the most far-reaching influence. It resulted in the precept that the site should suggest and largely control the design of a building, a precept still revered.⁶⁸

Gilpin is also interested in certain modes of architecture which were in themselves considered picturesque. He is, for instance, intrigued by the simplest form of picturesque architecture--the rustic. In Remarks on Forest Scenery he describes an idyllic scene:

[The glen] abounds with frequent openings. The eye is carried down, from the higher grounds, to a sweep of the river --or to a little gushing cascade . . .--or perhaps to a cottage, with its scanty area of lawn falling to the river, on one side; and sheltered by a clump of oaks on the other; while the smoke, wreathing behind the trees, disperses, and loses itself, as it gains the summit of the glen.⁶⁹

This description brings to mind a scene by Morland, the master of picturesque cottage painting. But here the cottage is still really an element in landscape. However, on at least one occasion the cottage inspires in Gilpin a true Morlandesque

⁶⁷Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Wye Tour] (London, 1782), p. 54.

⁶⁸The Picturesque, p. 217.

⁶⁹I, 206-207.

attitude (what Wylie Sypher calls "the psychological picturesque"),⁷⁰ a sentimental idealization of the lower classes:

In the middle of the vale stands a lonely cottage, sheltered with a few trees, and adorned with it's little orchard and other appendages. Here resides the hind, who manages, and overlooks the cattle, which in numerous herds, graze this fertile vale: and if peace, and quietness inhabit not the humble mansion, it does not harmonize with the scene, to which it belongs.⁷¹

Gilpin also displays an interest in that peculiar eighteenth-century architectural form--the sham ruin. But unlike most of his contemporaries, he is not sentimental in his attitude to new-made ruins; he judges them according to a rational and austere aesthetic. He is not concerned with historical nostalgia, with gloomth, or even merely with visual qualities; he insists that imitation ruins meet certain intellectual requirements. They must be constructed with verisimilitude; they must be situated where a castle or abbey might originally have been built; and they must be well built.⁷² Of shoddy and illogical ruins he is completely contemptuous. He says of Kingsgate:

It consists of a complete set of ruins, which compose the house and offices. The brew house is a fort--the stable a monastery--the pigeon house a watchtower--and the porter's lodge a castle.

⁷⁰Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 91-109.

⁷¹Scottish Tour, II, 11-12.

⁷²Ibid., II, 170.

Among all the crude conceptions of depraved taste, we scarce ever met with anything more absurd than this collection of heterogeneous ruins. Nothing can equal the caprice of bringing such a motley confusion of abbies, forts, and castles together, except the paltry style in which they are executed.⁷³

Gilpin is moderately interested in Gothic revival (non-ruined) architecture. He thinks Strawberry Hill worthy of notice,⁷⁴ and admits that the castle style can be impressive.⁷⁵ But his comments are certainly not enthusiastic. He notes the stylistic flaws of Walpole's house, criticizes the confusion of modern and Gothic form at Inverary, and thinks that Enmore obtains no particular beauty from its castle form.⁷⁶ Actually, he is not convinced that the castellated style is reasonable: there is "something whimsical in the idea of a man's enclosing himself, in the reign of George the Second, in a fortress that would have suited the times of King Stephen."⁷⁷ Gilpin definitely prefers the classical style for domestic architecture: "On the whole, the Grecian architecture seems much better adapted to a private dwelling house, than the Gothic. It has a better assortment . . . of proper ornaments and proportions for all its purposes."⁷⁸

⁷³Southern Tour, pp. 97-98.

⁷⁴Scottish Tour, II, 194.

⁷⁵Ibid., I, 184.

⁷⁶Ibid., II, 194; Ibid., I, 184; Western Tour, p. 160.

⁷⁷Western Tour, p. 158.

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 126-127.

But Gilpin has no such reservations about ecclesiastical Gothic. There were, of course, no Gothic revival churches in Gilpin's day, so his comments are all about genuine medieval ecclesiastical architecture. And he undertakes a serious, detailed defence of it. Moreover, the "Master of the Picturesque" does not discuss Gothic churches exclusively in terms of their value as elements in landscape, and he does not discuss the picturesqueness of their exterior forms. Nor does he treat the Gothic as a field for pedantry. Gilpin, like Gray and Walpole, appreciates and criticizes Gothic churches as architecture, as buildings with genuine aesthetic importance. But this is why he gets into trouble; he finds it difficult to correlate his essentially classical ideas of architectural values with his appreciation of Gothic buildings.

Gilpin presents his defence of the Gothic most explicitly in the Western Tour:

The Greek and Roman architecture, no doubt, possess great beauty: but why should we suppose them to possess all beauty? . . .

Rules, we allow, must confine every art; but what rules are necessary to confine architecture, except those of utility, symmetry, proportion and simplicity? . . . I know not in which of these regards the Gothic does not equal the Roman.⁷⁹

The extent to which these rules reflect the classical tradition has already been discussed. Gilpin is following in the footsteps of Addison (who pointed out the similarities between

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 63.

the ballad and the "heroick" poem of Homer and Virgil) and Hurd (who insisted that Chinese plays followed Aristotle's precepts);⁸⁰ he is, in part, attempting to defend the non-classical by means of the classical canons.

Gilpin's statements also reveal an essentially non-classical attitude toward aesthetic standards. Bodo Cichy points out that until the last half of the eighteenth century, "whatever had been the prevailing architectural style and aesthetic principles of the time had been accepted without question as absolute--as the only true form of expression."⁸¹ Such a faith was the result of evaluating art in relation to an absolute standard--the universal ideal.⁸² But the eighteenth-century philosophers were demolishing the idea that beauty is an objective quality. Moreover, the archeological research of the latter part of the century, especially the work of Winklemann, developed a new consciousness of time and history and architectural flux, as well as a knowledge of beautiful buildings of all periods all over the world.⁸³ Summerson says that the result of all this was the weakening of the concept of an absolute standard of taste, and the establishment of a new

⁸⁰See Allen, Tides in English Taste, II, 24.

⁸¹The Great Ages of Architecture: From Ancient Greece to the Present Day, trans. Susan McMorran (New York: Putnam's, 1964), p. 365.

⁸²See Bate, Classic to Romantic, p. 22.

⁸³Hamlin, Architecture Through the Ages, p. 473.

concept--"the plurality of valid styles."⁸⁴ Gilpin's statement that the Gothic has a validity equal to that of the Roman proves his acceptance of the new concept.

Actually, Gilpin's belief in the validity of many styles is qualified. His attempt to relate Gothic architecture to classical rules shows that he cannot really accept the Gothic in terms of its own aesthetic. Still, he does accept it.

The Gothic equals the Roman in utility, says Gilpin. Again I will draw attention to Geoffrey Scott's statement that all architecture is somehow concerned with utility.⁸⁵ But the Gothic is perhaps (of all the Western styles of architecture) the least concerned with utility; the Gothic cathedral is not a man-oriented building. Its size, for instance, is in no way related to the number of people it was intended to serve. Wilhelm Worringer says, ". . . Gothic architecture might be described as an endless mania for construction; for it has no direct object, no particular aim: it is merely subservient to the artistic will to expression."⁸⁶ Renaissance churches, in contrast to Gothic, are closely related in size and design to their function in human society. Those who derided the Gothic recognized the contrast. Evelyn's famous attack on the "congestions of heavy, dark, melancholy, and monkish piles" uses

⁸⁴Architecture in Britain, p. 283.

⁸⁵The Architecture of Humanism, p. 3.

⁸⁶Form in Gothic, authorized translation, ed. Sir Herbert Read (London: Tiranti, 1957), p. 107.

the stricture that they are equally without use as beauty.⁸⁷ Bishop Berkeley criticizes the Gothic as "for the most part being founded neither in nature, nor reason, neither necessity nor use."⁸⁸ So when Gilpin asserts the utility of the Gothic he is arguing against the statements of many previous critics. More important, he is denying the true nature of the Gothic, which is not a useful building but, as Otto von Simson says, "an image, more precisely, . . . the representation of super-natural reality."⁸⁹

Gilpin encounters similar difficulties with his statement that the Gothic equals the Roman in symmetry. It definitely does not. Bilateral symmetry may have been an aim of the Gothic cathedral builders, but it was rarely achieved. Several English churches even have an aesthetically purposeful aberration from symmetry, a bent east end. And though purposeful assymetry is rare, the Gothic builder was certainly not obsessed by the desire for symmetry that controlled the Renaissance architects. He did not object to building the second tower in a different style from the first if style had changed during the hundred years between construction dates. Nor did he object to adding side porches, as at Wells and

⁸⁷Quoted in Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival," Essays p. 138.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 142.

⁸⁹The Gothic Cathedral, 2nd ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), p. xvii.

Lincoln, and chapter houses, as at most abbey churches. And he was quite willing to dispose the stained glass in an unbalanced manner so that those colours likely to fade could remain in relatively shaded places. Moreover, these variations and irregularities do not spoil a Gothic church as they would a church by Hawksmoor. A.E. Richardson, the eminently distinguished architect, comments that "the Gothic principle of poised equilibrium admitted a malleability denied to classic art. There was scope for rhythm ignoring absolute symmetry, recognition of irregularity and delicate silhouette."⁹⁰

Critics preceding Gilpin had also noted the difference between the abstractly controlled equivalence of mass, recess, and line that characterizes the classical style, and the "malleability" of the Gothic. They had on this basis damned the Gothic.⁹¹ Gilpin attempts to ignore the difference and thus rescue the Gothic from condemnation. But the rather obvious difference between the theory and the fact is occasionally noted even by him. He says of Salisbury that though it is in a ruder style than most cathedrals, ". . . it possesses one beauty which few of them possess, that of absolute symmetry in all its parts."⁹²

⁹⁰With Hector O. Coriato, The Art of Architecture, 3rd ed. (London: English Universities Press, 1952), p. 63.

⁹¹See Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival," Essays, pp. 145-146.

⁹²Western Tour, p. 54.

The comment about Salisbury clearly involves the ordinary meaning of "symmetry". But Gilpin also utilizes the larger meaning of the word in his defense of Gothic. The Gothic equals the Roman, he says, in "the general purity and sameness of the style."⁹³ This statement is also untrue; the Gothic ill satisfies the classical demand for purity of style. Its structures are almost invariably mixtures of various styles --Early, Decorated, Perpendicular, and often Norman as well. Gilpin is quite aware of this fact and is suitably distressed by it. He mentions the confusion of styles at Canterbury and Wells, for instance, and on one occasion explicitly disparages "that mixed style, of which many cathedrals are composed."⁹⁴ Such exceptionally pure churches as Ely and Exeter delight him. Of the latter he says:

It was four hundred years in the building. . . . Yet notwithstanding this lapse of time, in which the fashion of architecture underwent so much change; and notwithstanding the different architects employed . . . , it is singular that each succeeding bishop hath so attentively pursued the plan of his predecessor, that the whole together strikes the eye as a uniform building.⁹⁵

It is indeed singular, so much so that one wonders how Gilpin, knowing this, could assert that the Gothic equals the Roman in purity of style.

⁹³Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁴Eastern Tour, p. 18.

⁹⁵Western Tour, p. 253.

With his third rule Gilpin is somewhat more successful, though there is still a dichotomy between rule and fact. The Gothic equals the Roman in proportion, he says. Otto von Simson, in his thorough study, discovers that the Gothic builders did rely on harmonic proportions as the bases of the designs, the knowledge of Pythagorean harmonics flowing through the middle ages unchecked.⁹⁶ But their use of proportional harmonics was radically different from that of the post-Alberti architects. In medieval architecture the harmonic module did determine the sizes and ratios of elements, but, as Paul Frankl explains, only because the module used as a special sort of "yardstick", a practical unit of measurement.⁹⁷ In the Gothic the proportional system was not something to be grasped by the viewer as part of the aesthetic experience. On the other hand, proportion perception was intended to be part of the aesthetic delight of the classical style: "The appeal of . . . Renaissance design was to the trained eye that could perceive the formal logic and proportional qualities of the design."⁹⁸ The Gothic spirit is simply not concerned with this sort of aesthetic pleasure; it is concerned with creating

⁹⁶The Gothic Cathedral.

⁹⁷The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries, trans. Priscilla Sitz (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), p. 93.

⁹⁸Bruce Allsopp, A General History of Architecture (London: Putnam's, 1955), p. 141.

a space suggestive of infinity, an overpowering upward and/or altarward movement, a spiritual entity which attempts to overcome its physical material in order to create an indefinable mystic experience.⁹⁹ Simson asserts that the Gothic's "founder", the abbé Sugar, wished "to battle down that very sense of detachment which is characteristic of purely aesthetic observation, and to lead visitors to the new sanctuary on to the religious experience that art had revealed to Sugar himself."¹⁰⁰ It is quite obvious that applying the Palladian rule of just proportion to the Gothic is going counter to its real aesthetic values. And Gilpin does seem to realize this. His specific discussions of proportion are always directed to the smaller and subsidiary Gothic buildings, to the chapels and chapter houses.¹⁰¹ Earlier critics had attacked the bad proportions of the cathedrals themselves.¹⁰² Gilpin does not comment favourably or unfavourably upon their proportions; perhaps he realizes that his "rule" is irrelevant to the aesthetic values of a Gothic masterpiece.

Gilpin's fourth rule of architecture is simplicity. And though he makes certain qualifications, he does assert that the Gothic equals the Roman in simplicity. Here he is

⁹⁹Cichy, The Great Ages of Architecture, p. 250.

¹⁰⁰Simson, The Gothic Cathedral, p. xix.

¹⁰¹See Eastern Tour, p. 19; Southern Tour, p. 9; Western Tour, p. 349.

¹⁰²See Lovejoy, p. 133.

contradicting the eighteenth century's most consistent and violent anti-Gothic statement, that it wanted rational simplicity and plainness.¹⁰³ The justice of their generalization is confirmed by, among others, Sir Bannister Fletcher; he lists ornate decoration, the elaboration of interior members, and extreme decorative profusion on the west front as characteristics of English Gothic, especially of its later phases.¹⁰⁴ Gilpin does acknowledge that "if in any it be thought to fail, it is in the ornamental part."¹⁰⁵ However, he defines simplicity as "the modesty and propriety of ornaments" and insists that in the Gothic

. . . there is generally such propriety of ornament; that is, each ornamental member arises so naturally from the building itself, and is so much a piece with it, (which is all we wish in ornament,) that in the best specimens of Gothic architecture, the eye is nowhere offended, or called aside by the contention of parts. . . .¹⁰⁶

This is generally true of the earlier phases of Gothic, where ornament is subordinated to the pattern produced by the structural members, and even the statues "spring from and form part of the structural features of the building."¹⁰⁷ But in the

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 143-145.

¹⁰⁴A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method, rev. B.A. Cordingley, 17th ed. (New York: Scribners, 1961), p. 664.

¹⁰⁵Western Tour, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 63-64.

¹⁰⁷Fletcher, p. 664.

Decorated period there is a pronounced elaboration of decoration, and in the Perpendicular an exceptional love of multiplicity and complexity.

Here we encounter a further weakness in Gilpin's defense of the Gothic. Medieval architecture followed the spontaneous tendency of the arts to progress from clarity, severity and simplicity toward complication, richness and variety.¹⁰⁸ My generalizations about the Gothic have been largely pertinent to the high Gothic. And Gilpin's theoretical defense would have been fairly successful had it been directed toward the Norman or Early styles. The Norman retains some classical qualities, especially simplicity, clear articulation of space, and comprehensible proportions. The Early Gothic is less clearly defined, but still depends for effect on restrained decoration, simple spaces, and pleasing (though heightened and lengthened) proportions. Rochester and Salisbury are proof of these qualities. But Gilpin classes the pre-conquest, Norman, and Early Gothic together as "Saxon" and calls it a heavy, awkward style. He says of Kirkstall: ". . . the Saxon heaviness prevails."¹⁰⁹ He dismisses the whole of Chichester as "an ordinary, heavy, Saxon pile."¹¹⁰ He does admire Salisbury and know that it is not Saxon, but he says it is

¹⁰⁸Cichy, p. 367.

¹⁰⁹Scottish Tour, I, 31.

¹¹⁰Wye Tour, p. 15.

"of the rudest Gothic."¹¹¹ The styles of medieval architecture which have the most relation to his superimposed classical rules are those which he dismisses as decidedly inferior. His highest praise is reserved for architecture of the Decorated and Perpendicular phases--the nave at Winchester, the chapel at Roslin, the cloisters at Gloucester.¹¹² He is, in other words, most appreciative of those structures which display structural complexity, vertically attenuated proportions, and decorative elaboration.

I do not mean to criticize Gilpin for liking the later rather than the early Gothic. I wish merely to point out that his taste has outrun his criticism. He admires the Gothic, so he attempts to defend it by critical principles; he uses classical principles because they are the only ones he knows. But the defense is weak, and the weakness is underscored by his defending the phase of the Gothic which the rules least suit but which he likes best. Moreover, when he forgets about theoretical justification and just writes "appreciations", he reveals a delight in many qualities other than utility, symmetry, proportion, and simplicity. He likes, for instance, lightness and delicacy: he praises the lightness of the cloisters at Salisbury and Gloucester, and the light and airy pillars at Worcester.¹¹³ He delights in richness. When discussing the west front at Exeter and the Mary chapel at

¹¹¹Western Tour, p. 56.

¹¹²Western Tour, p. 46; Scottish Tour, I, 65; Wye Tour, p. 5.

¹¹³Western Tour, p. 62; Wye Tour, p. 5; North Wales Tour, p. 202.

Canterbury,¹¹⁴ Gilpin forgets about simplicity and enjoys the richness, variety and elaboration of ornament. And in discussing the arrangement of screens at Salisbury, he ignores the concept of proportion and suggests creating a "sublime" perspective view making some sort of approach towards infinity.¹¹⁵ Consistency is not his strong point.

Gilpin achieves greater consistency in his discussion of medieval military and domestic architecture. But this is because he does not even attempt to discuss it in terms of architectural values. Or at least, he discusses it in terms of picturesque (two-dimensional, visual) architectural values rather than three-dimensional, formal values. In the area of picturesque criteria he is not hampered by classical canons. Dumbarton castle Gilpin describes as irregular, rugged, broken into planes, and therefore "very picturesque."¹¹⁶ *Edinburgh castle* "tho, in its whole immensity, it is too large an object for a picture . . . ; yet many of its craggy corners with their watch towers and other appendages, are very picturesque."¹¹⁷ Gilpin's theoretical discussion of "the old baronial castle" concentrates exclusively on picturesque values:

¹¹⁴Western Tour, p. 283; Southern Tour, p. 105.

¹¹⁵Western Tour, pp. 59-60.

¹¹⁶Scottish Tour, II, 44.

¹¹⁷Ibid., I, 63.

If one tower was square and low, the other, perhaps, would be round and lofty. The curtain too was irregular, following the declivity or projection of the hill on which it stood. It was adorned also with watch-towers, here and there, at unequal distances. Nor were the windows more regular, either in form or situation, than the internal parts of the castle, which they enlightened. Some jutting corner of a detached hill was also probably fortified with a projecting tower. A large buttress or two perhaps propped the wall, in some part, where the attack of the enemy had made it weak: while the keep, rising above the castle, formed generally a grand apex to the whole. Amidst all this mass of irregularity, the lines would be broken, the light often beautifully received, and various points of view presented, some of which would be exceedingly picturesque.¹¹⁸

And he often considers castles merely as elements in a landscape. For instance, Dunglas castle "appears to stand upon a peninsula, which runs into the Clyde, and, being adorned with a background of mountains, makes a good picture."¹¹⁹ In all of these comments he displays a pre-romantic attitude: a delight in irregularity, an interest in landscape, and a concern for purely visual rather than intellectual aesthetic values.

But Gilpin never indicates, in his criticism of Gothic churches and castles, an acceptance of the critical criterion that Geoffrey Scott calls the "romantic fallacy".¹²⁰ Scott's thesis is that romanticism tends to deny that: "A combination plastic forms has a sensuous value apart from anything we may

¹¹⁸Western Tour, pp. 159-160.

¹¹⁹Scottish Tour, II, 55.

¹²⁰The Architecture of Humanism, p. 37 et seq.

know about them."¹²¹ The romantics, he says, insist that plastic arts should be like poetry and "bring the mind within the charmed circles of imaginative ideas. . . . Thus, for example, the Gothic building . . . came to "suggest" the idealized Goth--'firm in his faith and noble in his aspirations'"¹²² This attitude shifts the emphasis from form as a primary element to form as a "means of significance."¹²³ This involves a denial of the basic nature of architecture, which is formal rather than suggestive. Gilpin does occasionally indicate the importance of ideas associated with certain buildings. The castle at Loch Leven ". . . was important in itself and still more so by an association with Mary Queen of Scots."¹²⁴ But he does not admire medieval architecture because it arouses "recollections which carry us back to the time when religion was all splendour and society all chivalry";¹²⁵ he admires it because it has sensuous value, even if the value is picturesque.

However, Gilpin does allow the "romantic fallacy" to influence his appreciation of ruins. Several critics have noted that the eighteenth century generally used ruins either

¹²¹Ibid., p. 54.

¹²²Ibid., pp. 52-53.

¹²³Ibid., p. 60.

¹²⁴Scottish Tour, I, 92.

¹²⁵Scott, p. 54.

to create a mood (especially pleasant melancholy) or to suggest ideas (the lost age of chivalry; the pathos of decay). Such is, in part, Gilpin's attitude. The landscape at Beaulieu Abbey is "picturesquely marked by the ruins of time."¹²⁶ The tower of a ruined Welsh fortress inspires the comment: "A lonely tower is itself an emblem of solitude."¹²⁷ And the ruined castle, the remains of an abbey "are the richest legacies of art. They are consecrated by time. . . ."¹²⁸

And then too, as Eleanor Addison has well demonstrated, the delight in ruins is itself a romantic attitude:

Nothing is more displeasing to a classicist than a ruin, for he enjoys a completed whole. On the other hand, nothing is more pleasing to the romantic temperament, which likes the unfinished, the incomplete. . . .¹²⁹

Gilpin's attitude is evident in such statements as: "We . . . wish for that degree of dilapidation, which gives conjecture room to wander and imagination some little scope."¹³⁰ He is obviously interested not only in the value of the form, but in the imaginative impact of the undetermined and undefined.

But by far the greatest part of Gilpin's discussion of ruins is concerned with their determinate sensuous value. As

¹²⁶Forest Scenery, II, 140.

¹²⁷North Wales Tour, p. 159.

¹²⁸"On Picturesque Beauty," Five Essays, p. 46.

¹²⁹Romanticism and the Gothic Revival, p. 145.

¹³⁰Scottish Tour, I, 30.

Templeman says, his discussion "moves round the fact not that they are ruins but that they please the eye."¹³¹ His is primarily a "transitional" attitude, concerned neither with intellectual nor with emotional qualities but with visual ones.

The picturesque advantages, which a castle or any eminent building, receives from a state of ruin are chiefly these.

It gains irregularity in its general form. . . .

Secondly, a pile gains from a state of ruin an irregularity in its parts. . . .

Lastly, a pile in a state of ruin receives the richest decorations from the various colours, which it acquires from time.¹³²

He is also concerned that the ruins unite with their setting so as to form a composed landscape.

But the most beautiful scenery we saw at Brecknor, is about the abbey. We had a view of it . . . from a little bridge in the neighbourhood. There we saw a sweet limpid stream, glistening over a bed of pebbles; and forming two or three cascades, as it hurried to the bridge. It issued from a wood, with which its banks were beautifully hung. Amidst the gloom rose the venerable remains of the abbey, tinged with a bright taw, which discovered a profusion of rich Gothic workmanship; and contrasted the grey stone, of which the ruins are composed, with the feathering foliage, that floated around them: . . . all these beauteous parts were formed into a whole.¹³³

In his consideration of both castles and ruins then, Gilpin's aesthetic ideal is the picturesque. He is interested

¹³¹William Darby Templeman, The Life and Work of William Gilpin . . . (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939), p.120.

¹³²North Wales Tour, pp. 121-122.

¹³³Wye Tour, p. 52.

in irregularity, concerned with grouped masses, and insistent on viewing architecture as part of a composed landscape. There are no intellectual criteria, no classical formal requirements, and few romantic criteria. But it is significant that Gilpin can apply picturesque criteria freely only when he is discussing buildings which are not really "architecture". The Gothic castle, as opposed to the church, was built for a utilitarian function rather than from an aesthetic impulse.¹³⁴ This factor Gilpin himself noted.¹³⁵ And ruins can not be really considered as architecture since their original artistic values have been lost.¹³⁶ Gilpin is not able to do what Price and Knight later do--systematically apply picturesque values to architecture proper.

Architecture is, as Hussey comments, the most rational and physical of the arts.¹³⁷ Also, experimental poetry is attempted with ease; experimental architecture with great difficulty: a failure in architecture is a major disaster. So architecture was the last of the arts to be affected by either the picturesque or the romantic.¹³⁸ This tardiness of architecture's is perhaps reflected in the strong conservative and

¹³⁴Allsopp, A General History of Architecture, p. 193.

¹³⁵Southern Tour, pp. 86-88.

¹³⁶Paul Zucker, "Ruins--an Aesthetic Hybrid," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XX (1961), 119.

¹³⁷The Picturesque, p. 5.

¹³⁸Ibid.

classical bias of Gilpin's architectural criticism. Certainly the Burlington-Palladian is the style with which Gilpin feels most at ease and the style whose criteria dominate his thinking. But his confused appreciation of the Gothic and his application of non-classical criteria to minor architectural genres do indicate that his taste is more liberal than his theoretical criticism would indicate. As a man of taste he refuses to be bound too severely by the consistencies that would bind an aesthetician.

CHAPTER VI
GILPIN'S CRITICISM OF GARDENING

In his discussions of the art of gardening Gilpin gives further proof that he is "involved in perpetual compromise."¹ His basic critical technique is again the defence of the non-classical with the weapons of neo-classicism. The "natural garden" was, as nearly all its biographers have said, a reaction against the imposition on the garden of classical standards--"formal and regular design, symmetry, simplicity and the rest. . . ."² It was, in fact, based on the aesthetic principle of irregularity,³ a principle diametrically opposed to classical precept. And this is the garden that Gilpin defends, though not on the basis of its pleasing irregularity. He proves that the new taste in the laying out of grounds is completely in accord with neo-classical artistic principles. And he does this so well that he almost convinces me that the natural garden is an essentially classical art form.

There can be no doubt about Gilpin's complete approval of the natural garden. "About the beginning of this present

¹Christopher Hussey, The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927), p. 114.

²Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival and the Return to Nature," Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: Putnam's, 1960), p. 164. See also Lovejoy, "The Chinese Origin of Romanticism," Essays, pp. 99-102.

³Lovejoy, "The First Gothic Revival," Essays, p. 155.

century appeared first the present taste in improving gardens and pleasure grounds. . . ." ⁴ This present taste is not only correct but exclusively so; of the time before its arrival Gilpin says: "Taste, however, then was not. . . ." ⁵ The old architectural gardens, "with regular cascades, spouting fountains, flights of terraces, and other achievements," ⁶ he characterizes as "formal and ill contrived," graced with "every sort of expensive deformity." ⁷ The new gardens are "simple, easy, and natural," ⁸ and "a species of landscape, which no country, but England, can display in such perfection." ⁹

The perfection that the English have achieved is the result of their ability to follow nature: "In England alone the model of nature is adopted." ¹⁰ Conformity to nature was,

⁴Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of Great Britain; Particularly the High-Lands of Scotland [abbreviation: Scottish Tour] (London, 1789), II, 142.

⁵"Observations, on Several Parts of the Counties of Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex . . . ," Observations, on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Eastern Tour] (London, 1809), p. 41.

⁶Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, . . . on Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland [abbreviation: Northern Tour] (London, 1786), I, 9.

⁷Ibid., I, 44; see also Scottish Tour, II, 81-85.

⁸Northern Tour, I, 9.

⁹Northern Tour, I, 9.

¹⁰Ibid.

as I indicated in the chapter on painting, both a primary principle of neo-classicism and a justification for revolt against neo-classical standards.¹¹ Pevsner suggests that the principle was used by the advocates of the natural garden as the justification for horticultural romanticism: "But in gardening the very term imitation of nature was bound to create quite different associations. To be natural in a garden evidently was to re-create nature untouched by man."¹² This theory was probably not held by any landscape gardener; it is certainly not Gilpin's theory. Gilpin assigns to the precept "follow nature" the same essentially neo-classic significance that Pope assigns it in An Essay of Criticism.

Gilpin definitely does not believe what later theorists were to suggest, that the natural garden can be a matter of chance or picturesque neglect.¹³ Nature may be the model, but nature left to herself produces confusion, or at least produces something other than a garden. No, the garden may be "simple, easy and natural," but must not be wild and uncontrolled. Talking of William Ashburnham's seat, Gilpin hopes

¹¹See Arthur O. Lovejoy, "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm," Essays, p. 69.

¹²Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Genesis of the Picturesque," The Architectural Review, XCVI (1944), 146.

¹³See H.F. Clark, The English Landscape Garden (London: Pleiades Books, 1948), p. 25.

that the grounds will be well laid out. For though the grounds are as yet neglected, they are "capable of great improvement"; they are indeed "capable of receiving all the beauties of nature."¹⁴ This sounds rather senseless. What have they now but "all the beauties of nature" (such as they are); what will they receive from improvement but all the beauties of garden art? Obviously Gilpin believes that the well laid out garden is ". . . Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd."¹⁵

Gilpin also explains how the gardener should methodize. The method is to "to improve nature by herself; to collect ideas of the most beautiful scenery, and to adapt them to different situations, preserving at the same time the natural character of each scene."¹⁶ This statement, like Pope's, indicates a belief that "nature in its 'natural' state can be aesthetically improved."¹⁷ And Gilpin emphasizes that this is his belief by quoting with approval: "Tis thine [the gardener's] alone/ To mend, not change her features."¹⁸ The mended is more perfect than the wild:

¹⁴Observations on the Coasts of Hampshire, Sussex, and Kent, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Southern Tour] (London, 1804), p. 58.

¹⁵Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," l. 89, Pastoral Poetry and "An Essay on Criticism," ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen, 1961), p. 249.

¹⁶Scottish Tour, II, 142.

¹⁷Paul Ilie, "Picturesque Beauty in Spain and England: Aesthetic Rappports Between Jovellanos and Gilpin," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XIX (1960-61), 171.

¹⁸Northern Tour, I, 57.

As the park is a scene either planted by art, or, if naturally woody, artificially improved, we expect a beauty, and contrast in its clumps which we do not look for in the wild scenes of nature. We expect to see it's lawns, and their appendages, contrasted with each other, in shape, size, and disposition; from which a variety of artificial, yet natural scenes will arise. We expect that when trees are left standing as individuals, they should be the most beautiful of their kind, elegant and well balanced. We expect that all offensive trumpery, and all the rough luxuriance of undergrowth, should be removed; unless where it is necessary to thicken, or connect a scene; or hide some staring boundary.¹⁹

This passage clearly indicates that Gilpin believes the aim of gardening is to perfect nature, "to realize the ideal beauty which we only glimpse in nature as she actually is."²⁰

The gardener is, according to Gilpin's theory, trying to create that same ideal nature that the painter is trying to capture in mimetic art. The gardener's nature is thus that fundamental neo-classic nature, what Christopher Hussey calls "the Christian humanist concept of nature derived from Aristotle, of an immanent force always striving to produce perfection of form, but always deflected from perfection by evil 'accidents' until enabled to do so by man's divinely ordered rational faculties."²¹ Gilpin does not actually state that the garden must be controlled by man's rational faculties,

¹⁹Remarks on Forest Scenery, and Other Woodland Views, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . ., 3rd ed. (London, 1808), I, 192-193.

²⁰R.L. Brett, The Third Earl of Shaftesbury: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), p. 203.

²¹Christopher Hussey, "Introduction," Capability Brown, Dorothy Stroud (London: Country Life, 1950), p. 15.

but the principle is inherent in his theory of methodizing. The method involves selection, decision as to what are nature's most beautiful forms; and composition, arrangement of these forms in the most beautiful manner. And the basis of selection and composition is an ideal. This ideal is more empirically conceived and much closer to unimproved nature than was the ideal of Le Notre; Gilpin does not believe that straight lines, circular seas, and geometrical trees embody the perfection to which nature is constantly striving.²² But although it is not based on mathematics, his is still a rationally conceived ideal; it is nature brought into conformity with the rules of art.

One of the first duties of Gilpin's improver is to remove deformity. Even a scene of such superior natural beauty as Keswick needs some deformities removed:

But notwithstanding the beauties of nature; it may happen that some deformities, even in her operations may exist. We often observe the craggy points and summits of mountains not well formed; and the mountain itself not exactly shaped. With these things however we must rest satisfied. --Yet sometimes, in smaller matters, a natural deformity may be done away. An awkward knole, on the foreground may offend; which art may remove or at least correct.²³

And he continues in this vein. The suggestions are very restrained and modest, and Gilpin feels obliged to say that

²²Derek Clifford, A History of Garden Design (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 128.

²³Scottish Tour, II, 163-164.

nature does not often produce deformity. But the concern for removing deformity implies a clear conception of form. The mountain and the foreground have deviated from some ideal form in the artist's mind.

The qualities of ideal form in individual objects of nature Gilpin indicates in specific discussions. In Forest Scenery he says of trees: "The same rules which establish elegance in other subjects, establish it in these. There must be the same harmony of parts; the same sweeping line; the same contrast; the same ease and freedom."²⁴ Later in the same book he gives rules for judging clumps, and specifies such criteria as balance, contrast, and proportion.²⁵ And in the Northern Tour he discourses on the criteria by which lakes are to be judged.²⁶ It is evident from these discussions that Gilpin is being sophistical when he says, "In arts, we judge by the rules of art. In nature, we have no criterion but the forms of nature . . . in judging of a tree, or a mountain; we judge by the most beautiful forms of each, which nature hath given us."²⁷ The decision as to which are the most beautiful forms is made on the basis of the rules of art. The most beautiful are those which are naturally in accord with the rules.

²⁴I, 3.

²⁵I, 179-187.

²⁶I, 93-101.

²⁷Forest Scenery, II, 262.

But the gardener, after he has collected his ideas, must "adapt them to different situations, preserving at the same time the natural character of each scene."²⁸ This dictum is clearly an echo of the classical doctrine of decorum in art. Decorum--what Bate describes as "the simultaneous 'preservation and ennobling of the type'"²⁹--was a rule traditionally applied to the depiction of human character or form, but it seems to have been appropriated by the theoreticians of the landscape school of gardening.³⁰ Gilpin insists that the character of a scene not be altered but be clarified and intensified.³¹ He praises particularly at Leasowes Shenstone's success in coherently characterizing his scenes.³² And when making suggestions for the improving of Fountains Abbey and its surroundings, he first decides on the ruling character of the scene: ". . . the idea which such a scene naturally suggests, is that of retirement--the habitation of cheerful solitude." And he asserts: "Solitude therefore being the reigning idea of the scene, every accompaniment should tend to impress it."³³

²⁸Scottish Tour, II, 142.

²⁹Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England (New York: Harpers, 1961), p. 14.

³⁰See Ralph Dutton, The English Garden (London: Batsford, 1937), p. 84.

³¹Northern Tour, I, 57.

³²*Ibid.*, I, 54.

³³*Ibid.*, II, 179.

This sounds very much like Dryden insisting that "when a poet has given the dignity of a king to one of his persons, in all his actions and speeches that person must discover majesty, magnanimity, and jealousy of power, because these are suitable to the general manners of a king."³⁴

The concern for a coherently characterized scene reveals that Gilpin is not satisfied with that which is visually effective, or with that which is capable of arousing pleasant sensations; he is only satisfied with what is a rationally justifiable part of ordered reality. That this is so is also proven by his insistence on propriety, a rule subordinate and contributory to the rule of decorum. Gilpin objects to temples in the park but requires them in pleasure grounds;³⁵ he thinks a shattered spruce picturesque but does not allow it on the lawn;³⁶ he praises the bridge and obelisk at Blenheim but insists that anywhere else they would be ostentatious.³⁷ The basis of all these pronouncements is his conviction of the importance of propriety in garden arrangement and ornamentation. As he says in the Scottish Tour:

Thus an elegant path round the environs of a house, where you would naturally expect the decorating hand of art, is pleasing: propriety gives it beauty. But in a wild rocky

³⁴"Preface," Troilus and Cressida, quoted from Bate, p. 15.

³⁵Forest Scenery, I, 207.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 193.

scene, where you expect no human dwelling; nor anything but the naked print of nature's foot, all appearance of artificial ornament offends.³⁸

Here is indeed a non-sensational aesthetic: propriety creates beauty.

Gilpin also insists on verisimilitude, or probability, in the laying out and ornamenting of grounds. The park road should wind,

. . . but let it not take any deviation, which is not well accounted for. To have the convenience of winding along a valley, or passing a commodious bridge, or avoiding a piece of water, any traveller would naturally wish to deviate a little; and obstacles of this kind, if necessary, must be interposed. Mr. Brown was often happy in creating these artificial obstructions.³⁹

Similarly, a triumphal arch on the summit of a hill is "grotesquely" placed because it is not located where a procession would have gone.⁴⁰ And Gilpin warns the gardener that in the placing of an ornamental bridge

. . . you must follow the idea of probability (which is nature as far as it goes) and throw the bridge over some part, where it appears really to be wanted. Your path must lead over it; or at least be directed to some safer place in it's neighbourhood, that the danger of the bridge may appear plainly to be the cause of it's desertion.⁴¹

³⁸Scottish Tour, I, 121.

³⁹Forest Scenery, I, 194.

⁴⁰Observations on the Western Parts of England, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty. . . . [abbreviation: Western Tour], 2nd ed. (London, 1808), pp. 100-101.

⁴¹Scottish Tour, II, 171-172.

Again Gilpin is concerned about the rational reaction of the observer.

Gilpin also insists that the garden meet certain compositional requirements. The gardener must take care that all his handiwork is in accord with the compositional rules; he must also give compositional guidance to nature herself, for "Nature is always great in design but unequal in composition."⁴² Gilpin's essential concern here is that the garden produce a unified whole. The gardener is "imitating nature" in her own medium. But actual nature is, according to Gilpin, often compositionally faulty: ". . . seldom is she so correct in composition as to produce an harmonious whole."⁴³ The gardener must improve her so as to produce an harmonious whole; he thereby imitates the essential order of reality. Gilpin obviously considers gardening an art of ideal imitation.

Gilpin constantly discusses the garden as a single, unified composition. He cannot accept the "gardenesque" garden, a place with several specialized gardens--Italian, Japanese, rustic, flower, herb--each elbowing the other and

⁴²Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: Wye Tour] (London, 1782), p. 18. He means that in nature's scenes there is unity of subject, a close relationship between the elements; but the elements are not arranged so as to produce a unified whole.

⁴³Ibid.

each handled as a separate entity.⁴⁴ Of Hagley, one of the most celebrated gardens of his day, Gilpin says, "The plan of Hagley, (if there be any) is so confused that it is impossible to describe it. There is no coherency of parts. . . ."⁴⁵ What would he have said of Ashridge, with its seventeen independent gardens?

Any individual element, no matter how beautiful, is banished if it distracts attention from the composition as a whole. Shrubs, flowers, artificial ornaments, are allowed by Gilpin only if they are properly subordinated. Too many buildings "distract the eye, and become separate spots instead of parts of a whole."⁴⁶ And ". . . flowering shrubs may have their elegance and beauty: but in [park] scenes like this, they are only splendid patches, which injure the grandeur and simplicity of the whole."⁴⁷

It is interesting to note, by the way, that the garden must not only be an orderly whole, but its organization pattern must be apparent. "A work of art (be it what it may, house, picture, book, or garden,) however beautiful in it's underparts, loses half it's value, if the general scope of it is

⁴⁴This type of garden design began with Repton and dominated the nineteenth century. Butchart's gardens are a fine example of the gardenesque manner of the laying out of grounds.

⁴⁵Northern Tour, I, 57.

⁴⁶Western Tour, p. 157.

⁴⁷Wye Tour, p. 42.

not obvious to conception."⁴⁸ On this basis Gilpin criticizes Leasowes; he did not immediately comprehend its general scope: "We should have been carried first into the higher parts; where we might have had a view of the whole at once. We should then have seen that it is, what is properly called, an adorned farm. . . ."⁴⁹ Thus the garden's rational order is only part of the matter; the viewer's aesthetic response is at least partially dependent upon his intellectual comprehension of the order displayed. All this sounds rather like Le Notre's great principle "--that the whole extent of the enormous garden should be visible at a gasp; accordingly whatever variety there might be within the parts the parts themselves were to be subordinated to the whole."⁵⁰

Gilpin uses the term "harmony" in his criticism of gardens. By harmony he seems to mean a combination of unity and propriety, with perhaps a few other ingredients. The principal denotation of the term is agreement of parts: "It is among the first principles which should guide every improver, that all contiguous objects should suit each other, and likewise the situation in which they are placed."⁵¹ On the grounds of harmony he excludes many "picturesque" objects from the garden.

⁴⁸Northern Tour, I, 57.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁰Clifford, Garden Design, p. 73.

⁵¹Southern Tour, p. 45.

Whether these maladies in trees ever produce beauty in adorned nature, I much doubt. Kent was hardy enough to plant a withered tree, but the error was too glaring for imitation. Objects in every mode of composition should harmonize. . . .⁵²

Again he has no doubts about the suitability of applying the rules of art to the garden. The garden is a work of art, despite its natural medium.

Gilpin's comments on gardening reaffirm his devotion to the principle of simplicity. Simplicity, in the garden as elsewhere, is "conformity to nature." But for Gilpin simplicity is not consistent with formal and regular design:

As a contrast to parks thus laid out in the simplicity of nature, let us just throw our eyes over a park laid out with the formality of art. The comparison will not injure the principles we established.

"From Vauvrey recrossing the Seine, we come to Muids. This chateau stands on a rising ground on the north side of it; and commands a fine prospect, having two long avenues of trees, running down to the river. Adjoining to the house are pleasant gardens, and a paddock planted with timber trees in the form of a star."⁵³

Simplicity is, in this passage, opposed not to complexity but to formality. And in another passage he indicates that simplicity is the result of skillful artistry:

The house [Trentham] stands low; at the bottom of a woody hill, on the banks of the Trent, and tho there is nothing very peculiarly striking in the situation; yet it consists

⁵²Forest Scenery, I, 10.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 197-198. Gilpin acknowledges the quotation as being from Ducairel's Norman Antiquities, p. 42.

of considerable variety in point of ground, wood, and water. Of all this Mr. Brown, who was called in to improve it, has made masterly use; and has adapted with great judgement his improvements to the ground. The contrivance is more varied, than the works of this artist commonly are; and the result is, a scene of great simplicity and beauty.⁵⁴

In this instance variety is the source of simplicity. Such a theory would make no sense to a classicist. Clearly Gilpin means by simplicity not freedom from intricacy or complexity of composition (Vauvrey has this) but an apparently artless informality. The terminology is classical, but the meaning has been changed to defend the natural garden rather than the formal garden.

Gilpin's handling of the rule of simplicity is indicative of his ambiguous critical attitude to the garden. The garden he advocates is undoubtedly nature methodized, improved, brought into conformity with the rules of art. As such it is a rationally conceived ideal, the product of essentially neo-classical concepts of nature, truth, and beauty. But the rules to which the garden must conform, while also essentially neo-classical, are presented by Gilpin in such a way as to allow the introduction of significantly non-classical elements.

For instance, Gilpin says that the gardener must select the most beautiful individual objects as the elements of his composition. The objects are selected on the basis of their conformity to such rules of art as proportion, balance, harmony

⁵⁴Scottish Tour, II, 182.

of parts. But the rules to which they must conform do not include regularity. And thus the revolutionary element is introduced: the objects Gilpin selects are invariably irregular. He objects to the "spruce-fir" as an ornamental tree because ". . . it is rather disagreeable to see a repetition of these feathery strata, beautiful as they are, in regular order, from the bottom of a tree to the top."⁵⁵ The same criterion applies to the clump: "No regular form is pleasing. A group on the side of a hill, or in any situation, where the eye can more easily investigate its shape, must be circumscribed by an irregular line. . . ."⁵⁶ And similar remarks are made in relation to lawns, lakes, and cascades. Gilpin is applying the rules of art to forms that are other than "in some sort regular."⁵⁷ He is rejecting Wren's thesis that "Geometrical Figures are naturally more beautiful than any other irregular; in this all consent, as to a Law of Nature."⁵⁸

Also, the classicism inherent in Gilpin's applying to gardening the principle of decorum is often qualified by the nature of the ruling idea he wishes to clarify. He suggests

⁵⁵Forest Scenery, I, 92.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 186.

⁵⁷William Temple, Upon the Gardens of Epicurus. Quoted by Lovejoy, "The Chinese Origin of Romanticism," Essays, p. 111.

⁵⁸Christopher Wren. Quoted by Lovejoy, "The Chinese Origin of Romanticism," Essays, p. 99.

that the ideas of wildness, neglect, and desolation be dominant in improved "wild park scenes" and in the improvements around ruins.⁵⁹ Though this is a logical application of the rule of decorum, the ruling ideas are ones which no true classicist would wish to cultivate. They are opposed to the classical enjoyment of clarity, completeness, and refinement.⁶⁰

Similarly, Gilpin uses the rule of propriety for subversive ends. He makes it an argument against the regularity of the formal garden: "A house is an artificial object: and the scenery around it, must, in some degree, partake of art, Propriety requires it. . . . But if it partakes of art, as allied to the mansion; it should also partake of nature, as allied to the country."⁶¹ And he goes on from here to defend the irregular garden as the only one proper for a country house. He concludes by saying that few gardens are as wild and irregular as the rule of propriety demands.

But Gilpin cannot escape the fact that even in the natural garden the improver must give compositional guidance to nature. This theory implies, as I suggested earlier, that man is capable of aesthetically improving wild nature. However, Gilpin manages to justify man's improving nature, while still retaining a romantic reverence for the unimproved:

⁵⁹See Scottish Tour, I, 24; Northern Tour, II, 179.

⁶⁰See Agnes Eleanor Addison, Romanticism and the Gothic Revival (New York: Smith, 1938), p. 145.

⁶¹Northern Tour, I, xix.

The case is, the immensity of Nature is beyond human comprehension. She works on a vast scale; and, no doubt, harmoniously, if her schemes could be comprehended. The artist in the mean time, is confined to a span.⁶²

Therefore, ". . . as we can view only detached parts, we must not wonder, if we seldom see in any of them our confined ideas of a whole."⁶³ So man's ability to aesthetically improve nature is the result of nature's essential superiority. Gilpin is indeed having his cake and eating it too.

Gilpin seems determined to theoretically justify whatever qualities he likes. It is therefore interesting that he refrains from justifying picturesqueness in garden scenes. He does not require in the garden the roughness and sudden variation that he thinks distinctive of picturesqueness. In the Northern Tour he explains that ". . . we cannot well admit the embellished scene among objects purely picturesque. It is too trim, and neat for the pencil. . . ."⁶⁴ But he does not condemn it because of this: "It has beauties peculiar to itself. . . ."⁶⁵

But Gilpin does, quite understandably, allow his inter-

⁶²Wye Tour, p. 18.

⁶³"Observations on Several Parts of North Wales; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . .," Observations on . . . Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex. Also on Several Parts of North Wales; Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty . . . [abbreviation: North Wales Tour] (London, 1809), p. 175.

⁶⁴I, xv.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. xvi.

est in the picturesque to influence somewhat his theory of garden design. Many of his practical suggestions for the laying out of grounds are related to principles of picturesque beauty. And some of these ideas later became key elements in the systems of the "picturesque garden" theorists. and in the practice of early-nineteenth-century gardeners.

For instance, Gilpin thinks that the well-laid-out garden, though not picturesque, should be formed on the same general principles as the painted landscape:

In the embellished pleasure-ground . . . , tho all is neat, and elegant--far too neat and elegant for the use of the pencil--yet, if it be well laid out, it exhibits the lines, and principles of landscape; and is worth the study of the picturesque traveller.⁶⁶

This belief follows quite logically from Gilpin's requiring that the rules of art be considered in the laying out of grounds. It anticipates the theory of Sir Uvedale Price that

. . . gardening is not to imitate particular pictures, or even to reproduce the same kind of scenes as are found in pictures; rather, the original compositions formed by improvers from the elements of scenery are to be guided by the general principles of painting.⁶⁷

Gilpin seems to be, in fact, tending toward Price's theory

⁶⁶"Essay II. On Picturesque Travel," Five Essays, on Picturesque Subjects; With a Poem on Landscape Painting (London, 1808), p. 45.

⁶⁷Walter John Hipple, The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), p. 215.

that these principles are entirely independent of painting and are "the general principles on which the effect of all visible objects must depend, and to which it must be referred."⁶⁸

Gilpin also seems to anticipate Price's intense concern for "insensible transition" as a principle of visual effect and "the justest and most comprehensive principle of the beautiful in landscape."⁶⁹ Gilpin frequently mentions, for instance, the value of shrubbery and undergrowth in connecting trees to the grass.⁷⁰ But Gilpin does not share Price's violent objection to the Kent-Brown arrangement of neat clumps on a shaven lawn. On one occasion he defends the arrangement, asserting that ". . . in the artificial lawn we commonly require neatness; so that the rude connections of nature are excluded."⁷¹ He insists that the irregular shape of the clump and the ground-level branches of some shrubbery give adequate connection.

The principle of insensible transition Gilpin sees as applicable to the laying out of the grounds as a whole. The grounds should "be considered as a connecting thread between the regularity of the house, and the freedom of the natural

⁶⁸Uvedale Price, "On the Picturesque," Sir Uvedale Price on the Picturesque . . . by Thomas Dick Lauder (Edinburgh and London, 1842), p. 64.

⁶⁹Price, "On Artificial Water," Sir Uvedale Price on the Picturesque, p. 295.

⁷⁰See for instance Forest Scenery, I, 192 and II, 73.

⁷¹Forest Scenery, II, 126.

scene."⁷² Therefore, "as the garden . . . approaches nearer the house than the park, it takes of course a higher polish."⁷³ "If the scene be large it throws off art by degrees, the more it recedes from the mansion, and approaches the country."⁷⁴ This principle of transition is in direct opposition to, and implicitly a criticism of, Brown's methods. (Price later made the condemnation explicit.) Brown handled the entire estate as a neat and tidy, albeit gracefully irregular, park. He distributed clumps, belts, and lakes on an otherwise close-shaven terrain; the house was, as Clifford says, simply placed in the middle of this park "like a tea-box put down on the middle of a sheet of green baize."⁷⁵ Gilpin's theory places a far greater emphasis on the beauties of wild nature, and it implies a belief that man and his gardens are somewhat of intruders in the natural landscape. Man must relate his improvements to the beauties of the natural countryside. The theory indicates, I think, a weakening in man's belief in his superiority over nature and in his ability to improve it. In any case, Gilpin's concern for relating the garden to the countryside is an interestingly early statement of a principle which has had enormous influence on the practice of gardening

⁷²Northern Tour, I, xiv.

⁷³Forest Scenery, I, 196.

⁷⁴Northern Tour, I, xv.

⁷⁵Garden Design, p. 174.

in both the nineteenth and our own century.

Gilpin is also interested in picturesque views from the house and from the paths and ridings of the park. In some instances Gilpin even suggests that the real purpose of the garden is merely to "add a pleasing foreground to the distance,"⁷⁶ to "break those distant views into parts--to form those parts into the most beautiful scenes, and to exhibit them with woody foregrounds to the best advantage."⁷⁷ And though he is not often this extreme, he is constant in his belief that "A great house stands most nobly on an elevated knoll, from whence it may overlook the distant country."⁷⁸ Gilpin is insistent on a good view from the house because he genuinely feels that natural scenery is preferable to the best laid out gardens. In fact, the only danger of having a spectacular view from the house would seem to be that "The grand natural scenes will always appear so superior to the embellished artificial one . . . that one is apt to look contemptuously on the latter."⁷⁹ In view of the fact that Gilpin's theory of garden design is based chiefly on his acceptance of garden as "improved" nature, this preference for wild nature seems illogical. And indeed there is a certain amount of

⁷⁶Northern Tour, I, xiv.

⁷⁷Forest Scenery, II, 184-185.

⁷⁸Ibid., I, 190.

⁷⁹Northern Tour, I, xiii.

inconsistency that cannot be explained away.

But Gilpin does manage partially to reconcile his two seemingly contradictory attitudes. He admits that the garden scene is the more correct; but he explains that the natural scene is in a grander style, is, as it were, of a superior genre. The wild scene is like "the works of a great literary genius, which contain greater beauties, tho perhaps blended with greater defects, than the laboured work of a less exalted, tho more correct writer."⁸⁰ He says: "In wild scenes of nature we have grander exhibitions, but greater deformities, than are generally met with in the polished works of art."⁸¹ He does not deny that man can aesthetically improve nature, or that the garden is more perfect than the mountain valley. It is simply that the grandeur of the latter may make the perfection of the former seem insignificant. However, Gilpin is not averse to correcting and improving even a sublime scene, if such improvement is possible. He devotes several pages to suggestions for the "improvement" of Keswick.⁸² Grand though it is, and therefore preferable to a perfect bowling green, Keswick still has capabilities for improvement.

Thus Gilpin manages to maintain his "perpetual compromise"⁸³ to the awkward end. Having defended the natural

⁸⁰Forest Scenery, II, 229.

⁸¹Ibid., I, 193.

⁸²Scottish Tour, II, 161-171.

⁸³Hussey, The Picturesque, p. 114.

garden by means of the rules of art, he then asserts the superiority of wild nature over art, only to enlist the aid of art in making wild nature even more superior. In his discussions of improving we see, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, the justice of Hussey's "comical vision of the kindly parson, first abasing himself before nature as the source of all beauty and emotion; then getting up and giving her a lesson in deportment."⁸⁴

⁸⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Gilpin's chief importance is undoubtedly as popularizer of the picturesque way of looking at landscape. It was he who first taught the fashionable world to look at scenery as if it were an infinite series of more or less well-composed landscape paintings. And, as Christopher Hussey has shown, this mode of vision dominated for several decades the Englishman's reaction to nature.¹ Also of importance is Gilpin's role as advertising agent for the "romantic" scenery of the lake district and the highlands of Scotland. On these aspects of his activity Gilpin's biographers and critics have concentrated their attention.

Gilpin's criticism of the fine arts is less important than his criticism of nature in that it is less original and was less influential. But it is none the less interesting. It reveals some of the difficulties that were encountered by the man of taste in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, a time of changing premises, changing attitudes to the arts, and changing taste. Gilpin's criticism is rooted in the classical tradition and centered around classical

¹The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View (London: Putnam's, 1927), pp. 1-2.

principles. But many of his ideas, values, and tastes are different in emphasis from, or directly opposed to, those of classical theory. He attempts to reconcile the conflicting elements in his criticism and form a coherent critical system. He is not always successful, but his attempt is an interesting chapter (or at least a paragraph) in the history of criticism.

Gilpin's critical eclecticism is indicative of the extent to which "classical" and "romantic" attitudes were interwoven in the critical thought of the later eighteenth century. It reveals the flexibility and breadth of outlook that characterized the eighteenth century's critical application of classical principles. His criticism stresses the fact that in many respects romanticism itself grew out of the classical tradition. It also reveals that sometimes artistic taste outran the aesthetic and critical theories used to justify that taste.

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