

THE SEARCH FOR THE SUBLIME IRISH LANDSCAPE: THE PROVINCES  
VERSUS THE METROPOLIS IN THE WORK AND LIVES OF FRANCIS DANBY,  
JAMES ARTHUR O'CONNOR, AND GEORGE PETRIE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

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The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the lives and works of three Irish artists within different parameters than has traditionally been done so within Irish art-historical discourse. Most scholars who have focused on Irish artists of the past two hundred years have taken a monographic approach. By contrast I shall consider the developmental trajectory of Francis Danby, James Arthur O'Connor, and George Petrie from a thematic methodology that will consider specific metropolitan versus provincial influences on their work, travel, and most significantly, their adoption of the Sublime as a means of transcending their regional training and allowing them to be considered within a wider, international context.

In the nineteenth century many Irish artists felt compelled to leave their homeland with the hopes of finding financial and professional success abroad. The majority of them chose London for their destination and as such, hoped to transcend the limitations of the provincial training they had received within Dublin artistic circles. In 1813, Francis Danby, James Arthur O'Connor, and George Petrie left Dublin together with the hopes of finding financial and artistic success in London. Although they arrived together, they did not all remain. Petrie returned to Ireland almost immediately, O'Connor did so a few weeks later (although he would ultimately move to London in 1822), and Danby made his way to Bristol to hone his skills before making his London debut several years later.

Within the parameters of Romanticism, each artist evolved from topographic painters to artists who adopted their own version of the Sublime for their landscape views. My analysis will encompass how each artist chose the different versions of the Sublime to differentiate themselves and to propel their careers forward in a more innovative and international manner. Study of their development enables us to consider them as artists from the provinces who ultimately were able to transcend their limited training and engage with the formal and theoretical metropolitan advances of the Sublime.

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## INTRODUCTION

The German verb *wandern* denotes traveling . . . wandering will be used throughout to denote travel, frequently (but not exclusively) in the sense of a journey undertaken on foot, which may or may not be directed to a particular goal, but also refers to nomadism, those forms of existence distinct from the settled life . . . the wanderers I have in mind . . . as well as the artists . . . who, from the early phase of Romanticism onward, also identified themselves as wanderers . . . it is apparent that the journey is driven not by rational calculation but by feeling—specifically, the feeling of longing . . . thus, with respect to motivation, the journey appears as an analogue of the creative process itself as understood by the Romantics.

—Andrew Cusack, *The Wanderer in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*<sup>1</sup>

For centuries Ireland has been a point of departure and a point of arrival. From the *iomramh* to the *navigatio* to the Tour, travellers in search of salvation, instruction or the godsend of novelty have either left the island or landed on it, tracking the signs of specificity.

—Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin, *Tourism in Ireland*<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth century, many Irish artists left their homeland to pursue professional opportunities abroad. Early on, London was a major international artistic center of the Western world, second only to Paris, and it remained so until about 1850.<sup>3</sup> Artists who stayed in Ireland to establish themselves professionally were hampered by the political, economic, and sociological tensions engendered by that country's relationship with England. Those who went to England, on the other hand, joined myriad other international artists in the thriving metropolitan art market of its capitol. As the century progressed, such international travel became even easier, further encouraging

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Cusack, *The Wanderer in Nineteenth-Century German Literature: Intellectual History and Cultural Criticism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin, eds., *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 52.

<sup>3</sup> In the eighteenth century, Rome was the primary artistic hub; from the mid-nineteenth century until World War II, Paris reigned supreme.

those artists who wanted to pursue a career abroad and use travel to expand their artistic practice and education. For some, the decision to leave Ireland was a permanent one, as in the case of Francis Danby (1791–1861); others such as James Arthur O’Connor (1792–1841) vacillated, moving between Ireland, England, and the continent. George Petrie (1790–1866) even returned home to Ireland after a brief stay in England.

Most scholars interested in Irish art of the past two hundred years have taken a monographic approach.<sup>4</sup> More recently, in the context of Irish studies, scholars have considered modern Irish painters and their careers in the fraught context of Ireland’s often problematic relationship with England.<sup>5</sup> Today, however, richer and more complex analyses of developments of all kinds in nineteenth-century Ireland contribute significantly to its unique art history.

With a few exceptions, the methodologies of the existing Irish art historical canon appear to underestimate the true breadth and depth of Irish artists’ involvement with international developments over the past three hundred years.<sup>6</sup> Irish artists have been traditionally overshadowed by England’s dominating political, social, and cultural presence in the region.<sup>7</sup> By redefining the criteria of judgment and shifting the parameters

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<sup>4</sup> See, in particular, Eric Adams, *Francis Danby: Varieties of Poetic Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Jonathan Benington, *Roderic O’Conor: A Biography, with a Catalogue of His Work* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992); John Hutchinson, *James Arthur O’Connor* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1985), exh. cat.

<sup>5</sup> See Cyril Barrett, “Irish Nationalism and Art,” *Studies* (Winter 1975): 393–409; Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland, 1750–1930* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> See Julian Campbell, *Nathaniel Hone the Younger: 1831–1917*, exh. cat. (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1991), which in fact positions Irish Impressionist painters within the general context of Impressionism. In general, however, Irish contributions to the history of art are attributed most prominently to the eighth and ninth centuries—illuminated manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells* (early ninth century), high stone crosses such as the High Cross of Monasterboice, Co. Lough (eighth century), and the intricate designing and manufactured jewelry/metal work typified by the Tara Brooch and the Ardagh Chalice (early eighth century).

<sup>7</sup> See Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993). Foster discusses the “incongruence” that existed between the English and the Irish at length, stating that the conflict dates back to the sixteenth century, as “Ireland was undergoing a process of conquest and

of analysis, however, we might reappraise this tumultuous period in Irish art. In that regard, I intend to reject terminology that is rigid, judgmental, or outdated, such as “minor” versus “major” or “derivative” versus “original.” And while I am interested in approaching the careers of these artists in terms that transcend “Irish” versus “English” as well, I will use “England” rather than “Britain” to call to mind the relationship that existed with Ireland at this time.<sup>8</sup> I will also consider Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie within a broad international context, drawing parallels to other artists who adopted the Sublime in their own methodologies.

A survey of the visual arts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries suggests many factors that might have contributed to the dissimilar artistic environments of London and Dublin, including their embrace of change versus continuity, respectively. Yet such terms must be acknowledged as fluid and relative. For example, within Ireland, Dublin would certainly be considered a metropolis, and the provinces would refer to the rest of the country. In relation to England, on the other hand, all of Ireland, including Dublin, would have been at one time considered provincial. Furthermore, as I discuss in depth in chapter 2, London would have been ultimately seen as more provincial than Paris. These inferiority complexes were viral, then: while the Irish artists battled their relative anonymity, eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century English artists were likewise struggling to realize a proper “English school” of art that might equal the historic artistic accomplishments of France.<sup>9</sup>

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colonization—which meant being technically subsumed into the theoretical borders of the British state” (87).

<sup>8</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, xii. Like Foster, I prefer to discuss Ireland’s relationship to England separately from England’s relationship to Scotland and Wales. The connotations of the term “British,” then, are problematic, contentious, and beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>9</sup> See William Vaughn, “The Englishness of British Art,” *Oxford Art Journal* 13.2 (1990): 11–23.

In relation to my own interdisciplinary focus, certain key texts have thrown light upon the particular problems and challenges of artists (and others) who chose to, or were compelled to, leave Ireland for the world beyond.<sup>10</sup> Many individuals, and numerous artists, in fact “exiled” *themselves* in search of professional rewards, though in this case the definition of exile is quite broad.<sup>11</sup> My own discussion of exile centers on the aspiration of three Irish artists to transcend the limits of their provincial training and embrace modernity, both literally and metaphorically, in the London metropolis (and, for one of them, back in Ireland as well). How were the careers of Francis Danby, James Arthur O’Connor, and George Petrie affected by their respective decisions to depart Ireland by ship for England in 1813?

For many Irish artists of this period, there were certainly strong enticements to leave home in search of better professional prospects abroad.<sup>12</sup> Artists who remained in Ireland were first and foremost hobbled by the prevailing taste for English art, as I will discuss further in chapter 1. In addition, most Irish artists who made their careers in Ireland were not exposed to the innovations behind the international art practices that

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<sup>10</sup> These include Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*; Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843–1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999); T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, *The Course of Irish History* (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001); James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791–1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003). While the latter three texts provide a helpful broader perspective on the relationship between Ireland and England, Foster’s invaluable contribution specifically focuses on the choices and experiences of the émigré, whether artist, professional, or worker, in terms of identity, politics, cultural background, and personal ambition.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, 288. Foster links exile and emigration because both are “involuntary”: “This is taken to mean banishment from a territory—mental and spiritual as well as physical—which still imposes the psychological norms of reality, and exerts a compulsion to return which will never be fulfilled . . . It is certainly an inseparable component of expatriate Irish rhetoric; alienation persisted as a literary trope, even among the prosperous emigrants who had no intention of ever returning home. It was sustained by a long native tradition: religious poetry derived from the cult of St. Columkille, the folk memory of Cromwellian transplantations, the romance of the Wild Geese. All these associations stressed the inseparability of Irishness and exile, and the links between Anglicization and displacement.”

<sup>12</sup> Examples of eighteenth-century Irish artists who relocated to London include George Barret R.A. (1732–1784), James Barry R.A. (1741–1806), Martin Cregan (1788–1870), Nathaniel Hone R.A. (1718–1784), and Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769–1850).

were more readily available to their colleagues in London. Although there were a number of private collections in Dublin, access to them would not have been granted to most artists. In general, then, artists in Ireland produced a corpus of work that, while substantial, did not reflect the glamour of the metropolis or the benefits to be derived from the study of the Old Masters. The work of artists such as James Brennan (1837–1907), William Brocas (1794–1868), Nathaniel Grogan (1740–1807), and Erskine Nicol (1825–1904) is today largely labeled “genre painting,” occupied as it is with everyday Irish scenes, though of excellent quality.<sup>13</sup>

In 1757, the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke (1729–1797) published the eighteenth century’s most influential treatise on aesthetics: *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.<sup>14</sup> In this essay Burke explored the schism that he felt existed in creative works between those that arose from pain or danger (which produced the Sublime) and those that arose from love (which produced the Beautiful).<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that an Irishman in fact produced the seminal text on the Sublime from this period, given its negligible impact on Irish genre artists such as those just mentioned. Nevertheless, for many international artists (and a few Irish ones), this essay would serve as an introduction to a discourse on the Sublime that in fact dated back to 1 C. E.

Certainly the work of Sublimely inclined artists like Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie presents clear differences from those genre painters. For the former, the Sublime

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<sup>13</sup> See Peter Murray, ed., *Whipping the Herring: Survival and Celebration in Nineteenth-Century Irish Life*, exh. cat. (Kinsale: Gandon Editions, 2006). This publication classifies the genre paintings from this period by the following themes: festivals, fairs and pilgrimages, social occasions, famine and emigration, rents and evictions, education and improvement, funerals and weddings, and working life.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, 86, 128.

represented a distinct alternative to the styles and habits of the artists who remained at home, literally and figuratively. Their exposure to progressive metropolitan artistic and philosophical advances opened them up to possibilities beyond the scope of their training in Ireland. The Sublime was modern; genre painting was traditional. By choosing the Sublime, Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie distinguished themselves by triumphing over the limitations of their roots and co-opting the sophistication of international artistic advances. They encountered this sophistication first in London, where the many economic incentives and benefits included well-established patronage systems, a thriving art market supported by an infrastructure of artistic exhibition and sales opportunities, and the availability of advanced training in a formalized professional art academy. All of these factors created a stimulating culture for artists, one that encouraged both the supply of and the demand for their work.

These artists' geographic, artistic, and symbolic journeys must be framed within a broader, more comprehensive international cultural context, particularly given Ireland *and* England's efforts to establish schools of painting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I will consider how the atmosphere of insecurity that was prevalent in both art markets propelled certain individuals (and groups) to promote the arts by emulating and appropriating international practices of education, artistic and commercial innovations, and systems of sustainable patronage. For this reason, the status of the arts in Ireland occupies chapter 1, and that of England occupies chapter 2. Certain individuals and events within London engendered radical cultural advances that would influence the Irish artists who sought to improve themselves there. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792),

Alderman Boydell (1719–1804), and John Julius Angerstein (1732–1823) each attempted to elevate the English school to an international stature.

In addition to these developments, a continuing intellectual dialogue about the Sublime informed the cultural context of the Irish painters I will explore in this dissertation. By attempting to build upon their provincial training in the context of the metropolis of London, Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie aligned themselves with an international coterie of visual and literary artists whose work was grounded in the precepts of the Sublime as a rhetorical, aesthetic, and theoretical discourse. Beginning with Longinus in 1 C. E. and regaining momentum from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the theme of the Sublime appeared in the work of numerous writers. Those of most immediate relevance to the period in question here, including John Dennis (1657–1734), linked the Sublime to the popularity of travel and especially the vistas available through the Grand Tour. As a result, there is an abundance of texts that directly relate to observations about nature and its relationship to the Sublime. The sheer volume and popularity of these texts within contemporary artistic culture suggests that artists such as Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie would have been well informed on this subject.

My discussion of the Sublime in relation to those artists will be presented in tandem with significant texts concerning it, especially those that might deepen our appreciation for how the Sublime was brought to bear upon paintings. Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie were not the first Irish artists to embrace it—this honor falls instead to George Barret (1732–1784) and James Forrester (fl. 1761–1765.) Both of these men were trained in Dublin but also left their homeland in pursuit of professional success. Barret made his way to London in 1762, whereupon he submitted the large *Powerscourt Waterfall* at the

Society of Artists in 1764; (fig. i:1).<sup>16</sup> Barret found patrons and success in London, becoming a good friend of Edmund Burke and eventually a founding member of the Royal Academy of Art. One of his commissions in particular stands out as prescient with regard to his impact upon his countrymen: when the Reverend John Lock asked him to paint a room in his house for decorative purposes, Barret responded with a panoramic view that in fact encircled the entire space.<sup>17</sup> Forrester began his education at the Dublin Society, where he remained for five years. In 1752, he left for Rome, whereupon he produced several large-scale landscapes that are rife with the tenets of the Sublime, including *Landscape with Monks by Lake Nemi* from 1772; (fig .i:2). Dark and mysterious, this moonlit landscape takes as its subject two monks immersed in their prayers, presenting a classically inspired composition that harkens back to the work of Nicolas Poussin (1593–1665) and Claude Gellée (Claude Lorraine; 1600–1682). Certainly the accomplishments of both Barret and Forester would have been well known to the younger artists at issue here.

The challenges and triumphs inherent in straddling the provincial and the metropolitan, while perhaps underestimated within the historiography of Irish art history, have resonated within the larger field of Irish studies.<sup>18</sup> Many historical figures have struggled with the pejorative associations attributed to regionalism and provincialism, particularly as they sought to define themselves in relation to their world. Within the canon of Romanticism, artists, writers, and philosophers all explored the individual's

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<sup>16</sup> O'Connor painted a similar work, titled *View of the Dargle, Lover's Leap*, in 1837.

<sup>17</sup> George Walter Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1913), 1:30–32.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); Seán Ryder, "The Politics of Landscape and Region in Nineteenth-Century Poetry," in *Ireland in the Nineteenth Century: Regional Identity*, ed. Leon Litvack and Glenn Hooper (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

relationship to the universal.<sup>19</sup> Robert Rosenblum’s seminal work on this topic discusses how numerous Romantic artists rejected the prevailing conventions of Christian iconography and theology in painting in favor of a more pantheistic, nature-based divinity: “Already by the 1760s and 1770s, those decades in which one first begins to feel the stirrings that became more and more agitated in the course of the Romantic movement, there were artists as far afield as Ireland and Switzerland who suddenly turned to specific sites in wild nature that seemed to elicit at the least, curiosity, and at the most, divine revelation, in the intrepid tourists who observed them.”<sup>20</sup>

Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie all began as topographical painters and their provincial roots would continue to inform their work despite a profound engagement with the Sublime. It is this fact that makes them so distinctive. Throughout my analysis I will examine the ways in which these artists engaged with the prevailing Romantic discourse relating to man’s (the individual’s) search for transcendence through nature (the universal). As such, their Irishness played a role in their uniquely metropolitan challenges and successes with variations upon the Sublime—Danby’s was apocalyptic, O’Connor’s, Romantic, and Petrie’s, historical. Despite their distinct styles, however, they all sought to represent the transformative desire of humanity to engage with divinity in nature. The Sublime was a means to this end.

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<sup>19</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965 (reprint: Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14–17; Carl Gustav Carus, *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting, Written in the Years 1815–1824, with a Letter from Goethe by Way of Introduction*, trans. David Britt (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1831; reprint, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002); Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 14–15.

<sup>20</sup> Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 17.

## **Nineteenth-Century London and Paris: Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie Seek the Metropolis**

Artists have often moved around in the interests of professional study, training, exhibitions, and sales opportunities. In the first half of the nineteenth century, many continental artists headed for London, where they sought to benefit from a well-established history of private and royal patronage, a successful education system, and a range of flourishing artistic societies and institutions, including the well-established and highly regarded Royal Academy of Art, founded in 1768. In chapters 3 through 5 of this study, I will consider the impact of such perambulation upon the careers of Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie, respectively.

When they first arrived in London together, the men viewed the Royal Academy collection and enjoyed a private audience with Benjamin West (1738–1820). Given the precarious nature of their finances, however, Petrie was enticed by his father to return home almost immediately. When Danby and O'Connor soon thereafter ran out of money, they opted to walk to Bristol, where they hoped to obtain passage on a boat scheduled to leave for Ireland. For Danby, providence intervened, however, when he met a generous patron who admired his work; he decided to remain in the port town to paint for this man and plot an eventual return to London. Through his hard work and the attractiveness of his art to sponsors and patrons, Danby's career would blossom in England even as his topographical landscape views gave way to apocalyptic Sublime vistas that presented man's heroic struggle to triumph over tragedy, as I will discuss in chapter 3.

Of the three artists, only Danby publicly exulted in rejecting Ireland for England. Nevertheless, throughout his career he remained in close touch with Petrie back home, and O'Connor, who would eventually become his neighbor in London. Danby's successful ascent within English artistic culture, first in Bristol and then in London, was indeed remarkable; he garnered attention, support, and patronage within the environs of both the Royal Academy and the British Institution. But his professional reputation would suffer irrevocable damage from a series of tumultuous mid-career personal problems, and he was eventually compelled to flee England for the continent. After many years, he returned to London and produced, among others, a major epic work that encapsulates his resolute dedication to the Sublime. He also began to return to Ireland to paint on occasion, and, while there, he would abandon his penchant for epic and spectacular Sublime exhibition pieces in favor of a poetic landscape style that mirrored his early works, prior to his debut in London. Perhaps he had come full circle, or possibly it was only through the excesses of the Sublime that he came to recognize the virtues of the "neo-provincial."

In chapter 4, I consider James Arthur O'Connor, who left Bristol (without Danby) within a few weeks and returned to Ireland. Somewhat indecisive in his career plans, he would finally return to London in 1822, where he would establish himself as a regular exhibitor at both the Royal Academy and the British Institution. In 1826 and again in 1832, moreover, O'Connor went on extensive continental excursions. During the second one, he traveled throughout Rhenish Prussia and immersed himself in German Romanticism, transforming his approach to the canvas. He was not alone—many travelers, tourists, and artists alike were drawn to the Rhineland and the ambiance of the

*Rhineromantik*. O'Connor's art soon turned inward; instead of producing topographic "portraits" of his clients' houses and demesnes, he produced powerful and emotional landscapes that were rife with drama and passion, leading later scholars to link the Irishman to the work of Caspar David Friedrich (1770–1840).

My investigation of O'Connor will focus primarily on his post-continental, Romantic Sublime paintings, completed in England, and I will position him within a broad theoretical and formal modern context. Of the three Irish artists, he most embodies the conundrum, discussed by Roy Foster in *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*, of the "exile of his own volition": "People who lived, or were in some sense 'caught,' between the two countries . . . [whose experiences are] restricted to particular intersections in the modern period."<sup>21</sup> O'Connor was indeed "caught" in this sense, obliged as he was to live in England while always yearning for his home country's emotional and creative sustenance. O'Connor's experience further evokes that of many other Romantic artists who identified with the theme of the wanderer, particularly given his "self-representation" within his later landscapes.<sup>22</sup>

In chapter 5, I will consider George Petrie's unique success in establishing a sustainable international professional reputation while living exclusively in Ireland. The catholic nature of Petrie's career encompasses work as an archeologist, antiquarian, writer, cartographer, and artist. As the latter, notably, he established early and longstanding relationships with numerous reproductive print publishers, who produced volumes of his images. This practice ensured a wide distribution of his art and made his reputation. These various print editions were comprised of Irish landscape views, some in

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<sup>21</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, i.

<sup>22</sup> Cusack, *Wanderer in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*, 75–76.

a large format best suited to viewing at home, others sized to be portable travel guides featuring Petrie's illustrations along with detailed descriptions of tourism routes and sights of interest.

In addition, Petrie produced many watercolor paintings during his career, indulging an interest in Sublime views of the Irish landscape. These images depict sites of critical importance to Irish history, culture, and religion, and several illustrate Irish patterns of pilgrimage—those of the pagan, the Christian, and, ultimately, the tourist. The watercolors are particularly telling of Petrie's priorities and interests as an artist because they were not encumbered by the censorious editing of his print publishers. Though Petrie never undertook continental sketching excursions as his colleagues Danby and O'Connor did, the theme of travel nevertheless resonates within his work, promoting an essentially Irish perspective on the multilayered diachronic and synchronic possibilities of the land. As such, these images present an important counterpoint to the longstanding and frequently pejorative English perspective on "provincial" Irish cultural history that is documented through centuries of historiography.

I intend to present these artists' innovations as representative of a uniquely realized incarnation of the Sublime in Irish landscape painting. Through an exploration of the relationship of the provinces to the metropolis and the themes of exile, the quest for modernity, and the artistic virtues of the Sublime, I hope to shed some light on a heretofore underappreciated moment in the history of Irish and international art in the nineteenth century.

## Chapter 1

### The Provincial: The Visual Arts in Ireland during the Nineteenth Century

No one could write a book about Ireland without getting into trouble.

—Halliday Sutherland, *Irish Journey*, 1959<sup>1</sup>

All travel can be seen as an act of translation. In the geometrical sense, the traveller is “translated” or moved from one point to another. In the linguistic sense, travel can involve inter-lingual translation, speaking a foreign language in another country, or intra-lingual translation, speaking the same language but in a different country. In addition, there are intellectual and emotional acts of translation, converting the experiences of the other place and people into the traveller’s own native currency.

—Michael Cronin, “Fellow Writers,” 1993<sup>2</sup>

To provide a context for Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie’s transformations from provincial neophytes to masters of the intercontinental Sublime, a thorough consideration of Ireland’s cultural milieu in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is required. The complex challenges that plagued Ireland’s artistic community both before and during their professional coming of age will inform my later analyses of their attempts to move past their Irish artistic heritage. Here I will attempt to make those challenges as plain as possible.

The artists themselves had mixed feelings about their origins and training. In England, Danby was so eager to fit in that he proudly called himself an English artist. However, his loyalty to England would eventually diminish, as he reconnected with Ireland and once again exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy. O’Connor’s love for Ireland, on the other hand, never faded at all despite his relocation. Intent on making a

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<sup>1</sup> Halliday Sutherland, *Irish Journey* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1959), preface, no page.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cronin, “Fellow Writers: Contemporary Travel Writing and Ireland,” in *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Barbara O’Connor and Michael Cronin (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 57.

living with his art, he sought the relative economic security of London. However, throughout his life he returned to his ancestral and spiritual home for sketching excursions, reveling in the beauty of his native land but returning to his adopted one to exhibit his work. Finally, Petrie's youthful excitement at the opportunities London offered was curtailed by pressure from his loved ones at home. After his early and successful exhibition in 1816 at the Royal Academy, he returned his focus to Ireland. Although he abandoned his initial enthusiasm for the life of an artistic "exile," throughout his career he demonstrated his awareness of progressive, metropolitan influences. His interest in international formal and theoretical artistic developments is evident in his landscapes that celebrate Ireland's history, which, despite their contents, are anything but provincial in their style and intent.

When studied in tandem, these artists' various attempts at "exile" from their culture and artistic training, their drive to absorb modern formal and theoretical concepts in London, and their unique interpretations of the metropolitan perspective they encountered there all contribute to a pointed reappraisal of their painting as a significant contribution to the Romantic obsession with the Sublime. First, then, it is essential to review the experiences of artists in general in Ireland in order to gain a more meaningful appreciation of why so many were compelled to leave. This goes against prevailing art historical wisdom, by and large, which views Ireland's artistic culture, and the majority of its artists, as "derivative" in comparison to their international contemporaries. There has been a tendency to rely on formalist analysis, in addition to a biographical, monographic approach, and most of the past chronicles of Ireland's art and artists stopped there. This discussion, on the other hand, will engage the work and lives of these three

artists in an unbiased and interdisciplinary context. Artists do not work in a vacuum, though we might like to imagine otherwise. Business plays a crucial role in an artist's reputation. In addition, without an economic foundation, artists would not be able to acquire the necessary educational training, exhibition opportunities, or sustainable patronage to practice their art.

Politics further influences the stability of economic support systems for the arts. Ireland's longstanding and often contentious relationship with England provided the fodder for much controversy, and this affected cultural life too. Given the time frame of Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie's coming of age, the specter of the Great Rebellion and uprising of 1798 loomed too near.<sup>3</sup> The social plight of the disenfranchised, impoverished peasant class was visible everywhere and could not be ignored, even by those in the arts or, especially, in some ways, those interested in supporting them.

### **Regrets and Aspirations: Fine Art in Dublin at a Difficult Time**

Successful efforts had come to fruition during the eighteenth century to establish viable schools and exhibition opportunities for Irish artists. However, in 1801, the Irish Parliament was moved from Dublin to London, and this had a host of ramifications for

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<sup>3</sup> For background on the Great Rebellion, see James Gordon, *History of the Rebellion in Ireland, in the Year 1798, Etc. Containing an Impartial Account of the Proceedings of the Irish Revolutionists from the Year 1782, till the Suppression of the Rebellion* (London: J. D. Dewick, 1803); Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600–1972* (Dublin: Penguin, 1988), 240–86; R. B. McDowell, "The Protestant Nation: 1775–1800," in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 190–203; J. H. Whyte, "The Age of Daniel O'Connell: 1800–47," in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 204–17.

the Irish people over the ensuing century.<sup>4</sup> After this “Act of Union” took place, the social, political, and cultural climate within the Irish capitol changed dramatically. Very quickly, most of the Irish peers and nobles who had maintained residences in Dublin, often with a second home in the Irish countryside moved their families, and social and cultural roles, to London, whereby Ireland became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.<sup>5</sup> William Carey, a self-described “patron of the fine arts,” cited the harsh realities associated with these issues in *Some Memoirs of the Patronage and Progress of the Fine Arts, in England and Ireland* (1826):

The internal resources of Ireland, so far as they can be fairly estimated by the capital city, will be more obvious by looking to the number of the Irish nobility and gentry necessarily withdrawn from their place, as inhabitants of Dublin, by the Union. Prior to that memorable change, two hundred and seventy-one spiritual and temporal peers, and three hundred members of the House of Commons, resided, with [sic] constantly or during the sitting of the Irish Parliament, in that city. The citizens derived no inconsiderable encouragement in their trade from the supply of those families; and the money which they circulated contributed much of the wealth and growth of the metropolis.<sup>6</sup>

For artists who had depended upon the aristocratic class (which meant most of them), this mass departure had disastrous consequences for both patronage and commissions. Just twelve years after this exodus of the nobility and gentry, then, following several years of training at the Royal Dublin Society schools, Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie left for London.

The themes of emigration and exile, of course, dominate many discussions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish life and culture; the need to leave Ireland in

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<sup>4</sup> See James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791–1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 21. Essentially, this act meant that the power to govern Ireland was transferred to England.

<sup>5</sup> See Patrick M. Geoghegan, *The Irish Act of Union: A Study in High Politics, 1798–1801* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1999); *Hearts and Minds: Irish Culture and Society under the Act of Union*, ed. Bruce Stewart (Gerards Cross, Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 2002.)

<sup>6</sup> William Carey, *Some Memoirs of the Patronage and Progress of the Fine Arts in England and Ireland* (London: Saunders and Ottley, 1826), 216–17.

search of economic opportunities affected all professions.<sup>7</sup> In his *Essay on the Natural Advantages of Ireland, the Manufactures to Which They Are Adapted and the Best Means of Improving Those Manufactures* (1796), William Preston presented to the Royal Irish Academy the problems that compelled many of the landed gentry to emigrate, as well as the negative consequences for Irish culture: “The arts are little cultivated, such artists and men of genius as the country produces (notwithstanding the countenance of a few, who hold out, a right example, but in vain to the men of rank and fortune, in *Ireland*) are driven, by the meager encouragement, which their native soil affords, to emigrate, for daily bread. Even those arts, which minister to the more refined pleasures, and elegant luxuries; at how low, how deplorable an ebb, are they among us.”<sup>8</sup>

The desultory condition of the arts in Ireland was remarked upon by literary lights of the period as well, often with considerable candor or even wit. In his *An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture, & Architecture, Who Have Practised in IRELAND; Involving Original Letters from Sir Joshua Reynolds, Which Prove Him to Have Been Illiterate. To Which Are Added, Memoirs of the Royal Academicians; Being an Attempt to Improve the Taste of the Realm*, Anthony Pasquin [John Williams, 1754–1818] strove to

rescue, as far as I am able, the Professors of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture, in our sister kingdom, from oblivion; and to strengthen the propensities of the wise and powerful, in their habits of protection and encouragement towards the Muses and their retainers . . . The *Fine Arts* have never been cultivated in Ireland, with that strong attention and encouragement which is necessary to produce *eminent* Professors: there are two reasons which may be adduced to apologize for

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<sup>7</sup> See Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch* (Dublin: Penguin, 1988), 281–305, for a general discussion of the Irish trend toward emigration to England.

<sup>8</sup> William Preston, *Essay on the Natural Advantages of Ireland, the Manufactures to Which They Are Adapted and the Best Means of Improving Those Manufacturers* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1796), 310. The Royal Irish Academy recorded Preston’s essay in its transactions for the year.

this unfortunate truth; *viz.* the poverty of the nation, and the consequent want of illumination in the general orders of its inhabitants. Though Ireland has become proverbial for her wit and her bravery, she appears to me to want that portion of consideration and perseverance, which is incontestably expedient to the furtherance and completion of such an object.—PAINTING, SCULPTURE, and ARCHITECTURE, are the offspring of Luxury, and the concomitants of refinement; and were never known to flourish greatly, where Nature was unadulterated, or Society enfeebled by penury:—those impressive and alluring ladies must be pampered, or they will sicken, if not perish.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the rhetorical flourish, Pasquin points out an essential hindrance to the development of an art market in Ireland at this time: the majority of its people lived below the poverty level.<sup>10</sup> Pasquin observes that support for the fine arts was predicated upon a culture of luxury. The Irish peasantry simply could not afford, literally or figuratively, any indulgence in the arts during this period. Thus the arts in Ireland were to be entwined with its tumultuous history with England, just as its politics had been since the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the twelfth century.<sup>11</sup> Later invasions were motivated by England's interest in Ireland as a valuable and strategic resource, and this prolonged struggle for colonial control devastated the country, resulting in pervasive poverty and the dispossession of land some for the peasant majority, which would lack many freedoms and comforts until the social reforms of the eighteenth and nineteenth

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Pasquin [John Williams], *An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture, & Architecture, Who Have Practised in IRELAND; Involving Original Letters from Sir Joshua Reynolds, Which Prove Him to Have Been Illiterate. To Which Are Added, Memoirs of the Royal Academicians; Being an Attempt to Improve the Taste of the Realm* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1796; reprint, London: Cornmarket Press, 1970), 5. Williams was born in England and studied as a painter and engraver at the Royal Academy.

<sup>10</sup> See Charles Gavan Duffy, *Young Ireland: A Fragment of Irish History* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin, 1880), 141–48; J. H. Whyte, “Age of Daniel O’Connell,” in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 204–5.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843–1850* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999); Kevin Kenny, *Ireland and the British Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and F. X. Martin, “The Normans: Arrival and Settlement, 1169–1300,” in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 95–112.

centuries.<sup>12</sup> As longtime invaders, too, the English cultivated a powerful literary prejudice toward the Irish, which included a well-publicized disdain for their faith, cultural identity, art, and history.<sup>13</sup>

Given their various and endemic political, social, and economic crises, then, the Irish people were unable to develop a formal, traditional infrastructure to support the arts, in the manner of countries such as Italy or France. In the early nineteenth century, Irish artists had to scramble not only to acquire patrons but also to overcome the bias for English artists and styles that persisted among the Anglo-Irish upper classes, those titled landowners whose Anglican background separated them from the majority of the Catholic Irish natives.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, it was not even English but French and Italian art that reigned supreme among patrons on the isles. Many British aristocrats, upon their return from the Grand Tour of the continent, brought back with them a decided penchant for continental painting in the style of the seventeenth-century artists Nicolas Poussin (1593–1665) and Claude Gellée (Claude Lorraine, 1600–1682).<sup>15</sup> For many wealthy young men and women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Grand Tour's extensive

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<sup>12</sup> Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics*, 1–11; Maureen Wall, “The Age of the Penal Laws: 1691–1778,” in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 176–89; Arthur Young, *A Tour of Ireland* (Dublin: G. Bonham, 1780), 35–36.

<sup>13</sup> See David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), and Terry Eagleton, Frederick Jameson, and Edward W. Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 170. The term “Anglo-Irish” refers to a class of landed gentry that traced its roots back to “Norman, Old English, Cromwellian or even (in a very few cases) ancient Gaelic. Anglicanism conferred exclusivity, in Ireland as in contemporary England; and exclusivity defined the Ascendancy, not ethnic origin. They comprised an elite class who monopolized law, politics, and ‘society,’ and whose aspirations were focused on the Irish House of Commons.”

<sup>15</sup> See Patrick Anderson, *Over the Alps: Reflections on Travel and Travel Writing with Special Reference to the Grand Tours of Boswell, Beckford and Byron* (London: Hart-Davis, 1969); Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Elizabeth Fitzgerald, *Lord Kildare's Grand Tour: The Letters of William Fitzgerald, 1766–1769* (Wilton, Cork: Collins Press, 2000); Christopher Hibbert, *The Grand Tour* (London: Thames Methuen, 1987); Cornelius Kelly, *The Grand Tour of Galway* (Cork: Caileach Books, 2002).

travel abroad comprised a necessary sort of finishing school. There are numerous tour accounts that document the experiences of these travelers, who, during their journeys, immersed themselves in the arts and society of Europe. In a chapter of his previously quoted memoir titled “Anti-British Prejudices of the English, Irish and Scotch Travelers and Absentees at Paris and Rome,” William Carey vividly describes those fashionable contemporaries who disdained provincial Irish and even English artistic capabilities: “At the time when Lord de Tabley traveled on the continent, it was more customary than at present, for persons of rank and fortune, from Great Britain and Ireland, to visit Paris and Rome, and to adopt the Anti-British prejudice, or belief, that the climate of the sister island disqualified their countrymen from the attainment of excellence in painting and sculpture.”<sup>16</sup> Carey concluded, with some disgust, that these continental and Francophile prejudices arose from the succession of wars between Britain and France and represented treasonable leanings among his countrymen on the continent.<sup>17</sup>

In his multivolume *History of the City of Dublin* (1861), John T. Gilbert recounts the challenges for Irish artists who were searching for support, including an anecdote, told to him by an anonymous Dubliner, which demonstrates the prevalence of anti-Irish attitudes and biases in particular. After viewing a private collection of Old Master paintings in Dublin, this gentleman had a fortuitous encounter with the Irish landscape painter Robert Carver (1750–1791), who inquired as to his opinion of them. The gentleman retorted that he much preferred to see Irish paintings by Irish artists. Seizing the opportunity, Carver invited the gentleman to visit his painting studio, so that the artist

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<sup>16</sup> Carey, *Some Memoirs*, 10–11.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

could share his frustration with the patron about the hypocritical nature of the current cultural milieu:

Why, replied he [Carver], I have some pieces at home which would be of no disgrace to a gentleman's dining-room, but then they would be known to be mine, and no one would vouchsafe to look upon the paltry daubings. Indeed, if I had recourse to the dealers' arts, made use of the Spaltham pot, and gave it out that they [the paintings] were executed by Signor Somebodini, all the connoisseurs in town would flock about them, examine them attentively with their glasses, and cry out with rapture—"What striking attitudes! What warm colouring! What masses of light and shade! What a rich foreground! Did you ever see anything more riant?" The gentleman's critique of Carver's work was exceedingly positive, . . . and found he had not uttered a vain boast; for, indeed, he showed me a piece executed in so masterly a manner, that I could have gazed on it for hours with the highest satisfaction, but that I was pained to see so much merit unadmired and unrewarded.<sup>18</sup>

There were exceptions to this chauvinism, however. Slowly, individuals and, eventually, groups of like-minded citizens came together in an attempt to bridge the cultural abyss.<sup>19</sup> In the eighteenth century, a group of forward-thinking men of primarily Anglo-Irish ascendancy met at Trinity College on June 25, 1731, to create the Royal Dublin Society to promote the visual arts in Ireland.<sup>20</sup> In his book entitled *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century*, art historian John Turpin analyzes the lack of a strong, formalized system of art education in Ireland, and the establishment of the Royal

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<sup>18</sup> John T. Gilbert, *The History of the City of Dublin* (Dublin: McGlashan, 1859), 3:347–49. Gilbert continued by noting that when Carver sought to leave Dublin for employment in London, he had to stage a "musical benefit" simply to raise money for his passage. Once in London he found work painting stage sets for the theater and "attained an eminence unapproached in that department of art." Gilbert also presented the problems encountered by the Irish artist Richard Hickey, who had studied and worked in Italy before returning home in the naïve belief that his success in obtaining commissions would continue. Eventually he too was compelled to immigrate to London, where his talents were ultimately recognized at the 1771 British Exhibition.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest, of course, that the Irish were the only ones experiencing difficulties with setting up proper systems of artistic education, exhibition opportunities, and a viable sales market; the English, as well as the Americans, had similar problems.

<sup>20</sup> The Royal Dublin Society's original charter was for "improving husbandry, manufacture and the useful arts and sciences." Under the direction of Dr. Samuel Madden, the school promptly set up a system of rewarding students with "premiums" or financial prizes for good work.

Dublin Society to fill that void.<sup>21</sup> From the outset, the Royal Dublin Society also aligned itself with a preexisting drawing academy run by the artist Robert West (d. 1770).<sup>22</sup> The Royal Dublin Society was never intended to be a painting academy like the Royal Academy in London.<sup>23</sup> Rather, teachers at the society offered instruction on the basics of architecture, drawing, color theory, and perspective, with a distinct emphasis on the practical applications of these skills, which were intended to be utilized in the creation of good design within industrial production.<sup>24</sup>

In 1776, the Society of Artists in Dublin, Ireland, was formed to sustain and encourage the exhibition prospects of contemporary local artists. Over the next fifty-eight years, this organization changed its name and address multiple times, but, until the foundation of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1823, it remained the most consistent

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<sup>21</sup> John Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin since the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1995), 76. Turpin notes that the original members of the Royal Dublin Society included many acting parliamentarians. Once the Irish Parliament moved to London, the patronage of King George IV left the society as well, and its other support withered for a time.

<sup>22</sup> See George Walter Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1913), 2:515. Strickland wrote that West was born in Waterford and was an art student in Paris. Additionally, Strickland quotes the minutes of the Royal Dublin Society: "Since a good spirit shows itself from drawing and designing, which is the groundwork of painting and so useful in manufactures, it is intended to erect a little academy or school of drawing and painting, from whence some geniuses may arise to the benefit and honour of this Kingdom; and it is hoped that gentlemen of taste will encourage and support so useful a design." The Royal Dublin Society absorbed West's private school into its own on George's Lane, Dublin, until 1756, when the society's schools moved to Dame Street, Dublin. See Rev. Robert Walsh, John Warburton, and Rev. J. Whitelaw, *History of the City of Dublin, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* (London: W. Bulmer and Company, 1818), 2:1180: "He [Robert West] is considered as the parent of the Arts in Dublin."

<sup>23</sup> Gilbert, *History of the City of Dublin*, 349. Gilbert stated that forty years after the establishment of the Royal Dublin Society, during the Vice Royalty of the Duke of Rutland (in the 1770s), there were plans afoot to create an ancillary painting academy in Dublin. This proposed academy would provide further education to students who had graduated from the Royal Dublin Society. The plans for the academy included a president and twenty members from the first graduating class, with subsequent members to be supplied from future classes. Additionally, there were plans for a National Gallery of Art that would be stocked with fine examples of art for the students to copy while being open to the public. After the duke died in 1787, however, the plans were scrapped and the establishments of both a painting academy and a national gallery of art would wait until the nineteenth century.

<sup>24</sup> Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 39–40. Turpin proposes that the Royal Dublin Society's function was pragmatic and practical rather than "primarily intellectual or aesthetic." Derived from the South Kensington System of art education in England, this sense of practicality prevailed until the establishment of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1823.

source of exhibition opportunities as well as published catalogues itemizing paintings for sale. Gilbert claimed that this society was founded both to promote an appreciation of native Irish artists' talents *and* to market their work to purchasers with a penchant for continental art.<sup>25</sup> In his analysis of it, Gilbert observes that many of his contemporaries in fact bemoaned the lack of quality in Irish work, which arose in part from the departure of Dublin-trained artists for more advanced instruction abroad, where they often remained: "The Academy [Royal Dublin Society schools] has produced many excellent in chalks, and more than this it could not do, for more it did not teach. To expect painters from mere workers in chalk would be to expect philosophers from a grammar school . . . Surely, to have painters from a mere drawing school is to reap without sowing. If the Society would have painters, there must be schools for painting."<sup>26</sup> Gilbert's dismay and frustration with the limitations of the Irish art market are obvious. In particular, he was outraged by the fact that many artists ultimately achieved financial success in London with the very same paintings they could not sell in Dublin. He further laments that Irish clients tended to favor exclusively Old Master paintings that were in fact often simply copies presented as originals.<sup>27</sup>

The Royal Dublin Society was not without its critics, naturally, including those with particularly vituperative opinions of the schools' conditions. For example, while Pasquin applauded the growing list of subscribers to the society and the efforts of well-

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<sup>25</sup> Gilbert, *History of the City of Dublin*, 344. In the first year of existence of the Society of Artists in Ireland, Dublin, over one hundred gentlemen subscribed, paying three guineas each for entrance for themselves and their heirs to future exhibitions. The first exhibition was held in 1766 at the William Street address; it included landscape paintings by Robert Carver (1750–1791), Delane (d. 1812), and Jonathan Fisher (d. 1809); sculptures by Patrick Cunningham (d. 1774), Richard Cranfield (1731–1809), and James Tassie (1735–1799); and drawings and prints by William Bertrand (1765–1770) and Thomas Chambers (1724–1789).

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert, *History of the City of Dublin*, 345.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 343. The same conditions existed in England and America as well.

meaning patrons such as the Lords Charlemont, Powerscourt, and Portarlington, he continues:

The encouragement which even they [the Royal Dublin Society] afforded to the Polite Arts, though comparatively ample, was not sufficient. Their Academy is rather destructive than otherwise; as it annually vomits forth an immense pictorial fry, who fall short of their expected attainments; as, commonly speaking, they are surreptitiously imitative, and unqualified claimants upon Fame and Patronage;—their talents are immature, and their lives replete with disappointment and sorrow. Thus, in this particular department of their vast undertaking, I think the Society has been more injurious than beneficial; as it is not in the disposition of a human being to bless those who create an appetite, without having the ability to administer sustenance . . . Considering Ireland as a nation, she possesses a more than ordinary portion of genius; but that genius is exemplified in an aptitude of merriment according with momentary social desires, and conducive to the sublimation of hilarity; rather than in those progressive stages of endeavor, which lead the struggling mind to an established excellence. Irishmen are, generally speaking, too mercurial, in their propensities for the habitudes of profound thinking.<sup>28</sup>

Until the formation of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1823, successful students of the Royal Dublin Society who sought advanced training in painting were encouraged to align themselves with professional artists outside of its schools.<sup>29</sup> In *Thoughts and Facts Concerning the Fine Arts in Ireland and Schools of Design* (1847), the portrait and subject painter George Mulvaney lamented the longtime neglect of the arts in Ireland, from “its highest walk of ideal embodiment to its humblest influence on the very pottery of every day demand.”<sup>30</sup> He implored his readers to consider their nation’s legacy to future generations: “When the mere parchment records of a nation’s great news have crumbled into dust; when power and dominion have melted from her grasp, when

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<sup>28</sup> Pasquin, *An Authentic History*, 6–7.

<sup>29</sup> Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 64–65. Turpin observes that it was through this arrangement that the landscape painter Thomas Roberts (1760–1826) received instruction from the landscape painter George Mullins (fl. 1763–75). Mullins was a well-regarded landscape artist who, after exhibiting with the Royal Dublin Society, left Ireland for London and exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1770 to 1775.

<sup>30</sup> George Mulvaney, *Thoughts and Facts Concerning the Fine Arts in Ireland and Schools of Design* (Dublin: Cuming and Ferguson, 1847), 15.

prostrate under the reverses decreed to all by Immutable Wisdom, what are her best testimonies of her past glory? Her monuments of Art.”<sup>31</sup>

Rhetorical excess aside, Mulvaney’s “thoughts and facts” do include details about the practical educational approaches of the Royal Dublin Society. Students learned rudimentary drawing, chiaroscuro, color theory, and perspective, and then they were encouraged to choose a specialty from the hierarchies of painting types, which included history, portraiture, genre, landscape, and still life. Mulvaney observed, “If he can find an eminent professor in any of these branches, capable and willing to aid him in the direct application of his power, who will install sound principles of practice, not mere tricks of art, many of the difficulties of his path will be cleared, and he can the earlier apply his powers to work out something new and great.”<sup>32</sup>

Frustrated by the shortcomings of the Royal Dublin Society, the writer Joseph Cooper Walker, in an essay entitled *Outlines of a Plan for Promoting the Art of Painting in Ireland* (1790), blamed the school’s small endowment. He joined many others in pointing out how a desperate lack of funds hindered proper instruction, the adequate supply of art materials, and the acquisition of appropriate drawings, models, and paintings for the purpose of study: “A School thus frugally constituted may produce indifferent draughtsman, but it can never make a good painter. Painting is an imitative art, yet the students of this school are almost without a single object worthy of imitation.”<sup>33</sup> Initially he was impressed with the quality of “several effusions” from the

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<sup>31</sup> Mulvaney, *Thoughts and Facts*, 7–14.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. See also Turpin, *A School of Art in Dublin*, 64–65. Turpin states, however, that for any student who sought “more advanced study” than that of an apprenticeship with a professional painter, the only choice was to go abroad. Joseph Cooper Walker, *Outlines of a Plan for Promoting the Art of Painting in Ireland: With a List of Subjects for Painters, Drawn from the Romantic and Genuine Histories of Ireland* (Dublin: George Bonham, 1790), 8–9.

<sup>33</sup> Walker, *Outlines of a Plan*, 8.

students, but upon inspecting the desultory physical condition of the rooms, he declared, “The appearance of the rooms filled me with shame; nay, it almost made me regret I was an Irishman.”<sup>34</sup>

Walker understood that without an academy that taught painting at the level of the Royal Academy in London, Ireland’s artists would suffer as painters. He was also familiar with the Englishman Sir Joshua Reynolds’s *Discourses*, and he quotes from them extensively to make his point, observing, among other things, the need for students to copy Old Masters as a means of attaining the level of sophistication that could be found in London. In addition, he specifies the teaching of *history painting* in Ireland as a crucial element for the establishing a first-rate academy, because it was “one of the tests by which national character will be tried in after ages.”<sup>35</sup>

The absence of advanced training for students of painting was much discussed in the literature of the time. John O’Keefe (1744–1833), a student of the society schools, had been instructed by their first master, Robert West. O’Keefe provides a firsthand account of the school’s habit of encouraging advanced pupils to further their education overseas—the faculty in Dublin fully recognized the shortcomings in its curriculum, while cultivating a healthy appreciation for international artistic practice and theory as well. O’Keefe writes, “The members of the Dublin Society composed of the Lord Lieutenant and most of the nobility, and others, frequently visited our academy to see our goings on and some of the lads were occasionally sent to Rome, to study the Italian Masters. I was present . . . and saw the cases containing the casts from the antique

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<sup>34</sup> Walker, *Outlines of a Plan*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24.

brought from Rome, and opened, and from these in a very few years I studied.”<sup>36</sup> The institution was handicapped well into the nineteenth century by a lack of fine art objects for its students to copy.<sup>37</sup>

Another resource of great relevance to London artists that was missing in Dublin was the print shop. As will be discussed further in chapter 5, in London during this period there were many shops catering to buyers of reproductive prints that were run by knowledgeable people. In contrast, prints were much less available in Dublin. In *The Life of James Gandon* (1846), artist and writer Thomas J. Mulvaney (1779–1845), father of George Mulvaney, describes the architect Gandon’s arrival in Dublin in 1781 to supervise the construction of the Custom House, which he had designed and positioned alongside the River Liffey in central Dublin. Despite his prominent architectural commission Gandon wrote about Ireland’s problematic historical and political situation as the cause for the absence of an infrastructure for artistic support, both public and private.

In traversing a city of such large extent, the capital of a kingdom, I was greatly surprised to find but one print shop . . . The few houses to which I had access scarcely possessed a picture or print, and those which they had were but indifferent, mostly suspended from the wall, without either frame or glass. Hence I concluded that the Fine Arts were little attended to, and the profession not much respected. I afterwards found this to be the case. There were few painters of eminence . . . Wheatley and Hone in portrait; Ashford and Fisher in landscape but these last two gentlemen depended more for their incomes on the places [jobs] which they held, than on the results of their professional labours. But it was no wonder that the polite arts should not prosper in a country continually in a political ferment, and where most of the families of distinction seemed wholly employed in converting their political influence into sources of personal

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<sup>36</sup> See *The Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853: A Detailed Catalogue of Its Contents with Critical Dissertations, Statistical Information, and Accounts of Manufacturing Processes in the Different Departments* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1854), 433–67; John O’Keefe, *The Recollections of John O’Keefe* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 13–16.

<sup>37</sup> The eventual dissemination of major private art collections from Italy and France to England and, to a lesser degree, Ireland, will be considered at length in chapter 2.

aggrandizement. The polite arts or their professors can obtain little notice and less encouragement amidst such conflicting selfishness . . . There were but four collections of pictures of consequence; these were the Duke of Leinster's, the Earl of Farnham's, the Earl of Charlemont's and Lord Londonderry's.<sup>38</sup>

Gandon's mention of but a single Dublin establishment that sold prints confirms that, at least in the eighteenth century, such places were not as common in Ireland as they were in England. We will see in chapter 2, however, just how important the English reproductive print market would prove to be for the international exposure of both English and Irish artists and their work.<sup>39</sup> As such, Alderman John Boydell's radical efforts to expand the market for reproductive prints would have lasting consequences for Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie, among many others.<sup>40</sup>

With the advent of the new century, other cultural organizations formed in Ireland as well, including the Royal Irish Institution in 1814. This group primarily focused on promoting Old Master exhibitions, which provided excellent opportunities for the study and appreciation of significant continental art at a time when Dublin was without a public painting gallery.<sup>41</sup> The philosophy, mission, and aspirations of the members of the Royal Irish Institution were announced in its annual exhibition catalogues:

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas J. Mulvaney, *The Life of James Gandon* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1846; reprint, London: Cornmarket Press, 1969), 49. The painters Gandon mentions are Jonathan Fisher (d. 1809), William Ashford (1746–1824), Francis Wheatley (1747–1801), and Horace Hone (1756–1825). See also George Newenham Wright, *An Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin: Illustrated by Engravings, after Drawings by George Petrie, Esq. to Which Is Annexed a Plan of the City* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1821), 421, who contradicts the writer and lists other private collections, including those of The Marquis of Waterford, The Rev. Mr. Pomeroy, William John Moore, Provost's House, Grafton Street, Francis Johnston, John Boyd, Esq., Alderman Cash, Thomas Manning, Esq., Henry Manning, Lady Harriet Daly, and Richard Powers, Esq.

<sup>39</sup> See Gordon Fyfe, *Art, Power and Modernity: English Art Institutions, 1750–1950* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), especially chapter 5, "Art and Reproduction: Some Aspects of the Relations between Painters and Engravers in London, 1760 to 1850," 101–19.

<sup>40</sup> Prints play an important role in the dissemination of fine art to an international art audience in the nineteenth century. In chapter 2, I consider the development of the English print trade and its effect on London, and later Dublin, as a "metropolitan" (as opposed to "provincial") artistic hub.

<sup>41</sup> See *Royal Irish Institution, for Promoting the Fine Arts in Ireland, First Exhibition, July 8, 1814* (Dublin: John Jones, 1814), vol. 8, exh. cat. The establishment of the Royal Irish Institution must be

The Directors of the Royal Irish Academy for promoting the fine arts in Ireland, have the pleasure of bringing before the public their first Exhibition of Pictures, by the Ancient Masters . . . The Directors entertain a strong hope, that this exhibition will be the commencement of a new era in the History of the Arts in Ireland, not only by exciting her industry, improving the talents, and stimulating the genius of her Artists, but by inducing the public to bestow . . . discriminating attention and effectual support.<sup>42</sup>

Tellingly, the catalogue text then clarifies that these artistic societies sought the kind of patronage that sustained English art associations and encouraged active patronage there:

The taste and genius of the Irish people are happily too congenial, their “internal powers too active, strong, and feelingly alive to each fine impulse” to permit any doubt of their obtaining from an assiduous and persevering cultivation of the Fine Arts, the same pleasing and profitable results as have been invariably derived by other nations from similar pursuits, and induce the gratifying anticipation, that Ireland will one day give to the world the rivals of a Reynolds and of a West!<sup>43</sup>

A sequential reading of the Royal Irish Institution exhibition catalogues reveals how the ambitious objectives of the founding members were gradually realized over time. The Royal Irish Institution’s mission statements indicate the members’ belief that their exhibitions were indeed successful in encouraging the appreciation of art within Irish society and instrumental in supplying students with quality examples of Old Master paintings to study.<sup>44</sup> By their fifth exhibition in 1829, the institution counted over two hundred subscribers, and the installed works had grown to include landscape paintings by or attributed to Claude Lorraine, Jacob Van Ruisdael (1628/9–1682), Pieter Bruegel the

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considered in connection to the large influx of Old Master paintings to England and Ireland as a result of the dissolution of major European private collections due to the Napoleonic wars. The first exhibition of Old Master paintings in Dublin was in 1814, which demonstrates the members’ commitment to making Old Master painting available for emulation and study by young artists. This dispersal will be discussed at length in chapter 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Royal Irish Institution . . . First Exhibition*, viii.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>44</sup> *Royal Irish Institution, for Promoting the Fine Arts in Ireland, Third Exhibition, May 25, 1816* (Dublin: John Jones, 1816), 7, exh. cat.

Elder (c. 1525–1569), Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669), Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709), and Aelbert Cuyp (1620–1691).<sup>45</sup>

Despite Gandon's pejorative assessment, other significant private collections of paintings did exist in Dublin at this time. The Reverend George Newenham Wright, in *An Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin* (1821), described the holdings of the Earl of Milltown, the Marquis of Waterford, Reverend Pomeroy, Esquire William John Moore, Esquire Francis Johnston, Esquire Richard Power, Esquire Henry Manning, Esquire Thomas Manning, Esquire John Boyd, Alderman Cash, and the Provost of Trinity College, and Esquire Francis Johnson.<sup>46</sup> The existence of these private collections in Ireland by 1821 indicates that there were individuals with the wherewithal to collect art, which constituted a hopeful prospect to the needs of local artists. Yet those private Irish collections would have been closed to them. In fact, until the opening of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1823, there was virtually no dependable access at all to works of fine art for the general public, nor for struggling artists who wished to emulate the Old Masters as part of their artistic education.

Contemporaneous with the developments in Dublin, regional societies throughout Ireland began to encourage artists through instruction, exhibition, and sales: the Cork Society for Promoting the Fine Arts flourished from 1815 to 1833, the Belfast Association of Artists from 1836 to 1838, the Royal Irish Art Union in 1839, and the

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<sup>45</sup> *Royal Irish Institution, for Promoting the Fine Arts in Ireland, Fifth Exhibition, May 1829* (Dublin: John Jones, 1829), introduction, exh. cat.

<sup>46</sup> Wright, *An Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin*, 421–27. The majority of these collections included Old Master paintings, with particular emphasis on Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and French artists such as Teniers, Van Dyke, Cuyp, Rembrandt, Rubens, Brueghel, Caravaggio, Correggio, Titian, Veronese, Murillo, Velasquez, Poussin, and Salvator Rosa.

Cork Art Union from 1841 to 1843 (plate 5).<sup>47</sup> The relatively brief tenures of these institutions and societies reflect, however, the ongoing social, economic, and cultural problems that plagued Ireland at that time. Even for supporters of the arts, the severity of the difficulties linked to famine, the post-union departure of English patrons, and the challenging nature of Ireland's relationship with England mitigated their noble efforts.<sup>48</sup>

William Carey suggests that the Cork project was a particular triumph, an institution that welcomed both amateur and professional artists and fostered oils, watercolors, and drawings that were in turn enthusiastically received by the public.<sup>49</sup> In particular, Carey notes the generous gift to the art union by King George IV of plaster-cast copies of important classical sculptures, including the *Apollo Belvedere* and *Laocoön and His Two Sons*.<sup>50</sup>

Culminating this spate of art-related organizations was the founding of the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1823. This momentous development occurred with the support of the Viceroy, Earl Talbot, and the encouragement of both Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830), president of the Royal Academy of London from 1820 to 1830, and the Dublin-born Sir Martin Archer Shee (1769–1850), who succeeded Lawrence as president of the

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<sup>47</sup> *Cork Society for Promoting the Fine Arts, First Exhibition, 1816* (Cork: Edwards and Savage, 1816), 3–6, exh. cat.; Catherine de Courcy, “The History of the Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts,” *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts* 1 (1987): xiii–xxi. The Royal Irish Art Union promoted the exhibition and sale of Irish artists' works, encouraged viewers to attend the openings, and further stimulated economic success for the artists by the systematic purchase of works for distribution among union members. The union was successful up until 1847, when the Great Famine devastated the Irish economy; see *Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts* (Dublin: Webb and Son, 1826), exh. cat.

<sup>48</sup> See James H. Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History, 1791–1891* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 33, 95. Ireland was plagued by problems during this period. In the famine of 1800–1801, an estimated forty thousand people died; in the famine of 1817–19, sixty thousand people died; smaller famines followed as well in 1822 and 1831. The Great Famine then occurred from 1845 to 1850; see Thomas Colville-Scott, *Connemara after the Famine: Journal of a Survey of the Martin Estate* (1853), ed. Tim Robinson (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1995).

<sup>49</sup> Carey, *Some Memoirs*, 252.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

London academy from 1830 to 1850.<sup>51</sup> The structure of the academy derived from the nomination of fourteen academicians and ten associate academicians. Its first exhibition was held in 1826 at the Academy House in Dublin, and the institution promptly benefited as a result from gifts of antique and modern sculpture, a research library, and master drawings and prints appropriate for classroom emulation.<sup>52</sup>

From its inception, the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin succeeded in eliminating the barrier that separated the public from fine art. George Petrie was a founding member of the academy and its president from 1857 to 1859. For him, and for many other artists who chose not to leave Ireland, the academy provided an invaluable education as well as exhibition opportunities. Petrie exhibited his paintings there throughout his career (though O'Connor and Danby rarely did). Art historians Catherine de Courcy and John Turpin have compiled a meticulous record of the establishment and development of the Royal Hibernian Academy throughout the nineteenth century, but it is once again William Carey's primary-source documentation that sheds the most light on the anticipation and exhilaration surrounding the academy's opening. His flowery prose does little to disguise the real challenges facing the institution. He compared the position of struggling academy to

the majestic oak, the glory of the forest, [which] is contained in the lowly acorn . . . Rome, the august city that stretched her scepter over the tributary world, was, at first, a petty and obscure cluster of clay-built cottages. There can be no discredit in aiming at that which is essential to the honor and interest of every country. Even a failure in such an attempt would be more honorable than a mean and heartless activity.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> De Courcy, "History of the Royal Hibernian Academy," xii; Royal Irish Academy Manuscript 4B28-30, 4. This manuscript is comprised of news cuttings and letters related to the establishment of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

<sup>52</sup> De Courcy, "History of the Royal Hibernian Academy," xi-xix.

<sup>53</sup> Carey, *Some Memoirs*, 355.

Just twenty years later, in 1846, George Mulvaney discussed the still fragile artistic culture in Ireland and, while calling for more support, likewise evokes the ongoing famine's horror:

It may be said, with famine stalking through the land, desolation and death piling corpses on our shores, society almost shaken to its centre, and each man asking his neighbor—what is next to happen?—How can any sane man expect attention to abstract theories of Fine Arts, and plans for Schools of Design? Simply because the arts are amongst the highest elements of national regeneration. Art-knowledge is essential to manufacturing or commercial wealth . . . Broken in fortunes, but not in spirit, as we nationally may be, we should remember that, as citizens of the State, we hold our places only in sacred trust for our successors; that we must work if we would advance; and that the generation which lays the foundation of ultimate national prosperity is perhaps even more to be honoured than the happier generation which reaps the profit in enjoyment . . . to evoke an Irish School of Art we want but a right direction of energy. To a remarkable degree, Art-taste, both in its appreciative and operative sense, is characteristic of the Irish temperament.<sup>54</sup>

Mulvaney's rallying call underscores the predicament of those who sought to promote and expand the role of culture within Ireland at a time when the country was consumed by the devastation of famine.<sup>55</sup> Masses of starving peasants were obviously not interested in encouraging the arts.<sup>56</sup> Fortunately, international developments interceded, and, in 1852, Ireland's artistic climate benefited from a much-needed influx of cultural support.

### **The National and International Exhibitions of 1852 and 1853**

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<sup>54</sup> Mulvaney, *Life of James Gandon*, 25–26. For further reading on the Great Famine, see Mary E. Daly, *The Famine in Ireland* (Dundalk: Published for the Dublin Historical Association, 1986); James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (London: Sutton, 2002); the *Illustrated London News* (July–Dec. 1845): 279–403; (Jan.–June 1846): 201–2, 227; (July–Dec. 1846): 102–3, 195, 215, 227, 230–31, 286; (Jan.–June 1847): 38, 44, 66, 100, 116, 354; (July–Dec. 1847): 140, 331; (Jan.–June 1848): 335, 405; Cormac Ó Grada, *Black '47 and Beyond: The Great Irish Famine in History, Economy and Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> Colville-Scott, *Connemara after the Famine*.

<sup>56</sup> See E. R. R. Green, "The Great Famine: 1845–50," in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 218–27; Murphy, *Ireland: A Social, Cultural and Literary History*, 95–101.

In 1851, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations opened in the Crystal Palace of London's Hyde Park and immediately became the model for all subsequent nineteenth-century national and international exhibitions, including the two Irish exhibitions that opened in its wake in 1852 and 1853.<sup>57</sup>

Inspired by the success of the London exhibition, the National Exhibition of the Arts, Manufactures, and Materials opened in Cork on June 10, 1852. Two Irish businessmen who had seen the London spectacle were primarily responsible: John Francis Maguire, owner of the *Cork Examiner*, mayor-elect, and member of parliament, and Daniel Corbett, Esquire. The Cork exhibition differed significantly from its predecessor, however, in that the focus was national rather than international, and it included the display of paintings.

In his essay entitled "Exhibiting Ireland, 1851–53: Colonial Mimicry in London, Cork and Dublin," historian Leon Litvack notes that paintings had been excluded from the London event because its primary focus was on developments in industry and manufacturing, not the fine arts.<sup>58</sup> This was not the case in Cork: the *Illustrated London News* included a depiction of the Fine Arts Hall in which over three hundred paintings are

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<sup>57</sup> See the *Illustrated London News* 22 (Jan.–June 1853): 393–94. The press coverage of the Irish Industrial Exhibition in Dublin of 1853 was more complimentary than that of the *Illustrated London News* for the National Exhibition of the Arts, Manufactures, and Materials in Cork of 1852. Perhaps the visit by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert to the opening ceremonies of the 1853 exhibition opened the eyes of the English press to the cultural strides that Ireland was making (and that the royals were acknowledging).

<sup>58</sup> Leon Litvack, "Exhibiting Ireland, 1851–53: Colonial Mimicry in London, Cork and Dublin," in *Ireland in the Nineteenth Century: Regional Identity*, ed. Leon Litvack and Glenn Hooper (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 41; see also Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 22–30.

hung salon style, surrounding many sculptures.<sup>59</sup> The vast space is filled to capacity with visitors admiring the paintings of both living and deceased Irish artists.<sup>60</sup>

In *The Industrial Movement in Ireland, as Illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852*, the contemporary critic John Francis Maguire uses the occasion of the exhibition to articulate his philosophical beliefs about fine art's potentially inspirational role within Irish society:

Is it to no advantage, I would ask, to awaken intelligence, to excite emulation, to impart knowledge? It is to no advantage to exhibit the gradual progress of a nation in the arts of civilized life, and urge the mind of a country to bolder efforts, and more glorious achievements? . . . Upon the principle of an exhibition or public display of the productions of a country and its people, I feel it is unnecessary to add a word more. But if there be any country in the world in which a public display of its own capabilities and resources would be of greater value and importance than in another, that country is Ireland. It would be a task as unnecessary as it would certainly be painful, to attempt any description of the social condition of this country. Afflicted by a calamity, for a parallel to which we must refer to the pages of history; its staple food blackened and rotted by some mysterious agency, which science cannot fathom . . . its people mowed down in tens of thousands, by the two-edged sword of famine and pestilence; its gentry prostrated beneath the weight of national ruin . . . its cities and towns filled with the degraded and demoralized wrecks of the population; who had not means to emigrate, or who would not seek relief in a workhouse . . . This is, briefly, a sketch of the condition to which this country has been reduced, from various causes; to two only on which it is now necessary to allude—the calamity to which I have referred, and the absence of industrial employment, principally owing to the want or the decay of manufactures.<sup>61</sup>

Maguire acknowledges that some people would question the prominent display of fine paintings within the exhibition, given the severity of Ireland's social crisis. For him, however, the national exhibition had a timely significance, in that it provided an

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<sup>59</sup> *The Illustrated London News* 20 (Jan.–June 1852): 496–97.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* See also James Francis Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland, as Illustrated by the National Exhibition of 1852* (Cork: John O'Brien, 1853). The works exhibited in Cork included James Barry's *George, Prince of Wales, in the Character of St. George* (1807), Samuel Forde's *Fall of the Rebel Angels* (1830), William Willies's *Mock Funeral* (no date), John O'Keefe's *Sybil* (no date), Francis Danby's *Tempest* (1846), Samuel West's *Charles I Receiving Instruction in Drawing from Rubens* (1842), William Fisher's *Coulin* (1850), Nicholas Crowley's *Desmond Bride* (1848), Joseph Haverty's *The Blind Piper* (1844), and Michael Angelo Hayes's *Charge of the Light Dragoons* (1847).

<sup>61</sup> Maguire, *Industrial Movement in Ireland*, 7–9.

opportunity for hope, and for progress: “Displaying the imitative and creative genius of our countrymen in the highest walks of Art; and because the application of Art to the purposes of manufacture—the blending of artistic beauty with practical utility—is becoming every day more necessary to the refined tastes of the age in which we live.”<sup>62</sup>

With his supporters, Maguire hoped to inspire Irish people of all classes to rise above the horror of the past decade and embrace the possibilities for renewal, to “elevate the moral and physical condition of the mass of the people, by the practical encouragement of native industry.”<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the optimism surrounding industrial expansion could be coupled with an appreciation of Irish art by the people. Maguire concluded his book by relating his pleasure at being present at the inauguration of Dublin’s Great Industrial Exhibition of 1853, while recalling the exhibition in Cork as well:

The [Cork] Exhibition of 52 was an indication, modest but yet convincing, of what Ireland could do in arts and industry,—a testimony, as well to her children as to the stranger, that she was not that incapable and barbarous nation which mistrust and self depreciation had supposed, or prejudice had represented her to be,—an evidence that she possessed resources that might be called into active and beneficial operation, and capabilities that could be turned to great and noble objects. This was the meaning of the Exhibition of 52. But the Exhibition of 53 is a proud and confident competition,—a bold and assured rivalry, a brave challenge to the nations of the earth, calling on them to display their genius, and intelligence and industry, side by side with the genius, and intelligence and industry, of a country which has sprung, as it were, from a moral grave, and is rising into a new life, health and vigor.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 284.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>64</sup> John Sproule, *The Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853: A Detailed Catalogue of Its Contents with Critical Dissertations, Statistical Information, and Accounts of Manufacturing Processes in the Different Departments: Also a Portrait of Mr. Dargan Engraved on Steel Accompanied by a Memoir* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1854), 430.

The international Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853 was conceived by the businessman and railroad tycoon William Dargan, based upon the success of the Cork event of the previous year. It opened in Dublin on May 12, 1853, and was viewed by over 1,200,000 people before it closed on October 31, 1853.<sup>65</sup> The artist James Mahoney (1810–1879) produced an illustration entitled *Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in the Paintings and Sculpture Hall of the 1853 Great Dublin Exhibition* (1853) that commemorated a royal visit to Dublin with the caption *An uair is dorcha sé an uair roimh breacadh an Iaé* (The darkest hour is the one before the dawn). Historian A. Jamie Saris suggests that the caption refers to the Great Famine (not the royal visit) while anticipating a resurgence of the arts and culture of Ireland.<sup>66</sup>

The attendance of the Queen and Prince Albert was the cause of much commentary within the press in London: “It is true that the Queen crossed the channel that separates the two countries, and entered the Irish Metropolis.”<sup>67</sup> The international display of paintings in the 1853 exhibition included many Old Masters and a strong selection of works categorized as “British school” that included Irish artists.<sup>68</sup> In the *Supplement to the Official Catalogue of the Great Industrial Exhibition*, 1853, the ebullient descriptions of the selection subtly allude to the still sensitive issue of the dominance of English art on Irish soil: “Although scarcely of a century standing, [Ireland] has produced many distinguished artists; until the end of the eighteenth century,

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<sup>65</sup> *The Exhibition Exposer and Advertiser*, no. 23 (1853); *The Exhibition of Art and Industry* (Dublin: Virtue and Co., 1853); Maguire, *The Industrial Movement in Ireland*, 449.

<sup>66</sup> A. Jamie Saris, “Imagining Ireland in the Great Exhibition of 1853,” in *Ireland in the Nineteenth Century: Regional Identity*, ed. Leon Litvak and Glenn Hooper (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 76. Saris claimed that over 600,000 visitors paid and another 600,000 obtained free passes (p. 17).

<sup>67</sup> *Art Journal* 15 (1853): 262.

<sup>68</sup> Sproule, *Irish Industrial Exhibition*, 451–56. The Italian, Dutch, and Flemish Old Masters were accompanied by British school artists George Barret, James Barry, Frederick Burton, Daniel Maclise, Francis Danby, James Arthur O’Connor, George Petrie, William Ashford, William Mulready, and Martin Shee.

foreigners usurped the whole patronage in art in Great Britain . . . The Royal Hibernian Academy at Dublin was founded in 1823, and the Scottish Academy in 1833. Portraiture, domestic subjects, and landscape principally predominate; and colour and finish being principal requisites; the consequence has been a rather close approximation to the Dutch and Flemish schools.”<sup>69</sup> While its Irish artists were glowingly reviewed, the exhibition also inspired calls for the display of more Irish *subjects*, and in particular Irish landscape paintings:

And amid all these able paintings where is our own country represented, with its magnificent coast, its rich and its savage lakes, its fair rivers, its abundant meadows, and in so many parts its beautiful plantations so often skirting a romantic shore? Only a few oil paintings of the late James A. O’Connor . . . at all attempt the adequate representation of an Irish scene . . . We can only hope that the examples of France, Prussia, Holland, and Belgium may stir some of our aspiring students to do in and for Ireland at least some small portion of that work which Ireland wants at their hands.<sup>70</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, however, this situation was finally addressed. In *The Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853: A Detailed Catalogue* . . . (1854), the writer John Sproule reiterates the much-discussed notion that for Irish artists to move beyond their provincial style and methodologies, they must study Italian and French Old Master paintings. As such, his commentary addresses a principal catalyst for the improvement of the fine arts in Ireland. Without some knowledge of the past masters, artists would not be able to transcend their regional training. With the 1853 exhibition, however, the dearth of inspiration for Irish artists had finally been rectified. After the intensive study and assimilation of their esteemed international (and often metropolitan) forebears, they would, Sproule believes, finally be competitive with other international artists:

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<sup>69</sup> *Supplement to the Official Catalogue of the Great Industrial Exhibition* (Dublin: J. M. O’Toole, 1853), 5: 5.

<sup>70</sup> *The Exhibition Exposer and Advertiser*, no. 23 (1853): 3.

The great importance of the study of the older and greater Masters of Art, and of the consideration of the means by which they arrived at extraordinary excellence in so many varieties of style, become most apparent when we examine the works of the moderns; who usually exhibit, in comparison with their predecessors, so much of feeble conventionality of treatment, so much unimaginative sameness of design, and so little pains taken in perfecting the execution of their pictures. And it was on this account that the opportunity afforded by the Exhibition of studying so rich a collection of the old Masters was of especial value, because it better allowed the visitor to apply to the modern works, placed so nearly in juxtaposition with them, the principles suggested by their example. For the object of all criticism ought to be improvement . . . but still more by becoming acquainted with the excellencies which distinguish the works of perfectly accomplished painters, that the artist and the student of the present and future time may be stimulated to brilliant and successful exertion. And much does the Irish artist and the Irish student stand in need of such study, and humbly and patiently must he apply himself to it if he will ever produce anything really worthy of a place on the walls of such an Exhibition . . . for purity and grace of design, and the richness of poetic imagination, these things lie dormant in the Irish mind, only because it wants the opportunities of education, and it has not yet created for itself an intellectual refuge against the vulgarizing tendencies of such public and social life as afflicts the present generation of this ill-starred people. And yet the devotion of but a few young men of genius to the task of elevating that life by the influence of Art,—if rightly directed and supported by the vigorous and self-denying enthusiasm of an Italian spirit,—might almost save the next if not the present age of the Irish race, and might lay the foundations of a career for this nation: directing its energies towards the cultivation of the Ideal, the Spiritual, and the Beautiful,—and the spread of that purest civilization throughout the world.<sup>71</sup>

Francis Danby, James Arthur O'Connor, and George Petrie all received positive evaluations at this time that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, Irish artists such as Daniel Maclise and James Barry were recognized; like Danby, however, they had both spent the majority of their adult professional careers in London. Amongst the 1,028 individual paintings listed, only 283 were grouped within the British school, which included English and Scottish artists as well.<sup>73</sup>

Much criticism of the Dublin exhibition in fact evokes the tensions of the “metropolitan versus provincial” status of the island neighbors. The difference in tone

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<sup>71</sup> John Sproule, *Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853*, 451.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 452–54.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 464–67.

between the English and Irish press is particularly apparent around the paintings. For example, in the *Illustrated London News*, the exhibition was compared to the London exhibition of 1851 and fares better than the Cork exhibition of 1852:

Though a consequence, and, to a certain extent, an imitation, of the Great London Exhibition of 1851, that of Dublin in 1853 may claim, in some important respects, a moral pre-eminence over it. London is the metropolis of the world—has a population equal, if not superior, to a third of the whole of Ireland—is the seat of a splendid Court and of a magnificent nobility—is situated on a river into which at every tide enter ships from almost every nation under the sun—and is not only the largest and most populous, but the richest city in either hemisphere. Dublin, on the other hand, though a metropolis in name, is but a provincial city in fact; and, instead of a crowned Queen and her resplendent Court, possesses but a small and shadowy vice-regal establishment, which is supposed to inflict more moral degradation than social benefit. It can boast no wealthy resident nobles; has no merchant princes . . . and yet, while the Great Exhibition of 1851 needed and obtained Royal patronage, and the subscriptions of the wealthy and well-disposed in all the principal cities and towns of England and Scotland, before its success could be safely predicted by the most sanguine, the Dublin Exhibition, without Royal or patrician support . . . has become what it is the fashion to call ‘a great fact.’ At the cost and risk of a single Irishman . . . a new Crystal Palace has been designed, built, opened, and filled with a rich and varied display of objects of art and industry, such as were never before gathered together in any edifice in any part of the world, except at the first Crystal Palace in Hyde-park.<sup>74</sup>

Sproule commented on the contrast between the exhibited European and Irish paintings with more discretion. Like many of his contemporaries, he exhibits a keen awareness of the continuing (and deleterious) emigration of Irish artists for London. After pointing out the virtues of a few Irish painters who had remained at home, such as Samuel Forde (1805–1828), he takes the émigrés to task:

Amongst our own countrymen this century has witnessed success in many different walks of Art,—success even in the highest degree in each; yet how different is that of William Mulready from that of Daniel Maclise, and his again from the style of James Barry, whose Olympic Games (at the Society of Arts, Adelphi, London) is perhaps the grandest work of design since the golden days of art in Italy and Spain? . . . It is necessary to call to mind these rare examples, or in the depth of darkness to which Art has now sunk in Ireland, we might run some risk of earning only the ridicule of the reader when we insist upon what we

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<sup>74</sup> Article “The Dublin Exhibition,” *Illustrated London News* 22 (Jan.–June 1853): 393.

believe may be done in Ireland; when we repeat, again and again, that here, amidst the poverty and ignorance in which, alas! So many of us seem content to leave a nation once so noble—that here, even in the Ireland of to-day, Art may at last find a firm refuge, and one day compass for herself a glorious home. It is necessary, too, because in the Exhibition there were but a few Irish works at all (even including those men such as the first three above named, who transferred their genius to a strange soil, and too soon forgot the purer inspirations of their youth at home, and among these few works, still fewer of which we are called on to make any special mention; for though some of our greatest names are indeed represented, they are by no means so by their greatest works.<sup>75</sup>

The exhibition of 1853 was deemed a success. However, while generally it was thought to be a positive step forward in the development, education, and exhibition of Irish art, it was still hindered by the ever-present awareness that so much more was necessary to raise the level of Irish art to those of the “sister Isle.” Gradually, however, the British press was softening toward its neighbor, and the *Illustrated London News* began to note, with cautious optimism, the strength, resolve, and courage displayed by the Irish people (particularly Dargan) in bringing to fruition such a successful international exhibition:

It may be said that the Irish people count as little or nothing in this matter [the staging of a successful exhibition]; and that, had it not been for the accident that Ireland possessed a man like Mr. Dargan, with a liberality as profuse as his means, there would have been no Exhibition in Dublin. But this we cannot admit. The thing might not have been so speedily done; but the enthusiasm that pervades Ireland upon the subject shows that at a period somewhat later it would have been equally well done. Give an Irishman a thing to do, and, if his self-interest or his patriotism be excited or involved, he will do the work with an alacrity seldom surpassed . . . The sum already realized by the sale of season-tickets proves that the Irish are in earnest upon the subject, and goes far to justify the expectation that, before it close, the Exhibition will meet with sufficient support from the bulk of the people to pay its expenses. . . . At the opposite side of the Palace . . . is the Fine Arts Court. This is one of the most novel and beautiful features in the Dublin Exhibition. In the Crystal Palace paintings were not admitted as works of art, but only as illustrative of certain processes; nor was this very necessary in England, where so many splendid public galleries and private collections existed, many of them open to the public: but in Dublin the case is different; for the country that has given birth to Moore, McDowell, Hogan, West, Maclise, Danby, and a

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<sup>75</sup> Sproule, *Irish Industrial Exhibition*, 452.

number of other names equally distinguished, cannot boast of a single national collection, however humble. Every day the fine arts are becoming more intimately connected with the practical purposes of life; and a collection of the products of industry would have been very incomplete without a display of some of those masterpieces of genius from which the merely useful borrows all its elegance and grace. Accordingly the Committee determined to allocate a separate hall to the fine arts; and we are gratified to say that, beyond all question, their efforts to assemble together the *chef-d'oeuvres* of modern and ancient masters have proved eminently successful. It is only necessary, as a guarantee for this statement, to mention the names of some of those whose works grace the walls of the Fine Arts Court: Cuyp, Titian, Murillo, Rembrandt, Hogarth, Eastlake, Etty, Danby, West, Cooper, Pyne, Stanfield, Mulready, Maclise, Landseer, and a number of other distinguished masters, whose works will presently require a more distinct notice at our hands.<sup>76</sup>

While Sproule was quick to reiterate the well-known refrain that Irish artists had a penchant for leaving their homeland for England, he does acknowledge one additional and positive outcome of the exhibition on the whole. He gloats over the chance for Irish artists at this international exhibition to study the Old Masters in the interests of their proper education and emulation of the best international painters from the past:

The opportunity afforded by the Exhibition of studying so rich a collection of the old masters was of especial value, because it better enabled the visitor to apply to the modern works, placed so nearly in juxtaposition with them, the principles suggested by their example. For the object of all criticism ought to be improvement, and it is not by merely discovering and exposing the faults of his contemporaries, but still more by becoming acquainted with the excellencies which distinguish the works of perfectly accomplished painters, that the artist and the student of the present and the future time may be stimulated to brilliant and successful exertion. And much does the Irish artist and the Irish student stand in need of such study, and humbly and patiently must he apply himself to it if he will ever produce anything really worthy of a place on the walls of such an Exhibition...these things lie dormant in the Irish mind, only because it wants the opportunities of education, and it has not yet created for itself an intellectual

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<sup>76</sup> *Illustrated London News* 20 (Jan.–June 1852): 390; Sproule, “The Fine Arts—Painting,” in *The Irish Exhibition of 1853*, 452. Of particular interest with regard to the success of the exhibition is the fact that Sproule took this opportunity to criticize Irish artists who chose to live abroad, citing Daniel Maclise in particular: “We insist upon what we believe may be done in Ireland; when we repeat, again and again, that here, amidst the poverty and ignorance in which, alas! So many of us seem content to leave a nation once so noble—that here, even in the Ireland of to-day, Art may at last find a firm refuge, and one day compass for herself a glorious home. It is necessary, too, because in the Exhibition there were but a few Irish works at all (even including those men such as the first three above names, who transferred their genius to a strange soil, and too soon forgot the purer inspirations of their youth at home).”

refuge against the vulgarizing tendencies of such public and social life as afflicts the present generation of this ill-starred people . . . we greedily drink in whatever of instruction may in any way be derived from the different Masters who stood there around silently pointing out the innumerable roads to artistic greatness.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond the general press critiques, both positive and negative, another noteworthy reaction was that of the British royals: Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were so delighted with the exhibition that the queen offered Dargan a peerage. Much to her surprise, Dargan refused, out of his strong sense of Irish identity and profound nationalist beliefs. His rejection of the honor was not well received in either London or Dublin Castle.<sup>78</sup> Eleven years later, at the official opening of the National Gallery of Ireland, the ramifications of Dargan's actions came to fruition: a proposal to name the gallery after Dargan was strongly rebuffed by the royalists.<sup>79</sup>

With a precedent now firmly established, Ireland would host an additional seven international exhibitions over the next five decades.<sup>80</sup> The exhibition catalogues reveal that, by 1861, the "Irish school" section had expanded to incorporate an individual category for "modern masters" that included George Mulvaney (1809–1869), Daniel Maclise (1806–1870), and Edwin Hayes (1797–1864). The category titled "ancient masters" included the painter James Arthur O'Connor (1792–1841), which indicates that the categories are stylistic rather than chronological.<sup>81</sup> In 1865, the Dublin International

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<sup>77</sup> Sproule, "The Fine Arts—Painting," in *The Irish Exhibition of 1853*, 451–52.

<sup>78</sup> "The Exhibition of Art and Industry in Dublin," *Art Journal* 15 (1853): 161.

<sup>79</sup> See Saris on Dargan's rejection of the offer of peerage, baronetcy, or knighthood; "Imagining Ireland," 76–77. In 1877, Britain instituted an Act of Parliament to specifically prevent the association of Dargan's name with the gallery.

<sup>80</sup> See *Gems of the Exhibition of Fine and Ornamental Art, under the Patronage of the Royal Dublin Society; or, How to See the Chief Objects of Attraction in One Visit* (Dublin: John M. O'Toole and Son, 1861), 9, exh. cat.; *Dublin Exhibition of Arts, Industries and Manufactures, 1872* (Dublin: John Falconer, 1872), 9, exh. cat.; *Exhibition of Irish Art and Manufactures* (Dublin: John Falconer, 1882), exh. cat. The fine arts remained well attended to. In 1882, there were over 830 paintings exhibited; in 1883, the Cork Industrial Exhibition displayed 1,025 paintings; in 1888, the Irish Exhibition in London exhibited 1,855 paintings.

<sup>81</sup> *Gems of the Exhibition, 1861*, 9.

Exhibition incorporated a large section of paintings, and the fine art committee was hosted by such notable patrons as Lord Powerscourt, George Mulvaney (then director of the National Gallery), Sir Richard Redgrave, and Daniel Maclise. The exhibition received significant loans from Queen Victoria and Pope Pius IX. In 1872, the fine arts section of the same exhibition was rife with Irish paintings, including works by Sir Thomas Alfred Jones (1823–1893), James Brennan (fl. 1826–34), Martin Cregan (1788–1870), George Barret (1732–1784), James Barry (1741–1806), George Mulvaney, Erskine Nichol (1825–1904), and Edwin Hayes, as well as numerous English and continental paintings.<sup>82</sup>

The last major Exhibition of Irish Art and Manufactures was held in 1882 and is primarily remembered for being the Centenary of the Volunteers, which included the ceremonial unveiling of the monument by the Irish sculptor John Foley (1818–1874) commemorating Irish patriot Daniel O’Connell (1775–1847).<sup>83</sup>

### **The Long-Awaited Establishment of the National Gallery of Ireland**

Just as Ireland’s people were becoming increasingly sophisticated in their appreciation of fine art, the National Gallery of Ireland finally opened to the public in 1864.<sup>84</sup> The need for a picture gallery had long been a very familiar refrain. The Royal Dublin Society school minutes record a discussion of the problem as early as May 14,

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<sup>82</sup> *Dublin Exhibition of Arts, Industries and Manufactures, 1872* (Dublin: John Falconer, 1872), 9, exh. cat.

<sup>83</sup> *Exhibition of Irish Art and Manufacturers, 1882*. See also J. H. Whyte, “The Age of Daniel O’Connell, 1800–47,” in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. M. Moody and F. X. Martin, 4th ed. (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 204–27. Daniel O’Connell was one of the most significant Irish political figures of the nineteenth century. He is best remembered for his advocacy of the Catholic emancipation movement, as well as the movement to repeal the Act of Union.

<sup>84</sup> *Irish Times*, January 27, 1864, 107.

1746.<sup>85</sup> Twenty-one years later, in 1767, the Reverend Thomas Campbell protested the lack of a formal gallery of paintings:

We have no publick statues, no publick galleries of pictures, no academies for either paintings or sculpture, nor will the great allow their pieces to be copied. How different abroad! You can never go into the Vatican or Medicean Palace, the Farnese or Luxembourg gallery, but you will see a scaffold raised and an artist at work . . . there should be, at least in the capital, one great collection of masterpieces both of painting and sculpture, where there might be constant access under certain regulations.<sup>86</sup>

In 1784, a national gallery in fact seemed imminent through the sponsorship of the Fourth Duke of Rutland, Lieutenant Charles Manners (1754–1787); sadly, the duke died before his ambitions could be realized. In 1826, art lover William Carey rhapsodized eloquently about his friend Lord de Tabley, who attempted to establish a much-needed English painting gallery in Dublin to combat anti-British prejudices there. As Carey saw it, without such a gallery “no people can ever hope to rouse the energies of their own time, and arrive at excellence in the arts.”<sup>87</sup>

In 1842, poet and writer Thomas Davis (1814–1845) joined Charles Gavan Duffy (1816–1903) and John Blake Dillon (1816–1866) in founding a newspaper titled *The Nation*, in which Davis published many articles concerning Irish identity and cultural nationalism. In 1843, two of his pieces remarked upon the lack of a cogent imperative for Irish art within contemporary society: “National Art” and “Hints for Irish Historical Paintings.” He also addressed the lack of a national gallery:

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<sup>85</sup> Strickland, *Dictionary of Irish Artists*, 2:580. “Since a good spirit shows itself for drawing and designing, which is the groundwork of painting and so useful in manufactures, it is intended to erect a little academy or school of drawing or painting, from whence some geniuses may arise to the benefit and honour of this Kingdom; and it is hoped that gentlemen of taste will encourage and support such a useful design.”

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Campbell, *An Essay on Perfecting the Fine Arts in Great Britain and Ireland* (Dublin: William Sleator, 1767).

<sup>87</sup> Carey, *Some Memoirs*, 267–68.

Ireland has had some great Painters—Barry and Forde, for example, and many of inferior but great excellence; and now she boasts high names—Maclise, Hogan, and Mulready. But their works were seldom done for Ireland, and are rarely known in it. Our portrait and landscape Painters paint foreign men and scenes; and, at all events, the Irish people do not see, possess, nor receive knowledge from their works . . . the pictures of the latter are mostly abroad; those of the former unseen and unknown. Alas! That they are so few. To collect into, and make known, and publish in Ireland the best works of our living and dead Artists is one of the steps towards procuring for Ireland a recognized National Art. And this is essential to our civilization and renown. The other is by giving education to students and rewards to Artists, to make many of this generation true representers, some of them great illustrators and composers, and, perchance, to facilitate the creation of some great spirit. Something has been done—more remains. There are schools in Dublin and Cork. But why are those so neglected and imperfect? And why are not similar or better institutions in Belfast, Derry, Galway, Waterford, and Kilkenny? Why is there not a decent collection of casts anywhere but in Cork, and why are they in a garret there? And why have we no gallery of Irishmen's, or any other men's, pictures in Ireland? The Art Union has done a great deal. It has helped to support in Ireland artists who should otherwise have starved or emigrated; it has dispersed one (when, oh when, will it disperse another?) fine print of a fine Irish picture through the country, and to some extent interested as well as instructed thousands . . . Ireland, fortunately or unfortunately, has everything to do yet. We have had great artists—we have not their works—we own the nativity of great living artists—they live on the Tiber and the Thames. Our capital has no school of art—no facilities for acquiring it. To be sure there are rooms open in the Dublin Society, and they have not been useless, that is all. But a student here cannot learn anatomy, save at the same expense as a surgical student. He has no great works of art before him, no Pantheon, no Valhalla, not even a good museum or gallery.<sup>88</sup>

*The Nation* gave Davis a platform from which to expound upon goals and aspirations for Ireland's cultural community. His essays certainly contribute to the interdisciplinary discourse about Irish nationalism that took place throughout the nineteenth century, but they also enumerate critical issues hindering the development of a true Irish school of art. "Hints for Irish Historical Paintings" is further notable in demonstrating Davis's awareness, shared by certain individuals in London, of the link

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas Davis, columns titled "National Art" and "Hints for Irish Historical Paintings," in *The Nation*, December 2, 1843, and July 29, 1843: reprint, centenary edition (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1914), 122–23.

between history painting and any potential “Irish school.” In chapter 2, I will consider the similar, though earlier, predicament of the English school, whose advocates likewise acknowledged the essential role of history painting in solidifying a country’s artistic legacy. In relation to Ireland, Danby and Petrie’s art in particular reflects the contemporary interest in historical landscapes and its potential links to the Sublime.<sup>89</sup>

The history painting that Davis envisions for Irish artists differed from the types of historical landscape paintings that Danby and Petrie ultimately produced. Nonetheless, Davis was true to his time in asserting a link between history painting and a certain level of respectability or authenticity within the hierarchies of art. Writing just two years prior to the onset of the Great Famine, Davis acknowledges the progress that has been made with regard to the status of the arts, but he is not yet satisfied. He wants superior schools, improved opportunities for exhibitions, and better incentives for Ireland’s talented artists to remain at home.

Twenty years later, Davis’s call would be largely answered—the National Gallery opened in 1864.<sup>90</sup> The gallery was deemed an immediate success by the press and represented a major milestone in the encouragement of a more sophisticated appreciation of the visual arts within Ireland. It certainly attracted many visitors, including 167,698 in the first year and, over the next three years, 89,943, 109,605, and 128,680, respectively.<sup>91</sup> Critics continued to quibble, however, especially when considering the proportion of

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<sup>89</sup> O’Connor instead favored the concerns of the Romantic Sublime.

<sup>90</sup> See Peter Somerville-Large, *The Story of the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2004); *Daily Express*, May 25, 1864; *Irish Times*, January 22, 1864, and *Irish Times*, February 19, 1864.

<sup>91</sup> Homan Potterman, *Illustrated Summary Catalogue of Paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1981), xviii.

Irish paintings displayed within the new institution. The title of an anonymous letter penned to the *Irish Times*, “A Plea for Irish Art,” says it all:

We have a National Gallery which, with few exceptions, contains no Irish pictures, and is singularly deficient in modern works. It is only National at present in as far as its valuables are national property. What is wanted is a collection of first class works by Irish artists exclusively, which would always be open in some public hall in Dublin so that their beauties and peculiarities should be easily seen by the public as well as our young artists who would work more enthusiastically and express their native poetic feelings more freely when they saw that such were honoured and welcomed by the nation. When it is recollected that Ireland has produced such artists as Barry, Danby, Mulready, Foley and Hogan, it is clear that a great artistic future is possible to it.<sup>92</sup>

Nevertheless, the National Gallery of Ireland represented the culmination of the efforts of many concerned and committed art-loving citizens and institutions to enhance the support of Irish artists and the work they produced. Significant advances had been made within Irish art circles, yet compared to England, Dublin painters were still considered provincial and separate from international consideration. Prior to a comprehensive assessment of the developmental trajectory of Danby, O’Connor’s, and Petrie’s careers, we must now turn to London. The influences of the metropolis would have far reaching impact upon Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie. This analysis will provide a revealing and provocative counterpoint to their evidently more provincial (though complex) roots.

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<sup>92</sup> *Irish Times*, February 10, 1869.

## Chapter 2

### The Metropolitan: The Visual Arts in England during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries

As stated in the introduction, Francis Danby, James Arthur O'Connor, and George Petrie left Ireland by ship in 1813, traveling together to London to further their artistic careers.<sup>1</sup> They joined many other ambitious international artists in a city that was rife with culture relative to Dublin. Although Petrie returned to Ireland almost immediately, London was to play a major role in the careers of Danby and O'Connor, and, tangentially, Petrie as well. All three exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art, and both Danby and O'Connor exhibited at the British Institution.<sup>2</sup> In chapters 3, 4, and 5, I will focus on Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie, respectively. Before that, however, I will introduce the "metropolitan" features of the London art scene that acted in concert with (or competed with) the "provincial" features of their home country as the three men sought inspiration, better training, and a new source of patrons.

All was not as it seemed in England, whatever promise it held for those who came from the island next door. London too suffered from insecurity about its cultural sophistication in relation to France. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, art institutions in both London and Dublin struggled to establish themselves within an European context, to develop support and patronage from the aristocratic and middle

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<sup>1</sup> See anonymous, "Obituary of Francis Danby," *Art Journal* 7 (1861): 118; anonymous, "Obituary of Danby," *Athenaeum* (March 2, 1861): 294; William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archaeology of George Petrie, L.L.D., M.R.I.A.* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1868), 2–4.

<sup>2</sup> O'Connor returned to Ireland within a few weeks of his initial trip to London, then went back to the city in 1822 and remained there for the rest of his life. Danby stayed in England for his whole career, although he did visit Ireland in the 1850s.

classes, and to successfully define first-rate English and Irish schools of painting. Danby and O'Connor would capitalize on the relationships (and resonances) between the two capitals while benefiting from the more formalized and innovative training and exhibition opportunities of the Royal Academy of Arts and the British Institution.

In the late eighteenth century, three important things happened in London in relation to the arts that paved the way for the arrival and eventual successes of our Irish artists. First of all, the novel emphasis on historical landscape painting that arose through the championing of Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) in his *Discourses* would raise the bar for the English school. During Reynolds's extended reign as president of the Royal Academy, painting exhibitions became more popular, and gained a wider, more diverse audience for their ever more spectacular displays.<sup>3</sup> Painting compositions, sizes, and styles became more ambitious and in turn talked about, until exhibitions themselves became sites where society members were on display as much as the actual artwork. Critics took note of the attendees and covered both the art and its viewers in popular journals and magazines.<sup>4</sup> These grand-manner historical landscape paintings and their

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<sup>3</sup> See anonymous, "Our Royal-Academical Lounge," *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 5 (Feb.–July 1832): 710–11; Martin Myrone, "The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 77–91.

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Hallett, "The Business of Criticism: The Press and the Royal Academy Exhibition in Eighteenth-Century London," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 65–75. Hallett identifies the publications that covered the Royal Academy exhibitions as *A Candid Review of the Exhibition of the Royal Academy*, *The Ear-Wig*, *General Advertisers*, *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, *St. James Chronicle*, *A Liberal Critique of the Exhibition*. See also the *Art Journal*, *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, *The London Magazine*, and the *Repository of the Arts*, all of which continuously published reviews of art exhibitions at both the Royal Academy and the British Institution.

display-centric audiences and exhibitions naturally suggested the theme of the Sublime to artists anxious to satisfy the demands of both.<sup>5</sup>

The second art-related advance to alter English culture was the new role that reproductive prints played in expanding the market for fine art. With the encouragement of Reynolds, among others, the businessman Alderman Boydell (1720–1804) became the catalyst for irrevocable changes in the international print market, to England's advantage.<sup>6</sup> Through his vigorous (and profitable) efforts, prints became widely accessible to an audience that was otherwise unable to see private displays of actual paintings. Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery displayed paintings and fine prints in its windows in London, in addition to publishing numerous annual editions of prints of historical/literary and travel-related landscape views, the latter a response to a boost in the British tourism industry and the popularity of travel memoirs by a host of British writers. Only the turmoil of the Napoleonic wars would curtail for a time the growing English penchant for excursions to the continent.

Due to those wars, several important private collections of art from France and Italy entered the international art market. This was the third advance: many paintings from these collections were purchased by the English aristocracy, allowing countless artists and collectors to benefit from exposure to continental art. Although many of the

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<sup>5</sup> See Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Ann Bermingham, "Landscape-O-Rama: The Exhibition Landscape at Somerset House and the Rise of Popular Landscape Entertainments," in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David H. Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 127–43; Ralph Hyde, *Panoromania!: The Art and Entertainment of the "All-Embracing View"* (London: Trefoil Publications, 1988); Myrone, "The Sublime as Spectacle," 77–91.

<sup>6</sup> For a contemporary perspective on Boydell, see Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978–84), 1:69, 2:455, 3:970, 4:1557, 7:2512, 2716; Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds with Some Observations on His Talents and Character* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1819), 74–79.

Old Master paintings that were imported into England were purchased by familiar aristocratic patrons, one new collector inspired much speculation and commentary. John Julius Angerstein (1735–1823) represented the new face of the nineteenth-century English collector, a self-made man whose fortune was derived from business rather than inheritance. His enthusiasm for fine art culminated in a small but very prestigious collection that would ultimately form the basis of the National Gallery in London.

### **Surprising Commonalities: England’s (and Ireland’s) Struggles for Authenticity**

Compared to Ireland, England enjoyed a relatively stable government throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> As a result, during the Georgian and early Victorian reigns, the English art market flourished, giving rise to patronage systems, education and exhibition opportunities, public auctions of art, and even international art dealers to facilitate the import and export of fine art.<sup>8</sup> All of these

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<sup>7</sup> See Martin Pugh, *Britain since 1789: A Concise History* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999); Thomas Wright, *England under the House of Hanover: Its History and Condition during the Reigns of the Three Georges* (London: Richard Bentley, 1848). The long-ruling Hanoverian monarchy had been established in 1714, when England’s nobles, reeling from the Catholic insurgents known as the Stuarts, “appointed” George I (1660–1727) to be their king. This “constitutional monarchy” was no longer absolute, and the parliamentary system arose to constrain the power of the throne. Turbulent as all of this was at first, the cultural elite did manage to co-opt George III into establishing an institutional framework to sustain and encourage the visual arts in England; see also Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella [Robert Southey], *Letters from England* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), 3:156.

<sup>8</sup> See Carol Gibson-Wood, “Picture Consumption in London at the End of the Seventeenth Century,” *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (September 2002): 491–591; Louise Lippincott, *Selling Art in Georgian London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); John Pye, *Patronage of British Art: An Historical Sketch, Comprising an Account of the Rise and Progress of Art and Artists in London from the Beginning of the Reign of George the Second, Together with a History of the Society for the Management and Distribution of the Artists’ Fund* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845; reprint, London: Cornmarket Press, 1970); David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). The intangible boundaries previously separating the fine arts from commerce became less apparent over time. In addition, a growing force comprised of interested “patrons” from the middle class changed fine art exhibitions forever, in turn influencing the artists who produced work for those exhibitions.

developments comprised the vibrant culture in which Danby and O'Connor sought to establish themselves, and several detailed and wide-ranging analyses relate England's economic climate to its art market.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, there is a great deal of scholarship that documents the growth of the "middling ranks" of patronage, those middle-class families who were neither poor nor aristocratic but are documented as increasingly involved in the consumption of paintings and prints to decorate their homes.<sup>10</sup> Here I will not engage at length with England's economic dominance in the international art market of the first half of the nineteenth century, a topic thoroughly investigated most recently by Ian Pears in *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680–1768* (1988) and David Solkin in *Painting for Money* (1993).<sup>11</sup> There is also significant research on the growth and establishment of such artistic collectives and institutions as the Society of British Artists, the Royal Academy of Art, the British Institution, and the

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<sup>9</sup> See Robert Allen, "The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War," *Explorations in Economic History* 38 (2001): 411–47; William N. Goetzmann, "Accounting for Taste: Art and the Financial Markets over Three Centuries," *American Economic Review* 83, no. 5 (December 1993): 1370–76; David Ormond, *Art Markets in Europe, 1400–1800* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998). In general, studies such as these suggest that myriad factors contributed to London's preeminent economic position in the early to mid-nineteenth century, including higher wages for workers, a surplus of income for the aristocratic class, the relaxation of trade obstructions, and the cessation of war.

<sup>10</sup> See John Feather, "The Power of Print: Word and Image in Eighteenth-Century England," in *Culture and Society in Britain: 1660–1800*, ed. Jeremy Black (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 51–68; Gibson-Wood, "Picture Consumption in London," 491–501; Martin Pugh, *Britain since 1789: A Concise History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 1–3; Espriella, *Letters from England*, 3:156. By the end of the seventeenth century in England, it was common for middle-class English buyers to decorate their homes with reproductive prints. Gibson-Wood divides the English population as follows: aristocratic (2–3 percent); working laborers, unemployed and in service (75 percent); and the newly established middle class (20–25 percent). Utilizing analyses of existing probate inventories, Gibson-Wood ascertains that from one hundred "middling rank" household inventories, over 62 percent of them itemized decorative paintings. Regrettably, the inventories did not include descriptions of those paintings.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Pears, *The Discovery of Painting: The Growth of Interest in the Arts in England, 1680–1768* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Solkin, *Painting for Money*. Pears links the art market in England to shifts in international trade, greater foreign travel, significant upturns in the economy, the growth of art associations and the Royal Academy, an increase in auction and art dealer activity, and a growing market for English-born contemporary painters (as opposed to previous preferences for the Old Masters).

new National Gallery of Art, as well as on the growing prominence of art auctions and the role of international art dealers in all of this activity.<sup>12</sup>

With regard to the relationship of metropolitan and provincial in the English visual arts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I will focus here on the individual (particular artists and patrons) and the collective (the establishment of critical institutions and galleries and the major shifts in taste indicated by habits of patronage and the collection of art). I will explore several interrelated developments that improved English art and ultimately influenced the Irish art market and the careers of Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie as well: (1) the enduring lack of confidence in the English school and the measures taken to remedy this; (2) the pivotal role of Sir Joshua Reynolds and the founding of the Royal Academy of Arts; (3) the expansion and appreciation in value of the print-publishing market, as evidenced by Alderman Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery; (4) the seismic global political developments that occasioned the redistribution of certain eminent European collections; (5) and the budding penchant of English patrons to establish both private and public collections comprised of Old Master paintings, as represented by the story of John Julius Angerstein. Together these factors comment upon the "metropolitan" nature of the English art market and its profound effect upon the developmental trajectories of the three Irish artists I will be discussing here.

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<sup>12</sup> See William Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting, with a Chronological History of the Importation of Pictures by the Great Masters into England since the French Revolution* (London: R. Ackerman, 1824), 2:1–33; Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*; Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 57–74; Sidney C. Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768–1968* (New York: Taplinger, 1968); John Pye, *Patronage of British Art: An Historical Sketch*; Lippencott, *Selling Art in Georgian London*; Whitley, *Art in England*, 1:107–12. The establishment of the Society of British Artists in 1823 provided another venue for the exhibition of paintings, engravings, and architectural designs. This society enabled artists who were not members of the Royal Academy to display and sell their work.

## The Royal Academy of Art: Metropolitan Aspirations and Market Motivations

Throughout the relevant literature of the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries, there is an uncomfortable awareness among the cultural cognoscenti of the still wanting “English school” of painting.<sup>13</sup> During the previous few centuries, England had experienced political, religious, and social upheavals that had damaged or destroyed its conventional structures of and strategies for art education, patronage, and exhibition.<sup>14</sup> However, a select few internationally acclaimed foreign artists continued to visit England and establish relationships with high-ranking patrons there.<sup>15</sup> The paintings they then produced were intended for an exclusive enclave of connoisseurs, well-connected aristocrats, and royalty. These elite collections would have been inaccessible to most artists and art lovers of any class, thus thwarting those who sought to encourage a wider appreciation of art within English culture.<sup>16</sup>

The lack of a truly confident or secure English school of painting must have recalled to Danby and O’Connor the very issues they had left behind in Dublin. While London was far ahead in terms of its cultural sophistication, it was likewise in the throes of an artistic identity crisis with regard to both the careers and the achievements of its artists in relation to the continent, especially France. As mentioned in chapter 1, a

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, James Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds, KNT. LL.D., F.R.S., F.S.A., &c., Late President of the Royal Academy, Comprising Original Anecdotes of Many Distinguished Persons, His Contemporaries, and a Brief Analysis of His Discourses, to Which Are Added, Varieties on Art* (London: Henry Colburn, 1813); Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert Wark (London: T. Cadell, Jun., and W. Davies, 1797; reprint, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1:13.

<sup>14</sup> See R. W. Lightbown’s introduction to Pye, *Patronage of British Art*, no page.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 14. Farington cited Anthony Van Dyck (1599–1641), Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), and Hans Holbein (1465–1524) as examples of foreign artists who had visited England in their times in search of work.

<sup>16</sup> See Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters* (London: J. Murray, 1830–33; rev. ed., “annotated and continued to the present time by Mrs. Charles Heaton,” London: George Bell, 1879–80), 1–40.

preference for the sort of French and Italian paintings many art patrons would have seen on the Grand Tour prejudiced English buyers against their own artists, to say nothing of any interloping Irish artists. There are many accounts of the pursuit and purchase of European Old Master paintings by English noblemen and royalty. John Steegman notes the shift that occurred over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the classification of art lovers: first, they were considered to be connoisseurs and collectors; later, they were patrons.<sup>17</sup> The critical difference is that patrons actively supported living artists.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, cultural associations arose in Europe that offered a variety of levels of artistic instruction.<sup>19</sup> These early schools, modeled after precedents established in the post-Renaissance academies of Europe, offered instruction.<sup>20</sup> Certainly within English art circles, the French approach to academic instruction reigned supreme. Most of the artists based in England, regardless of their

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<sup>17</sup> John Steegman, *Victorian Taste: A Study of the Arts and Architecture from 1830 to 1870* (London: Century, 1962; reprint, London: Century, in association with the National Trust, 1987), 49–75.

<sup>18</sup> Lightbown, introduction to Pye, *Patronage of British Art*, no page. Pye in particular grumbles about the aristocrats' penchant for spending copious amounts of money on copies, fakes, and shoddy Old Masters rather than real pieces by true talents who worked closer to home: "We often hear of a sum given for a single work of an ancient master that equals the annual revenue of a gentleman's estate, and sometimes, in those cases, the ignorance of the purchaser, or the knavery of the seller, imposes a copy of little value instead of an original." While Steegman's text is primarily devoted to developments in English art during the Victorian period, his chapter entitled "Collectors and Connoisseurs" deals with eighteenth-century patronage issues as well.

<sup>19</sup> See Ilaria Bignamini, "The Artist's Model from Lely to Hogarth," in *The Artist's Model: Its Role in British Art from Lely to Ety*, ed. Ilaria Bignamini and Martin Postle (Nottingham: Nottingham University Art Gallery, 1991); Holger Hoock, *The King's Artists, The Royal Academy of Arts and the Politics of British Culture, 1760–1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003); Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (New York: Da Capo, 1973). Ilaria Bignamini and Martin Postle have analyzed how English drawing schools and studios evolved into English artistic "academies." Pevsner reviews the sequential establishment of academies in Italy and France, including the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* (Paris, 1648). More recently, Holger Hoock has traced the establishment of the Royal Academy and its influence on like institutions, including those in Scotland and Ireland.

<sup>20</sup> Bignamini, "The Artist's Model from Lely to Hogarth," 9; Pevsner, *Academies of Art*. Bignamini specified that unlike the Royal Academy of Art, 1768, these early schools did not offer the comprehensive study of all three disciplines under one roof: students at "the Drawing School established by William Shipley in 1753 . . . were taught the rudiments of drawing at Shipley's School, while they drew from the Antique at the Duke of Richmond's Academy and from the living model at the second St. Martin's Lane Academy."

country of birth, would have been aware of the superlative reputation of French artists, art education, and patronage and exhibition prospects.

### **Sir Joshua Reynolds: Innovator, Muse, and Visionary**

Several prominent gentlemen who were active within London social, political, and artistic circles sought a solution for England's shortcoming in this regard. The architect Sir William Chambers (1723–1796), along with the American-born artist Benjamin West (1738–1820), and the English artist Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), attempted to enlist the support of King George III for a painting academy that would offer training and a comprehensive and prescribed series of yearly exhibitions. The soon-to-be founders of this Royal Academy believed that it would fill the obvious need for an official institution for art training while providing a venue for the display of the academicians' work. This, in turn, would encourage English art in general among members of the public and professionals alike.

The strategic efforts of these motivated individuals paid off, and the Royal Academy was established in 1768.<sup>21</sup> The inaugural general meeting of the academy was promptly held on January 2, 1769.<sup>22</sup> Its first president, Joshua Reynolds, not only set a

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<sup>21</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 1:32–33, 2:506; Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 47–49; Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 64–65. The initial proposal to the king for the Royal Academy stated cagily “that it was not meant to be a burthen upon the King, but to be supported by Artists by means of Exhibitions & that His Majesty’s sanction & countenance was all that was required unless there shd. happen to be defficiencies, which His Majesty it was hoped would not think money ill applied which might be devoted to such a purpose, as the great object of the Society was to support a National School of art.”

<sup>22</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 2:506, 3:804; Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 1:11–21; David Solkin, “This Great Mart of Genius,” in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 11–21. Initially, the Royal Academy held its exhibitions in a temporary space in Pall Mall, and its administrative offices were

noble precedent by delivering the first of his fifteen discourses at the occasion but also received the honor of a knighthood.<sup>23</sup> Reynolds remains to this day a pivotal figure within the history of English art, and his prolonged oversight of the Academy (from 1768 to 1792) contributed to this legacy. Beyond his talent as an educator, he was also able to transcend (and often fuse) the otherwise incompatible artistic genres of history painting and portraiture. Ebulliently refashioning the *beau ideal*, Reynolds inspired his contemporary patrons and audience members while creating an enduring legacy for the English school.

In his opening speech, he expounded at length on this latter concern (as he would in the succeeding fourteen discourses as well).<sup>24</sup> He began by remarking upon the need for such an academy in England, linking the school to larger aspirations for a thriving English art market and a more appreciative English art audience:<sup>25</sup>

Gentlemen, An Academy, in which the Polite Arts may be regularly cultivated, is at last opened among us by Royal Munificence. This must appear an event in the highest degree interesting, not only to the Artists, but to the whole nation. It is indeed difficult to give any other reason, why an empire like that of BRITAIN, should so long have wanted an ornament so suitable to its greatness, than that slow progression of things, which naturally makes elegance and refinement the last effect of opulence and power.<sup>26</sup>

Proselytizing to his fellow academicians and, as time went on, to his students, Reynolds spoke of emulating the past glories of Greek, Roman, and Renaissance art by instilling in contemporary British painting the principles, ethics, and attributions of the

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located at Old Somerset House. In 1780, a new building designed by Sir William Chambers and located on the Strand combined both exhibition and administrative functions. In 1836, the academy moved to Trafalgar Square, where it shared space with the National Gallery.

<sup>23</sup> Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 100; Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 93; Pye, *Patronage of British Art*, 173, 209.

<sup>24</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. John Ingamells and John Edgcumbe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), #22, 29–31; Pevsner, *Academies of Art*, 183–85.

<sup>25</sup> Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 1:13; delivered at the Opening of the Royal Academy, January 2, 1769.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

grand style.<sup>27</sup> While Reynolds (and others) argued for the moral imperatives of history painting, the art market often favored more “practical” genres, including, for example, portraiture.<sup>28</sup> James Northcote summarily describes the desire on the patron’s part to be represented in portraits that idealized and emphasized their prominence within contemporary culture, while frequently alluding to the classical past: “A true taste was wanting, vanity, however, was not wanting; and the desire to perpetuate the form of self complacency crowded his [Reynolds] sitting room to women who wished to be transmitted as angels, and with men who wanted to appear as heroes and philosophers.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus Reynolds’s call to arms failed to produce a swift embrace of the more esoteric but aesthetically rewarding genre of history painting, whatever its promise for the English school. Landscape painter and writer Joseph Farington (1741–1821) claimed in his *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1819) that the yearly Royal Academy exhibitions significantly enhanced the English public’s appreciation of art. On the other hand, artist and writer Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786–1846), an academician who was also known for his history paintings, titled an acidic essay “On the Relative Encouragement of Sculpture and of Painting in England” (1820), implying with this

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<sup>27</sup> Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 134–35; Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, 1:13–27; 3:43; delivered at the Royal Academy on December 14, 1770. In Reynolds’s third discourse, delivered on December 14, 1770, he expounded on the international appreciation of the grand style, or the “*gusto grande* of the Italians, the *beau ideal* of the French, and the *great style*, *genius*, and *taste*, among the English, are but different appellations of the same thing.”

<sup>28</sup> See Robert Jones’s review of Martin Postle’s *Sir Joshua Reynolds; The Subject Picture* in *Oxford Art Journal* 19, no. 2 (1996): 105–7. Reynolds was painfully aware that despite his advocacy of the Grand Style of history painting, no artist could sustain a career without resorting to portraiture in Britain in the 1770s and 1780s.

<sup>29</sup> Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 134–35.

ordering of media the challenges for artists who pursued the exalted genre of history painting.<sup>30</sup>

Patronage patterns in England were also shifting during this time, and the art market was becoming both more competitive and more diversified.<sup>31</sup> Intellectual and philosophical yearnings aside, most visual artists were driven by these market forces to develop styles and approaches that would enable them to reach out to audiences who were becoming ever more fickle and exacting in their search for both novelty and formal innovation.<sup>32</sup> In response, many artists modified their approach to paintings in order to attract the public, differentiating themselves (and their work) in the process from the hundreds of paintings that were typically displayed at the Royal Academy exhibitions.

Several writers commented on the “display culture” infiltrating contemporary exhibitions, including an anonymous writer for the *London Magazine* in 1820:

We are not unaware, that the crowded state of these annual Exhibitions, which, on the first entrance of the spectator, flings upon his eye, before his attention is riveted on some particular object, a chaotic mass of colouring, is very unfavourable on many occasions of the well-founded claims of a number of artists to public encouragement. Works of delicacy and sentiment are often overlooked in the thronged heap, and the very crowd of visitors which fills the rooms,

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<sup>30</sup> Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 49; Benjamin Robert Haydon, “On the Relative Encouragement of Sculpture and of Painting in England,” *London Magazine* 2 (July–Dec. 1820): 206–9. Haydon excoriates the public for their ignorance of the genre: “There is nothing of which the nobility and the public of this country are so little aware as the expenses of a great historical picture . . . If an historical painter wishes to paint a great picture, he begins it without employment, because it is not wanted, though every body is convinced it ought to be done . . . I appeal to the country if this is a fair state of things. Is historical painting, or is it not, essential to the pleasure and greatness of this country?”

<sup>31</sup> See Pye, *Patronage of British Art*, 30–42. In their essays in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, Kay Dian Kriz and C. S. Matheson also discuss the synthesis of fashion, spectacle, commerce, art, and society that had come to characterize the London painting exhibitions.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous review in the *British Evening Post* of *An Historical Review of the Paintings &c. Now Exhibiting at the Great-Room of the Society Instituted for the Encouragement of the Arts* (London, 1762); Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 47; anonymous, “Our Royal Academical Lounge,” *Fraser’s Magazine*, 710–11.

obstructs, in a great degree, that view of the pictures which is essential to a consideration of their merits.<sup>33</sup>

Another commentary, published in *Fraser's Magazine of Town and Country*, finds numerous faults with the Royal Academy exhibitions: "On every occasion [the painters] are ready to adapt themselves to the taste of the public, be it ever so vitiated, and to comply with its humours, be they ever so preposterous and extravagant . . . Annual exhibitions are quite as much calculated to create a hankering after mere novelty, and to give rise to a habit of hasty and superficial examination, as to induce attentive study of what is most deserving."<sup>34</sup>

Scholar Gordon Fyfe, who has chronicled the growing commercialism of the English art market at length, recognizes the increasingly social import of art in Reynolds's era:

Exhibitions had ritual functions; they were among the metropolitan spaces at which the solidarity of the upper class was reclaimed in the face of the divisions of modernity. Exhibitions were among the seasonal rituals of power which promoted the authority of a centered Society over commercial competition. The London Season was a period of some six months . . . when country squires and aristocrats gathered in London to pursue the pleasure of social intercourse, to settle their affairs and to confirm their elite status through acts of display.<sup>35</sup>

Reynolds's influence spread far beyond his success in establishing the rigorous doctrines of the Royal Academy of Arts in England. He was the veritable embodiment of a metropolitan artist at a very heady time in English culture. His portrait *The Duchess of Devonshire* of 1775, for example, was commercial enough to secure public attention and

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<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, "Fine Arts, Exhibition of Royal Academy," *London Magazine* 10 (1820): 356–62. See also Mark Hallett, "Reynolds, Celebrity and the Exhibition Space," in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, ed. Martin Postle and Mark Hallett (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 35–37. Hallett suggests that the London exhibitions were so popular among those who desired to see and be seen that the exhibitions became "crucibles of celebrity."

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous, "Our Royal-Academical Lounge," *Fraser's Magazine*, 709–10.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon Fyfe, *Art, Power and Modernity: English Art Institutions, 1750–1950* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 60; see also Hallett, "Reynolds, Celebrity and the Exhibition Space," *passim*.

please the sitter while nevertheless alluding to the grand manner and a certain reverence for classical culture. Lady Georgiana Cavendish, née Spencer (1757–1806), married William Cavendish, the Fifth Duke of Devonshire (1748–1811), and was soon renowned for her scandalous behavior.<sup>36</sup> Capitalizing on the duchess's reputation as a fashion plate, Reynolds presents her full-length image within a serene pastoral setting.<sup>37</sup> The ambiance of the antique is enhanced by her classically derived yet sumptuous dress and signature headdress ensemble. The juxtaposition of her extraordinarily contrived attire and the idyllic vista demonstrates Reynolds's flair for capturing his subjects while never abandoning the grand manner.

The portrait of the duchess was a success and well received within the celebrity-fixated audience. Given Reynolds's repeated avocation for the importance of history painting, however, it is likely that such a work did not measure up to the historical standards he had outlined in his *Discourses*. The philosophical and artistic ideals that he proposed there set forth a strategy for the metropolitan success of the English school, modeled as he thought it should be after the well-established, metropolitan academies in Paris and Rome. However, as Reynolds would soon discover, there were simply not enough patrons in England to support the necessarily expensive and time-consuming process of grand-scale history painting. Thus it is already apparent that even the first president of the Royal Academy felt compelled to alter his stylistic approach and methodology to painting in order to attract and maintain sources of patronage within a rapidly changing art market that was fueled by audiences who clamored for novelty. As a

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<sup>36</sup> See Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire* (New York: Random House, 1998).

<sup>37</sup> Hallett, "Reynolds, Celebrity and the Exhibition Space," 43–44.

result, he came to advocate advances that satisfied a heightened, spectacular, and display-centered cultural environment encompassing the paintings, the audience, and the critics.

His aspirations would be realized in time. His plan to improve English painting would be carried forward by younger artists who also became part of the increasingly metropolitan ambiance of London art circles. Many artists, including J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), Danby, Petrie, and John Martin (1789–1854), gradually incorporated the tenets of the international Sublime into their “history paintings,” began to display all of the excitement, drama, and special effects that Romanticism delighted in. Highly esteemed and respected as he was, Reynolds set an important precedent with his own accommodation to the market and the public, encouraging artists ever afterward to do the same as they sought their own voices and styles within an increasingly international, metropolitan, commercial, and competitive London art market.<sup>38</sup>

### **Alderman Boydell’s Shakespeare Gallery: Evaporating Boundaries between Prints and Fine Art**

Foremost among the coterie of colleagues who joined Reynolds in advocating for new, metropolitan innovations in the name of elevating the role of English art was Alderman John Boydell. In his *Diary*, the painter Joseph Farington describes the entrepreneur’s conviction in this regard: “The Alderman is bigoted to his scheme, which seems to exclude almost every other.”<sup>39</sup> The plan was to rival European competitors in the continental print trade by reproducing paintings of a trove of narratives from English

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<sup>38</sup> Ingamells and Edgcumbe, *Letters of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 174.

<sup>39</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 1:174; Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 337–43.

“history” by premier contemporary artists. In his memoirs, he articulates his goals, which mirror but also expand upon the aspirations of Reynolds for both English art and English culture more generally:

To advance that art [history painting] towards maturity, and establish an English School of Historical Painting, was the great object of the present design . . . In the course of many years’ endeavours, I flatter myself I have somewhat contributed to the establishment of an English School of Engraving . . . When I began the business of publishing and selling Prints, all the fine Engravings sold in England were imported from foreign countries, particularly from France.—Happily, the reverse is now the case; for few are imported, and many are exported, to a great annual amount . . . I flatter myself that the present undertaking, in that, and many other points of view, will essentially serve this country. The more objects of attraction and amusement held out to Foreigners, that may induce them to visit this Metropolis.<sup>40</sup>

Prints were certainly popular and gradually became more present within the cultural discourses then taking place, as Boydell implies above; for the expanding “middling class” of art patrons, published prints were an attractive alternative to original painted works.<sup>41</sup> The fact that one entrepreneurial print publisher in England could alter the existing international patterns of print dissemination, then dominated by France, would prove very fortuitous to those artists who were moving from traditional history painting to an embrace of the Sublime in their work, such as Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie. Having first established himself as an engraver, Boydell would make his mark on

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<sup>40</sup> John Boydell, *The Boydell Gallery; A Collection of Engravings Illustrating the Dramatic Works of Shakespeare, by the Artists of Great Britain; Reproduced from the Originals in Permanent Woodburytype*, with a preface by Josiah Boydell (London: Bickers and Son, 1874), 5–11. See also Farington, *Memoirs of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 76–79.

<sup>41</sup> David Alexander and Richard T. Godfrey, *The Reproductive Print from Hogarth to Wilkie* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1980); Anthony Dyson, *Pictures to Print: The Nineteenth-Century Engraving Trade* (London: Farrand, 1984); John Feather, “The Power of Print: Word and Image in Eighteenth-Century England,” in *Culture and Society in Britain, 1660–1800*, ed. Jeremy Black (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 51–68; and Malcolm C. Salaman, *Old English Colour-Prints*, ed. Charles Holm (London: The Studio, 1909).

art history as a purveyor of fine published prints from original oil paintings.<sup>42</sup> His artistic and business instincts combined to ensure his success.<sup>43</sup>

The Shakespeare Gallery opened in 1789 at 52 Pall Mall, London.<sup>44</sup> The venture comprised a base of operations for Boydell's three-part scheme: the commissioning of original paintings by English artists depicting scenes from Shakespeare's works that would be exhibited in a gallery; the selling of subscriptions of well-crafted and beautifully designed editions of prints engraved from the original paintings; and eventually selling and dissemination of individual engraved prints in England and abroad.<sup>45</sup> The early reviews of the gallery were jubilant: "This establishment may be considered with great truth, as the first stone of an English School of Painting; and it is peculiarly honourable to a great commercial country, that it is indebted for such a distinguished circumstance to a commercial character—such an institution—will place, in the Calendar of Arts, the name of Boydell in the same rank with the Medici of Italy."<sup>46</sup> Certainly Boydell's efforts resulted in an English art market that was for the first time relatively democratized and commercialized; it was also a tremendous affirmation of

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<sup>42</sup> John Boydell, *A Collection of Prints: Engraved After the Most Capital Paintings in England . . . With a Description of Each Picture* (London: J. Boydell, 1769–72); Boydell, *A Collection of Views in England and Wales, Drawn and Engraved by John Boydell* (London: Sold by John and Josiah Boydell, 1790). See also *Extraordinary Characters of the Nineteenth Century* (London: J. Parry, 1805), no page; Cunningham, *Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters*, 57; Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 78–79; and Algernon Graves, "A New Light on Alderman Boydell and the Shakespeare Gallery," *Magazine of Art* 21 (1897): 143–44.

<sup>43</sup> *Extraordinary Characters of the Nineteenth Century*, no page; Farington, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 78.

<sup>44</sup> *Times* (London), May 7, 1789, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Northcote, *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 337–43.

<sup>46</sup> *Times* (London), May 7, 1789, p. 2; *The Public Advertiser*, June 9, 1789; *Universal Chronicle*, May 1789; *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* (January 1791), reprinted in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Brian Vickers (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974–1981), 6:508–13.

England itself.<sup>47</sup> Art publisher Algernon Graves recalled the meeting with Boydell that led to the establishment of the Shakespeare Gallery in this light:

He was not yet satisfied with what he had done . . . old as he was, he should like to wipe away the stigma that all foreign critics threw on this nation—that they had no genius for historical painting. He said he was certain from his success in encouraging engraving that Englishmen wanted nothing but proper encouragement and a proper subject to excel in historical painting. The encouragement he would endeavour to find if a proper subject were pointed out. Mr. Nicol replied that there was one great National subject concerning which there could be no second opinion, and mentioned Shakespeare.<sup>48</sup>

Like Reynolds before him, Boydell faced challenges along the way. But in the end it was clear that he had correctly anticipated a shift in patronage within English art circles, as the insular and elitist oligarchy of English Old Master collectors gave way to a thriving art market that was able to accommodate growing numbers of new, middle-class buyers who were attracted to the availability, financial accessibility, and respectability associated with the ownership of art.<sup>49</sup>

Boydell was further responsible for significant shifts in the international print market through his imposition of financial duties on the import of foreign prints, which effectively reversed the flow of those prints, especially relative to France, and earned upwards of £300,000 per year from export alone. Unfortunately, his success in this regard would not endure. Reeling by the turn of the century from the sudden and severe financial impact of even more ruthless trade restrictions brought about by Napoleon's campaigns, Boydell was eventually forced to appeal to the English Parliament for the passing of an

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<sup>47</sup> See Alfred Beaver, "Alderman Boydell," *Magazine of Art* 9 (1886): 110–11. Beaver claimed that in 1785, the engravings being exported from England to the continent were worth over £200,000 per year, whereas the amount of revenue generated via imports was a mere £100. See also Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 5:1302–3; Graves, "A New Light on Alderman Boydell," 143–48.

<sup>48</sup> Graves, "A New Light on Alderman Boydell," 143–44; see also Winifred H. Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (New York: Garland, 1976), 4–6.

<sup>49</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 5: 1302–3.

act that would allow him to put his business up for sale via lottery.<sup>50</sup> In 1803, Parliament granted Boydell permission to hold the lottery, which encompassed not only the 52 Pall Mall building but the inventory of paintings as well.<sup>51</sup> This sad fate epitomizes the numerous challenges England faced with respect to its position as a visual arts center during this period of global political crises, many of which had important ramifications for the international and domestic art markets. Nevertheless, Boydell had made his mark.

Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie were all involved with prints to a certain degree. Danby and Petrie (and less frequently O'Connor) worked with a variety of print publishers to have their drawings and paintings engraved for publication, which contributed to their growing reputations. All three artists would benefit as well from the precedent of more established artists like J. M. W. Turner, whose sketching expeditions abroad often led to the publication of books of travel-related engravings.<sup>52</sup>

### **Napoleonic Catalysts for Change in the English Art Market**

As mentioned above, the wide-ranging effects of political chaos on the continent included the dispersal of noteworthy private European collections of fine art. The revolution in France forced many private collectors to transport their paintings to England

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 6:2160, 2191, 2233, 7:2512; Whitley, *Art in England*, 2:72. Boydell's business success was predicated on returns from the export of English prints abroad. Whitley quotes from an unidentified journal from the spring of 1789: "The export trade of our engravings to France far exceeds the trade at home. The trade at home is chiefly in low-priced prints—little ovals and furniture decorations of the more costly productions of the French exceed by three to one the buyers in England. In Paris alone to Sir Robert Strange's last print the subscriptions there exceeded ours as seventeen to three. The calculations in all undertakings are on the foreign sale, being thrice above our own. Spain is also beginning to deal largely in the commodity. A late order from Madrid to Messrs. Boydell exceeded 1,500 pounds sterling."

<sup>51</sup> Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*, 84–93.

<sup>52</sup> Professional artists who traveled abroad would return to London with sketchbooks full of drawings that could be engraved as prints or developed into large-sized, full-scale exhibition paintings. Danby and O'Connor both embraced the desire to experience the drama and inspiration of overseas travel.

to either protect or sell them. As a result, a select and savvy group of English collectors was able to purchase an enormous amount of fine art, including many Old Master paintings. Art dealer William Buchanan's *Memoirs of Painting, with a Chronological History of the Importation of Pictures by the Great Masters into England since the French Revolution* (1824) is a riveting account of these events.<sup>53</sup> The importation of one distinctive trove of paintings caused a great deal of press coverage in England:

In 1792, the Duke d'Orleans gave orders for disposing of his magnificent collection of pictures, as will be found particularised in the subsequent details; and the causalities of the times afterwards forced the purchasers to send it for protection to our more happy shores. The storm of Revolution at last burst forth with all its terrors, and with it sprung up those causes, which in a measure forced upon us a species of remuneration in the Arts, for our former heavy losses.

As the introduction of a collection of so much importance as that of the Orleans into this country formed of itself an era, it cannot but be interesting to trace it to its origin, to observe the new turn which it gave to the prevailing taste of the day; to know the objects of which it was composed, with the value attached to each; and to learn the names of those men who first gave its reception into this country, a marked patronage and encouragement in matters almost as interesting to those who appreciate a correct knowledge of chronological events, as to the lover of art himself.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting*, 1:xii–xvi, 1–33; Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 3:970. See also Burton B. Frederickson, ed., *The Index of Paintings Sold in the British Isles during the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1988), 1:xi–xiv; Thomas Martyn, *The English Connoisseur: Containing an Account of Whatever Is Curious in Painting, Sculpture, &c. in the Palaces and Seats of the Nobility and Principal Gentry of England, both in Town and Country* (Dublin: T. and J. Whitehouse, 1767); George Redford, *Art Sales: A History of Sales, Pictures, and Other Works of Art with Notices of the Collections Sold, Names of Owners, Titles of Pictures, Prices and Purchases* (London: Whitefriars Press, 1888).

<sup>54</sup> Buchanan, *Memoirs of Painting*, 1:9–24. Buchanan details how, over a twenty-year period, through strategic purchases and generous gifts, Philip Regent Duke d'Orleans had compiled "one of the most splendid and consequential [collections of paintings] in Europe." The Orleans collection was by no means the only major group of paintings to be imported into England, however. Buchanan describes several other considerable collections in his memoirs as well: volume 1 was concerned with paintings from France; volume 2, with paintings that arrived via Italy, as a result of Napoleon's campaigns in 1797–98. Early viewers who ultimately purchased major paintings from the sale included Mr. Angerstein (whose collection would eventually establish the National Gallery), the Viscount Fitzwilliam, Sir Francis Baring, and Mr. Udney. Of the four, only Angerstein was a new collector who was not known as a member of the aristocratic class.

Once the works were safe in England, the three English nobles responsible for organizing their sale (the Duke of Bridgewater, the Earl of Carlisle, and the Marquis of Stafford) divided a portion of the paintings among themselves, with the rest to be sold after a public exhibition.<sup>55</sup> Buchanan recalls:

Until the arrival of the Orleans Collection in England, the prevailing taste and fashion had been for the acquisition of pictures of the Flemish and Dutch schools; this likewise had for a long period been the rage in France. These were much more easily to be acquired, and came more frequently before the eye of the public than works of the Italian masters; it might, therefore, be deemed somewhat singular to see with what avidity the present collection was seized on by the amateurs of painting in general; and it will not be deemed surprising, that, from that time, a new turn was given to the taste for collecting in this country. Subsequent importations of the works of the Italian masters, gave an opportunity of improving that taste, and brought the English collections, generally, to a standard of consequence, which they could not boast of before that period.<sup>56</sup>

Those entrepreneurial British art dealers and financiers who happened to be in Italy when the French army arrived were uniquely positioned to export these paintings to England with haste—the alternative, often as not, was to enrich the conqueror himself.<sup>57</sup>

Responding rapidly, art brokers either renegotiated the sale of the paintings to agents from England and France or hoarded the collections until there was a more propitious time to sell.<sup>58</sup> For example, William Young Ottley, Esquire, happened to be in Rome in 1799, just when the difficulties for the major Roman patrons were most severe. He purchased many paintings over the next year and organized a major sale at Christie's in London in 1801. In due course these paintings would contribute to the formation of major English collections including that of William Beckford of Fonthill, who was a

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1:222–56, 271–96. The Italian collections included Mr. Day's, from which Mr. Angerstein purchased three paintings: Titian's *Venus and Adonis* and *Ganymede*, and a work by Gaspar Poussin.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1:22.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2:1–3.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2:1–33.

patron of Francis Danby, and the magnificent grouping put together by John Julius Angerstein.<sup>59</sup>

For art lovers in England, these artistic treasures comprised a powerful revelation.

Burgeoning enthusiast William Hazlitt wrote the following in 1820 in *London Magazine*:

My first initiation in the mysteries of the art [of painting] was at the Orleans Gallery: it was there I formed my taste, such as it is; so that I am irreclaimably of the old school in painting. I was staggered when I saw the works there collected, and looked at them with wondering and with longing eyes. A mist passed away from my sight: the scales fell off. A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me . . . Old Time had unlocked his treasures, and Fame stood portress at the door. We had all heard of the names of Titian, Raphael, Guido, Domenichino, the Caracci—but to see them face to face, to be in the same room with their deathless productions, was like breaking some mighty spell,—was almost an effect of necromancy! From that time I lived in a world of pictures.<sup>60</sup>

## **An Appreciation for Old Masters and Contemporary English Artists: John Julius**

### **Angerstein as the Consummate Metropolitan Collector**

While most of the Orléans collection was snapped up by English nobility, this unprecedented offering of Old Master paintings enabled non-titled personages such as John Julius Angerstein to expand their private collections as well. Challenging entrenched notions of class, prestige, and privilege, Angerstein's entry into the London market happily affected the cognoscenti, young artists, and the general public yearning to know more about fine art.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the dedicated aesthete would prove vital to London's

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:3–33; Redford, preface, *Art Sales*, 1:69–78. William Beckford purchased the Altieri Claudes, among other objects.

<sup>60</sup> William Hazlitt, "On the Pleasures of Painting," *London Magazine* 2 (July–Dec. 1820): 603; Hazlitt, "Mr. Angerstein's Collection of Pictures," *London Magazine* 6 (July–Dec. 1822): 489–94.

<sup>61</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 6:2059, 9:400, 645, 647.

ultimate transformation from an eighteenth-century city with an emerging art market to a nineteenth-century metropolitan cultural hub. Unlike other well-known patrons such as the Marquis of Stafford, the Earl of Carlisle, and the Duke of Bridgewater, the leading purchasers of the paintings from the Orleans sale, Angerstein (like Boydell) had a good head for business in addition to being an art lover.<sup>62</sup> Of Russian heritage, he had made a name for himself in the marine insurance business at Lloyds of London and accumulated a considerable personal fortune.

Joseph Farington's *Diary* mentions Angerstein frequently. In his typically detached, brusque manner, Farington details Angerstein's background and reputation among the cognoscenti:

Mr. Angerstein has profited much by his marriages . . . Mr. Angerstein is much respected for his good heart & intentions but is considered deficient in Education, & very embarrassed on all occasions when He is required to express himself.— His fortune is not esteemed to be of the first rate, perhaps not more, if so much as £100,000, but his expences will be borne by His [*sic*] income *from business* which must be very considerable. Mr. Angerstein might have been at the head of popularity *in the City*, but has chosen to associate chiefly at the west end of town so that He is one who the Citizens say, “*Comes among them* for what he can get.”<sup>63</sup>

**“A visit to a genuine Collection is like going on a pilgrimage—it is an act of devotion performed at the shrine of Art!”<sup>64</sup>**

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<sup>62</sup> See John Julius Angerstein, *A Catalogue of the Celebrated Pictures of the Late John Julius Angerstein, Esq., Containing a Finished Etching of Every Picture, and Accompanied with Historical and Biographical Notices by John Young* (London: John Young, 1823); Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 6:2059; Redford, *Art Sales*, 1:124–27; Sarah Palmer, “Angerstein, John Julius,” entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography; in Association with the British Academy; From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000* (2004).

<sup>63</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 6:2059.

<sup>64</sup> William Hazlitt, “The Angerstein Gallery,” *London Magazine* 6 (July–Dec. 1822): 489–90.

While it may have taken London society a while to adjust to having a businessman among its members, they were eventually able to overcome their distaste at his lack of pedigree.<sup>65</sup> The aforementioned writer William Hazlitt visited the Angerstein collection in 1822 and wrote about the paintings in ecstatic, religious terms: “This is not a bazaar, a raree-show of art, a Noah’s ark of all the Schools . . . but a sanctuary, a holy of holies, collected by taste, sacred to fame, enriched by the rarest products of genius.”<sup>66</sup> Other changes also came about as a result of Angerstein’s influence. For example, the Marquis of Stafford, an early patron of Francis Danby and enthusiastic champion of the British Institution, made his private holdings available to a select “public” as well.<sup>67</sup> In May 1806, Stafford hosted a reception for two thousand people during which they toured his newly refurbished home and art collection. Stafford then decided to arrange for his paintings to be viewed by ticketed individuals on Wednesdays.<sup>68</sup>

Still, for most struggling artists (and others), the prospects for gaining entrance to the state apartments of the Marquis of Stafford were not good. In general, the only opportunity to see paintings without an admission charge as was necessary at the Royal

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<sup>65</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 3:821.

<sup>66</sup> Hazlitt, “Angerstein Gallery,” 489–90. The passage continues: “For the number of pictures, Mr. Angerstein’s is the finest gallery, perhaps in the world . . . We know of no greater treat than to be admitted freely to a Collection of this sort, where the mind reposes with full confidence in its feelings of admiration . . . It is a cure (for the time at least) for low-thoughted cares and uneasy passions. We are abstracted to another sphere: we breathe empyrean air; we enter into the minds of Raphael, of Titian, of Poussin, of the Caracci, and look at nature with their eyes; we live in time past, and seem identified with the permanent forms of things.”

<sup>67</sup> Anonymous, “Fine Arts, Exhibition of Royal Academy,” *London Magazine* 10 (1820): 355; anonymous, “Lord Grosvenor’s Gallery,” *London Magazine* 10 (1820): 365. With regard to Lord Grosvenor’s opening of his home and his art collection for a select audience, the anonymous writer said the following: “This distinguished patron of the fine arts has opened his noble collection of pictures at Grosvenor-House, on stated days, for those who have been presented with tickets. A collection like this, which is enriched by some of the standard works of the old masters, and by many of the finest of the modern school, cannot fail to be appreciated by all the lovers of the fine arts.”

<sup>68</sup> Anonymous, “Lord Grosvenor’s Gallery,” *London Magazine*, 365. The Marquis of Stafford offered tickets to Royal Academicians in addition to others on special occasions.

Academy exhibitions would be at the growing number of public auction rooms in London.<sup>69</sup> Not until 1824 did the English government specifically seek out what were perceived to be important works by historic Old Master English artists for a national collection that would be open without restrictions to the public and artists for instructive, educational, and inspirational purposes.<sup>70</sup> It was a familiar refrain; already in 1767 an anonymous writer for *The English Connoisseur* was goading the landed gentry to open their estates to facilitate much-needed access to Old Master collections for young artists: “The polite arts are rising in Britain, and call for the fostering hand of the rich and powerful; one certain way of advancing them, is to give all possible opportunities to those who make them their study, to contemplate the works of the best masters, that they may not form a bad taste and a poor manner.”<sup>71</sup>

Fortuitously for England, just as the clamor for an unrestricted national gallery had reached its apex, Angerstein’s collection became available, following his death in 1823. After the careful strategizing of insiders such as Sir Thomas Lawrence, it was purchased by Lord Liverpool’s government for £57,000 with the intention of finally establishing a real national gallery in London.<sup>72</sup> The gallery opened in 1823 and remains to this day a major institution dedicated to international paintings and sculpture.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Whitley, *Art in England*, 2:3.

<sup>70</sup> John Eagles, “The Fine Arts and the Public Taste in 1853,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 74 (July 1853): 90–91. Eagles enthused about an accessible public collection: “The public—the public, and none but the public—shall have a National Gallery, a Royal Academy—demand especial legislation, committees of taste, to tell this public what it wants, which it ought to know very well of itself, if the said public hath any individual bodily existence.” See also Hutchinson, *History of the Royal Academy*, 98.

<sup>71</sup> Martyn, *English Connoisseur*, 5; Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 16:5696.

<sup>72</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 7:2721, 16:5696; “Mr. Angerstein’s Collection,” *London Magazine* 6 (Jan.–June): 489–94; *Sir Thomas Lawrence’s Letter-Bag; with Recollections of the Artists by Miss Elizabeth Croft*, ed. George Somes Layard (London: George Allen, 1906), 173.

<sup>73</sup> Gregory Martin, “The Founding of the National Gallery in London,” *Connoisseur* 9 (April–Dec. 1974): 280–88.

The growth of the status of the fine arts in England during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries comprises a complex narrative that resonates with challenges, opportunities, and serendipity. As did Ireland, England had to overcome prejudices and its own insecurity to claim a viable place within international artistic circles. Any consideration of Irish artists who were living or exhibiting in London, then, must begin with the historical challenges and opportunities that they would have encountered there, including developments in taste and style, changes in the art market, and the advent of successful new institutions.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we have seen that both Ireland and England sought to improve their international status with regard to the arts. Ireland was hindered by numerous economic, political, and sociological problems, but individuals and organizations strove to establish a viable support system for the visual arts, one that involved patronage, education, exposure to artistic innovation from abroad, and increased opportunities for the exhibition of artists' work. The combination of these factors created a situation that had serious negative consequences for Irish artists.

England too struggled to position itself as an international arts hub that could boast of a well-established school of art. Compared to the metropolis of Paris, London was likewise considered a provincial player in the international art market. A number of factors did encourage the eventual establishment of a respected English school that would be recognized within an international arena, largely thanks to the efforts of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Alderman John Boydell, and John Julius Angerstein.

While in the eighteenth century, Irish artists who journeyed to London likely would have been surprised by the lack of support for the arts within English culture,

things changed relatively quickly. In the nineteenth century, advances had taken place, and the journey that Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie undertook in 1813 would prove to be pivotal for all three of them. In terms of ambition, they recognized the problems that existed within the Irish art market and sought alternatives to further their own professional advancement in London. To distinguish themselves among the throngs of struggling artists there, they sought out the resources offered by the Royal Academy of Art and the British Institution. They recognized how the efforts of men like Reynolds to advocate for historical landscapes had contributed to a growing market for Sublime landscapes of all genres—apocalyptic, Romantic, and historical. In turn, each Irishman abandoned his earlier penchant for topography and created a new path for himself through the Sublime. To varying degrees and through different methodologies, each of them managed to retain certain aspects of his provincial roots while embracing the novelty and modernity offered by London and the tenets of the Sublime.

These innovations included an awareness of the benefits of sketching excursions abroad, the use of the growing market for published prints to further leverage their reputations within an international market and at home, the use of Old Master paintings as a means of grounding their new approaches, and an embrace of the increased prominence of history painting as a way to the Sublime. In London and Dublin, respectively, Danby and Petrie realized that if they grounded their paintings in the genre of “history” as promoted within the English school, they had a chance to rise above other artists and, in a very modern way, adapt the tenets of the Sublime to the broader genre of “history” painting in its new incarnation. Lastly, each artist was cognizant of the shifts in

the aesthetic appreciation of artistic stylistic developments in conjunction with the role that audiences played in the establishment of an artist's reputation.

### Chapter 3

#### Francis Danby: Striving for the Metropolis and Finding the Sublime

If Ireland does little towards rearing and establishing her men of genius, she has the merit of producing them: the arts of peace and the arts of war number in their highest ranks a host of distinguished names. To the list of notable painters who have conferred honour on the sister-isle we may add Francis Danby.<sup>1</sup>

When Francis Danby arrived in London in 1813, the city was becoming an international artistic hub.<sup>2</sup> The surest measurement of success for any Irish artist was a triumph in London among the many other international artists who worked there.

Eleven years later, Danby would secure such a triumph. The exhibition of his painting titled *Sunset at Sea after a Storm* (1824; fig. 3:1) would result in an uproar at London's Royal Academy, and its strong critical reviews would win him international acclaim and the camaraderie of his prominent fellow academicians. For this debut, he had chosen a magnificent seascape whose historical narrative promised a broader appeal than the content of his British Institution debut painting.<sup>3</sup> In fact, *Sunset at Sea after a Storm* is a brilliant realization of the Burkean tenets of the Sublime, and Danby had very high hopes for it, given his growing love of the metropolis.<sup>4</sup> Years later he would reminisce with the editor of the *Art Journal* about his first visit to London, "with the

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<sup>1</sup> See anonymous, "British Artists, Their Style and Character, with Engraved Illustrations," *Art Journal* 1 (1855): 78.

<sup>2</sup> Anonymous, "Obituary of Francis Danby," *Art Journal* 7 (1861): 118; anonymous, "Obituary of Danby," *The Athenaeum*, March 2, 1861, p. 294; William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archeology of George Petrie, L.L.D., M.R.I.A.* (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1868), 2–4.

<sup>3</sup> *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* (1819) was exhibited at the British Institution in 1820.

<sup>4</sup> See Celina Fox, ed., *London World City: 1800–1840* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1992), 453. The popularity of the painting's subject matter—a raft set adrift in the sea—may be linked to the acclaim surrounding the 1820 London appearance of Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, which was exhibited in Piccadilly at the Egyptian Hall. Danby did not see the painting himself, but it was described to him by an acquaintance, Francis Gold.

wonders of which . . . I was so struck that they increased my ambition, and from my twentieth year I have been an English artist.”<sup>5</sup>

Enthralled by the booming London art market, Danby promptly produced a work that would make an impression there. Drawing upon the scholarly discourse then heating up around the Sublime, Danby heightened his viewers’ experience of nature through a fresh, even disconcerting perspective. His low horizon, red sun, white-capped waves, and luminous sky invite more than an appraising look: they invite meditation. Evocative and enigmatic, this masterpiece surpasses simple mimesis by evoking the grander intentions that would drive Danby throughout his career. Already, however, he was no longer the provincial Dubliner who had toiled and trained in the relative backwater of Bristol before making his way to London for good. Writing in 1856, David Bogue vividly recalled Danby’s triumph in his book *Men of the Time*:

Springing like Pallas from the head of Jupiter completely armed for the battle of fame, [Danby] produced his “Sunset at Sea after a Storm;” one of the most remarkable pictures of the English school. There is scarcely an instance in the history of modern art of so great a stride having been made in so short time. This marvellous effect—a blood-red setting sun over a weltering sea, whose solitude is only broken by the straining raft of a shipwrecked crew clinging convulsively to its timbers, at once established Mr. Danby’s position as a painter. Sir Thomas Lawrence . . . was so charmed with the picture that he purchased it at a liberal price; one more in accordance with his own sense of its value than the modest expectations of the artist . . . This work has been finely engraved in Finden’s “Royal Gallery of British Art” but as much of its beauty depends upon colour—a colour, too, which is but feebly represented by the burin—the engraving affords but a very imperfect notion of the magical variety of hues which glorify the original.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See anonymous, “British Artists,” *Art Journal* 1 (1855), 77–80; David Bogue, *Men of the Time: Biographical Sketches of Eminent Living Characters* (London: David Bogue, 1856), 190. This exclamation recollects Danby’s initial enthusiasm for London, when he of course could not foresee the professional and personal tragedies that would besiege him. Beyond his enthusiasm and fervor to appropriate all things English, Danby, like his colleagues O’Connor and Petrie, would have been exposed to the reverberating political dissonance that remained after the rebellion of 1798, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> David Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 190.

Longinus, Burke, Immanuel Kant, and the other writers to be discussed here in relation to Danby's art were all admirers of *phantasia*, the power of the human imagination when properly inspired or moved by the Sublime. Danby's epic canvases fit this bill; he (and certain of his colleagues) harnessed the tenets of the Sublime even as its themes continued to be developed by the critics and philosophers of his day and indeed, by twentieth- and twenty-first century scholars.<sup>7</sup> Metropolitan nineteenth-century audiences were fascinated with cataclysmic canvases, and Danby's ability to infuse an otherwise beautifully composed painting such as *Sunset at Sea after a Storm* with a haunting mortality earned him some renown. In 1847, critic Richard Redgrave reminisced about the impact that *Sunset at Sea after a Storm* had upon him when he first viewed it in the Royal Academy:

Forty years have passed since we saw this picture, yet we could almost describe from memory the lurid red of the setting sun, the broken waves of the subsiding storm, the few survivors of the wreck, alone on a raft on the limitless ocean; perhaps if we saw it now we might think it less impressive than its memory, yet it was a work that made the painter's reputation. Lawrence, the president, purchased it, it is said, at a much higher sum than the painter's price, and the world of artists and the outer world of art-lovers were so struck with it that in the next year, when he followed up his success by a still greater effort, "The Delivery of Israel out of Egypt, and Host of Pharaoh overwhelmed in the Red Sea," the Academy elected him an associate of their body, and the road to wealth and fame seemed to lie open before him.<sup>8</sup>

At the time the reputable and influential patron Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830), president of the Royal Academy, purchased *Sunset at Sea after a Storm*, he was known

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960); Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>8</sup> Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters of the English School, with Critical Notices of Their Works, and an Account of the Progress of Art in England* (London: Smith, Elder, 1866; reprint, London: Phaidon Press, 1947), 400.

as a discriminating and influential collector of Old Master paintings and drawings.<sup>9</sup> The publicity attending his purchase of the young artist's debut painting no doubt aided Danby in his ascent.

The painting was remarkable for its style as well as its story, and perhaps most of all for its coupling of the two. In it, Danby employs brushwork that is loose, gestural, and expansive, almost Turneresque. He also uses his rich, deep, lurid colors with nuance and flair in the manner of the northern German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840).

The radical influences of Friedrich's Sublime landscape painting are palpable in *Sunset at Sea after a Storm*, whose wide-angle, panoramic perspective abandons the prevailing conventions of framing the view that are apparent in earlier eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British paintings. With his provocative subject, Danby aligned himself with Friedrich's *Polar Sea*, 1824, mistakenly titled *Wreck of the Hope* by later art historians, as well as Turner's *The Shipwreck*, 1805, and Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, 1818–19.<sup>10</sup> Danby's technique recalls another painting by Friedrich as well, specifically the study *Evening* of the same year (1824; fig. 3:2).<sup>11</sup> The explicit similarities between these two paintings are considerable, even though Friedrich's study

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<sup>9</sup> See George Redford, *Art Sales: A History of the Sales of Pictures and Other Works of Art with Notices of the Collections Sold, Names of Owners, Titles of Pictures, Prices and Purchase* (London: Whitefriars, 1888), 124. According to Redford, Lawrence kept the highly regarded expert and dealer Samuel Woodburn very busy: "SW was constantly engaged in finding drawings worthy of the collection which Sir T. Lawrence was forming, and no one knew better than he did the great value of such a collection." See also D. E. Williams, *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Thomas Lawrence* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831).

<sup>10</sup> See Helmut Börsch-Supan, *Caspar David Friedrich* (New York: George Braziller, 1974), 140. *The Shipwreck* refers to the wreck of the *Earl of Abergavenny* off the coast of Weymouth in 1805, and *Disaster at Sea* refers to the sinking of a female convict ship off the coast of France in 1833.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 142. Börsch-Supan suggests that this study, like two others produced in 1824, was not intended for exhibition but instead represents an attempt to transcribe ephemeral cloud formations and the nuances of twilight. Although Friedrich's *Evening* is not an example of the apocalyptic Sublime per se, it does seek to express the intangible connection between divinity and nature.

dispenses with any foreground narrative and instead focuses solely upon that most ephemeral and Romantic moment of the day, twilight. Its glorious, saturated colors and ethereal cloud formations far surpass the more scientific attempts of peers as famous as John Constable (1776–1837) to execute cloud studies. Much like Friedrich’s earlier painting *Monk by the Sea* (1810; fig. 3:3), *Evening* emphasizes the vast and seemingly infinite expanse of the horizon above only the slightest of details to register a foreground for the landscape:

In Friedrich’s works . . . the sky is a mysterious vacuum in which the clouds are suspended like the characters of a strange script. Their ethereal substance is highlighted by the glow of the setting sun. The feathery cloud configurations in the upper right-hand corner must have struck Friedrich as extremely suggestive . . . in these rapidly painted sketches the sky assumes a divine quality when compared to Dahl’s cloud studies and those of his contemporaries who portrayed meteorological phenomena in a more scientific manner. For Friedrich the sky possessed a religious significance.<sup>12</sup>

Danby’s own phantasmagorical sky demonstrates a like flair for exploiting the emotive possibilities of rich, deep, and arresting colors. The intrinsic beauty and emotive power of what initially appears to be a serene, maritime sunset is only sharpened by the grisly details of a tragedy at sea. As an example of Danby’s increasingly savvy understanding of how one’s reputation within and beyond the metropolis was established, the painting was engraved by William Miller (1849; fig. 3:4).<sup>13</sup>

In *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), the eighteenth-century scholar John Dennis (1654–1734) draws particular attention to the Sublime’s tension between the metaphysical (Danby’s sunset) and the (sometimes painfully) concrete (the life raft):

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed description of the print see Edward Francis Finden, *The Royal Gallery of British Art* (London: Hogarth, 1842–51); *A Sunset at Sea After a Storm* was engraved by William Miller.

And here I desire the reader to observe, that ideas in meditation are often very different from what ideas of the same object are, in the course of common conversation. As for example, the sun mentioned in ordinary conversation, gives the idea of a round flat shining body, of about two foot diameter. But the sun occurring to us in meditation, gives the idea of a vast and glorious body, and at the top of all the visible creation, and the brightest material image of divinity.<sup>14</sup>

Thus early in his career in London Danby established his interest in portraying idealized landscape views that were rife with the Sublime, which hint at the relationship between divinity within nature. With his Royal Academy debut, then, Danby had quickly arrived at the epitome of an Irish artist's success in London. But the talent and perspective that brought him to those heights were developed in Dublin, and it is there where we must begin.

### **Danby's Early Artistic Career in Dublin and Bristol**

Born in 1793, Francis Danby was the son of James and Margaret Watson Danby of Killinick, County Wexford. His family moved to Dublin in 1799, and young Danby began his artistic education at the Dublin Society's schools.<sup>15</sup> The first painting he exhibited in Dublin, at the Society of Artists in 1813, was called *Landscape—Evening*. In *A Century of British Painters of the English School* (1866), Samuel and Richard Redgrave indicate that in this early painting, “The bias had already been given towards that period of the day when breadth of effect and colour predominate, and the mystery of gloom and twilight divest even the most homely scene of its commonplace, and

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<sup>14</sup> John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry: Contain'd in Some New Discoveries Never Made Before, Requisite for the Writing and Judging of Poems Surely: Being a Preliminary to a Larger Work Design'd to be Publish'd in Folio, and Entitled, A Criticism upon Our Most Celebrated English Poets Deceas'd* (London: George Strahan and Bernard Lintott, 1704), 35.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, “Obituary of Francis Danby,” *Art Journal*, 118; “Obituary of Danby,” *The Athenaeum*, 294; Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 190.

clothe the tamest forms with grandeur and ideality.”<sup>16</sup> Danby’s penchant for dramatic light effects manifested itself throughout his career, as seen in numerous scenes that depicted glowing sunsets as well as more dramatic and self-conscious appropriations of light.<sup>17</sup> According to an anonymous 1855 essay on Danby in the *Art Journal*, the revenue that Danby earned from his sale of *Landscape—Evening* to Dublin collector Archdeacon Hill financed his trip across the Irish Sea: “The young artist came at once to London to see what Art was doing in the great metropolis.”<sup>18</sup>

The journey shared by Danby, O’Connor, and Petrie is well documented within nineteenth- and twentieth-century Irish art historical literature.<sup>19</sup> They hoped to establish themselves in London as working artists, and upon their arrival in June 1813, they presented themselves to the celebrated artist Benjamin West (1738–1820). Apparently, they impressed him, and West arranged for private viewings for all three artists of exclusive London painting collections.<sup>20</sup> Contemporaneous Petrie biographer William Stokes observes, “Through the influence of Sir Benjamin West, to whom Petrie brought letters of introduction, and who received him most kindly, he enjoyed full opportunities of examining the public, as well as many of the private collections of painting in the metropolis.”<sup>21</sup> These collections likely included many Old Master paintings, which would have made quite an impression on the young men (see chapters

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<sup>16</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 398–400.

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, “British Artists,” *Art Journal*, 77–78.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. The whereabouts of this painting is unknown.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78; Thomas Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1920), 18; Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 190; Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 398; Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 2–4; W. G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Painters* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1913), 1:253.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, “Obituary of Francis Danby,” *Art Journal*, 118. The *Art Journal* obituary writer states that Danby and O’Connor also had letters of introduction to West.

<sup>21</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 7.

1 and 2). Whether or not Danby had seen many Old Master paintings in Dublin prior to his departure for London is not known.

Ultimately, Danby would surpass his two compatriots in the vigor of his commitment to the English art scene, foreshadowing Roy Foster's striking description of George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) as “a middle-class Irishman on the make who felt no guilt at all about emigration.”<sup>22</sup> “Every Irishman who felt that his business in life was on the higher planes of the cultural professions felt that he must have a metropolitan domicile and an international culture: that is, he felt that his first business was to get out of Ireland.”<sup>23</sup> Petrie left within a month of his arrival in Dublin; his father, James, forwarded a painting to his son, the sale of which was to pay for George's boat fare home.<sup>24</sup> After a few weeks in London, as the senior Petrie had predicted, Danby and O'Connor found themselves financially strapped, and with great regret they temporarily abandoned their plans for London, setting out on foot for Bristol, 120 miles away. Once in Bristol, Danby and O'Connor had to trade art for lodging.<sup>25</sup> Very quickly, Danby became enamored with the local landscape and decided to remain in Bristol, where he honed his skills over several years before planning his return move to

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<sup>22</sup> Roy Foster, “Marginal Men and Micks on the Make,” in Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 291.

<sup>23</sup> George Bernard Shaw, “Fragment of an Autobiography,” in *The Matter with Ireland*, ed. Dan H. Laurence and David H. Greene 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1879; Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 9; Petrie sold the painting his father had sent for the return passage and gave Danby and O'Connor two rings as well, purely as insurance against financial disaster. Further information about either the sale or the title of the painting is not available.

<sup>25</sup> From anonymous, “Obituary of Francis Danby,” *Athenaeum*, 294: “[While in London in 1813] they soon exhausted their small means in the great city; and finding themselves almost penniless, they started *on foot* to Bristol, hoping to be able to make their way somehow or other from that city across the Channel to the place of their birth. On their arrival in Bristol they found themselves (to use a familiar expression) ‘hard up,’ and they had the greatest difficulty obtaining a night's lodging. This being found after some difficulty, the two pilgrims set to work next day to make drawings. Danby succeeded in making three drawings, which he sold . . . to one Minthorn, a fancy stationer, in College Green. Thus encouraged, Danby soon collected enough to enable him to frank [finance the transportation for] his friend O'Connor back to his native shores.”

London. Danby's success in parlaying his artistic talents even under great financial duress in the Bristol area encouraged him to take his chances in England instead of returning to Ireland with O'Connor. With a few shillings in his pocket and some new friends to encourage him, he soon came to view Bristol as a launching pad for his professional debut in London.

Once he was exhibiting in the Bristol area, Danby began to develop his personal style of "poetic landscape painting."<sup>26</sup> During these early years in England, he enjoyed the advantages of working in an artistic environment among supportive, culturally aware individuals who included both amateur and professional artists and patrons.<sup>27</sup> In a letter published in the *Bristol Times and Mirror* on March 5, 1825, an anonymous writer reflects on Danby and his impact:

Mr. Danby, in passing through Bristol, about twelve years ago, upon his return *home* from *London to Dublin*, was induced to remain here, in consequence of finding that he could readily dispose of his drawings. He rapidly acquired a reputation, both as a drawing-master and as an artist, and met with many sincere friends, both able and willing to serve him; but, with all his good qualities, be it said, he was not a prudent man. Besides which, he had a large family. However, for the last three or four years of his residence here, he certainly made from 3 to 400£ per annum by his profession, and the last picture which he exhibited in London—the Enchanted Island—was painted for Mr. Gibbons, ONE OF HIS BRISTOL FRIENDS [*sic*], for which he received 200 guineas.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, "Obituary of Francis Danby," *Art Journal*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> See Francis Greenacre, *Francis Danby: 1793–1861* (London: The Tate Gallery, in Association with the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 1988), 12–17, exh. cat. This loosely defined "Bristol School" included Royal Academy artist Edward Bird (1772–1819) and artists Edward Villiers Ripplingille (1798–1859), Samuel Colman (1780–1845), and Francis Gold (1779–1832), as well as patrons Dr. John King (1766–1846), George Cumberland Sr. (1754–1848), John Gibbons (1777–1851), and the Reverend John Eagles (1783–1855). Cumberland, whose correspondence is an excellent primary source for much of Danby's activity during this period, was a particularly formative influence on the artist; his reputation as a friend and patron of the arts extended to relationships with William Blake (1757–1827) and later Sir Thomas Lawrence, the second president of the Royal Academy, as well as Sir Charles Long, who became the primary driving force behind the British Institution. It was Francis Gold, interestingly, who first described Théodore Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1819) to Danby, which would later inspire *Sunset at Sea after a Storm*.

<sup>28</sup> *Bristol Times and Mirror*, March 5, 1825, p. 23.

Despite his strong artistic reputation in Bristol, we sense already the disapproval attracted by Danby's private affairs. He met and quickly wed a young Bristol woman named Hannah, as we will see later in the chapter, the relationship would not end well.

With regard to primary source documents on Danby, the voluminous correspondence among the members of the Cumberland family provides invaluable contemporaneous documents.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the extensive obituary from the *Bristol Times Mirror* provides insightful contemporaneous analyses of Danby's triumphs and failures. For secondary sources, Eric Adams's monograph *Francis Danby: Varieties of Poetic Landscape* (1973) and Francis Greenacre's exhibition catalogue *Francis Danby: 1793–1861* (1988) each treat Danby's career comprehensively.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the earlier scholarship of Adams and Greenacre, however, my focus here is primarily on this artist's methodical and strategic efforts to employ the apocalyptic Sublime as a means of transforming his career and his art.

As he first learned his craft in Ireland, Danby appropriated the topographical manner of landscape painting.<sup>31</sup> Later, in Bristol, he was able to use this experience to secure necessary professional support, interaction with artistic colleagues, and patronage that in turn allowed him to begin to take chances with his painting. He soon found himself in London as a result.

### **Historical Precedents: Irish Artists' Ambivalence in London**

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<sup>29</sup> Cumberland Papers, National Library, MS 36491–36522. This source consists of papers, notebooks, and journals of the Cumberland family, primarily George Cumberland Sr. (1748–1836).

<sup>30</sup> Adams, *Francis Danby*; Greenacre, *Francis Danby: 1793–1861*, 33.

<sup>31</sup> This approach prioritizes the accurate and detailed reproduction of the features and details of a vista, if necessary at the expense of any larger symbolism or meaning.

For Danby and his friends, the decision to leave Dublin by ship for London indicated the strength of their shared conviction to literally and figuratively expand their professional horizons.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the limited artistic resources in Dublin, the shadow of the Irish rebellion of 1798 was still long and dark, and all three artists would have felt its unsettling effects.<sup>33</sup> England's response to the rebels had been harsh. Numerous individuals were executed in retaliation, and within two short years, the Act of Union would lessen Ireland's independence and increase England's control over Ireland with regard to parliamentary governance. Regardless of one's particular political sympathies, the political and social climate of Ireland continued to be fraught. As a result of the difficulties in Wexford, Danby's father moved the family to the relative safety of Dublin.

Within the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, numerous predecessors of Danby and his friends sought more lucrative horizons in London as well, due to their disenchantment with the lack of support of the visual arts in their own country.<sup>34</sup> In his book *The Picture of Dublin: or, A Stranger's Guide to the Irish Metropolis . . .* (1835), publisher and writer William Curry Jr. discusses the challenges for Irish artists at home even at that late date: "Owing to the want of taste and encouragement . . . though there are many painters of merit, there is no existing Society of Artists in Dublin, and many have been compelled to seek for support in other occupations, tired out and disgusted

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<sup>32</sup> See anonymous, "Obituary of Francis Danby," *Art Journal*, 118; anonymous, "Obituary of Danby," *The Athenaeum*, 292; Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 2, 7–9.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, "British Artists," *Art Journal*, 78; Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 190; J. Gordon, *History of the Rebellion in Ireland*.

<sup>34</sup> The number of artists who had left Ireland, seeking success either in England or on the continent, is large. Of particular interest in this group are those that became associated with the Royal Academy, some of whom will be discussed later in this chapter.

with repeated efforts unrewarded.”<sup>35</sup> Written in 1913, W. G. Strickland’s in-depth biographical summaries of Irish artists provide insight and detailed commentary on the scores of those artists, many of whom had difficulty assimilating in London.<sup>36</sup>

Not all of these stories of self-imposed exile were happy ones, or at least not right away. James White (director of the National Gallery of Ireland from 1964–80), wrote an essay in 1964 entitled “Irish Romantic Painting” that carefully considers the challenges that many artists faced in London, particularly those hindered by a debilitating combination of insecurity and defiance:

Whatever the advantages that might accrue, the Irish artist carried with him his sense of inferiority and injustice arising from the religious and political background at home. Whichever creed or class he belonged to, he was saddened and oppressed by the feeling that his national identity committed him to a line of conduct, to a manner of behaviour which would today cause him to be described as a man with a chip on his shoulder. In spite of himself he was forced to make some compensation in his work for the state of civilization to which he belonged. And, if he could break away from the conditions which oppressed him by finding success abroad, he was nevertheless burdened by the spectre of these conditions and bound to mirror them in his pictures.<sup>37</sup>

Danby’s artistic predecessors established a pattern of exile for Irish artists who experienced an accompanying ambivalence toward seeking success in England. The complicated relationship between England and Ireland provided a climate of unrest for those Irishmen that left as well as those that stayed; many exiles would remain resentful of England’s connection to their country.

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<sup>35</sup> William Curry Jr., *The Picture of Dublin: or, A Stranger’s Guide to the Irish Metropolis, Containing an Account of Every Object and Institution Worthy of Notice, Together with a Brief Description of the Surrounding Country and Its Geology* (Dublin: W. Curry Jr., 1835).

<sup>36</sup> Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Painters*, passim.

<sup>37</sup> James White, “Irish Romantic Painting,” *Apollo* 74 (October 1966): 269.

One notorious Irish artist who bristled at the situation was Nathaniel Hone the Elder R.A., R.H.A. (1718–1784).<sup>38</sup> Hone is the archetype of a contentious Irish émigré; after establishing himself in London, he proceeded to tangle with the Royal Academy members at the expense of his own professional reputation. In 1796, artist and critic Anthony Pasquin, who was of both English and Irish ancestry, published a sweeping attack on both English and Irish art associations titled *An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture, & Architecture, Who Have Practiced in Ireland; Involving Original Letters from Sir Joshua Reynolds, Which Prove Him to Have Been ILLITERATE. To Which Are Added, Memoirs of the Royal Academicians; Being an Attempt to Improve the Taste of the Real*, which revels in Hone's (and others') scandalous behavior, while also taking on Reynolds himself.<sup>39</sup>

Hone was not above using his own art as a weapon in his conflict with his adopted country of residence (and its foremost citizens). Hone's painting *The Conjurer* of 1775, for example, was taken by many to be a direct attack on Reynolds as well.<sup>40</sup> In it, a male artist, posed as a "conjurer," is surrounded by numerous engravings in addition to an illustration modeled after the artist Angelica Kauffman (in the nude), and an additional nude child's figure. The insult to Reynolds is twofold: the image implies to contemporary audiences that Reynolds relied too much on idealized and commonly known engravings of Old Master conventions for his own narratives; it also pointed to the gossip that Kauffman was in fact Reynolds's mistress. According to Redgrave,

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<sup>38</sup> The initials R.A. stands for a member of the Royal Academy in London, while R.H.A. stands for a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy in Ireland.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony Pasquin [John Williams], *An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture, & Architecture, who have Practiced in Ireland; Involving Original Letters from Sir Joshua Reynolds, Which Prove Him to Have Been Illiterate. To Which Are Added, Memoirs of the Royal Academicians; Being an Attempt to Improve the National Taste* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1796; reprint, London: Cornmarket Press, 1970).

<sup>40</sup> Pasquin, *An Authentic History*, 9; Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 168.

Hone's actions were not well received: "We do not know on what provocation, but he had the temerity to lampoon the President in a picture which he sent for exhibiting and also the gentle Kauffman. This brought upon him the anger of the Academy."<sup>41</sup> The academy refused the painting in 1775, but it was eventually exhibited after Hone altered its most inflammatory characteristics—among other things, Kauffman's nude body was painted over. Nevertheless, Hone's reputation in England was tarnished:

[His] exhibition of a pictorial conjuror, displaying his cleverness in the arts of deceiving the fight. This last performance was intended as an exposition of the manoeuvring, in respect to attitudes, which was so attributable to Sir *Joshua Reynolds*. This vindictive effort was sent by its parent to the annual exhibition; but was rejected by the Academicians with becoming scorn, as the issue of a little mind, and poweres [*sic*]of fancy most scandalously directed.<sup>42</sup>

The Irish artist James Barry R.A. (1741–1806) likewise engaged in a public quarrel with the academy.<sup>43</sup> He too initially enjoyed success in London as a particular favorite of both Reynolds and Edmund Burke (who not only mentored him but paid for his extensive training and traveling in Italy), both of whom he engaged with in a public quarrel.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, his vituperative essay *An Inquiry into the Real or Imaginary Obstacles to the Arts in England* demonstrates his disgust and eventual disenfranchisement with his fellow academicians. Like his mentor Reynolds, he bemoans the lack of support for history painting in England as a critical hindrance to the advancement of the English school.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 168.

<sup>43</sup> Pasquin, *Memoirs of the Royal Academicians*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Farington, *Diary of Joseph Farington*, 4:1168.

<sup>44</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 89–90.

<sup>45</sup> James Barry, *An Inquiry into the Real and Imaginary Obstructions to the Acquisition of the Arts in England* (London: T. Becket, 1775); Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 45–46, 80–91, 96, 109, 168, 288; Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Painters*, 1:34–42; E. Fryer, ed., *The Works of James Barry, Historical Painter* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809). Barry was eventually removed from his position as Professor of Painting in the academy and later expelled due his ongoing contentious relations with the members there.

Lastly, the younger artist Daniel Maclise R.A. (1806/1811–1870) a younger enjoyed tremendous success in London but struggled, especially later in his career, to reconcile his Irish heritage with his English patronage. Arriving in London in 1827, Maclise soon demonstrated a sharp understanding of the art market and became a prolific painter whose exhibition history is impressive. He was appointed an associate at the academy in 1835, and a full member in 1840.<sup>46</sup> He commanded substantial prices for paintings such as *Wellington and Blucher*, 1859, and *Death of Nelson*, 1864, both of which also indicate his penchant for history painting. Throughout his career, however, he would alternate between English and Irish narratives in his work, which encompassed history, genre, and portrait paintings.<sup>47</sup> With the massive, panoramic painting *The Marriage of Eva and Strongbow*, 1854, he chose to represent an event in Irish history that continues to resonate today in Irish politics. This epic and enormous work represents the moment when Anglo-Norman invaders were actually welcomed into Ireland by a vulnerable and desperate chieftain who was willing to negotiate with them to maintain his power. Loaded narratives such as this one were as potentially inflammatory then as they are now, in their celebration of a uniquely Irish heritage. Yet for Maclise, this painting successfully bridged his Irish past with his English present, in the demand for grand history narratives for the London cognoscenti.

After the completion of *The Marriage of Eva and Strongbow*, Maclise was approached by representatives from the Houses of Parliament, who desired to purchase it. Maclise refused, selling it to Lord Northwick instead for £4,000, a hefty sum at the

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<sup>46</sup> Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Painters*, 1:64–68, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Many of his sketches of Irish subject matter were later engraved in numerous Irish print annuals as well.

time. His reticence was thought to have arisen from a simmering resentment toward the English, which resulted in the artist's conviction that a painting of such a significant subject within Irish history deserved to be displayed in Ireland, not England. Today the painting is prominently placed within the National Gallery of Ireland, a development that Maclise would surely have appreciated.<sup>48</sup> Regardless of the political fallout from this particular sale, Maclise would remain an influential exemplar of Reynolds's metropolitan advocacy for grand style historical paintings to raise the standards of the English school. To summarize the early precedents of Irish artists who vacillated about their decision to seek work in London, James White's essay concludes:

Maclise and his contemporaries bring to a close a period of painting in which the artists found a means to communicate their sense of deprivation and struggle. To be a painter under conditions of economic security makes demands enough. To be a painter during the period in question in Ireland was to be forced into a position of extreme anguish. Only by finding an outlet in subjects and style which would compensate the emotions could the artist in question hope to achieve self-satisfaction.<sup>49</sup>

Certainly the list of Irish artists who emigrated from Ireland to London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is long. Although many were compelled to leave, their participation in the London system of art instruction and exhibition was influenced by residual and, for many, inescapable antagonism to their English colleagues. While some demonstrated a keen ability to work the system of the Royal Academy, others' careers were tainted by their inability to transcend the complex associations of their Irish heritage on English soil. This context will helpfully inform our examination of Danby's professional ascent (and decline) in England.

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<sup>48</sup> Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Painters*, 77: "The painting was bought by Lord Northcote for £4,000; sold at his sale in 1859 for £1,759. It was purchased at Christie's in 1879 by Sir Richard Wallace, who presented it to the Gallery."

<sup>49</sup> White, "Irish Romantic Painting," 275.

### The Bristol Paintings

From the congenial quasi-sophistication of the seaside town, Danby again set his sights as a self-proclaimed English artist on the power and prestige associated with London's British Institution and Royal Academy. While his professional and artistic ambitions would ultimately lead him to the apocalyptic Sublime landscapes that made his reputation, he began with (and occasionally returned to) decidedly more intimate, naturalistic, and sentimental cabinet paintings. Yet even these works presage his later inclinations. The intensely Romantic *Disappointed Love* (1821; fig. 3:5), for example, was presumably intended for a patron's private collection and is thus much smaller in size than his later epic landscapes. It was also judged rather harshly by contemporary critics: "The full effect of the work is marred by the want of beauty in the girl, who is going to drown herself."<sup>50</sup>

Whatever its lack of painterly polish, however, scholars have remarked upon *Disappointed Love*'s connections to the northern European Romantic tradition that would nourish the Sublime. Robert Rosenblum has written extensively on this subject in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition* (1975).<sup>51</sup> In his chapter on Vincent Van Gogh, Rosenblum discusses a woodcut entitled *Woman with the Cobweb* which depicts a despondent woman from the side, seated among trees, tracing it back to

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<sup>50</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 400.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 7–40. In this provocative book, Rosenblum takes issue with a reading of art history that privileges the French, emphasizing instead the Protestant North, the German romantics, post-Reformation politics, and the desire by many artists to transform a primarily sacred, recognizably Christian iconography into a secularized landscape tradition.

a woodcut by Friedrich (1803–04; fig. 3:6; he also discusses Danby's *Disappointed Love* and considers the similarity the works shared.

We noted at the end of Chapter 1 that Van Gogh's drawing of gnarled trees (April 1882) belonged to the same emotional world as Friedrich's trees, conveying a sense of near-human suffering in the painful network of twisted roots and branches, and translating the very leaflessness of the trees into a metaphor of inner emotions brutally exposed . . . In this close echoing of human emotions with those of trees and landscape, Van Gogh again can be located in a Romantic ancestral table, which might be exemplified by such works as Francis Danby's *Disappointed Love*, a painting of 1821, in which all of nature droops with the melancholic heroine and even the thorns, wrapped around the leaves in the foreground, echo the rejected woman's emotion strings; or, on a somewhat more elusive symbolic level, a woodcut based on an early drawing by Friedrich . . . in which the interior, man-made environment of Dürer's *Melancholia* is replaced by a melancholic nature that reflects, in the leafless trees and thistles, the despondency of a woman whose emotions seem to flow directly into the ambient landscape.<sup>52</sup>

Danby's young woman appears to have just finished reading a letter that likely bears bad news; her slumping form is echoed by the dense foliage surrounding her, and her distress is palpable.<sup>53</sup> Such narratives, however popular they might have been with his Bristol clientele, would not hold Danby's interest for long. There were too many other possibilities.

Already in 1756, Edmund Burke had written about the Sublime in the eighteenth century's most influential treatise on aesthetics: *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*.<sup>54</sup> In this essay Burke isolated those characteristics of the Sublime that will be readily apparent in the visual language of later Romantic artists such as Danby and his contemporaries John Martin (1789–1854) and J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851): “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>54</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure.”<sup>55</sup> Burke points to the fine line between exhilaration and outright fear that might confront the audience of any art form, whatever its actual physical detachment from the narrative presented. The Sublime artist must endeavor to respect the psychological (and even corporal) moorings that prevent the viewer’s total catapult into the abyss: “When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.”<sup>56</sup>

This recognition of the power of the Sublime had a very old tradition behind it. The Greek author Dionysius Longinus’s first-century treatise *On the Sublime* (a translation of the Greek *Peri Hupsous* by way of the Latin *De Sublimitate*) explains how the Sublime might be marshaled by artists who desire to transport (*ekstasis*, defined as “a state of being ‘carried outside’ oneself”) their audience.<sup>57</sup> Longinus stresses the power of what he called “the marvelous” as a means to that end, and he celebrated nature as the ultimate source for the Sublime.<sup>58</sup> Like Burke, Longinus then details how to best thrill the audience with supernatural or pseudo-divine special effects, observing

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Dionysus Longinus, *On the Sublime* (first century A.D.), trans. William Smith (London: J. Watts, 1739), 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4, 16.

that thunderbolts, lightning, celestial fires, and boiling volcanoes, among other things, always intensify the mood.<sup>59</sup> He continues:

For the Sublime not only persuades, but even throws an audience into transport. The marvelous always works with more surprising force, that that which barely persuades or delights. In most cases, it is wholly in our own power, either to resist or yield in persuasion. But the Sublime, endured with strength irresistible, strikes home, and triumphs over every hearer.<sup>60</sup>

The theatrical potential of this concept delighted Longinus, who identified sources of the Sublime as being “boldness and grandeur of thought” and “the pathetic power of raising the passions to a violent and even enthusiastic degree.”<sup>61</sup> Through the catalyst of the Sublime, the audience could be then transported and experience a new state of mind.<sup>62</sup> This theoretical context would suit Danby well.

Danby’s first appropriation of the Sublime is illustrated by the foremost epic painting of his Bristol period (1813–24): *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* (1820; fig. 3:7), his debut at the British Institution. Turning away from personal or romantic narratives and local landscapes, *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* resonates instead with the universal Sublime. Danby portrays the vast view typical of the then-fashionable panoramas and dioramas to deliver his apocalyptic jolt.<sup>63</sup> Yet it is clear that Danby recalls his Burke as well: “If the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 34, 85.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 3–4.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 16–17.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 3, 60.

<sup>63</sup> See Robert Barker, *Explanation of the Six Plates, Which Contain a Representation of the City and Its Environs of Edinburgh* (London: A. Grant, 1788), 1–26; Charles Dickens, “Moving Dioramic Experiences,” *All the Year Round* 17 (1837): 304–7; George Mogridge, *Old Humphrey’s Walks in London and Its Neighborhoods* (London: Robert Carter, 1845); Hubert J. Pragnell, *The London Panoramas of Robert Barker and Thomas Girtin circa 1800* (London: London Topographical Society, 1968). The diorama was a popular theatrical presentation in which the audience entered a specially modified theater that immersed them in shifting views of popular scenery that were achieved through the manipulation of lights in combination with several layers of screening.

emotions clear the parts, whether fine, or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome incumbrance, they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquility tinged with terror; which as it belongs to self-preservation is one of the strongest of all the passions. Its object is the Sublime.”<sup>64</sup>

Had Danby remained in Ireland, it is likely that he never would have thought to indulge in such formal innovation and bravura in a manner so obviously intended for the metropolitan context of the British Institution. Beyond the enlargement of the canvas itself (*The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* measures 66 1/2 by 92 3/4 inches), Danby increased the narrative scale of his composition to marvelous effect. The “Upas Tree” legend also offered Danby an abundance of material with which to explore man’s interactions with nature. The gruesome Malaysian custom involved condemned prisoners who, in exchange for a pardon, would attempt to extract the poison from this tree without succumbing to its lethal vapors.<sup>65</sup> In Danby’s image, the field where the tree grows is scattered with the bodies and bones of previous prisoners who had failed at their task. Danby’s portrayal of the towering crags, cavernous depths, and desolate terrain of the island of Java is intensified by the diminutive size of the ill-fated prisoner in the lower right-hand corner. It is a stirring contrast best anticipated by Burke:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with the same degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the Sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force.

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<sup>64</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 165.

<sup>65</sup> N. P. Foersch, “Description of the Poison-Tree, in the Island of Java,” *London Magazine* 1 (July–Dec. 1783): 512–17.

Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the Sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect.<sup>66</sup>

Danby's distraught prisoner reels at the terrible sight before him. The dread he feels is conveyed through the contortions of his body as the vast, deserted, and formidable terrain heightens his desperation and portends his doom: "Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the Sublime. This is too evident, and the observation too common, to need any illustration . . . However, it may not be amiss to add to these remarks upon magnitude; that, as the great extreme of dimension is sublime, so the last extreme of littleness is in some measure sublime likewise."<sup>67</sup>

Danby's choice of this narrative exemplifies a stylistic and thematic shift that betrays his abandonment of the provincial for the metropolitan. *Disappointed Love* (fig. 3:5) was evocative and melancholic; *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java*, on the other hand, resists any pretense toward the poetic or the painterly. Beyond its obvious visual and stylistic changes, this painting heralds the artist's decisive rejection of sentiment in favor of thematic subjects that allowed for a more inward and personal response, preferably within increasingly theatrical and horrific landscapes. In this painting, the focus is on the anguish of the lone figure (the individual) as he is tested by the torments of nature (the universal). Barring divine intervention, the outlook is grim for the figure. As we shall see, such relationships between humanity, nature, and divinity will play an essential role in Danby's later Sublime views as well.

*The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* was well received, in part due to George Cumberland Sr.'s success in securing an appropriate position for the painting

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<sup>66</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 101.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

within the exhibition at the British Institution. In a letter dated January 2, 1820, Cumberland wrote to his son, George Jr.: “Mr. Danby is going to send up a landscape in oil of 9 feet x 8, called *The Upas Tree of Java*—it is a grand scene of desolate rocks by moonlight. I will write to Mr. Rogers about it to befriend him—take it yourself and say it has great merit and he not one friend in London. We want a good place for him for his first exhibition at the Institution. He can speak for him.”<sup>68</sup>

The Cumberlands continued to intervene on Danby’s behalf, as evidenced by further correspondence from that same week, including a letter written by the elder Cumberland to another son, Sydney: “Mr. Bird’s picture will go up tomorrow for the Institution and also Mr. Danby’s. I hope George gave Mr. Rogers [missing text] that I wrote and enclosed on that subject—it was to try to get him a good place. If George knows where to find Mr. Sanger . . . and could interest him in favour of Danby so as to get him a good place I should be glad.”<sup>69</sup>

At this time, the location of an artist’s painting within these often vast exhibition halls was in fact crucial. Placements that were too high, too low, or at a bad angle for viewing seriously hindered an artist’s prospects. Danby’s ability to forge relationships with powerful patrons who were willing to intercede on his behalf was therefore critical to his first major exhibition effort in London (and, in fact, his first decade in London).

The critical response to *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* echoed the elder Cumberland’s enthusiasm. Richard and Samuel Redgrave wrote,

Danby’s interesting picture represents a deep chasm in a valley of dark slaty rocks, into which the pale light of the hidden moon only partially penetrates. Above the black crest of the gorge is a space of starlit sky, with the pointed

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<sup>68</sup> Cumberland Sr. to Cumberland Jr., January 2, 1820, N.L. MS 36508, ff. 154, 156, 257.

<sup>69</sup> Cumberland Sr. to Sydney Cumberland Jr., January 2, 1821, N.L. MS 36508, ff. 154, 156, 257.

summits of a mountain range stretching away into the distance . . . The whole rests in the silence of death, broken only by the dripping of a little fall of water from the gloomy rocks. The poison-seeker is in the foreground, about half-way down into the cavernous pit, and has just arrived within view of the tree and within the influence of the pestiferous vapour. He turns sickening from the sight: for at his feet are the bodies of several of his latest predecessors, while around the fearful tree the ground is white with the dry-bleached bones of multitudes who have gone before him, and perished at the moment they had reached the goal . . . It is a wonderful first attempt, and shows the original poetry of Danby's mind.<sup>70</sup>

Although *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* did not ultimately sell, it was noticed by the president of the Royal Academy, Sir Thomas Lawrence, and received a positive review in the *Repository of the Arts* as well: "There is a grand and solemn tone in this picture, which partakes much of Mr. Martin's style."<sup>71</sup> It would appear that Danby had successfully transcended his training and earlier stylistic approaches and was now in a position to attract and secure much-needed patronage as he made his way toward London.

### **The Sublime in English Art: Vicarious Thrills and Tranquility Tinged with Horror**

In "Apocalyptic Themes in British Landscape Art" (1975), Lynn Robert Matteson defines the apocalyptic as follows:

Strictly speaking, "apocalyptic" refers to a highly charged visionary state attendant to the discovery of transcendent truths, especially that state described in the Book of Revelation. As is plain to any reader, landscape is hardly a consideration in that most hermetic of texts . . . Rather, the term "apocalyptic" is understood in its broadest meaning, that is, as describing what one critic has called "the sense of an ending," the eschatological despair that forbodes the violent cessation of all things temporal. In the visual arts this spirit is seen best

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<sup>70</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 399.

<sup>71</sup> Rudolph Ackerman, "Fine Arts; Exhibition of the British Institution," *Repository of the Arts* 9 (1820): 180.

in those landscape paintings which have as their subject themes of destruction and cataclysm.<sup>72</sup>

In keeping with Matteson's emphasis on cataclysm as a visual trigger for transcendence, all of Danby's epic exhibition paintings depict scenes of catastrophe within a landscape.<sup>73</sup> Danby and other artists who adopted the apocalyptic Sublime aimed to engage and even terrorize their viewers through depictions of tragic devastation. According to the contemporaneous theory of the Sublime as expressed by Burke, those viewers would feel a simultaneous sense of relief at their position of literal (if not figurative) remove from this devastation. Such notions of transport—both into this scene and back out of it again, and from one emotional state to another—is the essence of the Sublime experience.

### **A Source for the Apocalyptic: Danby and the Bible**

Danby's next major venture was his 1825 exhibition of the enormous painting *Delivery of Israel out of Egypt* (1825; fig. 3:8) at the Royal Academy. As yet another example of how savvy Danby had become with regard to adapting to metropolitan advances within London cultural circles, after the exhibition of *The Delivery of Israel Out of Egypt* (1825; fig. 3:9), the painting was engraved by J. & G. Nicholls in the form of a large mezzotint in 1829.<sup>74</sup> In terms of art historical precedents, Nicolas Poussin's *The Flood* (c. 1660–64; fig. 3:10) represents a potent fusion of biblical and apocalyptic subject

<sup>72</sup> Lynn Robert Matteson, "Apocalyptic Themes in British Landscape Painting" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1975), 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 9. Matteson describes this state of transcendence as a "delightful loss of self and critical judgment in the presence of an overwhelming force."

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Danby's painting became well known as a widely dispersed print, as did several of his later works, including *The Embarkation of Cleopatra on the Cydnus, When She First Met Marc Anthony in Cilica*, as well as a later version of *The Deluge*.

matter within a traditional landscape format.<sup>75</sup> The rising waters, desperation of Noah's family, and stark landscape with its precipitous rocks, gushing waterfall, and formidable though distant mountain are all depicted with notable and evocative restraint while incorporating the classical compositional conventions of *repoussoir* and *coulisse*, the *repoussoir* acting as a framing device and the *coulisse*, which serves as a pathway that guides the viewer's eye through the work.<sup>76</sup> Artists like Danby would gravitate toward Poussin's prescient synthesis of the Grand Style, historical subjects, and the epic Sublime.

Morton D. Paley's *The Apocalyptic Sublime* (1986) explores the popularity of this genre for nineteenth-century artists, especially around the theme of the deluge within British art: "Involving by definition a divinely sent, universal catastrophe, employing by necessity the most powerful natural forces, the Deluge scene can make the transition from the natural to the apocalyptic sublime."<sup>77</sup> Danby likewise embraced the physically spectacular canvases and other formal priorities of the still struggling "English school," while simultaneously continuing to emphasize and elevate grand style history painting. His path to the apocalyptic Sublime was made easier by older artists such as Turner, whose large, historical landscapes were actually quite modern. In fact, Danby's attraction to epic scenes from biblical texts may have been encouraged by Turner's own forays there.

In 1800, Turner exhibited *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* at the Royal Academy; in 1802, *The Tenth Plague of Egypt*; in 1805, *The Destruction of Sodom*; and in 1804–5,

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<sup>75</sup> Danby also would delve into the theme of the flood, or *The Deluge*, later in his career.

<sup>76</sup> In 1740, George Trumbull identified Poussin as being one of "the sublimest of the modern painters"; Trumbull, *A Treatise on Ancient Painting* (London: A. Millar, 1740), 27.

<sup>77</sup> Morton D. Paley, *The Apocalyptic Sublime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 8.

*The Deluge* (1804–5; fig. 3:11). Turner often combined landscape and history, and as he developed as an artist his natural settings became terrible and extreme, as in *Snowstorm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps* (1812; fig. 3:12).<sup>78</sup> The army, perched on a vertiginous mountainside, is obscured by the ferocity of a blizzard; at any moment, we fear that the people in the foreground and middleground could be swept away. Like *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* (fig. 3:7), Turner's painting draws upon the principles of the Sublime to sharpen the struggle of man against nature. In *Delivery of Israel out of Egypt* however, Danby introduces divine intervention into the dynamic.

From a compositional as well as a thematic point of view, Danby's *Delivery of Israel Out of Egypt* shares much with Turner's *Snowstorm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps* (fig. 3:12). The tragedy is in the Red Sea, which will close over and kill the Egyptians. People pitch forward over curved and precipitous rock promontories, and azure water and a blood-red horizon anticipate the tragedy much like Turner's snowstorm. With this large painting, Danby demonstrates his ability to handle an increasingly complex compositional arrangement comprised of myriad figures and astonishing effects that create the intense theatricality of the chaotic scene. The classical restraint so evident in Poussin's *The Deluge* (fig. 3:10) has now given way to a heaving, haphazard tangle of man and nature. In 1825, the commentary by an anonymous writer from *London Magazine* establishes the impact that this painting had on contemporary art critics and Danby's success at garnering jubilant reviews: "We have heard the late President of the Royal Academy, and the late Professor of Painting, discourse of *Epic* pictures. Mr. Danby here *shows* us one; which seems like a practical illustration of that

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<sup>78</sup> It would appear that this painting influenced Danby in terms of the composition of his *Delivery of Israel out of Egypt* as well, based on the similarities there.

apothegm of one of Plutarch's heroes. 'All that my brother (or my rival) hath said, that will I *do*' . . . In colour it is of a livid and ominous bluish green: a pervading hue of death and dismay; it seems the element where life dies and death lives, which only Dante or Milton could imagine, and only Danby has painted."<sup>79</sup>

Danby's contemporary, David Bogue, writing in 1856, also verifies that Danby was well on his way to widespread success with a public that was hungry for spectacle, diversion, and excitement: "It might be said, that 'going to bed one evening with moderate anticipations of success, he awoke the following morning to find himself famous."<sup>80</sup> Bogue continues, "The Delivery of Israel out of Egypt'—one of the grandest conceptions of his genius; a picture depending for its success not merely on the highly imaginative qualities it displayed, but remarkable for a dexterity of manipulation, a perfection of finish in all its details, of which there are few modern examples."<sup>81</sup> The *Art Journal* even went so far as to compare Danby to Rembrandt in this painting's wake.<sup>82</sup>

Danby's turn to the divine in his apocalyptic Sublime work was not unprecedented. Writing in 1716, Sir Richard Blackmore framed "the marvelous" in terms of the connections between an epic work and the power of divinity:

All Things excite Admiration that either transcend the Sphere of finite Activity, or that break the usual Series of Natural Causes and Events. The first sort, which proceed from Almighty Power, are stil'd Miracles . . . It is the Novelty of these Appearances, that the essential Idea of Marvelous does consist. . . . All unusual

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<sup>79</sup> Anonymous, "Exhibition of the Royal Academy," *London Magazine* 12 (May–Aug. 1825): 266.

<sup>80</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 191.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Anonymous, "British Artists," *Art Journal*, 77–78: "This picture may justly rank as one of the most poetic conceptions ever transmitted to canvas. The red, angry, lurid glare of lightning playing in the horizon, and the miraculous 'pillar of light' falling on the countless multitudes in the middle distance, are treated with a power and felicity unsurpassed by Rembrandt himself. Although some years have elapsed since we saw the picture, it still retains its supremacy as one of the most glorious emanations of our native school."

Occurrences, especially the Excursions and Transgressions of Nature in her Operations, move the Imagination with great Force, agitate the Spirits, and raise in the Soul strong Emotions.<sup>83</sup>

Others also sought to connect the shock and import of religious subjects with the theoretical and formal tenets of the Sublime, including John Dennis, writing in 1704: “Let us now shew [*sic*] from what Ideas this Enthusiastick [*sic*] Terror is chiefly to be deriv’d. The greatest Enthusiastick Terrour then must needs be deriv’d from Religious Idea’s, for since the more their Objects are Powerful, and likely to hurt, the greater Terrour their Idea’s produce: What can produce a greater Terrour than the Idea of an Angry God?”<sup>84</sup> Another eighteenth-century writer, David Hartley, suggests the most effective compositional arrangements for paintings inspired by the Sublime: “If there be a precipice, a cataract, a mountain of snow, &c. in one part of the scene, the nascent ideas of fear and horror magnify and enliven all the other ideas, and by degrees pass into pleasures, by suggesting the security from pain.”<sup>85</sup>

By now, obviously, Danby’s work and the artist himself were being noticed. A writer in *London Magazine* commented that if Henry Fuseli (1741–1825) and Benjamin West had long pontificated about the desirability of painting a grand composition, it was Danby who had finally delivered one.<sup>86</sup> And with this feat behind him, Danby was elected to the prestigious position of Associate of the Royal Academy on November 7, 1825. Joining those ranks impressed upon Danby the bright academic and critical future for the Sublime in England, in the wake of Reynolds’s emphasis on the grand style (see

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<sup>83</sup> Sir Richard Blackmore, *Essays upon Several Subjects* (London: E. Curll, 1716), 34–36.

<sup>84</sup> John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, 70.

<sup>85</sup> David Hartley, *Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations* (London: S. Richardson, 1749; reprint, London: E. Eyres, 1850), 419.

<sup>86</sup> Anonymous, “Exhibitions of the Royal Academy,” *London Magazine* 2 (1825): 265.

chapter 2). He further noted the ongoing shifts in modern patronage patterns toward what (literally) stood out best within the display-centered, celebrity-conscious exhibition salons. A capable and versatile experimenter, Danby would come to prepare an array of topographical, naturalistic, and sentimental poetic paintings in addition to the apocalyptic historical landscapes that he saw as key exhibition pieces for display in the metropolis.

Art historians today see other motivations as well, some decidedly more pedestrian, for the turn to the Sublime in visual art. In “The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House” (2001), Martin Myrone discusses the Sublime in less esoteric or aesthetic terms as a movement engendered by the paucity of state and royal patronage in England.<sup>87</sup> He argues that artists such as James Northcote (1746–1831) and Henry Fuseli (1741–1825) appropriated the Sublime in order to gain critical acclaim (and commissions) from an increasingly diverse and spectacle-minded public who loved the style’s emphasis on display and visual delight.<sup>88</sup> Amid an ongoing shift within the hierarchies of painting styles from portraiture to idealized historical and poetic landscapes, Myrone sees the growing prevalence of colossal and theatrical landscape views in the Royal Academy as a reflection of early-nineteenth-century artists’ desire to engage their viewers with grand style tableaux that evoked the enduring influence of Reynolds.<sup>89</sup> Danby was not alone in seeking to benefit from the

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<sup>87</sup> Martin Myrone, “The Sublime as Spectacle: The Transformation of Ideal Art at Somerset House,” in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Courtauld Institute Gallery, 2001), 77–91.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80. Myrone discusses how Northcote, a provincial portrait painter who had traveled to Rome, was not able to sustain patronage upon his return to Devon. In an attempt to attract a wider audience, Northcote began to paint historical and poetic narratives that were grounded in literature, popular with a broader public, and suitable for published prints.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

ever more commercial atmosphere within London's exhibition rooms. Danby even appropriated two very fashionable forms of cultural entertainment, the panorama and the diorama.

**The Panorama: An “IMPROVEMENT ON PAINTING, Which relieves that sublime Art from a Restraint it has ever laboured under”<sup>90</sup>**

Several writers have linked the prevalence of panoramas and dioramas in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular culture with significant changes in English painting.<sup>91</sup> Panoramic paintings were comprised of a 360° surface that encircled the audience and often gave the effect of changing portrayals of landscapes, historic sites and vistas. Dioramas were viewed in specially designed theatres that moved spectators on a turntable-like device to give the impression of changing prospects through the manipulation of light effects projected upon linen scrims. These common entertainment had a profound impact on questions of form and painterly scope in the rarified exhibition rooms of the Royal Academy and the British Institution.<sup>92</sup> Numerous primary sources contain testimony to this effect, including the letters of John Constable, who

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<sup>90</sup> *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, December 29, 1787. This quotation sums up the view of the inventor of the panorama, Robert Barker, with regard to the impact of his invention.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); Ann Bermingham, “Landscape-O-Rama: The Exhibition Landscape at Somerset House and the Rise of Popular Landscape Entertainments,” in *Art on the Line: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780–1836*, ed. David Solkin (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and the Courtauld Institute Gallery, 2001), 127–43; Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon, 1999), 150–67; and Andrew Wilton, “Painting in London in the Early Nineteenth Century,” in *London-World City: 1800–1840*, ed. Celina Fox (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 182–84.

<sup>92</sup> Bernard Comment, *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion, 1999), 51; Hyde, *Panoromania*, 20–21.

claimed that it was “all the rage.”<sup>93</sup> Other contemporary writers, such as Charles Dickens, Joseph Farrington, and George Mogridge [Old Humphrey], likewise testify to the prevalence of such entertainments in British, European, and American cultural circles, often in articles published in contemporaneous journals.<sup>94</sup>

In the exhibition catalogue *Panoromania! The Art and Entertainment of the “All-Embracing View”* (1988), Ralph Hyde discusses its historical precedents, while for a more contemporary perspective on of the views of the popularity of panoramas we can turn to George Mogridge, among others: “Panoramic paintings afford a much greater degree of pleasure to the common observer, though not to the artist and connoisseur, than is usually derived from the most finished specimens of the best masters; and this pleasure is of course much increased when the subject it represents is one of peculiar interest.”<sup>95</sup>

From the Greek, “panorama” literally means “all” and “view.” Nineteenth-century artists soon realized the potential behind its principles, and London exhibition rooms filled with colossal historical views rife with special effects gleaned from panorama and diorama presentations.<sup>96</sup> Such paintings literally subsumed the audience

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<sup>93</sup> John Constable, *John Constable’s Correspondence*, ed. R. B. Beckett (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1962–68), 2:34; Farrington, *Diary of Joseph Farrington*, 1:180, 4:1418, 5:1583, 6:2032.

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous, “Obituary of Danby,” *The Athenaeum*, 294; Barker, *Explanation of the Six Plates*, 1–26. See also George Richard Corner, *The Panorama: With Memoirs of Its Inventor, Robert Barker, and His Son, the Late Henry Aston Barker* (London: J. and W. Robins, 1857); Dickens, “Moving Dioramic Experiences,” 304–7; anonymous, “On Cosmoramas, Dioramas, and Panoramas”; Farrington, *Diary of Joseph Farrington*, 1:180, 4:1418, 5:1583, 6:2032; Mogridge, *Old Humphrey’s Walks in London*, 152–68, 213–25; *Penny Magazine* 11 (1842): 363–64; Pragnel, *The London Panoramas of Robert Barker*, 3–37.

<sup>95</sup> Mogridge, *Old Humphrey’s Walks in London*, 81. The term “Panoromania” was introduced by the *Illustrated London News* in 1850. Irishman Robert Barker patented the panorama; see the *London Advertiser*, March 14, 1789, and the *Repository of the Arts and Manufacturers* 4 (1796): 165–67.

<sup>96</sup> Hyde, *Panoromania*, 20; Bermingham, “Landscape-O-Rama,” 127–43; Mogridge, *Old Humphrey’s Walks in London*, 81. Bermingham links the increase in size in artists’ canvases in the Great Room of Somerset House (the official exhibition space of the Royal Academy) to aesthetic elements of panoramas and dioramas.

while helpfully claiming more space for their artists within the competitive real estate of the exhibition. In May 1818, the *London Literary Gazette* commented wryly on the many larger canvases in an ongoing Royal Academy exhibition: “Whether it is owing to the dismantling of our navy that has made canvas cheap, we cannot say, but there is no want of prodigious expanse in a number of subjects.”<sup>97</sup> It is evident that the increase in the size of the exhibition paintings was noted by the press, and, the public. Artists’ paintings became larger; all the better for displaying more dramatic and spectacular views of the Sublime.

**From Apocalypse to Revelation: Danby’s *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal***

Danby’s consummate painted rendering of the Sublime, however, was yet to come, and by contrast, his earlier attempts at panoramic painting would be outdone. Having established himself in London and accepted the new metropolitan expectations brought about by those captivating amusements, he next firmed up plans for the exhibition of a magisterial painting that he had begun mapping out already in 1825.<sup>98</sup> This painting, entitled *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* (1828; fig. 3:13), had raised a furor already in Danby’s circles for several years around a contemporaneous work by his English colleague John Martin. In 1826, Martin exhibited a sweeping canvas called *The Deluge* (whereabouts unknown, with no reproduction of the painting available), which failed to sell. However, in 1828, Martin exhibited a print

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<sup>97</sup> *London Literary Gazette, and Journal of Belles Letters* 68 (May 9, 1818): 299.

<sup>98</sup> Cumberland Jr. to Cumberland Sr., no date, N.L. MS 36515, f. 111.

based on the painting of 1826 at the British Institution (1828; fig. 3:14), with notable modifications.<sup>99</sup> Later in his career, he would again focus on this subject, and we have the print from 1828 and another *The Deluge* by Martin (1834; fig. 3:15) for reference purposes.

To Danby and supporters familiar with his ongoing work, Martin's print in particular had taken on an undeniable resemblance to Danby's painting *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* (fig. 3:13), which, as stated, he had begun to work on in his studio in 1825. George Cumberland Sr. commented on the debacle: "I am sorry to hear it reported that Martin has copied Danby's great picture in a little print—if so it is infamous; but I would finish it for all that if I were he, to shew him up to the public."<sup>100</sup>

In another letter dated March 22, 1826, Cumberland Sr. berated his son about the matter again: "You don't say what Danby's picture is, or if the story is true about that Quack Martin."<sup>101</sup> Others who traveled those same circuits would later join in; on March 7, 1828, playwright T. L. Beddoes wrote to poet B. W. Proctor, "Have you seen Martin's Deluge; do you like it? And do you know that it is a rascally plagiarism upon Danby? D. was to have painted a picture for the King: subject the opening of y [*sic*] sixth seal in y [*sic*] revelations: price 800 guineas: he had collected his ideas and scene, and very imprudently mentioned them publicly to his friends & foes—it appears; Like

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. Danby ultimately declined to exhibit the *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* in 1826, putting it aside until its exhibition in 1828. So while the correspondence concerning the painting and the problem with John Martin date from 1826, Danby's painting was not in fact exhibited until two years later.

<sup>100</sup> Cumberland Sr. to Cumberland Jr., no date, N.L. MS 36511, f. 129.

<sup>101</sup> Cumberland Sr. to Cumberland Jr., March 22, 1826, N.L. MS 36511, ff. 146–47.

Campbell and Lord B: and lo! his own ideas stare at him out of Martin's canvass in the institution—this is the Last man again—and why does not he paint a last Man?"<sup>102</sup>

Given the furor, it is perhaps not surprising that Danby had abandoned his initial plans for exhibiting *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* in 1826, and delayed its exhibition until 1828. Scholar Lynn Matteson discusses the controversy at length and suggests that Martin is ultimately to be blamed.<sup>103</sup>

Given the competitive nature that existed between the two artists at this time, and, the prevailing penchant for both artists to depict cataclysmic biblical scenes, the truth of the matter remains vague to this day. One perspective on the debacle is as follows. If Martin did indeed visit Danby's rooms while Danby was absent and saw Danby's *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal*, one may surmise that Martin drew inspiration from his competitor's painting. Perhaps this is an example of how Danby, due to his provincial upbringing was naive and not savvy enough to ascertain the level of competition that existed among his contemporary associates. He may not have been as canny as Martin, and, seeing Martin's finished painting in 1826 (the whereabouts and reproduction of which is unknown today), as a result he put off exhibiting his own painting. There is no doubt that the two works are similar in terms of formal compositional characteristics. Further, if we attempt to guess the color and tones that Martin had used, which would not be evident in the mezzotint but would be visible

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<sup>102</sup> Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. Edmund Gosse, (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1894; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971), 96–97. The poet Beddoes (1803–1849) was writing to his colleague Barry Cornwall (1787–1874) about *The Flood of Thessaly*; 112. According to Eric Adams, the reference by Beddoes to Lord Byron and Thomas Campbell concerns another infamous occasion of plagiarism, in which Campbell had been accused of copying Byron's poem "The Last Man."

<sup>103</sup> Matteson, "Apocalyptic Themes," 112–14. Matteson states that due to Danby's letters of 1826, which discuss his painting *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal*, it appears that Martin may indeed have copied Danby's idea and utilized it for his own purposes.

in his later version (1834; Fig. 3:15), we can surmise that the two artists were working in a mode that was strikingly similar.

Danby's *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* drew upon the Revelations for its subject:

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?<sup>104</sup>

According to the *London Weekly Review*, the painting incited pandemonium in the crowd of the Royal Academy upon its formal exhibition there.<sup>105</sup> Even by the standards of today's high-resolution digital photography, wide-angle lenses, gigantic billboards, 3-D special effects, and Imax movie theaters, *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* delivers an awesome Sublimity in its 72-by-100-inch frame.

A rock-strewn foreground contains numerous fallen individuals, splayed across a precipice; one lone figure stands and raises his arms in defiance. Beyond him, torrents of lava, rocks, and debris spew forth, destroying anything in their path. Danby fills the right-hand side of the canvas with steep crags, juxtaposing natural elements with the diminutive scale of the myriad figures below. The earth is split with convulsions, mountains fall, the sky has darkened, and the eerie light of the red moon does little to mute the devastation. Rather than specifically delineating the middleground volcano,

<sup>104</sup> Revelations 6:12–17 (King James Version).

<sup>105</sup> *London Weekly Review* 2 (May 14, 1828): 300.

Danby instead focuses on the hellish flames at the center of the landscape. The only respite from the consuming dark is the dramatic juxtaposition of hot and cool colors. The crimson sun and spewing volcano dramatically oppose the brilliant, white bolt of lightning, evoking Burke's exposition on color's link to the effects of the Sublime:

*Colour* comes next under consideration. All colours depend on *light*. Light therefore ought previously to be examined, and with it, its opposite, darkness. With regard to light; to make it a cause capable of producing the sublime, it must be attended with some circumstances, besides its bare faculty of shewing other objects. Mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind, and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime. But such a light as that of the sun, immediately exerted on the eye, as it overpowers the sense, is a very great idea. Light of an inferior strength to this, if it moves with great celerity, has the same power; for lightning is certainly productive of grandeur, which it owes chiefly to the extreme velocity of its motion. A quick transition from light to darkness, or from darkness to light, has yet a greater effect. But darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light . . . Thus are two ideas as opposite as can be imagined reconciled in the extremes of both; and both in spite of their opposite nature brought to concur in producing the sublime.<sup>106</sup>

For Danby and his contemporary colleagues and viewers, this brutal and unforgiving epic seemed to capture all of the theoretical and formal principles associated with the apocalyptic Sublime, as espoused by numerous writers through history. Danby's ability to heighten the viewer's astonishment, awe, terror, and sense of a higher power had grown exponentially from earlier works such as *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* (fig. 3:7), and conformed to the audiences' desire for views of terror.

Writing in 1712, Joseph Addison wryly comments on the pleasure to be derived from viewing horror; at a distance:

Is it not strange, that we should take delight in such passages that are apt to produce hope, joy, admiration, love or the like emotions, in us, because they never rise in the mind without an inward pleasure that attends them: but how

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<sup>106</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 120–21.

comes it to pass, that we should take delight in being terrified or dejected by a description, when we find so much uneasiness in the fear or grief which we receive from any other occasion? If we consider, therefore, the nature of this pleasure, we shall find that it does not arise so properly from the description of what is terrible, as from the reflection we make on ourselves at the time of reading it. When we look on such hideous objects, we are not a little pleased to think we are in no danger of them. We consider them at the same time as dreadful and harmless; so that the more frightful appearance they make, the greater is the pleasure we receive from the sense of our own safety.”<sup>107</sup>

Here Danby shows us masses of people, the scope and scale of the landscape are enormous and the ambiance is ridden with horror, violence, and devastation. Right before our eyes the trauma appears to unfold in a manner that conveys feelings of suspense and fear as to what will happen next. His illustration exaggerates the feeling of dread that more horror awaits the doomed figures trapped in this astonishing and sudden cataclysmic event. This visual illustration recalls a corresponding literary description of the Sublime to be found in the writings of Adam Smith. Writing in 1758, in his *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, Smith cites the influence of “Unexpectedness [and] Surprise” upon Sublimity.”<sup>108</sup> Danby’s portrayal of this scene from *Revelations* communicates a sense of devastating shock, leaving the viewer engulfed with horrific terror; and the impression is not easily shaken off.

With the exhibition of this painting in 1828, Danby caught the attention of a well-known and prestigious patron, William Beckford (1760–1844) of Fonthill Abbey.<sup>109</sup> This in itself is notable, considering William Carey’s declaration that most

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<sup>107</sup> Joseph Addison, “On the Pleasures of the Imagination,” in *The Spectator: With Biographical Notices of the Contributors* (1712) (Cincinnati: A. H. Poundsford, 1876), 506.

<sup>108</sup> Adam Smith, *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1758; reprint, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 34–35.

<sup>109</sup> Anonymous, “Encouragement of the Fine Arts,” *Literary Gazette* (1828): 365. “We learn with pleasure, that Mr. Beckford has become the possessor of Danby’s grand and imaginative picture of the Sixth Seal: the author of *Vathek* is, of right, a fit owner of such a production. Mr. Beckford has not only given 500*l.* for this painting, but has commissioned the artist to execute four other subjects for him on a

English and Irish patrons preferred to purchase from continental artists. Beckford purchased the painting for £500 and further commissioned the artist to generate a separate series of paintings for his personal collection.<sup>110</sup> Thus Danby's reputation rose with the caliber of his patrons. Beyond the generous selling price of the painting, Danby negotiated, through the powerful English art dealer Paul Colnaghi, the sale of the publication rights for the engraving of the painting to George Henry Phillips for an additional £300–500 (no date; fig. 3:16).<sup>111</sup> With this Danby was assured that his epic painting could be viewed by an international public extending beyond London. Danby's ability to nourish relationships with patrons, the press, and the public while supporting himself with his art was the surest indication of his professional embrace of the metropolitan, regardless of his later struggles.

The popularity of *An Attempt to Illustrate the Opening of the Sixth Seal* was such that after the exhibition at the Royal Academy, the painting traveled to America in 1833 to be displayed at the American Academy on Barclay Street in New York. The smaller mezzotint engraving of the painting was also for sale there. The American reviews were ebullient as well: "*Opening of the Sixth Seal by F. Danby R. A.*—It is long since we have beheld a work of art, in any degree capable of sustaining a comparison with this solemn and beautiful picture; nor is it easy to say whether the sublimity of the

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smaller scale, as its companions. The British Institution, to shew their sense of Mr. Danby's exertions in the higher walk of art, have presented him with 200l."

<sup>110</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 192; anonymous, "Encouragement of the Fine Arts," *Literary Gazette*, 365.

<sup>111</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 193; Ian Mackenzie, *British Prints: Dictionary and Price Guide* (Woodbridge, England: Antique Collectors Club, 1987), 244. Bogue indicates that the subject of the painting had become well known due to the popularity of this large mezzotint print, as *The Delivery of Israel out of Egypt* (1825; see fig. 3:8) and his later painting, *The Deluge* (1837–40; see fig. 3:17), would come to be.

conception, or the power of the execution be most deserving of praise.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed Danby’s star had risen, even among international circles.

### Misadventure Slows the Artist’s Ascent

Francis Danby, A. R. A., was another of the disappointed sons of genius.

—Richard and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 1866.<sup>113</sup>

Early in 1828, a place became vacant in the upper ranks of the Royal Academy, and Danby was part of the discussions regarding promotion to full academician. At this stage in his career, he was already acknowledged to be an up-and-coming associate within the academy (and a favorite of Sir Thomas Lawrence). At a celebratory Academy dinner in 1828, Lawrence toasted Danby as part of a speech praising him and his older and much esteemed colleague Turner. The fanfare accompanying such a toast must have been a heady experience for Danby.<sup>114</sup>

In the election on February 10, 1828, however, he failed to sway enough votes, and his associate John Constable beat him by one.<sup>115</sup> In the aftermath, it became apparent that Lawrence had favored the election of Danby to full academician over Constable; according to C. R. Leslie, the original editor of the *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, Lawrence “did not conceal from his visitor [Constable] that he

<sup>112</sup> Anonymous, “Fine Arts,” *The American Monthly Magazine* 2 (October 1833): 137.

<sup>113</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 398.

<sup>114</sup> John Wilson Croker, *The Croker Papers: The Correspondence and Diaries of the Late Right Honourable John Wilson Croker . . . Secretary to the Admiralty from 1809–1830* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1884); Whitley, *Art in England*, 86–87, 145. Croker was present at the dinner.

<sup>115</sup> Adams, *Francis Danby*, 67; Royal Academy, “Minutes of the General Assembly” (February 10, 1829), 4:63.

considered him peculiarly fortunate in being chosen as Academician at a time when there were historical painters of great merit on the list of candidates.”<sup>116</sup> It is unfortunate that the relationship between Danby and Constable does not figure much in either artist’s correspondence, though Constable did at one point archly dismiss Danby’s “phantasmagoric” approach to painting, in contrast to his own naturalism.<sup>117</sup> For Danby, the election loss coincided with (and was perhaps related to) the painful and public demise of his marriage. While his union with Hannah had produced six children, it had not produced happiness, and the couple became embroiled in a tawdry scandal that had severe social and professional ramifications for all involved. It is somewhat difficult to uncover the full details of the affair, due to the modesty of contemporaneous discourse. But the ensuing dishonor did result in Danby’s departure from England in December 1829, with his children and a woman by the name of Ellen Evans.

Having left London in haste, by the middle of 1830 Danby was in Bruges, with debtors (and scandal) still on his trail. Over the next ten years, he and his new family frequently moved about on the continent, while he continued to paint with regularity. The Redgraves suggest that while living in Switzerland, Danby pursued commissions amid a lot of yachting and boat building on Lake Geneva and cite a few paintings from

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<sup>116</sup> C. R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, with a preface by Jonathan Mayne (London: J. Carpenter, 1843; 2nd ed., London: Phaidon Press, 1951), 173. Lawrence’s comments recall Reynolds’s like conviction that historical paintings trumped more romantic landscapes, such as those produced by Constable.

<sup>117</sup> John Constable to John Fisher, July 4, 1829, in Constable, *Correspondence*, 6:248–49. In this letter, Constable referred to another friend who, when discussing current artistic trends with reference to Danby and John Martin, had said that their art sought to “‘unite nature with imagination’; we were talking of Danby—&c—&c. The art is now filled with Phantasmagorias.”

this period that they admired in particular: *The Grave of the Excommunicated*, 1846, *The Evening Gun*, 1848, and *A Wild Seashore*, 1853.<sup>118</sup>

From this sequence of events we can ascertain that Danby's personal experience with exile had become considerably more complicated. Following his initial departure from Ireland to pursue professional success in London, he now found himself virtually on the run for both social and financial reasons, thanks to his past indiscretions in London. While much of the contemporaneous literature glosses over the sordid details, Bogue at least touches upon them: "This may be said to have been the culminating period of Mr. Danby's career as a painter. An unhappy marriage and its concomitants shivered household gods, and pecuniary difficulties, originating in the erection of a studio, but increased by other circumstances which the painter was unable to control, forced him to quit England at the moment when his anticipations of prosperity seemed brightest."<sup>119</sup>

Perhaps we might say that in spite of his metropolitan aspirations, Danby's provincial upbringing in Ireland left him unprepared, as it were, for the complexities of professional success after his debut in London. Beyond his personal problems, he was further devastated by his inability (by one vote) to secure the lifetime standing of a Royal Academician. This former exile by choice was now simply an exile, and a stubborn, even unrepentant, one to boot. Five years after Danby's death in 1861, the Redgraves wrote:

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<sup>118</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 192–93; Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 445. Bogue goes into great detail discussing the numerous patrons, and the merits of the paintings that Danby produced during his time away from London.

<sup>119</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 192.

The road to fame seemed open before him. Why, then, was he disappointed? Why was Danby never elected to the full membership of the Academy? It is a story ill to tell, with faults, and no doubt recriminations, which the grave has partly closed over, and which we will not venture to reopen; suffice it to say, most emphatically, it was not for want of a sense of the great merit of the painter: not that his art was unappreciated by his brother members; hardly even that he made a false step involving the council of that day in many annoyances, and bringing disgrace on art; since this might have been overlooked as time dimmed its recollection, had not Danby defended the fault to the last rather than regretted it . . . Whatever were his failings as a man, as an artist Danby should take high rank. His pictures are true poetry as compared with the prose—noble prose that it may be—of many who have great reputation as landscape painters.<sup>120</sup>

### **Danby's Redemption: *The Deluge***

Dire as his travails might have been, however, nothing could keep Danby from the London metropolis forever. In August 1837, while living in Paris, he began work on a particularly grand reintroduction to his colleagues there. *The Deluge* (1837–40; fig. 3:17) would occasion a skillfully choreographed homecoming, as Danby and his patron William Jones, who had commissioned the painting, organized its exhibition at 213 Piccadilly in an 1840 solo show.<sup>121</sup> According to David Bogue, this massive and epic painting “should be classed among his best works.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 400–401.

<sup>121</sup> See Thackerary, “Mr. Danby’s Deluge,” in *Fraser’s Magazine* 22 (1840): 120–121.

<sup>122</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 193; Algernon Graves, *Art Sales: From Early in the Eighteenth Century to Early in the Twentieth Century (Mostly Old Master and Early English Pictures)* (London: Algernon Graves, 1918–21), 197. Returning to London in 1839, Danby reconnected with the Royal Academy and the British Institution and continued to exhibit at both for the remainder of his life. He exhibited three paintings at the Royal Academy in 1841, four in 1842, and, over the next nineteen years, an additional forty-two paintings between the two institutions. Bogue maintains that there was an original engraving of *The Deluge* made from an early sketch in 1824, “the later version which much be considered among his best works.”

For precedents, Turner's first painting of *The Deluge* (1804–05; fig. 3:10) set the bar for the rendering of this biblical text quite high, whatever the controversy surrounding the earlier debacle between Danby and Martin. First exhibited at his own gallery and subsequently at the Royal Academy (in 1813), Turner's painting includes several elements that Danby would incorporate later in his own work, including the masterful deployment of color and a striking and cohesive compositional structure.

Distinctively, however, Danby skews his deliberately panoramic vista by positioning the vanishing pinnacle of Mount Ararat off-center and framed by torrential rains, thudding waves, and shifting clouds. Far to the left, almost invisible amidst the turmoil, we find hope in the still visible sun and three angels. The triangular figural grouping in the lower right-hand corner is likewise spotlit and compelling; unlike the many people thrashing about, drowning, and otherwise suffering beyond them, these individualized figures earn our empathy. In a true Sublime fashion, the struggles of the terrorized masses are obscured by darkness, their torment magnified by our inability to ascertain the details of it. The vastness of the devastation and the magnitude of the wave on the verge of its cresting fully express nature's horrific power and, by extension, the scope of divine retribution.<sup>123</sup>

In this instance, Danby continues to plumb key themes that define his epic paintings. Like *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* (fig. 3:7), this imagined landscape provides a compelling context for the struggle of the individual versus the universal within nature. In the earlier painting a tormented prisoner's desire to live was the catalyst for his courageous but doomed attempt to earn a reprieve from execution by attempting an impossible task. In the more sophisticated compositional arrangements of

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<sup>123</sup> For a full analysis of *The Deluge*, see Thackeray, "Mr. Danby's Deluge," *Fraser's Magazine*, 120–21.

*Delivery of Israel out of Egypt* (Fig. 3: 8), Danby introduced divine intervention to save the hordes of people below. However, with *The Deluge*, divine intervention has taken a turn; the forces of nature are unleashed and nearly all will perish there. Nature triumphs at humanity's expense, and forgiveness is nowhere to be found. Based on Genesis 7 and 8: 1–19, Danby's painting portrays the apocalyptic flood that devastated all of mankind except for Noah's family, who were forewarned and took refuge on the ark.

Luxurious, velvety tones and textures lend themselves to a vast and violent cataclysm whose innumerable victims glow only dimly in the thin moonlight. The wretched horror of the scene harnesses the power of the Sublime that John Dennis recalls as a priority for the "father" of the principle, Longinus: "For he tells us in the beginning of the Treatise, that the Sublime does not so properly persuade us, as it Ravishes and Transports us, and produces in us a certain Admiration, mingled with astonishment . . . an invincible force."<sup>124</sup> *The Deluge* is indeed astonishing and forceful.

In an effort to interpret *The Deluge* from a literary perspective, we can turn to Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who, writing in 1790, also reviews Sublime qualities in a list that will be very familiar to those who know Danby's work:

Bold, overhanging, and as it were threatening rocks; clouds piled up in the sky, moving with lightning flashes and thunder peals; volcanoes in all their violence of destruction; hurricanes with their track of devastation; the boundless ocean in a state of tumult; the lofty waterfall of a mighty river, and such like—these exhibit our faculty of resistance as insignificantly small in comparison with their might. But the sight of them is the more attractive, the more fearful it is, provided only that we are in security; and we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above their accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism*, 79.

<sup>125</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Berlin: Ben Lagarde and Friederih, 1790; reprint, Cambridge: University Press, 1987), 100–101.

Kant's description captures the essence of the Sublime that Danby sought to communicate to his viewer. Utter chaos, desultory cataclysm, yet the solace of psychologically knowing that the devastation illustrated was ultimately separate from the experience of the eager and appreciative onlookers. While they sought to immerse themselves into the enormous and all consuming depiction of devastation, unlike the physical enclosures of three-dimensional panoramas, merely by backing away the viewers' sense of comfort and security would be once again returned to normalcy.

Danby's bravura rendering of the Sublime received a great deal of coverage in the contemporary press. According to William Makepeace Thackeray,

We have been through a number of galleries and cannot do better than go and visit a gentleman who has a gallery of his own, containing only one picture. We mean Mr. Danby, with his "Deluge," now visible in Piccadilly. Every person in London will no doubt go to see this; artists, because the treatment and effect of the picture are extraordinarily skillful and broad; and the rest of the world, who cannot fail of being deeply moved by the awful tragedy which is here laid before them . . . the work is full of the strongest dramatic interest; a vast performance, grandly treated, and telling in a wonderful way its solemn awful tale.<sup>126</sup>

### ***The Deluge and the 1853 International Irish Exhibition***

*The Deluge* was eventually exhibited in the 1853 Irish Exhibition and received an extraordinarily lengthy analysis by the critic John Sproule.<sup>127</sup> From Sproule's text we can see that much had changed with regard to the reception of certain Irish artists in the forty years since Danby's arrival from Ireland. The 1853 exhibition was in fact an international affair, and many foreign artists exhibited their paintings and sculptures for

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<sup>126</sup> Thackeray, "Mr. Danby's Deluge," 120–21.

<sup>127</sup> See also John Edmund Reade, *The Deluge: A Drama in Twelve Scenes* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1839); Sproule, *Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853*, 452–54.

its Irish, English, and continental audiences. Just three years after the Great Exhibition of Works of Industry of All Nations in London, some of the finest contemporary art in the West was on view, and Sproule (admittedly with a bias for Irish art) points to *The Deluge* as “one of the most important, of all those which filled the Fine Arts Hall of the Exhibition.”<sup>128</sup> Danby had truly come of age, and in his own country as well, by tackling “the most terrible fact of the world’s history as recorded in the sacred writing.”<sup>129</sup>

With this painting Danby had certainly orchestrated his return to the metropolis on a (literal and figurative) grand scale. While he was perhaps not sufficiently repentant for his past missteps, he appears to be seeking retribution with all of the means at his disposal. Perhaps this specific excerpt from the Bible rang particularly true for him; not being one of the few to attain the position of full member of the academy, he must have felt likewise doomed by forces beyond his control.

Settled once more in England, Danby began to exhibit again at the Royal Academy and the British Institution, showing at the former every year from 1841 to 1861, with the exception of 1856.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, he exhibited paintings at the Royal Hibernian Academy between 1844 and 1846.<sup>131</sup> The fact that he returned to Ireland and exhibited paintings there suggests that, regardless of his youthful boast of being an

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<sup>128</sup> John Sproule, John. *The Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853: A Detailed Catalogue of Its Contents with Critical Dissertations, Statistical Information, and Accounts of Manufacturing Processes in the Different Departments: Also a Portrait of Mr. Dargan Engraved on Steel Accompanied by a Memoir* (Dublin: James McGlashan, 1854), 452.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 192–94; Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 401. The Redgraves identify paintings from this period as *The Grave of the Excommunicated* (1846), *The Evening Gun* (1848), *Spring* (1850), and *A Wild Seashore* (1853).

<sup>131</sup> There is no reference within the literature as to why Danby chose to exhibit at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Ireland during these years, although he was still in close contact with George Petrie.

“English artist,” Danby perhaps missed Ireland and had come to appreciate what it could offer. His longtime friend George Petrie may have been the catalyst for Danby’s return as well. Petrie, Danby, and O’Connor kept in touch throughout their lives.<sup>132</sup>

Wherever he was, Danby remained active as a painter, exhibiting widely and cultivating patrons for the rest of his life.<sup>133</sup> He had reestablished his connections with the Gibbons family, and they, along with new patrons Thomas Pemberton and Joseph Gillott, supported him in his later career.<sup>134</sup> Beyond these enduring patronage relationships, Danby also benefited from the sale of *The Gate of the Harem* to Queen Victoria and *The Wood-Nymph’s Hymn to the Rising Sun* to Lord Northwick, a fact that indicates a small degree of redemption for him in light of his struggle to overcome the scandal from his earlier years.<sup>135</sup> After a few years in London, he once again moved to the provinces, this time to Exmouth, in the area of Deaconshire, with two of his sons, from where he sent 35 paintings from 1840 until 1861 to the Royal Academy.<sup>136</sup> He remained there until his death on February 10, 1861.<sup>137</sup>

In the end, the difficult circumstances of Danby’s personal and professional life hindered his career. Because of his extended sojourn on the continent (and his attitude of defiance), even with the success of *The Deluge* he was not truly able to recapture the momentum of his early years in London. In addition, the prestige and salutations that accompanied full membership in the Royal Academy eluded him. However, as an Irish

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<sup>132</sup> Adams, *Francis Danby*, 107.

<sup>133</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 192–94.

<sup>134</sup> Redford, *A History of Sales of Pictures*, 26. Redford mentions clients such as J. Gillott and J. Griffiths, among others, whose patronage sustained Danby at the end of his painting career. See also Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 401.

<sup>135</sup> Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary*, 4:237–38.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*; Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 446.

<sup>137</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 398, 402–3.

artist who succeeded in England, he represents a remarkable story. The trajectory of his artistic development from provincial topography to magnificent apocalyptic Sublime epics is itself quite spectacular. Written in 1856, Bogue's entry on Danby paid tribute to his success:

Danby, Francis, A.R.A., the most original Painter of what is technically called the Historical Landscape of our time—an artist who to highly imaginative power superadds a dexterity of handling which has rarely been surpassed, and not often equaled . . . Those who may happen to be aware that Mr. Danby was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Painting nearly thirty years ago, and that he has not yet achieved the full honours of that institution, but our description of his art may appear in some degree hyperbolic; but it is nevertheless warranted, not only by the verdict of painters and connoisseurs of his time . . . Various pretest [*sic*] have been assigned for the injustice of which Mr. Danby has been the victim, but none that are in the slightest degree tenable, had they any foundation in fact; Mr. Danby may, however, console himself with the conviction that this art will be remembered and prized when that of a large majority of his oppressors has been forgotten.<sup>138</sup>

A decade earlier, the *Art Journal* likewise anticipated such positive reassessments:

We doubt much if any landscape painter had done more to maintain the high position of this branch of our national school . . . Though not now young in years, he is, we rejoice to say, still young in the spirit and energy of his art, and if 'time has now thinned his flowing hair,' it has not dimmed his eyes to the perception of the beautiful, not palsied his hand to incapacitate him for the representation of nature in her most glorious aspects, which his residence, now and for some time past, in one of the most picturesque towns of Devonshire, and by the sea-side, affords him the most favorable opportunities of doing.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Bogue, *Men of the Time*, 190.

<sup>139</sup> Anonymous, "British Artists," *Art Journal* (1855): 79–80. See also anonymous, "Obituary of Francis Danby," *Art Journal*, 118: "Mr. Danby was the oldest associate member of the Academy, having been elected in 1825; why, for thirty-five years he was suffered to remain in the lower rank when men who had scarcely even handled a pencil ere he had achieved a good reputation have passed over his head, is a mystery the public could never understand; while his exclusion has called forth deserved censure. We are acquainted with the alleged ground of his rejection, but there are many extenuating circumstances connected with the case, which, if known—and doubtless they were known to those who sat in judgment upon him—ought to have proved sufficient vindication to warrant his admission among the privileged forty. The Academy will never get rid of the charge of having, upon evidence not altogether tenable,

This selection of major epic exhibition paintings from Danby's long and tumultuous career demonstrates how his searching intellect and ambition propelled him to push against the formal and aesthetic boundaries that were typical of Irish and English painting in the early to mid-nineteenth century. His desire to identify himself as an English artist, and his decision to abandon his provincial Irish training and its approaches to topographical and poetic cabinet paintings, drove his quest for success in the metropolitan English art scene. In addition, his ability to establish relationships with mentors, advisors, and patrons early on sustained him throughout the highs and the lows of his career over the next five decades, even if he did not realize his goal to become a full academician. His strategic appropriation of the apocalyptic Sublime provides an introduction to how many Irish artists, including O'Connor and Petrie, would choose to imbue their artistic practice with more international and modern tenets. Danby's success as a metropolitan artist was in the end due to his mastery of the apocalyptic Sublime, wherever his early training might otherwise have led.

“Whatever were his failings as a man, as an artist Danby should take high rank. His pictures are true poetry as compared with the prose—noble prose it may be—of many who have great reputations as landscape painters.”<sup>140</sup>

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repudiated one of the greatest painters of the age and country, and a man possessed of many excellent and endearing qualities. The whole question, both with respect to the Academy and the deceased artist, admits of much discussion, although our pages are not the suitable place for it.”

<sup>140</sup> Redgrave, *A Century of British Painters*, 401.

## Chapter 4

### James Arthur O'Connor: Romanticism and an Emotional Response to Landscape

While Francis Danby favored the apocalyptic Sublime, as evidenced by his many exhibition landscape paintings depicting cataclysmic mythical and biblical narratives within idealized landscape settings, his friend and colleague James Arthur O'Connor (1792–1841) took an alternate route, cultivating the Romantic Sublime, particularly in the landscape paintings he produced after his two continental excursions in 1826 and 1832.<sup>1</sup> Happily, he would likewise evolve from a young Dublin artist with a conventional topographic style similar to Danby's to a London-based but well-traveled professional landscape painter whose mature work was filled with emotion, nuance, and individuality. Through his embrace of the Romantic Sublime, he recorded and painted sites that he actually visited, imbuing his views with a sensibility that is personal, authentic, intimate, and often melancholic.

It was his departure from Ireland for London in 1822 that allowed him to later transcend his provincial status, conventional perspective, and representational limitations. He (along with Danby and Petrie) felt compelled to relocate to the metropolis to find sustainable support and patronage for his professional development.<sup>2</sup> As a result, he was introduced to a variety of innovative and modern opportunities that

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<sup>1</sup> For general and contemporary discussions of the romantic Sublime, see Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, eds., *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1935); Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (New York: Routledge, 2006); and Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archaeology of George Petrie, L.L.D., M.R.I.A.* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1868), 7–8.

were not as readily available to him in the provinces, including better training possibilities; greater access to a wide range of Dutch, Italian, and French Old Master paintings for study; more exhibition venues and prospects; and exposure to many artists just then turning to reproductive prints as a means of disseminating their work to a wider audience.<sup>3</sup> O'Connor also met artists there whose frequent travels to the continent informed their exhibition paintings in London with the latest formal and theoretical approaches to their craft, in addition to providing farflung locales for their landscapes.

While Danby had been, at least initially, quite eager to sever his ties with Ireland upon his arrival in England, O'Connor's allegiance to his home was stronger, and thus his career path and artistic development were more complicated. Despite O'Connor's permanent move to London in 1822, he continued to return to Ireland throughout his life for sketching excursions, which he relied upon for inspiration. It was not until the late 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s that O'Connor ultimately realized his artistic potential. Nor was he ever entirely content in his new city. Historian Roy Foster suggests that while many artists like O'Connor would have felt compelled to leave Ireland, they would have felt equally strongly their displacement afterward, especially in England: "Observing and participating in British forms of government, reading English books, attending British educational institutions, looking for employment with the structures of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 7–8. Both the *Art Journal* and Stokes mention that Benjamin West arranged for Danby, Petrie, and O'Connor to view several private collections during their initial visit to London in 1813, which indicates that in the early nineteenth century, private collections of Old Master paintings were becoming more accessible to artists, even those as yet relatively unheralded. By 1822, when O'Connor returned to London, the British Institution had exhibitions of Old Master paintings, a fact that was promoted within the press and cultural circles. In 1814 the Royal Irish Institution exhibited the first collection of Old Master paintings, lent by subscribers; see the exhibition catalogue *The Royal Irish Institution, For Promoting the Fine Arts in Ireland* (Dublin: John Jones, 1814), viii; George Newenham Wright, *A Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin* (Dublin, 1821), 421–27. Wright lists over fourteen private collections of paintings in Dublin, a fact that contradicts earlier commentary on the paucity of private collections there. Of course, it is relevant to note that these collections would not have been made available to the public, or to struggling artists.

the British Empire and speaking English. It was never an identity comfortably accepted.”<sup>4</sup> It was a longtime quandary for the Irish in general, depicted powerfully by such literary lights as William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and James Joyce (1882–1941). Foster mentions in particular Yeats’s early novel *John Sherman* (1891), which “deals with a divided man, caught between provincial, rooted Ireland and the metropolitan temptations of England; his [Yeats’s] first great popular success was a poem about exile, ‘The Lake Isle of Innisfree’ (1890).”<sup>5</sup>

In this regard, O’Connor’s dilemma was certainly not unique. It is also true that his personal and professional paths are not as familiar or, in comparison to Danby and Petrie, as frequently commented upon in contemporary discourse and primary sources. O’Connor’s motivations remain somewhat enigmatic and elusive. It is apparent, however, that over the years, his work changed profoundly. His early paintings reflect the prevailing penchant for topographical recordings of house portraits in Ireland; John Constable (among other of O’Connor’s colleagues) started with exactly these sorts of commissions as well. Patrons sought to have themselves, and their demesnes, represented in a flattering, if conventional, style. Yet this would not content O’Connor for long, and once he left Ireland, his paintings began to evolve in a manner that resonates with wider international influences, particularly German Romanticism. It is this period of growth during his mature years that primarily interests me here. Within the literature concerning English and Irish Romanticism, O’Connor has not received the attention that he deserves. Though he labored to retain his spiritual and psychological relationship to Ireland, he profited handsomely, in a literal and figural sense, from the

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<sup>4</sup> Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 283.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, 297.

international and modern influences that he encountered in the London metropolis. Once he was ensconced there, he was savvy enough to advance his painterly approach, mindfully but not timidly, and realize himself as an artist in a way that Ireland simply would not have accommodated. The place of his birth needed the place of his practice to complete him in his work.

The most critical period of O'Connor's formal and theoretical development occurred right after he moved to London in 1822, when, like Danby, he was promptly exposed to the burgeoning international artistic fashion for the Sublime at the Royal Academy and the British Institution. After eight years of continuous exhibition in London, O'Connor developed a more personal response to the landscape and produced non-idealized, emotionally charged landscapes that were utterly opposed to his earlier topographical paintings. He embraced Romanticism and modernity, grew as comfortable as possible with working in exile, and finally internalized the stylistic tenets associated with the Old Masters. All of these factors contributed to his embrace of an individuated expressive and emotive style that is characterized by an aura of heightened visual immediacy.

O'Connor even availed himself of the continent. Following two extended European sojourns, one of which included a transformative sketching tour on the Rhine, he became particularly enamored of the thematic and formal tenets of German Romanticism. Leading up to and, in particular, after his continental journeys, he changed his painterly approach to begin to harness the Sublime. From his beginnings in Irish topographical landscapes to his profound, cerebral engagement with nature via the

Romantic Sublime, O'Connor always informed his art, and his career, with a Irish wanderlust and a powerful sense of the artistic moment.

Beyond his experience as an exile of his own volition, then, as the chapter progresses, I will consider how O'Connor's life, profession, and works develop. Over time he moved away from his early penchant for topographical house portraits and instead came to infuse his paintings with nuance and emotion that correspond to other international motifs such as that of the Romantic wanderer.<sup>6</sup> Several of his early works portray travelers or journeyers within the landscape. In O'Connor's later career, his representation of individuals who appear both mired in an enigmatic manner within the landscape yet also disconnected and on the move evokes a deeper, more complex international framework.<sup>7</sup>

Like many other Romantic visual and literary artists, he came to embrace the complex emotions associated with the theme of the wanderer, which has been linked to "the creative process itself as understood by the Romantics."<sup>8</sup> I would suggest that several of O'Connor's paintings include figures that specifically symbolize the artist's own restlessness in places other than his home. The lengths that O'Connor went to in his art to address his chronic sense of dislocation sheds light on the early character of the man while providing valuable perspective on where he ended up.

### A Different Kind of Sublime

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Cusack, *The Wanderer in 19th-Century German Literature* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> See William Thomas Hill, *Graham Green's Wanderers: The Search for Dwelling; Journeying and Wandering in the Novels of Graham Green* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1999), 1–14.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Cusack, *Wanderer in 19th-Century German Literature*, 64. See also Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), *Franz Sternbald's Wandering Years*; Richard Wagner (1813–1883), *The Flying Dutchman*; and George Gordon Byron (1788–1824), *Childe Harold, a Romaunt*.

To begin with, then, we will consider a painting by O'Connor that is thought to have been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1836 and is imbued with the precepts of the Romantic Sublime.<sup>9</sup> *View of the Dargle—Lover's Leap* (1837; fig. 4:1), at forty-seven by sixty-six inches, is much larger than his earlier paintings, and it is infused with the emotion and theatricality associated with both physical and psychological representations of the Sublime. A letter from O'Connor to his sister Mary, dated October 20, 1836, provides a rare firsthand glimpse into the artist's mind: "[I] have commenced a large picture (indeed the largest I have ever attempted) for the exhibition at the Royal Academy next season—my brother artists flatter me very highly as to its merits—but after [all?] the Public are the persons to be pleas'd as they are the purchasers . . ." <sup>10</sup>

Here we encounter Ireland, but decidedly not via those predictable, idyllic, and sun-dappled demesne portraits and topographical landscapes that had provided O'Connor with a steady stream of patrons in his early career. "The Dargle" is an area in County Wicklow, south of Dublin that is referred to as the garden of Ireland. Its mountains, glens, lakes, and rushing streams continue to attract travelers and artists who

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<sup>9</sup> See Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from Its Foundation in 1769–1904* (London: Henry Graves, 1906), 4:4 (see especially no. 316, *An Irish Glen*).

<sup>10</sup> James O'Connor to Mary O'Connor, October 11, 1836, quoted in John Hutchinson, *James Arthur O'Connor* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1985), 186, exh. cat. I, along with other scholars writing on nineteenth-century Irish art, have not been able to locate the Gibbons papers (the source of this quote) despite a thorough investigation in Dublin with experts at the National Gallery of Ireland and the National Library, as well as with O'Connor expert John Hutchinson himself. Thankfully, in addition to Hutchinson's exhibition catalogue, *James Arthur O'Connor* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1985), Francis Adams's footnotes in his book on Danby (*Francis Danby: Varieties of Poetic Landscape*) corroborate the wording of the Gibbons papers source.

yearn to experience the sublimity found in this magical Irish site. In 1855, the travel writer Mrs. Samuel Carter Hall (Anna Maria Fielding [1800–1881]) remarked,

‘The Dargle,’ commences, as we have intimated, on the side opposite the gate to Powerscourt . . . before trading the lonely path that leads through it, the tourist will do well to visit a small hillock just over Tinahinch (the seat of James Grattan, Esq.); and then climb a steep hill that rises immediately above it, on the south. As the Dargle is, usually, the beauty of Wicklow first introduced to its visitors, and as, in consequence of its short distance from Dublin, many travellers examine no other portion of the country.<sup>11</sup>

O’Connor’s good friend, the artist and writer George Mulvaney (1809–1869), published an extensive 1842 obituary of the artist in which he noted the pleasure O’Connor took from his numerous trips to Wicklow throughout his career:

His early works were all compositions, but, as he advanced, he went out to nature. His first studies from nature were made in the Dargle; and some of the very finest of his matuerer [*sic*] years were also made there, beneath its impending rocks, its tangled foliage, its rushing waters. He loved the Dargle. Its quiet retirement—its picturesque intricacies—its moss-covered rocks at once entranced the painter and pleased the man. He was the child of Nature, and in her sequestered recesses he felt at home. Jarring, flaunting, noisy bustle were out of keeping with the quiet peace of his heart.<sup>12</sup>

O’Connor’s representation of this secluded idyll powerfully evokes his two main artistic influences, the Italian and Dutch Old Masters and the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century German romantics. At this point he had refined his unique manner of portraying the wild Irish countryside, in distinct contrast to his earlier illustrative landscapes. This dark, forested view brings with it emotional drama, energetic immediacy, and an intangible sense of the uncanny. Two graceful trees frame the

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<sup>11</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Carter Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character, &c.* (London: Jeremiah Hall, 1840), 2:202–3.

<sup>12</sup> George Mulvaney, “Memoirs of Native Artists: James O’Connor,” *Dublin Monthly Magazine* (April 1842): 260. Mulvaney was a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy and served as the first director of the National Gallery of Art, Dublin.

canvas, but it is the storm-blasted and gnarled trunk on the left that recalls Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), who was known for incorporating such shattered trees within his seminal Sublime paintings. The anthropomorphized foliage on the right side in turn recalls both Jacob von Ruisdael (1628–1682) and Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), both of whom animated natural growth in this way. The lower central portion of the canvas contains a frothy cascade of water and many pale and enormous boulders, on two of which young boys perch. O'Connor closely crops this foreground, thereby luring the viewer into the dense woods.

The painting also features a novel composition. A high horizon line leaves only a very small portion of the canvas to the brilliant azure sky, but it represents a reprieve nevertheless, both psychological and visual, from the darkness of the forest scene. Otherwise, the whole middle of the canvas is subsumed by a cavernous triangular recession that is obscured by shadows and crowned with ominous storm clouds. The cavity of the large rock formation attracts our attention but, upon closer inspection, reveals nothing but our own anxiety at the boys playing in the darkness. This conflation of rushing water, threatening storm clouds, and anthropomorphized trees, the innocence of the boys near the precipice, and the gloomy crevices and ravines lend this painting its aura of the Sublime, in profound contrast to O'Connor's earlier, much more predictable landscapes. In comparison this view is more enigmatic.

For O'Connor, in particular, shadow-filled and melancholic vistas within the landscape appealed to his penchant for the Romantic Sublime: dark, damp, apparently inconsequential settings are transformed through his unique perspective into images that reward close looking by the viewer. In general, mundane patches of land such as this

often become settings for a meditation. In *View of the Dargle—Lover's Leap* he engages with the landscape on a spiritual and philosophical level.

In this painting from his mature period, O'Connor delves into a theme that resonates with his development, and, within the wider parameters of international artists (both literary and visual), who attempted to illustrate the intangible relationship between spiritual meditation and nature. With subtlety, O'Connor manages to transcend the everyday view of nature by infusing this painting with mystery and ambiguity. In this particular picture, O'Connor conjures the ambiance of quietude and tranquility, while simultaneously imbuing the painting with darkness and obscurity. He, like many other Romantic artists, attempted to portray nature in a manner that resonates with pantheistic spirituality.

To further illustrate this point, we can turn to the Romantic writer Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853), who considers the connection between nature as refuge and as a site for contemplation of a personal, otherworldly, and natural portrayal of divinity: “It is not the soft gray shimmer of the “beechen green” but also the deeper and more solemn note of the pine forest with its hush, its haze and mystery.”<sup>13</sup> Like many other of his international artistic colleagues invested in the tenets of Romanticism, O'Connor would slowly evolve in a manner that substantiates the contemplation of divinity within nature.

In terms of its composition and style, in fact, this painting evokes two other English Romantic works, J. M. W. Turner's *Morning Amongst the Coniston Fells, Cumberland* (c.1797; fig. 4:2), and James Ward's (1768–1859) *Gordale Scar (A View of Gordale in the Manor of East Malham in Craven, Yorkshire, the Property of Lord*

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<sup>13</sup> George Henry Danton, *The Nature Sense in the Writings of Ludwig Tieck* (New York: AMS, 1966), 68.

*Ribblesdale*) (c.1812–14; fig. 4:3). Like O’Connor’s Wicklow landscape, these paintings contrast dark, deep crevices (of varying sizes, scope, and scale) with rushing streams of highlighted water. The torrents serve as *coulisses* that define the structure, depth, and scale of the composition. The human figures are small and utterly overshadowed by the scale and scope of the surrounding views. Nature itself has taken the role of narrative here, in place of the expected biblical or mythical sources. The ambiance of Turner and Ward’s views is dramatic, and, like *A View of the Dargle—Lovers Leap*, they both have a slight portentous quality to them.

Significantly, all three artists found the inspiration for their depiction of the Sublime in the landscapes in England and Ireland. No longer were artists required to travel to Italy or France. As Romantic painters they sought the Sublime anywhere they were, and the public appreciated the gesture, especially as the Napoleonic wars inhibited international travel. Certainly many English and Irish tourists were also staying put and seeking to immerse themselves, psychologically and literally, in the Sublime in their own backyards, such as the English poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850).<sup>14</sup> Though O’Connor lived and worked in London for most of his adulthood, he was always drawn to the wild Irish countryside and included it among his other gripping natural landscape views. While Danby, then, responded to the trend of the apocalyptic Sublime, satisfying those audiences that clamored for gigantic, awe-inspiring canvases based on familiar mythical and biblical narratives in imagined settings, O’Connor stuck to landscapes that he had actually encountered from sketching excursions throughout

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<sup>14</sup> William Wordsworth, “The Sublime and the Beautiful” (1811–12), in Wordsworth, *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 349–60.

his career. Despite their friendship, similar training, and shared exhibition venues in Dublin and London, these men developed very different approaches to Sublime landscapes.

*View of the Dargle—Lover's Leap* does not revel in tragedy, impending cataclysm, doom, or horror. Rather, this view from County Wicklow is a somewhat mysterious sanctuary, albeit it an untamed one, within nature. Of course, at any moment the notorious and capricious Irish weather could intrude and the Dargle could be transformed by lashing rains, wind, and threatening clouds. Certainly, within Romanticism, representations of stormy weather become more frequent and represent an abandonment of the classical pastoral ideal—many Romantic paintings instead reiterate the concept that man is always subject to nature's power. As such, O'Connor's approach illustrates a dramatic shift between eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century painting, in that nature itself has become the primary source of "narrative," while the role of the young boys is secondary.

In 1743, the scholar William Smith, who was best known for his translation of Dionysius Longinus's *On the Sublime*, discusses the relatively esoteric notion of the pleasure we take in privation and darkness. This excerpt from his writings resonates with much of O'Connor's work, as he describes how landscapes such as the Dargle might rouse an appreciation for Sublimity:

There is a serious turn, an inborn Sedateness in the Mind, which renders Images of Terror grateful and engaging. Agreeable Sensations are not only produced by bright and lively Objects, but sometimes by such as are gloomy and solemn. It is not the blue Sky, the cheerful Sun-shine, or the smiling Landscape, that give us all our Pleasure, since we are indebted for no little share of it to the silent Night,

the distant howling Wilderness, the melancholy Grot, the dark Wood, and hanging Precipice.<sup>15</sup>

Contemporaneous intellectual trends also spurred O'Connor on. Like Danby, he likely would have known Edmund Burke's writings on the Sublime *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), and he had probably read widely among the other thinkers who were equally taken with this theme.<sup>16</sup> In addition, numerous international artists, tourists, and travel writers were reporting on sites that had become renowned for their Sublimity in Switzerland, Germany, and Norway, among other places.<sup>17</sup> One influential early contributor to the historiography of the search for the Sublime in the landscape is the English dramatist and critic John Dennis. In his *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose* (1692), he ponders the connection between Sublimity and the viewer's experiential response to landscape vistas.<sup>18</sup> Dennis's recollections of his travels in the Alps give a sense of the wonder of the Sublime, which for him is not at all a rhetorical concept alone. His words reinforce the notion that to completely engage with the Sublime, one must utterly submit to, or immerse in, the quest itself:

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<sup>15</sup> Dionysius Longinus, *On the Sublime* (first century A.D.), trans. William Smith (London: J. Watts, 1739), 124.

<sup>16</sup> English and Irish writers would have included Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Books, 1998); Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London: T. Payne, 1805); John Lawson, *Lectures Concerning Oratory* (Dublin: George Faulkner, 1759); George Miller, "An Essay on the Origins and Nature of Our Ideas of the Sublime," *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 5 (1794): 199–226; Richard Stack, "An Essay on Sublimity of Writing," *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* 1 (1787): 111–37; and James Usher, *Clio: Or, A Discourse on Taste* (London: T. Davies, 1769).

<sup>17</sup> See Robert Rosenblum, "The Dawn of British Romantic Painting, 1760–1780," in *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the 18th Century*, ed. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto: A. M. Hakkert, 1971), 192; Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Icon Editions), 17, 77.

<sup>18</sup> John Dennis, *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose* (London: James Knapton, 1692), 133–34. Dennis's contemporaries included writers on the Sublime such as Sir Richard Blackmore (1654–1729), Joseph Addison (1672–1719), Thomas Stackhouse (1677–1752), James Usher (1581–1621), Adam Smith (1723–1790), and Edmund Burke.

Octob. 21. We entered into Savoy in the Morning, and past over Mount Aiguebellette. The ascent was the more easie, because it wound about the Mountain. But as soon as we had conquer'd one half of it, the unusual height in which we found our selves, the impending Rock that hung over us, the dreadful Depth of the Precipice, and the Torrent that roar'd at the bottom, gave us such a view as was altogether new and amazing. On the other side of that Torrent, was a Mountain that equall'd ours, about the distance of thirty Yards from us. Its craggy Clifts, which we half discern'd, thro the misty gloom of the Clouds that surrounded them, sometimes have us a horrid Prospect . . . In the very same place Nature was seen Severe and Wanton. In the mean time we walk'd upon the very brink, in a litteral sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different motions in me, *viz.* a delightful Horrour, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely, pleas'd I trembled.<sup>19</sup>

Dennis emphasizes the necessity of experiencing the landscape firsthand, a belief that would eventually lead to the connection between the landscape itself and painted views of such Sublime sites. James Twitchell concurs and observes, “When the painter is overly concerned with proportion, order, taste, good sense, and keeping himself ‘at a distance,’ no sublimity can result.”<sup>20</sup> Thus to truly experience the Sublime, the artist and spectator must immerse themselves within the landscape. Dennis is among the first writers to connect the awe, terror, and exhilaration of his Sublime experiences with his travels in the landscape itself.<sup>21</sup>

Many people shared this view, contributing to the phenomenon of the Grand Tour, during which travelers and artists journeyed to farflung places to experience their culture, excitement, and novelty. As time went on, the quarry for these travelers became the Sublime itself, first perceived as an independent quality in nature and then as a quality *brought to* nature by the viewer.. Following pioneers like Dennis, cultural

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See James B. Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770–1850* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 19.

<sup>21</sup> Dennis, *Miscellanies*, 132–40.

aficionados, artists, and travelers sought their own personal interpretation of the Sublime in the landscape.

O'Connor and Danby's appropriation of the theoretical and formal tenets of the Sublime liberated them as artists, just as Dennis had been liberated as a thinker. Within its parameters they expanded the range of their personal expression in a manner that was not possible within traditional topographical landscapes. They also benefited from joining an international coterie of artists who inspired them. Though their stories are not the same, they are nevertheless entwined, and the binding of these two artists is their faith in the Sublime. Before I consider this further in relation to O'Connor, I will review the existing scholarship on this somewhat elusive artist.

### **O'Connor Scholarship: Some Thoughts**

Within the literature, the most significant primary source documentation on O'Connor is the lengthy obituary of the artist written by George Mulvaney (and signed "M") in the *Dublin Monthly Magazine* in 1842.<sup>22</sup> Mulvaney positions O'Connor within the context of the challenging environment for Irish artists in the nineteenth century, in addition to providing numerous details about his goals, experiences, and actual travel itineraries during his trips to the continent. He acknowledges the necessity for O'Connor to leave Ireland to expose himself to the international influences of the London art market. Of additional importance, he also notes the troubling tendency for

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<sup>22</sup> Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 255–266.

English patrons to favor continental over local talent.<sup>23</sup> Mulvaney's narrative (and perspective) is of critical importance and relevance to my discussion.

There are also two early-twentieth-century secondary sources that deal with O'Connor: W. G. Strickland's *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (1913) and Thomas Bodkin's *Four Irish Landscape Painters* (1920).<sup>24</sup> Another secondary source is art historian John Hutchinson's exhibition catalogue *James Arthur O'Connor* (1985), which comprises the most detailed contemporary account. In addition, in 2001, art historian William Laffan edited an exhibition/sale catalogue entitled *The Sublime and the Beautiful: Irish Art, 1700–1830*, whose entries on O'Connor relate to paintings from the 1820s (not the mature works to be considered here).<sup>25</sup>

Art historian Katherine Nahum's essay "Observing Irish Romantic Landscape Painting" (2003) covers O'Connor's early topographical house portraits, in addition to the painting *A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner* (1832; fig. 4: 4).<sup>26</sup> It merits a brief summary here as an insightful recent interdisciplinary assessment. Nahum's thesis is that some Irish Romantic paintings subtly reflect the political, historical, and social implications of the ongoing colonial relationship between England and Ireland. Though Nahum's overview of romantic Irish art also leaves aside O'Connor's later paintings, she sets the stage for them in observing that the intellectual shift from an eighteenth-century Enlightenment perspective to Romanticism contributed to the turmoil for Irish

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<sup>23</sup> See chapter 2 for more discussion of this topic.

<sup>24</sup> Walter George Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1913; reprint, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 2:179–82; Thomas Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1920), 17–28.

<sup>25</sup> William Laffan, ed., *The Sublime and the Beautiful: Irish Art, 1700–1830* (London: Pym's Gallery, 2001), exh. cat.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine Nahum, "Observing Irish Romantic Landscape Painting," in *Éire/Land*, ed. Vera Kreilkamp (Boston: Charles S. and Isabella V. McMullen Museum of Art, 2003), 65–70, exh. cat. O'Connor painted *A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner* just prior to his second trip abroad in 1833. This painting will be discussed later in this chapter.

artists: “As Ireland experienced the economic and social trauma of poverty and famine, as well as the political disorder accompanying a long struggle for independence, painters were moved to find an artistic language to address such upheaval. As a far-reaching artistic movement comprised of contradictory definitions and themes, Romanticism offered a flexible visual language to express complex responses to the social landscape.”<sup>27</sup> As well, Nahum proposes that O’Connor, like other Irish artists, sought to compensate for the precariousness of his pursuit by appropriating Romanticism in his canvases. Later in this chapter I will consider how O’Connor’s late paintings reflect Nahum’s observations about the contribution of Romanticism (and the Sublime) to an artist’s reputation.

Art historian Brendan Rooney also discusses links between Romanticism and nineteenth-century Irish art in an essay entitled “Seitenblick: The German Influence on Nineteenth-Century Irish Painting” (2005).<sup>28</sup> With respect to O’Connor’s *A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner* (1832; fig. 4:4) and *The Eagle’s Rock, Killarney* (1831; fig. 4:5), Rooney observes that after the artist’s second trip to the continent, his “use of colour and light invites comparison with Caspar David Friedrich.”<sup>29</sup> This is significant because Rooney, like other scholars before him, at first prevaricates on the influence of German Romanticism on O’Connor. I will demonstrate, however, just how relevant the German Romantic philosophers and artists were to O’Connor’s thinking. For, like other artists who were influenced by the German Romantic Gessellschaft, O’Connor’s mature works suggest that he had joined their

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<sup>27</sup> Nahum, “Observing Irish Romantic Landscape Painting,” 65.

<sup>28</sup> Brendan Rooney, “Seitenblick: The German Influence on Nineteenth-Century Irish Painting,” in *A German Dream: Masterpieces of Romanticism from the Nationalgalerie Berlin*, ed. Bernhard Maaz (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 2004), 32–39, exh. cat.

<sup>29</sup> Rooney, “Seitenblick,” 32–39.

quest to locate secular divinity within the landscape.<sup>30</sup> From the thematic and visual correspondences between Friedrich's and O'Connor's paintings, then, I will proceed to a consideration of the synergy between the German Romantic cultural circles that included Friedrich and Carl Gustave Carus (1789–1869) and the late Sublime work of O'Connor.

Rosenblum's discussion of the evolution of the secular Sublime in northern Romantic painting, in relation to Romanticism in general, is another influence on my own work. He notes that during the eighteenth century, many people turned away from the didactic message and hierarchical trappings of Christianity. Many northern artists in particular sought to reframe alternative views of Christianity within nature. In contrast to the more overtly Catholic iconography common to southern Europe, many northern Protestant (Romantic) artists imbued their views of nature with subtle allusions to spirituality.<sup>31</sup> Through a variety of approaches, they tried to represent humanity's essentially intangible engagement with divinity in the landscape.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the quality of the scholarship that has been done on O'Connor to this point, few people have paused to appreciate the profound influence of his travel and feelings of dislocation in his Romantic Sublime paintings. In London he met artists whose travels included frequent sketching excursions abroad that expanded their

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<sup>30</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (1790), trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 466; Joseph Leo Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). The term "Gessellschaft," loosely defined within the vernacular of German culture as a group consciousness, society, or collaborative effort, helpfully emphasizes the vitally important synthesis between the visual and the literary arts in German romanticism.

<sup>31</sup> Keith Patrick, "Romanticism and the Modernist Myth," in *The New Romantics*, ed. Andreas C. Papadakis (London: Academy Group, 1988), 43–49; Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons*, 187–90; Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 14.

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979); Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 10–40.

stylistic approaches.<sup>33</sup> By focusing primarily on those late paintings that reflect his embrace of the Romantic Sublime, I will position O'Connor within a wider global framework in a way that is long overdue.

Scholars of Romanticism who have considered the shifts in Western culture relating to an objective versus a subjective response to nature have tended to stick with Friedrich as their representative painter. In "Romanticism and the Modern Myth," for example, Michael Greenhalgh concludes, "Friedrich's painting suddenly corresponds to an experience familiar to the spectator in the modern world, an experience in which the individual is pitted against, or confronted by, the overwhelming, incomprehensible immensity of the universe, as if the mysteries of religion had left the rituals of church and synagogue and had been relocated in the natural world."<sup>34</sup> I suggest that the same holds true for O'Connor. As he matured, his paintings become less predictable. He is no longer interested in merely describing the Irish terrain and its mountains, woods, and streams. Instead, his paintings encompass his own emotional and cerebral response to the mystery of the natural world. While his isolated figures are typically dwarfed by the size and scale of the landscape, from the late 1820s forward they are no longer mere staffage. In several of his later works, individuals stare at the viewer as if seeking deliverance from a world that is unpredictable and precarious. Their presence and their relationship to the landscape is perplexing, sometimes disturbing, and contributes to an

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<sup>33</sup> During Turner's numerous well-documented sketching tours, for example, he managed to accumulate a sizeable portfolio of drawings. Interestingly, some of Turner's sketching trips coincide with O'Connor's continental journey of 1832–33.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Greenhalgh, "Romanticism: A Definition," in *The New Romantics*, ed. Andreas C. Papadakis (London: Academy Group, 1988), 20–27; Keith Patrick, "Romanticism and the Modern Myth," in *The New Romantics*, 42–49; Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 17.

aura of unease. There is certainly nothing “pastoral” about these Irish landscape paintings for the people we encounter within them.

For artists in search of transcendence through the Sublime in nature, then, the landscape became their vehicle.<sup>35</sup> And for Irish artists in particular who wished to rise above their provincial training, the Sublime offered a new artistic opportunity as well.

### **O’Connor’s Early Career in Ireland**

James Arthur O’Connor was born in Dublin; his father, William O’Connor, was an artist, engraver, and printseller.<sup>36</sup> George Mulvaney suggests that James was interested in landscape at an early age:

The son gave early proofs of his love for the arts. Landscape painting was always the bent of his mind. His early attempts in oil were very small, but remarkable for neatness of pencil . . . Close scenery was always his choice, which was partly referable to weak and near sight . . . The prevailing tones of his early pictures were deep and cool green, and brown; with small portions of light peeping in between the trunks, or beneath the branches of his trees. It was quite evident that his soul lay in landscape paintings.<sup>37</sup>

In this chapter I hope to explicate the conflict and complications that O’Connor encountered during his quest to reconcile this provincial “soul” with the sophisticated, fast-paced, and competitive atmosphere of the metropolis. After the short-lived journey to England in 1813 with his friends Francis Danby and George Petrie, O’Connor

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<sup>35</sup> Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Mulvaney, “Memoirs of Native Artists: James O’Connor,” 260. There is no mention of O’Connor’s mother within the sources.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

returned to Ireland for the next eleven years, reconnecting with Dublin art circles and focusing on landscapes often based on popular tourist sites.<sup>38</sup>

O'Connor received his first significant landscape commission, from the Marquis of Sligo, in 1818.<sup>39</sup> O'Connor was able to attract such patrons through showings of his work at many of the Irish societies of art, including the Dublin Society, the Society of the Artists of Ireland, the Hibernian Society, and the Exhibition of the Artists of Ireland at the Dublin Society's House. From 1809 to 1821, prior to O'Connor's final move to England, he exhibited forty-three paintings at such venues.<sup>40</sup>

The marquis asked O'Connor to paint his house and surrounding family demesne in Westport, County Mayo, in the northwest of Ireland.<sup>41</sup> Like his eighteenth-century Irish predecessors George Barret, Thomas Roberts (1748–1778), and William Ashford (1746–1824), O'Connor developed his skills in the rendering of such conventional paintings to develop his skills.

*Ballinrobe House* (1818; fig. 4:6) typifies his sixteen views of which the Westport series is comprised. The viewer's perspective is high and takes in a broad swath of land, river, and architecture within the grounds, which was not unusual for house portraits at this time. The painting depicts a vast expanse of cultivated land, and its composition relies upon classical Claudean conventions—trees in the right foreground serve as *repoussoir* elements that frame the viewer's perspective upon the

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<sup>38</sup> See Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 17–19; Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 260. Upon his return from England, O'Connor first lived at Aston's Quay, then on Dawson Street in Dublin. Without much demand for views of Dublin, O'Connor set out to paint in Wicklow County, southeast of Dublin. His membership with the Hibernian Society of Artists was recorded beginning in 1815.

<sup>39</sup> Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Hutchinson, 98.

<sup>41</sup> Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Painters* 2:180. O'Connor produced sixteen paintings in the Westport series from 1818 to 1819.

vista, while the river acts as a *coulisse* or path to lead the eye into the center and background of the painting, where the Palladian mansion rests on the elegant grounds. O'Connor employs both linear and atmospheric perspective to enhance the depth of this striking view, including especially the line of trees on the left side, the sizes of which decrease as they recede into the property. Two stone walls and a substantial hedge also direct our view into the distance and further accentuate the impression of depth. Even the bridge's arches over the river open up the background of the composition with their glimpses of additional smaller trees and buildings, the details of which are less obvious due to the effects of the atmosphere. This too is a classical convention, inspired especially by Claude; we can easily imagine that the land continues far into the distance.

Two well-dressed male figures complement the finery of the landscape as they gaze out at the viewer, their backs to the buildings and grounds behind them. We imagine they are viewing the resplendent acreage and gardens where we as viewers are in fact positioned. The figure on the left has his arms folded across his chest, while his companion stands in a more traditional, classically derived pose, with left foot forward and bent knee. He in particular evokes the image of a Greco-Roman sculpture in the position of *contrapasto*. These figures, elevated on a sloping knoll, provide an element of scale as opposed to the home and features of the grounds.

House portraits in this period embraced an idealized view of land ownership, typically relied on classical stylistic standards, and emphasized the pastoral and idyllic surroundings. Here, O'Connor joins many other eighteenth-century Irish artists in accepting seventeenth-century classical conventions in particular. At the beginning of

his career, O'Connor's painterly response to the land was driven by the demands of his patrons, and he veils his own interpretation of the setting, both visually and socially. Like many other painters during this time period, O'Connor skips over one essential element of a well-run property—the peasants and workers whose physical effort (and rental payments) supported those vast holdings, often despite living conditions that contrasted powerfully with those represented in such paintings.<sup>42</sup> *Ballinrobe House* thus presents an idealized view of Ireland that responded to the hopes and plans of O'Connor's generally Anglo-Irish patrons. Scholars have often observed that many artists suppressed social or political tensions within their landscape views at this time.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar fashion, *Rockingham House, Co. Roscommon* (1818; fig. 4:7), presents a view of the lands and palatial home of Lord Lorton, of which the principle architect was John Nash (1752–35).<sup>44</sup> What is of primary interest about this painting that typifies O'Connor's house portraits from his early career is the fact that a print was made after this painting. *Rockingham House, Co. Roscommon* (1825; fig. 4:8), engraved by James Storer and Henry Sargent Storer. Small in size, this engraving may well have been intended for a travel guide that would typically include views of Ireland and a selection of prominent homes and demesnes of the aristocracy. This indicates that while O'Connor may not have benefited from having as many reproductive prints made from

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Henrietta Chatterton, *Lady Chatterton's Rambles in Ireland* (London: Saunders and Ottley, 1832), 1:60: "The appearance of the dwellings of the peasantry [in Castletown] was more truly wretched than any I have ever seen. The people, particularly the children, were worse clothed. Some of the younger children, completely naked, were playing about before the miserable hovels. How strange that such rude habitations should send forth a people of such good and refined manners."

<sup>43</sup> See John Barrell, *The Dark Side of English Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition, 1740–1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>44</sup> Hutchinson, *James Arthur O'Connor*, 114.

his paintings as his colleagues Danby and Petrie, he was not unaware of the advantages to be had by so doing. The engraving was made three years after O'Connor moved to London, so one may surmise that the innovative strategies of the metropolis were indeed having an effect on the young artist.

However, of equal importance to this analysis of O'Connor's development is the fact that both Ballinrobe and the views of Roscommon represent portraits of the Irish countryside that, in fact, idealize and elide the reality of life in Ireland for the majority of its inhabitants. Contemporary commentators such as Sir John Barrow (1764–1848) are considerably more forthright about the often dire straits of peasants living on estates such as these. In *A Tour Round Ireland, through the Sea Coast Counties, in the Autumn of 1835*, Barrow comments on the deplorable conditions that he encountered: “At present . . . there appears to be misery enough in this line of country. The cottages I have passed were few and wretched, of a construction so humble, as to scarcely be discernible at the shortest distance,—the people ragged in their dress, and the children almost in a state of nudity.”<sup>45</sup> Yet for O'Connor to satisfy his patrons, he had to be complicit in an act of artistic idealization of Ireland.<sup>46</sup> There was no money in social commentary at this time. Such house portraits attempt to smooth over the contentious

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<sup>45</sup> John Barrow, *A Tour Round Ireland through the Sea Coast Counties in the Autumn of 1835* (London: John Murray, 1836), 245. Barrow's comments on life in Ireland before the Great Famine likewise indicate the desperate living conditions of many Irish people, including even relatively busy farmers: “The habitations scattered along the road. The same kind of house, perhaps more wretched still than those in County Kilkenny. Houses of mud, roofs of thatch, often falling down. No chimney or chimney so imperfect that nearly all of the smoke comes out the door. No windows. A little dung hill near the door, a pig in the house . . . I believe that these wretched dwellings contain beggars, but my traveling companions assure me that they are the dwellings of small farmers who have twenty or thirty acres to cultivate.”

<sup>46</sup> Later paintings faced those conditions more directly; see Daniel MacDonald (1821–1853), *The Discovery of the Potato Blight*, c. 1847; Erskine Nicol (1825–1904), *An Ejected Family*, 1853; and Elizabeth Thompson (1846–1943), *Eviction*, 1890, among others.

and longstanding relationship between England and Ireland that had most recently erupted during the rebellion of 1798, just twenty years earlier.<sup>47</sup>

So O'Connor's graceful views of Westport were well received, and commissions such as these allowed the burgeoning artist to hone his stylistic and formal approaches to the landscape. Nevertheless, compared to the paintings he produced later in his career, the *Ballinrobe* series is constrained and cautious, more a point of departure than a place of arrival. For the latter, he would have to leave his home (and its tensions and conflicts) altogether.

### **An Exile of His Own Volition**

After years of hard labour, disappointment, and neglect, he [O'Connor], in the early part of 1822, quitted Ireland, and made London his residence! He soon found sale for his works; but so clogged with the commission fees of salerooms, or so screwed down by the usurious exactions of dealers, as to render continuous labour very inadequately remunerative. To be distinguished in London, demands something from the man as well as from the artist. Modest, unassuming talent, in quiet, inexpensive lodgings, unpuffed and unpraised, may remain long unknown. Modesty and delicacy of feeling may not obstruct the progress of him, whose walk of art links him with the affections or the vanities of mankind. Unobtrusive, gentlemanlike retirement of manner, is seen, felt, and admired in the portrait painter, because we can't have his works without coming into contact with himself. But the painter of the silent glen, the mountain torrent, the gnarled oak, or the lonely lake, studies far away from the haunts of men—we may know his works, we rarely ever know their author; nor is it the interest of those who too often negotiate the sale of his works to let us know him.<sup>48</sup>

—George Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor"

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<sup>47</sup> See John D. Beatty, ed., *Protestant Women's Narratives of the Irish Rebellion of 1798* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2001); James Gordon, *History of the Rebellion in Ireland, in the Year 1798, &c. Containing an Impartial Account of the Proceedings of the Irish Revolutionists, from the Year 1782, till the Suppression of the Rebellion* (London: Printed by J. D. Dewick, 1803).

<sup>48</sup> Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 260–61.

Written in hindsight, Mulvaney's text suggests that perhaps O'Connor was not entirely cosmopolitan or shrewd enough in inserting himself into the competitive London art circles. He arrived in London with very few contacts and was thus hindered by a lack of support, guidance, and patronage. Mulvaney further observes that O'Connor's apparent modesty and humility are not qualities that lend themselves to success in the metropolis.

Recalling William Carey's comments (discussed in chapter 1), Mulvaney is evidently dispirited by the fickle nature of art audiences who are unable to appreciate hard-working and accomplished artists (such as O'Connor) who avoid the limelight. Though he was talented, he would have been perceived as one among a large group of artists who sought success within the Royal Academy and British Institution. Also, O'Connor's commitment to Romantic landscapes might have decreased the odds of standing out among the crowd. Though it is admirable that he refused to be swayed by cultural fashions that did not resonate with his own vision, his success might have been slowed by his disinterest in the more spectacular trends in London at that time.

His friend Danby presents a telling contrast. Before returning to London, Danby first established himself in Bristol, cultivated sponsors who helped him make the transition to London, and secured a patron relationship with the president of the Royal Academy, Sir Thomas Lawrence. As a result, Danby and O'Connor's experiences diverged in London. Although the friends shared their provincial upbringing and training, Danby more readily adapted to the sophisticated and competitive metropolitan arena.

Upon his arrival in London in 1822 with his wife, Anastasia, O'Connor began to work with promptness; however unheralded he was at first.<sup>49</sup> Although O'Connor had a profound emotional connection to Ireland, he would paint more or less exclusively for an English clientele throughout his career. Dublin's artistic community simply did not offer the same professional opportunities and like many other emigrants, he found himself caught between remaining in a country he loved and moving abroad to achieve greater success. Historian Roy Foster considers the widespread phenomenon of self-imposed exile by the Irish in light of the lack of work in Ireland for anybody (not just artists):

The micks on the make were not the average Irish emigrant; but who was? Emigration dominates nineteenth-century Irish history; it is bound up with the history of the Union, beginning on a large scale well before the Famine exodus, and reflecting the discouraging history of the Irish agrarian economy under the Union. By 1861 the Irish-born population of England, Scotland and Wales had reached 805,000, or 3.5 per cent of the population . . . All Irish emigrants tended to be lumped together for generalization by the host country. But there was also an overflow at other levels of Irish society, up to the artisanate and aspiring middle class. Many of these would help create and re-create images of Irishness in exile.<sup>50</sup>

In O'Connor's obituary, Mulvaney recognizes that Ireland had always needed more advanced educational training opportunities for artists, and better patrons too—people inclined to appreciate the excellence that Irish artists offered. The following quotation captures Mulvaney's frustration with the inhibitions to the arts in Ireland, even as late as 1842. In a familiar refrain, he pleads for more sensitivity to Irish art and bemoans the bias for English or continental art. He further regrets the tendency for

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<sup>49</sup> Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 19–20; Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts*, 6:4; Hutchinson, *James Arthur O'Connor*, 194–96. During this period, O'Connor sent paintings to the Royal Hibernian Academy only twice—a landscape in 1830, and three additional paintings in 1840. On the other hand, O'Connor exhibited twenty-one paintings at the Royal Academy between 1822 and 1840, thirty-eight at the British Institution between 1823 and 1839, and sixteen at the Society of British Artists between 1829 and 1838.

<sup>50</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, 284–85

artists to abandon their careers in Ireland in search of success overseas (which he labels self-expatriation):

Shall we be the devotee abroad, the sceptic at home? Shall we worship at the tomb of foreign art, and coldly scoff at the cradle of our own? In one word, shall we be generous to others, unjust to ourselves . . . Had such been the treatment of Irish art, we should now have many high names among us; nonresidence would not then be held as presumptive evidence of native talent; nor would self-expatriation be the result of professional ambition. Genius might venture to live at home . . . None of her sons ever loved Ireland more ardently than did our gifted, our lamented friend, James O'Connor. His patriotism, like his taste, was pure and undefiled; single-minded and sincere, he knew no guile. The valleys, the glens, the mountains, the songs, the sufferings, and the sorrows of Ireland, were dear to him. In deep feeling, and in quiet retirement, he loved her; and in dismay and neglect, but not disgust, he sailed from her shores.<sup>51</sup>

According to Mulvaney, if the conditions in Ireland had been better for artists in terms of patronage, respect, and financial opportunities, O'Connor would not have been compelled to leave. Yet leave he did, and despite some initial naiveté about what would be necessary to succeed in London, he slowly acclimated to the metropolitan scene and began to study those Old Master artists whose influence would propel him (ironically) toward modernity.

### **The Influence of the Old Masters: Metropolitan Themes and Innovation in O'Connor's Mid-Career Paintings**

In London, thanks to the continental political turmoil discussed in chapter 2, O'Connor discovered a new source of inspiration: the paintings of Salvatore Rosa (1615–1673) and Jacob van Ruisdael (1628–1682). Several scholars have remarked

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<sup>51</sup> Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 260.

upon the Dutch influence on Irish artists in particular, but it is true that the Dutch, French, and Italian paintings that were imported into the British art market in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all made their mark.<sup>52</sup> Art historian Bruce Arnold, in fact, notes that O'Connor's nickname was "the Irish Hobbema," which he suggests might have arisen from O'Connor's careful study of his father's seventeenth-century engraved print collection.<sup>53</sup> I will counter these rather broad assertions with a brief summary of Rosa and Ruisdael's styles as they are reflected in key mid-career paintings by O'Connor.

Neapolitan-born painter Salvator Rosa's advocacy of Sublime landscape painting stood in contrast to Claude's devotion to the Beautiful. Rosa's storm-shattered tree trunks and precariously positioned boulders, dark, formidable forests, and sinister storm-filled skies set a very different mood from the Frenchman's sunlit mythic and biblical narratives from the southern Italian *campagna*.<sup>54</sup> Two relatively contemporaneous sources, Lady Sydney Morgan and Horace Walpole, refer to Rosa and the appeal of his formal and thematic exoticism for English travelers, patrons, and art lovers in particular. Lady Morgan (née Owenson; 1776–1859) recalls in her biography of the artist that Rosa's work was an important part of many English collections during the nineteenth century:

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<sup>52</sup> See Bruce Arnold, *Irish Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 96–97; Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 17–28; and Anne Crookshank and The Knight of Glin, Desmond Fitzgerald, *The Painters of Ireland, 1660–1920* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1979), 211–12. Bodkin suggests that O'Connor sought to replicate seventeenth-century Dutch subjects in particular, especially those of Aart van der Neer (1603–1677): "For O'Connor was the only landscape painter in these islands who painted moonlight scenes with anything like the truth and force of the Dutchman who was the first to essay them seriously."

<sup>53</sup> Arnold, *Irish Art*, 96–97; see also Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 17; Crookshank and Fitzgerald, *Painters of Ireland*, 211–12.

<sup>54</sup> See Otilie G. Boetzkes, *Salvator Rosa: Seventeenth-Century Italian Painter, Poet, and Patriot* (New York: Vantage Press, 1960), and Jonathan Scott, *Salvator Rosa: His Life and Times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

When Salvator Rosa came forth upon that arena [Rome] . . . *His* magic pencil threw all into life and motion and fearful activity . . . *he* painted her the inevitable agent of human suffering, mingling all her great operations with the passions and interests of man, blasting him with her thunderbolt! Wrecking him in her storms! burying him in her avalanches! and whelming him in tornadoes! . . . The way-worn traveller, the benighted pilgrim, the shipwrecked mariner, introduced as accessories into the main scene, become images that engage the heart as well as the eye . . . The *many*, in gazing on the works of Salvatore, felt, they knew not why—the *few* (and those few the great) became enamored of pictures, which gave them a sensation, even though that sensation was one of terror: and the public, always idolatrous of originality and prone to excitement, were not to be satiated by representations powerfully calculated to awaken all their sympathies.<sup>55</sup>

Lady Morgan acknowledges the appeal that such a painter would have had to the rather well-traveled English public in particular at this time. Tourists had seen what Rosa had also seen, and they welcomed the opportunity to relive it on the canvas, as dramatically as possible.

English art historian Horace Walpole (1717–1797) goes so far as to equate the Italian painter with the Sublime features he enjoyed: “Precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings, Salvator Rosa!”<sup>56</sup> His exuberance reflects the excitement engendered by Rosa’s subject matter. Looking ahead to the nineteenth century, it is thus easy to see why the ambitious O’Connor would seek to emulate the drama and intensity of the Sublime as rendered by such a renowned painter. And, as an active artist in London’s cultural circles, O’Connor would have had access to exhibitions of Old

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<sup>55</sup> Lady Morgan, *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa* (London: H. Colburn, 1824; reprint, London: David Bryce, 1855), 119–20. According to Lady Morgan, there were 113 paintings by Rosa in English collections in 1824, two years after O’Connor’s return to London.

<sup>56</sup> Horace Walpole to Richard West, September 28, 1739, in Walpole, *Letters of Horace Walpole*, ed. W. S. Lewis (London: Folio Society, 1951), 39.

Master paintings at the British Institution, in addition to their display within select private collections in both cities.<sup>57</sup>

In *Landscape with Travellers Asking the Way* (c. 1641; fig. 4:9), for example, Rosa appropriates the subject of travelers while both utilizing classical conventions and conjuring a dramatic aura. Structurally, he carefully delineates foreground, middleground, and background and incorporates the familiar *repoussoir* and *coulisse* devices. The ruined trees on the left and the trees on the right point toward the center of the road, giving the impression that the travelers are passing through an arbor formed by the overhanging rocks above and the flanking trees and shrubbery. The meandering *coulisse* brings our attention to the foreground, where the figures (both on foot and on horseback) take time to rest and converse after their travels. Once they continue on, they will pass through the darkened middleground to the sunlit fields that Rosa creates with contrasting blues and yellows—a respite from their present dark grotto.

Another Old Master painter influenced O'Connor as well. Jacob van Ruisdael was the son of the artist, dealer, and framer Isaak van Ruysdael (1599–1677) and the nephew of the celebrated painter Salomon van Ruysdael (1600/3–1670).<sup>58</sup> Born in Haarlem, he too was a busy continental traveler who found inspiration for his paintings away from home.<sup>59</sup> From 1650 to 1655, the period of his *Wanderjahre*, he was stimulated by extended excursions to Germany and Holland in much the same way that travel would challenge and inspire O'Connor and other romantic wanderers almost two

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<sup>57</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 7–8; G. N. Wright, *A Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1821), 421. Wright identifies several private collections in Ireland, most of which are full of Old Masters, although it is unlikely that as a young artist, O'Connor would have had access to those works.

<sup>58</sup> See Seymour Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1981), exh. cat.; and Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael: Master of Landscape* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005), exh. cat.

<sup>59</sup> See Jacob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, and E. H. ter Kuile, *Dutch Art and Architecture: 1600 to 1800* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966; reprint, Kingsport: Kingsport Press, 1979).

centuries later. With time, Ruisdael's landscape views came to reverberate with energy and, sometimes, a particular melancholia that invites a state of contemplation.<sup>60</sup>

Ruisdael's trees in particular became increasingly aggrandized in their "heroic" size, shapes, and general wildness, evoking Ruskin's "pathetic fallacy," by which representations of flora and fauna acquired the ability to express human emotions and feelings. (O'Connor would partake of this "fallacy" himself as time went on.)<sup>61</sup> At first glance, *Trees in a Dune* (1647; fig. 4:10) depicts a man and his dog out for a stroll in a typical Dutch countryside, made to appear so by Ruisdael's emphasis on the flatness of the landscape, the dramatic sky above the low horizon line, and the green and brown shrubbery and trees. However, the attentive viewer will soon note that Ruisdael has arranged his composition to emphasize the anthropomorphic nature of the trees lining this rural lane.<sup>62</sup> Bent by the wind, the enormous tree on the left points significantly toward the town ahead, where a church steeple pokes above the flatlands. Thus, what first appears to be a typical genre painting subtly hints towards a more symbolic and subtle message about the presence of spirituality in nature. This cultivation of layers of meaning within a single, otherwise unremarkable landscape will be appropriated by the Romantics, including Friedrich's circle and O'Connor himself, to great effect.

Prior to his own continental travel, O'Connor produced numerous landscapes with travelers in them. After his trips abroad, however, those same paintings become more enigmatic, both formally and thematically.<sup>63</sup> An early example of the influence of

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<sup>60</sup> See Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 36; Rosenberg, *Dutch Art and Architecture*, 265–67; Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael*, 5; John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 5th ed. (London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1851), 3:157–72.

<sup>61</sup> John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, 157–72.

<sup>62</sup> Rosenberg et al., *Dutch Art and Architecture*, 265.

<sup>63</sup> See Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael: Master of Landscape*, 9, 84.

the Rosa and Ruisdael upon O'Connor is evident in the latter's *Homeward Bound* (c. 1825–30; fig. 4:11). Here O'Connor no longer relies upon generalized or formulaic representations of foliage and plant life. Instead, his trees have become increasingly animated and anthropomorphic. Bodkin comments on this approach to representing nature: "The way in which O'Connor handles paint was very workmanlike, and particularly adapted to his smaller scale pictures. He developed a deft, rapid touch, indicating foliage with peculiar crispness. Oak trees were his speciality [*sic*]. He used his colours rather dry and liked a good impasto in the more highly keyed passages."<sup>64</sup>

In *Homeward Bound* O'Connor embraces a view of nature that moves beyond the formal principles he relied upon in his earlier works. Boulders and shrubs funnel our attention to the small figure of a man strolling down a meandering country lane (a *coulisse*), accompanied by his dog. To the right, almost in the center of the composition, an enormous tree dominates the painting, much as Ruisdael's tree did in *Trees in a Dune* (fig. 4:10). O'Connor positions the tree and its foliage in a manner that is more realistic than his earlier topographical treatments of nature, which were more idealized and conventional.<sup>65</sup> Through this arrangement of tree and surrounding undergrowth, the viewer is drawn from the truncated foreground to the middleground and then to the pleasing vista of the horizon and delicate clouds beyond. Unlike in his earlier paintings, the lone figure traversing the landscape has become the primary focus.

For young artists such as O'Connor, the importance of being exposed to the revered Old Masters as part of their educational development cannot be too heavily emphasized. It wasn't enough to just paint a pretty picture, for artists to expand their

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<sup>64</sup> Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 25–26.

<sup>65</sup> See *Ballinrobe House* (fig. 4:6).

capabilities it was necessary to look to the past to project themselves forward with innovative but simultaneously well-grounded modes of expression. An anonymous writer in 1825 summarized the necessity of this relationship, albeit in rather poetic terms: “Every man cannot see what nature displays before his eyes, for the art of seeing is a complicated and laborious one, and must be acquired by study and practice.” He continues with reference to poets who refuse to study their literary predecessors, “The business of the painter is the same. He, too, must *learn* to see, whatever original assistance nature may have given him in a happy organization, that he may be ably like the poet, to record his thoughts, in that which is his language—the language which most clearly speaks to the mind through the eye.”<sup>66</sup>

While some of O’Connor’s paintings that depict travelers within the landscape are rather repetitious, even formulaic, as he matured, his rendering of this theme would become more dynamic and less predictable. No longer are his travelers mere staffage; they begin to take on greater emotional expressiveness and can be discussed within the wider discussion of the theme of the wanderer within international nineteenth-century art.

Certainly the theme of the traveler would have had great appeal to a painter like O’Connor. Over the years, the constant pursuit of patronage must have been very wearing for him and his family, while the problems associated with exile continued to bedevil him as he tried to establish a home and pursue his career.<sup>67</sup> While his exhibition

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<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, “The British Institution,” *London Magazine* 12 (May–Aug. 1825): 391.

<sup>67</sup> Mulvaney, “Memoirs of Native Artists: James O’Connor,” 265–66.

record at both the Royal Academy and the British Institution is impressive, his artistic growth and adoption of the tenets of Romanticism did not necessarily mean financial success. Significantly, then, in *Homeward Bound*, the size of the figure is small in comparison to the scale and scope of the landscape that surround him; it almost appears as if the figure is merging with the landscape rather than set apart from it, as in the earlier Ballinrobe series. While this theme is one that many artists adopted, it would have had particular resonance for O'Connor, given his self-chosen exile in London.

### **Irish Interludes: Early Romantic Paintings**

During the early 1820s, O'Connor abandoned his earlier topographic approach to landscape for the power of the Sublime, like Danby before him. However, for O'Connor, the spectacular, cataclysmic nature of the apocalyptic Sublime held no appeal. Shying away from the display-centric paintings that would occupy Danby, O'Connor explored instead the internationally popular Romantic Sublime. Through it, he could respond to landscape in a more personal and evocative manner. He began to favor a closer cropping of his compositions, to draw attention to their simpler, more profound arrangements of elements. In terms of content, his paintings come to encourage reflection and contemplation rather than awe. Finally, O'Connor tried hard to actively engage the viewer—to initiate a more intimate and emotive bond with his painting.

Before looking more closely at O'Connor's later career, I will briefly review the characteristics of Romantic painting that are most salient here. The literature is

expansive, but sometimes contradictory, with regard to the characterization of Romanticism.<sup>68</sup> Definitions of Romanticism typically begin with its emphasis on the primacy of the individual's experience. The Romantic artist embraces a personal and increasingly emotional response to his or her surroundings in a manner that sometimes conflates religion, art, and nature. For many, Romanticism endorsed the search for transcendence within (as opposed to beyond) nature. In certain cases, this was manifested through artists' attempts to give visual expression to such intangible concepts as the power of divinity within nature. Historian Isaiah Berlin writes:

Romanticism is . . . the strange, the exotic, the grotesque, the mysterious, the supernatural, ruins, moonlight, enchanted castles . . . Also it is the pursuit of novelty, revolutionary change . . . a sense of timelessness . . . It is nostalgia, it is reverie . . . it is sweet melancholy and bitter melancholy, solitude, the suffering of exile, the sense of alienation, roaming in remote places . . . The Romantic doctrine was that there is an infinite striving forward on the part of reality, of the universe around us, that there is something which is infinite, something which is inexhaustible, of which the finite attempts to be the symbol but of course cannot.<sup>69</sup>

For those who sought a respite from the Christian pragmatism of the Enlightenment, Romanticism offered a channel for meaningful expression of faith

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1965 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 14–17; Greenhalgh, “Romanticism: A Definition,” 20–27; Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), esp. 11–20; Northrop Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 3–7, 27. Frye's popular definition of romanticism addresses the confluence of the arts contained within it: “Historically, it refers to the literature, and in lesser degree the painting, music, and some of the philosophy, produced in the period c. 1780–1830, the period of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the nationalistic movements in Greece, Italy, and Germany that followed. It is not, however, purely a historical term like ‘medieval,’ for within the Romantic period we feel that some artists are Romantics and that others are not, or are much less so. The further we move from the arts, the less sure we are of the importance of the term” (27). Honour further remarks upon the contradictions among such diverse artists as Keats, Shelly, Byron, Wordsworth, Constable, Turner, and Palmer, among others. What they share, Honour decides, is a more personal, individualized view of events, nature, and ideas that encourages their audiences to identify with them rather than seek some objective or classical “truth.”

<sup>69</sup> Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism*, 101.

outside the conventions of Christian doctrine.<sup>70</sup> Many Romantic artistic expressions, both visual and literary, challenged prevailing philosophies that stressed the theme of the “universal” and nature at the expense of the individual. The boundaries that had long distinguished man from nature became more tenuous and fluid. In particular, within the genre of landscape painting, topographic representations began to lose their appeal to artists, and seemingly patrons. Landscapes no longer merely recorded man’s architectural stamp upon nature or desire to control it. Compositions that included trees, land, and people now reflected a desire to express what lay beyond the temporal. Often, the presence of man in nature was reduced to a sole and diminutive figure swallowed up by vast expanses of anthropomorphic flora and fauna. Nature asserts itself in numerous, powerful, and uncontrollable guises, while man’s presence often has been diminished and psychologically humbled.

O’Connor’s early Romantic paintings appear more nuanced in light of the contemporary sociological, cultural, and political dynamics. During this tumultuous period, the lasting impact of the French Revolution, an ongoing reassessment of eighteenth-century Enlightenment belief systems, the shifts caused by the Industrial Revolution, and the trauma caused by the Napoleonic wars reverberated throughout Europe.<sup>71</sup> They were also felt much closer to home and informed O’Connor’s work in London as well as his trips back to Ireland, during which he drew inspiration for several important exhibition paintings.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 21; Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 10–14.

<sup>71</sup> See Barrell, *Dark Side of English Landscape*, passim; Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting* (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1982); Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis: The Lost Centre*, trans. Brian Battershaw (London: Hollis and Carter, 1957).

During the 1820s and 1830s, O'Connor often went to Ireland for sketching outings in County Wicklow and County Kerry. He and his fellow artists were joined by countless other pleasure-seeking tourists who flocked to the Lakes of Killarney, the Meeting of the Waters, and the Devil's Glen in search of Sublime vistas.<sup>72</sup> Such destinations were recommended by the numerous guidebooks that provided visual and textual direction to sightseers within Ireland.<sup>73</sup> Historian Martin Ryle observes that the most popular route chosen by Irish travel authors in the nineteenth century incorporated Dublin and its environs, the south, southwest, and west coasts (encompassing Counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Clare, Galway, Mayo, and Donegal), and the northern County Antrim.<sup>74</sup> Ryle maintains that the western route's popularity in the nineteenth century derived from an eighteenth-century taste for the Sublime, which would have been satisfied by the Atlantic coast's rugged, wild environs. For O'Connor, County Wicklow and the Irish Sea would also provide material for his new approach to the Romantic Sublime.

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<sup>72</sup> Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 260–61.

<sup>73</sup> James Norris Brewer, *The Beauties of Ireland: Being Original Delineations, Topographical, Historical, and Biographical, of Each County. Illustrated with Engravings by J. & H. S. Storer, after Original Drawings, Chiefly by Mr. Petrie* (London: Sherwood Jones, 1825–26); Jonathan Fisher, *A Picturesque Tour of Killarney, Describing in Twenty Views, the Most Pleasing Scenes of That Celebrated Lake, Accompanied by Some General Observations and Necessary Instructions for the Use of Those Who May Visit It: Together with a Map of the Lake and Its Environs, Engraved in Aquatint by Jonathan Fisher* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789); Dennis Sullivan, *A Picturesque Tour through Ireland, Illustrated with Numerous Coloured Views of the Most Interesting Scenery* (London: Thomas McLean, 1824).

<sup>74</sup> Martin Ryle, *Journeys in Ireland: Literary Travelers, Rural Landscapes, Cultural Relations* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999), 7–13; see also Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin, eds., *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993); John P. Harrington, ed., *The English Traveller in Ireland: Accounts of Ireland and the Irish through Five Centuries* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991); Cornelius Kelly, *The Grand Tour of Galway* (Cork: Cailleach Books, 2002); John McVeagh, *Irish Travel Writing: A Bibliography* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1996); and William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Irish Sketchbook of 1842 by M. A. Titmarsh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843; reprint, Dublin: Nonesuch, 2005).

O'Connor was, after all, a very different kind of "exile" than his friend Danby. As discussed previously, Danby was eager to put his provincial past in Ireland behind him upon his arrival in England. Danby's appropriation of the Sublime was centered on the London exhibition rooms and that audience's attraction to cataclysmic paintings. But O'Connor held back. He returned to Ireland throughout his career, and one may imagine that he felt forced to live in England in an attempt to succeed. By appropriating the Romantic Sublime, O'Connor could indulge in Irish sketching expeditions but transcend his former provincial approaches to painting them. It was a tenable solution to what Roy Foster describes as a dilemma for many Irish emigrants:

The conditions of life under the Union imposed a divided identity. We find it easier to visualize this for denizens of Northern Ireland today, or disorientated Anglo-Irishry after 1922, than to reconstruct the consciousness of nineteenth-century Irish people who saw much of their focus and most of their career opportunity as lying across St. George's Channel. But for many of the Victorian Irish middle class, life was spent travelling back and forth across the Irish Sea, observing and participating in British forms of government, reading English books, attending British educational institutions, looking for employment within the structures of the British Empire, and speaking English. It was never an identity comfortably accepted.<sup>75</sup>

As opposed to the more readily enthusiastic Danby, O'Connor perhaps felt the stresses and contradictions of their situation more acutely, and, his ambivalence may have hindered him professionally. Foster continues: "The generalizations about Irish emigration remain based on the notion that it was invariably both proletarian and involuntary; and that it was inseparable from a sense of exile. This is taken to mean banishment from a territory—mental and spiritual as well as physical—which still imposes the psychological norms of reality, and exerts a compulsion to return which

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<sup>75</sup> Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, 282–83.

will never be fulfilled.”<sup>76</sup> Although he gained much from the metropolis, O’Connor’s discomfort there is a touching reminder that all is not always what it seems in his art (or his career).

### **Romantic Paintings and International Artistic Influences**

Two enigmatic paintings from 1831 and 1832 may mirror some of the inner turmoil that O’Connor was experiencing. The early Romantic Sublime experiment titled *The Eagle’s Rock, Killarney* (fig. 4:5) is something new for him. O’Connor’s assimilation of Rosa and Ruisdael is fully evident: much of the painting is dark, gloomy, and foreboding, far more mysterious than his earlier scenes of country life in Ireland. The oppressive presence of the enormous trees, shrubs, boulders, and gathering storm clouds overwhelms the small human figure on the edge. While earlier paintings such as *Homeward Bound* (fig. 4:11) also focused on a lone individual in the landscape, O’Connor is attempting a different kind of engagement here.

Idealistic vistas such as those found in the 1818 *Ballinrobe House* (fig. 4:6) have disappeared in his paintings from the 1830s forward. Foreboding and enigmatic, the painting is filled with a pervasive sense of the uncanny. What is going on here? What is O’Connor trying to express through this vulnerable man, dwarfed by his dense surroundings, cloaked in shadows and perched next to an abyss? He stands in stillness, gazing out at the viewer with an intensity that seems to seek a connection with the viewer beyond the confines of the painting. The golden glow that prevailed in

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 288.

*Homeward Bound* (fig. 4:11) has vanished. Nor is this man an aristocrat but instead a peasant. If he is a poacher, the veil of darkness is perhaps necessary for the stealthy business at hand. Is O'Connor making a comment about the still unsolved problems of land reform for the majority of the Irish people?<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the mystery in this work is in fact a way for O'Connor to address covertly a contemporary problem plaguing Ireland without being overtly critical of the colonial power's presence there.

Likewise, *A Thunderstorm: The Frightened Wagoner* (fig. 4:4) also emphasizes the potential psychological and physical intensity of the relationship between the individual and nature. In terms of its formal arrangement, O'Connor eschews a planar procession that conveys a perspective of depth, focusing instead upon a darkened middle ground where a wagoner struggles to control his horses during an afternoon thunderstorm.<sup>78</sup> One horse has fallen to the ground, while another violently rears at the sound of thunder and the shock of the lightning bolt. O'Connor positions an enormous tree in the left hand foreground that twists and bends in much the same manner as Rosa and Ruisdael's trees within an electric energy field. A gaping and ominous void dominates the lower right-hand corner of the canvas adjacent to the anthropomorphic tree that further accentuates the danger threatening the driver. Here, nature is a force to be reckoned with, not something that an artist merely records with an air of detachment. O'Connor's unique portrayal of the relationship among the driver, the animals, and

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<sup>77</sup> D. B. Cashman, *The Life of Michael Davitt, with a History of the Rise and Development of the Irish National Land League* (Boston: Murphy and McCarthy, 1881); T. W. Moody, "Fenianism, Home Rule and the Land War: 1850–91," in *The Course of Irish History*, ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin (Lanham: Roberts Rinehart, 2001), 228–44; Lawrence McBride, ed., *Reading Irish Histories: Texts, Contexts, and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003).

<sup>78</sup> Danton, *Nature Sense*, 68. This theme is one that was popular with other romantic artists. In particular, Ludwig Tieck wrote on how the confluence of thunder, storm, and torrential winds transformed the pastoral view, as seen in the terror of the horse and driver.

nature may further be symbolically suggestive of the personal turbulence that the artist was experiencing in his life. It is certainly a triumph of the romantic Sublime.

Although this dramatic image reflects O'Connor's personal interpretation of a landscape, it also resonates with a much earlier text that discusses the Sublime in nature. Writing in 1704, John Dennis summarizes how the relatively ordinary (or at least not overtly menacing) can be transformed into the Sublime: "So Thunder mention'd in common Conversation, gives an Idea of a black Cloud, and a great Noise, which makes no great Impression upon us. But the Idea of it occurring in Meditation, sets before us the most forcible, most resistless [sic], and consequently the most dreadful Phaenomenon [sic] in Nature: So this Idea must move a great deal of The terror in us."<sup>79</sup> Regardless of whether O'Connor was familiar with Dennis's writings on the Sublime, he likewise takes an everyday occurrence and transforms it. Both of these mid-career paintings reflect O'Connor's inward emotional journey and the spirited contemporary discourse concerning the place of the individual within nature. This theme would continue to occupy O'Connor for the remainder of his career. However, it was not until he undertook his continental excursions in 1826 and 1832 that he fully engaged with it through his artistic embrace of German Romanticism.

### Continental Influences

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<sup>79</sup> John Dennis, *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, Contain'd in Some New Discoveries Never Made Before, Requisite for the Writing and Judging of Poems Surely. Being a Preliminary to a Larger Work Design'd to be Publish'd in Folio, and Entitled, A Criticism upon Our Most Celebrated English Poets Deceas'd* (London: George Strahan, 1704), 17–18.

For young artists such as O'Connor, the presence of older artists who were regular exhibitors within the English rooms of the Royal Academy and the British Institution must have been compelling for many reasons. A provincial artist coming from Dublin would learn much from the international flair of these painters' formal and theoretical accomplishments. He would also see the Old Masters in a new light (or perhaps for the first time), on their own as well as juxtaposed with those English and international artists who had already appropriated them. Therefore he might be likewise inspired to seek more modern formal and theoretical methodologies while simultaneously grounding his work in the traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such was the case with O'Connor, who was exposed to his elders even as he sought to retain his emotional and spiritual ties to his provincial home.

Beyond the professional influence of these seasoned artists, O'Connor also became acquainted with the foreign destinations that were then popular with artists, patrons, and tourists. Art historian Michael Greenhalgh suggests that it was because of artists' affinity for international travel at this time that the landscape's position in the hierarchy of fine art rose significantly.<sup>80</sup> Travel was very fashionable when O'Connor arrived in London.<sup>81</sup> This was very much in evidence in the numerous paintings displayed in exhibition rooms that documented artists' travels, and in the market for engraved prints of scenic views as well as travel guides and memoirs.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Greenhalgh, "Romanticism: A Definition," 22–23.

<sup>81</sup> Graves, *Royal Academy of Art*, 6:4. Although Turner was notorious for his regular sketching tours abroad, he was not the first British artist to exhibit paintings in London from his travels down the Rhine. During the last two decades of the eighteenth century, for example, the Reverend John Gardnor (1729–1808) exhibited fifteen paintings at the Royal Academy that documented his visit to Germany in 1787.

<sup>82</sup> Walter Thornbury, *The Life of J. M. W. Turner, R. A., Founded on Letters and Papers Furnished by His Friends and Fellow Academicians* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1862), 163–76.

One artist who may have influenced O'Connor in terms of his international exposure was Turner, whose many trips abroad are well documented.<sup>83</sup> Like Reynolds before him, he sought to elevate his landscapes by including historical narratives, which were in turn informed by and derived from sketches both in England and abroad. The relative frequency of domestic and foreign sketching expeditions ensured that Turner was able to transcend the confines of English art circles. His novel techniques and interest in foreign locales encouraged his successors to see as much as they could of art and the world and then try something different in their own work as well.

However, if Turner is today regarded as a modern artist who challenged many formal conventions in painting, however, he was once seen as more conservative. Cecelia Powell's analysis of Turner provides an alternative perspective on Turner's reputation as an innovator in terms of travel. She suggests that his travel to the Low Countries and the Rhineland in 1817 is of interest more for the fact that he didn't visit these locations earlier in his career, in the wake of other artists such as Gardner whose visits to the Rhineland were well recorded. In fact, she proposes that he may be considered somewhat provincial for this reticence, an identification that nuances the prevailing view of him as a revolutionary artistic innovator within his time.<sup>84</sup> However, in time, Turner would come to be in the vanguard of artists in England who sought inspiration in the theoretical and formal developments from abroad. The same could also be said of O'Connor, albeit in a less dramatic and publicized manner.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 447–56; see also Andrew Wilton, *J. M. W. Turner: France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland* (New York: George Braziller, 1982). Turner toured on the continent from 1802 to 1845 and visited the Rhineland in 1817, 1824, 1834, and 1840.

<sup>84</sup> Cecilia Powell, *Turner's Rivers of Europe: The Rhine, the Meuse and the Mosel* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1991), 20.

The travels of O'Connor and Turner even overlap around O'Connor's second continental journey of 1832–33 (his first expedition to the continent was in May 1826). The countless vistas that inspired Turner while he was abroad went from his sketch pad to his canvas, and from there some of them even made it onto the walls of the Royal Academy.<sup>85</sup> In much the same way, O'Connor's approach to painting would also demonstrate key alterations after he was exposed to international travel.

After living in London for four years, O'Connor arranged to visit the continent, traveling with an art dealer named Collier.<sup>86</sup> O'Connor left for Brussels in May 1826 and, according to Thomas Bodkin, director of the National Gallery of Ireland, was very successful in selling his works (as yet unidentified) before returning to London a year later.<sup>87</sup> During this year of his initial journey abroad, he painted *A River Scene* (1826; fig. 4:12), a meandering, tranquil river view whose marked romantic emphasis is balanced by the classical framing *repoussoir* elements of the graceful, swaying trees on the left. The translucent moon occupies center stage and fills the nighttime vista with ambient light that accentuates the foliage and precipitous escarpments.

Although there is no contemporaneous testimony to this effect, *A River Scene* likely depicts a vista from O'Connor's first trip abroad. Nothing about this nocturnal vision recalls earlier works that he produced while in England or Ireland. It evokes instead northern Romantic visual and literary artists such as Friedrich and the

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<sup>85</sup> Graves, *Royal Academy of Art*, 8:33–41. From the myriad sketches and watercolors that Turner composed during his extensive Rhineland travel, six paintings were exhibited between 1819 and 1843 at the Royal Academy.

<sup>86</sup> Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 20; Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 261.

<sup>87</sup> Bodkin, *Four Irish Landscape Painters*, 9; Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 261. Extant documentation of this trip is quite scarce in comparison to the documentation of his second trip in 1832.

philosopher Carl Gustave Carus (1789–1840), whose contributions to German Romanticism would be so significant.

Though we do not know whether O'Connor encountered paintings or prints by Friedrich during his travels to the continent, we can see that his paintings took on the stylistic, formal, and theoretical propensities of Friedrich's circle.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, art historian Hugh Honour and literary critic Ronald Taylor have remarked upon the breadth, depth, and eclecticism of German Romanticism and the challenges inherent in its definition.<sup>89</sup> To provide a context for O'Connor's development, in the present discussion I will focus upon Friedrich's use of the principles of Romanticism in landscape to locate divinity within nature.<sup>90</sup> Like Turner, Friedrich had also abandoned his early topographical approach to art and embraced a symbolic, enigmatic style that reflects a pantheistic vision of nature.

German culture from this time period was changing rapidly. After the Napoleonic invasions, the Wars of Liberation, and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, Germany's efforts to regroup were manifested through a profound cultural nationalism, and the many German small states and principalities sought to cultivate an

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<sup>88</sup> See Helmut Börsch-Supan, *Caspar David Friedrich: Gemälde, Druckgraphik u. bildmässige Zeichn* (Munich: Prestel, 1973). There were very few prints made after Friedrich, but the British Museum has two aquatints in their collection. *Königsstuhl*, by Karl Friedrich Thiele after Friedrich (1821), has interesting compositional correlations with O'Connor's drawings from the Rhine. See also *Winter Landscape with Church*, by Johann Jakob Wagner after Friedrich (1820), which correlates with Friedrich's painting in the National Gallery of London titled *Winter Landscape* (1811). See also George Granville Leveson-Gower, Duke of Sutherland, *Engravings of the Most Noble the Marquis of Stafford's Collection of Pictures, in London, Arranged According to Schools, and in Chronological Order, with Remarks on Each Picture* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1818).

<sup>89</sup> Honour, *Romanticism*, 21–56; Richard Taylor, *The Romantic Tradition in Germany* (London: Methuen, 1970), xi: "In German culture one may . . . legitimately talk of a Romantic tradition which had a central position in the unfolding of the modern German spiritual, intellectual and political life and in the constitution of the national German psyche . . . It is a complex tradition, drawn from a complex pattern of historical impulses, the reality of whose existence is not disproven by difficulties of definition."

<sup>90</sup> Patrick, "Romanticism and the Modernist Myth," 46; Rosenblum, *Modern Painting*, 10–40.

appreciation of local and regional lore.<sup>91</sup> Philosophical and artistic dialogues took place concerning the primacy of the individual over the universal, and the relationship of the individual to nature.<sup>92</sup> Philosophers such as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1759–1854), Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805), and Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), along with the writers and poets Ludwig Tieck, and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773–1798), were all part of the flourishing cultural circles in early-nineteenth-century Germany.<sup>93</sup> These people set the stage for international artists like O’Connor, who would appropriate many of the formal and theoretical tenets of German Romanticism that they espoused.

Of these writers and philosophers, Schelling was particularly influential upon the three literary figures who ultimately personified German Romanticism for German artists (and their international colleagues, including O’Connor): Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, and Carl Gustave Carus. Schelling’s *Philosophy of Nature* (1797) directly inspired Carus’s authoritative *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting* (1815–24).<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See Keith Hartley, Henry Meyric Hughes, Peter-Klaus Schuster, and William Vaughn, eds., *The Romantic Spirit in German Art, 1790–1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 13, exh. cat.

<sup>92</sup> See Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1963), 7:216.

<sup>93</sup> Other pivotal figures within this circle included August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), Jean-Paul (1763–1825), Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) (1772–1801), and Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811). Schelling, Schlegel, and Schiller taught at Jena University in Thuringier and were known for their all-encompassing philosophical vision of art, nature, and religion that focused on the individual’s relation to humanity.

<sup>94</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting, Written in the Years 1815–1824, with a Letter from Goethe by Way of Introduction*, trans. David Britt (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer, 1831; reprint, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002); Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature, as an Introduction to the Study of This Science* (1797; 2nd ed., 1803, Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Another influential Schelling text, *On the World Soul* (1797), described his belief that God was in fact united with nature, and that through nature, divinity becomes visible.

Also important to later visual artists were Wackenroder and Tieck's *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar* (1796).<sup>95</sup>

Carus met Friedrich in 1816, and they were friends and colleagues until Friedrich's death in 1840; they both held doctoral degrees in medicine and philosophy, and Carus was even a practiced amateur painter who received the tutelage of his friend. In his obituary for Friedrich, Carus wrote: "In landscape it was Friedrich above all whose profound and vigorous mind, with total originality, laid hold of this tangle of banality, staleness, and tedium and—cutting through it with a mordant melancholy—raised from its midst a distinctively new and radiant poetic tendency."<sup>96</sup> Carus believed that Friedrich had invigorated landscape painting in Germany, and that they might (together) shock Dresden out of its "limpness" in art.<sup>97</sup> Throughout the *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting*, Carus reiterates his deeply held belief that nature, divinity, and transcendence were inextricably connected: "But any painter who attains true knowledge of the life of nature must find the purest and most sublime matter on every side. With what eloquence and power the history of the mountains speaks to us; how sublimely it makes of man a thing divine, in direct relation to God, by sweeping away all the vanities of his transient earthly existence; and how clearly that history speaks to

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<sup>95</sup> Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*, with a foreword by Edward Mornin (Hamburg: F. Perthes, 1799; reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1975). In this text, Wackenroder and Tieck introduce a narrator who is a monk, a theme that would become prevalent within romanticism and the Sublime (see James Forrester's painting *Landscape with Monks by Lake Nemi* (see fig. i:2), as well as several paintings by Friedrich and O'Connor). For many artists, the monk would symbolize man's retreat from society for a life of contemplation within nature. In addition, the monk symbolized someone who is outside of the conventional world, who rejects contemporary societal mores and chooses instead to be alone in an attempt to engage divinity within nature.

<sup>96</sup> Carl Gustav Carus, "The Landscape Painter Friedrich: Including Fragments of His Unpublished Papers," *Kunst-Blatt* 86 (October 27, 1840): 357–58.

<sup>97</sup> Carus, *Nine Letters*, 33: "Friedrich, with his somewhat stiff and diffuse but highly poetic manner, was the first artist—in painting as a whole, but more especially in landscape painting—who ever assailed and shook up the philistines of Dresden."

us in certain stratified formations and mountain outlines: so clearly as to suggest even to the uninitiated that such a history exists!”<sup>98</sup> His insistence on the fusion of art, nature, and the spirit mirrored Friedrich’s own ideology, as did Wackenroder and Tieck’s *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*, which further evokes the Germanic fascination with spirituality, nature, and creativity and earned renown far beyond Germany.<sup>99</sup>

Friedrich’s paintings and Carus’s texts examine man’s relationship to nature in a fashion that is both angst-ridden and alluring. Through their work, they sought to convey their philosophical beliefs regarding the splendor, spirituality, and grandeur of nature’s magnitude. Carus writes, “What does landscape painting depict, if not the earthly nature that surrounds us? And what is more sublime than to apprehend the mysterious life of that nature?” Elsewhere, he remarks: “Surely, insofar as you have evolved the requisite knowledge and imagination—The organs with which to interpret the colored marks of the brush, though this has only a limited connection with ‘truth to nature’—surely you find yourself, as you look, progressively transported into the landscape in question.”<sup>100</sup> Carus’s mention of being “transported” evokes Longinus’s recognition of the Sublime’s ability to transport (*ekstasis*) its audience.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>99</sup> See the foreword by Edward Mornin in Wackenroder and Tieck, *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*, vii; see also 62, 70–73. In an essay entitled “Of Two Wonderful Languages and Their Mysterious Power,” the monk praises art in particular, which “reveals to us the treasures of the human breast, turns our gaze inward, and shows the Invisible, I mean all that is noble, sublime, and divine in human form.” In a second essay titled “How and In What Manner We Ought Properly to Contemplate the Works of the World’s Great Artists and Employ Them for the Benefit of Our Souls,” the monk adds: “The appreciation of sublime artworks is akin to prayer . . . Artworks are by their very nature as little part of the common flow of life . . . They transcend what is ordinary and commonplace, and we must raise ourselves up to their level in the fullness of our hearts for them to become in our eyes, all too often dimmed by the fog of our worldliness, what they truly and sublimely are.”

<sup>100</sup> Carus, *Nine Letters*, 90–91.

<sup>101</sup> Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 15: “He therefore who has a competent Share of natural and acquired Taste, may easily discover the Value of any Performance from a bare Recital of it. If he finds, that it transports not his Soul, nor exalts his Thoughts . . . he may conclude, that whatever pierces no deeper than the Ears, can never be the true Sublime.”

With this philosophical and theological context in place, we might now briefly consider three paintings by Friedrich that embody the theoretical and formal characteristics of German Romanticism that would in turn resonate with O'Connor as seen in his paintings from the late 1820's onward. Already in 1810 the sweeping view of Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* (fig. 3:3) is permeated with mysticism. With a sense of theatricality Friedrich presents a vast horizontal expanse that engulfs his wraithlike and diminutive solitary monk. This provocative isolation of the figure without any classical framing conventions such as the *repoussoir* or *coulisse* is stunning, as is the extremely low horizon line, which measures just one-fifth of the height of the canvas. The meager dunes in the foreground are devoid of any vegetation or animal life, highlighting the painting's desolation. The formidable weight of the immense sky overshadows, both physically and psychologically, the presence of the friar.

Friedrich's preference for dwarfing his human figures while bathing them in an atmospheric glow suggests a symbiotic relationship between divinity, man, and nature. Two additional paintings by Friedrich that bring to mind later works by O'Connor are *Two Men by the Sea at Moonrise* (1817; fig. 4:13) and *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819; fig. 4:14). The latter work also exemplifies the artist's penchant for animating natural forms within his landscapes. His silhouetted figures, placed to the left, are framed by the sinuous tendrils of the gnarled trees, rocks, and precipitously tilted middle ground. With these virtuosic visual polemics, Friedrich delivered a resounding blow to the prevailing landscape conventions and furthered his reputation as an artist of the Sublime.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See Helmut Börsh-Supan, *Caspar David Friedrich* (New York: George Braziller, 1974).

O'Connor would admire the conceit. In September 1832, he would be presented with a second opportunity to travel to Germany, joining the many tourists flocking to the Rhine in search of the spectacular panoramic vistas described in numerous travel guides and engraved in prints. Following in the path of Longinus (who referred to the Rhine in his own writings), Romanticism would allow artists like O'Connor to experience the Sublime in a whole new way. In the words of scholar James Twitchell, O'Connor would "span the abyss between inner and outer, and outer and 'the Beyond.'"<sup>103</sup>

The formal innovations that we are ascribing to Friedrich, such as his experiments with light, his focus on the natural world, and his propensity for subsuming his figures within wide-angled yet enigmatic perspectives, are already apparent in O'Connor's *Rhine Landscape* (1833; fig. 4:15). This painting depicts the medieval ruins of Castle Arras, which was built by the Bishop of Trier in 938 on the Moselle, south of Bullay.<sup>104</sup> O'Connor's penchant for incorporating ruins within his landscapes dates back to his early days as a painter, but after his Rhineland travel, they become considerably more compelling and evocative.<sup>105</sup>

Within the composition, O'Connor nods toward classical conventions by allowing the viewer's eye to be pulled into the middleground through his subtle, *coulisse*-like path. A large hill dwarfs the slight form of a solitary man. Positioned just within the boundary of the foreground, he seems compressed, isolated, and bewildered,

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<sup>103</sup> Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons*, 11.

<sup>104</sup> See Eileen Black, *Irish Oil Paintings, 1572–c. 1830* (Belfast: Ulster Museum, 1991), 53, exh. cat.

<sup>105</sup> Early O'Connor paintings with ruins include, for example, *View of Lough Derg with Portumna Castle in the Background* (1818), *A Landscape with a View of Drimnagh Castle* (1821), and *Landscape with Mill* (1821). This painting is much like Turner's *Dolbadarn Castle*, c. 1798–1800, which indicates the influence of English Romanticism in general and the vital importance of Turner's work as a precedent for O'Connor's development

as if he were literally out of place within the composition, and perhaps the world. In a manner similar to *The Eagle's Rock, Killarney* (fig. 4:5), an uncanny sense of unease envelops all—the landscape is steeped in stillness, but it is not tranquil. Although light does emanate from the background here, it offers little relief from the dense, hovering clouds that frame the distant, elevated ruins of the castle.

Although we cannot know the extent of O'Connor's exposure to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings on the Sublime, this particular painting by O'Connor seems to be a visual realization of Joseph Priestly's meditation of 1777: "Moreover, the pure sublime, by strongly engaging, tends to fix the attention, and to keep the mind in a kind of *awful stillness*; whereas it is of the nature of every species of the pathetic to throw it into an *agitation*. Hence the sensations we feel from *darkness* and *profound silence*, resembling the stillness the mind is thrown into when the attention is strongly fixed by a sublime object, partake of the nature of the sublime."<sup>106</sup> Certainly O'Connor infuses this work with a disturbing ambiance of stillness, stasis, and obscurity, qualities that would be enumerated by Burke (and other writers), among his tenets of the Sublime.<sup>107</sup>

As historian Katharine Nahum observes, art like this arises from "attitudes that differed fundamentally from those of the eighteenth century in which reason and certainty were thought to underpin all human exchange and artistic expression. These changed attitudes and art are characterized by newly valued extremes of emotions, often experienced by a hero facing an uncertain world."<sup>108</sup> Indeed this perplexing figure amongst the landscape does face an uncertain world, and one wonders if O'Connor identified with the emotive and uncertain portrayal of this forlorn individual. From a

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<sup>106</sup> Joseph Priestly, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London: J. Johnson, 1777), 159.

<sup>107</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into . . . the Sublime*, 102–13.

<sup>108</sup> Nahum, "Observing Irish Romantic Landscape Painting," 65.

literal and metaphorical perspective, O'Connor has traveled very far indeed—*Rhine Landscape* evokes a disquieting and enigmatic ambiance that is very different from his earlier picturesque views.

**O'Connor's Travels Abroad: The Sublimity of *Rhineromantick***

The castled crag of Drachenfels  
 Frowns o'er the wide and winding Rhine  
 Whose breast of waters broadly swells  
 Between the banks which bear the vine,  
 And hills all rich with blossom'd trees,  
 And fields which promise corn and wine,  
 And scattered cities crowning these,  
 Whose far white walls along them shine,  
 Have strew'd a scene, which I should see  
 With double joy wert *thou* with me.

—George Gordon Byron, *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 4<sup>109</sup>

The roar of the Water, the fury of the foam . . . the mountains from which it rises, the various countries thro' which it flows, & the distant Seas in which its waters are lost . . . these objects will be found to have exalted the mind to the highest state of sublimity . . . the absolute crown of the impression is infinity, which is a modification of unity.

William Wordsworth, *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 1790.<sup>110</sup>

For many travelers in the nineteenth century, a voyage on the Rhine and its surrounding countryside was a necessary right of passage, and an invitation to publish as well. Things had changed since the eighteenth century's Grand Tour, which often included extensive sojourns in Italy, where visitors would immerse themselves in

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<sup>109</sup> George Gordon Byron, *Child Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt* (London: John Murray, 1812; reprint, London: John Murray, 1869), canto 4, 150.

<sup>110</sup> William Wordsworth, *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 2:356–57.

antique classical culture while enjoying the bucolic vistas of the Roman *campagna*.<sup>111</sup>

The Grand Tour also included stopovers in Rome and Florence, and perhaps, like the experience of explorer John Dennis, even an attempt to cross the Alps.<sup>112</sup> Post-Waterloo, however, many British travelers wanted to explore the continental regions that had been off limits to them during the long years of war between France and England. Tourists flocked to Germany in pursuit of the enduring history, romance, and excitement that the *Rhineromantik* promised. Many adventurers wanted to explore new places in pursuit of Sublime landscape views, and the popular travel literature ensured that they would be primed for the spectacle.<sup>113</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, for example, not only offers a vivid account of her experiences in the Rhine region but also mentions her reliance on travel literature as she prepared for her trip: “I have found it a pleasant thing while travelling to have in the carriage the works of those who have passed through the same country. Sometimes they inform, sometimes they excite curiosity. If alone, they serve as society; if with others, they suggest matter for conversation.”<sup>114</sup> Traveler’s itineraries would include romantic

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<sup>111</sup> See Jeremy Black, *The British and the Grand Tour* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1985).

<sup>112</sup> See Patrick Anderson, *Over the Alps: Reflections on Travel and Travel Writing with Special Reference to the Grand Tours of Boswell, Beckford and Byron* (London: Hart-Davis, 1969); Dennis, *Miscellanies*, 132–40; Lynne Withey, *Grand Tours and Cook’s Tours: A History of Leisure Travel, 1750–1915* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1997).

<sup>113</sup> Captain Robert Batty, *Scenery of the Rhine, Belgium and Holland, from Drawings by Captn. Batty* (London: Robert Jennings, 1826); William Edward Frye, *After Waterloo: Reminiscences of European Travel, 1815–1819*, with a preface by Salomon Reinach (London: W. Heinemann, 1908); Joel Tyler Headley, *The Alps and the Rhine: A Series of Sketches* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846). See also M. A. Titmarsh [William Makepeace Thackeray], *The Kickleburys on the Rhine* (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1851), for a satirical account of the prevalence of contemporary Rhineland travel among the English.

<sup>114</sup> Mrs. Shelley [Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley], *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842, and 1843* (London: Edward Moxon, 1844), 1:vii.

towns and villages that retained the charm and fascination of their ancient, medieval, and more recent histories.<sup>115</sup>

While some travelers sought simply diversion, others, including artists like O'Connor, would find themselves immersed in the pervasive and mystical atmosphere of the Sublime, and the German Romantic movement that embraced it. O'Connor certainly jumped at the chance to return to the continent and was this time accompanied by his wife. They spent the first eight months in Paris, where O'Connor apparently applied himself steadily to his craft and amassed a good collection of well-conceived and finely executed studies and finished oils. He shipped the completed canvases back to London for sale and ultimately received "good prices" for work that George Mulvaney describes as being of the highest quality. One such painting (present whereabouts unknown), titled *The Bois de Boulogne*, is described as follows: "For truth of colour, beauty of general form, or effect, it could not be surpassed; it has all the freshness of nature, which more elaborate works seldom retain. In the sketches of a clever man we are sure to have his feelings; in his finished works, his attainments. Hence the sketches of the genuine painter are ever valued."<sup>116</sup>

On May 3, 1833, however, O'Connor embarked on a career-changing journey from Paris to Rhenish Prussia. It is noteworthy that he and his wife had been headed for Italy when a chance encounter changed their minds. Certainly the influence of Salvator

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<sup>115</sup> See for example, George Palmer Putnam, *The Tourist in Europe: or, A Concise Summary of the Various Routes, Objects of Interest, &c., in Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Belgium, and Holland; with Hints on Time, Expenses, Hotels, Conveyances, Passports, Coins, &c.* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1838), 51. Nineteenth-century travelers in pursuit of the Rhine experience were following in the footsteps of well-known predecessors: Julius Caesar (100 B.C.–44 B.C.), who first invaded the Rhineland in 57 B.C., and the later Roman general Nero Claudius Drusus (37–11 B.C.), who established a stronghold on the Rhine with his castle at Ehrenbreitstein, which figures prominently in the literature.

<sup>116</sup> Mulvaney, "Memoirs of Native Artists: James O'Connor," 261.

Rosa and other Old Masters was already apparent in his work, and we might well wonder what would have happened if he had gone to Italy. Fate intervened in favor of the German Romantics, however.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was common for letters of introduction to ease one's passage throughout the continent. (Already in 1823 the writer Alois Schreiber, in his *Traveller's Guide down the Rhine*, admonished his readers to arrange for not only appropriate passports and necessary documentation but also letters of introduction, for "obtaining a view of curious objects" and meeting the right sorts of people during their travels.<sup>117</sup> Despite his recent successes in Paris, however, O'Connor had no letters to pave his way to Rome and might well have been wavering.

The night before they were scheduled to leave France for Italy, he and his wife dined in a restaurant, at which time they were discussing their travel plans and O'Connor's intent to sketch landscapes in Rome. As they were about to leave, a stranger from a nearby table approached them, introduced himself as one "Mr. Elliot," and entered into a conversation with them about their itinerary. Mr. Elliot evinced interest in seeing O'Connor's work and suggested that he might be able to help O'Connor with some professional advice. He then arranged to meet the O'Connors the next morning at breakfast to view O'Connor's paintings. He did so, admiring the paintings and suggesting further that O'Connor could well find support and success in Rhenish Prussia through his letter of introduction to an influential friend, Monsieur Boch Bushman. With that, O'Connor changed his plans, probably hoping that these

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<sup>117</sup> Alois Schreiber, *The Traveller's Guide down the Rhine, Exhibiting the Course of That River from Schaffhausen to Holland, and Describing the Moselle from Coblenz to Trevers; with an Account of the Cities, Towns, Villages, Prospects, &c., in Their Vicinity, and of the Places Where There Are Mineral Springs, Together with Description of the Various Routes, Modes of Conveyance, Inns, Coins, &c.* (Heidelberg: J. Engelmann, 1816; reprint, London: Samuel Leigh, 1823), 1.

personal and professional references would lead to sales, which were all too rare on the continent so far.<sup>118</sup>

As it turned out, Mr. Elliot was operating under an alias; his true name was “Chevalier M\_\_\_\_\_.” Apparently he was a con man who was wanted for arrest by the very gentleman, Bushman, to whom he had written the letters of introduction for the O’Connors. While “Mr. Elliot” may indeed have admired O’Connor’s paintings, the letter of introduction was intended as a practical joke on the burgomaster, whose efforts to arrest the swindler had been unsuccessful. Regardless, when the O’Connors arrived at Bushman’s home, he offered the O’Connors his hospitality; they stayed with him for an extended period of time, whereupon he furnished them with authentic letters of introduction for the remainder of their trip.<sup>119</sup>

Arriving in Rhenish Prussia, O’Connor spent a few days enjoying the sketching opportunities of the glorious surrounding views (See fig; 4:16 and fig; 4:17).<sup>120</sup> The kinds of drawings that O’Connor produced there include the following two examples from the collection of the British Museum: *Rudesheim: View Looking Up the Rhine from the Bank near Bingen* (1833; fig. 4:18) and *Bingen: View on the Rhine Looking Up the River to Bingen* (1833; fig. 4:19). Like Turner, O’Connor’s sketching style involved capturing the essence of a landscape with relatively few extraneous details, producing drawings like those Turner made from comparable Rhineland sites.<sup>121</sup> The first conveys

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<sup>118</sup> Mulvaney, “Memoirs of Native Artists: James O’Connor,” 254–62.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 262–63.

<sup>120</sup> *Von Cöln bis Mainz: [panorama of the Rhine with Illustrations at the Sides]*, no imprint.

<sup>121</sup> Powell, *Turner in Germany* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1995), 187. Turner’s version of virtually the same spot on the Rhine provides a more colorful, fully detailed, and comprehensive image in watercolor, sketch, and gouache that better captures the magical quality that attracted both artists. *The Klemenskapelle with Burg Rheinstein and Burg Reichenstein* (1841) was painted eight years after O’Connor’s visit to the Rhine. After comparing O’Connor’s Rhineland drawings and paintings to earlier

the magnetism and scale of the Rhine, while the second represents a more detailed image: O'Connor delineates the town of Bingen in the background and the castellated ruins of Klopp and Mansthurm, along with a surprising amount of detail in the foliage and shrubbery. It is unfortunate that there are not more paintings from this period that relate to his sketches. Though we do not have notes from O'Connor on his travels abroad, his contemporaries could be quite verbose about their experiences. Just a few years after O'Connor's visit, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley reminisced about her Rhine adventures and the same Romantic views that the O'Connors would likely have encountered:

Two years ago I renewed my acquaintance with the Rhine, and emerging on it from the Moselle, it gained in dignity . . . then the diorama, as it were, of tower-crowned crag and vine-clad hills—of ruined castle, fallen abbey, and time-honoured battlements, sufficed to enchain [*sic*] the attention and satisfy the imagination; and now—was I really *blasée*, and did my fancy no longer warm as I looked around? No; but I wanted more: I had enough of the Rhine, as a *picture*, all that the steam-voyager sees;—I desired to penetrate the ravines, to scale the heights, to linger among the ruins, to hear still more of its legends and visit every romantic spot.<sup>122</sup>

Shelley's ruminations suggest the allure of experiencing the Rhineland firsthand, with all of the senses.

Other travelers expressed a similar regard for the river and echo Mrs. Shelley's impression of the grandeur, excitement, and thrill of travel upon it. Much like the panoramas and dioramas that were so popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, tourists on the Rhine would come across an endless procession of Sublime vistas. With every turn of the river, their views could include mountains capped with

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drawings and paintings by Turner, the significance of Turner's influence on the younger artist becomes apparent.

<sup>122</sup> Shelley, *Rambles in Germany*, 1:167.

historic medieval ruins or the enduring beauty of ancient towns. Rhineland travelers relished the corporeal, psychological, and emotional experience of the Sublime; for the encounter to be successful mere viewing was not sufficient.<sup>123</sup> They sought to enter the Sublime experience and to be changed by the journey, and upon their return, they appreciated all the more paintings of the scenes they had encountered.

### **London and Ireland: Post-1833**

After his return to London from Germany on November 1, 1833, O'Connor resumed his exhibition schedule at the Royal Academy and the British Institution. In 1834, O'Connor exhibited *A View in the Valley of Tieferbach on the Moselle* at the British Institution and three paintings at the Society of British Artists, including *Landscape-Moonlight* (1834), *Saarbourg on the Saar, Rhenish Prussia* (1834), and *The Mountain Pass* (1834), in addition to *A Scene on the Rhine* (1834) and two river views from either the Saar or the Moselle.<sup>124</sup>

Having been exposed to the magnificent Sublimity of the Rhineland, O'Connor began to infuse his Irish vistas with a more inward, emotional sensibility. The melancholy, darkness, and sense of the uncanny that had begun to appear in his paintings just prior to his second continental tour become more prominent, and the goal of transcendence becomes more important.

In 1835, for example, O'Connor finished the spectacular painting entitled *The Poachers* (1835; fig; 4:20), which was ultimately purchased from the collection of Lord

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<sup>123</sup> Wordsworth, *The Sublime and the Beautiful*, 357.

<sup>124</sup> Hutchinson, *James Arthur O'Connor*, 193.

Powerscourt in 1879 for the National Gallery of Ireland. Abandoning topographical mimesis altogether, O'Connor positions three figures in the center foreground: two face the landscape beyond them, while one confronts the viewer directly. In a nod to classical conventions, the brushy undergrowth of the foreground reveals a *coulisse*-like path that leads the eye into the distance, flanked by the balanced *repoussoir* elements of the grove of trees on the left and the shadowy cover of the rambling bushes on the right.

The middle section of the painting is rendered with a loose, broad brush, which increases the sense of depth. Mirroring the approach that Friedrich utilizes in several of his paintings, O'Connor devotes much of the canvas to the sky, stars, and clouds above the men, and, from a compositional perspective this painting shares much with Friedrich's *Two Men by the Sea at Moonrise* (fig. 4:13).<sup>125</sup> His handling of color and tone is delicate and subtle, particularly in the luminescent lighting—he enchants the viewer by conjuring a moonlit view through a medley of greens, blues, and silvery grays. This dreamy quality is enhanced by the subtle shadows that embrace the silhouettes of the men within this magical Irish glen.

At once tranquil and luminescent, this seminal work finally claims the Sublime for O'Connor—it is not Danby's Sublime, with its terror, cataclysm, and doom, but rather a meditative, moody, and evocative romantic version. In comparison to *Rhine Landscape* (fig. 4:15), O'Connor presents a view that is, on the surface, at least, serene. The enigmatic, even disturbing characteristics of the earlier painting have given way to what at first seems to be a sense of peace. Certainly moonlit scenes had long been popular within Romanticism. In 1724, essayist Henry Needler pointed to the romance of moonlight in vistas of this sort: "The ample arch of heaven, which hangs over our

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<sup>125</sup> See, for example, Friedrich's *Men Contemplating the Moon* (c. 1807; fig. 4:12).

Heads, is tinctur'd with a sprightly Azure. In a clear Night it appears like a vast Roof of Sapphire, studded with innumerable glowing Spangles, or illumin'd, with ten thousand shining Lamps . . . How beauteous as well as useful is that nightly Substitute of the sun, the Moon, who cheers us in his Absence with her borrow'd beams?"<sup>126</sup>

The bewitching beauty of the landscape, however, both reveals and conceals the hunters' clandestine endeavors. The tension behind the ostensibly tranquil narrative is sharpened by O'Connor's straightforward title and the figures' boots, loose clothing, poachers' hats, sacks, and weapons. This is no nocturnal stroll. Scholar Vera Kreilkamp in fact points to this painting as one of the rare occasions in nineteenth-century Irish art when the subtext of nationalism becomes more overt (normally the prerogative of writers, not artists): "A provocatively subversive midnight landscape . . . [in which O'Connor] explicitly engage[s] with political matter."<sup>127</sup> She finds the subject unusual for O'Connor (and other Irish artists in general), given the challenges behind sustaining patronage in England or Ireland: "Painting for elite audiences in a developing market economy, early nineteenth-century Irish artists generally avoided those particularized exposures of Empire's depredations that figure so prominently in the national tale."<sup>128</sup>

### **The Wanderer**

For later artists of the Romantic period, another motif emerged, which had a more particularized, evocative, and emotive representation that signifies and encourages a deeper theoretical interpretation; the wanderer. In the late-eighteenth and early-

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<sup>126</sup> Henry Needler, "The Beauty of the Universe," in *The Works of Mr. Henry Needler: Consisting of Original Poems, Translations, Essays, and Letters*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Watts, 1735), 65–66.

<sup>127</sup> Vera Kreilkamp, "Fiction and Empire: The Irish Novel," in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kevin Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 154–81.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–68.

nineteenth centuries, visual and literary German Romantic artists such as Friedrich and Goethe, as well as English poet Byron explored this theme within their works. This appropriation (which was rife with contemporaneous connotations regarding identity, politics, and cultural shifts), has been considered as a distinct thematic development, separate from the more prosaic representation of the traveler. Consideration of the difference between these representations will be discussed further in this chapter, with regard to O'Connor's work and German Romanticism.

Previously I have considered how O'Connor's straddling of national identities may have contributed to his identification with the theme of the wanderer, as it had for many of his Romantic colleagues. Perhaps in his maturity, however, he felt more confident about presenting a painting that had a subtext beyond its visual, Romantic allure. As to his specific political leanings, we might presume that due to his repeated trips home, his sympathies would have remained with the very peasants depicted here. It is not known if the title of the painting came about after his death, however. The exhibition records of the Royal Academy and the British Institution do not contain this particular title; although there are several paintings titled *Landscape—Moonlight. The Poachers* represents a major step toward a more developed and sophisticated exploration of the Romantic Sublime in the Irish landscape. Much like the inscrutable portrayal by Friedrich in *Monk by the Sea* (fig. 3:3), O'Connor resists an explicit narrative here, instead infusing the painting with mystery and obscurity.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into . . . the Sublime*, 103–7.

Lastly we return to the Romantic motif of the solitary monk in the landscape as a symbol of the quest for transcendence and communion with divinity in nature.<sup>130</sup> Regarding artists who appropriated the theme of the monk in nature, one can imagine that the prevailing international zeitgeist was a catalyst for the allure of this topic. Countries were still reeling from the devastation and disruption of the Napoleonic wars, the tenets of the Enlightenment gave way to the growth of the Romantic movement, and the emphasis on individuals and their relationship to nature was a compelling background against which we can consider individual artists' development. Within the parameters of this context, it is of interest that many metropolitan artists sought painterly expression as a result of their regular excursions into rural, undeveloped nature. There, visual and literary artists could experience the advantages of a refuge from the urban cultural circles. Separate from the discord of the city, within nature one had the opportunity to go inward. As a result, they could explore and artistically respond to the landscape in an emotional, individual, and visceral manner.

O'Connor appropriated this motif in a painting entitled *Monk in a Landscape* (c. 1834; fig. 4:21), which depicts a lone friar in a dark, isolated, and forested landscape. The theme of the monk in the landscape was prevalent within Romanticism, although there are earlier examples such as Salvator Rosa's *Landscape with Hermit* (1662; fig. 4:22), which arose from a journey that artist had taken to the rural countryside of Loretto. Rosa had admired the untamed scenery of the Apennines, the "stupendous elevations of the Col-fiorito," and the evocative, secluded hermitages that he had

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<sup>130</sup> The three important eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works I have already discussed that are engaged with this theme are Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*, Ludwig Tieck and Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's text *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*, and Richard Wilson's painting entitled *Solitude* (1762), although there are numerous other examples.

encountered there: “God! How often have I sighed to possess—how often since called to mind, those solitary hermitages which I passed on the road—how often wished that fortune had reserved for me such a destiny!”<sup>131</sup> Rosa’s simple monk is utterly eclipsed by the mystical, oppressive, vertiginous rocks and intense, verdant greenery—he might almost be another gnarled tree. One with the natural world, then, this man has ostensibly found peace.

Many writers on the Sublime were intrigued by the compulsion of individuals to seek refuge, meditation, and solace in the landscape, particularly in the search for divinity. With his own *Monk in a Landscape*, O’Connor delineates just a hint of the foreground in the lower right corner. Our eyes move forward from here to the chasm, alongside which the figure of the bearded, robed monk stands isolated, staff in hand, within one of the few light-filled patches of ground. Could the light shining amidst the forest symbolically represent the literal enlightenment of the solitary monk within nature?

For many Romantic artists, light was symbolic of a deeper meaning beyond the obvious connection to physical illumination. Instead, the literal power of light was often connected to spiritual enlightenment; light as a means of revealing the presence of divinity.<sup>132</sup> Ludwig Tieck’s philosophical writings on the symbiotic relationship between nature and God evolved through several stages. At first he rejoices in paying homage to the emblematic meaning of light and its connection to the identification of God in nature. Over time he becomes convinced that man can access nature through the spiritual, but eventually he asserts that it is through an immersion into religion that man

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<sup>131</sup> Letter quoted in Lady Morgan’s *Salvatore Rosa*, 2:148.

<sup>132</sup> Danton, *The Nature Sense*, 40–42.

can fully understand the meaning of divinity in its personification of nature: “Nature may be conceived of as more than merely suggesting God. It may in a thousand forms reveal the Deity to man and yet not be identical with that Deity.”<sup>133</sup> Much in the same manner that Friedrich sought to communicate and illustrate the human quest for divinity in nature without reliance on typical Christian iconography, here we grasp Tieck’s philosophy, and ultimately O’Connor’s intention to imbue his painting with the enigmatic suggestion of a divine presence within the solitude found in nature.

In O’Connor’s *Monk in a Landscape* (fig. 4:21), the friar is surrounded by woods that bear no sign of man’s imprint, he is utterly alone. O’Connor permeates this inscrutable landscape with an almost claustrophobic aura of silence, vastness, and privation, yet the diminutive hermit emanates peace, quiet dignity, inner strength, and meditative repose. Here is human triumph, however hardwon. With the inclusion of the monastic garb, the lengthy beard, and primitive yet supportive staff, O’Connor reinforces the sense that the monk has turned away from society to seek physical, mental, and spiritual sustenance from nature. While this view is suffused with shadows and silence, this portrayal of a lone figure in nature does not evoke despair, as does Danby’s *The Upas, or Poison Tree in the Island of Java* (fig. 3:7), where the abandoned prisoner was bereft, disconsolate, and doomed.

O’Connor’s exploration of solitude in nature is very different—a vision of the Sublime that, like Friedrich’s, represents a glimpse into the internal psyche of the artist, in a provocative manner enhanced by the ambiance of quietude. This monk faces the viewer, and his availability to us forestalls any dread or discomfort at his seclusion.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 36–38.

Like the Irish artists who are the subjects of this study, this monk perhaps represents an individual who has chosen to leave a life of the familiar for one much less so. And, possibly, this painting indicates O'Connor's recognition that for him, solace and peace were to be found within, not determined or influenced by the vagaries of financial and critical success that he was compelled to seek in the metropolis for the purposes of economic survival.

It is of interest to consider the notion that what O'Connor found in his search for painterly enlightenment would, to a certain degree, set him at odds with the public he had gone to England to court. Painting landscape views that were imbued with solitude, silence, and intimacy, O'Connor's perspective appears to disavow the spectacle to be found within London's exhibition rooms. It is evident that he did not share Danby's attraction to the apocalyptic Sublime, which was the rage in the Royal Academy and the British Institution. As previously discussed, for viewers who craved spectacle, it was not necessary to literally enter the actual physical landscape to experience the Sublime. They chose instead the more obvious and vicarious thrills of the increasingly large, dramatic, and often idealized panoramic visions of Martin and Danby.

O'Connor's oeuvre does not reflect a desire to be fashionable, to be perceived as a dashing exemplar of the new. That being said however, one imagines he would have been grateful to see his works positioned "on the line," and to be the recipient of such public and commercial success. Perhaps he suffered from eschewing the tastes of contemporary art lovers' and their demands to be bedazzled by the new: "That incessant craving after fresh excitement which is so manifestly one of the symptoms of the public mind, and the feverish restlessness it betrays, are by no means propitious to intellectual

excellence, and, should they continue to prevail, can be less than fatal in their consequences.”<sup>134</sup> He followed his own course, and persevered in his portrayals of the Romantic sublime that he found inspiration for in his travels abroad, as well as in his homeland.

Ultimately, the theme of exile—whatever its guise, resonated with many nineteenth-century artists. Being away from their homeland was the cause of and the answer to many of their struggles for success. Through their experience, they were individually able to project their own challenges, whether for artistic expression, creativity, and self-definition, or simply for patronage. Yet for an artist to leave home was no guarantee of commercial triumph: the success O’Connor found in his career would ultimately be fleeting.

Sadly, O’Connor’s health began to decline dramatically in 1833, while his financial problems began to escalate.<sup>135</sup> Nevertheless, through his conscious immersion in the Romantic Sublime, he had managed to produce a corpus of provocative paintings that echoed the volatility of the time in which he lived. His choice to emigrate from Ireland, his two continental trips, and his consistent travel back and forth between England and Ireland ensured that, for this Irish artist in “exile,” at least, there was no repose.

As a result of his immersion in the metropolis of London’s innovative art circles, O’Connor’s work underwent a dramatic developmental trajectory. His appropriation and study of the Old Masters, his growing awareness of the benefits of travel in the search for modern artistic inspiration, his experience as an émigré in a country that had

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<sup>134</sup> Anonymous, “Our Royal Academical Lounge,” *Fraser’s Magazine* (Feb.–July 1832): 711.

<sup>135</sup> Mulvaney, “Memoirs of Native Artists: James O’Connor,” 259.

an enduring and contentious relationship with Ireland: all these factors would exert formidable influence on O'Connor as a man and an artist. Turning away from his early penchant for topographical and picturesque house portraits, over time, as a result of his move to London, he adopted exciting new theoretical and formal approaches to his painting. We can speculate that after his continental trips the resounding influence of German Romanticism resonated with him to the degree that he too began to explore the connection between nature, divinity, and the Sublimity of landscape. His reputation remains somewhat obscure, yet it is evident that this initially provincial Irish artist is deserving of being considered within a wider and deeper modern international context.

Mulvaney concludes: "His patriotism, like his taste, was pure and undefiled; single-minded and sincere, he knew no guile. The valleys, the glens, the mountains, the songs, the sufferings, and the sorrows of Ireland, were dear to him. In deep feeling, and in quiet retirement, he loved her; and in dismay and neglect, but not disgust, he sailed from her shores."<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 260.

## Chapter 5

### George Petrie's Sublime Reinscription of the Irish Landscape: Putting History on the Canvas

Ireland is to a traveler, according to his mental peculiarities, either one of the most or least interesting countries in the world. The mere pleasure tourist, who, uninformed of its history and unenlightened by philosophy, seeks a passing enjoyment from the varied beauties which nature has scattered over it with a bounteous hand, will meet with less to please and entertain than to disgust and disappoint. He will find the country almost denuded of wood, disfigured with black and endless bogs, and dreary and extensive moors; he will behold the habitations of the people miserable and comfortless, and the people themselves the most wretched in the world . . . not so the traveler who has read its unhappy history, and who takes an equal interest in whatever relates to nature and to man . . . he will find nature magnificent and often beautiful in her solitudes, and where man has least penetrated, sublime in the very dreariness which surrounds her. Innumerable remains of man in past times, in which she is for the greater part clothed, will everywhere present themselves . . . illustrating in their simplicity and variety the customs of different and remote periods of society. Everything, in short, that he meets will tell him eloquently of the changes that have passed over them, and he will be led irresistibly to contrast the good, God has dispensed, with the bad done by man.

—From the journals of George Petrie<sup>1</sup>

My Dear Sir,—I beg to acquaint you that I am now ready to place in the hands of the Committee of the Royal Irish Art Union my picture of Clonmacnoise . . . I trust also that it will be apparent that my aim was something beyond that of the ordinary class of portrait landscape, and, therefore, more difficult of attainment. It was my wish to produce an Irish picture somewhat historical in its object, and poetical in its sentiment—a landscape composed of several of the monuments characteristic of the past history of our country, and which will soon cease to exist, and to connect with them the expression of human feelings equally belonging to our history, and which are destined to a similar extinction.

In short, I desired to produce a picture which might have an interest and value, not merely pictorial, beyond the present time, and thus connect my name with that of the Art Union Association, and with the history of art in Ireland. And, with this

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<sup>1</sup> George Petrie, quoted in William Stokes, *The Life and Labours in Art and Archaeology of George Petrie, LL.D., M.R.I.A.* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1868), 5–6.

feeling, I did my best to adhere to local as well as general truth at whatever cost to the pictorial attraction of the work, and to adopt such a treatment of effect as might conduce to the sentiment of the picture without unfitting it for the purpose of a popular print, if it should ever be deemed worthy to be engraved.

—From the journals of George Petrie<sup>2</sup>

As has been seen, George Petrie traveled to London from Ireland with Danby and O'Connor in 1813. After a few weeks, however, Petrie returned to Ireland, where he remained for the rest of his life. That decision had profound implications for his work as an artist. While Danby and O'Connor struggled for (and to varying degrees, found) acceptance in England via their embrace of variations upon the Sublime, Petrie applied that same stylistic traits to the particular vistas of his home country. In his paintings he presented romantic Irish landscapes that resonate with, but ultimately transcend, the topographical style in which they are rooted. Over time, Petrie comes to infuse his work with both historical and cultural content, and his Sublime paintings pay homage to, and in some important ways represent and reinforce, the symbiosis of the Irish people with their land.

My previous discussion of how London's and Dublin's art markets, institutions, and educational opportunities—in addition to their critics, patrons, and artists—became, over time, more sophisticated, modern, and international provides a context for how Petrie's experience would differ from his friends' experiences. Each man formed an individual stylistic and theoretical relationship to the Sublime, as their paintings reveal, and shifts in landscape aesthetics occurred that drew the public to the Sublime as well.

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<sup>2</sup> George Petrie, quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 15.

People wanted to see it, in real life and in paintings, and to read about it as well. And in Ireland, at least, George Petrie came to embody it, especially in its historical incarnation.

Though Petrie did not rely directly on international travel for inspiration, he joined Danby and O'Connor in benefiting from the metropolitan, international developments in art that I discussed in chapter 2. Sir Joshua Reynolds had been particularly concerned with establishing a true English school of painting, and his advocacy of historical subjects that included landscapes influenced many of the artists who followed in his wake. Petrie too grounded his landscapes within a historical context. He shared Reynolds's (and Alderman Boydell's) goal of raising public awareness about the importance of local history and culture. For them, English history was best represented by the works of Shakespeare, whereas Petrie's desire was to commemorate significant physical places in Ireland. This was a vital and noble effort, given the ongoing competition of English versions of Ireland's past that mitigated, ignored, or even denounced this heritage.<sup>3</sup> Petrie's enduring artistic legacy continues to inform our appreciation of long centuries of Irish history, dating from prehistoric times through the nineteenth century. Of particular importance is his emphasis on representing and saving

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<sup>3</sup> See, especially, Patrick J. Duffy, "The Changing Rural Landscape, 1750–1850: Pictorial Evidence," in *Ireland: Art into History*, ed. Brian P. Kennedy and Raymond Gillespie (Dublin: Town House, 1994), 26–42, and Duffy, "Writing Ireland: Literature and Art in the Representation of Irish Place," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 66–67. Chapters 1 and 2 cover the provincial status of the Irish art market compared to the English art market in Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie's time. Even in Ireland, the English were favored. Duffy states, "Nineteenth-century artistic representations of Ireland and its landscapes reflected the country's subservient economic and political relationship with Britain, patronage of the arts being largely dictated by the preferences and priorities of Victorian England. Often shaped by the tenets of the Romantic Movement, which was strongly English in origin and development, nineteenth-century images of Ireland are important in discussing the emergence of Irish identity because of their influence on the iconography of twentieth-century nationalism. The Gaelic Revival, the 'West of Ireland' imagery of Synge and Yeats, and even the Catholic Motherland visualized by Éamon de Valera owe much to the ethos of Romantic mysticism and exoticism engendered by some nineteenth-century artists and writers. Their representations of Ireland as exotic, sublime and picturesque reflect the way in which artistic imagery elided the desperate prevailing poverty that would be apparent throughout the landscape."

what was uniquely Irish before the invasions beginning in the seventh century, England's colonization of Ireland in the sixteenth century, and the ongoing ramifications of the Act of Union in 1801.<sup>4</sup>

Another key metropolitan influence on Petrie's career was his involvement with print publishers in the wake of Boydell's revolutionary changes to the international market for prints. As part of Boydell's strategy, published prints depicting scenes from the works of Shakespeare (often tied to English history) were disseminated widely throughout England and on the continent. In addition, Boydell also published numerous editions of prints depicting English and continental sites that were popular tourist destinations. London publishers in particular had begun to move away from their previous focus on traditional English history narratives in order to capitalize on the surging tourism market. As a result, Petrie's myriad contributions to tourist guides were seen by a more diverse and international audience.

Like Danby and O'Connor, Petrie benefited from seeing late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century private collections of paintings that arrived in London and Dublin as a result of political and economic conditions in Italy and France. Thus he was exposed to Old Master paintings (and prints based on these paintings) that would have informed his efforts, particularly from 1816 onward, to transcend the provincial approaches to painting found in Dublin.

In addition, the theme of exile continues to resonate with this discussion. Petrie's attempt to settle in London in 1813 was curtailed by the wishes of his father. Along with

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<sup>4</sup> See Dáire Keough and Kevin Whelan, eds., *Acts of Union: The Causes, Contexts and Consequences of the Act of Union* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), especially the essays by Thomas Bartlett, "Britishness, Irishness and the Act of Union," 345–58, and Kevin Whelan, "The Other within Ireland: Britain and the Act of Union," 13–33.

Danby and O'Connor, he too perceived the value of inspiration and education in London, to say nothing of commissions from sophisticated English patrons. Yet he returned home despite all of this. Due to the discretion of his correspondence and journal entries, we cannot tell how Petrie truly felt about his father's forceful admonitions for him to return to Ireland after a mere few weeks in London.<sup>5</sup> But it seems safe to say that he derived some motivation from his trip, brief as it was, as he began to seek out obscure sites within the Irish landscape that had never been depicted or even brought to the general public's attention before. His ultimate ability to transcend provincial precedents while remaining within Ireland makes Petrie different from his Irish peers and his international colleagues, and it is this paradox that will occupy me here.

After his brief visit to England in 1813, Petrie spent the next few years traveling through Ireland and Wales on ambitious and rigorous sketching tours. His love for the landscape is documented by the numerous drawings and letters that survive from his early excursions in both places.<sup>6</sup> In comparison to Danby and O'Connor, Petrie's early work was quite sophisticated. In the watercolor painting *Glenmalure in the County Wicklow*, (1815; fig. 5:1), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1816, Petrie demonstrates an urbane flair for imbuing the Irish landscape with a heightened, almost intoxicating sense of drama.<sup>7</sup> While still grounded in an authentic rendering of the resplendent County Wicklow environs, the artistic vision presented in these works rises above an ordinary or strictly topographical approach in significant ways. There is nothing dry or detached

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<sup>5</sup> See Stokes, *Life and Labours*. Within Stokes's voluminous transcriptions and records of Petrie's journals, there are no personal notes indicating Petrie's thoughts about returning to Ireland.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6. Stokes writes that Petrie first visited Wicklow in 1808 and returned regularly throughout the next few years: "So ardent was his enthusiasm that he would often start out on foot, at nightfall, when the labour of the day was done, so that by walking all night he might reach before sunrise some chosen spot for study among the Wicklow Mountains."

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 10. *Glenmalure, County Wicklow* was purchased by Lord Whitworth, which is an indication of Petrie's early success despite having returned to Ireland rather than remaining in England.

about this rendition of Wicklow. Through Petrie's facility with subtle tones and color, he captures the vista at its most glorious time of day. In addition, his perspective brings attention to the dramatic juxtaposition of the heights of the crags and the golden valley below. The arresting composition directs our gaze into the center via the right-foreground placement of a massive cromlech that has fallen and is laying on its side, a megalithic tomb consisting of a large flat stone positioned upon (typically) upright standing stones.<sup>8</sup> This he inscribes with his signature, linking himself and his work with the Irish tradition of inscribing stones (and with the site itself).<sup>9</sup> Further, he draws attention to the cromlech as an early Irish monument and encourages the viewer to consider the presence of such markers of human presence within the landscape, or what sociologist Brian Graham calls the representation of an "emblematic landscape . . . [which included] iconic sites of continuity."<sup>10</sup>

Stones such as these are scattered throughout the Irish landscape and continue to mark centuries of the presence of Irish people and their affection for their land. From the perspective of outsiders, perhaps English travelers, stones such as these inscribed with Ogham markings would be puzzling and, one imagines, misunderstood within the longstanding contextual history of Ireland's cultural development. As an antiquarian, Petrie was a specialist in documenting the Irish stones that were inscribed with the Ogham script, the first form of writing in the Irish language, which dates from the fourth

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<sup>8</sup> See Peter Harbison, *Ancient Irish Monuments* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1997), 14–15, and Harbison, *Pre-Christian Ireland: From the First Settlers to the Early Celts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 52–53. Harbison suggests that the three-dimensional rock formations of cromlechs and dolmens were the visible markers of earlier cremation burial sites.

<sup>9</sup> James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 308–9. .

<sup>10</sup> Brian Graham, "The Imagining of Place: Representation and Identity in Contemporary Ireland," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 195.

to the eight centuries.<sup>11</sup> Ruminating on such a site within the landscape, Lady Georgiana Chatterton exclaims: “Then there are the strange superstitions of the inhabitants, which have probably survived longer than in other European lands. Every ruined tower, and the mighty and mysterious works which are attributed to the Druids, have each its wild tale of wonder and interest. Then there are those puzzling Ogham inscriptions, the meaning of which has hitherto baffled enquiry.”<sup>12</sup>

While his efforts may have gone unnoticed among overseas travelers, from both a metaphorical and a formal perspective, Petrie nonetheless aligns himself with other artists who focused on identity and nationalism. Like Caspar David Friedrich, for example, Petrie seeks to bring attention to the richness of his own historical heritage, and from the beginning of his career, his paintings reiterate the longstanding traditions of the Irish in relation to the landscape.

In this work, the megalithic cromlech acts as a modified classical *repoussoir*, framing and balancing the image in an innovative manner. This nod toward Irish antiquity distinguishes him from his Irish colleagues abroad. For example, while O’Connor frequently used massive boulders to frame the lower corners of his paintings as well, Petrie’s stones bear an additional weight, evoking the longtime presence of the Irish in Ireland.<sup>13</sup> This would have been a poignant gesture of homage to much earlier Irish “artists” at a particularly fraught moment in the process of Ireland’s reclamation of itself.

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<sup>11</sup> MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*, 308–309.

<sup>12</sup> Lady Georgiana Chatterton, *Rambles in the South of Ireland during the Year 1838* (London: Saunders and Ottley, 1839), 1:8.

<sup>13</sup> See Peter Harbison, Homan Potterman, and Jeanne Sheehy, *Irish Art and Architecture from Prehistory to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland: The Monuments and the People* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1991); Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the Early Christian Period* (London: Methuen, 1940); and Jacqueline O’Brian and Peter Harbison, *Ancient Ireland: From Prehistory to the Middle Ages* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996).

The manner in which Petrie crops the composition presents an especially innovative and sweeping view of County Wicklow. Like O'Connor, Petrie forgoes the classical convention of a substantial foreground to draw the viewer into the landscape. Instead, he positions us atop a hill next to the cromlech, above the valley below. Our privileged, elevated perspective allows us to look down at the encircling, precipitous crags. In a similar manner to O'Connor and his compositional arrangement of *A View of the Dargle, Lover's Leap* (fig. 4:1), Petrie provides relief from the enormous mountains through glimpses of a soft, glowing sky. Unlike the endless expanses of sky and low horizon lines favored by Friedrich, then, Petrie immerses us in the landscape, evoking the physical sensation of being surrounded within the landscape, rather than floating free of it. Petrie's figures here are barely perceptible, but they play their part nevertheless: the individual is overwhelmed, even subsumed, by nature. The Sublime is no longer simply the rhetorical and aesthetic concept promulgated by Longinus—thinkers in Petrie's time insisted that for something to be Sublime, a subject had to experience it, and be seen to do so. Thus the mountains of Wicklow are not in themselves Sublime, but rather vehicles for one's experience of it.

In comparison to Danby and O'Connor, Petrie certainly proves to be the more catholic artist, devoted as he was to a patriotic sense of place while nevertheless experimenting with the most forward-looking tendencies of his day with regard to the Sublime. To achieve his goal of preserving Ireland's history, Petrie functioned in turn as an artist, historian, antiquarian, musicologist, cartographer, writer, and editor.<sup>14</sup> As his painting career progressed, he came to firmly favor landscape subjects that resonated with cultural, historical, and spiritual associations, which may or may not have had

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<sup>14</sup> W. G. Strickland, *A Dictionary of Artists* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1913), 1:238.

meaning for viewers, especially British visitors.<sup>15</sup> It was never just about the Sublime for him, but about the ways in which the Sublime might be harnessed to larger ends in art—through Petrie’s landscapes, then, we see the history of Ireland from an Irish perspective.

Writing in 2001, historian Patrick Duffy examines the valences of texts that describe or illustrate places of meaning within the Irish landscape: “One way in which geographers have sought to elucidate and illuminate place identity and place experience has been through creative art—both literature and painting. Writers and artists are both witnesses to our world but also products of it, possessing qualities of insight which can be mustered in helping to understand the diversity of place and the contested meanings that can be attributed to it.”<sup>16</sup> While we can glean insight into how travelers and the Irish people sought to experience the Sublime for themselves, the paintings also function as historic narrative “texts” that can be interpreted on myriad levels, and yet remain timeless.

Evoking strong Irish tropes in new ways, historian Brian Graham observes, “Significant elements of any cultural landscape will be rendered timeless because of the importance—in perceptions of contemporary communality—of deep-rooted continuities with the past which bring about the seeming collapse or foreshortening of time.”<sup>17</sup> The vastness of this contested cultural weight over time placed a heavy burden on Petrie’s artistic aspirations, but his paintings bore up to the challenge, even in the tumultuous era in which they were created.

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<sup>15</sup> Graham, “Ireland and Irishness: Place, Culture and Identity,” in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–15; see also Frank Mitchell and Michael Ryan, *Reading the Irish Landscape*, rev. ed. (Dublin: Town House and Country House, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Duffy, “Writing Ireland,” 64.

<sup>17</sup> Graham, “Ireland and Irishness,” 5; William Smyth, “A Plurality of Irelands: Regions, Societies, and Mentalities,” in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 19–20.

Thus Petrie's Sublime visions differ from those of his colleagues Danby and O'Connor. Petrie is given to the real deployment of the Sublime, activating it well beyond the bounds of the picture frame. Danby's appropriation of the Sublime was more an artistic tool for achieving success in the metropolitan market. O'Connor's work was steeped in the theoretical tenets of German Romanticism, so his engagement with the Sublime was more personal than Danby's. By no means was O'Connor merely adopting a popular approach to success.

Petrie's adoption of the Sublime, as revealed in this painting, had a historical bent but was no less artistic in its aims—in his words, he sought “to adopt such a treatment of effect as might conduce to the sentiment of the picture without unfitting it for the purpose of a popular print, if it should ever be deemed worthy to be engraved.”<sup>18</sup> For Petrie the Sublime resonated peculiarly well with the situation in Ireland, a theme that will continue to inform this discussion. Petrie was further drawn to Wordsworth early on in his career and emulated his own stylistic appropriation of nature.<sup>19</sup> In an important text, “The Sublime and the Beautiful,” 1811–12, Wordsworth admonished English tourists who were well accustomed to continental travel to seek the Sublime instead in England.<sup>20</sup>

In this chapter I will focus upon several Sublime paintings that capture Petrie's vision of Ireland and reflect metropolitan influences from abroad. In addition, they harken back to a time when Ireland was being “repackaged” and repositioned as a valid site for English tourists through an expanding and thriving tourism industry aided by a

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<sup>18</sup> George Petrie quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 21–22.

<sup>20</sup> William Wordsworth, “The Sublime and the Beautiful” (1811–12), in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 349–60.

voluminous body of travel literature.<sup>21</sup> Petrie's work would play a part in a burgeoning market for all places Irish. I will present paintings that incorporate sites of both prehistoric (Bronze Age, 2300–600 B.C.) and medieval Christian significance yet continue to function as locations that drew contemporary visitors, both historians and tourists, who wished to immerse themselves in the newfound Sublimity of the Irish landscape.

### Previous Scholarship and Early Career

Existing scholarship on Petrie relies primarily on the 1868 monograph written by William Stokes entitled *The Life and Labours in Art and Archaeology of George Petrie*, which took advantage of (and reprints) Petrie's own journals, papers, and family manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Peter Murray's 2004 catalogue for *George Petrie (1790–1866): The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past*, an exhibition shown at the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Ireland, provides a broad overview of every aspect of Petrie's career but specifically lingers over his involvement with print publishers, his engagement with the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Hibernian Academy, and his contributions to the Ordnance Survey of Ireland that took place between 1833 and 1842.<sup>23</sup> Stokes's book provides the major primary sources on Petrie's

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<sup>21</sup> See Barbara O'Connor and Michael Cronin, eds., *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Murray, ed., *George Petrie (1790–1866): The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past*, (Cork: Gandon Editions, 2004), exh. cat. Murray explicates the close relationship between George Petrie and William Stokes. As friends and colleagues, Stokes had access to Petrie's papers, journals, and manuscripts during his friend's life, and upon his death, Stokes was the recipient of Petrie's papers, many of them hitherto unpublished. Stokes quotes directly from Petrie's journals throughout his book. Murray's exhibition

career, while Murray's catalogue discusses Petrie's life and achievements from a contemporary perspective. Stokes' primary sources provide a critical context for Petrie's background in general, which allows for my particular consideration of the import of his historical Sublime landscapes.

I will also discuss his work within the metropolitan versus provincial theme as it touches upon the importance of history painting, his appreciation for the Old Masters, his exposure to private collections, his longstanding engagement with print publishers, and his decision to remain in Ireland, rejecting the allure (and challenges) of life as an exile. Petrie was able to surpass the limitations of his provincial roots, but, while doing so, he retained a deep and meaningful connection to Ireland itself.

Petrie was born in Dublin in 1790 and was educated at the Dublin Society Schools. His father, James Petrie (d. 1819), was also an artist and known as both a loyalist and a republican.<sup>24</sup> While these terms are not always exclusive, we do get a sense that the senior Petrie's open-minded political tendencies may have influenced his son's penchant for imbuing his art with a nuanced and non-didactic approach to nationalist ideologies.<sup>25</sup> In Ireland at this time, generally speaking, the term loyalist implies that the individual would be sympathetic to England's colonial stance toward independence and would support the Union in 1801. An Irish republican would support an independent

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catalogue also includes a comprehensive list of the engraved prints that were made from Petrie's drawings for various print publishers.

<sup>24</sup> Strickland, *A Dictionary of Irish Artists*, 2:236, 243.

<sup>25</sup> See S. J. Connolly, "Culture, Identity, and Tradition: Changing Definitions of Irishness," in *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, ed. Brian Graham (London: Routledge, 1997), 43–63. Connolly claims that after the debacle of the 1798 rebellion, "Protestant patriots had to decide whether their commitment to a sense of Irish liberties was strong enough for them to forsake the protection of Great Britain for alliance with a Catholic majority whose ultimate intentions remained to be discovered . . . Catholics [such as Petrie] had to decide whether their interests were best served by joining with Protestant radicals in an attack on the whole political and social order, or by seeking to outbid their opponents in terms of loyalty to the crown and the London government" (53).

Ireland. Given the complexity of the issue circa 1800, one might well be ideologically torn by sympathy to both points of view.

### **Petrie's Encounter with London**

Upon his arrival in London with Danby and O'Connor in 1813, Petrie wrote a letter to Miss Eliza Mills, the woman in Ireland who would soon become his wife, that foreshadows his lifelong admiration for the artistic advances of the metropolis:

Eight days have passed since I arrived in this magnificent seat of arts and learning, the entire of which has been busily employed in seeking and admiring the various interesting objects which this vast and truly wonderful city presents to the astonished mind of a stranger. I would fain give you an account of the points in which London and Dublin most differ, and of the superiority of the former, but such would be impossible in the form of an epistle. That which amazed me most of all things here is the knowledge in the arts which the people possess. There is not an artist of any rank whose merits they are not acquainted with, even in the middle ranks. I never go to an obscure land or street in which I do not meet shops where coins, antiquities, books, prints, pictures &c., are the only things they sell, and I always found that they knew the rarity and value of every article they had . . . In the same lane, in a hole which I could scarce turn in, I found a poor sick-looking woman, who to my astonishment had all the information of a complete print connoisseur; the works of the different ages and classes of engravers were arranged in the most systematic manner, and the prices marked on each with the most perfect knowledge of their value. She could hand me the work of any particular master, and speak at length of its merits.<sup>26</sup>

Petrie's response to the urbanity of the London art world demonstrates that he is no hick from the provinces, and his approval is not in keeping with his willingness to abandon his pursuit of a career there. However taken he might have been, his stay would

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<sup>26</sup> George Petrie to Miss Mills, June 10, 1813, quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 8–9. It is unfortunate that Stokes largely neglects Petrie's personal life, as do the letters and documents that comprise the relevant archival manuscripts.

be brief. Aside from the influence of Petrie's father, who pressed him to return, the surviving literature indicates only one other contributing factor: all three artists soon depleted the funds they had allocated for their journey and stay in London. One of Petrie's later colleagues, William Fredrick Wakeman, details the severity of their economic circumstances:

Petrie has often related, in the presence of the writer of this paper, an account of the adventure of the youthful trio in the English capital. How, as their bullion evaporated—as bullion will in London,—they gradually descended from their high estate in a hotel, and sought furnished lodgings and restaurants—for even poetical young artists cannot choose but eat. Their last dinner in London was in one of those mysterious dens where gentlemen pay in advance, are furnished with knives and forks chained to the table, and are not supposed to object to having their viands peppered with flies, or other little animals, which we refrain from naming.<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, though, it was Petrie's father, anxious for his son's return, who turned the tide. Just a few weeks after the three young men had arrived in London, he implored his son to come back to Ireland. Enclosed with the letter was an unnamed painting with which to obtain money for the return trip:

I could wish it [the painting] was disposed of, that you might return home; your presence would cheer me. However, it can't be long till I have that happiness. Of your friendship and affection, my dear George, I have had many instances. You have ever been the idol of my heart, under all the pressure of my life, you it was who buoyed me up, therefore it is not a weakness to express to you how much I long for your presence . . . How are Danby and O'Connor? What are they doing? Have they stolen any of the great men's works? I mean, have they lodged in their brains all their excellences?<sup>28</sup>

Petrie's father's commentary is significant in that he refers to the penchant for younger artists in London to study and absorb the works of the Old Masters, a theme that

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<sup>27</sup> W. F. Wakeman, "Petrie as Painter," *Dublin Saturday Magazine* (March 1866): 364.

<sup>28</sup> James Petrie to George Petrie, June 1813, quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 9.

resonates throughout this discussion. The painting was indeed sold, and, parting from his friends, the dutiful son returned to Ireland.

### **Experience with Print Publishers as a Prelude to the Sublime Paintings**

As Petrie set about to make his career in Ireland, the wonder and possibility of London would have remained with him, and it was perhaps this that eventually led him to print publishers as a means of furthering his career.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, Petrie was employed by a succession of publishers to produce drawings intended for engraving for a variety of books, particularly with touristic or otherwise commemorative aims. These titles include *The Beauties of Ireland*, *Excursions through Ireland*, and *Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin*, among others.<sup>30</sup> William Stokes commented on the increasing fashion for illustrated travel guides, pointing out Turner's involvement with them as a sure sign of their high quality and artistic promise.<sup>31</sup> In the 1820s books such as these, including special editions called annuals, were at the height of their popularity. Given his allegiance to his home country, Petrie likely also chose the print medium as a means of reaching a broader audience for his Sublime landscape views

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<sup>29</sup> Petrie's longstanding professional relationships with print publishers are documented at length in Murray, *George Petrie*.

<sup>30</sup> James Norris Brewer, *The Beauties of Ireland* (London: Sherwood, Jones and Co., 1825–26); Thomas Kitson Cromwell, *Excursions through Ireland* (London: Longman, 1820); George Petrie, *Ten Views of the North and North-West* (Dublin: William Curry and Co., 1830); George Newenham Wright, *Historical Guide to Ancient and Modern Dublin* (London: Baldwin, Caradock and Joy, 1821); Wright, *Tours in Ireland, or Guides to the Lakes of Killarney, the County of Wicklow and the Giant's Causeway* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1823); Wright, *Ireland Illustrated from Original Drawings* (London: Fisher, Son and Jackson, 1832). For comparative purposes, see two earlier editions of landscape views: Jonathan Fisher, *A Picturesque Tour of Killarney, Describing in Twenty Views, the Most Pleasing Scenes of That Celebrated Lake, Accompanied by Some General Observations . . . with a Map of the Lake and Its Environs, Engraved in Aquatinta by J. F. Fisher* (London: J. F. Fisher, 1789), and Dennis Sullivan, *A Picturesque Tour through Ireland, by Dennis Sullivan, Esq. Illustrated with Numerous Coloured Views of the Most Interesting Scenery* (London: Thomas McLean, 1824).

<sup>31</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 11.

than the professional, private, and elite audiences that he mixed with in the Royal Irish Academy and the Antiquarian Society. Stokes further observes that during this period, watercolor paintings became quite popular within the British Isles, and Turner was the exemplar of the finest watercolor painter in England, followed by Petrie in Ireland.<sup>32</sup>

Within this genre of engraved landscape views, published print editions sometimes included illustrations that portrayed the “seats” of the landed gentry. Petrie’s drawing *View of Carton* (1824–25; fig. 5:2) was engraved by J. H. Storer and published in James Norris Brewer’s *The Beauties of Ireland* in 1825–26. Fairly conventional, *View of Carton* demonstrates the artist’s ability to render the architectural details of an aristocratic demesne with accuracy (whereas, we might recall, O’Connor’s house portraits favored the landscape, despite their putative subjects), although both artists skirted the reality of the peasantry that would have lived and worked the land surrounding the “Big House.”<sup>33</sup> The graceful curves of Carton’s beeches, which function as a *repoussoir* on the left, lure the eye forward to the drawing’s middleground, where two aristocratic figures gesture expansively toward the Palladian estate. The image’s want of the Sublime qualities that were already beginning to inform Petrie’s paintings is probably due to the influence of publisher George Brewer; Petrie himself notes the dampening effect of profit-minded publishers upon his grander artistic aspirations. In addition, extant correspondence between Petrie and Brewer concerning productions such as *The Beauties of Ireland* documents their differences over what might constitute an appropriate mix of Sublime landscape views and topographical renditions of the landed gentry’s estates. In an early letter, the publisher politely suggested, “With any views you may be preparing of

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Duffy, “Writing Ireland,” 71–72.

Dublin, be so good as otherwise to make drawings of one or two seats of nobility or gentry. I should think the county in which they are situated would be no object. There must be a proportionate quantity of seats.”<sup>34</sup> Over the years, Brewer became a bolder advocate for the commercially viable: “Carton is ugly enough, but the Duke’s name is a ‘tower of strength.’”<sup>35</sup>

As a businessman, Brewer was likely to be more sensitive to the public’s interest in seeing how these Irish aristocrats lived, whatever the burden on the Romantically inclined artist. The disagreement between Petrie and Brewer illustrates the varying motivations of the artist and the publisher. From Petrie’s perspective, publishers such as Brewer were censorious and motivated by commerce. Brewer insisted on the inclusion of the drawing of the Carton estate to satisfy the public’s taste for views of well-known aristocrats’ demesnes. And, as Brewer was motivated to sell as many editions as possible, drawings such as these were considered indispensable.

In an early letter to his wife, Petrie laments the amount of time necessary to accurately record architectural details in a drawing such as that of the Carton estate: “To-day have been till now (four o’clock), sketching a nobleman’s seat here (Lord Rosse’s) which, though very fine, cost me a great deal too much time; but, in fact, it has been the same with all the subjects of that character which I have hitherto done; less than four or five hours will not suffice for one sketch.”<sup>36</sup> For him, the Sublime landscapes constituted more meaningful work. His commitment to excellence and innovation made him

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<sup>34</sup> Brewer to Petrie, May 8, 1820, National Library of Ireland, MS 789, no. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Brewer to Petrie, August 26, 1826, National Library of Ireland, MS 789, no. 46.

<sup>36</sup> George Petrie to Eliza Petrie, August 1, 1820, quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 27.

uncomfortable with the time commitment involved in satisfying the publisher's increasingly commercial demands.

While Petrie had to toe the line in his early career with print publishers, as he matured and developed other means of income, he became less dependent upon them and able to spend more time and energy on his exhibition paintings. In this regard, his preference for more innovative, personal, and Sublime paintings (more like O'Connor than Danby, for example) signifies his unwillingness to surrender any more artistic control to his metropolitan publishers.

It is ironic that Petrie's interest in the specifically Irish landscape coincided with a profound desire to promote more innovative and modern formal advances. His passion was for Ireland and he longed for free reign in how and what he chose to illustrate and paint. His embrace of metropolitan influences was thus predicated upon his own artistic desires and goals. Over time he became immune to the publishers' commercial incentives for portraying and pandering to the Anglo-Irish establishment. His interest lay in illustrating Irish landscapes that were far removed from commissions by titled patrons for paintings of their demesnes. Instead of aristocratic homes, he portrayed scenes of the untamed Irish landscape, far indeed from Palladian demesnes and their associations with Anglo-Irish landlords.

All of the paintings that I will discuss are steeped in the Irish historical Sublime. Several of them illustrate places of meaning within the Irish landscape that were far older than such "recent" influences as the Norman invaders of the twelfth century, who would have been the ancestral connection to such individuals as the Duke of Carton.

### The Aran Islands: Finding the Irish Sublime

Petrie traveled extensively throughout Ireland over his career. During these sketching expeditions, he accumulated drawings that were suitable for the likes of Brewer and other publishers. But he also found time for other drawings, later to be turned into grand paintings, and it is in those projects that we might take the most accurate measure of his attraction to the Sublime.

The Aran Islands were particularly important. Petrie visited the islands twice, in 1821 and again, much later, in 1857; the drawings from his first trip are the earliest extant representations of this locale from any artist of note.<sup>37</sup> The three islands called the Oiléain Árann are located twenty-eight miles off the southwest coast of Galway and comprised of Inis Oírr (Inisheer, Eastern Island), Inis Meáin (Inishmaan, Middle Island), and Árann (Inishmore, Great Island). The physical isolation of these corporeal forms, floating on the periphery of western Ireland, belies (or, in another way, explains) their impact upon the spiritual, psychological, and cultural consciousness of the Irish people.<sup>38</sup> They continue to exert their formidable allure upon an assortment of modern literary and visual artists, filmmakers, and historians today, and their many prehistoric (1300–800 B.C.) remains have given rise to centuries of Irish legend, pagan and ecclesiastical history, and art.<sup>39</sup> The islands remain relatively remote and difficult to reach, even today.

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<sup>37</sup> Brewer to Petrie, August 29, 1821, National Library of Ireland, cat. no. 2375, as well as a sketchbook at the Royal Irish Academy, MS 12, n. 22, which contains eight drawings from these trips.

<sup>38</sup> For an evocative expression of this impact, see Tim Robinson, *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara and Other Writings* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>39</sup> John T. O'Flaherty, *A Sketch of the History and Antiquities of the Southern Islands of Aran, Lying off the West Coast of Ireland; with Observations on the Religion of the Celtic Nations, Pagan Monuments of the Early Irish, Druidic Rites, &c. read in Dublin at the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy* (Dublin: R. Graisberry, 1825).

The location of the Aran Islands in the “West of Ireland” further informs their place and meaning within Irish culture. While much of the literature pointing to the West as a center of cultural nationalism considers developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the region’s difference or uniqueness was already a trope of sorts a century before. From a geographic perspective, this area is the farthest from England, and its people were steadfast in maintaining the longstanding traditions of the Gaels and the Celts, including the Irish (Gaelic) language, in the years leading up to and following the invasions. Historian Catherine Nash recognizes the practical ramifications of the West’s acclaimed distinction:

For an area to be valued as a potential tourist destination a sense of difference has to be established. This difference provides a reason for and gives value to the tourist visit. For the West of Ireland this difference was articulated against the Englishness of the colonial power. Yet it was also constructed as different within Ireland. The West came to stand for Ireland in general, to be representative of true Irishness. It could be seen as a way of access into the Irish past through its language, folklore, antiquities, and way of life, yet also be conceived of as outside time, separated from normal temporal development . . . In the context of Ireland’s colonial history, the West functioned as a primitive “other” against which the superiority of the colonial power could be measured.<sup>40</sup>

For many Irish people, then, Oileain Árann has long evoked their country and heritage like nowhere else.<sup>41</sup>

Petrie was thus enraptured, as much by the cultural valence of the place as by its sublime vistas. After his 1821 trip, he wrote to George Brewer to express his excitement about using views of the Irish West in future publications.<sup>42</sup> As we might expect, Brewer

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<sup>40</sup> Catherine Nash, “‘Embodying the Nation’—The West of Ireland Landscape and Identity,” in *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*, ed. Barbara O’Connor and Michael Cronin (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993), 87–109; see also Ryle, *Journeys in Ireland*, 64–91.

<sup>41</sup> See O’Flaherty, *A Sketch of the History and Antiquities*, 79–139, and Smyth, “Explorations of Place,” 6.

<sup>42</sup> Petrie to Brewer, August 29, 1821, National Library of Ireland, cat. NO 2375: Royal Irish Academy, MS 12, n. 22.

was torn; through he feared that the remoteness of Aran might discourage potential buyers, he recognized its allure: “On the other hand the very circumstance of obscurity as related to insulated tracts so near home—the entire ignorance of the polished and reading part of the world concerning the natural features and (as I was taught to believe when at Galway) the very curious traces of ancient manners—unite in rendering the subject worthy of attention. The hand of taste may elicit charms from any soil.”<sup>43</sup>

Although the drawing in question never did appear in Brewer’s publication, Petrie developed a painting of the vista. In 1827, at the second exhibition of the Royal Hibernian Academy, he exhibited *Dun Aengus Fort, Inismore, Aran Islands*, (c. 1827; fig. 5:3). In comparison to *View of Carton* (fig. 5:2) and the many other house-portrait drawings that Petrie had produced for his “celebrity-centric” publishers, this painting depicts the Romantic ruins of Irish antiquity in the midst of an iconic Sublime landscape of colossal precipices thrusting into the churning waters of the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>44</sup> In the central foreground we see an animated couple perched on the edge of a cliff, gesturing out at the rollicking waves. Our eyes follow an ascending path to the cliff top, where a second couple, shrouded by mist, is dwarfed by a massive prehistoric fort. The boulder in the lower right corner acts as a touchstone against the sheer scale of the prospect, which is further enhanced by the serpentine curves of layered limestone that draw the eyes ahead to the ruins. We hover above a dizzying and spectacular view that is fraught with tension and motion.

The first major “modern” source on the Aran Islands was John T. O’Flaherty, who delivered a lengthy paper to the Royal Irish Academy in 1825 that meticulously

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<sup>43</sup> Brewer to Petrie, December 1821, National Library of Ireland, MS 789, n. 57.

<sup>44</sup> The National Gallery of Ireland possesses a pencil drawing of this view; cat. N. 6695.

outlined the extraordinary breadth of history, myth, and antiquarian cultural artifacts associated with them.<sup>45</sup> He also detailed his trip there:

The approach to the Isles of Aran presents a view awfully sublime. Elevated high above a wide tract of deep and boisterous ocean, and opposing to the beating billows an impregnable and perpendicular barrier of mossy and lava-coloured rock, several hundred feet high, one may easily associate with the sublimity of the scene, and its Alpine grandeur, something of the terrors of a Vesuvian eruption, or of that violent shock, which is supposed to have torn these isles from the neighboring continent . . . As you advance close to the islands, you observe craggy and stupendous rocks, sharply shelved towards the base, and presenting winding cavities, formed by the raging and constant dashing of the waves. The scenery on these islands is bold, romantic, and pleasing, surrounded with a tract of ocean, almost entirely boundless to the eye.<sup>46</sup>

Thus early on in the literature that focused on the Aran Islands, authors such as Flaherty (and Petrie as well) were cognizant of the necessity to immerse oneself into the landscape in order to appreciate such views within the context of the Sublime. The Sublime was meant to be experienced, and Petrie's rendering of them reflects that fact. His innovative handling of this iconic site on Inishmore is animated, grand, and epic—in short, the embodiment of the Irish Sublime. The words of one prolific writer on the Sublime, Joseph Addison, explain in literary terms the effect of the heaving ocean such as Petrie later painted:

Of all objects that I have ever seen, there is none which affects my imagination so much as the sea, or ocean. I cannot see the heavings of this prodigious bulk of waters, even in a calm, without a very pleasing astonishment; but when it is worked up in a tempest, so that the horizon on every side is nothing but foaming billows and floating mountains, it is impossible to describe the agreeable horror that rises from such a prospect. A troubled ocean, to a man who sails upon it, is, I think, the biggest object that he can see in motion, and consequently gives his imagination of the highest kinds of pleasure that can arise from greatness.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> O'Flaherty, *A Sketch of the History and Antiquities*, 79–139.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–32; Smyth, "Explorations of Place," 6.

<sup>47</sup> Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 459 (1712–1714, reprint, Cincinnati: A. H. Pounsford and Company, 1876), 582.

Petrie's own frothing waves and erratic, menacing cloud formations are softened only by the comparative remove of our topographical vantage point.

Somewhat after Addison, in 1795, William Marshall, whose works may or may not have been familiar to Petrie, also remarked upon the impact of the ocean and its contribution to an experience of the Sublime: "But, of all natural scenery, the ocean, agitated by a violent storm, attended with thunder and lightning, is perhaps the most capable of filling the mind with sublime emotions; and most especially the mind of a spectator who is himself exposed on its frail surface, and who is not incapable, either from constant habit, or from an excess of apprehension, of contemplating the scenery which surrounds him."<sup>48</sup> Petrie was not alone in recognizing the inherent power of an encounter with the ocean for the informed observer who was sensitive to the tenets of the Sublime.

It is no wonder, then, that the figures in *Dun Aengus Fort, Inismore, Aran Islands* are so small, utterly overshadowed as they are by the aquatic forces of nature, the colossal cliffs, and the ruins of the fort. Petrie does, however, render a few key details that save them from complete obscurity, perhaps in a nod to his earlier representations of the aristocracy. The vivid red of the woman's cape draws attention to her animated gesturing, and her male partner is likewise portrayed in clothes that are too well cut and elegant for the then-common garb of the Aran Islands. These two may therefore represent members of the O'Malley or the O'Flaherty families, or wealthy tourists; their large picnic basket reinforces the likelihood that they are visiting. This painting certainly

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<sup>48</sup> William Marshall, *A Review of the Landscape, a Didactic Poem: Also of an Essay on the Picturesque, Together with Practical Remarks on Rural Ornament* (London: G. Nicol, G. G. and J. Robinson, and J. Debrett, 1795), 274.

recognizes and makes apparent the lengths to which travelers (presumably English) would go in order to experience the Sublime. It also demonstrates Petrie's empathy with them, which presumably contributed to his popularity.

Petrie's love of the Aran Islands rang true to his countrymen in part because so many Irish people shared it (and always had), as the significance of the ruins of Dun Aengus attest.<sup>49</sup> The existing literature on the islands is extensive, and throughout these accounts, the islands' otherworldliness is consistently remarked upon, as if they constituted a site made for a reckoning with a magical or divine presence. Petrie's conviction about this possibility—that a place in the landscape could transport one—would inform his work and the manner in which he represented such sites and the cultural rituals associated with them.<sup>50</sup> As Irish history scholar William H. A. Williams succinctly observes, “Tourists in search of the sublime and the picturesque did not just view ruins, they *experienced* them.”<sup>51</sup> Petrie sought to paint that experience, as well as the place responsible for it.

*Dun Aengus Fort, Inismore, Aran Islands* likewise comments upon how sites of historic importance become so. The Aran Islands boast cultural remnants ranging from huge, still-unexplored pagan burial chambers and stone circles to clusters of Christian hermitage enclaves and other sorts of ecclesiastical architecture in various stages of decay. Petrie reveled in the islands' still very evident intersections of ritual, religion, culture, history, folklore, and myth, resisting the temptation to fill his landscapes with

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<sup>49</sup> For further history on the prehistoric and early Christian significance of this site, see Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, 90–91; O'Flaherty, *A Sketch of the History and Antiquities*, 127; Mitchell and Ryan, *Reading the Irish Landscape*, 229, 239. Mitchell and Ryan propose that the earliest inhabitants of Dun Aengus on the Aran Islands date from 1300 to 1000 BC.

<sup>50</sup> Mitchell and Ryan, *Reading the Irish Landscape*, 241–42.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, *Tourism, Landscape and the Irish Character*, 33.

specific narratives and instead allowing the place to speak for itself. Given Petrie's antiquarian, archeological, and cartographic background, his visual "texts" are remarkably eloquent ripostes to the otherwise all too common pejorative commentary of both earlier and contemporary English visitors and writers. Petrie reminded the Irish people of where they had come from, literally and figuratively, through his artwork and his related professional pursuits.

### **Illustration and Illumination: Petrie and Place within the Irish Landscape**

In his *Discourse on Ancient and Modern Learning* (1734), the writer Joseph Addison considers the Sublime in relation to humanity's search for divinity in the landscape. Like Petrie almost a century later, Addison sees a country's past as informing and enriching its present—as something to be celebrated, venerated, and never forgotten:

Another great pleasure the ancients had beyond us, if we consider 'em [*sic*] as the Poet's Countrymen, was, that they liv'd as it were upon the Spot, and within the Verge of the Poem; their Habitations lay among the Scenes of the *Aeneid*; they cou'd find out their own Country in Homer, and had every Day perhaps in their Sight the Mountain or Field where such an Adventure happen'd, or such a Battle was fought. Many of 'em [*sic*] had often walk'd on the Banks of *Helicon*, or the Sides of *Parnassus*, and knew all the private Haunts and Retirements of the Muses: So that they liv'd as it were on *Fairy Ground*, and convers'd in an enchanted Region, where every Thing they look'd upon appear'd Romantic, and gave a thousand pleasing Hints to their Imaginations.<sup>52</sup>

Petrie sees the same potential in the Irish landscape for Irish people. As a historian and an antiquarian, he was devoted to the visual and literary texts that demonstrated Ireland's ancient and medieval historical, cultural, and spiritual traditions. In response to the more derogatory perspectives of historians, politicians, explorers, and

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<sup>52</sup> Joseph Addison, *A Discourse on Ancient and Modern Learning* (London: T. Osborne, 1739), 13.

tourists, Petrie lauded his country's cultural achievements. Much as the English extolled the importance of the Island of Iona to their own unique heritage, Petrie re-presents Irish pilgrimage sites as the same sorts of cultural beacons, even at a time when historians such as the Scotsman John Pinkerton (1758–1826) disparaged the Irish and could actually claim, “The old inhabitants of your country, the wild Irish, the true Milesian breed, untainted with Gothic blood, we know to be utter savages at this day.”<sup>53</sup> In a later rebuttal, Petrie composed the seven-part series titled “Fine Arts: Historic Sketch of the Past and Present State of the Fine Arts in Ireland,” beginning in July 1832.<sup>54</sup> In it he points out that Ireland's ancient history yields many fine achievements while observing that the status of the arts in the present day was rather troubled:

We respond, they are exhibited abundantly in the numerous antiquities of gold, silver, and bronze, dug up every day in all parts of Ireland, and similar to the most ancient remains of the Greeks, Egyptians, Phoenicians. Our gold crowns, collars, bracelets, anklets, our brazen swords, spears, and domestic vessels—our cinerary urns, our cairns with sepulchral chambers, which are not to be paralleled in the British isles . . . These are the evidences of the early colonization of Ireland, by a civilized people, which her antiquaries should rely on . . . But while we thus support the theories of Milesian writers, we are far from asserting that knowledge of the Fine Arts was introduced into the country in those remote times. It would be folly to ground such a supposition upon idle conjecture; and there is little else on which to found it. Infant colonies do not often carry knowledge of the Fine Arts along with them, they are only to be found where wealth, luxury, and peace have fixed their abode. The domestic arts, the traditions, the religion, the poetry, and the music of a people, will accompany them everywhere, because these are fixed in their minds, and transferred from generation to generation . . . The only indications of taste in the arts of design, previous to the introduction of Christianity, discoverable in Ireland, are those which our antiquities exhibit.<sup>55</sup>

In *Pagan Sepulchral Monument on the Caugh Hill, a Mountain in the Parish of Bannagher, County of Londonderry-Twilight*, which was alternatively titled *The Stone*

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<sup>53</sup> John Pinkerton, *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland, Preceding the Reign of Malcolm III, or the Year 1056: Including the Authentic History of that Period* (London: John Nichols, 1794), 2:18.

<sup>54</sup> *Dublin Penny Journal* 1, no. 5 (July 28, 1832): 83–84.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

*Circle on Caan Hill, Derry* (c. 1839–40; fig. 5:4), Petrie's interest in the symbolic and architectonic vestiges of pagan rituals is apparent in a profound manner.<sup>56</sup> This finely wrought composition presents this site in the early evening light, enhanced by the barely perceptible twilight star, high above the horizon. The manner in which Petrie portrays this place reflects his efforts to transcend topographical mimesis and instead inspire reflection and contemplation. He has traveled far indeed from the formulaic stylistic reportage seen in *View of Carton* (fig. 5:2).

Unlike the forces of nature that surrounded the dramatic view seen in *Dun Aengus Fort, Inismore, Aran Islands* (fig. 5:3), here an ancient stone circle dominates the expansive landscape beneath the golden sky, with its delicate cloud patterns and subtle glimpse of the rising moon. In many ways this Romantic painting evokes Friedrich's penchant for vast skies, low horizons, and dramatic, simplified, enigmatic figures; it is comparable as well to Danby's *Sunset at Sea, after a Storm* (fig. 3:1) or O'Connor's *The Poachers* (fig. 4:18). Also like his countrymen in particular, here Petrie has eliminated most of the foreground, positioning the viewer within the pasture rather than above or beyond it. Most of the stones in the circle are relatively small, except for the prominently placed, vertical stone that was a common feature of circles from this period.

Steeped in the Sublime, Petrie's twilight appears almost mystical. His inclusion of cattle fills some of the functions of staffage in the composition and, interestingly, does away with the need for a particular style of costume or dress that might otherwise force

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<sup>56</sup> The extensive scholarship on early Irish art includes Lisa M. Bitel, *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Peter Harbison, *The Golden Age of Irish Art: The Medieval Achievement, 600–1200* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999); Harbison, *Irish Art and Architecture from Prehistory to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); Harbison, *Pre-Christian Ireland*; and Françoise Henry, *Irish Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965).

him to commit to a recognizable era. The simplicity of the compositional arrangement further belies the complexity of the historical and cultural connotations of this site for the Irish people. Given the painting's aura of tranquility, it is particularly ironic that this was a site of death and destruction, in addition to a burial ground for slain chieftains. The local people of Bannagher, near Dungiven, had indicated to Petrie that the ancient circle contained the tombs of chiefs killed in a battle that had occurred there, from which it derived the name *Caah*, or battle-hill.<sup>57</sup>

In 1825, scholar John T. O'Flaherty identified stone circles such as the one here as the remnants of pagan temples where druidic believers sought to connect with the divine through outdoor worship and rituals.<sup>58</sup> He asserts that pagan worshippers would have viewed these sites as "sacred and inviolable; being, they imagine, the enchanted [*sic*] haunts and property of their aeries beings, whose power of doing mischief they greatly dread and studiously propitiate."<sup>59</sup> O'Flaherty further observes that the people of Bannagher would reenact rituals tied to spirituality within the landscape, activating the stone circles as literal markers of the past and metaphorical symbols with an ongoing claim on the Irish soul. Modern historian Daniel Corkery points out that for the uninitiated (English invaders, plantation owners, and contemporary colonizers), the importance of these markings within the landscape would be negligible:

To recollect the place-names in certain regions was to remember the ancient tribes and their memorable deeds. How different it was with the planters [English settlers who were awarded large tracts of land after the Irish had been "relocated"] round about them. For them, all that Gaelic background of myth, literature and history had no existence. They differed from the people in race, language, religion

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<sup>57</sup> Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 19–20.

<sup>58</sup> O'Flaherty, *A Sketch of the History and Antiquities*, 98–105; Stokes, *Life and Labours*. Petrie knew O'Flaherty and would have been familiar with his work, which was presented to Royal Irish Academy in 1825.

<sup>59</sup> O'Flaherty, *A Sketch of the History and Antiquities*, 98.

and culture; while the landscape they looked upon was indeed but rocks and stones and trees.<sup>60</sup>

Contemporary art historian Peter Harbison concurs that these circles, numbering some two hundred throughout the Irish countryside, arose through pagan spiritual ceremonies tied to honoring the sepulchral remains of high-ranking individuals within historic Irish communities.<sup>61</sup> Certainly these stones represent more than their material appearance, and this urge to establish a link between the temporal and the divine is commented on by numerous writers.

In the early nineteenth century, other people, many of them English, began to visit Ireland and encounter these sites. For them, perhaps, the historical meaning of such locations was less relevant as well, but the aura was even more so. Unlike earlier English visitors to Ireland whose purpose was to invade, exploit resources, or possess the land through plantation, these visitors were tourists who sought the Sublime.

### **Representing Ireland: English Tourists in Search of the Sublime**

During this period, several developments within Irish culture affected how the country came across to the rest of the world. Early in Petrie's career, patterns of tourism among English travelers shifted in favor of Ireland as a destination. But for centuries before as well, many writers obliged their Anglo readers (and potential visitors) with

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1967), 64–65.

<sup>61</sup> Harbison, *Ancient Irish Monuments*, 16–19; O'Brien and Harbison, *Ancient Ireland*, 26. Stone circles such as these in Ireland are thought to represent sites of rituals tied to specific times of the year, such as celebrations of the solstice, as well as sites of burial.

information on virtually every aspect of Ireland.<sup>62</sup> In *Journeys in Ireland: Literary Travellers, Rural Landscapes, Cultural Relations* (1999), Martin Ryle observes: “Scenic tourism in Ireland did not begin until the later eighteenth century, long after the country’s invasion and subjugation by Anglo-Norman and English arms. In the writing which had accompanied and rationalized sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conquest and plantation, there had been an evident relationship between the forcible seizure of the land and its representation as a space to be possessed.”<sup>63</sup> By Petrie’s time, however, memoirs, prints, and penny journals had become “tourist literature.” The evolution of these innovative media as channels to the public was a boon for artists such as Petrie, as his work would be distributed to a far wider circle of viewers, as Alderman Boydell had envisioned in the English print market.

Another painting, *The Eagle’s Nest at Killarney* (c. 1831; fig. 5:5), documents Petrie’s desire to render Sublime Irish views that illustrate relevant locations along popular tourism routes. Thus, he demonstrates his awareness of the growing tourist market and the myriad visitors who sought to find the Sublime within the beauty of previously unheralded landscapes in the southwest of the country. In this sense, Petrie’s motivation here differs somewhat from his earlier works; while *Dun Aengus Fort*, *Inismore*, *Aran Islands* (fig. 5:3), for example, also referred to the burgeoning tourist

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<sup>62</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the genre of English travel writing that covers Ireland, see John P. Harrington, ed., *The English Traveller in Ireland: Accounts of Ireland and the Irish through Five Centuries* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991); Martin Ryle, *Journeys in Ireland: Literary Travellers, Rural Landscapes, Cultural Relations* (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999); and Katherine Turner, *British Travel Writing in Europe, 1750–1800: Authorship, Gender, and National Identity* (London: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> Gerard Boate, *Irelands Naturall History. Being a True and Ample Description of its Situation . . . Hills . . . Harbours . . . Metalls, Mineralls . . . Temperature . . . What Diseases It Is Free From, or Subject Unto* (London: John Wright, 1652); Giraldus Cambrensis (1146–1223), *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John J. O’Meara (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982); Ryle, *Journeys in Ireland*, 13.

market, it did so in the context of the history of the place. Petrie had in fact produced several drawings of *The Eagle's Nest at Killarney* already, one early on, in 1807, and another that was engraved and included in *Reverend G. N. Wright's Guides to Ireland* (1821–25; fig. 5:6), which is rather more dry and topographic. With his painting, however, he was released from the censorious and commercially motivated control of his print publishers and enjoyed free reign over the choice of what and how to portray his beloved Irish landscape. With delicacy, he renders an elegant and majestic view that depicts a contemporary tour boat carrying visitors to Killarney in search of the Sublime. This rendering of pencil and watercolor on paper captures the disparities of heights, the breadth and depth of the view, the immensity of scale, and the seemingly endless vista that provides the background for the glass-like surface of the Killarney Lakes.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike *Pagan Sepulchral Monument on the Caugh Hill* (fig. 5:4), here, Petrie pulls back from this vista and crops the composition in a more conventional manner, lending an expansive perspective to the Killarney prospect. While faithfully recording the details that define this revered terrain (see, for example, the silhouette of the mountain on the left side; note also the delicacy with which he handles the trees, clouds, and shimmering surface of the water), he simultaneously portrays the scene with a sense of enchantment that preserves the grandeur that is so integral to the impact of the Sublime.

Beneath the mountains, a lake acts as a subtle *coulisse* to lead the eye to the middleground and its signs of human life: the boat, some bystanders, and an additional lone figure perched at the edge of the water. The scale of figures to surroundings recalls Danby's penchant for drawing viewers into his cataclysmic paintings, compelling them,

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<sup>64</sup> See Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 117–20, on the visual and emotional effects of observing magnitude and magnificence.

in a metaphorical and a psychological sense, to cross the threshold of the canvas. Here Petrie has returned to the vastness of scope and scale seen in *Dun Aengus Fort, Inismore, Aran Islands* (fig. 5:3). The viewer feels immersed in and surrounded by the theatrical magnificence of the Killarney mountain range—we might imagine that it continues to either side, much as it would in the all-encompassing panoramas and dioramas. For Petrie, the Romantic motif of the individual versus the universal resonates here: we are made to feel small from within the painting, though we retain a virtually celestial perspective as we view it.

Killarney was, and continues to be today, a much-loved attraction for tourists. Many nineteenth-century travelers to the Ring of Kerry supplemented their trip with a boat ride on the lakes, where they encountered the panoramic views of precipitous cliffs, commanding mountains and serene lakes.<sup>65</sup> With regard to the all encompassing view of the mountain-ringed lakes, George Newenham Wright describes the sight with enthusiasm: “The channels between them [the lakes] open to new and varied scenes, which, combined with panoramic views of rocks, wood, and mountain, produce one of the most awfully sublime pictures in nature.”<sup>66</sup>

One popular feature of the Killarney Lake tour that contributed to the Sublimity of the tourist experience was its booming aural accompaniment.<sup>67</sup> In an effort to increase excitement for the tourists onboard, tour operators would arrange for resounding blasts from a bugle or cannon that would reverberate repeatedly among the crags:

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<sup>65</sup> See *A Guide to Killarney and Glengariff* (Dublin: William Curry, 1804) for many descriptions of the Sublimity of the tourist’s experience in the Irish countryside.

<sup>66</sup> George Newenham Wright, *Guide to the Lakes of Killarney: Illustrated by Engravings, after the Designs of George Petrie, Esq.* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1822), 53.

<sup>67</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 123. Burke suggests that loudness and sound enhance Sublime encounters.

The Eagle's Nest is the next important object in the passage. It is placed in a hanging crag, near the summit of an almost perpendicular rock of a pyramidal form, and twelve or thirteen hundred feet in height . . . it is from this sublime and stupendous rock the sound is returned in so miraculous a manner, that it is considered one of the most singular phenomena in existence. A small hillock on the opposite side of the river, usually called the "Station for Audience," is used as the resting place of a paterara, which is carried in the boat from Killarney: the gunner is placed on one side of the hillock, and the auditor on the other, and upon the discharge of the piece, a roaring is heard in the bosom of the opposite mountain, like a peal of thunder, or the discharge of a rain of artillery, and this echo is multiplied a number of times, after which it gradually fades away, like the rolling of distant thunder . . . The sound of a musical instrument produces reverberations of a quite different character from that of the musket or small cannon. The only instrument that can be procured at Killarney is a bugle, which is peculiarly appropriate for the production of echoes, and in 1821, one of the best performers in Great Britain, Spalane, afforded the visitors [*sic*] to Lough Lein an opportunity of gratifying their curiosity by listening, amid the rude recesses of the mountains, to the most ecstatic tones, and the most dulcet harmony, apparently produced by preternatural influence.<sup>68</sup>

The popularity of the Killarney cacophony of echoes mirrored a trend that was evident in other international tourist spots, such as the pursuit of excitement in Rhineland travel, as discussed in reference to O'Connor in chapter 4. O'Connor also adapted his approach to landscapes in order to lure his viewers into his emotive, intimate, and enigmatic Sublime paintings. And tourists evidently wanted to enter the experience, not just observe it from a far-removed spot. Henry Inglis, for example, described the spectacle he encountered in Killarney:

I had the advantage of having, in my boat, the *Prince of Killarney*, buglemen, and I had also a cannon of a larger caliber than the public boats carry; and, in the course of our voyage, we often woke the echoes of the hills, and I never heard echoes of greater perfection. There is, certainly, something bordering on the sublime, in the oft-repeated echoes of the mountains, even when these are awoke, not by the deep-mouthed thunder, but by the sonorous bugle. The hills seem, alike, to call to each other; and, although it would have puzzled Burke to trace the emotion of sublimity to terror, it may be traced to its truer origin—power; for—when we hear the call repeated and answered, from mountain to mountain—sometimes loud, and without interval, and then fainter and fainter—and, after a solemn pause, again rising, as if from some far distant glen—our imagination

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<sup>68</sup> Wright, *A Guide to the Lakes of Killarney*, 44–46.

endues [*sic*] the mountains with life; and to their attributes of magnitude, and silence, and solitude, we, for a moment, add the power of listening, and a voice.<sup>69</sup>

Writers on the Sublime advocated the multi-sensory experience as the surest way to maximize the intensity of the encounter, and Inglis associates the emotion of sublimity with power (this was explored at length by Edmund Burke as well).<sup>70</sup> The resounding “voice” that appears to emanate from the mountains has in a way anthropomorphized them but also hints at the divine; in the words of Longinus, the echoes *transport* us. This sense of transport resonates with the idea of touristic travel, but it also evokes the spiritual search, or pilgrimage. Petrie’s paintings depict those sites as well.

### **Paintings of Pagan and “Holy” Wells: The Sublimity of Pilgrimage in the Landscape**

Petrie’s interest in documenting people in search of the Irish Sublime was not limited to pleasure-seeking travelers. He also was drawn to the historical and cultural rituals and places of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage in Ireland dates back to the fifth century A.D. Throughout Ireland, distinctive locations, often situated in groves of trees or near springs of water, lent themselves to such ritual or religious causes.

In *Isle of the Saints: Monastic Settlement and Christian Community in Early Ireland* (1990), art historian Lisa Bitel analyzes monastic settlement patterns throughout Ireland during the period 800–1200 A.D. and suggests that religious communities appropriated pagan sites of worship both for their sacredness and for their proximity,

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<sup>69</sup> Henry D. Inglis, *Ireland in 1834: A Journey through Ireland during the Spring, Summer, and Autumn of 1834* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1834), 228.

<sup>70</sup> Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 107–8.

often, to fresh water (which explains why so many pagan wells and Christian sites of worship were adjacent to bodies of water). Particular types of trees were often associated with these sites. In Gaelic, the *Bili*—often oak or hazel trees—were considered to be particularly otherworldly and often marked sites where early spiritual or secular authorities would be crowned. *Bili na cille*, the “sacred tree of the church,” also marked locations where it was possible to move from this world to another.<sup>71</sup> The tradition of visiting wells, or “well worship,” is very important to the Irish and is linked to the practice of pilgrimage. Petrie was interested in this theme and incorporated it into several of his Sublime paintings, as if to draw attention to the continuity behind centuries of pagan and Christian sites of worship.

Among contemporary historians, much has been made of the fact that the Irish people converted to Christianity in the fifth century without any bloodshed. This was presumably at least partly due to the adoption of preexisting pagan “spiritual” sites such as wells within the countryside. In fact, Christian missionaries made a practice of appropriating pagan places of veneration linked to ceremonial holidays that celebrated seasonal farming schedules. Thus a site within the landscape that drew pagan devotees was frequently renamed after a Christian saint in the hopes of the continued, conflict-free participation of the locals. The ritual patterns tied to what became Christian settings within the landscape replicate the earlier pagan rituals.

In the painting entitled *St. Brigid’s Well* (c. 1829; fig. 5:7), Petrie abandons his predilection for sweeping, wide-angled views in favor of a clear, foregrounded view of Christian pilgrims congregating at this remote and sacred grove. Clustered around a

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<sup>71</sup> Bitel, *Isle of the Saints*, 44–45.

standing stone pillar from centuries past, these pilgrims are depicted among trees that almost imitate the human figures beneath them. Like O'Connor, Friedrich, Ruisdael, and Rosa, Petrie balances his composition with anthropomorphized trees. One source of the mystical appeal of the site is its curvilinear flowing spring. In the lower right corner, Petrie places large earthenware jugs to indicate that the pilgrims intend to take holy water home from the well. Although the scene is tranquil, Petrie conveys a feeling of continuous movement, of arrivals and departures across the woodland stream.

A painting such as this in fact represents a complicated gesture of preservation. At a time when many people continued to encounter (and pass along) history orally, an image had certain advantages over a text in its potential accommodation of multiple narratives. Petrie seems well aware of these possibilities and provides a painting that invites our engagement, even participation, regardless of our particular religious (or patriotic) inclinations.

He was concerned that, over time, there had been an elision of meaning with regard to these customs, as a result of the colonial inclination to disregard this history or interpret it incorrectly. Within an Irish setting, then, Petrie evokes a universal human drive to the sacred using an international, innovative style: the Sublime. He counters the smallness of the otherwise all-too-common colonial narrative with the grandness, both literal and figurative, of the landscape he depicts. His insistence on the relevance and vitality of Irish culture contradicts the prevailing colonial perspective, which positioned the Irish people as the "other": "English perceptions of the Irish were largely based on purely Romantic constructions of Otherness. Celtic cultural distinctiveness was reflected in the wildness and strangeness of an exotic, imaginative race, inhabiting untamed

landscapes of ‘horrible beauty,’ a people very different from the practical and pragmatic English.”<sup>72</sup> In a moving way this painting presents the authentic and potent history of such sites and advocates for their preservation.

Writing in 1836, Philip Dixon Hardy discusses wells such as this within a grand and international context:

It is impossible, indeed, for any traveler, to pass over any considerable portion of the country, more especially in the south and west, without meeting with numerous Holy Wells and other places of superstitious resort, celebrated either for the cure of cattle, or the restoration to health of beings of the human race; and having around them various emblems of superstitious reverence, such as rags and ribbons hung on holy places, as memorials of the sacredness of the waters—as offerings to the tutelary saint, who is supposed to preside over and impart to them their healing virtue,—or as remembrancers to the Almighty in the day of judgment . . . In reference to the idea thrown out in the preface, that the various Stations and Holy Wells throughout Ireland are remnants of Heathen superstitions, it is considered only necessary to allude to the fact, well known to every classic reader, that the entire countries of ancient Greece and Italy abounded with trees and springs, consecrated to their imaginary deities, who were supposed particularly to delight in groves and fountains of water; and who, resorting thither to disport or enjoy themselves, rendered the locality sacred by their presence; and that in these places such of the people wished to ensure their favour or protection, used to hang garlands upon the trees, and leave offerings of wine, milk and honey . . . [they] hoped to appease their wrath.<sup>73</sup>

Although Hardy stresses the “Heathen superstitions” of this practice, he simultaneously acknowledges its noble historical precedents in Greek and Italian culture and the role played by specific features of the landscape, those that, not coincidentally, provide our Irish artists with so much of their material for the Sublime.<sup>74</sup>

In 1769, Irishman James Usher also discussed the correlation between pagan beliefs in polytheism based in nature and the Sublime:

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<sup>72</sup> Duffy, “Writing Ireland,” 67.

<sup>73</sup> Philip Dixon Hardy, *The Holy Wells of Ireland, Containing an Authentic Account of Those Various Places of Pilgrimage and Penance Which Are Still Annually Visited by Thousands of the Roman Catholic Peasantry, with a Minute Description of the Patterns and Stations Periodically Held in Various Districts of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: published by the author, 1836), 54.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph Addison also recognized the power of place in his comments on religious sites and the Sublime.

When we have carried our views this far, it is easy to discover the springs of polytheism. The imagination found the divine idea rising before it in a variety of circumstances, and worshipped it under the several distinctions in which it appeared. The Greeks, the fathers of thought and sublime knowledge, always nicely observed the difference between the native powers of the mind over its stock of sensible ideas, and the sublime influence to which it was passive. They traced the latter through its various appearances, and never failed to attribute it to divine power; sometimes to the Muses, sometimes to Apollo, to the Furies, to Pan, to the Sylvan deities, and to the genius of the place; they never mistook the supernatural presence, but only divided it out, according as the imagination happened to be struck, and to the concomitant external ideas. It was not fear made the gods, but God made his presence known by an awe that does not attend on sensible objects. If man falls down to worship in the groves, it is because the sacred impression he feels in solitude and obscurity makes him sensible of the presence of invisible power.<sup>75</sup>

Traditionally, the pagan Irish would flock to such springs to pay homage to the spirits in the hope of receiving good fortune or grace with regard to their livelihood and health. Writing in 1724, Henry Needler discusses rituals such as these within the context of the Romans, who also believed that particular sites within the landscape were both magical and were considered as ports to connecting with the Gods:

The superstitious among the *Romans* imagin'd, that the Places in the Country, which were more than commonly pleasant, such as the Openings of Woods and the Flowery Margins of Fountains, were haunted by certain Rural Deities. This Fancy of theirs has often given me Occasion to reflect, at the Sight of such places, that tho' there are indeed no Marks to be seen in them of the Presence of their chimerical Divinities, yet that an attentive and considering mind may find there many tokens and Signatures of the real Presence and operation of the true God.<sup>76</sup>

Of particular interest in Needler's commentary is his identification that the opportunity for engaging with "chimerical Divinities" was not predicated on explicit markings of the locations as a site for reverence, although people would often leave behind something that signified their own experience in this process. This practice and

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<sup>75</sup> James Usher, *Clio: or, a Discourse on Taste Addressed to a Young Lady*, 3rd ed. (London: T. Davies, 1769), 112.

<sup>76</sup> Henry Needler, "The Beauty of the Universe," in *The Works of Mr. Henry Needler: Consisting of Original Poems, Translations, Essays, and Letters*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Watts, 1735), 64.

belief system is reminiscent of Friedrich and his many German Romantic colleagues and followers who also sought spiritual inspiration within the landscape beyond the pre-established confines of Christian iconography.

For the Irish, places of meaning such as that represented in *St. Brigid's Well* were considered to be magical. Over time, Christianity made inroads and usurped the names associated with the more overt pagan rituals. However, customs from the past continued to resonate for the Irish, even if the names of the sites were changed to adhere to Christian beliefs and ideology.

For centuries people believed that by visiting such places in nature, they could connect with the world beyond, as if the sites themselves provided a channel wherein they could beckon the spirit world, and experience spiritual transformation. Such belief systems may be considered within the context of the Sublime with regard to several perspectives. For, as discussed, it was necessary to enter the landscape to truly appreciate the mystical Sublimity of an experience. The lure of the transformative power of these places implied the possibility of corporeal, spiritual, and metaphorical journeys for travelers. Ultimately, landscapes were considered as locations for the possibility of transcendence. And, as these practices became increasingly recognized within a wider community, places of meaning such as these then became prominent destinations for pilgrims throughout the Irish countryside.

For Petrie, these rituals within the Irish landscape were compelling on many levels. It was critical for him to illustrate, record, and reinscribe the landscape with the meaning of such practices that had been established over centuries.<sup>77</sup> Without Petrie's

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<sup>77</sup> Many of the sites that Petrie painted are historically linked to documented Irish pilgrimage patterns, including *Glendalough* (1815), *Glenmalure* (1815), *Dun Aengus Fort*, *Inishmore*, *Aran Islands* (c. 1827),

efforts to visually represent such longstanding Irish rites, this symbiotic relationship between the Irish people, the land, and the quest for spiritual connection may have been lost.

### **Reinscribing the Landscape with the Historic Sublime**

Within this discussion, much attention has been paid to the connection between the experience of the Sublime and the need for the observer to psychologically and physically engage with the landscape. As such I have discussed the importance for viewers to immerse themselves into the Sublimity of the experience with all three artists to varying degrees. With Petrie, I have focused on the implied presence of the observer and participant in various compositions as a means of fully experiencing the Sublime. This was discussed with regard to *Glenmalure, County Wicklow* (fig. 5:1), the difficulty and challenge of the approach to experience the majesty of *Dun Aengus Fort, Inismore, Aran Islands* (fig. 5:3), and the surrender of the tourists to the cacophony of echoes in *The Eagle's Nest at Killarney* (fig. 5:5). With regard to the final painting to be considered, *The Last Circuit of the Pilgrims at Clonmacnoise* (1842; fig. 5:8), we can turn to Petrie's own words to obtain insight into his feelings of reverence about immersing himself within this historical and ecclesiastical site of importance within the Irish landscape:

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*The Last Circuit of the Pilgrims at Clonmacnoise* (c. 1828), *St. Brigid's Well* (c. 1829), *Gougane Barra* (c. 1831), *Pagan Sepulchral Monument on the Caugh Hill, a Mountain in the Parish of Bannagher, County of Londonderry—Twilight, or The Stone Circle on Caan Hill, Derry* (c. 1839–40), *The Last Circuit of the Pilgrims of Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly* (c. 1842), and *The Skelligs* (c. 1834).

It was not without a considerable feeling of romance that we approached this, the most interesting spot that our island affords; nor without some emotion of awe that we entered its lonely and sacred precincts. Once the chief seat of piety and learning of the *Insula Sanctorum*, now a place hardly known to the inhabitants of Ireland, yet for ages held the most sacred and venerated; the Iona of Ireland, which her princes embellished, and containing the tombs of her noblest blood. Journeying thither, we indulged our fancy in such pleasing anticipations as that we should find, among the ruins of those ancient temples, sufficient evidence that Ireland was not ignorant of architectural art, as practised in Europe during the early ages of Christianity; and that among the tombs we should discover inscriptions which would show her ancient history was not, as is generally believed, a fable. Those pleasing hopes were more than realized.<sup>78</sup>

Like *St. Brigid's Well* (fig. 5:7), this painting departs from Petrie's more typical approach to the Sublime landscape and illustrates a scene populated by numerous, relatively large figures whose physical positions vary. Some kneel at the gravestones and high cross while others proceed to the river with folded hands and bowed heads. With this view Petrie manages to represent the concrete history of a place while simultaneously conveying the timelessness of the rituals that were once, and continue to be, practiced there.

Petrie's eloquent description of Clonmacnoise reveals his deep feelings about the spiritual, cultural, and historical significance of the tradition of pilgrimage in Irish culture. He humbly disavows his own contribution to the preservation of these traditions and seems content to have the paintings themselves represent his convictions. Cluain Moccu Nóis is located in the southwest of Ireland, on the banks of the River Shannon, County Clare. The beauty of the site is ironic given the centuries of violence associated with it (such was also the case for the site of *Pagan Sepulchral Monument on the Caugh Hill*). Petrie's depiction of it has a distinctly intimate feel, as he positions the viewer

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<sup>78</sup> Journal of George Petrie, quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 27.

within the physical and psychological space of the numerous pilgrims that wander among the monastic ruins.

The painting is dominated by the dilapidated remains of an ivy-covered, round tower, a Celtic high cross, and the façade of a Romanesque church, all of which might be landmarks to the sailing vessels glimpsed in the distance. Petrie wrote his letter about Clonmacnoise to the Royal Irish Art Union in 1842 (which is included at the beginning of this chapter), just three years before the beginning of the Great Famine (1845–50). At this time in Irish culture, sites of historic significance would not have been of primary importance to the peasantry, who were struggling simply to survive. Yet Petrie connects them directly to the spiritual and psychological health of Ireland itself:

There is not, perhaps, in Europe a spot where the feeling heart would find more matter for melancholy reflection than among the ancient churches of Clonmacnoise. Its ruined buildings call forth national associations and ideas. They remind us of the arts and literature, the piety and humanity, which distinguished their time, and are the work of a people, who, in a dark age, marched among the foremost on the road to life and civilization, but who were unfortunately checked and barbarized by those who were journeying in the same course and ought to have cheered them on.<sup>79</sup>

Of particular note within this quotation is Petrie's acknowledgment of the importance of national associations and ideas. Within this text and the corresponding painting, Petrie succinctly clarifies his compelling mission. He aims to honor, cherish, and document the significance of such ritualistic pilgrimages centered within the Irish landscape. He doesn't resort to harsh, incendiary, or pejorative commentary with regard to those who have not yet respected Ireland's past. Instead he employs his brush and pen to entice, enthrall, and excite the reader and viewer about the myriad levels of meaning associated with Clonmacnoise.

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<sup>79</sup> Journal of George Petrie quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 31–34.

Calling forth nationalist associations and ideas, he does so with subtlety. It wasn't until later in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries that more overt nationalistic themes were typically illustrated in Irish painting. Petrie's manner is not one of confrontation, rather, he aims to attract by persuasion. Giving visual expression to years of Irish history, one can only imagine the intensity of his hopes to bring the glory of Ireland's history to a wider public, and finally, to provide evidence of it before it was forgotten.

There is much in Petrie's vivid response to his experience at Clonmacnoise that indicates his attraction to the inherent, primal Sublimity of the setting. In particular, with passion he recalls and explicates the meaning of the *ulligaun*, or death-cry, of the pilgrims as part of their mourning ritual. While it would be difficult to illustrate the enactment of the death-cry, through his journals we can glean his own recognition of the powerful impression this ritualistic practice had on him. Surrounded by the beauty of the Irish landscape, we can only imagine the disturbing effect that the desperate and piercing *ulligaun* cry would have on the sanctified site and its mourners.

It will be seen from the above outline that the scenery of Clonmacnoise is of a character altogether lonely, sublime, and poetic. These qualities are rather enhanced than abated by the appearance of the figures usually found here, and which are so identified in character with the ruins, that they may be truly said to belong to each other. These figures are of pilgrims who come hither from various and frequently the most remote parts of Ireland, to court the favour or avert the displeasure of God by a long and painful penance . . . Their attitudes too, and the situations in which they are grouped, are often in the highest degree picturesque and striking. Sometimes kneeling or prostrated round a grassy hollow—the ruins of some holy shrine; at other times creeping on their bare knees to some place of still higher sanctity; now arranged in silent prayer round the rude but gorgeously sculptured stone cross, which they afterwards kiss with the utmost fervency of devotion; and now, hurrying rapidly along to some more distant object of worship. In all their movements there is an abstracted intensity of feeling that carries the mind back to remote times, and a rapturous expression of devotion and

holy love may occasionally be observed, which a philosophic observer might, perhaps, envy or wish to participate in.

Few days however pass over, in which it does not, for a while, present a scene of wild commotion, when the silent solitude is disturbed by the *ulligaun* or death-cry, raised as some peasant of the country is borne to the grave of his ancestors. On those occasions the sorrowing kindred of those interred here, give full vent to their excited feelings of grief and affection at sight of their graves, throwing themselves on the grassy hillocks, which they kiss and press with melancholy ardour, now praying fervently, and now making the most distressing lamentations. These noisy, temporary visitors are not less in character with the place than the silent pilgrims who usually haunt this desolate ruin. Both alike come for those purposes that brought others here for more than a thousand years, with the same customs and ceremonies, the same lamentations and death-cry, and the same peculiar and intense feelings. Then, indeed, when the *ulligaun* was raised, it was for some person of the highest rank or glory, and among the pilgrims might be seen the richly adorned figures of princes leaving their caps and sandals at the church door, and, with staff in hand, performing the routine of penances now only the duty of the peasant.<sup>80</sup>

Within this passage, in his own words, Petrie establishes once again his ability to capture the timeless nature of such practices within magical locations of the Irish landscape. Portraying contemporary pilgrims, he uses the text to enhance our appreciation for the myriad levels of meaning to this custom. With flair he manages to be poetic (by harkening back to the “princes leaving their caps and sandals at the church door,” at the same time as he reinforces the utter Sublimity of the forlorn and dramatic reenactment. This is Petrie at his best. He presents a Sublime landscape and simultaneously imbues it with beauty, drama, majesty, and history.

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<sup>80</sup> Journal of George Petrie, quoted in Stokes, *Life and Labours*, 31–32.

## Conclusion

Petrie reveals his interpretation of the value of the Sublime in his own history paintings, and it is essentially different from his countrymen. Danby's cataclysmic vistas were idealized and based on mythical and biblical texts, including formidable views of the apocalypse. In addition, from the outset of his career, Danby was aware of the metropolitan ambiance within the exhibition arena itself and worked hard to impress his savvy London viewers.

O'Connor's Romantic Sublime was somewhat more complicated. His paintings invite viewers to enter into and share the experience of his mystical and enigmatic views of Sublime vistas in Ireland and on the continent. The locations he chose to paint would have become more fashionable by the early to mid-nineteenth century, and we can assume that some travelers and viewers would have been familiar with them. However, it does not appear that his methodology included a strategy to further promote tourism, or to preserve the cultural meanings of his landscapes as subjects. Rather, his own feelings seem to motivate his landscapes. Certainly he needed to sell paintings and sought to capture his viewers' attention by appropriating various metropolitan influences to that end. But the impression he sought to share was his own—that of the Romantic exile, if you will, but not the doomsayer or the historian.

For both Danby and O'Connor numerous metropolitan influences allowed them to transcend the limitations of their early experience in Ireland. To varying degrees both of them aspired to assimilate within the more commercial parameters of London's cultural circles. They sought to do so while (to varying degrees) retaining their personal connections to the complicated heritage of their provincial homeland.

Danby's struggle to do so was less obvious; for O'Connor, the challenge was overt. However, the means with which they transformed their practical and theoretical approach to painting were specifically tied to the following factors. By leaving Ireland they gained exposure to advanced training and exhibition opportunities, which availed them the benefit of exposure to Old Master paintings. In addition, they profited from the increasing preponderance of reproductive prints that hastened and promulgated their careers through new access to middle class art lovers. For O'Connor in particular, London was the catalyst for his two continental trips. Upon his return his art was transformed and imbued with the drama, emotion, and depth associated with German Romanticism. Thus for both Danby and O'Connor, the metropolis was a critical venue that propelled their artistic development forward.

Petrie also benefited from the aforementioned metropolitan influences; the brilliance of his career is that he was able to do so while remaining in Ireland. In comparison to his numerous Irish artistic colleagues, his ability to go beyond the provincial typical genre and topographical landscapes is astounding. In addition, Petrie's motivations were far more ambitious and complex. By contrast, Petrie wanted to depict the continuity of Ireland's cultural history, yet make it relevant to contemporaneous viewers as well. He sought to share his compelling vision of the unique importance of place to Irish culture. Like Salvatore Rosa, whose own travels inspired his popular Sublime paintings, Petrie would illustrate places in Ireland that moved him and that he felt he must reclaim. In many ways, his travels to paint sites of historic and spiritual

meaning throughout the landscape mirror those Irish pilgrimages that dated back to the seventh century.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Petrie's motivations were multifaceted. There is a particular congruence between his paintings of pilgrimage (both in the past and during his life) and how pilgrimage was perceived in centuries gone by. Historians such as Peter Harbison have connected the concept of the *peregrinatio*, those participants on a pilgrimage, or travelers in search of spiritual sustenance and inspiration, with the practice of voluntary exile.<sup>2</sup> For Petrie, sites in the landscape that were linked to prehistoric, pagan, and Christian rituals exerted a magnetic pull upon him. His interest lay in mining the centuries of Irish history beyond the historical and cultural timeline established by the English to reclaim the country's artistic heritage and preserve it before it was literally and figuratively lost.

Within the letter addressed to the Royal Irish Art Union that is quoted at the beginning of the last chapter, Petrie identifies several key elements that summarize his efforts, motivations, inspirations, and success as a painter of the historical Sublime in Ireland. He emphasizes his desire to produce a history painting that transcends mere topography; one that would have deeper and more significant resonance and meaning for the Irish people, at that time, and, he hoped, in the future. He acknowledges his desire to illustrate and record the relationship between the Irish people, their land, and centuries of their troubled history. Yes it was contested, but the history he chose to paint was theirs. With a nod towards modernity, he even expresses his desire that the painting be engraved for a reproductive print, so that it could be seen and resonate with, a wider audience.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Hughes, "The Changing Theory and Practice of Irish Pilgrimage," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 2 (1960): 143–51; Daphne D. C. Pochin Mould, *Irish Pilgrimage* (New York: Devin-Adare, 1955).

<sup>2</sup> Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland*, passim.

<sup>3</sup> There is no record of an engraving having been made of this painting.

Perhaps then, later journeyers and wanderers such as Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie can be considered within the century's old tradition of searching for inspiration within the landscape. Their Sublime paintings reflect their quest to explore the relationship between divinity and the landscape that they encountered or imagined on their travels. For Petrie especially, I would further argue that he was in a sense, on his own pilgrimage. His quest was to document, illustrate, and reinscribe the symbiotic historical relationship between man's search for transcendence and engagement with divinity within the Irish landscape, lest it be lost.

Throughout this discussion I have considered the work of Francis Danby, James Arthur O'Connor, and George Petrie within a metropolitan versus provincial context, incorporating as well the international influences upon their paintings. This approach differs from much of the prevailing scholarship on Irish artists, which tends to be monographic and often considers Irish artists only in the shadow of their English colleagues.

Numerous contributing factors created a cultural climate in Ireland that failed to offer the necessary support, education, and patronage for struggling artists trying to make a name for themselves. In addition, the political, social, and economic environment there ensured both tension and competitiveness between the Irish people and their English neighbors. As a result of the Act of Union, the structure of support for the arts that was in place in the eighteenth century fell apart as aristocratic patrons tied to the parliament immediately moved to London. With far fewer patrons, no state or governmental support, and poor educational and exhibition opportunities, exile for Irish artists must have seemed very attractive, whatever the cost.

For those artists who did leave, the grass was not always greener; English artists and cultural figures were working equally hard to raise the reputation of the English school to the level of other European artistic milieus. Thus, throughout my discussion here, I have been careful to point out the fluidity of the terms metropolitan and provincial: while England offered Irish artists more support than they had at home, breaking into those competitive London art circles required fresh strategic efforts based upon the realization that a new inferiority complex awaited there as well. It was in fact important for Irish artists to distinguish themselves among their English peers as well as their myriad international colleagues by appropriating formal and theoretical methodologies that would propel them, and their reputations, forward into the sought-after exhibition rooms of the Royal Academy and the British Institution.

While numerous Irish artists had long enjoyed success in London, and in fact were regular contributors to the Royal Academy, there were residual issues even in Danby's, Petrie's, and O'Connor's time that prevented them from fully assimilating into London's cultural scene. Many of their peers had difficulty reconciling their hopes for financial and professional success with their ambivalence about leaving home and choosing to seek success within England's cultural environs. Due to the limited amount of documentation that deals with this period, and the fact that many writers discussed Irish artists in London as "English" artists, it is an engaging challenge to piece together the situation that confronted Irish artists who tried to assimilate into the London art world.

Though England faced its own share of obstacles to acknowledged artistic legitimacy, the concerted intervention of key individuals such as Sir Joshua Reynolds,

Alderman John Boydell, and John Julius Angerstein resulted in the improvement of English school. Gradually the infrastructures developed that were necessary to raising the level of the cultural support in London, including the establishment of the Royal Academy of Art, the seismic changes in the international reproductive print market, and the nascent availability of Old Master paintings from the continent for English (and Irish) artists to study. Ultimately, as well, artists and their influential supporters would recognize, to the great benefit of the English school overall, that they must privilege history painting as a way of competing with their continental peers.

Many Irish artists already sought to transcend their topographical roots in favor of more modern means of transcribing landscape views. As a result, they rose to the occasion of these uniquely metropolitan influences by exploring a new type of Romantic painting, which in turn lent itself to the fashion for ever larger, more spectacular and emotive paintings that resonated with the international attraction to the Sublime. In addition, there were new possibilities associated with the burgeoning market for reproductive prints within international art markets, thanks in part to Boydell's keen understanding of the relevance of history painting to the new demographics of the middle-class art lovers and buyers, to say nothing of the broader international audiences.

Finally, Old Master paintings became available through the dispersal of European collections to private collectors such as John Julius Angerstein. Having access to such paintings for study was essential for young artists who wanted to advance their career by expanding their formal and theoretical strategies within the metropolis. Artists such as Danby, O'Connor, and Petrie had the opportunity to ground their work within these powerful traditions while forging ahead with new advances, many of them internationally

inspired. For them, the most viable means of transcending their provincial roots was their individualized adaptation of the Sublime, an approach to formal and theoretical expression that was fashionable within the parameters of international Romanticism. At all times, however, their provincial roots continued to inform their work, their lives, and their world view as they matured and set about establishing their individual reputations, both successfully and less so.

Throughout their lives, the friendships among Danby, Petrie, and O'Connor sustained them as they traveled (or did not, in Petrie's case) back and forth from England to Ireland, and abroad, in an effort to make their way in the world. In *The Wanderer in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*, Andrew Cusack suggests that friendships, communal leave-takings, and an ongoing sense of separation from friends and homelands profoundly shaped those journeyers who felt compelled to search for new opportunities elsewhere, and were willing to pay the cost of doing so.<sup>4</sup>

These Irish artists' distinguished appropriation of three unique versions of the Sublime allowed them to transcend their earlier training and expand their formal and theoretical practice. Without the modern and innovative influences that they found on their travels, it is likely that they too would have remained artists whose talents, capabilities, and creativity would remain underappreciated. Instead, they made art that would prove to be crucial to the incarnation of the Irish Sublime, a personal artistic response to, and engagement with, divinity within the natural world.

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Cusack, *The Wanderer in Nineteenth-Century German Literature: Intellectual History and Cultural Criticism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), passim.

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