

The Impossibility of Artistic Escape: Thomas Watling, John Glover, and the Australian Picturesque

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In 1792 a young artist named Thomas Watling was transported to Sydney after being convicted of forgery in Dumfries, Scotland. Assigned to work for John White, the Surgeon General, who was gathering material for a book of natural history illustrations, Watling spent several years painting picturesque views of Australia, despite complaining to his aunt that the landscape of the penal colony lacked such typically picturesque features as 'happy-opposed off-scapes', 'bold rising hills', or 'azure distances'. Instead, all he found were 'extensive woods, spread over a little varied plain'.¹

Not quite forty years later, in 1831, John Glover, a prosperous English artist, settled with his family in Launceston, a region his son likewise framed in picturesque terms, commenting that it had 'much of the Ulswater [sic] character'. He described the masses of hills as 'strong and striking, and very like the management of Gaspard Poussin's landscapes'.² Although the elder Glover produced a number of picturesque views of this region, he also painted several landscapes that are antipodean inversions of the picturesque.

Both Watling and Glover struggled to reconcile the Australian landscape with the confines of the picturesque, the dominant landscape aesthetic of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Ironically, Watling, the convict, who rebelled against the idea of empire in his letters, ended up portraying Australia in picturesque ways, even though the picturesque was in effect the visual language of the colonizers.³ Glover, on the other hand, glorified and

¹ T. Watling, *Letters from an exile at Botany Bay to his aunt in Dumfries*, Penrith, 1979 [1792]. All quotes and page numbers are from the reprint edition, intro. G. Mackaness, Sydney, 1945, p. 25.

² Glover to M. Bowles, 20 February 1831, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

³ See especially, though not exclusively, S. Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India*, Chicago, 1992, pp. 75-109; G. Tillotson, *The Artificial Empire*, Richmond, Surrey, 2000; B. Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd ed., New Haven, 1985.

profited from the empire, but in the process of embracing Australia found himself on several occasions rejecting the picturesque as a means of painting the landscape. In the end, for both men, the picturesque mediated their possibilities of escape: Watling from his convict status, Glover from England and an art market in which he had secured financial success but not critical acclaim. Their experiences, therefore, raise questions about what it means to escape pictorially, and how art can facilitate — or limit — the possibilities of escape.

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Thomas Watling was born in Dumfries in 1762, a soldier's son, and was raised by his aunt, his parents having died when he was an infant. The first record of him, aside from his baptism, is of his art academy where he taught 'drawing to ladies and gentlemen for a guinea a month'. Business was either not good or the wages insufficient, for in 1788 he was charged with forging Bank of Scotland notes. He tried for more than a year to gain his freedom on the grounds of 'false information', but in 1789, fearing conviction and possibly hanging, he filed a petition requesting transportation, stating that he could not 'remain longer in this country with any degree of credit'. His petition was granted and he was sentenced to fourteen years transportation to the new colony of Botany Bay.⁴

Two episodes on the journey out shed some light on the convict experience, and on the possibilities of — and Watling's ambivalent attitudes towards — escape. Along with six other prisoners, Watling was transferred from Dumfries to Edinburgh where he was put on a small ship bound for Plymouth. During the short voyage some of the convicts on board became mutinous, but not Watling, who apparently provided the captain, Robert Smith, with information about the mutineers' intentions, enabling the captain to thwart their plot. Smith subsequently took an interest in Watling's case, believing him, as a result of his behavior on board, to be innocent of the charge of forgery, and writing a letter to the Lord Advocate on Watling's behalf. Although Watling was not freed, because the captain thought Watling 'an ingenious artist' and 'an acquisition' to the new colony, he was given a less onerous assignment (see below).⁵

⁴ Watling, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

The second episode occurred at the Cape of Good Hope, where in December 1791 Watling wrote to his Aunt excitedly, 'Your loved Watling is at liberty!' He added cryptically, 'I hold it imprudent to commit to paper how I have obtained emancipation. I will only say that the ship *Pitt* lies opposite my window and means to sail by Sunday next'. Two weeks later, however, he was recaptured after being betrayed by the Dutch. In the absence of any additional information, it is hard to know why he tried to thwart his fellow convicts' attempts to escape in the first instance, and then himself escaped in the second, though perhaps in the first instance he thought his chances of gaining his freedom better by allying his interests with those of his ship captain, whereas by the time he got to South Africa he was more desperate (perhaps having endangered himself by informing on his shipmates). Regardless, after spending seven months in an African prison he was put on another ship, and reached his final destination, Port Jackson, in October 1792.⁶

Watling was the first professional artist to arrive in the colony, and was assigned to work for the Surgeon General, John White, an amateur naturalist who was keeping a journal and collecting specimens and drawings of the colony. White had already produced a book of natural history illustrations, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (1790), which was a great success, and probably had in mind a second volume. He worked Watling very hard drawing the flora and fauna of the settlement, prompting Watling to call him 'a very mercenary, sordid person'. Watling's principal task was to paint, as he put it, 'the non-descript productions of the country'.⁷ Although White's second book came to nothing, Watling published a brief account of his own experiences and impressions of Australia in 1794, though without illustrations, titled *Letters from an Exile at Botany Bay to his Aunt in Dumfries*, a 32-page octavo volume of which only three original copies are known to exist.

Letters from an Exile makes clear that Watling felt trapped and unhappy in this strange new world:

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 20-1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Our longest day coincides exactly with your shortest; and *vice versa*. The climate is an extremely sultry one, especially in summer; and yet paradoxical as it may appear, it is in no ways propitious for tropical vegetation. A few *European* culinary vegetables grow, but never arrive to their pristine maturity, and when re-transplanted dwindle unto nothing. The face of the country is deceitful; having every appearance of fertility; and yet productive of no one article in itself fit for the support of mankind ... In the warmer season, the thunder very frequently rolls tremendous, accompanied by a scorching wind, so intolerable as almost to obstruct respiration; – whilst the surrounding horizon looks like one entire sheet of uninterrupted flame. The air, notwithstanding, is in general dry. Fifteen months have been known to elapse without a single shower ... The vast number of green frogs, reptiles and large insects, among the grass and on the trees, during the spring, summer, and fall, make an incessant noise and clamor.⁸

The vast difference between the Scotland he knew and the Australia where he was now forced to live produced in him a pronounced feeling of melancholy, a theme that sets the tone for his *Letters from an Exile*. He wrote of his 'despondent state of mind', of the 'gloom' that 'frowns dreadful' over the vista of his being; of the 'dreary prospect' and 'the wide domain of adversity terminated only by the impending darkness'. He felt as though 'melancholy's somber shadow' had lowered over his soul.⁹

Watling was hardly alone in his reaction. But whereas many Europeans consequently responded unfavorably to the Australian landscape, including Watling's patron, John White, who wrote of 'a country and place so forbidding and so hateful as only to merit execration and curses',¹⁰ Watling ended up acknowledging Australia's potential beauty, again using paradigmatically Romantic language:

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 25-6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18. According to I. McLean, 'Under Satan: Melancholy and the Colonial Imagination', in N. Thomas and D. Losche (eds), *Double Vision: Art Histories and Colonial Histories in the Pacific*, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 131-62, melancholy was 'a persistent trope used in the discourse of redemption during the epoch of colonialism' (p. 136).

¹⁰ Quoted in A. H. Chisholm (ed.), *Australia: Land of Wonder*, Sydney, 1979, p. 16.

Perhaps nothing can surpass the circumambient windings, and romantic banks of the narrow arm of the sea that leads from this to *Parramatta*, another settlement fourteen miles off. The poet may there descry numberless beauties; nor can there be fitter haunts for the imagination ... Arcadian shades, or classic bowers, present themselves at every winding to the ravished eye. Overhead the most grotesque foliage yields a shade, where cooling zephyrs breathe every perfume ... In short, were the benefits of the least equal to the specious external, this country need hardly give any place to any other on earth.¹¹

At least in the last decade of the eighteenth century, however, it was the picturesque that was the dominant mode of landscape painting, and Watling struggled to reconcile what he perceived to be the Romantic qualities of the landscape with the formal requirements of the picturesque.

The picturesque was a literary and visual aesthetic that developed during the second half of the eighteenth century, most famously by William Gilpin in relation to the English Lake District. Picturesque artists employed a formulaic way of composing pictures that was based upon certain rules of classical proportion. The picturesque generally divided the landscape into three distances: a darkened and detailed foreground, a strongly lit and deep-toned middle ground, and a hazy background. Features such as trees and ruins were to be positioned so as to create a balanced composition that provided a sense of both harmony and variety, and to push the viewer's eye to the middle distance, as in a stage set. In a typical picturesque scene there is a winding river; two *coulisses* which are the opposite banks of the river and, in conjunction with some hills, mark the perspective; a front screen which points out the winding of the river; and a hazy, rugged, mountainous background. There was also an identifiable picturesque tint, the soft golden light of the Roman *Campagna*, which, as a number of scholars have suggested, artists transposed first onto the English landscape, and then carried to the furthest reaches of the British Empire.¹² Everywhere it was deployed, the picturesque had the effect

¹¹ Watling, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4.

¹² The picturesque was hardly a stable or unitary aesthetic. Its elements and definition were hotly contested in the eighteenth century, and have been debated by art historians and literary scholars ever since. In fact, its very malleability made it useful as an ideology of empire. See, among many, C. Hussey, *The Picturesque; Studies in a*

of concealing hardships, neutralizing racial, ethnic, and class differences, and beautifying the frequently unpleasant surroundings that characterized life both in England and in the imperial zone. It refracted local people and conditions through a single, formulaic lens.¹³

Translating the Australian landscape into the picturesque proved challenging for Watling because of the absence of typically picturesque features such as old and gnarled trees, winding mountain paths, peasant cottages, and jagged and rocky cliffs. Watling wrote to his aunt:

My worthy friend, Mr. H ----- may reasonably conclude that these romantic scenes will much amuse my pencil; although therein he is much mistaken. The landscape painter may in vain seek here that kind of beauty that arises from happy-opposed off-scapes. Bold rising hills, or azure distances would be a kind of phenomena. The principal traits of the country are extensive woods, spread over a little varied plain'.

He knew, however, as so many of his contemporary artists did, that picturesque paintings were not simply transcriptions of nature but arrangements of it, incorporating motifs culled from a number of sketches. As he put it, 'I confess that were I to select and combine, I might avoid that sameness, and find engaging employment'.¹⁴ And in the end, that is just what Watling did. His convict status, his need for employment, and his work for John White mitigated against his ability to escape the confines of the picturesque and to paint the landscape as he described it.

Point of View, London, 1927, which established the picturesque as an 'interregnum between classic and romantic art' (p. 4), and more recently, M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, Stanford, 1989; S. Copley and P. Garside (eds), *The Politics of the Picturesque*, Cambridge, 1994; K. I. Michasiw, 'Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque', *Representations*, Vol. 38, 1992, pp. 76-100; P. Godrej and P. Rohatgi, *Scenic Splendours: India through the Painted Image*, London, 1989; M. Archer, *British Drawings in the India Office Library*, Vol. I, London, 1969.

¹³ In addition to Suleri, *op. cit.*, and Tillotson, *op. cit.*, see J. Barrell (ed.), *Painting and the Politics of Culture: Nine Essays on British Art, 1700-1850*, Oxford, 1992; A. Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology: The English Rustic Tradition*, Berkeley, 1986; N. Everet, *The Tory View of the Landscape*, New Haven, 1984.

¹⁴ Watling, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9; B. Smith, *Australian Painting 1788-1960*, Melbourne, 1962, pp. 11-15, and *European Vision*, pp. 182-5.

Watling's pen and wash sketch of Sydney Cove located in the British Natural History Museum (Figure 1) reveals Watling's struggle to reconcile the Australian landscape with the demands of the picturesque, and by extension to resolve his ambiguous status within the British Empire.¹⁵ In the drawing, for example, Watling softened what would otherwise have been an unpicturesque, unbroken, arcing, horizon line with several tall trees and a gentle, serpentine curve, in keeping with Gilpin who wrote that 'a continuity of line without break ... will always displease, because it wants variety'.¹⁶ Watling also darkened the foreground, again following Gilpin, in order to lead the viewer's eye to the Cove, the subject of the painting, and dotted it with several details, including some felled trees and plants.¹⁷ Finally, to complete the picturesque treatment, Watling framed the picture with two gently sloping hillsides on either side of the road, forming a *coulisse* in the normal manner of a picturesque landscape.¹⁸ In short,

15 There is also an oil painting of the view, located in the Dixon Galleries at the State Library of New South Wales, that for many years was attributed to Watling. Tim McCormick first raised the question of attribution in *First Views of Australia 1788-1825*, Chippendale, 1987, p. 274. P. Dredge and S. Laidler, 'Comparative examination and pigment analysis of four oil paintings attributed to Thomas Watling', in S. Wallace, J. Macnaughton, and J. Parvi (eds), *The Articulate Surface*, Canberra, 1995, pp. 203-12, probes the question more thoroughly, noting that 'quality' materials were used and that these were probably lacking in the colony in the late-eighteenth century. I. McLean, 'Sense of Place: Edward Dayes's and Thomas Watling's Pictures of Sydney Cove', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2001, pp. 11-26, defends this position, claiming that '*Sydney Cove 1794* is too skilfully painted to be by Watling', and that 'Watling's depictions of the colony generally omit Europeans', whereas this painting does not. McLean suggests that Edward Dayes, who reworked other Watling drawings to illustrate *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, London, 1798, made the oil painting. Smith has defended the Watling attribution in *European Vision*, pp. 182-5, and in 'The Oil Painting "Sydney in 1794"', *Australian Journal of Art*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1998, pp. 52-9. Smith points out that Dayes generally signed his work, whereas *Sydney Cove 1794* is unsigned; that the original inscription on the back of the painting – which reads 'Painted immediately from Nature by T. Watling' – is most likely in Watling's hand; and that it would have been possible for Watling to have produced the oils he needed, mixing available materials. No such questions exist about the pen and wash drawing. It should also be noted that although Watling described the landscape in Romantic terms, there is very little that is stylistically Romantic about either the drawing or the oil painting.

16 W. Gilpin, *Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1772, on several parts of England; particularly the mountains, and lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland*, London, 1786, p. 83.

17 W. Gilpin, *Two Essays: one on the author's mode of executing rough sketches: the other on the principles on which they are composed*, London, 1804, pp. 35-6.

18 Gilpin, *Observations*, had written of the importance of 'an ancient oak to give the foreground grandeur when we want the magnificence of its shadowing form to mantle over a vacant corner of a landscape' (p. 106).

Watling took a landscape that was, by his own admission, rather monotonous, and transformed it into desirable tourist destination, reminiscent of the English Lake District. In so doing, he was at least implicitly helping to promote the colonization of Australia.¹⁹



Figure 1: Thomas Watling, *View Taken from the Westside of Sydney Cove behind the Hospital* (c. 1794), Natural History Museum, London.

¹⁹ It should be noted that the practice of executing sketches on the spot and then reworking them into picturesque watercolors or oil paintings was quite normal, for example, Westall on Flinders voyage and Hodges on Cook's voyage.

Watling's written comments, however, suggest that he had serious reservations about the form colonization was taking, and that Australia remained a place for scientists not settlers. In addition to his dissatisfaction with the climate noted earlier, Watling was also quite deprecating of the development that had taken place in New South Wales, grousing that 'Sydney-Cove is the principal settlement, and is about 1/3 part as large as *Dumfries* ... Many houses ... are built with brick, and covered with tiles; but none of them, the governor's excepted, exceed the height of one story'.²⁰ In fact, he seems to have thought that the whole idea of a new colony a waste of time:

To see what has been done in the space of five or six years, of clearing, building and planting, is astonishing. To behold hundreds of hands laboriously mis-employed, that might be of service, and not burdensome to their country, assuredly deserves attention and reformation; ... all that has been done is of little service to our support, and of none at all to government; and that neither this, nor the ensuing century will see us able to subsist ourselves, much less to retaliate what has been lavished upon so very an adventure.²¹

Watling even went so far as to imply that the colony might not survive, though it is possible to discern this only from his *Letters*. Nevertheless, his artistic work remains comfortably within the confines of the late-eighteenth century picturesque, which highlighted the beauty rather than the hardships of imperial lands, depicting Sydney as a place ripe for settlement.

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20 Watling, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 33.

21 *Ibid.*

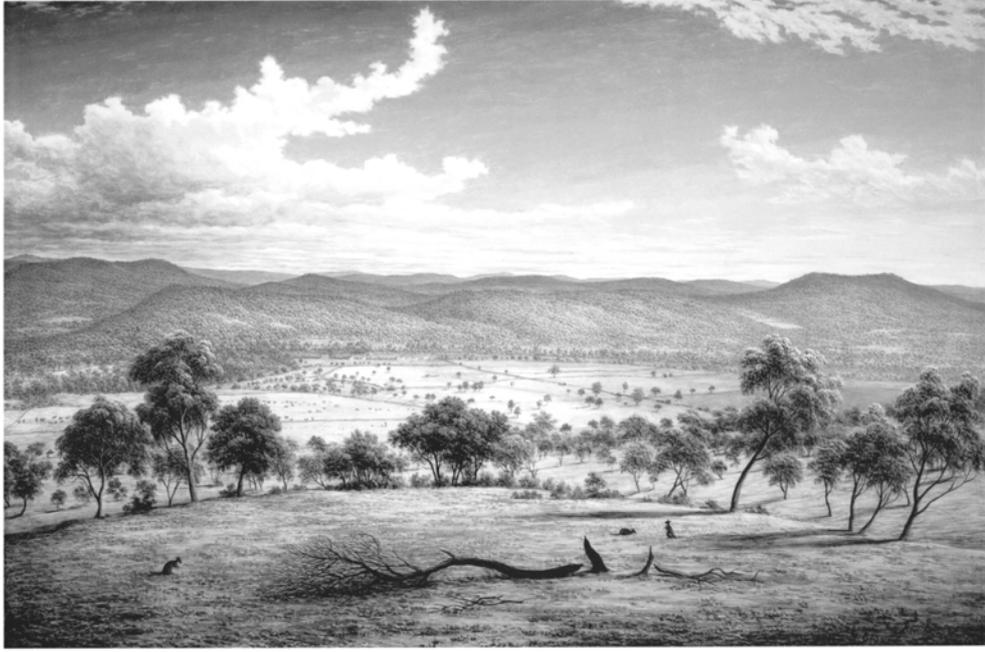


Figure 2: John Glover, *Cawood on the Ouse River* (1838), Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart .



Figure 3: John Glover, *Hobart Town, from the Garden where I lived* (1832), Dixon Galleries, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

John Glover's story is rather different.²² Glover was born in 1767 near Leicester, England, the son of a small farm owner. His formal education was probably rudimentary, but at the age of nineteen he received an appointment as writing master at an area school, in which position he was able to travel to London to see exhibitions and to take painting lessons. Glover familiarized himself with the landscapes of Claude, Gainsborough, Wilson, and Salvator Rosa, and his early sketchbooks, filled with detailed studies of trees, cows, and country people going about their daily occupations, reflect a love and understanding of the landscape. Glover first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1795, but was never a regular at the annual exhibitions, and he tried in vain throughout his career to gain acceptance into the Academy. In the 1820s Glover began to achieve considerable financial success after opening an exhibition of his own on Old Bond Street, but his work continued to be criticized. A *Times* reviewer considered Glover to be 'deficient in a feeling for the poetry of art', and *Ackermann's Repository* complained of 'too great particularity upon minute objects'. In a similar vein, a critic in the *New Monthly Magazine* found Glover's oil paintings to be 'too much like Claude and the old Italian painters ... to form a good original style of his own'.²³ After a particularly scathing account of Glover's activities by Constable in a letter to the Reverend John Fisher, Fisher replied:

Your account of the English Claude [J. M. W. Turner's snide and denigrating appellation for him] is delightful. I wish I had one of his landscapes to hang up near yours to see what the world would say. – But what is the world but a flock of sheep following their leader. And Glover is the old Ram with the bell just at present.

Glover may have been fashionable (and wealthy), but critical acclaim eluded him. After his three younger sons emigrated to Van Diemen's Land in 1829, Glover left the following year with his wife, his eldest son John, and their servant, arriving in Hobart in 1831.²⁴

²² Insight into Glover's life is hampered by the fact that there is no collection of his correspondence, no journal, not even a contemporary biography. The biographical details that follow are drawn principally from J. McPhee, *The Art of John Glover*, South Melbourne, 1980, pp. 1-16, and D. Hansen, *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque*, Hobart, 2003.

²³ *The Times*, 14 June 1821; *Ackermann's Repository*, 2nd ser., Vol. X, No. LXXVI, p. 373; *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 March 1825, p. 108. For extensive discussion of the mixed reception of Glover's work, see Hansen, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 70-8.

²⁴ Glover's decision to emigrate has baffled his biographers, especially given his advanced age and his professional reputation. Speculation has centred on his lack of

In contrast to Watling, who, though frustrated by the apparent lack of picturesque features in Australia ended up employing its stylistic elements nonetheless, Glover on occasion challenged its confines, depicting colonial Australia as a land ripe for settlement and development in unique and original ways.²⁵ One such example is *Cawood on the Ouse River* (1838) (Figure 2). Cawood was a widely admired nineteenth century estate, originally a 1000 acre land grant that by the end of the century had become one of the most extensive sheep farms in Tasmania. The homestead, in the exact centre of Glover's painting, was 'of description not generally seen in the colony, comprising [a] large family mansion, with extensive outbuildings, the whole substantially built of stone'. The property itself, situated on the well-irrigated flats alongside the sinuous Ouse River, was described in 1844 as having 'excellent pasture and arable land, the whole substantially fenced in and subdivided into convenient sized paddocks' with several hundred acres under crop. Glover's painting depicts a half dozen or so of these paddocks stretching before the house planted with grain crops, and several more dotted with cattle. Another paddock contains a shepherd and his dogs with a flock of sheep, and close to the house is a bullock wagon, suggestive of hay making. Although the finished oil shows only two felled trees, Glover's sketch for the painting has numerous felled trees in the foreground, evidence of a vigorous campaign of clearing.²⁶

The painting's significance, however, lies less in its cataloguing of Marzetti's impressive assets, than in what David Hansen has characterized as its 'antipodean anti-Claudean structure'.²⁷ Instead of

critical acclaim and his son's financial difficulties. Hansen, *op. cit.*, focuses on Glover's 'sense of adventure' and 'irrepressible curiosity', quoting a letter from Glover in which he wrote about his 'expectation of finding a new Beautiful World' and his desire to 'take possession of 2,000 Acres of Land' (p. 80).

²⁵ There is disagreement as to Glover's relationship with the picturesque. Smith asserts that Glover's Australian work depended less on ideas of picturesqueness than on his 'clear perception of the characteristic features of the Australian scene' (*European Vision*, p. 199), whereas I. McLean, *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art*, Cambridge, 1998, claims that 'there are no substantial stylistic differences between Glover's English and Tasmanian work', noting that Glover brought to Australia a copy of Price's treatise on the picturesque, and that he painted a number of his so-called 'English' paintings in Tasmania from sketches he had brought with him (p. 39). See also McPhee, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-5; R. Hughes, *Art of Australia*, Harmondsworth, 1970, pp. 41-2; T. Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition: Australian Landscape Painting 1801-1890*, Oxford, 1985, pp. 30-4.

²⁶ J. Glover, Sketchbook 102, Nos. 65, 67-8, National Library of Australia, NK644/1.

²⁷ Hansen, *op. cit.* See also E. Johns *et. al.*, *New Worlds from Old: 19th Century Australian & American Landscapes*, Canberra, 1998, p. 124.

employing the classical, concave, bowl-like structure with trees spreading up the sides of the canvas like *coulisses*, Glover has defined his foreground by means of a convex ridge, marked by eucalypts and acacias that form a barrier between the viewer and the middle distance. Instead of a lower border of rich, deeply coloured foliage, the frontal plain consists almost entirely of naked grass, varied only by the two felled trees and three little wallabies. Instead of a winding river or path to carry the viewer's eye through the painting, Glover's Ouse runs horizontally across the canvas. And although the central plain of the painting is suitably pastoral, the background consists not of hazy, distant mountains, but of almost unvaried hills (which Glover's son described as 'so much alike, in form like a succession of waves of the sea') dotted with crisply painted little bushes.²⁸ Glover has endowed his painting with a sense of breadth and scale — the buildings are tiny and dwarfed by the landscape, and the slightly convex amphitheatre quality, especially in the foreground, creates a platform from which the view can enjoy a sense of endless bounty — but there is very little that is structurally picturesque about this painting. He has indeed challenged the confines of the picturesque in order to capture the uniqueness of the Australian landscape and to embrace the possibilities of European settlement and cultivation.

Glover also pushed the boundaries of the picturesque in *Hobart Town, from the Garden where I lived* (1832) (Figure 3) a painting which Hansen has aptly described as 'more concerned with informational topography than with Picturesque view-making'.²⁹ One of the first paintings Glover sent back to England, it was made from the garden in front of Glover's residence, Stanwell Hall, built in 1828 in the Georgian style, featuring the plain and symmetrical façade found in many domestic dwellings in England at the time. The house and garden overlook the prosperous colonial town, a thriving settlement that was second in size only to Sydney, with the Derwent River, named after its Derbyshire counterpart, beyond, dotted with sailing vessels. Also visible is a white church, with Government House just to its left and the Barracks to its right, suggesting that beyond the boundaries of personal property implied by the painting's subtitle, the church, the executive, and the military remain the dominant features of the colonial scene. The picture marks the achievements of the colonial

²⁸ J. R. Glover to M. Bowles, 8 September 1833, Mitchell Library, Sydney.

²⁹ Hansen, *op. cit.*, p. 200. *Launceston and the River Tamar* (c. 1832) is a third major painting of Glover's that could be characterized as unpicturesque, though it needs to be acknowledged that the picturesque is an extremely broad category.

settlement, with the landscape flattened and several viewpoints incorporated simultaneously to show the whole town in an almost panoramic, more than picturesque, style.³⁰

Hobart Town also illustrates the European refashioning of the Australian environment to resemble the typical picturesque English landscape — what Alfred Crosby terms 'ecological imperialism'.³¹ Geraniums and roses, painted in meticulous detail and mentioned in Glover's inscription, dominate the foreground. Geraniums especially were popular in the colony because they thrived on very little water. Several varieties were indigenous to Australia, but others arrived with the First Fleet in 1788. Additional varieties, native to southern Africa, were unwittingly carried into Australia in seed form on the coats of animals shipped from Cape Town.³² The Glovers also brought with them a range of northern hemispheric seedlings, though not all survived the journey.³³

Elsewhere in this painting, however, Glover has made concessions to a vastly different environment. He has toned down the rich greens of the English countryside, and has shown the trees as distinct entities, befitting the somewhat sparse Australian forests, rather than as part of the dense foliage that characterized European forests. And the large areas of greenery present in Hobart Town constitute a marked departure from the closely packed villages and towns of rural England. In all of these ways this painting

³⁰ McPhee, *op. cit.*, p. 27. On the relationship between the picturesque and the panorama, see S. Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 54-100.

³¹ T. Bonyhady, *The Colonial Earth*, Melbourne, 2000, pp. 69, 90-9; A. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Cambridge, 1986.

³² Arthur Bowes Smyth, the surgeon aboard the *Lady Penryhn* in 1788, wrote in his journal: '5th January 1788 ... There are now in the cabin geraniums in full blossom and some grapevines which flourish very much, there are also myrtles, bananas and other sort of plant brought from Rio de Janeiro'. See P. G. Fidlon and R. J. Ryan (eds), *The Journal of Arthur Bowes Smyth: Surgeon, Lady Penryhn, 1787-1789*, Sydney, 1979.

³³ Glover's son recorded that their tangerine saplings died *en route*, although enough survived that the Land Board, in endorsing Glover's application for a land grant, recorded approvingly that 'he has imported English song birds and shrubs'. See S. Morgan, *Land Settlement in Early Tasmania*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 99. Foreign plants were brought to Van Diemen's Land at such a rate that by the time Rev. W. W. Spicer took his weed census in 1878 more than one hundred exotic species had become naturalized. See W. W. Spicer, 'Alien Plants', *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*, Hobart, 1878, p. 64; J. R. Glover to M. Bowles, 8 September 1833, Mitchell Library, Sydney; Land Board Report 753, 11 May 1831, Archives Office of Tasmania.

demonstrates, in John McPhee's words, 'a remarkable realism'.³⁴ It simultaneously replicates and repudiates the English picturesque, both in its content and its structure, thus illustrating Glover's struggle to escape from England, both literally and pictorially.

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Figure 4: John Glover, *My Harvest Home* (1835), Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

³⁴ J. McPhee, 'The Symbolic Landscape', in Hansen, *op. cit.*, p. 119; Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

What made possible the early development of Australia that Glover portrays so gloriously was, of course, convict labour. Glover was assigned a number of convict labourers, some of whom he depicted in *My Harvest Home* (1835) (Figure 4), an autobiographical statement about his life in Australia, although the harvest scene, with its comforting ideal of communal labour and productivity, was a staple of British landscape painting in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁵ The painting is dominated by the fully loaded hay wagon. Overhead the dazzling late-afternoon sun irradiates the sky and casts deep shadows. Certainly the use of the possessive pronoun in the title endows the work with a sense of personal good fortune and veracity. There are, however, no obvious visual clues that he is depicting convicts. They have been assimilated into his family and his triumphant celebration of colonial redemption.

In contrast, convicts are entirely absent from Watling's work, and this is not unusual for convict artists. Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones, in what remains the only study of Australian convict artists, has offered a number of potential reasons why convicts painted themselves out of their pictures. Perhaps the subaltern cannot speak, although Watling's journal would suggest otherwise. Perhaps their resistances are not obvious in pictures that were painted for the consumption and legitimation of a ruling class. Perhaps the convicts, who did not like to call themselves convicts, were trying to erase signs of their punishment. Or perhaps the convict artists were a special class of convict, well-educated artisans convicted of forgery, and more ideologically attuned to the values of their masters than their fellow convicts.³⁶ Whatever the reason, the assimilation of convicts in Glover's work, and their total absence from Watling's work, is once again reflective of the artists' respective positions within the new colony.

Watling and Glover also differed in their attitudes toward Aborigines. This issue is complicated by the thirty-year gap between when the two men worked, during which time attitudes towards Aborigines changed considerably, to say nothing of the treatment of them. The differences between Watling and Glover may also have had to do with their roles in the burgeoning empire. For the most part, Watling was disparaging in his views on Aborigines:

³⁵ M. Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, Oxford, 1982.

³⁶ J. Hackforth-Jones, *The Convict Artists*, South Melbourne, 1977, p. 10.

The people are in general very straight and firm, but extremely ill featured; and in my opinion the women more so than the men. Irascibility, ferocity, cunning, treachery, revenge, filth, and immodesty are strikingly their dark characteristics – their virtues are so far from conspicuous, that I have not, as yet, been able to discern them.

He conceded, though, that 'to their credit, that they are not cannibals', noting that they buried their dead, although he was confused as to their reasons, claiming that 'they have not apparently the smallest idea of a Deity, much less of religion'.³⁷ In several other instances, however, Watling exhibited a certain measure of cultural relativity, acknowledging the difficulty of drawing conclusions about mental acuity based solely on the presence or absence of certain skills or material possessions, and granting that the Aborigines were quite advanced given how little they had to work with in the way of raw materials:

That the inhabitants of *N. S. Wales*, are centuries behind some other savage nations, in point of useful knowledge, may be fact; but in this there is no criterion of judging mental ability. Their huts and canoes ... are extremely rude and ill formed; but when we consider their non-acquaintance with iron tools, and the hardness of their wood, it is more surprising that they can use it at all.³⁸

In fact, despite echoing a common complaint among convicts that the governor was more liberal to Aborigines than to them, Watling seems to have got on well with 'the natives', commenting that they 'are extremely fond of painting and sit hours by me when at work'. (He also complained that 'Many of these savages are allowed, what is termed, a freeman's ratio of provisions for their idleness, and they are treated with the most singular tenderness'). And while some of his drawings of Aboriginal groups depict them in rather stereotyped poses, his pencil portraits of individuals such as that of Nanbree (Figure 5) reveal a considerable degree of sensitivity and perceptiveness.³⁹

³⁷ Watling, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29; Smith, *European Vision*, pp. 184-7.

Glover presented a rather different attitude toward Aborigines, though it is important to note that his arrival in Tasmania coincided with a turning point in the European subjugation of the Aborigines following years of virtual war. Several scholars have seen in Glover's Aboriginal paintings a kind of 'double vision', a split between what Tim Bonyhady has termed Aboriginal and Pastoral Arcadias, with the former depicting Aborigines before invasion, and the latter showing the pastoral wealth of the settled land without Aborigines.⁴⁰ Ian McLean has pushed the issue further in focusing on the iconography of trees in Glover's work, claiming that they serve an allegorical purpose, and that the limbs and branches of the trees in many of his paintings featuring Aborigines have a grotesque, sinuous, primitive character that serves as a metaphor for the Aborigines themselves.⁴¹



Figure 5: Thomas Watling, *Nabree* (c. 1794), Natural History Museum, London.

⁴⁰ See Thomas and Losche, *op. cit.*; Bonyhady, *Images in Opposition*.

⁴¹ McLean, *White Aborigines*, pp. 40-2.

But Glover, in characteristic picturesque fashion, repressed the history of white colonial brutality in paintings such as the recently rediscovered *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point* (1834) (Figure 6), refusing to depict the Aborigines within a contemporary landscape, and instead relegating them to a pre-colonial situation as a dark, primitive, exotic, mysterious factor in nature. Although this work would appear to memorialise the last few days of freedom of the Big River tribe who were brought to Hobart by George Augustus Robertson in January 1832, before being shipped to Flinders' Island, the Derwent clearly separates the Aborigines from the rapidly developing colonial capital. One does not need to accept Keith Windschuttle's claim that the painting has no eyewitness value in order to see that Glover was drawing a distinction between the Aboriginal past and the colonial present.⁴² Although his sketchbooks are filled with drawings of Aborigines, reflecting the fact that they were all around him, in paintings such as *My Harvest Home*, he erased their presence entirely. Glover's free, white Australia is devoid of Aborigines, whereas for Watling, oppressed himself, colonists and Aborigines existed, literally, side by side.

* * *



Figure 6: John Glover, *Mount Wellington and Hobart Town from Kangaroo Point* (1834), Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart.

⁴² K. Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803-1847*, Sydney, 2002, p. 218. Also, see Hansen, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-3.

Watling and Glover, in sum, were two early colonial artists of Australia who arrived under different circumstances, viewed the settlement and development of Australia differently, and consequently had different relationships with the picturesque, the dominant artistic aesthetic of the time. Watling was never at home in Australia. He did not arrive voluntarily, he disliked the colony and the form colonization was taking, and when his years of servitude were ended by an early pardon, he returned to his native Scotland. Incredibly, he was arrested and charged with forgery again in 1805, although this time the jury found the charge not proven and he was freed.⁴³ And his Australian art reflects his sense of alienation. His use of the picturesque transforms the landscape, but only pictorially, not physically. For him, the British Empire was an impossibility, and therefore did not leave its mark. Glover, on the other hand, moved to Australia voluntarily, and embraced both it and the broader idea of empire. His painting, in turn, emphasizes settlement, development, and cultivation; in short, the transformation of the landscape physically as well as pictorially. Their differing uses of the picturesque reflect in part their very unequal positions within Britain's expanding empire.

The irony is that Watling, who did not see the picturesque in Australia, ended up portraying Australia in picturesque ways, despite the fact that the picturesque was the visual language of the colonizers, used by any number of other colonial artists, many of whom were paid to promote an appealing vision of the British Empire. Glover, on the other hand, at least on occasion rejected the picturesque frame, but still managed to achieve what were in a sense the aims of the picturesque, namely, making Australia attractive and appealing, and concealing the many hardships and difficulties of early colonial life. Moreover, Watling was arguably liberated by the picturesque, because his work got him pardoned in 1797. Glover, on the other hand, who challenged picturesque conventions in order to depict the Australian landscape in new and original ways, never escaped his characterization as merely a good picturesque artist doing predominantly derivative work. In the end, both men were simultaneously prisoners and escapees.

⁴³ Watling, *op. cit.*, p. 11.