Tourists, Tintern Abbey and the Picturesque

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William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye* has rightly been seen as an important source of eighteenth-century conceptions of the Picturesque. Although Gilpin's account of his fortnight's excursion in the Wye Valley and South Wales was composed in 1770, it was not published until 1782, when the new technology of aquatint could provide high-quality commercial reproductions of the ink-and-wash sketches accompanying the original narrative. The published volume was most obviously influential in contributing to the fashion of the period for domestic tourism, with its associated activities of amateur sketching and painting (and indeed keeping tour journals); and it helped establish the lower Wye as a prime site for such tourism, just as Gilpin's subsequently published tours of the Lake District, Scotland and North Wales helped to popularize those regions. At the same time Gilpin's pronouncements on the Picturesque in the course of the tour, which were expanded and supplemented in his later tours and essays, fed into larger discussions of the aesthetic as they were picked up and disputed by the theorists and practical landscapers Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight in the 1790s and early 1800s.

The climax of the trip down the Wye for Gilpin, and for many of the tourists who followed in his footsteps, was the visit to the ruins of Tintern Abbey, which consequently became one of the most frequently described and represented picturesque historical sites in the country. Gilpin's instructions to the tourist on the development of what he calls "the picturesque eye"[1] meet a series of challenges at Tintern, which illuminate the relation between written narrative and visual representation in his version of the Picturesque aesthetic.

Gilpin's reputation has been double-edged since the late eighteenth century. On the one hand, the popularity of his published tours is clear from

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the numerous editions they went through, from the encomiums and imitations they provoked from later tourists, and in the case of the Wye tour in particular, from Rev. T. D. Fosbroke's incorporation of large parts of Gilpin's narrative into a guidebook of 1818, *Gilpin on the Wye*, which remained the standard companion volume to the area well into the nineteenth century. Fosbroke is unstinting in his praise of Gilpin. In the preface to *Gilpin on the Wye* he insists that "In the picturesque, Gilpin is unquestionably an Oracle; and his work is a Grammar of the Rules, by which alone, the beauties of the Tour can be properly understood and appreciated."[2] He qualifies and rewrites Gilpin's descriptions extensively, however, partly in the interests of transforming his narrative into a guidebook, and partly in the light of later prevailing tastes. His volume can thus be seen both as an index of the codification, popularisation and commodification of the Picturesque aesthetic,[3] and as a retrospective commentary on that aesthetic. In the third edition Fosbroke's ambition "to render this work as much as possible a standard one on the subject" leads him to separate his picturesque, historical and geographical material formally into different "departments," and instruct tourists on how to make use of each.[4] At the same time he alters Gilpin's emphasis considerably throughout, suggesting in the first edition that his failure to provide "precise accounts of the scenery, (his drawings being fancy-embellishments)" demands remedy, and deflecting his stress on the peculiar picturesque attractions of decay. At Tintern Abbey, for instance, he writes "Such, even in ruin, is *holy* Tintern: what would it be, if entire, and 'with storied windows richly dight.'"[5] Comparison with Gilpin's passing comment on Cardiff in the original *Observations* suggests how far Fosbroke's imagined historical completeness is from Gilpin's conception of the Picturesque: Gilpin had written that Cardiff "appeared with more of the furniture of antiquity about it, than any other town we had seen in Wales: but *on the spot* the picturesque eye finds it too intire to be in full perfection."[6]

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[2] T. D. Fosbro[o]ke, *The Wye Tour, or Gilpin on the Wye* (1st ed., Ross, 1818), p. vii. (Hence-forward *Gilpin.*)

[3] See Ann Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), especially chapter 2.

[4] The reader is offered "the Picturesque, that the matter might conform to the Tour; the Historical to be read at the Inn, and the source of the River ... for perusal at leisure." Fosbroke, *Gilpin* (3rd. ed., Ross, 1826), Preface.

[5] Fosbroke, *Gilpin* (1st ed.), pp. viii, 97.

[6] Gilpin, *Wye*, p. 83.

On the other hand, in the realm of Picturesque theory, Payne Knight and Price came to frame many of their discussions as attacks on the unsystematic contradictoriness of Gilpin's pronouncements. This is also how his accounts of the Picturesque have been read by many twentieth-century critics,[7] although attempts have recently been made to reassess his distinctive claims. Kim Ian Michasiw, for instance, has attacked the assumption that, in the words of Frances Ferguson, "a writer like William Gilpin composes his guides to picturesque travel as a way of reconciling nature with art, making the walking tour itself the near relation and opposite number to the eighteenth-century landscape garden."[8] Instead, Michasiw emphasises the distinctions between Picturesque tourism and landscape management and attacks the preference of earlier commentators for Price and Knight over the supposedly naive Gilpin. He identifies in Gilpin's writings an aesthetic that is in some ways radically opposed to the claims of the later theorists, and celebrates this aesthetic for precisely the reasons that had earlier caused critics to denigrate it as trivial and frivolous. For Michasiw, Gilpin's "Enlightenment games" with the artifices of perception and representation, his self-aware ironic playfulness, are the antithesis of the Romantic mystification of nature, and are of considerable interest now: as he writes, "the implications of Gilpin's theories have some relevance to the necessary demystification of art and its ideolatry in the postmodern condition ... the fact that they were unsuited to their era should not license our continuing to condemn and dismiss them."[9] Michasiw's commentary is useful in its rejection of the model of a monolithic and univocal Picturesque movement. However his concentration on the single issue of the "demystification of art" tends to obscure the more immediate social and ideological implications of Gilpin's version of the aesthetic, which were of considerable interest to contemporary commentators, and which are my main concern.

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[7] For general discussion of Gilpin and the Picturesque see Carl Paul Barbier, *William Gilpin: His Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963); Walter J. Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957); Christopher Hussey, *The Picturesque: Studies in a Point of View* (London and New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1927) and works cited below. Topics considered in this essay are also discussed in several essays in Stephen Copley and Peter Garside (eds.), *The Politics of the Picturesque: Literature, Landscape and Aesthetics since 1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[8] Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individualism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 138.

[9] Kim Ian Michasiw, "Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque," *Representations* 38 (1992), pp. 94, 96.

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Gilpin's tours are not presented as empirically accurate guidebooks but as the sources of an aesthetic programme, a way of seeing. The tourist in search of the Picturesque views and represents the landscape through which he or she travels in the light of an elaborate framework of preconceived expectations, derived from a wide range of visual and literary sources. At times, indeed, these expectations efface the physical evidence of the surroundings altogether. In the Lakes tour, for instance, Gilpin's description of the road running past Derwentwater on the approach to Borrowdale leads him to generalize, and he confides that

> As we proceeded in our rout along the lake, the road grew wilder, and more romantic. There is not an idea more tremendous, than that of riding along the edge of a precipice, unguarded by any parapet, under the impending rocks, which threaten above; while the surges of a flood, or the whirlpools of a rapid river, terrify below...

He continues in this vein for a full page before confessing that "But here we had not even the miniature of these dreadful ideas, at least on the side of the lake; for in the steepest part, we were scarce raised thirty or forty feet above the water."[10]

At the start of the Wye tour, Gilpin admits that "We travel for various purposes," and suggests that "The following little work proposes a new object of pursuit; that of not barely examining the face of a country; but of examining it by the rules of picturesque beauty: that of not merely describing; but of adapting the description of natural scenery to the principles of artificial landscape."[11] His comments introduce many of the conflicts that mark his writing generally – between nature and artifice, spontaneous observation and the generation of aesthetic rules, visual representation and narrative description, the pursuit of aesthetic pleasure and the various other "purposes" that motivate travel. The most striking conflicts involve what appear to be contradictory appeals to the natural and to the artificial, to codified aesthetic rules and to spontaneous perception. In the introduction to the Lakes tour, Gilpin tries to square the circle of representation and nature by claiming that although "examining landscape

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[10] William 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*, 2 vols (London, 1786), vol. 1, pp. 187-8. (Henceforward *Lakes*.)

[11] Gilpin, *Wye*, p. 1.

by the *rules of picturesque beauty*, seems rather a deviation from *nature* to *art*," this is not the case, "for the *rules of picturesque beauty*, we know, are drawn from *nature*,"[12] but the problem remains pervasive in all his discussions. On the one hand, he finds attractions in roughness, irregularity, wildness and decay because they can be taken as the signs and tokens of the spontaneously "natural." On the other hand, however, he suggests that picturesque objects "please from some quality, capable of being illustrated by painting," whereas beautiful ones "please the eye in their *natural* state."[13] Smoothness and neatness may thus please as components of natural beauty, but roughness and irregularity offer greater sources of picturesque interest in representation. Gilpin's confused distinctions are refined in the extended debates in which Price and Knight define the Picturesque against the Sublime and the Beautiful, and disagree over whether the quality of picturesque attractiveness resides in objects or only in representations.[14] However, in the course of those debates, some of Gilpin's distinctive emphases are lost.

In his search to define the Picturesque, for instance, Gilpin repeatedly sets the term against other aesthetic categories, and "places" the whole activity of Picturesque tourism against other, potentially more valuable or useful activities. His aesthetic lexicon thus includes other terms for the description of scenery or objects that are not picturesque, but that may still be enjoyed by the tourist. On the Wye tour, Brecknoc castle is thus "too ruined even for picturesque use," but the town's setting is "romantic," and the castle site remains "very amusing." Similarly the view from Ross churchyard is not strictly picturesque: "It is marked by no characteristic objects: it is broken into too many parts; and it is seen from too high a point." Nevertheless it is "indeed very amusing."[15] This last category – "amusing" – loses its place in the configuration of terms in which the later

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[12] Gilpin, *Lakes*, vol. 1, p. xxii.

[13] William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: to which is added a poem, on Landscape Painting*, 2nd ed. (London, 1794), pp. 1-2. (Henceforward *Essays*.)

[14] See in particular Richard Payne Knight, *The Landscape: a Didactic Poem in Three Books (London, 1794), An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (London, 1805); Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque* (1794), *A Dialogue on the Distinct Characters of the Picturesque and the Beautiful. In Answer to the Objections of Mr Knight* (Hereford and London, 1801), *Essays on the Picturesque as compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 3 vols. (London, 1810) (Henceforward *Essays*). For discussion of Knight see Michael Clarke and Nicholas Penny (eds.), *The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751-1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982). For Price see Sidney K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1991).

[15] Gilpin, *Wye*, pp. 51, 6.

eighteenth-century aesthetic debates are conducted, but it anchors Gilpin's discussions firmly in the context of consideration of the leisured pursuit of pleasure – and causes him considerable problems as a consequence.

The great attraction in landscape for the observer schooled in the Picturesque is its appearance of unconstrained, spontaneous naturalness, signified by its irregularity. The extent of Gilpin's break with earlier eighteenth-century perceptions in this respect is clear in comparison with "A Trip to North Wales," included in John Torbuck's *A Collection of Welch Travels* (1738), in which the anonymous author describes a visit to a Welsh circuit judge along part of the route that later became established as the North Wales tour. He writes of the area that "The Country looks like the fag End of the Creation; the very Rubbish of *Noah*'s Flood; and will (if anything) serve to confirm an *Epicurean* in his Creed, that the World was made by Chance."[16] Even in Gilpin, however, the connection between wildness and attractiveness is not inevitable, and artful artifice in the landscape is by no means rejected. In Cornwall, on the Western tour, for instance, Gilpin notes that "Great part of this country, it is true, is in a state of nature, which in general is a state of picturesque beauty, but here it was otherwise."[17] At times nature itself composes a fully pictorial view (or conspires with human artifice in such a composition). At Goodrich Castle, on the Wye, Gilpin thus finds a view which is spontaneously "correctly picturesque," but as he comments, this is unusual: "Nature is always great in design; but unequal in composition. She is an admirable colourist; and can harmonize her tints with infinite variety, and inimitable beauty; but is seldom so correct in composition, as to produce an harmonious whole."[18] In these circumstances, the artist or the observer may legitimately intervene to correct the natural composition of the landscape by adding or altering features to produce pictorial harmony.

One of Gilpin's geographically unspecific drawings, *A View into a Winding Valley* (c.1790) [Fig. 1], illustrates very clearly the programmed components of the picturesque landscape, which allow the tourist to delight in natural irregularities of appearance, but to see and represent them as parts in a sequence of composed whole pictorial views. As Gilpin's descriptive sub-title to the picture makes clear, the discontinuously observed high valley sides represented provide the side-screens and an

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[16] John Torbuck, *A Collection of Welch Travels, and Memoirs of Wales* (Dublin, 1738), p. 62.

[17] William Gilpin, *Observations on the Western Parts of England, relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; to which are added a few Remarks on the Picturesque Beauties of the Isle of Wight* (London, 1798), p. 196.

[18] Gilpin, *Wye*, pp. 18-19.

effective end-screen to the image, clearly revealing their origins in the design of theatrical side-screens, and creating successive and sharply defined planes of depth from each natural abutment. The generally indicated wildness of the terrain excludes the signs of human habitation, property division and cultivation that Gilpin claims to find "disgusting" in landscape, and the human figures in the dark foreground of the picture take their place as "picturesque appendages,"[19] characteristically posed to indicate leisure, and minimally sketched. The castle, in its appropriate place according to various of Gilpin's comments on actual castles, has an outline softened and made irregular by ruination to the point at which it forms a continuity with the line of the "inlightened" rocky knoll on which it stands.

Seen in relation to this schema, the peculiar beauty of the river Wye derives from its "lofty banks" and its "mazy course," which form and frame endlessly changing pictorial compositions, analysed by Gilpin in terms of "the area" (the river), the two "side-screens" (the banks), and the "front-screen" offered by the sharpness of the bends in the valley.[20] Within this frame the "ornaments" of the scene, individually categorized as "ground – woods – rocks – buildings," are each negotiated in particular ways: the animals and people who inhabit the landscape are more problematic, particularly when the encounter with them becomes inevitable, as it does at Tintern.

The devices by which pictorial harmony is shaped by proponents of the Picturesque – the rules of viewing, the frame provided by the Claude glass, the use of viewing stations – have been documented at length by modern scholars.[21] At the same time commentators have outlined the ways in which picturesque visual representation differs from earlier traditions of painting. Alan Liu, for instance, suggests that "The picturesque ... forgot half the Classic picture – the narrative – to focus exclusively on the landscape mapping form": without "narrative reference," the "fact of interpretation became unapparent," so that in the Picturesque "unapparent interpretation *is* form."[22] Picturesque pictorial "form" does not emerge pure and untrammelled in paintings and sketches of the period, however, any more than its descriptive equivalent does in narratives: in both, it is important to recognize the tensions that may exist between the claims of the Picturesque

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[19] Gilpin, *Lakes*, vol. 2, p. 45.

[20] Gilpin, *Wye*, p. 8.

[21] See for instance Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape, Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1989), pp. 67-82.

[22] Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: the Sense of History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1989), pp. 75-6.

and those of other aesthetics. In Gilpin's *Forest Scenery*, for instance, the emblematic tradition is clear in the author's suggestion that "If a man were disposed to moralize, the ramification of a thriving tree affords a good theme. Nothing gives a happier idea of a busy life. Industry, and activity, pervade every part ... In this fallen state alone, it is true, the tree becomes the basis of England's glory. Tho' we regret the fall, therefore, we must not repine...."[23] Nevertheless, what Liu presents as the Picturesque's suppression of narrative in favour of decorative pictorial form makes for an interesting relation between Gilpin's tour narratives and the sketches which accompany them.

In the preface to the Lakes tour Gilpin discusses the form of the tour narrative, while offering an elaborate apologia for his own interest in such self-confessedly trivial matters.[24] He suggests that the ensuing tour can be seen as "didactic, or descriptive (as in fact it is intended to be a species between both)." In this context, "What in argument would be absurd; in works of amusement may be necessary," and he justifies his narrative "digressions" from landscape description into "observations, anecdote, or history" as examples of "occasional relief" and "poetic licence," which literally and figuratively reinforce the Picturesque's concern with avoiding "satiety" (xx). At the same time he makes analogies between descriptive writing and visual representation (and vice versa). On the one hand, he claims that "It is the aim of *picturesque description* to bring the images of nature, as forcibly, and as closely to the eye, as it can." This involves "*high colouring*," which does not, however, depend on "*A string of rapturous epithets* ... but an attempt to analize the views of nature" (xix). On the other hand, he comments on the inadequacy of the sketches included in the Wye tour (published three years earlier) as "*portraits*" of scenes in the area, even taking into account his original proviso that these "*portraits*" were only intended to give general impressions of locations. In the new work, he suggests, the prints are either "meant to *illustrate and explain picturesque ideas*" or to "*characterize the countries* through which the reader is carried ... from the *general face of the country*; not from any particular scene." Such general representations, avoiding the specificity involved in the "*portrait*" of "a *single spot*," "spread themselves more diffusely; and are carried, in the reader's imagination, through the *whole description*" (xxv). They are "the *most picturesque* kind of drawing," and Gilpin enumerates

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[23] William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery, and Other Woodland Views, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (London, 1791), pp. 103-116.
[24] See Gilpin, *Lakes*, vol. 1, especially pp. xv-xxxi.

the changes to the observed scene that an artist who works "*from imagination*" may make in creating them. These must stay within the bounds of "liberty" rather than "licence": the "grand exhibition" must be copied faithfully, although its "fore-ground" may be redesigned – but only by altering components which are in any case naturally mutable rather than by adding "*new features*" (xxviii).

In this context the effects of time are essential to Gilpin's aesthetic. The various traces of the ephemeral, the mutable and the historical have picturesque effects in the landscape, while the constraints of time shape Gilpin's narratives and visual representations, and guarantee their expressive authenticity. In each tour, the tourist's journey through the landscape is narrated as a single experiential sequence, with the illustrations as part of that sequence. Despite his suggestion that "To criticize the face of a country correctly, you should see it oftner than once; and in various seasons," it is thus no part of Gilpin's design to revisit the Wye in the twelve years between the initial trip and publication of the tour, in order to supply missing or more accurate information about the area. Instead, "The descriptive part" of the book is offered as "a hasty sketch," as are the illustrations. In both cases "these scenes are marked just as they struck the eye at first." Although the "eye" in question only sees them because it is imbued with the conventions of Picturesque representation, Gilpin insists that "Observations of this kind, through the vehicle of description, have the better chance of being founded in truth; as they are not the offspring of theory; but are taken warm from the scenes of nature, as they arise."[25]

The signs of commerce and industry are not precluded from Gilpin's accounts of attractive landscape: they may be appreciated in other terms (for instance, as elements of the sublime) or they may themselves be seen as picturesque. On the Wye, Gilpin thus enjoys the sight of "abbeys, castles, villages, spires, forges, mills, and bridges ... venerable vestiges of the past, or chearful habitations of the present times," while at Lidbroke Wharf, "the contrast of all this business, the engines used in lading, and unlading, together with the solemnity of the scene, produce all together a picturesque assemblage."[26] At various stages, too, he comments on the incidental attractions of the smoke which rises from the hidden charcoal and iron works of the region, setting his commentary in the context of a long historical sequence of discussions of the pleasing aesthetic effects of smoke as a harmonizing or decorative element in landscape, which

[25] Gilpin, *Wye*, pp. v, 2.
[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 22.

simultaneously reveals and conceals the human activities which produce it. In 1861 Mr and Mrs Hall, describing the Wye, still draw on this tradition when they comment that "dark and dense pillars of smoke issue here and there out of the matted foliage; they rise from occasional foundaries, for the smoke created by the charcoal burners is light and blue, and adds to the picturesque as it ascends upwards."[27]

A greater problem, for Gilpin, is posed by the visible signs of agriculture and property division. On the Western tour, for instance, he rejects "*manufactured scenes*" and "*artificial appendages*" for their unfortunate pictorial effect, while conceding their positive literary associations in pastoral or georgic: "however pleasing all this may be in poetry, on canvas, hedge-rows, elms, furrowed lands, meadows adorned with milk-maids, and hay-fields adorned with mowers, have a bad effect."[28] In contrast, the scenery on the banks of the Wye consists almost entirely of "wood, or of pasturage," both of which minimize or conceal the signs of cultivation: "the painter never desires the hand of art to touch his grounds – but if art *must* mark out the limits of property, and turn them to the use of agriculture; he wishes that these limits may be as much concealed as possible."[29]

In the examples above, the observer rejects the signs of productive utility in landscape in favour of those of "nature" read as decorative redundancy. Similarly, in *Forest Scenery*, Gilpin insists that it is not the "business" of "the picturesque eye" "to consider matters of utility. It has nothing to do with the affairs of the plough, and the spade; but merely examines the face of nature as a beautiful object."[30] As various agricultural improvers of the period point out, this stance, combined with endorsement of the picturesque attractions of decrepitude, aestheticizes the visible signs of poverty and economic deprivation. In the case of the Lake District, for instance, commentators on the Picturesque celebrate exactly the features which cause William Marshall's agricultural reporters to claim that

> In a county like this, that does not raise corn sufficient for the consumption of its inhabitants ... it is lamentable to see such extensive tracts of *good corn land* lying waste, of no value to its owners, and of no benefit to the community. Instead of the present scarcity of grain, large quantities might be yearly exported; and instead of the ill-formed, poor,

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[27] Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, *The Book of South Wales, the Wye, and the Coast*, (London, 1861), p. 54.
[28] Gilpin, *Western Parts*, p. 285.
[29] Gilpin, *Wye*, p. 29.
[30] Gilpin, *Forest Scenery*, p.298.

starved, meagre animals that depasture the commons at present, an abundant supply of good fat mutton would be had to *grace* the markets of the county.[31]

The project of distancing and differentiating the tourist from the economic activities in the locales he or she visits underlies every area of Gilpin's aesthetic discussions. Specifically amateur sketching, for instance, is recommended as a preferred activity for tourists at least in part because its amateur nature confirms their leisured status: "gentlemen-artists" can never be very good at painting in the higher forms, which would require application, and which might be tainted by associations with professionalism, "but the *art of sketching landscapes* is attainable by a man of business."[32] The tourist's view is positively superficial. It is the perception of a gentleman amateur, marked out from the local inhabitants by his leisure, and aware that his leisure-time pursuits are constrained but also justified by their status as relief from the more serious business which he pursues elsewhere.

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Gilpin's account of his visit to Tintern Abbey, with its two accompanying illustrations,[33] raises in an extreme form many of the problems I have already considered. The famously inaccurate impression of the ruins given by Gilpin's illustrations is clear if Gilpin's view of the abbey from the Chepstow road is compared with the engraving of the scene from the Halls' *Book of the Wye* (1861) [Figs. 2 and 3]. The comparison shows clearly the radical simplification, alteration of perspective and proportion, and suppression of details such as the run-down houses surrounding the ruin, which characterize Gilpin's sketch. (By contrast, the Halls' engraving shows something of the mixture of empirical accuracy and Gothic fantasy which characterizes Victorian medievalism, for instance in its combination of accurate visual detail with a Gothicized spelling of the place name – "Tinterne" – which has no historical provenance.) Gilpin's near view of the ruin [Fig. 4] is similarly inaccurate in its proportions and rearrangement of detail; and both views are particularly striking for their replacement of the

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[31] William Marshall, *The Review and Abstract of the County Reports to the Board of Agriculture; from the Several Agricultural Departments of England*, 4 vols (London, Edinburgh and York, 1818), vol. I, *Northern Department*, p. 168.

[32] Gilpin, *Essays*, p. 88.

[33] See Gilpin, *Wye*, pp. 31-7.

hamlet-full of impoverished beggars that Gilpin describes at the scene with two lightly sketched and characteristically posed figures in each print.

Gilpin begins his description of his Tintern by gesturing to the historical imperatives which originally dictated the sites of castles and monasteries, but he marks the redundancy of those imperatives – or, in the case of the monastery, their modification – as the ruined buildings are translated into sources of aesthetic pleasure for the modern observer. He writes that "Castles, and abbeys have different situations, agreeable to their respective uses. The castle, meant for defence, stands boldly on the hill: the abbey, intended for meditation, is hid in the sequestered vale," and he moves into exclamatory blank verse to suggest that tourists in search of the picturesque will be "happy" at the first of these sites, and "most happy" at the second. The description of Tintern is thus framed with references to the visitors' expectations, which are then either confirmed or frustrated in the course of their visit. Disappointing them, the ruin itself "does not make that appearance as a *distant* object, which we expected" (32): later, disconcerting them, when they encounter an old beggar woman at the site, her narrative commands their attention, although "we did not expect to be interested" (36).

The description of the Abbey begins with a survey of the pictorial harmony of the whole scene, with its irregularities of ground and river screened and harmonized by wooded hills. That screen of hills screens out "inclement blasts" and, literally and figuratively, leaves "an air so calm, and tranquil; so sequestered from the commerce of life, that it is easy to conceive, a man of warm imagination, in monkish times, might have been allured by such a scene to become an inhabitant of it" (32). The hills also screen out the signs of nearby manufacturing industry. As Gilpin writes at the end of his account, "The country about Tintern hath been described as a solitary, tranquil scene: but its immediate environs only are meant. Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron works; which introduce noise and bustle into these regions of tranquillity" (37). The site of privileged seclusion from the (nearly present) evidence of commerce and industry offers a scene in which the modern observer, himself disengaged from economic imperatives, can enjoy a meditative calm which links him imaginatively and transhistorically with the man of similarly "warm imagination" in "monkish times."

The evidence of the iron works is by no means excluded from later tourists' accounts of Tintern. Twenty years after Gilpin's visit, in Richard Warner's first *Walk through Wales*, Warner describes and is entirely

untroubled by the proximity of industry to the abbey site. From the window of the Beaufort Arms, at night, he and his companion see "a scene perfectly new to us, highly gratifying to a warm imagination. Immediately opposite to the room in which we were lodged stands a large iron-forge, one among the many that are constantly worked night and day, in the valley of Tintern." The effect is sublime: "This scene of bustle amidst smoke and fire, during the darkness and silence of midnight, which was only interrupted by the vibrations of the bar-hammer, produced a most impressive effect on the mind. We saw Virgil's description realized, and the interior of Etna, the forges of the Cyclops, and their fearful employment, immediately occured to us." The next day, "Having gratified ourselves with a minute observation of every part of this ruin, and visited the iron-works ...," the tourists continue on their way.[34]

Returning to Gilpin's account, the attractions of the ruins of Tintern are severalfold. Because of its ruination "Nature has now made it her own. Time has now worn off all traces of the rule: it has blunted the sharp edges of the chissel; and broken the regularity of opposing parts," as well as adding its own "ornaments." In this context Gilpin famously complains about the inadequately ruined appearance of the ruins, and wishes he dared indulge in a little creative vandalism himself: "a number of gabel-ends hurt the eye with their regularity; and disgust it by the vulgarity of their shape. A mallet judiciously used (but who durst use it?) might be of service in fracturing some of them; particularly those of the cross isles, which are not only disagreeable in themselves, but confound the perspective" (33). This desire for intervention is echoed in the Essays, when Gilpin claims literary and pictorial precedents for suggesting that Palladian architecture is inappropriate in the Picturesque: "Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty we must use the mallet instead of the chissel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. ... Virgil would have done the same," as did Milton and Homer; Reynolds paints portraits with dishevelled hair, and the "worn-out cart horse" is preferable to the glossy young animal as a model for painting.[35]

The situation at Tintern is complicated because of the presence at the site of various versions of ruination at once. The Abbey's appearance is spoiled by the "shabby houses" that surround it, and it is inhabited by beggars; and Gilpin cannot extend the category of the Picturesque unproblematically to cover them – as Price, for instance, does when he

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[34] Richard Warner, A Walk through Wales in August 1797 (Bath, 1798), p. 231.
[35] Gilpin, Essays, p. 14.

suggests that "in our own species, objects merely picturesque are to be found among the wandering tribes of gypsies and beggars: who in all the qualities which give them that character, bear a close analogy to the wild forester and the worn out cart-horse, and again to old mills, hovels, and other inanimate objects of the same kind."[36] In the case of Tintern, Gilpin's delayed mention of the presence of industry near the Abbey serves an important retrospective function in his description, bringing into play an alternative value system to that of the Picturesque, and an alternative reading of the site, as he tries to negotiate his encounter with its occupants. He thus writes of "the poverty and wretchedness of the inhabitants," who "seem to have no employment, but begging, as if a place once devoted to indolence, could never again become the seat of industry" (35). The meditative tranquillity earlier celebrated in the monks becomes culpable indolence when it is associated with the beggars and set against industry, and Gilpin must differentiate all these categories firmly from his own secular meditative leisure as the observing tourist.

Distantiation of such laudable leisure from various forms of laziness on the one hand and commercial employment on the other remains an important concern in many published tours and guides of the period. In Charles Heath's guide to the Wye (1799), for instance, the author is acutely aware of the contrast between his own financial and social situation and that of the gentleman tourist. He writes that "Considerable allowance will be made for my situation in life. The MIND of a person in the constant exercise of a retail trade, has many and indispensible claims upon its attention; whereas the Man of Letters sits calmly in his study, to meditate over and revise his thoughts, without the chain of them being interrupted by casual intrusion."[37] In a quite different context, at the start of his mammoth pedestrian tour of 1799, which takes in most of the famous sights of Northern England, Scotland and Wales, Rev. James Plumptre discusses whether to take a servant with him. He thinks initially of a local "Gypsie Youth, whose life I thought had well disciplined him for such an undertaking" and resolves to take him despite knowing that "I would have

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[36] Price, *Essays*, p. 62. The motifs that run through Gilpin's narrative are echoed by many later proponents of the Picturesque in their comments on the scene at Tintern. In *Picturesque Views on the River Wye* (London, 1797), pp. 132-4, for instance, Samuel Ireland negotiates the troubling transition from uncomfortable historical facts to an aesthetic appreciation of the ruins at the site in verse, and suggests that the elements of the scene "all conspire to impress the mind with awe, and for a moment withdraw from its vain pursuit of wealth and power, and abstract it from the world." In this context, even the cottages "serve ... as a scale, and give magnitude to the principal object."

[37] Charles Heath, *The Excursion down the Wye* (Monmouth, 1799), unnumbered pp.

much prejudice to encounter in attempting to civilize one of a race which
have so bad a character and the peculiar trait of which is generally held to
be thieving." Ultimately, and in a nice inversion of his expectations, the
gypsy rejects Plumptre's offer for fear that it is a device to trap him into
conscription into the army. Plumptre then thinks of a young local labourer,
but rejects him after a month's trial when he realises that the youth in
question does not understand the special nature of pedestrian tourism, and
simply regards being a porter on the tour as an easy alternative to his proper
agricultural employment. Plumptre completes the tour alone.[38]

   Among the "whole hamlet" of beggars that Gilpin encounters at Tintern
his description of one particular old woman (36-7) stands out as the only
such extended description of an individual in the whole tour. Indeed it
remains unusual, even in the context of his later tours, in which extended
accounts of historical or mythological figures sometimes have a place,
alongside brief descriptions of local inhabitants. The account of the woman
involves several enforced perceptive shifts on Gilpin's part. The ruined
Abbey, which is attractive as an aesthetic object, is potentially disturbing
when it is seen as a "loathsome" human dwelling. In this context the
description of the woman herself partially bears out John Barrell's
suggestion that Picturesque pictorial representation of human figures "is
concerned only with visible appearances, to the exclusion of the moral and
the sentimental" and is "absolutely hostile to narrative."[39] Gilpin's account
is a narrative, however; and since non-narrative pictorial representation is
altogether easier to envisage than non-narrative narrative prose Gilpin must
fend off other expectations as he writes.

   The encounter with, and relief of, poverty and suffering is a standard
trope of sentimental narrative of the period, as Goldsmith's descriptions of
the activities of the Man in Black and the Vicar of Wakefield, or
Mackenzie's account of the behaviour of the Man of Feeling, confirm.[40] As
part of their complex repository of literary sources, tour writers absorb and
deploy the tropes of sentimental narrative, which shape their accounts in a
variety of ways. Two more or less random examples will illustrate this. At

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[38] James Plumptre, "A Narrative of a Pedestrian Journey through some Parts of Yorkshire,
Durham and Northumberland to the Highlands of Scotland and Home by the Lakes and some
Parts of Wales in the Summer of the Year 1799," in Ian Ousby (ed.), *James Plumptre's
Britain: the Journals of a Tourist in the 1790s* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), pp. 85-7.

[39] John Barrell, "Visualising the Division of Labour: William Pyne's *Microcosm*," in *The
Birth of Pandora* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 104.

[40] See for instance Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World* (1760-1), Letters XXVI and
XXVII; *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), chapters III, IV, XIV, XXVII; Henry Mackenzie, *The
Man of Feeling* (1771), chapter XIV.

the end of Thomas Pennant's *Tour in Scotland* (1774), Pennant rapidly brings his account to a close by introducing the family he has left at home, which has never been mentioned before. He writes: "SEPT 22. Hastened through *Preston*, *Wiggan*, *Warrington*, and *Chester*, and finished my journey with a rapture of which no fond parent can be ignorant, that of being again restored to two innocent prattlers after an absence equally regretted by all parties."[41] The sentence provides a conventional moment of closure to the narrative and also gives retrospective point and weight to the repeated incidents earlier in the tour in which Pennant has reported, and sympathized with the victims of, the opposite of this ideal – the exploitation of women and children in Scotland. Twenty-five years later, on his second walk through Wales, and much more responsive to the appeal of the Picturesque than Pennant had been, Richard Warner nonetheless recalls an incident in the course of his first tour, in which he saved an old woman accused of bewitching a small boy in Caerwent; and he hears of the later death of the boy from smallpox. He writes: "The story was a simple, but an affecting one, and naturally introduced a train of serious reflections. I did not endeavour to restrain them, impressed with a conviction that the mind is never injured by the indulgence of a rational sensibility."[42]

In Gilpin's tour the description of the old beggar woman offers every expectation that the trope of the relief of charity will be deployed. Gilpin – after all a clergyman – is surprised into interest in a tale of suffering, despite his aesthetic expectation that he will not be. The old woman is described in terms of horror, which nonetheless hover disconcertingly on the edge of expressing interest in her as a species of picturesque ruination, on a par with the ruin she inhabits; and the imperative of the narrative sequence then truncates the potentially sentimental episode and leads on to the next landscape description. Gilpin writes:

> – When we stood in the midst of this cell of misery; and felt the chilling damps, which struck us in every direction, we were rather surprised, that the wretched inhabitant was still alive; than that she had only lost the use of her limbs.
>
> The country about *Tintern-abbey* hath been described as a solitary, tranquil scene: but its immediate environs only are meant. Within half a mile of it are carried on great iron works ... (37)

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[41] Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides MDCCLXXII* (London, 1774), p. 220.

[42] Richard Warner, *A Second Walk through Wales in 1798* (Bath, 1799), pp. 3-6.

Later tourists retrace Gilpin's path through Tintern, marking the continuities and changes at the scene, but also echoing the motifs of Gilpin's original narrative. In a letter to his father describing a tour of the Wye in 1791, Samuel Rogers thus writes "Adjoining to what is called the Monk's cell a poor woman has furnished a melancholy apartment. The vault and its tenant correspond with Mr. Gilpin's description, but are not the same. The woman he mentions died in the workhouse ..." As he is leaving the abbey Rogers asks another beggar woman the way to Chepstow and, making the same rapid transition as Gilpin, reports that "My question drew an appeal to my charity. She was returning home from the surgeon with a strengthening plaster and could scarcely crawl. Gained the heights, and saw the Severn ..."[43] The conflict between humane engagement and aesthetic enjoyment which emerges in Gilpin's narrative suppression of the act of charity at Tintern and which is reproduced in this later account, offers a telling index of the problems attaching to Picturesque perception and representation.

In the different context of the guidebook, T. D. Fosbroke cuts Gilpin's original description of the beggars, as part of what he rather brutally dismisses as the author's "irrelevant expletory additions, inserted to make up a volume," which "are exchanged for historical and topographical illustrations, the evident *desiderata* of his work." He does continue Gilpin's complaint about the "mob of houses" that lie next to the abbey, however, on the grounds that "*Solitude, Neglect* and *Desolation* are the proper characteristics of ruins," and some at least of the permanent inhabitants and passing observers of the scene continue to lurk vestigially in his account. As he writes, "Tintern would be a most unfortunate spot for visits of speculation concerning future destinies, at least in the minds of old women, and poets, (who resemble in many points old women) for superstition and imagination are relatives."[44]

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[43] Quoted in P. W. Clayden, *The Early Life of Samuel Rogers* (London, 1887), p. 199. Later accounts of Tintern are discussed in Andrews, *Search for the Picturesque*, pp. 94-105.

[44] Fosbroke, *Gilpin* (1st ed.), p. viii; (3rd ed.), pp. 63-4, 74.

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