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Reconstructing ‘nature’ as a picturesque theme park: the colonial case of Ireland

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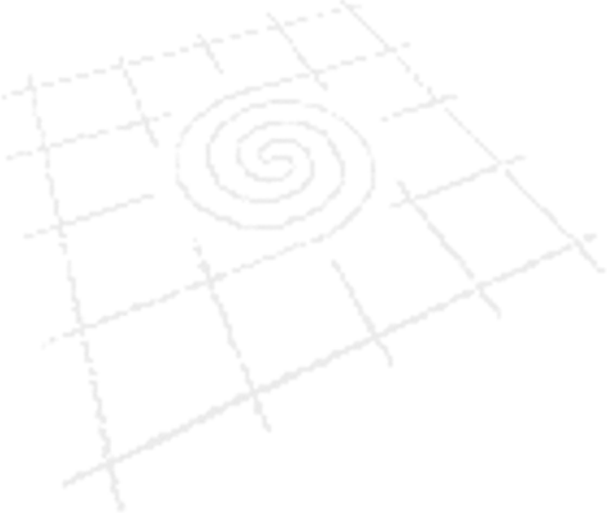

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Reconstructing ‘nature’ as a picturesque theme park: the colonial case of Ireland

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Abstract:

This paper explores how a form of visuality, - the picturesque became the essential framework for the emergence of a theme park on the landed estates of the Anglo-Irish landlords in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The initial cultural forms of the picturesque, which evolved from the disciplines of landscape painting and the philosophy of aesthetics, later became the design principles that guided the English Informal style of gardening. Accordingly, the original abstract concepts of the picturesque become physically embedded in the Irish landscape ecosystems and subsequently established these spatial enclaves as a picturesque theme park. In becoming spatialized, the colonial ideology of the picturesque, - designing Irish landscape to look like English landscape, -became a colonised space which was inherently hegemonic with regard to the native sense of place. In physically embedding the picturesque visual principles into the local ecosystems, the cultural forms of the picturesque take on ecological dimension to them, where aesthetic forms of society merge with the natural forms of plants and their metabolic systems. And in ‘naturalising’ the aesthetic principles of the picturesque, any portrayal of a scene from the theme park tended to replicate the hegemonic position of the picturesque as the dominant place ideology, since the portrayal tended to reproduce what the writer or author actually saw, the problem was that the scenes were already changed and manipulated to reflect the picturesque visuality. This particular social form of picturesque visuality fell from its dominant position with the fall of Irish landlordism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The capacity for seeing (nature) with the painters' eye was the
Picturesque vision.
Richard Payne Knight

Where power was, there beauty shall reside.
Ann Bermingham

No natural laws can be done away with. What can change is the
form in which these laws operate.
Karl Marx

For the house of the planter is known by the trees.
Austin Clarke

Introduction: a brief history of the complex cultural forms of the picturesque

This essay explores how a new form of visuality – the *Picturesque* – became the dominant framework through which the Irish landscape was interpreted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Initially consisting of painterly concepts that emerged from Italian landscape painting in the seventeenth century, the picturesque was later theoretically developed in eighteenth century philosophy of aesthetics. These cultural forms of the picturesque subsequently became an interpretative mechanism through which landscape connoisseurship emerged as an elite cultural activity among Ireland's landed gentry. Later on these ideological forms of the picturesque became the accepted principles that guided the design dicta of the English informal style of gardening in rural Ireland. In becoming a gardening design framework, the cultural and ideological forms of the picturesque took on a material structure as these abstract concepts became embedded into the natural structures of the local landscape ecosystems. It is at this point that the gardeners of the informal English style responded to the cultural forms of the picturesque, and crucially where the cultural forms of this ideological circulation process of the picturesque entered into a material production process resulting in the picturesque landscape becoming a theme park.[i] A theme park that not only reflected the contradictory cultural forms of the picturesque but also took on a spatial dimension, where the design principles of the English informal garden attempted to transform the material structures of the Irish landscape by creating 'little Englands' in Ireland. These spatial enclaves on the landlord's demesne, protected behind high walls (2), became a colonised space, where the hegemonic picturesque held sway over the native sense of place. This theme park and its cultural forms of the picturesque closed down when the legal buttress of landlordism fell in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We begin our analysis with a travelogue account of Ireland in the early 1840s.

A ‘picturesque’ travelogue to nineteenth century Ireland

Travelogue writing on Ireland had its formative period from 1775 to 1850 (Woods 1992, 173). The greatest travel writers of this period were the Halls – Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Carter Hall. They undertook several tours of Ireland in the early 1840s, from which they compiled a travelogue published in several editions (Hall 1853). Their stated purpose was to induce visits to Ireland, especially from mainland Britain:

> Those who require relaxation from labour, or may be advised to seek health under the influence of a mild climate, or search for sources of novel and rational amusement, or draw from a change of scene a stimulus to wholesome excitement, or covert acquaintance with the charms of nature, or wish to study a people full of original character – cannot project an excursion to any part of Europe that will afford a more ample recompense (Hall 1853).

In this opening statement, the Hall’s ideologically constructed Ireland as a place of escape, where one can depart from the routines of British everyday life and engage with exotic peoples living in natural environment. What is strange about this construct is that it could be applied to Ireland at this particular period, since the reality for the majority of Irish people was suffering from crushing poverty with no hope of escape (Mokyr 1983). Therefore, the Halls seem to be evading the economic reality of mass poverty by encouraging their travelogue readers to see Ireland as a landscape picture:

> Wicklow is the garden of Ireland; its prominent feature is, indeed, sublimity – wild grandeur, healthful and refreshing; but among its high and bleak mountains there are numerous rich and fertile valleys, luxuriantly wooded and with the most romantic rivers running through them, forming in their course, an endless variety of cataracts. Its natural graces are enhanced in value, because they are invariably encountered after the eye and mind have been wearied from gazing upon the rude and uncultivated districts, covered with peat, upon the scanty herbage of which the small sheep can scarcely find pasture. [….] Usually, the work of nature has been improved by the skill of Art, and it is impossible to imagine a scene more sublime and beautiful than the one of these ravines of which there are so many (1853, 99).

In this description the pictorial quality of Wicklow's landscape is structured on the syntax of the sentences. The Hall's way of proceeding is to follow the description of the 'high and bleak mountains' with a description of the 'rich and fertile valleys'. The syntax is sequenced around the word 'after', and this syntactical structure of the passage is not only imitating a viewing process but also a downward glance. The Halls have 'placed' the readers in a position of a commanding vantage point, allowing their readers to 'see' a wide sweep of the landscape. According to John Barrel, the main point in 'constructing' a textual viewing point is that it creates an imaginary space between the landscape and the spectator (reader), similar in effect to the real space between a picture and whoever is looking at it (1972, 21). This descriptive technique conveys the original sense of the picturesque, - that which is capable of being represented in a picture.

However, on closer examination of the Hall's text another level in which their narrative celebrates the compositional techniques of the picturesque landscape painting of Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin can be identified. According to Ernst Gombrich, Lorraine and Poussin employed alternating bands of light and darkness to create depth in their paintings to establish a foreground, middle-ground and background to their compositions (1973, 309). Such Claudean compositional techniques can be identified in the Hall's account of the Irish landscape in the following:

> Descending from any one of the hills, the moment the slope commences, the prospect becomes cheering beyond conception; all that wood, rock, and water – infinitely varied – can do to render a scene grand and beautiful, has been wrought in the valley over which the eye wanders; trees of every form and hue, from the lightest and the brightest green, to the sombre brown, or – made so by distance – the deepest purple; rivers, of every possible character, from the small thread of white that trickles down the hill-side, to the broad and deep current that rushes along, furiously, a mass of foam and spray….(1853, 100).

In identifying the differing colour tones of the trees and streams the Halls locate the spatial characteristics associated with perspective similar to that achieved by the picturesque painters. However, not only do the Hall's use the compositional spatial patterns employed by Claude and Poussin, they also used the same aesthetic categories. These were categories of the beautiful and the sublime and they formed themselves into a dualism.[ii] Following the publication of Edmund Burke's *The Origin of our Ideas about the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757, the sublime and the beautiful became identified in the public mind as a pair of binary opposites. On one side of this dichotomy, the notion of the beautiful was held to consist of smooth flowing lines, of smoothness of surface and of clear, bright colours. Stuart has even suggested that beneath the veil of Burke's attempt at the analysis of beauty can be seen the gentle form of a woman's body (1979, 83). The sublime was altogether an opposing quality that created an awe-inspiring and fearful feeling (Burke 1990, 36).

In the second passage from the Halls, the concept of the sublime was applied to the 'rude and uncultivated districts, covered with peat' of the 'high and bleak mountains', while the beautiful was located in the 'rich and fertile valleys' where 'the work of nature has been improved by the skill of Art'. Accordingly, the spatial difference established by the aesthetic dichotomy was further complemented by the new dichotomy of art/nature. This particular dichotomy distinguishes natural wilderness from man-made cultivation. These dichotomies complement each other as they incorporate each other within similar spatial locations. The sublime and natural wilderness is applied to the 'high and bleak mountains', while the man-made landscape of the 'fertile valleys' is defined as beautiful. All of these techniques of description found within Hall's travelogue suggests their overall framework should be described as picturesque. These principles of composition borrowed from the painterly tradition of the picturesque created a new type of visuality, which moved from the medium of painting to that of travelogue writing and the philosophy of aesthetics. This new visuality of the picturesque was not a passive activity; it was a process that involved reconstructing the landscape in the imagination according to the compositional principles of the picturesque (Barrell, 1972, 6). As a consequence of this mental process of composition, the objects in the real landscape and their surface appearances were conceptually structured into new relationships with each other, determined by their visual characteristics within the overall framework of the picturesque. This mediated relationship of the picturesque (Bell, 1993, 22) and its compositional principles had to be learned, and were indeed learned so thoroughly that it became impossible for anyone with an aesthetic interest in landscape to look at the countryside without applying them, whether or not they knew they were doing so (Barrell, 1972, 6). The Hall's did not just provide a guide to Ireland's picturesque locations they also created a framework that helped the landscape connoisseur to evaluate the picturesque qualities within identified locations. As the following suggests:

> The glen is little more than a mile in length; and midway a small moss-house has been erected; to our minds, the structure – although exceedingly simple – disturbed the perfect solitude of the place; where the work of the artificer ought not to be recognised (1853, 157).

The adequacy of the moss-house in Hall's text and in the specificity of its picturesque framework was determined not by its use-value but by its surface appearance within the landscape of the glen. Its subsequent condemnation as aesthetic object was conditioned by its social form – it was physically constructed – contrasting negatively with the natural forms of the glen. However, an important question emerges from the moss-house quotation. Who is the 'artificer' of the condemned moss-house?

'Planting' the cultural forms of the picturesque in Ireland

The picturesque artificer in the above quotation was the landlord. Because of their ownership of the land, they were the only people who had the power and capital to physically reshape the landscape in a picturesque way. The perilous legal position of the Irish tenantry with regard to the occupancy of land,[iii] and the smallness of their holdings, prevented them from redesigning the Irish landscape on such a grand scale as required by the picturesque.[iv] From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards it was the Anglo-Irish landlords who began to physically redesign their demesnes according to the dicta of the picturesque. For this to happen the abstract concepts of the picturesque jumped from ideological texts into concrete reality in the form of the English informal style of landscape gardening. According to

Reeves-Smith, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the parkland of the demesnes occupied around 800,000 acres, or 4 per cent of Ireland's landmass, with over 7,000 houses featuring pleasure landscapes of ten acres or more (1997, 551). The English Informal or picturesque garden was itself a rejection of the rigid formality of the Dutch and French styles (McCullagh 1987, 67). The greatest exponent of this English style was Capability Brown. The Brownian landscape was worked in three elements alone; wood, water and grass (Struart, 1979, 42). The old formal gardens were ploughed over, avenues left to wander like country lanes; the vista from the window became one of gently rolling greenery, with cunningly placed clumps of trees in natural positions (McCullagh 1987, 67). Although engendering a spirit of simplicity, this picturesque garden created subtle changes to people's relationship to their landscape. According to Stuart, Brown's most famous contribution was to create a transition from a landscape seen in a two-dimensional way to a landscape fully integrated in three dimensions: landscape as a sculpture, rather than as a painting (1979, 42). The Brownian landscape was a designed set to be walked through rather than a mere stationary view from the 'Big House'. As a consequence, the 'garden' began to move away from the immediate environs of the house and in many cases out of sight of the house itself, creating an even more natural feel to the redesigned landscape. Although, Capability Brown never made it to Ireland,[v] he did have his Irish disciples, most notably Dean Swift and the Delanys (Hayden 1992). The following is a typical informal Brownian 'garden' as described by the Halls:

> …in the demesne of Altadore, a small glen called the 'Heritage', for which nature has done much, and art more. And here is another of the magnificent waterfalls for which the country is so famous. It is but one of the many attractions in this delicious spot; the grounds have been laid out with exceeding taste, the walks through it are very varied; and considerable judgement and skill have been exhibited in planting and 'trimming' – the one being even more necessary than the other where the growth is rapid and luxuriant – as to obtain a new and striking view almost at every step. (1853, 162)

The Hall's account here oscillates between describing the natural occurring forms of nature and artificial constructions, reflecting their tendencies to interpenetrate each other in the concrete reality of the garden itself. With regard to 'planting and trimming', the social process of design is combined with the natural processes of the plants, the 'rapid and luxuriant growth'. As a consequence, the artificial aspects of 'this delicious spot', except for the physical walkways, tend to be disguised - hidden from view because the artificial features of the garden are in its design. In manicuring the surface appearance of the plants and purposely arranging the spatial relationships between the natural entities of the new ecosystem of the English Informal garden to 'mimic' the visual characteristics of the picturesque framework, the gardener was 'redesigning' nature in an idealistic way (5).

Therefore the construction of a picturesque 'spot', like the Hermitage above, is a result of an intended manipulation of nature to reflect an image and ideology concerning society's relationship to nature. The 'natural' garden of the picturesque is therefore in a real concrete sense an embodied ideology. Gallagher suggests that the emergence of the English informal garden in the middle of the eighteenth century indicated a societal change of perspective to nature in general. The new perspective of the picturesque saw man's position as being within nature itself, rather than as an agent to tame and regulate its forces as in the Dutch and French formal gardens (Gallagher 1989, 34). In the picturesque nature cannot be conquered and at best only certain aspects of it can be manicured by society for its own ends. This tension between nature and society is materially manifested in the spatial difference between the beautiful and sublime aspects of the picturesque landscape as revealed in the following from the Hall's description of the Crampton estate at Lough Bray:

> The wall that surrounds these grounds is not, in some places as high as the bank of peat within a few feet of it, and the contrast between the neglect, the desolation, the barrenness that reign without, and the beauty within, is very striking, exhibiting the mastery which science and civilization hold over nature even in her sternest and most rugged domain. The cottage and grounds are here, in this lofty and unreclaimed region, 'like Tadmor in the wilderness, or an oasis in the desert'' (1853, 104).

The spatial contrast between 'the neglect and the barrenness' of the bog outside the walls with the 'order and cultivation' of the garden within, is further conceptualized in the aesthetic dualism of the beautiful and the sublime. The 'beautiful' in the above quotation which exhibits the application of 'science and civilization' is located within the walls of the parkland. On the other hand, the sublime refers to the wilderness of the peat bog without. As a consequence, the sublime aspect of the picturesque could only be visually appropriated into the picturesque landscape as a backdrop to the beautiful within the garden itself. The landscape gardener could only physically reshape the beautiful aspects of the picturesque – those within the walls of the parkland – by constructing water features such as artificial lakes and meandering rivers, and planting alternating bands of grass and trees in the foreground and middle-ground of the parkland (Clifford 1962, 173). The sublime features of the picturesque could not be successively planted in the parkland without losing those characteristics which define them as sublime, i.e. being truly 'natural' and 'awe-inspiring and fearful feeling'. These sublime characteristics can only be achieved by looking into the vast uncultivated wastes of bog land (Bellamy 1986) beyond the comfortable confines of the 'beautiful' walled gardens.

The 'politics' of the picturesque in Ireland: The detached peasantry of the sublime

The landlords of Ireland were the major forces behind the picturesque movement in Ireland. They commissioned journeymen painters to paint their demesnes in the picturesque style, their families engaged in picturesque tours in Ireland and abroad, and they educated their families in a classical elite culture (literature and poetry), which included connoisseurship of the principles of the romantic, picturesque movement. Crucially they also constructed the gardens of the picturesque on their estates. The Halls demonstrate their appreciation of the landlords and their gardening endeavours by explicitly identifying the 'beautiful spots' of the picturesque (Somerville and Ross 1990, 168) by praising their picturesque achievements in their travelogue. However, this public act of appreciation may have had a practical side to it, in that permission had to be sought from the landlord to gain entry to these picturesque spots. In Co. Wicklow alone, the Hall's identify twelve owners of sixteen picturesque locations. Villages and towns are mentioned fleetingly as the Hall's pass through them on their way to their picturesque 'Ireland'. In this light, the Hall's sense of place is the landed estate of the Anglo-Irish landlord class (MacDonagh 1983, 29). Although, this particular sense of place is merely a consequence of the adoption of a culture of the picturesque by a landowning elite, it turned out to be extremely repressive to the native, peasant population and their local sense of place.

By only identifying the picturesque locations of the landed estates, the Hall's have filtered out of their travelogue account the working, productive aspects of those estates. In doing so they foster the notion of the estate as a socially empty space, omitting the presence of the peasantry within the landscape. By ideologically detaching the peasantry from the landscape, the Halls were replicating the silences of the seventeenth-century cartographers as they excluded the cabins of the native Irish from their otherwise accurate maps (Harley 1988, 292). Consequently, the peasantry play no part in the picturesque of Ireland. When they are referred to it is generally with regard to their cottage dwellings mostly described as hovels. This 'innocent' definition of a cottage as a hovel may have had important consequences for the actual occupiers in picturesque locations. In *Maps, Knowledge and Power*, J.B. Harley has suggested that the nineteenth century maps impinged on the daily lives of the ordinary people. As the clock brought time discipline to the new industrial workers, maps introduced a dimension of spatial discipline on the rural peasantry. Following this line of argument, it could be suggested that the picturesque introduced a similar type of constraint on the Irish peasantry, in that the picturesque introduced a dimension of aesthetic discipline on them. Defining an area as picturesque within the estate of an improving landlord meant that the peasantry could never hope to gain access to that land for productive purposes. Even more harmful to a sitting tenant was to have their occupied land defined as picturesque by a landscape connoisseur. This surely meant eviction of the tenantry from their hovels as the landlord cleared these unsightly objects from the potential picturesque landscape (Gallagher 1989, 42).

Edward Said would see this spatial act of coercion as a form of geographical violence. He has suggested that imperialism is an act of geographical violence through which every space in an occupied country is explored, charted and finally brought under control (Said 1993, 271). The picturesque appears to have gone through similar stages of imposed cultural imperialism in Ireland. As part of the Romantic movement in general, picturesque connoisseurs explored the globe in search of new picturesque spots.[vi] They charted and captured these locations in written texts and paintings. Additionally the dicta of the picturesque, was the main ideological rationality for controlling access to these spots by conserving them for the travelling connoisseurs. Conserving the picturesque meant in effect preventing the everyday activities of the local population from ‘ruining the view’. Although the detaching of the local population from these picturesque defined locations was for ‘high’ cultural reasons, the actual consequence for the native Irish was the creation of a ‘no-go’ area within their own ancestral lands. Crucially not only were the natives debarred from entry to the picturesque spots, but the actual material, natural structures of their ancestral lands were changed to respond to the new sensibilities of the picturesque. Many of the traditional spiritual locations which possessed symbolic significance for the native population were either physically destroyed or access to them were permanently denied because these mythical and historical sites were now located on the picturesque demesnes and ultimately protected by the legal dicta of private property. Examples of these sacred spots would be holy wells, fairy trees and built structures, which would be associated with a famous person or historical event. In strict Brownian landscape, the structures of the landscape were not calculated to stimulate historical reflections (Crandell 1993, 129) although later on ‘follies’ were constructed to give a general air of the historical past to the parkland. But follies were only symbolic of an idealised past rather representing a real historical past or event and especially for the collective memory of the native Irish. As a consequence, peasant resentment to the picturesque emerged which overlapped with property relationships between the Anglo-Irish landlord class and their Irish re-entry,[vii] to such an extent that certain physical aspects of the picturesque, such as the ornamental trees became objects of political hatred, manifested in these ‘beloved’ trees being attacked and damaged by disgruntled tenants.

Alfred Crosby in his work, *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, suggests that European colonists had a conscious aim to transform the colonialsed territories into the images of what they left behind in their homelands. For the British empire this meant creating ‘little Englands’ in far off places, like Ireland. The picturesque garden was essentially not only informal but more crucially it was English. This imperialist expansion of an idealised spatial construct involved an attempt to physically reconstruct not only the native Irish landscape, but also to introduce foreign flora specie into this remodelled terrain. Most of the foreign plant species were trees and scrubs, which were ‘hunted down’ and ‘chosen’ because of their visible ornamental qualities. As a consequence, the plant species of the picturesque were not only distinctly British like the lime tree and weeping willow, but more exotic species from various parts of the globe collected by the ‘plant-hunters’ of the eighteenth century were also put on the ‘palette’ of the landscape gardener, such as cedar, walnut, Spanish chestnut and sycamore (Reeves-Smith, 556). Consequently, the global diffusion of the cultural form of the picturesque brought in its wake, a huge amount of exotic plant species into the local ecosystems of the world. This cultural and ecological expansion of the picturesque not surprisingly tended to follow the routes that the British empire had previously forged.[viii]Ireland was no exception to this global and imperial trend. Most of these ‘introduced’ species were able to fit into the native Irish ecosystems without much disruption. However some of these introduced species, like the rhododendron, proved to be more problematic for their integration into the local ecosystems. Consequently, although these foreign cultural and ecological forms of the picturesque were imposed on the native population and their ecosystems, the actual aesthetic experience of the picturesque landscape was in general a pleasing event for the strolling connoisseur. The fetished forms through which the picturesque was enjoyed hid the reality of its enforced imposition. The parkland was not just a spatial enclave it was also an ideological enclave.

The picturesque theme park

The spatial aspect of the picturesque was crucial for the emergence of the picturesque as a theme park. Here, at the concrete level of spatial relationships, the circulation of the cultural picturesque forms allowed the garden design to move through space and time and circulate as commodities. Therefore, this social process of circulation of the picturesque began its life as an ideological perspective in the paintings and texts of its connoisseurs. This had a specific structure to it (its visuality) and a particular history of development over time and space (its cultural connoisseurship in the romantic movement). The actual spatial realization of this ideological perspective was achieved in the gardening techniques of the English informal style, where the garden designs of the picturesque consciously reflected the sensibilities of the picturesque in the spatial arrangements between the plants. The ‘planting’ of the picturesque constructed its location as a cultural enclave within a wider landscape of the Irish countryside. According to Crandell:

> This is the pivotal moment in the pictorialization of nature: what is designed (and owned) is composed to give the illusion of being natural, when in fact it is maintained as an enclave. To create the illusion, Brown’s garden used compositional conventions taken from painting,…Increasingly it meant something visual: a forested landscape with serpentine clearings (Crandell, 130).

The picturesque enclave was therefore a constructed environment, owned and controlled by the landed gentry. It was their and their advisors interpretation of the picturesque that prevailed in the garden. The dominance of the designers/landlords in constructing their own specific version of the picturesque within these spatial enclaves was necessary to prevent the emergence of alternative ‘realities’ and thereby disrupting the overall imagineering process (Archer, 334). Within the boundary walls and through the gated lodges of the parklands, however, the experience of the picturesque enclave as documented by the travelogue writers and artists was not of domination and constraint imposed by the landlord class upon the connoisseurs, but the opposite, - feelings of unrestrained mobility and freedom. Here lies the power of illusion inherent in theme parking, where the necessary form of design domination with its physically embedded aesthetic structure produced by the direct producers was subsumed under the cultural form of how that aesthetic form was actually experienced with its sense of free and unrestrained movement. It was the parks’ constructed topography, which connected the embedded design structure with the sense of free spatial movement. As a consequence, the theme park designers found it is necessary to distinguish between differing experiences of movement with regard to the body and its eyes as Crandell suggests in the following:

> In painting, the rise and fall, advance and recess, and convexity and concavity of form has the same effect of creating movement as do hill and dale, foreground and distance, and swelling and sinking, in the landscape. For the spectator in an actual landscape, however, topographic relief does more than effect the eyes; it creates a distinction between eyes and feet and becomes a design principle that mandates that the foot should never travel by the same route as the eye. The

> eyes can travel quickly, ‘irritated’ by lights and shades, while the feet stroll leisurely over hill and dale (Crandell 1993, 125).

In the picturesque landscape, bodily movement was not explicitly determined nor directly controlled by physical structures. There was no obvious process of focalisation (Ingram, 5) as in the more formal French and Italian gardens. The only exception to this tendency was in the proximity of the ‘big house’, and through wooded areas, where footpaths were constructed. As a consequence the picturesque stroller was allowed to wonder free and unrestrained and this opportunity for undirected movement was determined by lack of focalising straight lines. The dominance of the serpentine design feature had the tendency to encourage the sensation of free, unrestrained bodily movement through this spatial enclave, but eye movements were controlled by the scenic sights provided by the landscape gardener. For example, in Kents’ gardens, the spectator was lead from one ‘picture’ to another as ‘a continued series of new and delightful scenes at every step you take’ (Hussey 1967, 130). The differing physical movement and the differing pace of that movement between the body and the eye allowed the gardener the opportunity to design into the garden a sense of dramatic unfolding as the visual scenes ‘lured’ the body to move through the landscape. However, the visually exciting aesthetic appearance of the ‘scenes’ within the landscape had to be complimented by easy bodily movement through that landscape in order for the stroller to experience a feel good effect. Any discomfort from any side of this sensory dichotomy would destroy the pleasure of the other. Theme parking involved complete sensory cocooning from all possible undesirable sensations and for this to happen it had to occur in a controlled environment, such as in picturesque parkland. However, the immediate aesthetic and sensory experiences were usually expressed either in the compositional forms of the picturesque e.g. beautiful, sublime, or in the conceptual forms of sensory movement e.g. unrestrained, free, or in both forms of sensory appreciation. When the ‘cocooning’ worked and the aesthetic experience was deemed to be successful, there was a strong temptation to use more allegorical forms of expressions in summarising the overall experience. These more abstract associational concepts tended to symbolize a moral and spiritual meaning to these picturesque gardens. Concepts such as idyllic, Arcadian, virgilian, pastoral and even utopian were appearing in cultural texts summarising the picturesque experience:

> What we are presented with in a Brown park is, apparently, a whole ‘world’. This world is Utopian in concept, offering a kind of perfection to the senses, where every alien or untoward element has been gracefully banished (Turner 1985, 78).

The designed physical structures of the picturesque theme park and the immediate aesthetic categories, which mediated and conceptualized the landscape as a ‘feel good’ experience such as beautiful, serene, serpentine etc were appropriated by the allegorical concepts as their ontological conditions of existence. The constructed openness and physically uninterrupted lawns not only evoked feelings of freedom of physical mobility but also could evoke more philosophical feelings of political freedom, which could even emerge across the Atlantic:

> This appearance (of uninterrupted openness), however, is the consequence of design and calculated manipulation. The extraordinary appeal of this design in American landscape architecture is surely a result of the fact that the landscape garden’s potential for undirected movement feels like and looks like, freedom (Crandell 1993, 126).

However, all of these grand allegorical concepts were conditional on the recognition of the aesthetic landscape categories being present in these garden enclaves and never vice-a-versa. The idea of the landscape garden being a ‘utopian world’ could not emerge unless that particular enclave had meet all the aesthetic criteria necessary to fulfil the requirements of the ‘picturesque’ category. It is at this point, where these over-determined idealistic concepts were being not only applied to these spatial enclaves but were also being accepted without criticism, that the picturesque landscape became iconic of the political ideals and aspirations of the land owning class. These ideological categories of the picturesque have moved from the various cultural practices of art, philosophy and travel writing to become ‘spatialized’ in the design forms of the informal English garden, waiting, like ancient hieroglyphics, to be interpreted by the connoisseur and thereby to emerge again as not just a conceptual expression of an aesthetic experience, but as an ideology reflecting the ideals and social values of the landed elite class. In doing so it provided a meaningless dream of a new ‘world’, beyond the gritty reality of everyday life and especially class relationships. Like all theme parks, they were about escape – escape from the physical spaces of mundane reality into a space of idealized nature, and secondly an escape from the harsh realities of everyday economic life into an idealized dream world of democracy for the landowning elite only:

> In a more general sense, the landscape garden's forms were presented as a political challenge to the brash, -worldly, and authoritarian attitudes that the English attributed to the axial and geometric French gardens. The English landscape garden was taken to be more natural because it was rooted in a democracy (Crandell 1993, 126).

But it was only democracy for the few - the ones who controlled the ideological and material production of the picturesque. However, in its own political habitat the English informal garden may have been accepted as democratic, but such an intellectual flight of fantasy in the context of colonial Ireland came up against a real turbulent political reality, whose inhabitants were ready and willing to disturb the constructed tranquillity of the Anglo-Irish landlord's picturesque gardens. But the strength of this particular hegemonic ideology of the picturesque was determined by how it actually became embedded in the physical landscape and how this ideology was continually replicated as these picturesque scenes were reproduced in the paintings/texts of picturesque connoisseurs. The portrayal of a picturesque scene on a landlord's demesne may have been realistic and authentic of what was physically present to be replicated, the crucial determining factor of the picturesque theme park was that scene was already restructured and manipulated to reflect the picturesque visuality.

Conclusion: Ending the tyranny of the picturesque theme park

When the Halls had nearly completed their tour of the picturesque 'spots' of county Wicklow, they decided to visit one last picturesque location - the ruined monastic city of Glendalough. Unlike the other picturesque locations that they visited, however, their attempted picturesque reading of the Glendalough landscape was interrupted by the native Irish guides:

> At Glendalough guides of all degrees start from beneath the bushes, and from amid the crags – we had almost written, and the lake – and 'they will do anything in the wide world to serve and obleege yer honours', except leave you to yourselves (1853, 127).

These amassing guides, - these destroyers 'of the solemn harmony of the surrounding objects', were initially paid to stay away from the 'city' as the two picturesque connoisseurs toured the ruins by themselves accompanied only by their picturesque compositional framework. However, the Halls had to promise to hire some of the guides the following morning for a guided tour of the site. This they did. Their guided tour was a non-picturesque interpretation of the landscape. The chosen guides provided an oral interpretation that highlighted the spiritual and symbolic aspects of the landscape mostly associated with St.Kevin's life. There was no mention of the picturesque qualities, which the Halls had discovered the previous evening. This new oral interpretation of the Irish landscape was not only challenging the dominance of the picturesque as a cultural form, the contestation between the differing landscape interpretations had a class basis to it (Slater 1993, 45). The picturesque was a cultural attribute of the landed elite, while the oral interpretation was a crucial ingredient of the local peasant culture. In the spatial area of Glendalough and through the competing perspectives of the Halls and the peasant guides, the landscape of the ruined city became contested. This occurred because Glendalough was not on a landlord's demesne but was located on old ecclesiastical lands not a 'picturesque' theme park.

The spatial control within the parklands allowed the landlords the conditions to create and continually reproduce the picturesque visibility. When this crucial element of spatial control was lost, i.e. where the picturesque attempted to impose its ideological interpretation beyond the secure boundaries of the parkland and subsequently without the necessary societal force of private property, this hegemonic visuality, could and was challenged by the natives and their non-picturesque interpretation of place. Finally, the theme parks of the picturesque meet their own demise with the fall of landlordism in the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, some of the old picturesque grounds and especially their wooded areas became the drilling and training grounds for the IRA during the war of Independence. Such an occurrence happened on the picturesque demesne of Dunboy Castle, the residence of the Puxley family on the Bere peninsula (Williams 1991, 179). In a very real sense, the political 'sublime' forces of the IRA in scaling the walls of the 'beautiful' garden closed the chapter of this particular theme park of the picturesque (11).

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[i] Recently there has been a lot discussion among cultural theorists of theme parks and the theming of urban America (Wasko 2001, Sorokin 1992, Zukin 1993, Fjellman 1992, and Gottdiener 2001). Most of this work has been concerned with the 'Disneyfication' of modern consumption patterns. Gottdiener comes closest to the idea that theme parks existed before Disney in his work, -*Theming of America.*

2 According to Duffy, the demesne walls of the Irish landed estate had no equivalent in England (Duffy, 1994, p.15). Some of these walls were impressive in both length and height. The Coole estate had all of its six hundred acres walled in (Somerville-Large 1995, p.136).

[3] The dualism of the beautiful and the sublime has a long history of evolution in Aesthetics (Le Bris 1981, pp.28-30). But it was not until the 1760s that the first British (and Irish) pictorial representation of the sublime was painted (Hutchinson 1985, p.18). This coincided with the publication of Burke's treatise on *The Origin of our Ideas about the Sublime and the Beautiful.* (1757).

[4] The Trinity College political economist at the time of the 1840s and 1850s, William Neilson Hancock, argued that legal statutes prevented the tenants from investing in improvements on their holdings, such as drainage and tree planting in his work –*Impediments to the Prosperity of Ireland*, 1850.

[5] With Terrence McDonough I argued that Irish rural economy was dominated by a Feudal mode of production rather than by the Capitalist mode of production in the nineteenth century. Because of the way Ireland was colonised by Britain, the Anglo-Irish landlords were ceded an enormous amount of political and legal power, which allowed them to 'rackrent' their tenantry in a Feudal way (Slater and Mc Donough, 1994).

6 Trees had to be planted in specific 'picturesque' locations, trimmed, pruned, and they had to be replaced when damaged. The grass had not only to be cut (by scythes and/or grazing livestock but also it had to be brushed and swept. Non-picturesque natural entities of the local ecosystem tended to be eliminated in the classical Brownian landscape:

> …every irregularity and blemish has to be manicured out of existence. […] A messy line of reeds, brambles, nettles and bushes was never his intention. It was important either to mow or else let the cattle browse right up to the water's edge (Turner 1985, p.81/82).

[7] In 1762 the Duke of Leinster wrote to Capability Brown in England and offered him 1,000 pounds to come to Ireland to create a picturesque garden at his Carton estate, but Brown allegedly refused stating that he had first of all to finish England (T. Dooley and C. Mallaghan 2006, 58).

[8] Gibbons suggests that the opening up of the picturesque locations of Ireland to the 'modern' traveller in the 1740s was one of the founding moments of European Romanticism (Gibbons 1996, 95).

[9] O'Kane suggests that there was a prevalence of peasant resentment at the dispossession of their ancestral lands and a firm belief that they might be restored to them one day (O'Kane 2004, 173).

10 In the first fifty years of the 18th century, sixty-one trees and ninety-one new shrubs were introduced into England (Dixon-Hunt 2003, 45). Many of these global plant species were re-routed to the colonies including Ireland.

11 In the twentieth century, other 'chapters' of the picturesque theme park were reopened as backdrops to the new emerging corporate golf courses in Ireland and to the movie industry, - in which Ireland's most famous film, -the *Quiet Man* was filmed mostly in the picturesque grounds of Ashford Castle, Co. Mayo.

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