

NORTHERN ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE PAINTING

AN INTRODUCTION TO ITS PROBLEMS

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What is Romanticism?

In his 'Salon de 1846' Charles Baudelaire gives the second chapter the title 'What is Romanticism?'¹ His answer can serve as the theme of the considerations laid out here, if we supplement them with the German poet Novalis' oft-quoted definition of the Romantic. Baudelaire's remarks are forward-looking: for him, Romanticism was pointing the way to an art for the modern age. Novalis's fragment by contrast looks back: he wants to restore to the world its original meaning, now lost. For Baudelaire the undefined is a quality of beauty as a result of present experience, and designates a positive feeling. For Novalis, the undefined as present experience gives rise to an idea of the lost wholeness of a childlike age of innocence, and creates a yearning for a renewed, universal connectedness. Following the failure of the ideals of the French Revolution, however, we know that this longing is no more than a mere hope, albeit an ongoing one.

At least here, in the 'Salon de 1846', Baudelaire is content with the notion of 'relative progress'; he accepts the conditions of the present day, it is these to which one must react. Novalis, who had died back in 1801, had a yearning for a non-alienated pristine era, and saw this era embodied in the Christian Middle Ages. In his 1799 speech on 'Europe', Novalis sketched out the (reactionary) utopia of a Europe renewing itself under the Christian banner. In 1804,

the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel too was seized by an enthusiasm for the Christian Middle Ages, above all as a result of becoming acquainted with the collection of the Boisserée brothers, who were gathering together relics of medieval art, following the occupation of their home city of Cologne by the French and the ensuing looting and dissolution of the monasteries. Linked to this was a conservative political turnaround, which found expression from 1808, in Vienna too, in Schlegel's influence on the group known as the Nazarenes, which was in the process of formation and whose leader, Friedrich Overbeck, later developed into the most zealous propagator of a renewal of Christian art. Baudelaire in his turn propagated the art of Eugène Delacroix, whom he saw as the most important of the Romantics, being regarded, not least by the public, as the leader of an 'école moderne'.²

It must already be clear by now that Romanticism can have contradictory faces. This is true of individual countries when compared, but also of individuals. For in France too there were advocates of a Romanticism with a decidedly religious stamp. In 1802, François-René de Chateaubriand, who was to become the founder of Romantic literature in France, published *The Genius of Christianity, or the Spirit and Beauty of the Christian Religion* (*Le génie du christianisme ou beautés de la religion chrétienne*). As the title suggests, revelation of

the faith is seen as only possible via an aesthetic experience. This was to turn out to be central to the understanding of Romantic art above all in the German-speaking lands: art became the mediator of faith, an idea already propagated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his 1799 treatise *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (*Über die Religion. Reden eines Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*).

Artists reacted very differently in the face of what were altogether similar experiences. What they had in common was the experience of highly disconcerting circumstances. It was in words and picture that the Romantics most clearly gave expression to these uncertainties. For this reason it is worth tracing this existential change, for it can be found not only in various utterances on the part of declared Romantics, but is also emblematic of an entire age. Occasionally the term 'Romantic' for this era has been totally avoided as a result. The art historian Werner Hofmann, for example, talks of the period from 1750 to 1830 as a 'bisected century', and looks at its art under this aspect.³ I myself have spoken, on the basis of Friedrich Schiller's distinction between naive and sentimental, of the 'sentimental image' that characterizes the age.⁴ An image with a dual connotation: on the one hand, appealing to sensibility and demanding surrender to emotion, while on the other characterized by a reflective

mode well aware of the loss of a naïve approach to the world. The artist accepts the sentimental emotion for the moment, in the full knowledge that it cannot stand up in the face of actual circumstances, representing as it does a conscious piece of self-deception. For the Romantics, the unresolved relationship between true sentiment and the awareness of the impossibility of its delivery can only be borne with a sense of irony.

Now in our exhibition, which is devoted to landscape painting from the 1770s to the early 1860s, a series of artists are represented whom we would not normally count among the Romantics: Joseph Wright of Derby at the start of the period, or the Danish and other Scandinavian artists at the end of it. The Danish artists with their now acclaimed oil sketches of the 1820s to the 1850s seem not to fit into any pigeonhole. How can we describe their art: Romantic, Realistic, Biedermeier? And yet it makes sense to measure all these artists by Romantic criteria in order to reveal where and to what extent they broke free of centuries-old artistic prescription, and where they took account of the uncertainties of the age as they experienced them. To this extent we need to state at the outset the criteria that we find in the works of the Romantic theoreticians and literati.

In the 'Salon de 1846' Baudelaire wrote: "Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subjects nor in exact truth, but in a mode of feeling. They looked for it outside themselves, but it was only to be found within. For me Romanticism is the most recent, the latest expression of the beautiful. There are as many kinds of beauty as there are habitual ways of seeking happiness." And a little further on:

To say the word Romanticism is to say modern art – that is, intimacy, spirituality, colour, aspiration towards the infinite, expressed by every means available to the arts. Thence it follows that there is an obvious contradiction between romanticism and the works of its principal adherents. (...) Romanticism is a child of the North, and the North is all for colour; dreams and fairytales are born of the mist. England – that home of fanatical colourists, Flanders and half of France are all plunged in fog; Venice herself lies steeped in her lagoons. As for the painters of Spain, they are painters of contrast rather than colourists. The South, in return, is all for nature; for there nature is so beautiful and bright that nothing is left for man to desire, and he can find nothing more beautiful to invent than what he sees. There art belongs to the open air: but several hundred leagues to the north you will find the deep dreams of the studio and the gaze of the fancy lost in horizons of grey.

The South is as brutal and positive as a sculptor even in his most delicate compositions; the North; suffering and restless, seeks comfort with the imagination, and if it turns to sculpture, it will more often be picturesque than classical.⁵

Let us fasten on to what, for Baudelaire, constitutes Romanticism. In Romantic art, it is not the object that is crucial, but the emotions that it triggers, and that, we might add, is what defines how the object is treated. We shall see that the English poet William Wordsworth understands this notion even more radically. Baudelaire goes in this direction when he seeks Romanticism within the beholder, and not in the object which the latter is facing. Baudelaire comes up with a new concept of beauty: it is no longer defined by classical balance, by normative proportion, but consists rather in non-definition, in a striving for the infinite, in totally individual use of colour, conditioned by the experience of the mist-shrouded northern landscape which unleashes dreams and fairytale ideas. The land of the true colourists seems to him to be England, permeated as it is by northern weather, which evidently for him is what brings out the actual colour nuances. Although Baudelaire never mentions him by name, there is good reason to believe that when talking about the fanatical English exponents of colour, he was thinking primarily of John Constable, who caused a stir with his appearance at the 1824/25

Salon in Paris and exercised a lasting impression on Baudelaire's hero Delacroix, leading to his revision of *The Massacre at Chios* (1824, Musée du Louvre, Paris). Constable's appearance at the Salon was honoured with a medal, as was a further appearance at an exhibition in Lille. Doubtless Baudelaire was pursuing a cliché of the north, but if one relates his characterization – as suffering and restlessly following the imagination – to Romanticism, we certainly have a comprehensible dimension.

Wordsworth too, in the tradition of Joseph Addison's 'Pleasures of the Imagination'⁶, decisively upvalues an artistic fantasy that triggers emotions and is itself borne by emotions. But in the preface to the 1815 edition of his *Poems*, Wordsworth carefully distinguishes between imagination and 'fancy': "Imagination is the power of depicting, and fancy of evoking and combining."⁷ Imagination is based on patient observation, 'fancy' snatches a glimpse of a fleeting original association. They necessarily complement each other. In an earlier preface (1802), which became central for English theories of early Romanticism, Wordsworth ascribed the decisive role to emotion both on the part of producer and recipient, and concluded, with far-reaching consequences: "(...) the feeling (...) gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling."⁸ But how should we imagine the path thither? The point of departure

is the precise observation of nature, altogether on the basis of scientific insight. This dimension of all Romantic art is easily forgotten. As we shall see, it is true of Caspar David Friedrich, of Constable and Turner, and also of the Danish painter Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, albeit mostly on a natural-philosophical level, in other words not yet separated from the notion of a holistic higher purpose of all being. But in order to become poetry, it is necessary to transcend the point of departure, for, as Wordsworth puts it:

(...) all good poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever, which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment.⁹

In addition, in order to describe adequately this animated state, he demands a simple language that dispenses with traditional ornamental devices and lyrical floweriness. The verse form is only chosen because it is more penetrating than mere prose, for, as he opines, "Poetry is the image of man and nature."¹⁰ Complicated as Wordsworth's explanation of the origin of poetry may be, it describes exactly how the state of poetic productivity is achieved, the role played by feelings and emotion in this process, the importance of immediate obligation to (and observation of) nature, how emotion is aroused, and how it has also to apply to the recipient. Poetry is the trigger of emotion, and thus serves the purpose of self-discovery.

By adding to this Novalis' description of the Romanticization process – oft quoted, albeit mostly very fragmentarily – we might open up a horizon of understanding against which the pictures in this exhibition, whether they are assigned by scholarship directly to Romantic or not, have to prove themselves. As we shall see, they do this in very different ways. Novalis decrees:

The world must be romanticized. This yields again its original meaning. Romanticization is nothing less than a qualitative potentization. In this operation, the lower self becomes identified with a better self. (...) This operation is still entirely

unknown. By giving the common a higher meaning, the everyday a mysterious semblance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the appearance of the infinite, I *romanticize* it. For what is higher, unknown, mystical, infinite, one uses the inverse operation (...). It receives a common expression.¹¹

This is not altogether easy to understand. For Novalis too, the material of reality is the starting point, but he says we must look at it through new eyes. If we transfer the idea to form, then the 'potentization' of the starting material stands for a stylization, a defamiliarization of the appearance. The mere object, indeed the banal object, becomes, in its literary version, something special, something mysterious, which seems to point beyond itself. But even the grand concepts like 'the mystical' or 'the infinite' must be defamiliarized, so that they come across as normal. It is in the tension thus created that the deeper sense of poetry consists, for in the tension of 'high and low' there open up for us the desire and the hope that the high and the low can become one and the same, thus regaining their pristine, but lost, meaning or purpose. Here too, the poet is the mediator of an experience that seems to balance reality and transcendence. A display of the nature of something is to be opened up to view only in the estrangement of the familiar. Even if behind this the notion of the Platonic *eidos* still lurks, which

refers not only to the nature of something, such as its outward form or *gestalt*, but also to the original unchanging 'idea', nonetheless we can see the difference in that the artist reveals not only the nature of the thing, but, even without any reference to God, brings forth a self-determined work solely through his subjective aesthetic sensibility. It is by giving priority thus to aestheticization, for example by stylization or defamiliarization, that art becomes autonomous. The 'how' becomes more important than the 'what'.

Sublime and Beautiful: Joseph Wright of Derby

The three pictures by Joseph Wright of Derby are among the earliest on display here, dating from the 1780s and 1790s. While his works have been called proto-Romantic, this judgement is based primarily on their chosen motifs. They are mostly nocturnal depictions of caves, grottoes, eruptions of Vesuvius, scenes illuminated by firelight or the moon. In order to characterize them, aesthetic categories such as picturesque or sublime have been commandeered into service. Both are categories that go beyond the merely beautiful, but also beyond any drama that finds its fulfilment in a picture. The picturesque and the sublime do not lead to anything, but open up an undefined state, appealing to the beholder's feeling. The structures of the landscapes awaken aesthetic interest, as they are reproduced in a painterly mode that seeks to match the structure as

it exists in nature. What counts is the picturesque as such. The sublime demands extreme 'potentization' all the way to total emptiness, absolute expanse and raging chaos. It would be alarming, if one were not in a place of safety. It allows a pleasurable shudder. There exist hybrids of the picturesque and the sublime. The term 'picturesque' was first defined by William Gilpin, and finally put in writing in his 1768 'Essay on Print', while the term 'sublime' in this sense goes back to Edmund Burke's treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757. Both categories can be termed proto-Romantic in their potentization of the merely beautiful.

Wright of Derby lays claim to both in equal measure. *Virgil's Tomb by Moonlight* (fig. 1), dating from 1782, is one of a total of six variations on this theme painted between 1779 and 1785. Virgil's purported tomb on the hill above the grotto in Posilippo near Naples was one of the attractions for English gentlemen on the Grand Tour. Wright, who spent several months in Naples in 1774, painting mainly grottoes and eruptions of Vesuvius, may have based his painting on an illustration in Paolo Antonio Paoli's 1768 *Antichità di Pozzuoli*. Two versions place the Neronian consul Silius Italicus, who retired to Naples, in the tomb cave. Tradition had it that every year, on the anniversary of Virgil's birth, he would come to the cave to declaim



1. Joseph Wright of Derby, *Virgil's Tomb by Moonlight*, 1782, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm, Derby Museums (Museum & Art Gallery), Derby (cat. 91)



2. Joseph Wright of Derby, *Grotto in the Gulf of Salerno, by Moonlight*, c. 1780-90, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm, Derby Museums (Museum & Art Gallery), Derby (cat. 92)

Virgil's works. Wright has him do this by night in dim light. Crucial for him, however, in this case, is the contrast (which we also find in his Vesuvius pictures) between the warm light of the lamp (or the fire-spewing volcano) on the one side of the picture, and the cool moonlight on the other. The actual theme, then, is the subtle gradation of the landscape through the two light sources with their different effects. The 1782 version has the full moon appear from behind clouds, plunging the scene into a diffuse light with subtle brownish-purple gradations in the landscape, on the masonry and in the sky. These are colour nuances that had never appeared in art before. The reason? Evidently Wright of Derby had read Joseph Priestley's *The History and Present State of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light and Colours*, published in 1772. Priestley had used Newton's prism to refract light rays. But while Newton persisted with seven basic colours, very clearly by analogy with the intervals in the musical octave that embodied the harmony of the spheres, in order thus to bestow on light a divine origin, Priestley was more rigorous, stating: "Nor are there only rays proper and particular to the more eminent (i.e. Newton's seven) colours, but even to all their intermediate gradations."¹² Very obviously, in his pictures Wright sweeps precisely these 'intermediate gradations' to the fore: orange, lemon yellow, turquoise, purple, amber, cinnamon and other unusual hues can also be found in his late

landscapes. He has a predilection for reflections in water, which cast tiny nuances of these hues on rocks and trees. In this way, particularly in the moonlit landscapes, he creates moods into which he invites beholders to plunge, and thus transcend the actual theme of the picture. The mood *is* the theme. We may experience longing or melancholy thoughts, we may take a deep breath or feel a tightness in the chest, depending on the chromatic gradation. And for this reason the various tomb, grotto or fire pictures are not mere repetitions, speculating on interest in the motif on the part of tourists, but tonal variants that mark minimally transposed spheres of expression. This veritably points ahead to the serial procedure employed by Monet in his cathedral or haystack pictures. To this extent, it is, in the spirit of Baudelaire, Romantic and Modern at the same time.

In Wright of Derby's grotto pictures (fig. 2), which all go back to two carefully executed drawings made in 1774 of two specific grottoes on the Gulf of Salerno, the staging is yet more varied, to the extent that there are versions with and without staffage, showing both sunrise and sunset atmospheres, as well as clear moonlight, where we have a pale blue and turquoise sky alongside distant mauve hills seen through the entrance to an otherwise almost black grotto. Occasionally Wright deliberately created pairs of pictures, which in itself is a signal

for us to compare tonal nuances and distinctions. Then he would add people, bandits in the tradition of Salvator Rosa, leaving it quite open as to what they might be planning. Or he has Augustus' daughter Julia appear as a dark silhouette against the water, making a gesture of lamentation before a lemon-yellow evening sky: she had been banished to the grotto for adultery. It should be noted that art historians have overlooked the fact that while she is gesturing pathetically thus, she has also spotted a tiny ship in the far distance, almost on the horizon. She has turned towards it, hoping desperately that she might be rescued before night falls and the high tide sweeps her up. Hence the picture prefigures an element from Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819, Musée du Louvre, Paris). There too, the shipwreck victims on their raft see the tiny silhouette of a ship, and can, like Wright's Julia, not be sure that they have been seen in their turn. Once again this open-endedness, this refusal to deliver a resolution, is responsible for the freezing in time of the desperate yearning and hoping: a genuinely Romantic situation.

Let's take a quick glance at Wright of Derby's third picture, depicting *A Cottage on Fire* (fig. 3), dating from 1793. The glow of the flames is so strong that their colours dominate the whole picture, reflected off everything in it. The moon with its cool light, visible behind trees, can hardly compete: yet



3. Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Cottage on Fire*, 1793, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2 cm, Derby Museums (Museum & Art Gallery), Derby (cat. 93)



4. Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape*, 1811, oil on canvas, 33 x 46 cm, Staatliches Museum Schwerin / Ludwigslust / Güstrow (cat. 38)

another variation on the struggle between hot and cold tones. Sometimes the moon is dominant in the pictures, sometimes fire; the moon stands for calm, fire for uproar. This tension is the actual theme. Romantic problems are characterized by contrasts, be it the contrast between precise observation of nature and diffuse emotion, between classical references and present experience. Romanticism is rarely mere sentimentality. And when it is, the sort of art that presents us with nothing more than ruins and knights in armour soon descends into banality.

Romantic and Further Mathematics: Caspar David Friedrich

Caspar David Friedrich is seen as the epitome of the early-Romantic artist. But what is 'Romantic' about his pictures in the sense of the criteria laid out above? Among scholars generally, the characteristic things about his view of Romanticism are set out in the following catalogue. First of all, the rear-view figure in the picture, the representative of the beholder. This figure is understood as longingly facing the landscape, alone with the feelings that the act of viewing the landscape has unleashed. Next, the religious charge of the landscape, in which is expressed a yearning for the other world on the part of one trapped in this. And finally, if we only name these three, a prevailing tone of religious devotion, a renunciation of all movement or action which might challenge our meditative immersion of

our senses in the often-enough melancholy tone of what is depicted, created by calm picture-internal correspondences, above all subtle colour nuances that urge us to trace the impression of nature. There is doubtless nothing wrong with any of this. Only, such a representation ignores our actual experience in the presence of Friedrich's pictures, namely that ultimately they do not work out neatly in the tone that they strike up, or in their religious intention. The yearning that they trigger does end in self-enjoyment, but remains in the realm of the uncertain. Without a doubt this has a decidedly protestant dimension: there is no more religious certainty than there is a promise of redemption, at best a vague hope. And yearning in the face of nature is necessarily a result of the experience of alienation from nature. The subject is not absorbed in the object, no matter how much this may be propagated by pantheistic ideas. For a protestant, any such thought, for all the desire of reconciliation with nature and the world, is ultimately altogether sacrilegious.

But how does the artist give expression to this indeterminacy, this absolute separation in a picture between the 'I' and the world? For a long time, there was a refusal or reluctance to see that Friedrich was trying to do this by aesthetic means, and that this is precisely where the actual Romantic dimension is to be seen. A central possibility for Friedrich to present graphically the aesthetic as the

very symbol of separation and alienation consists in giving the picture an abstract aesthetic order not provoked by the objects depicted, an order that can by all means be in a relationship of tension with these objects. This sounds more complicated than it is. I shall illustrate it by reference to just one picture, the exhibit *Winter Landscape* from Schwerin, dating from 1811 (fig. 4).¹³ We can read, anywhere we care to look in the art-historical literature, that a wanderer, supporting himself on a stick, has arrived at the end of his journey and is now standing surrounded by tree stumps and the ruins of old oaks in front of an empty snow-covered landscape that extends away into infinity, beneath a dirty, dark sky heavy with snow. The outlook, literally and metaphorically, is bleak. The wanderer cannot go on, but has no way back. This interpretation is all very well, but misses out on one detail, a detail with consequences, as I shall show. The wanderer is bent forwards; however he is not leaning on a stick: rather, he has crutches under his arms, which explains his posture, although this is hard to see, and then only by looking at the original or a high-resolution enlargement of the detail. For the right-hand crutch is in front of his body, touching the ground by the heel of his right shoe. The left crutch projects forwards, to allow him to retain his balance as he bends forward. This is all very closely observed. Is the loss of bearings of the wanderer in a desolate landscape (and the word 'desolate'

can also be taken literally) totally without hope? Is this a solely negative picture? Now, Friedrich was in the habit of giving his paintings an abstract, necessarily antecedent aesthetic order; sometimes this is more, sometimes less pronounced. Primarily he uses the golden section, since the Renaissance a 'divine proportion', a means of dividing a surface or line that was felt to be particularly pleasing, and various conic sections, in particular hyperbolas and parabolas.¹⁴ Very rarely, he dispensed with these devices entirely, as apparently in *Monk by the Sea* (1810, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin). By way of compensation, in the pair to this latter picture, namely *The Abbey in the Oak Wood* (1810, Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin), the underlying aesthetic order is all the more fundamental. The church ruin with the tall pointed windows is placed on the picture's central vertical axis, while the two huge oaks to the left and right lie on the two verticals of the golden section, and the shaded zone of the sky, which is lowered towards the middle, describes a hyperbola. In this way, the negative statement of the first picture is countermanded in a dialectical manner in the composition of the second.

Now one might ask why the use of a hyperbola or parabola in the picture should have a deeper meaning. We can easily show this by taking a glance at Romantic mathematics. For the Romantics, mathematics was the hallmark of abstract world

order, in which God's laws were reflected. We need only to quote a series of mathematical fragments by Novalis: "Geometry is the transcendental art of signs." "Pure mathematics is religion." "The highest and purest is the commonest, the most comprehensible. Hence elementary geometry is higher than higher geometry." But above all: "It is very probably that there is a wonderful number mysticism in nature. (...) Can God not also reveal himself in mathematics as in every other science?"¹⁵ Now, these ideas did not spring from the Romantic imagination alone. Already in medieval book illumination, God is depicted as a geometer with a large pair of dividers in His hand when creating the earth. In the following fragment, Novalis refers us to the deeper reason for the possibility of reading numbers and their relations as a reference to God: "Everything real created from nothing (such as, for example, the numbers and abstract expressions) has a wonderful relationship with things of another world (...)." ¹⁶ By this he means that numbers are posited, and not connected with anything in the concrete world. They are abstract. Mathematical concepts are subsumed under their function, they are pure regularity without immediate reference to reality. To this extent, they are directly related to God, whose primordial creation came from nothingness. Thus we can recognize behind the real façade of a thing its (abstract) essence. Novalis is not alone with his reflexions; we see them in the

German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose ideas had enormous influence on Friedrich. Friedrich and Schleiermacher were well acquainted with each other, they were both among the demagogues who ostentatiously, by their very clothes, represented the ideals of the wars of liberation, and were persecuted by the state. In Friedrich Schelling too, for example, we can attest something of the same sort: "Thus rough matter strives, as it were blindly, after regular shape, and unconsciously assumes pure stereometric forms, which, indeed, belong to the realm of conception, and are somewhat of spirituality in matter."¹⁷ Thus we can see the foundation of Friedrich's pictures with the help of abstract proportionality and geometry as a way to evoke God's presence in nature, to transcend our fragmented experience of reality towards a higher purpose.

This is also the case with the Schwerin *Winter Landscape*, allegedly characterized by hopelessness. The only reference to higher things in this desolation is indicated by the one patch of colour in this picture, the red cap of the invalid wanderer, because it lies exactly on the lower horizontal of the golden section. The idea is doubtless that we be told that the hope of salvation can come only from itself. The fact that this is so is made clear to us by Friedrich in his own way, because this picture also has a pair, which responds



5. Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape with Church*, 1811, oil on canvas, 32.5 x 45 cm, The National Gallery, London



6. Caspar David Friedrich, *Fir Trees and Cloud Studies*, 1807, pencil on paper, page 8r from the sketchbook of 1807, 36.7 x 24.1 cm, Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design, Oslo



7. John Constable, *The Cottage in a Cornfield*, c. 1817-1833, oil on canvas, 62 x 51.5 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (cat. 20)

to the problem horizon of the first picture – without, however, completely eliminating the problem. The pair, also dating from 1811, is generally called *Winter Landscape with Church* (fig. 5); what is evidently its first version is in the National Gallery in London. The invalid, we must presume with regard to the first picture, has dragged himself further along in the snow, finally discovering a crucifix in a small group of fir trees, and then thrown away his crutches, and leaning back against a large boulder, has settled down to venerate the crucifix. Obviously he is now at the end of his journey. For the group of firs into which the crucifix was later inserted, there is a preliminary drawing by Friedrich dating from 1807 (fig. 6). If we compare the picture and the drawing, we see that he has taken over the smallest details of the latter into the former. Nature as God's creation must be reproduced in a completely natural way. Thus when transferring a preliminary drawing to a painting, Friedrich regularly takes over not only the exact shape of the object, but even the angle of view from which it was seen. This also applies to the incident light. In the preliminary drawing for the London picture, a horizontal line appears at the foot of the tallest fir, with the word 'Horizont' ('horizon') above it. If we check this in the painting, we notice two things: on the one hand, in the painting, the only horizontal in the course of the terrain is indicated at the height of the line of the horizon, and more importantly still, the tiny head of

the now bareheaded invalid is also marked by the line of the horizon. This latter is the line of infinity, along which the gaze of the invalid is led out of the picture. The tallest fir, on the other hand, lies with its trunk and tip exactly on the right-hand vertical of the golden section; it is the secret aesthetic centre of the picture. But as if this were not enough, behind the invalid, the lightly veiled vision of a five-tower cathedral appears in the reddish glow of the foggy snowy sky. The tip of its main tower has exactly the height of the tip of the fir, so already the two are linked. Even more so, however, because the fir evinces a parabola about a third of the way up which is similar in shape to the top of the blurred lower section of the cathedral. And finally, the gateway to the walled cathedral precinct, which is visible in the axis of the cathedral, once again lies entirely on the lower horizontal of the golden section. Thus the cathedral and the fir are mutually entangled in a number of ways. Beholders will see that, in the veneration of the crucifix in front of the fir, the latter's shape has passed from the invalid into the vision of a cathedral. And doubtless we must also see that the hope of salvation appears to him in death. In words and images, Friedrich has given expression to the hope that the path to eternal life is opened only by death. It is important for us to note that Friedrich's pictures are beholden to absolute precision in their depiction of reality – he could conceive of even this as divine service – and

yet, with the help of an abstract and aesthetically effective pictorial order, he wants to have us experience the vision of infinity and transcendence. Whether we accept this or not, there remains an offer, just as all Romantic art remains in the potential, since it opens up an aesthetic possibility which we have to activate and for which we are not necessarily immediately in the mood.

Romanticism and Realism: John Constable

At first sight, John Constable's *The Cottage in a Cornfield* (fig. 7) dating from 1833 appears if anything harmless, almost conventional. Constable's critics certainly made the snide remark that, yes, it showed a house. And yet it is precisely to this picture that we can link a huge amount that is characteristic of Constable's art in every respect. For a long time there was uncertainty about the status and dating of the picture. It goes back to a drawing of 1815, which it follows as far as the motif is concerned. In connection with the exhibition of the picture at the Royal Academy in 1833, Constable noted in a letter to his friend Leslie: "I have licked up my cottage into a pretty look."¹⁸ As there is mention of a *Cottage in a Cornfield* at the 1817 Royal Academy exhibition and at another exhibition at the British Institution the following year, Constable's comment to Leslie has been interpreted to mean that in 1833 he had painted over the old picture before entering it at the

exhibition. Three things speak against this. The 1817 picture has reappeared, but Leslie's description of the 1817 picture in his *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, which complicates things, corresponds more to the 1833 picture, while the dimensions given still refer to that of 1817.¹⁹ This suggests that Leslie had taken notes at the earlier date but only had the second picture available when writing his *Memoirs*. On the other hand, it is possible to conclude on the basis of a sticker that the picture exhibited in 1833 was painted by Constable in 1832. This speaks in favour of the customary process of production: the picture painted the year before is given to the exhibition the following year in spring. And thirdly, in spite of the identical motif, the 1833 picture differs from the earlier image, both in the much more nuanced light management, and also – and especially – in the sky.

Here one could now digress and follow the protracted process of Constable's systematic conquest of meteorological phenomena. But I will only say this: early critics complained that Constable's skies were too pushy, and dominated the picture too much.²⁰ Constable must have been seriously worried by this, for the sky was indeed the most important thing to him, being responsible for the tone and expression of the whole picture. And instead of moderating his approach, in 1821/22 Constable embarked on his famous cloud studies

with more than one hundred oil sketches of cloudy skies seen from Hampstead Heath. He wanted to learn the language of the clouds, he wanted to do justice to them not least from a scientific point of view. During the period of the cloud studies, he wrote about them on 23 October 1821 in a letter to his close friend John Fisher; this letter has, with justification, become famous. "I have often been advised," he said, "to consider my sky as a white sheet of paper put behind the objects." Thus it would remain a mere filling which was not "obtrusive."²¹ Constable argued against this with some force. "The sky is the source of light in nature and governs everything." The skies had to be an effective part of the picture, they were the "key note", the "standard of Scale", and above all they were "the chief Organ of sentiment."²²

Now, it is remarkable that not a single sky captured in the oil sketches ever appeared again in a finished painting. There can be only one explanation. When painting any particular sky, he wanted to do justice to his 'mood', which would be different from when he had recorded one of the cloudy skies. Hence the intensive study of skies: he wanted to use the language of the clouds freely as he saw fit, to be able to invoke them, adjust his feelings to one of the countless meteorological conditions. This was not without its problems. Feelings are difficult to conserve, if they can be conserved at all. The process

of painting one of his so-called 'six-footers' (ca. 1.30 x 1.90 m), his exhibition pictures, certainly took some time. Often he painted, increasingly in the same format as the exhibition pictures, first an oil sketch in one go, in order to preserve the 'mood', and then the exhibition picture itself, which demanded a greater degree of perfection. Logically, but also tragically, the skies in the latter pictures had to look completely different, as they were created in a different emotional state. Often Constable no longer knew whether he should send in to the exhibition the oil sketch, which clearly seemed to him to be more in harmony with the mood, albeit not meeting public expectations, or the finished picture. And when the completed version came back from the exhibition, Constable could often not stop himself from working on it further, in order to adapt it to what his dominant feelings were then. His friend Fisher recommended taking the pictures away from him.²³

But what is special about the clouds in the 1833 version of the picture? On the one hand, the fact that Constable carefully distinguished the cloud types. It comes as no surprise to learn that the definitive classification of clouds into cumulus, stratus, nimbus and cirrus, and their various mixed and sub-types was published by Luke Howard in his two-volume work *The Climate of London* in 1820, shortly before Constable's cloud studies.²⁴ While it has been pointed out that Constable

hardly ever used this definitive terminology, his library did contain Thomas Forster's *Researches About Atmospheric Phaenomena*, published first in 1813, and then in an enlarged edition in 1815. The first chapter includes a detailed discussion of Howard's cloud terminology, first formulated in 1803.²⁵ But something else seems to be more important, something that had rightly been named cloud perspective. However this had not yet been applied in the first version of the 'Cottage' picture, but only in the second, dating from 1833. In the first version, the sky, as Constable acknowledged in his cloud letter of 1821, seems to have been set up more as a backcloth behind the landscape. The sky has no real depth. The goal of the late Constable – and incidentally also of Turner, to the same degree – was to represent the sky in such a way that it would seem to arch over the landscape, and extend into the depth of the picture, while the clouds increase in volume from back to front, or at least appear larger. John Ruskin, who declared his great admiration for Turner in five extensive volumes between 1843 and 1860 under the title *Modern Painters*, shows in the fifth volume three diagrams on the construction of cloud perspective.²⁶ Constable stakes a claim to scientific accuracy also in the composition of light and shade. As the notes on the *versi* of his cloud oil-sketches make clear, he recorded the date, the seasonal conditions, the time of day, and thus the height of the sun, and very

precise meteorological notes, mentioning also what the weather had been like just before.

The fact that Constable raised questions about the adequate representation of a fleeting moment precisely at the time of the 1833 'Cottage' picture, and that he did so with scientific aspirations, need come as no surprise. In 1828 his wife Maria, with whom he had lived in an altogether symbiotic relationship, had died; her death was followed in 1832 by that of his closest friend, Fisher. In 1829 he had been elected a full member of the Royal Academy, decades later than he thought he should have been, and by just a single vote, to boot: his art was so out of tune with academic requirements. And even though he spent the evening of the election with Turner, among others – they were "mutually pleased with one another"²⁷ – the honour came too late to please him. In a mood of resignation, Constable began to draw up a balance sheet of his life, even though he was only fifty-three. With the mezzotint engraver David-Lucas, he began a project to publish reproductions of his pictures – not the demanding 'six-footers', his exhibition pieces, in the spirit of 'the best of...!', but, surprisingly, small and unassuming oil sketches. Very obviously, what he wanted to present was not primarily the motif, but the way in which he had registered it. The first edition appeared in 1830, a second and enlarged edition in 1833.²⁸ And this second, 1833 edition was accompanied, albeit

unsystematically, by Constable's detailed comments on a whole series of pictures; in particular, the work was given a new title, and an introduction, known as a 'letter-press'. The whole collection of twenty-three pictures was now titled *Various Subjects of Landscape, Characteristic of English Scenery, principally intended to display the Phaenomena of the Chiar'oscuro of Nature: From pictures painted by John Constable, R.A. engraved by David Lucas*. In other words it was primarily concerned with the phenomena of light and dark – which is in no way intended to imply a middling old-master tone. In parallel with the reproductions and as a detailed extension of the introduction to the series, Constable worked on a series of lectures on the history of landscape painting, which he delivered in a number of places and served the cause of further self-justification. Here he notes in respect of chiaroscuro:

Chiaroscuro is by no means confined to dark pictures (...). It may be defined as the power which created space; we find it everywhere and at all times in nature; opposition, union, light, shade, reflection, and refraction, all contribute to it. By this power, the moment we come into a room, we see that the chairs are not standing on the tables, but a glance shows us the relative distances of all the objects from the eye (...).²⁹

That is the one thing, the physiological foundation of our perception as the prerequisite for correct representation in atmospheric space. The other had already been given expression in the 'letter-press' that prefaced the reproductions, where he says:

In some of these subjects on Landscape an attempt has been made to arrest the more abrupt and transient appearances of the Chiar'oscuro in Nature; to show its effects in the most striking manner, to give "to one brief moment caught from fleeting time," a lasting and sober existence, and to render permanent many of those splendid but evanescent Exhibitions, which are ever occurring in the endless varieties of Nature, in her external changes.³⁰

Constable did not indicate the source of the words "to one brief moment caught from fleeting time", which he quoted, but it comes from a poem by William Wordsworth, written in 1811 and published in the 1815 edition of the *Poems*, and has a telling origin.³¹ It celebrates a painting by Sir George Beaumont, a rich amateur painter, art collector and patron. Constable had known him through his family for a long time, and in 1823 copied paintings by Claude Lorrain at his country house. Wordsworth's poems were recited at Sir George's table, and Constable met Wordsworth here, as he had already done as a young painter

on a drawing tour in the Lake District. To this extent it is hardly surprising that at the end of his life, Constable sent Wordsworth a copy of his above-mentioned collections of reproductions, the *English Landscape Scenery*, with an accompanying letter. This makes it clear once again – and this is something we can certainly regard as a hallmark of Romanticism – that a pronounced devotion to nature on a scientific basis – Constable saw his pictures explicitly as experiments, as Wordsworth did his poems³² – by no means excluded a subjective momentary emotional state during the artistic production process, indeed had to be consciously linked with it, or, as Wordsworth formulated it: a sensation experienced in the presence of the object is recollected, tested against one's own knowledge of nature, in order then to be displayed in the process of representation.

One more brief observation on Constable's picture. We may be surprised by the fact that in the foreground a small bird is to be seen on the ground, even more so when we realize that it is quite definitely a very accurately depicted pied wagtail. What is the justification for such a precise incidental motif? In an exchange with fellow painter John Thomas Smith, Constable was able to learn at an early stage what Leslie tells us: "Do not (...) set about inventing figures for a landscape taken from nature; for you cannot remain an hour in any

spot, however solitary, without the appearance of some living thing that will in all probability accord better with the scene and time of day than will any invention of your own."³³ Thus we may assume that Constable had seen a pied wagtail in the place in question – as also the tiny cat on the fence directly by the house, and, in the far distance over to the right, farm-workers ploughing a gently sloping field. They take the form of no more than a few tiny dabs of colour. The indispensable bond with the directly experienced moment, which is then 'immortalized', brings together even such different artists as Constable and Caspar David Friedrich.

It may fly in the face of the conventional wisdom, but if there is anything that links the so very different concepts of Romanticism, it is, as the history of philosophy attests, the attempt to bring the idealized and realistic dimensions together.³⁴ Sometimes the idealistic pole seems to dominate, sometimes the realistic. But this only seems to be so, for whenever, as with Constable, the obligation to depict reality seems to prevail, it is still not an end in itself.

Light as Energy: William Turner

In principle, much the same is true of Constable's diametric opposite, William Turner. His range was enormous. He began as a painter of *vedute*, mainly of towns and buildings in England, drawn in absolutely convincing perspective. It was not



8. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Petworth Park: Tillington Church in the Distance*, c. 1828, oil on canvas, 60 x 145.5 cm, Tate Britain, London (cat. 85)

for nothing that he later became professor of perspective at the Royal Academy. Even when the forms began to dissolve, he still had at his disposal, when necessary, the *veduta* mode with rigorously constructed perspective foreshortening. Things only get interesting, however, when he seeks to transcend this mode, as in the views of Petworth Park, dating from 1828/29. George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont, the owner of Petworth House and its huge park, had been one of Turner's most important clients from an early date. He ran an open house, known for its hospitality. Guests could come and go as they liked. Turner also made use of this opportunity, especially after the death of his other great patron, Walter Fawkes of Farnley Hall in 1825, who, like Lord Egremont, was a great agricultural reformer. Egremont fathered a vast number of children with different women. They all lived on the premises in wild confusion. He invited numerous artists to his house, and they profited from the easy-going atmosphere, as Turner's erotic drawings testify. All the rooms were available (Turner captured them in small-format gouaches), while the Library was at the same time the main studio for all the artists. In 1750 Egremont's father, the 2nd Earl, had commissioned Lancelot 'Capability' Brown to transform the grounds into a landscape garden with a large lake in the middle, but while he had mostly collected Old Masters, the 3rd Earl added contemporary works to the collection, including

no less than twenty paintings by Turner. Already in the 2nd Earl's time, the so-called Carved Room had been the venue for banquets under the eyes of important sixteenth and seventeenth-century Old Master portraits. The 3rd Earl wanted to add some variety, and in 1827 he commissioned four narrow landscapes to hang beneath the portraits.³⁵ The first two were put in place in 1828/29: *Petworth Park: Tillington Church in the Distance*, 65 x 145 cm, was hung first, to be joined by *The Lake, Petworth: Sunset, fighting Bucks* of more or less exactly the same format.³⁶ These were later followed by *The Chain Pier, Brighton* and *Chichester Canal – Egremont* had had a heavy financial involvement in the construction of both.³⁷ In *Petworth Park* (fig. 8), the angle of view is extraordinary. From one of the south-facing rooms, we look diagonally over the terrace, and at the extreme left-hand edge we can see the jamb of one of the terrace doors, while a fold of the heavy curtain is piled on the floor. The gaze is led in a strange, broad arc against the sun, which is low in the sky and casts long shadows, while the lake in the distance is hardly visible, as it is already in the shade of the trees. A huge, bare lawn, looking brownish in the evening light, seems to extend to infinity. On the right-hand side are a few fallow deer, on the left, a long straight line of hounds racing towards a man who, as often in Turner's work, looks confusingly large; it could well be Egremont himself. If we extend the line of the

pack of hounds out past Egremont, it leads directly to the sun. One could also read the picture in the opposite direction, from the standpoint of the sun, which would also make more sense. It is the source of all the light, casts shadows and colours the sky, which arches over the scene from back to front. The arching, which drops off towards the sides, creates, together with the foreground arching that dips in the middle, an ellipse, which can also be read as an eye with the sun as lens.

There are surprising correspondences with a late painting by Caspar David Friedrich, the so-called *Large Enclosure at Dresden* (fig. 9), dating from 1832. What in Turner's painting is convex, is here concave. It is entirely conceivable that both artists used curved mirrors, convex and concave respectively. The perspective distortions each come across as internally consistent. In Friedrich's case, they open out into the infinite in the reflected hyperbolas, while Turner's ellipse, in spite of its wide angle, which does justice to the expanse of the park, ultimately brings everything together. Now the sun in Turner's picture is not just the dispenser of colour and life, but the dynamic force as such. In the spirit of the scientist Michael Faraday, with whom Turner (like Constable) was friends, it causes the earth's magnetism, charges the world with electricity. All of Turner's late watercolours and oil-studies, especially around 1840 (fig. 10), are not



9. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Large Enclosure at Dresden*, 1832, oil on canvas, 73.5 cm x 102.5 cm, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden



10. Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Evening: Cloud on Mount Rigi, seen from Zug*, c. 1841, water colour on paper, 21.8 x 26.7 cm, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, Oxford

only pervaded by this force; rather, Turner's aim is to illustrate the dynamic forces, especially in the water, the sky and the clouds, in a sea of colour. Thus the theme is not so much a particular sky or a particular seascape, in spite of the fact that he studied the constant changes in both, but the forces effective within them. So for Turner too, the study of nature is the point of departure, but unlike Constable he does not seek to do justice to the experience of the momentary phenomenon, or immortalize it for posterity, but to focus on the sublime, divine forces behind all phenomena. Both forms of appropriation of nature bear Romantic features; they seek, with the backing of science, to illustrate the forces behind the mere earthly, or rather, to enable the experience of these forces.

Nature, Natural Science and Natural Philosophy: Danish Painting

A large part of the exhibition is devoted to two further fields: the Danish painting of the so-called Golden Age, and the dramatic Nordic, mostly Norwegian landscape. In the case of Danish landscape painting, it is difficult to talk of Romanticism; it has also been described as 'Biedermeier', as it is largely concerned with the depiction of homeland regions. We can hardly talk in this context of transcendent experiences. Even so, this art is not entirely free of Romantic traits. I will draw attention to just two aspects here.

Food for thought is provided by the mere fact that one of the founding fathers of Danish painting, Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, had been friends with Caspar David Friedrich since they were at the Copenhagen Royal Danish Academy together. Also, Eckersberg is said to have visited Friedrich occasionally in Dresden. Where might we look for the points of contact? Clearly in both cases it is the geometry of the picture, and then as the expression of divine order that raises representational fidelity to nature on to a different plane. *Moonlit Scene from Saltholm* (fig. 11) dating from 1821 might be called, from the atmosphere, a Romantic moonlit landscape, so precisely do the things depicted in the half-light appear. In spite of the activities of the figures on the quay, the picture looks quite empty. The smaller sailing ship with no superstructure in the foreground is parallel with the plane of the picture, while the larger one behind it is heavily foreshortened. The masts of the two-master in the distance, which is again parallel with the horizon, rise dead straight into the sky, which had been overcast, although there is now a break in the clouds on the right to reveal the full moon, whose soft, cool light pervades everything and gives the clouds a weak, yellowish, in places almost violet glow. The sea is smooth, only right at the front are there some slight ripples, parallel to the plane of the picture, so that the reflection of the moon in the water is fragmented into narrow, closely juxtaposed

strips. The fact that the moon is exactly above the bow of the boat is conspicuous; it matches the masts reaching into the sky. But there is something else more important: the moon is precisely on the upper horizontal of the golden section. We already know this from Caspar David Friedrich. And everything speaks in favour of the assumption that the use of this principle of division, aesthetically effective and reputedly divine, played a not unimportant role at the Royal Danish Academy, where both studied. They shared a teacher in Nicolai Abildgaard, who was particularly qualified in the theory of perspective, and so it comes as no surprise that at a much later date Eckersberg wrote two treatises on perspective himself.³⁸ The Danish art historian Eric Fisher noted many years ago that there are drawings by Eckersberg in which, for all the banality of the motif, several golden sections are enmeshed.³⁹ Here we can say that as moon and ship are linked as with a cord, the scene is under the sign of the moon, while the this-worldly and the other-worldly are placed in a mutual relationship. Other-worldly hope and this-worldly activity are mutually dependent.

That Eckersberg was a perspective artist, and was able to use perspective in an extreme fashion, is shown by his 1836 painting *Langebrogade, Copenhagen*, by *Moonlight with Running Figures* (fig. 12), which has always been found confusing.



11. Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, *Moonlit Scene from Saltholm*, 1821, oil on canvas, 48 x 63.5 cm, Nivaagaards Malerisamling, Nivå (cat. 33)

There is once again a full moon, this time in a sky which, while almost cloudless, has a slight haze, giving the moon a weak halo. Just as the running figures are charging towards us, so the bridge, heavily foreshortened, seems to do the same. Two people are standing at the balustrade pointing at something in the water which we cannot see; something must have happened; the runners, who are also looking in this direction, seem to be hurrying to the end of the bridge. In order to make the impending danger clear, the woman at the balustrade is painted with a bright red shawl as well as a white bonnet, and responding to this are two windows in a small house on the bank, likewise lit up red. Danger which one cannot pinpoint seems particularly threatening. The calm, slightly hazy moon, with its cool colouration in a totally calm sky, is contrasted with the unrest on the earth below. This unresolved tension is transferred to the beholder and continues for as long as the picture is viewed. The disconcerting effect is taken even beyond the confines of the image by the broad shadow of the figure of the front fisherman – the shadow's head is cut off by the edge of the picture. Dankvart Dreyer's *Bridge over a Stream in Assens, Funen* (fig. 13) dating from 1842 shows the use of a bridge running directly towards us in a gentle landscape, without any human staffage, as a way of asking a simple question which we cannot directly answer: where does the bridge lead? Here too, the motif does

not provide a text with a definitive statement, but remains open as far as its meaning is concerned.

A whole series of pictures by Danish artists are characterized by extreme cropping. Here I shall only mention one of the versions of Christen Købke's *Roof Ridge of Frederiksborg Castle, with View of Lake, Town and Forest* (fig. 14), dating from 1834/35.⁴⁰ This fragmentariness, which captures the subjective view from a deliberately chosen unusual location and thus devalues the object – the castle is no longer a castle but just a section of roof – may be regarded, in its radicalism, as an ultimately Romantic motif after all.

But in Eckersberg's case, there is something else to interest us. His extreme perspectives, austere constructed, especially in his Roman cityscapes, often fly in the face of the sketchy painting mode. This obviously deliberate tension only makes sense if we realize that Eckersberg uses perspective, understood as a higher, divine order, to add an idealistic dimension to the superficially true-to-nature. Eckersberg was a friend of the scientist and philosopher Hans Christian Ørsted, who in 1850 summarized the thoughts he had been developing since 1809 in a major treatise titled *The Soul in Nature*. Eckersberg had met him during his time in Paris from 1810–1813. A series of paragraphs of this treatise, which was based on Schelling, seem

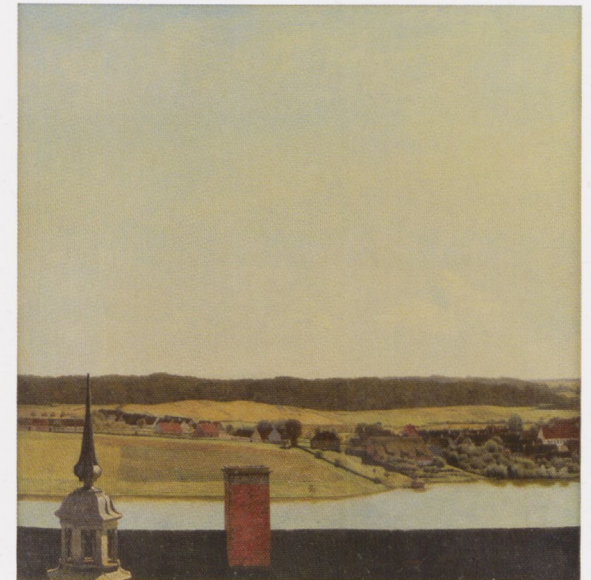


12. Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, *Langebrogade, Copenhagen by Moonlight with Running Figures*, 1836, oil on canvas, 45.5 x 33.5 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (cat. 34)

to be crying out to be applied to Eckersberg's art. Here are just a couple: "The Beautiful is the idea expressed in things so far it is reconciled to perception." Or: "(...) the idea of a thing is the oneness of thought expressed in it, when apprehended by reason, but as a perception."⁴¹ Both quotations make clear that in the reality which the artist has brought to perception, the idea of the thing should come to the forefront. Ørsted demands scientifically based reproduction of reality. And how does this dimension come directly to perception? Ørsted and Eckersberg were able to learn this from Schelling, with whom Ørsted was in close contact. In 1809, in his *Philosophical Writings (Philosophische Schriften)* Schelling had written, and here we quote it once more in somewhat more detail: "Thus rough matter (we might also say 'mere reality') strives, as it were blindly, after regular shape, and unconsciously assumes pure stereometric forms, which, indeed, belong to the realm of conception (as already noted by Kant, about whom Ørsted wrote his dissertation)..."⁴² This brings us back to where we came in. The ostensive abstract geometric order of a picture points, as a divine invention, to the ideal of a thing. The philosopher and scientist Ørsted also necessarily invokes this tension between ideal and reality, and Eckersberg quite obviously followed him. This tension-filled entanglement does not, however, mean that reality is subsumed without trace in the ideal; rather, it is



13. Dankvart Dreyer, *Bridge over a Stream in Assens, Funen*, 1842, oil on panel, 24,5 x 37,5 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (cat. 30)



14. Christen Købke, *Roof Ridge of Frederiksborg Castle, with View of Lake, Town and Forest*, c. 1834/35, oil on canvas, 177 x 171 cm, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen (cat. 50)

the bearer of the tension which we experience, and thus expresses the hope of reconciliation between the opposing dimensions, which represent the two sides of a coin – and that is something which one can, with total justification, call Romantic.⁴³

To put it in one sentence: artists such as Friedrich, Constable, Turner, Eckersberg and others, with their so very different intentions and techniques, are all beholden to a Romantic paradigm which ultimately can be reduced to the consciously invoked and maintained tension between ideal and reality.

- 1 Charles Baudelaire, *Salon de 1846*, in Claude Pichois, ed., *Charles Baudelaire. Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1961, pp. 878–880. (All the English translations of Baudelaire are taken from Jonathan Mayne, ed., *Charles Baudelaire, Art in Paris. 1845–1862. Salons and other Exhibitions*, London, 1965.)
- 2 Ibid. p. 885
- 3 Werner Hofmann, *Das entzweite Jahrhundert. Kunst zwischen 1750 und 1830*, Munich, 1995. A summary of the history of research into the various concepts of Romanticism can be found in Helmut Hühn, 'Deutungskonflikt "Romantik." Problemgeschichtliche Überlegungen', in Helmut Hühn and Joachim Schiedermaier, eds., *Europäische Romantik. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven der Forschung*, Berlin/Boston, 2015, pp. 17–34.
- 4 Werner Busch, *Das sentimentalische Bild. Die Krise der Kunst im 18. Jahrhundert und die Geburt der Moderne*, Munich, 1993.
- 5 Baudelaire, op. cit., (note 1), p. 879f.
- 6 Joseph Addison, 'The Pleasures of the Imagination', in *The Spectator*, vol. 6, London n.d. (c. 1750), nos. 411–421. 21 June – 3 July 1712, pp. 62–112.
- 7 William Wordsworth, 'Preface to the Edition of 1815', in: *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson, A New Edition, revised by Ernest de Selincourt, London, 1961, p. 753.
- 8 William Wordsworth, 'Preface to the Second Edition of Several of the Foregoing Poems published with an Additional Volume, under the Title of "Lyrical Ballads"' (1802), in: *ibid.*, p. 735.
- 9 Ibid., p. 740.
- 10 Ibid., p. 737.

- 11 Novalis, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. by Alfred Kellertat, Munich, 1968, p. 424. The present translation is quoted from Alan Cardew, 'The archaic and the sublimity of religion', in Paul Bishop, ed., *The Archaic. The Past in the Present*, New York, 2012, pp. 93–146, here p. 122.
- 12 Joseph Priestley, *The History and Present State of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light and Colours*, London, 1772, p. 257.
- 13 For a more detailed interpretation, see Werner Busch, *Caspar David Friedrich. Ästhetik und Religion*, Munich, 2003, pp. 92–97, 156–195.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 101–122 (golden section), pp. 123–141 (geometric figures), *et passim*.
- 15 Novalis, *Schriften*, 4 vols., Leipzig 1929, vol. 3, pp. 160, 296, 20, 337. The translations are by the present translator (MS).
- 16 Novalis, *Schriften*, 2 vols., ed. by Ludwig Tieck and Fr. Schlegel, 4th enlarged edition, 2nd part, Berlin, 1826, p. 108 (trans. MS).
- 17 F.W.J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, trans. A. Johnson, London, 1845, p. 8.
- 18 The finding is somewhat confusing. See Leslie Parris, Ian Fleming-Williams, Conal Shields, *Constable. Paintings, Watercolours & Drawings*, The Tate Gallery, London, 1976, cat. no. 297, p. 173, evidently quoted from Leslie's first edition of 1843: 'I have licked up', later editions up to the present day quote: 'I have brushed up', presumably because it seems more appropriate. C. R. Leslie, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable. Composed chiefly of his Letters*, London, 1951, p. 218 (likewise reprint 1980); see also John E. Thornes, *John Constable's Skies. A Fusion of Art and Science*, Birmingham, 1999, p. 109.
- 19 See Parris et al., op.cit., (note 18), p. 173; for a different view, Thornes, op.cit., (note 18), pp. 109 and 145.
- 20 R.B. Beckett, ed., *John Constable's Correspondence*, 6 vols., Ipswich 1962–1968, vol. 6, p. 75f.; Leslie, op.cit., (note 18), p. 84; Frederic Bancroft, ed., *Constable's Skies*, Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, New York, 2004, pp. 33–36.
- 21 Beckett, op. cit., (note 20), pp. 73–76; Thornes, op. cit., (note 18), pp. 278–282 (new transcription of the letter, Hampstead, 23 October 1821).
- 22 Thornes, op. cit., (note 18), p. 280.
- 23 Beckett, op. cit., (note 20), p. 181.
- 24 Luke Howard, *On the Modification of Clouds, etc.*, London, 1804; Luke Howard, *The Climate of London, deduced from Meteorological Observations made at different plans in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis*, 2 vols., London, 1818 and 1820; Richard Hamblyn, *The Invention of Clouds*, London, 2001.
- 25 On Forster; Thornes, op. cit., (note 18), pp. 68–78.
- 26 On Ruskin's diagrams: *ibid.*, pp. 191–196; Werner Busch, *Das unklassische Bild. Von Tizian bis Constable und Turner*, Munich, 2009, pp. 245–249.
- 27 Leslie, op. cit., (note 18), p. 172. Whether this is to be taken so literally must probably remain open: Turner was not so much in favour of Constable's

- election to the Royal Academy as to Charles Eastlake's; see R.B. Beckett, *John Constable's Correspondence*, vol. 3, *The Correspondence with C.R. Leslie*, R.A., Ipswich, 1965, p. 19.
- 28 Andrew Wilton, *Constable's 'English Landscape Scenery'*, London, 1979; David Hill, *Constable's 'English Landscape Scenery'*, Hong Kong, 1992.
 - 29 R.B. Beckett, ed., *John Constable's Discourses*, Ipswich, 1970, p. 62 (3rd Lecture 1836); Leslie, op. cit., (note 18), p. 316f. (3rd Lecture 1836).
 - 30 Wilton, op. cit., (note 28), p. 34.
 - 31 Wordsworth, op. cit., (note 7), p. 200.
 - 32 Beckett, op. cit., (note 29), p. 69 (4th Lecture 1836), p. 53 (2nd Lecture 1836); *William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford/New York, 1984, p. 591.
 - 33 Leslie, op. cit., (note 18), p. 6.
 - 34 Andreas Arndt, 'Die Frühromantik als Bestandteil der klassischen deutschen Philosophie', in Helmut Hühn and Joachim Schiedermaier, eds., op. cit., (note 3), pp. 143–156.
 - 35 *William Turner. Licht und Farbe*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Georg-W. Koltzsch, Museum Folkwang Essen, Kunsthau Zürich, Cologne, 2002, cat. nos. 136–144; Andrew Wilton, *J.M.W. Turner. His Art and Life*, London & New York, 1979, pl. 282–291.
 - 36 Wilton, op. cit., (note 35), pl. 288, p. 279 and fig. 180, p. 165.
 - 37 *Ibid.* pl. 285, 286, 290.
 - 38 Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg, *Forsøg til en Veiledning i Anvendelsen af Perspektivlaeren for unge Malere*, Copenhagen, 1833; *Linearperspektiven anvendt paa Malerkunsten* (text by Georg Frederik Ursin), Copenhagen 1841; Marianne Marcussen, 'Perspective, Science et sens. L'art, la loi et l'ordre', in: *Hafnia* 9, 1983, pp. 66–88.
 - 39 Eric Fisher, 'Eckersbergs harmoniske univers', in *Tegninger af C.W. Eckersberg. Den Kongelige Kobberstiksamling*, exhibition catalogue, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 1983, pp. 7–16 (English trans.: pp. 229–337).
 - 40 'Die Dächer von Frederiksborg' in *Christen Købke. 1810–1848*, exhibition catalogue, ed. by Hans Edvard Nørregård-Nielsen and Kasper Monrad, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 1996, pp. 187–191, cat. nos. 75, 76, 87, 88.
 - 41 Hans Christian Ørsted, *The Soul in Nature*, trans. L. & J. B. Horner, London, 1852, pp. xli, 375.
 - 42 As note 17. The passage in the 1809 text (which seems not to have appeared in English translation) corresponds to that in the 1850 text (which did).
 - 43 Werner Busch, 'Überlegungen zu Eckersberg und der Ölskizze', in *Kunstchronik* 69, no. 9/10, 2016, pp. 490–498.