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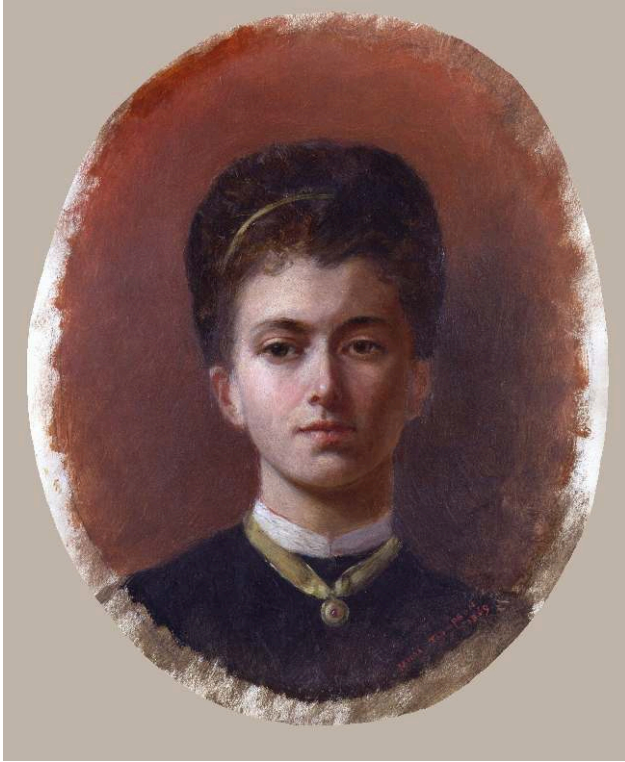
Polysèmes

“[B]eyond my landscape powers”: Elizabeth Thompson Butler and the Politics of Landscape Painting

*« Au-delà de mes capacités de peintre paysagiste » : Elizabeth Thompson Butler
et les enjeux politiques du paysage*

Nathalie Saudo-Welby

- 1 The French historical and military painter Ernest Meissonnier said, “L’Angleterre n’a guère qu’un peintre militaire, c’est une femme”.¹ Elizabeth Thompson Butler was that war artist. Her mother was a water-colour painter, and her father dedicated much of his energy and wealth to her education and that of her sister, the poetess Alice Meynell. Having been given a thorough education in history, Elizabeth Thompson’s talents developed into a passion for military art,² and in 1862, she joined what her father called the “tremendous ruck” of oil-painters with the intention of “singling [her]self out of it”.³ In 1879, she was nearly elected a member of the Royal Academy on the merits of her war paintings.



Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Self-Portrait*, oil on canvas, 21.9 x18.1cm, National Portrait Gallery, London
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- 2 The format and typically commanding perspective of academic war painting give pride of place to vast panoramas, and Elizabeth Thompson's paintings do indeed address issues of territorial conquest and defense; however, her focus was not landscape, and it was not even the battlefield. Her paintings generally represent a detailed foreground with a particular focus on the human figure (in particular the simple soldier) and animals (horses or camels depending on the latitude), but they rarely have a background. In the immense majority of Elizabeth Thompson's paintings, the background is concealed by the troops or disappears in haze or smoke. This is the case in her foremost paintings, belonging to the period before and around 1879, the year of her near-election to the Royal Academy: "The Roll Call" (1874), a scene from the Crimean War; "The 28th Regiment at Quatre Bras" (1875) which represents the Franco-Belgian War; "The Return from Inkerman" (1877), another scene from the Crimean War; as well as in a later work devoted to Waterloo, "Scotland for Ever" (1881).
- 3 It is necessary to look beyond this paradox to consider Elizabeth Thompson's conception of landscape, especially given the place it takes in her written works. In her autobiographical writings, she describes with great care the Italian landscapes she saw while at her family's winter residence, and the different kinds of sceneries she discovered on her Grand Tours across Europe. Besides her *Autobiography* (1922), she wrote *From Sketchbook and Diary* (1909), a delightful piece of self-writing illustrated with 21 small sketches in the text and 28 full-page watercolours. The book is dedicated and addressed to her sister, and mixes extracts from her youthful diary, letters to her mother and later comments. The descriptions of landscapes and the ekphrasis of her own watercolours do justice to the "pictoriality" of what she sees. Elizabeth Thompson calls a landscape "pictorial" when it deserves representation on canvas, provides a fine

painterly subject or evokes to her a previous artistic representation. The city of Carcassonne thus reminds her of "a town in the background of some hunting scene, so often shown in old tapestry" (A 141-142). The sights and colours of Egypt evoke for her the art of Delacroix and Gérôme.

- 4 However, pictorial scenery is no guarantee of aesthetic success. Thompson's writings frequently express a discrepancy between the potential of a view and its rendering on canvas, as though the proper medium for landscapes was other than visual. This paper investigates Elizabeth Thompson's analysis of her personal involvement with landscape—and occasionally her struggle against it. It examines how Thompson's troubled relationship with the background of her military subjects led her to an increased awareness of the politics of landscape painting, understood as the sometimes contested imprint of human presence on the land. Her life spanned the height of imperial power and the critical events of the Boer War and the First World War, when imperial views were radically undermined. In several of her canvases, she engaged with the male-dominated process of colonization within a pictorial genre which had traditionally fixed and celebrated masculine feats. However, being well-travelled and highly versed in history and politics, she must have become aware of the similarities in imperial situations and anti-imperial contexts in Ireland and Africa. Her pictures devoted to colonized countries invite comparisons; they make apparent some of the connections between colonial places which later fuelled transnational anticolonial resistance.
- 5 Despite her claims to the contrary, Thompson's descriptions have a visual power which lets us see things. They also tell us how she orders the world around her. In the lines she devoted to seascapes, the syntax breaks down into noun clauses and subclauses, which act as coloured brushstrokes:

I was interested in making comparisons between that sea [in County Clare in Ireland] and the other "sounding deep" that washes the rocks of Porto Fino as I looked down on the thundering waves below the cliffs of Moher. Here was the simplest and severest colouring dark green, almost amounting to black; light green, cold and pure; foam so pure that its whiteness had over it a rosy tinge, merely by contrast with the green of the waves, and that was all; whereas the sea around Porto Fino baffles both painter and word-painter with its infinite variety of blues, purples, and greens.⁴ (A 138)
- 6 In conceding her inadequacies as a "word-painter", Thompson is looking affectionately towards her sister, whose fame was not as great as hers. In confessing her insufficiencies as a landscape painter, it is as if she would have us believe that the absence of background in her famous paintings can be attributed to incapacity. She admits elsewhere that colour is her "weak point" (A 75) and that she sometimes needed her mother's support to craft the landscapes (A 114). Scenes and costumes may be recreated through the use of models and war relics: "We had a dress rehearsal, and very delighted I was" (A 100). Elizabeth Thompson even went to the trouble of re-enacting the scenes she tried to represent, for instance by imitating the moves of soldiers and the movements of horses (194-195), but there is something in landscapes that resists her efforts.
- 7 The Egyptian landscape defies the artist by its grandeur, the uniqueness of its colourful moments and the technical challenges they pose to the artist. Elizabeth Thompson has no hesitation about using the alternative medium of words to praise such sublime scenery.

Oh! land of enchantment, is it any wonder the Nile is so passionately loved, especially by the artist, to whom the joy of the eye is supreme? As to worthily painting the Egyptian landscape, I cannot think any one will ever do it—the light is its charm, and this light is unattainable. There is one thing very certain, oil paints are hopelessly “out of it,” and in water-colours alone can one hope to suggest that light. I soon gave up oils in Egypt, not only on account of their heaviness, but the miseries I endured from flies and sand were heart-breaking; your skies are seamed with the last wanderings and struggles of moribund flies, and coated with whiffs of sand suddenly flung on them by a desert gust! (Thompson, *From Sketchbook and Diary* 69)⁵

8 No foreign painter can rise up to the delicacy of its tones: “The abrupt sand-hills held shadows of the most delicate amethyst at noonday which, combined with the gold of the sunlit parts, produced a delicacy of vibrating tones which enchanted the eye but saddened the artist’s mind, recognising as it did the futility of trying to record such things in paint!” (SD 75). Thompson’s discouragement with the Egyptian landscape is passed off as technical excuses and a yearning for the unattainable. In what could be called an immature move (although she was then 40 years old), her own incapacity is even extended to that of her fellow-painters.

9 If she is to be believed, the elusiveness of landscapes has partly to do with their variability, and the technical challenges it creates.

To me Ireland is very appealing, though I owe her a grudge for being so tantalizing and evasive for the painter. The low clouds of her skies cause such rapid changes of sun and shadow over her landscapes that it requires feats of technical agility to catch them on the wing beyond my landscape powers. My only chance is to have unlimited time and thus be able to wait a week, if necessary, for the particular effect to come round again. An artist I heard of thought he had “bested” the Irish weather and its wiles when he set up this clever system: six canvasses he spread out before him on the ground in a row, each with a given arrangement of light and shade sketched out ready. But when the psychological moment arrived he was so flurried, that while he was wildly running his hand up and down the row of canvasses for the right one he could never find it in time.

A nice dance you are led, sketching in Ireland, altogether! (SD 26)

10 The allegory turns into a mock-heroic narrative of the provoked, half-mad artist, dancing frantically around his canvases in his realization that none of them will fit the precise moment. It satirizes the fantasy of control which lies behind landscape painting. The artist becomes an absurd figure literally colonizing the ground with his canvases, in the hope of capturing it all. The sketches, colour-notes and colour-studies (A 168) which Thompson made in her journeys abroad were later used as studies for the background of her oil paintings,⁶ but whether in her protestations against landscapes in writing or in the absence of background in her paintings, there seems to be something in the landscape that remains unrepresentable or unpaintable. This is particularly true of the sites which underwent British occupation, such as Ireland, Egypt and the area around Cape Town.

11 In the preceding quotations, Thompson refers mostly to natural landscapes modeled by the elements: sea erosion, sunlight, wind, weather and climate. As she gradually introduces background elements into her paintings, we feel that landscapes are not only transient and variable but that, like paintings, they are cultural products belonging to a historical moment and shaped by political changes, social evolution and the passing of time. Elizabeth Thompson considered that the artist’s personal involvement was the hallmark of great painting, but political and ideological bias can

distort the way landscapes are perceived. Landscapes—both scenes and pictures of them—express specific moments in human experience; but in front of both, the personal investment of the artist or viewer may blind her or him to important features of what s/he sees.

- 12 Elizabeth Thompson's account of her Grand Tour thus narrates her apprenticeship in coming to terms with geography in its most material and concrete form, and in its political and cultural form. As the autobiographical narratives progress, her disenchantment with landscape painting gives way to internal disturbance or even revolution, bringing out the necessity of changing her perspective on things. We are reminded of Lucy Honeychurch's inner turmoil when, having left her room with no view, she sees too much of Florence. As Lucy finds herself in Santa Croce, with no Baedeker, the narrator tells us that "instead of acquiring information, she began to be happy" (Forster 19). Italy was a second home for Elizabeth, who must have had little respect for the Baedeker, but South Africa brought real "muddle", to use a word dear to E.M. Forster. The opening words of the section devoted to the Cape are about losing one's cultural bearings and being muddled:

Strange land; strange birds with startling cries; strange flowers; strange scents! I received a bouquet of welcome on my arrival composed of grass-green flowers with brilliant rose-coloured leaves. Where am I? Where are the points of the compass?

I was watching the sun travelling to his setting this evening, and, forgetting I was perforce facing North to watch him, he seemed to be sloping down towards the East! And lo! When he was gone, the crescent moon on the wrong side of the sunset and turned the wrong way. [...]

My Bible, so full of imagery taken from the aspects of Nature, is turned inside out.

Arise (depart), north wind; and come, O south wind; blow through my garden, and let the aromatical spices thereof flow (Canticles iv. 16).

"My Shakespeare is upside down.

At Christmas I no more desire a rose

Than wish a snow in May's new-fangled mirth.—

Love's Labour's Lost.

Here roses load the Christmas air with sweetness, and May ushers in the snow upon the mountains." (SD 105-106. This passage was taken from the original diary)



Elizabeth Thompson Butler, "The Inverted Crescent", *From Sketchbook and Diary* (1909), 113
 Wikimedia Commons ©

- 13 These lines provide a fine illustration of Elleke Boehmer’s view that “[d]istant lands [...] were brought into the colonizer’s language by trial and error, in the process of their being explored and travelled. Though it might ultimately be ineffectual, writing strove to contain the disturbing effects of a new environment by attaching to that environment recognizable narrative and metaphoric patterns” (1995, 2005, 87). Novel experiences are narrated and described within existing aesthetic values and patterns, but as they fail to fit with these values and patterns, they raise questions in the traveller-observer.
- 14 Later in her career, painted landscapes became a way for Thompson to inscribe political issues into her art and to problematize conflicts. We associate battle artists with the task of recording and fixing in collective memory a nation’s victories and defeats, we also associate military painting to the official version of history. In Thompson’s paintings, the space given to landscapes seems to invite us to question conflicting values. The artistic depiction of colonized countries is the most challenging and makes the representation of landscape all the more necessary. In *From Sketchbook and Diary*, Elizabeth Thompson feels very strongly that, while the Italian landscape has remained intact and genuine, British occupation is putting a blemish on native lands, such as Ireland, Egypt and South Africa. Her writings express her regrets that the British have spoiled the country:⁷

The Dutch never jarred; their old farm-houses with white walls, thatched roofs, green shutters, and rounded Flemish gables look most harmonious in this landscape. Wherever we have colonized there you will see the corrugated iron dwelling, the barbed-wire fence, the loathsome advertisement. We talk so much of the love of the beautiful, and yet no people do so much to spoil beauty as we do wherever we settle down, all the world over. (SD 109)

- 15 Having married an Irish-born British Army Officer in 1877, Elizabeth Thompson was able to come back to the places of her youth, revisit them and gain a keen appreciation of what had changed or not.⁸ She could then use her earlier sketches and notes to clothe her paintings in their natural scenery. A Home Ruler, William Butler was a kind of rebel inside the military world: he was unfavourable to the politics of Irish evictions and to the war in South Africa.⁹ Even in his quality as a British officer, he embodied a connection that was becoming operative in nascent anticolonial discourse between the pro-Boer cause and Irish nationalist discourse (Boehmer 2002, 25-33). It has been observed that after her marriage, Elizabeth Thompson’s own politics became more clearly marked (Usherwood and Spencer-Smith 70-73). “Listed for the Connaught Rangers”, which she called her “first married picture”, depicts a recruiting officer, a soldier and two drummer boys, walking along a muddy road with the two Irish peasants they have just recruited. Elizabeth Thompson described the painting as “a departure from [her] former ones, the landscape occupying an equal share with the figures, and the civilian peasant dress forming the centre of interest” (A 135). The sergeant looks both self-conscious and self-effacing and we get a sense that the two sturdy recruits, who look determined and dignified, might well form an independent army of their own. The painting pays tribute to the health and stamina of Irish youths. The one on the right is full of the daring and recklessness which good soldiery requires; the other is more hesitant, he is throwing a look back toward the ruins of a house evoking the ongoing evictions of Irish non-paying tenants by farmers of the Protestant ascendancy. Just behind them is a bog lit up by the evening sun, the landscape of his youth, which remains full of promise.



Elizabeth Thompson Butler, *Evicted* (1890), oil on canvas, 131 x 194 cm, University College, Dublin University College, Dublin ©

- 16 In the 1880s, Elizabeth Thompson made another attempt to capture the Irish landscape in a canvas entitled *Evicted* (1890), which is even more clearly empathetic towards the Irish. “The eighties had seen our Government do some dreadful things in the way of evictions in Ireland” (A 157), she writes.¹⁰ The painting brings together two subjects which are outside Thompson’s usual concerns: landscape and woman. It focuses on a

lone female figure, standing in a desolate heath in the Wicklow Mountains, with the ruins of her house behind her. As in the previous painting, the character’s look at the sky directs our gaze to the boundless scenery, and invites us to evaluate the scene from a perspective outside the painting. In her autobiography, Thompson wrote that she felt unusually “complacent about this picture”:

[...] it has the true Irish atmosphere, and I was glad to turn out that landscape successfully which I had made all my studies for, on the spot, at Glendalough. What storms of wind and rain, and what dazzling sunbursts I struggled in, one day the paints being blown out of my box and nearly whirled into the lake far below my mountain perch! My canvas, acting like a sail, once nearly sent me down there too. I did not see this picture at all at the Academy, but I am very certain it cannot have been very “popular” in England. (A 158)

- 17 The mock-heroic account of her victory against the weather and her own canvas concludes on her indifferent defeat before the British public, whose unfavourable response to the political implications of the painting was disguised as indifference or, worse, as purely aesthetic appreciation. Thompson reports that the then Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, praised the landscape and made a poor joke about the tragic evictions: “the ‘breezy beauty’ of the landscape [...] almost made him wish he could take part in an eviction himself” (A 157).¹¹ The ruggedness of the crags and ruins, and the woman’s shapelessness become elements of the picturesque. Lord Salisbury’s aesthetic response promotes the landscape from setting to genre subject, demoting the poor woman and the ruins of her house to landscape features, thus creating a romantically deserted landscape. The metropolitan subject, positioning himself in the centre, refuses the canvas’s invitation to shift his gaze away to the periphery. As a result, the painting’s tragic political overtones are dispelled. The red skirt may well jar with the scene and convey ideas of violence, bloodshed and fire, but the harmony of colours becomes an excuse for ignoring such ugliness and for overlooking the political implications of the association between womanhood and nation. This allegorical feature was all the more noticeable as Elizabeth Thompson had so far favoured a representation of colonial politics which placed it within a strictly patriarchal frame.
- 18 The chapter entitled “County Mayo in 1905” in *From Sketchbook and Diary* was written after these two Irish pictures were completed and hung, and yet, she still threw this challenge to herself: “I have never seen Ireland at all worthily painted. I think we ought to leave her to her poets and to the composers of her matchless music” (SD 27). This sweeping statement matters not so much for the way its author dismisses her fellow-painters’ works and her past and future ones, as for the way she is giving back Ireland to its people and artistic traditions, at the risk of relegating her own art to the metropolitan periphery.



Elizabeth Butler, *The Remnants of an Army: Jellalabad, January 13th, 1842* (1879), oil on canvas, 132.1 x 233.7 cm, Tate Britain, London

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- 19 Elizabeth Thompson's panoramic painting of the first Afghan War, *The Remnants of an Army* (with its ironical plural) is set after a British Army was exterminated by Afghan tribesmen, but it was painted in the middle of the second Afghan war. It reveals a disconnection between the lone rider and the natural elements, which act as a substitute for the victorious enemies. Thompson's landscape powers seem to have revived with her realization of the power of the land to claim its rights over foreign occupiers. The last British soldier and his horse, with its tongue hanging out, look as if they have been defeated by the environment in a land of beauty and plenty: the abundance of water in this marsh-like desert contrasts with the impression of drought and thirst, while the presence of snow in the distance contrasts with the apparent heat. Despite the harmony of colours, the narrative behind the painting seems to imply that the soldier and his horse do not belong in this landscape: they look out of place. The real landscape has had its revenge on a mirage: the refreshing, idealized landscape which foreign lands became in the colonialist psyche.¹²
- 20 The twisting of the British rider's neck bears a striking resemblance to that of the female peasant in *Evicted*. This expression of extreme despair may have been copied from the sketches Elizabeth Thompson made while staying in Baroque Rome.¹³ The resulting cross-pictorial correspondence makes us aware of unexpected similarities in the way conflicting territorial claims are inscribed on the human body across the British Empire.



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* (detail), Altieri chapel, San Francesco a Ripa, Rome
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- 21 Elizabeth Thompson Butler's artistic evolution as it transpires in her autobiographical writing runs parallel with a development which is observable in her paintings: by gradually including landscape in her war paintings, she brings in contextual elements and expresses her doubts about British imperialism abroad. Then the historical background behind the natural and human landscape is made to appear. Landscape paintings are a surface on which the eyes can rest, a source of aesthetic and atmospheric gratification. So, as our eyes travel and dwell on that surface, we are allowed to ponder on what it means to occupy the land and appropriate it for oneself. We can also sense, through her painted works, some of the correspondences between colonized regions which would fuel cross-cultural resistance to British domination.

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NOTES

1. "England has only one battle artist, and she is a woman" (quoted by Thompson, *Autobiography*, 109). Further references to Elizabeth Thompson Butler's *Autobiography* will be indicated as follows: (A x).
2. "No sooner did my father perceive that I meant business than he got me books on anatomy, architecture, costume, arms and armour, Ruskin's inspiring writings, and everything he thought the most appropriate for my training" (A 11).
3. "'You will be entering into a tremendous ruck of painters, though, my child,' my father said one day, with a shake of his head. I answered, 'I will single myself out of it'" (A 11).
4. Portofino is a port in Liguria, praised by Guy de Maupassant and the backdrop of one of the stories in Wim Wenders's movie *Beyond the Clouds* (1995).
5. Further references to *From Sketchbook and Diary* will be abbreviated as follows: (SD x).
6. "I have never used a Kodak myself, finding snapshots of little value, but quick sketches done unbeknown to the sketchee and a good memory serve much better" (A 183).
7. See also, "Cairo in '85, '86, was only at the beginning of its mutilations by occidentalism, and the Oriental cachet was dominant still" (SD 34).

8. “Though I have often returned to Egypt since, that first-time feeling was never renewed” (A 155).
 9. Elizabeth writes of her husband’s disagreement about British politics in South Africa: “His offence had been a frank admission of sympathy for a people tenacious of their independence and, knowing the Boers as he did, he knew what their resistance would mean in case of attack. He was appalled at the prospect of a war, not against an army but against a people, involving the farm-burnings and all the horrors which our armies would have to resort to” (A 218).
 10. The text continues: “Being at Glendalough at the end of that decade, and hearing one day that an eviction was to take place some nine miles distant from where we were staying for my husband’s shooting, I got an outside car and drove off to the scene, armed with my paints. I met the police returning from their distasteful ‘job,’ armed to the teeth and very flushed. On getting there I found the ruins of the cabin smouldering, the ground quite hot under my feet, and I set up my easel there” (157).
 11. As quoted in *The Times*, the lines even ended with the cynical comment “either in a passive or in an active sense” (Usherwood and Spencer-Smith 95).
 12. “One image among many which colonial writing projected from the centre represented potentially fruitful lands as pastoral Edens, a multiplicity of English meadows. With the help of this particular figure, which cropped up wherever fertile lands were found to develop, the British sprinkled across the world, both in text and in fact, a whole collection of green spots” (Boehmer, 1995, 2005, 51).
 13. I am indebted to Adam Stephenson for this idea. Thompson may have remembered Michelangelo’s Doni tondo (Uffizi Museum), Bernini’s “Apollo and Daphne” (Galleria Borghese) or his “Blessed Ludovica Albertoni” (San Francesco a Ripa, Rome). She also had a special eye for the expression of individual character: “What luck it was for us to be in Rome that wonderful year of 1870 [...]. Great times for the art student, with all these types and colours as subjects for his pencil! The characteristics and the colour of Rome were thus multiplied and elaborated to the utmost possible point, up to the very verge of the Great Cleavage; and we saw it all” (SD 163-64). Among other figures, she mentions “the off-duty zouaves, with bare necks outstretched, cheering frantically, ‘Long live the Pope-King,’ in many languages [...]” (165).
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ABSTRACTS

After joining the “tremendous ruck” of battle artists very early in her career, Elizabeth Thompson Butler (1846-1933) became a major British military painter and was almost elected a member of the Royal Academy. Her paintings, which were admired by Queen Victoria and John Ruskin, place their focus mainly on human figures, horses and action. Most of them have a careful foreground with what she calls “human interest” but no background. However, in her autobiographical writings, Elizabeth Thompson expressed great admiration for the landscapes she saw during her Italian youth, in the course of her travel with her father and her foreign expeditions as an officer’s wife, and she renders them in brief carefully-worded descriptions which confirm that she was also a fine “word-painter”. In *From Sketchbook and Diary* (1909), an account of her stays in Ireland, Egypt and South-Africa, dedicated and addressed to her sister, Alice Meynell, the poetess, and illustrated with her own watercolours, she conveys a sense of her keen appreciation of landscape and of her own inability to raise her art to the effects produced by the original, which lies “beyond [her] landscape powers”. Behind this hyperbolic expression of

her personal inability, there are technical and political reasons for the claim. Starting from Thompson’s careful description of “picturesque” and “pictorial” scenery in her autobiographical writings, this essay will examine Thompson’s fascination for actual landscapes with a view to showing that her limited painterly engagement with landscape, which she justifies in terms of technical difficulties, also stems from a very high vision of what landscape represents and a keen awareness of its politics. My paper will focus in particular on her perception of colonized countries (especially Ireland and South Africa) in *From Sketchbook and Diary* (1909) with occasional references to her *Autobiography* (1922).

Ayant choisi très tôt de faire carrière dans la voie masculine de la peinture militaire, Elizabeth Thompson Butler (1846-1933) était à la fin du XIX^e siècle la plus grande artiste britannique du genre, ce qui lui valut d’être presque élue membre de la Royal Academy en 1879. Ses toiles, qui firent l’admiration de Ruskin et de la Reine Victoria, sont organisées autour de personnages et leur monture engagés dans l’action. Leur premier plan soigneusement détaillé crée ce qu’elle appelait un « intérêt humain », mais l’arrière-plan est généralement absent ou obstrué. Dans ses écrits autobiographiques, Elizabeth Thompson exprima pourtant son admiration envers les paysages observés pendant ses séjours en Italie, lors de ses voyages avec son père et au cours des expéditions militaires où elle accompagna son mari, et les décrivit avec une minutie et un art qui confirment qu’elle était aussi une excellente « peintre de la plume ». Son ouvrage *From Sketchbook and Diary* (1909), récit de ses voyages en Irlande, en Égypte et en Afrique du Sud, adressé à sa sœur, la poétesse Alice Meynell, et illustré de ses propres aquarelles, révèle combien était grande son appréciation du paysage, mais exprime aussi son incapacité à atteindre dans ses toiles la qualité de l’original, qu’elle place au-delà de ses « capacités de paysagiste ». Dans *From Sketchbook and Diary* et dans son autobiographie (1922), cet aveu d’impuissance est sous-tendu par des considérations techniques mais aussi par des motifs politiques. Cet essai examine le paradoxe suivant : la fascination d’Elizabeth Thompson pour les paysages contraste avec leur absence relative dans son œuvre peinte, qu’elle justifie par des motifs techniques. Par une mise en regard d’écrits autobiographiques et de représentations picturales dans des pays colonisés (Irlande, Afrique du Sud), on fera apparaître que la peintre était extrêmement sensible aux enjeux politiques et culturels entourant les paysages.

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Mots-clés: autobiographie, Afrique du sud, guerre, Irlande, peinture militaire, peinture victorienne, peinture édouardienne, paysage

Keywords: autobiography, Empire, Ireland, landscape, military painting, Victorian painting, Edwardian painting, South Africa, war

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