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The Sketcher: Reverend John Eagles, His Poetical Shelter from the World and the 1812 Collection

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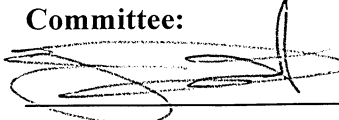
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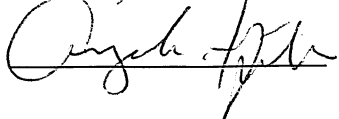
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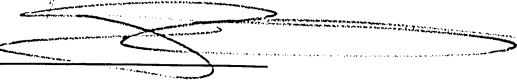


Thesis Title:

**“The Sketcher: Reverend John Eagles, his Poetical
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The Sketcher: Reverend John Eagles, His Poetical Shelter from the World and the 1812
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In 2004, the Wordsworth Trust purchased seventy-four unidentified Lake District images. From watercolors to barely visible drafts in pencil, the mountains and lakes captured in these images are the work of an artist who, like countless others before him, toured the Lake District, but unlike most, he showed little interest in following the tours outlined in popular guidebooks by Thomas West and William Gilpin. The 1812 Collection instead reflects a passion for sketching *in* nature and venturing off of the beaten paths so heavily travelled by tourists in search of the picturesque. Though the images may at first glance seem insignificant in relation to the already prolific body of Lake District art, the style, subject matter, and artist of the collection offer unconventionally picturesque qualities that are worthy of further scrutiny.

I recently uncovered evidence that one of the sketches in the 1812 Collection was nearly identical to a more finished image in one of Reverend John Eagles's sketchbooks held by the University of Nottingham. As an all-but-forgotten figure of the Romantic period, Eagles (1783-1855), if remembered at all, is best known for inadvertently launching John Ruskin's career as an art critic when in 1836, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published Eagles's scathing review of J.M.W. Turner's Royal Academy Exhibition, *Juliet and her Nurse*, calling it, "A strange jumble...thrown higgledy-piggledy together, streaked blue and pink, and thrown into a flour tub" ("Exhibitions" 551). Because of this review, and his other critical articles, Eagles was painted by Ruskin and subsequent scholars as the hostile reviewer of Turner's groundbreaking modern art. This one-dimensional portrait of Eagles has since overshadowed his broader contributions as an amateur landscape artist, a published author, and a poet.

Though Eagles did not achieve the success, nor the lasting fame of his better-known contemporaries, his work remained loyal to his aesthetic that landscape art should reflect, “a poetical shelter from the world.” This idea governed his career as “The Sketcher,” a pseudonym that symbolized his life’s work both on canvas and printed page. Eagles’s surviving work represents this place of repose, a place to connect with and better understand nature through art. Though not a particularly ground breaking idea on the surface, Eagles’s aesthetic, upon closer examination, reveals his role in a larger conversation on the evolution of landscape art during the early 19th century, which he viewed as a transition from art that reflected a close study of the natural landscape to art created for public consumption in an exhibition room. The 1812 Collection, as well as Eagles’s role in The Bristol School of Artists, a small group of professional and amateur artists situated in and around Bristol during that time, represent the early foundation for Eagles’s later writings and his criticisms of Turner’s landscapes, which Eagles saw as filled with “effects” produced for an exhibition room.

Since identifying Eagles as at least one of the artists of the 1812 Collection, I have discovered that his specific tour of the Lakes, the route he followed and the scenery conveyed in his images, deviated from the conventional tours in that Eagles was in search of what he regarded as a poetical landscape rather than a traditionally picturesque one. In other words, Eagles sought to capture more than an aesthetically pleasing scene as a picturesque image would, he endeavored to capture the soul of the scene and the 1812 Collection is evidence that Eagles practiced the artistic principles he so often espoused. As such, the 1812 Collection offers further implications for Eagles’s body of work, his aesthetic, and his strong criticisms of the changes he witnessed in landscape art during his

lifetime. In this essay, I therefore propose demonstrate not only how the 1812 Collection is in critical conversation with the picturesque tradition, but also how Eagles's sketches, like his writings and criticisms, expressed his own guiding aesthetic on discovering the poetry of nature instead of a strictly picturesque aesthetic. In doing so, I hope to restore Eagles's reputation as an artist and art critic as well as reveal the historical importance of the recently rediscovered 1812 Collection.

I

Setting the Scene

"I have been far and wide in this pursuit—a pedestrian, frequently with knapsack and portfolio, and trudging along, in a happy conceit that every man's lands were mine...I held their maps (as people call sketches), papers, and descriptions in my pack" (Sketcher 8).

The 1812 Collection, seventy-four individual sheets of Smith and Warner paper cut from a sketchbook, appears to be the work of one artist, or potentially multiple artists working side-by-side, studying the Lake District landscape in 1812. Though it is likely that some of the images are missing, since there are gaps between dated images, the extant images consist of eight watercolors, seventeen pencil sketches, and forty-nine pen and ink wash pictures. None of the images have a signature, but sixty of them include a handwritten location name and date. A reconstruction of the tour, based on this information, reveals that the artist(s) traveled several hundred miles over the course of September. The nearly month long tour produced multiple images of locations throughout the Lake District including Bowness, Ambleside, Coniston, Grasmere, Rydal, Keswick, Borrowdale, Patterdale and Haweswater. Although the images were created within the tradition of touring the

English Lakes, they do not strictly follow the tours outlined in popular guidebooks, nor do they convey a strictly picturesque aesthetic. By examining the provenance of the images, we can move closer to understanding how the route and subject matter diverge from popular tours of the English Lakes and how the images reflect Eagles's personal aesthetic rather than a conventionally picturesque one. Based on this information, *The 1812 Collection* offers a previously unexplored perspective on the English Lakes and raises the question of why Eagles was interested in studying and capturing specific landscapes as opposed to following the conventional tour and capturing popular picturesque scenery and landmarks.

By 1812, a nearly 40-year tradition of exploring the sublime mountains and beautiful lakes of northwest England was well established. In *The Search for the Picturesque* (1989), Malcolm Andrews traces the evolution of picturesque tourism throughout Britain, which included the Lake District, North Wales, and the Scottish Highlands. "From the 1770s onward," writes Andrews, "the lake scenery of Cumberland and Westmoreland was a serious challenge to the aesthetic supremacy of the European Grand Tour" (153). This "rage for the lakes" as it was popularly called, inspired tourists, artists, and writers to travel to the English Lakes instead of the Continent, where they attempted to capture in their own sketchbooks and journals the scenery they read about in popular guidebooks and descriptive accounts such as Dr. John Brown's *Description of the Lake at Keswick* (1767), Arthur Young's *Six Months' Tour Through the North of England* (1770), James Clarke's *A Survey of the Lakes* (1787) and Thomas Gray's *Journal in the Lakes* (1775). Though not a guidebook, Gray's *Journal* was considered one of the first important pieces of travel writing in the eighteenth century. Shortly after its publication, watercolorist Joseph Farington

retraced Gray's tour and painted images to complement his picturesque descriptions. *Views of the Lakes*, a collection of engravings published in 1789, was not only topographically accurate, but it also enabled tourists to match an image to a description. Other artists published similar collections, including William Bellers's *Six Select Views in the North of England* (1752), Peter Holland's *Select Views of the Lakes in Cumberland, Westmoreland and Lancashire* (1792), Thomas Smith's *Three Views in the North of England* (1761) and William Green's *A Description of a Series of Sixty Small Prints* (1814). The entire canon of guidebooks and images of the English Lakes are too numerous to list, but by the turn of the century, travellers mainly relied upon the two best-selling guides to direct them to specific locations throughout the Lake District: Thomas West's *A Guide to the Lakes* (1778) and William Gilpin's *Observations, on Several Parts of England, Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, made in the year 1772* (1808).

Thomas West, a clergyman, author, and return visitor to the Lake District, wrote that the purpose of his guide, perhaps the most popular of the time, was "to encourage the taste of visiting the lakes" by providing travellers with desirable vantage points and picturesque locations. These "viewing stations," as they were called, captured what West referred to as "natural beauties...the soft, the rude, the romantic, and the sublime...of which perhaps like instances can no where be found assembled in so small a tract of country" (2). Like countless other travellers, Eagles may have been enticed to travel to the Lakes to see this kind of scenery but, at least in his later writings, attempted to distance himself from the guided tour. "Sketchers," wrote Eagles, "are very unlike tourists in general, who go to the *points and sights* directly, and by the most easy ways" (*Sketcher* 266). Undoubtedly directed

toward the followers of West's *Guide*, Eagles's comment distinguished artists, like himself, not only from other travellers, but also tourists. Tourists rarely ventured from the main roads, which were much easier to navigate on horseback or by carriage whereas, for Eagles, sketchers travelled on foot and ventured off of the beaten paths further into the "woods and wilds" ("Sketcher" IV 529). Based on the viewpoints captured in the 1812 Collection, Eagles travelled on foot both on and off the main roads. Some of the images are of unidentifiable locations while others include glimpses of the main roads throughout the Lake District. Eagles also saw taking the divergent path as important to sketching: "Nature hides herself. I would not recommend a regular path...the points that would afford good studies are not very accessible" (220/194). Seeking less travelled areas within the natural landscape was an important facet of Eagles's aesthetic because he sought something more than the highlighted tour points or, at least attempted to capture those points from a different perspective. Eagles's interest in studying the landscape as an artist, not a tourist, is reflected in the route and subject matter of the 1812 Collection and is important in distinguishing his work from the countless other images of the Lakes that were created during this time.

The route of Eagles's journey demonstrated his interest in visiting popular Lake District locations mentioned in guidebooks, but ultimately following his own journey. Whereas Thomas West's *Guide* recommended visiting the Lakes between June and August, travelling from Coniston in the south to Keswick in the north, and William Gilpin's one-week tour in May followed a similar orientation, Eagles's journey (based on the first dated image) began in the middle of most picturesque tours, near Bowness on Windermere on the 4th of September. Much longer than most Lakes tours, Eagles's tour proceeded in a

meandering journey north, then south, then north again, east, and west, before finally moving south again and ending between Ambleside and Keswick on September 23rd. The dated images are not only important for the reconstruction of the tour, but they also reveal how long Eagles spent at different locations and how many images were presumably sketched at those locations. "It is far better to remain at one beautiful spot, days, even weeks," wrote Eagles, "than to run post haste from spot to spot, the mind overwhelmed with vague recollections, and the portfolio crammed with imperfect studies" (388). The majority of the images in the Collection are of Ambleside (7), Rydal (8), Borrowdale (7), and Ullswater (7), whereas the fewest images are of Windermere (3), Patterdale (2) and Haweswater (3). This concentration of images conflicts with the areas that were the focus of most guides: Windermere, Coniston, Ullswater and Keswick. According to Malcolm Andrews, "The vale of Keswick was the most eagerly sought area on the tour to the Lakes" (177), yet the 1812 Collection does not focus heavily on this area. Eagles's journey may have crossed paths with the guided tours, but he ultimately wandered on his own tour, moving around rivers and lakes, and positioning himself at different heights, angles, and distances as reflected in the images. Eagles's self-guided tour tells us that he was more interested in studying and gaining a more thorough understanding of the land(scape), rather than traveling on the main roads in search of the next prescribed viewing station.

The subject matter reflected in the images suggests that, although Eagles went to popular Lake District locations, he did not specifically capture the picturesque views recommended in guidebooks. Tourists sought the beauty and grandeur of Windermere, the sublime mountains around Derwentwater, several natural landmarks including Rydal Falls, Helm Crag, Lodore Falls and the Bowder Stone or buildings such as Coniston Hall, the

Palace of Patterdale, and Belle Isle House. The images in the 1812 Collection include a few of these landmarks, while other images near these locations do not. Of the eight images near Rydal, none of them show Rydal Falls; and though there is a sketch taken from above Lodore Falls, none of the six images around Derwentwater specifically capture the waterfall from the prescribed northern location on the lake facing south. “Windermere-water...is viewed to the greatest advantage by facing the mountains” (56) wrote West, and all three images of Windermere in the Collection show this perspective from the eastern shore of the lake. Belle Isle house is glimpsed in two of the images, one from a distance on the eastern shore and one from closer viewpoint just slightly north on Windermere (fig. 1 and fig. 2).



Figure 1: *Bowness 4 Sept 1812*

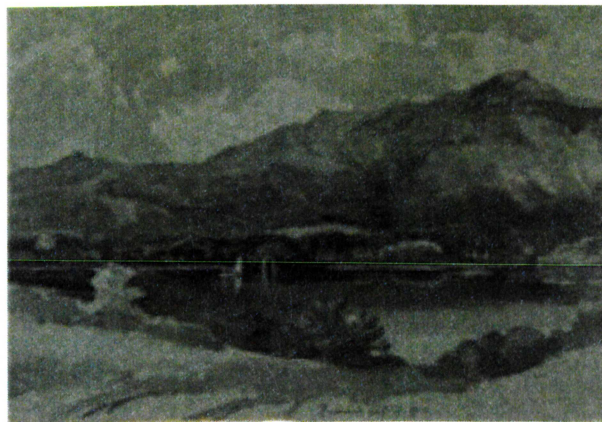


Figure 2: *Bowness Sept 4 1812*

Interestingly, Belle Isle House is not the focus of either image, nor is there an image from another recommended guidebook location by boat on Windermere. What the artist does focus on is capturing the details of the landscape from a different distance and angle. Other noteworthy locations captured in the 1812 Collection also mentioned in guidebooks include The Old Inn at the head of Coniston and the Yew Tree in the Patterdale Churchyard, both mentioned in William Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* (1810). The consciousness of popular guide locations reflected in the images suggests that Eagles was interested in traveling to these picturesque sights, even capturing a few of the well-known landmarks, but ultimately creating sketches based on his own careful study of the area. Though it is possible that Eagles sketched some of these popular landmarks and they have since been separated from the extant collection, the close observations of subtleties and subject matter within the majority of the images confirms that Eagles was not especially interested in sketching widely recognized landmarks. While traveling through Patterdale, for example, Eagles was more interested in depicting the bales of hay in a field rather than sketching the Palace of Patterdale. Or, at Rydal, he sketched Rydal Hall from an elevated northeast point rather than sketching the popular picturesque Rydal Falls. Although the details of Eagles's journey, as gathered from the images, offer valuable information about where he went and what he saw, they do not tell us why Eagles travelled to some of the popular picturesque locations that he claimed to distance himself from as an artist. And, most importantly, what did Eagles hope to achieve by sketching unconventionally picturesque, careful studies of the landscape? The artifact that recently tied Eagles to the 1812 Collection may hold the answers to such questions.

My identification of Eagles as at least one of the artists of the collection came about

when I compared the 1812 Collection to a smaller sketchbook by Eagles held by the University of Nottingham. The Nottingham Sketchbook, a more formally constructed sketchbook, contains six more finished versions of some of the sketches in the 1812 Collection. The Nottingham Sketchbook is significant, not only because it connects Eagles with the 1812 Collection, but also because it offers potential answers to why Eagles sketched multiple, slightly different views of the landscape. Dated “22 September 1812 Keswick,” this finished sketchbook was created near the end of Eagles’s tour, which suggests that after touring the Lakes, he selected specific sketches to include in his smaller sketchbook. The Nottingham Sketchbook contains images of Grasmere, Rydal House and Lake, Ullswater, Borrowdale, Pass Near Buttermere and the Bowder Stone Borrowdale. The images of Grasmere, Rydal House and Lake, Ullswater and Borrowdale have matching sketches in the 1812 Collection, however, the sketches of the Pass Near Buttermere and the Bowder Stone Borrowdale are either missing or non-existent from the larger collection. The images from the Nottingham Sketchbook tell us that Eagles chose locations from different dates throughout his tour, and though the images show popular Lake District landmarks such as Helm Crag, Rydal Hall, and the Bowder Stone, they are not presented in



Figure 3: Nottingham Sketchbook, *Grasmere*



Figure 4: 1812 Collection, *Grasmere 6 Sept 1812*

a traditionally picturesque style.

In one of two studied views of Grasmere from the 1812 Collection, two figures recline on a hill above a flock of sheep and grove below, small in comparison to distinctive Helm Crag rising high in the background. The image from Eagles's Nottingham Sketchbook (fig. 3) shows a more polished version of his sketch (fig. 4). "There are other judges of landscape painting who prefer Mr. Eagles's *Sketches* to his more finished paintings..." recalled one of Eagles's friends, and most will agree that this is true of the images in the smaller sketchbook (*Garland* xxvi). The six images in the Nottingham Sketchbook appear more polished, but lack the intimacy and raw appeal of the sketches from the 1812 Collection. The Grasmere sketch, for example, places the viewer within the scene, privy to the two reclining figures on the hill, the reflections on the lake, white sheep along the path, and the details of the lion and the lamb on Helm Crag; whereas the finished sketch feels removed, losing the details of the figures and lake, the white of the sheep, and the details of Helm Crag. The Nottingham Sketchbook image makes a nice, neat picture within the boundaries of the square frame drawn around it, yet there is a disconnect for the viewer and apparently for Eagles, who captured a certain depth within the frameless sketch that he did not translate to the finished version. The sketch Eagles created while he was in Grasmere on September 6th is more vivid and alive than the finished version he created over two weeks later. The importance of sketching *in* nature rather than by memory, or even imagination, manifests itself in these two images. Francis Towne, a well-known painter who also travelled to the Lakes, made a practice of noting on the back of his pictures that they were composed "on the spot" and this practice was encouraged by William Gilpin and others in pursuit of picturesque landscape (Andrews 80). Sketching *in*

nature meant sketching where all senses were engaged with the landscape first-hand. This approach to art was also a key point within Eagles's aesthetic and his understanding of nature is evident not only in the Grasmere sketch, but also within the larger 1812 Collection.

Since Eagles distanced himself from tourists following points and sights in guidebooks, and there are no additional descriptions of the images in the Nottingham Sketchbook or within his larger canon, it seems likely that Eagles did not intend to make this smaller sketchbook into his own guide to the Lakes. The smaller sketchbook does, however, add an interesting facet to Eagles's tour even though he later denounced the pursuit of merely depicting what was evident to the eye in *The Sketcher*, "When you sketch from nature," he would later write, "if you find, on examining your portfolio, you have brought back nothing but views, and that it is a remembrancer [sic] of localities, as your almanack [sic] is of dates, there is so little dignity in your employment it will not be amiss if you quit it" ("Sketcher" 683-4). Given the careful preparation of the smaller sketchbook perhaps it was intended as a gift, or, maybe Eagles particularly enjoyed sketching these specific locations over the course of his journey. It is also possible that, instead of a guidebook, Eagles may have had aspirations to publish his *Six Views of the Lakes* like William Bellers and other artists. Though the Nottingham Sketchbook opens up further speculation rather than providing concrete answers, the style of the images and the handwriting of the location names in the sketchbook help to attribute the majority of the images in the 1812 Collection to Eagles and place him firmly within the tradition of the Lakes Tours and the picturesque.

II

The Picturesque Tour

“For whoever wanders in search of the Picturesque with all his acquirements, bears about him a pride that will have many a fall” (Sketcher 8).

Originally derived from the Italian *pittoresco*, meaning “of a painting,” the term picturesque was as vague as it was popular during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and a significant facet of Lake District tourism. “There are few words whose meaning has been less accurately determined than that of the word picturesque,” wrote Sir Uvedale Price in his *Essays on The Picturesque* (1796), “it is applied to every object, and every kind of scenery, which has been or might be represented with good effect in painting” (37). Price was one of many theorists on the picturesque and one who Eagles often referred to when criticizing the picturesque in *The Sketcher*. Even today, the word continues to prove challenging to scholars who have openly referred to the term as “an elusive object” (Whale 177) or “a verbal chameleon” (Heffernan 5). The picturesque is equally elusive when applied to the 1812 Collection, though essential to understanding how the images are unconventionally picturesque and how Gilpin’s aesthetic, in particular, both coincides and conflicts with Eagles’s personal aesthetic.

Building on ideas of the beautiful and the sublime established by Edmund Burke in 1757, the picturesque became an aesthetic ideal used as a guideline for painting. Though Gilpin was not the first artist to discover picturesque scenery in the English Lakes, he is often credited with pioneering the aesthetic and contributing to its ongoing popularity. In his *Essay Upon Prints* (1768), Gilpin initially defined the picturesque as, “a term expressive of that peculiar kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture” (x). He further developed his picturesque theory in *Observations on the River Wye: and several parts of South Wales*,

&c. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the summer of the year 1770 (1782), and later in *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; And On Sketching Landscape* (1792). In his simplest terms, Gilpin described the picturesque as “roughness” or “ruggedness” found in nature. In other words, a rocky precipice, a crumbling ruin, or a crooked tree was more pleasing and interesting to the eye in a painting than smooth rolling hills. Seeking to convey the picturesque in a painting set a new standard for landscape art and was Gilpin’s way of distinguishing a beautiful scene from one that an artist found worthy of painting: “Those which please the eye in their natural state; and those, which please from some quality, capable of being illustrated in painting” (*Three Essays* 3). Despite its lack of clarity, the term picturesque evolved into a buzzword, which, perhaps more importantly than anything else, encouraged tourism in the English Lakes. The Lake District provided tourists with ample picturesque scenery and, as with guidebooks, several prints were published and exhibited as the result of tours of the Lakes. Among the most well known were Joseph Farington’s painting of the Rydal waterfall, Francis Towne’s images of Ambleside and, though not picturesque, images of Coniston and Buttermere Lake by J.M.W. Turner. Gilpin’s guide was also interspersed with examples of his own picturesque images from the Lakes.

Whereas Thomas West guided travellers on where to go and what to see, Gilpin taught artists how to see the landscape. Within his series of *Observations*, in which he explored several parts of England, Gilpin demonstrated his thorough understanding of the English landscape and shared techniques on how to convey those studies of nature on canvas. Gilpin, like West, was a clergyman and author, but Gilpin was also an artist and his writings on landscape were presented through this aesthetic lens. He, too, shared West’s

views on the significance of traveling to the Lake District for picturesque scenery, “I believe...that this country exceeds most countries in the variety of it’s [sic] picturesque beauties” (*Cumberland* 5). In *Savage Grandeur and Noblest Thoughts: Discovering the Lake District 1750-1820* (2010), Cecilia Powell defined the picturesque against the backdrop of the Lake District tours:

At its simplest level [picturesque beauty] referred to the beauty found in the pictures of the Old Masters...The search for ‘picturesque beauty’ within Britain itself, assessing actual views against artistic prototypes, created a positive industry in ‘picturesque tourism’...and appropriate viewpoints being endlessly searched out, praised or criticised [sic]. (16)

These “artistic prototypes” were significant because, although the picturesque was difficult to define, artists were familiar with the works of the Old Masters and able to associate their traditional aesthetics with different views throughout the Lake District, “from the delicate touches of Claude, verified on Coniston lake, to the noble scenes of Poussin exhibited on Windermere-water, and from these to the stupendous romantic ideas of Salvator Rosa, realized on the lake of Derwent” (Andrews 159). Even though Eagles sought to distance himself from the term picturesque, he endeavored to imitate the Old Masters and Gaspar Poussin was admittedly Eagles’s favorite landscape artist, “I shall never forget the impression these made upon me: I had never before seen anything at all to satisfy me; but here...was the poetry of landscape” (*Sketcher* 24). Eagles’s tour through the Lake District may not have been in search of the picturesque, but it provided him with inspired scenery reminiscent of Gaspar’s landscapes.

Though the picturesque “created a positive industry in ‘picturesque tourism,’” it

eventually devolved into a term synonymous with the fashionable tourist searching for a view worthy of a picture rather than exploring and studying nature. In "The Problem of the Picturesque" (2002), David Marshall notes, "In a sense, however, it was both the contribution and the curse of the picturesque to inscribe the place of nature in the realm of art" (431). As West's and Gilpin's guide continued to draw increased numbers of tourists to the Lake District, by the early nineteenth century, the picturesque tour had reached the point of satire. Published in the same year as Eagles's tour, *The Tour of Dr. Syntax in Search of the Picturesque* transformed Gilpin into Dr. Syntax, the clumsy curate comically searching for picturesque scenery, "I'll ride and write and sketch and print...I'll prose it here, I'll prose it there./ I'll picturesque it ev'ry where [sic]" (Combe 5). The pursuit of the picturesque and the use of a Claude Glass, a small handheld mirror used by turning one's back on a scene and sketching the framed reflection of nature, were also criticized. "The Picturesque artist 'appropriates' natural scenery and processes it into a commodity," writes Andrews, "With the aid of his 'knick-knacks' he converts Nature's unmanageable bounty into a frameable [sic] possession" (81). Gilpin's original intention with the picturesque was to teach the public how to look at scenery from an artist's perspective and translate that onto canvas. The most important contribution of the picturesque was that it drew the public, both amateurs and artists, to explore natural scenery and to gain a deeper understanding of British land(scapes). In his chapter on "The Discovery of Nature," Jonathan Wordsworth defends Gilpin's intentions and aesthetic: "The picturesque was by no means a ridiculous fashion. Gilpin taught people—Wordsworth among them—to discover Nature for themselves. The limitation of his way of seeing, as the term picturesque implies, was that he saw the natural world through painting" (88). The curse of the picturesque, as Jonathan

Wordsworth alludes, was that it filtered nature through a poorly defined aesthetic and then confined it within a neatly framed commodity. The fashion for seeking picturesque scenery gradually overshadowed Gilpin's original intention.

Despite Gilpin's original intentions, "by the turn of the century," notes Malcolm Andrews, "The Picturesque vocabulary, both verbal and pictorial, had hardened into jargon, and impatience with it became more marked" (33). Within *The Sketcher*, Eagles included several of his observations on the picturesque, which expressed this frustration:

Then, besides the sublime, and beautiful, and the picturesque, there is the elegant: or is the elegant a kind of beauty, or one quality of it? So may be the picturesque, and, in fact, therefore not something distinct. I am, I confess, thrown out. If [Price] would call the picturesque whatever is not beautiful nor sublime, yet paintable (pardon the horrible word) well; but it does not define, amid a great variety, and particular character...with this view, everything is paintable, or picturesque. (40-1)

According to Eagles, if an artist was searching for the picturesque, he or she was more concerned with a concept rather than creating art, "Much of this absurdity arises from the mistaken notions of the 'picturesque' and the eternal 'roughness' that has been dinned into the ears, and spoiled the eyes, in precept and worse example, of early admirers of Art and Nature; as if Nature, to be Nature, must be ever 'shagg'd [sic] with horrid thorn" (187).

Eagles was ultimately not interested in the Picturesque nor any other term for that matter, "We are sadly inventive in theories for lack of mere names. There are in nature and in art, besides the sublime and beautiful, ten thousand gradations and shades of forms and sentiments" (40). Based on his writings and the images in 1812 Collection, Eagles was not in search of the picturesque as represented by Dr. Syntax, instead, Eagles focused on

earnestly studying the landscape, as Gilpin originally intended, and conveying his own aesthetic principles in his art.

The images in the 1812 Collection are unconventionally picturesque, yet they help to elucidate Gilpin's original intentions by demonstrating a close observation of the landscape. In "Re-Drawing the Borders of Vision; or, The Art of Picturesque Travel" (2012), Jason Goldsmith observes, "The object of Gilpin's extensive writing on the picturesque: [was] to encourage us to observe nature at first hand, unclouded by routine and our tendency to symbolize" (195). Picturesque theory or terminology aside, Gilpin's writing encouraged tourists, travellers, writers, and artists to study the local landscape in order to better understand nature. Creating multiple sketches of the same scenery in order to truly understand the land(scape) is evident in Gilpin's writings, the 1812 Collection, and even Eagles's later writings. Since the term picturesque was, over time, diluted by the fashionable tourists flocking to viewing stations, and criticized by those who failed to fully grasp Gilpin's original intentions, it may be beneficial to separate the term picturesque, as it is now understood, from Gilpin's original intentions, which may be more appropriately termed, "Gilpinesque." Though Eagles may have found fault with the picturesque as a term and satirical concept, The 1812 Collection and Eagles's own aesthetic appear to be more closely aligned with the Gilpinesque observation of landscape rather than the picturesque scene.

The images in the 1812 Collection are unconventionally picturesque because they capture scenery that was not typically sketched by travellers to the Lake District. Nor do the images convey stereotypical picturesque qualities. The sweeping views, elevated viewpoints, varying amount of detail, lack of foregrounds and neatly frame-able scenes, all



Figure 5: *Near Keswick Lake*



Figure 6: *From Haweswater to Ambleside View of Ullswater 15 Sept 1812*

suggest that Eagles was interested in capturing something different because he physically and artistically travelled outside of the picturesque box. Several of the images in the 1812 Collection show expansive views of the mountains and lakes, disregarding the picturesque aesthetic which depicted much smaller scale views, usually framed by trees. A watercolor image of Skiddaw rising high into an overcast sky or a sepia toned ink sketch of rocky Kirkstone Pass, might be considered sublime, but by no means picturesque (fig. 5 and fig. 6). Skiddaw was referenced in guidebooks, yet neither of these specific locations were mentioned as picturesque destinations. In the Skiddaw image, Eagles captured the details of the light peering through the clouds over the mountain as it hit the mossy brown boulders in the foreground, a Gilpinesque observation of light that he noted as important to the study of the landscape, "No one can paint a country properly, unless he has seen it in various lights...The summit of a mountain, for instance, which in a morning appears round, may discover, when enlightened by an evening ray, a double top" (*Cumberland* vi-vii). The sepia Kirkstone Pass image appears to be an observation of the way the mountains seemingly flow into one another from an elevated viewpoint. Several of the images are

taken from higher viewpoints, which was not conducive to a picturesque image. “Gray, West, Young and Gilpin each made a strong distinction between elevated viewpoints,” writes Andrews, “which are not, generally suitable for the artist” (161). These vantage points were not suitable for a picturesque artist because they would not have fit within the frame of a Claude Glass, the picturesque tool that Eagles later denounced the use of in *The Sketcher* as, “a false view of art, arising from a practice of finishing off every corner of a picture, which is not in imitation of nature” (298). A smooth watercolor of Brathay Hall across Windermere and of Ullswater from Watermillock, both of which could both be termed beautiful, are also too sweeping to be framed by picturesque standards (Figure 7 and Figure 8). The smooth, blurred lines in the Windermere image are opposite of the “rough” or “rugged” picturesque qualities, as is the expansive view of Ullswater, with no trees framing the foreground. All of these unconventionally picturesque views demonstrate a departure from most picturesque images of the Lake District and are significant because they offer a new way of viewing the Lakes from the perspective of an artist who decided to travel on his own path and ultimately create images that represented his own aesthetic.

Eagles’s unconventionally picturesque landscapes do not directly tell us why he sketched these particular images, yet they all allude to the fact that Eagles was in search of



Figure 7: *Windermere* 5 Sept 1812

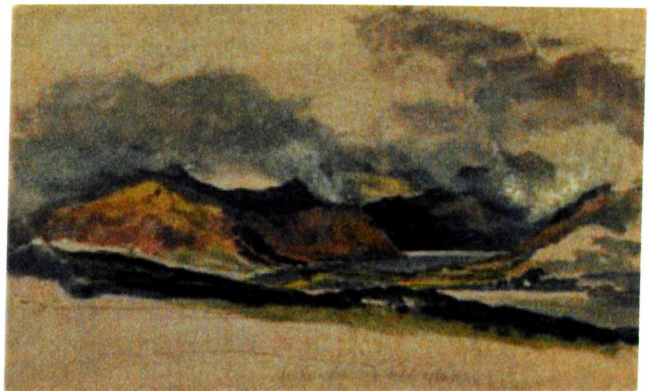


Figure 8: *Ullswater* 14 Sept 1812

something more than the picturesque during his tour of the Lakes. Eagles believed that nature was not a frame-able possession, but rather something to be carefully observed and felt with an artist's sensibility, and conveyed on canvas something more profound than an aesthetically pleasing picture. Although they were ultimately dissimilar in their aesthetic approaches to the finished image, picturesque aside, both Eagles and Gilpin agreed upon the importance of carefully studying and understanding the landscape. As a result of studying the 1812 Collection, as well as Eagles's writings on art, it is evident that though he may have been drawn to the Lake District because of the picturesque scenery reminiscent of the Old Masters, his images present his own personal aesthetic, which reached past the picturesque.

III

The Sketcher

"If the mind of the sketcher do not drink poetry through his eye, and convey it to his portfolio, he may be sure neither nature nor art intended him to be a painter or sketcher. But if he finds his soul poetic, and imbued with the feelings of the poets he has read, he will call up such ideas as will suit his scenery, enable him to give it a new character" (Sketcher 73).

At a basic level, *The Sketcher* was for Eagles what *Observations* was for Gilpin: an aesthetic approach to landscape art. Originally published in fourteen installments in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from 1833-35, *The Sketcher*, like most of Eagles's writings on art, was published over twenty years after his early excursions in Bristol and the Lake District. Despite recounting several of his sketching adventures, Eagles only made one passing reference to his Lake District tour in the first serial installment of *The Sketcher* in 1833, "I have visited the Lakes of Cumberland...been refused admittance to an inn 'that did

not take in trampers,' been questioned as a pedlar [sic] by mountain lasses, eyeing my large portfolio..." (682). Nevertheless, the impressions made by these early experiences, coupled with Eagles's ideas on art, poetry, and nature make *The Sketcher* his premier, defining piece of writing and the source to which we should turn in order to better understand why Eagles sketched certain images in the 1812 Collection.

The foundation for Eagles's aesthetic can be traced back to his formative years as a member of The Bristol School of Artists. At the time of his tour of the Lake District, Eagles was a resident of Bristol, where he was born and lived for most of his life. Aside from the 1812 Collection, most of Eagles's surviving art was the result of his frequent excursions to Leigh Woods and Avon Gorge. Much of the scenery described in *The Sketcher* was taken from the "romantic scenery of...the valleys and rocks at Clifton, near Bristol" and it was there, *in nature*, that he found inspiration for his art and nurtured his aesthetic ideas. (*Garland xxxiii*). The Bristol School of Artists, first referred to as such by Eagles in 1826, was a collection of artists, active from the 1810s-1830s, known for their animated sketching parties, which opened up dialogues between professional and amateur artists (*Greenacre 244*). Eagles was an instrumental figure and played an integral part in organizing what he referred to in *The Sketcher* as "the brethren of the brush" for evening sketching excursions which included music, poetry, and of course, sketching (129). In his biography of Francis Danby, Eric Adams vividly describes Eagles's role:

This pride of the local artists in their landscape was elaborated by Eagles into a kind of poetical cult, with its sanctuary in Leigh Woods, its saints the classical painters and poets, its votaries the members of the drawing society, its doctrine a complete theory of the picturesque, and lacking only a god, whose place Eagles

supplied by supposing, with a skittish fancy which he calls a 'poetical faith,' that the inner recesses of the woods 'were the reign and kingdom of invisible fairy beings.' (29)

Though a Reverend, holding different curacies throughout his life, Eagles by no means thought of himself or his aesthetic as a god. Adams does, however, raise valid points about Eagles's interest in fairies and poetry as they relate to landscape, since they directly tie into Eagles's artistic principles. Adams may have also been more accurate to refer to "a complete theory of the *Gilpinesque*" rather than the picturesque, yet the underlying emphasis on a first-hand study of the natural landscape is an important observation. A more realistic view of what the Bristol sketching parties may have been like, however, was recounted in *The Sketcher*, where a conversation between The Sketcher and The Pictor (Edward Villiers Ripplingille) illustrated a lively and congenial repartee on poetry, music, art, and technique while the two men sketched nature around them:

Pictor. (drawing a sketch out of his portfolio). Here is an attempt at this scene.

Sketcher. And what is this at the back—Poetry?

Pictor. I amuse myself sometimes more with rhyme than reason, and here is an instance. I have ever felt that these woods were the reign and kingdom of invisible fairy beings, and have so felt it when here, that the feeling has amounted to a poetical faith...

Sketcher. As Sketcher-general, I must not express much admiration of your poetry. Do you not think it better to be master of one weapon, than to beat the air idly with two?

Pictor. I would not beat the air “*idly*” with either; your illustration is from the art of offence and defense. Poetry and painting are *sister* arts—feminine, they walk the woods, and even wilds, defenceless [sic] and fearless in the spell and power of their beauty, loveliness, and gentleness.

Sketcher. Add music and they are the three Graces, and it will readily be admitted there is one spirit of inspiration in all. (Sketcher 105-8)

Eagles’s inclusion of these exchanges is evidence that he was particularly fond of the time he spent amongst fellow artists, revisiting and sketching the same scenery in and around Bristol.

Since Eagles was an avid supporter of sketching parties in Bristol, he likely travelled with other artists and friends during his tour of the Lake District. In addition to the Nottingham Sketchbook, Eagles’s presence in the Lake District was further confirmed by amateur artist and Lake District resident, John Harden. An image by Harden, dated “20 August 1812,” contains a note in the bottom right hand corner, “at Rydal with Mr. Eagles Townley, R. Shannon” (Foskett XXV). As a fellow amateur artist and member of The Bristol School, George Townley was well acquainted with Eagles and Richard Shannon was a close friend of Harden. The Harden family was known for hosting various guests at Brathay Hall, their home at the head of Windermere, including several well-known artists who also sketched the Lake District such as Joseph Farington and John Constable. If Eagles stayed with the Hardens, he would have enjoyed the same kind of friendly socializing that he enjoyed in Bristol, including sketching excursions into nature. Whether or not Townley, Shannon, and Harden were part of the September tour is still a matter of speculation, as is their credit for producing any of the images in the collection. Harden’s image, however,

places Eagles in the Lake District before the beginning of the 1812 Collection and at Rydal instead of Bowness, where the extant Collection began.

In addition to manuscripts, publications, and surviving sketches, the details of Eagles's life and demeanor are best gleaned from the remembrances of his close friends' introductions to *The Sketcher* (published as a complete volume a year after his death in 1856) and *A Garland of Roses*, (a collection of Eagles's poetry published in 1857). Written just after his death, these writings give us a better sense of who Eagles was as an artist. Since Eagles wrote anonymously during his lifetime, perhaps his friends wished to give readers a glimpse of the real man behind the pen and paintbrush. The recurring theme throughout all of the recollections of Eagles was his genuine passion for art, "No artist ever loved Art more purely and entirely for its own sake" (*Sketcher* vii). In addition to "The Sketcher Papers," an article that revealed and celebrated Eagles as the author of *The Sketcher* articles, Blackwood's also published an obituary, wherein Eagles was similarly remembered, "No man has ever had the right to speak on the subject of Painting with fuller knowledge, and on the strength of more practical experience; for few amateurs, if any, have ever plied the brush with greater perseverance and success" (758). The same sentiment was expressed about his writings, "[which] were chiefly the expression and interpretation of his thoughts and feelings as an artist. The bulk of his papers were written on subjects connected with painting" (757). It is also important to note that Eagles's friends remembered his practice of the aesthetic that he so often preached:

He held that almost every beautiful scene in nature contained in itself many pictures, but that there existed generally one which was more living and forcible than the rest, which it was the business of the artistic eye to select and appropriate.

He ever wished...to seize and secure on paper and canvass [sic] this soul of every scene. (*Sketcher* viii)

Such details are significant not only because they demonstrate his passion for art but also the foundation for the aesthetic we see in the 1812 Collection. That Eagles sought the “living and forcible soul” of every scene potentially answers what he may have been interested in capturing by sketching multiple images of the same locations throughout the Lake District.

The evidence of several nearly identical images from particular locations is a significant theme of the 1812 Collection, and these careful observations of the landscape coincide with the Gilpinesque aesthetic. “When you meet a scene you wish to sketch,” wrote Gilpin, “your first consideration is to get it in the best point of view. A few paces to the right or left, make a great difference” (*Three Essays* 63). Though Eagles and Gilpin ultimately defined the goal of landscape art differently, Eagles with the poetical and Gilpin with the picturesque, both artists agreed on closely studying the details of the landscape. As Eagles ventured from Grasmere to Ambleside on his journey, it is evident that he wanted to make a perfect study of the northern entrance into the town of Ambleside (fig. 9 and fig. 10).

In two of the four images, Eagles sketched nearly the same view but from different distances and slightly different angles. The first viewpoint faces south, where the tall trees and white buildings, reminiscent of Francis Towne’s images of Ambleside, are evident. One of the images is closer to town, with a few more details in the trees and buildings and the figures on the path are slightly clearer. The second image is farther away, losing some of the detail, but also gaining a wider views of the mountains in the distance. In another image near the same location, Eagles moved to the other side of the stream pictured in the first



Figure 9: *Ambleside 8 Sept 1812*



Figure 10: *Ambleside 8 Sept 1812*



Figure 11: *Ambleside 8 Sept 1812*



Figure 12: *Near Ambleside*

two views and faced the opposite direction, north, to capture the stone wall also found in the first two images (fig. 11). In the fourth image, Eagles positioned himself closer to the town and completely turned around to face north away from Ambleside (fig. 12). The tall, thin trees are evident, as is part of one of the white buildings in the first two images. From Ambleside, Eagles travelled south to Coniston where six of the images in the Collection were created. The Old Inn at the head of Coniston is portrayed from several different angles (fig. 13, fig. 14 and fig. 15). The differences in these images suggest that they are either



Figure 13: *Coniston 11 Sept 1812*



Figure 14: *Coniston 11 Sept 1812*



Figure 15: *Coniston Lake*

attempts to understand the scene from multiple perspectives or possibly the work of multiple artists, working side by side, sketching the same views. Other duplicate views in the Collection include three views of Haweswater, two of Ullswater, and two of Grasmere.

Within these careful studies of the landscape is also conveyed another similarity between Eagles and Gilpin: a “truthful” representation of the landscape. Based on the picturesque aesthetic, the artist was permitted to rearrange a scene in order to make it picturesque, “Trees he may generally plant, or remove, at pleasure...he may throw down a cottage” (*Cumberland* xxvvi). Gilpin also warned, however, “It is truth you desire and not

fiction" (xxvi). "As Gilpin saw it," observes Goldsmith, "the aim of art was not to provide 'an exact resemblance of nature,' but rather to engage the involvement of the viewer by providing 'those bold, those strong characteristic touches which excite the imagination'" (192). Though Eagles and Gilpin agreed on truthfully representing the landscape, both artists also emphasized the importance of not creating an exact copy of a scene. Gilpin believed that a picturesque image was not simply a geographical survey of the landscape, "It is certainly an error in landscape painting to comprehend too much. It turns a picture into a map" (*Observations* 160). Instead, there must be a sense of imagination within the painting, "he who works from imagination," wrote Gilpin, "will in all probability, make a much better landscape, than he who takes all as it comes" (*Cumberland* xxv-xxvi). There was a line between truthfully representing the landscape but also interjecting a sense of imagination, so as not to simply provide a topographical view of the landscape, which was not considered art. Eagles more clearly tied these seemingly disparate ideas together, "[The Artist's] creations must have that relation to truth: he may, shunning exact imitation, idealise, but it must ever be upon the *suggestions* of Nature; to contradict which, is to take flight beyond all legitimate boundaries of art" (*Sketcher* 6). Though they both believed in seeking the natural landscape and faithfully representing it with an artist's sense of imagination, the resulting aesthetics were different. Whereas Gilpin's observations resulted in the creation of a picturesque image, Eagles studied nature in order to convey a poetical sketch of the landscape.

IV

A Poetical Shelter

"That land of peace, that lies between Fairy Land and our common working world" (Sketcher 17).

Eagles sought to convey on canvas what Wordsworth and other poets inspired by Lake District scenery conveyed through poetry. With a poet's sensibility, Wordsworth famously experienced, "with an eye made quiet by the power/ Of Harmony, and the deep power of joy" (47), the ability to "see into the life of things" (49). Similarly, Eagles with an artistic eye, endeavored to see and translate to canvas something more in nature than what was readily observable to others. The poetry of nature, therefore, was what Eagles sought to convey in his art by reaching beyond what nature presented on the surface, what was referred to in *The Sketcher* as a scene "more living and forcible than the rest" (*Sketcher* viii). Eagles's references to the poetry of nature is an ideal continually echoed throughout his writing. A few pages into *The Sketcher*, Eagles offered the cornerstone of his aesthetic:

For the ultimate end of [the sketcher's] art should be to create, at all events to portray, the poetry of Nature, which is, in other words, the poetry that is in his own mind. This sense of poetry, this poetical faculty, is to be cultivated. The poetry of Nature hides itself, is to be sought, and can only be found by those who know what, in a general sense, they have to look for. (4)

For Eagles, art should embody the inverse of what Horace referenced in *Ars Poetica: ut pictura poesis*, (as is painting, so is poetry). Eagles saw art and poetry as reciprocal, reliant upon one another in order to create what he viewed as enduring, quality art, not simply a frame-able picturesque representation or one created for an exhibition room. "Poetry and painting are sister arts," discussed *The Sketcher and Pictor*, "A painter cannot too much

study poetry—reading and practicing it” (108). Eagles also encouraged his fellow artists in The Bristol School to read poetry before going out into nature to sketch:

I have often thought a sketcher would do well to read some delightful tale, say in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* or Spenser, and then, with the character of picture vivid in his mind, go forth to the rocks, the woods, and wilds, and sketch and paint in, on the spot...and with poetry in his heart he will not be afraid to heighten a little, for Nature will often give him but a glimpse, where he must imagine a great deal.

(“Sketcher” IV 529)

Associating painting and poetry elevated the composition of the image and the artist’s role. Whereas only the poet can produce poetry, only a true painter can see the “hidden” poetry of nature and convey that on canvas. Sir Joshua Reynolds, a founder and the first president of the Royal Academy, expressed a similar idea in *Discourses*, “Art in its perfection is not ostentatious; it lies hid and works its effect, itself unseen. It is the proper study and labor of an artist to uncover and find out the latent cause of conspicuous beauties, and from thence form principles of his own conduct” (99-100). Reynolds also wrote on the idea of the “sister arts” and the relationship of the painter and poet, “A painter is but a poetical mind, operating through the means of a palette and brushes” (8). Eagles mentioned Reynolds in *The Sketcher* and evidently had Reynolds’s writing in mind when he expressed, “If you can see no poetry in nature, beyond what is on the retina of your eye, you want the mind’s eye to constitute the painter; you must be the poet, or discard the idea of the pursuit;” (11).

The painter’s imagination was another key concern for Eagles. Using the “mind’s eye” not only elevated the vocation of the painter, but it also alluded to the imaginative faculty necessary to illustrate a scene. Eagles had a clear notion of what exactly an image

should convey and this was the cornerstone of his argument, “The scene should be a poetical shelter from the world, and if in anything partaking of it, it should be only so much as would show it to be part and parcel of the ‘debatable land’ that lies between Fairy Land and the cold working world” (12). This idea manifested itself in different forms throughout *The Sketcher*, but the premise remained the same. To understand “a poetical shelter from the world” is to understand what guided Eagles’s art, writing, and his criticisms of landscape art.

Within his aesthetic, Eagles essentially drew a line between what a scene should be—repose, shelter, poetic, imaginative, nature—and what it should not be—the realities of a restless, harsh, fallen world. Eagles referenced the world twice in his ‘poetical shelter’ statement, and repeated it in other passages as the “common working world.” In the first serial installment of *The Sketcher*, Eagles presented this same statement, but replaced “cold working world” with “cold Utilitarian world” (684). Regardless of his phrasing, Eagles’s implication remained the same, that a scene should not be encumbered with the realities of the world. Conversely, a shelter is a safe refuge from outside elements and a poetical shelter, specifically, implies finding solace in being surrounded by nature. Shelter is also connected with the term repose, which is equally significant and appears directly before and after this idea, “And always remember that repose is the beauty of the landscape,” and, “As it is to be shelter, remember rest” (12). Eagles was adamant about repose, that a painting should invite the viewer’s eye to calmly roam over and enjoy the image. The scene should neither excite nor startle the eye, which did not enable to viewer to look over the painting for long periods of time. Repose was also the opposite of the realities of the bustling, working world. Eagles’s observation in *The Sketcher*, “How strange that men living

in the heat and turmoil, and sooty atmosphere, of some obscure parts of the crowded and reeking metropolis, who, perhaps, scarcely saw nature in her green, variegated, and refreshing beauty, should at once...have such feeling for romantic landscape" (29-30) directly echoes Wordsworth's "din/ Of towns and cities" (27-8) and "the fever of the world" (54). The "quiet," "deep seclusion," "tranquil restoration," and "serene and blessed mood" that Wordsworth was mentally comforted by while reflecting on the English landscape is similar to the "poetical shelter" that Eagles sought to experience *in* nature and convey on canvas.

In the second part of Eagles's quote, we gain further insight into what Eagles believed an image should also show. An image should exclusively depict nature with the only exception being people or objects that are integral to an unseen, enchanted, imaginary land. The "debatable land" which is interestingly defined both as "questionable" and "on the border of England and Scotland" (OED), suggests that an image should convey more than just a location, it should visually transcend that physical location. Whether or not Eagles had the Lake District in mind when using the phrase "debatable land" is open for interpretation, but it is evident that he at least wished to evoke the idea of a place outside of the common working world in his art. That Eagles mentioned "Fairy Land" also reinforced his emphasis on creating art that reflected something beyond what we see in the realities of the physical world. Eagles believed that a painting should appeal not just to the eye, but also to the mind's eye, or, imagination. If he wished to distance himself from the cold working world to study the poetry of nature and to seek his "Fairy Land," it made sense that Eagles sought his poetical shelter in the Lake District.

There are several images in the 1812 Collection that demonstrate a consciousness of “a poetical shelter from the world.” Among the most poetical images are those that have no identifiable characteristics such as homes or towns. In one of the watercolor images, Eagles captured a quiet stream in a heavily wooded area (fig. 16). The Old Man of Coniston and adjoining mountains rise high in the background, peering over an opening surrounded by trees. As the eye wanders casually over the picture, what appears to be a line of stepping-stones reaches across the stream. To the right of picture is a path, leading through the woods, away from the stream. The image evokes a sense of intimacy with the surrounding trees sheltering from the mountains in the distance. The line of stepping-stones and path along the side of the stream offer interesting details that evoke a sense of enchantment. The colors also offer repose, from the gray green mountains to the variations of the green in the trees, to the browns of the rocks and path, there are only natural tones. If Eagles had not labeled the image “Rydal 6 Sept 1812,” the viewer would not necessarily be able to identify the location, it could be anywhere or, as Eagles intended it, the image does not show the “common working world,” but instead presents a peaceful escape. In one of the pen and ink



Figure 16: Rydal 6 Sept 1812



Figure 17: *Ullswater 12 Sept 1812*

wash images near Ullswater, Eagles sketched a less intimate, but no less poetical view (fig. 17). The scene faces south, capturing a path along the Eastern side of Ullswater. The lake, mountains, and clouds are in the distance on the left hand side of the sketch and appear nearly equal in height to the trees on the right hand side in the foreground of the image. A large, distinctive tree hanging over the path offers shelter to the small, barely visible figure walking down the path towards the grove. As with Eagles's Grasmere sketch, the viewer is invited into the scene and feels a sense of repose with his use of sepia tones. Most of the images in the 1812 Collection, like this one, possess a poetical consciousness. A beam of sunlight breaking through the clouds onto Ullswater, a boathouse tucked along the edge of calm Rydal water, a glimpse of the blue sky above Coniston, a nameless path near Borrowdale, a grove near Grasmere, these are the images that illustrate the poetry in nature that Eagles had in mind when he wrote *The Sketcher* and what he sought to convey in the images created during his tour of the Lakes.

Though the 1812 Collection did not reflect Eagles's poetical shelter ideal in its entirety, the images show an early foundation for the aesthetic that Eagles later wrote

about in *The Sketcher*. The images are unique in relation to the prolific body of Lake District art because the images exhibit characteristics both of the picturesque tour and of Eagles's aesthetic. The poetical and the picturesque were not entirely different in that they both sought to represent nature through art. The key, underlying difference was that Eagles did not impose an aesthetic on nature, but rather sought to expose "the soul of every scene," and to convey this deeper understanding of nature. Eagles's aesthetic marks a transition from Gilpin's traditional picturesque landscapes to attempting to translate the infinite and unknowable "soul" of nature onto canvas. Eagles conveyed this transition in *The Sketcher*: "Gentle sketcher, when you take your portfolio among the mountains, into the woods and wilds, you must learn so to half-shut your eyes, like Gaspar, that you may have the power to reject; then set your imagination free, cut the strings of tight-laced formality, and walk elastic" (39). Cutting the "tight-laced formality" of the picturesque and allowing the artist's imagination to explore nature is another way of understanding what Eagles sought in landscape art.

V

Conflicting Aesthetics

"Are there any landscape painters yet living in the world?" (Sketcher, No. 1, 683).

Until now, Eagles's tour of the Lake District during the early years of his artistic career has gone virtually unnoted by biographers and critics who focus primarily on Eagles's critical reviews of J.M.W. Turner's Royal Academy Exhibitions. The 1812 Collection was not referenced, nor directly related to Eagles's criticisms of Turner. However, Eagles's

aesthetic, as exhibited by his early Lake District images, informed his concerns with landscape art. As a transitional figure from the picturesque tradition to modern landscapes, Eagles adhered to the traditional style of the Old Masters, but also sought a more imaginative element within his art. What Eagles saw in Turner's modern art, however, was what he described in *The Sketcher* as, "[taking] flight beyond all legitimate boundaries of Art" (6). Understanding Eagles's aesthetic and taking into consideration the recently rediscovered 1812 Collection provides a new perspective on Eagles's criticisms of Turner than has been previously explored.

In the early years of the Royal Academy exhibitions, the Lake District was a popular subject matter, as evidenced by the numerous landscapes that were exhibited. As Powell notes, "Derwentwater and Windermere were the most popular subjects...Farington was the first to show a painting of the waterfall at Rydal" (5). In 1798, after his own tour of the Lakes, Turner exhibited *Buttermere Lake, with Part of Cromackwater, Cumberland, a Shower*. By the time Eagles began writing for Blackwood's in 1831, the composition, color, and subject matter of exhibition art no longer reflected the poetical shelter that he enjoyed in the traditional landscape art of the Old Masters, "We know not how to account for nearly the total absence of landscape in Somerset House" (555), wrote Eagles in one of his many reviews, "as usual, we have to lament the absence of landscape—composition landscape" ("Exhibitions" 26). The transition from traditional landscape paintings to those "made for an exhibition room" was Eagles's larger concern for the changes he witnessed in the exhibitions, particularly in Turner's work. When Eagles instructed sketchers to "cut the strings of tight laced formality and walk elastic" he probably did not anticipate Turner's disregard for traditional artistic conventions of the time. Like any artist, Turner's style

evolved from his 1798 Lake District landscape images to his impressionistic landscapes filled with bright colors and vague figures exhibited 1836. This was troublesome for Eagles, who at one time revered Turner as a great landscape artist, "we recollect," wrote Eagles, "when the first great change in watercolours [sic] began with landscape, many very beautiful and original specimens of English genius. When Turner was really great" (555). Eagles was not always critical of Turner and this fact is often overlooked by scholars who focus solely on the 1836 review that incited a response from Ruskin that "raised [him] to the height of black anger" (*Works* 217).

Eagles's review(s) included commentary on several other exhibited works, a significant point also often ignored by scholars, and one that speaks to a larger issue than simply Eagles personally attacking Turner's work. Constable and Turner, the two leading landscape artists, demonstrated what Eagles viewed as an increased predominance of imaginative effects in their paintings, "the old masters delighted in shade and depth," wrote Eagles, "modern artists delight in glare and glitter, foil and tinsel, in staring bare-faced defiance of shade and repose, as if quietness were a crime" (543). As Adams observes, "The exhibitions had tended to make painting into a kind of public entertainment or show, and this encouraged the production of effects" (Adams 73). Effects were what Eagles found primarily troublesome in Turner's works. Though he believed in conveying the natural landscape with an element of the artist's imagination, Eagles also believed, like Gilpin, in conveying nature, not embellishing the scene nor adding effects. Among other terms defined in his *Essays Upon Prints*, Gilpin defined the term "effect" as "Aris[ing] chiefly from the management of light; but the word is sometimes applied to the general view of the picture" (*Prints* x). Had Gilpin lived long enough to see Turner's R.A. Exhibitions, he would

have found no trace of the picturesque and perhaps would have even agreed with Eagles's reviews. In his own writings, Gilpin emphasized, "The grand natural scene, will always appear so superior to the embellished artificial one; that the picturesque eye in contemplating the former, will be too apt to look contemptuously on the latter" (*Essays* xii). Eagles was wary of art that exhibited mere effect, embellishments, and what he referred to as "vapoury softness." In *The Sketcher*, Eagles made it clear that he sought in art, "landscape, and effects are not landscape" (32).

Turner's use of effects (as defined by Gilpin) was of paramount concern to Eagles in his 1836 review, where Eagles found them, both in Turner's composition (general view) and colors (management of light). *Juliet and Her Nurse* was, in his view, "a strange jumble—confusion worse confounded... thrown higgledy-piggledy together," *Rome from Mount Aventine*, "a most unpleasant mixture...with childish execution," and *Mercury and Argus* was "perfectly childish" (551). None of Eagles's criticisms of the R.A. Exhibitions should have been a surprise to those familiar with *The Sketcher*. Many of the criticisms he expressed about Turner in 1836 were already evident in the second installment of *The Sketcher* in 1833, "his skies,—his town views, their stir, and bustle, and vapour [sic]; all which, I nevertheless think, astonish too much, and I confess I seldom look at them twice" (953). In the 10th installment of *The Sketcher* in 1835, Eagles wrote of Turner's *The Bright Stone of Honor and Tomb of Marceau*, "All jumble and confusion in effect, colour, and composition...the texture is perfectly fuzzy. It represents nothing substantial or unsubstantial, neither earth, air, fire, nor water...There is not as much poetry as the paring of a nail" ("Sketcher" XII 201). It is also important to note that Eagles was not alone in these kinds of criticisms of Turner's work. Sir George Beaumont, another admirer of the old

masters, especially Claude Lorrain, was one of Turner's most vehement critics, often finding fault with Turner's colors. In 1828 the *Literary Gazette* referred to Turner's *Dido directing the Equipment of the Fleet* as, "a glare of violent colours [sic]" adding "There is scarcely a word of truth in the whole picture." Two years later *The Spectator* wrote, "Turner falsifies not only actual scenes but effects of nature" (Costello 159). All of these complaints of effect, color, the jumbled composition and particularly the lack of poetry are exactly what Eagles found fault with in his infamous 1836 review. Eagles was not solely critical of Turner, however, he saw Turner's growing popularity as a result of abandoning traditional landscape art in exchange for imaginative effects that were popular with the public in an exhibition room. For Eagles, Turner's works spearheaded the transition from traditional landscape art filled with repose, shelter, and a "truthful" representation of nature to conveying landscapes representative of a "cold working world."

Creating art with effects for public consumption in an exhibition room not only meant that the artist was detached from nature, no longer traversing the landscape and creating from experience, but it also signified a commodification of art, "The larger concern for Eagles and Blackwood's was the loss of traditional values amidst the commercialism" writes Costello, "the effects of individual ambition, entrepreneurship, and self aggrandizement" (125). This is not to say that the evolution in Turner's works was the direct result of commercialism or even that Turner was painting specifically for public consumption, yet it does raise a correlational question, as Eagles did. "The public taste has run mad after effects, wonders, and novelties," observed Eagles, "and will perform or look to little else. And this is particularly vile in landscape, in which we want true pastoral in the painter, and the characteristic execution of our old etchers" (*Sketcher* 32). The transition

from private sketchbook to an exhibition room was more than just physical, it was representative of the rising commercialism of art and, for traditional landscape artists like Eagles, a growing disconnect with nature.

Given Eagles's "poetical shelter from the world" principle, it is much clearer to see why he was later critical of Turner's paintings. As exhibitions displayed more of what he regarded as "effects," Eagles believed that also meant a decrease in poetry, "I must say, then, that the two exhibitions of the Royal Academy, Somerset House, and the Society of Painters in Water Colours [sic], Pall-Mall, are greatly deficient in poetical feeling" (302). One only has to read Eagles's comments on Turner's colors and composition to understand that they do not reflect Eagles's 'poetical shelter from the world.' Eagles's own traditional landscape art and his guiding principle reflect his desire to capture "the soul of every scene," to reach beyond what was evident to the eye and seek the poetry of nature. Eagles's aesthetic produced art that was "built upon general nature" as opposed to transient art that was the "fluctuation of fashion," as described several years earlier by Reynolds in his *Discourses* (72). "The old masters of landscape never painted extraordinary effects;" wrote Eagles, "they aimed more at permanent and general nature than accidental and evanescent beauties" (*Sketcher* 13). Throughout all of Eagles's reviews, there is a lament for traditional landscape art that he believed possessed an enduring quality. Overall, Eagles's aesthetic highlighted a moral dichotomy between his poetical shelter, which represented elevated, divine, eternal qualities versus modern art which he described as "chaos" and representative of worldly and fleeting art: "and where is the Poesy of Painting all this while? She has withdrawn, and refused to be dragged on the excursion into Chaos" (13). Discovering the poetry of nature and a poetical shelter was closely tied to the natural

landscape, not the modern world, and discovered by artists like Gilpin and Eagles, who traversed the countryside in search of it.

As a landscape artist, who found repose in nature and sought to convey those “poetical shelters” on canvas, Eagles maintained his traditional aesthetic in spite of the popularity of Turner’s effects. Though he never profited from his art as Turner did, Eagles achieved something arguably just as important for himself and for the Gilpinesque tradition. The 1812 Collection is a testament to Eagles’s desire to create landscape art based on first-hand observations *in* nature. Eagles stayed true to his aesthetic throughout his life, dedicated to sketching and writing about art, even in his later reviews he emphasized, “the very principles of landscape painting...that it is open to poetry” (555). Though Eagles was fondly remembered and revered by his close friends after his death in 1855, his historical significance as an art critic and amateur artist, whose work included early sketches of the Lake District, would become all-but-forgotten.

Now that the 1812 Collection has been rediscovered and connected with Eagles, perhaps a new portrait of Eagles will emerge. Instead of being remembered simply as the hateful reviewer of Turner’s work, Eagles will be regarded as a noteworthy landscape artist with an aesthetic that reflected his passion for art and his desire to discover the poetry of nature. Because Eagles sought his poetical shelter from the world, he was not traditional enough to live within the boundaries of the picturesque, yet not modern enough to create completely outside of those boundaries as Turner did. The 1812 Collection not only helps to illustrate Eagles’s ideas in *The Sketcher*, the images also demonstrate the broader significance of the picturesque tour for Eagles and countless others who continue to travel to the Lake District in search of similar scenery.

In a private conversation, Jeff Cowton, Curator at The Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, commented that the seventy-four Lake District images were purchased because, “They are so original, fresh, fantastic, and full of potential for display and research.” For all that has been uncovered about Eagles and his tour, there is still much to be discovered. As new insights on Eagles and the 1812 Collection emerge, they will be posted on a website I created and dedicated to Project Eagles: *apoeticalshelter.com*. Whether Eagles is remembered for his early sketches in the Lake District, his membership in the Bristol School of Artists, or for insulting Turner’s work and inciting Ruskin, the point is that Eagles and his work are once again remembered.

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