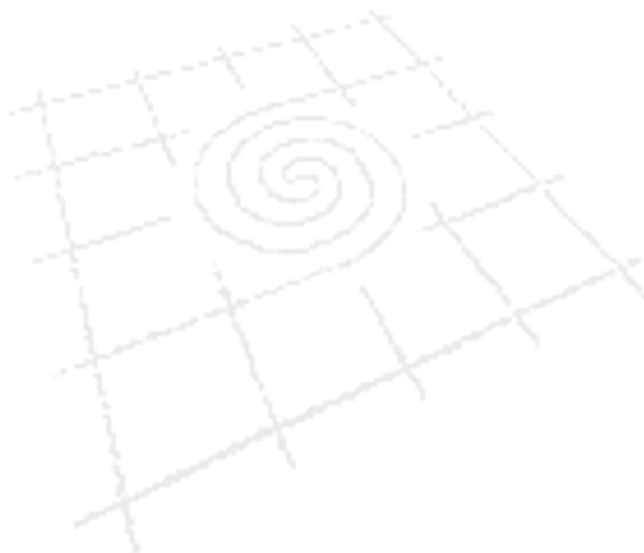


## The Postcolonial Landscape Aesthetic of the *Quiet Man*

Eamonn Slater



# **The Postcolonial Landscape Aesthetic of the *Quiet Man***

**Eamonn Slater**

**Department of Sociology and NIRSA, NUIM**

*Abstract:* This paper explores how a cinematic representation of landscape appropriates not just the material objects of the landscape backdrop but can also simultaneously ‘capture’ an ideological framework in which the landscape objects are physically embedded in. This process of embedding an ideological framework is a consequence of society at some historical point intentionally designing the landscape to have a particular affect on the ‘seeing-eye’, - in effect constructing a garden. In choosing a considerable amount of the movie locations from within the grounds of Ashford Castle to represent Irish landscape the collective cinematographers of the *Quiet Man* appropriated an idealised English looking landscape - a garden which was designed to look ‘natural’. This type of garden is known as the Informal style or the Picturesque which originated in the eighteenth century England and is associated with the endeavours of Capability Brown and his followers. And the Picturesque style of garden was adopted by the large property owning classes of Britain and later by their class peers throughout the British Empire. Therefore, Ashford Castle and the other large landed estates of Ireland created Brownian gardens in the image of ‘little Englands’ in their grounds. Consequently, the landscape aesthetic of the *Quiet Man* is in designed terms closer to England than Ireland, but when Ford filmed in these idealised grounds he appropriated an English landscape garden to become the best known representation of Irish landscape in the world of the global cinema.

# The Postcolonial Landscape Aesthetic of the *Quiet Man*

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*When Edmund Burke, the Irish philosopher and aesthete, wished to illustrate by example his theory of beauty, he did not choose a piece of classical statuary, an inspiring ode, nor even a beautiful woman, but one of the experiences of a Brownian park.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Gibbons on the Cinematic Representation of Irish Landscape:**

Luke Gibbons dramatically proposed that landscape as it has been represented in Irish cinema tended to play a leading role, to such an extent that it ‘upstaged’ the main characters and narrative themes in the construction of Ireland on the screen.<sup>2</sup> John Ford’s movie, *The Quiet Man* was no exception in this regard. Gibbons backs up his assertion by referring to a contemporary reviewer’s commentary on the movie:

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<sup>1</sup> Keith Lamb & Patrick Bowe, *A History of Gardening in Ireland* (Dublin: National Botanical Gardens, 1995), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Luke Gibbons, ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema’, *Cinema and Ireland*, ed. by Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and John Hill (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 203

there can be no quarrel with Ford's fine treatment of the scenery he found in the West (West of Ireland). It is a lovely background caught in soft shades of technicolour and as real as one could wish. The camera lingers on it lovingly, almost reluctant one would imagine at times, to be getting on with the story.<sup>3</sup>

To begin, I want to 'quarrel' with Ford's representation of Irish landscape by suggesting that what gets depicted as authentic Irish landscape in the movie is atypical rather than the more prevalent landscape of bog and mountain in the West of Ireland. Ford's 'lovely background' to his action is generally a parkland garden, an Anglo-Irish landlord landscape. The reason for this has to do with the complex relationship between landscape appreciation, romanticism and landscape gardening of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the appropriation of their historical 'entails' by the twentieth century movie industry.

However, before we explore this complex matrix of intertextual and transhistorical relationships, let us continue our examination of the structure of cinematic representation of Irish landscape through the work of Gibbons. He goes on to suggest that this preoccupation with Irish landscape dates back to the emergence of romanticism in the eighteenth century. Des Bell has argued for a direct historical link between romanticism and film.<sup>4</sup> In a more recent article, Gibbons cites the work of Raymond Immerwahr in suggesting that the opening up of picturesque locations of Ireland to the modern traveller in the 1740's was one of the founding moments of European Romanticism.<sup>5</sup> European romantics constituted a dazzling assortment of artistic talents and classes which came together in their opposition to the apparent rationalism of the Enlightenment and their rejection of urban industrial life.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the inherent anti-urbanism of the early romantics determined that as an intellectual movement Romanticism was going to have its emotional 'home' in the rural countryside. The countryside through the romantic perspective was to embody the lost virtues of simplicity and natural harmony.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Des Bell observes that 'there seems to be a clear line of historical development leading from the late eighteenth century romantic landscape tradition with its painterly search for the sublime, to the picturesque knick knacks of the turn of the century, via the contrived dioramas of the mid-century, and via the stage designs and special effects of the melodrama in the last decades of the nineteenth century, eventually to the advent of cinema in the early twentieth century. Film, once it had shaken itself free from the scientism that early photography had bequeathed to it, drew on the rich imagination of Romanticism to offer its audiences a "higher reality"'. [Des Bell, 'Framing Nature: First Steps into the Wilderness for a Sociology of the Landscape', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1993) 14]

<sup>5</sup> Luke Gibbons, 'Topographies of Terror: Killarney and the Politics of the Sublime', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 95.1 (Winter, 1996) 25. Quoting Raymond Immerwahr, "'Romantic' and its Cognates in England, Germany and France before 1790', *Romanticism and its Cognates: The European History of the Word*, ed. by Hans Eichner (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> David Pepper, *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 77.

However, according to Gibbons, the romantic relationship to nature was not a simple one, but a mediated relationship, which can take on many forms. He himself identified two, the American and the Irish form.

In American romanticism, nature was to be experienced in a raw elemental condition, more or less in the state in which God had left it.<sup>7</sup> Nature and wilderness in this perspective was to be devoid of any symbolic associations with history or legend. Language and society were not permitted to enter this 'natural' terrain of the romantic. In these circumstances, the romantic quest was to be experienced in silence and in solitude.<sup>8</sup> Recently, John Urry has described this condition as the romantic gaze.<sup>9</sup> In contrast to American romanticism, Gibbons suggests that:

Irish romanticism, though no less concerned with the celebration of wilderness and natural disorder, is from the outset characterised by an aversion to individualism and the clarity of vision required by the puritan ideal. Perception is accorded no primacy over language, so that there is little evidence of any wish to apprehend nature in a pristine unadulterated state, free from any symbolic or linguistic contamination.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, in Irish romanticism nature and landscape can never be reduced to the mere physicality of scenery but always bear some traces of cultural meaning. This symbolic meaning to landscape can be given by the presence of ruins in that landscape or by narrative accounts (both oral or written). Gibbons draws the following important implication from his analysis:

The point of drawing attention to this interpretation of nature as a symbolic field is to underline the case for treating landscape in romantic images of Ireland not merely as a picturesque backdrop, but as a layer of meaning in its own right, a thematic element which may cut across the other levels of meaning in a text.<sup>11</sup>

But the picturesque backdrop can have its own symbolic field when we are able to read the text inscribed in the landscape.

He concludes this section by suggesting that landscape can operate on two levels, one which conforms to a realist, pictorial aesthetic and which represents the vantage point of the outsider,

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<sup>7</sup> Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> John Urry, 'The Consumption of Tourism', *Sociology*, 24 (1990) 31.

<sup>10</sup> Gibbons, 'Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema', p. 208

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

and the other which refuses instant or immediate access and the kind of transparency which is integral to the tourist or colonial vision.<sup>12</sup> The latter can be interpreted as the insider's or native gaze.<sup>13</sup> But the crucial point to be grasped from Gibbon's analysis is that there are not only two differing forms of romantic interpretations of landscape, but they can also be competing with each other for dominance. And the structure of the contest between these competing interpretations and the subsequent emergence of one as dominant may depend on the actual context (and crucially the text) in which this struggle is fought out in.<sup>14</sup> We also should be careful in not accepting the idea that the American version of romantic appreciation of landscape is without its own symbolic associations, that is, is not mediated through a language or a framework. Even the landscape connoisseur of the American puritan mould did not stand in front of a scene without thoughts and concepts passing through his or her head. On the contrary, according to John Barrell, the contemplation of the landscape was not a passive activity but involved reconstructing the landscape in the imagination according to the principles of composition of the picturesque. And these principles had to be learned and were indeed learned so thoroughly that in the later eighteenth century it became impossible for anyone with an aesthetic interest in landscape to look at the countryside without applying them, whether s/he knew s/he was doing so or not.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the appearance of silence from a landscape connoisseur does not imply the absence of language or cultural symbols but can imply the diametrical opposite. As a consequence, the dualism of language/silence has to be superseded as a way of making sense of how we relate to nature and wilderness. I want to argue that it is better to investigate how the landscape is constructed as a cultural object, either ideologically or physically, or both. With this approach in mind, let us return to the 'lovely background...of soft shades' in *The Quiet Man*.

### **The visual extravaganza of the scenic backdrops to the *Quiet Man*:**

Here, I want to examine some backdrop scenes from the movie. One of the first scenic locations of the movie is when Michaleen Oge (Barry Fitzgerald) and Sean Thornton (John Wayne) meet Father Lonergan (Victor McLaglen) on the way to Innisfree. Michaleen is seen

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> In a previous article - 'Contested Terrain: Differing Interpretations of Co. Wicklow's Landscape', *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1993) - , I argued that the insider perspective on landscape should be conceptualised as the native gaze and the outsider's gaze as picturesque.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-55.

<sup>15</sup> John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place: 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 6.

driving Sean along through the countryside in a jaunting cart as is depicted in the following still (Fig. 1):



Fig. 1. *The Quiet Man* (Republic Pictures, 1952)

There are a number of things I find rather curious about this particular setting. The first is the way we are able to see the jaunting car moving through the landscape from a side angle, as if it is sailing through a vast sea of grass. What is unusual about this depiction of the West and especially Connemara is the actual vastness of the field which allows us such an uninterrupted long shot. The typical Connemara landscape is made up either of a patchwork of small fields divided by small stone walls,<sup>16</sup> within which grass is produced as a crop, or of a vast expanse of poor unproductive bog without any walls.<sup>17</sup> The latter is held in commonage by the local farmers, from which they produce turf. Secondly, we as spectators are placed under a clump of trees as indicated by the dark shadow falling over the grass in the foreground. The background is similarly made up of tree clusters or clumps. All these tree clusters seem to consist of differing species as indicated by the contrasting shapes of the tree trunks in the foreground and varying colour tones in the background. But, trees and especially clusters are not typical in the West of Ireland. Where trees do exist they do so in industrial type plantations planted in linear rows and

<sup>16</sup> Éamon de Buitléar, *Ireland's Wild Countryside* (London: Tiger Books International, 1993), p. 86.

<sup>17</sup> David Bellamy, *Bellamy's Ireland: The Wild Boglands* (Dublin: Country House, 1986), p. 1.

are of one particular species, but never in clusters of broadleaf and evergreen. This setting therefore indicates that the land is being underutilised for productive purposes, either for forestry or agricultural production. In actual fact the mixing of the two suggests an extravaganza.

The following scene has another example of visual extravaganza. As Michaeleen and Sean pass along the now visible road, an old Celtic cross comes into view (Fig. 2):



Fig. 2. *The Quiet Man* (Republic Pictures, 1952)

There are two odd things about this scene. Firstly, with regard to the cross, there are no religious icons depicted on it. Also, it has extremely elaborate art work for a mere boundary cross, and therefore it should be in a graveyard not on the side of the road. This oddity begs the following question: Is this an authentic ruin or is it a folly, constructed to look like a ruin? I suggest that we see it as a folly and therefore its value to the scene cannot be judged from the view point of historical accuracy or authenticity. It merely stands as a token of historical development, but also because it is seen to be leaning over this historical legacy is itself seeming to be deteriorating. And as a folly, the cross's function in the shot is to exude an air of decay. Secondly, with regard to the roadway, it appears to be sunken into the ground on both sides. The consequence of this is that there is a good likelihood that this road would flood in heavy rain, unless there is extensive underground draining provided. The sunken aspect of this roadway



implies that someone has constructed it this way in order to hide it. This is no ordinary landscape!

Sean and Michaelleen continue their sojourn through this exotic landscape until they meet the local priest. The next still depicts the jaunting car approaching the priest.<sup>18</sup> Here, we are provided with the most panoramic view of the landscape in this sequence (Fig. 3):



Fig. 3. *The Quiet Man* (Republic Pictures, 1952)

What is unusual about this view in the Irish context is the sense of freedom which it conveys, freedom with regard to a person's ability to move from the public highway into the surrounding countryside without being impeded by fence or a stone wall. Fences and walls are the physical manifestation of private property and society's attempt to control access to rural space. But here these normal rural boundaries do not exist suggesting maybe that private property may also not be operating in this exotic place. These depictions are getting close to a pre-modern world, a world without constraint, an arcadia. This arcadian theme is continued in the next still and final scene in this sequence. Here, John Wayne has dismounted from the car and sees Maureen O'Hara for the first time (Fig 4.):

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<sup>18</sup> Gerry McGuinness, *The Quiet Man* (Dublin: GLI Limited, 1996), p. 24.



Fig. 2. *The Quiet Man* (Republic Pictures, 1952)

Gibbons has subtitled this particular shot as ‘paradise regained’<sup>19</sup> and states the following:

Here, in John Ford’s most memorable evocation of the pastoral ideal, we see a radiant Mary Kate (Maureen O’Hara) driving sheep through a primeval forest in luminous sunlight, a perfectly realised image of woman at home with nature.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Picturesque Garden:**

It could be stated against my approach that this is just one ideological reading of *The Quiet Man* among many. But there is a material basis for my interpretation of the landscape depicted in this movie. The reason for this is that the backdrop to this sequence of events (and many subsequent ones) from the movie were filmed in the parklands of Ashford Castle, Co. Mayo. As a parkland, it is a garden, designed by landscape gardeners according to certain principles and therefore was conceived to have a predetermined effect on the viewing subject. In short, it is an ideology ‘made flesh’ by the ‘natural’ forms of reconstructed terrain and selected species of vegetation. Therefore, the visible oddities which we have highlighted are a result of an

<sup>19</sup> Luke Gibbons, ‘Romanticism, Realism and Irish Cinema’, p. 162.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

established set of meanings that are fixed before the construction of these pleasure parklands.<sup>21</sup> Within such vast stretches of pasture, panoramic vistas of uninterrupted landscape can be got from sunken serpentine-like roadways. Such spectacular views were only interrupted by obvious artificial follies and by clumps of trees scattered through the landscape without any apparent order to them. Therefore, these landscape ‘oddities’ as depicted in the movie are a result of gardening. But crucially this type of gardening was not an attempt to highlight the exotic features of the Irish landscape, but to make those ‘natural’ Irish features look like an English landscape, a little England in Ireland. To make sense of this contradiction, we need to go back beyond Ford’s time in the West of Ireland to the eighteenth century and to the world of art.

According to John Barrell, the word landscape is originally a painter’s word,<sup>22</sup> first introduced from Dutch in the sixteenth century to describe a pictorial representation of the countryside. Later the word came to include within its meaning both the sense of countryside represented in a picture, and another, of a piece of countryside considered as a visual phenomenon. In the latter sense, the concept has jumped from its pictorial frame, to mean all that could be seen at one glance from a fixed position, usually from an eminence. But not only did it go into commonsense understanding of landscape, it also emerged within philosophy, with the appearance of Edmund Burke’s work in 1757, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke was the first to develop philosophical ideas in the appreciation of scenery. Beauty was smooth, rounded, and induced feelings of peace and well-being. Sublime on the other hand was rugged, ‘awe-full’, and produced feelings of horror and fright.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, these categories created a dualism, the dualism of the beautiful and the sublime and this became identified in the public mind as a pair of binary opposites from the 1760s onwards.<sup>24</sup> Parallel to this movement of aesthetic categories between painting, philosophy, and scenery appreciation was a more mundane development in landscape gardening. All of these developments were intrinsically connected with each other. But the emergence of the new English-style garden of the mid-eighteenth century was a further development because the abstract categories of the beautiful and the sublime were now going to

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<sup>21</sup> Simon Pugh, *Garden-Nature-Language* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place: 1730-1840*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> D. Aldridge, ‘How the Ship of interpretation was Blown Off Course in the Tempest: Some Philosophical Thoughts’, *Heritage Interpretation, vol.1*, ed. by in D. Uzzell (London: Belhaven Press, 1989), p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> The dualism of the beautiful and the sublime has had a long history of evolution of aesthetics (See M. Le Bris, *Romantics and Romanticism* (Geneva: Rizzoli, 1981), pp. 28-30). But it was not until the 1760s that the first British (and Irish) pictorial representation of the sublime was painted (See John Hutchinson, *James Arthur O’Connor* (Dublin: National Gallery of Ireland, 1985), p. 18). This coincided with the publication of Burke’s treatise on *The Origin of our Ideas about the Sublime and the Beautiful*.

be made manifest in a concrete form, the form of a garden. This new revolutionary style garden, which emanated from England, was also known as the Informal style garden. As a design, it demanded that flowers, fruit and vegetables be banished to walled gardens away from the house and that formal features, such as parterres, avenues and canals, be swept away and replaced with an idealised conception of 'natural' landscapes.<sup>25</sup> According to Gallagher, the emergence of the informal English garden, indicated a crucial change in man's relationship to nature. Now the perspective was to see man's position as being within nature itself, rather than as an agent to tame and regulate its forces as in the old Dutch and French formal gardens.<sup>26</sup> But not only did the change in the ideological outlook influence the new style, but also the adoption of new media techniques of representation, the compositional techniques of landscape painting. In particular, the English informal garden owed much to the portrayal of idyllic Italian scenery in the paintings of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorraine.<sup>27</sup> The greatest exponent of the English garden was Capability Brown. Brown applied the compositional principles of Poussin and Claude and worked them through three basic mediums of wood, water and grass. However, it was the tree which became the essential tool of Brown and his followers.

Although, in spatial terms the Brownian landscape was dominated by grass and water (lakes), it was the tree which created the dramatic effect in this 'natural' garden. Grass and water tended to be monotonous in tone and lacking in visual variety. In contrast, the tree, because of its physical variety and differing colour tones, became the actual 'brush strokes' of the landscape gardener, as the following advice of Uvdale Price suggests:

Consult the works of painters, and learn the principles which guided them in their combinations of natural and artificial objects. Group your trees on the principles they do. Connect your masses as they do. In short, apply their principles of painting whenever you intend any imitation of nature; for the principles of nature and painting are the same.<sup>28</sup>

Trees, therefore, became the most useful and the most manageable material on the palette of the Brownian landscape gardener. And by mixing deciduous with evergreen trees and by placing them along differing planes in the landscape, the landscape gardener was able to achieve the same effect as the painters did in perspective. In attempting to replicate the same optical

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<sup>25</sup> Terrence Reeves-Smyth, 'Demesnes', *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, ed. by in F.H.A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan & Matthew Stout (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), p. 201.

<sup>26</sup> Lynn Gallagher, 'Nature improved and raised by Art', *The Shaping of the Ulster Landscape* (Belfast: Ulster Folk Studies, 1989), p. 34.

<sup>27</sup> Reeves-Smyth, 'Demesnes', p. 201.

<sup>28</sup> Uvdale Price quoted in M. Hadfield, *Landscape with Trees* (London: Country Life, 1967), pp. 133-4.

illusion of the landscape painters of Claude and Poussin, the gardeners had to follow the very rigid compositional structure of their work:

A landscape by Claude employs, in the first place, a fairly high viewpoint - high enough, that is, for a distant horizon to appear above any rising ground between it and the viewpoint: and the first impression which everyone must receive, I imagine, on seeing a Claude landscape, is one of tremendous depth [...] The eye, attracted by an area of light usually set just below the horizon, travels immediately towards it over a long and often steeply contoured stretch of intervening land [...] The initial movement in all Claude's landscapes is this one, from the foreground straight to the far distance; [...] The foreground itself is usually in the shade of the coulisse - a group of trees, or a building, to the right or left of the picture, and framing the landscape behind. There is, therefore, a band of fairly dark colour at the bottom of the picture; and, dropping below the level of the land in the foreground, and deeper into the picture, is the second plane, of ground more exposed to the sunlight. A third plane beyond this will be darker again, overshadowed by trees or a cloud which is understood to have come between this patch of land and the sun. The next plane will be the one that first attracts the eye, and usually suffused with a clear yellow evening light; and the last will often be blue, and connects the landscape with the colour of the sky.<sup>29</sup>

By mixing the colour tones of the differing tree species and placing them along differing planes, the gardener was able to reproduce the compositional techniques similar to a Claudian landscape painting. But crucially, this reproduction was not a mere representation of a landscape, it was the real thing, a real landscape designed to look picturesque.

However, not only were the compositional techniques of Claude and Poussin adopted to a new medium, but also some of the painterly categories used to describe their work and the work of Salvator Rosa. These were the old aesthetic dualism of the beautiful and the sublime. The beautiful in this type of garden tended to be associated with the cultivated parts of the demesne, those of the parkland itself. On the other hand, the sublime applies to wilderness, in spatial terms, the area beyond the parkland of the beautiful. As a consequence, the sublime aspect of the picturesque could only be visually appropriated into the overall framework as a background to the beautiful. The landscape gardener could only physically reshape the beautiful aspects of

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<sup>29</sup> Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place: 1730-1840*, pp. 8-9.

the picturesque. This he did by planting alternating bands of grass and trees in the foreground and middle-ground of the picturesque.<sup>30</sup> The sublime features could not be successively planted in the parkland, without losing those characteristics which defined them as sublime, i.e. being truly 'natural' and creating 'awe-inspiring and fearful feeling', which could only be achieved by looking into vast uncultivated wastes beyond the comforting confines of the beautiful. In terms of terrain, the sublime appeared as high jagged mountains and with regard to flora, the sublime was generally indicated by the presence of bogland, especially mountain blanket bog.<sup>31</sup> However, there was a way in which the sublime could enter the garden of the beautiful, but not as a living plant or as prospect but as a decaying man-made object, - a 'historical' ruin. The existence of a ruin, whether real or artificial (therefore a folly) was an important feature of the picturesque experience. Ruins became nodes for the contemplation of the transient nature of life by the way they exude an air of decay. According to Andrews, ruins create a feeling of 'awe and agreeable horror' similar to looking at the wild desolation of the sublime.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the ruin and its artificial variant, the folly, become the physical icon of the forces of sublimity within the beautiful parkland.

### **The Theme Park of the Picturesque:**

Accordingly, the picturesque landscape within the estate parkland was designed to impress the mind of the viewer. These disguised gardens are about consumption, they are about the consumption of views. And in this respect, the most important subject in the picturesque does not actually appear in the landscape, because that person is doing the viewing. The social vision to be viewed, although actually hidden from view because the culturally designed framework is enveloped in the natural forms of grass, water and the tree and can be explicated from these physical forms by the application of the appropriate interpretative device, the ideological categories of the picturesque. Therefore, the landscape in the parkland is not just a physical backdrop but also a medium which was full of aesthetic icons that needed to be interpreted, - to

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<sup>30</sup> Clifford, *A History of Garden Design*, p. 173.

<sup>31</sup> The best known picturesque connoisseurs of the nineteenth century were Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall. In the following they provide a description of the beautiful and the sublime with regard to the Crampton estate at Lough Bray: 'The wall that surrounds these grounds is not, in some places as high as the bank of peat (bog) within a few feet of it, and the contrast between the neglect, and desolation, and barrenness that reigns without, and the order, cultivation, and beauty within, is very striking, exhibiting the mastery which science and civilisation hold over nature even in her sternest and most rugged domain'. [Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall, *Hand-books for Ireland: Dublin and Wicklow* (London: Virtue, 1853), p. 104.]

<sup>32</sup> M. Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape, Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, 1760-1800*, (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1989), p. 45.

be read. And this reading depended on acquiring the skill to make sense of the 'natural' hieroglyphics thrown about the landscape. Interpreting the view is not only a mediated relationship, but that process of mediation which is an acquired connoisseurship of the arts, i.e. painting, poetry, garden design and travelogue reading. Therefore, this form of landscape appreciation was an essential aspect of an elite culture. The essential philosophical endeavour of the picturesque was about an attempt to restore the harmony between society and nature. But the experience of this restorative harmony was to be exclusively visual. And since the process of viewing is inherently an individual activity, any attempt to grasp nature through the visual had to be conceived of as an individual experience. It is not a collective experience. As a consequence, viewing the picturesque can be seen as constituting a form of bourgeois individualism, an ethic where the emphasis is on consumption and the activity of the individual subject.<sup>33</sup> But in the consumption of the picturesque view, a state of harmony is sought between the individual and the 'natural' surrounds, an arcadia without anomie. Therefore, for this experience of harmony to be achieved, any form of disharmony must be excluded from the garden. Disharmony cannot be natural - of nature - since in the picturesque nature, as in the sublime, is given. The idea of disharmony could only be ascertained as being determined by social factors, those which involve people interacting with nature or with other people, in the sense that people or objects constructed by people can ruin the view. Therefore, people must be kept out of the frame, detached from the picturesque.

The detaching of the local people from their native habitat is itself a complex process and in many instances replicating the movement of ideological concepts between differing mediums within the overall framework of the picturesque. J.B. Harley in his work on *Maps, Knowledge, and Power*, has suggested that the nineteenth-century rural maps impinged on the daily lives of the ordinary rural people. As the clock had brought a form of time discipline on the new industrial workers, maps introduced a dimension of space discipline on the rural peasantry. Following this line of argument, it could be suggested that the picturesque framework introduced a dimension of aesthetic discipline on the Irish peasantry. Defining an area as picturesque within the domain of an improving landlord meant that the peasantry could never hope to gain access to that land for productive purposes. Even more harmful was to have a sitting tenant's land defined as picturesque by a landscape connoisseur. This surely meant eviction for the sitting tenants as the landlord cleared these unsightly objects from the

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<sup>33</sup> D. Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 15.

picturesque landscape.<sup>34</sup> It could be argued that this process of detachment is an essential feature of colonialism and imperialism. Edward Said would certainly suggest so. He has argued that imperialism is an act of geographical violence through which every space in a country is explored, charted, and finally brought under control.<sup>35</sup> The picturesque as we have described it fits into the Saidian idea of imperialism, in that the picturesque, as part of romanticism in general, explored the globe in search of picturesque spots. It charted those spots through various forms of representations. As a cultural and social movement with a strong ideological framework, it had the power to control access to those areas identified as picturesque.

The ideology of the picturesque was an essential aspect of the Anglo-Irish elite in Ireland. It, as an ideological support, had the ability to justify the prevention of the native population from occupying the land. In a sense, the picturesque as an ideological apparatus defined the terrain as a landscape to be viewed rather than a place to be lived in. Finally, as part of this wrenching of control over the land from the native population, the picturesque landscape movement changed the ecology of the local habitat by introducing foreign plant species into their gardens. Trees, such as beech, lime, horse chestnut, sycamore, and walnut were all foreign exotics introduced by the landscape gardener of the eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Edward Said argues that the colonialists in general had a conscious plan to transform the colonised territories into images of what they have left behind. Therefore, the appearance of the English informal garden in Ireland can now be seen in a different light, in the political light of British colonialism of Ireland. If Said is right, the picturesque framework is a crucial element in the colonialist mind-set, and an important part of the ideology of the planter colony, an ideology which is inherently imperialist as it detaches the peasantry from their native environment, by transforming their place into a picturesque landscape.

The picturesque is then about the way an outsider wishes to see landscape, either as a colonising landlord or as a tourist in search of the picturesque. It, as we have discovered is about consumerism, i.e. consuming harmonious visions of the landscape. And because of this essential relationship between spectatorship and the land, the actual landscape is changed to suit the wishes of the picturesque connoisseurs. According to Reeves-Smyth, by the middle of the nineteenth century, parkland occupied around 800,000 acres, or 4 per cent of Ireland, with over

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<sup>34</sup> Gallagher, 'Nature improved and raised by Art', p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 271.

<sup>36</sup> Eileen McCracken, *The Irish Woods since Tudor Times: Distribution and Exploitation* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), p. 135.



7,000 houses featuring pleasure landscapes of ten acres or more.<sup>37</sup> The fixing of the viewing points is crucial to the way the landscaper could respond to the demands of these consumers of landscape.

This desire to see a certain vision of and on the landscape meant that the picturesque could evade ugly issues by hiding them from being viewed. One such issue was work and work activities. Since this landscape was designed to be a leisure garden, one of the essential principles of the project was to eliminate the appearance of work from the horizon. Repton advises this in the following:

The pleasure of appropriation is gratified in viewing a landscape which cannot be injured by the malice or bad taste of a neighbouring intruder: thus an ugly barn, or a ploughed field, or any obtrusive object which disgraces the scenery of a park, looks as if it belonged to another, and therefore robs the mind of the pleasure derived from appropriation, or unity and continuity of unmixed property.<sup>38</sup>

A number of concrete strategies were developed to achieve this disappearing trick. Again, it was the tree which was the main instrument in this act of concealment as the tree clumps screened off the productive area of the estate. It was on this land that the tenants worked to pay a rack-rent to the landlord and it was this money which paid for these gardens of consumption.<sup>39</sup> Also on a number of estates service tunnels and sunken roads were dug so that the supply of goods and services to the landlord's house might take place without disturbing the peace of the lawns.<sup>40</sup> Even the grazing 'picturesque' livestock on the parkland were kept at a visibly pleasing distance by the ha ha (sunken fence, designed to act as a means of keeping cattle and sheep away from the house but not interrupting the view from the house.). Therefore, this type of 'natural' garden and its inherent tendency to conceal will always be detached from the actuality of real nature and society's real productive relationship to that nature.<sup>41</sup> Neil Smith argues that this is so because this ideological concept and physical reconstruction of nature has exorcised all

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<sup>37</sup> Terence Reeves-Smyth, 'The Natural History of Demesnes', *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, ed. by John Wilson Foster (Dublin: Lilliput, 1997), p. 551.

<sup>38</sup> Humphry Repton quoted in S. Daniels, 'Humphry Repton and the Morality of Landscape', *Valued Environments*, ed. J. Gold & J. Burgess (London: George Allen & Unwin Publishers Ltd., 1982), p. 128

<sup>39</sup> Eamonn Slater and Terence McDonough, 'Bulwark of Landlordism and Capitalism: The Dynamics of Feudalism in nineteenth-century Ireland', *Research in Political Economy*, 14 (1994), 63-118.

<sup>40</sup> The most famous or infamous service tunnel was located on the Rockingham estate, Co. Roscommon. See Lamb & Bowe, *A History of Gardening in Ireland*, p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 5 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), pp. 39-40.

forms of social activity from it including work.<sup>42</sup> In doing so, the so-called natural picturesque garden has become dehistoricised. By excluding the concrete work of the Irish peasantry from the garden, the picturesque framework denies that class its social relationship to its native habitat and its subsequent historical relationship to that habitat. In the classic Saidian sense the picturesque in a typically colonial way denies a history to the Other.<sup>43</sup> Their place has become somebody else's landscape. In filtering out work from the landscape, the framework has in a sense ideologically jumped from a state of nature to immediate consumption, without recognising the necessity of production. The object of nature becomes an object of consumption, without seemingly having to go through the social activity of production. So when the picturesque connoisseur came to appropriate a scene, through whatever artistic means chosen, the portrayal of that scene may have been an authentic representation of what was seen. The problem was that the scene itself was ideologically biased, cocooned away from the reality of the working countryside. We can now make sense of the 'hidden' aesthetic aspects of the 'lovely background' ' to *The Quiet Man*.

### **Conclusion- Ford as a 'Postcolonialist':**

The dominant 'natural' backdrop to the movie is a highly idealised landscape, whose aesthetic appearance is determined by the landscape gardening designs of the English Informal style of the eighteenth century. It is a landscape which is thoroughly laden with symbolic icons which evoke emotions associated with idyllic characteristics of being a location which is safe, free and comfortable. A place which is concerned with the pleasures of consumption rather than production, - a garden to grow roses rather than agricultural crops! Its essential ideological structure is therefore one of escape from the mundane reality of Irish everyday life. In a real sense, it is a theme park of the visually exotic.<sup>44</sup> What is quite ironic is how Ford appropriated the aesthetic of the English Informal garden of the eighteenth century by filming in the grounds of Ashford Castle and in doing so engaged in the ultimate act of a post-colonialist, making an English garden the most globally recognized representation of Irish landscape.

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<sup>42</sup> Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 269.

<sup>44</sup> Eamonn Slater, 'Reconstructing 'Nature' as a Picturesque Theme Park: The Colonial Case of Ireland'. *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 5 (2007) 3: 231-245.







