



Sensibility and the sublime in the storm paintings of Thomas Roberts (1748-1777)

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WITHIN TWENTY YEARS OF HIS TRAGICALLY EARLY DEATH, THOMAS ROBERTS WAS described admirably by the normally acerbic ‘Anthony Pasquin’ (John Williams) as having ‘gained more reputation as a landscape painter than any other Irishman’.¹ This reputation was confirmed for many by the exhibition of most of his surviving output at the National Gallery of Ireland from March to June, 2009. In the lavish monograph-cum-catalogue that accompanied this exhibition, its curators, William Laffan and Brendan Rooney, highlighted the remarkable diversity and sophistication of Roberts’ work, and situated him in a dynamic ‘Dublin school’ of landscape painters and in a network of enlightened patrons, whose art collections supplemented his training in the Dublin Society drawing school, giving him access to the classical landscape tradition, to Dutch landscape art, and to leading contemporary practitioners, such as Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789). One of the most interesting, if tentative, suggestions of their fine monograph is that some of Roberts’ paintings ‘create a mood of Romantic introspection’, despite his usual Claudian classicism. Some of his storm paintings, in particular, they believe, ‘have a generically Romantic feeling about them’. The number and quality of such paintings in the exhibition – seven in all, and mainly from his final years – was a surprise. They offered a fascinating contrast to the still, almost dreamlike quality of so many of his landscapes, particularly the Carton series from the same period. However, Laffan and Rooney believe that these dramatic paintings fall short of the ideal of the sublime, especially as articulated a few decades earlier by Edmund Burke. Instead, they argue, Roberts sometimes anticipated ‘the slightly later picturesque theorists, such as Uvedale Price’.² In what follows, I propose to explore these issues, looking at the storm

1 – *Thomas Roberts (1748-1777)*

A LANDSTORM, A MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE, WITH TRAVELLERS ON A BRIDGE (detail)
n.d., oil on canvas, 96 x 132 cm (courtesy McCarthy family and Irish Heritage Trust [Fota House])

paintings in the light of changing contemporary views of the sublime, and, more broadly, in terms of the cult of sensibility, of which the fashionable picturesque was part. Long a strong current in European literature, and an important forerunner and facilitator of Romanticism, sensibility was a rather amorphous, portmanteau term for those elite and artistic responses to nature and to the human condition that stressed emotion and empathy.³ Its ubiquity by the 1770s contributed to the gradual erosion of neoclassical dominance, particularly in British and Irish landscape art, as can be seen, for example, in the early paintings of Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1799), depicting peasants going to and returning from market.⁴ Roberts' significantly different treatment of such travelling figures will be a focus in what follows.

The emphasis, from the mid-seventeenth century by scientists and philosophers, on the senses and emotions as key to human experience and understanding of reality had found literary expression by the early eighteenth century, particularly in English nature poetry, with James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) establishing a new template. Literary sensibility reached a high point in the 1770s, when Thomas Roberts was establishing himself as a painter, and had developed a new empathy with the poor, for example, in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). In 1774, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* – the ultimate novel of sensibility – created a sensation throughout Europe. Even the conservative British art establishment was to feel obliged to make some accommodation with the new fashion. Thus, James Barry, that most hardline defender of the classical tradition, lecturing in the Royal Academy as professor of painting, came to argue that 'this intellectual sense of taste' embraced both 'nature' and 'art'. He even conceded that hitherto lowly landscape art 'can be made interesting in a man of sensibility'. This was particularly true of Poussin, described as 'sometimes verging on sublimity', but it also applied to Claude and his Italianate followers, including leading British landscape artist Richard Wilson (1714-1782), 'allowing for a little unnecessary rags and vulgarity'. The elements that comprised Barry's preferred landscape of sensibility were profoundly conservative in social and political terms:

The simple, laborious, honest hinds [peasants], the lowing herds, smooth lakes, and cool extended shade; the snug warm cot [cottage], sufficient and independent; the distant hamlet, and the free, unconfined association between all the parts of nature, must ever afford a grateful prospect to the mind.⁵

He could have been describing many landscapes by Roberts (with the addition of 'rags and vulgarity'), but not the storm paintings. Laffan and Rooney speculate that Barry may have been aware of Roberts' work. Both had been trained in the Dublin Society School, both were apprenticed early in their careers to John Butts, and they shared a 'surprising similarity of sensibility' in their depiction of light.⁶

Barry was also remarkable among contemporary artists for his sustained attempts to represent one aspect of the sublime, as it was described by his first patron, Edmund

Burke – that is, ‘the idea of pain and danger’ shown ‘in a manner analogous to terror’.⁷ Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1757, was, on one level, an attempt to analyse the new sensibility in terms of aesthetic theory. It too was grounded in the empiricism of Locke and Hume and in a sustained attempt to understand experience through what could be perceived directly through the senses. Its remarkable prominence, then and since, has been due, above all, to the fact that it captured the *Zeitgeist*, and played a role in the gradual, but ultimately seismic shift from classical to Romantic. But it was only one formulation of the sublime and not a very helpful one in understanding the evolution of landscape art. For Burke, ‘the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature’ involved ‘astonishment ... that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror’. But painters, he felt, ‘almost always failed’ when they ‘have attempted to give us clear representations of these very fanciful and terrible ideas’.⁸ Instead, for Burke, as W.J.T. Mitchell pointed out, ‘words are the sublime medium precisely because they cannot provide clear images’.⁹ This had long been borne out by the excited reveries of English nature poetry. ‘By 1740 poetry was full of terror and horror’, wrote Samuel Monk in his quirky, but still indispensable, survey of the sublime in eighteenth-century English writing, and he instanced ‘the graveyard school’ of Grey and Blair and the popularity of ‘ruin poetry’, while ‘the descriptive and excursion poets were fond of storms, raging seas, inundations, earthquakes and volcanoes’.¹⁰ While it is rarely possible to show a direct link between a particular poem and a particular landscape painting (one example, a painting by George Mullins, is discussed below), interesting correspondences will be noted between Roberts’ storm scenes and the poetry of Malet, Thomson and Cowper particularly.

A more traditional and still powerful idea of what constituted the sublime in art focussed on history painting, and on the human figure rather than on landscape. An anonymous letter to Barry in 1783 (now known to be a joint production of Burke and Reynolds) admonishing him against ‘confounding greatness of size with greatness of matter’, asserted that ‘the only kind of sublimity which a painter or sculptor should aim at is to express by certain proportions and positions of limbs and features, that strength and dignity of mind, and vigour and activity of body, which enable men to conceive an execute great actions.’¹¹ However, the shifting nature of the ‘sublime’ in the 1770s, even thus traditionally understood, was already evident in Reynolds’ Fifth Discourse, delivered to the Royal Academy in 1772. This went against the conventional wisdom that ‘Raphael ... stands in general foremost of the first painters’, and argued that Michelangelo, who ‘has more of the Poetical Inspiration; his ideas are vast and sublime’, was superior. Raphael may have had ‘a greater combination of the higher qualities’, but ‘if, as Longinus thinks, the Sublime, being the highest excellence that human composition can attain to, abundantly compensates the absence of every other beauty, and atones for all other deficiencies, then Michelangelo demands the preference.’¹² The significance of this new emphasis on a ‘poetical’ sublime for Roberts’ most remarkable landscape commission is discussed below.

This shift is seen by Monk as reflecting ‘a new taste and a new sublime, one less

dependant on mastery of technique than on a painter's sensibility, or "genius". He connects it with the remarkable cult of 'Ossian and of wild rugged nature' which copper-fastened the idea that the 'Sublime' was not a matter of ideal forms but of 'intensity and depth of feeling'.¹³ The fact that this kind of literary sensibility had also long included a passion for the Gothic helped to prepare the way for James Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (1757), which was to become the literary and, indeed, cultural sensation of the 1760s. This too may have a role in explaining Roberts' storm landscapes. Ignoring the protestations and proofs of scholars (mainly in Ireland) that Macpherson's Gaelic 'originals' were forgeries, the reading public in Britain, and soon throughout northern Europe, hailed Ossian as their Homer, chronicler of a great northern saga of war and heroism, comparable to the *Iliad*.¹⁴ Central to the appeal of its bombastic verse, as its principal early promoter Hugh Blair pointed out in 1763, was its exuberant invocation of wild scenery, which chimed perfectly with well-established fashions in poetry, nature appreciation and garden design. Blair emphasised 'the scenery throughout, wild and romantic. The extended heath by the seashore; the mountains shaded with mist; the torrent rushing through a solitary valley; the shattered oaks...' Among 'such rude scenes of nature ... dwells the sublime. It is the thunder and the lightening of genius ... an awful and serious emotion ... heightened by all the images of Trouble and Terror and Darkness.'¹⁵ The echo of Burke is clear, yet in his letter to Barry, written jointly with Reynolds, he attacked 'this taste for the false sublime gaining ground in England', exemplified by 'the applause and admiration that have been given to those miserable rhapsodies published by Macpherson under the name of Ossian', which, far from being 'standards of true taste and sublimity', were 'gigantic and extravagant tinsel'. He cannot be compared to Homer, who 'shows that the true sublime is always easy and always natural, that it consists more in the manner than in the subject'.¹⁶ As he was to do a decade later in his response to the French Revolution, Burke shied away in horror from such an extreme manifestation of the theory of sensibility that he had propounded.

As it happened, Ossian was to inspire far more art than Burke, and while much of this came from the more extreme romantic tendency in French history painting, its influence on British art was also apparent in British landscape painting, most notably that of Thomas Jones. At the same time, landscape art in general achieved a new respectability, reflected in the inclusion of painters like George Barret (c.1728-1784), the leading Irish landscape painter when Roberts began his career, among the founding members of the new Royal Academy in 1768. Four years later, its president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, immediately after his elevation of Michelangelo over Raphael, gave grudging praise to the genius of Salvator Rosa, 'which, though it has nothing of that elevation and dignity which belongs to the grand style, yet has that sort of dignity which belongs to savage and uncultivated nature'. A year earlier, he had declared that Claude Lorraine was the best model for 'Landscape Painters' as his practice 'is founded upon the same principles as that by which the Historical Painter acquires perfect form'.¹⁷ By then it had also become a commonplace to articulate the modish enthusiasm for wild scenery in terms of art. As early

as 1739, that *uber*-sophisticate, Horace Walpole, soon to embark on the Gothic remodelling of Strawberry Hill, visiting the Alps with his friend, the ‘graveyard’ poet Thomas Grey, had written of the thrill of ‘precipices, mountains, torrents, wolves, rumblings, Salvator Rosa’.¹⁸ This tendency became known as the picturesque, and was given formal definition from the 1780s in the writings of William Gilpin and Uvedale Price. It betokened connoisseurship, and was captured nicely by a Swiss traveller in 1774: ‘In our travels, it sometimes happened that both of us would cry out at the same time, *Salvator Rosa, Poussin, Saveri, Ruisdael* or *Claude* – according to whether the subjects before our eyes reminded us of the manner and choice of one or other of the masters named.’¹⁹

In England and Ireland such ease of identification was facilitated by the burgeoning print market and by the fact that, for example, the prime exemplars of the sublime and the beautiful, *Salvator Rosa* and *Claude*, were well represented in private art collections by the 1770s. Artists were, of course, even more susceptible to this tendency, and, as Burke pointed out, were more inclined ‘to be imitators of one another than of nature’.²⁰ Most landscape art in the new age of sensibility was, inevitably, picturesque.

Thus, Roberts began his career at a time of transition when the vogue for emotional and personal responses to nature, long evident in literature, increasingly influenced art. This was evident in the work of Roberts’ teachers, the most important being George Mullins (fl. 1756-75/6), who painted a range of landscapes, most of them Claudian, but who also produced land and sea storms and who sold several paintings to Walpole. In 1772 he exhibited *A Cataract; a rude scene. Vide from Thompson’s [sic] Seasons. Summer, ver. 585*, at the Royal Academy. James Thomson’s poem *The Seasons* had long been a key text of the new sensibility, and was published in a new edition that year. This painting is, almost certainly, the one now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, entitled *Landscape with a Fishing Party by a Waterfall* (Plate 2). In this, the ‘rude scene’ is mediated through a well-dressed group of men and women in animated conversation in the foreground, while the force of the ‘cataract’ is kept at a safe middle distance.²¹ Roberts’ other teacher, John Butts (c.1728-1765) is known to have copied *Salvator Rosa*, and one of his few surviving paintings, *Into the hands of the Shades* (1760, private collection), echoes the terror landscapes of Poussin.²² Barret had moved to London a few years before Roberts came on the scene, and there is little evidence of direct influence. A friend of Burke’s, he described himself as a ‘landscape painter who wishes to exhibit the sublime parts of nature’,²³ but, as Laffan and Rooney point out, there is little, if any, sense of awe, much less of terror, even in his series of paintings of the majestic Powerscourt waterfall in county Wicklow.²⁴ Instead, these typify the kind of picturesque discussed by Andrews in terms of ‘landscape, aesthetics and tourism’. This wild torrent was a major tourist attraction and was showcased in the Italianate demesne of Lord Powerscourt, praised by Richard Twiss, one of the many foreign travel writers who admired it, for its ‘several walks ... with agreeable conveniences of benches and summerhouses’.²⁵ One of Barret’s paintings of the waterfall shows a thatched octagon room with facilities for visitors; in others, fashionable visitors view the towering falls as spectacle rather than as an over-



2 – George Mullins (fl. 1756-75/6), *LANDSCAPE WITH A FISHING PARTY BY A WATERFALL*
n.d., oil on canvas, 117 x 151 cm (courtesy Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

whelming force of nature.²⁶ In general, ‘the tourist gaze’ dictated much Irish landscape art, helping to ensure the ubiquity of picturesque modes even in the age of Romanticism. Despite its picturesque elements, Roberts’ sensibility was different.

Most of the landscapes that Roberts painted were Claudian, featuring long, layered vistas, framing trees and an aqueous calm. Such landscapes could also incorporate sublime elements, however, involving wild mountain ranges, for example. Jonathan Fisher (fl. 1763-1809), another significant figure in the ‘Dublin School’, described such a composite landscape well in *A Picturesque Tour of Killarney* (1789). Ideally, he wrote, in a pithy distillation of fashionable landscape vocabulary, the artist should chose a viewpoint ‘where the sublime and beautiful could be most picturesquely combined’. (In another example of aristocratic exploitation of wild places, he also recommended ‘a comfortable inn established by Lord Kenmare’.)²⁷ His best-known painting, *View of the Lakes of Killarney from the park of Kenmare House* (c.1768, private collection) features ordered, cultivated land in the foreground with the wild grandeur of lakes and mountains in the background. His influence was clear in some of Roberts’ early work, notably in his views of Lough Erne.²⁸ However, from the beginning of his career, Roberts also engaged more directly with the sublime, especially in two contrasting storm scenes in imaginary landscapes.

In 1769, a year before he exhibited some of his Lough Erne series at the Society of Artists in Dublin, he showed ‘A Landstorm with a Waterfall’, which Laffan and Rooney identify as possibly *A Landstorm with a Ruined Bridge and a River in Spate* (Plate 3).²⁹ Its combination of nature at its most destructive, terrified people helpless before it, and a looming gothic ruin offers a marked contrast to Barret’s Powerscourt paintings. It has echoes of Salvator Rosa and Poussin, though more muted, for example, than in *Figures by a Torrent in a Stormy Wooded Landscape* (private collection) by the Italian-based Irish artist James Forrester, three years earlier.³⁰ Forrester was very influenced by the Welsh artist Richard Wilson, and his painting has some similarities to Wilson’s *Destruction of the Children of Niobe* (Yale Centre for British Art).³¹ A possible influence of Wilson on some Roberts landscapes will be considered below.

Roberts had access to a range of European landscape art in the collections of his well-travelled patrons. This was evident in the second early storm painting, his only sea storm (Plate 4), exhibited in 1771. The influence of the celebrated storm scenes of Claude Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), whose work could be seen in the houses of at least three of Roberts’ patrons, is clear. *Storm at Sea* in Kilkenny Castle, attributed to ‘school of Vernet’, may be the direct prototype.³² Another possible influence on this painting – and a major influence on Roberts’ work in general – was the great seventeenth-century Dutch painter of storms and waterfalls, Jacob van Ruisdael (c.1628-1682). His *Rough Sea with Sailing*

3 – Thomas Roberts, *A LANDSTORM WITH A RUINED BRIDGE AND A RIVER IN SPATE*

c.1769, oil on canvas, 42 x 62 cm





4 – Thomas Roberts, *A SEA STORM*

c.1771, oil on canvas, 57 x 91 cm (courtesy National Gallery of Ireland)

Vessels off a Rocky Coast (Foundation Calouste Gulbankian, Lisbon) is also very similar to Roberts' *A Sea Storm* in terms of composition, if not of mood.³³ Significantly, however, unlike Ruisdael but like Vernet, Roberts highlights the human element by adding four tiny figures clinging to the wreckage. *A Sea Storm* may also owe something to the well-known passage from Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, which anticipates the eighteenth-century vogue for horror enjoyed at a safe distance, and which Dryden's translated as:

'Tis pleasant, safely to behold from shore
 The rowling Ship; and hear the Tempest roar:
 Not that another's Pain is our delight;
 But Pains unfelt, produce the pleasing sight.³⁴

These two early storm landscapes are closer to elements of the sublime in the Burkean sense than those Roberts was to do later in his career when he developed a more distinctive style, which replaced the element of fear with one of struggle. However, continued empathy with ordinary people at the mercy of the elements in all of Roberts' storm scenes reflect his immersion in the new climate of sensibility. Its core was captured nicely in a letter from Samuel Johnson to Joseph Baretti ten years earlier, describing a visit to 'my native town ... where I found the streets much narrower and shorter than I thought I had left them, inhabited by a race of people, to whom I was little known.' After commenting on the disappointments of the visit, he justified moralising on the basis of such banalities: 'Such pleasures and pains make up the general mass of life; and, as nothing is little to him

who feels it with great sensibility, a mind able to see common incidents in their real state, is disposed by very common incidents to very serious contemplations.’³⁵

Such ‘common incidents’ of ‘the general mass of life’ featured repeatedly in Thomas Roberts’ landscapes. His figures, though generally small and often on the margins of the paintings, are full of human interest. Far from being the colourful ‘appendages’, such as Gilpin recommended in his recipe for painting the picturesque,³⁶ they resemble, rather, the similarly small-scale and seemingly marginal figures of many of Claude’s later landscapes, which have a narrative element akin to history painting.³⁷ Roberts’ great contemporary, Thomas Gainsborough, playfully dismissed such figures as designed merely ‘to create a little business for the Eye to be drawn from the trees in order to return to them with more glee’.³⁸ However, in his own landscapes, such figures are often of great significance, being, in the words of Ann Bermingham, ‘instead *dramatis peronae*, who amplify the mood of the landscape, and give it meaning through the way in which they abide in it. They propel the landscape towards narrative.’³⁹ The same is true of many of Thomas Roberts’ landscapes, whose sensibility is akin especially to that of Gainsborough’s early depictions of the comings and goings of country people, though it differs significantly also, as discussed below. Dianne Perkins has shown how the most celebrated of those early Gainsboroughs, *Cornard Wood* (1746-48, National Gallery, London), was modelled on Ruisdael,⁴⁰ and his influence, and that of the many other Dutch artists who populated their landscapes with a complex commingling of travellers, animals and locals, also helped to shape the peopled landscapes of Roberts.

One of the most interesting ways in which these resemble Gainsboroughs is in their balance of images of industry and idleness (or poverty), which John Barrell sees as crucial for Gainsborough’s concern to depict ‘the ideal rural life of Merry England’.⁴¹ For example, Roberts’ 1769 canvas *A View of Rathfarnham Castle* (private collection),⁴² in which a man busy with a horse and cart is about to pass by an itinerant family resting by the roadside, has similarities to Gainsborough’s *Peasants returning from Market* (1768-71, Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood, London), but lacks its social commentary, most evident in Gainsborough’s depiction of the refusal of alms to the poor family by the roadside.⁴³ Indeed, Roberts, coming from a more polarised society, is even more anxious than Gainsborough to make his landscapes socially inclusive and harmonious.⁴⁴ What makes his storm paintings different is that the figures who help to interpret the landscape for the viewer seem isolated, rootless figures, who, far from being at one with the landscape, are at odds with it. How such figures react to their situation is particularly important in determining whether there are elements of the Burkean sublime in the picture, as we saw in the case of the early *Landstorm with a Ruined Bridge and a River in Spate* (Plate 3).⁴⁵ While it does not involve a storm, his 1771 painting *Landscape with Travellers and Cattle Crossing a Bridge by a Waterfall* (Plate 5) can help to illustrate this further.⁴⁶ This scene, like the Lough Erne paintings, combines elements of the sublime and beautiful, but in this case the wild element is foregrounded. In composition it is very similar to Ruisdael’s, *Waterfall in a Mountainous Landscape* (c.1670-80, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)



5 – Thomas Roberts

A LANDSCAPE WITH TRAVELLERS AND CATTLE CROSSING A BRIDGE BY A WATERFALL

c.1771, oil on canvas, 57 x 91 cm (courtesy National Gallery of Ireland)

(Plate 6),⁴⁷ but the mood is very different. In the Roberts painting, the waterfall is distanced from the viewer at the far side of the bridge, and the cattle herders crossing that rickety structure are admiring the torrent, rather like Barret's wealthy tourists, and they feel no need to hurry to safety. Ruisdael's waterfall foams threateningly in the foreground, drawing the viewer into the sense of danger that is clearly felt by the figures hurrying across the bridge with their burdens. Roberts' picture is picturesque, while Ruisdael's has key elements of what came to be called the sublime. So had Roberts' early *Landstorm* (Plate 3), but he was not to repeat its anguished figures reacting to imminent danger in his later storm paintings.

Over thirty works are listed by Laffan and Rooney between the two series of storm paintings, most of them commissions to paint demesne lands and the environs of great houses. A number of these mirrored the new sensibility, featuring Gothic ruins or picturesque vagrants, or estate workers employed in various tasks. Many of Roberts' paintings cannot be dated with certainty. Their ordering for exhibition purposes involved some informed guesswork and was not meant to imply clearly distinct phases or progression in his work. Laffan and Rooney stress his versatility instead, pointing to the fact, for example, that his two Carton paintings, suffused in a golden calm, were 'clearly contemporaneous with the landstorms of 1774-75'.⁴⁸

A Stormy Landscape with Travellers (1774) (Plate 7) was a very different kind of storm scene,⁴⁹ establishing a new kind of relationship between the landscape and the peo-



6 – *Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682)*

WATERFALL IN A MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE

c.1670-80, oil on canvas, 63 x 46 cm (courtesy Kunthistorisches Museum, Vienna)



7 – Thomas Roberts

A STORMY LANDSCAPE WITH TRAVELLERS

c.1775, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown (20 St James's Square, London)



8 – *Thomas Roberts, An Irish Capriccio Landscape*
Based on the Lady Chapel of Castledermot, County Kildare, with Travellers Approaching
c.1775, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown (20 St James's Square, London)



9 – Robert Adam (1728-1792), stairwell of 20 St James's Square, London,
 showing the landscapes by Thomas Roberts and *THE TRANSFIGURATION* after Raphael
 (photo by Richard Valencia)

ple who inhabit it, one which he continued to explore in four similar pictures. It too was a commission, but of an excitingly different kind. His new patron was not an Irish grandee, but a leading art connoisseur in London, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn (1749-1789), who had recently purchased Poussin's great terror painting, *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648, National Gallery, London). Roberts' dramatic *Stormy Landscape* together with a companion piece, a calmer Claudian scene featuring a series of Gothic but recognisably Irish ruins (Plate 8), were chosen to flank a copy of Raphael's iconic *The Transfiguration* in a key position over the grand staircase of the Wynn's new Adam-designed house in St James's Square (Plate 9).

This remarkable commission raises two major questions, which, given the lack of documentary evidence, cannot be answered definitively. Firstly, why did this sophisticated patron of the arts engage an Irish artist, virtually unknown in London, to execute such key works for his meticulously planned and classically inspired house? Wynn's art connoisseurship and extravagant lifestyle were funded by his large Welsh estates, and he was both a cosmopolitan aesthete and a passionate Welshman. These combined in the commission of two large Claudian landscapes from the Italian-trained, Welsh-born artist Richard Wilson – the leading British landscape artist of the day – to celebrate his com-

ing of age in 1769. One of them, *Dinas Bran from Llangollen* (1770-71, Yale Centre for British Art) has been described by David Solkin as a ‘vision of Wales in its ancient state of liberty’.⁵⁰ Wynn was also much taken by the new fashion for wild scenery, and in 1771 he accompanied his other favourite Welsh artist Paul Sandby (1731?-1809) on ‘the first picturesque tour in North Wales’.⁵¹ However, Sandby was a watercolourist and not a candidate for a large commission, and Wilson’s descent into alcoholism had already begun in 1774. But, why choose Roberts? Laffan and Rooney speculate on connections through Roberts’ Irish patrons or through Hugh Douglas Hamilton, but we simply do not know the answer. It may be connected to the fact that Roberts’ very limited exposure in London had included the exhibition of his *View of Croagh Patrick* (location unknown),⁵² reminiscent of Sandby’s views of Wales, or, more convincingly, perhaps to the likelihood that Wynn had already commissioned or bought a strikingly similar large landscape from Roberts, *A Windstorm, A Wooded Rocky Landscape with a Cascade and Travellers on a Bridge* (Plate 10),⁵³ which is signed and dated 1774 and which hung in the James’s Square house.

A second and more important question is why Wynn choose to flank the Raphael copy with such fashionable images of the new sensibility – a waterfall in the wilds and a capriccio of Gothic ruins? Can this commission, to some degree at least, be seen as

10 – Thomas Roberts

A WINDSTORM, A WOODED ROCKY LANDSCAPE WITH A CASCADE AND TRAVELLERS ON A BRIDGE

1774, oil on canvas, 149 x 205 cm



‘Ossianic’, a product of the enthusiasm for the ‘mists, clouds and storms of a northern mountainous region’, which Macpherson’s poems inspired?⁵⁴ Wynn was chief president of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorians, several other members of which commissioned a series of Welsh views from Wilson.⁵⁵ The society’s ranks had been swollen in response to the Ossianic excitement, despite the fact that the crudity and oral nature of Macpherson’s putative sources proved a stumbling block for the traditional Welsh Bards until the 1790s.⁵⁶ Wynn also believed himself to be a descendant of ancient Welsh kings, and was vice-president of the Society of Ancient Britons. Politically, his main focus was on the defence of Welsh gentry interests at Westminster. But if all of this influenced him, he would appear to have had the ideal Welsh artist for an Ossianic project to hand in Thomas Jones (1742-1783), whose *The Bard* (National Museum of Wales, Cardiff), also exhibited in 1774, had caused a sensation and inspired many imitations.⁵⁷ Its own inspiration was Thomas Grey’s poem of the same name, which, in turn harked back to the visit to Cambridge of John Parry, the venerable harpist, whose patron had been Wynn’s father, and whose son painted the copy of *The Transfiguration*.⁵⁸ Again we can only speculate. Perhaps Jones was unavailable, or he was already focussed on the trip to Italy that was to transform his art.

The contemporary fashion for such Ossianic landscapes can be seen in the very similar pair of pictures commissioned from Richard Wilson by William, 2nd Viscount Courtenay, three years earlier. The 2nd Viscount is a shadowy figure, best remembered as the father of the notorious ‘Kitty’ Courtenay, intimate of the even more notorious William Beckford of Fonthill. As well as being the 2nd Viscount Courtenay, he was ‘the fifteenth inheritor of Powderham Castle, the sixteenth in succession to Hugh, Earl of Devonshire’.⁵⁹ He also had a large estate in Limerick, though it appears that he never lived there. We know nothing of his political or cultural perspectives, other than the fact that he inherited a centuries-old family grievance connected to the loss of the title Earl of Devonshire after political miscalculations in Elizabethan times. (His wayward son, ironically, managed to get the title restored just before his death.) This family tradition may account for his choice of the two Devon landscapes commissioned from Wilson, *The Keep at Oakhampton Castle* (c.1771-72, Manchester City Art Galleries) (Plate 11) and *Lydford Waterfall Tavistock* (c.1771-72, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff) (Plate 12). Neither were on Courtenay land, but they had been once. What is more significant is Wilson’s interpretation of the commission, breaking dramatically with his earlier classicising of English and Welsh scenes in his trademark grand style. David Solkin has described *The Keep at Oakhampton Castle* as a ‘romantic landscape’ involving ‘Gothic melancholy’. Even more romantic is *Lydford Waterfall, Tavistock*, painted ‘with a directness that is virtually unprecedented in his work’. Solkin sees comparisons with Barret’s Powerscourt waterfalls, but the most important influences on these pictures (and on those done earlier for Wynn) come from Dutch landscape art, and particularly that of Ruisdael.⁶⁰ It is possible, perhaps likely, that Wynn had seen the Courtenay pictures, or at least heard of them. In any case, there are clear similarities between them and the paintings that he



11 – Richard Wilson (c.1713-1782), *THE KEEP AT OAKHAMPTON CASTLE*
 c.1771-72, oil on canvas, 170 x 164 cm (courtesy Manchester City Art Galleries)

commissioned from Roberts. This is particularly clear in the two waterfalls, both of which engage the viewer directly with the landscape, but it can also be seen in the ‘Gothic melancholy’ of the two ruin landscapes. The most significant difference between the two painters in their treatment of these scenes is that Wilson’s figures are merely ornamental onlookers, while Roberts’ figures respond animatedly to their surroundings, and are thus more reflective of the new sensibility, as might be expected from the much younger and less classically trained artist.

None of this, however, explains why Wynn decided that the Roberts paintings were suitable companion pieces for Raphael’s *Transfiguration* (Plate 9); once again, one can only speculate. Perhaps he was demonstrating both his connoisseurship and his modernity by juxtaposing a key work of the Italian grand style with contemporary examples of



12 – Richard Wilson (c.1713-1782), *LYDFORD WATERFALL TAVISTOCK*
c.1771-72, oil on canvas, 173 x 164 cm (courtesy National Museum of Wales, Cardiff)

the Dutch-inflected ‘Northern’ art that was gradually replacing it in England.⁶¹ Or, more broadly, perhaps we have here, consciously or not, a reflection of the changing perspectives on the sublime shown in their different ways by Wynn’s friend Sir Joshua Reynolds when he elevated Michelangelo over Raphael, and by Hugh Blair and others in their response to Macpherson. Perhaps the remarkable triptych that still dominates the grand staircase at 20 St James’s Square is an illustration of Samuel Monks’ claim that, in this period, ‘the classic calm of Homer and Raphael was giving way to the energy of Ossian and Michelangelo’.⁶² However it is explained, the answer must lie in how we contextualise these two sets of paintings by Wilson and Roberts in the vibrant, evolving cultural ethos of the 1770s.

Solkin takes a different view of Wilson’s figures in the landscapes painted for

Courtenay, seeing them as ‘a specimen of primitive humanity who can live in harmony with untamed nature’.⁶³ This seems more appropriate to the figures in the two storm paintings that Roberts painted for Wynn, and the three that he was to paint subsequently. Most feature a family group, but apart from the *Windstorm* bought by Wynn (Plate 10), these are in marked contrast to the barefoot, wayside poor of his *View of Rathfarnham Castle* and of *A Wooded River Landscape*,⁶⁴ being led by sturdy, independent-looking men who are dressed to cope with the conditions. In the Wynn *Windstorm* (Plate 10), a poor family, ‘led by a barefoot woman with a pained expression’, can be seen dimly in the background about to cross a rough wooden bridge over a ravine that takes away the water of the raging, rock-strewn torrent that dominates the painting.⁶⁵ Nearer to the viewer is a warmly dressed man holding his hat against the wind, with a fine white horse hauling logs on a rude hurdle. A similar figure can be seen coming over the brow of a hill in the background to the 1774 *Stormy Landscape with Travellers* (Plate 7), also commissioned by Wynn.⁶⁶ He is ahead of a woman and child, all battling the elements on a rough track in a wild place. Are they sightseers with servants following? Unburdened, surprisingly well dressed, they look incongruous in that setting. In a very similar scene, *A Landstorm with Travellers on a Road to the Left* (Plate 14), signed and dated to the next year, 1775,

13 – Thomas Roberts

A LANDSTORM, A MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE, WITH TRAVELLERS ON A BRIDGE

n.d., oil on canvas, 96 x 132 cm (courtesy McCarthy family and Irish Heritage Trust [Fota House])





14 – Thomas Roberts, *A LANDSCAPE WITH TRAVELLERS ON A ROAD TO THE LEFT*
1775, oil on canvas, 111 x 150 cm

a yet more dramatic waterfall is set off by a lush valley in the background, and out of this is emerging another well-accounted man holding on to his hat, striding ahead of a woman sitting on a packhorse, who is getting directions from a local. Are the travellers together? Impossible to say, but they seem purposeful, strong characters, undaunted by a hostile environment.

The landscape itself is less threatening in *A Windstorm, Figures with a Packhorse on a Path by an Estuary. A Castle on the Hill in the Middle Distance* (Plate 15), as the Laffan and Rooney catalogue sums up another storm scene from this period.⁶⁷ This time the sturdy, hat-holding figure is a packman with a laden horse. The other figure may be a travelling companion, as the catalogue suggests, or is he a poorer peddler with a backpack, resting by the side of the road, holding out his hat? Is he making a point, or asking for alms? Again we are left guessing, but here too is a narrative of struggle and survival, with interesting similarities to Roberts' serene Claudian landscape *An Extensive Coastal Landscape with Travellers resting in the foreground, a Rainbow beyond* (Fota House), in which a man and a woman with pack animals rest in a lonely place.⁶⁸ A final storm scene is described in the catalogue as *A Landstorm, a Mountainous Landscape, with Travellers on a Bridge* (Plates 1, 13).⁶⁹ In compositional terms this has similarities to an earlier painting, *A Landscape with Travellers Crossing a Bridge by a Waterfall* (Plate 5).⁷⁰ Once again,

a foregrounded sublime landscape is balanced by a distant beautiful one, and the sublime element further diminished by distancing a waterfall from the viewer at the far side of a bridge. However, the differences between the two illustrate how far Roberts had come in terms of sensibility. In the earlier painting, as indicated above, the travellers are enjoying the waterfall rather like tourists in a picturesque landscape. In this later *Landstorm* (Plates 1, 13), Roberts' travellers press forward, hunched against the wind, at one with the more threatening mood of this landscape rather than reducing it to spectacle. This time the ubiquitous man holding on to his hat is approaching the bridge on horseback, with a woman behind. Already across the bridge, another well-dressed man, hunched against the wind, is leading a cadaverous white horse. Once again the viewer's attention is engaged on a variety of levels – with the beauty and danger of the landscape, with an intriguing group of travellers whose struggles with the wind heighten its effects, and with their story, at which the viewer can only guess.

How does this recurring motif of sturdy travellers struggling through a stormy wild landscape, but in no apparent danger, compare to Roberts' Italian and Dutch models, and to contemporary paintings with similar themes, notably Gainsborough's? The peopled landscapes of the Italian, Jan Both (1618?-52), who has been identified as an influence on Roberts, feature laden travellers in expansive Claudian landscapes passing people resting by the roadside or engaged in business, as in *Italian Landscape with Draftsman*

15 – Thomas Roberts

A WINDSTORM, FIGURES WITH A PACKHORSE ON A PATH BY AN ESTUARY.
A CASTLE ON THE HILL IN THE MIDDLE DISTANCE n.d., oil on canvas, 64 x 97 cm





16 – Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682), *STORM ON THE DUNES*
 n.d., oil on canvas, 70 x 82 cm (courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art)

(c.1650, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).⁷¹ An even busier confluence of assorted people and animals, where two woodland tracks meet, in *The Great Oak* (Los Angeles County Museum of Modern Art)⁷² by Ruisdael is characteristic of Dutch art of this type. Despite their busy record of meetings and passings, the atmosphere in both traditions is of calm and of a thriving community. Ruisdael's many paintings of wild waterfalls, 'the largest category of his existing paintings',⁷³ reflect a different Dutch tradition, and were clearly a model for Roberts, but few of them feature people, and those that do convey a sense of real danger, absent in Roberts, as noted earlier. Ruisdael's only storm scene featuring a traveller, *Storm on the Dunes* (Plate 16),⁷⁴ however, has an interesting similarity with Roberts' storm scenes, featuring, as it does, a single well-dressed figure enjoying a walk, though he would appear to be on familiar ground and near home. This is also true of the early landscapes by Roberts' great contemporary Gainsborough, featuring peasants going to and from market, which also hark back to Ruisdael.⁷⁵ They too represent a community at home in its environment, though one under threat from enclosure of commonages and privatisation of woodlands. There are gestures towards this in the paintings, which have echoes of Oliver Goldsmith's attack on the process in *The Deserted Village* (1774), but Gainsborough is even more concerned to portray 'the essential solidarity of the English rural community'.⁷⁶

Roberts' travellers battling the wind in wild, lonely places are different. They appear as strangers in the landscape, and, in some cases, as mysterious figures whose business is unfathomable. They seem isolated figures for the most part, even when they are part of a small group, each wrapped up in his or her own thoughts, as in their coats. They are not Goldsmith's 'melancholy band' of dispossessed, scourged by famine from the smiling land',⁷⁷ apart from the faint image of the poor family in the background of the 1774 *Windstorm* (Plate 10) – very much, in Barrell's celebrated phrase, 'on the dark side of the landscape'.⁷⁸ They are, rather, romantic figures, braving rough terrain and adverse weather, as many of the art-buying public were beginning to do in their search for the picturesque in Wicklow and Kerry, north Wales and the Lake District. These storm landscapes reflect Roberts' experience of wild Irish landscapes, no doubt, but they may also, like Gainsborough's landscapes, owe something to social upheaval. In the real Irish landscape of the 1760s and 1770s, the agricultural 'improvement', in part associated with the creation of great new estates and demesnes, caused even greater hardship than similar events in England, and led to more organised and alarming rural violence. Travellers' accounts, as they journey from one great house or beauty spot to another, often featured roads crowded with the dispossessed rural poor, a cause of great alarm to the Irish landowning class who were Roberts' main patrons. His isolated, independent travellers offered an alternative, non-threatening vision, while also being in tune with the new sensibility of the picturesque, the latter of more conscious concern to him no doubt.

From the early eighteenth century, a new strain of English nature poetry had delighted in the frisson of fear induced by storms and waterfalls. In David Malet's, *The Excursion* (1728), for example, the landscape is first experienced as a rural idyll populated by hard-working 'labourer' and 'swain', though even this is greeted with 'rapture in his eye'. This sensibility finds its true subject in a vivid description of a thunderstorm, and 'the hour of terror', with lightning burning 'yon riven oak'. The onset of night brings more pleasurable terrors, particularly 'a dashing flood in headlong torrent' from 'shapeless rock of dusky height'.⁷⁹ The same combination appeared in James Thomson's wildly successful *The Seasons* (1730). This celebrated the rituals of the agricultural year in 'Happy Britannia' before thrilling to the 'sacred terror' of herding sheep at night in remote uplands, and of a waterfall, 'raging still amid the shaggy rocks', until

... falling fast from gradual slope to slope
 With wild infracted course and lessened roar
 It gains a safer bed, and steals at last,
 Along the mazes of the quiet vale.

[This is the scene painted by Mullins and discussed earlier (Plate 2)].

The poet finds refuge in a 'hollowed rock, grotesque and wild' before returning gratefully to the pleasures of 'golden waves of corn'.⁸⁰ Such evocations of wild landscape as an exciting but safe counterpart to the mundane was, doubtless, part of what situates Roberts' storm landscapes in the modish picturesque. They also contain gestures towards the sub-

lime, however, though more muted than in his first storm landscape. The juxtaposition of inhospitable terrain, raging torrents and wild winds with the small figures of meticulously observed, somewhat mysterious, indomitable, but still vulnerable, people echoes the romantic mood of poetry like Thomson's. This juxtaposition makes them unusual, almost unique, in Irish and English art of the period. Laffan and Rooney are correct in their observations that these figures are not, in fact, threatened or frightened by torrent or storm, and that 'the motif of catching one's hat against the wind' is banal.⁸¹ Yet, it is also an everyday gesture with which the viewer can identify, and if these landscapes fail to evoke terror, they do evoke empathy, not least in their understated valorising of the storm-bound travellers. It is also reminiscent of the everyday experiences which Burke cites throughout the *Enquiry* to exemplify responses to both the sublime and the beautiful. A similar sensibility can be found in William Cowper's *The Task*, written around the same time and first published in 1785. The poet, snug at home on a winter's evening, evokes sympathetically the plight of a poor carter, toiling through the storm which rages outside. He is a noble figure, a child of nature, immune to 'that sensibility of pain with which refinement is endowed'. Indeed, he is 'formed to bear / The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night', and is imagined 'With half-shut eyes ... bare against the storm' while 'one hand secures his hat'. Crucially, he is also 'poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat' – that is, one of the deserving poor, who alone are deemed worthy of sympathetic treatment either in art or in reality in this period.⁸²

The same combination of stolid endurance of harsh conditions together with an air of resolute independence, can be found in the second series of storm paintings by Roberts. It was to recur in the early heyday of Romanticism, particularly in the poetry of Wordsworth. His celebration of 'the wanderer, the solitary' in *The Excursion* (1814), for example, includes a heroic image of 'the peddler', which is reminiscent of several of these paintings.

An irksome drudgery seems it to plod on,
 Through hot or dusty ways or pelting storm,
 A vagrant merchant under a heavy load,
 Bent as he moves, and needing frequent rest;
 Yet do such travellers find their own delight.⁸³

The viewer is meant to identify, likewise, with Roberts' figures, who are ordinary people – objects of admiration or curiosity rather than pity, as they battle, however prosaically, through storm and inhospitable terrain. Their everyday struggle is heroic, that of 'Everyman' (and 'Everywoman'), a 'Pilgrims Progress', an image of life's journey.

ENDNOTES

The following abbreviation is used:

Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts* William Laffan and Brendan Rooney, *Thomas Roberts: Landscape and Patronage in Eighteenth Century Ireland* (Tralee, 2009)

- ¹ 'Anthony Pasquin' (John Williams), *An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, who have practised in Ireland...* (London, 1796) 7-8.
- ² Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, especially pages 132, 131, 180.
- ³ For a useful recent survey, see Adela Pinch, 'Sensibility' in Nicholas Roe (ed.), *Romanticism, an Oxford Guide* (Oxford, 2005) 49-61.
- ⁴ See Ann Bermingham (ed.), *Sensation and Sensibility: viewing Gainsborough's Cottage Door* (New Haven and London, 2005)
- ⁵ James Barry, *The Works of James Barry* (Edward Fryer [ed.]), 2 vols (London, 1809) I, 405.
- ⁶ Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, 198-99, 240.
- ⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London, 1757); quotations from Oxford World Classics edition (1990) which is based on 2nd edn. (1759) 36.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, 53, 58.
- ⁹ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986) 125.
- ¹⁰ Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: a study of critical theories in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1935; Ann Arbor edn., 1960) 54.
- ¹¹ Barry, *The Works of James Barry*, I, 257-68. On authorship, see Martin Postle, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds, Edmund Burke, and the Grand Whiggery' in Elise Goodman (ed.), *Art and Culture in the Eighteenth Century: new dimensions and multiple perspectives* (Newark, DE, 2001) 112.
- ¹² Robert R. Wark (ed.), *Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art* (based on Reynolds' 1797 edn.), (New Haven and London, 1974) 81-84.
- ¹³ Monk, *The Sublime*, 182-88.
- ¹⁴ See Fiona Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: a study of James Macpherson and the poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1988); for the Irish response, see Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: antiquarian debate and cultural politics in Ireland, c.1750-1800* (Cork, 2004).
- ¹⁵ Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the son of Fingal* (London, 1763) 21, 63.
- ¹⁶ Barry, *The Works of James Barry*, I, 266-67.
- ¹⁷ Wark (ed.), *Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art*, 85, 70.
- ¹⁸ P. Cunningham (ed.), *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, I (Edinburgh, 1966) 27.
- ¹⁹ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford, 1999) 131.
- ²⁰ Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 49.
- ²¹ Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters 1600-1940* (New Haven and London, 2002) 143-44.
- ²² Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, 46-47.
- ²³ Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 138.
- ²⁴ Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, 32-33.
- ²⁵ Richard Twiss, *A Tour of Ireland in 1775* (London, 1776) 62.
- ²⁶ Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 134.
- ²⁷ Jonathan Fisher, *A Picturesque Tour of Killarney...* (Dublin, 1789) introduction and 1.

- ²⁸ Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, cat. nos 11-15.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, cat. no. 7.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, 265. See also Nicola Figgis, 'Irish Landscapists in Rome' in *Irish Arts Review*, 4, no. 4, 1987, 60-65 and, more recently, William Laffan, 'All the Terrors of the Storm: the FitzWilliam Forresters and the beginnings of the Romantic Sublime' in P. Murray (ed.), *Terror and the Sublime* (Cork, 2009).
- ³¹ David Solkin, *Richard Wilson: the Landscape of Reaction* (London, 1982) 59-66.
- ³² Jane Fenlon, *The Ormond Picture Collection* (Kilkenny, 2001) 102.
- ³³ Seymour Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael: a complete catalogue of his paintings, drawings and etchings* (New Haven and London, 2001) no. 648.
- ³⁴ James Kinsley (ed.), *The Poems of John Dryden*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1958) I, 403.
- ³⁵ James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson. L.L.D. Comprehending an Account of his Studies and numerous Works, in Three Volumes* (2nd edn., London, 1793) I, 335-37.
- ³⁶ Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque: landscape aesthetics and tourism in Britain, 1760-1800* (Aldershot and Stanford, 1989) 25.
- ³⁷ Humphry Wine, *Claude and the Poetic Landscape* (London, 1994).
- ³⁸ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: the rural poor in English painting 1730-1840* (Cambridge, 1980) 35.
- ³⁹ Birmingham, *Sensation and Sensibility*, 10-12.
- ⁴⁰ Diane Perkins, 'Gainsborough's Forest' in Michael Rosenthal and Martin Myrone (eds), *Gainsborough* (London, 2002) 48.
- ⁴¹ Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 49.
- ⁴² Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, cat. no. 4.
- ⁴³ Birmingham, *Sensation and Sensibility*, 1-2, 89.
- ⁴⁴ See Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, 295, on the Carton pictures, for example.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, cat. no. 7.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, cat. no. 21.
- ⁴⁷ Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael*, no. 287.
- ⁴⁸ Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, 277.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*, cat. no. 53.
- ⁵⁰ Solkin, *Richard Wilson*, 131.
- ⁵¹ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, 112-13.
- ⁵² Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, cat. no. 24.
- ⁵³ *ibid.*, cat. no. 55.
- ⁵⁴ Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, 53.
- ⁵⁵ Solkin, *Richard Wilson*, 139, fn. 32.
- ⁵⁶ Mary Ann Constantine, 'Ossian in Wales and Brittany' in Howard Gaskill (ed.), *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London and New York, 2004) 67-90.
- ⁵⁷ See Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven and London, 1992) ch. 4.
- ⁵⁸ Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, 127.
- ⁵⁹ John Burke, *A General and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the British Empire*, 2 vols (London, 1832) I, 358. See also Solkin, *Richard Wilson*, 105-12.
- ⁶⁰ Solkin, *Richard Wilson*, 105, 110-11.
- ⁶¹ This was a suggestion made by David Solkin in response to my paper at the symposium on Roberts, National Gallery of Ireland, 4th April 2009.
- ⁶² Monk, *The Sublime*, 190

- ⁶³ Solkin, *Richard Wilson*, 111.
- ⁶⁴ Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, cat. nos 4, 50.
- ⁶⁵ *ibid.*, cat. no. 55; quote, 265.
- ⁶⁶ *ibid.*, cat. no. 53.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid.*, cat. no. 58.
- ⁶⁸ *ibid.*, cat., no. 62.
- ⁶⁹ *ibid.*, cat., no. 60.
- ⁷⁰ *ibid.*, cat., no. 21.
- ⁷¹ *ibid.*, 238.
- ⁷² Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael*, no. 380.
- ⁷³ *ibid.*, 153.
- ⁷⁴ *ibid.*, no. 613.
- ⁷⁵ Perkins, 'Gainsborough's Forest', 48.
- ⁷⁶ Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 59. On the echoes of Goldsmith in Gainsborough's landscapes, see Rosenthal and Myrone (eds), *Gainsborough*, 20, 214-15.
- ⁷⁷ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted village: a poem* (London, 1770) 25.
- ⁷⁸ Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, title and *passim*.
- ⁷⁹ David Malet, *The Excursion: a Poem in two Cantos* (London, 1728) 69-78.
- ⁸⁰ James Thomson, *The Seasons* (London, 1730; 1772 edn.) 47-59, lines 585-606 quoted.
- ⁸¹ Laffan and Rooney, *Roberts*, 265.
- ⁸² William Cowper, *The Task in Poems by William Cowper*, 2 vols (3rd edn., London, 1787) II, 154-78.
- ⁸³ William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* (1814) Book 1, *The Wanderer*.