II

Time, Territory and Wilderness in Early Modern Landscape Images, II

After the Paradigm Shift 1420

Introduction

ASSERTING THAT THE modern paradigm breaks through in the Western landscape image around 1420 is the same as saying that what previously could be generated only via specific thematic motivation – weather, time, cast light, cultivation, and so forth – now spreads from particular iconographic contexts to the landscape image *in general*, independently of what might otherwise be going on in terms of figurative events. Simultaneously with the view expanding through an atmosphere now characterised by time, the formerly so dominant rocks have to make way for a softened earth that can be ploughed into fields, dissected by roads and form gently sloping shores for lakes, rivers and oceans. In this landscape, the forest has also been balanced with the territory as a whole, for whereas before it appeared in agoraphobically isolated units it can now absorb the space in its mass and spread out across the ground.

Looked at cosmologically – and vertically – this image transformation depends, as already mentioned, on a dissolution of the geocentric tension: as the magnetic field between heavens and underworld is weakened by the Copernican infinity, the segregation of Paradise in an elevated garden is penetrated, at which its forests and meadows can slide down in the simultaneously levelled rock masses of the inferno. Looked at socially – and horizontally – the transformation involves a displacement along the *field* framework of the Golden Age and Paradise myth: the fulcrum slides from the *terra* of the Paradise mountain to the *territory* of the plains of the Fall. Just as I, in chapter 2, concluded that the rock formations of pre-modern images found resonance in the geographical environment of their commissioners, the mountains of the Mediterranean area, the same argument can be applied to the geographical

setting of their successors, the landscape formations of a more plains-like character. For could it not be said that the fulcrum of Western civilisation towards the end of the Middle Ages has been moved from the mountain-dominated Mediterranean culture to the transalpine, plains-like and increasingly territorially re-mapped Northern Europe: the British Isles, Holland, Flanders, France, Germany? Having once expanded my optical instrument with the lenses of the paradigms and their associated *fields,* and having recognised that there is no such thing as a 'pure', unmediated pictorial view, I can then actually allow myself a certain measure of realistic and mimetic pictorial reading: the rocks in pre-modern images are those of the Mediterranean region; the fields in their modern successors are those of Northern Europe. In a temporally very wide-ranging sense, Europe's tangible terrain thereby functions as part of a macrohistorical attractor, a structure of forces that control Western cultural evolution; and the paradigms of the landscape image can be read as a fixing, an imprint of this attractor.

Put succinctly, the flattened-out terrain of the landscape image spreads between two poles, those of territory and wilderness, which could simultaneously be said to correspond with two extremities of the naturalistic visual spectrum, those of realism and romanticism. In the realistically beheld utilitarian nature of the territory, the human being is master and through his or her own efforts has made the landscape purposive. In the romantically beheld expanses of the wilderness, on the other hand, nature takes over and shows that it has no pact with humankind. Ultimately, this is the pathless landscape in which the human being is inspired with sublime emotions upon contemplation of the indomitable forces of nature, from which, however, this subject simultaneously finds him- or herself at a reassuring distance guaranteed by the non-visible, but nonetheless indispensable urban civilisation. Despite the polarisation, these landscape types are thereby an expression of the same approach to nature, for whether the human being has control of nature or has, in his imagination, commended himself to its forces, the situation is qualified by a rift between humankind and nature – the nominalist rift that has shaped humankind's self-volition with regard to a nature that is in itself infinite, changeable and devoid of *telos*. Whether the human being wishes to relinquish passively to this nature (romanticism) or actively conquer it (realism), is entirely a question of free will.

But the couplings of opposites, territory/wilderness, realism/romanticism, do not take over the landscape image by means of a smooth development. Reminiscences of the pre-modern Paradise/underworld duality live on far into the 15th century, and from the end of that century the Renaissance puts the lid on the modernity paradigm. What we ascertained in chapter 9 about space, diversity and particularity in relation to the reawakened antique canon can thus here be extended with the factors of time, topography and work. In my analysis of the antique landscape image

I observed that such phenomena were not represented, and it would therefore seem understandable that they must also be moderated in modernity's neo-antique version. Apollo cannot wander among windmills, cornfields, logs or quarries, nor can he play his lyre in front of a roadside inn or a city hall depicted with topographical accuracy. Narcissus does not look at his reflection in the surface of a frozen lake on which children are skating, and Venus does not go ashore on a beach flanked by autumnal trees.

But whereas timelessness, spatial limitation and absence of work in the sacral-idyllic landscape were deeply embedded in the pre-modern pictorial paradigm, the Golden Age paradigm, these conditions now have to be recreated as a pocket in the modernity paradigm. While Northern Europe's images increasingly give way to time, topography and cultivation, the Italians put a sordine on the new effects, an enterprise that culminates in the *ideal landscape* of 16th-17th-century pictorial art. In other words, Renaissance art is amazingly consistent in its neo-antique endeavours. Not only does the devotion to the ideal body take place in a tamed pictorial space which reduces details, pulls the heavens back to the earth and limits ideality-threatening time; this space also shuns the cultivated nature of the territory because this nature, just as in antiquity, is reminiscent of an existence in which there is not sufficient leisure time for the heroic deeds involved in the devotion to the ideal body.

As to the cultivated and temporally-determined landscape, this reaches a provisional climax in 17th-century Dutch art. Not least with Renaissance ideology in mind, the degree to which Carel van Mander refers to farm work in *Het Schilder-Boeck*'s section on landscape painting (1604) is striking. As the painter expands his view across the landscape, he must

> skilfully divide the expanse of land in fields. While we can see the blond-haired Ceres at one side, the other field is filled with unripened oats. It is here that Eurus floats in, who passes the time by turning the fields into a sea of green waves and whispering sounds. [...] There are also red and blue flowers among the corn and wheat and the useful, sky-blue flax. Ploughed fields, too, hatched with furrows, or here and there fields, with harvested crops; then too, fields and meadows with the ditches, hedges and winding paths belonging to them.[1]

Nor does van Mander find any fundamental difference between agriculture and other forms of rural activity. Immediately after the passage just cited, he refers to strange shepherds' huts and peasants' homes in caves or hollow trees. And of the small figures in the landscapes, he urges: "Show them either ploughing or mowing, or loading up a cart further away. Elsewhere you may show them in the act of fishing, sailing, catching birds or hunting."

In particular, van Mander sees no difference between this new land iconography and that of antiquity. The Augustan Ludius would almost seem to have been painting van Mander's contemporary Netherlands: "In landscapes without water he would paint fully laden carts and asses in the fields and paths, near the houses and farmyards, and other agricultural implements." And: "The achievement for which he received the highest general acclaim at that time was his depiction of a marshy low-lying piece of land in which he painted a couple of farms and muddy, almost impassable, slippery roads. He showed this very explicitly by painting women slipping and falling down."[2] When reading these mildly distorted paraphrases of Pliny, slipping in territorial fields, paths, roads and agricultural implements which were not there in the original, we can understand how hard it has been to define modernity in relation to antiquity.

In the light of my contention in the previous chapter that the introduction of fields into the landscape image was facilitated by a reappraisal of physical work, indeed of work all told, the obvious question now has to be asked: is the retreat of the fields – and the pictorial conservatism of the Renaissance in general – connected to a corresponding regression within work philosophy and politics, i.e. to a revival of antique aristocratic politics? It is beyond the remit of the present study to pursue this question in depth, but I must however point out a few principal trends that would seem to bear out a connection.

In his famous study of the religious roots of capitalism, Max Weber emphasised the special status of this form of production in a world historical perspective. Not only is there no capitalism outside, or before, the Western modernity; within the European area it should be specifically located to the Protestant settings, which thus means that commercial, technical and industrial work is mainly developed in North European areas such as the Netherlands, England, certain parts of Germany and Northern France (and later, with colonisation: the US). Among religious communities such as Calvinists, Pietists, Puritans, Baptists and Methodists, the teaching was that one should lead an industrious, regulated and ascetic life, should not waste time and should earn money; in brief, a profusion of qualities that stimulated – and were stimulated by – the development of modern market economics and standardised production.[3]

Having, in chapter 8, mentioned the connection between the Copernican world picture, colonisation of the non-Western world and expansion of the pictorial space, all predominantly Northern European phenomena (Spain and Portugal being more complex hybrids), it would thus not seem unreasonable to extend the effective radius of the *field* and connect the equally Northern European phenomena of capitalism and Protestantism to the Northern pictorial art's corresponding temporally-dominated and cultivated terrains. The connection is particularly pertinent

in the 17th-century Netherlands, Europe's first fully bourgeois, commercial, non-aristocratic, non-Catholic and democratic republic, which, as we have seen, is also where the gaze is first lowered down to the flatness of the fields under the high misty skies. If this is correct, then it is still, however, a case of the mature fruit of a lengthy evolution, for as Weber also points out, the communal space between capitalism and worldly religion can be traced far back to the *Devotio Moderna* movement in the 13th-15th centuries, and this in turn is nourished by the culture of the monasteries and convents.[4]

If, however, we focus on Italy, the Catholic culture that fosters the Renaissance and the neo-antique ideal landscape, we find, in keeping with the 19th-century republican historians, *I nuovi piagnoni* (cf. chapter 9), that it is characterised by an escalating process of aristocratisation in the 15th-16th centuries. Machiavelli writes *Il Principe*, the formula for total princely power, in 1513, at the same time as his desired host city, Florence, the 15th-century's symbol of inviolable republican liberty,[5] is in the process of being transformed into the capital city of a duchy – a process that is completed in 1530. According to Le Goff, the Renaissance also seeks to revive Roman law and Aristotelian politics, even though the antique vocabulary – for example, the term *opera servilia* – is often at odds with social progress.[6] In particular, the Italians do not plunge into the same kind of trade and colonial ventures that are undertaken by Northern Europeans, the Spanish and Portuguese. The Italians do not yearn outwards, but inwards towards their own past. After Charles VIII's Italian passion catalyses his conquering expedition to the country in 1494, this nostalgia is enlarged upon by the Northern Europeans' craving for all things Italian. The otherwise highly expanding world picture of modernity has to be provisionally curbed by, if not directly implode in, the concentration on Italy and the neo-antique culture.

All in all, the period from the end of the 15th century to the late 18th century seems to incorporate what Le Roy Ladurie calls an "immense multi-secular breath of a social structure", a re-feudalisation in which previously free farmers are now again serfs or reduced to day-labourers, while power is concentrated in the hands of absolute rulers. Braudel even refers to the "second serfdom", a comprehensive European trend that has its fulcrum in Italy, Germany, France and Eastern Europe.[7] This countercurrent in cultural evolution, then, occurs at the same time as the revival of antique imagery during the Counter Reformation, and it is therefore extremely tempting to see the Renaissance style as, to a large extent, the manifestation of absolute monarchy. As far as the production of art is concerned, it is particularly of note that the art academies, the Renaissance's new centres of education, are indeed aristocratic institutions under the auspices of the powerful elite. Their forerunners, the workshops of the Late Middle Ages, were, on the other hand, independent institutions, the leaders of which were organised in guilds.

Fig. II.1. Vincent van Gogh, *The Siesta* (after Millet) (1889-90), oil on canvas. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

Even though I acknowledge the considerable complexity of the development, I must therefore trust that in relation to the modern epoch it would make a certain degree of sense to couple the following concepts: on the one hand, images with ideal landscapes, Renaissance, Catholicism and aristocratism; on the other hand, images with cultivated or romantic landscapes, modernity, Protestantism and republicanism.

Like the traces of time and the infinite pictorial space, agricultural iconography could be said to culminate in the work-fixated 19th century, if not the 20th century. In the work of painters such as Bastien-Lepage, Jules Breton, Millet and van Gogh, farm workers become more or less martyr-like heroes fighting a daily and gruelling battle to put food on the table (FIG. II.1). The range of motifs is clearly qualified by the nationalistic movements' accelerating affection for the ancestral turf, and by an expanded awareness of the workers' circumstances. The iconography not only continues to flourish during the Communist revolutions in Russia and China,

but also during late-capitalist culture[8] and its totalitarian extremes, fascism and Nazism. As the totalitarian regimes also, however, revive the antique notion of the heroic human being, a disastrous and destructive coupling occurs: comprising, on the one hand, modernity's anti-heroic everyday life and fixation on physical work, and, on the other hand, the Renaissance cult of the ideal body, an aristocratic cult in which heroism is actually rooted in freedom from work. This ominous totalitarian constellation could be said, then, ultimately to stem from the self-deception that we have yet to put behind us: the idea that modernity is a rebirth of antiquity.

11.1 Time as weather and light

Scanning the paradigm

In diametrical opposition to the Golden Age paradigm's timelessness, from its very earliest beginnings the modern landscape paradigm draws nourishment from time. Time drained of events, *tempus*, can be equated with weather, the atmosphere's changeable constellation of water and air that determines the way in which light from the sky is spread across trees, plains, mountains and seas. And as can be illustrated by, for example, Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *The Harvesters* (1565; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art) and *Hunters in the Snow* (1565; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), the modern landscape paradigm is easily condensed in conditions that offer a pictorial representation of Ovid's post-paradisiacal weather: "Then first the parched air glared white with burning heat, and icicles hung down congealed by freezing winds."[9] Unlike the classical culture, this inconstancy is, however, no longer unequivocally negative; in the instantaneous atmospheric condition, nature would rather seem to have a tender effect on the observing mind, transporting it to a mood. Indeed, atmosphere has even become synonymous with mood, so it seems logical that when the German landscape painter, physician and Schelling pupil Carl Gustav Carus is to define the main task of landscape art in his *Neun Briefe über die Landschaftsmalerei* (1815-24), he describes it as "[r]epresentation of a certain mood in the life of the mind (perception) through the depiction of a corresponding mood in the life of nature (truth)."[10] This strong correspondence between inner and outer mood can also be clarified in musical terminology if we bring in the concept of *tempering* (from the Latin *temperare*), the slight deviation from absolute mathematics which is necessary in order to establish the modern major and minor scales. The term, which actually means to mingle or proportion properly, is indeed also, like, for example, *tempesta* (weather, storm), derived from *tempus*, and again it points both outwards towards meteorology's *temperature* as

well as inwards towards the mind's *temper* (Latin: *temperamentum*), the mingling of bodily fluids (*humours*) that determine the state of mind.

This intimate connection between weather and state of mind could be used as further evidence of modernity's air of original sin, for just as the Fall involves a shift from eternal spring to unstable weather, it also entails a shift from a harmonious person to someone at the mercy of the rages of moods. According to a doctrine developed in the 12th century, original man was free of sin or death because he was in perfect balance with himself and his bodily fluids. In the words of Hildegard of Bingen: "had man remained in Paradise he would not have noxious fluids in his body." The Fall thus leads to an imbalance in which the warped distribution of bodily fluids not only causes death, illness and sin, but also the disharmonious personality types called temperaments – with the melancholic temperament generated by the black bile, the phlegmatic by the white, the choleric by the yellow and the sanguine (despite everything, the most desirable) by the red. It is these four temperaments – in the shape of elk, ox, cat and rabbit, respectively – which, as emblems of the post-paradisiacal fluctuations in state of mind, accompany Dürer's engraved Adam and Eve (1504).[11]

A god who invariably features as tutelary spirit for the mental as well as the landscape changes in mood is Saturn, alias Cronus. Although host of the Golden Age, the eternal cloudless spring, he is also, as the god of lead, the epitome of its cessation, the epoch in which time and depression take over. Melancholy transpires when the *otium* of the Golden Age changes into idleness. The Middle Ages used the same word for both concepts: *accidia*. In pre-modern times melancholy is chiefly seen as an illness, linked to the black bile, albeit Aristotle had already remarked that great minds are usually melancholics.[12] This notion becomes all-important in modernity, in which melancholy and mental instability are considered marks of genius, a necessary illness that is reflected aesthetically in changeable external matters such as, for example, temporally-marked landscapes. The tutelary spirit is, of course, Cronus, as Cronus-Saturn was associated with time, the epitome of inconsistency, and was also said to have introduced time measurement.[13]

The topicality of the link between external and internal lability in the wake of the 1420 shift in pictorial paradigm, the fall from the Golden Age paradigm, is evident in Alberti's dialogue *Theogenius*:

> Look, how the earth is now dressed in flowers, now heavy with apples and fruits, now naked without her foliage and hair, now squalid and horrid through ice and snow which make the sides and tops of mountains and lonely places white-haired. And do we not, when we are ready, see anything now, no moment follows, as the poet Mannilius says, which is like the previous, not only in the minds of humans,

> who are now happy, then sad, next angry, then full of suspicion and similar perturbances [*perturbazioni*], but also in the whole universal nature, warm in the day, cold at night, bright in the morning, dark in the evening, recently windy, suddenly calm, then clear, then full of rain, splendour, thunder, and thus incessantly with variation upon variation [*varietà*].[14]

We notice that the word *varietà* is here used in the temporal sense, in that it is part of the changeableness of the world. The leap to spatial diversity, in reference to which we have heard Alberti use the term before, is, however, obvious. Both the temporal and spatial aspects of the word concern a fundamental feature of modernity and its representations in landscape imagery.

During the period of the Golden Age *field*, this changeability and unrestrained variation is considered a degeneration of beauty, but in modernity it becomes the basic element of art. If the weather is due to the instantaneous attuning of atmospheric elements, and the mood is created by the momentary mingling of bodily fluids, then correspondingly a degree of non-harmonious, but well-moderated constellation of tones is necessary before the music rings. It is hardly accidental that polyphonic music is born in the Late Middle Ages alongside the growth of the modern pictorial paradigm, and that this music's modern ('classical') successor matures and culminates at the same time as the highpoint of the landscape painting in the 18th-19th centuries.[15] Both parties reflect fluctuating, dissonant frames of mind by means of pure sense perception, the former aurally, the latter visually; both are inextricably bound to the passage of time. Michel Serres even considers music to be the absolute antithesis of sculpture: while sculpture is hard, solid, silent and has kinship with death, music is gentle, buoyant, audible and roams the non-differentiated space.[16] In general, we can thus conclude that the well-tempered blend that comprises mood, weather and music is located at the focal point of modernity. *Modus*, the mode determined by the instant, is its approximate synonym.

It would therefore be no trouble at all to install landscape painting in the place of music. Hegel corroborates the objectless, hovering and sonorous quality of the romantic vision:

> The inner, thus pushed to extremes, is the uttering without externality, invisible, as if perceiving only itself, a sounding as such, without objecthood or form, a hovering over waters, a ringing over a world, which, in and by its heterogeneous apparitions, can only receive and reflect one reverberation of this in-itself-being of the soul.[17]

As a consequence of this internalised resonance, Hegel alleges that the romantic disposition, also when expressing itself visually, is musical and lyrical. This line of

thought continues with Spengler who, like Serres, considers music to be the Faustian archetypal art form. The nuances of light, shadow and colour in painting are basically dealing with musical matters and, conversely, music is a spatial art form. At its culmination in 18th-century instrumental music, we are offered

> bodiless realms of tone, tone-intervals, tone-seas. The orchestra swells, breaks, and ebbs, it depicts distances, lights, shadows, storms, driving clouds, lightning flashes, colours etherealized and transcendent – think of the landscapes in the instrumentation of Gluck and Beethoven.[18]

The engine driving the atmospheric visions of painting and music alike is, again, time: time in the form of unburied death. We recall that the seasons made their renewed entrance into the West's understanding of the world when winter was excavated from the land of the dead and thus released its shadows, winds, stenches and diseases. According to Lucretius, it is the very clouds or fogs that bring plague and disease:

> Therefore when a sky which is alien to us happens to set itself in motion and [...] when it has come to our sky, it corrupts it, making it like itself and alien to us. Accordingly this new plague or pestilence either falls on the waters suddenly, or settles on the corn itself, or other food of mankind or fodder of beasts, or even remains as a force suspended in the air itself.[19]

In whatever way this airborne epidemic might choose to reveal itself, it once more has its origins in Saturn since besides incarnating melancholy, the contamination of bodily fluids by the black bile, in the landscape environment this sluggish god was also linked to clouds, which brought plague. In *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (*On the Genealogy of the Gods of the Gentiles*; begun *c.* 1350) Boccaccio states:

> Finally, when standing thus irresolutely, it seemed to me that I saw a slow and cloudy star, blurred by Stygian steam, rising from the Eastern sea as if it were from hell. While I observed this cloud-enveloped sight, I remembered the precepts of the venerable Andalò and knew that it was the hated and harmful star Saturn.[20]

As we are, after all, on our way into the epistemic *field* of modernity, we must however note that what here, on its threshold, is still regarded as infernal and contaminating, becomes, in its more mature state, uplifting and inspiring, an outer reflection of the slightest emotions in the depths of the soul. In Carus' *Neun Briefe über die Landschaftsmalerei*, the now transformed Saturnian steam cladding, the ordinary

clouds of landscape painting, is praised for its ability to encapsulate this connection in particular:

> Everything which resonates in the human breast, a brightening and eclipsing, a developing and dissolving, a making and destroying, everything hovers before our senses in the delicate images of the cloud regions; and perceived in the right way, inspired by the spirit of art, it reaches wonderfully the very mind which these apparitions pass by unnoticed in reality.[21]

In 1821, John Constable also has to put the case for the way in which the upper parts, the celestial regions, speak to the beholding mind:

> Sir Joshua Reynolds speaking of the "Landscape" of Titian & Salvator & Claude – says *"Even their skies seem to sympathize with the Subject."* [...] It will be difficult to name a class of Landscape, in which the sky is not the *"key note"*, the *standard of "Scale"*, and the chief *"Organ of Sentiment"* [...]. The sky is the *"source of light"* in nature – and governs every thing.[22] [Constable's italics]

That the atmosphere of the sky can be de-demonised in this way and instead become the subject's sympathiser, the chief organ of emotion and the principal tone for the modern landscape image – and the landscape all in all – is perhaps because it has the characteristic of a medium: it lies *between* the beholder and the objects in the environment. Along with foreshortening, it determines how things appear from the instantaneous point of view. In its way it could thereby be regarded as part of the modern visual process itself. Plato's statement that "distance has the effect of befogging the vision of nearly everybody",[23] could both be read as the fog of the world cave getting in the way of vision, given that objects are removed to a distance, and as vision itself becoming foggy *because* it is directed towards that which is at a distance. To look far out into the environment is to shroud it in atmosphere.

It therefore also seems characteristic that Leonardo, the artist who makes sight the empirical sense par excellence, is also the artist who invents *sfumato*, the dark smokescreen that veils the surroundings in indefinable shadows. And, later, Jan Vermeer's soft, imperceptible gradations can be seen as reflecting the experience of using the camera obscura: captured as light-projections in the darkness, the houses of Delft are not razor-sharp and plastic, but appear as ambiguous expanses with a relationship to reality that is a question of interpretation. Here we understand the etymological kinship between *nuance*, *nuer* (to shade) and *nuage* (cloud), as it is in the rims of the shadows and in the clouds that we find the subtle gradations of colour that are the ideal for the modern painting.

As Damisch has pointed out, the gap from exposition of atmosphere and vision to so-called *painterly* styles is therefore not so big.[24] If the soft brushstrokes do not directly imitate the atmosphere or the haziness of vision, they are indicative of the painting process itself: sight becoming brushstrokes. And, since sight itself is a case of assimilating the world *through* something, the version of sight that has been filtered through the brushstrokes also comes close to the act of seeing.[25]

From its very beginnings in Venice around 1500, the painterly style was characterised by anti-classical propensities. While the classical, Florentine *disegno* aims for the plastic representation of the human body's *ergon*, the Venetian *colore* shifts attention to the way of seeing itself and to the *parergon* of the fleeting qualities: mood, atmosphere, light, environment. The mere fact of their speed and sketchiness would seem to put the brushstrokes in harmony with these qualities. With the possible exception of Rubens, the mediator between North and South, the classicist painting has thus always had problems with the painterly style; we need only think of all the Italian painters South of Parma, of Poussin, David, Ingres and 19th-century academic painters generally. Conversely, painterliness is congenially suited to the antithesis of classicism: landscape painting. This applies to the Venetians, Rubens and a number of 17th-century Dutch painters; it is true of romantics such as Turner, Constable and Corot; and it applies to the Impressionists. The surface of the painting, too, can often accommodate stylistic distinction between figure and landscape. While the *ergon* of the figure usually requires a degree of clear-cut drawing, the *parergon* of the landscape setting is more easily resolved in fleeting strokes.

Nevertheless, the painterly style's harmonisation with qualities of the moment does not mean that it has a monopoly on them. As shown by, for example, Caspar David Friedrich, they can still be attended to by its apparent opposite, the sharp definition of hypernaturalism (PLATE 2). Just how intimately the two pictorial languages, hypernaturalism and painterliness, are connected is demonstrated by romantics such as Turner and Moreau, or by realists like Menzel, Courbet and Sargent, not to mention masters of abstraction like de Kooning or Gerhard Richter. Hypernaturalism and painterliness are kith and kin, classicism is their mutual antithesis.

Bearing in mind the structural similarities binding together every epistemic *field*, we must ask a final and pressing question: is it a coincidence that the culture which makes atmosphere the pictorial mood-bearing element is also a culture which procures physical energy from devices that exploit the atmosphere: pressure from wind and water in mills, pressure from gunpowder explosions in firearms, pressure from steam in steam engines; furthermore, all manner of combustibles: wood, coal and oil? The first Western image to show frost breath and the grey winter sky, the *February* picture in *Les Très Riches Heures*, is also the first image to

Fig. 11.2. Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise* (1872), oil on canvas. Paris, Musée Marmottan.

revive the late antique ground-breaking motif: smoke from the chimney (PLATE 34). From this point and on to the first paintings to systematise mood by means of this very smoke, Leonardo's *sfumato* paintings (FIG. 11.22, 12.31 and PLATE 36), the gaze can glide on to the latest progeny of the tradition: a large share of the ambience in Monet's atmospheric paintings of the mist-swathed River Thames comes from the *smog* which was the result of fog mixed with smoke emanating from the factory chimneys, the industrial version of Saturnian plague-laden air emanating from hell (FIG. 11.2).

Similarly, it should be noted that Turner succumbs to the movements of the atmosphere at the same time as the industrial application of steampower becomes widespread (FIG. 8.1). According to the logic that turns aesthetics into a chaos-cultivating complementary phenomenon to rule-based natural science and technology (cf. chapter 8.1), the common denominator here thus comprises turbulence, which in aesthetics is given free rein, whereas its cascades of atmospheres are tamed in the turbine. And the turbulent unbridledness must again, as shown earlier, be

interpreted as an expression of the inner emotions: given that Ghiberti referred to Ambrogio Lorenzetti's turbulence of dark weather (*turbatione di tempo scuro*), and Fazio mentioned Gentile da Fabriano's root-pulling whirlwind (*turbo*), in terms of visual communication they became counterparts to Alberti who compared the changeableness of the weather with the inner disturbances (*perturbazioni*).

To this tradition, which allows the modern soul with its fluctuations of temperament find reflection in smoke and steam, we could ultimately add *tobacco smoking*, a stimulant imported from Europe's New World and often depicted in 17th-century Dutch genre paintings. To heighten the mood, smoke from the burned tobacco is inhaled, and then, by being puffed out, this same mood is transposed in a picturesque atmosphere.

Weather between 1420 and 1500: sunshine without sun

Even though, post-1400, genres such as *Tacuinum Sanitatis* and the *labours of the months* furnished a rather advanced repertoire for iconographically-determined depictions of time, it has to be noted that, strangely, this repertoire is not given unfettered freedom as soon as the new pictorial paradigm makes it technically possible, but is in fact curbed and enters into a kind of compromise with the timelessness of its predecessor, the Golden Age paradigm. The result in the typical image between 1420 and 1500, both North and South of the Alps, is a landscape bathed in sunshine, where the sun is rarely seen; where there might well be modulations of light and shade, but few fully-drawn shadows; where the universal noon and summer blooming is seldom contravened; and where the sky is usually a cloudless blue that becomes whiter towards the horizon.

An exception to this tendency is found, however, in the immediate wake of the paradigm shift when some of the most naturalistic-minded – Gothic – artists carry on with experiments begun in manuscripts such as *Les Très Riches Heures*. In pioneering works of the 1420s, such as Gentile's *Flight into Egypt* and Robert Campin's *Nativity* (PLATES 6 and 7), the artist cannot resist showing the otherwise rarely depicted sun: Gentile, so that the hills to the left flare up in gold-leaf rays; Campin, so that trees and human figures cast full-sized shadows. Illustrating December, moreover, Campin's trees are leafless. For the *Nativity* scene in the Strozzi predella, Gentile also provides a fully-mature night scene with stars and light cast from the angel and the radiant infant Saviour. In Flanders, this early realism culminates in the school of Jan van Eyck's now partially burnt *Turin Hours* (1430s (?)), which presents several landscapes that have no parallel right up until the 17th century, if not even the 19th century: a coastline with waves washing up onto a flat beach (*Prayer on the Shore*; FIG. 11.3); a strait with foaming and yet reflecting waves (*Saint Julian Conveying Our*

Fig. II.3. School of Jan van Eyck, *Prayer on the Shore* (1430s). Miniature from the *Turin Hours*. Formerly Turin, Biblioteca Reale; destroyed 1904.

Fig. II.4. School of Jan van Eyck, *Saint Julian Conveying Our Lord across a River* (1430s). Miniature from the *Turin Hours*. Formerly Turin, Biblioteca Reale; destroyed 1904.

Lord across a River; FIG. II.4); a dusk scene in which the setting sun can be glimpsed behind misty cloud formations as it throws the hilly horizon and windmill into silhouette (*Betrayal of Christ*; FIG. II.5).[26]

In the Italy of the time, the closest the general landscape image gets to this realism is probably in paintings by Fra Angelico. His 1434 *Deposition* presents an evocative sky in which the deep-blue air, like a vestige of the darkness at the crucifixion, is covered by greyish, partially stacked clouds, while beautiful sunlight streams down from the left (FIG. II.6).[27] Shortly after the Flemings' innovations, light at daybreak is explored by Jacopo Bellini, Gentile da Fabriano's Venetian pupil. In *Madonna of Humility with Donor (Leonello D'Este(?))* from *c.* 1441, the rising sun casts its light on

Fig. II.5. School of Jan van Eyck, *Betrayal of Christ* (1430s). Miniature from the *Turin Hours*. Formerly Turin, Biblioteca Reale; destroyed 1904.

the clouds, mountaintops, city walls and the treetops in the hedge surrounding the Madonna (FIG. II.7).[28]

This, along with the other paintings mentioned, leads the paradigmatic effects interestingly into an iconographic junction, for in the literary discussion about the competitive relationship between painting and poetry, temporal traces were a favourite topic of dispute. Thus, in Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria* (*On Literary Polish*), a dialogue written in 1462 and set in the court of the presumed commissioner of the Bellini painting, the Marchese of Ferrara Leonello d'Este (reigned 1441-51), sunrises are among the subjects listed as being beyond the scope of painting. In his dialogue, the court humanist places poetry above painting, leading Leonello to ask:

> For what painter could ever depict thunder and lightning, clouds and winds and the other elements of tempests as well as the poet does? What painter could draw the hissing of snakes, the concert of birds, the roar of men fighting, the groans of men

Fig. II.6. Fra Angelico, *Deposition* (1434), tempera on wood. Florence, Museo di San Marco.

Fig. II.7. Jacopo Bellini, *Madonna of Humility with Donor (Leonello D'Este?)* (*c.* 1441), tempera on wood. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

> dying. [...] Or the colours of dawn, one moment red, the next yellow? Or the rising and the setting of the sun? [...] Who will ever show through skill in colouring the darkness of night, or shining moon, the many different movements of the constellations, the changes of the time of day or of the seasons? But let us say no more of the genius [*ingenium*] of writers: it is a divine thing and beyond the reach of painters.[29]

In an epoch which had just reached a stage where it could in fact visualise these effects of the passage of time, it must have been an agreeable challenge for Bellini to contradict this attitude, whosoever might be expressing it.

An earlier text, Leonardo Giustiniani's (d. 1446) letter to a certain Queen of Cyprus, is differently disposed in favour of painting. Like writing, in some aspects painting surpasses nature, because where nature can only make flowers in the spring and fruit in the autumn, "the art of painting may produce snow even under a blazing sun, and abundant violets, roses, apples, and olives even in winter tempests."[30] Guistiniani's teacher, Guarino Veronese, does not differ in his assessment when in his 1430's praise of the International Gothic artist Pisanello, another of Gentile da Fabriano's pupils, he states:

> When you paint a nocturnal scene you make the night-birds flit about and not one of the birds of the day is to be seen; you pick out the stars, the moon's sphere, the sunless darkness. If you paint a winter scene everything bristles with frost and the leafless trees grate in the wind. If you set the action in spring, varied flowers smile in the green meadows, the old brilliance returns to the trees, and the hills bloom; here the air quivers with the songs of birds.[31]

This statement is located at an interesting midway spot between actual description and non-observing *ekphrasis*. On the one hand, traces of time had become a spectacular effect in the new painting and even though no nighttime scenes from Pisanello's brush have survived, it is quite likely that they once existed. On the other hand, the landscape paradigm had, as mentioned, consolidated itself in such a position that conspicuous seasonal effects, especially winter scenes, were again not featured in the contemporary paintings. The closest we get to snow landscapes are scenes illustrating legends such as Masolino's *Founding of Santa Maria Maggiore* (*c.* 1423; FIG. II.8), in which a swarm of low-hanging clouds – against, incidentally, a medieval gold ground – have deposited their snow in the shape of a ground plan of the church; or Fra Angelico's *Martyrdom of Saint Mark* (from the *Linaiuoli Triptych*, commissioned 1433), in which dry-looking hail falls from a dark sky.[32] The two humanist statements thus become more like prophetic manifestos, given that seasonal effects are at the heart of the future landscape painting.

Fig. 11.8. Masolino, *Founding of Santa Maria Maggiore* (*c.* 1423), tempera on wood, from the *Santa Maria Maggiore Triptych*. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte.

Even though it might at first seem unlikely, Sienese painting is also a telling example of the pioneering spirit after the paradigm shift. Having comprised the 14th-century European avant-garde, Sienese painters enter the 15th century with a strangely conservative outlook. The paradigm in total is lost on the grey Byzantine rocks, and the gold ground is often preserved. In the midst of this conservatism, the modern *concepts* nonetheless make their presence felt, and often with considerably more selective strength than in the rest of Italy. In works by Sassetta (d. 1450) and the Master of the Osservanza (documented until 1450), the hilly horizons curve as if they are illustrating the spherical shape of the globe and the skies are filled with extraordinary, refractive clouds (FIG. 11.9).[33] In Giovanni di Paolo's *Flight into Egypt* (1436?), the radiant sun casts fully-grown shadows from the trees and

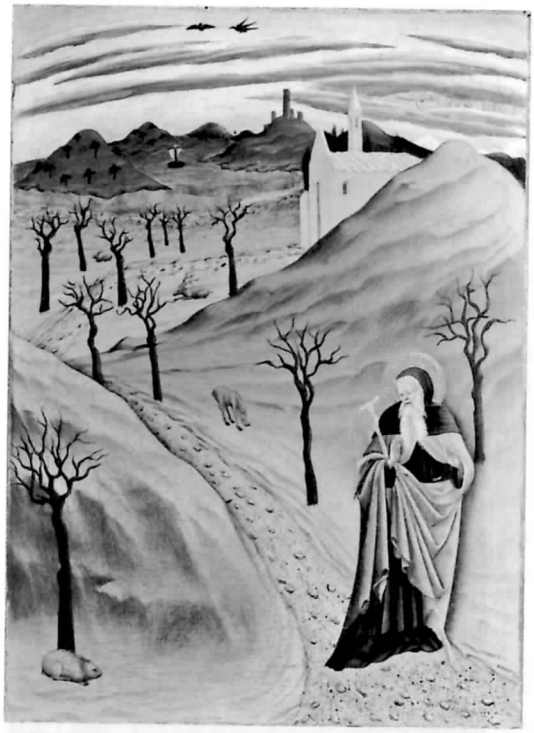


Fig. II.9. Master of the Osservanza, *Saint Anthony the Abbot in the Wilderness* (*c.* 1435), tempera and gold on wood. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

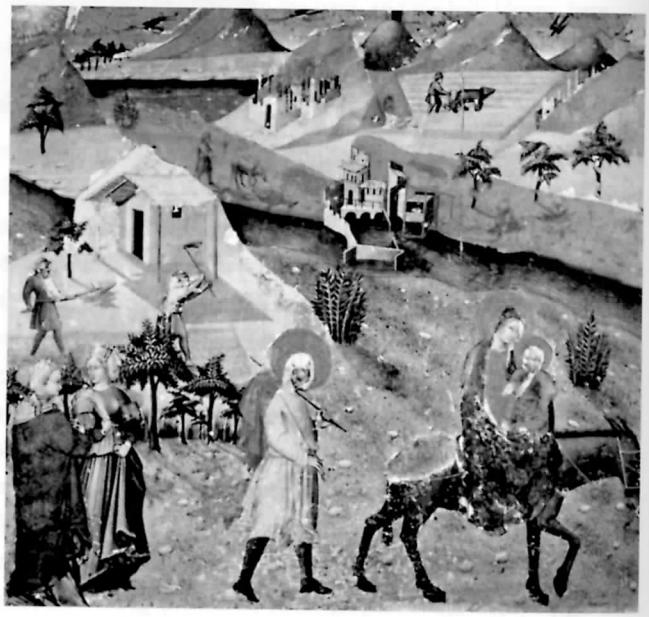


Fig. II.10. Giovanni di Paolo, *Flight into Egypt* (1436?), tempera on wood. Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale.

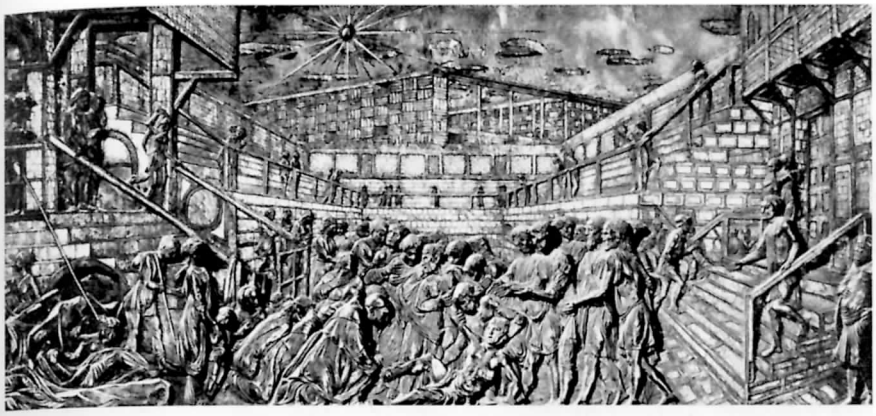
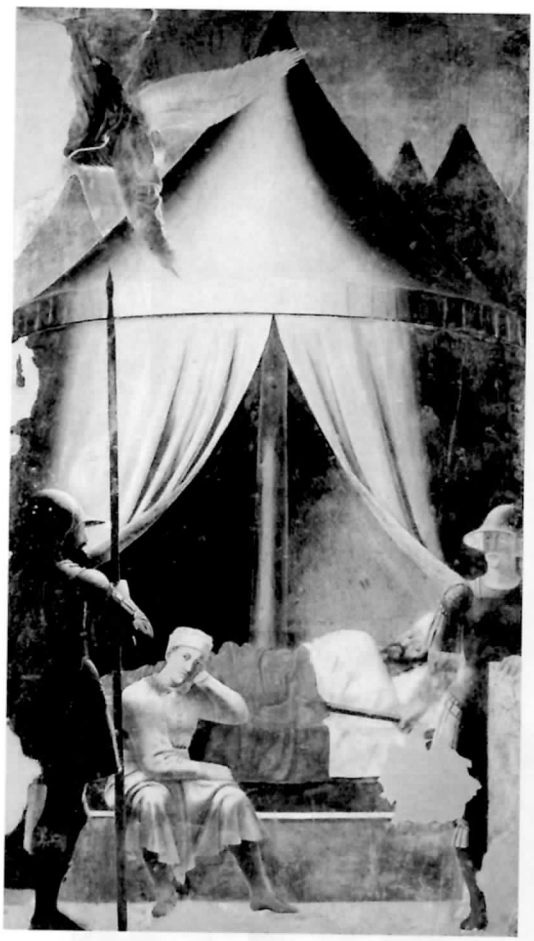


Fig. 11.11. Donatello, *Miracle of the Irascible Son* (1446-53), bronze relief. Padua, Sant'Antonio, high altar.

Fig. 11.12. Dirk Bouts, *Altarpiece of the Deposition* (*c.* 1445), oil on wood. Granada, Capilla Real.



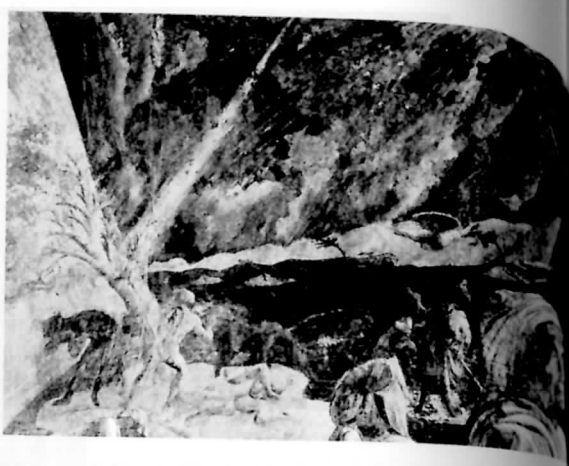


Fig. II.14. Paolo Uccello, *Flood* (*c.* 1445-47), fresco (detail). Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Chiostro Verde.

Fig. II.13. Piero della Francesca, *Constantine's Dream* (*c.* 1455), fresco. Arezzo, San Francesco.

farm (FIG. II.10) – a direct gaze towards the sun, which otherwise only re-appears in Donatello's bronze relief of the *Miracle of the Irascible Son* (1446-53; FIG. II.11).[34] Characteristically, Sienese temporal effects were also complemented on the surface of the earth. The terrains are distinguished by dense forests and stony tracks, and in Giovanni di Paolo they are furthermore covered with rigidly geometric field grids (FIG. II.30).

However, after this hectic overture, the indefinite sunlight of noontime takes over both south and north of the Alps. Up until the last third of the century, this is generally only breached when so demanded by a specific iconography: night, storm, the rising or setting of the sun – themes which, unsurprisingly, are most frequently and thoroughly explored in the Netherlands. The nighttime theme is

Fig. 11.15. Giovanni Bellini, *Transfiguration of Christ* (late 1480s), tempera on wood. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte.

generated chiefly by the *Nativity* and episodes from the Passion such as the *Last Supper*, the *Arrest* and the *Crucifixion*. The earliest extant Netherlandish work to transfer night and sunset effects from the miniature to the painting on wood panel is Dirk Bouts' *Altarpiece of the Deposition* (*c.* 1445; FIG. 11.12):[35] under the ink-black sky of the centre panel, the trees darken against the luminosity of the sunset, and in the *Resurrection* of the right-hand panel, the rocks on the horizon glow in the Easter dawn. The nocturnal effects reach an interim culmination in Geertgen tot Sint Jans' *Nativity at Night* of about 1490, a virtuoso study in the diffusion of light through dense darkness.[36]

Confronted with this realism, the Italians' darkest nocturnal image, Piero della Francesca's fresco of *Constantine's Dream* (*c.* 1455), seems more subdued in its effects, as if Piero feels uneasy about turning darkness loose across his imposing figures (FIG. 11.13).[37] Besides being caused by the absence of the sun, the Italian skies also darken in stormy weather, as is the case in Uccello's *Flood* (*c.* 1445-47) where the clouds are gashed by a conical flash of lightning (FIG. 11.14), or Fra Angelico's *Saint*

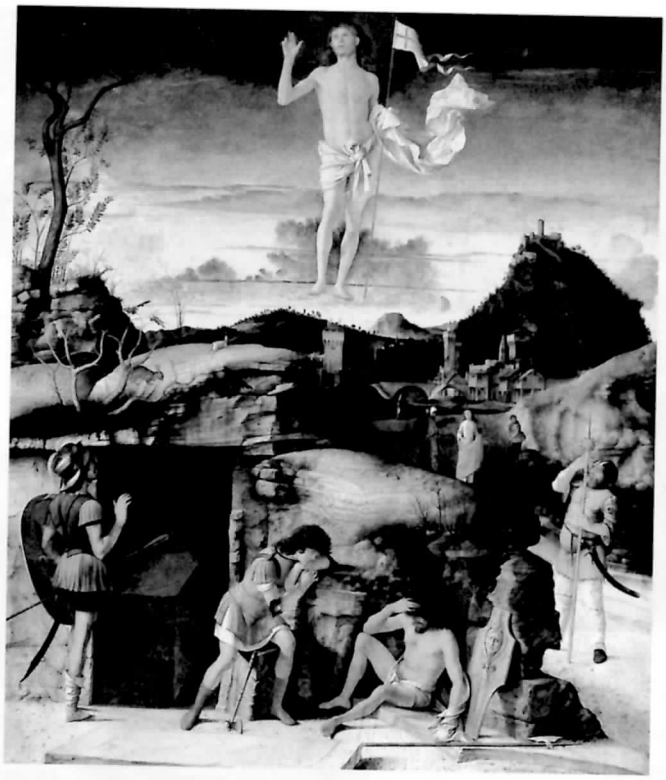


Fig. II.16. Giovanni Bellini, *Resurrection of Christ* (*c.* 1480), tempera on wood. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

Nicholas Saving a Ship during a Storm (1437), where the blue sky shades into black.[38] A more muted form of darkness – the one in which the transfiguring light of heaven shines down on Christ – can be seen in Giovanni Bellini's *Transfiguration of Christ* from the late 1480s (FIG. II.15).[39] Here the discreet celestial rays shine down from blue-grey clouds laden with rain, while breezier white clouds can be seen floating further away in the background of the overcast grey sky. This could be a perceptive portrait of April weather, and thus it comes as no surprise that Bellini is also the painter to carry on with his father's sunrise motif. It is taken up again in works such as *Agony in the Garden* (*c.* 1460; London, National Gallery) and *Resurrection of Christ* (*c.* 1480; FIG. II.16) and, as we will see, Mantegna, Giovanni's brother-in-law, takes it to Mantua in his *Christ as the Suffering Redeemer* (*c.* 1495-97; PLATE 38).

While the 15th-century landscape image might, then, occasionally admit to

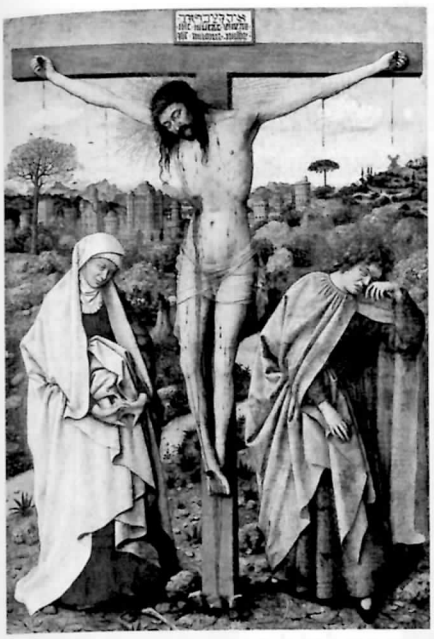


Fig. 11.17. School of Jan van Eyck, *Crucifixion* (1430s), oil on wood. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.

Fig. 11.18. Hugo van der Goes, *Donors and Saints* (late 1470s), oil on wood, right panel from the *Portinari Altarpiece*. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

variations of the diurnal cycle, it is a different story with the annual equivalent. The flora is mostly evergreen and in flower, but, if not, then it leaps straight to an unspecified and total withering. As we saw exemplified in Piero's *Resurrection* (cf. Interlude), the withered or dead flora can be prompted by the theme (PLATE 10). A corresponding symbolism with a dead tree contrasted to a flowering one can be seen in the background of the Jan van Eyck school *Crucifixion* (FIG. 11.17). But apparently there is no need for any iconographic compulsion given that the 15th-century landscape image acquires an increasing number of dead trees, which appear among the thriving ones.[40] On the other hand, Robert Campin's wintriness is only followed up a few more times during the 15th century, the most striking example being Hugo van der Goes' *Portinari Altarpiece* where all three panels depicting the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (late 1470s; FIG. 11.18) are filled with bare trees and ravens.

Post 1470: overcast skies

While the landscape images in the wake of the paradigm shift are controlled by sunshine and blossoming, their successors from about 1470 onwards, and especially in the 16th century, become more complex: the sky might be overcast, the light might be that of dusk, and among the evergreen trees there are now not only leafless trunks but also trees with faded brown leaves. Situations involving weather and time, which formerly required specific iconographic justification, are now part of the general landscape paradigm. However, while North and South share the clouds and more complex times of day, they gradually drift apart in their approaches to the subjects of weather and seasonal traces. Whereas the Italians have little inclination to go beyond the unspecified withered leaves and twilight, the seasons and the weather are more manifest North of the Alps from and with Brueghel.

The newly-overcast pictorial sky could be said to behave like the clouds of reality, which increase the temperature at night, but lower it in the day. In Italy, we thus encounter a 'nocturnal' cloud cover which, while admitting a new kind of mood, also supports the closed, geocentric world picture that is in the process of re-establishing itself. Just behind the clouds we can feel the presence of the Counter Reformation's down-to-earth sky, which seems to be permanently ready to slash them open in a revelation. These are the nocturnal clouds that will frame the Baroque realm of *chiaroscuro*. The 'daytime clouds' of the North, however, hold the source of rain, snow and seasons, and their skies are at a greater distance from the underlying earth. These clouds have to be able to pile up to dizzying heights above the flat soils of the Netherlands.[41]

The darkness which may, increasingly, appropriate the pictorial space in its entirety, does not, of course, kick in without warning, but has a number of forerunners, all of which are, however, conceived of and determined by the modern paradigm. In addition to variations in the diurnal and seasonal cycles, we can spot two in particular: *locally-qualified shadows*, especially indoor dimness; and outdoor *mist*. Right from the paradigm shift of 1420, figures can be placed in surroundings where they appear against a dark background. It could be van Eyck's donor in his semi-dark architectonic niche (*c.* 1432; **FIG. II.19**), or it could be Cosmè Tura's Madonna in her shadowy garden (*c.* 1452; **FIG. II.20**). As darkness gradually loses its tie to such delimited locations, it can be conditional for the landscape space as a totality: for example, overcast skies or twilight. In *Saint George and the Dragon* of 1469, for instance, Tura manages both to darken his figures with sooty shadows and to make these shadows a convincing expression of the scene's yellow-toned gloaming.

If the shadows thus move from the close-up to the distance, the mist moves in the opposite direction. Earlier in the 15th century, the mist is exclusively a feature

Fig. 11.19. Jan van Eyck, *Donor* (*c.* 1432), oil on wood, from the *Ghent Altarpiece*. Ghent, Cathedral of St Bavo.

Fig. 11.20. Cosmè Tura, *Madonna and Child in a Garden* (*c.* 1452), tempera on wood. Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.29.

of the distant horizons. It is the white haze stretching some distance up into the blue firmament, turning the mountains light-blue and softening their outlines. The shift of atmosphere around 1470 could accordingly be described as an expanded radius of action for this haze: on the one hand, it can absorb the sky in its entirety (overclouding) and, on the other hand, it can spread via the darkness to the immediate space (*sfumato* and painterliness). While the atmosphere and interplay of light/dark in *sfumato* still keep to the other side of the image plane, which consequently seems whitewashed and sharply delineated (window), through painterliness they have taken possession of it, sullying it by traces of brushstrokes (veil or mirror). In Damisch's terminology, the brushstrokes have here changed function from denotative *cloud* to connotative /cloud/.[42]

The extent to which painterliness on the image plane is caused by atmosphere and light from remote space becomes clear from the work of the inventor of

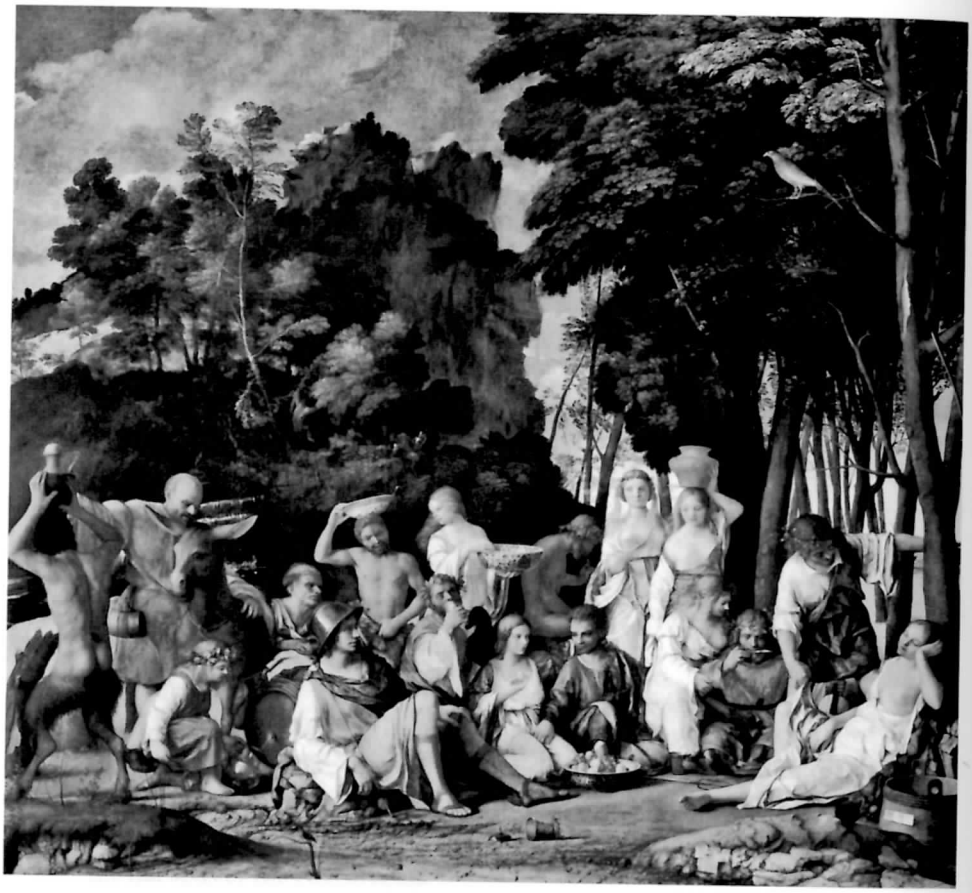


Fig. II.21. Giovanni Bellini, finished by Titian, *Feast of the Gods* (1514/1529), oil on canvas. Washington, National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection 1942.9.1.

painterliness in the modern era, Giovanni Bellini. Even such a divine motif as the *Feast of the Gods* – his late work for Alfonso d'Este's Camerino di alabastro, finished by Titian – is lowered into terrestrial time to such an extent that a pale-yellow glow breaks through between the trunks of the forest trees (1514/1529; FIG. II.21). At the same time, the castle atop the shadow-swathed rocky outcrop is struck by a ray of sun, causing it to glow against the deep-blue sky. This landscape also features trees with dead foliage and trees whose green leaves show the first spots of brown. It is not for nothing that a devotee of the picturesque such as Uvedale Price could regard

Venetian painting, particularly the works of Giorgione and Titian, as being based on autumnal colours, even calling autumn "the painter's season".[43] These picturesque innovations are thus also soon to be seen among the customary features in Italian landscape images, from Dosso Dossi to Beccafumi.

Sfumato too is a phenomenon that throws a bridge from the stylistic *how* to the thematic *what*. Even though Leonardo does not provide a straightforward recipe for *sfumato*, his notes are full of deliberations as to atmospheric and temporal influence on light. To linear perspective he adds two further kinds of perspective, both of which relate to the behaviour of objects in the atmosphere. The one, *colour perspective*, deals with "the variation and loss or diminution of the essential character of colours" when they are pulled away from the eye. The other, *aerial perspective*, pertains to the explanation as to how things seen at a distance have to be less defined and more similar to the colour of the atmosphere.[44] Notice here the use of "less defined" (*meno profilato*), which clearly turns aside from plasticity and closedness, and instead towards the projection of infinite space.[45]

In addition, Leonardo also writes about the light itself. Bearing in mind the typical manner in which trees in 15th-century paintings are lit through by the blue of the sky, it can come as no surprise that he has to recommend the midday sun in order to achieve this particular effect. Otherwise he prefers moments in time when the light is muted and distributed more softly: cloudiness, sunrises or sunsets. Works executed with this light are "sweet and every kind of face acquires grace". The reddening of the clouds at the horizon gives rise to a mixed tone between red and blue "which renders the countryside very gay and cheerful." The twilight glow that endows Ginevra de' Benci's face with a graceful ivory luminosity would seem to be a case of theory put into practice (*c.* 1474; **FIG. 11.22**). Leonardo goes on to assert that objects not struck directly by the sun "appear to be enveloped in obscuring mists [...]." He also discusses various forms of smoke and vapour and recommends that a landscape should be made "with smoke in the manner of a thick mist, so that clouds of smoke are seen in various locations [...]. And the highest parts of the mountains will be more evident than their bases [...]."[46] From such comments, it is not such a very great leap to the phantasmagorical, mist-enveloped mountains seen in works such as *Mona Lisa* and *Virgin of the Rocks* (**FIG. 12.31** and **PLATE 36**; see also chapter 12).

True to form, Leonardo was also the first to study atmospheric forces on the very large scale. In a drawing showing stormy weather breaking over a mountain valley (**FIG. 11.23**),[47] the point of view is so high that we see both the downpour of rain falling on the smaller mountains under the clouds and a mountain ridge rising above these clouds. When, in *On Painting*, Leonardo advises how to depict this kind of storm, he uses the term *fortuna* because, like its synonym the temporally-derived *tempesta*, this stormy weather was the epitome of the unpredictable events

Fig. II.22. Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci* (*c.* 1474), oil on wood. Washington National Gallery of Art, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund 1967.6.1.a.

Fig. II.23. Leonardo da Vinci, *Storm in an Alpine Valley* (*c.* 1500), red chalk on paper. Windsor, Royal Library.

occasioned by time.[48] The connection is elaborated in an alarming manner in Leonardo's well-known 'deluge' drawings, where the ruthless power of the storm cleaves the very mountains.

How innovative these themes relating to weather and light might have seemed in an age which was otherwise well under way with re-instituting the closed body as the foremost yardstick of art, becomes apparent if we move northward and look at Erasmus' praise of Dürer in the dialogue *De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione* (*On the Correct Pronunciation of Latin and Greek*; 1528).[49] In making a comparison with Apelles, who achieved his results by the use of colour, Erasmus is impressed by the graphic artist Dürer because by means of the mere black line he not only produces proportions and harmonies: "Nay, he even depicts what cannot be depicted: fire, rays of light, thunderstorms, sheet lightning, or even, as the saying is, the clouds upon a wall [*nebulas, ut aiunt, in pariete*]." With this slightly paraphrased citation from Ausonius (cf. chapter 3), Erasmus is alluding to the 'undrawable' par excellence, as in his *Adagia* he makes it clear that such a cloud is "something most similar to nothing or a dream" and consequently too

Fig. II.24. Piero di Cosimo, *Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci* (*c.* 1501), oil on wood. Chantilly, Musée Condé.

incorporeal to express in colour.[50] In modernity, however, it is this incorporeal matter that comprises such stuff as images are made on, and Dürer's wall clouds, the already *re*-presented mists, thus become indistinguishable from Leonardo's still unformed wall stains, those "obscure things" which under the influence of imagination can be included in the domain of the figuration, for example that of the landscape (cf. chapter 9).

In the contemporaneous Florence, Piero di Cosimo is also an artist working at the intersection between the stylistic potential of the paradigm and its condensation in themes related to meteorology. At the same time as using, in *Perseus Freeing Andromeda* (*c.* 1515; Florence, Uffizi), for example, a form of misty brushwork that is midway between *sfumato* and Venetian painterliness, between *cloud* and /cloud/, he is exploring subject matter such as: being dazzled by the light of celestial rays (*Incarnation with Saints* (*c.* 1505-10), Florence, Uffizi); storm clouds (*Portrait of Simonetta Vespucci* (*c.* 1501); FIG. II.24); and, not least, forest fire – his paintings of primitive humankind, commissioned by the wool merchant Francesco del Pugliese in the 1490s, show smoke and clouds working together to bring about a darkness against which the flames light up (FIG. II.25).

According to Vitruvius, forest fire, a topos in the depiction of hard primitivism, is triggered by friction between closely-packed trees during stormy weather.[51] After their initial fear, people discover that heat makes their bodies feel good and they

Fig. II.25. Piero di Cosimo, *Hunting Scene* (1490s), tempera and oil transferred to masonite. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

learn to keep it alight. The discovery of fire leads to the institution of civilisation, because people now gather around it and then learn to speak, walk upright and, eventually, to build huts. And for Lorenzo il Magnifico, Piero's contemporary, storm and forest fire are made into another aspect of the Fall, passionate love:

> But, if Aeolus frees from the cave fierce and violent winds, not only the green branches break, but whole aged pines fall to earth: the infuriated sea menaces the miserable wood of the pointed prow, and seems to despair; the air of dense clouds assumes a veil; so mourns earth, sea and sky.[52]

Lorenzo goes on to describe how the wind transforms a spark into a forest fire, so that the formerly so homelike forest expels its residents: the animals and a shepherd. Forest fire is thus linked to a whole register of features from advanced civilisation: language, craft, warmth as protection from the cold, passionate love, raging of the elements. And, as such, its pictorial rendering can be seen as a form of condensation in the modern paradigm – the very paradigm which renders visible the post-paradisiacal era and makes inner passion and outer weather slot together.

In the contemporaneous Venice, Giorgione's *La tempesta* (*c.* 1505-10; PLATE 30)

Fig. II.26. Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, *God Admonishing Adam and Eve* (*c.* 1472-73), marble relief. Bergamo, Cappella Colleoni.

is a particularly striking example of this the motif being absorbed into the style, of narration being lifted into the paradigm. If the weather theme contributes to the painting's pioneer status, it is not so much because of the newsworthiness of stormy weather and lightning, but because of the manner in which these phenomena become part of the general mood of the painting. Who would have suspected that a gathering storm could arouse such gentle, melancholy yearnings?[53] The overcast sky makes the trees, lit-up by the lightning, stand out against the green-grey background, and it casts the whole foreground landscape and its three figures in mysterious shadow. But this is still not, as a number of art historians have wrongly assumed, a case of sheer *poesia*, an image devoid of defined narrative, for, as Salvatore Settis has convincingly shown, the painting shares its figurative arrangement with a relief by Giovanni Antonio Amadeo, *God Admonishing Adam and Eve* (*c.* 1472-73; FIG. II.26).[54] What the painting is so discreetly referring to is a situation after their expulsion when a staff-holding Adam and a nursing Eve rest against a background of the lost Paradise, a New Jerusalem in the shape of a modern Italian city.[55] The broken columns and wall ruins in the middle distance thus become emblems of the post-paradisiacal decline. Seen through this lens, which naturalises the allegory by absorbing it in a contemporaneous landscape, the lacerating lightning of the stormy

sky can be specifically understood as a figure which is otherwise very conspicuous by its absence, namely the admonitory God of the relief. The consequent transformation of the incarnated deity into a vanishing flash is emphasised in the fallen world below, where the serpent of the Fall, Satan, is also seen, in a reflection of the lightning's sinuous flight, darting into a cave under the rock. *La tempesta* thereby becomes a Southern offshoot of the North European proliferating image type which reduces the narrative – and its associated moralising – in unison with the opening up of the wide expanses of the landscape. In the large void between Adam, Eve and Cain, God fades away to infinity, a sublime intimation in the sultry thunderstorm atmosphere. Paradise has been, in the most profound sense, forsaken.

If weather is an indispensable compensator for Venetian *poesie*'s breakaway from narrative, it is obviously even less dispensable for the autonomous landscape image – the landscape image holding so much 'content' in itself that it can be enjoyed purely at face value. In Albrecht Altdorfer's autonomous landscape images from the 1520s, the first to be produced in the West, a significant element of this content indeed comprises the mist and light into which the land has sunk. In two instances, the mist is even wrapped around a sunset.

Post-1500: nocturnal clouds to the south, diurnal clouds to the north

But, as already mentioned, the weather of the images does not open the way for the same route to modernity north and south of the Alps. If the greying clouds in Italy entail a new landscape mood, a 'nocturnal' aspect nevertheless makes sure that the heat is retained – heat understood as pre-modern, geocentric animation. Their emergence thus coincides with the High Renaissance, as if they were to prevent a leakage of that volume which neo-antique plasticity re-injects into the body. In the Gothic style, the body was elongated under the expanding sky; in the High Renaissance it becomes muscular, because the firmament is again closed.

This epistemic climatic change can be detected in an amazingly concrete manner from a pictorial genre that sprouts up in Italy after 1500: scenes in which the sky meets the earth – revelations, visions, transfigurations, ascensions, expulsions, and so forth. The genre not only substantiates that the divine heavens still exist, but also that they are at an approachable distance to earth, since the celestial figures are always depicted on the same scale as the mortals. In Raphael's *Disputà* (1510-11), the clouds bearing the celestial assembly have sunk down to a level immediately above the heads of the disputing theologians (FIG. 21). At the same time, the landscape view with building and trees has been moved to a distant background, as if it is them, and not the heavens, that belong to the hereafter. Close juxtapositions of

Fig. 11.27. Albrecht Dürer, *Sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt* (*c.* 1502), woodcut from the *Marienleben* cycle (published 1511).

heavens and earth such as this do not occur nearly as frequently in Northern art because, as in Giorgione's *La tempesta*, the sky here has slipped out to the distance delineated by the landscape's horizon. In a revelation scene such as Dürer's woodcut of the *Sojourn of the Holy Family in Egypt* from *c.* 1502, the perspective is ruthless in ensuring that God is kept back in a distant sky (FIG. 11.27). From far away, on a cloud, He looks down upon the large foreground figures.

Nor are the Italian revelations restricted to Christian contexts – no more than the neo-antique abundance of figures is a speciality of antique themes. Raphael releases cherubs from the clouds in his *Triumph of Galathea* (1513, Rome, Villa Farnesina). Giulio Romano lets the giants fall from the antique Parnassus (*c.* 1532-34, Mantua, Palazzo Te). Correggio lets Io be embraced by the cloud-clad Jupiter (*c.* 1532; FIG. 11.28). We are here dealing with a Catholic epistemic *field* which, be it called Renaissance, Counter Reformation or Baroque, re-installs humankind in a celestial hierarchy – a hierarchy that would seem to be definitively dismantled in the Protestant – and proto-Protestant – culture.[56] Mannerism might be a disruption

Fig. 11.28. Correggio, *Jupiter and Io* (*c.* 1532), oil on canvas. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Fig. 11.29. Nicolas Poussin, *Winter, or The Flood* (1660-64), oil on canvas. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

within this archaic tendency, a protuberance from the chaos of the Gothic style. Like the Gothic, here we see the reappearance of both the figurative elongation and the mixture of extreme naturalism and affected artificiality. And yet here, too, everyday life, physical labour, weather and ugliness are kept at a suitable distance.

In relation to the closedness of the Renaissance image, the 17th-century ideal landscapes by Poussin and Claude Lorrain, both Frenchmen residing in Italy, nevertheless signify an opening. Particularly in Claude's case, the figures become diminutive under an extensive sky, which now also admits a sinking afternoon sun. And yet, the spatial expanses and the temporal changeableness are still muted. The figures never leave the landscape setting which surrounds them in the same manner as a mount embeds a jewel. The sun never seems to reach the horizon, and late summer never turns into autumn. Just how alien changeableness is for these landscapes is starkly illustrated when the ageing Poussin atypically depicts the *Four Seasons* (1660-64). Even though snow is absent in *Winter*, it is already non-classical in its rainy darkness (FIG. 11.29).[57]

The absolute contemporaneous antithesis of the ideal landscapes is to be found in the Netherlands, where temporal phenomena such as snow, heavy rainclouds and nocturnal light are common occurrences (FIG. 22). In his *Het Schilder-Boeck* (1604), Carel van Mander praises sunrises and adds that "you cannot show the distance too vaguely" because of the mistiness of the air, thanks to which the "hazy landscape in the distance begins to look like the sky, and almost merges into it. Solid mountains seem to be moving clouds." Even though he considers extreme weather conditions to be the exception, a thunderstorm sky should be "monstrously ugly", and the path of lightning through the dark stormy sky should frighten the mortals. Furthermore: "One should try to express in paint, the snow, hail, rainy squall, ice, hoar frost, and impenetrable fog. These are all needed to show gloomy winter days, for when we try to see distant spires, houses and towns, we realize that we cannot see further than a stone's throw." Nonetheless, van Mander feels called upon to grumble that certain nations accuse the Netherlanders of never painting good weather.[58]

In contrast to the Italian Baroque painting, in which the sacredness of the sky prevents it from being viewed in large sections devoid of figures, the North European dispersal of God in an infinite Copernican space causes the sky and the overall landscape expanses to undergo a pictorial extension, possibly leading to a total displacement of the figure. Above the flat terrains in 17th-century Dutch landscape paintings, we see a misty sky which can easily take up three-quarters of the image plane. From such a de-sacralised sky it is unthinkable that a band of angels would be able to burst through in a golden radiance, descending effortlessly down to earth. In order to experience this still geocentric sky, we have to go to the conservative pocket of modernity, Italy of the Counter Reformation and the Renaissance. Is it possible to imagine that Descartes, the philosopher of the mechanical world picture, could have developed his ideas in Italy rather than the Netherlands, or that Giordano Bruno, martyr to the infinite cosmos, could have been burnt at the stake in Amsterdam rather than Rome?

11.2 Territory and wilderness

Scanning the paradigm

In the same way as the paradigm of modernity breaks with the timelessness of the Golden Age paradigm, it also challenges the unexploited *terra* of this paradigm, the wild mountains. A multiplicity of terrains enters pictorial art after 1420 – besides the now more peripheral mountains: plains, forests, marshes, bays – all of which are potential objects for the Fall's territorial control, especially the control that stems

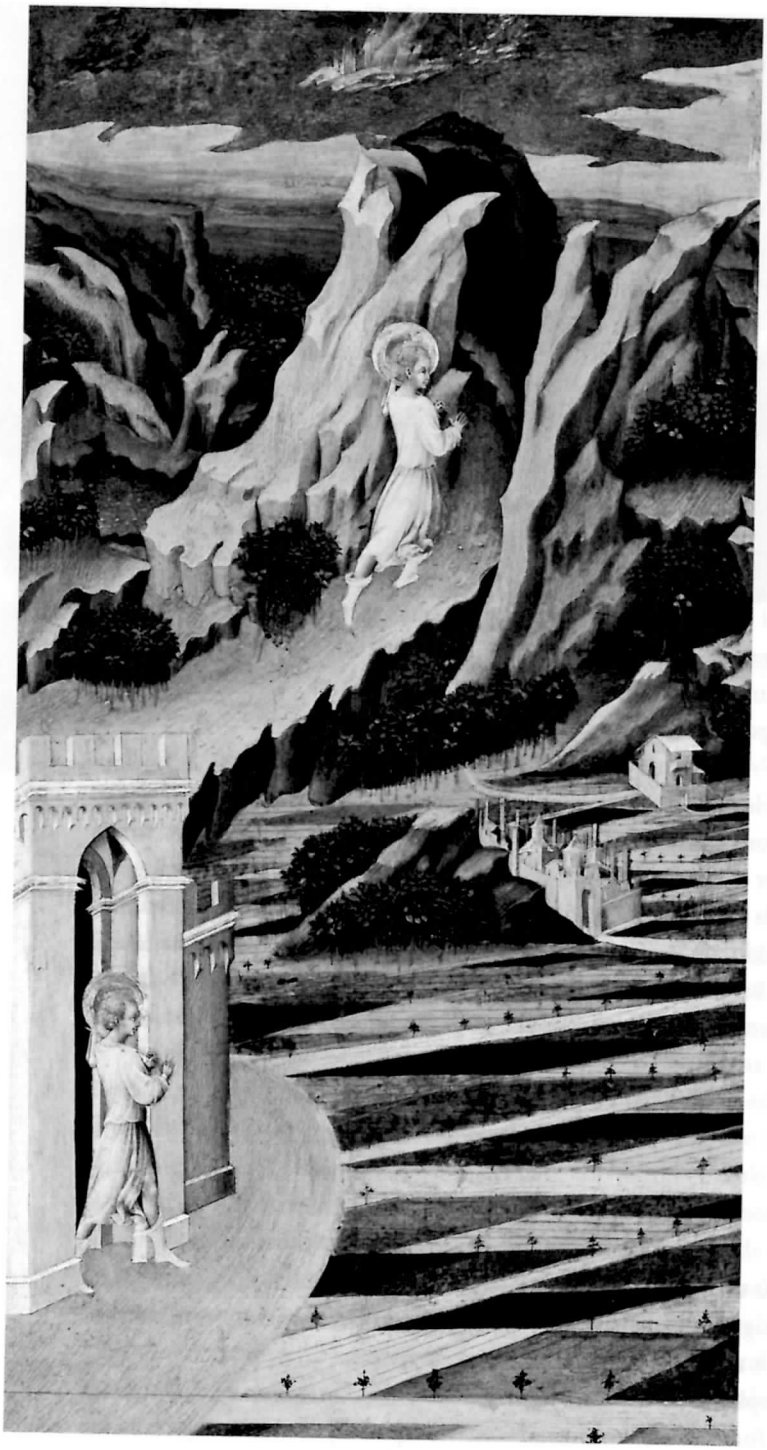


Fig. II.30. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint John the Baptist Entering the Wilderness* (*c.* 1453-64), tempera on wood. Chicago, Art Institute.

from agriculture. As in Ovid's Silver Age, now, for the first time, Ceres' "seeds of grain were planted in long furrows", and, as in Ovid's Iron Age, it is quite safe to say that "the ground, which had hitherto been a common possession like the sunlight and the air, the careful surveyor now marked out with long-drawn boundary-line."[59] (cf. chapter 4)

As in the perhaps key iconographic forerunner of the modern paradigm, the land surveying treatises of late antiquity, here we can again trace a connection between use and measuring. Just as in chapter 10 I was able to show that it was principally secular utility contexts – health compendia, labours of the months, encyclopaedias, property portraits – which led directly towards the genesis of the modern landscape image, I can also here, in the network of fields, trace a type of constructive interference, a reciprocal reinforcement between the earth's use in particular and the new pictorial space in general. For if the hard and undulating rocks of the Golden Age paradigm were impervious to the plough, while in their chaos they thwarted spatial definition and in their verticality hindered the view towards the horizon, the viewpoint is now displaced to the plains, which can be ploughed, measured and surveyed. It is the triumph of geometry – tellurian surveying – where the Latin *limes*, the border between two ploughed fields, is transformed into that *limes* which in differential calculus, the mathematics of the system of co-ordinates, designates the marginal value for a function that goes towards infinity. In effect, the measure to which *modus*, the mother word of modernity, refers (cf. chapter 9), could, also in the Roman period, be a surface measure, especially an agrarian unit.[60]

This movement, in which agriculture's land marks are transformed into the incorporeal spatial lines of mathematics, can be read with sensuous tangibility in several 15th-century landscape images. In Giovanni di Paolo's *Saint John the Baptist Entering the Wilderness* (*c.* 1453-64) the wilderness is represented by mountains, whereas civilisation, which the holy man leaves behind, is indicated by a flat grid of fields (FIG. 11.30). From the almost aerial-photographic angle whence the fields are viewed, this grid looks just as much like a dizzying albeit somewhat awkward study in perspectival foreshortening. A similar effect can be observed in Leonardo's drawing of the imaginary Arno landscape (1473), in which the distant, foreshortened grids are positioned in an ambiguous zone between fields and a perspective that measures out the plain (FIG. 9.6). The section on landscape painting in Carel van Mander's later *Het Schilder-Boeck* actually includes advice on this effect: "Notice how the ditches and furrows in the field taper and converge at the same vanishing point, looking just like a tiled floor. Do not get bored taking it all in, as it will give a convincing sense of space to your own background."[61] Although the tract results from a period in which the cultivated landscape blossomed in Dutch art, van Mander's idea of boredom suggests a slight insecurity about this effect, as if it exercised force on untamed nature.

The boredom could, however, indicate another point at which the fields become symbolic of the culture that depicts them in landscape images: modernity's *plainness*, i.e. its uniformity and mediocrity. Fields are areas where the soil is evened out and, in the actual space of the Later Middle Ages, this plainness reached a hitherto unseen extent. The fields crept further up the mountains than they had before and, in the modern *field's* centre of gravity north of the Alps, wetlands such as marshes, bogs, lake shores and rivers, which had previously been too waterlogged to cultivate, became cultivatable as a result of drainage and the new deep-digging wheeled ploughs.[62] At the same time, plainness is a keyword in modern, popular culture. In *rota Virgilii*, an interpretative schema systematised by the Parisian scholastic John of Garland (b. *c.* 1190), but with roots back to Donatus (*c.* 350), the writing styles, *artes poeticae*, are arranged in order of precedence in concentric circle segments corresponding to Virgil's three works: one for the high, serious style (*gravis*) represented by the *Aeneid*; one for the mediocre style (*mediocris*) represented by the *Georgics*; and one for the humble style (*humilis*) constituted by the *Eclogues*.[63] Thus the peasants do not represent the lowest soil, *humus*, but are evened out, via their occupation, to a middle position in the cosmic wheel, which at the same time makes neighbours of shepherds and heroes. This is modernity in its social aspect, in which the individual is not isolated, but appears in a homogenised common mass, *vulgus*. The *vulgata* version is the Bible for everyone; *volgare* is the common language spoken by the people; the *comune* is government based on collective work. As the earth is evened out in the ploughed furrows of the fields, then so is society homogenised towards the mediocre norm – the very same middle way that was celebrated by Eustache Deschamps' worker (cf. chapter 10).[64]

And, as such, it again has Saturn as tutelary spirit. While I earlier pointed out that Saturn, god of time, was intimately linked to the atmospheric changes in the landscape image, his influence similarly extends to its territory. It is part of his peculiar dual nature that just as much as he presides over the agriculture-less Golden Age, he also protects its successor, civilisation, which sows, reaps and divides. A recurring attribute is thus a sickle or a scythe, and in astrological illustrations, for example in 15th-century block books, his crippled, criminal and forest worker *Planetenkinder* are accompanied by farm workers (FIG. II.31).[65]

Saturn also gives us a sense of how closely the perceptions of space and time are connected. His measurement of time forms part of an overall personification of every type of measurement, including land surveying.[66] Similarly, there are hazy boundaries between his harvesting and temporal activities: the sickle and scythe, which gather in the grain, turn into the scythe with which his alter ego, Death, reaps his souls. In truth, working in the fields was so gruelling in itself – grinding to death – that the Grim Reaper had no need to strike here, but could make do

Fig. 11.31. *Saturn* (*c.* 1480), pen and black ink, from the *Master of the Housebook Manuscript*. Aulendorf, Fürstlich zu Waldburg-Wolfeggsches Kupferstichkabinett, f. 11.

Fig. 11.32. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Ploughman* (1523-25), woodcut made by Hans Lützelburger from the series *Totentanz* (*Bilder des Totes*). Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Kupferstich-Kabinett.

with pushing at the yoke and egging on the oxen. This is how, running exuberantly, he is portrayed in one of the sheets from Hans Holbein's woodcut series *Totentanz* (1523-25) depicting the *Ploughman* (FIG. 11.32).[67] Rather than the disastrous and suddenly fatal hour, our common destination has here been extended in time, a time that is indicated by the ploughed furrows' relentlessly perspectival sweep towards the vanishing point, the setting sun. The Hebrews had also employed this personification of Death as the reaper, and here it had already provided presentiments of time, in that it was specifically linked to the unburied dead: "The dead bodies of

men shall fall like dung upon the open field, like sheaves after the reaper, and none shall gather them". (Jeremiah 9: 22) And: "[...] they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground." (Jeremiah 8: 2)

The circle is thus, once more, complete – the modern landscape paradigm's morbid circle of which one half is comprised of the vaporous atmosphere, the realm of the dead converted into temporal restless weather, and the other half is comprised of the ploughed fields, the consumed earth manured by its own unburied cultivators.

Farm land as park: territory and wilderness in the 15th-century landscape image

If we now turn our attention more specifically towards the 15th-century landscape image, we have to note that, in the same way as it toned down temporal inconsistency, nor is it actually intrusive when it comes to its work associations – just as the wilderness is similarly restrained. If the 15th-century image has a typical landscape, then it is made up of a green terrain, the components of which enter into a pleasantly harmonious blend against the summer-blue sky. We see grass-covered hills, trees and copses, fields, meadows, hedges, meandering streams and rocks. We see cities, castles and farms; and tracks, gravel roads or the occasional bridge conduct the imaginary visitor through the terrain. Any scenes of sea, bays or mountains are generally located towards the distant, slightly misty horizon. The landscape is domesticated, but not over-eager to display its utility function. It is an agricultural landscape camouflaged as a park.

Elements associated with fertility include: fields, pastures, orchards, fences, hedges, tree stumps, roads, bridges and, as we will see in chapter 12, quarries. In the 15th century, however, none of these elements make a show of their working function, and field cultivation in particular goes through a noticeable curve, both North and South of the Alps, reminiscent of the curve followed by weather and light: high at first, quickly flattening out, and rising again at the end, after which, in the 16th century, it divides into North and South.

As can be seen in, for example, Gozzoli's *Adoration of the Magi* (1459; FIG. 11.33) or Botticelli's little panel of *Judith's Return to Bethulia* (1470s; FIG. 11.34), fields and ploughed furrows feature whenever the opportunity arises. Nonetheless, what lies between the hedges in the images is seldom precisely defined, be it mature fields, fallow fields or pastures. Surprisingly, the impression of a park is particularly dominant in the Netherlands, from Roger van der Weyden onwards. The muted utility function of the landscape is signalled by the temporary disappearance of the windmill – the corn milling machine. While they still leave their mark on the horizon in

Fig. 11.33. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Adoration of the Magi* (1459), fresco. Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi.

Fig. 11.34. Sandro Botticelli, *Judith's Return to Bethulia* (1470s), tempera on wood. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

Fig. II.35. Konrad Witz, *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1444), oil on wood. Geneva, Musée d'Art et d'Historie.

pioneering works such as the Jan van Eyck school *Crucifixion* (1430s; FIG. II.17) and the *Turin Hours' Betrayal of Christ* (FIG. II.5), they then slip out of sight and do not reappear until around 1500 in Bosch (*Temptation of Saint Anthony*; Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga).

In the wake of the paradigm shift, distinct specifications of fields are to be found in Robert Campin's *Nativity* (*c.* 1425; PLATE 7), in Jan van Eyck's *Madonna of Chancellor Rolin* (*c.* 1433-34; FIG. 9.2 and PLATE 28), in Konrad Witz' *Miraculous Draught of Fishes* (1444; FIG. II.35), in Gentile da Fabriano's *Strozzi Altarpiece* (1423; PLATE 6) and in Domenico Veneziano's *Adoration of the Magi* (1439-43; Berlin, Staatliche Museen).[68] Uccello's depictions of the *Battle of San Romano* (*c.* 1445; FIG. 9.24) also take place against a background of brown ploughed fields,[69] and in his later *Saint George and*

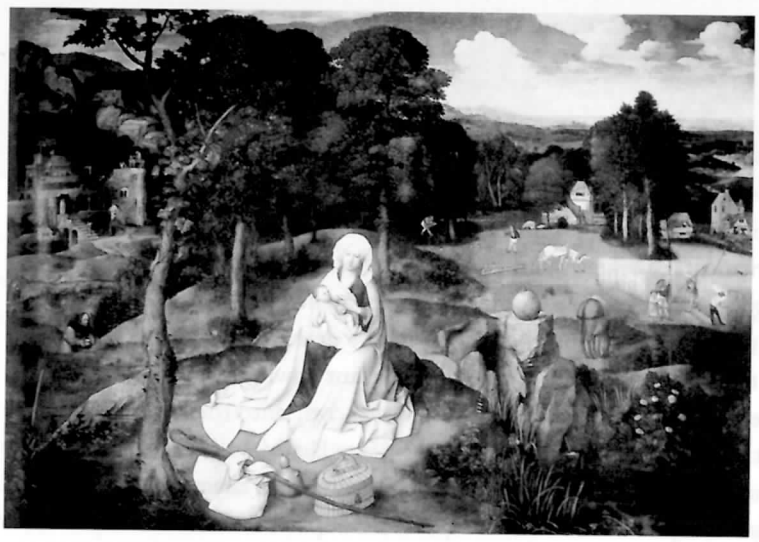
Fig. 11.36. Paolo Uccello, *Saint George and the Dragon* (1456-60), tempera on wood. Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André.

the Dragon (1456-60; FIG. 11.36), the city, Selena, is surrounded by flat fields. In addition to being made possible in the modern paradigm, these fields are endowed with a particular thematic import in that 'George' means 'earthworker'.[70]

The agricultural workers themselves are illustrated in the pictorial theme of *the flight into Egypt*. According to a legend, which apparently did not become tradition until the 13th century, during their flight to the granary of the Roman Empire, Mary and the infant Jesus encountered a peasant sowing wheat. Jesus reached into the seed basket and threw a handful of seed corn onto the ground where, by morning, it had grown into ripe ears of corn. When Herod's soldiers heard that the peasant has last seen Jesus at sowing time they abandoned their search. The tale is presumably a symptom of the late medieval development in which Mary became more overtly identified with the goddess of corn; through Christ's sacrifice the corn can rise again.[71] Seen in this light, the otherwise primarily paradigmatically-determined ploughed fields in Gentile's interpretation of the theme are perhaps endowed with an extra iconographic weight – a matter that should be corroborated by the following comparisons: in the *flight* scene in the early-15th-century *Rohan Book of Hours*, i.e. before the paradigm shift, the peasant is in the process of harvesting the newly-ripened corn when the soldiers appear (FIG. 11.37); in Giovanni di Paolo's version (*c.* 1440) there are no soldiers, but, then again, two field hands are working

Fig. II.37. The Rohan Master, *Flight into Egypt* (early 15th century), miniature from the *Rohan Book of Hours*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms lat. 9471, f. 99.

Fig. II.38. Joachim Patinir, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (*c.* 1520), oil on wood. Madrid, Museo del Prado.



with spade and hoe, while a third is ploughing in the background (FIG. II.10); and in several 16th-century Flemish depictions of the *Flight* narrative, by Patinir for example, the field hands have been put to work out in the panoramic world landscape (FIG. II.38).[72] These scenes are all interesting because they provide a rare illustration of the agricultural activities behind the 15th-16th-century paradigm's otherwise invisibly cultivated fields.

Fig. 11.39. Michele Pannonio, *Thalia* (1456-59), tempera on wood. Budapest, Szépmüvészeti Múzeum.

The pressure of agricultural work on painting was also manifested more indirectly, as we have seen, in Guarino's Pisanello-*ekphrasis* from the 1430s. Pisanello's manner of painting was so lifelike that Guarino "put out a hand to wipe the sweat from the brow of the labouring peasant".[73] Agriculture again makes its presence felt when, in 1447, the Ferrarese court humanist is designing the first monumental work of modernity with a thoroughly antique content, the now only partially extant cycle depicting the *Muses* for the *studiolo* in Belfiore Castle.[74] In late antiquity, Boethius (*c.* 480-*c.* 525) had accused the arts of the muses – *inter alia* poetry, song and music – of being frivolous and in conflict with theology and philosophy. The humanists of a more modern era – Petrarch, Boccaccio, Salutati – had therefore done what they could to rehabilitate them, not least by highlighting poetry as the source of theology. Guarino now gives the inspirational power of the muses a simultaneously

more useful and fecund slant when he resorts to a Byzantine Hesiod tradition in which two of the muses become tutelary spirits for agriculture.[75] According to a letter written by Guarino to Leonello d'Este in 1447, Thalia's customary comedy is replaced by "one part of agriculture, that which concerns planting the land". And Polyhymnia did not discover the writing of hymns, but the cultivation of fields: "[...] let her be girt up and dispose hoes and vases of seed, bearing in her hand ears of corn and bunches of grapes."[76]

This agriculture is thus the late medieval all-embracing variety which puts grain and wine cultivation on an equal footing, a juxtaposition that is also seen in Michele Pannonio's free interpretation of Thalia from *c.* 1456-59, an enthroned women crowned with corn and holding a rose and a vine (FIG. II.39). The admission of agriculture to this princely private cycle, which otherwise focuses on the more 'musical' arts, could be seen as a sign of a despotism trying to create a more civically legitimate, quasi-republican image. Activities appreciated by Leonello d'Este lead to, *inter alia*, the Good Government in the countryside, while also stimulating the fertility of the soil – thus providing justification for otherwise extravagantly erotic gestures such as unlacing the bodices of several of the muses.[77]

The accuracy of the first part of the reading is confirmed by the fact that the Good Government is also the one later celebrated in Palazzo Schifanoia's *Frescoes of the Months* (1469-71) under the rule of Leonello's brother, Borso.[78] In Sala dei Mesi's cycle it does not, however, appear in the shape of muses, but as the plain agricultural labours of the months of the late medieval tradition. Taking inspiration from the antique *planisphere*, a circular zodiac chart, each month is divided into three bands. Uppermost, the Olympian god of the month exults; in the middle lingers the star sign accompanied by three star demons, known as *decans*; and at the bottom we see various episodes centred on Ferrara's good regent, Borso d'Este. Among the many activities distinguished in the now somewhat ruined frescoes – besides Borso's feats and leisure pursuits, also mythological episodes, plus assorted seasonal labours and amusements – there are quite a few farm labours: in *March* the vines are pruned, in *May* the hay is cut and the trees are pruned, in *June* the grain is harvested, in *August* the land is ploughed and sown (FIG. II.40). Despite this iconographically-determined cultivation, we nonetheless search in vain for agricultural divisions among the green parts of the frescoes.[79] In return, we encounter bizarre rock formations whose simultaneously growing and artificial qualities would in themselves seem to develop the theme: the fertility of the earth (more about this in chapter 12).

If we again look at the more general traces of work in the 15th-century landscape images, I must also mention the phenomenon *tree stumps*, i.e. vestiges of tree felling. As we saw in chapter 4, trees in the antique and medieval landscape images as often as not bear evidence of pruning in the shape of branch stumps with sharp-edged

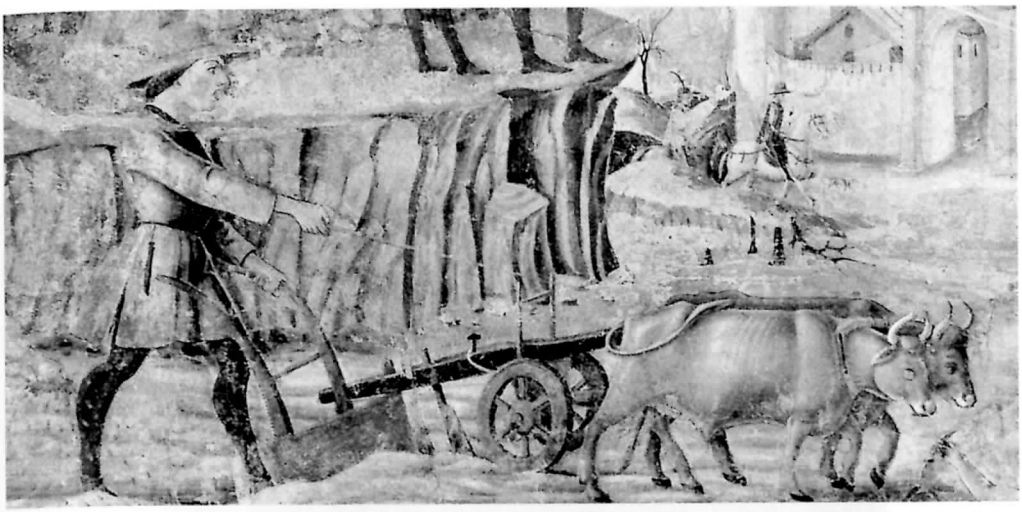


Fig. 11.40. Anonymous artist, *August* (1469-71), fresco (section). Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia, Sala dei Mesi.

surfaces. These traces represent the Golden Age paradigm, in that they can be perceived as a result of horticulture, a gentle shaping of trees that are allowed to carry on growing. The tree stumps, on the other hand, seemingly attest to a more radical intervention in nature, an intervention that is not restricted to adapting the tree, but kills it so that the stump is left mutilated and dead, while the trunk, as in Ovid's Iron Age, "now leap[s] insolently over unknown waves" (cf. chapter 4).

We have already noted the tree stumps in the Boucicaut Master's *Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth* (*c.* 1401-05; PLATE 35). Later, in Filippo Lippi's adoration scenes, they appear in rocky forest settings among sound and dead trees (*c.* 1463; FIG. 11.41). Mantegna places them in several types of environment: along the winding road in the *Agony in the Garden* (*c.* 1460; FIG. 11.42); on the rock plateau behind *Saint George* (*c.* 1467; Venice, Accademia); on the flat tract in front of the forest in *Pallas Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue* (*c.* 1499-1502; FIG. 12.77).[80] In the latter case, they become part of the depraved world beyond the garden, because the trees inside the garden are not hacked down. The tree stumps' link to felling is unequivocally demonstrated in an anonymous Venetian painting of *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness* (*c.* 1500-20; FIG. 11.43). A few men in the background are here in the process of felling trees and collecting branches.[81]

These traces of the exploitation of nature could be seen in context with a typical figure of late medieval literature: the woodcutter. When youths such as Aucassin

Fig. II.41. Filippo Lippi, *Adoration of the Child with Saints* (*c.* 1463), tempera on wood. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

Fig. II.42. Andrea Mantegna, *Agony in the Garden* (*c.* 1460), tempera on wood. London, National Gallery.

Fig. 11.43. Anonymous Venetian artist, *Saint Jerome in the Wilderness* (*c.* 1500-20), oil on wood. Toledo (Ohio), Toledo Museum of Art.

or knights such as Lancelot have gone astray in the forest, they encounter this late mutation of the savage man, a semi-monster with unkempt hair.[82] The forest is thus no longer more comfortable than that even its most primitive inhabitants have to procure warmth via the systematic felling of trees. A such diminutive forest worker signifies the kind of nature in question when Altdorfer, around 1522, makes one of the first independent landscape images in the West.[83] Even the Venetians' otherwise so pastoral 16th-century landscapes are not free of tree stumps.[84]

The field *of work ideology*

The utility landscape, which becomes a part of 15th-century painting's new pictorial paradigm, can be said overall to incorporate two contradictory inclinations: on the one hand, a clarification of the origins of fields, hedges, fences and tree stumps in arduous work on the land; on the other hand, an obscuring of these origins in favour of a more park-like appearance characterised by the pursuit of leisure. The admission of utility traces in the general paradigm herewith resembles, as already mentioned, that which was also the fortune of the traces of time and weather, in that the paradigm provisionally postpones the adoption of the more extreme thematic potential (snow, rain, close-up portraits of fields, etc.) – a potential which, in more specific iconographic circumstances, was otherwise already displayed in precursors such as *Tacuinum Sanitatis* and *Labours of the Months*.

Would it be hasty to connect this initial toning down of the landscape images' temporal and work-related potential with the aforementioned "multi-secular breath" in the social structure which, according to Le Roy Ladurie, is underway in this very period – a breath which, in many European regions, is re-strengthening the feudal structure and thereby the polarization between the upper and lower strata of society? Even though I have argued that this re-feudalisation finds its mature paradigmatic pictorial expression in the neo-antique work-free and pastoral landscape image, the ideal landscape, between 1500 and 1700, a certain prelude to this would seem likely, and this prelude, then, could comprise the transformation of agricultural land into parkland in the pictorial paradigm between 1420 and 1500.

Certainly, it is a fact that what in the 12th-13th centuries had constituted a relatively unambiguous liberation process for the peasantry and workers in general, gradually turns into an intense class struggle in the 14th-15th centuries. The conflict is manifested in social unrest such as the 1358 Jacquerie peasant revolt in France, the 1381 peasant uprising in England and the Hussite movement in Bohemia following the death of religious reformer Jan Hus in 1415. As an indication of the upper classes' reaction to this, for example, Rodríguez Sanchez de Arévalo (1404-70), a learned bishop and close ally of the pope, wrote a widely-read analysis of the relations between the social classes, *Speculum vitae humanae* (1468). Whereas in the olden days the peasants turned weapons into tools, it is now the reverse, writes Arévalo, and therefore they must be punished. The good society requires an upper class.[85]

This late medieval deflection of peasant liberation could then find correspondence in the preliminary park-characteristics of the landscape paradigm. But, at the same time, a perceptible countercurrent is also beginning to take shape in Northern Europe: a current which does not go along with the period's "multi-secular breath" on its way towards a re-strengthened feudalism, but which prefers to stress a work

Fig. 11.44. Anonymous artist, *Bailiff and Peasant* (*c.* 1490-1500), woodcut from a German edition of Pier de Crescenzi's *De commodorum ruralium libri XII* (*c.* 1305).

ethic. A positive evaluation of the peasantry is accordingly detectable in the engravings of peasants which begin to appear after 1470 in the work of the Master of the Housebook, Martin Schongauer, Dürer and the Beham Brothers – interestingly, all artists from areas (respectively, Oberrhein, Alsace and, in the case of the last three, Nuremberg) in which the peasants rose in rebellion, and where a degree of support from the urban middle class, the social stratum to which the artists belonged, could therefore be expected.[86]

This attitude is also apparent in many German woodcuts from the decades around 1500; for example, in a late-15th-century German edition of Pier de Crescenzi's widely-distributed agricultural treatise *De commodorum ruralium libri XII* (*12 Books on the Rural Arts*; *c.* 1305). Crescenzi (Latin: Petrus de Crescentiis), a Bolognese lawyer, was indeed a conservative feudalist of the opinion that peasants were the property of the lord of the estate, but a critical attitude can be sensed in the German illustrations. One of them shows, for example, a stern-faced bailiff harrying the stooped peasant as he hoes (FIG. 11.44).[87] An unambiguous critique of feudal society is simultaneously produced by Johannes Lichtenberger (d. 1503), a German astrologer, who in the similarly woodcut-illustrated *Prognosticatio* (1488, imprint 1499) advanced a prophetic vision of the undoing of the social order: "The rich will be overthrown, the poor, however, rise and attain riches." Although Lichtenberger upholds the social stratification, he considers humankind to be one big community.[88]

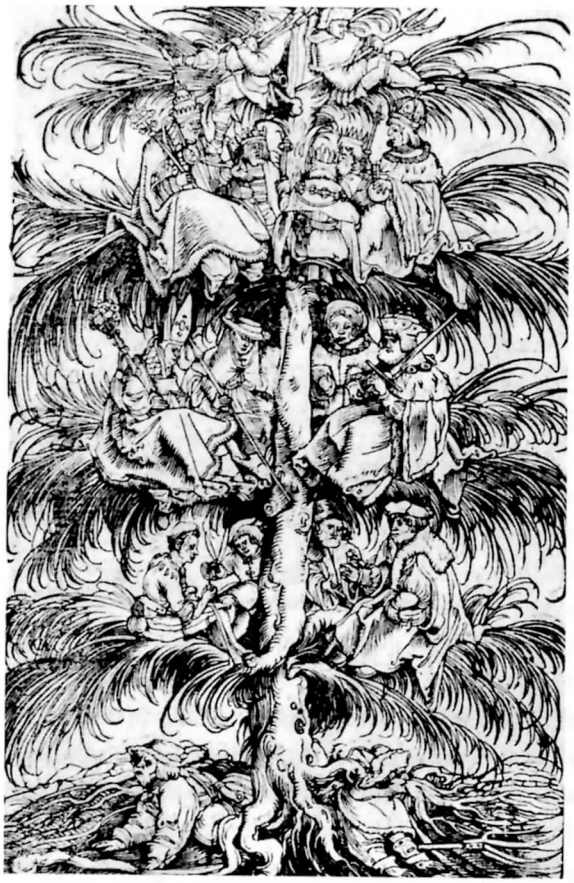


Fig. II.45. Anonymous artist, *Allegory of Society* (1520), woodcut from Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae* (publ. Augsburg 1532)

A similar inversion of the social hierarchy is found in a 1520 woodcut illustration for the Augsburg edition of Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae* (*Remedies Against Luck and Bad Luck*; published 1532). In the text, Petrarch claims that there is no difference between the blood of noblemen and that of peasants, and that nobility is achieved through deeds alone. The woodcut illustrates this outlook by making peasants both the root and the top of feudal society, symbolised by a fir tree (FIG. II.45). The three sets of branches in between hold a hierarchy of, respectively: craftsmen and merchants; bishop, cardinal and princes; pope, emperor and kings.[89]

Faced with illustrations such as these, we get a clear sense that an interest in and compassion for the lower social strata is beginning to gain credence and become part of the emerging Protestant culture. Still in the 15th century, we also come across compelling Italian examples of a work ethic, for example in Lorenzo Valla who declares that work with its potential to transform nature is the means by which

Fig. 11.46. Domenico Veneziano, *Saint John in the Desert* (*c.* 1445-50), tempera on wood, from the predella of the *Santa Lucia Altarpiece*. Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection.

humankind fulfils its destiny.[90] But, as Max Weber shows, the cultivation of work as a common calling gradually becomes a speciality of North Europe, intensified by the reforming faith of Luther, Calvin and others.[91] In painting, the first results of this alliance probably comprise the secular genres, which make their debut in painting's monumental scale after 1550. For Netherlandish artists such as Aertsen, Beuckelaer and Brueghel, lives of the peasants have become a valid autonomous subject – a subject which often supersedes the religious and mythological themes, relegating them to inconsequential backgrounds or complete withdrawal.[92]

Paradisiacal rudiments of the landscape image

However, as implied, the new landscape formations in painting are not only made up of fields. During its dissolution in the Copernican infinity, Paradise can just as well be transformed into gardens, thickets or forests. While this procedure goes along quite homogenously in 15th-century Netherlandish images, the process of change in Italy would seem to be up against a greater degree of inertia and is therefore more conflict-ridden. The Byzantine rock formations are tougher to stamp out and do not seem prepared to undergo a levelling with the Paradise nature coming down from above, which in its turn retains something of the pre-modern agoraphobic look. Far into the 15th century the turf thus still floats around as detached rugs on the rock formations, as if plant life and underground continue to live their mutually independent lives (FIG. 11.46).

Fig. II.47. Sandro Botticelli, *Primavera* (*c.* 1482(?)), tempera on wood. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

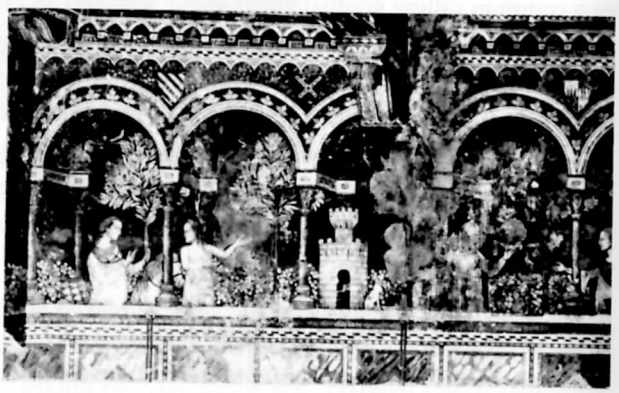


Fig. II.48. Anonymous artist, fresco from Sala della Donna del Verzù (*c.* 1350). Florence, Palazzo Davanzati.

Just such an agoraphobic carpet of flowers spreads relentlessly, for example, under the screening orange trees in Botticelli's *Primavera* (*c.* 1482 (?); FIG. II.47). Venus and her entourage have a curiously weightless appearance since all the flowers and plants distributed so generously by Flora seem to be rooted in an obscure void – a typical effect of meadow floors for the period. Botticelli even reinforces the paradisiacal enclosure by means of Mercury turning away a little flock of clouds with his staff – a gesture recalling Marsilio Ficino's idea of Mercury as a force driving out the clouds from the light of intellectual beauty.[93] And, in this, as we shall soon see, the meadow

Fig. 11.49. Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo, *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1475), tempera on wood. London, National Gallery.

floor takes on the aspect of Venus' cloudless garden of love as depicted in Claudian's *Epithalamium de nuptiis Honorii Augusti* (*Nuptial Poem to Emperor Honorius*; 398 AD).

Indissoluble paradisiacal remnants in 15th-century Italian landscape images are also sensed in the many sequences of assorted trees gathered behind walls or spread across the wide expanses of the landscape (FIGS. 11.6 and 11.33). Are these series of trees not a kind of spatially-reconciled successors to the agoraphobic antique mixed forest as found in the Pompeian garden frescoes or in the House of Livia (PLATE 5)? Immediate forerunners can be seen in the interior decoration of 14th-century palaces, for example in the Florentine Palazzo Davanzati where assorted trees are spread across the flat space between the illusionistic arcades (*c.* 1350; FIG. 11.48).[94]

Were we to identify a watershed where the Italians dissolve the Paradise/underground gap and reach right into the central ground of levelled soil, which the Northerners had already reached with *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (FIG. 10.23), it would have to be the Pollaiuolo brothers' *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* from 1475 – a work that is characteristically set on the flattest plain imaginable (FIG. 11.49). In this image, it is as if Giovanni di Paolo's infinite latticework of fields (FIG. 11.30) has slipped from clear-headed concept to an illusion of the senses. Put a hand into

Fig. II.50. Francesco Traini (?), *Triumph of Death* (1330s?), fresco. Pisa, Camposanto.

the green-brown plain and it really would come out green from grass and brown from soil.

If we look closer at the 'un-dissolved' meadow floors, they would seem to be just as tangibly produced by the garden notion as are the series of trees. Quite to what an extent is apparent from comparison with an earlier example such as the *Triumph of Death* (1330s?; FIG. II.50).[95] The Garden of Vanity is here a flourishing plant environment floating around in the bare rocky landscape in the same way as the abovementioned sections of turf. However, this garden also demonstrates just how ambiguous the concept of Paradise has become in the transience-conscious Late Middle Ages. The flower carpet with its orange trees has here become the meeting place for a group of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen who are making music, conversing and flirting in the company of their pets: a dog and two falcons – the latter undoubtedly there to assist in the hunt, the favourite sport of the nobility. In the rocks of the wilderness beyond the garden – and apparently at a safe distance from it – a far more macabre scene is unfolding: against a background of the hermits' penitential life, an aristocratic retinue on horseback comes across three semi-decomposed corpses, while elsewhere angels and demons fight over the souls flying upwards from a large pile of bodies: the corpses of merchants, scholars, monks, nuns and beautiful ladies. The garden, however, will soon also become part of this hell, for Death, a hideous be-winged woman, has swung her scythe over her shoulder and is just about to harvest the carefree gathering in the garden. She is

the antithesis of another flying woman, Securitas in the *Effects of Good Government in the Countryside* (PLATE 13). Whereas the agricultural workers achieve security by swinging the scythe, the garden guests have brought themselves into the greatest possible danger by putting it away. The repressed work has here re-emerged in the figure of the Grim Reaper.

The Paradise garden is thus no longer protection from death but, on the contrary, is turned into the image of frailty. Although the idea of the garden of immortality continues to thrive, the very possibility of its fall marks a volte-face in relation to the *locus amoenus* image of the Golden Age *field*. In the Judeo-Christian culture, classical antiquity and Mesopotamia, Paradise gardens might well be guarded by demonic forces (Paradise itself by the serpent, the Garden of the Hesperides by the dragon Ladon, the Cedar Forest by the monstrous Humbaba, and so forth), but in itself the *locus amoenus* milieu – fruit trees, flowers, meadows – would seem to be quite unequivocally linked with that which is good, beautiful and imperishable. The Late Middle Ages challenges this sanctity from two angles in particular: partly, as indicated, the garden incarnates *accidia* (sloth), one of the seven deadly sins; and partly it appeals to the senses, the epitome of frailty. At the beginning of the 12th century, for example, Saint Anselm states that the harmfulness of things is proportional to the senses they gratify. This is especially true of the garden with its roses which appeal to sight and smell, and song and stories which feed hearing.[96]

This idea is also unambiguously present in Camposanto's Garden of Vanity, for among the border figures under the garden we encounter a grinning skeleton which, in *volgare*, asks: "O soul, why, why, do you not consider that Death will tear from you that vesture in which you feel corporeal delight through the power of the five senses?"[97] The garden and its party are thus confronted with death in the form of time. The advent of time amid the fragrant plant life pushes the garden down from its elevated pedestal and out into the landscape. So saying, it could be noted that time is not just something added to the landscape from the realistic pole, cultivated nature, it is just as much input from the romantic pole, work-free nature.

The advent of time in Paradise is also depicted in *Il Tesoretto*, Brunetto Latini's unfinished poem begun shortly after 1262. The writer is on pilgrimage in *Natura* and, having left the beautiful land of the Virtues, curiosity drives him to visit a strange realm:

> As it was in May time, after traversing vales and mounts, woods, groves, and bridges, I came to a fine meadow, sprinkled with flowers on every side. But now it seemed like a circle to me, now like a square; now its air was obscured, now clear and shining; now I saw great crowds, now I saw no one. [...] Thus on every side I saw both joy and sorrow.[98]

The inconstancy is due to the circumstance that the garden is dedicated to the Goddess of Love, called *Piacere* (pleasure) by Latini. According to the author, to be in love, i.e. to seek pleasure, involves constant changeability of the soul, a changeability which, as in Lorenzo il Magnifico's poem on the passionate love, is projected out into the environment. The condition is considered dangerous and, not unlike Petrarch after his enjoyment of the view from Mont Ventoux or Taddeo Gaddi after staring at the solar eclipse, Latini has cause to regret his curiosity and must do penance.

The ultimate model for such inconstant gardens of love is the one in Claudian's abovementioned nuptial poem in honour of the Emperor Honorius. Venus' pleasure garden on the Cypriot mountain is an almost flawless Golden Age landscape in which a golden surrounding hedge ensures eternal springtime, perpetual youth and groves saturated with love. The harmony is fractured, however, by the two fountains in which Cupid dips his arrows. While one is honey-sweet, the other is bitter and poisonous. Love is a mixed pleasure, as is also evident from the other deities in the enclosure: Licence bound by no fetters, easily moved Anger, Wakes dripping with wine, inexperienced Tears, Pallor, trembling Boldness, happy Fears, unstable Pleasure, lovers' Oaths.[99] Despite the presence of these deities of inconstancy, it is worth noting, however, that the *garden itself* is unaffected. Instability fluctuates in an eternal springtime. What makes Latini modern, then, is the fact that he also draws the actual garden into this inconstancy – by means of which it is transformed into landscape.

The garden of love is, furthermore, a recurring motif in late medieval literature. We encounter it in Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose* (*c.* 1230), in Petrarch's *Trionfo d'Amore* (1338-43, later revised), in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and *Teseida* (shortly before 1343).[100] In pictorial art the motif is particularly widespread from the end of the 14th century onwards. Regular ingredients are: a fountain, possibly topped by a statue; a flower carpet; clusters of trees; and young lovers making music, dancing and flirting. The setting can be open country among rocks or an enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*).

As depicted in 14th-15th-century painting, work seldom gains access to the garden or its extension outwards in the landscape. Any practical utility activities are, as in antiquity, of the lighter variety: hunting, pastoralism, fishing. Part of the repertoire is displayed in Avignon's Papal Palace, where Simone Martini's workshop executed a fresco cycle around 1343-44 (FIG. II.51).[101] A dense thicket of trees in the House of Livia tradition here forms the setting not just for fowlers, anglers and falconers, but also for men hunting rabbits, deer and monkeys. Of these pursuits, falconry accounts for the epitome of aristocratic pastime: in Lorenzetti's land panorama, the *August* image in *Les Très Riches Heures* as well as Palazzo Schifanoia's *March*, the well-to-do are engaged in falconry while the peasants attend to agricultural matters.

Fig. 11.51. Workshop of Simone Martini, *Fowlers in Forest* (*c.* 1343-44), frescoes. Avignon, Papal Palace.

Nevertheless, late medieval work ideology is still so prevalent that there is never an absolute distinction between work- and grace-landscape in 15th-century painting. By the same token as the forest bore evidence of tree felling, we must also note that pastoralism, the prime occupation of primitivism, can be a feature of standard peasant farming. When the shepherds receive the Christmas message in Sano di Pietro's *Annunciation to the Shepherds* (1450s), they have enclosed their animals within a tight polygonal fence (**FIG. 11.52**).[102] And in Giovanni Bellini's *Saint Francis in Ecstasy* (*c.* 1485) even the sheep pasture behind the rocks of Mount Alverna is enclosed by a

Fig. II.52. Sano di Pietro, *Annunciation to the Shepherds* (1450s), tempera on wood. Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale.

Fig. II.53. Giovanni Bellini, *Saint Francis in Ecstasy* (*c.* 1485), oil and tempera on wood. New York, Frick Collection.

fence of wood stakes (FIG. 11.53). Such enclosures would never be found in an image from antiquity. And their renewed removal in 16th-17th-century Italian painting thus presupposes a conservative current, the Renaissance.

Return of the chthonic: Mary as earth goddess

If nature in the garden of love signifies transient pleasure, the imperishable Paradise is nevertheless within its immediate vicinity. The same *hortus conclusus* that encloses the sensuous flirtation can just as well form the setting for the humble Madonna on bare ground (*madonna humilitas*). In Stefano da Zevio we find her seated amid fragrant roses, music-making angels, singing birds and a trickling fountain (early 15th century; FIG. 11.54). The ease with which this replacement occurs is attributable to the fact that both Venus and Mary represent aspects of the goddess of earth. As the etymological origin of the Christian genre, *humus* (Latin=earth), suggests, it acknowledges the Virgin Mary's chthonic identity, her incarnation of the life-giving earth.

In chapter 2 we saw that this identity was, in a way, a built-in component of the Mary figure right from the hesitant beginnings of Christianity, but that it was kept in check by the Church, which wanted to stamp out the pagan fertility cults. However, as the West after the year 1000 takes a renewed interest in the material aspects of the universe, Mary is more overtly linked with nature in pictorial depictions. In an example of this, the Byzantine *Homilies of Jacob* from the beginning of the 12th century, the pregnant Virgin, on her way to visit Elizabeth, has come to a halt in a Paradise of a striking earthly nature (FIG. 11.55).[103] The surroundings might well be full of sumptuous plant life, but Mary's throne consists of a soil mound and, at her feet, *Terra* peeps out from a chasm between two hills. However, Terra – here a bare-breasted woman of savage appearance – is not accompanied by her usual attributes of the serpent and cornucopia, an omission which highlights an Early Church comparison between her and Eve.[104] Similarly, *Mare*, the man on the right pouring out a River Jordan from his pitcher, alludes to Adam. That the juxtaposition Terra-Eve can also be extended to Mary is here evident from Mary's appearance as the New Eve who, in a lateral reversion of the Fall, will redeem humankind: she accepts a fruit from the boy in the tree. As it says in the accompanying praise from Terra to the Virgin, written by the monk Jacob of Kokkinobaphos (*c.* 1050-1100): "Look at this, my gloriously flowering branch, see the fruit of my fertility, [...] through which all those thorns I have had to bear since the damnation will be torn out. [...] This fruit brings forth the one who will deliver me from the errors of humankind."[105] Jacob's poem thus conjures up a whole Tree of Life where Terra's fruit is not only transformed into the one who consumes it – i.e. Mary, the New Eve – but where the fruit also feeds the saviour who will make Terra paradisiacal again by releasing her

Fig. II.54. Stefano da Zevio, *Madonna of the Rose Garden* (early 15th century), tempera on wood. Verona, Museo del Castelvecchio.

Fig. II.55. *Mary and Terra* (early 12th century), miniature from the Byzantine *Homilies of Jacob*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms grec. 1208, f. 200.

from the burden of the original sin. The distance between the earth and its fruit is obviously reduced by the association Terra-Eve-Mary.

However, it takes another quarter of a millennium before the pictorial culture in more devotional contexts will venture an enthronement of Mary on the bare ground. An intermediate stage, highlighting her corporeal fertility with no explicit link to the soil, is found in *Madonna lactans*, the nursing Madonna. And when the Madonna is finally released into nature, after 1375, she is initially limited to a protective enclosure, the closed Paradise garden.[106]

What does the garden actually shield her from? The subterranean inferno? More likely the surface as cultivated after the Fall, because when the Madonna can again be found out in the open, after the 1420s' paradigm shift, she is surrounded by a garland of paradisiacal fruit trees, a hedge patently designed to keep the background fields out of the meadowland where she is sitting. In Jacopo Bellini's *Madonna of Humility with Donor (Leonello D'Este(?))*, from the early 1440s, the fields are specified by fine hatching (FIG. II.7), in Giovanni di Paolo's version by the customary chessboard

Fig. 11.56. Giovanni di Paolo, *Madonna of Humility* (1440s?), tempera on wood. Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale.

pattern (FIG. 11.56). The screening feels imperative as the *humus* incarnated by the Madonna is *ager bonus*, the sacred virgin ground,[107] which gives birth to Christ without strain or the agency of human semen, in exactly the same way as the clay of Paradise gave birth to Adam, touched only by God. In more secular contexts, the principle is reflected in *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, Boccaccio's pastoral poem written in 1341. The beautiful nymph Agapes (*non-sexual love*), whose parents have forced her to marry a hideous old man, cries out after the wedding night:

Fig. II.57. Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna and Child Holding a Swallow* (*c.* 1510), oil on wood. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

> O nymphs, have now compassion with my aggravations. Having dragged out most of the night with [...] gossip, he toils futilely to cultivate the gardens of Venus; and by using an old coulter [*vecchio bomere*] when trying to cleave the earth on those who wish the graceful seeds [*i graziosi semi*], he works in vain.[108]

So rather than fertilising the nymph's womb with divine sperm, the old man transforms it into a mere ploughed field which takes strenuous effort to be cultivated.

Against this background of toil in the fields, Venus and Mary become kindred spirits. Mary is clad in the earthly ground, whereas conversely the graceful seeds bring Venus from sensuality to the divine world. This association impedes the garden of love from disintegrating into pure sensuality. Its merger with Paradise is asserted by Lorenzo de'Medici:

> For "Paradise", to one who wishes to define it correctly, means nothing other than the loveliest garden, full of delightful and pleasant things, of trees, apples, flowers, living and running waters, birdsong, and, as a result, all the good things of which the human heart may dream; and this verifies that Paradise was where there was a beautiful woman, for here was every amenity and every sweetness a gentle heart might desire.[109]

Later, however, Mary relinquishes the protection of Paradise. When Giovanni Bellini places his *Madonna and Child Holding a Swallow* (*c.* 1510) on the bare ground, there are no longer barriers between the soil of the Virgin's seat and the furrowed fields behind, even though we still do not doubt the virginity of the seat (FIG. II.57).[110] And in his *Madonna of the Stonecutters* (*c.* 1488-90), Mantegna has made the Madonna

Fig. 11.58. Giovanni Britto after Titian, *Landscape with a Milkmaid* (*c.* 1520-25), woodcut. Venice, Museo Civico Correr.

a goddess of the earth by placing her immediately in front of a cave, an extension of her womb (FIG. 12.56). As we will see in chapter 12, the stonemasons who have transformed this cave into a quarry highlight her virginal status because, unlike her, they must resort to labour in order to create their progeny: idolatrous works of art.

11.3 The Renaissance and the ideal landscape: prelude

The corporeal swelling, reduction of details and darkening of the sky that occur with the post-1500 emergence of the High Renaissance in painting are accompanied by the disappearance of fields, hedges and fences from the Italian landscape paradigm. At the same time, the extensive 15th-century plains are displaced in favour of a renewed undulation in which tracks are restricted to sporadic traces. The traditional term for the terrain, *the ideal landscape*, could not have been better chosen, for this is the landscape parallel to the triumph of ideality that typifies the figures.

The changes that occur in the landscape image are just as comprehensive and persistent as the other Renaissance features I have discussed earlier, and they cannot be understood without them. It is therefore of no advantage simply to analyse the usual star model, 'the pastoral landscape' in Venice (FIG. 11.58), and then go on to talk of its 'influence'. For rather, it has to be said that the Renaissance paradigm, wherever it is operational, involves a suppression of the landscape image's territorial markers, and that the uncultivated landscape thus exposed provides the opportunity to accentuate the already built-in iconography known as 'the pastoral landscape'.[111] The ideal landscape is, exactly like its antique predecessor, *born*

pastoral, and there is nothing special about the Venetian iconography beyond the emphasis on shepherds and a focus on the purely scenic. And as is the case with the other Renaissance aspects, the uncultivated landscape is not restricted to antique iconography. The landscape surrounding a Venetian 16th-century Madonna or a saint in the wilderness is neither more nor less pastoral than an equivalent *poesia* imbued with antique inspiration.

Conversely, the ideal landscape's tolerance does not preclude antique motifs feeling particularly at home here. For one thing, the landscape is essentially neo-antique, and for another, the antique gods must presumably feel most comfortable in an uncultivated nature beyond historical time. Early antique motifs such as Botticelli's from the 1480s are thus also set on untouched ground. The contention that the ideal landscape thrives in a time pocket and has features of artificial regression is supported by the circumstance that the period in which traces of agriculture are displaced is also the era which makes explicit pictorial representation of the untouched, pre-civilisation earth. As early as the 1490s, Piero di Cosimo was already making his series dealing with life in primordial times (FIG. II.25). And on the outer panels of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-04; FIG. 9.10) we are looking down across the flat earth as it appeared on the third day of Creation, with water, trees, meadows and strange capsules but as of yet no animals or humans. Landscape images such as these point beyond the meaningful ideality of the Renaissance towards a nature that has no experience of humankind's comings and goings, a sublime romantic nature. The ideal landscape thereby simply represents one choice among many for the pictorial rendition of more or less exotic, untouched terrains, a choice which, however, unlike Bosch, makes the presence of humankind inevitable, albeit suitably primitive.

Alberti's landscape genres

The many paths leading to the genesis of the ideal landscape include Alberti's deliberations on the decoration of buildings as presented in his treatise on architecture *De re aedificatoria*, written around 1450. As the passage is of great significance and, moreover, reveals conflicting forces at work, I shall quote it in full:

> Since painting, like poetry, can deal with various matters – some depict the memorable deeds of great princes, others the manners of private citizens, and still others the life of the simple farmer [*aratoriam vitam*] – those first, which are the most majestic, will be appropriate for public works and for the buildings of the most eminent individuals; the second should adorn the walls of private citizens; and the last will be particularly suitable for gardens [*ortis*], being the most delightful of them all.

> We are particularly delighted when we see paintings of the amenities of the areas [*amoenitates regionum*] or harbors, scenes of fishing, hunting, bathing, or country sports, and flowery and leafy views.[112]

For the sake of clarity, it would be appropriate to schematise Alberti's genres and compare them with two similar hierarchies, Vitruvius' classification of theatre scenery and *rota Virgilii*, the late antique scholastic revision of literary genres:

Vitruvius (stage scenery genres)	Rota Virgilii (literary genres)
Tragedy – royal buildings	*Aeneid* – gravis (princes)
Comedy – private buildings	*Georgics* – mediocris (peasants)
Satyric plays – pastoral land	*Eclogues* – humilis (shepherds)

Alberti (pictorial genres and their application)
Memorable deeds of great princes – to be set in public buildings and buildings of eminent individuals
Manners of private citizens – to be set in private homes
Life of the simple farmer (particularly pastoral landscapes) – to be set chiefly in gardens

The three hierarchies share a categorization that looks from the noblest to the simplest, from the centre of civilisation to the distance of the wilderness, from *ergon* to *parergon*. On the face of it, the hierarchies might seem to correspond, as if in some virtual hall of mirrors. If the royal subjects of literature are transferred to the theatre, they ought to take place against a background of royal scenery, and when the same subjects are depicted in decorative painting, the pictures should be hung in actual royal or at least prominent buildings. The mirroring is, however, darkened in the nether – or outer – levels, because in the middle of *rota Virgilii* we find peasants rather than the private individuals specified by Vitruvius and Alberti. And Alberti, for his part, cannot quite decide whether he will have toiling farmers or playing primitives at the bottom. Still influenced by late medieval work ideology, he blithely declares that the third category should deal with "the life of the simple farmer". But in the more detailed commentary, the neo-classicist rears his head and slips over to Vitruvius' satyr land: of *special* preference are paintings of "the beauties of the areas" (read: *loci amoeni*), a genre which because of its "delightfulness" is *particularly* appropriate for gardens and which, furthermore, includes the leisurely pursuits we recall from Pliny's description of the sacral-idyllic paintings (see chapter 6): harbours, fishing, hunting, bathing, country sports, along with flowery and leafy views.

Not unlike *Libri della famiglia* (1437-38), in which Alberti praises the idyll and health of life on the land at the same time as deriding the farmers for their stupidity and poor character,[113] he here shows himself to be under the influence of the antique ambivalence vis-à-vis the countryside: everything rural is good, and yet the work-free earth is preferable to the utilised one. He thereby disregards the attractor of the *field* of modernity which engulfs all types of occupation towards the same mediocre middle, not just citizens and farmers, but also the outer edges of the former hierarchy: shepherds and aristocracy. All these types, exposed to the requirements of time and particularity, are the ones emerging in the figure-filled counterpart to the landscape painting in the secularised culture: the genre picture. At the bottom of his hierarchy, Alberti could thus just as well have placed what is brought to fruition in the 17th-century Netherlands: farming scenes hung on the walls of farmhouses.

Arcadia

If pastoral iconography ever disappeared to the extent that it could be said to be resuscitated with the Renaissance, then this resuscitation certainly has its roots far back in the Late Middle Ages. It develops in tandem with the garden of love, with which it is finally united. It can be spotted in one of modernity's first secularised allegories of poetry: the title page painted by Simone Martini for Petrarch's *Virgil* manuscript, after the two had met in 1339 at Avignon's papal court (FIG. II.59).[114] In this work Martini has taken a revolutionising step in relation to conventional medieval practice: rather than depicting the poet indoors, he has moved him out into the open air, in keeping with Petrarch's enjoyment of the outdoor life at the source of the Sorgue river in Vaucluse. On the other hand, in front of Servius, the interpreter pulling aside the curtain from his subject, we again meet, as in Alberti, a toned-down *rota Virgilii*: a spear-carrying Aeneas, a vine-cutting peasant and a shepherd milking. The landscape that brings inspiration to Virgil – and Petrarch – is that of viticulture and pastoralism, not that of grain-growing. There are several pieces of evidence bearing witness to how not only intellectuals but also the rulers of the day presented themselves as shepherds. A lost late-14th-century relief by Claus Sluter showed, for example, Philip the Bold of Burgundy and his duchess, Margaret of Flanders, as shepherds resting with their flock. According to a poem by the Burgundian court poet Chastellain, the literature-loving René d'Anjou (1409-80) was also fond of thus cultivating the joys of pastoral life with his wife.[115]

Pastoral iconography eventually became linked to a specific location, Pan's domicile of Arcadia. The connection had a core of realism, because in the actual world Arcadia was a wild Peloponnesian mountainous region far beyond the control

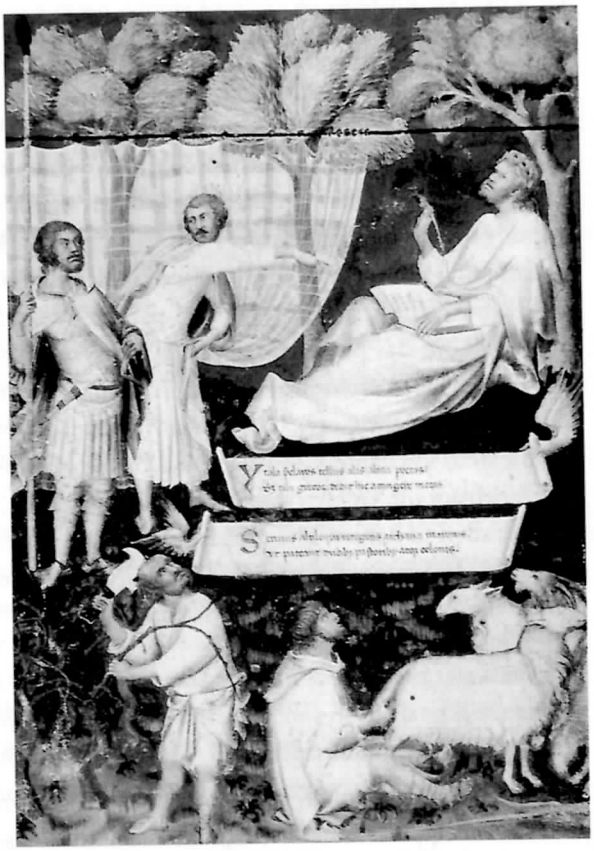


Fig. 11.59. Simone Martini, *Servius Pulling aside the Curtain for Virgil* (*c.* 1339), miniature, title page of Petrarch's *Virgil* manuscript. Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana.

of civilisation. Like the Swiss later on, the Arcadians of antiquity were suppliers of tough mercenaries, but otherwise they mainly provided for themselves by keeping flocks of sheep and goats. They had a reputation for hospitality, for equality between masters and slaves and for their music culture.[116] The Romans saw *Arcadia* as, *inter alia*, a symbol of the new Golden Age to be instituted under Pax Romana. A fresco from Herculaneum personifies the name by means of a Tellus-like mother goddess carrying a bulging fruit basket, a satyr at her side.[117] The Arcadians also appear in the pastoral landscapes of Virgil and Ovid. Even though *Fasti* dates the origins of the Arcadians to pre-Jupiter, their non-farming Golden Age still comprises a hard rather than a soft primitivism, where heavy showers pelt against the naked bodies.[118]

Arcadia as exclusive incarnation of the ideal landscape is, however, a modern phenomenon. The concept is rendered visible in Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia*, a pastoral romance in prose and verse written in 1489-91, which sets the agenda for most of the pastoral writing and much of the painting during subsequent centuries.[119] Here

Arcadia is a landscape in which the shepherds abandon themselves to the bittersweet emotions of romantic love. When love is not lived out in practice, it is described in elegiac songs to the accompaniment of the syrinx. The shepherds also yearn for a vanished past, a Golden Age in which humankind lived from the abundance of nature, watched over their flocks and sang like gods, because even though the Arcadian life is still related to that of the Golden Age, it is but a pale reflection. It is tempting to read into this yearning a metaphor for the Renaissance's own nostalgia for antiquity. For example, the antique Golden Age is given an emblem in Pan's lovely syrinx, which is discovered in a pine wood by the main character, Sincero (ch. 10): no one has played it since its last two owners, a shepherd from Syracuse (Theocritus) and – after him – Tityrus from Mantua (Virgil). But the Renaissance juxtaposition of antiquity and Golden Age is also more than metaphor since, as I pointed out in chapters 4-6, the upper classes of antiquity actually endeavoured to reconstruct the Golden Age themselves, including, in an imaginary form, its manifestation in nature. The Arcadian landscape therefore appears as a reflection of the Golden Age via something which is already in itself the reflection of this age, namely the antique work-free phantasm of nature.

A case story: Pan Saturnus Medicea and Signorelli's School of Pan

If the pastoral iconography had in this way proved proficient in shoring up the power of the upper classes in antiquity, then it must also be reusable when it came to the consolidation of autocratic power in the present. A telling example of how is given in Florence, the initial centre of the Renaissance movement. In response to the post-14th-century gradual decline that befalls the city's banking and trading empire,[120] after the mid-15th century its unofficial ruling family, the Medici, is overcome by a perceptible yearning for the *vita contemplativa* of rural life – a yearning which characteristically also involved an intensification of the family's power symbolism. By means of a presumptuous play on the word 'cosmos', the head of the family, Cosimo de' Medici (d. 1464), not only allows himself to be associated with Saint Cosmas, but also with Pan, the pagan goat god, in his capacity of controller of the universe. Since Pan's domain, the rural idyll, is also characterised by melancholy, *Pan Medicea* is additionally linked with Saturn, the tutelary deity of the Golden Age.

The centre of the Pan Saturnus cult was Careggi, a town just outside Florence and its answer to Arcadia. Here, not far from his own country palace, Cosimo had given a mountain villa to Marsilio Ficino, which the court humanist had then converted into a Neoplatonic academy. In a letter of 1480 sent to Cosimo's grandson Lorenzo il Magnifico, Ficino describes how, when taking an early morning walk to

the tree-clad summit of the mountain, Monte Vecchio, he suddenly realised it was the feast day of Saints Cosmas and Damian. The voice of an oracle was now heard coming from a tall oak tree and declaring that, seeing as Lorenzo was taking care of the festival celebrations in the city, then so Ficino should celebrate it here in the forest. Like a veritable *genius loci*, Cosimo's spirit – a spirit which Jupiter "with no limit has granted the civil power" – had taken domicile in an oak, the same tree with which Augustus had been associated in ancient times. The oracle went on to claim that as Phoebus and Saturn were today in conjunction in the heavens, so Marsilio should let the same powers meet on earth, because: "Happy is humankind should Pan Saturnus' flute harmonise with Phoebus' citar which governs in the cities." And Ficino concludes: "And so I organised an Apollonian, that is to say philosophical, feast for the Saturnians, that is to say the oldest of the peasants [*senioribus agricolis*]." To Ficino, the festival signifies that from now on not only this pair of gods should be worshipped, but also Apollo's accompanying muses, by which means god and muses will be brought "from the havoc of the city to Ceres' fields and Bacchus' hills".[121]

It is quite clear from Ficino's epistle, then, that the Medici regime's attempt to gain legitimisation on a combined Christian-pagan foundation leads to a displacement of the centre of power from an urban to an urban-rural context. This displacement not only supplements the Apollonian with the Pan-Saturnalian, *vita activa* with *vita contemplativa*, the civic spirit of the city with the body of the land (the oak tree as Cosimo's abode); ultimately, it ushers in the Le Roy Ladurie-esque "multi-secular breath" of around 1500, when power is transplanted from republican to autocratic soil.

That it is here worth dwelling on Ficino's astute articulation of this development is because parts of it reappear in pictorial form in Signorelli's painting *School of Pan* (*c.* 1490; destroyed 1945; FIG. 11.60). This monumental pagan allegory, which presumably decorated il Magnifico's Careggi residence, is fashioned, in best Neoplatonic manner, like a Christian *sacra conversazione*: in an Arcadian afternoon landscape, the sun casting long shadows, a minor court of figures, including two shepherds and a trio of pipe-players, have gathered around the goat god on his throne. Armed with his syrinx, Pan seems to be instructing the assembly in the art of playing the pipe. That we are again dealing with Pan in his role of controller of the universe – and thus with Pan Saturnus Medicea – is apparent from his crescent halo (instead of horns), his star-sprinkled cape, the *uroboros*-like handle of his shepherd's crook, and the division of the syrinx itself into seven, echoing the seven heavens. In addition, both more subtle and more dramatic, the exact centre of the painting – the point of intersection of the diagonals – is located in Pan's exposed genitals, thus indicating that the central force in the cosmos is of an erotic nature and originates in Pan's crotch.[122]

Fig. II.60. Luca Signorelli, *School of Pan* (*c.* 1490), tempera on wood. Formerly Berlin, Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, destroyed 1945.

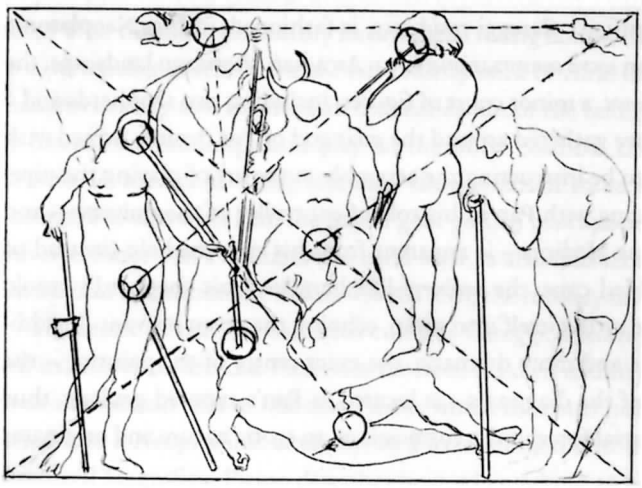


Fig. II.60a. Signorelli's *School of Pan*: diagram showing transmission of the cosmic forces. Illustration: author.

The symbolism incarnated in the marble-like figures of the allegory was certainly a mystery for a long time, but after Pochat's discovery of a number of visual and conceptual connections to the so-called *Mantegna tarocchi*, two series of engraved cards executed in Northern Italy *c.* 1450-85, there have been grounds for a more coherent interpretation (FIGS. 11.61A-11.61C).[123] In the same way as the figures on the cards span a cosmic hierarchy – from the celestial spheres to virtues, art forms and muses and on to humankind – the painting can be seen as relating to a *scala paradisi* on which the most wretched of humans, the shepherd, might through Pan's agency be fecundated by the cosmic breath. Signorelli's bowed shepherd leaning on his stick on the lowest ground to the right thus becomes the humble beginnings for this transformation – in the cards (FIG. 11.61A) he is called *Misero* and is given the number "1", in contrast to the "50" given to *Prima causa* at the top of the celestial hierarchy. Taking into consideration that Saturn's children generally include cripples and peasants, and that the Saturnalian guests at Ficino's aforementioned forest festival are specifically made up of "the oldest of the peasants", the case would seem to be clear-cut: in keeping with the Renaissance revival of the practice of antiquity – already seen as premonition in Alberti's ambivalent genre hierarchy – agriculture is displaced to the pastoral wilderness, and thus it is the shepherd, not the farmer, who becomes representative of Pan Saturnus' admirers.

The reference to Ficino's epistle also reaches the other shepherd in the painting – the one with hand raised in a gesture of blessing to Pan, on the right side of him, and now level with the throne. Can he not be seen as fertilised by the Apollonian spirit and thereby as an agent of *philosophia*? On a level more related to portrait, this philosopher-shepherd could be interpreted as *alter ego* of the elderly Ficino, Lorenzo's intellectual mentor. For the scene is already set in il Magnifico's pastoral poem, *Altercazione*, for a similar *locus amoenus* encounter: the lyre-playing mountain dweller Marsilio who typically comes across his friend, the ancient and sage shepherd Alfeo, alongside the spring or under a shady beech tree.[124] Rather than being two different shepherds, however, these two old men ultimately represent two phases through which *the same person* passes while climbing *scala paradisi*. Through Medici patronage, the extension of Pan's primordial power, the unblemished shepherd is elevated to a philosophical poet who can then in turn bless his benefactor.

Two routes – two sides of Pan – lead towards the philosophical transfiguration. One route, the Saturnalian, traverses contemplation and would seem to be incarnated in the left background by a melancholic Urania, who, according to Plato, is the lower of the two muses of philosophy.[125] Meanwhile, another and brighter route goes via Pan's father, Hermes *psychopompos* ('leader of souls'), because according to the humanists Pan was created from a mixture of Saturn's contemplation and Hermes' eloquence. In Signorelli, the Hermetic *eloquentia* is propagated via an

Fig. II.61a. *Misero* (*c.* 1450-85), engraved card from northern Italy.

Fig. II.61b. *Calliope* (*c.* 1450-85), engraved card from northern Italy.

Fig. II.61c. *Mercury* (*c.* 1450-85), engraved card from northern Italy.

ingenious – and apparently hitherto only halfway explored – network of lines which describes a form of loop between heavens and earth, and which is alternately realised in flute music and cleansed sexual power (FIG. 11.60A).[126] Hence, a network of lines transporting the energy from Pan's genitalia.

If we now look at Hermes, the naked figure standing with his back turned to Pan's left (cf. FIG. 11.61C), we will see that the reed pipe this god is playing points down at the crotch of the forward-facing naked woman, Calliope, who is the other – and higher ranked – of the two muses of philosophy (cf. FIG. 11.61B). This is a reference to the muses' traditional involvement with the celestial spheres: by setting the bodies of the heavens in motion, the muses produce celestial tones, *music*.[127] In the common tradition, which coupled tones and muses with the planets, Hermes was indeed brought together with Calliope,[128] but Ficino also considers Calliope to embody the harmony of the celestial spheres, the world soul.[129] Therefore, that which the messenger's pipe music plants in the womb of the muse in Signorelli's painting could be understood as the celestial breath of air that can be transposed into the harmony of the world soul.

Translated into Signorelli's pictorial imagery, this harmony is represented by three reed pipes positioned symmetrically so as to form a further system of rays: the middle ray goes from Calliope's crotch down to the ground; the upper ray is sent from her mouth down to the vineleaf-covered genitals of the recumbent Dionysus, the deity of the earth;[130] and the lower ray has a label attached, on which is written the artist's signature – as if the rendition in painting of the allegory itself is also a result of the pan-Hermetic power. This entire transmission from heaven to earth is, of course, elaborated via the interplay between body positions and differences in height: Hermes, heaven, is standing on the throne dais; Calliope, the world soul's union of heaven and earth, is standing on the ground; and Dionysus, god of the underworld, is lying on the ground, in the same position as the conquered Cupido in illustrations of Petrach's *Trionfi*.[131]

Taking into account that the three-stage ladder is based in Dionysian ground, but ends in pan-Hermetic eloquence, it would seem obvious to view it as a visualisation of the inspirational power of *locus amoenus* – what the Renaissance comprehended as *furor divinus*. On one level *locus amoenus* can be understood as Cosimo's oak tree, and on another level – one which stresses the transmission from nature to human mouth – as the source site which leads Socrates to eloquence in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Besides already being an appropriate model for Ficino, in this dialogue Socrates also points out that his dithyrambic speech is elicited by the deities of the site, i.e. particularly Pan and his mouthpiece, the nymphs, and in Ficino's Plato commentary these two sources of inspiration are extended by the addition of Dionysus and the muses.[132]

Ficino views Socrates' poetic ecstasy as an inevitable consequence of *furor divinus*, for "no one possessed by *furor* is satisfied with normal speech, but bursts out in shouting, in songs and poems."[133] If we earlier found it surprising that Signorelli could render celestial breaths of air, sexual powers and reed pipe music as manifestations of one and the same primordial force – that of Pan Saturnus – a passage such as this proves enlightening, given that here there are similarly extremely hazy borders between religious conduits (prophesies, mysteries), aesthetic expression (song, poetry – and in extension of this: philosophy) and love. Being a fusion of sensuous music and intelligible words, it was *carmina*, song, that Ficino considered to be the key medium leading to the spheres: from *musica instrumentalis* (external music) to *musica humana* (music of the inner ear) and on to *musica mundana* (cosmic music). And this very progression could be seen reflected in the trio Dionysus-Calliope-Hermes.[134]

Since the poetic *furor* is transmitted from *genius loci* to the philosopher's mouth, it could be presumed that it makes its way back along the same route – more specifically, via the usual soundtrack of *locus amoenus*, "the shrill summery music of the cicada choir".[135] Besides the fact that the cicadas stem from the same primordial root as the muses, Socrates goes on to say of them: "To the eldest [muse], Calliope, and to her next sister, Urania, they [the cicadas] tell of those who live a life of philosophy and so do honor to the music of those twain whose theme is the heavens and all the story of gods and men, and whose song is the noblest of them all."[136] This line of thought is corroborated in Ficino's *Phaedrus* commentary (*c.* 1484-93) when, having evoked a spiritual connection from muses to virtuous demons of the air and on to cicadas, he states: "In that way, the divine spirit of the philosopher really is taken back to the heavens."[137]

Signorelli represents this return of the cosmic powers in the figure of the conquered Dionysus who, having received the cleansing of his genital force by Calliope's ray, now returns the purified ray to the heavens via his own reed pipe.[138] Having passed by the shepherd in his act of blessing, Socrates-Ficino in poetic ecstasy, this flute-ray ends in a phantasmagoric cloud formation shaped like a winged horseman. A second cloud formation in the upper-right corner, shaped like another pipe-player, seems to be driving the horseman forward by means of its wind pressure. These cloud figures take us directly into the periphery of the allegory's significance, into a *parergon* zone where meaning is constructed and disintegrated. As Pochat, inspired by Edgar Wind, observes, they presumably refer to two of the three passages in the Neoplatonic concept of cosmic breath, i.e. *emanatio* (emanation) and *remeatio* (returning) – the middle passage, *conversio* (conversion), is thus covered by the reclining Dionysus. The pipe-player in the clouds must therefore, again, be perceived as Hermes, since apart from being master of wind and cloud (cf. the link: soul-breath-air), this swift god primarily incarnated the contemplative spirit that was believed to have taken

over as the soul left the world. The horseman, on the other hand, is his symmetrical counter-image, Zephyr, the fervent puff of air on entry. As Wind states apropos Botticelli's *Primavera* (FIG. II.47), the outer sides of which are closed by precisely these two gods: "To turn away from the world with the detachment of Mercury, to re-enter the world with the impetuosity of Zephyr [...]."[139]

As places where the celestial spirit disconnects and connects to its material casing – i.e. as grey zones between chaos and form – these clouds ultimately relate not just to that which is poetic-musical but also to the driving force of pictorial creation. In his *Phaedrus* commentary, Ficino notes that the intellect can appear in the soul in a multiplicity of forms, a variation that is compared to the way in which sunrays are refracted by the cloud in a spectrum of colours.[140] Bearing in mind the abovementioned bridge between heavens, demons of the air and cicadas, Signorelli's clouds must refer more specifically to an 11th-century treatise on demons, written by the Byzantine Michael Psellus, from which Ficino had translated excerpts in 1488 – just before the painting was made. For in his treatise Psellus refers to the demons' ability to adopt a variety of forms with the same ease as clouds can assume a likeness to humans, bears, dragons, etc.[141]

Indeed, looking at the upper – skyward – third of the painting, it is as if Signorelli is exploring and playing with the reciprocal kinship of the forms, so that it is unclear as to whether the amorphous masses of paint are drifting between various referents or, rather, if these referents themselves out there in the landscape expanses are actually the object of material identity shifts. The tall billowing tree and the rock arch in the upper right corner, thus have the same semi-turbulent appearance as the cloud image behind them and, conversely, the shepherd in his act of blessing and Hermes simply look like clearer-cut versions of the clouds that seem to be lingering in their immediate background. As we will see in the final chapter, visual puns of trees, clouds and, not least, rocks is a quite widespread practice in the contemporaneous painting, and they must therefore be seen in context with general trends in natural philosophy and alchemy at the time, as well as reflections on the inherent nature of pictorial art.

Here I will confine myself to a single interpretative key, a Hermetically-coloured letter of complaint, in which Ficino bemoans the reluctance of his friend, the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Cavalcanti, to meet him in the Careggian hills.[142] Even though Ficino himself would seem to have relocated into this contemplative Paradise in Hermetic-Zephyresque manner, "moved by some breeze", he has to use harsh transformative measures in order to entice Cavalcanti, "who has more weight than the rocks themselves".[143] First he implores Apollo to make his lyre play those "songs of Orpheus and Amphion with which they in days of old moved oaks and rocks, so that I thus could attract you, who in my opinion is such a wooden and rocky man,

out to me."[144] But Apollo discovers that Cavalcanti is in fact made of iron, and so he advises Ficino to lure him by means of Zoroaster's art of transformation, which is able to "transform the big rock on Monte Vecchio to a magnet".[145] In Ficino's epistle, the states of the soul are thus again seen as various forms of material attire (breezes, rocks, trees and iron) and, not unlike the strange landscape formations in Signorelli's painting, the Hermetic art consists of controlling the movement as well as the transformation of these substances.

Even though it is framed in an erudite and cryptic symbolism which could only have been comprehended by an informed elite, the commissioner of the painting has thus managed to inscribe the entire cosmic orbit, including the transformation of the soul into various material attires, within the Medici sphere of power. This megalomania can but corroborate the thesis of *I nuovi piagnoni* that the neo-antique Medici supremacy was an obstacle to the development of civic liberty, and that Savonarola's short-lived republic, established in the immediate aftermath of the Medici's expulsion by the French in 1494, was a final desperate attempt to thwart the growing countercurrent in modernity's epistemic *field*, the aristocratism of the Renaissance.

Jacob Wamberg

Landscape as World Picture

Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images

VOLUME II

Early Modernity

Translated by Gaye Kynoch

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