

INTRODUCTION

Landscape associates people and place ... landscape is not a mere visible surface, static composition, or passive backdrop to human theatre ... Landscape connotes a sense of the purposefully shaped, the sensual and aesthetic, the embeddedness in culture ... Landscape has meaning.¹

People have always attached meaning to the world around them, and these meanings have changed over time. In European societies from the later eighteenth century, the surface of the earth was increasingly seen not only in material terms, as an economic resource to be exploited, but also as ‘landscape’, as an object of aesthetic and moral value. Landscape was understood to incorporate human engagement with the physical environment over time. Although areas of ‘wilderness’ still existed, landscape was generally seen not as ‘natural’, but as something created in dialogue with men and women. In the words of John Stilgoe,

Once in a while landscape is new, fresh, almost virginal. South Georgia, the Falkland Islands, Kerguelen, the Crozets, Macquarie, Elephant, Pitcairn, and other islands ... proved bereft of humans when Europeans discovered them. Unknown to humankind, not just Europeans, they existed only as wilderness when found ... But typically landscape is mature, often hoary, sometimes ancient, part prehistoric. Wilderness appears timeless.²

¹ A. W. Spirn, *The language of landscape* (New Haven and London, 1998), pp. 16–18.

² J. R. Stilgoe, *What is landscape?* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), p. 83.

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As an historical product of humanity in all its diversity, landscape has attracted a great variety of aesthetic and moral responses. Different landscape features have been valued for different reasons by different cultures, and interpreted in different ways.³ Human responses to landscape are necessarily subjective.⁴ Yet, as with human responses to countless other things, generalisations remain possible: most obviously, perhaps, landscape has been valued on account of being seen as distinctively beautiful, picturesque or otherwise visually impressive.⁵

That said, assessments of the visual appeal of any given landscape feature do not derive from its (perceived) physical characteristics alone; because landscape is a human construct, exogenous factors inevitably come into play. Since Kant, philosophers have understood that evaluations of aesthetic worth depend on the quality of authenticity.⁶ Like forged art, landscape known to be ‘fake’ – to use Robert Elliot’s term – does not exert the same appeal as that deemed to be ‘original’. Thus, knowledge that an apparently ‘unspoilt’ hillside had previously been quarried limits one’s appreciation of it, even if no traces remain of the quarry, the landscape having been ‘restored’ to the appearance it had before the works were undertaken.⁷ The value of landscape depends on factors other than its perceived physical properties. Many visually inconspicuous landscape features are after all of considerable cultural significance: examples include sources of rivers, birthplaces of famous figures, and sites of battles and other historical events.⁸ Crucial here is what may be termed associational value, the value placed on

³ Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and place* (Minneapolis, 2008 [1977]), esp. p. 162; and, for the particular point on culture affecting perception, Y.-F. Tuan, *Passing strange and wonderful: Aesthetics, nature, and culture* (Washington, DC, 1993), p. 101.

⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic theory* (London, 1984 [1970]), p. 104; D. W. Meinig (ed.), *The interpretation of ordinary landscapes* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 3, 33–4.

⁵ D. Lowenthal, ‘Finding valued landscapes’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 2 (1978), 373–418.

⁶ ‘[W]ere we to play a trick on our lover of the beautiful, and plant in the ground artificial flowers ... and perch artfully carved birds on the branches of trees, and were he to find out how he had been deceived, the immediate interest which these things previously had for him would at once vanish ... The fact is that our intuition and reflection must have as their concomitant the thought that the beauty in question is nature’s handwork; and this is the sole basis of the immediate interest that is taken in it’; I. Kant, *Critique of judgement* (Oxford, 2007 [1790]), pp. 128–9.

⁷ R. Elliot, ‘Faking nature’, *Inquiry*, 25 (1982), 81–93. Elliot’s arguments are extended further in his *Faking nature: The ethics of environmental restoration* (London, 1997).

⁸ Tuan, *Space and place*, pp. 161–2.

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those connections and interactions between the environment and human experience that both create landscape qua landscape, and supply the basis for the ascription of meanings to it.

Especially important vectors of the spread and valence of associations attaching to landscape have been artistic and literary productions, their impact being aided by the commercialisation of culture and the development of modern tourism and leisure practices. In the British context one might think, for instance, of the ‘Constable country’ of Suffolk and Essex, made so famous by the paintings of the eponymous artist that the travel agents Thomas Cook were offering coach tours of the locality by the 1890s.⁹ Similarly, in relation to poets and novelists, ‘Dickens Land’, ‘Thackeray-land’, ‘Wordsworthshire’, ‘Hardy’s Wessex’, ‘The Land of Scott’, ‘The Brontë Country’ and ‘The Country of George Eliot’ had all emerged before the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ Writing in the *Quarterly Review* in 1881, one commentator noted that

it is English scenery, with its historical associations, which has inspired our poets, artists, and novelists. There are spots everywhere that evoke the shade of Shakespeare, from the cliff at Dover to the blasted heath of Forres ... Who can look on the windings of the Severn without thinking of Milton’s ‘Comus’; and what prettier pictures can we have of cottage life and country superstitions than those he gives with such exquisite grace and delicacy in ‘L’Allegro’?¹¹

The role of art and literature in so contributing to the appeal of landscape was part of a wider-felt sense of connection between landscape and the past: as the *Quarterly* reviewer observed, it was the ‘historical associations’ inscribed in the landscape that had so drawn the attention of English painters and writers. The landscape was storied. Indeed, it might be said that landscape is by definition storied. Recall the words of Stilgoe, quoted above: ‘typically landscape is mature,

⁹ S. Daniels, *Fields of vision: Landscape imagery and national identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 210–13. For the late-nineteenth-century enthusiasm for Constable, see I. Fleming-Williams and L. Parris, *The discovery of Constable* (London, 1984).

¹⁰ N. J. Watson, *The literary tourist* (Basingstoke, 2006), p. 5.

¹¹ [A. I. Shand], ‘Walks in England’, *Quarterly Review*, 152 (July 1881), 146.

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often hoary, sometimes ancient, part prehistoric'. Since the early modern period, if not before, societies have understood time to confer value on place. European (and non-European) landscapes evocative of past ages, significant events, the great figures of old, have come to be esteemed precisely because of these associations. Many of the more resonantly evocative of these became, to use a term now worn somewhat threadbare, 'sites of memory' – focal points for mobilising a collective consciousness of the past.¹² In large part because of its associations with human history, landscape was thus transformed into heritage, the impulse driving this shift in sensibility fuelling, among other things, the modern-day preservation and conservation movements.

The process by which landscape became heritage was inextricably bound up with contemporaneous constructions of collective identity. Before the eighteenth century, the heritage embodied in landscape tended to be related to local and confessional identities, as Alexandra Walsham's work on the Reformation-era environment has demonstrated.¹³ Over time, however, this heritage was increasingly understood to be national in character, despite the persistence of associations between landscape and locality (which, as we shall see, were by no means antithetical to the newer languages of landscape and nation). Just as a particular landscape might have special value for an individual on account of its being evocative of events in that individual's past (connected, for instance, with happy experiences in childhood), so did national communities come to ascribe value to landscapes evocative of the imagined pasts of those communities. On account of its historical associations, landscape became a powerful means by which a people's sense of self and identity might be maintained and celebrated, its utility in this respect growing stronger in the context of industrialisation, urbanisation, rapid technological and societal change, and other transformations of modernity.¹⁴

This is a point worth emphasising. Nations are by definition territorial entities, laying claim to defined portions of the earth's surface as rightfully their own. As the sociologist Michael Billig has written,

¹² P. Nora, *Realms of memory: Rethinking the French past*, 3 vols. (New York, 1996–8).

¹³ A. Walsham, *The reformation of the landscape: Religion, identity, and memory in early modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁴ For an especially valuable discussion of the dislocating effects of the technological and other changes associated with the experience of modernity, see S. Kern, *The culture of time and space, 1880–1918*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

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nationalism is never ‘beyond geography’, the ‘imagining of a “country”’ necessarily involving ‘the imagining of a bounded totality beyond immediate experience of place’; while for the philosopher David Miller a key ‘aspect of national identity is that it connects a group of people to a particular geographical place ... A nation ... must have a homeland.’¹⁵ Historians agree. In his recent survey of nationalism in Europe and America since the late eighteenth century, Lloyd Kramer has pointed out that ‘All nations and nationalisms claim a homeland or bounded territory ... Nationhood can scarcely be imagined without reference to specific lands, just as selfhood cannot be understood without reference to specific human bodies.’¹⁶ For Kramer, as for many other scholars, European intellectuals such as Herder, Fichte and Mazzini played a vital role in establishing the importance of geography to conceptualisations of the nation, the homeland being imagined as continuing undiluted up to its borders, there being separated from the similarly undiluted domains of other nations.¹⁷

Yet the imbrication of geography and nationhood goes beyond the definition, assertion and political control of territorial homelands. While bounded space is certainly important, specific places – landscapes – are no less so. Indeed, when it comes to the cultural as opposed to the political imagining of nations, they are crucial. As Stephen Daniels observed in his path-breaking *Fields of vision*, ‘Landscapes, whether focusing on single monuments or framing stretches of scenery, provide visible shape; they picture the nation.’¹⁸ Across the world in the modern period, landscapes, and distinctive landscapes in particular, have functioned as powerful symbols of national identity. The American ‘Wild West’, the Swiss Alps and the Norwegian Fjords are obvious examples here. One recent study has highlighted the importance of river landscapes to national identities, using case studies from France, the United States, Ireland and elsewhere; another has explored the potent appeal of the Russian Steppe to the nationalist sensibilities of that country; and there are of course many other examples, the work

¹⁵ M. Billig, *Banal nationalism* (London, 1995), p. 74; D. Miller, *On nationality* (Oxford, 1995), p. 24.

¹⁶ L. Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, cultures, and identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2011), p. 57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.

¹⁸ Daniels, *Fields of vision*, p. 5.

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in this vein produced by art historians being especially notable and extensive.¹⁹

Despite this literature, however, the significance of the *historical* associations of nationally valued landscapes has been insufficiently appreciated. This is surprising, not least because of the acknowledged significance of understandings of the past to nationalist discourse more generally. Indeed, building on the work of theorists of nations and nationalism such as Anthony D. Smith, who have insisted on the importance of history as an agent of nationalist mobilisation,²⁰ historians have shown an increasing interest in the part it played in the shaping of modern-day national cultures and identities. In the British context, one might point to the work of Billie Melman on nineteenth-century understandings of history as ‘a chamber of horrors’, Stephanie Barczewski on the myths of Robin Hood and King Arthur, or Martha Vandrei on the long continuities of British historical culture.²¹ In addition, the ever-burgeoning work on memory and commemoration has also deepened our understanding of the ways in which the past can be brought to bear on contemporary ideas of national belonging, most notably in relation to the experience of the First and Second World Wars.²² And a further well-ploughed furrow of enquiry has been

¹⁹ T. Cusack, *Riverscapes and national identities* (Syracuse, NY, 2010); C. Ely, *This meager nature: Landscape and national identity in imperial Russia* (DeKalb, IL, 2002); A. R. H. Baker, ‘Forging a national identity for France after 1789: The role of landscape symbols’, *Geography*, 97 (2012), 22–8; D. Hooson (ed.), *Geography and national identity* (Oxford, 1994); P. Bishop, *An archetypal Constable: National identity and the geography of nostalgia* (London, 1995).

²⁰ This argument is clear throughout Smith’s work as a whole, but an especially succinct expression of it can be found in his debate with Ernest Gellner in the pages of *Nations and Nationalism*: see A. D. Smith, ‘Nations and their pasts’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), 358–65; and A. D. Smith, ‘Memory and modernity: Reflections on Ernest Gellner’s theory of nationalism’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), 371–88.

²¹ B. Melman, *The culture of history: English uses of the past 1800–1953* (Oxford, 2006); S. L. Barczewski, *Myth and national identity in nineteenth-century Britain: The legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000); M. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica and historical culture in Britain since 1600: An image of truth* (Oxford, 2018); and M. Vandrei, ‘A Victorian invention? Thomas Thorneycroft’s “Boudicea” group and the idea of historical culture in Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), 485–508.

²² The literature on this is vast. See, e.g., J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European cultural history*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2014 [1995]); S. Goebel, *The Great War and medieval memory: War, remembrance and medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge, 2007); M. Connelly, *We can take it! Britain and the memory of the Second World War* (London, 2004);

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history writing itself. It may be that historians – perhaps motivated by professional narcissism – are naturally drawn to study the work of their forebears, but whatever the reason, considerable attention has been paid to the ways in which the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians intersected with, and helped to construct, patriotic discourse and understandings of the nation.²³ In particular, and following the lead of J. W. Burrow, British intellectual and cultural historians have had much to say about the Anglo-Saxonism of Stubbs, Freeman and other Victorian historians, and the teleologies of national progress that informed and found expression in their work.²⁴ In the wider European context, a major research project led by Stefan Berger on ‘Representations of the past: National histories in Europe’ has generated considerable interest in national historiographies and their nationalist significance, not least by means of its associated book series on ‘Writing the nation’, seven volumes of which have appeared at time of writing since 2008.²⁵ Yet for all that this work has elucidated the importance of the relationship between the past and the nation, it has had relatively little to say about landscape in this connection.²⁶ The

L. Noakes and J. Pattinson (eds.), *British cultural memory and the Second World War* (London, 2013).

²³ See, e.g., P. Mandler, *History and national life* (London, 2002); T. Lang, *The Victorians and the Stuart heritage* (Cambridge, 1995); J. Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and national history in twentieth-century Britain* (Lanham, MD, 2005). Many of the essays collected in S. Collini, *English pasts: Essays in history and culture* (Oxford 1999) and S. Collini, *Common reading: Critics, historians, publics* (Oxford, 2008) are also relevant here.

²⁴ J. W. Burrow, *A liberal descent: Victorian historians and the English past* (Cambridge, 1981); C. Parker, *The English historical tradition since 1850* (Edinburgh, 1990), esp. Chapter 1; M. Bentley, *Modernizing England's past: English historiography in the age of modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 2005), esp. Chapters 1–3; G. A. Bremner and J. Conlin (eds.), *Making history: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian cultural politics* (Oxford, 2015).

²⁵ See, e.g., S. Berger and C. Lorenz (eds.), *The contested nation: Ethnicity, class, religion, and gender in national histories* (Basingstoke, 2008); S. Berger and C. Conrad, *The past as history: National identity and historical consciousness in modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015); S. Berger and C. Lorenz (eds.), *Nationalizing the past: Historians as nation builders in modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2015).

²⁶ There are, of course, some exceptions, perhaps the most notable of which is provided by the work done on the German idea of *Heimat* and its relationship with local, regional and national identities. See, e.g., C. Applegate, *A nation of provincials: The German idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990); A. Confino, *The nation as a local metaphor: Württemberg, imperial Germany and national memory, 1871–1918* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997).

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same can be said of the work of historians of national identity more generally, and even those treatments that have emphasised the importance of the past, or of memory. Kramer's study, cited above, is an example. While cognisant of the territorial determinants of nationhood, it pays less attention to landscape than to history writing and language, stressing the 'crucial' role historians played in 'describing the national meaning of the past and ... showing how the living generations were always connected to the dead'.²⁷

This relative neglect of the patriotic force of valued landscapes reflects a more general privileging of the textual on the part of professional historians: 'modern conditions of research', Raphael Samuel pointed out some time ago, 'seem to dictate an almost complete detachment from the material environment'.²⁸ Yet, as Samuel's own work on memory, heritage and British identity demonstrated so eloquently, history manifests itself in a wide plurality of contexts: its 'subject matter is promiscuous', encompassing far more than the written word, let alone the 'chronological past of the documentary record' or the recondite interpretations of university-based scholars.²⁹ History, Samuel insisted, is present in fiction, myth, folk traditions, ritual, art, photography and material culture.³⁰ It is also deeply inscribed in landscape – indeed, it is intimately connected to the cultural value assigned to landscape, and more specifically to its patriotic significance.

The failure of historians fully to appreciate this is especially striking given what we know from social theorists about the historical associations typically attaching to valued landscapes, as well as their importance as sources of national symbolism and – at a more fundamental level – the fact that nations exist in space as well as time. Geographers in particular have understood that in the valued landscapes of a nation, space and time are powerfully conjoined. As Jan Penrose has put it, 'Every society has stories about its origins and its past. These stories ... always occur in space and are usually associated with specific sites and/or landscapes.'³¹ Indeed, a now quite considerable

²⁷ Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America*, Chapter 3, p. 73.

²⁸ R. Samuel, *Theatres of memory*, Vol. 1: *Past and present in contemporary culture* (London, 1994), p. 269.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. x, 443.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 3–48; and see also R. Samuel, *Theatres of memory*, Vol. II: *Island stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1998).

³¹ J. Penrose, 'Nations, states and homelands: Territory and territoriality in nationalist thought', *Nations and Nationalism*, 8 (2002), 277–97 (p. 282).

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number of geographers have explored the relationship between landscape and national identities – one might mention Stephen Daniels, David Lowenthal, Peter Bishop, Denis Cosgrove, David Matless and Catherine Brace, among others.³² Of these, David Lowenthal, one of the pioneers in the area, stands out as particularly important on account of the emphasis he has placed on the landscape–past nexus. In a series of books and articles across the space of several decades, Lowenthal has insisted that the English see their landscape not simply as beautiful or otherwise visually distinctive, but as ‘both admirable and ancestral’.³³ The value placed on English landscape, he has argued, has been to a large degree determined by its association with the past of the national community, and in this respect England stands out as distinctive: ‘Nowhere else is landscape so freighted as legacy.’³⁴ In articulating this argument, Lowenthal has stressed the importance of the countryside: the landscape most valued by the English is largely rural in character. This is no wilderness of untamed nature, but a landscape suggestive of many centuries of human occupation and cultivation, and thus the antiquity of the English nation.³⁵

³² See, e.g., Daniels, *Fields of vision*; D. Cosgrove and S. Daniels (eds.), *The iconography of landscape: Essays on the symbolic representation, design, and use of past environments* (Cambridge, 1988); D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998); Bishop, *Archetypal Constable*; D. Lowenthal, ‘British national identity and the English landscape’, *Rural History*, 2 (1991), 205–30; C. Brace, ‘Looking back: The Cotswolds and English national identity, c. 1890–1950’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25 (1999), 502–16; C. Brace, ‘Finding England everywhere: Regional identity and the construction of national identity, 1890–1940’, *Ecumene*, 6 (1998), 90–109.

³³ Lowenthal, ‘British national identity and the English landscape’, p. 215. See also D. Lowenthal and H. E. Prince, ‘English landscape tastes’, *Geographical Review*, 55 (1965), 186–222; D. Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge, 2015 [1986]), esp. pp. 104–5, 183–4; D. Lowenthal, *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history* (London, 1996), esp. pp. 7, 185–6.

³⁴ D. Lowenthal, ‘Landscape as heritage: National scenes and global changes’, in J. M. Fladmark (ed.), *Heritage: Conservation, interpretation and enterprise* (Aberdeen, 1993), pp. 3–15 (p. 9). See also D. Lowenthal, ‘European and English landscapes and national symbols’, in Hooson, *Geography and national identity*, pp. 15–38 (pp. 20–1).

³⁵ ‘Beloved rural England is trebly historical. Its features are compages of datable cultural acts, mostly ascribable to ancestral precursors. The past that permeates this landscape is not the primordial wild, but a nearer history infused with memorable human processes, desires, decisions, and tastes’; Lowenthal, ‘British national identity and the English landscape’, 216.

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It is of course England and the English nation that form the focus of the present book, and the importance of the countryside to constructions of English national identity is now quite generally recognised. In his wide-ranging synoptic study, *The making of English national identity*, Krishan Kumar concluded that by the late Victorian period, ‘the essential England was rural’, and many other scholars have made similar pronouncements.³⁶ In this perspective, although ideologies of the nation since Herder had promoted the idea of a return to nature and the countryside, away from the artificiality and corruption of towns, the impulse took particularly strong hold in England, and assumed distinctively conservative forms. Rooted in the rural, the discourse of Englishness was opposed to modernity and its works, extolling instead a pastoral south country of picturesque cottages, gently rolling farmland and stable social hierarchies, with squire and parson at the top. Given the actual lived experience of modern-day Englishmen and women – rich or poor, villager or city-dweller – much of this was a mirage, but it nonetheless offered a seductive vision of peace and order, permeating English culture and having a real influence on elite and popular attitudes. Some scholars – most notably Martin Wiener – have even suggested that this reactionary ruralism undermined the British ‘industrial spirit’, retarding economic development and contributing to the eventual ruin of the once-mighty workshop of the world.³⁷ Many more, however, have been content to identify and elucidate the phenomenon, without seeking to connect it to economic performance. Often drawing heavily on Wiener and his claim that the Industrial Revolution was increasingly seen as ‘an unEnglish aberration, “A spread over a green and pleasant land of dark satanic mills that ground down their inmates”’,³⁸ they have done so in a bewildering variety of contexts. These include art and literature,³⁹ architecture

³⁶ K. Kumar, *The making of English national identity* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 211.

³⁷ M. J. Wiener, *English culture and the decline of the industrial spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981).

³⁸ Daniels, *Fields of vision*, pp. 214–15, citing Wiener, *English culture*.

³⁹ See, e.g., P. Street, ‘Painting deepest England: The late landscapes of John Linnell and the uses of nostalgia’, in C. Shaw and M. Chase (eds.), *The imagined past: History and nostalgia* (Manchester, 1989), pp. 68–80; C. Payne, *Toil and plenty: Images of the agricultural landscape in England, 1780–1890* (New Haven and London, 1993). Many art historians have suggested that in the second half of the nineteenth century a concept of Englishness was developed that excluded the industrial north, was focused on ‘south country’ pastoralism, and was culturally reactionary and conservative. In