

SAMUEL HEARNE & THE LANDSCAPES OF DISCOVERY

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Like men of every age, we see in Nature what we have been taught to look for, we feel what we have been prepared to feel.

- MARJORIE NICOLSON¹

ALTHOUGH THE LITERARY MERIT of Samuel Hearne's *A Journey . . . to the Northern Ocean* (1795) has been recognized, and while the narrative has been deemed "one of the most sophisticated early journals and narratives," a search has not yet been undertaken for demonstrations of this sophistication in either the explorer's writing style or the ways in which his pen and pencil describe and depict the terrain through which he conducted his truly astonishing feats of exploration.²

Only six years after the publication of Hearne's *Journey*, Alexander Mackenzie published his *Voyages*. In his Preface, he recognized that, as a fur trader like Hearne, he was "better calculated to perform the voyages, arduous as they might be, than to write an account of them."³ Not a candidate for literary fame, he is anxious that his narratives manifest sufficient "charms of embellished narrative, or animated description" to suit the demands being made on travel literature by the British readers of his and Hearne's day. These demands issued, in large part, out of a taste for landscape tours which had developed during the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. A book publisher could not afford to bring out a book of travel which ignored the prevailing expectations of treatments of nature in terms of the Sublime and the Picturesque. The taste for illustrations of the Sublime in nature had been greatly influenced by, among many others, Edmund Burke, in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), and by Milton, in the landscapes of Hell in *Paradise Lost*. For a taste in the Picturesque, the eighteenth-century Englishman was indebted to many writers, but to none more than William Gilpin, whose six published regional tours of Britain (tours made 1769-1776, and published in 1782, 1786, 1789, 1798, 1804, and 1809) taught the reader how to view nature as a series of individually unified landscape paintings. Not only was this taste for the Sublime and the Picturesque in descriptions of nature firmly founded, it was also widespread. As John Barrell has stated, "in the later eighteenth century, it became impossible for anyone with an aesthetic interest in landscape to look at the

countryside without applying [principles of landscape composition], *whether he knew he was doing so or not.*"²⁴

The habit of seeing tracts of land as landscapes — sublime or picturesque — had become entrenched in the British understanding during Hearne's lifetime (1745-1792). Both the traveller and the reader shared this habit. When voyaging abroad, whether to Europe or North America, Hearne, like his contemporaries (including Mackenzie, a discussion of whose aesthetic response to nature must be undertaken in its own right) took this habit with him, whether he knew he was doing so or not. By deploying the taxonomies of the Sublime and the Picturesque which he shared with his readers, this habit permitted Hearne to describe foreign natural scenes in terms of or in contrast to landscapes familiar to him and his readers. This process of the identification of nature bears an affinity with the purpose of astronomical measurement: just as the determination of longitude and latitude told the traveller/explorer where he was in relation to Greenwich, so the habitual description of terrain by means of the Sublime and the Picturesque told him and his readers where he was relative to the landscapes roundabout Greenwich and the rest of England and Scotland. As the aesthetics of landscape appreciation had grown up with the science of cartography in the second half of the eighteenth century, Hearne's habitual identification of terrain in terms of these two eighteenth-century modes of perceiving and describing nature demonstrates nothing more, in a sense, than his affinity with his age. And, while his narrative displays several unique instances of landscape description which combine and adapt aspects of the Sublime and the Picturesque in order to picture thoroughly unique natural scenes, it remains clear that his geographical awareness is generally controlled by the modes of perceiving nature which he shared with his age. During the three journeys which he undertook from Prince of Wales' Fort across the modern Northwest Territories between 1769 and 1772, and between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-seven, he found and described, as Marjorie Nicolson suggests all observers of nature find and describe, what he had been taught to look for.

IN HIS FIRST, ABORTED, JOURNEY Hearne agonizes over the sight of the Barrens upon which he is about to venture. He records the deprivation he feels at the loss of recognizable signs of external nature in a style which he calls, as if in accordance with James Beattie's dictum (and the known standard) for the achievement of sublime Truth in literature, "plain and unadorned."²⁵ While the tundra confronts him, his inhospitable Cree "guide" chooses to desert him. Thus, amidst "the cold . . . now very intense, our small stock of English provisions all expended, and not the least thing to be got on the bleak hills we

had for some time been walking on," Hearne watches Chawchinahaw and his mixed "Crew" of Chipewyans and Cree

set out toward the South West, making the woods ring with their laughter, and [leaving] us to consider of our unhappy situation, near two hundred miles from Prince of Wales's Fort, all heavily laden, and our strength and spirits greatly reduced by hunger and fatigue.

The sublime prospects engage the reader at this juncture: the view looking on to the Barrens to the north — Hearne's intended direction — offers only, to reverse Coleridge's definition of the Sublime, a boundless or endless nothingness;⁶ to the south lie the woods permeated with the threat of the Indians' "diabolical villainy," and, beyond, the Fort whose symbol as a sanctuary is undermined both by Hearne's remarks on Governor Norton's incompetence and by his personal animosity towards him, as well as by its location, though further south, on the edge of the Barrens. Thus, Hearne, William Isbister, and Thomas Merriman, together with a few Indians, are caught at the end of November 1769 in a void that is utterly foreign to them; and, although Hearne states that "our situation at that time, though very alarming, would not permit us to spend much time in reflection," the reader's situation is not unlike what it would be in the sublime gothic Romances that were contemporaries of Hearne's *Journey* — a situation permitting what Edmund Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), considered the key element of the literary Sublime: reflection on the predicament of an innocent, vulnerable character.⁷

Proceeding on to the Barrens, Hearne encounters a taxonomical crisis, the type of situation in the external world which, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has argued, in *Man and Nature* (1971), threatens no less than one's whole sense of self.⁸ No vertical elements of landscape, such as trees, are present to reflect the mind's learned perception of spatial definition. But Hearne experiences not just the absence of phenomena whose presence would permit use of the British taxonomies of landscape composition: his dilemma is compounded by the absence of a common language among him and his "guides," the absence of sources of food, and the absence of conventional natural provisions of shelter. The threat of alienation, in the sense that the explorer cannot determine his relation with his surroundings, becomes actual and the threat of annihilation real. Faced with the prospect of consummate desolation, Hearne has no recourse but to return to the Fort. Likewise, on the second journey, in 1770, the damaging of the quadrant precludes the establishment of any conventionally verifiable point of reference, a situation which again leaves Hearne destitute. His reader participates vicariously in these experiences, some of the first in non-fictional eighteenth-century British literature that isolate an individual in a foreign terrain to such a sublime extreme.

The first two expeditions of near disaster act as a prelude to the third, successful journey. In terms of narrative style, Hearne exploits the sublime aspects of the tundra encountered on the first two expeditions as the backdrop to the main body of the narrative. Because the anxious tone of the first episode dominates the journal from the outset, many of the subsequent episodes can be conveyed effectively by the use of understatement. For example, the semi-barren land along Hearne's Little Fish River (probably the Thlewiaza and Thaanne Rivers, N.W.T., at approximately 61° - $61^{\circ}30'N$) is characterized simply as, "like all the rest which lie to the North of Seal River [in northern Manitoba, at approximately $58^{\circ}45'N$], hilly, and full of rocks. . . ." In this region of hundreds of square miles, Hearne encounters a solitary Indian family, the description of whom has helped as much as any passage in literature to encourage the perception of the Barrens as an inhospitable desert.

Those people were the first strangers whom we had met since we left the Fort [forty-six days previously], though we had travelled several hundred miles; which is a proof that this part of the country is but thinly inhabited. It is a truth well known to the natives, and doubtless founded on experience, that there are many very extensive tracts of land in those parts, which are incapable of affording support to any number of the human race even during the short time they are passing through them, in the capacity of migrants, from one place to another; much less are they capable of affording a constant support to those who might wish to make them their fixed residence at any season of the year. It is true, that few rivers or lakes in those parts are entirely destitute of fish; but the uncertainty of meeting with a sufficient supply for any considerable time together, makes the natives very cautious how they put their whole dependance on that article, as it has too frequently been the means of many hundreds being starved to death.

More than dissuading the governors of the Hudson's Bay Company from establishing posts in the eastern Arctic mainland, this wintertime account evokes a stark prospect that is sufficiently vivid to reawaken both the memories of the disappearance of the Knight voyage up the west side of Hudson Bay fifty years earlier (1721) and fears dating from the seventeenth century of desolate regions as the natural manifestations of God's wrath at man's sin. Hearne, who had visited the sublime ruins at Marble Island and had exhumed the bodies of the Knight expedition in the summer of the year of his first expedition (1769), emphasizes the "truth" and "certainty" of the picture he paints, as he equates visual emptiness with infertility, aridity, and uninhabitability. For the reader back amidst the variegated splendour of England, such an equation confirms the implication of the Picturesque aesthetic, that visual variety in landscape alone provides a comfortable environment. (Indeed, Hearne's equation anticipates the equation of the absence of trees with aridity made in the surveys of the Canadian Prairies undertaken in the nineteenth century by Henry Youle Hind and Captain John Palliser.) Hearne describes the tundra as "dreary" and "wretched"; the

lands about Churchill River near Hudson Bay as “nothing but a hot burning sand, like the Spanish lines at Gibraltar”; and one mine on the Coppermine River as a “ruins” comprising “an entire jumble of rocks and gravel, which has been rent many ways by an earthquake.”

Not only would Hearne’s late-eighteenth-century reader appreciate the image of the earthquake as the voice of God’s displeasure with man, he would also relish Hearne’s use of the ruins motif. As a literary and artistic device dating at least from the paintings of Claude [Gellee] Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, ruins lent to a scene a romantic effect by juxtaposing a present visual chaos with the suggestion of a past beauty of secular, religious, or mythical import. In the case of Hearne’s view of the Coppermine River, it is geographical beauty which has been ruined. But Hearne also employs the motif inversely in his account of the Coppermine River, in order to describe, not a chaos but, equally sublime, a uniform geography whose appearance he attributes to the ruination of a previous geography:

The general course of the [Coppermine] river is about North by East; but in some places it is very crooked, and its breadth varies from twenty yards to four or five hundred. The banks are in general a solid rock, both sides of which correspond so exactly with each other, as to leave no doubt that the channel of the river has been caused by some terrible convulsion of nature; and the stream is supplied by a variety of little rivulets that rush down the sides of the hills, occasioned chiefly by the melting of the snow.

Close topographical survey gives way to an imaginatively forceful response which colours the scene being depicted. But there is, as well, a measure of pathetic fallacy at work in this description since its imaginative force derives, in part, from the preceding episode, the ruination of the Esquimaux encampment by Hearne’s Chipewyan and a band of Copper Indians: the description of the river follows the account of the massacre on its banks. It may be that Hearne’s experience of that violence governs his perception, as it did his survey, since the whole account was added to the original MS after 1783.⁹ At any rate, the massacre represents a superb adaptation of Salvator Rosa’s sublime convention of the banditti ambush, while providing the North with one of its first historical ruins.

The land was so situated that we walked under cover of the rocks and hills till we were within two hundred yards of the tents. There we lay in ambush for some time, watching the motions of the Esquimaux. . . .

While we lay in ambush, the Indians performed the last ceremonies which were thought necessary before the engagement. These chiefly consisted in painting their faces; some all black, some all red, and others with a mixture of the two; and to prevent their hair from blowing into their eyes, it was either tied before and behind, and on both sides, or else cut short all round. . . .

By the time the Indians had made themselves thus completely frightful, it was near one o’clock in the morning of the seventeenth [July 1771]; when finding all

the Esquimaux quiet in their tents, they rushed forth from their ambuscade, and fell on the poor unsuspecting creatures, unperceived till close at the very eves of their tents, when they soon began the bloody massacre, while I stood neuter in the rear.

In a few seconds the horrible scene commenced; it was shocking beyond description; the poor unhappy victims were surprised in the midst of their sleep, and had neither time nor power to make any resistance; men, women, and children, in all upward of twenty, ran out of their tents stark naked, and endeavoured to make their escape; but the Indians having possession of all the landside, to no place could they fly for shelter. One alternative only remained, that of jumping into the river; but as none of them attempted it, they all fell a sacrifice to Indian barbarity!

The shrieks and groans of the poor expiring wretches were truly dreadful; and my horror was much increased at seeing a young girl, seemingly about eighteen years of age, killed so near me, that when the first spear was stuck into her side she fell down at my feet, and twisted round my legs, so that it was with difficulty that I could disengage myself from her dying gasps. As two Indian men pursued this unfortunate victim, I solicited very hard for her life; but the murderers made no reply till they had stuck both their spears through her body, and transfixed her to the ground. They then looked me sternly in the face, and began to ridicule me, by asking if I wanted an Esquimaux wife; and paid not the smallest regard to the shrieks and agony of the poor wretch, who was twining round their spears like an eel! Indeed, after receiving much abusive language from them on the occasion, I was at length obliged to desire that they would be more expeditious in dispatching their victim out of her misery, otherwise I should be obliged, out of pity, to assist in the friendly office of putting an end to the existence of a fellow-creature who was so cruelly wounded. On this request being made, one of the Indians hastily drew his spear from the place where it was first lodged, and pierced it through her breast near the heart. The love of life, however, even in this most miserable state, was so predominant, that though this might justly be called the most merciful act that could be done for the poor creature, it seemed to be unwelcome, for though much exhausted by pain and loss of blood, she made several efforts to ward off the friendly blow. My situation and the terror of my mind at beholding this butchery, cannot easily be conceived, much less described; though I summed up all the fortitude I was master of on the occasion, it was with difficulty that I could refrain from tears; and I am confident that my features must have feelingly expressed how sincerely I was affected at the barbarous scene I then witnessed; even at this hour I cannot reflect on the transactions of that horrid day without shedding tears.

“Barren hills and wide open marshes” entirely constitute the land roundabout the scene of the massacre, but what makes the situation of the Esquimaux “very convenient for surprising them” is its location at the foot of a fall, “where the river was contracted to the breadth of about twenty yards,” between walls of red sandstone. The roar of the river over the falls thus assists the Indians in their ambush as much as the cover provided by the treeless hills does. For the English reader, the desolate tracts and the roaring cataract provide a sublime landscape proper, in his view, to acts of barbarity. Moreover, Hearne sets the scene “near one o’clock in the morning,” suggesting, as his English reader would expect, that the

subsequent tragedy is enacted in darkness. Significantly, only in his record of the day does Hearne remind his reader of the brightness of a July night above the Arctic circle when no hour of complete darkness occurs.¹⁰

An accomplished dramatist of the scene, Hearne pauses after setting the scene in order to heighten audience suspense. He details the preparatory rituals undertaken by the Indians to an extent sufficient to redirect his reader's attention. Then, in nine swift sentences he springs the action. Clauses build upon clauses a momentum of their own, apparently no more under Hearne's control than is his "undisciplined rabble" of a crew.¹¹ The narrator, able neither to control his charges nor to retreat from the scene of genocide, experiences a paralysis from which he proves incapable of extricating himself. Like Burke's witness to a sublime scene, he can only reflect on the predicament of others while suspended "neuter in the rear." This close association of the authorial spectator with the reader is not unintentional: viewed from Hearne's prospect, the "engagement" occurs at the foot of the wildest falls on the Coppermine River, thus presenting a picture of shadowed, horizontal, criminal action in the foreground that is set against a wild, vertically-structured, remotely-located landscape background whose waterfall, facing the northwest, catches, with the effect of *chiaroscuro*, the sun's rays — in short, a scene not unlike many of Salvator Rosa's paintings.

The horror is noticeably heightened by the pathetic epithet of "poor unsuspecting creatures" (emphasis added) for the dormant Eskimos. As well, the descriptions of the demise of the Eskimo girl, a "poor creature," "fellow-creature," and an "eel," detail a further horror for Hearne as the picture of the massacre bursts out on its spectator. Like Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, Walpole's Matilda, or Radcliffe's Emily (who, introduced in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* only a year before the publication of Hearne's *Journey*, must have been fresh in the British readers' minds), Hearne's innocent eighteen-year-old attempts to flee a life-threatening pursuit. But in Hearne's narrative, the literary emotion is superseded by a waking nightmare, the universally-experienced dream of an indescribable serpentine creature appending itself to one's limb, seeking to derive succour from it. The innocent heroine for whose plight Hearne feels guilt, and the frightful image of an eel for which he feels only repulsion, together cast the narrator and — because his former spectatorial role allied the narrator with him — the reader into a bedlam of emotion amidst a chaos of slaughter. As narrator, Hearne prolongs the girl's life while, as participant, he seeks to terminate it mercifully. The tension arising out of this simultaneity serves to produce an interminableness appropriate to a nightmare sensation, and demonstrates Hearne's keen awareness of how conducive his experiences were to the conventions of the literary Sublime practised in late-eighteenth-century Britain. The whole scene is superbly staged by a narrator well accustomed to both native and, by virtue of his eleven years' service (1756-1766) as midshipman under Viscount Hood's wartime command,

European bloodshed. The dramatic picture culminates in a pathetic, but wholly conventional note — Hearne shedding retrospective tears at the recollection of the massacre.

MUCH OF THE TERRAIN over which Hearne travels, and some of the incidents which occur, can be represented to the English reader only in terms of the taxonomy of the Sublime. But, below the treeless tundra, the landscapes of the boreal forest/tundra transition zone differ sufficiently, not least because of the regular presence of such conifers as the black spruce, to warrant attempts to organize terrain by means of the taxonomy of the Picturesque. En route to and from the dreary and wretched wastes and the scenes of violence on the tundra, Hearne discovers more appealing and ordered scenes of open woodland. Not surprisingly (both because the Picturesque depends upon vegetation for spatial organization, and because, to a traveller, trees signify shelter, fire, and hot food), when Hearne finds himself below the tree-line, his eye notices and organizes landscapes more readily. The following one-sentence paragraph from the record of the third expedition demonstrates Hearne's use of such vocabulary of the Picturesque as "intermixture," and "here and there," to image a varied landscape:

Early in the morning of the twenty-eighth [December 1770], we again set out, and directed our course to the Westward, through thick shrubby woods, consisting chiefly of ill-shaped pines, with small dwarf junipers, intermixed here and there, particularly round the margins of ponds and swamps, with dwarf willow bushes; and among the rocks and sides of the hills were also some small poplars.

If not the quality, certainly the variety of vegetation and rock attracts the English eye, nourishing it with aesthetic sustenance before the push onto the Barrens and their (comparatively speaking) visual uniformity. The single-sentence structure serves to integrate various landscape features that are recognizably picturesque, including a tree-lined, small-sized area of water, even though a single scene is not composed. Indeed, the use of the preposition "through" to describe movement in the open woodlands suggests more interaction on the part of the perceiving eye with the terrain than do the prepositions "onto" and "across," which are used to describe tundra treks.

On the outgoing portion of Hearne's second voyage, his guide, Conne-e-quee, elects to remain below the tree line, and to await the weather of the late spring before embarking onto the Barrens. Hearne describes in one paragraph the situation of his spring encampment in March 1770, at, according to Gordon Speck, in *Samuel Hearne and the Northwest Passage* (1963), "the western end of She-thanei Lake [Manitoba] just below 59° north and 98° west":¹²

The situation of our tent at this time was truly pleasant, particularly for a

spring residence; being on a small elevated point, which commanded an extensive prospect over a large lake, the shores of which abounded with wood of different kinds, such as pine, larch [tamarack], birch, and poplar; and in many places was beautifully contrasted with a variety of high hills, that showed their snowy summits above the tallest woods. About two hundred yards from the tent was a fall, or rapid, which the swiftness of the current prevents from freezing in the coldest winters. At the bottom of this fall, which empties itself into the above lake, was a fine sheet of open water near a mile in length, and at least half a mile in breadth; by the margin of which we had our fishing nets set, all in open view from the tent.

By his guide's choice not to travel, Hearne's time is freed to appreciate the terrain about him. He transforms it, by means of the Picturesque, into a landscaped picture, just as he transforms himself from an explorer into a tourist-cum-sportsman. With his tent on an elevated point in the foreground, he looks out on an animated falls, to one side, which is connected to the forest-lined lake in the middlescape by the unfrozen (hence, animated) river, and snow-clad hills in the offskip or background, which contain and order the space in the scene. The picture, painted within the frame of a paragraph, presents a scene of "pleasant" contentment and "repose." Moreover, much of the variety in landscape that is so dear to the English eye is evidenced: different kinds of vegetation; variety of topography, with the middlescape set deep in the picture and the offskip higher than it or the foreground; and contrast in colours. A steady supply of fish from a moderately large opening in the lake ice provides the opportunity for sport and sustenance, while the falls enliven an otherwise frozen view.

So attractively does Hearne paint his paragraph scene that he feels it incumbent upon himself to account for the time spent at the "spring residence" to his "reader," which is originally to say, his employers. Far in kind but not in distance from the inhospitable, threatening landscapes of the Barrens, this landscape hospitably entices the Englishman to take up residence in it. Indeed, Hearne's "great surprise" at the discovery of empty fishing nets in April, and the "sudden change of circumstances," from pleasant repose to anxious travel, which that discovery occasions suggests that Hearne had been, to some extent, charmed by the favourable prospect he sees in the landscape. But the charming illusion of the picturesque scene at Lake Shethanei is shattered by September, when Hearne's death by starvation is forestalled only by the wholly aleatory and almost miraculous appearance of Matonabee.

Two examples from Hearne's narrative indicate that the ordering of terrain reminds the English explorer of picturesque features of an English landscape. The construction of a caribou pound on a frozen Kasba Lake (N.W.T., 60°N, 102°W) in March 1771, seems uncondusive to the Picturesque; yet, Hearne remarks how the rows of brushwood resemble hedge-rows, employed by the Indians in a manner not unlike the way hedgerows are occasionally used in

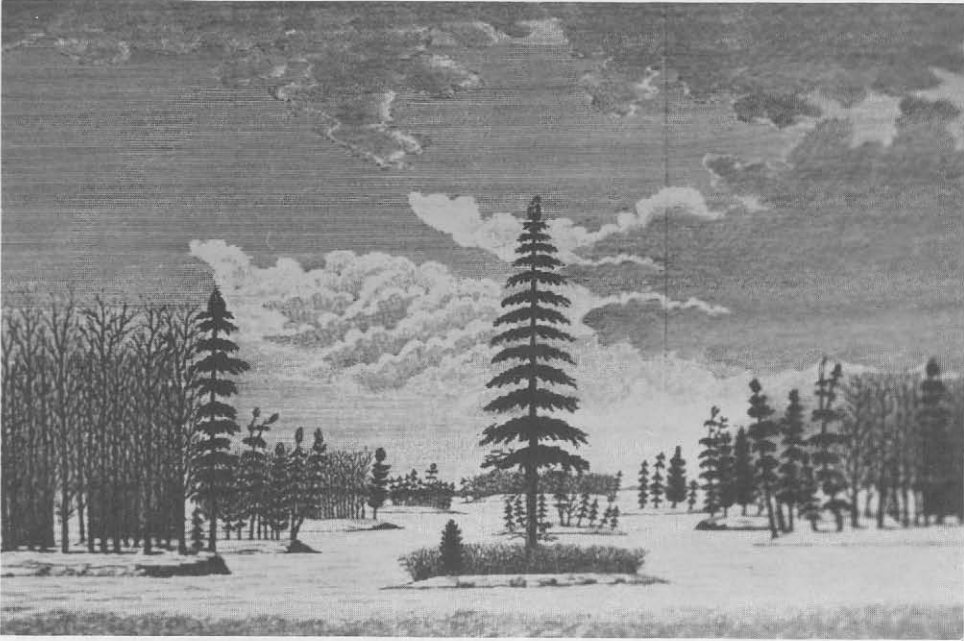
England, to limit the travel of animals. However unsportsmanlike he may find the Indian practice ("This method of hunting, if it deserves the name . . .," he, clearly, is charmed by the Indians' ingenuity and resourcefulness, and by the hunting scene itself. In another instance, while traversing the Stony Mountains of the barren Upper Coppermine River region, where the first Franklin expedition would encounter catastrophe fifty years later (1821), Hearne finds his perception of landscape altering with the appearance of a familiar topographical and human feature:

We . . . walked twenty-seven miles to the North West, fourteen of which were on what the Indians call the Stony Mountains; and surely no part of the world better deserves that name. On our first approaching these mountains, they appeared to be a confused heap of stones, utterly inaccessible to the foot of man: but having some Copper Indians with us who knew the best road, we made a tolerable shift to get on, though not without being obliged frequently to crawl on our hands and knees. Notwithstanding the intricacy of the road, there is a very visible path the whole way across these mountains, even in the most difficult parts; and also on the smooth rocks, and those parts which are capable of receiving an impression, the path is as plain and well-beaten, as any bye foot-path in England.

To be sure, this is not a picturesque landscape, but its potential sublimity as an "utterly inaccessible" "confused heap of stones" is tempered by the sign of human presence — at once an ordering, humanizing, and reassuring guide across a daunting terrain. In short, the path, in making the mountains a place, offers Hearne and his reader picturesque sentiment if it does not actually transform the traveller's first impression of the mountains.

Another, different, combination of form and sentiment occurs in Hearne's picture, entitled "A Winter View in the Athapuscow [Great Slave] Lake," Hearne's only landscape sketch of the expeditions, commemorating his discovery, on Christmas Eve, 1771, of the world's tenth largest lake. Perhaps the most striking feature of this picture is its symmetry: although the foreground pine is not precisely centred, its absolutely perpendicular relation to the tops of the dwarf trees and the ground on its island, as well as its uniform pairs of branches compel the attention and stamp the scene with a formal and regular division of space. Moreover, the uniformity in the height of each island's deciduous trees (a vision of fancy in the latitude being portrayed), the unbroken "lawn" of the frozen lake, and the orderliness of the three files of islands (suggestive of a *patte d'oie*¹³) all bear some affinity to the formal gardens of a Le Notre, Wise, or London. Yet, the still, stark, vacant quality of the view, achieved by the whiteness of ice and sky, does not accord well with the scene's order. The sense of isolation promoted by the location of such small islands miles, one supposes, from either shore of Great Slave Lake,¹⁴ overwhelms the symmetry with which Hearne strives to govern the view.

Moreover, several factors preclude the contentment sought in this view by the eye trained in the Picturesque. The island in the middle ground fails, either



because of its absolute size or its size relative to the foreground conifer, to carry off its double function as both middle ground and background, and thereby fails to contain the eye stretching to the horizon. Secondly, an indeterminable spatial quality is created in the foreground because of an absence of an elevated point of view, a human figure, footprints, or any feature which would assist the viewer with spatial orientation. Lastly, the difficulty, encountered by the viewer because of the dominant foreground conifer, of following the sight line suggested by the *coulisses* upsets the apparent intention of the picture, as do the absence of a vanishing point at the end of either sight line, and the fact that the *coulisses* themselves fail to achieve one of their customary functions, that of containing the view to either side. Not the least important factor contributing to the picture's mysterious quality are the areas of the lake beyond the islands, to the left and, to a lesser extent, to the right of the central view. Their presence beckons the eye to the realm beyond the picture's borders. By virtue of the vastness of northern space, the visual phenomena seem to resist telescopic ingestion by the perceiving eye. The viewer of the picture is left thinking as much about the space beyond and outside the view as about the scene in it.

Finally, the icebound setting of the scene posits a curious sense of imperma-

nency which is incompatible with the security sought by the Picturesque. Such unconventionality questions even the authority of the artist's single point of view. But rather than disappointment or failure, the picture evokes a sense of wonder, and, whether or not bafflement of the viewer is Hearne's intention, his work marks one of the first combinations of picturesque order and sublime sensation in the representation of a northern Canadian landscape. Somewhere between the north shore's "entire jumble of rocks and hills, for such is all the land on the North side," and the south shore's "fine level country, in which there was not a hill to be seen, or a stone to be found," appears to Hearne the aesthetic hybrid of the picturesque sublime, a foreign, yet orderable, landscape, neither alien nor humanized, which induces a quiet thrill of aesthetic discovery. That Hearne, his quadrant again broken and his watch stopped, misjudges the lake's whereabouts lends an added mystery to the magic of the silent scene.

The depiction of the picturesque sublime reflects a transformation that is only one of several that Hearne's sensibilities undergo. A British officer made to haul his own baggage, an explorer who chronicles anthropological as much as geographical discoveries, an Englishman of gentle Dorset rearing who survives all seasons on the tundra — all such anomalies produce the enigmas of Hearne's journal, his picture, and the man himself. Hearne's aesthetic experience of the North, far less roughhewn than it appears at a cursory glance, anticipates the experience of many explorers and travellers after him. The Sublime is ubiquitous in the region but the viewer, prompted by a thirst for the Picturesque which increases in proportion to his temporal distance from England, imbibes the meagre variety of form provided by the tundra and Arctic seas to produce recognizable landscapes out of voids whenever possible, even when the natural terrain displays variety and animation to a degree which could only stimulate an enthusiast of the paleozoic. As Al Purdy realizes in his poem, entitled "Trees at the Arctic Circle," the beauty of the land could not be found by the eye accustomed to organizing landscapes with "tall maples waving green / and oaks like gods in autumn gold."¹⁵ In a way that is similar to Blake's idea that the Sublime reveals itself in the beauty of minutiae, Purdy learns how to appreciate aspects of a land which frequently offers only an immediate foreground or an expansive background.¹⁶ Almost two hundred years before him, Hearne was learning how to adapt to northern landscapes the taxonomies with which every late-eighteenth-century Englishman with an aesthetic regard for nature had learned to describe and identify the external world. During the course of those two hundred years, Hearne's achievements in charting an aesthetic map of the North were followed by a remarkable number of overland and marine expeditions of Arctic exploration, the narrative and pictorial records of which continue to chart landscapes on the map whose first features were Bloody Fall, spring camp, and the Athapuscow Lake.

NOTES

- ¹ Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959; New York: Norton, 1963), p. 1.
- ² Victor G. Hopwood, "Explorers by Land (to 1867)," in *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al. (1965), 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966), 1, 27. See also Dermot McCarthy, "'Not Knowing Me from an Enemy': Hearne's Account of the Massacre at Bloody Falls [sic]," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 16 (1979-80), pp. 153-67.
- ³ This and subsequent quotations refer to Alexander Mackenzie, *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, for the Hakluyt Society, 1970).
- ⁴ John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to The Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), p. 6, emphasis added.
- ⁵ This and subsequent quotations refer to Samuel Hearne, *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772* (1795), ed. and intro. Richard Glover (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958). Beattie's call for "words very plain and simple," appears in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1783), p. 630. Of course, his statement echoes the call for the plain style in 1660 by The Royal Society, but also, and more importantly, it echoes Longinus' remarks on the suitability of a plain style to convey sublime thoughts. Beattie is cited here to demonstrate the concern for the dictum of style relative to the Sublime in the work of one of Hearne's contemporaries.
- ⁶ Coleridge emphasizes the extreme of excess of visual phenomena in his definition of the Sublime as "boundless or endless allness." See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria . . . with Aesthetical Essays*, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), II, 309. The reversion suggested for Hearne reflects the other aspect of nature which the eighteenth-century landscape aestheticians considered sublime. Besides representing the extreme of profuse visual detail, the Sublime also represented the extreme of uniformity and emptiness. This latter extreme was influenced markedly by Milton's scenes of Hell. Thus, the aesthetic of the Sublime incorporated, as it were, both the mountain and the abyss, both vast presence and vast emptiness.
- ⁷ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. and intro. J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 44-48.
- ⁸ Tuan's statement is as follows: "To live comfortably among the welter of sense impressions man must know how to organize them. A man without a system of values is as lost and unable to survive as an animal deprived of its instinctive patterns of behaviour. The conceptual frame is not only a shelter shielding a person from alien winds of doctrine and from anarchy, but it provides a directrix for human action: it enables a person to direct and rationalize his behavior." (Yi-Fu Tuan, *Man and Nature*, Association of American Geographers Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper no. 10 [Washington, 1971], p. 17.)
- ⁹ Cf. Glover's note, p. 107.
- ¹⁰ Indeed, at the mouth of the Coppermine River, the sun does not dip below the horizon during the month of July. This fact is witnessed by the multiple-exposure photograph of the sunset and sunrise at the mouth, taken by the Hudson's Bay

- Company, and reprinted in Gordon Speck, *Samuel Hearne and the Northwest Passage* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1963), p. 251.
- ¹¹ The qualification, "apparently," is a needful one because no evidence exists to suggest that Hearne did not have the scene under literary control. Indeed, the sublime effect of near chaos which he manages shows him at his most creative. That this passage comprises part of the larger section added to the MS after 1783 (Glover's note, p. 100n.), suggests that the explorer may have shaped it during the course of several draughts. The manuscript as a whole, according to Glover (pp. xxxv, xxxix) certainly went through many versions during the twenty-three years between the last sojourn and the publication of *A Journey*.
- ¹² This suggestion of the location is offered by Speck, p. 128.
- ¹³ Literally a goose foot, this device was employed in French, Italian, and, to a limited extent, English formal gardens of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. It consisted of a number of cinder paths which, like spokes in one quadrant or one half of a wheel, converged on a single hub where there was placed a statue, gazebo, fountain, or building; on a smaller scale, the *patte d'oie* is similar to the plan of the avenues which converge in front of the palace at Versailles.
- ¹⁴ Such was perhaps not the case, since Hearne appears to have traversed Great Slave Lake near its eastern end, where the Pethei Peninsula extends up from the south almost to the north shore.
- ¹⁵ In Al Purdy, *North of Summer: Poems from Baffin Island* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967); rpt. in *Poems of Contemporary Canada 1960-1970*, ed. Eli Mandel (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), pp. 12-13.
- ¹⁶ See William Blake, *Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Edmond Malone (London, 1798); rpt. in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965; 4th rpt. with revisions, 1970), p. 636.

HOW TO IMAGINE AN ALBATROSS

Don McKay

(assisted by the report of a CIA observer near Christmas Island)

To imagine an albatross
 a mind must widen to the breadth of the Pacific Ocean
 dissolve its edges to admit a twelve foot wingspan soaring
 silently across the soft enormous heave as the planet
 breathes into another dawn.
 This might be
 dream without content or the opening of a film
 in which the credits never run no speck appears
 on the horizon fattening to Randolph Scott on horseback or the lost
 brown mole below your shoulder blade, the albatross
 is so much of the scene he drinks the ocean never needs