VIEWING MOUNTAINS

In 1657, mountains were described with epithets such as "Warts, Wens, Blisters, Tumours, Imposthumes"[1] yet a century later, in 1769, Thomas Gray wrote of the Scottish highlands: "the mountains are ecstatic" (Nicolson, 1959). These were not isolated descriptions, they epitomise a sea change in attitudes towards mountain landscapes that occurred in as little as fifty years during the early 18th century. The reasons for this change illustrate the influence of culture on a society's attitudes towards nature, and landscapes in particular.

An English writer, S.P.B. Mais, in 1938 asserted that “Certain canons of beauty are unalterable ... Taken generally you and I, plain men, admire very much what plain men admired in Chaucer’s day, Shakespeare’s day, and Wordsworth’s day.” He went on to cite as examples the English downs, the fells and the jagged mountains of the north (Lowenthal, 1978). However as this paper will demonstrate, Mais was wrong; Western preferences for landscape *have* changed significantly, none more so than in regard to mountain scenery.

In *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959), Marjorie Hope Nicolson traced the reasons for this shift, focusing on the literature and poetry of the period. She considered that the change was the result of "one of the most profound revolutions in thought that has ever occurred."

CLASSICAL ATTITUDES TO MOUNTAINS

Up to the mid-17th century, mountains did not figure in paintings, literature or poetry except along classical lines. The standard mountains were Greek - Olympus, Pelion, Parnassus, Ossa, and Helicon, and these were described as they were imagined, not as they were seen or experienced because few writers had actually seen mountains. English mountain poetry rarely mentioned local mountains in the British Isles. Travellers' accounts mentioned the dangers and difficulties of travelling in mountainous areas but virtually never described them as beautiful.

Greek poets used terms that were similar to contemporary sublime descriptions:

> "Aeschylus felt the mingled majesty and terror of earthquake and storm, of 'sky-piercing rocks' and 'star-neighboured peaks,' of the distant Caucausus. Alcman's 'mountain summits ... glens, cliffs and caves,' like his 'dark ocean's waves,' were both beautiful and dangerous, associated with 'black earth's reptile brood' and the 'wild beasts of the mountain wood.' " (Nicolson, 1959)

Aristophanes was more sympathetic:

> “... the wood-crowned summits of the hills;
> Thence shall our glance command
> The beetling (literally - far seen look-out places) crags which sentinel the land”
> (Quoted by Gilbert, 1885, 13)

The Romans' attitudes were little different although some considered that the Roman feeling for nature was more developed overall than was the Greek (Biese, 1905). The Romans regarded mountains as aloof, inhospitable, desolate and hostile and described them in terms of difficult, sharp, horrid, inaccessible and frozen. Writers who lived near mountains, such as

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1. Wens are an Old English term for a lump, protuberance or wart. Imposthumes or impostumes is a Middle English term for a purulent swelling, a cyst, an abscess. Clearly neither term were used as endearments.

Catullus, Virgil or Horace scarcely ever mentioned them. Virgil spoke of “Father Apennine, when through his glistening holm oaks he murmurs low, and, lifting himself with snowy peak to the winds of heaven, rejoices.” (*Æneid*).

Only Lucretius seemed to admire mountains, and even climbed them although as a philosopher he described them as waste places occupying areas better occupied by green meadows. Like Constable and the Dutch painters centuries later, he loved clouds: “... the storm-wind, wild, comes carrying clouds like mountains through the air... may you mark ... huge caves built of hanging rocks of cloud” (*On the Nature of* Things. Book 6).

BIBLICAL BASIS OF ATTITUDES

A major determinant of the attitudes towards mountains was in the interpretation of Biblical passages that, in today’s eyes, seem quite amazing. The key passage is in Genesis 1:9 and 10 describing the third day of creation:

> And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.' And it was so.
> God called the dry ground 'land', and the gathered waters he called 'seas'. And God saw that it was good."

God called the world he created "good" so it should have been the paragon of beauty. The question arose whether God created the mountains when he created the earth. There were two opposing views, one that mountains were created on the third day, and a counter and stronger view that they developed at some later time. Influenced by classical notions of aesthetics in which symmetry, proportion and restraint determined beauty, many believed that God would not create something irregular, therefore what God created was regular and perfect, i.e. without mountains. Later, at the Fall, or at the Flood[2], when sin and judgement entered the world, mountains emerged symbolising the state of imperfection of man.

Somewhat incredibly to modern conceptions, it was widely believed that the earth was like an egg, which accounted for there being no mountains. The idea of the earth as a smooth round egg occurred in ancient Persian, Egyptian and Oriental legends and also in Jewish and early Christian theology. The Roman poet Ovid (43 BC-17 AD) in *Metamorphoses* described the creation of the earth by a god: "his first care was to shape the earth into a great ball, so that it might be the same in all directions." The passage "the Spirit of God was *hovering* over the waters." (Genesis 1:2, emphasis added) suggested to early Christian expositors a Heavenly Dove. It was a short step from there to suggest that a bird hovering over or sitting on eggs (i.e. that the earth was an egg). Basil was one of the Patristic writers who suggested this although it was meant in an allegorical sense. Later writers, however, extended the logic and sought to explain the structure of the egg. Abelard (1079 - 1142) suggested that the yolk is the earth, the white is the water, the membrane is the air, and the shell is fire. This model also helped explain the origin of the waters in the Flood. It certainly explained the smoothness of the earth without mountains to disfigure its beauty[3].

It was widely agreed that the mountains came after creation with both Jewish and Christian expositors arguing that these "blemishes" on creation were due to human depravity. Many

2. Mountains are not mentioned in the Genesis account until the flood. Genesis 7:19: "(The waters) rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heaven were covered."
3. The notion that the earth is flat rather than round may have derived from a misunderstanding of ancient texts. According to Nicolson "classical and patristic philosophers, with only a few exceptions, accepted the idea that the earth was round." The egg analogy could scarcely produce any other conclusion.

believed that mountains resulted from the sin of Adam and Eve and associated mountains with the idea of the earth growing old. From this, the parallel with man was apparent: the blemishes, deteriorations and excrescences which pockmark a human face and body occur also on the earth in the form of mountains - hence the expressions of the 17th century of mountains as warts, wens, blisters, tumours and imposthumes.

The fact that Adam and Eve and the serpent were guilty but that the earth was also being punished vexed many commentators - as Rabbi Nathan taught: "three entered for judgement, yet four came out guilty." The critical passage is in Genesis 3:17, which is now translated "Cursed is the *ground* because of you" (emphasis added) was originally translated by Jerome in the Vulgate as "earth". Jerome's translation can imply the entire world rather than the soil, which the rest of the passage makes clear, is meant (by its reference to it bringing forth thorns and thistles). Resulting from God's curse, the earth was defaced and was in a state of decay.

While there was disagreement concerning whether the mountains arose at the time of Adam and Eve's sin or when Cain killed Abel, it was almost universally agreed among Bible commentators that the Flood or Deluge caused major changes to the earth and that, if the mountains were not present prior to this, they were certainly there after the flood as the Ark came to rest on Ararat. Augustine's position was that the flood made the mountains higher and the valleys and ocean depths deeper and this became the generally accepted view.

PRE MID-17TH CENTURY ATTITUDES

Up to the middle of the 17th century, whenever writers, poets and travellers mentioned mountains (which was rare), they repeated the epithets of the classics. Augustine used descriptions of mountains and valleys to moralise about humanity, while Dante made clear his dislike of mountains describing the unappealing masses of broken stones and crags fit only to guard the entrance to hell (Rees, 1975b). Milton's "mountains on whose barren breast the labouring clouds do often rest", was based on classical conventions and, following anatomical use, described "huge-bellied mountains". Similarly Shakespeare, who probably never saw a mountain, described them in classical terms; for example Hamlet's description of his father is based on Virgil's description of Mercury on Mount Atlas:

> "Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
> An eye like Mars, to threaten or command,
> A station like the herald Mercury
> New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill"

To writers like Bunyan, mountains were allegories of life - he spoke of hills as symbols of the ups and downs of life, mountains were 'proud' and valleys 'humble'.

There were exceptions. In the 4th century Basil placed his hut on a mountain from where he could gain an extensive view. Dante (1265-1321), who had seen many lands, appeared to delight in the mountains, describing the ascent through charming upland, flowery glade, crag, rocky path and narrow cornice ledge, leading to the Paradise on the summit, for the abode of spirits on their upward way:

> “that so made pure and light.,
> They may spring upward to the starry spheres” (*The Divine Comedy: Purgatory*)

In the 13th century, John of Salisbury ascended to Grand St Bernard and described it thus:

> "I have been on the mount of Jove; on the one hand looking up to the heaven of the mountain; on the other shuddering at the hell of the valleys; feeling myself so much nearer to heaven that I was more sure that my prayer would be heard." (McLaughlin, 1894)

In 1335, Petrarch (1304-1374) climbed Mount Ventoux (less than 2000 m high) and was delighted by its grandeur and majesty until he read in his copy of Augustine's *Confessions*: "And men go forth, and admire lofty mountains and broad seas … and forget their own selves while doing so." He was angry with himself for admiring a mountain more than the human soul and dignity of man and scurried down guiltily.

In 1401, Adam of Usk had himself blindfolded and carried across the St Gothard Pass rather than view the horrid peaks. In 1480 Felix Fabri, a monk from Ulm, journeyed through the Alps and wrote of the dreadful peaks, "rigid from the cold of the snow or the heat of the sun" while "the valleys below them are pleasant, and as rich and fruitful in all earthly delights as Paradise itself." (*The Wanderings of Felix Fabri*). Again, there were exceptions. The naturalist, Konrad von Gesner wrote in *De Admiratione Montium* in 1541 of his delight in climbing mountains to study the plants and for exercises - "I say then that he is no lover of nature who does not esteem high mountains very worthy of profound contemplation." Gesner was atypical - a more typical example was a guidebook to Italy which included nothing of significance about the mountains of that country.

Mountains were often regarded as the haunts of evil spirits. Mount Pilatus near Lucerne for example, contains near its summit a lake that was thought to be haunted by the spirit of Pontius Pilate. The Lucerne council prohibited visits to the lake until the law was repealed in the early 16th century. However the legend was only demolished when a brave person threw stones into the lake without retaliation by Pilate.

In 1621, Joshua Poole described his journeying over the Alps and Pyrenees:

> "I am now got over the Alps …; I had crossed … the Pyreneans to Spain before; they are not so high and hideous as the Alps; but for our mountains in Wales ... they are but Molehills in comparison to these; they are but Pigmies compar'd to Giants, but Blisters to Imposthumes, or Pimples to Warts." Quoted by Nicolson, M. H., 1959. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, 61.

Similarly, Dr Johnson described the Pyrenees as "uncouth, huge, monstrous excrescences of Nature, being nothing but craggy stones." Recoiling from the Scottish mountains he penned: "An eye accustomed to flowery pastures and waving harvest is astonished and repelled by this wide extent of hopeless sterility." (Shepard, 1967)

George Hakewill, in *Apologie of the Power and Providence of God* (1627), believed that the mountains were the "immoveable markes of the great deluge" but, contrary to most of this age, he argued for their usefulness. He spoke of the "pleasing variety of mountaines and vallies". He considered variety to be one of God's principles of the universe. In a delightful conclusion to his book, Hakewill wrote:

> " I thinke that all things considered, wee have no less reason to blesse God for the less fruitfull mountaines, than for the fat and fruitfull vallies."

Galileo's *Sidereus nuncius,* in 1610 described his discovery that the moon's irregularities and mountains were like the earth. Together with his discovery of the four moons around Jupiter and that Venus had crescent phases, these had an electrifying impact across Europe. Coupled with his discovery in 1613 of spots on the sun, Galileo's findings were believed to indicate decay in the cosmos as well as on earth. Decay was thus thought to be universal, not only confined to the earth.

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In *Somnium*, an influential work of fiction, Kepler described the lunar hills and valleys as (in Nicolson's words), "a vivid if forbidding spectacle of vast towering mountains, profound chasms and abysses into which crept for protection the strange denizens of the moon world", scarcely a description of beauty and delight but rather of grandeur and terror which later formed the basis of the 'sublime'. Hard on the heels of these stellar discoveries, the poet John Donne described mountains as “warts and pock-holes on the face of the earth”:

> “But keepes the earth her round proportion still?
> Does not a Tenarif, or higher Hill
> Rise so high like a Rocke ... confesse, in this
> The worlds proportion disfigured is.” (*The First Anniversary*, 1611)

John Milton (1608 - 74) crossed the Alps in 1638 en route to Italy but left no record of his impressions.

In 1642, Sir John Denham's poem "Coopers Hill" was published. The poem was of the topographical poetry genre and described the prospect from Coopers Hill, situated at Runnymeade Island (where the Magna Carta was signed) on the Thames with Windsor nearby and London in the distance. The view included Windsor Castle, Runnymeade Island, an abbey ruined in the Dissolution and the Thames - a landscape of “English political and religious history” (Andrews, 1989). Denham’s description of the Thames Valley reflected experience of the Italian landscape - magnifying its attributes to the point of exaggeration (Hussey, 1927):

> “... the steepe horrid Roughness of the Wood
> Strives with the gentle Calmness of the Flood.
> Such huge Extremes, when Nature doth unite,
> Wonder from thence results and thence Delight ....”

The poem was unusual in not adopting the traditional classical model of Mount Parnassus as the basis for inspiration, but rather taking the, then, radical step of using a familiar English location. The poem was reprinted many times and stimulated an outpouring of similar topographical poetry over the next two centuries. Between 1650 and 1841, more than 200 poems either referred to Coopers Hill or borrowed from it (Aubin, 1936).

The topographical poem was an important feature of 17th and 18th century English literature, having its roots in the classics and providing practical and moral instruction. Myra Reynolds identified ten characteristic attitudes towards nature of the classical period including:

- Dislike of the grand, terrible or mysterious in nature (such as mountains, storms, and atmospheric phenomena);
- Delight in gentle, pleasant nature (such as rural England);
- Symmetrical forms in formal gardens;
- Cold and lifeless imitation of classical models;
- An underlying conception of nature as being entirely apart from man and therefore to be treated either as servant or foe (Reynolds, 1909).

By Denham's time, the Italian landscape picturesque was just beginning to be evident in English poetry, and the pictorial contrasts were developed in words more fully over the following two centuries.[4] Many poets adopted images of the paintings of Claude Lorraine and

4. Many authors have examined the treatment of nature in poetry. Some which have examined the themes of landscape in England from the 16th to 19th centuries include the following: Myra Reynolds, 1909. *The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry Between Pope and Wordsworth*.

Salvatore Rosa, seeking to portray in words the sweet serenity of Claude and the melancholy wildness of Rosa (see next section on art and landscape).

In 1644, John Evelyn partially climbed Mounte Pientio in Italy and noted conventionally in his diary of the "heapes of Rocks so strangely congested and broaken ... as would affright one with their horror and menacing postures." Evelyn regarded the Alps as an unpleasant barrier between the "sweet and delicious" gardens of France and Italy. As the translator of Lucretius who described mountains as waste places, when Evelyn reached Lake Maggiore at the foot of the Alps he exceeded Lucretius in his description of the Alps:

> "which now rise as it were suddainly ... as if nature had here swept up the rubbish of the Earth in the Alps, to forme and cleare the Plaines of Lombardy."

A common view was that the 'ugliness' of the mountains could enhance the beauty of man's accomplishments. The Earl of Devonshire's magnificent home, Chatsworth in Derbyshire, was often contrasted with the crags and wild rocks of the grotesque nearby Peak which was even referred to as the "Devil's arse"!

Henry More's *An Antidote against Atheism* (1652), advocated that all nature is designed by God and is therefore good. He argued that mountains are useful for many reasons and reiterated reasons cited from Pliny through to Hakewill. More's argument that "You may deem them (i.e. mountains) *ornaments* as well as *useful*" was little more than a repeat of long held views. Nicolson comments: "Intellectually he was persuaded of the value of mountains, but emotionally he was unmoved by them." More considered variety and diversity to be about ethical matters rather than aesthetic. He also regarded mountains as contributing to the diversity of the world metaphysically, ethically and aesthetically. Without them, the world would be a "languid flat thing." Following Augustine, More was unenthusiastic about irregularity in nature as found in clouds or mountains.

More's statement reflected the prevailing classical view that beauty was based on reason, not emotion. The architect, Sir Christopher Wren, summed it up thus:

> "Beauty is a Harmony of Objects, begetting Pleasure by the Eye.... Geometrical Figures are naturally more beautiful than any other irregular; in this all consent, as to a Law of Nature." (*Tracts on Architecture*)

Up to the 17th century, objective knowledge about mountains was limited. "Genesis governed geology." For example, the heights of mountains were greatly exaggerated, fossils found on mountains were believed to have been deposited by the receding Flood, the water in rivers was thought to ooze out of the mountains, and the analogy of the human body was used to suggest that the mountains comprise the bones of the earth and the rivers its arteries.

In the 1690s, the intrepid Celia Fiennes (1662-1741) rode about England on horseback; her diary comments reflected the prevailing standards of taste. Travelling through the Lake District, an area idolised by later generations, she appeared to have no sense of an aesthetic experience:

> "Looking upward I was as farre from the top which was all Rocks, and something more barren, tho' there was some trees and woods growing in ye Rocks and hanging over all down ye Brow of some of the hills. From these great ffells there are several springs out of

University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 388 pp; J.R. Watson, 1970. *Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry*. Hutchinson Educational, London, 210 pp; J.R. Watson, 1985. *English Poetry of the Romantic Period, 1789 - 1830*. Longman, London, 360 pp. Each of these has extensive bibliographies of further works.

> ye Rocks in the way, when something obstructs their passage and so they come with more violence, that gives a pleaseing (sic) sound and murmuring noise."

Her description gave no sense of the sublime, picturesque or romantic qualities about which latter writers would wax lyrical.

A few years later, Daniel Defoe made a similar tour of the country. Like Fiennes, he clearly "preferred scenes of activity and evidence of man's endeavour than wild uncultivated stretches of country. The natural landscape left them unmoved; at most it made them thankful when they reached civilization once again." (Clark, 1968). Defoe wrote of the "Barren Mountains of Wales", contrasting them against the "pleasant and fruitful" areas nearby. Of the Lake District, Defoe complained of "seeing nothing round me in any places, but unpassable Hills, whose tops, covered with snow, seemed to tell us all the pleasant part of England was at an end." (*A Tour through the whole island of Great Britain,* 1706)

Thomas Burnet's *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681), viewed the present world as inferior to the original - "its gross irregularities and lack of symmetry offended his sense of proportion." Burnet saw that the "first Model ... was drawn in Measure and Proportion by the Line and by the Plummet..." whereas the modern world "...'tis a broken and confus'd Heap of Bodies, plac'd in no Order to one another..." Mountains were one of the major "irregularities" which offended Burnet's sense of decorum: "Upon the ... Globe stand great Heaps of Earth or Stone, which we call Mountains." He contrasted the original pristine earth with the present scarred world in these words:

> "The Face of the Earth before the Deluge was smooth, regular, and uniform; without Mountains, and without a Sea... this smooth Earth … had the Beauty of Youth and blooming Nature, fresh and fruitful, and not a Wrinkle, Scar or Fracture in all its Body; no Rocks nor Mountains, no hollow Caves, nor gaping Channels, even and uniform all over. ... 'Twas suited to a golden Age, and to the first innocency of Nature."

All this was changed with the Deluge. When Noah alighted from the Ark, according to Burnet, he viewed a ruined world, which "Time's comforting hand gradually overlays with healing scars the 'raw and ghastly' wounds of nature." Where previously there had lain "a wide and endless Plain, smooth as the calm sea" now there were "wild, vast and indigested Heaps of Stone and Earth." The mountains stood as the spectacular "Ruins of a broken World", a dismal prospect indeed.

Burnet resurrected the idea of the earth as an egg, but unlike the egg of the ancients, Burnet's was informed by science and based on natural principles. He believed that the heavier parts of the Earth sunk towards the centre and the lighter water and air floated above this. There were two kinds of waters, one "fat, oily and light" and other "more earthy like common Water", the two like "Cream, and thin Milk, Oil and Water". His egg comprised several "Orbs", a world which was not spherical but ovoid, with a solid centre, the yolk where burned the "central Fire", a "Membrane" above, with the earth's surface being the shell and an "Abyss" underneath it. Burnet's egg model provided the answer to the question of the source of the Flood - it was the liquid within which had poured forth.

Interestingly Isaac Newton, in considering Burnet's theory of mountain formation suggested an alternative. He wrote "Milk is a uniform a liquor as the chaos was. If beer be poured into it, and the mixture let stand till it be dry, the surface of the curdled surface will appear as rugged and mountainous as the earth in any place." (*The Correspondence of Isaac Newton*: Volume II, 1676 - 1687) Perhaps the great scientist had visions of God mixing beer and milk in a gigantic vat to form the mountains!

There were other theories about the formation of mountains:

- John Ray - they were "elevated by subterraneous Wild-fire, Flatus (i.e. blowing), or Earthquakes";
- Edmund Halley of comet fame - they were formed by the "Choc" (i.e. collision) of a comet;
- John Beaumont - fermentation "after the manner of leaven in dough";
- Richard Jago - formed on the third day of creation when under the influence of the sun's heat, vapours rose within the earth's crust and with these also rose "rugosities" which hardened in the heat. (Nicolson, 1959)

CHANGE IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS MOUNTAINS

Burnet’s visit to the Alps in 1671 shattered his long cherished notions of proportion, symmetry and order. From a distance the Alps appeared to meet classical expectations but when among them and climbing them he found the "incredible Confusion" appalling:

> "These Mountains are plac'd in no Order one with another, that can either respect Use or Beauty;... There is nothing in Nature more shapeless and ill-figur'd than an old Rock or Mountain ... if you look upon an Heap of them together, or a mountainous Country, they are the greatest Examples of Confusion that we know in Nature." (*Concerning the deluge, and Concerning paradise*, 1684)

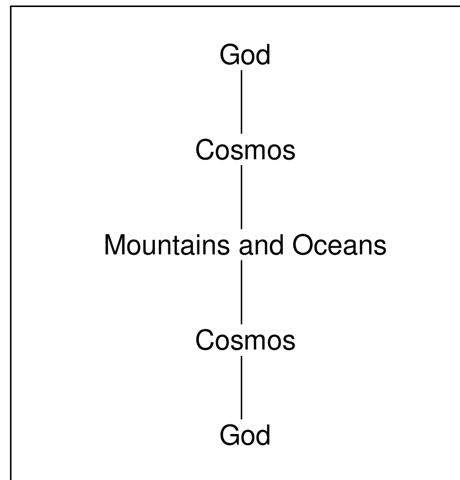
Burnet had commenced writing his Latin version of *A Sacred Theory of the Earth* while in the Alps. He stubbornly refused to accept that the Alps were created by God but they were a "secondary Work, and the best that could be made of broken Materials." Grouping mountains with clouds and stars, Burnet considered that none of them displayed order or proportion. He often wrote that it would have "cost no more" to put these things in "better Order"!

Yet despite his horror at what he saw in the mountains, he also experienced awe and attraction of their vastness, the beginnings of a love/hate response. Together with the cosmos and the oceans, he cited mountains as objects that gave him pleasure because of their sheer immensity: "The greatest Objects of Nature are, methinks, the most pleasing to behold.” He acknowledged their majesty that drew one's mind to the infinite:

> “...as all Things have that are too big for our Comprehension, they fill and overbear the Mind with their Excess, and cast it into a pleasing kind of Stupor and Admiration.”

Burnet sought to rationalise his feelings by distinguishing responses to beauty from responses to vastness, the former to be based on order, symmetry, decorum, reason and restraint; the latter based on grandeur, leading to contemplation of God and infinity. Vastness however carried with it a certain repulsion: “*Vastness* signifies an excessive Greatness.”

Describing this as the “Aesthetics of the Infinite”, Nicolson postulated the model:



From thoughts of God, humans think of the infinitude of the cosmos and then transfer such thoughts to mountains and oceans of the earth. In reverse the mountains and oceans raise one's thoughts to the cosmos and thence to God. Nicolson believed the 17th century discovered what she termed, the "Aesthetics of the Infinite": "Awe, compounded by mingled terror and exultation, once reserved for God, passed over in the seventeenth century first to an expanded cosmos, then from the macrocosm to the greatest objects in the geocosm - mountains, ocean, desert." (Nicolson, 1959) The pleasure derived from nature "lay in the enlargement of the soul to experience more completely the powers, desires, and aspirations given by its great Original, the true Infinite. Shepard (1967) noted a similar transfer of awe from sky spirits to stars and planets and then to earth.

Burnet faced an internal conflict between reason and emotion. On the one hand his training was based on reason:

> "He was taught that the external world reflects some shadow of the first Beauty, that all things in Nature exhibit design and plan, that proportion, relation, correspondence, symmetry are repeated in macrocosm, geocosm, microcosm, that Beauty is consonant with Reason, to be apprehended by the rational faculty." (Nicolson, 1959).

On the Alps, Burnett came face to face with what he termed "Phansy", an early term for "fantasy". The emotions he felt were: "enthusiastic, primitive and violent and as such repellent to a disciple of Reason." He was "both shocked and enthralled" at what he saw. The feelings and words that came to him were those that had legitimately been applied to God and the vastness of space. Now he found himself applying them to mountains.

Burnet's dilemma was a conflict between cognition - his reason and learning, and emotions - what he liked and disliked. As there was no place in his philosophy for beauty to derive from emotional response - he had to rationalise it - he linked it with the response to the Divine.

In his *Sacred Theory*, Burnet was the first to distinguish between the emotional effects of the beautiful and of the sublime in nature. In his lifetime, mountains did not become beautiful but they did become sublime. Importantly his book is one of the first to find that beauty exists, not in external objects (objective approach) but in our subjective response to them, in Burnet's terms, in the "soul" of the man perceiving the object.

Burnet's book raised a hornet's nest with protagonists attacking and supporters defending it. Burnet was regarded on the continent as one of the most important thinkers of his generation. He was quoted by numerous writers, some ranking him with Newton and Descartes. Many books and pamphlets were written supporting, opposing or amplifying Burnet. He made his

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generation "mountain conscious" and led to a new interest in geology. English hills were described as "Burnet mountains" - poets dwelt on the theme of Burnet's mountains as heaps of ruins:

> "Hills pil'd on hills, and rocks together hurl'd;
> Sure, Burnet, these the ruins of thy world."
> Anon, 1743, “The Prospect”, The Gentleman’s Magazine, XIII, p 608. Quoted by Nicholson, 1959, 231.

Burnet's book led to a new aesthetic - the sublime. Nicolson wrote of "an era that went mad over sublimity." Regularity vs. irregularity became a major area of debate with the former being regarded as classical, the latter English. It led to questions of absolute and relative standards of beauty and whether beauty was inherent in the object or in the mind of the viewer.

John Ray's *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (1691) resorted to the conventional utilitarian argument and provided an impressive list of twenty "uses" of mountains, including their role in transforming evaporated salt water from the sea into the fresh water of rain and for the provision of minerals. Ray also expressed his delight in the beauty of mountains, responding directly to Burnet's concept of them as a "Heap of Rubbish and Ruins":

> "I answer, That the present Face of the Earth, with all its Mountains and Hill's, its Promontories and Rockes, so rude and deformed as they appear, seem to me a beautiful and pleasant Object, and with all that Variety of Hills, and Valleys, and Inequalities, far more grateful to behold, than a perfectly level Country without any Rising or Protuberancy to terminate the Sight."

On 5 December, 1692, Richard Bentley’s Boyle Lecture opposed Burnet's thesis. Speaking of mountains, he used the classical and scriptural arguments and was one of the last to describe mountains in such disparaging terms as "Warts and superfluous Excrescences". Steeped in book knowledge, he failed to share Burnet's actual experiences of mountains. However, he did question the classical notion that irregularity equals deformity, arguing that:

> "There is no Universal Reason that a Figure be called Regular, which hath equal Sides and Angles, is absolutely more beautiful than any irregular one."

A mountain that appears perfectly formed from a distance can become a formless mass when viewed nearby (Monk, 1935). Bentley said that the supposed "deformity" was not in Nature but rather was read into Nature: "This objected Deformity is in our Imaginations only, and not really in the things themselves". With these words he, together with Burnet, recognised the subjective element in the appreciation of beauty. The very act of recognising that beauty may be subjectively based, instead of being inherent in the object presupposes a separation of mind and nature that was unlikely to have occurred prior to Descartes. With Burnet and Bentley we see the glimmerings of a new approach which grew to their full flowering in the 18th and 19th centuries, culminating in the works of Hume and Kant.

The trickle that Burnet launched in the late 17th century turned into a flood during the following century as more and more travellers to the Alps experienced the dilemma Burnet faced when attempting to reconcile their cultural upbringing in the classics, the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers with their experiences on the ground.

John Dennis set off to see the Alps in 1688 and experienced what Burnet had experienced. He too returned to write about his experiences (*Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, 1692), developing "an aesthetic that had been only embryonic when he went abroad, to seek for new

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criteria against which to test literature, and to make the first important distinction in English literary criticism between the Sublime and the Beautiful." Although dubbed by "Sir Tremendous Longinus" by Pope and Gray, as though he had assumed the mantle of Longinus[5] in regard to the sublime, Dennis actually went far beyond the Greek rhetorician. Unlike Longinus who focused on the effects of the sublime, Dennis had experienced first-hand the source of the sublime.

Writing to a friend of his journey across the Alps, Dennis used phrases such as "wonders", "astounding prospects", "horrid, hideous ghastly Ruins", "monstrous heaps", "horrour" (sic) joined with harmony", "a view (that) was altogether new and amazing", "a delightful Horrour", "a terrible Joy" (Thorpe, 1935). Dennis's words indicate a mixture of horror and joy, feelings that he considered were inconsistent with reason.

Dennis identified three causes for feelings of the sublime: 1. God, 2. the cosmos, and 3. earthly elements - wind, meteors, the sea, rivers and mountains. These aroused "Enthusiastick Passions" of admiration, terror, horror, joy, sadness and desire. In his frequent use of the word "soul" to describe the seat of emotions about the sublime, Dennis was articulating the result of the "Cartesian shears that had separated 'the world out there' from the 'mind in here' (and) had laid upon thoughtful men a burden of discovering how nature affected the mind and how mind knew nature." (Nicholson, 1959).

Dennis distinguished beauty from the sublime, the former being based on reason, order, regularity, symmetry while the later was the emotional response to objects that create a sense of awe and horror. Dennis regarded the sublime as something quite the opposite of beauty.

Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671 - 1713, born the year of Burnet's revelatory visit to the Alps), was the third Earl of Shaftesbury and a noted philosopher. He visited the Alps in 1686 (i.e. 15 years old) and wrote that the sublime derived from God and, in Nicolson's words, "in the manifestations of Deity in the superabundance and diversity of His cosmic and terrestrial works." Shaftesbury regarded the sublime as the higher, more majestic beauty; it was a power:

> "which naturally captivates the heart, and raises the imagination to an opinion or conceit of something majestic and divine... We cannot help being transported with the thought of it. It inspires us with something more than ordinary, and raises us above ourselves." (*Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*. 1711)

While beauty drew admiration, the sublime evoked a deeper emotion, drawing one closer to God.

Joseph Addison (1672 - 1719) took his tour of the Alps in 1699 and, writing about his observations, quoted from Latin poets but could find few poems of the mountainous areas. Like Burnet he described the mountains as "vast heaps of mountains ... thrown together with such irregularity and confusion." On arrival in Geneva he wrote to a friend:

> "My head is still Giddy with mountains and precipices, and you can't Imagine how much I am pleas'd with the sight of a Plain ..." (quoted by Nicolson, 1959)

While the vastness of the mountains did not affect Addison as it had affected Dennis, he nevertheless felt "an agreeable kind of horror." In describing the "great", Addison focused not on the object but on the "largeness of a whole view":

5. Cassius Longinus (AD 213 - 273) was a Greek philosopher who is purported to have written the book, *On the Sublime*. However the book was first century AD and may have been written by Dionysius.

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> "Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp any thing that is too big for its capacity. We are flung into a pleasing astonishment at such unbounded views, and feel a delightful stillness and amazement in the soul at the apprehension of them." (quoted by Nicolson, 1959)

In describing beauty, Addison conventionally followed the practices of his time - it was characterised by elegancy, decorum, symmetry, proportion and smallness rather than vastness. He wrote:

> "A beautiful prospect delights the soul, as much as a demonstration. We are struck, we know not how, with the symmetry of anything we see, and immediately assent to the beauty of an object…
>
> "There is nothing that makes its way more directly to the soul than beauty, which immediately diffuses a secret satisfaction and complacency through the imagination." (quoted by Nicolson, 1959)

There are inklings of the subjective view in these words. Addison's differentiation of the beautiful and the great were the basis of the important distinction between the sublime and the beautiful that developed in England during the 18th century.

Dennis, Shaftesbury and Addison all viewed the sublime as deriving from vast objects in nature - mountains and oceans, stars and the cosmos - reflecting the glory of Deity. Three distinctive characteristics of the sublime had been defined: firstly the distinction between the sublime and beautiful, secondly that the sublime is a higher beauty, and thirdly an emphasis on the vastness of objects that either God or man have made. On these concepts were based future developments of the sublime.

About 1699, William Nicholls proposed that, though travelling in mountainous areas was dangerous, it could offer aesthetic satisfaction:

> "Those Spectacles which you suppose give *Horror*, strike us rather with an *awful* Reverence; appear, methinks, like *stately Monuments* of the *Magnificence and Grandour* (sic) of their *Author*, and the *weary Traveller* himself at once *pants* and *admires*." (*A Conference with an Atheist*, c1699)

With the new century, mountains were increasingly experienced first-hand as growing numbers of wealthy English made the Grand Tour of Europe, particularly after the Treaties of Utrecht established peace between various European powers in 1713. Experiential knowledge gradually replaced, or at least supplemented, book knowledge. Irregularity in nature, which in the classical sense was detested, came to be appreciated as travellers acknowledged the beauty of mountains and clouds. Natural caves and grottoes had been abhorred but were now of interest, resulting in the proliferation of grottoes in English gardens. A greater tolerance of the different and the unclassical was apparent although the classical influence was still strong.

A curiosity of the era was the significance of colour following the discoveries of Newton's prism. Combined with the growing interest in geology and gemstones, beauty was seen in the colours of the gems and other objects of nature, while light which was regarded as the "effluence of Deity" was considered sublime (Nicolson, 1959). Thus in the early 18th century, colour equalled beauty and light equalled sublime.

Poems about hills became far more common in the 18th century than in the preceding century, although this was due in large measure to the popularity of Denham's poem, "Coopers Hill".

Mountains were no longer the 'warts and wens' and monstrosities of the previous century, but were emerging as significant aesthetic objects and essential parts of a diverse world. This was not fully achieved in the early part of the 18th century and reversals to the old classical position continued. But a major shift in Western attitudes towards mountains had begun and there would be no turning back. Poets writing of the Alps recorded their impressions, not in the "shock/horror" phrases of the 17th century writers but rather in a more objective fashion. James Thomson, a prominent mountain poet, drew on classical images but also wrote of the beauty, the romance, and the terror of mountains.

Bishop Berkeley's descriptions of Italy in 1714 illustrated the love of that land by the English and a more moderate attitude towards mountains: "wonderful variety of hills, vales, ragged rocks, fruitful plains, and barren mountains, all thrown together in a most romantic confusion..." (Letter V from Naples, Oct 22, 1717).

In 1739 the youthful Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray struck out on their Grand Tour, Gray later to be recognised as England's best classical scholar. Visiting Grand Chartreuse, in a passage that many regard as a hallmark of the Romantic Movement, Gray described its psychological effect on him:

> "I do not remember to have gone ten paces without an exclamation that there was no restraining: not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief ...You have death perpetually before your eyes, only so far removed, as to compose the mind without frightening it. One need not have a fantastic imagination to see spirits here at noonday." (Letter to Richard West, November 16, 1739)

Walpole said of Italy "our memory sees more than our eyes in this country", reflecting his classical education (Thomas Gray, Letter to Richard West, May, 1740) and the influence of their 'memories' was also apparent in their journey through the Alps. A thorough grounding in the classics was usual in England at the time. The influence of the sublime, of the picturesque, Italian landscape painting, and of the admiration of the vast, the grand and the wild, were all prominent. The experience of the Alps was to remain with Gray throughout his life. He found the mountains "astonished me beyond expression" and the vast, wild, and irregular enthralled him (Letter to Richard West, November 16, 1739). The influence was apparent in his description of a visit to Scotland in 1765:

> "I am returned from Scotland, charmed with my expedition; it is of the Highlands, I speak; the Lowlands are worth seeing once, but the mountains are ecstatic, and ought to be visited in pilgrimage once a year. None but those monstrous creatures of God know how to join so much beauty with so much horror." (Letter to Rev W. Mason, 1765)

During the 18th century, the prominence given to the vast objects of nature - mountains, oceans, the cosmos - overshadowed the works of man as subjects of poetry. More fundamental changes had also occurred. Geology had replaced Genesis as the explanation of nature, the six days of creation were replaced by "long and leisurely earth processes", and classical and Biblical descriptions of mountains in allegorical terms had made way for descriptions from observation. The horror and abhorrence formerly associated with mountains had disappeared, giving way gradually to a delight and love of mountains.

Travel burgeoned during the 18th century, not only to the Continent on Grand Tours but also throughout Britain. Many books were written of tours undertaken. The gradual establishment of railways and of steamboats on rivers and lakes, particularly in the early 19th century, made travel easier, more popular and common.

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The classic scene of the sublime
Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* 1817, Kunsthalle Hamburg.

Enthusiasm for the picturesque led to a growing appreciation of the Lake District in England in the later quarter of the 18th century by painters, poets and tourists (Manwaring, 1925). "There is a *Rage for the Lakes*, we travel to them, we row upon them, we write about them, and about them" wrote Hester Lynch Piozzi in 1789 (*Journey to the north of England and part of Scotland, Wales etc, 1789*, John Rylands Library, Deansgate Manchester Eng., MS 623) (Andrews, 1989). "Picturesque travel" was aided by guidebooks, such as Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes* in 1778 (which went through seven editions in 20 years), and the identification in these books of stations from which to view picturesque scenes. At Station III, West described the view over Derwentwater:

> "Here is all that is great and pleasing on the lake, all that is grand and sublime in the environs, lie before you in a beautiful order, and natural disposition."

Celia Fiennes recommended visiting the Lakes to cure "the evil itch of over-valuing fforeign (sic) parts". Dr John Brown published a letter about a visit to the Lakes in 1768:

> "On the opposite shore (from Keswick), you will find rocks and cliffs of stupendous height, hanging over the lake in horrible grandeur, the woods climbing up their steep and shaggy sides, where mortal foot never yet approached; on those dreadful heights the eagles built their nests; a variety of waterfalls are seen pouring from their summits, and tumbling in vast sheets from rock to rock in rude and terrible magnificence: while on all sides of this immense amphitheatre the lofty mountains rise round, piercing the clouds in shapes as spiry and fantastic as the rocks of Dovedale. " (*A description of the Lake at Keswick: (and the adjacent country) in Cumberland*).

Brown's letter was a factor in causing Thomas Gray and Arthur Young to visit the Lakes and with the improvement of roads in the area it became a popular place to visit. Young, a farmer, wrote in romantic terms of the Lakes similarly to Brown: "the towering rocks, many of them of terrible size", while Gray viewed them in picturesque terms, with "a certain intimacy of comprehension, a depth of tone which makes his descriptions seem like nineteenth-century

work". Gray viewed the scene as a painter rather than a poet; to him a landscape was more than a picture, it "had sentiment, character, meaning, almost personality". His descriptions of the Lakes helped make it a fashionable place to visit:

> "...the most delicious view, that my eyes ever beheld. Behind you are the magnificent heights of *Walla-crag*; opposite lie the thick hanging woods of Ld (sic) Egremont, and Newland Valley, with green & smiling fields embosom'd in the dark cliffs ... to the left the turbulent chaos of mountain behind mountain roll'd in confusion; beneath you ... the shining purity of the *Lake*, just ruffled by the breeze enough to shew it alive, reflecting rocks, woods, fields, & inverted tops of mountains ..." (Letter to Dr. Thomas Wharton, 1769)

During the 1760s and 1770s Thomas Gray also visited the Wye Valley and parts of the West Country, the Peak District and the Scottish highlands, the principal regions of Britain most visited by enthusiasts of the picturesque. His descriptions had a powerful effect in shaping aesthetic taste and ensuring the popularity of all of these areas - except the Peak which he found ugly, "black, tedious, barren, and not mountainous enough to please one with its horrors".

Rousseau's influence on European attitudes towards mountainous landscapes was also felt. In the 1760s he wrote to a friend about climbing:

> "Upon the top of mountains, the air being subtle and pure, we respire with greater freedom, our bodies are more active, our minds more serene, our pleasures less ardent, and our passions much more moderate. Our meditations acquire a degree of sublimity from the grandeur of the objects around us. It seems as if, being lifted above all human society, we had left every low terrestrial sentiment behind." (*La Nouvelle Heloise*, 1810)

Goethe made his first visit to the Swiss Alps in 1775 but did not come to appreciate them until a later visit in 1779, when he was "the first German poet to fall under the spell of the mountains" (Biese, 1905). He wrote "These sublime, incomparable scenes will remain for ever in my mind" (*The Works of J. W. von Goethe, Volume 12, Letters from Switzerland, Part I*) and described the mountains across Lake Geneva "The view was so great, man's eyes could not grasp it" (Ibid). He described the effect the mountains had on him:

> "The passage through this defile roused in me a grand but calm emotion. The sublime produces a beautiful calmness in the soul, which, entirely possessed by it, feels as great as it ever can feel. How glorious is such a pure feeling, when it rises to the very highest without overflowing. .... When we see such objects as these for the first time, the unaccustomed soul has to expand itself, and this gives rise to a sort of painful joy, an overflowing of emotion which agitates the mind and draws from us the most delicious tears ..." (*Letters from Switzerland*)

Increasingly during the 18th century, travellers experienced the European Alps with attitudes "diametrically opposed to those of Burnet and Dennis" (Nicolson, 1959). By the 1760s, Rousseau had "the ear of Europe and (was telling them) of the beauties and subtlities of Alpine scenery" (Monk, 1935). Armed with guidebooks travellers sought the experiences of sublimity. In 1785 a *Guide to Travelling in the Harz* was published and in 1806, a *Guide to Switzerland* appeared. Pinkerton's *Catalogue of Voyages and Travels* in 1814 identified 360 guidebooks, 276 being for travel on the Continent (Reynolds, 1909).

Writers and poets of the 19th century were interested in the geology of the mountains and features such as caves and chasms which were "symbols of the secret places in the soul of man" (Nicholson, 1959). They delighted in natural extreme events such as storms, avalanches, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. While 17th century poets were self-

conscious about space and 18th century poets self-conscious about time, the Romantic poets of the 19th century were comfortable with notions of both infinity and eternity. Writers of Burnet, Dennis and Addison's time distinguished clearly the sublime and the beautiful but by the time of the Romantics this distinction was no longer apparent. Shelley (1792-1822) had a vastly different impression of Mont Blanc from his predecessors:

> "Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,
> Mont Blanc appears, - still, snowy and serene." (*Mont Blanc*, 1817)

William Wordsworth expressed himself across the range of emotions about mountains. The Alps he found overwhelming and unstable, but the mountains of the English Lake District he found stable and permanent, a "tranquil sublimity":

> "... the brook itself,
> Old as the hills that feed it from afar,
> Doth rather deepen than disturb the calm
> Where all things else are still and motionless." (*Airey-Force Valley*, 1842)

Wordsworth's subjectivity, focusing on the influences of an object on the mind, has been likened to the philosopher, Kant whose *Critique of Judgement* has a similar point of view to Wordsworth's *Prelude* (Monk, 1935).

In the 20th century, a review of English landscape tastes in the post-war period failed to include mountainous landscapes among the categories identified (Lowenthal & Prince, 1965; see also Lowenthal, 1978).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Table 1 Summary of Significant Findings: Attitudes to Mountains

Period	Findings
Early Christian era to mid 17th century	Mountains did not meet classical principles of regularity, harmony, symmetry and proportion and therefore considered not to have been created by God. Mountains described in very negative terms. Regarded as ugly, evil, useless places, indicative of decay and of Man's fallen state.
Mid 17th century to late 19th century	Recognition of utility of mountains (More, 1652; Ray, 1691) Experienced awe and terror in mountains; identification of sublime (Burnet, 1681) Development of concept of sublime (Dennis, 1688; Shaftesbury, 1686; Addison, 1710; Burke, 1757; Kant, 1764, 1790) Aesthetics of the Infinite, late 17thc-early 18thc. Cosmos, oceans, mountains. Recognition of beauty of mountains (Ray, 1691; Nicolls, 1699; Berkeley, 1714; Gray, 1765; Gilpin, 1770) Profound psychological effect of mountains - Romanticism (Gray/Walpole, 1739; Rousseau, 1760; Goethe, 1775; Wordsworth, early 19th c.) Grand Tour, 18th c; Tours of sublime early 18th c; tours of mountainous areas 18th c; tours of picturesque, late 18th c.; Publication of guidebooks.

Western cultural attitudes to mountains derived originally from classical and scriptural origins, the former defining what was acceptable and which, from a scriptural view, established what was "good" and hence of Divine origin, it being axiomatic that God would not create anything that was not good. Because mountains did not fit into the classical definition of beauty, being irregular, asymmetric and without due restraint, it followed that they were loathsome and to be despised. Based on human analogy, mountains were regarded as excrescences and blisters, marring the earth's beauty. To cap it off they were also regarded as largely useless,

unproductive and barren. Many accounts of mountains by travellers over the centuries spoke of them as monstrosities and terror-filled places.

Then through travellers' first-hand experience of mountains, a change occurred in the late 17th century as they encountered both the terror of mountains and a sense of awe and attraction to their vastness. Feelings that had been reserved for God were applied to earthly elements such as mountains. These feelings aroused by vast objects were called sublime and were distinguished from the classical notions that defined beauty in terms of regularity, proportion, symmetry and restraint. Experiential learning displaced book learning.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, many English experienced mountains for themselves, initially experiencing them first hand as “a delightful Horrour” and “a terrible Joy” but as improved roads and later railways overcame the terrors of travelling, began to enjoy them as beautiful and delightful in their own right. Mountains became a favourite subject of writers and poets and with the understanding provided by geology and other natural sciences, the mythologies attached to mountains evaporated.

The history of Western culture's perception of mountains is testimony to a revolutionary shift in perception - in Marjorie Hope Nicolson's words “one of the most profound revolutions in thought that has ever occurred.” While she focussed on the change from viewing mountains as excrescences and warts that marred the beauty of the earth to viewing them as places of sublimity, the revolutionary shift is more than this. It also marked the shift from an objective to a subjective approach to aesthetics.

For centuries it was taken as self-evident that mountains were monstrous “horrours” and while such descriptions were merely the adjectives applied by the mind, they were regarded as objective descriptions of mountains. The Cartesian shears separated what was out there from what was in here. With Burke, Kant and other philosophers came the realisation, brought into stark clarity by the concept of the sublime that these descriptions were essentially subjective, and did not exist outside the mind. While humans thought they were objectively describing the mountains as excrescences, these descriptions were merely subjective tags.

The example of mountain aesthetics also provides a case study into the influence of cultural norms and expectations in shaping individual perceptions. Throughout history, up to the time of Burnett and with very few exceptions, the ruling cultural paradigm that had been derived from classicism and Scripture, defined the individual's view of mountains. The cultural paradigm created a womb-like enclosure, cutting off the individual from other influences and ensuring conformity of the individual to this paradigm. The individual's view of mountains is thus based, not on objective fact, but on the image provided by one's cultural blinkers. It takes a courageous individual to break out of this mould, to re-define what this paradigm should be.

The ruling cultural paradigm today, at least in the West, is that mountains are spectacular, beautiful, awesome places. The abundance of picture books, calendars, paintings and articles and stories of them and the many tourists, walkers and climbers who visit them attests to this. It would be incomprehensible for someone to describe such areas in the terms used 350 years ago. The cultural paradigm shapes the individual perceptions and can provide either a negative or a positive context for individual perceptions.

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