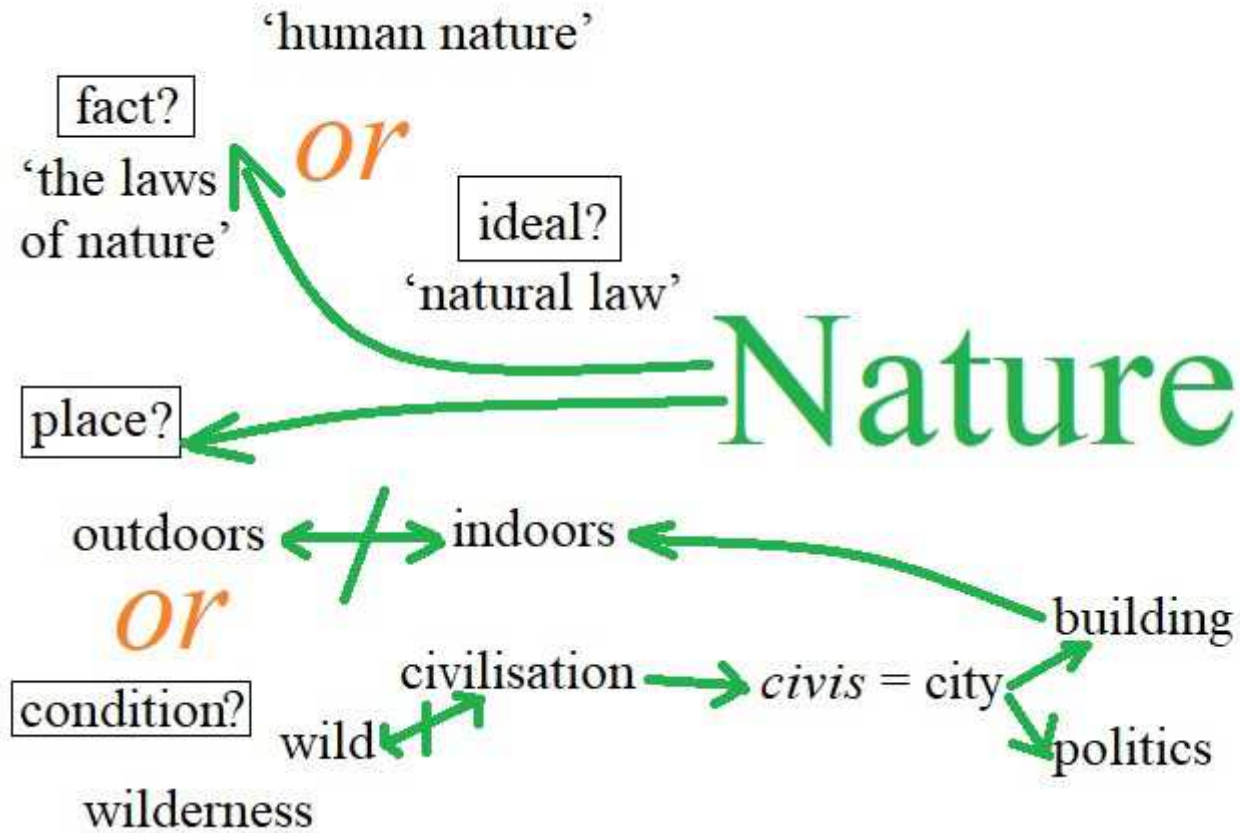




1. Religious landscapes / Landscape religion

1.1. Medieval sacred landscapes

In the Middle Ages, the British worshipped *loca sacra* / shrines, which they interpreted as signs of divine presence.

Typically, a particular feature of the landscape (the odd shape of a tree or rock, the presence of a spring, a rocking stone...) was attributed to God (or... to the devil) or related to the legend of a saint.

In a time when few people could read and laypeople were not allowed to read the Bible, the landscape was thus a book where divinity lessons were written (orally, by oral tradition) and could be read by anyone.

Shrines, churches and abbeys were built near these sacred spots.

People often travelled to these privileged spots, especially wells and springs, for healing, thus Christianising time-honoured pagan beliefs and practices.



Holywell (Wales) is named after a spring associated with St Winefride's legend.
The tents on the right are for bathers to change in.

- This vision of the landscape did not differentiate between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ in the way we do.
 - The perception of traces of human activity in the landscape was different to what it is now.



Swinside

For instance, many people believed stone circles (as well as menhirs, etc.) dated back to Creation. Thus they considered them ‘natural’ in that they did not think they were any more man-made than the hills, but from their creationist point of view that meant that they had been placed there by God.

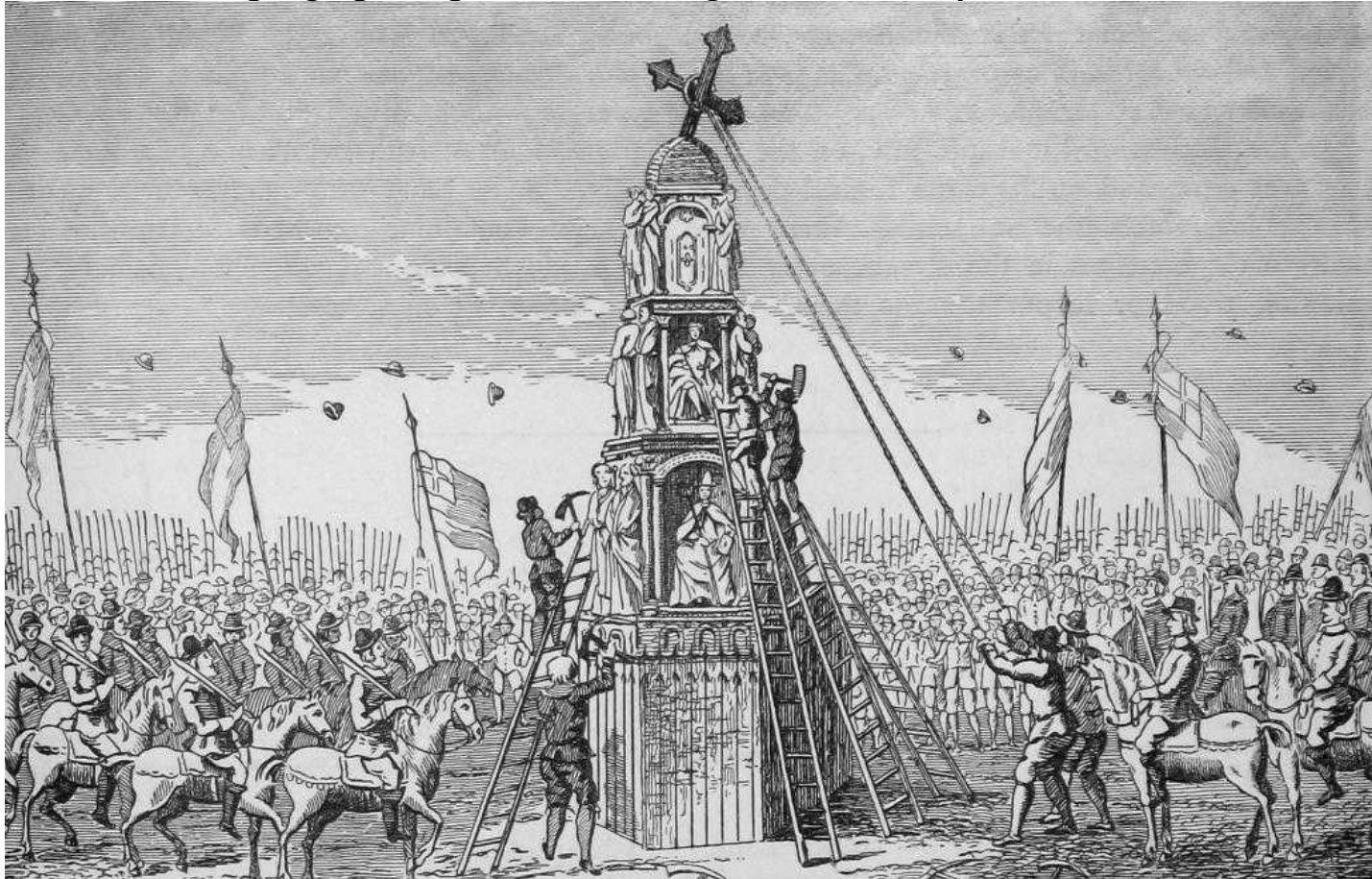


All Saints Church in Rudston (Yorkshire) was built next to a monolith, considered not a pre-Christian, therefore pagan, monument but a sign planted by God when he made the world.

People did not just *perceive* divine presence in the landscape, they also *made* the landscape sacred by erecting free-standing crosses.

1.2. The Reformation of the landscape

Protestant Reformers fought pilgrimages to 'sacred' spots, which they considered heathen and idolatrous.



Demolition of Cheapside cross (1643)

Reformers sought to eradicate the worship of saints (deemed by them polytheistic) and practises which particularised God's presence in a specific object or place (which to them amounted to idolatry).



About 1650, Cromwellians toppled the rocking stone of Men Amber (Cornwall), associated with superstition and royalism. Other rocking stones underwent the same fate.

By destroying shrines, but also crosses (which many Protestants consider idolatrous), reformers paradoxically secularised the landscape in the name of religion.

Gradually, holy springs were replaced by thermal spas (e.g. Tunbridge Wells).

People still saw divine agency in the natural environment, but as a general providential scheme rather than through special decrees (e.g. the medicinal virtues of thermal spas).

On the whole, however, landscapes began to be looked at for their own beauty.

2. Aesthetic landscapes / Landscape aesthetics

2.1. The pastoral

Classical Greek and Latin pastoral poems and novels showed the simple lifestyle of shepherds as the best.

This genre relies on:

- idealisation: nature and civilisation are envisioned as ideals rather than realities
- the belief that history is a downward movement: things used to be better than they are now
 - a rejection of technology and politics

After the Renaissance rediscovery of the Classics, the pastoral resurfaced.

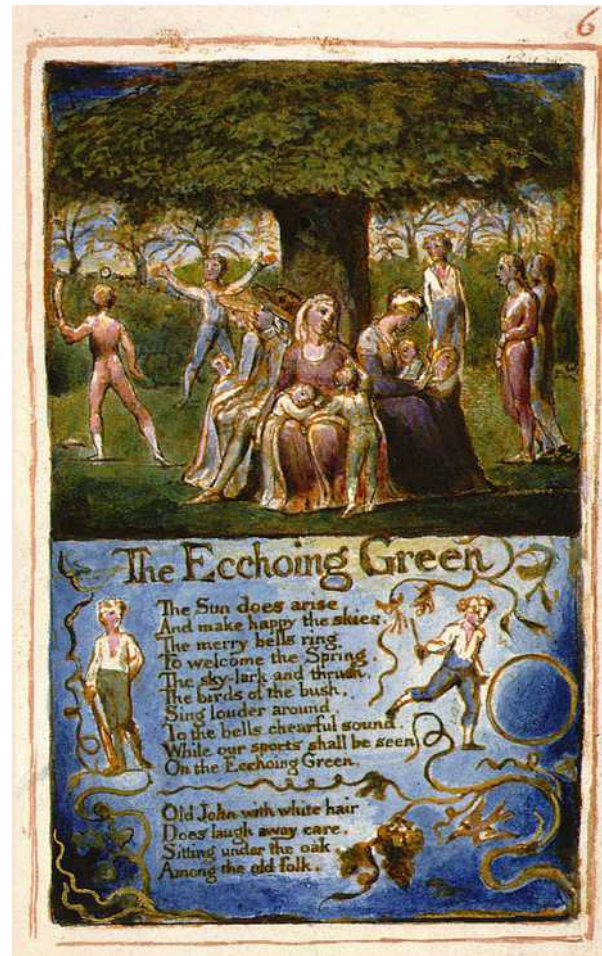
See Marlowe's poem and Raleigh's page 7 of your poetry booklet.

Marlowe paints an enchanted picture of life in nature, in line with the pastoral tradition, which Raleigh debunks as naive idealisation.

The influence of the pastoral can also be seen in the forest scenes of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (c. 1601).

Between 1789 and 1794, poet and engraver *William Blake* created two collections of poems collectively entitled ***Songs of Innocence and of Experience Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul***.

→ Like Rousseau with his ‘noble savage’, Blake rejected the Christian doctrine of original sin and borrowed from the pastoral genre to illustrate (verbally and visually) the native, prelapsarian condition of mankind. Thus his representation of nature fuses the pagan pastoral with the biblical image of the Garden of Eden.



Romanticism and nature

A few years after Blake, a key figure in the English **Romantic** movement placed nature at the centre of his writings: **William Wordsworth**.

Remember his poem 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'.

His long autobiographical poem *The Prelude* deals with identity, a major Romantic theme, by linking it to nature:

the story of his life is the story of the development of his identity and of his creativity as a poet, which are shaped by his contact with nature.

Later Romantics were influenced by Wordsworth and continued his interest in nature, although in sometimes more disturbing ways: think of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

The art critic **John Ruskin** (1819-1900) argued that all good art was connected to nature: 'The teaching of nature is as varied and infinite as it is constant; and the duty of the painter is to watch for every one of her lessons [...].'

'All really great pictures, therefore, exhibit the general habits of nature, manifested in some peculiar, rare, and beautiful way.'

Modern Painters, 1843-1860

2.2. The art of the outdoors: gardens

The **Italian Renaissance garden** aimed at pleasant and surprising sensations (visual, auditory, olfactive) achieved through formal design (geometrical composition) and ornaments such as statues, fountains, grottoes, waterworks...

In keeping with the neo-classical dimension of the Renaissance, it included mythological references. The Renaissance garden evolved into the parterres of the seventeenth-century **French classical garden**.



Kensington Palace and its grounds in 1724



Gardener John Rose presents King Charles II with a pineapple (c.1675).

Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown (c. 1716-1783) developed the **English landscape garden**.

- Whereas the seventeenth-century formal garden (French garden) exemplified man’s domestication and civilisation of nature, the English landscape garden cultivated the ‘natural look’ by emphasising large lawns punctuated by groves of trees and imitations of classical temples, medieval ruins, obelisks, etc.
 - Straight lines, flat surfaces and symmetrical composition were deliberately avoided.
- The fashion of the landscape garden also mirrored an interest in ‘nature’, ‘natural’, ‘rural’, ‘sublime’ spots. Travellers started looking for wild locations: the Scottish Highlands or the Swiss Alps.



The grounds of Blenheim Palace, improved by Capability Brown

Although the overall composition of the English garden is the antithesis of the French garden, it is also descended from the Italian garden in that it hinges on pleasant and surprising features.



The lake at Bowood House with the Doric temple (Capability Brown)

A major difference between French and English gardens concerns **point of view**:

The geometric composition of the French garden can only be seen and appreciated from one privileged spot (especially if forced **perspective** has been used in the design), from where its overall layout can be seen **at once**.

The English landscape garden incorporates several interesting points of view which the viewer discovers successively by walking through the garden.

The English garden may therefore be seen as a **chronological composition**, which unfolds in time like a narrative.

The differences between French and English gardens also mirror political ideologies:

The geometrical design of the French garden and the fact that it is designed to be seen from one privileged point of view iconify monarchical **absolutism** and **centralism**.

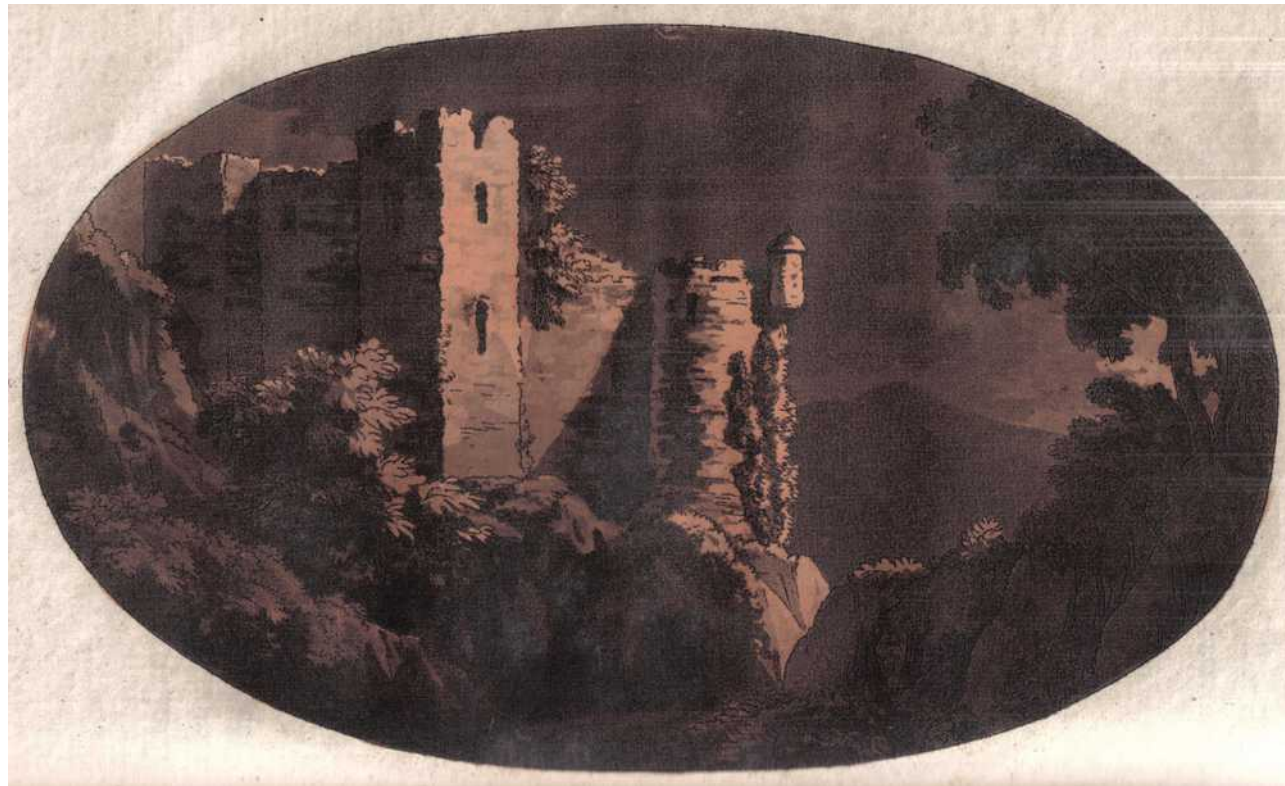
In 1688's Glorious Revolution (ousting of James VII and II and accession of William II and Mary), Britain had rejected absolutism, defending a **decentralised** governance and the role of Parliament.

“The grounds about the house were laid out in the old formal manner of artificial flower beds, clipped shrubberies, raised terraces, with heavy stone balustrades, ornamented with urns, a leaden statue or two, and a jet of water. The old gentleman, I was told, was extremely careful to preserve this obsolete finery in all its original state. He admired this fashion in gardening; it had an air of magnificence, was courtly and noble, and befitting good old family style. The boasted imitation of nature in modern gardening had sprung up with modern republican notions, but did not suit a monarchical government; it smacked of the levelling system.”

Washington Irving, “Christmas Eve” in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, 1819

The development of the English landscape garden was concomitant with the introduction of the notion of the **picturesque** by **William Gilpin** in 1768, reminding one that although nature was one major inspiration, another was the pictures of Claude Gellée (Le Lorrain).

‘A ruin is a sacred thing. Rooted for ages in the soil; assimilated to it; and become, as it were, a part of it; we consider it as a work of nature, rather than of art. Art cannot reach it.’ (William Gilpin, 1786)



Penrith Castle in 1772, as seen by Gilpin

‘Natural’ etymologically means ‘native’.

If ruins *become natural*, do they transcend an entropic (irreversible) process?

2.3. Landscape painting

2.3.1. The birth of British landscape painting

Landscape painting was introduced to England by Anton Van Dyck (the Flemish Stuart court painter) and other foreign artists.

However, it still took nearly two centuries for the genre to take root in England.

Until then, landscape was background for portraits.

Artists and audiences still adhered to traditional genre theories according to which landscape painting was an inferior form of art. Painters did not want to be thought of as landscape painters.

Thus, Capability Brown and other landscape gardeners were not inspired by national artists but foreign ones, especially Claude Gellée (Le Lorrain).

Then, in the course of the eighteenth century, a British school of landscape painting developed, in watercolour on paper, and in oil on canvas.

The subjects, however, were more often European (Swiss and Italian) than British.

Landscape painting gained prominence and artistic legitimacy with the Romantic movement.

‘The true ideal of landscape is precisely the same as that of the human form; it is the expression of the specific—not the individual, but the specific—characters of every object, in their perfection.’ (Ruskin, *Modern Painters*)



Landscape in Suffolk, c. 1748, Thomas Gainsborough



Lake of Vico, watercolour, c. 1783, John Robert Cozens (1752-1797)



An Unfinished View of the West Gate, Canterbury, 1780-85, by Paul Sandby



The Park at Petworth House, c. 1830, J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851)

Petworth Park was landscaped by Capability Brown.

‘Turner alone has followed nature in her highest efforts; he follows her faithfully, but far behind.’ (Ruskin, *Modern Painters*)



Wivenhoe Park, 1816, John Constable (1776-1837)

Landscape painting offered artists a way to engage with identity:



Stonehenge, 1835, Constable

The prehistoric site seems to confront the British with a mysterious, forgotten, aspect of their own identity.



Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Northern Railway, 1844, Turner
‘Nature is always mysterious and secret in her use of means; and art is always likest her when it is most inexplicable.’ (Ruskin, *Modern Painters*)

2.3.2. The landscapes of the New World

In the nineteenth century, there was a growing sense that industrialisation and technical progress was taking nature out of Britain's visible environment (see *Rain, Steam and Speed*).

In contrast, the New World was considered a place where man lived in contact with nature.

The English-born artist Thomas Cole (1801-1848) is considered the founder of the Hudson River School.



The Oxbow (The Connecticut River near Northampton), 1836

In the early years of the twentieth century, Canadian artists founded a national school of painting which reflected a specifically North American culture, where the presence of nature was a central experience.



Odds and Ends, 1939, Emily Carr (1871-1945)
In 1920, Canadian artists created the Group of Seven.

At the turn of the twentieth century, many people felt that traditional established religion had lost its power to organise society and individuals.

To regenerate man and society, they turned to ancient cultures, non-European spirituality, paganism, art, and nature. Some formed small communities.

The American painter **Georgia O'Keeffe** (1887-1986) went to live in New Mexico where she painted abstract landscapes in vibrant colours.



Lake George Reflection, 1921-1922

2.4. Land art

In the 1960s and 1970s, some artists who rejected commercial art and museums and galleries decided to create site-specific artworks, which were not movable and therefore could hardly be turned into commodities. Land artists are interested in space and environment. By creating artworks on a scale much larger than a human being, they transform or create a landscape or an environment.



Time Landscape, Alan Sonfist, New York City: between 1965 and 1978, the artist planted indigenous trees on a plot of land.



Spiral Jetty, Robert Smithson, Great Salt Lake, 1970

3. From political landscapes to landscape politics

3.1. Transformation of rural landscapes in England and Wales in the modern era: enclosure



Gloucestershire

This picture shows two historical layers:
The fields have been enclosed with hedges but the medieval strips are still visible.



In the Middle Ages, under the open field system, peasants cultivated strips of common land. From the end of the Middle Ages on, landowners enclosed plots of land to privatise their use.

3.2. The American frontier (1600-1910)

Remember the extract from The Scarlet Letter we have studied.

Part of the United States' 'manifest destiny' was thought to be domestication / civilisation of the American continent.

Westward expansion entailed two representations:

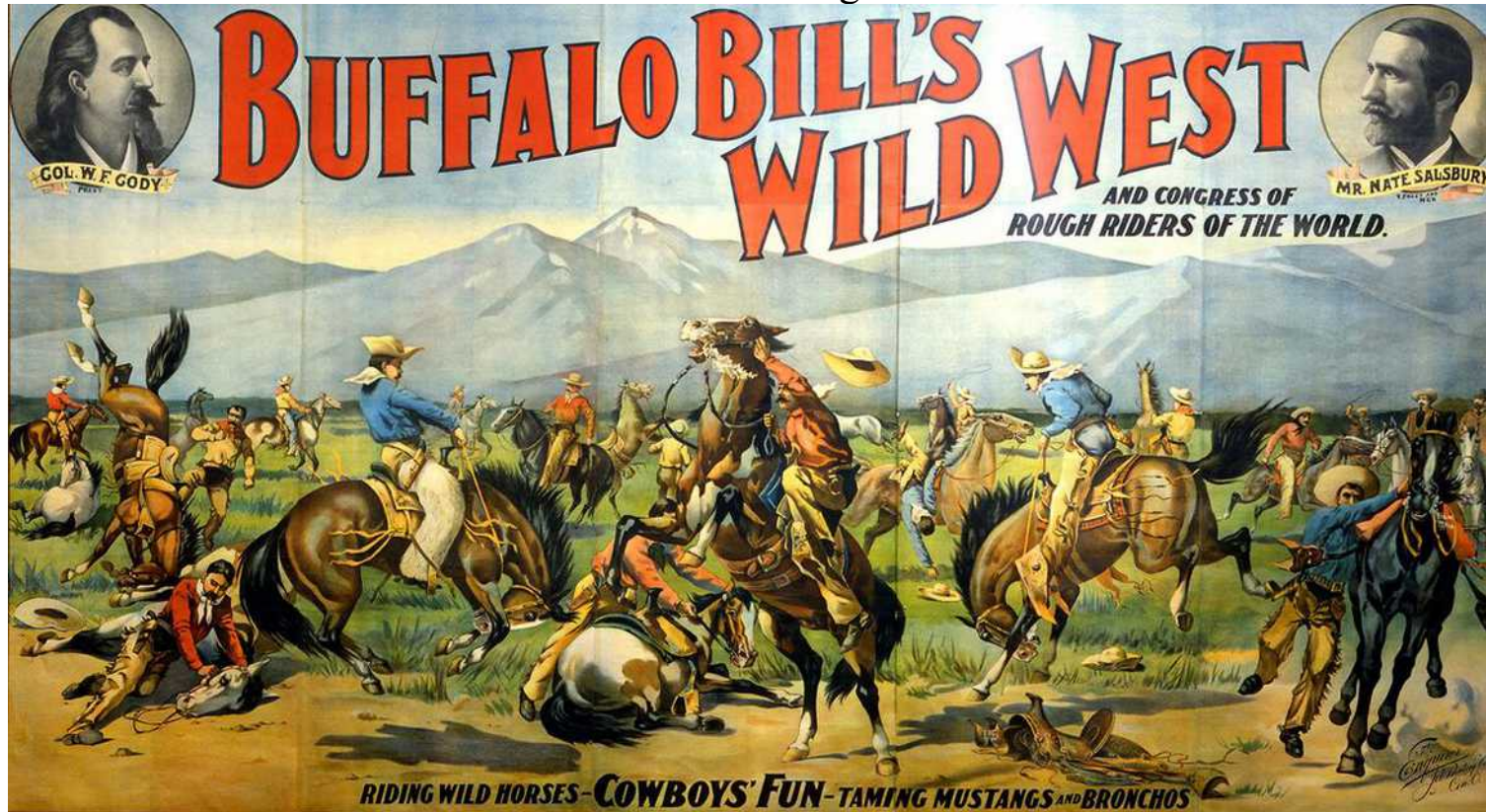
- **the Wild West:** the part of the continent that was not (yet) civilised
 - **the frontier:** the limit between land settled by Europeans and wilderness – that limit being one that was moving from east to west
- Nature is at the heart of American culture, but in an ambivalent way:
- an idyllic environment where man can improve himself?
 - a chaotic 'given' that man must improve?



American Progress, John Gast, 1872

From the early 1870s on, life on the frontier was dramatised in a new popular theatrical genre known as the Wild West show.

The best-known of these is the touring Buffalo Bill's Wild West.



In a key scene, BBWW re-enacted Custer's Last Stand. True to historical fact, General Custer and all his men were killed. Buffalo Bill would ride in, too late to save them, but not too late to avenge them by killing and scalping the Indian chieftain: an ambiguous narrative of the conflict between 'wilderness' and 'civilisation'.



Siegel, Cooper & Co.
Chicago.

3.3. Redeeming civilisation

In 1854, the American writer **Henry David Thoreau** published *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, in which he narrated how, after being jailed because he had refused to pay a tax to the state as long as it allowed slavery, he spent two years in a cabin by Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts.

He describes this experience as a regenerating one.



Walden shares characteristics with the pastoral:

- it idealises nature;
- it relates nature to politics ambiguously: nature plays a political role since it redeems society and the city although, and even because, it transcends politics.

The location of Thoreau's cabin marked by a cairn (1908).

The land where Thoreau built his cabin belonged to the American transcendentalist philosopher **Ralph Waldo Emerson**.

Thoreau had been influenced by *Nature*, an essay published by Emerson in 1836.

Emerson believed that God spoke to mankind not only through scripture but also through nature. Man should unite with nature and, in order to achieve this, immerse himself in the observation of nature to the point of self-forgetfulness: man should become a 'transparent eyeball'.



drawing by Christopher Pearse Cranch

Reminder: At the turn of the twentieth century, some intellectuals and artists sought to regenerate man and society by turning to ancient cultures, non-European spirituality, paganism, art, and nature.

The **scouting movement** developed at the beginning of the twentieth century. It aimed (and still aims) to educate and socialise the individual through communal experience and contact with nature.

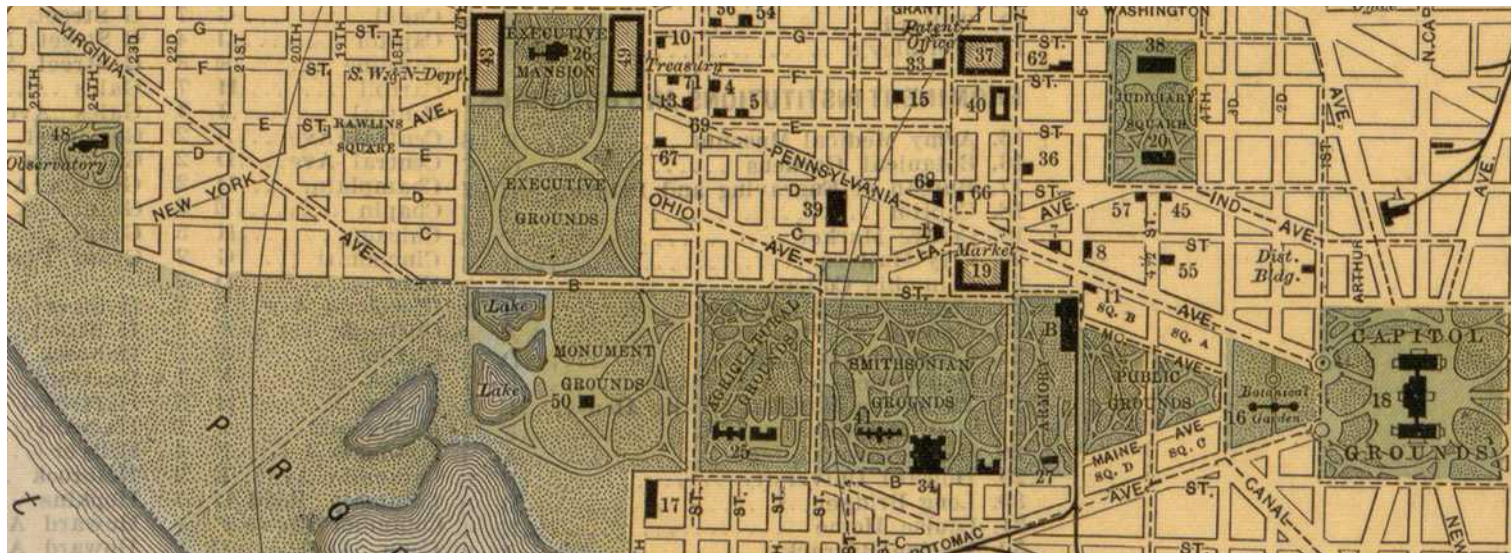
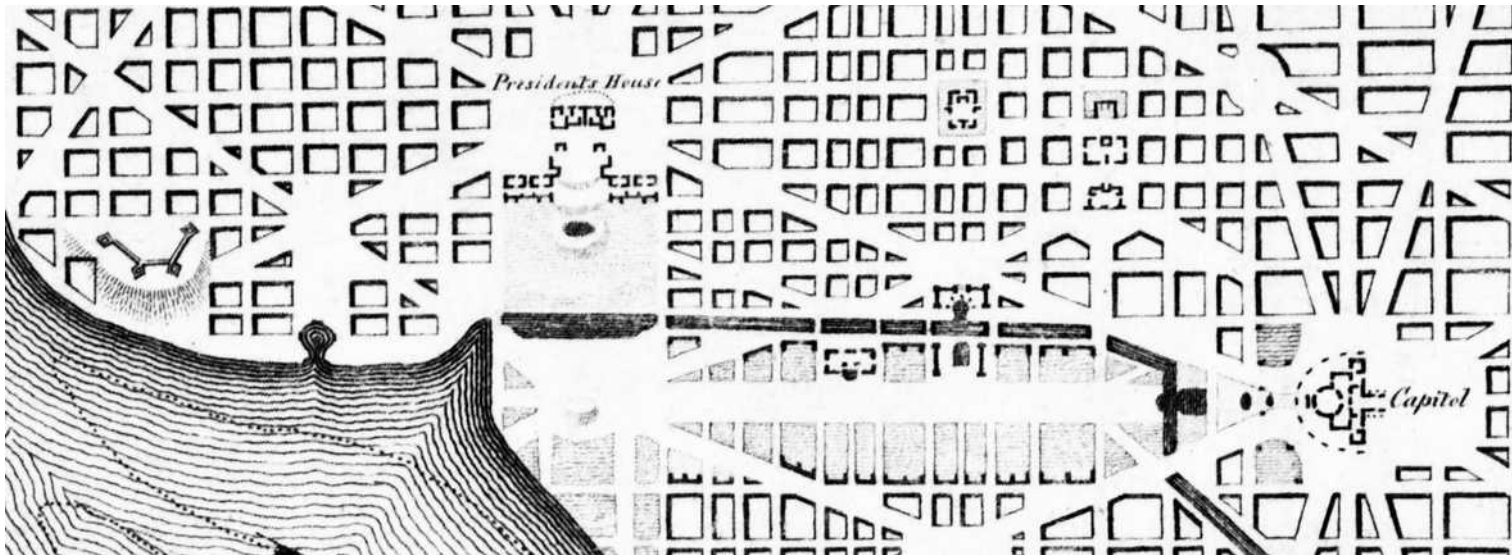
Pictures of members of the Kibbo Kift Kindred, an English scouting movement (1920-1935).



3.4. Democratic landscape gardens: the Park Movement

Pierre L'Enfant's 1791 plan for Washington (below) was not wholly realised. Among others, his one-mile avenue west of the Capitol (now called the National Mall) was not constructed.

In 1851 **Andrew Jackson Downing** designed a series of four landscape gardens (below: the Mall in 1893).



Calvert Vaux and **Frederick Law Olmsted** designed numerous public parks, including New York's Central Park. They applied the aesthetic principles of the English landscape garden to *public* spaces (Olmsted insisted they should remain so), bringing the soothing influence of nature to city dwellers of all social classes. They designed and developed park systems: networks of parks and gardens connected by thoroughfares.



3.5. Conservation

Just as the conquest of the American territory was nearing completion, the awareness that the natural environment was worth preserving and was threatened by human activity appeared.

Nature was no longer just seen as a raw material given by God to man so that man should use and improve it.

Naturalist and writer **John Muir** (1838-1914) was an early advocate of conservation.

Political instruments to protect areas were created:

- President Ulysses S. Grant designated the first **national park**: Yellowstone, in 1872.
In 1916, the National Park Service was created.
- In 1891, the **national forest** system was created.
- In 1906, President **Theodore Roosevelt** signed into law the Antiquities Act which allows the President of the United States to designate **national monuments**.

National monuments include natural locations as well as artifacts (Native American ruins, the Statue of Liberty...).

The word ‘monument’ comes from the Latin ‘monumentum’ (memorial), itself from ‘moneo’ (‘remind’), itself from the Indo-European root ‘men-’ (‘think’).

Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir



In 1989, the British Conservative government launched 'Roads for Prosperity', which it advertised as 'Britain's biggest road building programme since the Romans'.

This slogan glances at the equation between 'Rome' and 'civilisation'.

For the Romans, nature meant chaos and civilisation meant the exclusion of nature.

By contrast, environmentally-minded protestors often claim the heritage of a pagan spirituality tracing its roots to Celtic culture (Druidic revival) or even neolithic civilisation.



Protesting the construction of the Newbury bypass (1996)

Native Americans protesting the building of a pipeline in North Dakota (2016)



For Native Americans, the protection of the landscape is inseparable from the defense of their cultural identity and their collective rights as a people.

In 2016, campaigners protested the erection of forty-seven-metre high electrical pylons ten metres outside the Lake District National Park.



Arguments against the pylons have focused on the ‘natural beauty’ of the place but also William Wordsworth’s poems inspired by it, as if those poems were *in situ* artworks and building pylons could disfigure or destroy the poems themselves: it is possible to see artworks in a specific place even when there is no tangible artifact there.

Where and what is the monument? Is it the poem or the landscape?