

## LANDSCAPE DESIGN AND DRAWING IN

### *THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT:*

#### PEEPHOLES TO AN AGE

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Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* begins with various apparently unconnected scenes from which we gather that a young artist is to be commissioned to draw several pictures of a property during its owner's absence. The plot then shows the process of execution of these drawings while it also dwells on the relationship between the characters in the story. Although much information about contemporary issues is disclosed in the dialogues, one of the most striking features about the film is how much more our knowledge about the times is broadened if close attention is paid to the landscape and to remarks made by characters about gardens, garden elements or garden produce.

The purpose of this essay will therefore be to relate these motifs to main historical points by concentrating first, on the mise-en-scene, then on trees and fruits as part and produce of this mise-en-scene, and thirdly, on the actual drawings of the property and thus determine how much the insight into the times in *The Draughtsman's Contract* accords to the period.

Although the term landscape design includes such skills as site planning, land planning, urban design and environmental planning, it will be generally agreed that gardens, as vegetated green spaces on natural ground, are probably the most common example of landscape architecture.

Gardens, as architecturally-built ornamental grounds, are the result of the scientific planning and the harmonious blending of natural materials (earth, water and plants), and construction materials such as concrete, stone, wood, metal or glass. If this is correct, then it may safely be argued that garden and landscape design is concerned with direct relations between art, science and nature. Nature is invariably understood as meaning the whole world or simply scenery untouched by man, but art and science are the result of human

activity. Consequently, if garden and landscape design is the outcome of human activity upon Nature, it follows that it is also largely determined by one or other of the conflicting philosophies about how Man should relate to Nature.

Gardens and the produce of gardens represent an apparently discreet but all-pervading theme in *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Close attention to the opening section of the film will reveal that every time a character appears on screen he or she either refers directly to a garden, its fruits or trees (plums, plum-wood, a drive of orange-trees), or itemizes some component of garden architecture like water and stone, or even artificial elements of decoration such as water-cascades. If no direct allusion is made to gardens then the shot shows the actors speaking from behind a bowl of fruit as in the scene when Mrs Talmann convinces her mother to surprise the artist into a deal, or it shows the character eating fruit: while savouring a plum, Mr Neville describes his potential for controlling the jealousy of husbands by painting their wives dressed or undressed. Again, Mr Herbert's preferential order of things in life is clearly stated: "A house, a garden, a horse, a wife," while even time is calculated in terms of crop yielding: Mr Neville at first declines the offer made to him by Mrs Herbert by adducing that he will be occupied "this apple season until next year's apples have all been drunk as cider." Finally, the film closes with a pine-apple as a prominent allegorical element in the dramatic denouement.

The story of *The Draughtsman's Contract* is set at the end of the seventeenth century. During the introductory part of the film, a lady in the company recalls the amount of water in her father's garden and the stores of buckets kept, some thirty years beforehand, by her father in case of fire. Her witty account represents a muffled evocation of the Great Fire of London of 1666 — a deplorable event that caused up to thirteen-thousand houses and eighty-seven churches (Halliday, 1968: 166) to be destroyed but which indirectly, when the rebuilding began, produced men of the calibre of Sir Christopher Wren.<sup>1</sup> The date 1694 provides another, and this time precise, indication as to the temporal setting of the story.

Since the first contract binds the artist, Mr Neville, to produce twelve drawings of Mr Herbert's house and property within two weeks, logically, much of the action, or at least, many of the scenes in the film correspond to the spots selected by the draughtsman for the realization of his drawings. Consequently, the spectator is taken from one to another of the chosen sites within the garden and surrounding grounds. What, we may ask ourselves, does the view of the property reveal about the times?

First of all, it is important to stress the fact that gardens, as land-areas important to visual experience, with or without utilitarian functions, were still by the seventeenth-century a fairly recent phenomenon. During the middle ages, security and leisure had existed only in the monastic system. Consequently, for some time, the only type of garden was the cloister, with its well, herbs, pot plants, and shaded walk. Then, during the fourteenth century, secular gardens began to appear, but they were usually of limited extent, confined within the fortifications of a castle and often raised well above ground level. These Gothic gardens were rectangular, with the traditional division into four parts by paths. At the point of principal intersection there was usually a well, which, when elaborated, became the central feature of the garden.

The first major change came in the fifteenth century, when the increasing prosperity of Western Europe and man's increasing confidence in himself and his capacity to impose order on the external world was reflected in the gardens, first of Italy, where the old medieval enclosures began to open up, and then in the rest of Europe. As the century unfolded, dwellings were increasingly built for amenity rather than defence, and subsequently gardens became less enclosed and more susceptible first to visual, then to actual extension. However, even when the necessity for security was becoming less imperative, the feeling remained that any garth, or garden, needed a wall, or hedge, as a frame (Quennell 1933: 42). Hence, although larger in extension, gardens were still limited in size. Apart from that, the main ingredient of the Renaissance garden was its coordination with the building. In other words, gardens were seen as the "clothing" of houses. Since the houses had a certain square hardness about them, unity of concept between house and garden was rendered by an attempt to reproduce in nature the formality of the buildings. Garden layouts were therefore geometrical and the strong architectural component of the design was further emphasized by lavish employment of stone elements such as fountains, statues, urns and obelisks. However, the *social* implications of these innovations are also important. Harnessing plants into the strict confines of design demonstrates on the one hand the attempts made by man to master Nature and, on the other hand, it also demonstrates by implication that Nature, at the time, was still conceived as a dangerous place. Hence, gardens were the result of man's attempt to render natural space safe by means of architectural manipulation of plants and vegetation. In this way, man managed to extend the safety of the home beyond the walls of the building to the garden limits.

It is a well known fact that the sixteenth century was an age of great cultural interchange as well as a time when each European nation was beginning to develop its own peculiar characteristics. This general statement applies to politics, to religion, to the field of letters and can likewise be extended to landscape design. The French invasions of Italy at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth introduced to France the characteristics of the Italian garden. But what soon became a distinctive French element was the "parterre," or compartmentalized garden beds forming arabesques, sometimes of box hedging and flowers, or often of coloured stones and sand. Whereas the French laid out their grounds in the form of carpets that flanked a central axis of water, providing a sense of unlimited vista, the Dutch, to whom water was no luxury, tended to make less use of ornamental water canals or fountains. Moreover, because stone was scarce in Holland, walls were replaced by topiary: trees and shrubs cut and trimmed into sculptural, ornamental shapes (Heritage 1988: 11-18). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was no exception to the general influences from the continent. Formality and regularity were applied, as in France, in small details of design as well as in the overall concept, while extensive use of topiaried yew and box point to Dutch influence (Quennell 1933: 42-43). However, over and above these borrowed elements, a distinctive national trait was added by the emphasis laid on what has since become the characteristic English grass lawns together with the neat gravel drives and walks.

This brief and over-simplified outline of developments in garden design through several centuries should help the spectator to apprehend how well the grounds at Compton Anstey in *The Draughtsman's Contract* conform to the times.

It seems that Mr Herbert's property mirrors the general subject matter of the story in so far as the various views of the dominions reveal a combination of English and Dutch traits more than any French influence. The clashing confrontation between Mr Herbert's Dutch son-in-law and the English artist in matters of religion, politics, art, taste and morals is "pinned down" in an evergreen English setting, peppered with details of Dutch influence — or interference. The sites chosen for "drawing number two" and "drawing number nine" — the lower lawns of the house and the closed-in yew-tree walk in the centre of the lower garden — show a man-made landscape with topiaried sculpture typical of the Dutch garden. The decorative columns and statue of Hermes, popular details all over Europe during the Renaissance, are to be set down on paper in drawings number two and six. Otherwise, the

views reveal a very English scene and scenery. "Picture number four" and "picture number seven," corresponding to the front part of the house show, on the one hand, the front lawn surrounded by the neat and imposing gravel drive and on the other, the straight lines, square hardness and strict formality of the main entrance; while the details that seem most prominent in the other vistas are both the sense of space and openness and the presence of sheep.

Apart from adding a bucolic touch to the scenes, the flock of fat healthy animals that appears in drawings number five and ten, indirectly indicates that the property is "enclosed," meaning that the field boundaries were marked out by hedges and fences. The process of "enclosing" had gathered pace during the seventeenth century and, more than ever before, sheep-rearing had become the basis of private economies as well as national prosperity. In the last two decades of the period the average prices for grain had fallen sharply. The major consequence of the low price of grain was the enclosure of lands where corn had been grown and their subsequent conversion into pasture. This activity ensured landowners and farmers substantial profits since, at the outset of the century, wool and woollen cloth were still England's major exports while the price of meat and dairy products remained steady. Writing on *The Mystery of Husbandry: or Arable, Pasture and Woodland Improved* in 1697, Leonard Meager remarked "where the grounds are enclosed, how happily people live" (Ashley 1982: 101). In other words, country gentlemen such as Mr Herbert, whose incomes derived mainly from sheep rearing, never had to worry unduly about getting into debt.

The fact that Mr Neville allows sheep but not people to disturb his range of vision provokes a very acid and revealing oral exchange between Mr and Mrs Talmann and the artist. On having his pictures criticized for their lack of human motives, the draughtsman retorts that a garden should reflect peace and quiet while noise and excitement should be reserved for such occasions as Carnival. The association of ideas between the garden and the festivities preceeding Ash Wednesday causes Mrs Talmann to think of the garden of Gethsemane. A rapid interchange of opinions concerning gardens and garden design ensues. The comments the characters dart at one another comprise what amounts to a very clever political, religious and patriotic double-entendre: About Gethsemane, Mr Talmann disdainfully replies:

— "A wild sort of garden, I shouldn't wonder."

The point is taken up by Mr Neville and the conversation goes on in the following way:

Mr Neville: "Certainly, Mr Talmann, There would be no geometric paths or Dutch bulbs."

(This is obviously a disparaging reference to the sculptured trees in the background of his drawings.)

Mrs Talmann: "Well, we have a Cedar of Lebanon and a Judas tree, perhaps we could cultivate a tree of heaven."

Mr Talmann: "The gardens of England are becoming veritable jungles; such exotics are grossly unsuitable. If the Garden of Eden was planned for England God would have seen to it."

Mr Neville: "The Garden of Eden, Mr Talmann, was originally intended for Ireland, for it was there, after all, that St. Patrick eradicated the snake."

Mr Talmann: "The only use for eradication that ever happened in Ireland, Mr Neville, was performed four years ago by William of Orange, on my birthday."

A tendentious opinion that immediately provokes the following superbly contorted remark:

Mr Neville: "And happy birthday to you, Mr Talmann, and if you are not too old to receive presents perhaps the gardener and I can find a snake for your orangerie!"

Much information about the times is disclosed in this short dialogue about gardens. First, the reference to exotic trees points to the new phase of experiments and novelties in agriculture dating from the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup> This taste or fashion for unusual plants itself derived from the notable expansion overseas which had been taking place in all European nations since the late sixteenth century. By 1640, there were English footholds of empire in Asia and in the West Indies, while Virginia, Maryland and New England had long been settled and the conquest of New Netherland in 1664 had closed the gap in the row of English colonies along the North Atlantic coast. By 1691, Dudley North, in his *Discourse upon Trade*, could describe what he called "the exorbitant appetites of man" as the main spur to industry and exchange. "Did Men content themselves with bare

necessities," he went on, "we should have a poor world." This was the Restoration and post-Restoration view which led John Houghton to put forward the bold statement that "our high-living, so far from prejudicing the nation . . . enriches it" (Briggs 1985: 162). So when Dutch William ascended the throne, England already had the makings of a commercial and colonial empire. But the important point is that overseas enterprise was wholly backed by private investments of well-to-do families. As horizons were widened, attitudes at home were being transformed: England was growing richer and more money was in circulation. Freedom of enterprise, success, interest in the wider world and the new spirit of inquiry and experiment were all reflected in the vogue for innovative articles from foreign lands. The presence of foreign or exotic plants in English gardens is therefore a barometer of how all the ferments which had begun to break down orthodox views during the previous century were, by the end of the seventeenth century, showing widespread effects. Men no longer thought of European civilization as the pinnacle of human achievement and were now borrowing eagerly from other civilizations; new inventions, new instruments and mathematical aids invited men to examine, chart and experiment with nature instead of passively relying on scriptural revelation. All these elements together with the English triumph of having superseded Divine-right monarchy with a sovereign representative Parliament combined together to promote this new spirit of progressiveness and materialism.

The mention of the Judas tree — a popular name deriving from the belief that Judas hanged himself from one such tree — leads the conversation on to the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden is familiarly known as the dwelling place of Adam and Eve, but in a more figurative sense it also signifies a paradise as a delightful abode or resting place. The disparaging connection Mr Talmann makes between a jungle and the Garden of Eden neatly sums up his supercilious opinion of Englishmen and England as a wild and disorganized nation — a wasteland in matters of real art, mathematical aptitude and worthwhile knowledge. In other words, an uncivilized country in comparison to the greatness of Holland. This sentence sums up all the venom accumulated after a century of tension and wrestling between the two countries. In all England's early overseas enterprise the Protestant Dutch had been the country's main rivals. With its tiny population and their inability to feed even the mainland inhabitants from their own resources, the Dutch logically depended on overseas expansion and the holding of colonies for their living. Clashing trading interests between the two countries led to three wars against the Dutch (1652-4, 1665-7, 1672-4) all of which were attempts

by the Dutch to shake themselves free of the English Navigation Acts<sup>3</sup> that secured England's sea-trading monopoly. These acts required that goods be imported to England only in English ships or ships of the country of origin. In this way colonial trade was closed off to foreign shipping altogether. In other words, the supplies of tobacco, raw cotton, rice and sugar coming to Europe from the American and West Indian colonies were all transshipped through England. In the reverse direction, foreigners trading with the colonies had to ship their goods through England too, adding to their costs and putting them at a disadvantage with English manufacturers. It was a closed system, rigidly enforced and designed exclusively to supplant the Dutch in all fields of trade. These wars of attrition seriously wounded the Dutch nation and partly account for Mr Talmann's view of the English as a wild nation spurred on by its restless instinct for aggression. In his opinion, England was definitely no restful and peaceful Garden of Eden!

The intermingling of religious and botanical themes leads the conversation on to Ireland, an island which, as is well known, possesses certain unique features in plant and animal life due partly to climatic conditions, and partly to the fact that it became separated from Britain by the Irish Sea. Tradition ascribes the absence of snakes to banishment at the hand of St Patrick, the island's patron saint, although no miraculous explanation has ever been offered for the absence of other common English animals such as the weasel and the mole.

What had happened in Ireland at the hands of William of Orange in 1790 was still recent enough to be a raw wound or focus of contention among differing religious and political allegiances. However, in order to understand all the implications of the word eradication "spat" out by Mr Talmann, it is necessary to go back a few years in time. James II had inherited his brother's smoothly running despotism in 1685, but as a devout Catholic, he set out to make England Catholic again. He proceeded to dismiss Anglicans from all kinds of high office in Church, State and army to put Catholics in their places. The politically conscious elements in the nation began to draw together in angry opposition. They did not want another civil war; they might have put up with James and simply awaited the succession of his Protestant daughters Mary and Ann, if the Queen, after fifteen years of childless marriage, had not given birth to a son in 1688. The prospect of a Catholic dynasty was too much. Sinking their differences, the Tories joined the Whigs in sending a formal invitation to William of Orange, Stadholder of Holland and husband of James's daughter Mary, to come in, expel James, and take over the government. When William landed, James's flight was declared the



equivalent of abdication and both Whigs and Tories invited William to call a Convention Parliament. Parliament recognised William and his wife as joint sovereigns but in return, the monarchs had to accept the Bill of Rights which clearly established the supremacy of Parliament.

The event Mr Talmann alludes to took place in 1690, when James, with French aid, attempted to use Ireland and its people to regain his throne. William, in dire need of consolidating his position as king of England,<sup>4</sup> took charge and on the 1st July 1690 crossed the river Boyne to rout the rebels. Deserted by their king after the first blow had been struck, the Irish were left to the doubtful mercy of William, which meant that the country was reduced to starvation and surrender. The savagery of the army led by William and the massacres that took place during the Battle of the Boyne, have been remembered ever since, especially in Northern Ireland, as Orangeman's Day (Bryant 1981: 165).

The Dutchman's pompous pride is instantly crushed by the biting cynicism of Mr Neville's answer which neatly brings the subject round to gardens again while revealing his Catholic sympathies: "perhaps the gardener and I can find a snake for your orangery." Orangeries were gardening buildings for the wintering of orange trees or other exotic shrubs and fruits and were at the height of fashion in the second half of the seventeenth century. But it seems that the term "Orangery" is used by the artist less as a reference to this element of garden design than as a barely concealed indictment against William, the Dutch Prince of Orange.

The word orange brings us round to another notable component in a seventeenth century garden-plan: its orchard. As one of the most permanent features of nature or of any man-made scenery, trees usually form the structural foundation of a home garden. Likewise, in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, trees, and especially fruit trees, are a constant subject matter in conversations between characters. It is interesting to note that trees, fruit trees and their produce form not a visual, but a recurrent aural motif in the film. As the story proceeds, each new allusion to trees, however innocent it may seem in itself, gradually becomes more and more puzzling as it dawns on the spectator that such insistence on this common element of nature is no casual coincidence but some kind of message-conveying device. In trying to unravel the possible sequence of logic behind the reiterative allusions to trees and their fruits what soon becomes apparent is that the various species mentioned throughout the story are of no consequence in themselves while much information may be derived from their symbolic meaning.

In the introductory part of the film, the first character to appear on screen relates the story of a certain Mr Chandos who had a special predilection for growing plum trees. Why not? we may ask ourselves. However, suspicion that the story about plums and plum trees had more to it than a crude account of a man's peculiarities led me to the discovery that this common fruit had taken on a very pointed figurative meaning, precisely at the end of the seventeenth century. During the reign of King William, plum was a slang word used to refer to a specific amount of money: one hundred thousand pounds. In other words, fortunes were calculated in or as "plums": A gentleman could be reckoned a one plum man, a two plum man or half a plum man (*Oxford Dictionary*). If this more obscure meaning of the word plum is considered, then, the coarse anecdote about Mr Chandos's production of plums must be understood as referring less to the trees and fruits themselves than to a certain class, their resources, properties and their attitudes towards subordinates. Indeed, as has been suggested before, the period under study was a propitious time for the building up of fortunes. The increase of wealth of many families through commerce or investments in commerce implied a proportional increase of all those activities which were carried on by money-transactions and calculations of profit. It also meant a decrease of all the activities which had, up till then, been regulated by custom, tradition and authority. In all, it implied a movement from status to contract — an important theme in this film. Although, a century or two earlier, most people in Europe hardly handled any money at all, by the seventeenth century, a large proportion of the population, especially in England, Holland and France, was living by income economy. The heads of well-to-do family households planned their work and transactions with the primary aim of making as much profit as possible. However, it is important to remember that the growing wealth of this affluent class almost entirely derived from the work of employees or subordinates who never received any share of the benefits.

Bearing this in mind, two other definitions of the word plum gain special significance in the story about Mr Chandos. In the Webster Dictionary, it is stated that plum can also mean either; "something desirable or received as a recompense for service," or "an unexpected increment of property or money." Logically, the subordinates, bound by contract to work for the enrichment of their landlord, and without any other prospect than their fixed wages, could not expect any sudden increase in money. Hence, the cynicism in the anecdote stems from the playful oscillation between the literal or figurative meanings of the word plum: the only "recompense" received by the

people on Mr Chandos's property was the possibility of praying in the chapel on benches made out of plum wood while the landlord and his family physically suffered from the after-effects of so much plum-eating. In both cases, there was enough justification for Mr Chandos's tenants remembering their landlord "through their backsides." Consequently, it could be said that the last statement in the story shrewdly links the plum motif to a sardonic evaluation of class relationship.

Close attention to the following scenes will reveal that money and property are dominant themes in the preliminary setting of the film. The lady accompanying Mr Noyes explains to him that the members of the company have gathered simply "to express confidence in one another's money." To Mr Noyes's pointed remark about herself being a member of the company, she gaily answers that she was "strictly not of the company but a part of its property!" A property Mr Noyes would well like to possess if his own dominions, summed up as "two parterres and a grove of orange trees," could be somehow expanded to a more substantial fortune. The orange trees as indication of the character's economic position then take on a sexual connotation as Mr Noyes identifies the fruit with his companion's breasts. This scene anticipates a much more explicit comparison between a fruit tree and a woman's body. During their first encounter under contract, Mr Neville strips Mrs Herbert of her garments while asking a most shockingly unromantic question:

— "When your husband had the pear trees grafted, do you know if he asked the advice of Mr Seymour's gardener?"

He then evaluates Mrs Herbert's body in the following terms:

— "The trees have been poorly cared for, the angle between the branches and the main trunk is...too steep. But the original work is good. And what of the pears themselves Madam? Are they presentable?"

Although the equation between the fruit tree and the woman's body is quite patent, as with Mr Noyes's earlier comment the underlying message is that of physical delight in possessing the woman while the coldness of the mutually accepted relationship is emphasized: By contract, Mr Neville has a right of property on Mrs Herbert. As the first part of the contract is been duly carried out, Mr Neville can permit himself the luxury of mocking the

pompous talk about property and belongings of the company at Compton Anstey by referring to his meetings with Mrs Herbert in the following way:

— "Mrs Herbert pays no price she cannot afford, and thanks to her generosity I am permitted to take my pleasure without hindrance on her property and to enjoy the maturing delights of her country garden."

If the produce of fruit trees are to be understood as symbolic allusions to women or women's bodies, then many otherwise mystifying scenes take on some extra significance within the story. For example, before tackling one of his drawings, Mr Neville is shown eating raspberries and lost in thought. He then suddenly titters with no apparent reason. This could be interpreted as him daydreaming about his encounters with Mrs Herbert. Another instance is when the draughtsman gaily tells Mr Talmann that he is becoming the gardener's taster for victuals and goes on to praise the raspberries of the day which he considered much sweeter than the tasteless damsons (another name for plum) of the previous day. This seemingly fatuous comment takes on another significance if it is understood as a veiled account of the encounters agreed on in the dual contract between the artist and Mrs Herbert on the one hand, and the artist and Mrs Talmann on the other.

However, there is a deeper connotation in the allegorical assimilation of women to garden produce of various types. As has been suggested before, gardens were the pride of a certain class of men in the seventeenth century as integral part of their property. Likewise, women enjoyed little status beyond that as their husbands' property. The basic assumption which governed relations between the sexes was that women were simply inferior beings. Throughout their lives they were to depend on men — as daughters, on their fathers, and, once wives, on the "masculine dominion" of their husbands. In common law, wives had no right over their children or to matrimonial property. At the time, marriage had nothing to do with a couple's happiness, but was a matter of family policy (Hibbert 1989: 381-88; Basch 1974: 4-5). Hence, women were only considered in so far as they could bring to a marriage either titles, dowries or descendants — or a combination of one or other. Once they had fulfilled the functions assigned to them, they were no more important to their husbands than any other of their belongings. The status of women in the affluent society of the period is therefore discreetly, but correctly, depicted in the story: Compton Anstey had once belonged to Mrs Herbert's father, but was now the property of her husband, not hers. In

her husband's preferential order of things, she is rated last, even after the horse. On the other hand, Mrs Talmann as the only fruit of the marriage is in dire need of a child in order to maintain the property within the family. By taking this fact into consideration another most obscure comment made by Mr Neville concerning limes can be deciphered:

—"If you have any influence over your son-in-law, can I suggest that he travel over to Mr Seymour's to see what can be done with limes by doing as little as possible? Limes, Madam, can smell so sweet, especially when they are allowed to bloom without hindrance and it will shortly be time to bloom."

If Mrs Talmann is substituted for the fruit, the following meaning emerges: the draughtsman seems to be suggesting that in his incapacity to get his wife pregnant, the son-in-law should let another permit her "to bloom."

Apart from sexual implications, trees can also be used to transmit half stifled information about the political and religious allegiances of some of the characters. The story of Mr Lucas's eleven fruit trees, all named after his children, leads Mr Talmann to make yet another supercilious remark about the English, through his noticing that "they can raise colonies but not heirs to the throne." It is interesting to note that Mr Neville's defence of the fecundity in "some of England's oldest colonies" should immediately be interpreted by Mrs Talmann as an indication of the draughtsman's sympathy towards the Scots. By the Navigation Act of 1660, free trade within the British Isles, established by Cromwell, was done away with and Scotland and Ireland were given the status of foreign countries pertaining to the English Empire. Until 1707, Scotland had its own independent parliament which was a menace to English interests since there was no certainty that it would ever acknowledge the Hanoverian dynasty. Hence, from an English point of view, Mr Neville correctly refers to Scotland as "a colony." His remark about the colony's fertility in matter of heirs is a roundabout way of recalling that whereas William and Mary had no children, the Catholic king of England, James II (VII of Scotland), who had been destituted in their favour, was the father of three children.

Although constant, most of the allusions to fruit and fruit trees in the story are mere hints or dashes compared to the prominence given to the pomegranate as Mrs Herbert relates the mythological significance of the fruit. In the Greek legend, Persephone was seized by Hades and removed to the underworld. On learning of her abduction, her mother, in her misery, became

unconcerned with the harvest and the fruitfulness of the earth. Pluto therefore intervened, commanding Hades to release Persephone to her mother. However, as Persephone had eaten seeds from a pomegranate in the underworld, she could not be entirely freed but had to remain four months of the year with Hades,

By association, Mrs Herbert alludes to the efforts made by the gardeners to overcome adverse climatic conditions. Her tale then becomes a neat allegorical account of the drama befalling the main characters. On the one hand, man, capable of dominating nature by growing crops scientifically is himself defeated by nature since the fruits cultivated in hot-houses are themselves unfruitful. A picture that mirrors Mrs Talmann's position: She lives — or is kept — in a scientifically construed ambience but is incapable of engendering a child. On the other hand, the dark red colour of the pomegranate juice, which Mrs Herbert assimilates to blood — and murder — points both to her late husband's violent death and to the fate awaiting Mr Neville.

If the pomegranate was only an ill omen, the pine-apple proves to be fatal. The exotic fruit offered to the draughtsman by Mrs Herbert, serves as a closing symbol for the film. Yet again, it is less the fruit itself than its abstract meaning that brings sense to the final scene. By considering the fact that the written name of the fruit is made up of two parts linked by a hyphen, then, its full symbolic significance emerges: to pine is defined as "punishment; suffering inflicted as punishment; torment; torture" (*Oxford Dictionary*), while one of the immediate connotations the word apple brings to mind is that of the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden. Consequently, the pine-apple may be said to have religious overtones, but above all, it seems to comprise the major themes in the film: the garden as an artificially built Garden of Eden, the apple — or forbidden fruit — as component of the garden emblemizing women's bodies, and finally, the fate of Mr Neville, an opportunist who had dared to query the tastes, habits and political beliefs of his social superiors, and worse still, who had ventured to meddle with part of this closed circle's property: their women.

Hence, just as the various views of grounds at Compton Anstey form an overall frame or baseline for the film, Mr Neville (or the draughtsman) is the central figure around which the whole story evolves. As a young English artist wedging a place for himself in the world of arts, he accepts Mrs Herbert's commission for various views of the house and property to be set on paper, yet, as has already been made clear, only under certain conditions.

As the first day of work elapses, what soon becomes apparent from the outline of the drawings is that they are going to be severe renderings of the chosen sites; a style that calls to mind the preliminary drawings and designing an architect would undertake before tackling the actual construction of a building. As such, Mr Neville's drawings display little real artistic virtuosity. It is not surprising, therefore, that during the evening meal, Mr Talmann should put the following malevolent question to the guest artist:

—"If the best Englishmen are foreigners, Mr Neville, and that seems to me to be a statement of fact, then, the best English painters are foreigners too. There is no English painter worthy of the name. Would you agree, Mr Neville, that to be an English painter is a contradictory term?"

Since Mr Neville avoids answering the spiteful question put to him, we shall attempt to do so in his stead.

First of all, it seems necessary to elucidate the meaning behind "the statement of fact" about the best Englishmen being foreigners. From this provoking comment, it may be deduced that Mr Talmann was not born and bred on English soil. He was most probably one of the fifteen-thousand who landed at Torbay with William of Orange on the 5th of November 1688. This army, which marched on London with the King-to-be, was made up of Dutch followers and exiled Englishmen. It only fattened on the way to the capital as English supporters flocked to join in. It is interesting to note that in the film, Mr Talmann is made to assume many of the traits of character of William III. After the Revolution of 1688, England was once again ruled by a monarch who was a foreigner — a Dutch Calvinist who regarded the English as an inferior race. Just as it had been for England's medieval kings (The Angevins), English was only a second language for William (his first was French) (Billings 1991: 124). Everything he wrote had to be translated into English, which he spoke imperfectly. He was a very dry character, sullen with people and boorish in his manners. The nickname London society gave to the new King, the "low Dutch bear" (Billings 1991: 124), could perfectly well apply to Mr Talmann!

The turn of the character's question is most interesting for the plain sophism of the initial statement of fact leads on to, not only a logical probability, but a correct one: "the best English painters are foreigners too. There is no English painter worthy of the name."

Indeed, if England was omnipotent in matters of overseas trade and well ahead of other countries in political thinking<sup>5</sup> English art during the seventeenth century was dominated by a series of foreign-born painters, Rubens and Van Dyck before the civil War, and Peter Lely after it, all of whom were Flemish in origin. This indicates why Mr Talmann uses the term foreigner, the artists of renown in England being neither Dutch nor English. Meanwhile, apart from artists of relative notoriety such as the portrait painters William Dobson and Robert Walker, it is a fact that the vast majority of the painting executed by native Englishmen did not rise above the general level of mediocrity if compared to the remarkable flowering of vigorous styles on the Continent.

The seventeenth century was the period when giants like Bernini, Claude Lorrain and Poussin, Rembrandt and Velazquez produced their masterpieces. This period, known as Baroque,<sup>6</sup> was a time when each master developed his own style and when the peculiar qualities of individual styles were further enhanced by the different trends emanating from each country: between, for example, the characteristics of the art in Rome during the first half of the century and the later art of France and Holland. French, Dutch, Flemish and Spanish artists were in perpetual contact with Rome and Roman art, and all of them shared the same lively interest in Renaissance art and the art of ancient Rome. This meant that there also existed among them important common roots. If the wellspring of Baroque art was Rome it is because it started at the service of the Catholic Church and, through its influence, spread to other countries (Mainstone 1985: 9-11). Fraught with internal problems and loyal to its Reformation, England had remained mostly outside the orbit of influence of Rome, which probably accounts for its "provincialism" in matter of art during the seventeenth century.

In *The Draughtsman's Contract*, Mr Neville is an artist who has made a certain name for himself as a portrait artist, but, as has already been pointed out, he is commissioned to draw twelve pictures of Compton Anstey, not of the members of Mr Herbert's family. This, as we shall see, can also be considered as a telling detail about the times.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century had caused a division of Europe into two camps, Catholic and Protestant. This religious separation affected the art in the different countries and especially in a small country like the Netherlands, which was itself divided into Protestant Holland, which resisted Spanish Catholic domination, and Catholic Flanders. It was as painters of the Catholic camp that artists like Rubens or Van Dyck rose to their eminent position. The art of Rubens, for instance, suitably enhanced and



glorified the dominant powers of kings and Church and, for that reason, he received commissions from rulers from all over Europe. However, things were very different in the Protestant countries of Germany, Holland and England where artists were confronted with a crisis still unknown to their Catholic colleagues of France, Spain or Flanders. This crisis was brought about by the Reformation. Many Protestants objected to pictures or statues of saints in churches and regarded them as signs of Popish idolatry. Thus, for religious reasons, the painters of Protestant regions had lost their best source of income. All that remained to them as a regular source of income was portrait painting — rather a narrow field of action for so many artists to rely exclusively on commissions. Hence, a new phase came about as ambitious minor masters tried to make a reputation for themselves by specializing in other, novel branches or "genres" of painting to which there would be no objection on religious grounds. This trend towards specialization which had begun in the sixteenth century was firmly established in the seventeenth when landscapes and seascapes and skyscapes began to be considered as subject matters in their own right. In this particular genre, the Protestant Dutch excelled. Artists like Jan Van Goyen or Simon Vlieger were among the first to discover that the representation of a piece of nature could make just as satisfying picture as any illustration of a heroic tale or religious theme. Hence, Mr Talmann could rightly be portrayed as rather patronizing and condescending towards the young English artist.

As a passing comment, it may be added that Mrs Herbert's commission for pictures of the property (rather than of herself and her daughter) is also a telling detail of another kind. The fact of having the property reproduced on paper points to the growing materialistic outlook of a sector of society in the seventeenth century. Rank, status and possession were no longer entirely taken for granted towards the end of the century. Rather, for the wealthy middle class, they served as indications of social and economic success. Hence, the novel taste for drawings or paintings of one's property was an indirect way of immortalizing its owner's enterprise and achievements in the economic field, and a new mode of revelling in the family's social position acquired through prosperity. Landscape drawing therefore also shows how the course of the arts ran parallel to the economic development of a growing middle class.

With respect to the actual elaboration of the pictures, it is interesting to note how many shots display Mr Neville bent on representing reality with scientific accuracy. The camera insistently shows the artist working out exact proportions through a viewfinder and painstakingly reproducing them on his

squared sheet of paper. In other words, we see the draughtsman's attempt to copy as faithfully as possible the light and solid forms before him. As he himself declares:

—"I'm painstaking enough to notice quite small changes in the landscape. Once started, I make that a commitment whatsoever ensues, and I think you can surmise it is an attitude from which I obtain great satisfaction and some entertainment."

If the artist's scientific focus, clearly revealed in his preparatory sketches, is an acknowledgement of the way in which a seventeenth century human eye would "read" a scene in reality then, much information about the age may be ascertained from this work-technique.

Nowadays, most thinking people agree that science is based on observation, on experiment, using, so far as it can, all relevant data; that it is capable of being planned ahead, and that it results in power to control material objects and living beings, in a conquest of nature.<sup>7</sup>

This state of mind is so familiar that most people take it for granted; but it has not always been so. In the Middle Ages, the spirit of scientific inquiry was alive and active, but novelty in ideas was distrusted, and the general opinion was that the main outlines of truth laid down in theology and philosophy were permanently fixed, and provided adequate explanations of the nature of existing things. From this, the orientation of the human mind was altered. During the Renaissance, artists investigated optics and anatomy; the closer and deeper study of ancient Greek writers not only equipped Europe with better textbooks of mathematics, physics, medicine, and zoology, but it sharpened method in every kind of field. There was no turmoil or commotion yet, but the steady preparatory work was soon to lead on to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Consequently, the decisive period was the period with which we are here concerned.

During the seventeenth century, there was an infinite number of motives which led men to clear or free the scientific point of view from encumbrances. There were the economic motives. The explorers wanted ever more precise instruments for navigation; trading companies employed experts who used new methods of drawing charts; growing heavy industry led to questions being asked about metallurgy and about machines for lifting and carrying heavy loads; engineers improved canals and harbours by applying the principles of hydrostatics (involving the pressure of water or other liquid as a source of power). Not far removed from the economic motives were

those of the physicians and surgeons, who revolutionized anatomy and physiology. Like the doctors, the soldiers called science to their aid in designing and aiming artillery. But there were also other motives, unconnected to the economic sphere. While musicians learnt the mathematics of harmony, painters and architects studied light and colour, substances and proportions, not only as craftsmen but as artists.

Hence, well before the end of the seventeenth century the scientific movement was colouring almost every kind of human activity. However, the most important fact about the movement is not that it led to improvements in technology, or even that it fomented advances in man's conquest of nature. It is a fact related to thought.

So great an accession to the data of the universe was bound to influence philosophy and in this field, the work of René Descartes (1596-1650), so congenial to the scientific temper of the age, gave a tremendous new turn to the course of thought.

With Descartes, we come back to this permanent feature of nature, the tree — not, of course, as a botanical element but as a logical one. As explained by A. W. Levi,

In his *Principia Philosophiae*... Descartes expressed the relation of philosophy as theoretical inquiry to practical consequences in the famous metaphor of the tree of philosophy whose roots is metaphysics, whose trunk is physics, and whose branches are respectively, morals, medicine and mechanics. The metaphor is revealing, for it indicates that for Descartes the main concern was for the trunk and that he busied himself with the "roots" only in order to provide a firm foundation for the trunk" (1980: 14: 264).

As is well known, Descartes conceived his physics as a rational system grounded on philosophical principles. In his *Discours de la méthode*, he found the basis of certainty in his own existence: "I think, therefore I am." From this he concluded that the material world existed, and maintained that the spatial extension of bodies was the basis of all material reality. According to his theory, bodies are constituted only as particles of matter in motion; apart from extension, the properties we perceive in sensory experience are merely apparent (Huisman 1981: 23-26). In other words, he thought that the ultimately real was not an unchanging substance beneath all changes and differences, but the principle of change and difference which was itself a force.

Particular attention to the plot in *The Draughtsman's Contract* will reveal how it "patterns" this abstract principle. As has been determined beforehand, the draughtsman employs himself in reproducing on paper the reality that lies before him as faithfully and scientifically as possible. In modern terms, his drawings are as close to reality as a photograph could be. Although he gives precise orders about not being disturbed during the time of execution, various seemingly unimportant details of clothing find their way into his carefully selected views: riding boots, a shirt, a jacket and a ladder, and later, a dog and a sun-shade. Since the artist's method of working is that of "never to distort or dissemble," he decides to incorporate these details into his drawings. However, as Mr Neville is giving the finishing touches to his sixth drawing he is startled by Mrs Talmann's deduction in viewing his pictures. He is then told that

— "I have grown to believe that the really intelligent man makes an indifferent painter. Painting requires a certain blindness, a partial refusal to be aware of all the options. An intelligent man will know more about his drawing than he will see."

The artist's certainty of having reproduced the natural world is therefore shattered. It is *his perception* of reality that has been set on paper, not reality in itself. This fact is further, and dramatically enhanced towards the close of the film, when it appears that the supposedly photographic renderings of the sites are apprehended differently by each of the characters, thus leading to different conclusions: Mr Talmann is convinced that the drawings will immortalize his wife's "duplicity," while Mrs Talmann retaliates that the pictures could equally well be reflecting her husband's share in a conspiracy of inheritance. She then adds a third possible and plausible interpretation:

— "[the drawings] contain evidence of another kind... evidence that Mr Neville may be accomplice to the death of my father."

Hence, Mr Neville's attempt to "freeze" reality or to make of it an unchanging substance proves a lost battle, for his drawings turn out to be a force in themselves. Whereas many seventeenth century mathematicians and physicists still felt that what could be weighed, measured and expressed mathematically must be wholly independent of the mind, and therefore must possess a reality-status of a unique kind, Descartes' starting-point was scepticism about the truth of sense-data: a man's perception of external

objects may be deceptive. As suggested beforehand, all that is true about Mr Neville's drawings is that they reflect how *he* perceived reality. The artist's error is to judge his reproductions as the exact "likeness" of the real thing. Likewise, each of the other characters perceives a different reality from the one and same drawings. Consequently, the surprising multiplicity of interpretations about the artists's realistic drawings points to Descartes' discovery of *two* kinds of certainties, one objective and external (in this case, the drawings) and the other subjective and internal (the mind). According to the philosopher, the blending of these two worlds within each human being will bring about not an absolute certainty about truth, but an individual "knowledge" or perception of reality. This is precisely what takes place in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, where the nature of people's knowledge of external objects is illustrated by an insistence in the plot on how unreliable and subjective "reality" really is.

Once he has completed his part of the contract, Mr Neville departs. He has apparently accepted another commission from the Duke of Rauderdale. However, only three days after the burial of Mr Herbert, the artist is shown returning on a visit to Compton Anstey (invited by Mr Seymour). He finds Mrs Talmann going over the property with a Dutchman, Mr Van Hoyten, who, it seems, will be undertaking a "remodelling" of the grounds.

— "Mr Van Hoyten is to consider for us a new management for the grounds, an entirely new approach. He has come at our request to soften the geometry which my father found to his taste and to introduce a new ease and complexion."

The changes contemplated for Compton Anstey parallel an overall movement that was beginning to take place in the last years of the seventeenth century. As the times were slowly moulding themselves into a new era, people became increasingly aware of the natural world around them. Rather than imposing man-made geometric order on Nature, the new fashion tended towards a general relaxation of formality. The English garden, it was felt, should allow, as Stephen Switzer, the influential author of *The Nobleman, Gentleman and Gardener's Recreation* (1715), later stated, "Beauties of Nature to remain uncorrupted by Art."

All the adjacent Country [should] be laid open to view, and the eye should not be bounded with high walls, woods misplaced and several obstructions. It should assume the forms suggested by "the best of landskip painters" (Hibbert, 1989:326-7)

This idea is echoed by Mrs Talmann when she tells the draughtsman: "It is probably you, Mr Neville, that has opened his [Mr Talmann's] eyes to the possibilities of our landscape." This change towards architecturally planned "naturalness" was the practical result of important social factors. First of all, at least in England, it can be interpreted as a reaction against any trace of French formality in landscape gardening. During the reign of William and Mary, the overpowering Louis XIV, supporter of the Jacobite cause, was England's arch-enemy. The end of the century was also the time of splendour of Versailles and its geometrically planned gardens. Landscape carved into artificial shape was suddenly seen in England as a reflection of French authoritarianism in politics and inflexibility in art.

On the other hand, as has been suggested beforehand, gardens and garden design reflect people's philosophy of life. After the "Glorious Revolution," and with the accession of William and Mary, a new political stability had been established in England. The constitutional monarchy, the new English system of government whereby Parliament, as representative of the people, held the upper hand, assured the population that their rights and liberties were and would be protected against Royal despotism. With the security of long-lasting internal peace, people could afford to open their eyes to the natural world around them. In other words, by the end of the seventeenth century, homes were no longer seen as havens of security, shielding their inhabitants from outside conflict, violence and danger. On the contrary, homes were now to be an integral part of Nature, the result being a new aesthetic which imposed a loosening of boundaries between the habitat of man and the external world. Consequently, the original enclosed, geometrical gardens were slowly giving way to freer forms that concealed the division between private properties and contiguous land. In time, this movement would lead to the typical eighteenth century, scientifically planned, "natural" landscapes which consisted mainly of expanses of grass, irregularly shaped bodies of water, and trees, in their natural shape, placed singly and in clumps. Hence, we see here that landscape design or rather, planned alterations in landscape design also serves as a temporal device in the film for it is indicative of how the seventeenth century was slowly melting into another age.

As an overall conclusion, it may therefore be stated that landscape design and drawing, basic features in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, transmit important information about the times in which the story occurs and the lifestyles of its protagonists. The ingeniously planned murder and its dramatic

consequences for a guest artist — in essence, the basic plot of the film — could have happened at any historical time. However, the views of the property where the whole drama transpires, serve as chronicles of the period. As the spectator follows Mr Neville from one part of the grounds to another, he is presented with a typical late seventeenth century English garden dotted with details of Dutch influence such as the topiared yew walks and the cropped trees, while the vision of sheep in the grounds points to the economic standing of the Herbert family. Likewise, although the dialogues amongst the characters reveal much about contemporary events, a great deal more information may be extracted if particular attention is paid to conversations about gardens or elements of garden design. Thus, the rather sour interchange of words between Mr and Mrs Talmann and the artist concerning the Garden of Eden proves to be a veiled account of the famous battle of the Boyne while trees and fruits serve as symbols for women and women's position in seventeenth century well-to-do society. The fact that Mr Neville is commissioned to draw pictures of the property rather than portraits of the family is also a telling detail about the times. Similarly, the draughtsman's actual working method together with the surprising variety of interpretations of his reproductions of reality provoke, singularly recall Descartes's *Discours de la méthode*. Finally, the intended change of style of the grounds at Compton Anstey to more informal and natural is itself indicative of the passing of time and the changing mentality of a people secure of their economic position and forever freed from the yoke of royal despotism.

In all, landscape design and painting serve, not merely as a historically authentic frame or container for the story in *The Draughtsman's Contract*, but as an important wellspring of information about a past age — more especially for the viewer who is attentive to the given cues and willing to follow them up.

## NOTES

1. Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723), a famous mathematician and astronomer, earned lasting fame not as a scientist but as an architect. After the great fire, he submitted a comprehensive scheme for the rebuilding of the whole city. Wren put his distinctive stamp on over fifty churches, and produced his masterpiece in the new St Paul's Cathedral which took thirty-five years to build.

2. The Royal Society, founded in 1662, of which Charles II was the first patron, set up a committee on agriculture which carried out experiments, instituted inquiries and published the results. Among the refinements advocated were: the growing of fodder crops such as turnips to feed animals throughout the winter; the use of artificial grass; the growing of potatoes; the testing of different fertilizers and experiment with novel vegetation imported from the colonies.

3. The Cromwellian Navigation Act of 1651 shows how strong the Republic was at the time. It was designed to break the hold of the Dutch on the carrying trade between Europe and America. The Dutch protested at this blow to their trade and war broke out between the two countries (1652). Another Navigation Act was passed in the first year of Charles II's reign (1660). It re-enacted the provisions of the Commonwealth Navigation Act, i.e. that trade between England and her colonies was to be carried only in English ships. However, free trade which Cromwell had established throughout the British Isles, was done away with in this second Act for Ireland and Scotland were treated as foreign countries in matters of trade.

4. According to G.M. Trevelyan, "William's throne was tottering in the after-throes of the earthquake of the late Revolution, which had not yet subsided. The English Church and Army were disaffected; the civil, military, and naval services were in grave disorder; the Whigs and Tories of Parliament were renewing their old feuds; half the public men of both parties were in secret communication with the Jacobites, not because they desired but because they expected a Restoration. With good hope then, Louis (XIV) had sent James over with French money, troops, and generals, to complete first the conquest of Ireland, where three-fourths of the land already obeyed him. Until Ireland was secured for William, Britain could take no part in the continental war, and might soon herself be in the throes of a counter-revolution" (1967:360).

5. During the period previous to the actual Revolution, England's internal political thinking had been developing on lines very different from that in the rest of Europe where there was a reassertion of the absolute power of Kings. It was the time of Louis XIV in France and the great kings of Sweden. The ideas of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) had, by the second half of the seventeenth century, produced their effect. In his famous work, *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes had stripped the monarchy of its moral basis. In other words, he had replaced the concept of legitimacy as the justification of political authority by the ruler's obligation to afford protection to the subjects who lived under his power.

6. According to E.H. Gombrich, "Baroque" was a disparaging term coined by critics of a later period who fought against the tendencies of the seventeenth century. In his own words: "Baroque really means absurd or grotesque, and it was used by



men who insisted that the forms of classical buildings should never have been used or combined except in the ways adopted by the Greeks and Romans" (1988: 302).

7. In saying this, we are perfectly conscious of the new wave in science and physics. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Einstein's theory of relativity revealed that the very design of experiments, in fact, alters reality. Hence, from then on, experimentation as such is no longer thought of as being absolute — only probable or presumable; in other words, relative. Consequently, nowadays, instead of successful experimentation leading to a guideline theory, as had been the traditional practice, it is more usual for the reverse procedure to take place: a hypothesis is forwarded and then experimentation is made on the given assumption.

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