country, where there is no sorrow and no night. After all, I doubt not but there must be the study of this creation, as well as art and vision; tho' I cannot think it other than the veil of heaven, through which her divine features are dimly smiling; the setting of the table before the feast, the symphony before the tune, the prologue of the drama; a dream of antepast and proscenium of eternity. I doubt not, if I had the wisdom to use it rightly (and who can so well instruct me as yourself?) it would prove a helpful handmaid and comate of art, tho' dissimilar; as mercury sympathizes with gold, learning with genius, and poetry, with reverence to speak it, with religion. [...] 

I remain Dear Sir
Your obliged affectionate Servant
Samuel Palmer.

7 John Constable (1776–1837) Introduction to English Landscape

In 1829 Constable undertook the publication of a series of plates from his own paintings, to be engraved in mezzotint by David Lucas under his supervision. The finished collection of 22 images was issued in 1833. In its full form the title announced Various Subjects of Landscape, Characteristic of English Scenery, principally intended to display the Phenomena of the Chiar‘oscur of Nature. Constable’s introduction went through a number of drafts, reaching the definitive form represented here in May 1833. Composed self‐consciously to fulfil a public function, the painter’s prose lacks the spontaneity and directness of his letters. The principal argument is clear, however: an art nourished at the ‘Primitive Source’ of nature is more likely to result in an original style than one based upon ‘departed excellence’, and though it may be harder to assimilate will prove in the end of more lasting value. In fact it was not to be until the late 1880s that Constable’s importance was first widely acknowledged in England. In its original form the introduction was prefaced by quotations of poetry by Virgil, Thomson, Wordsworth and Ovid. It is reprinted in R. B. Beckett (ed.), John Constable’s Discourses, Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, volume XIV, 1970, pp. 9–10, from which source this text is taken.

The Author rests in the belief that the present collection of Prints of Rural Landscape may not be found wholly unworthy of attention. It originated in no mercenary views, but merely as a pleasing professional occupation, and was continued with a hope of imparting pleasure and instruction to others. He had imagined to himself certain objects in art, and has always pursued them.

Much of the Landscape, forming the subject of these Plates, going far to embody his ideas (owing perhaps to the rich and feeling manner in which they are engraved) he has been tempted to publish them, and offers them as the result of his own experience, founded as he conceives it to be in a just observation of natural scenery in its various aspects. From the almost universal esteem in which the Arts are now held, the Author is encouraged to hope that this work may not be found unacceptable, since perhaps no branch of the Art offers a more inviting study than Landscape.

Soul-soothing Art! whom morning, noon-tide, even
Do serve with all their fitful pageantry.
are qualified to judge of productions bearing an original cast of mind, of genuine study, and of consequent novelty of style in their mode of execution.

J. C. S. 35, CHARLOTTE STREET, FITZROY SQUARE, May, 1833.

8 John Constable (1776–1837) from ‘Discourses’

Immediately following the publication of his English Landscape, Constable was invited to lecture to the Literary and Scientific Society of Hampstead, where he was then living, and chose as his theme ‘An Outline of the History of Landscape Painting’. He followed this with a second lecture two years later, in June 1835, using prints, drawings and painted copies to illustrate the works he discussed. That autumn he lectured on the same theme at the Worcester Institution for promoting Literature, Science and the Fine Arts, now extending the series to three. It was then arranged for him to give a series of four lectures to the prestigious Royal Institution in London, before an audience drawn from the world of science as well as the arts. These took place at weekly intervals between 26 May and 16 June 1836, with Constable drawing so far as possible on works that could be seen in the National Gallery in London. On 25 July he gave a final lecture to the Literary and Scientific Society in Hampstead. His biographer C. R. Leslie attended all five of the latter lectures in London, taking careful notes. He later used these to represent the lectures in his Memoirs of the Life of John Constable. R. B. Beckett (see n67) provides a more complete account of the Discourses, supplementing Leslie’s text from Constable’s own record of the first lecture in Hampstead, from press reports of the lectures in Worcester and from further surviving notes in the artist’s hand. The effect, however, is to prove Leslie a reliable witness and a discriminating editor. We have therefore taken our extracts from his texts of the second, fourth and last lectures, as given in the Memoirs, second edition, London, 1845, pp. 342–4, 354–5 and 356–61. In the first lecture Constable provided a survey of the origins and early development of landscape in art, paying particular tribute to the work of Dürrer and of Titian. In an opening section of the second lecture he gave enthusiastic accounts of the work of Poussin and Claude. In the third he dwelt on four exceptional examples of the genre, by Titian, Poussin, Rubens and Rembrandt. His conclusion to the series at the Royal Institution – that landscape painting deserved to be considered an experimental science – was no doubt made with the mixed composition of his audience in mind.

From Lecture II, Royal Institution, 26 May 1836

[... ] ‘The deterioration of art has everywhere proceeded from similar causes, the imitation of preceding styles, with little reference to nature. In Italy, the taste was for the beautiful, but the beautiful in the hands of the mannerists became the insipid, and from that descended to the meaningless. In Germany a clumsy imitation of Italian art, and particularly of M. Angelo, produced inflation and bombast, as in the works of Goltzius and Spranger; while in Flanders and Holland, the taste for the picturesque, when colour, chiaroscuro, and execution were gone, left only the coarse and the mean.

‘The decline of history was paralleled with that of landscape. What is termed the ‘French taste’, (as opposed to good taste) and which may be characterized as romantic hyperbole, began with Lucatelli, a pupil of Pietro da Cortona, who died about 1717. He
the solitary shepherd,—the return of the rustic with his bill and bundle of wood,—the
darksome lane or dell,—the sweet little cottage girl at the spring with her pitcher,—
were the things he delighted to paint, and which he painted with exquisite refinement,
yet not a refinement beyond nature. Gainsborough has been compared to Murillo by
those who cannot distinguish between the subject and the art. Like Murillo he painted
the peasantry of his country, but here the resemblance ceases. His taste was in all
respects greatly superior to that of the Spanish painter.

‘Constable spoke of Constable and Girtin as possessing genius of the very highest
order, though their works being comparatively few and in water colours chiefly, they
are less known than they deserve to be. [...]’

‘As your kind attention,’ he said, ‘has so long been given to my description of
pictures, it may now be well to consider in what estimation we are to hold them, and in
what classes we are to place the men who have produced them. —It appears to me that
pictures have been over-valued; held up by a blind admiration as ideal things, and
almost as standards by which nature is to be judged rather than the reverse; and this
false estimate has been sanctioned by the extravagant epithets that have been applied
to painters, as “the divine”, “the inspired”, and so forth. Yet, in reality, what are the
most sublime productions of the pencil but reflections of some of the forms of nature,
and copies of a few of her evanescent effects; and this is the result, not of inspiration,
but of long and patient study, under the direction of much good sense. —It was said by
Sir Thomas Lawrence, that “we can never hope to compete with nature in the beauty
and delicacy of her separate forms or colours,—our only chance lies in selection and
combination.” Nothing can be more true,— and it may be added, that selection and
combination are learned from nature herself, who constantly presents us with com-
positions of her own, far more beautiful than the happiest arranged by human skill. I
have endeavoured to draw a line between genuine art and mannerism, but even the
greatest painters have never been wholly untainted by manner.—Painting is a science,
and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why, then may not
landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures
are but the experiments?’

From Last Lecture, Hampstead, 25 July 1836

‘The difference between the judgments pronounced by men who have given their
lives to a particular study, and by those who have attended to that study as the
amusement only of a few leisure hours, may be thus illustrated. I will imagine two
dishes, the one of gold, the other of wood. The golden dish is filled with diamonds,
rubies, and emeralds,—and chains, rings, and brooches of gold; while the other
contains shell-fish, stones, and earths. These dishes are offered to the world, who
choose the first; but it is afterwards discovered that the dish itself is but copper gilt,
the diamonds are paste, the rubies and emeralds painted glass, and the chains, rings,
&c. counterfeit. In the mean time, the naturalist has taken the wooden dish, for he
knows that the shell-fish are pearl oysters, and he sees that among the stones are gems,
and mixed with the earths are the ores of the precious metals.

The decline of painting, in every age and country, after arriving at excellence, has
been attributed by writers who have not been artists to every cause but the true one.
The first impression and a natural one is, that the fine arts have risen or declined in proportion as patronage has been given to them or withdrawn, but it will be found that there has often been more money lavished on them in their worst periods than in their best, and that the highest honours have frequently been bestowed on artists whose names are scarcely now known. Whenever the arts have not been upheld by the good sense of their professors, patronage and honours so far from checking their downward course, must inevitably accelerate it.

'The attempt to revive styles that have existed in former ages, may for a time appear to be successful, but experience may now surely teach us its impossibility. I might put on a suit of Claude Lorrain's clothes and walk into the street, and the many who know Claude but slightly would pull off their hats to me, but I should at last meet with some one, more intimately acquainted with him, who would expose me to the contempt I merited.

'It is thus in all the fine arts. A new Gothic building, or a new misal, is in reality little less absurd than a new ruin. The Gothic architecture, sculpture, and painting, belong to peculiar ages. The feelings that guided their inventors are unknown to us, we contemplate them with associations, many of which, however vague and dim, have a strong hold on our imaginations, and we feel indignant at the attempt to cheat us by any modern mimicry of their peculiarities.

'It is to be lamented that the tendency of taste is at present too much towards this kind of imitation, which, as long as it lasts, can only act as a blight on art, by engaging talents that might have stamped the Age with a character of its own, in the vain endeavour to reanimate deceased Art, in which the utmost that can be accomplished will be to reproduce a body without a soul.

'Attempts at the union of ungenial qualities in different styles of Art have also contributed to its decline.'

In illustration of this, Constable showed a print from Vernet, the trees of which were in a mannered imitation of Salvator Rosa, without his nature and wildness, while the rocks were in the artificial style of Berghem.

'In the foreground,' he said, 'you will perceive an emaciated French dancing master, in a dress something like one of Salvator's banditti, but intended by Vernet for a fisherman. It is thus the art is deteriorated by the mannerists who employ themselves in sweeping up the painting rooms of preceding ages. Imitators always render the defects of their model more conspicuous. Sir George Beaumont, on seeing a large picture by a modern artist, intended to be in the style of Claude, said, 'I never could have believed that Claude Lorrain had so many faults, if I had not seen them all collected together on this canvas.' It is useful, therefore, to a painter to have imitators, as they will teach him to avoid everything they do.

'The young painter, who regardless of present popularity, would leave a name behind him, must become the patient pupil of nature. If we refer to the lives of all who have distinguished themselves in art or science, we shall find they have always been laborious. The landscape painter must walk in the fields with an humble mind. No arrogant man was ever permitted to see nature in all her beauty. If I may be allowed to use a very solemn quotation, I would say most emphatically to the student, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' The friends of a young artist should not look or hope for precocity. It is often disease only. Quintilian makes use of a beautiful simile in speaking of precocious talent. He compares it to the forward ear of corn that turns yellow and dies before the harvest. Precocity often leads to criticism, - sharp, and severe as the feelings are morbid from ill health. Lord Bacon says, "when a young man becomes a critic, he will find much for his amusement, little for his instruction." The young artist must receive with deference the advice of his elders, not hastily questioning what he does not yet understand, otherwise his maturity will bear no fruit. The art of seeing nature is a thing almost as much to be acquired as the art of reading the Egyptian hieroglyphics. The Chinese have painted for two thousand years, and have not discovered that there is such a thing as chiaroscuro.'

Constable then gave some practical rules for drawing from nature, and showed some beautiful studies of trees. One, a tall and elegant ash, of which he said 'many of my Hampstead friends may remember this young lady at the entrance to the village. Her fate was distressing, for it is scarcely too much to say that she died of a broken heart. I made this drawing when she was in full health and beauty; on passing some time afterwards, I saw, to my grief, that a wretched board had been nailed to her side, on which was written in large letters "All vagrants and beggars will be dealt with according to law." The tree seemed to have felt the disgrace, for even then some of the top branches had withered. Two long spike nails had been driven far into her side. In another year one half became paralyzed, and not long after the other shared the same fate, and this beautiful creature was cut down to a stump, just high enough to hold the board.'

Constable exhibited an outline of the principal figure in Fuseli's 'Lazar house', and showed that the swellings and depressions in the outline of a figure in fine action never occur exactly on the opposite sides, and the same he said would be found true of trees when healthy.

He quoted from Thomson's 'Seasons' the sixteen introductory lines to the 'Winter' as a beautiful instance of the poet identifying his own feelings with external nature. He noticed also Milton's love of landscape, and how often in his poems the most simple imagery is mingled with the most sublime. 'Thus he has compared the army of the Cherubim attendant on the Archangel, while conducting our first parents from Paradise, to an evening mist.'

The Archangel stood, and from the other hill
To their fix'd station, all in bright array
The Cherubim descended; on the ground,
Gilding meteorous, as evening mist
Ris'n from a river o'er the marish glides,
And gathers ground fast at the lab'ring's heel,
Homeward returning.

Introducing the homely incident of the labourer's return, and calling up all the rustic fireside associations connected with it in the midst of a description of the host of Heaven.

'There has,' said Constable, 'never been an age, however rude or uncultivated, in which the love of landscape has not in some way been manifested. And how could it be
otherwise? for man is the sole intellectual inhabitant of one vast natural landscape. His nature is congenial with the elements of the planet itself, and he cannot but sympathize with its features, its various aspects, and its phenomena in all situations’ [...]

9 George Catlin (1796–1872) ‘Letter from the Mouth of the Yellowstone River’

Catlin discharged his vocation as an artist in a remarkable manner. He devoted his entire life and working career to the provision of a graphic record of the native American Indians, travelling widely throughout North America between 1829 and 1837 and staying with numerous different tribes. By 1838 he had produced over 600 pictures detailing their appearance and their customs. The letter quoted here was written after an unprecedented journey by steamer, covering a distance of some 2000 miles and lasting almost three months. The conditions Catlin describes were distinctive of the experience of several American painters of the time: on the one hand conscious of their remoteness from European standards and models of sophistication, on the other convinced that the wilderness was a ‘true source’ and a ‘true school’. It is typical of this circumstance that Catlin should think of his native models as at one and the same time close to nature and the equals in ‘grace and beauty’ of the figures represented by classical Greek sculptors. The value to the artist of this exposure to ‘human beings in the simplicity of nature’ is underlined by his awareness of the fragility of their state, and of the inevitability of its corruption and loss at the approach of civilization. Catlin’s collection was shown in a touring exhibition in America in 1838–9, in London in 1840–5 and subsequently in Paris (see IIC9). His literary accounts and illustrations were widely published in America, England and France. The original version of the present letter was addressed to the editor of the New York Commercial Advertiser, who published it on 24 July 1832. Catlin revised it for reprinting in his Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians, two volumes with 400 illustrations, London and New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841, pp. 14–16, from which this text has been taken.

Mouth of Yellow Stone, Upper Missouri, 1832

[...] You will, no doubt, be somewhat surprised on the receipt of a Letter from me, so far strayed into the Western World; and still more startled, when I tell you that I am here in the full enthusiasm and practice of my art. That enthusiasm alone has brought me into this remote region, 3,500 miles from my native soil; the last 2,000 of which have furnished me with almost unlimited models, both in landscape and the human figure, exactly suited to my feelings. I am now in the full possession and enjoyment of those conditions, on which alone I was induced to pursue the art as a profession; and in anticipation of which alone, my admiration for the art could ever have been kindled into a pure flame. I mean the free use of nature’s undisguised models, with the privilege of selecting for myself. If I am here losing the benefit of the fleeting fashions of the day, and neglecting that elegant polish, which the world says an artist should draw from a continual intercourse with the polite world; yet have I this consolation, that in this country, I am entirely divested of those dangerous steps and allurements which beset an artist in fashionable life; and have little to steal my