

Picturing the Picturesque: Lucius O'Brien's *Sunrise on the Saguenay*

Ellen L. Ramsay

Volume 17, numéro 2, 1990

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073074ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073074ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Ramsay, E. L. (1990). Picturing the Picturesque: Lucius O'Brien's *Sunrise on the Saguenay*. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 17(2), 150–157. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073074ar>

Résumé de l'article

L'oeuvre *Sunrise on the Saguenay* (1880) de Lucius R. O'Brien, premier président de l'Académie royale canadienne, fournit une excellente illustration de la relation entre le paysage géographique et la représentation picturale du paysage qui avait cours pendant le XIX^e siècle au Canada. Cette peinture célèbre constitue non seulement un exemple de la virtuosité que l'on peut atteindre en art pictural mais elle fut aussi reconnue comme l'une des meilleures oeuvres parmi celles de la collection des morceaux de réception de l'Académie. En effet, on l'a choisie comme l'un des éléments de base de la collection de l'Académie lors de la fondation de cette organisation et on lui attribua la place d'honneur au-dessus du podium de l'orateur pour l'ouverture officielle en 1882.

Quoique l'oeuvre s'inscrive dans la tradition pittoresque de la peinture canadienne, une étude des archives nous révèle que le pittoresque apparut dans discours populaire sur l'industrie, le tourisme et les loisirs vers la fin du XIX^e siècle. Outre un point d'excursion pour les voyageurs à la recherche du pittoresque, la rivière Saguenay faisait partie d'un nouveau secteur industriel québécois dans la région du bas Saint-Laurent. Le flottage du bois accompagné de la déforestation et de l'exode de la population agricole ont laissé leur marque alors que la relation ville-campagne modifiait la région. Les transformations romantiques de la scène picturale démontrent comment, chez le peintre-excursionniste, une cartographie mentale a conditionné l'approche au paysage de cette époque. Cette scène idyllique dévoile la grande variété d'influences artistiques chez O'Brien.

*Picturing the Picturesque: Lucius O'Brien's Sunrise on the Saguenay**

ELLEN L. RAMSAY

York University

RÉSUMÉ

L'oeuvre *Sunrise on the Saguenay* (1880) de Lucius R. O'Brien, premier président de l'Académie royale canadienne, fournit une excellente illustration de la relation entre le paysage géographique et la représentation picturale du paysage qui avait cours pendant le XIX^e siècle au Canada. Cette peinture célèbre constitue non seulement un exemple de la virtuosité que l'on peut atteindre en art pictural mais elle fut aussi reconnue comme l'une des meilleures oeuvres parmi celles de la collection des morceaux de réception de l'Académie. En effet, on l'a choisie comme l'un des éléments de base de la collection de l'Académie lors de la fondation de cette organisation et on lui attribua la place d'honneur au-dessus du podium de l'orateur pour l'ouverture officielle en 1882.

Quoique l'oeuvre s'inscrive dans la tradition pittoresque de la peinture canadienne, une étude des ar-

chives nous révèle que le pittoresque apparut dans discours populaire sur l'industrie, le tourisme et les loisirs vers la fin du XIX^e siècle. Outre un point d'excursion pour les voyageurs à la recherche du pittoresque, la rivière Saguenay faisait partie d'un nouveau secteur industriel québécois dans la région du bas Saint-Laurent. Le flottage du bois accompagné de la déforestation et de l'exode de la population agricole ont laissé leur marque alors que la relation ville-campagne modifiait la région. Les transformations romantiques de la scène picturale démontrent comment, chez le peintre-excursionniste, une cartographie mentale a conditionné l'approche au paysage de cette époque. Cette scène idyllique dévoile la grande variété d'influences artistiques chez O'Brien.

Thirty-one years ago, Canada was what can truly be called "a rough country." . . . Now, happily for the modern tourist, all this is changed. Magnificent ocean-ferrys ply semi-weekly between the British ports and the principal seaboard cities of the Dominion. . . . Steamer, railway, and stagecoach companies vie with each other in providing the readiest, cheapest, and most expeditious means of locomotion. Hotels are numerous and excellent. . . . The eight or ten weeks' journey in a timber barque or coal-ballasted brig and merchandise-freighted propeller through the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes to Sarnia or Detroit has become a pleasure tour of at most a fortnight; and the six or twelve months' trip of '49 or '50 is now a pleasant holiday excursion, a profitable way of passing the London "silly season" or the "Long Vacation."

(*Handbook to Canada: A Guide for Travellers and Settlers*, 1881)

The Saguenay, the "Great River of Canada" as it was known, was to the nineteenth-century middle-class excursionist what the St. Lawrence River had been for earlier vacationers—a delightful wa-

ter journey into the heartland of Canada. In the case of the Saguenay the venture took in the towns from Tadoussac to Chicoutimi, passed Capes Trinity and Eternity, and reached into Lac St. Jean itself. With the extension of industrialization along the St. Lawrence and into the tributaries of the St. Maurice and the Saguenay, the Lower St. Lawrence region was becoming an extension of Canada's industrial heartland. Yet in addition to the commercial potential of the region in this period, there was sufficient natural beauty to attract a stream of Canadian and overseas excursionists. They came to admire the precipitous hillsides, the chasms, and gorges of the blue-capped mountains on the north side of the St. Lawrence. In parts of the south side they witnessed the less aggressive pastoral charm of towns, church and streams, convents and windmills which provided the perfect contrast for the lived experience of the picturesque.

The accounts, the pictures, and the poetry of the region were also evidence of a profound geographical mapping of the mind onto the landscape in this period for, far from being the idyll depicted in the various discursive and pictorial representations, the Lower St. Lawrence region was fast becoming a locus of activity for the Canadian logging industry. Thus it is important both to bear in mind the selective interpretation of the landscape by artists of the period, and to investigate this re-presentation of the region in pictorial form for a better understanding of what the region meant to the nineteenth-century excursionist.

The *Sunrise on the Saguenay* of 1880 (Fig. 88) by Lucius O'Brien, first President of the Royal Canadian Academy, provides an excellent opportunity to study the relationship between the geographical landscape and the full pictorial rendition of the landscape in nineteenth-century Canada. This painting was not only celebrated in its time as an example of the virtuosity achievable in the pictorial arts, but it was also recognized for its historical position as one of the finest works in the Academy's diploma collection. Indeed it was selected to form part of the nucleus of the Academy's collection at the founding of that organization and was granted place of honour over the speaker's podium at the formal opening in 1880 (Fig. 89). The Governor-General, senior officials of the Canadian government, Ottawa's society elite, and academicians all toasted the opening of Canada's first national academy and listened to the tunes of *Scotland the Brave* and *Kunstler Leben* beneath O'Brien's scene of the Saguenay.

More was happening here. Despite the picture's prominence and status amongst Canadian artworks, there was no extended discussion of this painting. This lacuna in the historical discourse must come as a surprise and yet it is reflective of the rudimentary status of art criticism at the time. It is necessary therefore that we look more deeply into the period, to the physical geography of the Saguenay, to the lives and times of the painters, and to the expository and literary accounts of the region in order to come closer to what it might mean to picture the picturesque in the nineteenth century.

Raymond Williams has probably provided the most cogent framework for an understanding of the global transformations occurring to town-country relations in the nineteenth century. His renowned *The Country and the City* (1973) examined the way in which during the nineteenth century the division of labour within a single state became increasingly international (this process had already been visible since the establishment

of modern forms of colonial government in the seventeenth century). What had been relations between villages and towns and then towns and cities became extended into the relation between colonial producers and their local and distant metropolitan markets.

For our purposes here Williams's observations about the growth of metropolitan relations during the period of industrialization may be linked with an analysis of the meaning of the picturesque tradition. For it is no coincidence that landscape painting coincided with the new era of travel in the century leading up to John A. Macdonald's National Policy. One would presume some relation therefore between this new travel and the emergence of the picturesque aesthetic of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Certainly the travels of the Hudson River School of painters from their urban studios in Philadelphia up the Hudson and Schuylkill Rivers into the White Mountains (and by the 1880s as far afield as Quebec) must indicate that the picturesque was more than a quest for nice scenery. For here were painters travelling the newly extended rail lines into the industrializing landscape searching for, and selectively translating the remaining splendid forests and mountains into idyllic scenes of a natural America.

This landscape painting phenomenon was international in dimension following the patterns of colonial settlement. In Australia the discovery and development of the Victoria goldfields in 1850 introduced the patronage for a landscape tradition building the foundation for a group of painters known as the Heidelberg School in the 1880s. Like their Canadian counterparts, this school was dominated by English immigrant and first-generation artists who had received their training in Europe. The results were paintings of the Australian scene. A similar phenomenon occurred in New Zealand where landscape art emerged in a popular form among the middle classes. In South Africa, the imperial context was still operating and influencing the landscape tradition. Here landscape painting became the fashion among Dutch and English patrons in the centres of the Cape Colony, the port of Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and two towns adjacent to the Witwatersrand goldfield—Johannesburg and Pretoria. Each case serves to illustrate and support Williams's thesis about the internationalization of the division of labour and the concomitant expansion of social relations into this international context through the expansion of imperial trade relations.

The Canadian context for these activities is of particular significance. Here the background and

biography of Lucius O'Brien is especially revealing, for his life story and his painterly transformations of the countryside demonstrate the psychological profile of a mind at work before the environment in nineteenth-century Canada. For Lucius O'Brien, as representative of many senior academicians of his day, came to painting through the more commercially viable career of surveying. As a former land and rail surveyor O'Brien not only had an eye for drawing, but a precise and informed knowledge of geological formations, geographic contours, the identification of patterns of vegetation and agricultural growth, knowledge of the industrial potential of a region, and the impact of transportation on a region. He had, as well, a sharp eye for the geography of industrial conurbations, habitant cottages, small hamlets, and larger towns that dotted the Lower St. Lawrence Region. In other words, O'Brien's professional vocation provided him with all the skills of observation needed for a painter of the landscape.

Lucius Richard O'Brien (1832-99) was an archetypical first-generation Canadian gentleman artist born to an immigrant family who turned his attention to art following a career as a surveyor. O'Brien's father, Edward George O'Brien, a half-pay retired British army officer, left his home in county Clare, Ireland, following the Napoleonic Wars to take up land on one of the preferred land grants given by the Colonial government. He and his wife, Mary Sophia (née Gapper), established a farm at Shanty Bay in Simcoe County, oversaw the settlement of the region, and then expanded their property holdings into business development in Orillia. With their background, the family was well-acquainted with cultural pursuits, Mary O'Brien, not unlike Susanna Moodie, kept lively diary accounts of their settlement in Simcoe County and advanced the arts of poetry and water-colour painting in the region.¹

The O'Briens raised three sons in the tradition of young English gentlemen. The first son, Lieutenant-Colonel William Edward O'Brien, was called to the bar in 1874 although he later preferred to enter farm life and public life with his father. The youngest son, Henry, was also called to the bar in 1861 and is best known as editor of *O'Brien's Division Courts Manual*, the *Canadian Law Journal*, and *Harrison and O'Brien's Digest of Ontario Reports*. Lucius Richard O'Brien, the middle son of the family, prepared for a career in surveying and engineering following his education at Upper Canada College. With the expansion of railway development and settlement during the 1850s, O'Brien probably charted a successful ca-

reer as a professional surveyor. In addition to these activities, he managed one of the family businesses in Orillia and held public office as Reeve of Orillia in 1859. By 1870 Lucius O'Brien moved permanently to Toronto, where he was engaged in Quetton St. George and Company, a Canadian wine importing business. It appears he took early retirement from surveying before 50 as was the custom amongst gentlemen in nineteenth-century Canada and turned to his leisurely pursuit of painting, becoming one of the leading artists and patrons of his day.²

It was in the context of his acquaintance with Governor-General Dufferin, a distant relation of the O'Brien's, that Lucius O'Brien came to be painting the Saguenay region in 1879, for it appears that O'Brien accompanied or at least visited the Governor-General on his vice-regal tour of the region. The *Sunrise on the Saguenay* was one of several paintings that O'Brien produced during three summer trips to Quebec between 1878 and 1880. Although this was not a commissioned painting it coincided with a series of works for patrons including *Northern Head of Grand Manan* (1878) for George Brown, and two scenes, *View from the King's Bastion, Quebec* and *Quebec from Point Lévis*, commissioned by Governor-General Lorne for the Queen's collection. *Sunrise on the Saguenay* is therefore representative of O'Brien's work during the height of his artistic career and holds special significance in the National Gallery's diploma collection.

O'Brien's painting of Cape Trinity on the Saguenay River captures the geographical site in all its splendour. The work depicts the soaring 1,500-foot-high bluffs of granite and gneiss forming the Cape with its three-tiered formation (after which it was named Trinity) rising clearly out of the Bay. The bluff is one of two promontories flanking the south bank of the Saguenay at this point in the river's course three quarters of the way between Lac St. Jean and Tadoussac at the mouth of the river. The promontory, Cape Eternity, stands on the east side of Eternity Bay. O'Brien's view is therefore painted from within Eternity Bay facing the bluffs and looking almost north, with the rising sun towards the right of the picture. The blue-capped mountains of the Laurentians are seen in the distance. Included in the scene are assorted leisure boats and steamers nestled on the luminous calm of the waters at sunrise. A mist rises from the river casting a hue over the cliff walls, wrapping the top of the cliffs in mystery.

This picture of the Saguenay is of particular interest for the period in which it was created. The region had grown tremendously in popularity at

the time of this depiction. This was the favourite resort area of the governors-general of Canada, of urban trekkers from Quebec City and Toronto, and it was fast becoming a major centre for the commercial excursion trade. Guidebooks dating to the 1850s described three-day excursions from Quebec City down the St. Lawrence to the Saguenay River to the Gaspé and up to the St. Maurice River. They gave accounts of trips up the Saguenay River past the two capes and beyond into Lac St. Jean. Travellers were even served by holiday hotels along the banks of the river in areas adjacent to the small towns of Tadoussac and Chicoutimi.³ From the 1870s these travellers were assisted further by the improvement in road networks and partial rail links into the area so that by 1879 tourism had virtually exploded in the region:

Four times a week in the summer months steamers freighted with holiday-makers and tourists leave Quebec for Tadoussac and Chicoutimi, touching at the various places between these points. To look at the piles of baggage and furniture, the hosts of children and servants, the household gods (*sic*), the dogs, cats and birds, one might think the Canadians were emigrating *en masse*, like the *seigneurs* and their families after the cession of the country to England. But these travellers have a happier destiny than had those who sailed in the *Auguste*, shipwrecked on Cape Breton in November, 1762. Murray Bay and its adjoining villages are the resort of those who want grant scenery, and a quiet country life with a spice of gaiety. Many families have their own pretty country houses, but a favourite plan is to take a *habitant's* cottage just as it stands, and to play at "roughing it" with all the luxuries you care to add to the ragmatted floors and primitive furniture. Those who want more excitement find it at the hotels, where in the evening there is always a dance, a concert, or private theatricals, to wind up a day spent in bathing, picnicking, boating, driving, trout-fishing, tennis, bowling, billiards, and a dozen other amusements. It is a merry life and a healthy one; you live as you please, and do as you please, and nobody says you nay.⁴

Yet far from being a picturesque idyll, the Saguenay was on the verge of becoming one of Quebec's industrial enterprise zones of the late nineteenth century. The Saguenay River valley, along with the St. Maurice valley, formed the basis of Canada's logging industry covering some one-hundred thousand square miles of dense forest. Since the 1860s the lumber industry had begun to penetrate the region with saw-mills located in Tadoussac, Chicoutimi, and the Lac St. Jean region. Statistics issued by the Department of Agriculture indicated that since 1850 an estimated \$180,000 worth of wood had been exported from this region to Europe yearly, with a total of 43,289 logs of white pine alone descending the Saguenay bound for Quebec in the year 1862.

Crucial to the further exploitation of the natural resources in the region was the development of direct rail access through the heartland of the logging valleys 180 miles from Quebec City. This project occupied rail industrialists from the early 1860s until the route's completion in the late nineteenth century as they charted through the intermediary mountain ranges. Lumbering was a major Canadian activity, being not only the principal supply of wood for the British navy but the staple product for Canada's own industrialization as a primary building material and fuel. In 1879 the Department of Agriculture issued its first handbook on the region entitled *Le Saguenay et le Lac St. Jean: Ressources et Avantages qu'ils offrent aux Colons et aux Capitalistes* promoting the home-steading and industrial advantages of the area.

Indeed, during the time of Lucius O'Brien's sketching trip of the Saguenay in preparation for the *Sunrise on the Saguenay*, human intervention in the region was high. The federal government's Department of Public Works embarked on a dredging operation as part of its waterways improvement scheme, and fires ravaged the valley destroying stands of pine, denuding many of the mountains, closing some of the lumber industry and filling the valley with a choking smoke. On the result of the fires one traveller observed:

There is no rich foliage; forests fires have swept and blackened the hill tops; a scanty growth of sombre firs and slender birches replaces the lordly pines that once crowned the heights, and struggles for a foothold along the sides of the ravines and on the ledges of the cliffs, where the naked rock shows through the tops of the trees.⁵

All was not serene and tranquil on the banks and river of the Saguenay in the summer of 1879.

Lucius O'Brien's painting *Sunrise on the Saguenay* must be seen therefore as an indelibly romantic interpretation of the sights and activities of the Saguenay region. O'Brien has selected his subject matter at its most resplendent before the rising mist of the morning sun. A violet pink hue pervades the work at this moment in dawn as the water rests luminous upon the bay and a hazy light radiates from the partially revealed sun. In the foreground a yacht with several rowboats is safely harboured with two men aboard; two men are quietly rowing on the nearby water and in the distance a square-rigged ship is silhouetted alongside a steamboat. If the ship represents the era of sail and the steamboat the new age of industry, then O'Brien presents a gentle co-existence of the two ages displayed respectively in the distance. Artistically, O'Brien's work represents the end of the picturesque tradition in Canada which had begun with the early

work of military topographers Thomas Davies (c. 1737-1812), James Cockburn (1778-1847), and George Heriot (1766-1844). The picturesque tradition had transformed from the topographical-picturesque towards more romantic interpretations during the nineteenth century although the former always remained a strong influence. Paul Kane (1810-71), painter of Indian scenes and artist for the Hudson's Bay Company, continued the picturesque in his watercolour and illustration work during the 1850s but developed romantic variations in his oil paintings. The young O'Brien fell within Kane's realm of influence, although he was not the only painter who may have shaped the young artist. It is possible O'Brien may have been influenced by a group of engineer/architect-artists active in Toronto through the 1850s. Thomas Young (c. 1805-60), an architect whose work was available in lithographic reproduction was a possible mentor, as was Sandford Fleming (1827-1915), Canada's celebrated scientific engineer, William G. R. Hind (1833-89), and engineer William Armstrong (1822-1914). In each of these artists O'Brien would have discovered elements of the earlier landscape tradition.⁶

O'Brien was not limited to domestic influences, however, and after his formative years he came into contact with the American Hudson River School. Of all the Canadian painters of his day, O'Brien was probably the most profoundly influenced by the American school. The Hudson River painters were credited with extending and intensifying the picturesque tradition during the nineteenth-century romantic era. American painters Albert Bierstadt (1830-1902), Frederic Church (1826-1900), Thomas Cole (1801-48), Thomas Doughty (1793-1856), and Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) left their studios in search of an unspoiled America. We see their influence in the selection and interpretation of the mountain scenery, the effects of light unifying the surface of the work (here also is the influence of Luminists John Thomas Kensett [1816-72] and Fitz Hugh Lane [1804-65]). Like O'Brien who had tried to launch an early career in illustration, the American landscapists were greatly interested in picturesque interpretation for publications. William Henry Bartlett was a particular influence with the Hudson River painters who made numerous scenes after his illustrations. Bartlett himself made four trips to the United States between 1836 and 1852 reproducing his illustrations in N. P. Willis's *American Scenery* (c. 1850). This publication was widely circulated and provided numerous American artists with the basis for compositional studies. The American School then

found their own ideological expression through the pages of *Picturesque America* (1872-74) edited by William Cullen Bryant.⁷

The Hudson River School also had strong domestic influences for their landscape tradition. While England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had produced painters of classical landscape and topography in various permutations including Richard Wilson, Alexander and John Robert Cozens, Thomas Girtin, and Joseph M. W. Turner, the tradition was imported to America through their students Archibald Robertson (who emigrated in the early 1790s), William Winstanley (1790), William Birch (1794), William Groombridge (1794), Frances Guy (1800), Joshua Shaw (1817), John Hill (1816), William Wall (1818), William Bennett (1826), and Robert Salmon (1828). The Hudson River painters were attentive to their teachers and adapted their style to the new American scene.⁸ At various points throughout the early nineteenth century, J. M. W. Turner influenced the painters and helped to transform their work from the earlier topographical tradition towards a more romantic style.⁹ While the Hudson River School achieved its height of popularity during the 1840s and 1850s and went into decline by the 1860s, its popularity in Canada grew during the 1870s and early 1880s through the work of Albert Bierstadt. Bierstadt was invited to Canada on several trips between 1876 and 1883 by Governors-General Dufferin and Lorne and discovered a considerable follower in O'Brien. These artistic influences enlighten us to Lucius O'Brien's poetic transformation of the landscape.

A closer observation of *Sunrise on the Saugenay*, in conjunction with the archival records of the vicinity, reveals the striking studio alterations performed on the foreground in order to circumscribe the compositional features of the picturesque formula (Fig. 90). In place of the naturally arranged grass, rocks, and bulrushes at the site, O'Brien has arranged a delicate mixture of deciduous foliage, rock, and sandy beach. Structurally this studio artifice serves to locate the eye centrally within the composition and within the picture plane. The diagonal branch projecting across the foreground reflection of sunlight counterbalances the promontories in the left midground. The centre boulder has been introduced to secure the eye to the left side of the composition beneath the bluffs and to prevent the eye from wandering over the water and across the river to the extreme right. A tactile quality of light and shadow falls across the surface of the work. By securing the eye in this way O'Brien attempts to strike a balance between the

sublime scale of the bluffs and the small boats and people in the bay; hence he offers a reflection on art and landscape. This then is an amalgam of the picturesque and sublime for pictorial effect.¹⁰

In addition to altering nature's composition for the pictorial effect, O'Brien has also rejected industry as a basis for the picturesque in painting and accordingly tempered any signs of the industry in the valley. The continual stream of boom-tugs described in tourist literature and captured by amateur photographers, the presence of log jams at the height of industrial production in the summer, the dredgers of the Department of Public Works' waterways scheme, the smoke and fire from the conflagrations that summer are all absent from O'Brien's work. Instead we see the dignified promenade of boats and men upon a restful and perfect scene. The three different kinds of boats are in fact identifiable with the tourist trade. In the foreground there is the popular nineteenth-century wood-burning steam-assisted yacht towing several row boats. This type of yacht and its full-sail counterpart were commonly used holiday-makers on the Saguenay. The larger schooner in full sail silhouetted in the rising sun is the more exclusive leisure craft of the governor-general or some other prominent traveller and the adjacent steam tug is a regular industrial and tourist boat which plied the river in the summer. These leisure craft, then, are the only signs of modernity in the painting.

To secure further the meaning of his landscape tradition as it was applied in this painting and as it represents a profound geographical mapping of the mind, it is necessary to look more closely at the concrete links between O'Brien's picturing and the aesthetics of the travel literature in his day. Not surprisingly given the chronology of the art work, a version of the *Sunrise on the Saguenay* was quickly incorporated into the pages of one of Canada's important picturesque travel publications entitled *Picturesque Canada* (Fig. 91). Lucius O'Brien served as the journal's art editor during its brief period of publication (1880-84) and oversaw the illustration of various Canadian scenes within its pages. This publication centring on a popular middle-class notion of the picturesque, echoed the works of similar publications in Britain and throughout the "new worlds." In Britain the new leisure-travel into the provinces resulted in publications such as *Picturesque Excursions in Devonshire and Cornwall* (1804), *Picturesque Scenery of Norfolk* (1810-11), *Picturesque Scenery in Sussex* (1821), and *Picturesque Views of England and Wales* (1827-28). As industrial development expanded the transportation networks in the new world,

more picturesque publications emerged in the English language, including *Picturesque America* (1872-74), which served as the model for the Canadian publication, and *Picturesque Europe* (1879), its immediate predecessor. Each of these publications emphasized the picturesque scenic aspects of the regions under consideration as well as introducing topical concerns about protection of the countryside against the ravages of industry. *Picturesque Canada* was produced for a professional readership in the metropolitan centres of Central Canada and its editor, George Monro Grant, was a leading reformer in the early social gospel movement. This framework provides us with some means by which to interpret the meaning of the picturesque.

Under Grant's editorial stewardship *Picturesque Canada* came to embody a conservation philosophy. The romantic yearning for a pre-industrial or pastoral past in Canada had its origins, like the reform movement, in the industrial era. One of the principal tenets of the movement was the belief that industrial development could not proceed unchecked because of the devastation of the scenery and the accompanying loss of farm land. Underlying this concern was a somewhat romantic conception included in the subtitle *The Country as It Was and Is*, suggesting the structural historical alterations that were occurring on the land. The editorial policy set out explicitly to record picturesque scenes associated with a rural past before the ravages of industry:

The primeval beauty of the Old World of Canada, the quaint charm, and the picturesque incidents that gathered round the life of the primitive French and English settlers, are gradually vanishing before the rapid strides of its modern prosperity. It is the design of the authors of PICTURESQUE CANADA to record them permanently here, so that this volume, presenting an elaborate, faithful and most artistic picture of "Canada as it is" in this transition period of her history, and a complete account of the Dominion to the present day, may become a precious heirloom in the near future of the greatest colony in the Empire.¹¹

Although the articles in *Picturesque Canada* seldom expressed direct views on politics, one article on lumbering by Grant and A. Fleming concluded:

Replanting has been suggested to counterbalance the loss (of trees) caused by fires and reckless cutting. Such a remedy is practically impossible. It would be too costly, and there would be great difficulty in preserving the young trees from fires. Besides, a pine takes one hundred and fifty years to reach maturity.

One or two measures may be suggested. The Government should, by a commission of experts and scientific men, take stock of our forest wealth. This done, the annual increment presented to us by Nature could

be estimated. And then, on no account, should more than this increment be cut in any year. This is the law in Norway and Sweden, and it is a good law. The demand for lumber will increase. . . . Our form of government makes it difficult to pass or enforce laws to curb greed. But the call for immediate action is loud. One or two wise laws and the employment of the best men obtainable as "bush-rangers" to take care of Government timber limits, would preserve to Canada an income from her wilderness for centuries.

We owe much of our wealth and development to the lumber trade. It has been one of the greatest instruments in our self-expression during the past forty years. But the anxieties for a nation's future increase with increasing wealth and population. Civilized men cannot live in a fool's Paradise of the present.¹²

The reference to taking stock of the forest wealth suggest the authors' knowledge of efforts by scientific men such as G. M. Dawson in the documenting of timber wealth in 1879.

Features of the picturesque were linked with a response to the new industrial era. In the absence of the historic elements of the picturesque in Canada (castles, ruins, etc.), writers and artists drew on heavily encoded systems of reference to earlier period of settlement. The *ancien régime* was one such period recalled in purely romantic visage. *Picturesque Canada* included some pictures of devout habitants, resilient woodsmen, and physiognomies of characteristic settlers. In the article accompanying O'Brien's illustration of Cape Trinity there was an extended description of the rural life and mythologies of the local settlers, the physical structure of the geography and settlements, picturesque description of the region, and historical accounts of the discovery and human settlement of the Saguenay.¹³ This, then, was not a publication for the plebeian traveller but a professional presentation of a developed aesthetic for the experienced traveller.

The aesthetic was certainly shared by the passengers of the commercial tourist trade to the Saguenay, but as Creighton stated clearly in his article on the Lower St. Lawrence region, "our way lies not among, though perforce to some extent with the tourists. PICTURESQUE CANADA is not a guidebook; its random sketches attempt to show but a few scattered gems from among the treasures ready to artist's brush and writer's pen."¹⁴ Two years after its exhibition at the Royal Canadian Academy opening, *Sunrise on the Saguenay* was reproduced under its geographic title *Cape Trinity* within the pages of this picturesque publication. Apart from changes to accommodate the different medium (the omission of two birds, the rowboat with two oarsmen and a dinghy, the recomposition of the foreground, and the omission of the mist) the reproduction of this painting

found its place comfortably within the aesthetic of the publication.

Faced with the physical geography of the Saguenay region and the real development of the region for the logging industry, we witness the emergence of a widespread discourse on the picturesque which prefigures the transformation of the region with a mental re-mapping of the land. Whether we examine the expository discourse of the government's Department of Agriculture, the tourist brochures, or the artistic and literary discourses of the day, all sources indicate that the *Sunrise on the Saguenay* was the product of a profound psychological re-mapping of the land into pictorial form. The Saguenay was hardly the picturesque idyll presented to us in O'Brien's diploma painting. Rather it was the centre of a public debate on the development of Canada's wilderness landscape and a battle over the use of natural resources by contending pressures of industry, agriculture, leisure, and conservation forces. The painting's pictorial rendition of the region demonstrates the values and concerns of a painter faced with the transformation of the region asserting a harmonious and dignified relation between man, modernity, and natural forces. This ability to picture harmony in an age marked by industrial strife, political controversy, and social upheaval is testimony to the romantic yearning which is spawned under conditions of change.

In the international context, *Sunrise on the Saguenay* may be seen as the product of greater forces in the internationalization of the division of labour. As the model of city and country in economic and political relationships extended beyond the boundaries of the nation-state into the realm of a world model known as imperialism, we see the concomitant transformation of social and cultural activity around the world. In Canada this emerges in the form of a landscape tradition in the nineteenth century: a tradition premised on the understanding that nature is something to be interpreted and represented in the face of permanent historical alterations to the natural geography. Lucius O'Brien's work emerges as a hallmark of this new era with the *Sunrise on the Saguenay* serving as its insignia at the crossroads of new activity in the arena of industry, tourism, and leisure. As such we can perhaps better appreciate the profound forces at work upon the human psyche as the individual struggles in the act of creation before an increasingly complex world. Using the existing artistic traditions of his day, Lucius O'Brien renders a scene of tranquility balancing all the forces before him into a pictorial example of the picturesque. It is only through the recalling of archival

sources then that we are able to understand precisely how profound an interpretation has been worked in the creation of such a scene and what it may have meant to picture the picturesque in nineteenth-century Canada.

NOTES

* This research was originally prepared for the conference "Literary and Artistic Images of Canadian Landscapes" held at York University in 1989, organized by Glen Norcliffe and Paul Simpson-Housley. The proceedings of that conference appear in *A Few Acres of Snow: Literary and Artistic Images of Canada*, ed. by Paul Simpson-Housley and Glen Norcliffe (Toronto, 1992). A revised paper was delivered at the Universities Art Association of Canada Annual Conference 1991, in the panel "Landscape and Consumption" chaired by John O'Brien, University of British Columbia. The author would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of York University's Committee on Research, Grants and Scholarships.

- 1 Audrey Saunders Mills, ed., *The Journals of Mary O'Brien, 1828-1838* (Toronto, 1968). For an excellent account of Lucius O'Brien's life and art, see Dennis Reid, *Lucius R. O'Brien: Visions of Victorian Canada* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1990).
- 2 On the role of the gentlemen emigrant see Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver, 1981).
- 3 Hew Ramsay, *The Canadian Tourist* (Montreal, 1856), 130-35, and Samuel J. Kelso, *Notes on the Saguenay for Tourists and Others* (Quebec, 1862).
- 4 J. G. A. Creighton, "The Lower St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," in *Picturesque Canada*, ed. George M. Grant, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1882), 702.

- 5 Creighton, "The Lower St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," 719.
- 6 For domestic influences on the young O'Brien, see Reid, *Lucius R. O'Brien*, 12-20.
- 7 On the influence of Albert Bierstadt, see Reid, *Lucius R. O'Brien*, 48-49, and Dennis Reid, *Our Own Country Canada; Being an Account of the National Aspirations of the Principal Landscape Artists in Montreal and Toronto, 1860-1890* (The National Gallery of Canada, 1979), 290-95. On the influence of the Hudson River painters, see R. H. Hubbard, *Canadian Landscape Painting, 1670-1930* (The Elvehjem Art Center, 1973), 15-16. For a discussion of Bartlett in America, see John K. Howat, *The Hudson River and Its Painters* (New York, 1972), 131, and Cowdrey Bartlett, "William Henry Bartlett and the American Scene," *New York History*, xxii, 3 (October 1941).
- 8 Howat, *The Hudson River and Its Painters*, 131.
- 9 Howat, *The Hudson River and Its Painters*, 30, 40, 46, 132, 168, and 174.
- 10 The distinctions between the picturesque and sublime become difficult to define in the nineteenth century. John Gage has noted that for Turner's contemporaries the sublime often appeared as a category of the picturesque (John Gage, "Turner and the Picturesque—1," *Burlington Magazine*, cvii, 742 [January 1965], 18-19).
- 11 George M. Grant, ed., *Picturesque Canada*, vol. 1 (Toronto, 1881), inside front cover.
- 12 George M. Grant and A. Fleming, "Lumbering," in *Picturesque Canada*, vol. 1, 237-38.
- 13 Creighton, "The Lower St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," 697-740.
- 14 Creighton, "The Lower St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," 720.



FIGURE 88. Lucius O'Brien, *Sunrise on the Saguenay*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 87.7 × 128.8 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Illustrated News

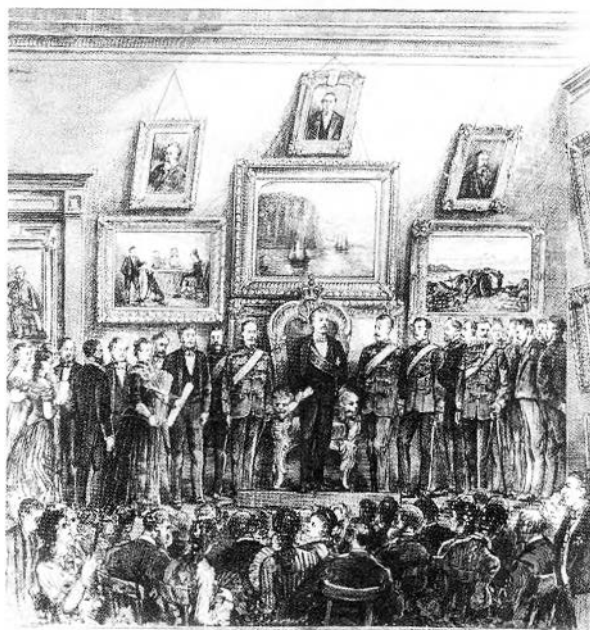


FIGURE 89. The First Exhibition of the Canadian Academy of Arts, *Canadian Illustrated News*, 24 April 1880. Public Archives of Canada, C-72968.



FIGURE 90. *Yacht in Full Sail, in Eternity Bay, P.Q.* National Photography Collection, Public Archives of Canada, PA-8716.



FIGURE 91. W. J. Redding after Lucius O'Brien, *Cape Trinity*. Wood engraving, 16.7 × 23.6 cm. In George M. Grant, ed., *Picturesque Canada*, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1882). Public Archives of Canada, C-85482.