

Finding the Sublime: Assessing Elizabeth Simcoe's Fires as an Art Practice

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ABSTRACT

Finding the Sublime: Elizabeth Simcoe's Fires as an Art Practice.

Bathsheba Susannah Wesley

This thesis traces Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe's (1766-1850) changing relationship to landscape during her stay in Canada (1791-1796), as she transformed from a genteel watercolour painter of tamed British landscapes to practicing less conventional means of creativity, which resulted most spectacularly in her developing an aesthetic fondness for setting forest fires. This thesis proposes that above and beyond Simcoe's painting, her art practice can also encompass this alternative means of aesthetic expression in relation to landscape.

Simcoe's practice, as such, conceptually parallels ideas running through late eighteenth-century European culture, specifically philosophy and art practice, concerned with the state of picturesque and sublime landscapes. Mirroring this discourse, Simcoe's performative behaviour and creative practice illustrate a subtle but marked shift from a removed picturesque appreciation of landscape, to an active creation of a sublime experience within the landscape, as she grapples with the colonial space in which she temporarily resides. When this transition in Simcoe's performativity and practice is analysed through contemporary theory on postcolonial landscape, female subjectivity and performativity, and the feminist sublime, an intriguing narrative begins to emerge of a woman facing, and then working within and for, the breakdown of conventional cultural systems through visual metaphor.

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Lastly, sincere thanks go out to my family and friends who have supported me through this process, particularly to Mark Lanctôt who has offered essential critical input and guidance, and provided me with much love and support.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents who fostered and encouraged my love of history and of art. I particularly dedicate this to my mother who, in 1982, bought a copy of Marion Fowler's *The Embroidered Tent*, and introduced my childish six-year-old imagination to the story of Elizabeth Simcoe and her fires.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

This thesis traces the perceptive journey of Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe (1766-1850) during her stay in Canada (1791-1796) as she moved from an English understanding of a fabricated picturesque landscape into a complex relationship with the vast, seemingly uncontrollable, daunting and “othered” wilderness of Canada.

During her cultural and geographical transition from England to Canada, Simcoe transformed from a genteel watercolour painter of tamed British landscapes to practicing less conventional means of creativity, which resulted most spectacularly in her developing fondness for forest fires. Simcoe set these fires for her own pleasure and that of her friends. Through these actions, Elizabeth Simcoe can be read as an exemplar of colonial excess and frivolity. I propose however, that she is a woman whose life and creative practice altered significantly during her time in Canada. I purport that above and beyond her painting, Simcoe’s art practice can also encompass her less conventional means of aesthetic expression, her forest fires, which at the time were not necessarily seen as art, but today can, productively if anachronistically be seen as such. Conceptually, Simcoe’s paintings and other means of visual expression parallel ideas running through late eighteenth-century European culture, specifically philosophy and art practice, concerned with the state of picturesque and sublime landscapes. Mirroring this discourse, Simcoe’s performative behaviour and creative practice illustrate a subtle but marked shift from a removed picturesque appreciation of landscape, to an active creation of a sublime experience within the landscape, as she grapples with the colonial space in which she temporarily resides. When this transition in Simcoe’s performativity and practice is analysed through contemporary theory on postcolonial landscape, female subjectivity and

performativity, and the “feminist sublime,” an intriguing narrative begins to emerge of a woman facing, and then working within and for, the breakdown of conventional cultural systems through visual metaphor.

Elizabeth Simcoe (née Gwillim) was raised in a wealthy, politically conservative environment in England. Simcoe’s mother, Elizabeth Spinckes died in childbirth and her father Thomas Gwillim Jr., who was a Lieutenant-Colonel and fought under General Wolfe at the Plains of Abraham, died just before her birth of unknown causes. Simcoe was raised, therefore, by her grandmother and aunts, as an only child in a household that valued education and conventional artistic accomplishments. In 1782, at the age of sixteen, Simcoe married Colonel John Graves Simcoe (1752-1806) and together they had eleven children.¹ In 1791 John Graves Simcoe was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada. The twenty-five year old Elizabeth Simcoe and their two youngest children Sophia and Frances, age two and four months respectively, accompanied him to Canada. Once in Canada the Simcoes travelled constantly, often by boat and canoe, guided by a combination of soldiers, voyageurs and First Nations guides. Initially they lodged in Quebec City, but quickly moved to what is now Southern Ontario, where John Graves Simcoe took up his post as Lieutenant Governor. While in Upper Canada, much of their time was spent around the shore of Lake Ontario, working in particular to develop the settlement of Toronto.² Elizabeth Simcoe took note of her observations in her Canadian journals, of which she wrote three versions. One version was a rough draft, another was for the caregiver of her children in England, Mrs Hunt, and the last version

¹ Six of the children were born before the Simcoes travelled to Canada. Mary Beacock Fryer, Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe 1762-1850: A Biography (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1989) 258-59.

² “The Toronto Carrying Place” was renamed York by John Graves Simcoe in 1793 and returned to the original name of Toronto in 1834. See Fryer, 74, 89, 216.

was for her oldest and dearest friend, the published botanist and geologist, Mary Anne Burges and includes supplementary detailed accounts and Simcoe's drawings of botanical specimens. While in Canada, Simcoe painted numerous watercolours and sketches depicting the landscape. Her artistic nature led her, however, to branch out creatively, imagining tableaux-vivants, painting on birch bark and most notably, developing a growing and active fascination with the visual spectacle of fire, which she recorded in her journals. When Simcoe returned to England in 1796, she ceased such dramatic and performative behaviour, and settled into a very conservative and conventional gentrified life, although she continued to paint the landscapes around her Wolford estate in Devon.

Simcoe's relationship with her surrounding landscape is one of the main themes within this thesis, as I analyse her subjective, performative negotiation between the known expectations of landscape formed in England, the unknown, "othered," ante-colonial landscape of Canada (which, as part of the colonial empire, she cannot have access to), and a burgeoning hybrid colonial landscape. During her time in Canada, Simcoe was keenly aware of the landscape around her. There is barely a journal entry written where she does not mention its appearance and climate, listing the qualities that do, or do not, make it "picturesque,"³ at times comparing and contrasting it against scenery in England⁴ and occasionally mentioning how the First Nations traditionally view and use particular areas of land.⁵ She travels through the landscape, often in search of

³ On many occasions Simcoe uses the term "picturesque" to describe the landscape, for examples see Elizabeth Simcoe, *The Diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe*, ed. Ross Robertson (Toronto: Prospero Books, 2001) 89, 119, 161, 191, 196, 234, 265, 286, 319, 328. Although the Mary Quayle Innis edited edition of Simcoe's diary is also available, it is the Robertson edited edition that I will refer to throughout these footnotes as "Simcoe."

⁴ For examples of these comparisons see Simcoe, 128, 161, 176.

“picturesque” scenery, such as Niagara Falls or views from the Niagara Escarpment. She describes this landscape in her letters and journal; she paints images of it; she paints on it (making paintings on birch bark); she draws with it (using pieces of clay⁶), and she also creates spectacle sites within the landscape through the use of fire.

Simcoe’s aesthetic appreciation for fire is exclusively tied to its surrounding wild landscape. Together they work to form a phantasmic scene, which pleases her immensely. Simcoe’s interest in the visuality of fire develops slowly, but it is present right from the beginning within her Canadian diaries. Although there are no images of Simcoe’s fires, in her journal she makes close to thirty references to fire,⁷ thirteen to forest and brush fires that she actively watches and studies as a spectacle,⁸ and two that she ultimately sets

⁵ For examples see Simcoe, 184, 216, 161.

⁶ Simcoe makes only one reference to drawing with clay chalk, gleaned from the Canadian landscape, on 10 June 1792. See Simcoe, 91.

⁷ See Simcoe, 68 (volcanoes), 69 (mention that Catholics are not allowed to have fires in their Churches as it damages the paintings), 71 (volcanoes and candlelight), 74 (reads of a leaf that emits a scent when lit with a match), 75-76 (chimney caught fire), 79 (description of building fires in the snow to warm them through the night), 135 (candle light and a violent lightening storm), 136 (temporary kitchen caught fire), 139 (cooking fish over a fire), 141 (mention of fire in the grate), 143 (description of a ball where the room was lit with wax candles, also mention of being accommodated with a “good fire” while travelling), 148 (packet of letters hung so near the fire that they burned), 155 (mention of a huge fire kept throughout the night for the officers also mention of a petroleum spring), 161 (children had made fires for diversion too near tall trees), 203 (dined by a large fire on wild duck), 215 (Mr Scadding’s cottage burned down), 229 (description of “Indians” round their fires), 242 (description of lighting canons with a match), 256 (notes that they had a “good fire” at the Maison de poste and that she “lay down on a boudet before the fire covered with a fur blanket”), 297 (note of fire in her woodstove), 298 (a huge fire made outside of Castle Frank, where they dined on toasted venison) 301 (ladies had another “immense” fire and toasted venison at Castle Frank), 302 (ladies had a large fire on the beach and toasted venison), 315 (had a fire made to dry from the rain), 336 (made two fires to stay warm), 348 (dried herself by the fire), 352 (description of Quebec City on fire).

⁸ See Simcoe, 74 (describes streams of fire resulting from rubbing silk gowns together), 94 (notes that Indigenous people sitting round fires was a good subject for her drawing), 97 (notes that the night sky filled with fire flies appeared like stars falling from heaven), 115 (walks with pleasure in a wood set on fire, notes that she will have woods set on fire for her evening walks), 158 (walks by woods set on fire and observes they are like stars and have a “beautiful effect”), 161 (notes the picturesque appearance of the “Indians” fires by the lakeshore at night), 209 (description of “wild and witchlike” Indigenous woman standing by a fire), 214 (watches fires set by children on the bay, and is reminded of Bath), 222 (observes a scene of starlight, the soldiers bright fires, and glimpses of moonlight), 293 (walks through a field alight with “immense” fires), 345 (watches moths flying into the fire flame), 353 (observes the fire burning in the Recollect Church in Quebec City).

herself.⁹ Simcoe's early observances of fire are very small and intimate. For example less than two months after her arrival in Canada, she writes in her journal, "I rub silk gowns with flannel to see the beautiful streams of fire which are emitted with a crackling noise during the cold weather."¹⁰ Throughout the next few months she takes note of the beauty of campfires and fireflies in the night sky, and then less than eight months into her stay in Canada, on 7 July 1792, Simcoe states:

Perhaps you have no idea of the pleasure of walking in a burning wood, but I found it so great that I think I shall have some woods set on fire for my evening walks. ...where the fire has caught the hollow trunk of a lofty tree the flame issuing from the top has a fine effect. In some trees where but a small flame appears it looks like stars as the evening grows dark, and the flare and smoke, interspread in different masses of dark woods, has a very picturesque appearance, a little like the poet Tasso's "enchanted wood."¹¹

Then on 9 November 1793 Simcoe logs her first recorded fire-setting incident, stating, "We dined in a meadow on the peninsula, where I amused myself with setting fire to a kind of long dry grass, which burns very quickly, and the flame and smoke run along the ground very quickly and with a pretty effect."¹²

Simcoe's actions with fire were unconventional. Although they reference aspects of eighteenth-century European culture, particularly an interest in the sublime, they were within their context, aberrant happenings, not set for any use other than an aesthetic one. As such, the fires conceptually relate directly to Simcoe's more conventional art practice, which takes the aesthetics of landscape and the picturesque almost exclusively as its

⁹ See Simcoe, 209 (sets fire to the grass along the peninsula), 214 (sets fire to the far shore of the bay).

¹⁰ Simcoe 74.

¹¹ Simcoe 115.

¹² Simcoe 209. Simcoe does not make note of with whom she was dining.

subject matter. Simcoe's fire setting, however, moves her art practice into the realm of the sublime. In this sense, from a contemporary perspective, Simcoe's fires are intrinsically connected to, and constitutive of, her art practice; as such, they beg to be examined, queried and hypothesized. Within this context it is also important to recall that Simcoe is not only a colonial subject within the landscape but also an agent of the colony. She is in a position of imperial power that does not alter and is inherent, regardless of how her approach to landscape and her art practice changes. As such, a dialectical tension is created between the performative role and perception of Simcoe in accordance to her status in society and her own interior subjective and creative transformation.

With this thesis I intend to expand discourse on the creative work of Elizabeth Simcoe, which has recently begun to be more critically explored in terms of art historical inquiry. Simcoe is among the first wave of English colonial women and artists to make the transition from the British Isles to the Canadas in the eighteenth century. I am questioning and exploring the effect and ramifications of that transition on Simcoe's subjecthood and creativity, most notably her fire setting, in relation to her surroundings. By exploring alternative forms of creative practice within a more traditional individual art practice I hope to broaden what historical art practices can be seen to encompass and challenge how they can be understood from a retrospective position. Fascinating, complex, innovative and sometimes contentious, Simcoe's practice and actions were produced at a formative time in Canadian, as well as European history, and illuminate a specifically female, colonial creative reality. Throughout the following pages I hope to provide new perspectives for future academic and popular study of Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe, further solidifying and vitalizing her role in Canadian art history and the history of women in Canada.

CHAPTER TWO: Methodology and Literature Review

The methodological approach of this thesis references Mieke Bal's edited anthology, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation* (1999),¹ which argues for cultural analysis as critical practice and emphasises an awareness of "the critic's situatedness in the present, the social and cultural present from which we look, and look back, at the objects that are always already of the past, objects that we take to define our present culture. Thus it can be summarized by the phrase 'cultural memory in the present.'² Bal seeks to problematize the silent assumptions of history, the gaps and ambiguities between the "object that is present and the statement about it" and recognise that this process is "inherently self-reflexive."³ Bal therefore does not want to isolate the past but instead sees it as "*part of the present.*"⁴ Objects, documents and histories continue to exist in and interface with the present, experiencing "transculturation" and "interdiscursive complexity"⁵ as they are viewed, read and repositioned by contemporary curators and art historians. Bal notes that the "reading itself, then, becomes part of the meaning it yields"⁶ and emphasises that such readings are born out of "an indifference to history but a foregrounding of the active presence of the

¹ Mieke Bal, "Introduction," *The Practice of Cultural Analysis: Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation*, ed. Mieke Bal (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 1-14.

² Bal 1.

³ Bal 1, 6.

⁴ Bal 1.

⁵ Bal 3.

⁶ Bal 10.

object or text, in the same historical space as is inhabited by the subject, 'me'."⁷

Following Bal's methodology, this thesis examines Simcoe's unconventional creative practice from a contemporary perspective, analysing Simcoe within her own cultural context, that of eighteenth-century England and colonial Canada, while acknowledging my place in the present, and applying recent, relevant, theoretical discourse.

Specifically relating to the feminist methodological approach taken within this thesis, Kristina Huneault has cautioned against a "reductive reading of the 'feminine'"⁸ when writing on individual female artists, while supporting a more complex exploration of the idea that males and females might have differing subjective approaches to creativity and the actual act of art making itself, dependent on cultural context and varying culturally imposed notions of femininity and masculinity. She sees difference as a "relational function that signals interactions amongst individuals and between individuals and social frameworks," which creates "structures of subjectivity (such as gender)."⁹ It is therefore my intention to produce an open-ended and complex discussion and analyses of Simcoe and her practice within the context of her gender and class influenced subjectivity, rather than a reductive one.

This thesis explores and expands on Simcoe's art practice using a combination of contemporary and historical references - primary, secondary and tertiary - with particular focus on landscape, subjective performativity and the sublime. Within each chapter I position Simcoe within the wider cultural ethos of her era both practically and

⁷ Bal 12.

⁸ Kristina Huneault, "Impressions of Difference: The Painted Canvases of Helen McNicoll," *Art History*, 27. 2 (2004): 213.

⁹ Huneault 215.

theoretically, and subsequently I examine Simcoe's creative actions from the standpoint of contemporary theory. In conclusion I assess what has been brought to Simcoe's art practice through the application of historical and contemporary research and theory.

Primary sources used in this thesis include Elizabeth Simcoe's journal entries and correspondence between Simcoe, her friends and family, which form part of the edited editions of her published diaries,¹⁰ as well as Simcoe's watercolours and sketchbooks.¹¹ Multiple versions of Elizabeth Simcoe's journal have been published in the last one hundred years. J. Ross Robertson edited and published *The Diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe* (1911), which includes notes and a biography, and I have based the majority of my primary source research on Robertson's edited version. Mary Quayle Innis also compiled and edited, *Mrs Simcoe's Diary* (1965).¹² According to Simcoe's biographer Mary Beacock Fryer, both published versions of Elizabeth Simcoe's diary are compiled from the three original copies she wrote in Canada.¹³ The majority of Simcoe's original diaries reside at the Archives of Ontario.¹⁴ The remainder are held at the Devon Record Office, UK, with microfilm copies made by Library and Archives Canada. As well many of Simcoe's original watercolours are housed within the collection of the Archives of

¹⁰ Simcoe's correspondence with Mrs Hunt, the caregiver to the Simcoe children who remained in England, is at the Archives Ontario (MS 517, B1-1). Simcoe's correspondence with Mary Anne Burges is split between the Archives Ontario (MS 517, B1-2) and Public Archives Canada (MG 23, H1, 1, ser.5, folder 29). Other family correspondence is held at Public Archives Canada.

¹¹ The majority of Simcoe's watercolours and drawings are in the Picture Collection of Archives Ontario. Thirty-two of Simcoe's watercolours are in the collection of the British Library (those that were given as a gift to King George III). The Public Archives of Canada and The David Macdonald Stewart Museum also hold sketchbooks.

¹² Elizabeth Simcoe, *Mrs Simcoe's Diary*, ed. Mary Quayle Innis (New York: St Martin's Press, 1965).

¹³ Fryer 7.

¹⁴ Available for consultation in fonds MS 517 133 of Archives Ontario.

Ontario and are available on-line through their website (www.archives.gov.on.ca/English/exhibits/simcoe/index.html).¹⁵ Public Archives Canada also possesses an Elizabeth Simcoe portfolio archive, some of which is housed at the David Macdonald Stewart Museum, Montreal.

Although Elizabeth Simcoe has never completely disappeared from the canonical narrative of Canadian history, within the late twentieth and early twenty-first century her texts and images have gained increasing attention and are being invested with new meaning and importance. Marian Fowler's text, *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada, Elizabeth Simcoe, Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, Anna Jameson, Lady Dufferin* (1982)¹⁶ began this process, positioning Simcoe within a revisionist feminist discourse on Canadian colonial history and literature, reflecting a second wave feminist interest in recuperating marginalised female narratives and achievements. Fowler also posits Simcoe within the eighteenth-century discourse of the picturesque and the sublime and suggests that this discourse can be seen as a metaphor for Simcoe's changing approach to living in the Canadian wilderness. Within the last decade there has subsequently been an increasing number of texts investigating aspects of Simcoe's life and creative output.¹⁷ In this thesis I reference recent articles on Simcoe such as Tom Gerry's text, "Extremes meet: Elizabeth Simcoe's birchbark landscapes"

¹⁵ "Travels with Elizabeth Simcoe: A Visual Journey Through Upper and Lower Canada," *Archives of Ontario*, eds. Janice Welsh and Guivevere Pura, 2005, Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, Ontario, June 2008, <www.archives.gov.on.ca/English/exhibits/simcoe/index.html>.

¹⁶ Marian Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada: Elizabeth Simcoe, Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, Anna Jameson, Lady Dufferin* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1982).

¹⁷ This may in part be a result of the Archives of Ontario's digitization of the Elizabeth Simcoe Archive and the creation of an on-line exhibition showcasing many of her watercolours in 2005 (formerly referenced in footnote 28).

(1999),¹⁸ “Canada’s First Literary Ladies” (2002) by Celine Kear,¹⁹ “Chateaubriand and Simcoe at Niagara Falls” (2005) by Eric Millar,²⁰ and Andrea Korda’s article, “Femininity, the Picturesque, and the Canadian Landscape: The Drawings and Watercolours of Elizabeth Simcoe and Elizabeth Hale.” (2006).²¹ The latter two papers were particularly relevant to this thesis, with its particular focus on Simcoe’s practice of setting wildfires. They discuss Simcoe’s subjective approach to landscape, and Korda, like Fowler, traces it from the picturesque to the sublime, although specifically through an analysis of Simcoe’s watercolour paintings. However, unlike Fowler, Korda examines Simcoe’s Canadian experience and painting from the perspective of contemporary theory on landscape and female subjectivity. Also useful and relevant to this thesis is the transcript of a conference paper given by Karen Landman, which investigates Simcoe’s approach to landscape and nature within her diary, setting it within “discourses of eighteenth-century imperialism, aesthetics, and science as found within her gender and class.”²² As well, Mary Beacock Fryer’s thoroughly researched biography, *Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe 1796-1850: A Biography* (1989) has been of great assistance in providing factual information on Simcoe and her immediate family, friends and

¹⁸ Tom Gerry, “Extremes meet: Elizabeth Simcoe’s Birchbark Landscapes,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, 106. 4 (1999): 588-601.

¹⁹ Celine Kear, “Canada’s First Literary Ladies,” *The Beaver: Exploring Canada’s History*, 82. 1 (2002): 15-19.

²⁰ Eric Millar, “Chateaubriand and Simcoe at Niagara Falls,” *Antigonish Review*, 143 (2005): 125-138.

²¹ Andrea Korda, “Femininity, the Picturesque, and the Canadian Landscape: The Drawings and Watercolours of Elizabeth Simcoe and Elizabeth Hale,” *Atlantis*, 30. 2 (2006): 8-19.

²² Landman, ““I think I shall have some woods set on fire for my evening walks’: Mrs Simcoe in Upper Canada, 1791-1796,” *Leaves vs Flames: Forest Fires and Canadian Society*, The 81st Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, University of Toronto, Toronto, 28 May 2002.

acquaintances. For similar reason, I relied on the editor's notes within J. Ross Robertson's most recent edited edition of *The Diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe*.

To locate Simcoe and her creative output within the wider, residual, cultural climate of eighteenth-century Europe, I examined texts and practices that were contemporary to Simcoe. This research included the development and popularization of theory relating to landscape, notably the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime as described by theorists such as Emmanuel Kant in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764),²³ and Edmund Burke within *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).²⁴ Also the picturesque, as discussed in William Gilpin's *Three Essays; On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape; to which is added a poem on Landscape Painting* (1794)²⁵ and Uvedale Price's *Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1810).²⁶ I have not found any reference that Simcoe read these texts (although it would not be surprising if she had considering her social class, education and artistic interest); nevertheless the arguments and ideas within these texts became so fashionable amongst Simcoe's class that, had she not read them, their overall message would have nevertheless infiltrated her perspective and taste and been influential on her

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T Goldthwait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

²⁴ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1987).

²⁵ William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (London: R. Blamire, 1794), [Google Books](http://books.google.ca/books?id=obclAAAAQAAJ&dq=gilpin,+william&client=firefox-a&source=gbs_summary_s&cad=0), digitized 14 June 2007 <http://books.google.ca/books?id=obclAAAAQAAJ&dq=gilpin,+william&client=firefox-a&source=gbs_summary_s&cad=0>.

²⁶ Uvedale Price, *Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London: L. J. Mawman, 1810), [Google Books](http://books.google.ca/books?id=A10AAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Uvedale+Price&client=firefox-a#PPP12,M1), digitized 12 Mar 2007 <<http://books.google.ca/books?id=A10AAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Uvedale+Price&client=firefox-a#PPP12,M1>>. This text was published after Simcoe left Canada, however it is still a useful reference in contextualising the discourse of the picturesque.

interpretation of landscape and her creative practice.²⁷ Simcoe's frequent use of the word "picturesque" to describe landscape scenery supports this notion.

I then researched how these theories were disseminated and realised in a practical and physical sense within European popular culture, making them relevant, accessible and popular within Simcoe's class and gender. This would include projects such as the constructed landscapes of Capability Brown (which are referred to in Simcoe's diary²⁸) the creation Marie-Antoinette's *Hameaux* (1770s and 1780s), the landscape paintings and drawings - picturesque or sublime in nature - by artists such as Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) (both of whom worked in the seventeenth century but whose work remained in vogue and an inspiration to the picturesque movement²⁹), François Boucher (1703-1770), Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), William Gilpin (1724-1804), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806), and Joseph Wright (1734-1797) among others. I have also referred to Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*³⁰ (delivered 1769-1790), which Simcoe read during her time in Canada.³¹ This text, which references many eighteenth-century artists and conveys Reynolds' approach to aesthetics, provides

²⁷ Women of Simcoe's period and class were trained, as part of their polite, accomplished education, to appreciate the qualities of the picturesque. This is supported in many of my sources including, Jaqueline M. Labbe, Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998) 37.

²⁸ Simcoe refers to visiting Blenheim Palace that was designed by Capability Brown (1716-1783) in 1764. See Simcoe, 161.

²⁹ Ann Bermingham, Learning to Draw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 90.

³⁰ Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975).

³¹ On 3 May 1793, Simcoe makes note in her journal that she is reading Reynolds's Discourses on Art. See Simcoe, 162.

access to knowledge that Simcoe unquestioningly possessed, thus offering greater insight into her artistic frame of reference.

Specifically in relation to eighteenth-century Canadian culture, I referred to the novel, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) by Frances Brooke,³² to which Simcoe alludes in her diary.³³ This text is useful in that it portrays life in eighteenth-century post-conquest Quebec from a female authorial perspective, describing the transitioning relationships between the Quebecois, the English colonizers and First Nations in a world comparable to the one occupied by Simcoe twenty years later. It also provides detailed, appealing and picturesque accounts of the Canadian landscape. As such it offers a wider perspective and background to the more narrow narrative of Simcoe's diary, while also supplying a glimpse into Simcoe's direct cultural influences, experience of literature and imaginative expectations of Canadian society, culture and landscape. For similar reasons I also examined Canadian landscape imagery executed by Simcoe's contemporaries, such as Thomas Davies (c.1737-1812), James Hunter (active 1776-1799), James S. Meares (active 1786-1835), and James Peachey (active 1774-1797) to acquire a general understanding of the range and commonality in the depiction of colonial landscape within Simcoe's period. Finally I referred briefly to John Graves Simcoe's journals to provide an alternative perspective to Simcoe's own.³⁴

Contemporary sources used in this thesis fall into three categories: present day theory on landscape, theory on the sublime (particularly the "feminist sublime"), and

³² Francis Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* (Don Mills: Carleton University Press, 1985).

³³ On 23 April 1792, Simcoe references the novel *The History of Emily Montague* in her journal. See Simcoe, 85.

³⁴ John Graves Simcoe, *A Journal of the Operations of the Queen's Rangers* (New York: Arno Press, 1968).

theory on subjectivity and performativity, which each take a historical/revisionist approach or are purely theoretical. Following my methodology this research functions not only to shed new light on Simcoe's experience and creative practice in Canada, but also to make it relevant within a contemporary perspective and context.

For this thesis it has been important to consider contemporary theory within the fields of Art History and Cultural Geography that discuss landscape as a subjective, culturally constructed entity. This research is pertinent to my analysis of Simcoe in that it supports the idea that her understanding and creative interpretation of the Canadian landscape was constructed and dependant on her cultural subjectivity. Significant texts I have cited which explore this theory include Denis E. Cosgrove's *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984),³⁵ Cosgrove and Daniels's anthology *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988),³⁶ Kay Anderson's *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (2003),³⁷ W. J. T. Mitchell's anthology *Landscape and Power* (1994),³⁸ which includes Ann Bermingham's text, "System, Order, and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795,"³⁹ and also Carole Fabricant's text, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth-Century" (1985).⁴⁰ Building on these theories of culturally constructed

³⁵ Dennis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

³⁶ David Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, eds., *The Iconography of Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁷ Kay Anderson, et al. ed., *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (London: Sage Publications, 2003).

³⁸ W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³⁹ Ann Bermingham, "System, Order and Abstraction: The Politics of English Landscape Drawing around 1795," *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 77-101.

landscape, but taking a gendered and specifically feminist perspective, I have referred to Jacqueline M. Labbe's *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and Romanticism* (2007), which situates and explores an eighteenth-century female approach to and expectation of landscape, which is directly relevant to Simcoe's experience. John E. Crowley's, "Taken on the Spot: The Visual Appropriation of New France for the Colonial British Landscape" (2005),⁴¹ Jill H. Casid's, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (2005),⁴² and "'Our Wattled Cot': Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes" by David Bunn⁴³ (published in *Landscape and Power*) all examine the idea of colonial landscape from a postcolonial perspective.

Leo Marx's text, *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral* (1964)⁴⁴ also discusses colonial landscape, as does Gaile McGregor's *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (1985).⁴⁵ Both examine how the construction of colonial landscape has effected and shaped the American (Marx) and Canadian (McGregor) psyches, and worked to manifest the nations' societies and identities as a whole. McGregor's text builds on Northrop Frye's theory of a "garrison

⁴⁰ Carole Fabricant, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 49-81.

⁴¹ John E. Crowley, "Taken on the Spot: The Visual Appropriation of New France for the Colonial British Landscape," *The Canadian Historical Review*, 86. 1 (2005): 1-28.

⁴² Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 2005).

⁴³ David Bunn, "'Our Wattled Cot': Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes," *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 127-173.

⁴⁴ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁴⁵ Gaile McGregor, *The Wacousta Syndrome: Explorations in the Canadian Landscape* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

mentality,” as described in *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (1971), which considers the Canadian colonial approach to “frontier” landscape and how it may have shaped the development of colonial communities and eventually Canadian society as a whole.⁴⁶ These theories particularly relate to Simcoe’s fire setting, which literally burnt down her physical frontier and in many ways worked outside the boundaries of social codes.

In connection to my research on landscape, while writing this thesis I found it relevant to examine ideas about the “feminist sublime” in relation to Simcoe’s experience of sublime landscape and nature in Canada, and most specifically in connection to her unconventional practice of performative fire-setting. The “feminist sublime,” as explored in Bonnie Mann’s text *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* (2006),⁴⁷ is a political and theoretical approach built upon the idea of the “feminine sublime,” an experience discussed in Barbara Claire Freeman’s book *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction* (1997).⁴⁸ The “feminist sublime” offers a critical analysis of the traditional masculinist sublime versus the “counter-experience” of a culturally feminine experience of the sublime, which emphasises alterity, excess, agency and the creation of trans-ontological experiences.

When applied to Simcoe, the “feminist sublime” challenges and further complexifies her

⁴⁶ According to Frye, the “garrison mentality” develops when “small isolated communities [are] surrounded with a physical or psychological ‘frontier’.... a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting...the real terror comes when the individual feels himself becoming an individual, pulling away from the group...” and symbolically find themselves alone in the overwhelming wilderness, battling nature and their inner self. Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1995) 227.

⁴⁷ Bonnie Mann, *Women’s Liberation and the Sublime: Feminism, Postmodernism, Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Barbara Claire Freeman, *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women’s Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

desire for sublime experiences in nature and her uninhibited and uncensored practice of setting wildfires visual pleasure.

To better understand the development of the eighteenth-century sublime, I have cited contemporary texts analysing its development, such as Ralph Cohen's anthology *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics* (1985),⁴⁹ which includes the text "From Addison to Kant" by M.H. Abrams⁵⁰ and Frances Ferguson's "Legislating the Sublime,"⁵¹ and also J.G Roberston's text *Studies in the Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth-Century* (1923).⁵² As well, to culturally contextualise Simcoe's desire for sublime spectacle in nature, I have referred to texts that examine the eighteenth century's popular cultural interest in the sublime, for example fire work displays, natural science experiments open to the public, and constructed environments, for example the Eidophusikon or mechanical stage sets. Texts such as Noah Herington's, "The Style of Natural Catastrophes," (1998),⁵³ Susan Seigfried's "Engaging the Audience: Sexual Economies of Vision in Joseph Wright" (1999),⁵⁴ and "Sparks For Sale: The Culture and

⁴⁹ Ralph Cohen, ed., *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

⁵⁰ M. H. Abrams, "From Addison to Kant," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 16-48.

⁵¹ Francis Ferguson, "Legislating the Sublime," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century British Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Ralph Cohen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 128-147.

⁵² J.G Roberston, *Studies in the Genesis of Romantic Theory in the Eighteenth-Century* (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1962).

⁵³ Noah Herington, "The Style of Natural Catastrophes," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 66. 1-2 (2003): 97-133.

⁵⁴ Susan Seigfried, "Engaging the Audience: Sexual Economies of Vision in Joseph Wright," *Representations*, 68 (1999): 34-58.

Commerce of Fireworks in Early Modern France” (2006) by Michael R. Lynn,⁵⁵ were all of use in building a cultural framework around Simcoe, providing important precedents to her works with fire, and locating her artistic outlook and motives.

Finally, I have examined the subjective aspect of Simcoe’s changing performative actions and creative practice while in Canada, through Judith Butler’s exploration of subjective performativity as dependent on context, laid out in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990).⁵⁶ Elspeth Probyn’s text, “The Spatial Imperative of Subjectivity” (2003)⁵⁷ was also useful in its discussion of the performative nature of subjectivity and identity as dependent on context. This relates to Simcoe in that I have allied her changing subjectivity with her changing colonial context.

To situate Simcoe’s subjective, gendered performativity, within a British eighteenth-century context, I have relied on Ann Bermingham’s book, *Learning to Draw* (2000), specifically her chapter “Accomplished Women,”⁵⁸ which discusses the performativity of eighteenth-century bourgeois and upper-class women like Simcoe, who represented their femininity through their use of creative accomplishment, such as picturesque drawing. Elaine Chalus’s text, “Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth-Century England” (2000)⁵⁹ further allowed me to situate Simcoe, performatively, within her class. Also of use was Lawrence Klein’s essay,

⁵⁵ Michael R. Lynn, “Sparks for Sale: The Culture and Commerce of Fireworks in Early Modern France,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 30. 2 (2006): 74-97.

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Probyn, “The Spatial Imperative of Subjectivity,” *Handbook of Cultural Geography*, ed. Kay Anderson, et al. ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2003) 290-299.

⁵⁸ Bermingham, *Learning to Draw*, 183-227.

⁵⁹ Elaine Chalus, “Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of late Eighteenth Century England,” *The Historical Journal*, 43. 3 (2000): 669-697.

“Politeness and the Interpretation of the British eighteenth-century” (2002),⁶⁰ which, together with aspects of Herington’s work, provide an analysis of the performance of politeness among the upper classes, particularly women. These texts were helpful in understanding and placing Simcoe’s behaviour, and more specifically her understated use of descriptive language within her cultural class.

Relating to female performativity, Meredith Martin’s PhD thesis, “Dairy Queens: Sexuality, Space and Subjectivity in Pleasure Dairies from Catherine de Medici to Marie Antoinette” (2006),⁶¹ has been valuable to this thesis in many ways, particularly in its discussion of elite eighteenth-century women who, like Simcoe, performed outside the bounds of expected and conventional behaviour, and created their own alternative and escapist spaces of performativity and modes of behaviour. As such, “Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias” (delivered in 1967) by Michel Foucault,⁶² has also been useful in its exploration of counter-sites, within real places, which exist between reality and utopia, outside of a traditional understanding of time and space. Additionally Mary McLeod’s feminist critique of Foucault’s theory of heterotopias, entitled “Everyday and ‘Other’ Space” (2000),⁶³ provides an alternative, female-oriented understanding of heterotopias. The theory of heterotopias has been valuable to apply to Simcoe’s wildfire events as a

⁶⁰ Lawrence E. Klein, “Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century,” The Historical Journal, 45. 4 (2002): 869-898.

⁶¹ Meredith Sunshine Martin, “Dairy Queens: Sexuality, Space and Subjectivity in Pleasure Dairies from Catherine de Medici to Marie-Antoinette,” PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2006.

⁶² Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, Feb. 2008 <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁶³ Mary McLeod, “Everyday and ‘Other’ Space,” Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction, ed. Jane Rendell et al. (London: Routledge, 2000) 182–202.

method of analysing and interpreting the physical and metaphorical space created by the fires as well as her performative behaviour in relation to them.

These texts, uniquely and collaboratively, have brought me new insight into Simcoe and her creative practice, as situated within her own era and from a contemporary standpoint. They have enriched and complicated my approach and analysis, and assisted my endeavour to strengthen Simcoe's legacy and relevancy within the present.

CHAPTER THREE: Simcoe's Subjective Performativity and the Picturesque

I rode to the whirlpool, a very grand scene half way between Queenstown and the Falls, where the current is so strong that eddies are formed in which hewn timber trees are carried down the Falls, from a saw mill, upright. Vast rocks surround this bend of the river, and they are covered with pine and hemlock spruce; some cascades among the rocks add to the wild appearance. These scenes have afforded me so much delight that I class these days with those in which I remember to have felt the greatest pleasure from fine art or nature, as at Blenheim, the "Valley of the Rocks," near Lynmouth and Lynton, in North Devon.¹

This chapter explores Elizabeth Simcoe's subjective relationship with the fashionable eighteenth-century idea of picturesque landscape, and how, within this context, various roles in society, particularly shifting expectations of female performativity and the threatened position of aristocracy can be allied with and interpreted within the picturesque. As well, I examine how Simcoe's notion of picturesque landscape and subject performativity adapt when placed in a Canadian context, where the aristocratic position shifts to a colonial one and upper class British notions of gender are challenged.

3.1 An Eighteenth-Century Grounding in Subjective Performativity and the Picturesque

Growing up in upper-class eighteenth-century England, Elizabeth Simcoe was likely schooled in the concepts of the picturesque. From childhood, Simcoe received drawing lessons,² which, for young patrician women in the second half of the eighteenth

¹ Simcoe 161.

² Fryer 15.

century, are framed around the concept of the picturesque.³ Fryer notes that Simcoe and her girlhood friend, Mary Anne Burges, took great enjoyment riding in the countryside, sketching, and collecting botanical specimens.⁴ Reading Simcoe's Canadian journal it becomes clear that, as an adult, she continually assessed the landscape in front of her in terms of its picturesque quality, noting her thoughts and associations. She also produced a multitude of drawings and paintings in the style of the picturesque while in Canada, read contemporary writing on art,⁵ participated in the eighteenth-century craze for images of volcanoes⁶ by copying imagery of Mount Vesuvius,⁷ and read popular fiction describing picturesque Canadian scenery, which she used as if it were a guide book.⁸ While in Canada, picturesque theory became a tool for Simcoe to use in deciphering and familiarising herself with the surrounding unknown landscape. Her search for picturesque scenery also provided her with a suitable reason to further explore and travel throughout the Canadian wilderness, which might have seemed an unnecessary undertaking were it not for her quest for the picturesque.

The concept of "picturesque" landscape began to acquire popularity in Europe during the early 1700s, spreading and evolving throughout the century.⁹ When examining

³ Labbe 37.

⁴ Fryer 17.

⁵ Note her reading of Joshua Reynolds's Discourses on Art. See Simcoe, 162.

⁶ Herington 98.

⁷ Simcoe 55, 59.

⁸ Simcoe refers to the colonial novel, The History of Emily of Montague (1769) by Frances Brooke, which I will discuss later in this chapter. See Simcoe, 85. Crowley discusses how this novel acted as a marketing tool for Canada in the eighteenth century. See Crowley, 15.

the picturesque it is critical to bear in mind that the very idea of landscape is a constructed fantasy, providing a space of mediation between human activity and nature.¹⁰ The roots of the picturesque lay in the ancient Greek idea of landscape, the Arcadian pastoral, which regained popularity in the seventeenth century and is depicted by landscape painters such as Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin (see figure 1).¹¹ This notion was then reinforced in the eighteenth century through the burgeoning field of Aesthetics, which most notably works to define and delineate the concept of the beautiful among other subjects. As well, a growing reaction against industrialisation and urban growth fuelled a nostalgic desire for picturesque landscape. Correspondingly, it also became a symbolic site for the power struggle between an emerging industrial bourgeoisie, who wanted to tour the countryside to experience and metaphorically possess its picturesque views, and the traditional landed aristocracy who resented this presence.¹² There was also contention over whether the picturesque as an ideology has feminine or masculine connotations, which I will now detail.

As a British, land-owning, female aristocrat who relocated to Canada in the role of a colonial figurehead, Simcoe's position in relationship to the idea of picturesque landscape is multifaceted. Her involvement with picturesque discourse can be read from several perspectives: as a female in a gendered discussion of the picturesque; as a member

⁹ Although there was an interest in Arcadian landscape in the seventeenth century, Joseph Addison's text "On the Pleasures of the Imagination" (1712) set the foundation for the picturesque movement, particularly in terms of landscape, in part because the philosophy of aesthetics in general proved very popular in the eighteenth century. For a detailed exploration of this see Fabricant, 49-81.

¹⁰ Cosgrove 20.

¹¹ Robertson discusses that the popularity of Arcadian landscape, noting that Queen Christine of Sweden, in affiliation with the Jesuits, contributed largely to the revival of the notion of Arcadia in the seventeenth century. See, Robertson 16.

¹² Fabricant 52.

of the aristocracy in the power struggle between the anti-republican landed classes and republican-leaning bourgeoisie; and as a symbol of colonial power in a contested landscape.

The picturesque represents a mild and domesticated view of rustic nature, which favours the general over the particular and gradual variation over uniformity.¹³ As the eighteenth-century landscape theorist, Uvedale Price states, “[the] picturesque appears to hold a station between beauty and sublimity; and on that account, perhaps, is more frequently, and more happily blended with them both, than they are with each other.”¹⁴ Price and his contemporary, the popular Reverend William Gilpin, very much rely on definitions of the beautiful as laid out by Edmund Burke¹⁵ and Immanuel Kant. Though when theorising on the picturesque, Price is very careful to distinguish it from the beautiful. Because Burke and Kant often ally qualities of the beautiful with femininity and place masculinity and the sublime as its binary,¹⁶ the picturesque began as a neutral ground to be enjoyed by both men and women, but became more associated with femininity as time goes on, particularly as women began to take up the art of drawing.¹⁷ Meredith Martin discusses the eighteenth-century association between women and the picturesque countryside, noting that in the writings of Joseph Addison¹⁸ we can find “[a]n idealization of the countryside as an appropriate, even necessary space for ‘good’

¹³ For a more detailed definition of the picturesque see, Gilpin, 3-38.

¹⁴ Price 66.

¹⁵ Burke xxxv.

¹⁶ Kant 78.

¹⁷ Please note Carole Fabricant’s previously cited essay. Also see, Bermingham, Learning to Draw 78.

¹⁸ Joseph Addison was an essayist at the turn of the eighteenth century, his text “On the Pleasures of the Imagination” (1712) contributed to the eighteenth-century interest in the aesthetics of landscape.

women.”¹⁹ She continues, “[For Addison] [t]he countryside is idealized for women and for married couples, whose domestic economy and prosperity mirrors the fertile abundance of the land.”²⁰ Women and beautiful landscapes were likewise seen as charming and agreeable objects to be viewed and admired, and rather like the paintings in which they are depicted, represented the status and worth of the men to whom they belonged. Furthermore, both women and landscape were the subjects of eighteenth-century theory put into practice. In the 1700s nature was classified and judged in terms of picturesque theory, which in-turn inspired estate owners, with the direction and imagination of landscape architects such as Capability Brown, to level and re-fabricate entire fenced in areas of the countryside to fit the newly adopted *natural* landscape ideals.²¹ Correspondingly, the century also witnessed the delineation, construction and establishment of a clear binary model of sex and gender, with particular pressures and expectations placed on the gendering of the female sex.²² These expectations required upper class and bourgeois women to perform an increasingly fabricated and stylized version of their gendered subjectivity to make themselves desirable within the marriage market, and to maintain an ideal state of femininity and accomplishment, reflecting well on their husbands in society.²³ In this way women were doubly aligned with landscape;

¹⁹ Martin 203.

²⁰ Martin 204.

²¹ It is of note that land enclosures were happening in England at this time. This was changing the use and meaning of the local landscape where communal land was being re-appropriated through enclosure measures. See Martin, 236.

²² See Thomas Laqueur, Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 153.

²³ See Bermingham, Learning to Draw 184 -186.

not only were their attributes seen as being similar, but both were expected and/or forced to strictly conform to those decided attributes, whatever their actual nature might be.

Because the picturesque was so commonly aligned with femininity, women were encouraged to partake in discussions and art making based on the notion of picturesque landscape as part of their feminine accomplishment.²⁴ But just as the constructed picturesque landscape is a very domesticated representation of nature, upper class women's accomplishments, with very few exceptions, remained within the domestic realm rather than entering the public and professional world.²⁵ Elizabeth Simcoe, who was raised within this milieu, participated in this expected, gendered performance of the eighteenth century. Her drawing abilities and intense appreciation of picturesque landscape would have been an asset in procuring romantic courtship.²⁶ We know, for example, that she seasoned in Bath,²⁷ where the spectacle of performed upper class female subjectivity aimed at an audience of admiring bachelors was most popularly played-out in eighteenth-century England. As well, when Elizabeth and John Graves Simcoe were courting they enjoyed long walks through their shared uncle's estate.²⁸ Once married, her knowledge and ability to depict the picturesque landscape became useful in establishing

²⁴ This idea is discussed in more general terms by Bermingham in the chapter "Accomplished Women" Learning to Draw (183-228). Also in Fryer's biography of Simcoe, in direct reference to Simcoe, Fryer mentions the idea that aristocratic women were schooled for appropriate conversation. See Fryer, 15. In tandem, Labbe notes that in the eighteenth century women were seen as thinking pictographically, as opposed to more deeply educated men. See Labbe, 12.

²⁵ In the eighteenth century, there were few exceptions, but they included women such as artists Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Angelica Kauffmann, Maria Cosway, and writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Fanny Burney, and Hannah More.

²⁶ Bermingham, Learning to Draw 225.

²⁷ In her journal Simcoe makes mention that she spent an evening remembering Bath, see Simcoe, 214. Also Simcoe's biographer notes that Simcoe often went to Bath as a young woman. See Fryer, 22.

²⁸ Fryer 23.

friendships between the Simcoes and key members of society. It is important to note that eighteenth-century upper class women exerted a subtle form of power in the establishment of political relationships for male family members through social calling and teas in particular (tea being a relatively new and fashionable phenomenon) and often female accomplishments such as drawing or discussing picturesque scenery would have been a desirable aid.²⁹ While in Canada, Simcoe made appointments to admire the drawing skills of members of elite society, such as Captain Benjamin Fisher of the Royal Engineers,³⁰ Mrs Dalton³¹ and Major Holland.³² She further solidified the relationship with Major Holland by borrowing his images of Mount Vesuvius from which she made her own copies.³³ Significantly, when she returned to England in 1796 Simcoe presented a folio of her landscape painting on birchbark as a gift to King George III.³⁴ In doing so, Simcoe, using her schooling in the picturesque, gained favour and ingratiating herself and her husband to the regal pinnacle of British aristocratic society.

²⁹ Chalus 671.

³⁰ Simcoe 82-83. Both Benjamin Fisher and his brother George Fisher were posted to Canada at the same time, both also were members and exhibited simultaneously at the Royal Academy in London. The two brothers are often confused as a result. It is believed however, to be Benjamin who lent his portfolio to Simcoe. The Fisher family had close relations with royalty. Their elder brother John was called the "King's Fisher" due to his friendship with King George III and also acted as patron to artists such as John Constable. Upon returning to Canada, George's watercolours of Canada were praised by Constable. See Frances G. Halpenny, ed, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Vol VI*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) 256-257. Also see Crowley, 27.

³¹ Simcoe calls on Mrs. Dalton in Quebec City on 14 August 1796, to see her "beautiful drawings." See Simcoe 351. There is no further information on Mrs. Dalton's social position, however Simcoe generally only associated with the social elite of the Colony.

³² Major Samuel Holland fought with Wolfe at Quebec. In 1763 he was appointed the Surveyor-General of Quebec, Director of Surveys in British North America and a member of the Council, Quebec. During Prince Edward's trip to Canada, he paid many visits to Major Holland at his home in Quebec. See Robertson, 57.

³³ Simcoe 351, 57, 59.

³⁴ See Gerry, 591.

During Simcoe's time in Canada however, the paradoxes, complexities and pitfalls of negotiating and performing female subjectivity in eighteenth-century society were accentuated. Ann Bermingham notes that problems potentially arise when women cease to be the object of the gaze and become active agents, performing the role of the viewer and the artist, viewing the "feminine" picturesque landscape from their own authoritative/authorial perspective.³⁵ In addition, Martin and Nancy Armstrong each discuss the delicate boundary sought in eighteenth-century women's learning and ambition, and the societal fear that a woman might become too accomplished.³⁶ Within Simcoe's era this concern is clearly laid out by Kant who, when defining the correspondence between femininity and the beautiful, states that women should "display facility, and appear to be accomplished without painful toil."³⁷ He continues:

Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex [...] they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex [...] The beautiful understanding selects for its objects everything closely related to the finer feeling, and relinquishes to the diligent, fundamental, and deep understanding abstract speculations or branches of knowledge useful but dry.³⁸

For the male landed aristocracy of the era, the fear was not only that women might overstep the boundary and penetrate or threaten their institutional domain of authority and authorship, but also that the rising middle class would do the same. This class had the

³⁵ Bermingham, Learning to Draw 193.

³⁶ Nancy Armstrong, "The Rise of the Domestic Woman," The Ideology of Conduct: Essays on Literature and the History of Sexuality, eds. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1987) 106. Also see Martin, 245.

³⁷ Kant 78.

³⁸ Kant 78.

finances to travel and the tools, via guides such as William Gilpin's *Observations of the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (1782), to tour the countryside and admire the picturesque scenery – experiencing first hand a gaze that had previously been reserved for, and symbolic of, patrician ownership. Carole Fabricant notes that, “the eighteenth century spectator, like a lord overseeing his creation, was able to ‘command’ a view of the country stretching out beneath him and thereby exert control over it in much the same way that the aristocratic class ruled over those on the lower rungs of the social hierarchy.”³⁹ In this way, landscape became a powerful political symbol in the eighteenth century at a time when the aristocracy were (in the case of England, yet again⁴⁰) feeling a threat to their traditional, closely guarded authority. Rather than turning against the bourgeoisie, the aristocracy superficially placated their fear of class revolt by targeting the rural and marginalised classes, through the representational codes of the picturesque. While the art and literature of the era aligned, stereotyped and pacified women within concepts of the beautiful and the picturesque, it also typecast the lower classes into harmless caricatures. This led to a craze for hired decorative “rustics” and “hermits” to wander through estate grounds, as well as an aristocratic trend for dressing up in the style of rural peasants. Martin notes that these stylized views and representations of pastoral life distance the aristocracy from reality and promote the fantasy of a return to feudal order.⁴¹

³⁹ Fabricant 56.

⁴⁰ Unlike France, England had already faced the abolishment of monarchy during the English Civil Wars 1642-1649, which resulted in the execution of the King Charles I and exile of Charles II.

⁴¹ Martin 13 – 14.

It is likely that Simcoe adhered to these picturesque and class values as part of her privileged up-bringing. While in Canada, she transplanted her perspective onto the peasants and marginalised communities she witnessed on her travels, frequently describing members of Canada's the First Nations as picturesque, allying them with simplified stereotypes, imagining them within tableaux-vivants scenarios,⁴² and having her young son dress up as an "Indian" for his third birthday.⁴³ Contextualising Simcoe's practices within this phenomenon, Eric Millar notes, "Picturesque doctrine in Europe favoured the marginalized - gypsies, banditti, beggars. To depict such people was not to extend great sympathy toward them; their appealing exoticism depended on their poverty."⁴⁴ He then specifies, "Servants and Native people may pose a threat [to the idealised notion of picturesque landscape and the dominant class system]. The servant could rise up, as happened in revolutionary France; the exotic 'Indian' could disrupt settlement."⁴⁵ Simcoe's actions can then be seen as symptomatic of a larger practice working to assuage the threat of the unknown and a loss of power.

In such ways Simcoe generally conformed to the expected conduct of her gender and class. Reflecting her patrician status, she was conservative, anti-republican and, as much as is possible during her stay in Canada, socialised with the upper echelons of Canadian society – the families of First Nations' leaders being considered marginally acceptable as well.⁴⁶ In first hand accounts she is described as being modest, demure, and

⁴² Simcoe 210.

⁴³ Simcoe 228.

⁴⁴ Millar 132.

⁴⁵ Millar 132.

polite,⁴⁷ feminine qualities that were considered ideal during this era.⁴⁸ From her journal we also know that she had a keen interest in fine objects and fashion⁴⁹ – fulfilling the eighteenth-century notion that women should be interested in ornamentation.⁵⁰ As well, Fowler notes that Simcoe showed a tireless devotion to hosting and attending social gatherings even if she was ill, thereby demonstrating her devotion to her position, status, and duty as a wife.⁵¹ Her time in Canada however, challenged this conformity to gender expectations and aesthetic expectations of landscape. Within the foreign landscape and the hybridity of a burgeoning colonial society, Simcoe struggled to maintain her eurocentric codes of vision and performance, and began little by little to take liberties to make dramatic gestures – lapses, that, in their most extreme moments, resulted in performative transgressions using the powerful, destructive and contentious spectacle of fire.

3.2 Seeing Picturesque

⁴⁶ For example the Simcoes only socialise with elite Upper Canadian families, not the average working settler. They do however host and socialise with the leading First Nation Chiefs and their families, for example The Great Sail's family as well as Joseph Brant and his extended family. Fryer notes however, Simcoe's restraint and hesitancy when socialising with First Nation women of high birth, such as Molly Brant. See Fryer, 107.

⁴⁷ Fowler 21.

⁴⁸ Martin 244.

⁴⁹ Simcoe is very interested in fashion and make note of the dresses worn at local balls, she also describes attempting to make herself a turban, which she had discovered were the latest trend in England. See Simcoe, 85. She is also extremely distraught when all her Nankeen china, newly received from England, is smashed in a kitchen fire. See Simcoe, 136. Fowler makes note of Simcoe's appreciation of fashion and finery. See Fowler, 21.

⁵⁰ Kant writes, "Women have a strong inborn feeling for all that is beautiful, elegant, and decorated. Even in childhood they like to be dressed up, and take pleasure when they are adorned." See Kant, 77.

⁵¹ Fowler notes Simcoe's tireless devotion to duty. See Fowler, 22. Also Elaine Chalus discusses the duties expected of elite women throughout her essay, previously cited, "Elite Women, Social Politics, and the Political World of Late Eighteenth Century England."

Writing on Simcoe's contemporary in Canada, the landscape artist George Heriot (1759-1839), cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove states, "as is so often the case, it was convention that framed his vision of the new environment he encountered rather than the environment which challenged that vision."⁵² While in Canada, Simcoe's writing, drawing and painting confirm that she also held on to a prescribed idea of what landscape should look like, what is pleasing and picturesque. Following the instruction of her girlhood tutors, she projects a European understanding of landscape onto the wilderness of Canada.⁵³ We clearly see this created vision of the Canadian landscape in Simcoe's paintings. The image of Canada she portrays is similar to Claude Lorrain's conception of Arcadian landscapes and other more contemporary European landscape artists, such as Reverend William Gilpin and Richard Wilson. The composition of the landscape, the style of trees and foliage depicted, the selected colour palette, the brushstrokes, and overall mood of the works are firmly rooted in the European picturesque tradition (see figures. 2, 3 and 4). As Andrea Korda notes, "Simcoe's *Whirlpool Below the Falls* is made up of sketchy lines filled in with imprecise applications of watercolour, corresponding to the picturesque's requirement of roughness and variety."⁵⁴ Simcoe represents the landscape to suit her culturally subjective expectations and requirements. Just as the idea of landscape itself is a forged and mediated space between nature and

⁵² Denis Cosgrove, "Review of Gerald Finley, *George Heriot: Postmaster-Painter of the Canadas*," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 14 (1984) 234-237. See also, Brian S. Osborne, "The Iconography of Nationhood in Canadian art," *The Iconography of Landscape*, eds. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Quoted in Osborne in Cosgrove, 163.)

⁵³ Korda 11.

⁵⁴ Korda 11.

human understanding,⁵⁵ Simcoe's work becomes a fictive construction of the landscape she inhabits – a fantasy. For WJT Mitchell, landscape is the “‘dreamwork’ of imperialism, unfolding its own movement in time and space from a central point of origin and folding back on itself to disclose both utopian fantasies of the perfected imperial prospect and fractured images of unresolved ambivalence and unsuppressed resistance.”⁵⁶ Simcoe's paintings do not represent the muggy, mosquito-laden environment she confronted, nor the grey bitter snowy vistas, which were so cold she was forced to wear a fencing mask lined with fur when travelling out of doors, nor does she depict the muddy sleet-filled April landscape she so detested, even though we know from her journal that these landscape scenarios were very much part of her reality.⁵⁷ As a result, the landscape Simcoe portrays exists as an imagined hybrid space, or perhaps a desired future space.⁵⁸

The hybrid space Simcoe creates in Canada has cultural precedent, however, which she was aware of and utilized. On 29 April 1792 Simcoe writes, “The woods are beautiful and we went to Sillery, that pretty vale Emily Montague describes, indeed her account of Quebec appears to me very near the truth.”⁵⁹ Simcoe is referring here to English author, Frances Brooke's 1768 novel, *The History of Emily Montague*, which is set in Canada and describes the experiences of upper-class British individuals in the

⁵⁵ Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* 20.

⁵⁶ Mitchell 10. The latter half of this quote can be seen to be reflected in Simcoe's transgressive fire setting, which will be discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

⁵⁷ Simcoe 118, 59, 83.

⁵⁸ See Casid 2. This landscape is a tidily packaged bucolic scene compared to the transgressive and unresolved issues demonstrated within Simcoe's fire setting (explored in Chapter four).

⁵⁹ Simcoe 85.

newly conquered Lower Canada.⁶⁰ In John E. Crowley's discussion of the visual appropriation of Lower Canada by the British colonizers, he writes that *The History of Emily Montague*, "played a crucial postwar role in familiarizing Britons with their new colony's scenic and social landscape."⁶¹ Crowley further observes, "Brooke's novel was distinctive for its topographical presentations of colonial landscapes [...] For a romantic novel with such a picturesque setting, *Emily Montague* had a strong undercurrent of imperial politics."⁶² Brooke's novel clearly helped shape Simcoe's expectations of her new physical landscape, as the reference to Brooke's novel in Simcoe's diary demonstrates. It could also, however, have shaped Simcoe's initial cultural understanding of the new colony. For example not long after Simcoe's arrival in Quebec, she notes that Quebec women are "better educated than the men, who [leave] ...the management of their affairs to the women."⁶³ Brooke makes reference to this in *Emily Montague*, stating:

"The peasants are ignorant, lazy, dirty, and stupid beyond all belief; but hospitable, courteous, civil; and what is particularly agreeable, they leave their wives and daughters to do the honours of the house.[...] All the knowledge of Canada is confined to the sex; very few, even of the *seigneurs*, being able to write their own names."⁶⁴

Simcoe journal demonstrates that she spends very little time fraternising with the common

⁶⁰ Frances Brooke (1724-1789) resided in Lower Canada from 1763-1768, joining her husband who was a garrison chaplain. She was a playwright as well as a novelist and her social circle in England included Samuel Johnson, Fanny Burney and Samuel Richardson. For further biographical information on Brooke see Kear, 17-18. In relation to Brooke, it is interesting to note that on 23 October, 1794 Simcoe writes in her journal that she was very amused by a play she had just seen, written by a lady emigrant. See Simcoe, 258. Other than Brooke there were very few, if any, "lady emigrant" playwrights in Canada at the time (see Kear, 17) so there is a strong possibility the play may have been written by Brooke. (Other notable early colonial writers such as Anna Jameson, Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr-Traill and Anne Langton were active after Simcoe's time, in the nineteenth century.)

⁶¹ Crowley 15.

⁶² Crowley 16.

⁶³ Simcoe 91.

⁶⁴ Brooke, 18

populace, so the opinions displayed in Brooke's novel would have provided her with insight and supplied a starting template for her own created hybrid space, blending the values of British aesthetic culture with the reality of a foreign landscape and mode of existence.

This created colonial landscape is what David Bunn calls a "transitional landscape," where "the terrain is displayed as though already ordered to European conventions of taste."⁶⁵ He goes on to write that within the colonial landscape, "we see more nakedly revealed the interdependence between representations of Nature and the emergence of an underdeveloped settler *public sphere*."⁶⁶ By portraying the Canadian landscape in the European tradition, Simcoe – like the novelist Frances Brooke – was subconsciously or consciously authoring the landscape to fit her own desires and expectations.

In Simcoe's case, this was a direct and literal possibility. She came to the Canadas with her husband, John Graves Simcoe, the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada who represented King and Country and wielded the power to shape this new area of Empire as he desired. He had great plans to do so, and Elizabeth Simcoe shared these plans to some extent. Simcoe's biographer, Mary Beacock Fryer writes, "He envisaged the vast peninsula...as his heartland, a kingdom to be filled with subjects who were both loyal to the Crown and adherents of the Church of England. This would be his paradise..."⁶⁷ John Graves Simcoe mapped out Upper Canada, renaming rivers, lakes and towns, and

⁶⁵ Bunn 136, 129.

⁶⁶ Bunn 141.

⁶⁷ Fryer 37.

strategically creating new towns.⁶⁸ Elizabeth Simcoe at times participated in this process of envisioning and mapping what would later become the province of Ontario. She drew detailed maps for General Simcoe's official reports,⁶⁹ referring in her journal to the long days spent drawing them (see figure 5).⁷⁰ Elizabeth Simcoe also participated with her husband in the naming of townships in Upper Canada. The region of Scarborough derives its name from the Simcoes' plans for a summer home.⁷¹ As well, several townships in Upper Canada, particularly in Simcoe County, are named Gwillimbury after her maiden name of Gwillim.⁷² She named three more townships in Simcoe County after her lap dogs, Tiny, Tay and Flos,⁷³ and named an island near Gananoque "Bass Island."⁷⁴ Simcoe's combined sense of power and whimsy is reflected in a first person account by

⁶⁸ John Graves Simcoe proposed to move the capital from Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario) to an area he dubbed New London (now London, Ontario) along the shores of a river names the Thames. When this proposed capital was rejected by his superior, Lord Dorchester, John Graves Simcoe settled on his second choice, the region of Toronto, which he renamed York. See Fryer, 121, 155. Also see Simcoe, 155. As Lieutenant Governor he granted "whole townships to individual applicants, who were to act as organizers of settlement and in turn to be accepted as a sort of local gentry," and he built key roads, namely Dundas and Young streets, which emanated from York and opened the province to trade and immigration. Young Street ran from Lake Simcoe to Lake Ontario along a tradition fur trade route. Dundas Street opened the Upper Canada corridor to Hamilton, which in turn provided thoroughfares to the Niagara region and Lake Erie. See, S. R. Mealing "John Graves Simcoe," Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, ed. John English, 2000, Library and Archives Canada, March 1, 2008 <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=36781>>.

⁶⁹ Bermingham notes that drawing maps was a popular activity in the eighteenth century. See Bermingham, Learning to Draw 78-81. It is interesting, particularly for a woman, that Simcoe's maps were not just for pleasure but used in an official capacity, mapping out an unknown area of the British Empire.

⁷⁰ Simcoe 148.

⁷¹ Simcoe writes, "The shore is extremely bold, and has the appearance of chalk cliffs, but I believe they are only white sand. They appeared so well that we talked of building a summer residence there and calling it Scarborough." Simcoe 180.

⁷² Simcoe 298.

⁷³ Simcoe and Norfolk County (Simcoe: Pearce Publishing, 1924) 1.

⁷⁴ Simcoe 336 - 339.

her contemporary Hannah Jarvis,⁷⁵ which is referenced in Marian Fowler's *Embroidered*

Tent. Jarvis writes:

The Governor and Family are gone to Toronto (now York) where it is said they Winter – and a part of the Regiment – they have or had, not four Days since, a Hut to shelter them from the Weather – in Tents – no means of Warming themselves, but in Bowers made of the Limbs of Trees – thus fare the Regiment – the Governor has two Canvas Houses there – Everybody are sick at York – but no matter – the Lady likes the place – therefore every one else must – Money is a God *many* worship.⁷⁶

Jarvis's disgruntled and disapproving comment reflects and critically complicates Simcoe's power and sway with regard to her husband's planning decisions.⁷⁷

Politically, geographically, visually and culturally, the Simcoes played a very overt role in shaping the colonial landscape and beginning to establish the "settler public sphere,"⁷⁸ blurring the lines between the pre-colonial world (or specifically an area of the French empire which had been explored but not significantly settled) and the culture of their conquering British homeland. Addressing this issue in his article, "Taken on the Spot: The Visual Appropriation of New France for the Colonial British Landscape," John E. Crowley sees Elizabeth Simcoe's artwork "in counterpoint to her husband's

⁷⁵ It is of note that Hannah Jarvis and her husband, who was the Provincial Secretary of Upper Canada, left England on the same ship as the Simcoes, the *Triton*. See Fryer, 39 - 40. Jarvis found Elizabeth Simcoe very patronizing. Fryer conjectures that Jarvis, who had grown up with wealth and status in Connecticut, was perhaps not used to the inflexible British class system where peerage meant more than wealth and landed gentry such as Simcoe were at the apex of the system. See Fryer, 70-71.

⁷⁶ Fowler 32.

⁷⁷ Fryer also notes that Jarvis "suggested that the governor had married [Elizabeth] for her money, and now he suffered from petticoat rule." See Fryer, 70. Fryer rebuts Jarvis's first hand opinion, however, stating that the Simcoes' made a joint decision to stay at York and noting that John Graves Simcoe agreed to follow his wife's desire realising he could observe first hand the building of his new Naval base and roads. See Fryer, 89.

⁷⁸ Bunn 141.

geopolitical strategies.”⁷⁹ Both were “colonizing” the imperial landscape, overwriting it with British order, reference, and politics, though in Simcoe’s paintings the political aspects are more subtle and metaphoric. Looking at the post-conquest Canadian colonial art tradition, Crowley observes: “In emphasizing the beauty of newly-acquired domains and the picturesqueness of their inhabitants, artists encouraged the metropolitan viewing public to consider the expanded empire as benign realms of amenable subjects. Such landscapes made it difficult to imagine Canadian insurgency.”⁸⁰ General Simcoe was directly implementing these same desires, making the country welcoming for British immigration, carving the landscape into familiar British-style towns, with grid-street systems named after familiar contemporary figures of English society, abolishing slavery in Upper Canada,⁸¹ and protecting the colony from revolt by the First Nations or invasion by Americans.⁸²

Since popular contemporary English landscapes were themselves often constructed as manicured imitations of wild and natural terrains, such as those existing in Canada, there is a certain irony in Elizabeth Simcoe’s desire (and that of her colonial contemporaries) to Anglicise the Canadian landscape. Eighteenth-century English estates

⁷⁹ Crowley 26.

⁸⁰ Crowley 14 - 15.

⁸¹ In 1793 Simcoe began the process of abolishing slavery in Upper Canada, passed legislation forbidding slaves to be brought into the Province and declaring that all children born to slaves to be free at the age of twenty-five, and their children to be born free. Fryer notes that both Elizabeth and John Graves Simcoe “agreed with the opinions of William Wilberforce and other abolitionists.” See Fryer, 87.

⁸² Simcoe acted as a diplomat attempting to maintain First Nations’ support for the British, keeping their claims counter to American negotiations and working for the failure of their treaties with the Americans. In a scheme to purchase land, Simcoe made unrealistic promises to the Six Nations, which exceeded his imperial instructions. Simcoe, however, could not understand why Natives would not conform to his imperial demands and expectations. This led to mistrust between Simcoe and Chief Joseph Brant (otherwise known as Thayendanegea). See Mealing, <<http://www.biographi.ca/EN/Show Bio.asp?BioId=36781>>.

and parks designed by landscape architects such as William Kent, Capability Brown, Henry Holland, and Humphry Repton, used imported trees from the far reaches of the Empire, including Canada. Estates such as Blenheim (which Simcoe references in her journal), Stowe, Kew, Milton Abbey and Harewood House, among others, are constructed to simulated ideal nature and wilderness scenery.⁸³ A very blatant example of this trend is at Althorp estate, where Lady Spencer commissioned Henry Holland to design and name a portion of her estate “The Wilderness.”⁸⁴ Of course, these landscapes are a far cry from the reality of what is commonly considered an “authentic” Canadian wilderness.

Conversely, Simcoe’s imperial projection of a European sensibility of the picturesque onto the Canadian landscape can be seen not only in her paintings, as previously discussed, but also in her written observations. Simcoe compared the wild reality of Canada to the simulated wildness of English landscapes almost as if she saw Canada as an imitation of the ideal British landscape.⁸⁵ As well as comparing her experience of the Canadian landscape to that of seeing “Blenheim, the ‘Valley of the Rocks,’ near Lynmouth and Lynton, in North Devon,”⁸⁶ she also writes,

I was struck with the similarity between these hills and the banks and those of the River Wye about Symond’s Gate (the name of a rising ground or eminence overlooking the Wye), and the lime rock near Whitchurch, both in Herefordshire, which differs very little, except in the superior width and clearness of the Niagara River.⁸⁷

⁸³ Casid 52. Also, Stephen Daniels describes trees as symbols of political ideals and empirical power. See Stephen Daniels, “The Political Iconography of Woodland in later Georgian England,” The Iconography of Landscape, eds. David Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 43.

⁸⁴ Martin 249.

⁸⁵ Millar 131.

⁸⁶ Simcoe 161.

⁸⁷ Simcoe 126 - 127.

Further, she compares the Upper Canada property of a Mrs Tice to properties in Epping Forest,⁸⁸ and the sands along Lake Ontario to the shore of Weymouth,⁸⁹ the popular Georgian resort town from which the Simcoes departed for Canada.⁹⁰

There is, consequently, a blending of local landscapes happening both within the colony and within the colonial power. In *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization*, Jill Casid states that in England, “Brownian landscape eroded visual distinction between the alien and the familiar, the native and the exotic. These exotic trees... were arranged into naturalistic clumps so as to appear as if they had always been there. Such carefully managed transitions functioned to absorb the introduction into an effect of the ‘natural’ and the ‘indigenous’.”⁹¹ Therefore it could be said that Simcoe who, previous to travelling to Canada, had always lived on and frequented the “picturesque” grounds of famous estates in England,⁹² was already programmed to see the “exotic” as natural and associate it with her homeland.⁹³

The landscape Simcoe inhabited in Canada was, nevertheless, far from the genteel, familiar landscapes of England. The terrain was often difficult to navigate and the weather was extreme. Simcoe however, generally kept her spirits high and often approached

⁸⁸ Simcoe 176.

⁸⁹ Simcoe 180.

⁹⁰ J. Ross Robertson, annotation, *The Diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe*, by Elizabeth Simcoe (Toronto: Prospero Books, 2001) 36.

⁹¹ Casid 52.

⁹² Fryer lists the various estates Simcoe lived on during her lifetime and the picturesque areas of the country Simcoe travelled to with her friend Mary Anne Burges. See Fryer, 17.

⁹³ In order to reach the demand for a new diversity on domesticated grounds, Casid notes that between 1701-1750 sixty-one foreign trees and ninety foreign shrubs were brought to England. See Casid, 52.

nature with a detached, philosophically empirical Enlightenment approach, noting and categorizing flora and fauna which were previously unknown to her and medicinally useful.⁹⁴ Much of this practical botanical information Simcoe gained from the First Nations people (particularly the women) around her.⁹⁵

Throughout her journal she describes the individuals and groups of Indigenous people she saw and with whom she interacted. To Simcoe, however, they were as much a part of the new scenery as native flowers and berries, lakes, rivers and waterfalls. Several times she describes the Indigenous people within the landscape as looking like one whole picturesque image.⁹⁶ She observes:

An Indian woman came today [...] to gum the canoe [...] Her figure was perfectly wild and witchlike, and a little fire, with a kettle on it by her side, in a stormy dark day, the waves roaring on the beach near which she stood, formed a scene very wildly picturesque.⁹⁷

While typical of her description of First Nations, this identification of indigenous bodies as part of the picturesque landscape is rarely applied to European bodies within the landscape.⁹⁸ Essentially, for Simcoe the First Nations were part of the landscape, while Europeans oversaw and directed the landscape. This attitude is typical of the European picturesque gaze that, clearly, saw Indigenous people in much the same vein as village

⁹⁴ For example, Simcoe writes, "I was amused by observing the various barks of trees – most deeply indented and light coloured white ash, the rugged shaf cedar, the bass wood, the varieties of white and black oak, the maple, chestnut, etc; the strong lines on the pine, particularly the Norway, which is of a yellow brown, and when cut approached to a bright orange colour; among all this the smooth bark of the beech looked as naked as a frog, and had a very mean appearance amongst the rest of the trees." See Simcoe, 269.

⁹⁵ For instance Molly Brant, the sister of Joseph Brant gave Simcoe a prescription of plant salve to cure her husband's illness. See Simcoe, 274-75.

⁹⁶ For example of these descriptions of the First Nation see Simcoe, 94, 161, 209.

⁹⁷ Simcoe 209.

⁹⁸ An exception being a scene of soldiers encamped by a fire, which she sees as picturesque and also the *Canadiens* in tradition dress. See Simcoe, 110, 265.

folk, gypsies and vagabonds. They were merely viewed as decorative objects within idealised landscapes. Carole Fabricant reinforces analysis that the eighteenth-century picturesque viewer saw poverty not as a social issue, but rather as either an offensive visual eyesore or as fodder for formal picturesque theory, there to offer variety of shape within the landscape.”⁹⁹

When Simcoe is not blending First Nations figures into picturesque landscapes, with a few intimate and marginal exceptions, she has a tendency to exoticise or Europeanise them, much as she does with the landscape.¹⁰⁰ She writes,

I sketched a Caughnawaga Indian to-day whose figure was quite antique [...] I have often observed (but never had more reason to do so than to-day) that when the Indians speak, their air and action is more like that of Roman or Greek orators than of modern nations. They have a great deal of impressive action, and look like the figures painted by the Old Masters.¹⁰¹

She also describes Indigenous people as appearing “fierce” and seeking to “inspire the spectators with terror and respect for their ferocious appearance” when they dance.¹⁰² She makes many comments about their drunkenness, but notes that First Nations communities in close contact with the British, such as the Ojibwas, do not have alcoholic tendencies,¹⁰³ and she also describes their singing as characterized by “dismal tones” and “savage whoop[s].”¹⁰⁴ Simcoe was obviously intrigued and affected by several of the men’s

⁹⁹ Fabricant 62 - 63.

¹⁰⁰ Simcoe 188.

¹⁰¹ Simcoe 213.

¹⁰² Simcoe 103.

¹⁰³ Simcoe 184.

¹⁰⁴ Simcoe 118.

physical appearances and on a few occasions she notes how handsome Indigenous men appear, particularly in their traditional attire (see figure 6).¹⁰⁵

To Simcoe and many of her contemporaries, the First Nations represented a mysterious extended history and tradition within the landscape to which she and her fellow colonials did not belong; it existed prior to their presence. The existence of this “other” world could be seen as being both disconcerting and of little interest to the colonialists’ present and hopes for the future. In this regard, Simcoe’s experience and reaction to the natural environment and its Indigenous people follows David Bunn’s observation regarding the colonial landscape imagery of Africa. He states,

Colonial space [...] is a site of regular ontological shock. It is filled with competing indigenous meaning, a foreign semiotics that does not accommodate class and gender distinctions in the same way, which must consequently be rewritten so that it appears willing to admit colonial appropriations.¹⁰⁶

In essence this is what Simcoe is effecting on the landscape. Within her hybrid space she is redrawing and overwriting the landscape, imbuing her surroundings with her own cultural subjectivity and meaning, while largely ignoring and suppressing (or perhaps, as we shall see in chapter four, in the case of her fire setting, burning and obliterating) an alternative ante-colonial realisation of landscape and existence.

3.3 Performative Strategies

As Simcoe reconstructs the landscape aesthetically, creating a hybrid space between a foreign reality and her British understanding and expectations, she also

¹⁰⁵ Simcoe 184, 192, 307.

¹⁰⁶ Bunn 129.

reconfigured her role within that space, performatively and ontologically. Gradually, in subtle and obvert ways, Simcoe's behaviour changed to adapt with her new surroundings.

Writing on the notion of performative identity, Judith Butler notes,

[...] acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body [...] Such acts, gestures, enactments generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.¹⁰⁷

Within her everyday, Simcoe is enacting a prescribed internalised role of gentrified British performativity.¹⁰⁸ As we have seen, Simcoe existed in a period when women were raised for the market of marriage,¹⁰⁹ and she was therefore well educated in proper feminine pursuits including literature,¹¹⁰ languages,¹¹¹ art, embroidery, deportment, riding and botany.¹¹² While in Canada, Simcoe put those pursuits into action.¹¹³ Simcoe's interest in the picturesque landscape and drawing fit the performative eighteenth-century expectations of femininity. In her analysis of Simcoe, Korda identifies this trend in femininity, noting that it, "prized surface appearances and aesthetics." As such the

¹⁰⁷ Butler 185.

¹⁰⁸ Butler 185.

¹⁰⁹ Korda 9.

¹¹⁰ Literature was not listed as one of Simcoe's subjects in Fryer's biography, however Simcoe's Canadian journal attests to her familiarity with literature including, plays and poetry in English, French and Spanish. See Simcoe, 77, 85, 143, 191.

¹¹¹ Outside of English, Elizabeth read four languages, French, German, Spanish and Italian. See Fowler, 19.

¹¹² Fryer 14-17.

¹¹³ Not long after arriving she describes in her journal how she fills her days in Quebec City, "The morning Coll. Simcoe and I spend together in reading, walking, etc. In the evening I go to balls, concerts, suppers, and when I am with French families, *je fais la conversation d'une façon à peu près parisienne...*" Simcoe 81-82. Some time later, in Upper Canada, she writes, "I draw maps, write, read and work so much that the days do not seem long." Simcoe 148. In these ways Simcoe is enacting the interests and skills that she was subjected to in England.

picturesque too was “appropriate to a discourse that marked women as commodified and inauthentic,”¹¹⁴ rather like the constructed manicured landscapes which surrounded them in England.

Looking at Simcoe’s journal it is interesting to compare how Simcoe perceived the women she encountered in Canada, contrasting those who, unlike herself, had not been raised so immediately within prescribed English notions of femininity, against those who had. She writes with approval of the Clerk of the Legislative Council’s wife, stating, “Mrs Williams is a very genteel woman, and paints beautifully and dresses very well. She has not been here above two years, having been educated in London.”¹¹⁵ Later she notes that the English wives must be “very agreeable, or they could never have liked [the Canadian] parties”¹¹⁶ which were held after dinners in the wintry countryside. One gathers that Simcoe believes the “weaker” sex would prefer to be sheltered from such events. Regarding Québécois women, Simcoe remarks, “The Canadian¹¹⁷ women are better educated than the men, who [leave] [...] the management of their affairs to the women,”¹¹⁸ an observed situation which is markedly different than her understanding of the English system. Following this, in Upper Canada, Simcoe attends a dance also attended by several

¹¹⁴ Korda 10.

¹¹⁵ Simcoe 66.

¹¹⁶ Simcoe 60 - 61.

¹¹⁷ Simcoe uses the term “Canadian” referring to “*les Canadiens*” ie. the Francophone people of Quebec.

¹¹⁸ Simcoe 91.

sisters¹¹⁹ who had mixed English and First Nations heritage. She is pleasantly surprised to observe that,

everything was conducted with propriety. What excited the best feelings of my heart was the ease and affection with which the ladies met each other... They appeared as well dressed as the company in general, and intermixed with them in a measure which evinced at once the dignity of their own minds, and the good sense of the others. The ladies possessed great ingenuity and industry, and have great merit; for the education they have acquired is own principally to their own industry, as their father, Sir William Johnson, was dead and the mother retained the manners and dress of her tribe.¹²⁰

This reaction contrasts with her descriptions of full-heritage First Nations women.¹²¹

Simcoe describes another First Nations woman as, “a very pretty woman, the only handsome woman I have seen among the Indians,”¹²² noting the woman’s skill at beadwork, which is seen as an appropriate, domestic, feminine skill. It is also interesting to note that the more alien the women’s subjectivities are to Simcoe’s own, the more nameless they become in her writing. This is somewhat akin to Simcoe’s desire to appropriate the Caughnawaga man she sketched into the European tradition of Greek and Roman Orators, thereby eliminating his individual identity and subjectivity. Similarly, she viewed an Indigenous family as having “grouped themselves like Van Dyck’s family pictures.”¹²³ By perceiving them in this way, Simcoe robs the family of their own individual and communal subjectivity, and treats them as objects performing in her own

¹¹⁹ Robertson writes in the footnotes of Simcoe’s journal that the Johnson sisters were also the nieces of Thayendanegea (Joseph Brant), the famous Mohawk Chief and statesman, their mother being Mary Brant and their father Sir William Johnson. See Robertson, 167.

¹²⁰ Simcoe 166.

¹²¹ Simcoe 209.

¹²² Simcoe 172.

¹²³ Simcoe 210.

imagined Eurocentric tableaux-vivants.¹²⁴ In this instance Simcoe's actions also display and reinforce what "powerful framers of self-image, social identity, and public values"¹²⁵ art and aesthetics are, as she imposed the desired cultural values imparted by a Van Dyck family portrait onto the objectified First Nations family.

While in Canada however, Simcoe's own understanding of her feminine role, and its prescriptions and limitations, changed. Initially Simcoe performed her feminine role rigorously and thoroughly. In *The Embroidered Tent*, Marion Fowler underlines Simcoe's outward conformity to expectations of female duty and modesty by quoting an anonymous first hand source, who writes that Simcoe was a "lady of manners...her conduct is perfectly exemplary, and admirably conformed to that correct model, which ought to be placed before a people."¹²⁶ This is further reinforced by the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's description, "Mrs Simcoe...is timid and speaks little, but is a woman of sense, handsome and amiable, and fulfils all the duties of a mother and wife with the most scrupulous exactness."¹²⁷ He then remarks again that she is "timid and speaks little."¹²⁸ These opinions emphasize the formalised public nature of gender

¹²⁴ It is of note that Simcoe was reading Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* on May 3, 1793 (see Simcoe, 162) previous to comparing the Great Sail's family to Van Dyck's paintings on December 2, 1793. See Simcoe, 210. In his *Discourses on Art* Reynolds mentions that many artists, himself included, dress their models in clothing of the seventeenth century, the period of Van Dyck. Reynolds explains that through this practice, "ordinary pictures acquired something of the air and effect of the works of Van Dyck, and appeared to be better pictures than they really were..." See Reynolds, xxxv. In this way Simcoe may be taking her cue from Reynolds's use of Van Dyck's aesthetics to ameliorate his paintings, when she imaginatively imposes the appearance of a Van Dyck painting onto the First Nation family. Both wish to "improve" and idealise the object of their gaze.

¹²⁵ Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Gender and Aesthetics: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 1.

¹²⁶ Fowler 21.

¹²⁷ Fowler 21.

¹²⁸ Fowler 21.

performance, which as Judith Butler notes, locates it within a binary frame and “must be understood to found and consolidate the subject.”¹²⁹

In the 1790s, particularly within the gentrified classes, the level of formality within the performance of day-to-day life was very stringent and nuanced. As Simcoe’s contemporaries attest, how well it is performed came to form individual identities and subjectivities. An example of the level of formality can be witnessed in the fact that throughout the whole of Simcoe’s journal, she only ever refers to her husband as “Colonel Simcoe,” a fact that Mary Beacock Fryer mentions in the introduction to her biography of Elizabeth Simcoe. Fryer expands on this, noting that in all the remaining correspondence between John Graves Simcoe and his wife he refers to her as “Eliza” only once (in a poem), usually addressing her instead as “My most Excellent & noble wife.”¹³⁰ This demonstrates the pervasive shell of formality that enclosed women and men of Elizabeth Simcoe’s class and how it was maintained throughout even the most intimate of relationships.

Fowler also observes how strictly Simcoe followed etiquette, particularly the etiquette of beauty, noting that while travelling in tents and on boats Simcoe continued to set her hair each night, always tried to keep up with the latest fashions,¹³¹ and worried about the effect moccasins would have on a woman’s feet, making them too large to wear the Duchess of York’s shoes.¹³² She further comments on Simcoe’s feelings of obligation

¹²⁹ Butler 191.

¹³⁰ Fryer 7 - 8.

¹³¹ Fowler 23.

¹³² The Duchess of York was famous for having very small delicate feet, a trait seen as being very feminine. See Fowler, 33.

to attend balls and host dinners even when she was unwell.¹³³ Korda continues this analysis of Simcoe, noting that on her tours of the “picturesque” landscape there were some views Simcoe deemed only suitable for men to experience, such as the close view of Niagara Falls as seen from lower rocks.¹³⁴ Simcoe performed and complied with the performative gender constructions of her era, which Judith Butler reminds us, were (and continue to be in different shapes and forms) compulsory systems with “punitive consequences.”¹³⁵

In Canada, the expected performance became increasingly difficult for Simcoe to maintain, namely because she was working within a morphed version of the predicated British system. As she does within the context of the fantasy of the colonial landscape, Simcoe existed between regimes, trying to perform and impose her genteel English subjectivity within a very othered cultural and physical world. Eventually though, she became slightly receptive to the “Other,” and accepted to diverge from the expected form and etiquette of her heritage, class and gender. We see this in instances where Simcoe begins to perform and enjoy the very actions she felt were inappropriate at the beginning of her stay in Canada. As Korda notes, eventually, with an adventurous attitude, Simcoe climbed down to the lower rocks of Niagara Falls.¹³⁶ She also began to understand the practicalities of wearing moccasins, putting aside her worries of not fitting into the Duchess of York’s slipper.¹³⁷ As well, despite having been initially wary of the outdoor

¹³³ Fowler 23.

¹³⁴ Korda 12.

¹³⁵ Butler 190.

¹³⁶ Korda 13.

winter dinners enjoyed by the Canadians and the English colonizers, Simcoe grew to delight in winter picnics, regularly partaking with her own family or hosting them for her friends. Furthermore, during her time in Canada, Simcoe spent a great deal of her time living out of tents (see figure 7), a practice which was uncommon among members of the minor aristocracy. In stormy weather she even acknowledged the possibility that she may have to sleep under a table for her own protection and comfort.¹³⁸ While in Canada Simcoe also began to travel for extended periods of time throughout the wilderness without the accompaniment of her husband, which was quite a daring and unconventional move for a late eighteenth-century woman. Fowler also suggests that Simcoe developed a particular fondness for Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Talbot, her husband's private secretary who lodged with the Simcoe family for an extended period, and with whom Simcoe spent a great deal of time on her own, riding, dining, canoeing, walking, and site-seeing by jig.¹³⁹ Finally, the radical emergence of Simcoe's fire-setting practice, which I shall explore more in depth in the following chapter, is as one might suspect, not at all within the prescribed behaviour of proper feminine comportment. This practice of setting fires correlates in time with a general marked shift in Simcoe's attitude and performative approach within the landscape. Fowler notes that Simcoe's "move to Queenston Heights is a decisive moment for Elizabeth, and a dramatic one, for it is exactly here that the old Elizabeth – the formal, social English one who had kept up the usual round of whist

¹³⁷ Korda 14.

¹³⁸ Simcoe 135.

¹³⁹ Fowler notes that Talbot was close to Simcoe in age, he was handsome, and compared to her husband, was healthy, athletic and interested in outdoor adventure. See Fowler, 38 - 40. Adultery or the even the perceived appearance of adultery was regarded as immoral behaviour among English gentry, particularly those as devoted to the Church of England as the Simcoes. For example, Martin notes that in the eighteenth century Lady Luxborough was banished into solitude, not allowed to see family or friends, for having had a romantic affair. See Martin, 233.

parties and balls meets the new Elizabeth, the spontaneous, independent Canadian one.”¹⁴⁰

This statement is rather oversimplified; after Queenston Heights Simcoe did remain formal and social, continuing with her balls and parties, however during this period she also became much more independently active and confident within the landscape. Fowler states that the combination of Simcoe travelling without her husband, together with having clear open views over the Lake Ontario basin from her tent on the Niagara escarpment, provided Simcoe with, “freedom and exhilaration... [She] begins to revel in the wilderness.”¹⁴¹ Significantly, beyond an ideologically driven metaphor, the idea of freedom as being connected with wide high views is a fundamental concept within the early picturesque. Addison states,

A spacious horizon is an image of liberty, where the eye has room to range abroad, to expatiate at large on the immensity of its views, and to lose it self amidst the variety of objects that offer themselves to its observation. Such wide and undetermined prospects are as pleasing to the fancy, as the speculations of eternity or infinitude are to the understanding.¹⁴²

Ann Bermingham further analyses Addison’s quote noting that, “the viewer’s experience of nature’s expansiveness is in fact an experience of subjecting this expansiveness to visual control.”¹⁴³ Similarly, when Simcoe witnessed the open landscape she began to feel a sense of liberty and control over her surroundings. This signals the beginning of a subtle but marked change in her behaviour and approach towards her new environment.

¹⁴⁰ Fowler 31.

¹⁴¹ Fowler 31.

¹⁴² Joseph Addison, “The Pleasures of the Imagination,” Minnesota State University Moorhead, 18 June 2008 <<http://www.mnstate.edu/gracyk/courses/web%20publishing/addison412.htm>>.

¹⁴³ Bermingham, “System, Order and Abstraction” 84.

Soon after she experienced her view from the Niagara Escarpment, Simcoe's newfound attitude towards the landscape was further put into practice when she moved to York. There she was captivated with what was then called the "peninsula,"¹⁴⁴ where she often went riding and eventually set a portion of her landscape fires. Simcoe's actions at this time, including most notably the setting of fires, seem to signify a form of ontological reckoning in relation to the landscape and her hybrid existence within it. It is perhaps no coincidence that Simcoe, consciously or subconsciously, chose the peninsula as a favourite place. She writes, "I rode on the peninsula from one till four. I saw loons swimming on the lake; they make a noise like a man hollowing in a tone of distress... The air on these sands is peculiarly clear and fine. The Indians esteem this place so healthy that they come and stay here when they are ill."¹⁴⁵ Within one short journal entry Simcoe brings together in physical and psychological space the loons' cry of distress and the healing capabilities of the area. One can imagine the distressing call of the loon as a metaphor for the fact that Simcoe herself has faced a period of displacement and challenge and stress. That she chose to spend her independent riding time on the "healing" peninsula and eventually to enact her very loaded, symbolic, and cathartic fire-setting there, seems meaningful.

At York, Simcoe further invested herself in the landscape by indulging in constant winter picnicking, particularly at Castle Frank, a Grecian temple-styled edifice the

¹⁴⁴ The "peninsula" is what is now known as Toronto Island. It consisted of a number of sandbars emanating from the Scarborough Bluffs, the longest of which was nine kilometres long continuing to the base of the lower Don River. In 1858 a storm broke the sand bar irreparably and therefore an island, Toronto Island, was formed. See "Central Beaches," Toronto Beaches, Environmental Defence, Toronto, February 2008 <http://www.torontobeach.ca/beaches/history_central.htm>. The sand bar peninsula would then have acted as a natural gateway leading the Simcoes to the Don River Valley, where in 1794 they built Castle Frank.

¹⁴⁵ Simcoe 184.

Simcoes had built on the slopes of the Don Valley towards the end of their tenure in Canada. Simcoe depicts Castle Frank, which was made of wood and had “large pine trees [making] pillars for the porticos”¹⁴⁶ in several watercolour sketches (see figure 8). Here Simcoe along with her family and friends would picnic all year round. She writes, “Some trees were cut and a large fire made near the house, by which venison was toasted on forks made on the spot, and we dined.”¹⁴⁷ Five days later this is repeated:

“Drove again to Castle Frank, and dined again in the woods on toasted venison. The ice is excellent. The berries of the mountain tea or winter green are now in great beauty, their bright scarlet berries peeping thro’ the snow and the rich colour of their green leaves; they taste like orgeat, but are of a very warm nature and raise the spirits.”¹⁴⁸

Clearly the winter picnic was a very sensual aesthetic experience for Simcoe. In winter she often road alone or with friends to Castle Frank, sometimes for the day, other times simply as the destination for her daily ride. On February 25th 1795 she writes, “I went with a party of ladies to Castle Frank. The ice is still good, tho’ the weather is warm and hazy like an Indian summer.”¹⁴⁹

Simcoe’s use of the “peninsula” and Castle Frank as places of retreat and escape is somewhat reminiscent of eighteenth-century practices by Simcoe’s British and European contemporaries, whereby members of the aristocracy – most often female – sought temporary refuge in constructed picturesque settings such as ornamental farms, dairies and woodland hermitage dwellings. In “Dairy Queens,” Martin discusses the seventeenth and eighteenth-century practice for elite women to enjoy an idealised, rustic, idle, setting

¹⁴⁶ Simcoe 298.

¹⁴⁷ Simcoe 298.

¹⁴⁸ Simcoe 298.

¹⁴⁹ Simcoe 308.

created specifically for repose and self-improvement.¹⁵⁰ She notes of places such as pleasure dairies that women “appropriated and re-fashioned these sites as mobile theatres of self-performance, whereby they both mimicked and transgressed the boundaries – of space and identity – established for women in this period.”¹⁵¹ Martin links this phenomenon with Michel de Certeau’s theory of “tactical space,” whereby individuals who are lacking in power or “subject to strict disciplinary codes” find retreat in a fragmentary space within the locus of institutional power, while keeping themselves at a distance from that power.¹⁵² Similar to women such as Marie-Antoinette, Simcoe was extremely privileged, powerful in her status, but relatively powerless in contrast to her husband who held ultimate authority, representing the Crown. In Simcoe’s case, she actually possessed more wealth and peerage status than her husband,¹⁵³ though he was the one invested with authority. While Simcoe’s spaces of retreat did not hold the fabricated and costumed performativity of places such as Marie-Antoinette’s *Hameaux*¹⁵⁴ or Lady Spencer’s pleasure dairy in “The Wilderness” (created in the 1780s) at Althorp,¹⁵⁵ they nevertheless acted similarly in some respects, providing alternative spaces where the women were able to perform independently and at times unconventionally (in Simcoe’s case having outdoor winter picnics and setting fires in the landscape, in the European

¹⁵⁰ Martin 91.

¹⁵¹ Martin 262.

¹⁵² Martin 109.

¹⁵³ Fryer 23.

¹⁵⁴ Martin’s entire chapter “Pastoral Space: The Hameau Phenomenon at Chantilly and Versailles,” deals with this issue. See Martin, 332 - 395.

¹⁵⁵ Martin 262.

examples dressing-down as peasants and holding aberrant festivities – such as Marie-Antoinette’s outdoor market¹⁵⁶ and her *troupe de seigneurs*¹⁵⁷).

There are obvious differences between Simcoe’s situation and those in Europe. For example, in Canada, Simcoe *always* inhabited a very rustic environment, whereas the European female aristocracy lived in gilded luxury and merely played at a constructed rustic picturesque life. However like her European counterparts, Simcoe’s favoured places of retreat were much more wild and natural than her home reality, which despite essentially being a luxury tent, was still more cosseted than the free outdoors and more opulent and comfortable than many settler dwellings. Nevertheless, Simcoe’s retreat involved her choosing to subject herself to a very intimate and “authentic” experience of nature as an actual wilderness, rather than the manufactured and superficial garden experience of nature enjoyed by the European elite, and perhaps as a result, her transgressive actions within her spaces of retreat, specifically the fire setting, are that much more visceral and unmediated. Through her picturesque walks and social picnics, Simcoe may have desired to emulate the performative gestures within picturesque landscapes depicted in paintings by artists like Fragonard, wherein aristocrats picnic leisurely in the woods, or Gainsborough’s *Mr. and Mrs. William Hallett (The Morning Walk)* (c.1785) (see figure. 9), which portrays young upper class couple walking through the woods, but Simcoe’s reality in Canada was far from those ideals. Although Simcoe

¹⁵⁶ Meredith Martin writes, “On one of the *fête*’s evenings Marie-Antoinette invited Paris merchants to set up booths alongside courtiers disguised as shopkeepers. The marketplace theme was complimented by a model of a *guinguette* or sub-urban café, which contained its own element of class mixing, including the queen herself disguised as a lemonade-seller, with her own snack booth.” See Martin, 367.

¹⁵⁷ Within her *jardin anglais*, Marie-Antoinette had a theatre built where she performed pastoral themed works with a “selected group of courtiers” including the duchesse de Polignac and the duchesse de Guiche. They called themselves the “*troupe des seigneurs*.” See Martin, 368-69.

only socialised with polite upper-crust society in Canada, this community was still far less constricted and scripted than the genteel social reality of England. She was able to have more independence, to adventure, take risks, and step outside of the prescribed performative system. This new freedom could be just as daunting and challenging as the wild foreign landscape with its extreme weather and unfamiliar threats.

Like European aristocrats whose play in their self-created picturesque landscapes grew more extravagant and further from reality as their traditional feudal powers disappeared and their familiar way of life became further under threat,¹⁵⁸ Simcoe's changing performative strategies functioned as coping methods and modes of escape in an unstable, transforming and formative colonial world, which also, to Simcoe and her fellow English settlers, lacked the precedent, tradition and comfort of a familiar past.

Simcoe's actions in, and depictions of, the Canadian landscape, come to symbolise her gradual ontological shift regarding her cultural understanding of herself and her surroundings. The picturesque is a means with which to bridge a known and unknown world, placing herself and her mark within it. However when Simcoe's ontological shift is pushed into a state of crisis, we see the malleable and comfortable picturesque placed aside and replaced by the urgency, agency and escape provided within a new phenomenon and exercise - the overwhelming sublime.

¹⁵⁸ For instance this is the case in eighteenth-century France and Marie-Antoinette among others can be seen as an example of this, see Martin, 14.

CHAPTER FOUR: Simcoe's Fires And The Sublime

Perhaps you have no idea of the pleasure of walking in a burning wood, but I found it so great that I think I shall have some woods set on fire for my evening walks. ...where the fire has caught the hollow trunk of a lofty tree the flame issuing from the top has a fine effect. In some trees where but a small flame appears it looks like stars as the evening grows dark, and the flare and smoke, interspread in different masses of dark woods, has a very picturesque appearance, a little like the poet Tasso's "enchanted wood".¹

Simcoe's attraction to fire produced a sublime that is uniquely her own. As I shall argue, this is true not only in the Kantian sense, that Simcoe initiated her own sensation of the sublime, but also in that she actively built sublime spaces, which from a contemporary perspective can be read as symbolically meaningful and manifold. Canada, already rich with landscapes and geographical conditions traditionally associated with the sublime, created a heightened climate within which Simcoe acts.

Though there were eighteenth-century European cultural antecedents for Simcoe's fire spectacles, of which she was aware and which influenced and inspired her, Simcoe's decision to *set* wildfires for visual pleasure was unusual within her circumstances and prescribed social and cultural codes of conduct and expectations. Occurring within a contested colonial context, Simcoe's fires are complex and their meaning and ramifications are conflicting and multi-faceted. In this sense their significance is twofold: they provide a sublime space to conjure, imaginatively escape and mediate Simcoe's disparate experiences and understandings of landscape, while conversely, they are also a sublime space of destruction and annihilation. In the former, most positive apparition, the fires can be seen to metaphorically ignite and unite multiple spaces in time and

¹ Simcoe 115.

geography. They signify a form of agency on Simcoe's part, and suggest a desire to imaginatively escape into the multiple worlds conjured within the flames. In the latter, the fires act as a violent symbol that erases and destroys the complex and problematic landscape. Simcoe can thus be seen to literally "fire" back at the unknown other regime.² Through her intense visual appreciation and active practice of igniting burning landscapes, she assertively eliminates areas of the landscape, leaving them burnt and barren. With this paradoxical and binary state, Simcoe activates and destroys the colonial space, physically and symbolically, by her own initiative. Her actions are at once additive and subtractive. As this chapter will explore, in both cases Simcoe's fires can be seen to represent her ontological breakdown relating to gender performance and colonial displacement within the foreign landscape. The eighteenth-century cultural interest and desire for sublime landscape experiences and aesthetics provided the perfect fuel and conduit for Simcoe's creative expression and complex reaction to her new colonial reality and surroundings. Simcoe's actions, as such, emerged from the ethos and preoccupations of her era. When Simcoe's fires are examined in relation to eighteenth-century philosophical discourse on the sublime, however, her actions can be read as even more complex and transgressive.

4.1 A Cultural Context for Simcoe's Sublime: Theory and Practice

Theories on the sublime emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century and were solidified and defined by Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756) and Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the*

² See Mann, 70.

Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime (1764). Both theories differentiate the beautiful from the sublime and relate primarily to nature. They invoke the overwhelming and immeasurable quality of greatness, whether physical, intellectual, emotional or otherwise. While Burke believes in a commonality of experience, where one is affected by the “workings of external objects on [one’s] sense,”³ Kant argues for a subjectively experienced sublime, in which “various feelings of enjoyment or of displeasure rest not so much upon the nature of the external things that arouse them as upon each person’s own disposition to be moved by these to pleasure or pain.”⁴ The “Kantian sublime” thus allows for a variety of tastes and feelings.

Simultaneously and in relation to this emerging, aesthetic understanding of the sublime, there was a popular interest in natural phenomena, inspired by numerous natural disasters that afflicted Europe in the mid 1700s, including the London and the Lisbon earthquakes (1750 and 1755 respectively), and a flux in the eruptions of the Mount Vesuvius volcano throughout the century. This together with the discovery of the Pompeii archaeological site in 1748, brought the volcano to popular prominence,⁵ much like the return of Halley’s comet did for astrology and celestial phenomena in 1759.⁶ Herington notes that late eighteenth-century natural philosophy created a “system of representation”

³ Ferguson 130.

⁴ Kant 45. Kant’s subjective approach to the sublime is the basis for postmodern and feminist readings of the sublime. See Jean François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). See Mann’s chapter “The Kantian Sublime: A Story in Two Paradoxes,” 33-59. See also, Paul Crowther, “The Kantian Sublime, The Avant-Garde and the Postmodern: A critique of Lyotard,” *Jean François Lyotard: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, eds Victor E Taylor and Gregg Lambert (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁵ Herington 99.

⁶ Courtland Canby, *A History of Rockets and Space* (London: Leisure Arts Ltd., 1964) 36.

using the aesthetic framework of the sublime to portray natural disasters to the curious public in the form of didactic spectacles.⁷ Herington explains,

The continued reliance of factual or spectacular narrative reflects a rhetorical necessity inscribed not in a particular discipline or mode of representation but in the particular inflection of aesthetic discourse associated with these eruptions and earthquakes. Because there was no disciplinary paradigm for geology, it still relied on literary circumscriptions of unrepresentable phenomena, tropes synthesized ...with geological observations and with the more established disciplinary rhetoric of chemistry.⁸

Herington also states that beyond the didactic spectacles of natural science and philosophy, "...geologic upheaval – especially Vesuvius – became the subject of increasingly spectacular representations in landscape painting, panoramas, fireworks displays, and on the stage."⁹

During the eighteenth century, along with other natural phenomena, the notion of fire and fireworks proved very popular in art, philosophy and science.¹⁰ For example, Mme du Châtelet's "Dissertation sur la nature et la propagation du feu" (1737), predicts infra-red radiation and explains the nature of light. Published by the Académie Royale des Sciences, Châtelet's text is the result of a larger call for papers on the nature of fire and its

⁷ Herington 97.

⁸ Herington 99.

⁹ Herington 99. Along with fires, in the eighteenth century, volcanoes and earthquakes, mechanical simulation of violent storms, shipwrecks and other "sublime" natural catastrophes, on stage or by effects such as de Louthembourg's Eidophusikon, were a dominant and popular trend. See Herington, 99. For example, Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg's Eidophusikon spectacle opened in 1781, and presented moving three-dimensional scenery with themes such as the "Phenomena of Nature." Ann Bermingham, "Making Motion Pictures in Eighteenth-Century London," Department of Art History Public Lecture, Concordia University, Montreal, 8 November 2007.

¹⁰ Burke discusses the direct relationship between fireworks and the sublime under the moniker "Magnificence." He notes that fireworks are "truly grand," as are stars in the night sky, light of superior strength, or light which quickly transitions to or from darkness. See Burke, 80.

propagation.¹¹ In the visual arts the artist, Joseph Wright of Derby was also interested in imagery of fire, completing many paintings of Mount Vesuvius, iron forges, and other fire scenes, such as *A Cottage on Fire: a moonlit landscape with figures by a burning cottage and the ruins of a castle beyond* (1793) (see fig. 10). Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) and François Boucher (1703-1770) (whose practices Simcoe would have been familiar with through her reading of Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* while in Canada¹²) went beyond the depiction of fire to collaborate with architects and mechanics to create elaborate firework shows.¹³ Sometimes such events were set to music. For example, in 1748 George Frideric Handel composed *Music for the Royal Fireworks* to accompany a spectacle celebration on the River Thames in England (see figure 11).¹⁴ These firework pageants proved very popular in the English and Continental courts. When Marie Antoinette and Louis-Auguste, the future King Louis XVI of France, were married in 1770, "the spectacle lasted nearly thirty minutes and included hundreds of rockets and thousands of explosions, along with 2000 Roman candles, turning stars, and jets of fire."¹⁵ The late 1700s also saw the production of the first commercial fireworks catering to tea

¹¹ J.J. O'Connor, E. F. Robertson, "Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil Marquise du Châtlet," [Biography at the University of St Andrews History of Mathematics Archive](http://www-gap.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Biographies/Chatelet.html), 5 February 2008 <www-gap.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Biographies/Chatelet.html>

¹² In her diary Simcoe makes note that she is reading Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*. See Simcoe, 162. Within this text Boucher is mentioned several times. See Reynolds, 108, 224, 225. It is not known, however, whether or not Simcoe was aware of these or other artists' involvement in choreographed fireworks displays.

¹³ Canby 17.

¹⁴ Canby 17.

¹⁵ Lynn 74-75. Later in the century there is hope that firework spectacles can become even more complex through the innovation of ballooning in 1783, which, it is thought, could provide new and more extreme launch points. Michael R. Lynn notes, however, that this trend led to unfortunate events; "the first professional female balloonist, Marie-Madeleine Blanchard, was thrown out of the gondola, crashing to her death on the rooftops of Paris, when her balloon caught fire during a combined [pyrotechnic] balloon launch. This disaster resulted in a ban on aeronautic fireworks." See Lynn, 89.

gardens, resorts, public gardens and country estates, offering up sublime spectacles that were more casually accessible to the general public.¹⁶ However, despite the popularity of such controlled fire spectacles,¹⁷ walking through forest fires, let alone setting the fires for aesthetic pleasure, would have been considered highly irregular and perhaps inappropriate behaviour for gentrified women.¹⁸

Within the context of eighteenth-century philosophy, the sublime is a male domain, not suitable for or accessible to women. Burke implies this through his description of the beautiful as having female characteristics and the sublime as having male ones. Burke discusses beautiful objects as being small, pleasing and submissive,¹⁹ while also possessing the characteristic of smoothness, noting that this can be found “in fine women, smooth skins.”²⁰ He also finds women delicate, which is a quality of beauty: “The beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality analogous to it.”²¹ Finally he summarises the differences between the beautiful and the sublime: “sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful

¹⁶ Canby 24.

¹⁷ And, also, despite the exceptionally rare circumstance and coincidence that two female figures are prominently involved in the theory and practice of fire in eighteenth-century France (Châtelet in theory and Blanchard in practice).

¹⁸ This behaviour would have been outside of the distinct eighteenth-century culture of politeness, in which Simcoe was raised and continued to function. As discussed later in this chapter, the language of the sublime is deemed to engage pathologies of solitude and self-absorption, which are not deemed appropriate for women. Rather there was a desire for the self to be reigned in and controlled through politeness and affability, which encouraged tolerance and moderation (Klein 874-75). As Simcoe was reading Reynolds while in Canada, it is of note that he was one of the gentlemen champions of the polite culture. See Klein, 876. Also, polite culture was reflected in the characteristics of the picturesque and the Palladian style of formal Classical architecture that were popular in eighteenth-century Europe. See Klein, 886.

¹⁹ Burke 113.

²⁰ Burke 114.

²¹ Burke 116.

ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid and even massive.”²² Although Burke does not specifically categorise women as representing Beauty and men the sublime, it is implied through the characteristics given to the sublime and the beautiful, which were also popularly associated with men and women.

Kant however, lays out the differentiation explicitly, stating, “[all] merits of a woman should unite solely to enhance the character of the beautiful, which is the proper reference point; and on the other hand, among the masculine qualities the sublime clearly stands out as the criterion of his kind.”²³ He then writes, “The fair sex has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a *beautiful understanding*, whereas ours should be a *deep understanding*, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime.”²⁴ Finally he makes a direct and scathing reference to Mme Châtelet: “A woman who... carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics, like the Marquise de Châtelet, might as well even have a beard for perhaps that would express more obviously the mine of profundity for which she strives.”²⁵

Within this climate of cultural excitement over the sublime, combined with blatant

²² Burke 124.

²³ Kant 77.

²⁴ Kant 78.

²⁵ Kant 78.

misogyny within philosophical discourse on the sublime, Simcoe's attraction to fire spectacles is understandable; however in setting the fires she is opening herself up to vulnerability²⁶ by stepping out of the strict cultural code of feminine subjectivity and performativity. Breaking this performative gender code had potentially harsh consequences²⁷ as Kant's remarks regarding women and the sublime demonstrate.

4.2 Simcoe's Practice of the Sublime

The complex meaning of Simcoe's fires can be better understood and contextualised through a closer look at the explicit content of her diaries. Simcoe's experiences in Canada are important in framing her unconventional performative practice with fire and her exploration of the sublime. They cumulatively create a climate that is conducive to both.

Witnessing her first forest fire in July 1792, Simcoe recorded the pleasure she derived from the experience and suggests that in future she will have woods set on fire for her evening walks.²⁸ There is no indication in Simcoe's journal that she ever arranged to have fires set *for* her, however she did begin to set fires *herself*.²⁹ By doing this, Simcoe eliminated an intermediary; there was no individual setting the fires for her, nor was she

²⁶ "Vulnerability" is discussed by both Freeman and Mann in relation to the "feminine sublime." Mann writes that the "feminine sublime," "refuses the consolation of [the] masculinist fantasy" that the response to vulnerability in the face of the sublime is to "reassert individual sovereignty, to shore up the boundaries of the subject..." Quoting Freeman, she continues, "Instead, the subject undergoes 'a crisis of in relation to language and representation without retreating into fantastic narratives of mastery.'" Mann 131. As I discuss on pages 76-77, Simcoe's relationship to the desire to master the sublime is contradictory.

²⁷ As stated on page 43, Butler posits that gender performance is a strategy of survival within compulsory systems. The construction compels our belief in its necessity and naturalness. See Butler, 190. Transgressing these systems can result in being socially stigmatised, ostracized and banished, and/or put in the care of the medical establishment.

²⁸ Simcoe 115.

²⁹ Simcoe 209, 214.

representing them in painting; instead she was working directly to create a sublime experience to satisfy, if only on a strictly personal level, her visual drive.

When Simcoe writes about the fires she herself set, the immediacy and excitement is, however, missing. Instead, her references to them are surprisingly short, distant and cool considering the aberrancy of her actions and the creative authorship and ownership she might have felt after producing such a dramatic effect. She set, for example, her first recorded fire on 9 November 1793: “We dined in a meadow on the peninsula, where I amused myself with setting fire to a kind of long dry grass, which burns very quickly, and the flame and smoke run along the ground very quickly and with a pretty effect.”³⁰ In January 1794 she notes the second and last fire she is recorded to have set. It is described in even briefer terms: “I walked below the bay and set the other side of the marsh on fire for amusement.”³¹ This last fire is logged as taking place the morning after her entry describing an evening spent gazing at a fire in the bay, lost in reverie and dreaming of Bath. Simcoe writes, “the long grass on it burns with great rapidity [in] this dry weather. It was a fine sight, and a study for flame and smoke from our house. At night the flames diminished, and appeared like lamps on a dark night in the crescent at Bath.”³² Perhaps the next morning Simcoe lit her own fire on the bay in an effort to recapture the experience of the night before. However if she did recuperate some of that evening’s qualities, it is not evident in the language and content of her account. Conversely, the descriptions of wildfires she comes upon by accident are marginally more descriptive, poetic, and engaged, although they are by no means indulgent in their language. For

³⁰ Simcoe 209.

³¹ Simcoe 214.

³² Simcoe 214.

example, in April 1793 she states, “[we] walked in the evening where I observed some trees on fire; the flames in part concealed, appeared like stars, and had a beautiful effect.”³³

The eighteenth century delineation of male and female qualities and the resulting systemic pressure of conformity, may in part explain why Simcoe never uses the word “sublime,” but rather always describes her fires as “picturesque,” despite the fact that fire is more accurately categorised within the realm of the sublime. Concurrently, her choice of descriptive language is also explained by the eighteenth-century upper-class practice of politeness and emotional restraint, which is apparent in many travel diaries and descriptions of natural disaster written by members of her class, especially women. Exaggerated excessive language was seen at the time as representing “pathologies of solitude and self-absorption,” whereas polite and moderate language signified “mutual tolerance and the overriding importance of social comity.”³⁴ Politeness “evoked a number of criteria...including ease, freedom, liveliness, and perhaps most important, reciprocity, which reined in the self and its distorting effects”³⁵ reflecting the detached view of the age of Empiricism. Herington, for example, notes that the correspondence of eighteenth-century bluestocking, Catherine Talbot, shows descriptive restraint regarding the London earthquake, it “avoids classifying the earthquakes [...] as sublime natural phenomena.”³⁶ He writes, “[Talbot] has to educate herself to this attitude, not from an ecstatic response to

³³ Simcoe 158.

³⁴ Klein 874.

³⁵ Klein 875.

³⁶ Herington 110.

the grandeur of nature, but from disinterest.”³⁷ Herington further adds that Talbot’s “refusal to adopt the spectacular representations of poetry [...] restrain[s] the excesses that had to be tempered – or rather balanced – by ‘coolness and precision’ in emerging scientific discourse.”³⁸ This same restraint can be seen in Simcoe’s writing, and her active interest and awareness of developments in science and geology might further encourage a disengaged writing style.³⁹

In her diary Simcoe shows herself to be very partial to and curious about geological phenomena and the associated pseudo-scientific experiments and spectacles, particularly when they involve flame. There are many entries relating this interest. Indeed, as mentioned above, within weeks of Simcoe’s arrival in North America in 1792, she admired and made copies of Major Samuel Holland’s prints of Mount Vesuvius.⁴⁰ In December 1792 Simcoe makes note of a volcano that people believed to exist near Quebec City:

Dr T.M Nooth says a great light was observed last night in the air in a direction N.E beyond St Paul’s Bay... He supposed the eruption had taken place from a volcano, which is believed from the reports of Indians to be in those parts, and a fresh eruption might have taken place there, occasioned by an earthquake which was severely felt a few days since... However, there is much of conjecture in the supposition about the existence of this volcano.⁴¹

³⁷ Herington 110.

³⁸ Herington 132.

³⁹ This is particularly true of Simcoe’s letters to her friend Mary Anne Burges, which contain a great deal of botanical observation, as Burges was a botanist and geologist.

⁴⁰ Simcoe 57, 59. Samuel Holland (1717-1801) was appointed the surveyor general of Lower Canada in 1763 a position that later encompassed Upper Canada as well.

⁴¹ Simcoe 68.

Days later she describes hearsay of an earlier volcanic eruption, “This day five years since the air became in a few hours so dark that it was necessary to light candles... The darkness continued the whole of the next day [...] Indians [...] assert that they have seen a burning mountain to the north-east of St Paul’s Bay.”⁴²

Toward the end of Simcoe’s stay in Canada, she notes another local geological phenomenon, stating: “a burning spring was discovered, which, if a candle is held to it, will continue flaming a great while.” Simcoe also attempted to participate (albeit from afar) in the fad for the constructed spectacle of natural science. In 1793 she recounts,

I have been much amused by reading Watson on chemistry, in which there is an account of the making of an artificial volcano... an experiment of putting diamonds and rubies in separate vessels and exposing them to a violent fire – the diamonds were dissipated and the rubies unchanged in weight or colour.⁴³

This interest in the effects of fire on gems is echoed in her description of reading of “a leaf imported from Botany Bay, which when dried goes off by the application of a match with an explosion like gunpowder, and the air is agreeably perfumed.”⁴⁴ From these accounts of controlled and second-hand encounters with potentially volatile phenomenon, Simcoe also remarks on certain discrepancies between stagings of phenomena (such as the eighteenth-century trend for experiments, elaborate mechanical stage sets or creations such as Eidophusikon) and the “real” thing. Recounting how she was caught in a storm

⁴² Simcoe 71. J. Ross Robertson notes, “The *Quebec Gazette*, of the 22nd December, 1791, contains a letter from St. Paul’s Bay written on December 11th, giving an account of a violent earthquake that occurred on the 6th at Bay St. Paul and relating the fact that there were thirty shocks in one day. On the 17th, about five o’clock in the evening “a globe of fire appearing to the eye of the size of a 48 pound cannon ball was observed in the sky coming from the southwest striking towards the northeast, disappearing in its perpendicular descent about St. Paul’s Bay, after bursting with an explosion.” See Robertson, 68-69.

⁴³ Simcoe 158.

⁴⁴ Simcoe 74.

sailing down the St Lawrence from York to Quebec, Simcoe states, “The waves, dashing against the bottom of the boat, sounded as if she struck on rocks, and their appearance more agitated than those we see in a shipwreck on stage.”⁴⁵ Here again, Simcoe compares “actual” nature to its fabricated rendition, but this time it is the sublime qualities of the observed phenomena that are clearly underlined.

In that regard, while in Canada, of all the natural “sublime” phenomena she directly observed, it is the spectacle of wildfires that appear to have had the greatest, reoccurring impact on Simcoe. She makes specific note of six wildfires that gave her great aesthetic pleasure,⁴⁶ two of which she admits setting herself. She also logs numerous other descriptions of scenes involving outdoor campfires, torches, and the appearance of shooting stars in the night sky. For example in June 1792 she came across a First Nations group who, gathered around the fire in the darkness of the night, created a scene which greatly impressed Simcoe and made her want to draw them.⁴⁷ Later that month she notes, “In going hence to Montreal we saw the air filled with fire flies which, as the night was dark, appeared beautiful, like falling stars.”⁴⁸ She also describes the beauty of seeing the Indigenous people catching fish in the middle of the night using torches that reflected in the water.⁴⁹ And, in the Spring of 1794 Simcoe notes, “We supped by starlight amid this fine scenery of wood and water; the bright fires of the soldiers below the hill, contrasted

⁴⁵ Simcoe 250.

⁴⁶ See Simcoe, 115, 158, 209, two examples on 214, 293.

⁴⁷ Simcoe 94.

⁴⁸ Simcoe 97.

⁴⁹ Simcoe 161.

with a dark sky, now and then brightened by a gleam of moonlight, had a beautiful effect.”⁵⁰ This latter description fits snugly within a traditional understanding of the sublime. Her words are very similar to those of Kant, who writes as follows:

“Temperaments that possess a feeling for the sublime are drawn gradually, by the quiet stillness of a summer evening as the shimmering light of the stars breaks through the brown shadows of night and the lonely moon rises into view.”⁵¹

Simcoe experienced many sublime elements and characteristics within nature while living in Upper Canada. There is however, no progressive order to Simcoe’s appreciation of the sublime; she did not begin by noticing the distant beauty of stars, progress to the roaring stimulation of Niagara Falls, and end by actively setting fires. Instead these experiential themes, appear, reappear and intermingle, throughout Simcoe’s Canadian narrative.⁵² Her accounts, that are here assembled under the rubric of the “sublime,” can each be read as symptomatic of Simcoe’s colonial crisis, when she was drawn to and/or overwhelmed by experiences that, within Simcoe’s upper-class British subjectivity, were seen as being extra-ordinary, strange, or othered. The cumulative result of these sublime experiences, which are sometimes very traditional in their sublime characteristics and at other times more unusual (due to the foreignness of the Canadian landscape and the unconventionality that a woman of Simcoe’s era and class would be in a position to have these sublime experiences),⁵³ emits a vaguely transgressive or uncanny

⁵⁰ Simcoe 222.

⁵¹ Kant 46.

⁵² For an indexed chronology of Simcoe’s Canadian experience, see page 101 of this thesis.

⁵³ For example, as mentioned on page 48-49, Simcoe finally climbed down to a lower ledge on the cliffs, a position normally only occupied by men, to have a better view of the Falls. Other examples of Simcoe’s more unconventional encounters with the sublime would include her experience of falling asleep listening

impression, creating a space for Simcoe's active and unconventional performative fire setting.

There was, however, precedent for Simcoe working outside conventional art mediums and directly with natural landscape elements. On the 10 June 1792 Simcoe notes: "The current being very strong, the men were obliged to *tirer à la cordelle*, or drag the boat by ropes on a narrow beach under high, woody banks. We picked up pieces of chalk or clay, which drew like crayon, but the strokes were not so easily effaced."⁵⁴ Simcoe also began painting picturesque landscapes directly onto the surface of the bark of a tree. Though she does not discuss in her journal the creative process that led her to this practice, her watercolours on birch bark still exist as testament. As previously noted, upon returning to England Simcoe gave a collection of these birch bark landscapes as a gift to the King, which suggests that she recognised the innovation, novelty and importance of this work.⁵⁵ Within this context, Simcoe's practice of setting fires for visual pleasure functions as another step in the merging of the subject of her creative interest with the physical object itself. She sees a beach scene and then she draws using part of that beach as her medium;

to the sound of the Falls. She writes, "We pitched the tent near the Falls and dined, after which, being fatigued by the heat, I lay down in the tent and slept, lulled by the sound of the Falls, which was going to sleep in the pleasantest way imaginable." Simcoe 285. Although this may not be the expected visual experience of Niagara Falls, surely falling asleep in what is essentially a sound bubble, listening to tons upon tons of roaring water pounding over the Falls could be categorized as a sublime experience, albeit gleaned through sound (or lack thereof) rather than sight. Another instance when Simcoe can be understood to have an unusual encounter with the sublime is when she experiences an intense spring rain shower. On the 25 May, 1794 she writes, "After changing our clothes we sat down to tea and agreed with Mr Talbot that the rain had been the pleasantest mode of taking a shower bath, and the extreme violence with which it fell rendered us less liable to catch cold than we should have been under a gentle shower." Simcoe 227. Despite Simcoe's polite and practical description of the event, it would seem to be an all-sensory sublime experience, particularly if one takes into account her use of the words "extreme violence" to describe the downpour. Bathing outdoors in the rain, let alone enjoying it, is not expected "feminine" behaviour for an eighteenth-century gentrified woman.

⁵⁴ Simcoe 91.

⁵⁵ Forthcoming scholarship by Denis Longchamps (Concordia University PhD candidate) will explore Simcoe's watercolours, particularly her watercolours painted on birch bark.

she admires the forest and begins to literally paint on the forest using birch bark as her canvas; she is taken with the visual spectacle of fire, and instead of merely representing it through painting, she recreates it by setting the fires herself. This process of merging her creative practice in content and form seems in itself to be an exercise in the sublime, as Simcoe moved from a conventional detached picturesque art practice to experimenting, now and again, with an unconventional one, which in the case of her fire setting veers toward the sublime. For whatever reason, she decided to step outside the boundaries of what was expected and even condoned.⁵⁶ Out of these more unusual (or even avant-garde) art strategies, Simcoe's fire setting is the only one that achieves an almost hallucinatory effect, becoming fully immersive both in its interaction with the landscape and its effect on the viewer, subsuming and disembodiment both through physical destruction and escapist reverie.

It is also important to underline that Simcoe's interest in the sublime quality of fire is very specific in its criteria and is entrenched in the idea of wilderness landscape and its affiliation with the picturesque and the sublime (a theme explored in Simcoe's more conventional art practice as well), rather than being the result of indiscriminate

⁵⁶ Fowler notes the close relationship between Simcoe and Talbot (previously mentioned on page 49) and suggests that there is a connection between this relationship and Simcoe setting fires. Fowler writes that the peninsula "is where [Simcoe] played with fire in a figurative sense, racing her horse with Thomas Talbot's" Fowler 44. Fowler also notes that the morning Simcoe sets the shore of the bay on fire, Talbot had taken her by the arm to cross the ice, while her husband trailed behind using a cane. In Fowler's interpretation the fires gain subtle sexual symbolism. With this perspective in mind, a re-examination of Simcoe's sublime experience of being caught in the violent rain shower with both her husband and Talbot (noted in footnote 53) gains new potency, aligning it with literary scenes in fiction, such as the rain scenes in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) that symbolise the state of an unwise and ill-fated romantic relationship which, in the arc of the narrative, is associated with transgressive, unconventional and, at the time, immoral, social behaviour. As such, these unusual sublime events can be seen as outlets or symbols of Simcoe's frustration, whether with love, the boundaries of social conformity and feminine conduct, or the overwhelming untamed natural space around her. Though the fires are unique in that they represent an instance when Simcoe chooses to initiate, activate, and engage this complex sublime, they are her own unconventional visual creation.

pyromania. The fires are, however, wild, and in accordance to Simcoe's journal descriptions, there seems to have been no desire or action on her part to keep them under control by any means. Despite the fact that it was common for settlers to clear the land for farming by executing controlled burns,⁵⁷ fire was still a very real and common threat in the colonial era as most buildings were made of wood, therefore homes, barns, livestock and produce were at risk. Simcoe herself records many unfortunate domestic fires, however these incidents are not described in "picturesque" or aesthetic terms.⁵⁸ The only exception to her pragmatic reactions to domestic fire arises within Simcoe's final days in Canada when the city of Quebec caught fire. Initially she describes the fire in a straightforward account:

The churches and houses, being covered with shingles, burnt rapidly, and the shingles being light, were also easily blown by the wind, which was high, and had it not changed probably the whole town would have been destroyed [...] I was terrified in passing the Parade. The heat was so great from the Recollet Church...⁵⁹

The following day however, Simcoe experienced visual enjoyment in the aftermath, she writes, "The ruins of the Recollet Church, brightened from within by fire, not yet

⁵⁷ On 14 July 1792 Simcoe notes, "The way of clearing land in this country is cutting down all the small wood, pile it and set it on fire. The heavier timber is cut through the bark five feet above the ground. This kills the tree, which in time the wind blows down. The stumps decay in the ground in the course of years, but appear very ugly for a long time, though the very large, leafless white trees have a singular and sometimes a picturesque effect among the living trees. The settler first builds a log hut covered with bark, and after two or three years raises a neat house by the side of it. This progress of industry is pleasant to observe." See Simcoe, 119.

⁵⁸ The Simcoes' chimney and roof caught on fire, see Simcoe 74 – 75; The Simcoes' kitchen caught on fire destroying her new set of dishes which arrived that day from England, this event made Simcoe lonely, dejected and homesick, see Simcoe, 136; Settlers houses on fire, see Fryer, 92; Quebec City catches on fire, see Simcoe 352 – 353.

⁵⁹ Simcoe 352 - 353.

extinguished, had an awful, grand appearance as we walked home in a dark night; the effect of colour was very rich.’⁶⁰

Yet, with the exception of this last quotation, Simcoe’s descriptive distinction between domestic fires and fires in the natural landscape is marked. In contrast to the language used to describe landscape fires, the language of the domestic fires is practical and to the point with no adjectives or aesthetic descriptions. This supports the idea that it was not fire in general that fascinated Simcoe, but rather fire seen under specific circumstances, in this case, in the natural landscape, thus fitting in accordance to the tenants of the “traditional sublime” as laid out by Kant and Burke. Unlike Simcoe’s known domestic sphere, Canada’s wild landscape was an unfamiliar space of contention, and also seen as a hindrance that must be eliminated for the project of colonial settlement to take place. Setting the landscape on fire charges it with increased excitement and sublime qualities, all the while destroying and pacifying it for domesticated use and the growth of the Empire.

4.3 Fire as a Space of Destruction and Production.

It is safe to assume that Simcoe was largely unfamiliar with the space within which she existed in Colonial Canada. She was geographically and culturally estranged from its ante-colonial realities, both Indigenous and French, which continued as parallel realities in the Canadas even after the British conquest. Simcoe often attempts to Europeanise these realities through her writing, painting and imagining, but essentially this strategy works to negotiate the gap between her accustomed subjective knowledge

⁶⁰ Simcoe 353.

and experience of space (the landscape of England) and another, unknown spatial reality (that of the Canadian landscape) and paralleling this, the gap between her sensory perception of landscape and the performative limitations of her strict cultural codes. As a result we see the creation of a subjective awareness that is ready and willing to overwrite ante-colonial landscape and reality, but to destroy it as well. In these instances the sublime is not found *in* the natural landscape, but instead in its *destruction*. In turn this destruction by fire, evokes a hallucinatory reminder for Simcoe of another time and place. It creates an overabundance of meaning and a sensation of displacement which floods over her in the form of memories and visions of England. The fires create and satisfy two desired spaces in which Simcoe can retreat and find catharsis, one reflexively conjuring up fantasies of escape and/or mediation between her conflicting landscape experiences, and the other satisfying an immediate sense of frustration and revenge against the “other” less known Canadian landscape. A space that despite providing her with much delight and curiosity is also the arena for a great deal of uncertainty and distress.

In spite of Simcoe’s comparatively pampered colonial lifestyle and generally positive and pragmatic attitude towards life, even she endured a certain amount of toil, fear, worry, loneliness and grief while living an essentially nomadic existence in Canada. She lost a child, another became very ill, she worried about the threat of war, the safety of her husband and family’s lives, and at times she became very homesick and discouraged. Simcoe’s sometimes dangerous grazes with nature⁶¹ experienced within a colonial context also, perhaps, evoked a dreaded understanding that there is a potential limit to the colonial drive to domesticate nature, that it may actually be an overwhelming exercise in

⁶¹ For example, accounts of being caught by snow and rainstorms, see Simcoe 58, 135, 250; of her husband slipping through the ice and narrowly escaping, see Simcoe 77; of contact with wild animals, see 128, 196, 229, 339; and of course her domestic fires, see Simcoe, 75, 76, 136.

futility, as futile as the sublime certainty of death: just as the sublime symbolizes ultimate fears of death and annihilation, the colonial fear is that everything being fought for (both in terms of war over territory and battles against nature to domesticate the land) in the “New World” can potentially collapse and be defeated. The awareness or glimpse at the fragility of their colonial position is, in and of itself, sublime in quality.⁶² In relation to this experience, Herington notes that natural catastrophe, “gives aesthetic form to the physical resistance that limits and defines any cultural program of human hegemony.”⁶³ Leo Marx observes the paradox that America’s natural landscape promises everything to Americans but also threatens to “obliterate much of what they already had achieved,”⁶⁴ while Gaile McGregor argues that underlying the colonial desire to dominate landscape symbolically is the colonial suspicion that actually, more often than not, it is the other way around.⁶⁵

With these remarks in mind, Simcoe’s fire setting can be seen as a physical embodiment of the colonial crisis within which she found herself. The fires literally dissolve the landscape. The flame and smoke obscure her topographical surroundings, leaving charred remnants of the former terrain in its wake. Despite their wildness, Simcoe’s fires exist as acts of domination and attempts at control over the landscape. She scars the landscape and obliterates it, indulging in a masterful position over a small area

⁶² Kant discusses the qualities of dread, melancholy and terror as being sublime within “Section One: Of the Distinct Objects of the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime.” See Kant, 48. Also, Burke notes that lack of clarity and uncertainty are sublime characteristics. See Burke, 62. These qualities also describe what colonials must have felt as their work and lives were overwhelmed or threatened by nature.

⁶³ Herington 132.

⁶⁴ Marx 45.

⁶⁵ McGregor 16.

of the enormity of untamed space around her. But within this violent grab for power over the landscape, Simcoe can simultaneously be seen to lose mastery over herself, as her actions are purely self-indulgent without any practical or necessary purpose (such as clearing land). She also, at moments, loses herself within the vision of the flames, in an almost hallucinatory sublime state. This situation finds resonance in Julia Kristeva's description of the sublime experience. Kristeva writes, "...when I *seek* (myself), *lose* (myself), or experience *jouissance*---then "I" is *heterogeneous*. Discomfort, unease, dizziness stemming from an ambiguity that, through the violence of a revolt *against*, demarcates a space out of which signs and objects arise."⁶⁶ The fires set by Simcoe can, similarly, be seen to exist as metaphors for her ambivalent colonial state. By setting them she is revolting against the landscape, dissolving it into lifeless ash, and losing herself in the process.

This reductive practice is however, counterbalanced by the creation of a productive space for reverie within the flames, which activates the landscape while alight. This latter space can be aligned with Mann's "feminist sublime."⁶⁷ The "feminist sublime" is a very social realm that seeks relationships with others. Unlike most incarnations of the sublime such as the "Kantian," "Burkean," or even the "postmodern sublime" that thrive on interiority, the "feminist sublime" builds "transontological"

⁶⁶ Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 10.

⁶⁷ Mann's approach towards the "feminist sublime" is made up of two parts. One part is the "liberatory" sublime that is political and practical, demonstrating that the unmaking of the notion of "women" and "women's liberation" in relation to the Symbolic Order, "is at the same moment a remaking that both discloses and alters our relationships to one another." The second part is the "natural" sublime, which is in "the realm of necessity, and the relations that it discloses are ecological." See Mann 146.

relationships between regimes and connects with an “other,”⁶⁸ building towards new understanding, new associations and possibilities.⁶⁹ It also discloses “a superabundance of meaning that overflows the limits of our representations rather than emptying them”⁷⁰ as the “traditional sublime” of Burke and Kant would have. For example, reflecting on the fire observed burning in the bay, Simcoe sat safely within her house, lost in the visuality of the fire and her “study” of it. By the evening the fire is evoking nostalgia in Simcoe, a longing for the world she left behind in England that is now intangible to her, only existing in memory. The fire works as a medium allowing Simcoe to imaginatively transport herself into a space beyond her reality in Canada.

Simcoe also writes several times in her journal that the fires’ sparks appear like stars, which she finds very appealing.⁷¹ Within these statements there is the sense that Simcoe is trying to bring the night sky down to earth, simulating an environment that is other-worldly. The fires provide her with an imaginative escape from the conflicted reality of the actual grounded landscape she exists with. She creates a third, libratory, space,⁷² which can be allied not only to Mann’s “feminist sublime,” but also parallels aspects Foucault’s idea of heterotopic space.

⁶⁸ Though Simcoe’s experiences with the sublime are often shared with family and friends, something that is not typical of the “traditional” or “male sublime,” her experiences do not necessarily connect with others in the way the “feminist sublime” seeks. Referring to Barbara Claire Freeman’s analysis of a “feminine sublime” in literature, Mann writes: “The pleasure or exhilaration in Freeman’s account of the [feminine] sublime has to do with a sense of ‘rapture,’ ‘merger,’ or ‘identification’ with the other that, while maintaining rather than colonizing difference, is also a source of meaning that is overwhelmingly intense and abundant.” See Mann, 132. It is debatable whether or not Simcoe’s sublime manages to identify with the “other” and similarly, whether it builds a space for transontological relationships.

⁶⁹ Mann 157.

⁷⁰ Mann 146.

⁷¹ Simcoe 97, 115, 158.

Unlike the unrealised space of utopia, heterotopia is a realised space. It is the meeting place of reality and utopia.⁷³ Heterotopias exist as bubbles of escape within the hard realism of the day-to-day world. Alternative and often transgressive, they are small establishments of the “other” within the established order. They are linked to, and intervene with, the accumulation of time,⁷⁴ and are “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.”⁷⁵ Heterotopias also act as spaces of illusion that paradoxically expose real space as being even more illusory.⁷⁶ Finally, these spaces often act as places of escape for “individuals within a state of crisis.”⁷⁷ The idea of heterotopia contributes to a reading of Simcoe’s fires because it supports the establishment of the fires as productive, constructed, alternative sites that actively work within, and react against, societal and cultural norms and expectations. The heterotopian model also provides a structure through which to approach the fires retrospectively.

⁷² The “third space” is a concept developed by Homi Bhabha. He states: “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.” see, Jonathan Rutherford, “The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,” Identity: Community, Culture, Difference, Ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990) 211.

⁷³ Foucault defines utopias, “First there are the utopias. Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.” See Foucault, <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁷⁴ For example, what Foucault names “time in the mode of the festival.” He describes these heterotopias as “temporal [chroniques].” See, Foucault <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁷⁵ Foucault <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁷⁶ Foucault <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁷⁷ Foucault lists examples of subjects in crisis, including adolescents, the elderly and pregnant women. These subjects are not only in physical crisis, but can be in ontological crisis as well. Like Simcoe they are trying to negotiate new and expected realities and modes of performance. See Foucault, <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

Simcoe's fires and the context surrounding them finds great resonance in Foucault's exploration of heterotopias. Simcoe, for example, can be seen to be in a state of ontological crisis in terms of her cultural and gender expectations and performance, as well as her colonial understanding of the landscape around her. She is living through a phase of personal transition. Her fires then provide an illusory space where Simcoe can project the past onto the present and her former space onto her current space, exposing their distinct and dissimilar realities within one space of spectacle.⁷⁸ This becomes particularly clear when the fires act as a medium for her to conjure up memories and illusions of Bath, and like Foucault's heterotopian example of a festival,⁷⁹ Simcoe's fiery heterotopias are temporal ones, existing for a limited period of time, providing escape, elation and exploration of her visual creativity and uncertain ontological state.

Simcoe's fires can also be understood to function as sub-heterotopias, taking place within a place that can itself be described as an attempt at heterotopian space. Though not as severe as the earlier Puritan or fundamental Catholic settlements, Governor Simcoe's personal desire as Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada was to create an ideal loyalist society that was Christian, conservative and anti-republican.⁸⁰ Simcoe was therefore

⁷⁸ Foucault notes that theatres and mirrors are heterotopias. I believe both are comparable to Simcoe's fire spectacles. They are each virtual realities framed within a known actual reality. See Foucault, <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁷⁹ See footnote 74 of this chapter.

⁸⁰ John Graves Simcoe saw Upper Canada as a North American Loyalists haven, in opposition to the republicanism of the United States. He was particularly passionate about this being a conservative royalist, and having fought in the American War of Independence (1775-1783), and while in Canada, he continued to battle the United States to maintain British control of Canada. See pages 34 -35 of this thesis. Note that Simcoe also imagined Upper Canada as a utopian alternative to England and its growing non-conformist sects. Upper Canada would be a Church of England nation. Once arrived Simcoe began fashioning his utopian dream into heterotopian reality.

acting and reacting within a space that is itself a colonial heterotopia, having been created as an escape and alternative to circumstances in England and the United States.⁸¹

Unlike her husband's colonial heterotopia however, Simcoe's heterotopia is far more private and less formal. In this way, it could be aligned with Mary McLeod's feminist approach to heterotopia, which investigates everyday spaces traditionally occupied by women such as kitchens, parks, the street, and backyards as possible heterotopias.⁸² Yet Simcoe's heterotopia fits awkwardly and inadvertently into this feminist approach. Because her heterotopian fires are sub-heterotopias within a colony, they exist in what is, for Simcoe, an exotic space, not the familiar space of the everyday (which would be the known and accustomed space of her life in England), and are in themselves an exotic unusual occurrence. Simcoe's heterotopia, however, on at least one occasion (when she imagines Bath in the fires on the Bay), provide her with a hallucinatory escape into her former life in England, into another time and place. It does not seek an "othered" place (as Foucault's heterotopias do), instead it works to destroy the "other" and produce a "known" place. Simcoe is also literally working at a grass-roots level, within the more institutional structure of her husband's colonial heterotopia. With her actions, Simcoe is creating a paradoxical and complicated space that, like the "feminist sublime," is producing an abundance of often-contradictory meaning.

Through her fire actions, Simcoe was able to leave her mark on the landscape, to brand it. The transgressive performativity, contextual complexity and lasting effects of Simcoe's fires gives these spectacles a richness and depth not achieved in the more

⁸¹ Foucault also draws on the example of early European colonies in the Americas as being heterotopias in their pursuit of utopian Christian societies on the fringes of the Empire. See Foucault, <<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>.

⁸² McLeod 184 - 186.

technically sophisticated and elaborate firework displays of her contemporaries in Europe, for while these tended to merge with the popularity of the sublime landscape, they did so in a much more superficial way. Simcoe's fires provide an immediacy that cannot be obtained by reproducing the sublime with paint on canvas. Instead the fires exist for themselves rather than a means to an end. The process thus becomes a "performance" in the sense given within the contemporary art world. Even though Simcoe's fires refer to organised spectacles in Europe, and these European precedents were inherently embedded within Simcoe's actions, her rustic circumstances in Canada were far from that European model and reality of celebratory regal pomp and circumstance or even elaborate firework displays at fashionable London tea houses. Instead, Simcoe's fire setting is an independent action, bordering on private, which takes place on the frontier of eighteenth-century Western society.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion: Simcoe's Fires as Art

Discussing postmodern performance art, Elin Diamond states that focus, “has shifted from authority to effect, from text to body, to the spectator’s freedom to make and transform meaning.”¹ Diamond is essentially concurring with Mieke Bal’s assertion that the contemporary reading of an object or event effectively becomes part of the meaning of the object or event itself.² Looking at Simcoe’s spectacles from the perspective of contemporary performance or environmental art we, as pseudo-spectators, have the freedom to do just that to create possible meanings for her “performances” or “events” with fire. What Simcoe signifies, both subjectively and creatively, changes within our contemporary context as a result.

Much like our own era of globalisation (but to a lesser degree), Simcoe lived in a period of migratory flux. We are still grappling with the resonances instilled and shaped by eighteenth-century colonial systems. In very different ways than those experienced in Simcoe’s colonial era, we continue to contend with issues of gender, place, otherness, and hybridity. Though the “structural coordinates”³ of this colonial system are not as overtly apparent in contemporary life as they once were (and the same can be said for patriarchal systems), present-day visual artists often directly grapple with

¹ Elin Diamond, “Introduction,” *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (New York: Routledge, 1996) 3.

² Bal 10.

³ Fredric Jameson writes, “The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual’s subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people.” Jameson 411.

these issues in their practices. Simcoe, who is operating within much more immediate and explicit systems of colonialization and patriarchy, can however, be seen as working through these issues in a more oblique and subconscious manner. Although she is not overtly addressing colonial and gender issues, her subjective shift, a result of her experience within these oppressive systems, becomes quietly apparent as she sheds some of her previous reserve and hesitation in relation to her everyday interaction with the landscape, and creatively moves from traditional picturesque landscape painting to creating visual displays of fire within the landscape.

In her text, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity*, Geraldine Harris writes that, “‘auteur’ status is supported by evidence of a continuity and development of recurring themes, interests and modes of expression throughout a body of work, in which their presence as a contributor is apparently the single constant factor.”⁴ Following this definition, Simcoe’s fire setting clearly sits within the trajectory of her art practice, which generally engages the picturesque and sublime landscape, often blending the reality of her new colonial landscape with the memory of landscape characteristics in her English homeland. In relation to her fires, Simcoe’s role as artist is direct. She is both the author and the player. Her audience is sometimes composed of her family and friends,⁵ other times her artistic initiation is private,⁶ though even Simcoe’s private spectacles are documented within her journal, which she copies in letterform and mails in instalments to England. As a result, Simcoe’s public and private fire setting has a pseudo-audience, which we, her contemporary readers, are also able to be part of. This exchange

⁴ Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999) 34.

⁵ Simcoe 209.

⁶ Simcoe 214.

between the past (Simcoe's actions) and the present (contemporary readers) embodies Bal's recognition that cultural or art historical analysis does not simply consist of the viewer or reader's metaphorical voyage back in time to study an object from the past, but rather the object's voyage into the present, and the analysis of what it has absorbed along the way, or what has been imposed and reflected onto it by the subjective reader living within a specific place in contemporary culture. This is when, Bal asserts, the "object' from subject matter becomes subject, participating in the construction of theoretical views."⁷ Simcoe's fires, thereby, become part of a creative dialectic on landscape that spans the centuries and continues to be part of contemporary theory and art today.

Within contemporary discourse on landscape and postcolonial issues a productive brief comparison can, for example, be made between Simcoe's activities with fire and Rebecca Belmore's video performance, *Fountain* (2005), made for the Canadian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (see fig. 12). Projected onto a fabricated waterfall, Belmore's work begins with a large brilliant fire burning on a Canadian beach. Belmore struggles with a bucket of water (one assumes to put the fire out), but instead walks towards the camera and throws the water, which turns to blood, at the viewer on the other side of the lens. In Belmore's video the fire represents the devastation of colonialisation, and her struggle with the bucket is a metaphor for the ongoing struggle of First Nations to resist and counter-act colonization. The blood thrown at the removed audience represents the physical and psychological harm and violence done towards the First Nations, and the viewers' shared responsibility in that ongoing process.⁸

⁷ Bal 12.

⁸ Lee-Ann Martin, "The Waters of Venice: Rebecca Belmore at the 51st Biennale," *Canadian Art*, 26 June 2005, 15 June 2008 <<http://www.canadianart.ca/art/features/2005/06/26/334/>>.

Performed over two hundred years later, Belmore's video is an indirect antidote to Simcoe's actions, despite the considerable difference between their subjective realities and historical moments. Whether Simcoe's fires are seen as a violent and arrogant Eurocentric reaction against an "othered" landscape, or whether they are read as a phantasmic, excessive display of her gradually more immersive and liberated attitude towards the foreign environment, Simcoe's fires, like the fire in Belmore's video, are construed as metaphors for a challenged and changing colonial subjectivity. Both Simcoe and Belmore's actions are on the edge of acceptable, expected behaviour, and while the reasoning behind Simcoe's actions may never be explained with any certainty, contemporary viewers may come to realise that Belmore's actions are explainable in that they demonstrate overt political protest. Belmore's performance makes evident the devastating ongoing legacy of "Simcoe's [colonial] fires" within the broader historical and cultural context of Canada and the world. For the artist, and symbolically for all Indigenous people, the work functions as a form of agency. It is steeped in characteristically sublime imagery (a solitary figure, waterfalls, fire, vast forest, a disquieting amount blood) and dissident content (allusion to the destruction of Indigenous people, communities and landscape, which is not the romanticized "sublime" story of the "last Indian," but instead a sharp and threatening reprimand). That the work is shown in Europe, which is the origin of the colonial project, and at the Venice Biennale, which is clearly identifiable as a heterotopic site, makes *Fountain* that much more poignant and further underlines its complex and antithetical parallels with Simcoe's fires.

Although Simcoe's fires do not necessarily identify or build transontological relationships directly with the "other" in an eighteenth-century context and in the manner that Mann's liberatory "feminist sublime" requires (as discussed in chapter four), a

productive connection is nevertheless created, though in the present and using what Bal identifies as, “expository agency,”⁹ provided by way of this thesis (for example, the comparison to Belmore). Through these newly forged dialogues, the legacy of Simcoe’s art practice, including her fire setting, is further asserted and implicated within the realm of visual art, and relationships between the past, the present and different cultures, are re-examined as readers become freshly invested in the issues and narratives involved.

The semantic flexibility of Simcoe’s fires lies in the fact that they can be re-contextualised and re-imagined from new and different positions, which bring expanding and challenging perspectives. This retrospective position facilitates a greater understanding of Simcoe’s own reality and subjectivity within her wider culture and time-period. Bringing contemporary theory and concerns to Simcoe’s work also enables her practice to be more relevant to our current situation, providing a bridge that, like in the juxtaposition of Simcoe’s fires against Rebecca Belmore’s *Fountain*, inspires self-reflexivity and reinforces how history has effected our present, and subsequently what knowledge we can glean from the past to shape our shared future.

⁹ Bal 10.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Claude Lorraine, *The Judgement of Paris*, 1645-46, oil on canvas. The National Gallery of Art, Washington.

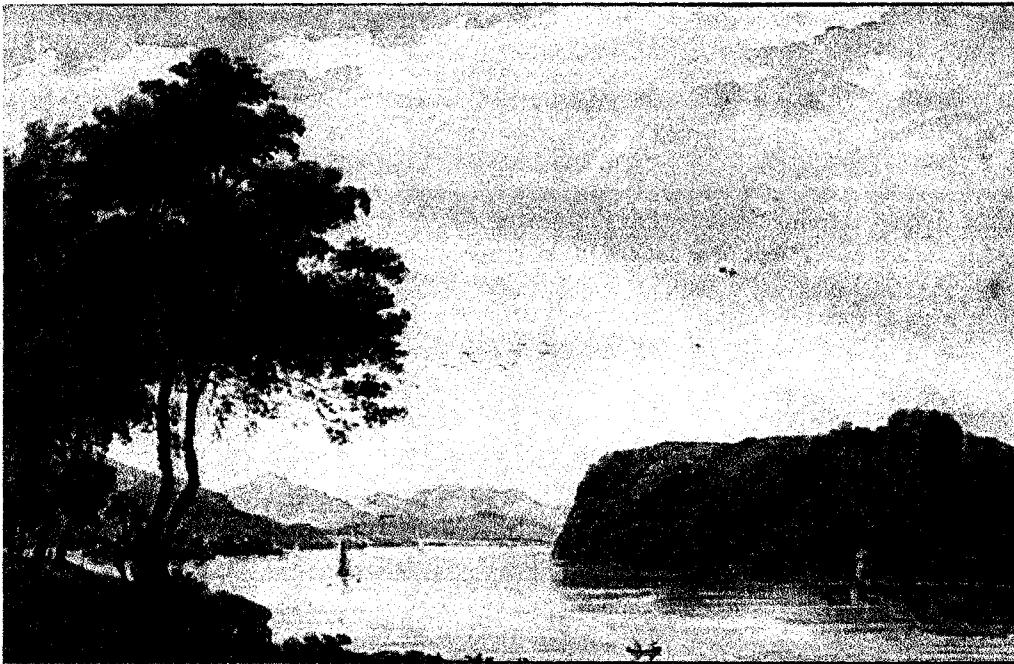


Fig. 2. Elizabeth Simcoe, *A Bend in the St. Lawrence*, c. 1792, wash-paper. Archives of Ontario.

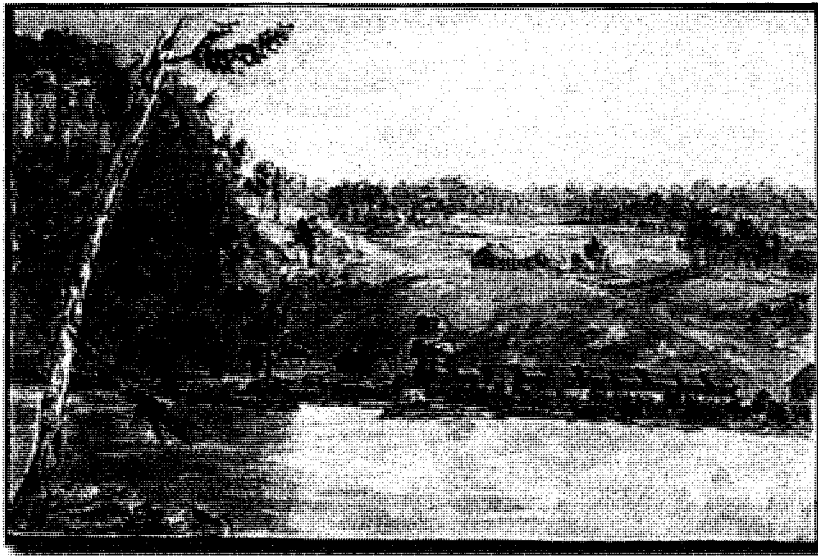


Fig. 3. Elizabeth Simcoe, *Queenston Barracks, Ontario*, c. 1793, watercolour paper. Archives of Ontario.

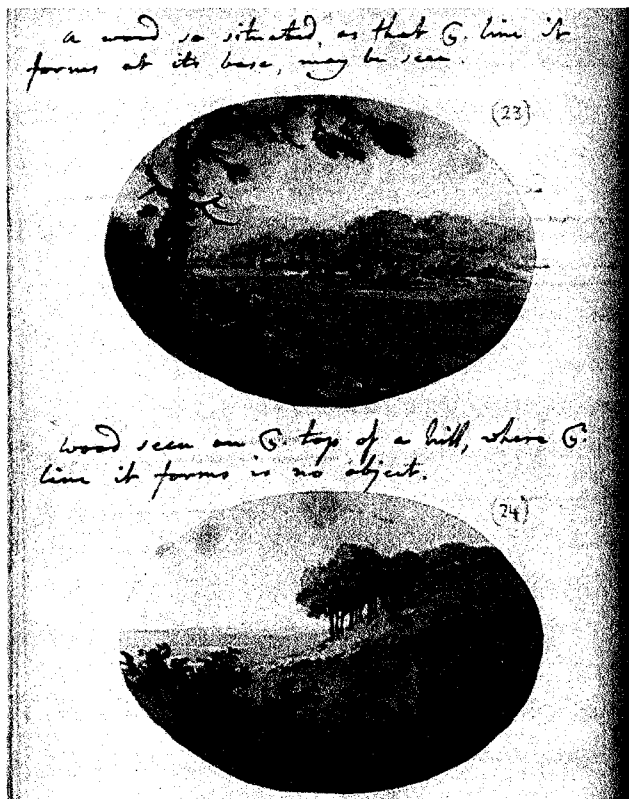


Fig. 4. William Gilpin, *How to clump trees*, from "Remarks on Forests; and other Woodland Scenery...illustrated by the scenes of New Forest in Hampshire," 1781, watercolour. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

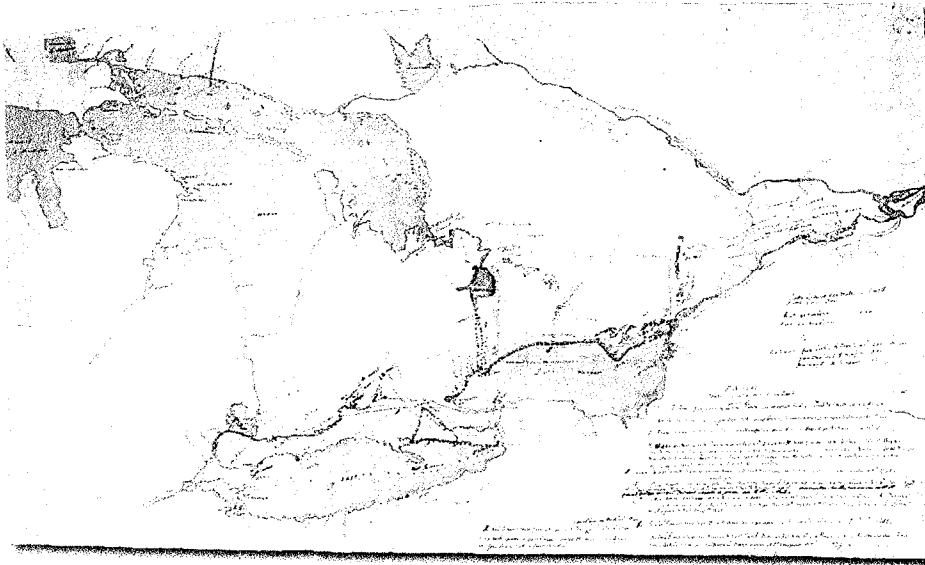


Fig. 5. Elizabeth Simcoe, *Sketch map of Upper Canada showing the routes Lt. Gov. Simcoe took on journeys between March 1793 and September 1795, 1795*. Archives of Ontario.

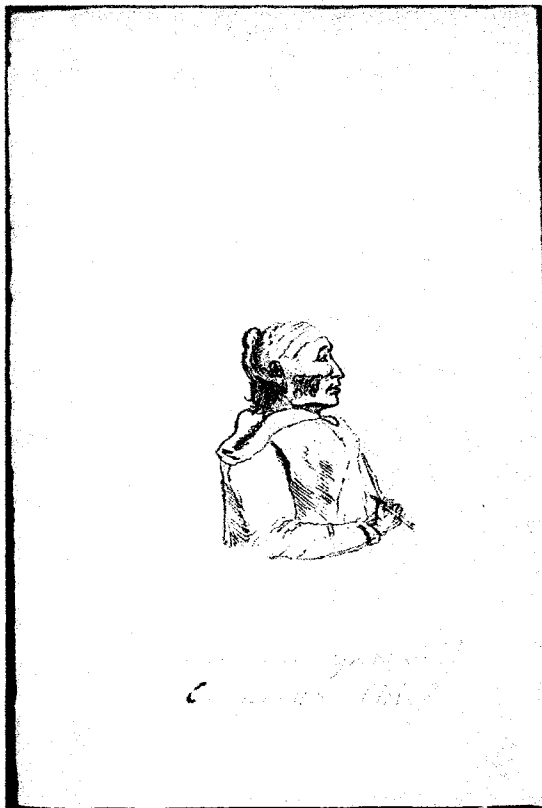


Fig. 6. Elizabeth Simcoe, *Canise or Great Sail, Chippewa Chief, c. 1796*, print. Archives of Ontario.



Fig. 7. Elizabeth Simcoe, *From the Camps on the heights above Queenstown, July 9, 1793, 1793*, wash-paper. Archives of Ontario.

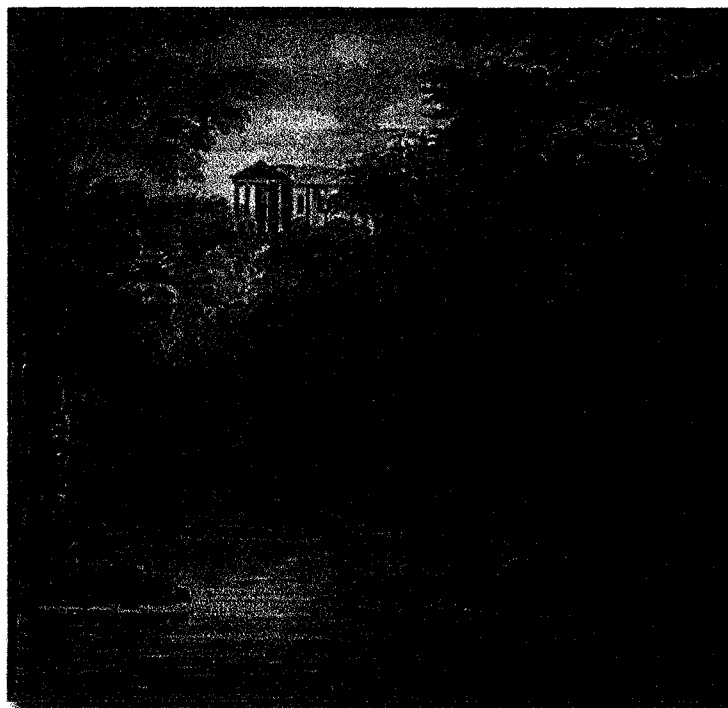


Fig. 8. Elizabeth Simcoe, *Castle Frank, 1796*, watercolour paper. Archives of Ontario.



Photo © The National Gallery, London.

Fig. 9. Thomas Gainsborough, *Mr. and Mrs. William Hallett (The Morning Walk)*, c.1785, oil on canvas. The National Gallery, London.



Fig. 10. Joseph Wright of Derby, *A Cottage on Fire: a moonlit landscape with figures by a burning cottage and the ruins of a castle beyond*, c. 1786-87, oil on canvas. Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

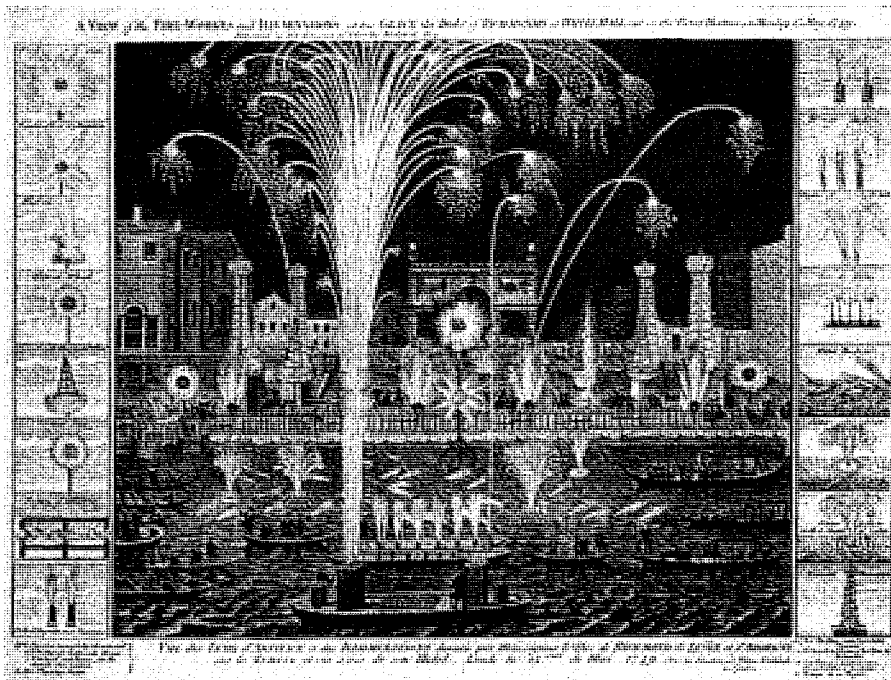


Fig. 11. *A View of the Fire-Works and Illuminations at his Grace the Duke of Richmond's at Whitehall and on the River Thames on Monday 15 May 1749*, 1749, hand-coloured etching. Theatre Museum: National Museum of the Performing Arts, London.



Fig. 12. Rebecca Belmore, *Fountain* (video still), 2005. Photo José Ramon Gonzales.

APPENDIX: Time-line of Elizabeth Simcoe's Canadian Experience.

- 26 Sept 1792 - the *Triton* sets sail from Weymouth, England.
11 Nov - the *Triton* anchors in Quebec City.
3 Dec - Simcoe copies Holland's images of Mount Vesuvius.
11 - Thomas Talbot joins the Simcoes as John Graves Simcoe's secretary.
- 7 Jan 1793 - Simcoe rubs her silk gown together and admires the static sparks.
21 - Simcoe makes note of a perfumed leaf that emits a lovely aroma when lit with a match.
7 Feb - The Simcoes' kitchen chimney catches fire.
Apr - Simcoe witnesses a picturesque scene that she had previously read of in *The History of Emily Montague*.
June - Simcoe travels to Montreal.
30 - Simcoe travels through the Thousand Islands.
7 July - Simcoe notes coming upon a burning wood and suggest she might have woods set on fire for her evening walks.
14 - Simcoe describes how the settlers clear the land by burning.
30 - Simcoe visits Niagara Falls.
- Simcoe compared the landscape to Sydmond's Gate and Lime Rock near Whitchurch.
17 Aug - Simcoe's temporary kitchen catches fire.
- Simcoe notes being homesick and depressed.
- 16 Jan 1793 - Simcoe makes note of her child Katherine's birth.
8 Feb - Simcoe notes that she spends her days drawing maps and writing.
16 Mar - Simcoe dreams of being fired at in the woods.
- Simcoe describes reading of an experiment where a volcano was created made of burning rubies and diamonds.
7 Apr - Simcoe observes trees on fire that look like stars.
23 - Simcoe describes the whirlpool at Queenstown.
- Simcoe compares the landscape to Blenheim and the Valley of the Rocks, Lynton.
3 May - Simcoe reads Joshua Reynold's *Discourses on Art*.
5 July - Simcoe admires the view from the Niagara Escarpment at Queenstown Heights.
18 - Simcoe compares the landscape to Epping Forest.
- Simcoe notes the pleasure she is taking in her independence.
4 Aug - Simcoe travels to the Toronto area, describes the beauty of the peninsula and decides the surrounding area should be named Scarborough.
- Simcoe rides on the peninsula.
- Simcoe notes the sands remind her of Weymouth.

- 7 - Simcoe views loons from the peninsula and notes it is a healing place for the First Nation.
- 10 - Simcoe declares her favourite sands are Gibraltar Point.
- Sept - Simcoe regularly rides on the peninsula of Gibraltar Point, sometime with Thomas Talbot.
- 14 - Simcoe visits the site of the town of York with the surveyor.
- 30 Oct - Simcoe describes the older First Nation woman patching their canoe by the fire.
- 9 Nov - Simcoe dines on the peninsula and set it on fire.
- 2 Dec - Simcoe notes that the Great Sail and his family have the appearance of a Van Dycke painting.

- 6 Jan 1794 - Simcoe notes that the First Nation look like Greek and Roman orators painted by Old Masters.
- 26 - children set the bay on fire, Simcoe spends the evening studying the fire and dreaming of Bath.
- 27 - Simcoe sets the bay on fire.
- 1 Mar - Simcoe receives news of the death of Marie-Antoinette, who had been guillotined in October 1793.
- 5 - Simcoe notes starving First Nation women knocking on her windows looking for bread.
- April - baby Katherine dies.
- 10 May - Simcoe describes supping by starlight and witnessing a picturesque moonlit scene.
- 20 - Simcoe worries about war.
- 25 - Simcoe bathes outdoors in a heavy rain pour.

- 14 Aug 1795 - Simcoe notes flaming spring.
- Simcoe falls asleep in her tent listening to the Falls.
- 9 Sept - Simcoe walks into fields with immense fires.

- 6 Sept 1796 - Quebec City catches on fire.
- 7 - Simcoe admires the embers of the church.

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