Art and Anatomy in Nineteenth Century Britain

Art and Anatomy in Nineteenth Century Britain:

Three Studies

By

Allister Neher

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Art and Anatomy in Nineteenth Century Britain: Three Studies

By Allister Neher

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7776-7
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7776-3

This book is dedicated to Alice Neher,
who first made me aware of the significance of art.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many individuals and institutions. The Library of the Royal Academy of Arts in London has been an important place for my self-education, and I must thank Annette Wickham in particular for years of patient and helpful advice. I have an equal debt to the staff of the Wellcome Trust Library and the staff of the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. Over the course of my research, I have also benefited from guidance by the experts of the Courtauld Institute's Prints and Drawings Study Room and UCL's Special Collections. As always, my greatest debt is to my home institution, the Osler Library of the History of Medicine at McGill University, and its staff: Mary Yearl, Lily Szczygiel and Bozena Latincic. Chris Lyons, head of Rare Books and Special Collections at McGill, has been an active supporter of this project since its inception. The wise and warm counsel of Ying Wang has sustained me at home, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, when this book was written.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades the literature on the relationship between art and anatomy in the Western world has been steadily expanding. Subjects related to European art and medicine since the Renaissance have attracted most of the attention. Less has been given to developments in Britain, which is unexpected because art and anatomy have had a long and varied history of interrelation in that country. The last half of the Eighteenth Century and the first half of the Nineteenth Century were particularly fertile times in Britain for their interaction, and there have been studies that have focused on developments from that period, which will be discussed when they are germane to the arguments in the chapters that follow. The ways in which the two disciplines have come together are wide, reciprocal and they have assumed many forms, as a review of the literature will immediately reveal. It is not my intention though to provide an overview of them. The studies that comprise the chapters of this book are interconnected inquiries that focus principally on three subjects: the significance of anatomical correctness in the evaluation of art, teaching anatomy for the education of artists, and the use of artistry as an epistemological instrument in anatomical illustration. These three subjects are examined in relation to the work of three men—John Bell, Charles Landseer, and Robert Carswell—who were once celebrated but are now neglected. All of them, however, left behind bodies of work that are important to understanding the tenor of their times and the histories of their disciplines, and they should be returned to those discussions.

Chapter One, "John Bell on Anatomy and the Ends of Art," is primarily concerned with the question of the place of anatomy in the evaluation of art, though it addresses anatomy and artistic education as well. John Bell (1763-1820) was one of Britain's most renowned anatomists and most respected surgeons; he was also a good amateur artist and very well read in the literature of the fine arts. At the beginning of the nineteenth century there was an ongoing debate about how much anatomy an artist should know and how relevant it was for the production and assessment of art. Bell, who had impeccable credentials as a commentator in both domains, advanced a strong case for the significance of anatomical correctness in his book *Observations on Italy*.[1] Most of the figures involved in this debate were artists and intellectuals associated with the established London art world and the Royal Academy of Arts. Probably the two most well-known figures in the debate—on the pro-anatomy side—were the history painter Benjamin Robert Haydon and John Bell's brother the anatomist and surgeon Charles Bell (later to become Sir Charles Bell for his work in neurology). What is not sufficiently appreciated by historians is that both Haydon and Charles Bell were intellectually indebted to John Bell. Haydon was inspired by his books on anatomy and used John Bell's *Engravings, Explaining the Anatomy of the Bones, Muscles and Joints* as the default anatomy textbook for his students when he began his own school of art in 1815 to compete with the Royal Academy.[2] Charles Bell followed a five year surgeon's apprenticeship with John Bell in Edinburgh, which began in 1792, and when the apprenticeship concluded Charles continued

[1] John Bell, *Observations on Italy*, 2nd ed. (Naples: Fibreno, 1834).
[2] John Bell, *Engravings, Explaining the Anatomy of the Bones, Muscles and Joints* (Edinburgh: printed by John Paterson, for Bell and Bradfute, and T. Duncan; and J. Johnson, and G. G. G. & J. Robinsons, London, 1794).

to work with John until 1801 as an assistant at his anatomy school. In sum, John was Charles' teacher and mentor for nine years. When we consider the important contributions to British art made by Haydon and Charles Bell, and the scope of their influence in the early nineteenth century, it becomes clear that we need to take a closer look at John Bell's contributions to the discussions of art in this period. The aim of this chapter is to provide that closer look by offering the first in-depth study of John Bell's writings on the fine arts.

Chapter Two, "'Make the knife accompany the pencil,' Charles Landseer's Anatomical Drawings," principally concerns the issue of how much anatomy an artist should study, though it addresses secondarily the question of what role anatomical correctness should have in artistic evaluation. Charles Landseer, the brother of the more famous Sir Edwin Landseer, was an important and well-respected artist and member of the Royal Academy. In his early years he studied with Benjamin Robert Haydon, the most prominent history painter of the time, who, as we already know, placed great emphasis on the study of anatomy and used John Bell's anatomy manual as his student' textbook. Dozens of Landseer's anatomical drawings, made during his years with Haydon, survive in the collection of the Wellcome Trust in London. Given the size of the collection and its importance, it is surprising that very little has been written about them, or Charles Landseer, or the significance of these drawings for British art in this period. They offer an exceptional opportunity to examine how artists approached the study of anatomy and how it shaped their depiction of the human figure.

Chapter Three, "Robert Carswell's *Pathological* Anatomy: Artistry at the Service of Science," is principally about the use of art as an

epistemological instrument for anatomical illustration.[3] While there were many attractively illustrated books on anatomy published in Britain in the nineteenth century, there are two features that set Carswell's apart: first, Carswell was a medical figure of historical importance and a very good artist who knew how to use art as an analytical tool; second, Carswell's lithographs for *Pathological Anatomy* have the peculiar distinction of being repeatedly described as illustrations that "have, for artistic merit and for fidelity, never been surpassed."[4] This sentence, or a paraphrase of it, which comes from the entry on Carswell in the first *Dictionary of National Biography*, is the claim that one will most frequently encounter in early discussions of his achievements. What is more surprising, however, is that no one ever says why the illustrations are artistically exceptional or explains how their artistry serves their scientific purposes. The objective of this chapter is to address both claims and explain why Carswell was so successful in bringing artistry and accuracy together. This objective has been facilitated by the exceptionally fortunate circumstance that all of the preliminary drawings for *Pathological Anatomy* survive in a set of almost one thousand drawings held by UCL in its Carswell Illustration Collections. It is rare for such collections to exist, and it is even rarer for preliminary studies to survive in such numbers. They offer a unique opportunity to track in visual form the development of an important but underappreciated medical treatise.

The studies that comprise this book, then, bring back to public attention three bodies of work that are significant for their times but have

[3] Robert Carswell, *Pathological Anatomy: Illustrations of the Elementary Forms of Disease* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1838).
[4] "Robert Carswell," by Joseph Frank Payne, *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1885-1890).

been overlooked. John Bell's *Observations on Italy*, Charles Landseer's anatomical drawings at the Wellcome Trust, and Robert Carswell's illustrations for *Pathological Anatomy*, with their preliminary drawings in UCL's Special Collections, are all worthy of attention and a careful examination of them will contribute to our understanding of their era and the histories of their disciplines.

CHAPTER ONE

JOHN BELL ON ANATOMY AND THE ENDS OF ART

John Bell (1763-1820) has a secure place in the history of medicine as one of the greatest anatomists and surgeons that Britain produced. Although he was educated in Edinburgh, and spent his entire medical career in that city, his influence extended around the world. Discussions of his contributions to medicine always recognize him as the founder of surgical anatomy, and they usually accord him joint recognition, with John Hunter, for the introduction of modern vascular surgery.[1] John Bell was also an accomplished writer with a deep and detailed understanding of the fine arts, as is evident in his book *Observations on Italy*.[2] His artistic background is usually recognized in accounts of his life and work, if only in passing, but to date there has been no systematic study of his ideas.[3] The purpose of this chapter is to provide that study, especially in relation to Bell's arguments about the importance

[1] MH Kaufman, "John Bell (1763-1820), the 'father' of surgical anatomy," *Journal of Medical Biography* 13 (2005): 73-81. EW Walls, "John Bell, 1763-1820," *Medical History* 8 (January 1964), 63-69.
[2] John Bell, *Observations on Italy*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Naples: Fibreno, 1834).
[3] The only publication devoted to John Bell's ideas on art is by Harold Avery, "John Bell's Last Tour," *Medical History* 8 (January 1964), 69-77. As an art historical study, however, it is quite thin.

of anatomy to the visual arts, which was a central question in the artistic debates of his era, and one which he was especially well placed to address.[4]

Bell qualified for the Edinburgh MD degree in 1779 and for the five years that followed he served his surgical apprenticeship with Alexander (Sandy) Wood. In 1786 he obtained the FRCS Edin diploma and began his independent practice as a surgeon. Bell had studied anatomy with Alexander Monro *secundus* and had noticed that Monro's approach to anatomy, while formal and systematic, lacked direct application to the procedures of surgery. Noting an opportunity, Bell petitioned the College of Surgeons and was granted permission to teach an extra-mural course on surgical anatomy; in 1788 the College further granted him the right to build his own school in Surgeons' Square.[5] As his presence in the Edinburgh medical world expanded, Bell engaged assistants to help with his teaching, the preparation of specimens and the administrative activities involved in the operation of the school. On 26 September 1792, his brother Charles was taken on as an apprentice for the standard five-year period.[6] Charles would go on to become Sir Charles Bell for his contributions to physiology and neurology, but it is important to keep in mind that when he joined John, he was just 18 years old and it was John who gave him his foundation and orientation in anatomy, surgery and the practice of medicine.

---

[4] For a discussion of the wider background to this question see, Anne Carol Darlington, "The Royal Academy of Art and Its Anatomical Teachings," University of London, Ph.D. Thesis, 1990.

[5] The first notice that I have found of Bell's lectures on anatomy and surgery occurs in the *Caledonian Mercury*, 11 November 1790, 1. The *Caledonian Mercury* was Bell's preferred publication for announcements.

[6] The formal contract between the two still exists in the collection of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. See as well, MH Kaufman, "Genealogy of John and Charles Bell: Their Relationship with the Children of Charles Shaw of Ayr," *Journal of Medical Biography* 13 (2005), 218-224.

Figure 1-1: Portrait of John Bell by an unknown artist, ca. 1803, oil on panel, 295 mm x 210 mm. With permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Bell lectured at the school until 1801. In the *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 November 1801, he published a long notice announcing his decision to discontinue his courses and explain the measures he was taking to mitigate the inconvenience it would cause those who had planned to study with him. Bell stated that his surgical career had expanded to such an extent that he was forced to give up lecturing in order to properly attend to his patients; this was true, though as we will see a dispute with James Gregory over the appointment of surgeons to the Royal Infirmary also contributed to his decision. There were no lectures that season, but by the following year Charles had taken over the lectures on anatomy and surgery.[7] That arrangement did not last for long, though, as Charles left for London on the 23rd of November 1804.[8] One year later John sold the building on Surgeon's Square that housed his school and museum.[9]

In part, Charles left Edinburgh to try to make a bigger name for himself in London, but he also left because he was John Bell's brother, and John had made powerful enemies in the city's medical establishment, which limited Charles' opportunities. In the entry on John Bell in the *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* we read, "the warmth of his temper . . . involved him in several misunderstandings with his professional

[7] *Caledonian Mercury*, 7 October 1802, 1. "ANATOMY AND SURGERY. MR CHARLES BELL will, in the ensuing season, deliver a full COURSE of LECTURES on Anatomy and Surgery."

[8] Charles Bell, *Letters of Sir Charles Bell, K.H., F.R.S.L. & E., Selected from his Correspondence with his Brother George Joseph Bell* (London: John Murray, 1870), 17.

[9] *Caledonian Mercury*, 2 May 1805, 1. "ANATOMlCAL THEATRE AND ROOMS FOR SALE to be SOLD by public sale within the Royal Exchange Coffeehouse, on Wednesday the 5th day of June 1805 at two o'clock afternoon, if not previously disposed of by private bargain. MR BELL'S ANATOMICAL TIIEATRE and ROOMS, Surgeon's Square."

brethren."[10] This is certainly an understatement. EW Walls is nearer the truth when he writes that Bell had a "combative temperament which would not suffer fools gladly,"[11] but he is guilty of overstatement when he claims that Bell's "professional life was one of unending, bitter controversy,"[12] though there were many controversies. The most famous one was his long and rancorous debate with Dr James Gregory, a senior manager of the Royal Infirmary, and Professor of the Practice of Physic at the University of Edinburgh. In 1800 Gregory decided there were too many surgeons associated with the Royal Infirmary and that for consistency of care the number should be reduced to six. This restriction excluded Bell and all of the other surgeons who practiced in Edinburgh. Not surprisingly, the excluded surgeons opposed Gregory's decision and they asked Bell to be their spokesman and write their reply. What ensued was a protracted public exchange of pamphlets between Bell and Gregory that became more acrimonious as the years passed. Bell's pamphlets were eventually collected into the book *Letters on the Education of a Surgeon and the Qualifications of a Physician*.[13] From the point of view of the present it is hard to imagine how something this acrimonious could be published, but it must be kept in mind that Gregory's decision was a blow to the heart of Bell's ambitions, and it was one of the factors that led to the closing of his school. Bell had always maintained that his system of teaching was inseparably connected

[10] Robert Chambers, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, vol. I (Edinburgh: Blackie and sons, 1837), 122.
[11] Walls, "John Bell," 64.
[12] Walls, "John Bell," 64.
[13] John Bell, *Letters on the Education of a Surgeon and the Qualifications of a Physician: Addressed to James Gregory, M.D*. (Edinburgh: John Muir, 1810). For a wider study of the Gregory controversy see MH Kaufman, "The Excoriation of Benjamin Bell: who was 'Jonathan Dawplucker'," *The Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* 35 (2005), 356-64.

with patient care and both were required for the improvement of surgery. Unwilling to betray his principles, when Gregory excluded him, he closed the school.

Many years later, when John died, Charles decided to write a biography of him. In a letter about this plan, sent to their brother George, we get a sense of John's character and the complexities behind their relationship:

> I send you my notes for John's life, to have my mind freed of a time of the oppressive subject. I have enough painful still in perusing these papers. Of these notes you will, of course, make what use you please—strengthen or blunt them—because you are as much interested as I am. Yet I do think it should be a good life. We may, dear George, have felt what others have not and should not . . . He did dunch and press one; but since I lived with him I have scarcely enjoyed what I would call a conversation. In short, he was much more than I have made him, and I feel so much as he felt that I think that I have represented many things truly which might have been forgotten.[14]

Following this letter the editor adds a footnote explaining how the project was ultimately abandoned: "John Bell's life was never published, for, on consultation together, the brothers decided that it was better to allow his works to speak for him, than to excite anew the controversies into which his enthusiasm for his profession had drawn him."[15] John's fiery temperament, accompanied by the conflagrations it created, is one reason why there is so little written about him by his contemporaries, and it also helps explain why

[14] Charles Bell, *Letters*, 262-63.
[15] Charles Bell, *Letters*, 262.

he passed into the background, behind his more agreeable brother Charles. An assessment of Bell's professional battles and incendiary personality would take us too far away from the subject of this chapter, though it is relevant to understanding him and his writings about art, because his anger was often inflamed by the suffering of others.[16] He denounced medical practitioners who did not lessen it, and he criticised artists who chose to depict it. As a surgeon living in an era before modern anaesthetics and antiseptics, he had seen too much of it.[17]

Reverend William Bell, the father of John and Charles, died in 1779 when John was sixteen and Charles five.[18] Reverend Bell was an Episcopalian minister of limited means with a wife and six children to

[16] For a wider view of Bell's role in these public debates see, Michael Brown, "Surgery and Emotion: the Era Before Anaesthesia," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the History of Surgery*, ed. T. Schlick (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2018), 327-47. For a greater historical context see, Lynda Payne, *With Words and Knives: Learning Medical Dispassion in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), and Peter Stanley, *For Fear of Pain: British Surgery, 1790–1850* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003).

[17] Bell's *Memoir Concerning the Present State of Military and Naval Surgery* provides another example of his concern for the misery of others. It was directed to Earl Spenser, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty. After the naval battle at Camperdown in October 1797 Bell hurried to Yarmouth to help attend to the hundreds of injured British sailors. He was so disturbed by the limited knowledge and abilities of the naval surgeons he worked with that he wrote a memorial to Lord Spenser arguing for a specialised school for military surgeons. It was ignored, so Bell published it as an address to the general public. This is the first sentence: "I beg leave to address your lordship on a subject interesting to every man of humane feelings, and where every man having such feelings will claim a privilege above all ceremony." John Bell, *Memoir Concerning the Present State of Military and Naval Surgery. Addressed Several Years Ago to the Right Honorable Earl Spenser. First Lord of the Admiralty; and Now S ubmitted to the Public* (Edinburgh and London: Longman and Rees and Casell and Davies, 1800). For a wider study of the social and professional context of Bell's *Memoir* see Michael Brown, "Wounds and Wonder: Emotion, Imagination and War in the Cultures of Romantic Surgery," Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies Vol. 43 No. 2 (2020), 239-259.

[18] MH Kaufman, "Genealogy of John and Charles Bell," 218.

support, and when he died their financial situation became quite difficult. While their father was alive the older children could be given proper schooling: John received a classical education at the High School of Edinburgh, went on to medical studies, and graduated with the Edinburgh MD degree the year of his father death.[19] Charles, on the other hand, was schooled mainly by his mother. Later in life, in response to a biography of him in Pettigrew's *Medical Portrait Gallery*, which claimed that he had attended the High School of Edinburgh, Charles wrote, "Nonsense! I received no education but from my mother, neither reading, writing, cyphering or anything else."[20] In the next sentence though he makes an important addition, "My education was the example set me by my brothers," which gives further significance to his years of apprenticeship with John, and not just for medical subjects, for John was multi-lingual, fluent in Latin, and an avid reader of classical literature and studies on the fine arts.[21]

---

[19] MH Kaufman, "John Bell (1763-1820)," 73.

[20] Charles Bell, *Letters*, 10. However, he does say a couple of pages on, "The education at the High School, which I attended for two years, was to me torture and humiliation. Adams, loved by all good scholars, was to me a stupid tyrant," 12-13. I am assuming that he only attended the High School for these two years.

[21] That Charles felt a debt to John is apparent in the last sentence of his Preface to the new edition of John's *The Principles of Surgery* that he brought out after John's death: "and, did it not sound like vanity, I would express a wish that the content of these volumes may prove to the reader of the same value that the lessons of a brother have been to me." On the other hand, a quite different picture of John emerges from a journal belonging to their brother George, which has recently been donated to the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh. In an undated entry devoted to Charles' apprenticeship with John he writes, "and a most uncomfortable master he had of him for he has ever shown himself a man of most capricious affections full of jealousy and apt to quarrel. He rather suffered Charles to be bred under him than bred him." The passages devoted to John in these early years are very unflattering, quite unlike the evaluations of his character that one finds in later writings of his contemporaries. How the conflicting testimonies should be understood is a question for another and quite different study.

Luckily for Charles, his mother, Margaret Morice, was a well-educated woman who valued the arts, and even in their strained financial situation she was somehow able to arrange drawing lessons for him with Edinburgh artists, who often shared their prints with Charles and filled him with stories that stoked his interest in the history of art.[22] It is likely John was also given drawing lessons, especially after he settled on a career in medicine, because in a pre-photographic age surgeons and anatomists had to be capable of accurately recording their cases and specimens. Both John and Charles turned out to be excellent draughtsmen who often made their own medical illustrations. They also collaborated: the third and fourth volumes of their monumental *Anatomy of the Human Body* were for the most part the result of Charles' labours.[23] In a series of advertisements for the work that ran in the *Caledonian Mercury* John always had Charles acknowledged as the joint author and illustrator.[24] Whatever the difficulties in their personal relations, they respected each other's professional achievements.

When Charles left for London in 1804 John had only 16 more years to live. During this period Charles began to solidify his reputation as a major contributor to neurology and physiology, and John became the most celebrated and sought-after surgeon in Scotland, with a reputation that extended around the world. Renown and success seem to have dampened

[22] Charles Bell, *Letters*, 14.
[23] John Bell and Charles Bell, *Anatomy of the Human Body*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Printed for Cadell and Davies, London; and G. Mudie and Son, Edinburgh), 1797-1804.
[24] The first occurs in the November 10, 1806, edition of the *Caledonian Mercury* and the last occurs in the April 25, 1811, edition.

his fiery temperament and he became a more congenial figure in Edinburgh society. Chambers *Dictionary* describes him as follows,

> [Bell] was polished and easy in his manners, his perception of the ludicrous was keen, and the tact with which he availed himself of his extensive reading and general knowledge of the interesting topics of the day will be long remembered by those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance . . . In the fine arts, Mr. Bell's taste was very correct . . . He was also proficient in music with more taste, however, than execution; and as Mrs. Bell was also a highly accomplished musician, his musical parties, although conducted on a scale of expense which his circumstances hardly warranted, assembled at his house the elite of Edinburgh society . . . Mr. Bell's personal appearance was good. Although considerably under the middle size, he was exceedingly well proportioned, very active and studiously elegant in his movements. His head was well formed, his features regular, his eyes keen and penetrating, and his whole expression intellectual and intelligent in no ordinary degree. He was also remarkable for the good taste which he exhibited in his dress; and was altogether a person whom even a stranger could not have passed without recognizing as no ordinary man.[25]

Bell's life continued on this path of professional and social success until February the 5th, 1816, "We learn with concern, that Mr John Bell was, ten days ago, while mounting, thrown from a young horse, in the broken ground at Newhaven; though much stunned, he was not materially injured by the fall. We trust the public will not long be deprived of his talents and usefulness."[26] Unfortunately, he would not fully recover from the fall,

[25] Chambers, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, vol. I, 122.
[26] *Caledonian Mercury*, 15 February 1816, 3.

and on September 16th, 1816, we read "Mr John Bell, from Edinburgh has passed through London for the Continent, with the design, we are informed, of inquiring into the present state of medical science. Perhaps no one can be better qualified for such an undertaking, than a gentleman so universally known by his writings, and residing in the first Medical University in Europe. — London Courier."[27] This flattering announcement does not give us though the complete set of circumstances behind Bell's decision to travel to Europe. His injuries prevented him from returning to his vigorous and demanding career as a surgeon and, as a surgeon, he knew that his remaining time was limited. He thought that rest in the more agreeable conditions Italy offered might aid his recovery; plus, he had always wanted to test his ideas about art against the actual works that he had only seen in reproduction.

From London Bell and his wife Rosine went directly to Paris and, after a period of rest and recovery, they travelled by carriage to Lyon and from there began their journey over the mountains to Italy. Everyone who comments on *Observations on Italy* praises Bell's descriptive powers as a writer, and they are impressive, especially in his loving portraits of landscapes and cities. In her introduction to the book Rosine Bell offers an important insight into his abilities: "To a classical taste, and knowledge of drawing . . . the author joined a mind strongly alive to the beauties of nature. He would often, in his earlier years, yield to the enjoyment they produced, and, wandering among the wild and grand scenery of his native land, indulge his imagination in gazing on the rapid stream, or watching the coming storm."[28] That imaginative engagement with the natural world is perhaps most evident in his descriptions of the scenery they encountered on

[27] *Caledonian Mercury*, 16 September 1816, 3.
[28] Rosine Bell, Introduction, *Observations on Italy*, ix.

their voyage over the mountains from France to Italy. A passage from the approach to Mont Cenis provides an excellent example, although almost any passage would do,

> From time to time a sudden blast would, for a moment, remove the black curtain of impending clouds, unfolding to the eye a scene inconceivably grand. The mountains were seen towering in distant elevation, their summits rising in rude piles, often bearing in their aspect strange and varied forms, of castellated towers, or of the desolated remains of some ancient city; while the sun, freed from the obstructing clouds, gleamed and sparkled, just gilding with its rays the dashing cataract, and projecting rock.[29]

In reading such descriptions one is also struck by how Bell's observations have been informed by his knowledge of art theory; the above passage, for instance, would provide a good example for a discussion of Edmund Burke's doctrines on the beautiful and sublime.[30] It also helps us situate Bell's aesthetic orientation. It is an art historical commonplace that a changing taste for sublime subjects over beautiful ones is what characterized the movement from Neoclassical to Romantic art. The sublime is usually described in terms of vastness and magnificence, but it is also associated with insignificance and fear, both of which are not present in Bell's passage on the approach to Mont Cenis. As Rosine Bell informed us, his taste is classical, and his vision of nature is still very much an Enlightenment one wherein nature can be awe-inspiring but understood, as

[29] Bell, *Observations*, vol. I, 28-29.
[30] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (London, R. & J. Dodiley, 1757).