

Claude Glass and the Aesthetic Experience of Natural Places

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The Claude glass can rightly be considered one of the significant tools that influenced the perception of the landscape and nature in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was a concave, dark-tinted mirror that nature and art lovers used on their excursions because it enhanced natural scenes to such an extent that they resembled the landscapes depicted in the paintings of Claude Lorrain. Claude glass thus contributed to the notion that nature is aesthetically interesting only when viewed from the perspective of its artistic representations. This notion subsequently found its way into influential guidebooks on significant natural sites, such as Thomas West's *A Guide to the Lakes*. West's guide is the first guidebook to the Lake District and has strongly shaped perceptions of its tourist attractions. What is interesting about is that it recommends routes based on their aesthetic impact and often justifies this impact by the sequence of scenic views that a given route offers. To fully appreciate these scenic views, Thomas West recommended the use of the Claude glass. The aim of this paper is to describe the circumstances that led to the popularity of the Claude glass and, in particular, to present the role that the Claude glass played in the aesthetic appreciation of nature, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. Using this specific example, it will be demonstrated how different forms of representing nature influenced its own appreciation.

