



- After portraits and landscapes, genre painting was the most popular type of painting in Britain.
- Early in the century genre or subject painting told a simple story which often made a moral point but as artists started to represent the harsher aspects of society the category became more controversial.
- However, from the middle of the century **William Powell Frith** started to paint a different type of modern-life painting that showed the complexity of the interacting Victorian class system. This was done in a light-hearted way that made the paintings extremely popular as engravings.
- See journalist **Henry Mayhew's** *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851–62).



Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate Britain  
His name is pronounced to rhyme with 'childs'.

- Starting with a late subject painting  
Key point: when we understand the Victorian period some paintings have more significance

### **Fildes, *The Doctor***

- Perhaps what lifts a work of art from the 'merely' sentimental is a better understanding of the social circumstances and intent behind the painting. An academic reading is much more difficult if we become 'entangled' in the emotions of a work. For example, this is Luke Fildes's painting *The Doctor* (1891), depicting a night vigil beside a child. When I saw this painting at the Tate with a group of art historians the **feminist view** was that it shows the **power** of the **male doctor**. The way he **sits reminds** us of **Lorenzo de' Medici** carved by **Michelangelo** (1520-1534, tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, containing figures of Dawn and Dusk). The figure has been nicknamed *Il Pensieroso*, '**The Thoughtful One**'. The implication is that the doctor is a different class, a thinking class, and the poor people are dependent on him for physical salvation as they depend on their priest for religious salvation.
- In 1890, Sir **Henry Tate** (1819-98) **commissioned** a painting from Luke Fildes, the subject of which was left to his **own discretion**. The artist chose to recall a **personal tragedy** of his own, when in 1877 his first son, Philip Luke, had died at the age of one in his Kensington home. Fildes' son and biographer wrote,  
*'The character and bearing of their doctor throughout the time of their anxiety, made a deep impression on my parents. Dr. Murray became a symbol of professional devotion which would one day inspire the painting of The Doctor'.*

- Fildes's painting was also inspired by the professional devotion of **Dr Gustavus Murray** who treated him. But this work shows the moment when a child shows the **first sign of recovery**. The **redeeming light of dawn** is shining on the child. In order to make the picture convincing Fildes **constructed a cottage interior** in his studio. He began **work at dawn** each day to catch the exact light conditions. The image of an ordinary doctor's quiet heroism was a huge success with the late-Victorian public
- Fildes chose a rustic interior with the boy's father resting his hand on the shoulder of his wife whose hands are clasped in prayer. The man is bravely looking into the face of the thoughtful doctor trying to read any sign of recovery. They are poor, there is a scrap of carpet on the floor and their clothes are **ragged** but the child has been given **medicine** and the bowl and the jug of water used to try to reduce his temperature. The **scraps of paper** on the floor could be prescriptions made out by the doctor and now taken. Fildes described the shaft of daylight as signifying the imminent recovery of the child. He wrote,

*'At the cottage window the dawn begins to steal in – the dawn that is the critical time of all deadly illnesses – and with it the parents again take hope into their hearts, the mother hiding her face to escape giving vent to her emotion, the father laying his hand on the shoulder of his wife in encouragement of the first glimmerings of the joy which is to follow'.*

- A year later it was exhibited at the Royal Academy and an engraving was published that sold more than a **million copies in America alone**. It became one of the **most profitable prints** Agnews had ever produced. **Tate paid Fildes £3,000** for the painting and he **donated it and 56 other** pictures as a gift to the nation in 1897 and it became that **start of the Tate** collection.

### Is Sentimental Art Unforgiveable?

- Why do many critics and art historians find sentimental Victorian art unforgiveable? It might be that art historians **look down** on art that **appeals to popular taste** or because the emotional themes – childhood and especially child death, forsaken love, animals, sunsets, heart-rending stories and pathetic scenes – now seem **hackneyed or trivialised**. It is sentimental and so **trivialises deep human emotions**. **Sentiment reduces all emotions to comfort and warmth**. In the **18<sup>th</sup> century** **sentimentality** was the **reliance on feelings** as a **guide to truth** and was much in vogue among the polite. By the end of the **19<sup>th</sup> century** it was seen as **false** and in **modern times**, as **Oscar Wilde** said,

*'A sentimentalist is one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it'.*

- The term 'sentimental' is often associated with Victorian genre painting but I will show that many paintings concerned social issues and morality.
- Alternatively, it could be that we see Victorian subject painting as trying to **manipulate us** by the use of emotion and manipulative images. We are used to being manipulated by **advertising** as so Victorian art could be seen as **debased** by similar motives. In this case not for commercial gain but to **persuade us** that the **religious, social and political systems are in our best interests**. For example, the 'deserving poor' are shown in a way that convinces us that everything is being done to correct the situation.
- Some later critics and art historians even believe that all painting that tries to **tell a story** is **dishonest** because it is **not the job** of the **medium**. Each art should focus on what **best suits the medium** so story telling is the task of writing and painting should be concerned with putting colours on a flat surface.

### Sir (Samuel) Luke Fildes (1843–1927)

- Illustrator and genre and portrait painter, was born on 18 October **1843** at 22 Standish Street, **Liverpool**, the fourth of the ten children.
- His **grandmother**, Mary Fildes, was a radical reformer (Manchester Female Reformers Society) who was injured at the **Peterloo massacre**.
- Trained as an **illustrator**. Government Art Training School and RA School.
- Influenced by Millais.
- **Five large social realist paintings**, praised for their realism but criticized as **inappropriate** subject matter for fine art.
  - ***Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward*** (exh. RA, 1874; Royal Holloway College, Egham), 23 freezing adults, children and babies waiting for food and a bed.
  - ***The Widower*** (National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; reduced version, 1902, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool), man looking after five children, one sick
  - ***Return of a Penitent*** (1879, City Hall, Cardiff), a young woman returns to find the old cottage deserted
  - ***The Village Wedding*** (ex Christies, 12 June 1992), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1883, young newly marrieds walking down the street followed by wedding guests
  - ***The Doctor*** (exh. RA, 1891; Tate collection)
- Friend **Henry Woods** (1846-1921, painter and illustrator, Neo-Venetian School, RA 1893), married his sister Fanny had six children.
- **Compassionate, caring, loving, affectionate.**
- 1879 associate RA, 1887 RA, knighted 1906.
- Admired by **Van Gogh**, took up portrait late in life but then **only rival** was John Singer **Sargent**.

- Fellow social realist painters included **Frank Holl** and **Hubert von Herkomer**, also **David Wilkie** and **Thomas Faed** and later **Richard Redgrave** and **George Frederick Watts**.



- These are the **principal themes** of Victorian genre paintings. A genre painting is about any day-to-day subject and social realism concerns serious social issues, such as the lives of the poor. The previous picture was of childhood, was a genre or subject painting and was also an example of social realism. The **categories overlap**.
- Such paintings were very popular throughout the Victorian period and took many forms. Literary subjects are not always representations of the Victorian period as they may be set in the past but they are still a representation of a story that is part of Victorian social life.
- Many paintings glamourize, sentimentalize and tell a story.





David Wilkie (1785-1841), *The Village Holiday*, 1809-11, Tate Britain

- An **early** subject painting from a master of the genre.
- Wilkie first called the painting *Public-House Door*, then *Alehouse Door* (more polite), then *Village Holiday* and finally *Village Festival* (a title often used by Teniers).
- Scottish born **David Wilkie** became a **star** of the London art world. Much admired for his **moralising** and **humorous** narratives of everyday life. He is **virtually unknown today**. This is about virtue and vice, in this case drink.
- It was exhibited in **1812** and bought by John Julius **Angerstein**, an important collector, for **900 guineas**. After his death 38 of his finest paintings were **bought** by the British government to form the nucleus of the collection of the **National Gallery**. Until the National Gallery was built in Trafalgar Square, the works were displayed in his town house in Pall Mall.
- Sir George Beaumont bought *The Blind Fiddler* in 1808 for 50 guineas and then wrote to Wilkie enclosing a cheque for an additional £50 as the rising fame of Wilkie made Beaumont feel in his debt. Wilkie returned the cheque although only three years previously he had been so poor he considered returning to Scotland.

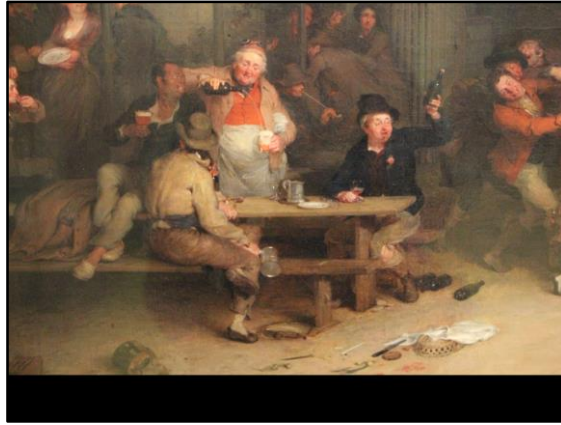
Key point: genre painting changed enormously during the nineteenth century.

### **David Wilkie (1785-1841)**

- Born in Fife, the son of a Reverend. Trained in **Edinburgh** and painted in the style of **David Teniers the Younger** (Flemish, Antwerp, 900 paintings) stories of common life.
- Went to London 1805 aged 20 and enrolled in **RA School**. No money so turned to **portraiture** and a genre subject was commissioned and accepted by the RA and hung in prime position.



- Patron Sir **George Beaumont**, by 1807 President Benjamin West already considered him a great painter.
- ARA 1809 **RA 1811**.
- In 1820 he was commissioned by the Duke of Wellington to paint **Chelsea Pensioners** (1822) for which he paid 1,200 guineas cash.
- His mother and eldest brother died in 1824 and his other older brother died in 1825. Both brothers left children to be taken care of. He had long been prone to **nervous illness**, brought on by anxiety and by 1825 he had become **too tense paint** and he travelled abroad.
- His **European travels** resulted in a looser less detailed style.
- He was made **Painter in Ordinary** to George IV (following Thomas Lawrence) and William IV the same year (1830) and then Queen Victoria. He found portraits difficult and failed with Victoria.
- He was knighted in 1836 and made chevalier of the Légion d'honneur in 1841.
- He went to the **Holy Land** in 1840 and made many sketches and his style may have changed again on his return but he **died suddenly** on the **steamer home** and was buried at sea.
- He **never married** and was a private man.



*London Society, 1863,*

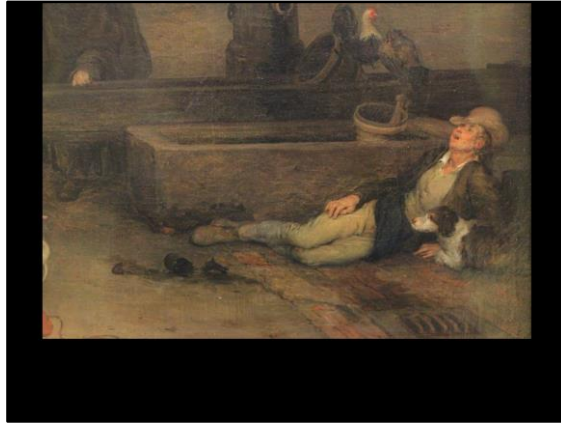
*'The landlord on the left pouring out ale with the air of one who knows the exact height and the precise angle at which to poise the bottle and manoeuvre the glass is a jolly, ruddy, well-to-do specimen of a host of the olden time. He does not disdain to crack a joke even with these tipsy revellers to the intense delight of the negro, who roars out his admiration so lustily as to call down upon himself a rebuke from the countryman who is waiting for his ale.'*



A man tries to decide whether to go home to his wife or stay for another drink with his friends.

*London Society*, 1863

*'...the half-drunken rustic with the smock-frock, whom Wilkie always speaks of as 'the principal figure' and his wife who is trying to drag him away from his riotous companions, from whom he parts with unmistakable reluctance. Detached the man's head loses something of its character; but on the whole it is the least satisfactory in the admirable group of which it is the centre. Wilkie acknowledged that this head 'puzzled him beyond everything' and that he 'could not get satisfied with it.' The wife is an exquisite conception. She is still pretty-the outline is handsomer in the sketch than in Wilkie's picture-but her face is worn and anxious her dress untidy. The village belle has been mated to one who was in his youth the village beau; but the club-room has proved more attractive than the home, and here are the old signs of a dissipated husband making a slatternly wife. The mischief has as yet only reached the first stage. Alone, his case would seem hopeless; but there is a something in her face that leads us to believe that there are better days in store for both.'*



- *London Society*, 1863  
*'The old dame whose pale sad face contrasts so strikingly with the rubicund visage of the landlord is, in the picture, standing by the pump, looking mournfully at the sot, her son, who is stretched at length beside the horse-trough'*



- Although was see this as a painting with a moral message concerning the evils of drink at the time and during the nineteenth century it is described as a jolly, friendly scene of an inn that reviewers would love to visit.
- Writers point out the attractive landlady, the skill with which the landlord pours the foaming beer into a glass and the jolly black man having a joke with him.
- A **different description** was provided by *The Saturday Magazine*, 1842, Volume 20, page 50,  
*This picture represents the circumstances likely to occur at the door of a village alehouse on a warm summer evening when the labours of the day are done and its fatigues have tempted some of the villagers to take something more than their needful repose.*

*It consists of three principal groups and several subordinate ones scattered about the scene in a somewhat unskilful and unsatisfactory manner, as far as relates to mere composition, but full of the most rich and admirable detail.*

***The centre group represents contest between two parties a set of halt tipsy merrymakers and a village housewife and her daughter as to which shall get possession of the person of an idle husband, whom the latter have come to fetch home. There is a homely and pathetic truth in the expression of the wife that is delightful. Anybody but Wilkie would have made her a shrew. The imploring expression of the daughter-which is conveyed by the air and attitude alone, her face not being seen-is also admirable.***

*These are richly but perhaps somewhat too forcibly contrasted with the coarse merriment of the boozers who wish to retain their companion.*

*The principal figure in this group the husband is the last expressive part of it. It seems a matter nearly of indifference to him whether the contest is decided for go or stay. The colouring of this group is exquisite in every part: perhaps superior to any thing else from the hand of this artist The left-hand group of the three is even more rich in the expression appropriate to the subject, than the one just described. The face of the sot who is holding up the bottle is absolutely perfect. It is unquestionably superior in its way to any one face that has proceeded from the pencil of any artist living or dead with the exception of two or three others by Wilkie himself.*

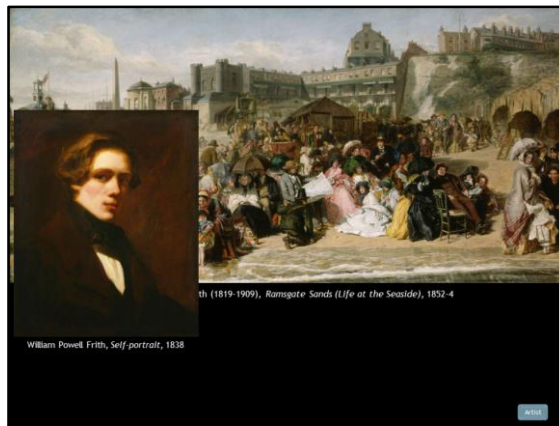
***That of the landlord also who is pouring out the ale and who seems to contrive to keep himself just sober enough to make his guests tipsy is no less true than rich. The black who is the third of this group is not so good he is not black but red. It is very rare to see this artist sacrifice truth to harmony of effect: he had better left the head out altogether than have done so in this instance.***

*The third principal division of the composition occupying the right corner contains two or three exquisite morceaux both of colouring and expression. The girl holding the fat infant is an admirable study, designed with infinite ease, and coloured with great sweetness. Indeed the colouring of many parts of this picture in breadth sweetness and purity is perhaps superior to any other from this painter, whose forte certainly does not lie in that department of his art. And, in fact, it is only of individual parts that the above is true even with regard to this picture.*

*As a whole it is scattered, confused and unsatisfactory in this respect. The only other portion of this group which requires particular mention, is the face, figure and whole deportment of the nice old woman who is just finding her idle drunken son half asleep behind the horse trough. The sight, painful as it evidently is to her, is scarcely capable of moving her from that staid gravity which becomes her age and character, for she is evidently one of the matronly oracles of the village, and perhaps the schoolmistress.*

*The secondary groups in this picture do not demand any detailed description The fault of this work and it is a great one is a want of unity and compression in the composition and consequently a want of general compactness and singleness of effect. **Unlike one of Teniers great works of this kind, it tells like two or three different pictures, instead of like one consistent and necessarily connected whole. The immense***

*size of the buildings as compared with that of the figures increases this defect. The work however, displays infinite talent, both of mind and of hand; but certainly more of the latter than of the former.*



William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)*, 1852-4  
 William Powell Frith, *Self-portrait*, 1838

- Before *Ramsgate Sands* Frith depicted figures from history or literature but this was the **first time** the **contemporary Victorian crowd** had been painted. The idea of **painting modern life** was a **revolutionary idea** of the Impressionists inspired by the writing of Charles Baudelaire but Frith's pictures **predates** the Impressionists by **twenty years**.
- Many of Frith's fellow artists were against the idea of painting modern-life and one called it '**a piece of vulgar Cockney business**' and another '**a tissue of vulgarity**'. However, **the public loved it** and it was an immediate **enormous success**. It was one of the few paintings at the Royal Academy for which a **guard rail had to be installed** to keep the public back – the ultimate sign of success. In all, Frith had six guard rails over the years.
- It was bought from the artist by Messrs Lloyd who sold it to **Queen Victoria** the same year, 1854, for **£1,000**, the same price he paid but he retained reproduction rights and Frith may have earned as much as £3,000 from the sales. Although this was the price they paid they retained engravings and print rights so it was a highly lucrative deal. Victoria had **stayed in Albion House** (built 1789) in Ramsgate before she became Queen. This is the highest house in the middle of Frith's painting. Victoria stayed in Ramsgate aged 16 she nearly died of typhoid and Sir John Conroy forced a pen into her hand to try to force her to sign authority to him, she resisted.
- Victoria had also entered the sea from a **bathing machine** in **Osborne**, Isle of Wight for the first time in **1847**. She wrote in her  
*'drove down to the beach with my maid & went into the bathing machines, where I undressed & bathed in the sea (for the 1st time in my life), a very nice bathing woman attended me. I thought it delightful till I put my head under water, when I thought I should be stifled.'*  
*Queen Victoria's Journal*, 30 July 1847
- It was inspired by a **holiday Frith** and his family took to Ramsgate in **1851**. He



always painted from **real people** and liked to use friends and family as he found professional models often turned up drunk and had no sense of responsibility. The artist included a **self-portrait** (peeping over the shoulder of the man on the far right), while the **little girl** paddling in the centre staring directly at the painter is thought to have been his **daughter**. He also shows himself, if I display his portrait can you **find him**?

- My professor at the Courtauld devoted a large part of her **doctoral thesis** to this painting and she **examined and analysed every person** and their **social role** within society. Seaside holidays or weekends had become possible with the advent of the railway. Trains first reach Ramsgate in 1846 and although it involved changing at Canterbury the old station was in the centre of the town near the beach.
- The bathing machines had a curtain that could be lowered to sea level but **men** were allowed to **bathe nude** until the 1860s. Some resorts employed a **dipper** whose job was to **push people under water** and then help them back into the bathing machine. The machine was developed in Margate about 1750 when most people bathed naked. Legal segregation of bathing areas ended in 1901 and the machines became extinct by 1820. Poorer people from London came to the seaside by train and as they could not afford bathing machines they often bathed naked. In 1874 a **rector wrote** in his diary that he had to adopt the **detestable custom of bathing in drawers**, he wrote, *'If ladies don't like to see men naked why don't they keep away from the sight?'* Boys and young men would **bathe naked** even in the **Edwardian Era** but **middle class girls and women** always had to be **fully covered** with clothes that did not expose their shape.
- Frith is showing a world of mixed sexes, ages, classes and occupations but he maintains the important **class distinctions** and generally the lower classes are shown as deferential and respectful. There is an intellectual air among the entertainment and **seven women are reading books**. One man is an **idler** and another appears to be **flirting** and two people are potentially voyeurs with telescopes watching women bathing. However, one is an old man and the other a young girl. No bathers are shown in the painting and there are no coarse or vulgar displays.
- Granite Obelisk (known as the Royal Tooth Pick) erected 1822 to commemorate the departure (1820) and safe return of King George IV from Ramsgate Harbour. He was so pleased with his reception he named it a 'Royal Harbour' (the only one). Beyond the obelisk is the Royal Harbour, important during the Napoleonic Wars. The first railway was 1846.
- Augustus Pugin, George du Maurier, James Tissot, Vincent van Gogh, Wilkie Collins and Jane Austen stayed in the town.
- Frith went on to paint many other scenes of everyday life such as *The Derby Day* (1858) and *The Railway Station* (1862) for which Frith was paid an astonishing **8,000 guineas**.
- **So 15 years before Claude Monet (1840-1926) was brave enough to paint a modern-life railway station (La gare Saint-Lazare, 1877) Frith was making**

**a fortune from the same daring subject matter.**

- Key point: an important painting that reflected Victorian life

**William Powell Frith (1819-1909)**

- Born in **Yorkshire** to a house steward and cook and his parents took a keen interest in art.
- He was sent to **school in Dover** where he indulged in drawing.
- His formal training was at the **Sass Academy** and then the **RA School** in 1837 (aged 18).
- His **father died** and his mother moved to London and he **made money** **portrait** painting (Lincolnshire farmers at 5-15 guineas).
- Member of **the Clique**, which included **Augustus Egg**, **Richard Dadd** and **Henry O'Neil** and rapidly established himself as a genre painter.
- His painting was at **odds with the RA** but his character and incident, sparkling detail and high finish made his work popular and suitable for engraving.
- 1840 travelled abroad and had his first painting exhibited at the RA.
- ARA 1845 and RA 1852 (aged 33).
- He was friends with **Charles Dickens** and centre of the literary life of London.
- In 1851 he visited **Ramsgate** and decided to take a commercial risk investing in *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)* and it was a success and sold to Lloyd then Queen Victoria for £1,000.
- His second panorama, *Derby Day* was a stroke of genius, few paintings have ever earned such universal acclaim.
- **He had a wife with 12 children and a mistress with 7.**
- **He was an artist with a well developed business sense and he remained in the news throughout his life.**
- **Six of his paintings** had to be **railed off** and his three most important works, *Ramsgate Sands*, *Derby Day*, and *The Railway Station*.
- He was criticized for his **artistic philistinism** by **John Ruskin**, **Whistler** and **Oscar Wilde**, and later **Roger Fry** and he was a **staunch reactionary** criticising the Aesthetic Movement, Oscar Wilde and Impressionism.





William Collins (1788-1847), *Rustic Civility*, 1833, V&A

Key point: poor children being shown at leisure was acceptable if they were civil

Sentimental scenes of children were popular with collectors and the public.

### Child Mortality

- The important thing to realise is that **in 1840, 1 in 6 children died before the age of one and one third before five**. In **slums half** of all children died before the age of five. Parents loved their children as much as today and without contraception most women were more or less **permanently pregnant**. This meant **everyone was in mourning**, had been in mourning or had friends in mourning for dead children.
- Surprisingly, if we **remove child mortality** then, despite what you often read, **life expectancy was similar to today**. **Degenerative disease** was **very low** compared to today (e.g. **heart diseases, cancer, dementia, diabetes, arthritis**). The reason was that everyone had a **lot of exercise and a healthy diet**. People did not die of degenerative diseases **but of infections** that can be cured today.
- The general view was that **children were naturally infidels** and had to be **taught Christian values**. This meant they had to be **rescued from the poor**. Children were treated **very strictly** and subject to **punishments** that historians now class as torture. Children who worked in **factories** were on average **six inches shorter** than those who did not and the average eighteen-year old factory boy was five feet three inches tall.
- One study of the poor in Bolton (1834) found of a total weekly wage of £1 8s 5d over £1 was spent on food, thirty pounds of bread, twenty pounds of potatoes and three pounds of flour. 3s 5d went on rent including coal.

Other items included cheese, butter, bacon, meat, sugar, tea, salt, soap, candles and tobacco but all small quantities. Their diet was **deficient in protein, iron and vitamin C**. Note that there were **no green vegetables**, they did not become available until the 1850s.

- As a result the children of the poor were **stunted**, might suffer from vitamin deficiencies such as **rickets** and as a result looked very different from the children of the wealthy. It was not until the twentieth century that children of different social backgrounds began to develop in a similar way.
- In this painting, we see three rustic children **holding a gate open** for a gentleman whose presence is indicated by his **shadow**. Poor children had generally been shown at work, for example in Gainsborough's pictures of children, but here they are **at leisure**. They are also displaying a natural civility. This painting is not ironic, **Collins was a Tory** and **opposed** to the **Reform Bill** and what this picture is saying is that the **poor do not need the vote** as they are **well off**, have **leisure time** and are **naturally subservient** to gentlemen.

#### William John Thomas Collins (1788-1847)

- William Collins was a **genre painter** whose work was **more highly valued than that of Turner or Constable**.
- He trained at the Royal Academy School and went on to become a popular painter of landscapes and rustic genre scenes.
- He travelled extensively in Britain and abroad, particularly in **Italy**, and these journeys are reflected in the subjects of his pictures.
- He was particularly fond of representing **children**.
- He became an **RA in 1820** (aged 32) and exhibited at the **RA every year from 1807 to 1846 (39 years, 124 pictures)**.
- He married the sister of **Margaret Sarah Carpenter (1793-1872)**, a British portrait painter who was very famous in her time but unknown today. She exhibited at the **RA from 1818 to 1866 (48 years)** and was awarded a £100 a year pension by Queen Victoria.
- The eldest of his two sons was **William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) the novelist** and author of *The Woman in White* (1859) and his other son Charles Allston Collins (1828-1873) the Pre-Raphaelite painter whose *Convent Thoughts* was attacked in *The Times* but defended by Ruskin and who gave up painting in 1857 as it gave him stomach pains (he died of stomach cancer in 1873).



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *My First Sermon*, 1863, Guildhall Art Gallery  
 John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *My Second Sermon*, 1864, Guildhall Art Gallery

Key point: by the 1860s 'childhood' as we understand it today had been created by the Victorians

### John Everett Millais

- The model was Millais' five-year old daughter **Effie** and she is sitting in one of the old high-backed pews in **All Saints Church, Kingston-on-Thames**, which Millais hurried to paint in December 1862 shortly before they were removed. The *Art Journal* wrote, '**One of the happiest works this artist has ever painted**'.
- After the success of *My First Sermon* at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1863, Millais painted a companion showing the same little girl - his daughter Effie - after the **novelty has worn off**. In his speech at the next Royal Academy Banquet, the Archbishop of Canterbury claimed it as a warning against '**the evil of lengthy sermons and drowsy discourses**'.
- *My Second Sermon* followed on the phenomenal success of Millais' painting *My First Sermon*. One critic noted: 'Everybody is rejoiced to recognise, sitting in the same place as last year, the little girl, now dear to many a heart, who then was listening...in rapt attention.' Both images were widely reproduced as **prints**.

### The Creation of the Modern Child

Millais and other artists painted many pictures of children which have caused art historians (Robert Polhemus in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* discussing Millais's *The Woodman's Daughter* based on Coventry Patmore's poem in which Maud gets pregnant by the squire's son and commits suicide) to make a number of general points:

- They create a **new relationship** between adults and children which

intensifies the **fascination with childhood**

- They express a strong cultural desire to **idolize and aestheticize** children
- They often identify **faith** with childhood
- They honour childhood as a time of **innocence** and potential virtue
- They make the **well-being** of children a touchstone of good
- They portray children as desirable but **time-doomed** and a menaced state of being
- They present children as **adorable** but also **vulnerable** requiring **vigilant adult concern**
- They often **eroticize and sexualize** childhood (although not in these paintings)
- They imply a **child's experience** is a **predictor** for later life
- They place children in a **narrative** that extends beyond childhood and so conceives it retrospectively implying psychoanalytic insight
- They turn ideas about 'proper' social station and class division into problems

The overall effect is to treat the child as an object onto which adult fantasies of innocence, morality, faith and nostalgia are projected.



Literary subjects were very common and there was demand for engravings that illustrated well-known scenes from novels, poems and historic events. Large paintings illustrating an historic events that expresses a noble feeling are history paintings but there are many less inspired subjects.





Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859), *A Scene from Tristram Shandy ('Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman')* 1829-30, exhibited 1831

Key point: the visual representation of literary subjects became popular

- The painting illustrates an incident from **Laurence Sterne's** novel ***The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*** (1760-7). Tristram's **uncle, Toby**, is a veteran of the **siege of Namur** (the French captured Namur, Spanish Netherlands, now Belgium, in 1692 during the Nine Years War and Allied forces recaptured it in 1695) where he received a nasty **groin injury**. His hobby is re-enacting historic sieges in **miniature** in his **garden** particularly the Siege of Namur, all of which he masterminds from his **sentry box**. Toby's **neighbour**, the **widow Wadman**, is in love with Toby and **lays siege to his heart**. She is described as 'A daughter of Eve' and she captures him by complaining that she has a **speck of dust in her eye**. Toby is forced to look, but sees nothing even though he looks '*with twice the good-nature that ever Galileo look'd for a spot in the sun*'. But her eye was, '*full of gentle salutations - and soft responses...like the last low accent of an expiring saint*'. Her seduction succeeds and **he falls in love**.
- Leslie was a popular genre painter, modelling his work on that of Hogarth and Wilkie.

### Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859)

- Friend of **John Constable** (1776-1837).
- Leslie was an English genre painter, who was born in London of **American parents** and returned to America for his education.
- In America he was considered 'a marvel and a prodigy' who needed to be sent to London to become 'a finished miracle'.
- He left for London in 1811, aged 18, was admitted to the **Royal Academy**

**School** and won two silver medals.

- In 1821 (aged 27) he was made an Associate Royal Academician and in **1826** a **Royal Academician**.
- He was influenced by **Benjamin West** and **Fuseli** and started painting high art but he quickly switched to painting **genre painting** mostly from great masters of fiction such as Shakespeare and Cervantes.
- Wrote *A Handbook for Young Painters* and *The Life of Constable*



William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness Attending the Revelry (The Eve of St. Agnes)*, 1847-57, Guildhall Art Gallery

There is another version in the Walker Art Gallery

- Begun in February 1848 before the Brotherhood was founded in September. Exhibited at the RA exhibition and admired by Rossetti which led to them becoming close friends and sharing a studio. The **cramped picture space, bright colours, naturalism and detail** prefigured the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.

Key point: literary subjects could be painted in the Pre-Raphaelite style

### The Eve of St. Agnes

- **Holman Hunt** was a founder member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with Rossetti and Millais. He was the one that stayed most true to its aims.
- In **John Keats** poem *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1820) a young maiden called **Madeline** is in love with a young man called **Porphyro**. It is **January 20<sup>th</sup>**, the day before the **feast of St. Agnes**, the **patron saint of virgins**. St Agnes was a young Roman girl, martyred in the fourth century for her faith. There was a superstition that a girl could **see her future husband** on St Agnes Eve if she followed a **certain ritual** when going to bed. She would dream of the man and he would prepare a feast for her. Her family are sworn enemies of his family and on the evening her family engages in an alcoholic revelry that can be seen in the background. Porphyro **rides** to the castle and persuades an elderly woman to **hide him** in Madeline's bedroom. He **watches her** prepare for bed and **fall asleep** and then **creeps out** to prepare a feast. Madeline **wakes** and **sees the man she has been dreaming about** and half asleep invites him to bed. She fully wakes, realizes her mistake and says she cannot hate him for his deception. They both **agree to flee** across the

southern moors where Porphyro promises her a home.

- Here we see Holman Hunt has caught the moment when both are downstairs opening the door and trying not to make a noise. I think they are both looking at the dog which is looking at them. He is a stranger so the dog could bark and wake everyone but she lays her hand on his chest to signify he is a friend.
- The painting is interesting as it was **started before the Pre-Raphaelite movement began** (which was September 1848) and yet it has many of the features such as **heightened colour, cleanly delineated detail** and a **medieval subject**.

### John Keats

- John Keats (1795–1821, aged 26) was an **English Romantic poet**. He was one of the main figures of the **second generation** of Romantic poets along with **Lord Byron** and **Percy Bysshe Shelley** despite his work having been in publication for only four years before his death.
- Although his poems were **not generally well received** by critics during his life, his **reputation grew** after his death, so that by the end of the 19th century, he had become one of the **most beloved** of all English poets. He had a significant influence on a diverse range of poets and writers. Jorge Luis Borges stated that his first encounter with Keats was the most significant literary experience of his life.
- The poetry of Keats is characterised by **sensual imagery** most notably in the series of odes. Today his poems and letters are some of the most popular and most analysed in English literature.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, 1863, Royal Collection

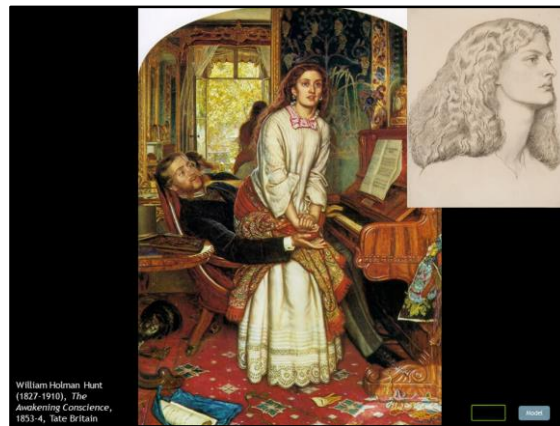
### Millais's Change in Style

- I am showing another painting of the same poem to illustrate how Millais's style changed from his earlier Pre-Raphaelite paintings such as *Ophelia*.
- Keats's protagonist, **Madeline**, is unaware that her lover, **Porphyro**, is hidden in the room. Later the poem tells how Porphyro wakes Madeline and they daringly elope on the following day. Millais was inspired by the descriptive and evocative language of Keats's poem. In the painting, the artist expresses the tension between romantic and sensual love, suspending Madeline in a pool of blue-green moonlight at the foot of her bed in anticipation of her vision.
- Millais worked at night in the King's Room at **Knole in Kent** to create a moonlit interior for Madeline, from Keats's *The Eve of St Agnes* (1819). His model for Madeline was his **wife Effie**. Her detailed jewel-like dress contrasts with the rapid brush-work elsewhere in the picture. Millais spent three and a half days at Knole and completed the picture in his London studio.



A favourite subject of the Victorians was the 'fallen women'. They were obsessed with the fallen woman. Women were expected to be pure and innocent yet were believed to be driven by emotion, like children. As a consequence it was believed they had to be protected by men and the best place for them was in the home where they could not come into contact with any influences that would lead them astray.

Poor women were a problem as they had to mix in the world so they were expected to be innocent and work in safe professions such as sewing.



William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853-4, Tate Britain

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Annie Miller*, c. 1860, black ink, pen and brush, National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm

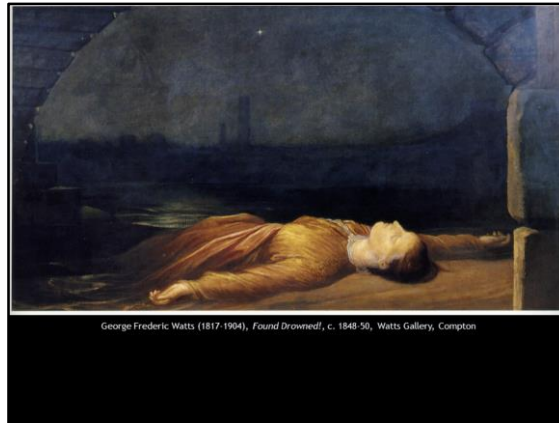
Key point: a controversial painting about an important social problem from a different angle

### The Awakening Conscience

- The inspiration for this painting was **Proverbs**: 'As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart'.
- Some critics misinterpreted this painting, one thought it was a **brother and sister** playing the piano but the real meaning was quickly determined. It is a gentleman with his mistress (she does not wear a wedding ring) in the room he has rented for their meetings. Hunt hired a room at Woodbine Villa, 7 Alpha Place, **St John's Wood** to provide an authentic interior.
- As they play the piano and sign Thomas Moore's *Oft in the Stilly Night* together she has a sudden spiritual revelation. She gazes into the **garden** reflected in the mirror representing **God's work on earth** and **redemption** is possible signified by the **ray of sunlight** in front of her.
- The painting is full of symbolic elements that are intended to be read.
  - The **cat** toying with the broken winged bird symbolizes her plight,
  - The man's **discarded glove** warns that the likely fate of a cast off mistress is prostitution.
  - The **tangled skein** of yarn signifies the complex situation in which she is trapped.
- Ruskin wrote to *The Times* on 25 May 1854, 'the very hem of the **poor girl's dress**, at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread, has story in it, if we think how soon its pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain, her outcast feet failing in the street'.

- The model is **Annie Miller** (1835-1925), a barmaid Hunt met when she was **15**. He **fell in love** with her and wanted to **marry her** but only if she **educated herself** when her was away in the **Middle East**. When he was away and contrary to his instructions she **sat for Dante Gabriel Rossetti** and this caused a **rift** between them on Hunt's return. She became involved with 7<sup>th</sup> **Viscount Ranelagh** (pronounced ran-er-lah) and Hunt broke off their engagement. She was going to sue for **breach of promise** by Ranelagh's cousin Captain Thomas Thomson **fell in love** with her. And they married in 1863. Years later Hunt met her on Richmond Hill 'a buxom matron with a carriage full of children'. She **died aged 90** in **Shoreham-by-Sea**. It is not known whether she became 'gay' (i.e. a prostitute) but one art historian (Jan Marsh) believes it is likely she remained 'pure'.





George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), *Found Drowned!*, c. 1848-50, Watts Gallery, Compton

- It was painted when Watts returned from Italy but was **not exhibited** for 20 years.
- This is one of four social realist pictures that Watts painted between 1848 and 1850.
  - *Under a Dry Arch* c. 1845-50, the most brutal. In London 1 person out of 20 had no food or shelter.
  - *The Irish Famine* c. 1845-50
  - *The Seamstress* c. 1845-50
- '**Found Drowned**' is a **legal term** used in a coroner's inquest and the heading used in newspapers to report bodies that had been found in the Thames who were typically women. This woman looks as if she has just been pulled from the Thames as her feet are still in the water.
- There is a chain and heart shaped locket in her hand suggesting the cause of her suicide. The setting is under **Waterloo Bridge**, well known for illegal suicide and the drama is increased by her outstretched pose, illuminated face and the star which suggest she is a **martyr** to the injustice of the way in which women were treated in society.
- Her plain clothes suggest poverty and in the distance we see the heavily industrialised south bank near **Hungerford Bridge** contrasting the wealth of capitalism with the despair brought about her poverty.
- This was one fate that befell a woman that had fallen on hard times. The other was prostitution which was the other scandal in Victorian London.
- Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851, 4<sup>th</sup> volume 1861 on prostitutes, thieves and beggars), detailed interviews first published in the *Morning Chronicle*. A significant part of the population had no fixed abode, outsiders and migrants teemed through the streets. All goods were transported by cart, there were thousands of street traders called costermongers. He describes now obsolete trades such as gathering snails for food, collecting dog dung for tanneries (pure finders) and sewer-hunters who such for metal. See

<https://archive.org/details/londonlabourlond04mayh>

- Mayhew estimates the number of prostitutes as 50,000 in 1793 when the population was 1 million. The police estimate 8,000 and the Bishop of Exeter 80,000. 50,000 in 1 million is 1 in 10 of all women (including children). 105 women were born to every 100 men, which is 50,000 per million excess women who cannot earn a living.

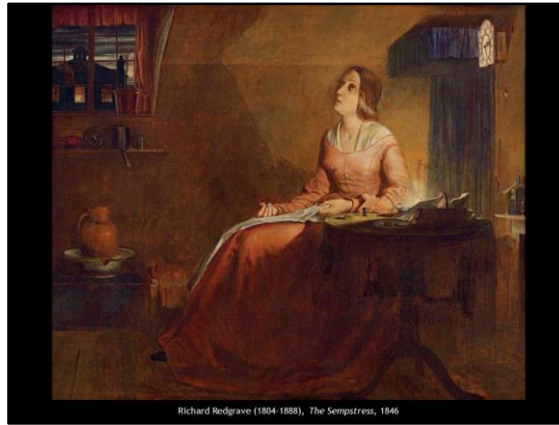
Key point: Watts painted four social realist paintings between 1848 and 1850



- The theme of the fallen woman was becoming increasingly popular at the time that Rossetti began his picture *Found*. Conceived in 1851, it was described by Helen Rossetti as follows,
 

*"A young drover from the country, while driving a calf to market, recognizes in a fallen woman on the pavement, his former sweetheart. He tries to raise her from where she crouches on the ground, but with closed eyes she turns her face from him to the wall."*
- The fall is described in Genesis Chapter 3 and in John Milton *Paradise Lost* (1667).
- God creates Adam and Eve, the first man and woman. God places them in the Garden of Eden and forbids them to eat fruit from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil". The serpent tempts Eve to eat fruit from the forbidden tree, which she shares with Adam and they immediately become ashamed of their nakedness. Subsequently, God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and places cherubim to guard the entrance, so that Adam and Eve will not eat from the "tree of life".
- In Victorian society a fallen woman was one who had lost her chastity. Women had few employment opportunities outside marriage and so in times of financial hardship some women turned to prostitution. More generally it was a woman who transgressed social norms such as by being educated or eccentric or, for example, female dancers and performers.
- As a result of rapid urbanisation there were many prostitutes in cities. Estimates vary from 7,000 (Police Department) to 80,000 (Society for the Suppression of Vice).

## Social Realism



Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), *The Sempstress*, 1846

Key point: This painting defined a new style of art.

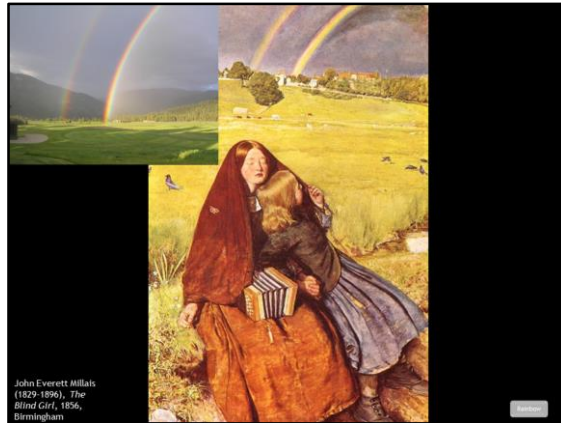
### The Sempstress

- This painting is **the fountain head** of a whole tradition of social realist painting in Victorian England.
- This painting is based on a poem of the same name and the two had a profound effect.
- You can see it is 2:30 in the morning and the sky is streaked with moonlight. The lit windows opposite indicate that the same thing is happening all over London. The seamstress's eyes are swollen and inflamed as she must do close work by the light of a candle. The morsel of food on the plate indicates she has to eat while she is working and on the mantelpiece you can see medicine bottles. One has a label saying 'The Mixture' and it is supplied by Middlesex Hospital so she is unwell.
- This is one of the first paintings in which art is used to campaign for the poor. Richard Redgrave did not come from a wealthy family and his sister had been forced to leave home and find a job as a governess. She became ill when in service and had to be nursed by his family until she died. It was painted in 1843, the year that Punch appeared and in the Christmas issues there was a poem that struck a nerve. By Thomas Hood and called *The Song of the Shirt*. It began:

*With fingers weary and worn  
 With eyelids heavy and red  
 A Woman sat, in unwomanly rags  
 Plying her needle and thread –  
 Stitch! stitch! stitch!  
 In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
 And still with a voice of dolorous pitch*

*She sang the "Song of the Shirt"*

- The verse that inspired Redgrave. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1844 (this is the 1846 version). The poem continues that she is sewing a shirt but also her own shroud.
- Redgrave was an Academician, art director of the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A), received the cross of the Legion of Honour and was surveyor of crown pictures for 24 years and produced a 34 volume catalogue. He declined a knighthood in 1869.
- It is impossible today to **understand the impact** it had. Thackeray described it as '*the most startling lyric in our language*'. It was set to music, the subject of a play and of many sermons. Sempstresses often went blind and if a single stitch was wrong their wages were docked. Articles appeared saying British citizens were being subjected to a **form of slavery** and a German living in England called **Friedrich Engels** showed a study he had written of the **horrors** of the situation to a **friend** living in **Paris called Karl Marx**.
- Redgrave had created a **new category of painting** but it is not based on visiting the poor but the interior is borrowed from a 17th-century Dutch work and the **swollen eyes** looking **heavenward** is typical of many Baroque images of **swooning saints**. Redgrave realised that unless he made the subject **respectable** it would not be accepted. He **succeeded** brilliantly.

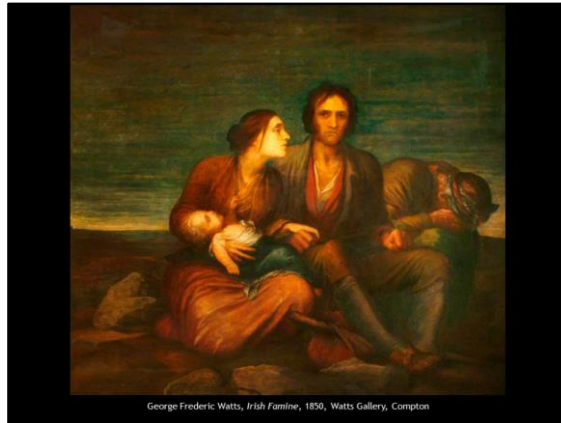


John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *The Blind Girl*, 1856, Birmingham

Key point: the 'deserving poor' were acceptable

### The Blind Girl

- Two itinerant beggars assumed to be sisters.
- One is a musician with a concertina on her lap and they are resting by the wayside after a rainstorm before travelling to **Winchelsea**, visible in the background.
- It has been interpreted as an **allegory** of the **senses** and the **rainbow** has been interpreted in **Biblical terms** as a sign of God's covenant (Genesis 9:16 'Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth').
- Note that a **double rainbow** is rare and caused by a double reflection in each rain drop. Because of the double reflection the colours of the secondary rainbow should be **inverted** with **red on the inside**. The area between the two rainbows should be darker than the rest of the sky. This is called **Alexander's band**, after Alexander of Aphrodisias (200 CE, taught in Athens and wrote commentaries on Aristotle's work) who first described it



George Frederic Watts, *Irish Famine*, 1850, Watts Gallery, Compton

- We have seen *Found Drowned*. This is another of the four social realist paintings of 1848-50. They were only shown privately.
- The Irish **Great Famine** was from 1846 to 1850 and resulted in the **deaths of 1 million** and the emigration of a further million, about 20-25% of the population. The cause was potato blight but Ireland was still exporting **30-50 shiploads of food** a day to Britain, more than enough to feed the population. Some historians therefore describe it as **genocide** and it eventually led to Irish independence in the next century (1921, law 1922, David Lloyd George and Michael Collins).
- Watts **falling spirits** and **ill health** fed into a series of social realist canvases depicting problems of Victorian society at the time.
- He fell in **love** with **Virginia Pattle** but she married Viscount Eastnor and Watts travelled to Ireland with the poet Aubrey de Vere.
- Virginia was one of the eight Pattle sisters (Adeline (eldest), Eliza, Julia, Sara, Maria, Louisa, Virginia and Sophia). Julia Pattle (the 'ugly duckling') married Charles Cameron and took up photography in her later life. Maria married John Jackson and one of their children, born in India, was Julia Prinsep Duckworth Stephen (née Jackson), a renowned beauty, niece of Julia Margaret Cameron and mother of Virginia Woolf. Her parents had both been married previously so she grew up with brothers and sisters from three marriages. Julia had first married Herbert Duckworth and Sir Leslie Stephen had first married Harriet Marian (Minny) Thackeray, a daughter of William Thackeray (novelist who wrote *Vanity Fair*).





Frank Holl (1845-1888), *Newgate, Committed for Trial*, 1878, Royal Holloway  
 Frank Holl, *Self-portrait*, 1863 (aged 18)

Key point: Frank Holl painted conditions he observed in prison

### Frank Holl

- **Frank Holl's** father and grandfather were Academicians and the family was committed to using art to highlight the problems of the poor.
- Holl worked in Newgate prison and got to know the Governor. In 1869 a new, weekly illustrated newspaper was launched called *The Graphic*. It used leading artists like Frank Holl, Luke Fildes (pronounced to rhyme with 'childs'), Hubert von Herkomer and John Millais and writers such as George Elliot, Thomas Hardy and Anthony Trollope. It explored social subjects, such as the plight of the poor and in 1878 commissioned Frank Holl to illustrate Newgate Prison.
- This scene shows 'the cage' where prisoners could meet visitors after sentencing. There are two lots of bars to the prison and the visitors cannot touch each other and a guard patrols between them.
- The man on the left is a **bank clerk** who has just been sentenced to **five years penal servitude for embezzlement**. Holl characterises him as a **weak man** from a genteel background, while the wife is **working class**. He has a look of wide-eyed innocence but the look of his wife suggest she may have heard it all before. The **grand lady** on the right in **furs** and jewels may be the young bank clerk's **mother**. It may be that the young bank clerk was **cut-off** by his rich family for **marrying beneath** him and so he may have embezzled the money in order to raise his wife to a level acceptable to his family. We do not know if his mother will now relent and make amends by looking after her grandchildren and daughter-in-law.

- The **second prisoner** looks desperate but his wife seems **resigned** to his fate. He is like a **caged animal** who lunges against the bars that prevent him from attacking the woman who has turned him in. She and the baby are safely protected from his alcoholic abuse as long as he is in prison.
- The painting received **mixed reviews** when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1878 but one critic summed up what we see before us, writing:  
*'...The characters are so real in this fine work that one feels there is a story to be told of ruined ambitions, of broken home ties, of devotion scorned and trampled underfoot....'*
- Wood engravings of Holl's work were admired by **Vincent van Gogh** as he painted the poor as real people. He was **extremely popular** until the end of the 1870s when the **Art for Art's Sake movement** made it **difficult to sell harrowing scenes of poverty** and death. It became difficult for those Academicians who specialized in painting pictures of **dead babies**. Holl abandoned this type of painting in the 1880s and took up portrait painting. He **died** when he was **only 43** and was forgotten within a few years. Holl did not engage in histrionic scenes but in restraint and he often expressed emotion by the look on a woman's face.

## Summary - Genre Painting & Social Realism

- ▶ Is sentimental art unforgivable?
- ▶ Everyday life, humour, sentiment and morality
- ▶ The invention of childhood
- ▶ Literary subjects
- ▶ The 'fallen woman' was a common theme
- ▶ The poor were often idealised as objects of charity

Dispelling the Myths Surrounding Nineteenth-Century British Art  
by Laurence Shafe  
Genre Painting & Social Realism - Slide List

1. Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate Britain
2. David Wilkie (1785-1841), *The Village Holiday*, 1809-11, Tate Britain
3. William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)*, 1852-4
4. William Powell Frith, *Self-portrait*, 1838
5. William Collins (1788-1847), *Rustic Civilty*, 1833, V&A
6. John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *My First Sermon*, 1863, Guildhall Art Gallery
7. John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *My Second Sermon*, 1864, Guildhall Art Gallery
8. Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859), *A Scene from Tristram Shandy (Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman)* 1829-30, exhibited 1831
9. William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness Attending the Revelry (The Eve of St. Agnes)*, 1847-57, Guildhall Art Gallery
10. John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, 1863, Royal Collection
11. William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853-4, Tate Britain
12. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Annie Miller*, c. 1860, black ink, pen and brush, National Museum of Fine Arts, Stockholm
13. George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), *Found Drowned!*, c. 1848-50, Watts Gallery, Compton
14. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), *Found*, (unfinished), 1865-1869
15. Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), *The Seamstress*, 1846
16. John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *The Blind Girl*, 1856, Birmingham
17. George Frederic Watts, *Irish Famine*, 1850, Watts Gallery, Compton
18. Frank Holl (1843-1888), *Newgate, Committed for Trial*, 1878, Royal Holloway
19. Frank Holl, *Self-portrait*, 1862 (aged 18)

## Orientalism

1. John Frederick Lewis (1805-1876), *The Coffee Bearer*, 1857, watercolour, Manchester Art Gallery
2. William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *A Street Scene in Cairo; The Lantern-Maker's Courtship*, 1854–61, Birmingham
3. William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, 1860, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery