



# A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe [www.shafe.uk](http://www.shafe.uk)

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- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art but I had some lectures that I gave many years ago and I thought I could use AI systems to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice to give them.

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Thomas Girtin  
(1775-1802)  
The White  
House at  
Chelsea  
1800

## 23-02 THE POLITICS OF EARLY 19THC LANDSCAPE

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

[WWW.SHAFE.UK](http://WWW.SHAFE.UK)



This lecture examines British landscape painting in the early nineteenth century as a political and social document, not merely an aesthetic one. We will trace how artists from Constable and Turner to Palmer and Brown responded to enclosure, rural poverty, industrialisation, famine, and emigration. Six distinct modes of seeing — topographical, picturesque, sublime, pastoral, Romantic, and socially realist — each carry an argument about who owned the land, and who suffered for it.





Thomas Girtin (1775-1802), *The White House at Chelsea*, 1800, Watercolour, Tate Britain, London

Thomas Girtin (1775-1802), *The White House at Chelsea*, 1800, Tate Britain, London

Building on that opening question of whether revolutions in farming and in painting were truly connected, we can say directly that they were — and both hinge on a fundamentally altered relationship with land. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Britain was at war with France and food was scarce. New agricultural practices transformed land into a resource to be exploited for maximum yield, and the consequences for farm workers were severe. Wages collapsed, rural poverty deepened, and by **1830** that suffering erupted into the **Swing Riots**, when thousands of agricultural labourers descended on farms demanding basic subsistence. Simultaneously, artists including **John Constable** and **J.M.W. Turner** were remaking how the British landscape was seen, valued, and felt. **John Ruskin** declared landscape the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century — a bold claim, and one worth interrogating throughout this lecture. Landscape as an independent subject was itself a relatively new idea. In classical and medieval painting, land existed only as backdrop for figures or gods. By the nineteenth century it had become the subject itself — a source of beauty, of carefully framed pleasure, and of genuine terror. These shifts gave rise to distinct ways of seeing: the

topographical, the picturesque, the sublime, the pastoral, the Romantic, and the socially realist — six modes we will trace across the remainder of the talk.

## Notes

At the beginning of the nineteenth century we were at war with France and the country was short of food. New farming practices were rapidly being introduced to grow more food per acre but these resulted in problems for the farm workers and, following the end of the war, violent revolution in the countryside.

At the same time, landscape artist, such as John Constable and J.M.W. Turner were bringing about revolutionary changes in landscape painting. John Ruskin, that often quoted Victorian art critic, argued that landscape was the chief artistic creation of the 19th century.

So, were these two revolutions, in farming and in painting, related and if so how?

Both revolutions involve a new relationship with the land. New farming practices saw the land as a resource to be exploited and the increases in productivity led to farm workers and their families suffering.

Painting the landscape as a subject in its own right is a relatively new idea. It is not found in classical and medieval painting except as a background in which to place people or gods. The landscape was increasingly seen as conveying beauty which could be enhanced by the careful selection of views and the control of the composition by the artist. The wilder and less accessible parts of the landscape were also a source of fear and terror which could give rise to pleasure if carefully controlled.

Let us start with landscape painting and let us start at the beginning.

How did artists go about painting a landscape. Let me ask you, how would you go about painting a landscape?

Would you go into the countryside and just paint what you see? Well, you would need to find a nice view. But on what basis would you choose the view?

When an artist chooses a view they have various influences on them, such as the work of earlier artists, the art establishment, what sells and what their

fellow artists are doing, what is going on in the wider world and what they regard as important.

All this boils down to many different types of landscape painting related to these different motives. We have the topographical, the pastoral, the picturesque, the sublime, the mystical and so on, all ways of seeing land in different ways.

Link: Let us first look at how the Old Masters painted a landscape in the 18th century ...

## Notes

Intended outcomes – to identify six major types of nineteenth-century landscape:

Academic

Topographical

Picturesque

Sublime

Romantic

Social realism

## A History of British Revolution

- James Hargreaves, Spinning Jenny of 1765, Richard Arkwright's Water frame, 1768 and Edmund Cartwright's weaving machine of 1785.
- Gordon Riots of 1780 began as an anti-Catholic protest against the 1778 Papist Act and escalated into riots and looting. The President of the Protestant Association, Lord George Gordon, inflamed the mob of 40,000 to 60,000. The army was called in and 285 people were shot dead, 200 wounded and 450 arrested. On the walls of Newgate prison was the proclamation that the inmates had been freed on the authority of 'His Majesty, King Mob'.
- Napoleonic Wars, War of the First Coalition 1792-1797, War of the Second Coalition 1798-1802 headed by Napoleon from 1799, Treaty of Amiens, Third Coalition 1803-1815.
- Speenhamland System, brought in in 1795 as an amendment to the Elizabethan Poor Law. Described as a 'universal system of pauperism' as it

encouraged farmers and industrialists to pay below subsistence wages as the parish would make up the difference needed to keep workers alive.

The payment was based on the number of children and the price of a gallon loaf and started at 3/- a week for a single man when bread was 1/- a loaf. It led to the introduction of the new Poor Law of 1834 and the workhouse.

- The Radicals, in 1797 the Whig Charles James Fox called for 'radical reform' of the electoral system. Fox was a gambler and womaniser but a brilliant orator who opposed both William Pitt the Younger and George III, whom he regarded as a tyrant. He supported the American War of Independence and the French Revolution and was a well-known anti-slavery campaigner. Thomas Spence (1750-1814) advocated the common ownership of land, universal suffrage and the rights of children. He was the first to use the phrase the 'rights of man' and invented a phonetic spelling system so rich and poor would speak the same way.
- Thomas Malthus argued in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) that helping the poor was counter-productive and would lead to earlier marriages and an increase in the number of the poor.
- William Cobbett, 1802, published his *Political Register* with a weekly circulation of 40,000. He was a conservative who turned radical after witnessing the starvation in the countryside. He was a difficult man who hated the Jews and opposed the emancipation of slaves.
- Peace of Amiens, 1802, lasted only one year but gave a break in the Napoleonic Wars.
- Assassination of the Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on 11 May 1812 by John Bellingham, a merchant with a grievance against the government. Although not political it brought about a period of repression and harsh punishments.
- Luddites 1811-17, weavers breaking machines to protest against unemployment and decreasing earnings, signed by the mythical 'King Ned Ludd'. They often disguised themselves as women. In 1812, 8 men and later 15 men were hanged.
- Hampden Club, 1812, of prominent Whigs and moderate Radicals sought political reform.
- Napoleonic Wars ended, 1815, followed by a brief boom in textile industry then chronic depression.



- Corn Laws, 1815, kept the price of corn artificially high so the average worker could not afford bread.
- The Year without a Summer, 1816, following the Mount Tambora eruption on 10 April 1815 in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). The largest recorded eruption in human history.
- Spa Fields meetings in Islington, Nov/Dec 1816, 10,000 people, first such mass meeting led to the 1817 Gagging Acts (the Treason Act and Seditious Meetings Act which controlled meetings of more than 50 people) and the Blanketeers march.
- March of the Blanketeers 1817, Manchester, weavers, desperate state textile industry and suspension of Habeas Corpus, 5,000 marchers met at St Peter's Field. Each man carried a blanket and groups of 10 carried a page of a petition to London.
- Pentridge Rising, 9/10 June 1817, 200-300 men, wanted to wipe out the national debt, 3 hanged.
- Peterloo Massacre, 16 Aug 1819, cavalry charged 60,000-80,000 people 15 killed, 400-700 injured, which resulted in the Manchester Guardian and the Six Acts (which made any meeting for radical reform treasonable, speeded up court cases, radical newspapers were gagged, weapons could be seized and unauthorised military training was made illegal).
- Cato Street Conspiracy, 1820, Arthur Thistlewood was hoodwinked by a government agent and a false notice in The Times into recruiting 27 men to kill the cabinet. They were caught, tried and hung, drawn and quartered for high treason.
- Pauperism, during the 1820s Poor Law expenditure decreased, rural crime increased by 30%, mostly food thefts, and 1828, 1829 and 1830 were poor harvests.
- Election in 1830, brought about by George IV dying, highlighted the need for reform. In France there was a revolution and Charles X was replaced by Louis Philippe, the 'Citizen King'.
- Swing Riots, 1830, agricultural workers did not disguise themselves but descended on farms in their hundreds demanding higher wages. 2,000 farm labourers were arrested and imprisoned and 19 were hung. Reform was needed but the Duke of Wellington, the Prime Minister thought the British system was ideal. His Tory government fell and Earl Grey's Whig government came into power. Grey's bill was rejected, the Whigs were re-

elected, it was again opposed by the House of Lords leading to riots across the country and Dorset, Somerset and Leicestershire became ungovernable. Grey requested King William IV to create 100 new Whig peers, he refused and Grey resigned. William called on the Duke of Wellington but even he admitted the country was ungovernable and he resigned. The Great Reform Act was passed.

- Tolpuddle Martyrs, in the early 1830s a group of six men formed a friendly society (which was now legal following the repeal of the Combination Act in 1824-5). They refused to work for less than 10s a week when the local rate was 7s a week. A local landowner wrote to Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, in 1834 invoking an obscure 1797 law prohibiting people from swearing oaths to each other. They were found guilty and transported to Australia. They became popular heroes, 800,000 signatures were collected and they were released in 1836 (James Hammett was released in 1837 as he had a previous conviction for theft). Four of the six returned to England and later emigrated to London, Ontario where they are buried.
- Bristol, Queen Square Riots, 1831, following House of Lords rejection of Second Reform Bill, 500-600 young men over 3 days, looting, destruction, 4 killed, 86 wounded, 4 hanged.
- Great Reform Act, 1832, allowed one in five adult males to vote, gave big cities MPs and removed rotten boroughs.
- New Poor Law, 1834, relief only given in workhouses whose conditions are designed to deter all but the starving. Based on the philosophy of Thomas Malthus (giving poor relief will only increase the problem), David Ricardo's 'iron law of wages' (wages fall to the minimum needed to sustain life) and Jeremy Bentham's belief that as people did what was most pleasant the poor would claim relief rather than work.
- Chartism, 1830s and 40s, culminating in the multi-million signature petition to Parliament and the meeting on Kennington Common in 1848.
- For more information on the Swing Riots see 'Echoes of Old Country Life' (1892) for the reminiscences of someone who lived through the Swing Riots as a child. At night from his bedroom at Uxbridge School in 1831 he could see three or four blazing homesteads a night. He pointed out that the landowners of parishes would pull down cottages of their tenants to force them into a neighbouring parish so they would not have to pay the poor

law. One man had to walk to the neighbouring parish every day and he calculated that in his working life he had walked three times round the earth. (I calculate this is 5 miles a day, every day, for 40 years). He mentions the disappearance of the old harvest home festival where labourers and landowners celebrated together.

- People enjoyed the old elections in 'rotten boroughs' as the candidate paid an exorbitant amount for food and drink for the few voters. It could cost thousands of pounds and many inn keepers were dishonest with the accounts. He shows accounts for £545 for 420 voters so 26s a head! When travelling in France he noticed that Frenchmen did not get as drunk on wine as Englishmen on beer. Englishmen expected to get so drunk they would fall over and feel terrible the next day.

### **References**

John Ruskin, *Modern Painters III* on landscape, and also see Kenneth Clarke, *Landscape into Art*, 1949.



Thomas Girtin (1775-1802)  
***The White House at Chelsea***  
1800  
Watercolour  
Tate Britain, London

Thomas Girtin (1775-1802), *The White House at Chelsea*, 1800, Tate Britain, London

**Thomas Girtin's** *The White House at Chelsea*, painted in **1800**, is far more than an accurate record of the Thames at Battersea. Girtin depicts the river looking upstream towards Battersea, with Old Battersea Bridge to the right, the Red House Mill owned by Joseph Freeman, and to its right the extraordinary **Fowler's Mill**, a horizontal windmill erected in **1788**, standing a hundred and twenty feet tall — the tallest windmill in England at the time. The painting exists partly because Britain was deep in the **Napoleonic Wars**. With the Grand Tour of Europe suspended, a booming market for British travel guides created demand for precisely this kind of topographical work. Yet Girtin transformed topography into something more resonant: a mood of stillness, fading light, and quiet patriotism that few earlier landscapes attempted. Girtin's reputation among contemporaries was enormous. **J. M. W. Turner**, who had studied alongside him, said after Girtin's death in **1802** at just twenty-seven years old, "If Tom Girtin had lived, I should have starved." Art historian **John Gage** recognised Girtin as decisive in elevating watercolour from a minor illustrative medium into a serious artistic form, directly influencing **John Sell Cotman** and the entire tradition of **British Romantic**

landscape painting.

### Notes

Thomas Girtin's *The White House at Chelsea* is a topographical landscape. This painting was produced in the first year of the century and many regard it as one of the great landscapes of the century.

It accurately represents a particular stretch of the Thames. One reason such accurate topographical paintings were produced was to enable engravings to be made for the rapidly growing market for travel guides and the market for travel guides for Britain was fuelled by the fact we were at war and no one could travel abroad.

In 1800 we were in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars. This meant that the Grand Tour of Europe was suspended and there was an increased interest in visiting sublime and picturesque sites in Britain. This idyllic scene gives no hint of the conflict abroad and it inspires patriotic feelings through invoking a mood. It is not just an accurate representation of a scene - it does something few earlier landscapes attempted which was to invoke a mood, of stillness, a reflective mood of lost time as the light slowly fades and the beauty of England.

(Click) Girtin is little known today but an anecdote involving Turner shows us how just how well he was regarded.

Anecdote: a dealer went to Turner's house and after looking through his drawings, had the audacity to say, 'I have a drawing out there in my hackney coach, finer than any of yours.' Turner bit his lip, looked first angry, then meditative. At length he broke silence: 'Then I tell you what it is. You have got Tom Girtin's *White House at Chelsea*'.

Turner knew Girtin well as they were the same age and students together. Unfortunately Girtin died aged only 27. He died painting variously reported as asthma or 'ossification of the heart'. Turner said after his death in 1802, 'Poor Tom.....If Tom Girtin had lived, I should have starved'.

Description: on the right is Battersea Old Bridge and we are looking upstream across the Thames towards Battersea. The windmill known as the Red House Mill belonged to Joseph Freeman and the white house is where Battersea Park is today (opened 1858, formerly marshland popular for

duelling, and growing lavender and 'Battersea Bunches' of asparagus). The bridge is Old Battersea Bridge and on the other side of the river is Chelsea Old Church which was destroyed in the Second World War (1941).

One of the most interesting buildings is to the right of the Mill. I thought at first it might be the pagoda in Kew but that is further away. I then thought it was All Saints Church in Fulham as that had a similar structure on top in 1800.

(Click) I now believe it is Fowler's Mill, a horizontal windmill erected in Battersea in 1788 (until c. 1825) on the site of Bolingbroke House (pulled down in 1763 and owned by Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, 1678-1751, pronounced 'bullingbrook'). It was 120 foot tall, the tallest windmill in England (at Great Yarmouth there was one 102 foot tall) and a well known sight at Battersea. There were not many horizontal windmills in England, but there was another at Margate, and it is thought they were invented independently from the horizontal windmills in the Middle East.

Link: let us next look at different type of topographical landscape...

Key point: Artists like Thomas Girtin responded to the Napoleonic War by producing illustrations for travel guides to the UK as young men were unable to tour Europe.

## Notes

All Saints Church, Fulham, "before 1845, as can be seen from many old paintings and prints, the tower was surmounted by a picturesque octagonal wooden spire enclosing the flagstaff and was popularly known as the 'pepper box'. This was eventually removed because it was considered to be 'incongruous'". This is unlikely as the church is two miles away but the structure seems nearer. It is not the pagoda at Kew although it was opened in 1761 (built by Sir William Chambers for George III) as it is in a slightly different direction and 7 miles away. Also, it is not Cremorne Gardens as they did not open until 1845-1877.

Bolingbroke was a politician who took part in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715 to overthrow George I. He later returned and supported the monarchy. Died aged 73 and is buried in Battersea. He was a major influence on Voltaire and the founders of America such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.

Benjamin Disraeli praised Bolingbroke as the 'founder of Modern Toryism'.



Bolingbroke wrote that we are 'free not from the law, but by the law'.

Fowler's Mill was an 80 foot structure on a 40 foot base with 96 sails inside and shutters that could be opened and closed.

### Napoleonic Wars

The French Revolutionary Wars led to the Napoleonic Wars so historians call the wars from 1792 to 1814 the Great French War.

Austria was one of our allies in the First Coalition when the war started in 1793 but was defeated and signed the Treat of Campo Formio in 1797 leaving Britain on its own. The Second Coalition was formed with Austria and others in 1798. France suffered from corruption but when Napoleon returned from Egypt he seized control in a coup in 1799 and then crossed the Alps and defeated the Austrians at Morengo in 1800 and then decisively at Hohenlinden leading to the Treat of Lunéville in 1801 forcing Britain to sign the Treaty of Amiens in 25 March 1802. Britain formed a Third Coalition and declared war on 18 May 1803.

Napoleon had returned from his campaign in Egypt, seized control of the corrupt French Government and in 1800 led his army across the Alps and defeated our ally, the Austrians, at Marengo. This led two years later (1802) to the Peace of Amiens when for a short period artists could travel to the Continent.

### Thomas Girtin (1775-1802)

Thomas Girtin's architectural and topographical sketches and drawings established his reputation and his use of watercolour for landscapes means he is credited with establishing watercolour as a reputable art form and creating the Romantic watercolour painting.

In 1800 Girtin married the daughter, Mary Ann Borrett, of a wealthy London goldsmith and moved to Hyde park next door to the painter Paul Sandby. In late 1801 to 1802 he spent five and a half months in Paris and in the spring and summer of 1802 he produced an enormous panorama of London called the 'Eidometropolis' (Greek for 'view of the mother city') which was 18 feet high and 108 feet long. That November he died while painting of either asthma or 'ossification of the heart'. His later bolder, spacious style had a lasting influence on English painting and the popular romantic and picturesque landscapes for which England became well known. The

panorama was patented by Robert Barker (1739-1806) in 1787. He moved to the first purpose-built panorama building in Leicester Square in 1793 and made a fortune as people paid 3 shillings to enter. They could also buy prints. 126 panoramas were exhibited by Barker and others between 1793 and 1863. Their popularity declined in the 1860s although in America they experienced a revival. The experience was intensified in the 1840s by the moving panorama, a canvas that was scrolled past and the diorama invented by Louis Daguerre.

Turner was an introvert and often rude but Girtin was kind and considerate. As the pair of them went around together people tolerated Turner because of Girtin.

Among his followers were John Sell Cotman (1782-1842) and John Varley (1778-1842) and through Varley, David Cox (1782-1859). Cox was one of the greatest but least recognised British artists and member of the Birmingham School, a precursor of Impressionism (e.g. Cox, Rhyl Sands, c. 1854, Tate).

### 'The Brothers'

Girtin was apprenticed to a water-colourist called Edward Dayes who did not appreciate his talent and had him imprisoned as a refractory apprentice. Girtin became friends with Turner and exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1794, when he was 19 (Turner was 15). Within five years he had acquired influential patrons such as Sir George Beaumont who helped create the National Gallery and Girtin was the leading member of the Brothers (or the 'Girtin Sketching Club'), a sketching society of professional artists. The Brothers used to meet at each of their houses in turn and in draw all evening based on a few lines of poetry that had been selected to produce historic landscapes. The host would keep all the sketches in exchange for providing everyone supper. Turner was an early member but thought his sketches were worth more than the cost of supper so he stopped attending.

### Watercolour

Watercolour is a transparent medium and there is no white watercolour. Watercolours are created by starting with the lightest colours and adding increasingly dark colours. Girtin played a key role in establishing watercolour as a reputable art form but in the early part of the nineteenth century it was regarded as a lesser art form compared with oil painting and watercolour

paintings were referred to as drawings which had been 'stained' or 'tinted'. In 1804 a group of watercolour artists formed their own exhibiting society, the Society of Painters in Water-Colours. They were anxious that the 'novel' term 'painters' in watercolour 'might...be considered by the world of taste to savour of assumption'.

### Topographical Landscape

This is known as a topographical landscape, one that shows the land and often buildings accurately. The interest in topographical landscapes started by patrons wanting to show their country estate but was fuelled by the extraordinary growth in travel guides. The representation of travel locations evolved out of the need to bring reminders back from the Grand Tour of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (flourished 1660 to 1840). The Grand Tour was a rite of passage for wealthy young men and they often brought back paintings of the cities they visited, such as Canaletto's (1697-1768) Venice. The eighteenth century was associated with a rise in travel and the need for travel guides. These guides described the landscape in terms of visual landscape conventions, such as bounding sidescreens and a receding foreground and the use of the term 'picturesque'. It was William Gilpin who first formalised the picturesque but it acquired a life of its own.

However, it is more than topographical. In 1852 The Art Journal claimed that Thomas Girtin was responsible for changing the merely topographical into an evocative composition. This painting, for example, does not just record a scene but creates an image that once seen cannot be forgotten.

### Battersea

Battersea is mentioned in Anglo-Saxon time as Badrices īeg = "Badric's Island" and later "Patrisey". As with many former Thames island settlements, Battersea was reclaimed by draining marshland and building culverts for streams. The settlement appears in the Domesday Book as Patricesy.

The first Battersea Bridge was built on the bend of the river and was the last Thames London bridge made of wood. It opened in 1771 and was a danger to shipping and there were frequent collisions, so the two central piers were removed and reinforced with steel girders.

"Fifty yards west of which Caesar crossed the Thames with the Britons

scattering before him".

"The [Horizontal] Mill at Battersea on the spot where [Henry] Bolingbroke [statesman and philosopher, friend of Pope] was born and died."

The first Chelsea Bridge did not open until 1857 and was called Victoria Bridge but it was found to be structurally unsound and so was renamed Chelsea Bridge to avoid Royal Family associations with any collapse.

#### Henry Edridge Portrait

Sold at Sotheby's in 2011 for £20,000. Watercolour with touches of gum Arabic on ivory, oval: 3 x 2  $\frac{3}{8}$  inches; 72 x 62 mm, the glazed reverse revealing a lock of Girtin's hair, painted c.1796. Now owned by the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.

#### References

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/girtin-the-white-house-at-chelsea-n04728>



Claude Lorrain (born Gellée, c. 1600–1682)

***Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah***

1648

National Gallery, London

Claude Lorrain (born Gellée, c. 1600–1682), *Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah*, 1648, National Gallery, London

Having established how artists navigated the market, we now turn to the standards they were expected to meet. **Claude Lorrain**, born Claude Gellée around 1600 in the Duchy of Lorraine, produced what **Sir Joshua Reynolds** held up as the ideal landscape. This painting, ***The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah***, dated **1648**, shows precisely why. Tall trees frame the left edge as a repoussoir device, pushing the eye inward; a winding river draws it through the middle distance; classical figures populate a clearly defined foreground, middleground, and background. The scene is biblical, but the Italian light and the calm grandeur are what Reynolds valued most. Reynolds, delivering his ***Discourses at the Royal Academy*** between 1769 and 1790, was unambiguous: artists should emulate the Old Masters, not copy nature directly. He criticised **Thomas Gainsborough** for a want of precision and finishing, and **Richard Wilson** for placing gods into landscapes that looked too natural to receive them. His hierarchy ranked history painting at the summit and landscape near the bottom, yet landscape painters who wished to exhibit at the Academy's annual show, one of the very few venues reaching a large public, largely followed his lead. The key principle Reynolds drew from Claude was

idealisation: removing the particular and the idiosyncratic to produce something ennobling.

## Notes

There is a typical academic landscape. The landscape is a setting for presenting a mythological or, in this case, a biblical scene. An alternative was the invention by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) of the *fêtes galantes*, scenes of pastoral and idyllic charm, with a theatrical air.

This is Claude's *Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah* produced 150 years before the period we are considering. So, why am I showing it?

This was considered to be the perfect landscape to emulate. Why?

The simple answer is that the art establishment represented by the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds, said so.

He made it very clear what was good and what was bad art and this painting is an example of a good landscape.

He gave as an example of bad art a landscape that was poorly finished and which had been copied from nature and he criticised Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) for a want of 'precision and finishing'. He criticized Richard Wilson (1714-1782) for introducing gods and goddesses into a landscape that looks too natural to receive them

He said:

... nature herself is not to be too closely copied. There are excellences in the art of painting, beyond what is commonly called the imitation of nature

Reynolds believed a good landscape should be based not on nature but on the work of the Old Masters, like Claude.

There was a tradition from Dutch art including Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and followed in England by Gainsborough and Richard Wilson of representing the landscape for its own sake.

Most artists, including Turner, followed Reynold's guidelines in the early part of the nineteenth century in order to produce landscapes that were acceptable to the Royal Academy as their annual exhibition was one of the few places an artist could present their work to a large audience.

Reynolds praised the way that Claude idealises a scene. It is produced by a poetical mind with imagination. Idealization means removing the particular and the idiosyncratic but it also meant that the painting should be ennobling.

It should cause the viewer to contemplate the finer aspects of life, such as faith, hope and charity, heroism and humility.

There were also more specific rules to create beauty such as incorporating a winding river framed by tall trees and the look of the Italian countryside. The foreground, middleground and background should be clearly distinguished and the inclusion of farm animals references classical literature, such as Virgil's poem, the Georgics (29 BCE).

But even if you did all this a landscape painter was a lesser being. Reynolds put paintings in a strict hierarchy. At the top of the list were history paintings, then portraits, then genre painting and then landscape and finally animal painting and still life.

Link: However, artists did not always care what Reynolds thought as they had other ways of making money. There were topographical landscapes ...

Key point: Artists were not copying nature but emulating the Old Masters.

## Notes

Reynolds gave a series of lectures (15 Discourses from 1769-1790) that have been described as 'one of the most eloquent literary documents in the history of European art'.

Claude ('Cload') Lorrain (c. 1600-1682)

Claude Gellée is better known as Lorrain as he came from the Duchy of Lorraine.

Claude Lorrain trained under Agostino Tassi (1578-1644) who is best known as the rapist of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593– c. 1656), one of the most progressive painters of her generation.

Beginning around 1640 Claude began to make his compositions more classical and monumental. During this decade something like a formula establishes itself: tall trees on one side of the picture (a framing device called 'repoussoir', from the French 'to push back') balanced by a classical ruin and smaller trees further back on the other; a foreground stage with figures; a low horizon; a winding river conducting the eye by stages through an open landscape to the horizon; and distant hills, often with a glimpse of the sea.

The figures are not, as often before, in contemporary dress but are always represented in classical or biblical costume. Contrary to popular belief, virtually all of Claude's figures were painted by himself. Sometimes they are merely shepherds, but frequently they embody a subject from classical mythology or sacred history. The light is clearer than in paintings of the early or late periods. Spacious, tranquil compositions are drenched in an even light, as can be seen in this painting, *The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah* (also called *The Mill*), dated 1648. Commissioned by the Duc de Bouillon ('Boo-yon'), general of the Papal army, together with '*Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*'.

In the 1650s he painted still larger and more heroic paintings, including *The Sermon on the Mount*. In the middle of the following decade, Claude's style moved into its last phase, when some of his greatest masterpieces were produced. The colour range is restricted, and the tones become cool and silvery. The figures are strangely elongated and by conventional standards ill drawn. The paintings of this period are solemn and mysterious and radiate a sublime poetic feeling. It was in this spirit that Claude painted his famous work *The Enchanted Castle*.

The reason for the blanching found in many paintings by Claude is not known but could be when he mixed egg tempura and oil. Embarkation is oil only and only slightly blanched.

Blue leaves in Dutch paintings is due to yellow lake fading leaving the blue.

### The Story of Isaac and Rebekah

Abraham sent his servant with gold and camels to find a wife for his son Isaac. The servant decided to choose a wife as follows. 'May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. ' Rebekah came out and offered him and the camels water.

Genesis 24: 'Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. 67 Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.'

### References



See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude\\_Lorrain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claude_Lorrain)

William Gilpin (1724-1804)  
**Tintern Abbey**  
1782  
Huntington Library



William Gilpin (1724-1804), Tintern Abbey, 1782, Huntington Library

Moving from topographical record into something altogether more charged, **William Gilpin** transformed how educated Britons looked at their own landscape. In **1782**, Gilpin published his *\*Observations on the River Wye\**, introducing the **picturesque** as a precise aesthetic category sitting between two ideas **Edmund Burke** had defined in 1757: the beautiful, associated with smoothness and gentleness, and the sublime, associated with vastness and obscurity. The picturesque occupied the territory between them, defined by roughness, irregularity, and sudden variation in form, colour, and light. Gilpin's prescription was radical in its confidence. Viewing **Tintern Abbey**, he proposed taking a mallet to its too-regular gable end to improve it pictorially. The landscape had to be made to conform to aesthetic rules, not simply observed. Crucially, Gilpin argued that picturesque scenery existed throughout Britain, making the **Grand Tour** unnecessary. He framed the search in terms of hunting, with tourists capturing wild scenes as pictorial trophies. The clergyman James Plumptre walked one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four miles in pursuit of such scenes, armed with a **Claude Glass**, barometer, sketchbooks, and watercolours. The land, in Gilpin's world, was not simply there. It had to be found, framed, and tamed.

## Notes

The picturesque landscape.

This is another type of landscape. It as a picturesque view of Tintern Abbey from William Gilpin's book Observations on the River Wye. The word 'picturesque' has changed its meaning over the years but William Gilpin precisely defined what it means and explained how to examine the countryside 'by the rules of picturesque beauty'.

The picturesque was essentially a combination of the beautiful and the sublime. Beauty was concerned with smoothness and gentleness, the sublime with vastness and obscurity and the picturesque by roughness, irregularity and sudden variation.

He explained that the gable end hurts the eye with its regularity and suggested taking a mallet to make it more picturesque.

This links back to the topographical engravings used in travel guides as Gilpin's argued the picturesque could be found in Britain and it was no longer necessary to go on the Grand Tour.

It was an exciting venture. Gilpin made an analogy with hunting and talked about capturing wild scenes, fixing them as pictorial trophies and hanging them on their drawing room walls.

Picturesque-hunters required a lot of equipment to control the untamed landscapes they encountered! One intrepid clergyman (James Plumptre, Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge) who went hunting the picturesque travelled 1,774¼ miles on foot as recorded by his trusty pedometer. He also took with him a piece of tinted glass, called a Claude Glass, a telescope, a barometer, maps, memorandum books, tour journals, sketch books, drawing pads, a watercolour set, pens and pencils, and a pocket edition of William Cowper's poems (1731-1800).

Link: from the point of view of our modern world we may look back and smile at these old-fashioned ideas and even crazy ideas such as taking a mallet to a ruined church but there was one astute person at the time who also saw the humour.

Key Point: the idea of the picturesque was created by William Gilpin as another way to see the land. The land had to be tamed and beauty had to be hunted.

## Notes

### Tintern Abbey

On the river Wye near the Severn Bridge M4/M48 crossing.

### William Gilpin

William Gilpin (4 June 1724 – 1804), an English artist, Anglican cleric, schoolmaster and author. The term picturesque now means a quaint or pretty style but it was originally an aesthetic ideal introduced by Gilpin in 1782.

### Picturesque Beauty

There were rules of picturesque beauty that Gilpin defined and it was part of the emerging Romantic movement of the 18th century. Enlightenment and rationalist ideas about beauty were being challenged as beauty was regarded as a basic human instinct. In the eighteenth century Edmund Burke had defined both beauty and the sublime in his 1757 book *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. He defines the sublime as any view that invokes terror and so appeals to our sense of self-preservation. The picturesque was defined as a mediator between the beautiful and the sublime. Whereas the beautiful was seen as associated with smoothness and gentleness and the sublime with vastness and obscurity the picturesque was associated with roughness and sudden variation in form, colour or light, i.e. the rustic. Gilpin's book *Observations on the River Wye, and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; made in the Summer of the Year 1770* was seen as an alternative to the Grand Tour of Europe. Instead picturesque hunters began crowding the Lake District in order to track down and capture wild scenes. Particular spots became associated with a picturesque view and local guides would take tourists to view from these spots. Artists would produce engravings of the views from these spots so tourists could take them home.

William Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye, 1782.

the most perfect river-views are composed of four grand parts: the area, which is the river itself; the two side-screens, which are the opposite banks, and lead the perspective; and the front-screen, which points out the winding of the river... They are varied by... the contrast of the screens...the folding of the side-screen over each other...the ornaments of the Wye... ground, wood, rocks, and buildings...and colour.

Travellers in search of the picturesque were described by Gilpin as being like big-game hunters and he described the equipment they required. The essential items for their luggage were deemed necessary to control the untamed landscapes they encountered! They included a piece of tinted glass, called a Claude Glass, a pedometer, a telescope, a barometer, maps, memorandum books, tour journals, sketch books, drawing pads, a watercolour set, pens and pencils, and a pocket edition of William Cowper's poems were the essential requisites for a tour.

William Cowper Quotations

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform;

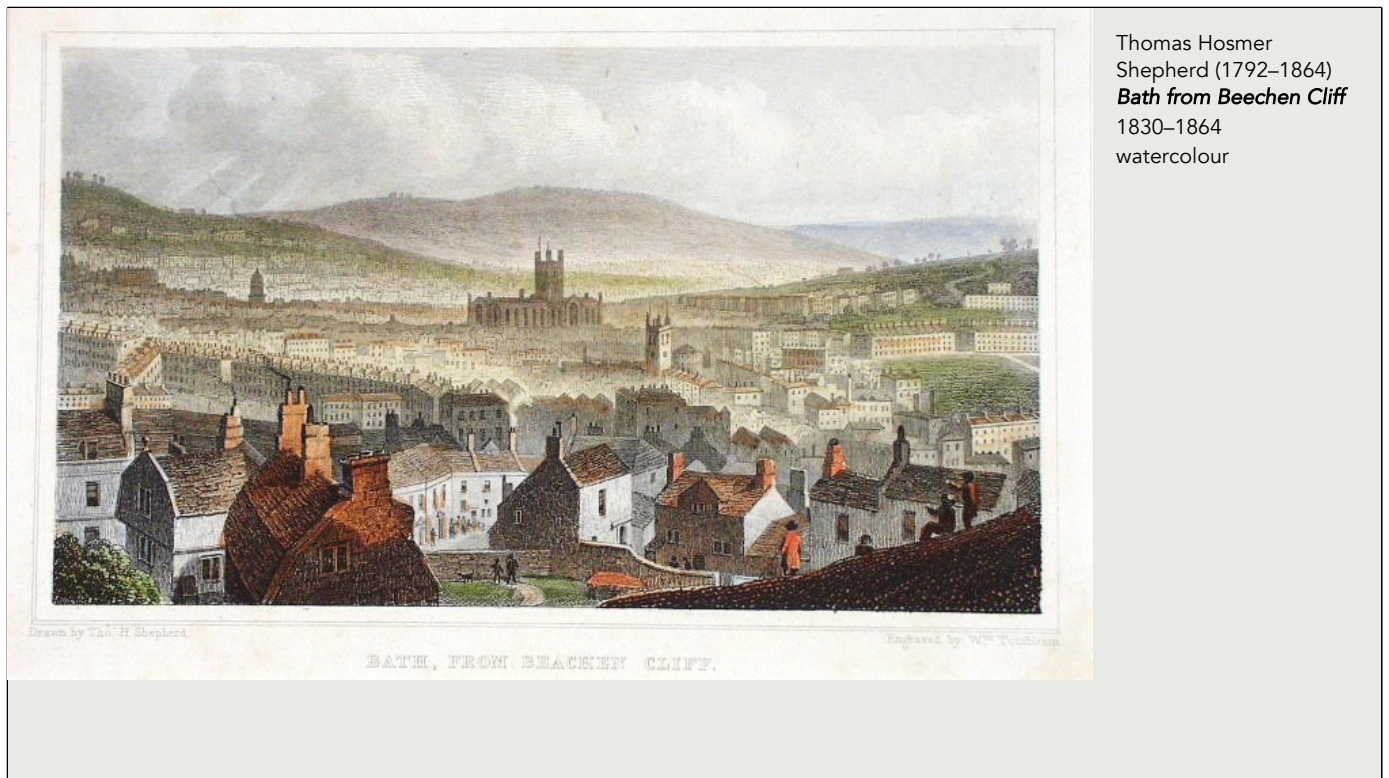
God made the country, and man made the town.

Variety's the very spice of life, That gives it all its flavour.

I am monarch of all I survey,

References

Malcolm Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque: Landscape Aesthetics and Tourism in Britain, James Plumptre p. 67.



Thomas Hosmer Shepherd (1792–1864), Bath from Beechen Cliff, 1830–1864

The **picturesque** had become, by the late eighteenth century, a social performance as much as an aesthetic category. **Jane Austen** satirised precisely this in *\*Northanger Abbey\**, where characters compete to demonstrate refined landscape taste rather than any genuine feeling. The joke landed because it was true: knowing how to read a view had become a mark of educated gentility. What makes this image so instructive is how thoroughly the landscape has been *\*constructed\**. Bath itself is a designed environment. **John Wood the Younger** laid out the **Royal Crescent** between 1767 and 1774, that great sweeping arc of Georgian terrace visible in the left distance, which remains the most complete expression of Hanoverian civic ambition in Britain. **Bath Abbey**, rising in the middle distance, carries its own layered history — Benedictine origins in the seventh century, a Tudor rebuild, and restoration work by **Sir Gilbert Scott** in the 1860s. Even the foreground churchscape blends medieval inheritance with Victorian Catholic ambition. Nothing here is accidental or untouched. Every element has been shaped, rebuilt, or framed for the viewing eye. The picturesque, in Bath, was not discovered in nature — it was engineered in stone.

This view from **Beechen Cliff** is precisely what Jane Austen had in mind when

she skewered picturesque culture in **Northanger Abbey**, written in 1803 and published posthumously in 1817. Austen was 27 when she drafted it, already sharp enough to expose the picturesque as social performance rather than genuine feeling. Her clergyman Henry Tilney lectures the good-natured Catherine Morland on foregrounds, distances, side-screens, and lights and shades — and Catherine proves so eager a pupil that she promptly rejects the whole city of Bath as unworthy of a landscape. The joke is precise: Catherine has not learned to see more clearly, she has learned to see less. Austen identifies something that Uvedale Price and William Gilpin never quite admitted — that **picturesque taste** had become a social credential, a code by which educated people signalled refinement to one another. The natural world was no longer simply observed; it was auditioned. A view either passed or failed against criteria absorbed from books and guided tours. By the early nineteenth century, the landscape was not something you moved through — it was something you composed, curated, and, if necessary, rejected entirely.

### Notes

- The picturesque was satirised by Jane Austen (1775-1817, died aged 42) in *Northanger Abbey* (1803 but published posthumously in 1817).
- She described how Catherine Morland (good natured, modest) is being shown round Bath by Henry Tilney (sarcastic but sympathetic clergyman) who relishes teaching a younger and inexperienced woman.
- This is the view of Bath Catherine and Henry would have seen from Beechen Cliff.
- Catherine confessed and lamented her want of knowledge, declared that she would give anything in the world to be able to draw; and a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which his instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him, and her attention was so earnest that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of foregrounds, distances, and second distances—side-screens and perspectives—lights and shades; and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath as unworthy to make part of a landscape (Chapter 14, *Libra Vox* recording in the public domain).
- In the middle distance is Bath Abbey, a former Benedictine monastery

founded in the 7th century. Rebuilt in the 12th and 16th centuries and restored by Sir Gilbert Scott in the 1860s (after this engraving was printed).

- The Royal Crescent is in the distance to the left. Designed by John Wood the Younger and built between 1767 and 1774. It is perhaps the greatest example of Georgian architecture in the country.
- The nearer church could be St Marks Church and behind it the priory of Benedictines of Downside Abbey (now the Church of St John the Evangelist, a Catholic Church built in 1861).





George Stubbs (1724–1806)  
**Haymakers**  
1785  
89.5 x 135.3 cm  
Tate Britain, London

George Stubbs (1724–1806), *Haymakers*, 1785, 89.5 x 135.3 cm, Tate Britain, London

George Stubbs painted *Haymakers* in 1785, exhibiting it at the Royal Academy the following year alongside its companion piece, *Reapers*. The work belongs to a tradition called the **Georgic**, a mode rooted in Virgil's poetry and Hesiod before him, which treats agricultural labour as both practical instruction and national celebration. Stubbs prepared the composition with characteristic rigour, working from nature studies and revising an earlier oil version by increasing the figures from four to seven and reorganising the landscape to alter the light and mood entirely. The final picture was rendered in **enamel**, which sharpens the contours and intensifies the clear, even light — effects impossible to achieve in oil. This brightness lifts the scene into something more ordered than any actual harvest field. The figures are posed with classical stillness, their clothing clean, their stances upright. One central female figure breaks the pictorial calm entirely by meeting the viewer's gaze directly. The question the painting poses is whether Stubbs is suppressing rural poverty or dignifying the people who worked the land. The **unsentimental** quality that distinguishes the work from the sentimentality of **Gainsborough** or **Wheatley** suggests the latter: these are

not pastoral ornaments but workers rendered with composure and respect.

### Notes

Another approach to social realism is George Stubbs Haymakers.

It is a careful composition for which Stubbs made numerous studies and painted an earlier version with fewer figures and less direct lighting.

This was painted before the Napoleonic Wars (the First Coalition was 1793) and before the French Revolution. The setting is idealised by the bright lighting, the clear lines accentuated by the use of enamel rather than oils, and the clean and tidy figures. It is a celebration of agricultural practices and is a type of landscape called the Georgic.

The figures are engaged in activities although they appear frozen in time except for one female figure in the centre who is staring straight out.

Does Stubbs idealise the workers to deny the realities of rural poverty or to make them heroic figures? Their upright stance, classical poses and above all the challenging look of the central female figure suggests he admires them and wishes to dignify their labour.

### Notes

Tate website, 'This is one of a pair with Reapers. They were the only works Stubbs exhibited in 1786, and his first exhibited pictures since 1782. He had painted earlier versions of the subjects, in oil on panel, in 1783 (National Trust, Bearsted Collection, Upton House). For his second versions, Stubbs improved the compositions, reorganising the groupings and increasing the number of figures from four in Haymakers and five in Reapers to seven in each of the 1785 paintings. He reordered the landscape elements, thereby altering the lighting and overall mood of the scenes. The pictures were most likely based on preliminary drawings made from nature, which he then rearranged to suit the design. Numerous studies and drawings of the subjects were included in the artist's posthumous sale, although they are now lost.

Both the 1785 paintings were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1786, then shown at the second exhibition of the Society for Promoting Painting and Design, Liverpool, in 1787. Stubbs announced his intention to engrave the pictures in 1788-9, publishing the engravings in 1791. He later adapted the subjects to three oval versions painted in enamel: Haymaking, 1794 (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight), Haymakers, 1795 (Lady Lever Art Gallery)

and Reapers, 1795 (Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut).

Picturesque rural subjects were popular during this period, and had been depicted by Gainsborough, Wheatley and Morland and some of the many illustrators of Thomson's *Seasons*. Stubbs's *Haymakers* is similar to an oval scene on the same theme painted in watercolour by Thomas Hearne, *A Landscape and Figures from Thomson's Seasons of 1783* (Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester). This suggests that the two artists may have studied the same scene, or that Stubbs borrowed from Hearne the images of the girl pausing in front of the haycart with her hayrake upright, the woman raking in hay, and the man on top of the cart. Hearne's picture was exhibited at the Society of Artists in 1783, but Stubbs chose not to exhibit his early versions of *Haymakers* and *Reapers* that year, possibly to avoid the inevitable comparisons. The pictures' unsentimental yet sympathetic observation of work in the countryside, with little or no narrative content, is reminiscent of Stubbs's earlier depictions of groups of grooms and stable-lads rubbing down horses. The location of the scenes has not been identified. It is possibly in the south midlands, although such scenes could have been witnessed in fields on the outskirts of London, within a few miles of Stubbs's house at Somerset Street, London. Ozias Humphry noted in his manuscript 'Memoir of Stubbs' (Liverpool Central Libraries) that the artist was accustomed to walk eight or nine miles a day.'

The Georgic was invented by Virgil on the model of a poem written by the Greek poet Hesiod. It is both an instruction for husbandry and a celebration of the agricultural and its importance to the nation.



George Morland (1763-1804)

*A Traveller Resting at a Cottage with  
a Boy Burning Weeds to the Left or  
Door of a Village Inn*

Tate Britain, London

George Morland (1763-1804), *A Traveller Resting at a Cottage with a Boy Burning Weeds to the Left or Door of a Village Inn*, Tate Britain, London

But seeing the land meant seeing its people too — and no painter did this more honestly than **George Morland**. This work is a **genre painting**, showing ordinary people engaged in everyday activity. A traveller has stopped at a cottage or inn for a pint of ale — no moral lesson, no improving allegory, just life as Morland knew it firsthand. He drank with these people, lived among them, and spent everything he earned doing so. Morland came from a wealthy family that collapsed into debt, and he exhibited at the **Royal Academy** at the age of ten. The prodigious early promise gave way to a life of chronic alcoholism, flight from creditors, and repeated spells in debtors' prison — a trajectory with few parallels in the history of British art. His paintings were reproduced as popular **engravings**, widely imitated and frequently forged, which speaks to how deeply his images of rural life resonated with a broad public. He married **Anne Ward**, sister of **James Ward** whose Gordale Scar we examined earlier. When Morland died from paralysis and brain fever, Anne died three days later from convulsive fits brought on by the news. But as art historian **John Barrell** has shown, those popular engravings were quietly altered — and those changes reveal much about how

the rural poor were being seen and managed.

### Notes

Social realism and landscape.

But there were other ways of seeing the land. A few artists, such as George Morland saw rural poverty and created popular art by representing the lives of the poor.

This is an genre painting, that is one showing a group of people engaged in some activity. Often the activity has a moral lesson but that was rare with Morland, here a traveller has stopped at a cottage or an inn for a pint of ale. Morland came from a wealthy family that fell on hard times. He exhibited at the RA when he was 10 and produced a huge amount of work but led a dissolute life, often being drunk, hiding from his creditors or in debtors prison. His life was so dissolute that it hardly has a parallel in the whole history of art which is some claim to fame.

He mixed and drunk with the people we see in his paintings and he spent everything he earned on drink. His painting became extremely popular as engravings and he was much imitated and forged.

There is a sad ending. He married Anne Ward a beautiful and virtuous woman who was deeply attached to him despite his profligacy. She was the sister of James Ward whose Gordale Scar we saw earlier. His drinking led to paralysis and then 'brain fever' and death and his wife died three days later from convulsive fits brought on by the news of his death.

Link: But if we examine the engravings in detail as the art historian John Barrell has done we find changes were made that tell us something about the rural poor...





James Ward (1769-1859)  
**Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire**  
Engraving

James Ward (1769-1859), *Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire*

The comparison between **Morland's** painting and the engraving made from it by **James Ward** is one of the sharpest illustrations of how commercial reproduction reshaped political meaning in late eighteenth-century British art. Ward, Morland's brother-in-law and a noted animal painter, produced the print under the title **Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire**, selling copies at prices ranging from three shillings and sixpence to twenty-one shillings, reaching a broad middle-class market. To make it sell, he transformed the image. The woman's blank, depressed expression becomes a welcoming smile. The hollow-faced child on the left, whom art historian **John Barrell** describes as broken in spirit, is softened into something approachable. The horse and dog are groomed to look livelier, the seated child gains a larger necklace and a fuller bowl. Barrell argues that these adjustments served an ideological function: the cheerful figures and tidier surroundings reassured viewers about the **governability of the poor** at a moment of acute social unrest. Morland painted the countryside as it was — a hard, dispiriting place, which is why so many rural labourers left for the cities. **Constable** and **Turner** would engage with that same charged landscape in very different ways.

## Notes

A detail from the painting is shown on the left and an engraving of the painting by James Ward is shown on the right.

The engraving and prints were called Sun-Set: a View of Leicestershire.

This is an example of 'spot the difference'. On the left is the painting in black and white and on the right an engraving produced by his brother-in-law James Ward (1769-1859) RA, painter of animals and an engraver (he painted Gordale Scar, 1814-5, 'sublime' and enormous English Romantic work in Tate Britain, died in poverty).

Look at the left hand child in the doorway and the woman's face. Morland was the most direct representation of the poor. There is no idealisation. The woman serving the farmer has a blank, depressed expression. The child on the left looks as if it is from a horror movie. The art historian John Barrell describes them as 'broken in spirit'.

James Ward has created an engraving from the painting which he thought would sell better. The engravings sold for between 3s 6d (17.5p) and 21s (just over a pound) to a wide market. In the engraving the woman and child are smiling and welcoming and John Barrell makes the point that their cheerful expression and the better condition of their clothes and surroundings would have reassured the viewer about the conditions and ultimately the governability of the poor at a time of increasing unrest.

Ward has even fluffed up the hair of the horse and the dog to make them look more lively and alert and the seated child has a larger necklace and a bigger bowl of soup.

The reality was the countryside was not a pleasant place to work for the poor, which is why many went to the cities and towns to find work despite the appalling conditions.

Let us next look at how Constable and Turner handled the politics of the period.

Humphry Repton (1752–1818)  
*Landscape Gardening and  
Landscape Architecture*  
1816  
Book (engravings)



VIEW FROM MY OWN COTTAGE, IN ESSEX.

London: Published 1816 by J. Repton

Humphry Repton (1752–1818), *Landscape Gardening and Landscape Architecture*, 1816

Turning now to landscape design, we see the picturesque move from painting into the physical reshaping of the land itself. In 1794, **Richard Payne Knight** and **Uvedale Price** attacked **Capability Brown's** smooth, curving parkland as bare and bald, lacking the rough, irregular texture the picturesque demanded. **Humphry Repton** defended Brown, though as his career progressed his own designs absorbed more rugged picturesque elements. This before-and-after image shows Repton's ideas applied to his own cottage at **Hare Street** near Romford in Essex. In the before view, notice the beggar — one-eyed, wooden-legged, a figure made common on English roads after **Waterloo in 1815**, when returning soldiers faced failed harvests, scarce work, and poverty. In the after view, Repton has appropriated the village green, enclosing it with flowering shrubs and evergreens. He wrote that **appropriation** meant exclusive visual command over the landscape, including the power of refusing others a share of one's pleasure. The coach passengers and the beggar, previously looking in, are now concealed and excluded. Repton's small garden is a direct metaphor for the great wave of **enclosures between 1750 and 1850**, which removed one sixth of England



from common use and drove smallholders into dependency — the very poverty that beggar represents.

## Notes

The picturesque in landscape design.

Another aspect of the picturesque was landscape design.

In the late eighteenth century Capability Brown was viciously attacked by those promoting the picturesque as his smooth curving landscapes were thought to be 'bare and bald' and lacking rough and irregular picturesque detail (1794, Richard Payne Knight and Uvedale Price attacked 'Capability' Brown).

Humphry Repton defended Brown although as his career progressed he grew his designs became more and more picturesque.

This is an example of Repton's design ideas applied to his own cottage in Hare Street near Romford, Essex. Top left is the 'before' view and bottom right the 'after'.

I would like to draw your attention to the beggar as he is the first person we have seen connected with political events. The Napoleonic Wars ended with Waterloo in 1815 and after the war many soldiers returned to find a poor harvest, expensive food and no work. The beggar with an eye patch and the wooden leg was a familiar sight and here he is shown as an undesirable to be removed. Let's see how Repton did it.

Looking at the after view we see that Repton has bought the village green and extended his garden.

Repton wrote about 'appropriation' which is an exclusive visual command over the landscape. This exclusive right includes 'the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure'. We all want 'something we can call our own...our own Home'. Notice that before the people on the coach and the beggar are looking and after they are concealed and excluded.

Repton's small garden is a metaphor for the widespread enclosures that were taking place across the countryside.

Although they were a major issue in Tudor times the final and most contentious wave of enclosures was between 1750 and 1850 and was justified

by improving productivity. In this period one sixth of England was enclosed and this took the ability to grow food away from a large part of the population. The smallholders and commoners became dependent on poor relief and had to buy food. The old soldier may be begging because his right to grow food for himself has been taken away. I talk more about enclosures later as they were one of the causes of the Swing Riots.

Key point: Repton's showed how to create a picturesque landscape and his purchase of the village green is a metaphor for the enclosures taking place and the idea of buying and owning a landscape of our own cut off from the political turmoil.

## Notes

### Humphry Repton

Humphry Repton coined the term 'landscape gardener' and created picturesque gardens.

Humphry Repton was the last great landscape designer of the eighteenth century often regarded as a successor to Capability Brown. He is best known for Blaise Castle near Bristol, the themed gardens at Woburn Abbey, the 'home lawn' at Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire and the central gardens in Russell Square.

At first he defended Brown's rolling vistas he later added more rugged 'picturesque elements'. Repton also introduced the innovation of his 'Red Books'. These contained before and after watercolours views of the clients garden and Repton sold these as his business rather than carrying out all the work as a contractor like Brown. As a result Repton's ideas were often only partly implemented and he made little money compared with Brown.

Repton believed that gardens should be designed like paintings with a foreground, middle ground and background. The foreground is for the art, ornamental planting, the middle ground like a Capability Brown park and the background should be wild and 'natural'.

He was a designer not a contractor like Capability Brown so many of his designs were never implemented or were modified. This is his advice based on how he modified his own cottage. It is a before and after picture which he specialised in.

He wrote about how his cottage faced a green often covered by cattle, pigs

or geese and how he appropriated 25 yards of garden by taking the green and surrounding it with flowering shrubs and evergreens.

He kept it open so that he could see the village scene unlike many owners of property as he enjoyed mankind and movement. But he hid the butcher's shop in preference to a basket of roses and he points out that a very small object may hid an offensive object that is ten times larger. The hedge hides the dirt of the road and prevents him being seen.

He concludes by saying that he has 'lived to reach that period when improvements of house and garden is more delightful to me than parks, forests, landscapes or distant prospects' (page 605).

He ends his book and his life with the words 'Allons mes amis, il faut cultiver nos jardins' [Come along, my friends, and let us cultivate our gardens.] (Voltaire, *Candide*, Chapter 30: Candide buys a small farm and finds working the farm satisfying at last.)

### Repton's Cottage

These engravings are from one of Repton's books describing how he applied picturesque ideas to the landscape. They show the front garden of his modest cottage at Hare Street near Romford in Essex.

Notice the people on the coach and the beggar are looking. Repton writes about 'appropriation' which is command over the landscape visible from a window that denotes it is private property. The exclusive right of enjoyment is part of the charm 'with the power of refusing that others should share our pleasure'. We all want 'something we can call our own...our own Home'.

He wrote about how his cottage faced a green often covered by cattle, pigs or geese and how he appropriated 25 yards of garden by taking the green and surrounding it with flowering shrubs and evergreens. He kept it open so that he could see the village scene unlike many owners of property as he enjoyed mankind and movement. But he hid the butcher's shop in preference to a basket of roses and he points out that a very small object may hid an offensive object that is ten times larger. The hedge hides the dirt of the road and prevents him being seen. He concludes by saying that he has 'lived to reach that period when improvements of house and garden is more delightful to me than parks, forests, landscapes or distant prospects' (page 605).



Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812)

*Coalbrookdale by Night*

1801

Science Museum, London

Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812), *Coalbrookdale by Night*, 1801, Science Museum, London

Depicting the **Madeley Wood Furnaces** owned by the **Coalbrookdale Company** from 1776 to 1796, this painting places us at the very heart of Britain's Industrial Revolution — and does so through the lens of a concept central to **eighteenth-century aesthetics**: the **sublime**. Where beauty offers harmony and elegance, the sublime provokes awe, terror, and a sensation too vast for reason to fully contain. **Edmund Burke** defined this experience in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in **1757**, identifying darkness, vastness, magnificence, and suddenness as its core qualities. For Burke, both beauty and the sublime ultimately produce pleasure, yet they are categorically distinct experiences. The concept did not originate with Burke. The ancient critic **Longinus** wrote of sublimity as the power to uplift an audience's soul beyond ordinary eloquence. Later, the **Romantic poets** — **Wordsworth** and **Coleridge** among them — made it central to their engagement with nature and human feeling. Blazing industrial furnaces in **1801** carried the same overwhelming force as images of the earth seen from space would carry for a later century. This is not beauty. This is the masculine sublime: terror transmuted into awe.

## Notes

### Lecture

The painting depicts the Madeley Wood (or Bedlam) Furnaces, which belonged to the Coalbrookdale Company from 1776 to 1796.

The picture has come to symbolize the birth of the Industrial Revolution in Ironbridge, England.

The blazing furnaces, the heat and the danger instil a sense of awe and terror. These are aspects of the sublime.

The sublime is the sense of terror or awe we get when we see certain sights in nature or a supreme human achievement, such as the first pictures of man on the moon or the earth from space. In 1801 this was the equivalent of man on the moon.

Such sights are not beautiful but they move us and in the eighteenth century Edmund Burke wrote a book on the origin of our ideas of the sublime and the beautiful.

Many people associated the sense of awe and beauty with God but they were also increasingly associated with the scientific quest and the man-made wonders of technology.

Key point: in the eighteenth century two types of aesthetic experience were defined – the beautiful and the sublime

## Notes

### Sublime

Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the thrill and danger of untamed nature. Burke identified seven aspects - darkness, obscurity, deprivation, vastness, magnificence, loudness and suddenness. It was associated with terror, infinity, immensity, awe, horror and despair. Feelings invoked by journeys across the Alps in the 18thC. Greatness beyond calculation.

It was an importance concept as it was beyond reason in an Age of Enlightenment when everything was subject to reason. It is when words fail us and involves painting the unpaintable and a oneness with nature. These days it is used to indicate a well executed performance, such as a good tennis shot or a delicious meal but in the eighteenth century it was an aesthetic

experience distinct from beauty.

The earliest writer about the sublime is Longinus (also called Pseudo-Longinus as his real name is unknown, he lived in the 1st or 3rd century CE and wrote *On the Sublime*) who saw it as an aspect of eloquence, the ability to uplift the soul of the audience and provide a sense of joy such they thought they had produced what they heard. Other examples are the Bible (Longinus used it to provide examples), Dante Alighieri's (1265–1321) *Divine Comedy* and John Milton's (1608-1674) *Paradise Lost*. The Romantic poets, such as William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) were very concerned with the sublime. Modern theorists such as Barbara Claire Freeman have distinguished between the feminine sublime involving feelings of awe, rapture and the spiritual and metaphysical infinity of nature and the masculine sublime concerned with terror and domination. This painting is an example of masculine sublime.

Romantic theorists saw Salvator Rosa (e.g. *Rocky Landscape with Huntsman and Warriors*) as sublime as his landscape was a vehicle of terror compared with Claude Lorrain (born Gellée, c. 1600-1682) as the antithesis of the sublime as he represented classical beauty, elegance, harmony and luminosity.

Before Burke (back to Augustine of Hippo) the ugly lacked form and was therefore non-existent. Burke said that both beauty and the sublime invoke pleasure and are therefore not opposites. Burke harks back to Plato in so far as the ugly can create intense emotions that are ultimately pleasurable.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the sublime was abandoned by artists for reasons of taste, an interest in beauty and scientific realism.

## References

See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/alison-smith-the-sublime-in-crisis-landscape-painting-after-turner-r1109220>



James Ward (1769–1859)  
*Gordale Scar (A View of Gordale, in the Manor of East Malham in Craven, Yorkshire, the property of Lord Ribblesdale)*  
c.1812  
3327 x 4216 cm  
Tate Britain

James Ward (1769–1859), *Gordale Scar (A View of Gordale, in the Manor of East Malham in Craven, Yorkshire, the property of Lord Ribblesdale)*, c.1812, 3327 x 4216 cm, Tate Britain

Stepping back into the eighteenth century, we need to understand the sublime before we can fully grasp the picturesque that grew from it. Georgian society experienced wild landscape as a source of terror — and crucially, a source of pleasure in that terror, not unlike the compulsion we feel watching a horror film. **Edmund Burke** gave this sensation its philosophical framework in his **1757** treatise *\*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful\**. It was the first rigorous attempt to separate the **Beautiful** and the **Sublime** into distinct rational categories, and it drew immediate engagement from **Denis Diderot** and **Immanuel Kant**. Burke argued that the Beautiful is what is well-formed and pleasing, whilst the Sublime is what carries the power to overwhelm and destroy us. Burke himself was a **Whig MP** whose political circle included **Samuel Johnson**, **Joshua Reynolds**, and **Oliver Goldsmith** — the leading intellectual figures of Georgian London — so his ideas entered the cultural mainstream with considerable force. That preference for raw, threatening grandeur over polished harmony marks the decisive transition from the **Neoclassical** to the



Romantic era, and it underpins everything the picturesque movement would later attempt to reconcile.

## Notes

The Sublime.

I need to step back into the eighteenth century to explain the nature of the sublime before describing the picturesque which combines the beautiful with the sublime.

Eighteenth century society saw the land as a source of terror and this was associated with a form of pleasure, similar to the pleasure we get from watching horror movies. This form of pleasure was known as the sublime and it was sought out by artists.

The importance of the sublime in art was described by Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, a 1757 treatise on aesthetics. It was the first complete philosophical exposition for separating the beautiful and the sublime into their own respective rational categories. It attracted the attention of prominent thinkers such as Denis Diderot and Immanuel Kant.

In short, the Beautiful, according to Burke, is what is well-formed and aesthetically pleasing, whereas the Sublime is what has the power to compel and destroy us. The preference for the Sublime over the Beautiful was to mark the transition from the Neoclassical to the Romantic era.

## Notes

Edmund Burke served for many years as a Whig MP. He supported American Revolutionaries, Catholic emancipation but opposed the French Revolution and so was labelled an 'Old Whig'. Charles James Fox led the 'New Whigs' who supported the French Revolution. Burke associated with the leaders of intellectual thought in London such as Samuel Johnson, David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith, and Joshua Reynolds. Edward Gibbon described Burke as 'the most eloquent and rational madman that I ever knew'. Although Johnson admired Burke's brilliance, he found him a dishonest politician.

James Ward was influenced by his brother-in-law George Morland and later by Rubens. From 1810 he painted landscapes which became very large scale landscapes of which Gordale Scar is an example. It is considered his masterpiece and a masterpiece of English Romantic painting. James Ward

was an outstanding painter of the day and influenced many other artists. His gigantic work *Allegory of Waterloo* (1815-21, now lost) was regarded as a failure and may have embittered him.



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851)

**Harvest Home**

c. 1809

Tate Britain, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851), *Harvest Home*, c. 1809, Tate Britain, London

We move now from landscape convention into something far more socially charged. **Turner's** unfinished painting of a **Harvest Home** at **Cassiobury Park** was made for his patron **Lord Essex**, and its incompleteness tells its own story. Essex reportedly told Turner to abandon the subject and return to landscapes, unwilling to see him rival the rising **David Wilkie**, the Scottish genre painter whose crowd-pleasing scenes had made him a sensation at the **Royal Academy**. What Turner recorded was a tradition already disappearing. The Harvest Home brought landowners and rural workers together in an annual ritual of payment and celebration, a semi-feudal bond that was fracturing as industrialisation pulled labourers into the cities. By **1843**, the Reverend R. S. Hawker had replaced the custom entirely with the harvest thanksgiving service we still recognise today. Turner's scene carries further significance: a Black man appears naturally within this English rural gathering, unremarked upon, present. Meanwhile, half of England's land was held by just **4,000 people**, and that concentration of ownership sat at the heart of the social tensions the painting quietly surfaces. Turner, whether Essex approved or not, was watching his world change.

## Notes

Social realism.

This unfinished painting shows a Harvest Home, an annual celebration of the harvest where the rural tenants pay their dues to the landowner and everyone celebrates the harvest.

It was painted at Cassiobury Park for Lord Essex and was in response to a painting by the up and coming David Wilkie.

It may not have been finished because Turner's patron Lord Essex told him to stick to landscapes and stop trying to do a 'Wilkie'.

The interesting thing however is that it shows the landowner mixing with the rural workers, a practice that was soon to stop.

The Harvest Home was a dying tradition at this time. It was replaced by a harvest thanks giving service invented by Rev. R. S. Hawker in 1843.

The other interesting point is that the painting shows a black man in an English rural setting.

Half the land in England was owned by only 4,000 people.

The semi-feudal relationship between landowners and rural workers was starting to break down partly because so many workers were moving to the cities.

## Notes

David Wilkie (1785-1841) was a Scottish genre painter, famous for The Chelsea Pensioners reading the Waterloo Dispatch, a huge success in 1822. He was elected an ARA in 1809 aged 24 and an RA in 1811 aged 26.

Turner entered the RA School in 1789 aged 14 and his first painting (watercolour, A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth) was exhibited the following year. He was made an ARA in 1799 aged 24, the youngest permitted age, and moved to a smart Harley Street address where he opened his own gallery and studio. Turner's private life was secretive, unsociable, and somewhat eccentric. In 1798 he began an affair, which was to last about 10 years, with Sarah Danby, a widow who probably bore him two children. In 1800 Turner's mother became hopelessly ill and was committed to a mental hospital. His father went to live with him and devoted the rest of his life to serving as his son's studio assistant and general agent. He became a RA in

1802. He was criticized even early on by Benjamin West (PRA) and Sir George Beaumont for his 'crude blotches' and was described as a 'white painter' because of his luminous pale tones. In 1807 Turner began his great enterprise of publishing a series of 100 plates known as the *Liber Studiorum*, inspired, in part, by Claude's own studio record, *Liber veritatis* (begun in 1635 and continued until his death in 1682). Turner's aim was to document the great variety and range of landscape including historical, architectural, mountainous, pastoral, and marine. The first part appeared in June 1807 and the last in 1819



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851)

*Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*

1809

Tate Britain, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, 1809, Tate Britain, London

Turner's 1809 painting *\*Ploughing up Turnips near Slough\** rewards far closer attention than its rural subject first suggests. **Michele Miller**, writing in 2004, identified three interlocking levels of meaning: pastoral, propagandist, and deeply critical. On the surface, this is a **Georgic** scene — a tradition rooted in **Virgil's Georgics of 29 BCE**, celebrating man's struggle against a hostile natural world through labour and animal husbandry. Critics praised Turner's atmospheric morning light and damp valley mists rising beneath **Windsor Castle**. Read as propaganda, the painting aligns monarchy, education, and agricultural labour in a wartime nation cut off from foreign food. The **Napoleonic blockade** made domestic crop yields a military priority, and **four-field crop rotation**, championed by **Viscount Townshend**, made the turnip England's most strategic agricultural weapon. Yet look carefully. The plough is broken. The harvest is meagre, surrounded by weeds. Turner names the site **Slough**, invoking the Slough of Despond from **Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress** — a place the King's labourers have worked for centuries without improvement. A bottle sits conspicuously in the brightest patch of land. Women nurse infants between rows, desperate for work. This is not

straightforward celebration. Turner embeds ambiguity into every detail, holding beauty and hardship, progress and failure, in unresolved tension.

## Notes

Social realism.

The same year Turner exhibited Ploughing up Turnips near Slough.

This seemingly innocuous painting hides many layers of meaning that I have separated into three – pastoral, propaganda and profound.

Level 1 – Pastoral: until recently critics have described this painting in formal terms. It is a pastoral scene, more specifically because of the animal husbandry it is called Georgic.

Virgil was a Roman writer and his Georgics were published in 29 BCE. It describes man's struggle against a hostile natural world and how hard work and animal husbandry can overcome setbacks.

It is related to the Greek Hesiod's Works and Days regarding man's relationship to the land and the importance of hard work.

Critics at the time and until recently praised Turner's success in representing sunlight seen through haze and what one called the 'poetically heightened atmospheric effects'. It is early morning, work has started and the damp morning mists rise from the valley below.

We know that Turner made extensive preparatory work including the view from Salt Hill (pop-up 1) near Slough. In modern terms we are looking towards the M4 motorway towards the Thames, Eton College and Windsor Castle. There was a famous inn, called Castle Inn at Salt Hill named for its view of Windsor Castle and the Inn and its view were so well known that in 1814 the Prince Regent hosted a breakfast there for the King of Prussia and his three sons.

Turner made studies of the individual parts of the picture including the cow (pop-up 2).

The puzzling thing is what are the people doing? This leads to the second level of interpretation.

Level 2 – Propaganda. In the 1980s it was re-interpreted as a celebration of progressive English agriculture.



The date is important, in 1809 we were in the middle of the Napoleonic Wars, the Peace of Amiens had quickly ended and following Nelson's victory at Trafalgar four years previously English ports were being blockaded by the French to starve us to death.

By 1808 all foreign food had been cut off and for the previous nine years the harvest had been poor to terrible. It was therefore crucial to the war effort that our farmers produce enough food to feed the nation. So all the latest agricultural techniques were employed including crop rotation and farm machinery.

In this light we see the Royal Palace at Windsor, representing monarchy, part of Eton school representing education and the aristocracy and in the foreground the labourers working to produce the food needed by everyone during the war. A piece of war propaganda.

The Tate website says, 'As well as its distant view of Windsor Castle, this picture of a turnip harvest depicts current efforts to maximise yields and increase the food supply to serve the needs of a wartime economy'.

But does it? We first need to understand the importance of turnips and crop rotation to understand what is going on here.

Crop rotation was practiced 8,000 years ago in the Middle East but the ancient practice involved letting a field lie unused or fallow for part of the year. The big advance was four-field rotation which was first used in Belgium and came to England in the 18th century. It was promoted by Viscount Charles Townshend or 'Turnip' Townsend as he was known. It consists of growing wheat, then turnips or swedes (used as winter fodder), then barley and then clover or ryegrass (which was grazed) each year. Using four fields each one could be at a different stage of the rotation. This enabled the land to be used all the time to grow a useful crop. Turnips leaves would feed the livestock in the autumn and the turnip bulbs could be stored over winter to feed the livestock. This in turn meant that livestock did not need to be slaughtered in the autumn but could survive over winter. This was a major innovation that led to higher crop yields and the excitement spread and was actively discussed in London clubs and in high society.

The turnip was our atom bomb, a secret weapon that could win the war.

However, there were problems. Turnips enabled four crop rotation but only if the land was enclosed so that livestock could be prevented from eating other farmer's turnips. In the Middle Ages all land was owned by the lord but the tenants had certain rights over part of the land. One such right was the right to pasture cattle, horses and sheep, another was turbary – the right to take turfs for fuel and estovers – the right to take sufficient wood for the commoner's house.

Over a period of hundreds of years common land had slowly been taken away by enclosing it. It was a major issue in the Tudor period and enclosures were constructed by the lord of the manor to create large fields to graze more sheep as our main export was wool. The final and most contentious wave of enclosures was later, between 1750 and 1850 and was justified by improving productivity. In this period one sixth of England was enclosed and this took the ability to grow food away from a large part of the population.

Previously, the poor could even keep a cow for milk and cheese. After enclosure, the smallholders and commoners became dependent on poor relief and had to buy food. The last wave of enclosures was mostly in the South East - Kent and Sussex and later Essex - and it led to what became known as the Swing Riots, of which more later. That was still in the future when this was painted but unrest was growing because of bad harvests and enclosures.

Level 3 – Profound. This leads to the most profound and detailed analysis of the painting.

This third level of meaning was suggested by the art historian Michele Miller in 2004. She said, if this is a patriotic painting showing a symbol of the King and the agriculture workers working hard to save the nation why is the work so disorderly, why is the plough broken and why do the workers appear dispirited?

In the distance we see Windsor Castle, one of George III's palaces (the Regency was still two years in the future), who was known as 'Farmer George'. During the late 1780s he had converted large parts of Windsor and Richmond into farms that used the latest agricultural techniques.

The women are sitting on part of a harrow and one of the men next to the

broken plough is carrying a seedlip, both indicators of progressive agriculture and that the field will be replanted with another crop as soon as the turnips have been gathered.

The King was associated with turnips in a negative way. Popular rumour was that George I had been hoeing turnips in his garden when he heard of Queen Anne's death (1714). Satirical cartoons (pop-up 3) like this one linked George III to turnips. A farm-yard scene with Windsor Castle on a hill in the background. George III, wearing a smock frock, his Garter ribbon hanging down his leg, and holding a pitchfork, gives orders to two guardsmen who are taking his carrots and turnips to market. Outside a farm-building (left) Queen Charlotte scatters corn to chickens. George III's admirable farming activities in the Great Park at Windsor, on land reclaimed from marsh, were a favourite subject of ridicule. They were usually associated with insinuations of miserliness.

Although the term 'Farmer George' was at first mocking his interest in the mundane and homely it later portrayed him as a man of the people compared to his grandiose and profligate son George IV. George III was passionately interested in agriculture and its revolutionary new methods and science.

In the title Turner explicitly names the area as 'near Slough' even though the site is nearer Eton than Slough. Why? Slough was a very small hamlet until the railway came in 1836 when it was known as the station nearest to Windsor. The word 'slough' means a muddy or boggy place (pronounced 'sloo' or 'slou', rhyming with 'cow'). The most famous slough is the Slough of Despond in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which was the most popular book after the Bible. In the book the slough is a place that cannot be mended. Help explains to Christian that the King's labourers have been working on it for 16 hundred years but it remains the Slough of Despond. The area around Windsor was boggy and not fully drained.

We can see a four-horse Berkshire plough which in 1808 was considered old-fashioned and inefficient. Yet even this heavy plough has broken down. Like the Slough of Despond this turnip field resists the efforts of the King's labourers. The harvest we can see consists of a small wheelbarrow of turnips alongside a large area of weeds. Notice the weeds vertically align with the broken plough and the palace. Turner tends to link important connected

details using vertical alignment.

Turnips were not a miracle crop and prefer light sandy soils and do not grow well in boggy soils. They also have low nutritional value. In the right soil they are an excellent preparation but in the wrong soil they 'will do more injury to the land than the turnips are worth' (1794, Board of Agriculture, Arthur Young).

What is the figure in white doing? Lord Winchilsea had noted a few years previously that farmers pressed for enclosure to keep labourers dependent. Class differences are indicated by the lone figure in the white coat on the raised ground who has just dismounted from the white horse at the left. This juxtaposition of workers with a higher social class is unusual.

Despite the new agriculture wheat production fell during the war, mostly because of bad weather and in Buckinghamshire it fell after enclosure because enclosed fields were used to pasture livestock an inefficient way to use the land. Bread shortages for the poor were caused by using enclosed fields to produce grain to feed cattle to produce meat for the monied classes. At this time the poor were often blamed for their circumstances and one thing that distinguished the deserving from the undeserving poor was idleness and drunkenness. It is significant that a bottle is located in the middle of the brightest patch of land.

During the war the shortage of men meant that women worked the fields, known as the 'petticoat harvests'. It has even been suggested that the development of farm machinery was a result of farmers' dissatisfaction with the productivity of the women compared with the men they had lost to the war (Women, Work, and Wages in England, 1600-1850, Michael Roberts, ed. Penelope Lane). We see one of the women is nursing showing the farmer is desperate for labour and the women for work.

Viewers at the time would have understood everything I have been telling you. They would also have known that turnips were associated with hunger. They were used to feed livestock and as human food they implied extreme desperation.

Many writers at the time use turnips as the example of extreme poverty in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (Henry Fielding, 1749) Squire Western says

'the Hanover rats have eat up all our corn, and left us nothing but turneps to feed upon'. There was not widespread starvation but the following year, 1809, the harvest was even worse driving up bread prices further and there were demonstrations in Cookham.

The third level of meaning is therefore that Turner was surreptitiously suggesting all is not right with the farming world. I do not mean this was a revolutionary painting and that Turner was calling for riots. I mean that for those who look carefully there is a whole world of levels of meaning, of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Like the real world there is no simple answer, no single interpretation, it is neither patriotic nor unpatriotic, it shows beauty and ugliness, power confronting poverty, agricultural advances and their negative impact, hard work and idleness, patriotism and the causes of revolution. In other words it is a masterpiece.

I think now would be a good time to break for tea.

## Notes

The view is from Salt Hill near Slough. In modern terms it is looking towards the M4 motorway towards the Thames, Eton College and Windsor Castle. Turner would have known the view and there was a famous inn, called Castle Inn, at Salt Hill a mile from Slough. It was named for its view of Windsor Castle and the Inn and its view were so well known that in 1814 the Prince Regent hosted a breakfast there for the King of Prussia and his three sons.

There are few representations of turnips, there is Constable's Flailing Turnip-heads and Gainsborough's Going to Market but generally they are poorly represented. Perhaps because they have little beauty or because they were a relatively new crop and did not represent timeless continuity but a new technique. In fact turnips were not a new crop but had been grown at least since the seventeenth century and in the Near East 4,000 years ago. It was grown as a human food in the southern states of America and the roots were eaten by the landowner and the turnip tops by the slaves (cooked like spinach).

Turner has made the castle more prominent than it would be from the site and for a while it was known as 'Windsor'.

Turnip tops are rich in calcium, four times more than kale or cabbage or broccoli. Also vitamin K and C.

The Domestic Encyclopedia or, a Dictionary of Facts, and Useful Knowledge (1802) points out that feeding cows on turnips or rape will taint the milk. Solutions are to avoid feeding the cows the turnip tops or to process the milk using boiling water to clean the churn of pout the cream over boiling water. There is something called 'turnip butter' which has a bad taste. In 1693 when corn was dear bread was made from turnips, 'turnip-bread' by boiling, them mashing and mixing with flour 50:50. Charlock is a noxious (poisonous) weed that can grow with turnips and it has similar shaped leaves but sheep enjoy it if they graze a field when it is young.



John Constable (1776-1837)  
**Wivenhoe Park, Essex**  
1816  
National Gallery of Art, Washington  
DC

John Constable (1776-1837), Wivenhoe Park, Essex, 1816, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

**Wivenhoe Park**, painted by **John Constable** in **1816**, looks like a faithful record of a country estate in Essex — and in many ways it is. Major-General Francis Slater Rebow, a friend of Constable's father, commissioned the work and stipulated exactly which features must appear: the lake, the house, a grotto with elms, and a deer house far to the right. To fit everything in, Constable physically extended the canvas and, crucially, shifted elements so that the house and the lake — which cannot actually be seen together from any single viewpoint — appear united in one coherent view. **Ernst Gombrich** photographed the park in **1959** specifically to demonstrate this impossibility. The painting rewards close looking. In the far distance, Mary Rebow, the owner's young daughter, drives a donkey cart across the grounds. Meanwhile, Constable needed the income this commission brought in order to win approval to marry **Maria Bicknell**; the wedding followed in October that same year. So topographical accuracy was never absolute. Artists worked within patron requirements, compositional ambitions, and personal circumstance. The key point is that no representation — painted or photographic — delivers a neutral truth. Every image reflects a set of choices about what to include,



and where to stand.

### Notes

Topographical landscapes represented the scene—hills, rivers and buildings—precisely.

This is Wivenhoe Park by John Constable. The owner of the estate Major-General Francis Slater Rebow, a friend of Constable's father, asked Constable to paint his country house in Essex.

We think of a topographical landscape as an accurate representation of a particular scene at a particular time and we can see a lot of detail, people fishing in the lake.

(Click) In the distance we can even see Mary Rebow, his daughter, driving a donkey cart with a friend (Mary was 11 years old and Constable had painted her portrait four years previously). (Click)

(Click) But what do we mean by accuracy and how important was it? If we zoom in on the house it is an accurate representation of the way it looked.(Click)

However, General Rebow specified certain features to be included and Constable has modified the location of certain elements and changed the relationship between the lake and the house.

Constable wrote, 'The great difficulty has been to get so much in as they wanted to make them acquainted with the scene. On my left is a grotto with some elms, at the head of a piece of water – in the centre is the house over a beautiful wood and very far to the right is a deer house, which it was necessary to add, so that my view comprehended too many degrees.'

(Click) The famous art historian Ernst Gombrich took this photograph in 1959 to show the difference. The house and the lake cannot both be seen at the same time. A photograph can also distort but Gombrich tried to recreate Constable's viewpoint. (Click)

The point is that artists use different schemes for representing landscape and there is no single true likeness even with a photograph. With photography we choose our position, the time of day and weather conditions and whether to

use a wide angle or telephoto lens. With painting the artist has even more latitude to represent the scene that best conveys their intention.

As an aside, at a personal level Constable needed the income from this painting to justify his artistic career and obtain permission to marry his long-time love Maria Bicknell from her parents (and, in particular, her grandfather Rev. Dr. Rhudde, the rector of East Bergholt) who opposed it. They married shortly after this painting was finished and we might imagine it was the income from this painting that swung it but it is more likely that her parents were persuaded by the inheritance Constable received following his father's death the same year. Dr Rhudde was still not persuaded and said he would disinherit her although in the end, when he died, he did leave her money.

Let's look at the politics and social circumstances of 1816, the year this was painted.

The war against Napoleon had finished the previous year, (Waterloo was Sunday, 18 June 1815), and the war had left the country close to starvation when a terrible summer occurred the like of which had never been seen before. It was an agricultural disaster and riots, arson, and looting took place in many European cities.

It was called the 'Year without a Summer'—world temperatures dropped and crops died worldwide.

We now know that it was caused by a combination of low solar activity and a series of volcanic events that winter capped by the April 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora (in the Dutch East Indies now Indonesia). This was the most powerful eruption in recorded history, four times larger than Krakatoa in 1883. One third of the mountain, 38 cubic miles of ash was ejected into the atmosphere, ten times more than the eruption of Vesuvius that destroyed Pompeii.

The summer had many interesting side effects. In Germany, the lack of oats to feed horses led inventor Karl von Drais ('Dray') to research horseless transport, which led to the invention of the Laufmaschine, velocipede (France) or dandy horse (which led to the invention of the bicycle). Note that this clever chap also invented the first typewriter five years later.

In Switzerland Mary Shelley was on holiday but the bad weather and incessant rain meant she had to stay indoors and she spent the time writing the novel

Frankenstein.

The bad harvests lasted for three years and led to riots across Europe. Amidst all this chaos, Constable shows us a tranquil summer day.

I will return to Constable's rendition of the landscape later but first let us consider another type of landscape, the picturesque.

Key point: Artists were also constrained by their patron's requirements and would paint what was required rather than what they saw.

## Notes

### John Constable

John Constable, RA (11 June 1776 – 31 March 1837) was an English Romantic painter. Born in Suffolk, he is known principally for his landscape paintings of Dedham Vale, the area surrounding his home—now known as "Constable Country"—which he invested with an intensity of affection. "I should paint my own places best", he wrote to his friend John Fisher in 1821, "painting is but another word for feeling". His most famous paintings include Dedham Vale of 1802 and The Hay Wain of 1821. Although his paintings are now among the most popular and valuable in British art, Constable was never financially successful. He did not become a member of the establishment until he was elected to the Royal Academy at the age of 52. His work was embraced in France, where he sold more works than in his native England and inspired the Barbizon school.

### Wivenhoe

This work is of Wivenhoe Park in Essex but is it topographical? It appears to radiate clarity, the precise recording of the estate and the expansive perspective. The brushstrokes are tighter compared with his later paintings giving it the air of accuracy. All is content and self-sustaining nature. However, Constable modified the view as the park and lake are not part of the same view.

In the far left distance is Mary Rebow, daughter of the owner Major-General (a 2-star general) Francis Slater Rebow. She is driving a donkey cart with a friend. The painting contains light and dark and has a strong open feel to the

sky, what Constable called the 'chiaroscuro of nature'.

In the late 1770s, Major General Rebow's father-in-law, Colonel Isaac Martin Rebow, had employed the landscape architect Richard Woods to undertake extensive alterations and additions to the parkland surrounding the house at Wivenhoe. He added many picturesque elements including a lock, a rustic arch and a brick bridge with an oak balustrade.

Wivenhoe Park is 55 miles northeast of London and east of Colchester now part of University of Essex and Wivenhoe House Hotel. The owner was a friend of Constable's father and commissioned Constable. Constable needed the income from this commission to marry Mary Bicknell as her parents did not approve. It was finished in September and they married in October 1816. Constable wrote,

The great difficulty has been to get so much in as they wanted to make them acquainted with the scene. On my left is a grotto with some elms, at the head of a peice [sic] of water – in the centre is the house over a beautiful wood and very far to the right is a deer house, which it was necessary to add, so that my view comprehended too many degrees.

Constable added strips of canvas of 3-4 inches on the left and right to incorporate all the details.

#### The Year Without a Summer

Part of a poem by Eileen Margeut:

The cows and horses had no grass, no grain to feed the chicks.

No hay to put aside that time, just dry and shriveled sticks.

The sheep were cold and hungry and many starved to death,

Still waiting for the warming sun to save their labored breath.

#### John Ruskin on Constable (Modern Painters 1, p.191)

"I have already alluded to the simplicity and earnestness of the mind of Constable; to its vigorous rupture with school laws, and to its unfortunate error on the opposite side. Unteachableness seems to have been a main feature of his character, and there is corresponding want of veneration in the way he approaches nature herself. His early education and associations were also against him; they induced in him a morbid preference of subjects of a low order. I have never seen any work of his in which there were any signs of

his being able to draw, and hence even the most necessary details are painted by him inefficiently. His works are also eminently wanting both in rest and refinement, and Fuseli's jesting compliment ('I am going to see Constable; bring me mine ombrella'), is too true; for the showery weather; in which the artist delights; misses alike the majesty of storm and the loveliness of calm weather; it is great-coat weather, and nothing more. There is strange want of depth in the mind which has no pleasure in sunbeams but when piercing painfully through clouds, nor in foliage but when shaken by the wind, nor in light itself but when flickering, glistening, restless and feeble. Yet, with all these deductions, his works are to be deeply respected, as thoroughly original, thoroughly honest, free from affectation, manly in manner, frequently successful in cool colour, and realizing certain motives of English scenery with perhaps as much affection as such scenery, unless when regarded through media of feeling derived from higher sources, is calculated to inspire."

## References

Alison Inglis, "'The heroine of all these scenes': John Constable and the Rebow family in 1816", National Gallery of Victoria website

Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1956



John Constable (1776-1837)  
**The Hay Wain**  
1821  
National Gallery, London

John Constable (1776-1837), The Hay Wain, 1821, National Gallery, London

Romanticism rejected the cold logic of the Enlightenment in favour of individual feeling, and nowhere is that shift more visible than in British landscape painting. **John Constable** understood the land as a direct source of emotion. **The Hay Wain**, painted in **1821**, presents his beloved Suffolk as fertile, calm, and orderly — yet the reality was anything but. Post-war depression had given way to peasant riots across East Anglia, driven by poor harvests, the enclosure of common land, and an agricultural revolution that delivered higher yields with fewer workers. Constable's brother Abram wrote in 1822 that there was never a night without fires visible near or at a distance. Constable responded by adopting what scholars term a **Georgic vision**: an idealised, peaceable countryside that suppressed all evidence of unrest. The labourers in the scene are pushed to the far distance and function as **staffage** — figures added for compositional balance rather than social meaning. They are absorbed into the landscape itself, indistinguishable from nature. English critics attacked his bright colours and broken white highlights as discordant departures from the **Old Masters**. French audiences disagreed. When **The Hay Wain** was exhibited in Paris in **1824**, **Charles X** awarded it a gold medal, and **Eugène Delacroix** credited Constable with transforming his entire

approach to colour and light.

## Notes

Romanticism in landscape art.

This was the time of the Romantic movement, of William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and later Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821) and George Gordon (Lord) Byron (1788-1824). It rejected the cold scientific logic of the Age of Enlightenment in favour of individual feeling.

One of the most famous Romantic artists is John Constable who wrote that he saw the land as a source of feelings. This, of course, is Constable's *The Hay Wain* painted in 1821.

The war had finished six years ago and the post-war depression was over but there were peasant riots in East Anglia.

Constable knew that the stability of his beloved Suffolk countryside was under threat. In 1822 his brother Abram wrote, 'never a night without seeing fires near or at a distance'.

Constable increasingly adopts a Georgic vision of a rich and peaceful land when it was clearly was not true so he insulates the workers and pushes them into the background (see pop-up).

We cannot see if they are happy, they are what is called staffage – figures simply added for compositional or decorative reasons.

The figures in Constable's landscapes are never social animals and they never intrude or have their own life. They are part of the landscape, part of the natural world. The figures become part of the timeless scene rather than a historically accurate record.

But why were there riots? There are many causes including poor harvests, the growth in the enclosure of common land that removed the ability of the poor to grow their own food and an agricultural revolution in which Britain led the world. The agricultural revolution meant higher yields using fewer workers.

Constable avoided showing the revolution in the fields but his art was revolutionary. English critics complained about the bright colours which were

not used by the Old Masters and the flecks of white paint that were described as distemper or snow.

However, when *The Hay-Wain* was shown in Paris in 1824 it caused a sensation and was awarded a gold medal by Charles X of France. Constable's revolutionary work inspired a new generation of French painters including Eugène Delacroix who in turn profoundly influenced the Impressionists.

Key point: John Constable's paintings were picturesque but broke with many of the traditions based on the Old Masters

## Notes

### Picturesque

The painting is Romantic and picturesque but was very innovative from the point of view of the techniques used but conservative in terms of the representation of land. The technique was increasingly criticized by English critics during the 1820s but *The Hay Wain* was awarded the gold medal when it was shown in Paris in 1824. English critics complained about the bright colours which were not used by the Old Masters and the flecks of white paint that were described as distemper or snow. In terms of its subject matter we see farm labourers in the far distance manually cutting and lifting the corn. Farms were increasingly being automated and manual labour like this was 20 years out of date as Constable would have been well aware.

An artist could therefore be innovative in their style but conservative in their subject. Let us look at an artist that was innovative in both, particularly in his later years after he had become successful.

## References

For more information see <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/john-constable-the-hay-wain>





John Constable (1776-1837)  
**The Hay Wain**  
1821  
National Gallery, London

John Constable (1776-1837), The Hay Wain, 1821, National Gallery, London

**John Constable** bent reality with intention. Comparing the original site to the canvas today, the scene is recognisably the same — the curve of the river, the placement of **Willy Lott's house** — yet Constable made deliberate choices. He elevated the cottage beyond its modest scale, granting it a solidity and presence the actual building never possessed. The banks, now thick with vegetation, were painted open, and trees that obscure the view today were cleared from his composition entirely. Look carefully at the collar on the horses: that flash of red is an artistic insertion, added purely to animate an otherwise muted foreground with chromatic contrast. More strikingly, a horse and rider visible in the **full-scale study** were removed from the final work. The outline of the figure survives beneath the paint, a ghost of a discarded decision. This matters because **Constable** was not a straightforward recorder of rural England. His paintings carried the flavour of the **picturesque tradition** yet broke from the formulaic conventions inherited from the **Old Masters** — Claude Lorrain chief among them. Where those conventions demanded idealised, composed scenery, Constable prioritised observed light, atmosphere, and the specific textures of the **Suffolk** landscape as he actually knew it.

## Notes

Before I turn to Turner I thought you might be interested in how topographically accurate Constable's painting was. I recently took (pop-up) this photograph of the same scene and, as you can see, Constable created a fairly accurate representation.

Constable made Willy Lot's house grander than it is. The banks are now more overgrown and trees have grown up blocking the view.

The red collar on the horses would have been unlikely and was added to introduce a note of colour.

A horse and rider on the shore that you can see in the full-size study were deleted. You can just see the outline of the figure.

Key point: John Constable's paintings were picturesque but broke with many of the traditions based on the Old Masters

## References

For more information see <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/john-constable-the-hay-wain>



John Constable (1776-1837)  
**Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows**  
1831  
Tate Britain, on loan to National Museum of Wales

John Constable (1776-1837), *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, 1831, Tate Britain, on loan to National Museum of Wales

**Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows**, painted in 1831, is one of **John Constable's** most emotionally charged works. His wife **Maria** had died of tuberculosis in **1828**, just twelve years into their marriage, and the painting bears the weight of that grief directly. When exhibited at the **Royal Academy**, Constable accompanied it with nine lines describing two young lovers caught in a thunderstorm that kills the woman — she dies in her lover's arms. The composition works as a journey through mourning. The wagon driver moves away from a grave marker toward **Salisbury Cathedral**, with a **rainbow** arching overhead as a symbol of resurrection and renewal. Constable himself clarified his intentions in **1834** lectures on landscape painting, stating he meant "dewy light and freshness, the departing shower, with the exhilaration of the returning sun." The rainbow was not decorative — it carried psychological and spiritual weight. The rainbow terminates at **Leadenhall**, home of Constable's close friend **John Fisher**, whose companionship sustained him through bereavement. Some art historians also read the stormy clash of elements as a commentary on industrialisation pressing against the natural world. In **2013**, a consortium including the **Tate** and the **National Galleries of**

Scotland acquired the painting for twenty-three point one million pounds.

### Notes

This is Constable's Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows of 1831. His beloved wife Maria had died of tuberculosis in 1828 and it seems like a personal statement of his turbulent emotions and his changing states of mind. They had only been married 12 years.

When it was exhibited at the Royal Academy he included nine lines from a poem about two young lovers out walking. As they walk through a wood a thunderstorm kills the young woman and she dies in her lover's arms.

A simply interpretation is that Constable, like the wagon driver, is moving away from death, represented by the grave marker, towards a symbol of resurrection and faith, the Cathedral, and renewal, the rainbow. I can almost see a woman dressed in black alongside the wagon driver.

In 1834 he gave a series of lectures on the history of landscape painting. Alluding to Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows he stated: "I mean more than the rainbow itself, I mean dewy light and freshness, the departing shower, with the exhilaration of the returning sun." The rainbow then generates feelings of "freshness" and "exhilaration"

Possible political meanings have been attributed to it, one of which being the clash of industrialization and nature represented through the clash of elements.

The rainbow ends at Leadenhall where John Fisher lived and Constable stayed. The church of St Thomas is on the left.

The painting was bought in May 2013 for £23.1 million as a partnership between the Tate, National Museum Wales, the National Galleries of Scotland, Colchester and Ipswich Museums and the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.





John Constable (1776-1837)  
**The Valley Farm**  
1835  
Tate Britain, London

John Constable (1776-1837), *The Valley Farm*, 1835, Tate Britain, London

**The Valley Farm**, painted in 1835, stands among John Constable's final works and carries a weight that his earlier Suffolk landscapes do not. Where figures in those paintings merge quietly into hedgerows and water meadows, here they press forward. A figure waits at the gate — read by several critics as the stranger at the threshold of Constable's private world. **Willy Lott's cottage**, familiar from decades of earlier work, has grown grander and more brooding, and the canvas bears the marks of prolonged, almost obsessive reworking. The ferryman crossing the water carries an unmistakable echo of **Charon** on the **River Styx**, and the atmosphere darkens accordingly. Constable himself wrote that painting is "but another word for feeling", and that feeling here is elegiac rather than celebratory. He had always resisted bravura — his word for painterly showing-off — insisting in 1802 that truth to nature was the only honest ambition. **The Valley Farm** honours that conviction, yet unsettles it. One contemporary critic called it "a sinister object" bearing "all the marks of obsession." Another said he ought to be whipped for maiming his own genius. Constable sold it for £300, the highest sum he ever received for a single painting.

## Notes

This painting is a late Constable, *The Valley Farm*, painted in 1835. It has been interpreted as a more solemn view of the countryside he loved.

It is one of his last paintings.

In 1802, Constable wrote: 'There is room enough for a natural painter. The great vice of the present day is bravura, an attempt to do something beyond the truth'. He consistently painted the natural world without bravura and without copying the Old Masters although he was inspired by Thomas Gainsborough, Claude Lorrain, Peter Paul Rubens, Annibale Carracci and Jacob van Ruisdael.

The figures in Constable's landscapes are never social animals and they never intrude or have their own life. They are part of the landscape, part of the natural world but in this painting they start to intrude.

Years early, Constable wrote that he liked Flatford Mill as beggars and idlers never found their way there but there is now a beggar is at the gate. The man at the gate has been suggested as the stranger waiting to come into Constable's private world.

Constable liked the result but it was not well received, one critic wrote: 'He ought to be whipped for thus maiming a real genius for Landscape'.

Nevertheless he sold it for £300, the highest amount he ever received for a painting (to Robert Vernon, later donated to the National Gallery in 1847).

Another critic said what 'a sinister object it is. The picture bears all the marks of obsession.'

Willy Lot's cottage is much larger and one critic said it had be turned into a 'sinister, rambling place'.

The ferry man (Charon) reminds us of the River Styx (originally Acheron).

The trees on the right are larger than an earlier sketch and the cottage is grander and the canvas is heavily worked. He spent a lot of time reworking the image and there is a sense of time lost or time he is trying to recover.

Constable is a Romantic painter. Not a social realist. He represents his inner feelings not the conditions of the working poor.

## Notes

Constable wrote: 'painting is with me but another word for feeling'.

Constable wrote: 'In such an age as this, painting should be understood, not

looked on with blind wonder, nor considered only as a poetic aspiration, but as a pursuit, legitimate, scientific, and mechanical.'

#### References

see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-the-valley-farm-n00327/text-summary>

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881)  
*In a Shoreham Garden*  
c. 1830  
watercolour  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *In a Shoreham Garden*, c. 1830, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Picking up from the Romantic and the mystical, we turn now to one of the most intensely visionary painters in the English tradition. **Samuel Palmer** first exhibited at the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen, and in **1824** John Linnell introduced him to **William Blake**, an encounter that sharpened the mystical instincts Palmer had carried since childhood. Two years later he settled in **Shoreham**, Kent, where he became the central figure of a Blake-inspired group called **the Ancients**, producing the concentrated visionary work for which he is now celebrated. His politics were deeply conservative — he believed ancient institutions such as the Anglican Church were sacred, and he distrusted revolutionary principles entirely. Yet as **Graham Sutherland**, who was directly influenced by Palmer, observed, he was essentially the English Van Gogh, a comparison **Kenneth Clark** also made. The reactionary and the radical coexisted in the same man. This enchanted image, *In a Shoreham Garden*, belongs to that extraordinary Shoreham decade. In **1835** Palmer returned to London, and the break with his visionary period was complete. He spent the rest of his career painting more conventional pastoral scenes, largely to support his family. His Shoreham work remained largely forgotten



until the 1950s.

### Notes

The Romantic and the mystical.

Welcome back.

This is Samuel Palmer's In a Shoreham Garden.

Samuel Palmer was another born artist, although he had little formal training he first exhibited at the Royal Academy when he was only 14.

In 1822, when he was 17 he met the artist John Linnell who introduced him to William Blake in 1824.

Like Blake, Palmer had visionary experiences from childhood and the effect of Blake was to intensify his inherent mystical leanings.

In 1826, he moved to Shoreham, near Sevenoaks, where he became the central figure of a Blake-inspired group of artists known as the Ancients.

Palmer was an old-fashioned high Tory, he thought the Tories gave 'liberty to the poor' but the Whigs were more cruel than the worst papists. He was deeply distrustful of any revolutionary principles. The ancient institutions, such as the Anglican Church, were sacred.

In 1832 he wrote a pamphlet in support of his local Tory candidate who came last in the poll.

Although his politics were reactionary his art was revolutionary.

Graham Sutherland who was influenced by Palmer described him as 'essentially the English Van Gogh', a comparison also made by Kenneth Clark.

### Notes

#### Voting Reform

By the 1830s dissent had grown into the Swing Riots and part of the discontent was with the voting system. Birmingham and Manchester had no MPs to represent them yet Old Sarum returned two MPs to represent an abandoned medieval town. Lord Grey's Whig Government presented a reform bill in 1831 but it was rejected and eventually despite opposition the Great Reform Act of 1832 was passed. It gave the vote to only 18% of the total adult male population (in towns everyone whose home's rateable value

was over £10 pa). 56 rotten boroughs (roughly less than 50 voters) and 130 pocket boroughs (one person owned at least half of the 'burgage' tenancies that included a right to vote) were abolished.

### Samuel Palmer – Visionary Landscapes

Samuel Palmer was an important artist whose most original period was when he worked in Shoreham, near Sevenoaks in Kent. He purchased a rundown cottage he called 'Rat Abbey' but later moved to a Queen Anne house called Waterhouse, which still stands. He lived in Shoreham there from 1826 to 1835, producing some of his greatest work. He had little formal training but first exhibited Turner-inspired works at the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen. He met William Blake in 1824 and his Shoreham work is influenced by Blake's visionary and mystical approach.

In Shoreham he fell in love with fourteen-year old Hannah Linnell, daughter of the then famous artist John Linnell and married her when she was nineteen. In 1832 what he described as his 'primitive and infantile feeling' began to fade and after returning to London in 1835 and marrying Hannah Linnell in 1837 we went on a two-year honeymoon to Italy. When he returned the break with his visionary period was complete and he painted more conventional topographical and pastoral paintings for the rest of his life. It is generally assumed he painted this way in order to sell the paintings more easily in order to support his wife and children. Tragically his eldest son died at the age of 19, a blow from which he never recovered.

Samuel Palmer was largely forgotten after his death. In 1909, many of his Shoreham works were destroyed by his surviving son Alfred Herbert Palmer, who burnt "a great quantity of father's handiwork ... Knowing that no one would be able to make head or tail of what I burnt; I wished to save it from a more humiliating fate". The destruction included "sketchbooks, notebooks, and original works, and lasted for days". It was not until the 1950s that his reputation began to recover and his rediscovered Shoreham work had a powerful influence on many English artists including Graham Sutherland and Eric Ravilious.

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881)  
*Coming from Evening Church*  
1830  
Tate Britain, London



Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *Coming from Evening Church*, 1830, Tate Britain, London

We move now from the rural idyll to the turbulent social forces pressing against it. **Samuel Palmer** settled in **Shoreham, Kent** around 1826, living there for seven years within a tight circle of artists he called the Ancients. His painting ***Coming from Evening Church***, dated **1830**, is one of the few works Palmer inscribed with a precise date and location — a deliberate act, given that 1830 was the very year the **Swing Riots** first reached Shoreham. The landscape envelops its parishioners in otherworldly warmth, yet just outside its frame, threshing machines were being smashed and hay ricks burned across East Kent. The Swing Riots grew from decades of rural dispossession. **Enclosure Acts** had stripped poor communities of common land used for grazing and growing food. The introduction of machinery — including the threshing machine attributed to **Andrew Meikle** in the 1780s — eliminated winter employment for agricultural labourers already pushed to the edge. Threatening letters signed by the fictitious **Captain Swing** were sent to farmers, magistrates, and parsons. Over two thousand rioters were brought to trial. The unrest contributed pressure that drove both the **Reform Act of 1832** and the **Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834**. Palmer, a committed Tory,

watched his beloved Shoreham transform — and kept painting its light regardless.

## Notes

Romantic.

Samuel Palmer moved to the rural village of Shoreham and founded an artistic community.

There he produced his now most famous works such as Coming from Evening Church.

At the bottom Palmer has painted '1830, Shoreham, Kent, S. Palmer'. He very rarely added the date to a painting. Surely this is his recording a time of change to his beloved Shoreham. This painting shows his view of the countryside, as enveloping the parishioners and protecting them.

They are infused with a sense of other worldly beauty and painting was produced in 1830 the year the Swing Riots first reached Shoreham.

To explain the Swing Riots I need to first set the scene

Between 1802 and 1809 the harvest had been terrible at the same time that France was imposing a blockade on food imports.

In Nottingham in 1811 the first smashing of textile machinery (popup) took place and the revolutionaries became known as Luddites.

The name was possibly based on a youth called Ned Ludd who first smashed a textile machine in 1779. This became expanded into a legend of General or King Ludd who lived in Sherwood Forest.

In the countryside rural workers were worse off than textile workers. The introduction of farm machinery resulted in machinery being destroyed and hay ricks burned. This was done in the name of Captain Swing and letters like this (popup) from Captain Swing were sent to farmers and magistrates threatening them with violence. They became known as the Swing Riots. (This letter was sent to Dr. Agnus of Kings College Cambridge and we have it as it was forwarded to Lord Melbourne the Home Secretary.)

This was at the same time as the Tolpuddle martyrs. In 1834 a group of six found guilty of illegally swearing oaths of allegiance and transported to Australia. A petition with 800,000 signatures led to their release.

It was also the time of the Great Reform Act which was eventually passed in

1832.

So, all these idyllic landscapes in the first part of the nineteenth century were produced against a background of rural riots

## Notes

Palmer lived in Shoreham for 7 years.

## Swing Riots

Palmer was a Tory and was disillusioned by the less than idyllic countryside at the time. The Swing riots began with the destruction of threshing machines in 1830 in East Kent near to where Palmer lived. In three weeks over 100 threshing machines had been destroyed, hay ricks were burned down and cattle maimed.

Andrew Meikle (1719–1811) was an early mechanical engineer credited with inventing the threshing machine, a device used to remove the outer husks from grains of wheat. He also had a hand in assisting Firbeck in the invention of the Rotherham Plough (much lighter and the first to be made in factories). This was regarded as one of the key developments of the British Agricultural Revolution in the late 18th century. The invention was made around 1786, although some say he only improved on an earlier design.

They were known as the Swing Riots and were led by the fictitious Captain Swing whose signature was appended to threatening letters sent to farmers, magistrates and parsons. One of the main reasons for the Swing Riots were the Enclosure Acts. These Acts removed land that had been used for centuries by poor people to graze animals and grow their own produce and so achieve independence. The Church also demanded cash payment of a tithe for the parson from everyone whether they were a member of the Church or not. The cash levy was rigorously enforced whether the poor person could afford it or not.

Only one person is recorded as having been killed during the Swing Riots, a rioter killed by a soldier or farmer but 2,000 were brought to trial, 252 sentenced to death (though only 19 were actually hanged), 644 imprisoned and 481 transported to Australia. The aim was a minimum living wage not to overturn society although many people blamed the French as the French revolution of July 1830 broke out a month before the Swing Riots started. Ultimately the Swing Riots succeeded as they put pressure on the

government that led to the Reform Act of 1832 and the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

It is interesting that although the Riots spread across the countryside and Constable mentions that he could see ricks burning almost every night there is no or little evidence of the social unrest in the landscapes of the period. If anything, Constable's landscapes reflect the farming conditions of twenty years previously when workers would be hired for a year at an annual hiring fair or mop rather than the one week contracts introduced later. In Turner's 1809 drawing 'Harvest Home' he shows the farmer and his family celebrating the harvest alongside the workers, something that had stopped by the 1830s as a gulf developed between the farmers and their workers.

### Luddites

Textile workers who protested about labour-saving machinery from 1811 to 1817. It started in Nottingham in 1811. The origin of the name is unknown but may be after Ned Ludd a youth who smashed two stocking frames in 1779. The name evolved into General Ludd or King Ludd, a person who, like Robin Hood, was reputed to live in Sherwood Forest. It was part of a rising tide of working class discontent and was associated with the harsh conditions during the Napoleonic Wars. The agricultural version was the widespread Swing Riots of 1830 in southern and eastern England. At one time, more British soldiers were fighting the Luddites than were fighting Napoleon on the Iberian Peninsula.

Machine-breaking was criminalised by the Parliament of the United Kingdom as early as 1721, the penalty being penal transportation, but as a result of continued opposition to mechanisation the Frame Breaking Act 1812 made the death penalty available.

### Tolpuddle Martyrs

In the early 1830s a group of six men formed a friendly society (which was now legal following the repeal of the Combination Act in 1824-5). They refused to work for less than 10s a week when the local rate was 7s a week. A local landowner wrote to Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister, in 1834 invoking an obscure 1797 law prohibiting people from swearing oaths to each other. They were found guilty and transported to Australia. They became popular heroes, 800,000 signatures were collected and they were released in

1836 (except for James Hammett who has a previous conviction for theft). The others moved to London, Ontario where they are buried.

#### References

See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/palmer-the-harvest-moon-drawing-for-a-pastoral-scene-n03699/text-summary>





J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851)  
*Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*  
1844  
National Gallery, London

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, 1844, National Gallery, London

Industrial hardship and the hunger of the eighteen forties form the backdrop against which **J. M. W. Turner** painted one of the most discussed images of the railway age. *Rain, Steam and Speed*, completed in 1844, depicts a locomotive crossing **Maidenhead Railway Bridge**, designed by **Isambard Kingdom Brunel** and completed in 1838, carrying the **Great Western Railway** east towards London. The conventional reading is that Turner celebrates industrial progress, and the painting does confirm that mass travel was reshaping Britain. Yet the image resists a single verdict. In the lower right, a tiny hare races ahead of the engine. The animal was the fastest creature most people had ever seen, and here the train overtakes it entirely. Whether that registers as triumph or threat is precisely the tension Turner sustains throughout the composition. On the river below, a figure shelters under a parasol, sketching what appear to be dancers on the bank. The bucolic scene sits in direct visual competition with the locomotive's charge. Turner does not resolve the contest between pastoral beauty and industrial power; he frames it as the central question of his moment. The painting asks whether technology liberates or destroys — and refuses to answer on your behalf.

## Notes

As a result of the industrial revolution there was widespread unemployment in the 1830s and 1840s.

The poor harvests meant that the 1840s were known as the Hungry 40s.

But first I would like to consider one of the most famous representation of the new age of steam that was rapidly covering the countryside with railroads and opening up the country to travellers.

This is an one of Turner's late landscapes, Rain, Steam and Speed and a conventional interpretation is that it is a celebration of power and progress and the new scientific age. What it does show is that large numbers of people were travelling around the country in increasing numbers.

## Notes

It shows Maidenhead Railway Bridge, across the River Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead and the view is looking east towards London.

The bridge was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859, died aged 53 of a stroke) and completed in 1838.

The Great Western Railway was one of a number of private British railway companies created to develop the new means of transport.

A tiny hare appears in the bottom right corner of the painting. Some have interpreted this as a positive statement about technology as the train is able to outrun what was the fastest animal before the steam train. Others see the hare running in fear of the new machinery and Turner warning us of the danger of man's new technology destroying the beauty of nature. My view is that this is a masterpiece precisely because it contains both contradictory interpretations.

The other interesting element of the picture is the boat on the river. It looks possible that this is an artist on the river with a parasol to keep off the sun and sketching a group of wild, bacchanalian dancers on the shore. Is this this Turner saying he prefers a bucolic scene of dancers to the new technology or are they celebrating the wonders of the new form transport that was changing the face of Britain? Again it is up to you to decide.

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904)  
*Irish Famine*  
1850



George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), *Irish Famine*, 1850

Social realism brings us to one of the most catastrophic events of the nineteenth century, and one that reshaped Ireland permanently. Between **1845 and 1852**, the **Great Famine** killed more than a million people and drove roughly one and a half million more to emigrate, reducing Ireland's population of eight million by nearly a third. The potato crop, on which the rural poor entirely depended, was destroyed year after year by **potato blight**. Throughout this period, sufficient grain was being exported from Ireland to feed the entire population — a fact that led **John Mitchel**, the Irish nationalist writer, to state directly: "The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine." That judgement has shaped how historians and the Irish public understand the catastrophe ever since. Few painters engaged with the subject. The most prominent exception was **George Frederic Watts**, the English Victorian painter who declared he painted ideas, not things. Returning from Florence in 1847, Watts produced a group of social realist works between **1848 and 1850**, including *Found Drowned* and *The Seamstress*. His painting *Irish Famine* belongs to this concentrated period of moral urgency, and stands as a rare visual document of an event that made Irish independence inevitable.

## Notes

Social realism.

The 1840s were also a time of much greater hardship in Ireland.

More than a million people died of starvation and disease in the Great Famine between 1845 and 1852 and about one and a half million people emigrated reducing the population by about a third (8 million to 5.5 million).

The Irish population depended on potatoes as they gave the highest yield of food per acre. The potato blight destroyed the crop from 1845 onwards and the famine was reported in The Illustrated London News throughout. The real outrage was that enough grain was being exported from Ireland throughout the famine to feed the entire population. At this time the whole of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom yet the Government allowed grain and butter exports to continue. This is why the famine is regarded by many today as direct or indirect genocide.

John Mitchel (1815-1875), Irish nationalist and author, wrote the famous line: 'The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine.'

The famine led to a failed uprising in 1848 and eventually to an independent Ireland.

Few painters tackled the subject but the best known was George Frederic Watts in this picture, Irish Famine.

## Notes

After the Great Famine (1845-1852), Irish independence was inevitable. More than 1 million of Ireland's 8 million people perished of starvation or disease. Another 1.5 million (some say 2 million) Irish emigrated. The population of Ireland was reduced by nearly a half, this at a time that the population of nearly all other European populations were rapidly expanding. As nothing before in Irish history, it created a burning hatred toward the English, both among those who survived in Ireland and the immigrants who fanned out around the world.

Phytophthora infestans or potato blight is still a major problem worldwide and potatoes are the third most important food crop worldwide. In 2012 the

potatoes lost to blight would have fed 80 million people.

One Quaker (Joseph Crosfield) wrote in 1846 that he saw:

heart-rending scene [of] poor wretches in the last stages of famine imploring to be received into the [work]house...Some of the children were worn to skeletons, their features sharpened with hunger, and their limbs wasted almost to the bone..

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904) was a popular English Victorian painter and sculptor, perhaps the most popular. He wrote that he painted ideas not things. In 1847 he returned from Florence and painted the massive fresco in the Great Hall of Lincoln's Inn. Between 1848 and 1850 he painted four social realist pictures. All had melancholy themes, the others are Found Drowned, Under the Dry Arch (an old woman kneels and leans against an arch) and Song of the Shirt (also known as The Seamstress, a woman sits holding a shirt in her lap and holds her head in her other hand). In 1850 he met the Prinseps and helped them secure a lease on Little Holland House and moved in and lived with them for the next 21 years.



George Frederic Watts (1817-1904)  
***Found Drowned***  
c. 1850  
Watts Gallery

George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), *Found Drowned*, c. 1850, Watts Gallery

**George Frederic Watts** painted *\*Found Drowned\** in **1850**, one of four social realism works prompted by his reading of newspaper reports on poverty and suffering in London. We are looking out from beneath **Waterloo Bridge**, with Hungerford Suspension Bridge visible in the distance. By the **1840s**, roughly fifteen percent of London's suicides occurred from Waterloo Bridge — a toll bridge, quieter than its neighbours, and therefore less likely to attract witnesses. **Thomas Hood's** 1844 poem *\*The Bridge of Sighs\** had already fixed the location in the public imagination as a site of female desperation. Watts places a **fallen woman** at the composition's centre, her body luminous against the darkened, polluted Thames. Her arms extend in a crucifix pose — a deliberate signal that Watts frames her death as suffering deserving redemption rather than criminal disgrace. Suicide was legally termed **self-murder**, and a verdict of it denied the deceased a Christian burial. The coroner's phrase **found drowned**, used when no conclusive evidence of intent existed, spared families that stigma. A heart-shaped locket in her left hand speaks to a love that destroyed her. Above, a single point of light — read as Venus — suggests Watts refuses to leave her entirely without hope.



## Notes

### Lecture

This is one of four social realism pictures by George Frederic Watts painted in 1850 after he had read reports of the poor in the newspapers and periodicals.

### Notes

We are viewing London from under Waterloo Bridge and in the distance we can just make out Hungerford Suspension Bridge.

Waterloo Bridge was a well known place for suicides with people throwing themselves off the structure into the Thames.

In the 1840s about 15 percent of London's suicides were from Waterloo Bridge, probably because, as a toll bridge, it was less busy than the others, and they were less likely to be disturbed.

In 1844 Thomas Hood wrote the poem *The Bridge of Sighs* about the suicide of a prostitute there. It was based on the real case of Mary Furley who tried to commit suicide in Regent's Canal but Hood moved it to Waterloo Bridge.

In the foreground Watts has painted a "fallen woman", a common subject in Victorian paintings.

Female suicides caused by adulterous relationships or financial hardship, which then led to prostitution, were not uncommon happenings.

Her body is lit up and is in stark comparison to the darkened background. Her dress still floats in the polluted waters, this is before the Thames was cleaned up.

Her arms are stretched out like a crucifix suggesting a religious theme.

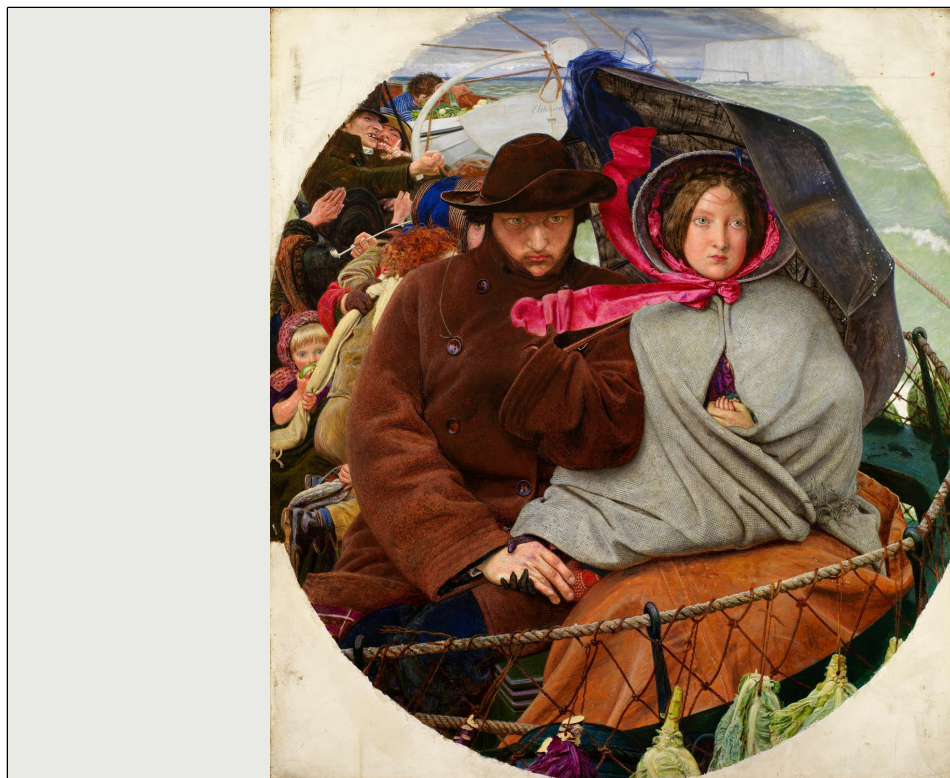
Suicides were known as 'self murder' and were a crime. Perhaps, Watts is suggesting redemption.

In her left hand she holds a chain with heart-shaped locket suggesting love.

In the sky is either a star or Venus perhaps a symbol of hope in the after-life.

Her face is calm suggesting she has found peace.

Found Drowned was a legal term used by coroners when there is no conclusive evidence of suicide, such as a note, avoiding the stigma of a suicide, which ruled out a Christian Burial.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)  
***Last of England***  
 1855  
 Birmingham Museum and Art  
 Gallery, Birmingham

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Last of England*, 1855, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham

The emigration crisis gripping mid-nineteenth century Britain extended well beyond Ireland's famine survivors. Middle-class professionals and skilled workers were leaving England in significant numbers, drawn by the **Australian gold rush of 1851** and earlier discoveries in California. **Ford Madox Brown** began *\*The Last of England\** in **1852**, the year emigration peaked at 350,000 departures. The immediate trigger was personal: his close friend **Thomas Woolner**, sculptor and member of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood**, emigrated to Australia that year, driven out by lack of commissions. Though Brown never formally joined the Brotherhood, the seven founding members were his intimate circle. Brown modelled the central male figure on himself, his wife **Emma** sits beside him, and their daughter **Catherine**, born 1850, appears as the fair-haired child. Brown worked outdoors in his garden on the coldest days, deliberately seeking freezing conditions to render the blue tones of cold skin accurately. His biographer records that he was the first painter in England to render light exactly as it appeared to him. The painting exists as a **tondo**, a circular format that reinforces the porthole-like compression of the couple's world. The **Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery** holds the primary



version, painted in grey.

### Notes

As I mentioned, 1.5 million people emigrated from Ireland but many people were emigrating from England to find a better life not just hungry farm workers but also the middle-class. One reason was the gold rush in Australia in 1851 (the Californian gold rush was 1848-55).

In *Last of England* by Ford Madox Brown we see a middle-class couple with a baby.

The man was modelled on Brown himself and the woman on his wife Emma. The model for the fair-haired child eating the apple was Brown's daughter Catherine (Cathy) born in 1850.

The hand of the baby was supposedly modelled by their second child, their son Oliver.

Although Brown was never officially one of the seven Pre-Raphaelites they were all close friends. In 1852 one of the group, the sculptor Thomas Woolner (1825-1892) was forced through lack of work to emigrate to Australia and this is thought to have inspired this painting. Woolner returned after a year and became a successful sculptor and was elected to the Royal Academy in 1875.

Emigration was at a peak in 1852 and 350,000 people left that year. Brown himself considered emigrating to India to find a better life.

Another trigger was the discovery of gold in Australia (Victoria gold rush was 1851 onwards) and California (1848 onwards). The work was extremely arduous and most made little money from gold although a few, such as Samuel Brannan in California, made a fortune from selling equipment to the miners.

Like the Impressionists Brown painted the scene outside in his garden and in his diary Brown noted that the '...ribbons of the bonnet took me 4 weeks to paint.'

Brown loved to pose on the coldest days with snow on the ground in order to achieve the right degree of blue skin.

According to his biographer 'He was the first painter in England, if not the world to attempt to render light exactly as it appeared to him.' (biography,

Ford Madox Brown)

## Notes

There are two versions, one in the Fitzwilliam Cambridge (1860, red cape) and the other in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (grey cape). A small watercolour replica of the Birmingham version is in the Tate. There is also a fully worked study and a detailed compositional drawing.

All are in the form of a tondo, or round panel. The circular, porthole theme is reinforced by all the circular elements of the painting.

1,900 tons of gold were mined in Victoria in the nineteenth century paying off the national debt and helping to create the British Empire.

Through his brutal honesty of vision and acute representation of light and colour he presents us with a universal theme of loss, travel, fortitude, love and despair hinting at Mary and Joseph and their flight out of Egypt.

Its representation of irresistible destiny and tragedy is as remorseless as King Lear.

On completion it sold for £150 to dealer David White.

His courtship was unconventional, when he started the painting in 1852 he had been living with Emma for three years, Catherine was born in 1850 and they married in 1853.

In 1859, *The Last Sight of England* as it was then known was sold by Benjamin Windus to Ernest Gambart for 325 guineas.

It was voted Britain's eight favourite painting in a BBC poll.



Richard Redgrave (1804-1888)  
*The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home*  
1858  
Tate Britain

Richard Redgrave (1804-1888), *The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home*, 1858, Tate Britain

Richard Redgrave's *\*The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home\** reveals how deeply the English landscape had become bound up with national identity by the mid-nineteenth century. Redgrave built his reputation on social realist work — *The Sempstress of 1844* and *The Outcast of 1851* established him as a painter of working-class hardship. By the time he painted this scene at **Leith Hill**, where his family spent their summers, his focus had shifted to landscape, though never without human weight. The father carries a carpenter's bag, a modern Joseph leading his family toward a new life, while across the hillside the villagers gather to bid farewell. A crippled boy stands alone, unable to follow, watching the girl who half-turns back toward him. After visiting the **International Exhibition in Paris in 1855**, Redgrave observed that French landscapes were filled with passion, strife, and bloodshed, a residue of revolutionary history. British landscapes, by contrast, were peaceful scenes of home. **John Ruskin** reinforced this view, praising the painting's beautiful distance and arguing that only through the English landscape could English painters access any genuine beauty at all. The result, as this painting shows, is a **Wordsworthian** ideal: rural England as a symbol of peace, belonging, and

loss — whatever the industrial reality beyond the frame.

## Notes

Lecture

This shows another aspect of emigration. It Richard Redgrave's *The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home*.

Redgrave was a pioneer of social realist paintings with paintings such as *The Sempstress* of 1844 and *The Outcast* of 1851. He later turned to landscapes and frequently painted in the open air.

This is Leith Hill where the Redgrave's owned a cottage and spent each summer.

In the painting, the father has a carpenter's bag 'a modern Joseph escaping with his family to a new land and life'.

Underlying the family's sadness is perhaps a sense of optimism reflected in the sunshine.

Halfway down the hill a crippled boy stands forlorn, unable to accompany them. Perhaps he loves the girl who half turns towards him encouraged by her sister.

Redgrave made an interesting point about British landscape painting. After visiting the International Exhibition in Paris in 1855 he found French landscapes full of 'passion, strife, and bloodshed' perhaps reflecting the history of revolution. British landscapes were 'the peaceful scenes of home'. The English landscape has become a symbol of peace in contrast with the strife and turmoil of post revolutionary France.

The Wordsworthian landscape of rural harmony has become a symbol of England.

The art critic John Ruskin, who described this painting's 'beautiful distance'. He believed that only by representing the beauty of the English landscape could English painters succeed in capturing any form of beauty and he denigrated those artists that sought to find it in Italy.

This may be one reason we have been unable to find British paintings showing the passion and strife of the countryside. It had become an icon representing home, peace and beauty whatever the reality.

## Notes

As a result of the industrial revolution there was widespread unemployment in the 1830s and 1840s resulting in mass emigration to the British colonies and to America.

One incentive was the discovery of gold in Australia and America and the possibility of making a fortune.

There were many paintings depicting this and some show hope, some foreboding but all with a sadness of never seen home, family and friends again.

The bright colours and detail are perhaps the influence of the Pre-Raphaelites.

On the hill opposite the inhabitants of the village, their friends, have come out to wish them goodbye.



John Brett (1830-1902)  
**Stonebreaker**  
 1857-8  
 Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

John Brett (1830-1902), *Stonebreaker*, 1857-8, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

Stone breaking returns us to the rural labourer and to the urgent debates around poverty that the **Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834** had inflamed. That Act introduced the workhouse system on the brutal assumption that the poor were responsible for their own condition, yet conditions inside proved so appalling that press scandals followed across the country. **John Brett's** painting *\*The Stonebreaker\**, completed in **1858**, places a well-nourished, neatly dressed boy breaking flints in a luminous **Surrey** landscape. The boy was modelled on Brett's brother Edwin, and much of the canvas was painted outdoors. **John Ruskin** declared it surpassed anything the **Pre-Raphaelites** had previously achieved, singling out the thistledown and chalk hills for particular praise. Every geological detail of the **Mole Valley** is rendered with scientific precision, reflecting Brett's lifelong commitment to natural inquiry — he later became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. The painting sustains competing readings. Some see a fortunate child in bright sunshine with a playful dog. Others, following **Marcia Pointon**, read it as a memento mori: the pile of ancient flint measuring geological time against the brevity of human life. Brett himself inscribed a preparatory sketch with the words **Outside Eden**, invoking God's curse on Adam to perpetual labour.

## Notes

Another social issues we have not covered is the workhouse, introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

The aim of this act was to reduce the rising cost to the rate payer of poor relief. This was done by introducing workhouses and by making condition in them worse than not working.

However, despite every effort they could not make them worse than conditions outside. They all tried and the conditions were so appalling it gave rise to scandals in the press.

The basic assumption was that through hard work people could earn a good living so the poor were responsible for their own condition.

This is John Brett's Stonebreaker and it returns us to the rural worker.

Stone breaking was a soul destroying occupation but Brett shows us a well nourished smartly dressed boy accompanied by a playful dog.

Traditionally, stone breaking was a task often given to the poor and destitute by local Parishes and they were used to fill in potholes.

Every detail of this Surrey valley are captured with scientific accuracy and John Ruskin said it went beyond anything the Pre-Raphaelites had done previously.

Brett worked on it outdoors with a few additions in the studio and the boy was modelled by his brother Edwin.

Other symbols are the blasted tree signifying the boy's restricted future and the bullfinch symbolising the free human spirit.

Across the Mole Valley we see Box Hill and the milestone shows the distance to London as 23 miles. There is a railway bridge and embankment in the middle distance on the right and we are looking down on St. Michael's Church. The painting reflects Brett's interest in geology.

Critics and historians disagree over the meaning. Some see a well-dressed boy in the sunshine, with a beautiful view and his playful puppy. Others see a boy sentenced to a lifetime of back-breaking work ending up like the blasted tree. He must work so hard he is oblivious to the sunshine, the view and the dog. Brett wrote on a sketch of the picture, 'Outside Eden' and it may refer to



God's curse on Adam to external labour. The most interesting interpretation is from the historian Marcia Pointon who sees it as a comment on the brevity of human life compared to the age of the earth indicated by the pile of flint, she sees it therefore as a memento mori ('remember that you will die').

## Notes

David Cordingly argues that there is a possibility that the painter knew of famous Stonebreakers by Courbet, which work had been shown at the Paris Salon in 1851. One of Brett's drawings depicts a standing boy in a position similar to one of the figures in Courbet's picture. This could be a coincidence, though.

Brett may also have seen *The Stonebreaker's Daughter* which was painted by Landseer in 1830.

Brett was both an artist and a scientist and later in life became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Astronomers. Brett was excited by the writings of John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites.

The painting was in response to another painting shown at the Royal Academy the previous year. Was this by Lewis?

He shows a young boy breaking flints in bright sunlight. The stones were used to fill in potholes in the local Parish roads. The work could be a comment on child labour but the boy appears to be dressed in clean clothes and he has a playful dog to keep him company. From his letters it appears that Brett painted a great deal of the painting outdoors. The boy was modelled by Brett's brother Edwin.

The painting was admired for its accurate detail and John Ruskin commented that it went beyond anything the Pre-Raphaelites had done particularly with regard to the thistledown, chalk hills, elm trees and far away cloud.

The painting could refer to God's curse on Adam to external labour or the great length of geological time compared to the brevity of human life. The ancient tree refers to death and the bullfinch to the free human spirit.

John Ruskin said of a later work by Brett (Val d'Aosta), 'I never saw the mirror so held up to Nature;<sup>1</sup> but it is Mirror's work, not Man's.' This is ironic considering he encouraged Brett to visit Val d'Aosta and paint in meticulous detail.

Sir Edwin Henry Landseer RA had painted *The Stonebreaker and His Daughter* in 1830. The labourer is worn out but well dressed and his daughter

is clean, well-dressed and sentimental and there is a cottage with smoke coming from the chimney in the background.



Henry Wallis (1830-1916)  
***The Stonebreaker***  
1857  
Birmingham Art Gallery, Birmingham

Henry Wallis (1830-1916), *The Stonebreaker*, 1857, Birmingham Art Gallery, Birmingham

Exhibited at the **Royal Academy** in **1858**, Henry Wallis's *\*The Stonebreaker\** confronts the human cost of rural poverty with quiet but devastating precision. The figure wears an agricultural labourer's clothing, situating him immediately within the class of men displaced and made destitute by the **Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834**, legislation that stripped away outdoor relief and replaced it with the workhouse. Wallis structured the image so that early viewers read the man as resting, yet the evidence against that reading accumulates on close inspection: his hammer has slipped rather than been laid aside, the setting sun drains the landscape of warmth, and a stoat, barely visible, has climbed onto his right foot — an animal that approaches only what is absolutely still. The original frame carried a line paraphrased from **Tennyson's** *\*A Dirge\** of 1830: "Now is thy long day's work done." The work has killed him. Wallis never stated this directly, but the composition makes any other conclusion difficult to sustain. Rather than sentimentalising poverty, the painting indicts a specific political failure, demanding that the viewer recognise the **stonebreaker** not as a picturesque rural type, but as a man the state abandoned.

## Notes

This is Henry Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858.

The man is wearing agricultural labourer's clothes so it shows what happened to out-of-work rural workers.

Many critics assumed the man was sleeping after a hard day's work and although Wallis never confirmed it there are many indications that the work has killed him.

The frame was inscribed with a line paraphrased from Tennyson's *A Dirge* (1830): "Now is thy long day's work done"; the muted colours and setting sun give a feeling of finality; the man's posture indicates that his hammer has slipped from his grasp as he was working rather than being laid aside while he rests, and his body is so still that a stoat, only visible on close examination, has climbed onto his right foot.

A grim painting of a grim subject.

It is believed in this case that Wallis did paint it as a commentary on horrors resulting from the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which discouraged any form of relief for the poor and introduced the workhouse.



Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849-1914)  
**Hard Times**  
1885  
Manchester City Art Gallery,  
Manchester

Sir Hubert von Herkomer (1849-1914), *Hard Times*, 1885, Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester

**Hubert von Herkomer** painted *\*Hard Times\** out of a conviction rooted in lived experience. Born into poverty and largely self-educated, having attended school for just two months, he believed artists carried a genuine obligation to document the hardships of working people. That belief shaped much of his output and found one of its most direct expressions here. The scene shows **Coldharbour Lane in Bushey**, Hertfordshire, inspired by the migrant labourers Herkomer observed near his home. He worked in two stages: the landscape was painted **en plein air**, while the figures were completed indoors at his Art School. Those figures were not invented — a labourer named **James Quarry**, his wife Annie, and their two sons posed for him directly. Herkomer credited publications like **The Graphic** with transforming subject matter in British painting. First published in **1869**, *The Graphic* employed over a thousand people by 1882 and commissioned leading artists including **Luke Fildes** and **Frank Holl** to depict contemporary social conditions. Herkomer argued the publication produced a visible shift in what English painters chose to show. Annie Quarry reads as exhausted and defeated. Her husband's expression is harder to fix — and that ambiguity is

the painting's real tension. Destitution or endurance: the painting holds both.

### Notes

This is by Hubert von Herkomer who had an impoverished childhood and health problems and only attended school for two months.

...Herkomer painted a number of pictures that revealed his sympathy with the poor and disadvantaged, a characteristic fostered in part by his own humble origins...

His inspiration for this painting was probably the impoverished migrant workers he had seen near his home in Bushey.

It shows Coldharbour Lane, Bushey in Hertfordshire. The road round the corner is now called Herkomer Road and Coldharbour Lane is now lined with semi-detached houses (pop-up).

Herkomer wrote about his belief that he had an obligation to pictorially depict the hard times of the poor and the importance of such magazines like the Graphic, saying: '...It is not too much to say that there was a visible change in the selection of subjects by painters in England after the advent of the Graphic.' The Graphic was first published in 1869 and by 1882 employed over 1,000 people. It was an illustrated newspaper that sold for 6d and employed leading artists including Luke Fildes, Hubert von Herkomer, Frank Holl, and John Millais.

For this painting Herkomer used a real family, a labourer called James Quarry and his wife Annie posed with their two sons Frederick George and James Joseph. The outdoor setting was painted en plein air but the characters in the painting were painted later, indoors at his Art School.

The wife looks sad and dejected but we could interpret the man's look hopeful that some work will turn up. Possibly from the group down the road. We can interpret the painting as one of hopelessness and destitution or one of hope. The interpretation is yours, the viewer, as we have found with many of these paintings.

### Notes

RA in 1890, knighted in 1907





Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)  
**Work**  
 1852-1863  
 Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *Work*, 1852-1863, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester

Ford Madox Brown's painting *\*Work\**, begun in 1852 at Hampstead, rewards close formal analysis before we turn to its dense symbolism. Brown designed the frame himself, arching it in deliberate echo of religious altarpieces — a pointed irony, given that the painting's true congregation is the street. Half-close your eyes and the composition resolves into something monumental. The **navvies** at centre hold the picture like a classical frieze, their muscular forms sculpted by fierce July sunlight in a way that consciously elevates them to the status of history painting. That scale matters: large canvases were reserved for the highest academic genre, and Brown understood exactly what claim he was making by working at this size. Two versions exist — the larger **Manchester Art Gallery** version, which Brown exhibited, was commissioned by **Thomas Plint**; the smaller **Birmingham Art Gallery** version was commissioned by **James Leathart** in 1859, with his wife Maria's portrait replacing that of Brown's wife Emma. The colour is saturated and unmediated, rejecting the tonal blending of academic convention. Light falls without flattery. **John Ruskin** and others found this jarring, but that directness is the point — Brown's formal choices are inseparable from his argument that ordinary



labour deserves unflinching attention.

### Notes

The interesting thing about this painting is that Ford Madox Brown wrote a detailed guide to the meaning he intended but let us start with the form.

Looking at the formal properties is always a good way to start as it requires no knowledge of the artists, its history or the context.

What do we mean by a paintings formal properties:

Composition – curves, diagonals, triangles, rhythm and spacing

Space – perspective, both aerial and linear, walking through the picture, how close are we to the picture space?

Form – such as the sculptural form of bodies, form achieved by chiaroscuro, form created by line and by colour

Tone – the contrast of light and shade, chiaroscuro.

Colour – and its use to create a mood and convey an emotion

The first and simplest formal property is its size, it is a big painting and large paintings were reserved for history paintings, the highest genre of academic art.

However, the style and approach are revolutionary which undermines the conventions of history painting.

We will start with composition.

Brown designed the frames and often used an arched frame or pictorial device reminiscent of religious altarpieces.

To see the overall form it is best to half close your eyes

There are two versions of this painting, one in Manchester Art Gallery and the other in Birmingham Art Gallery.

The Manchester version is the one that Brown exhibited, it is the larger version and it was commissioned by Thomas Plint based on an early sketch he was shown by Brown.

This is the Manchester version shown without its frame.

The other version is smaller and was commissioned by James Leathart for £315 in 1859. It is now in the Birmingham Art Gallery. It was completed the

same year as the original. Brown replaced the portrait of his wife Emma with one of Leathart's wife, Maria.

### Socio-Political – Work and Cleanliness

Overall, the painting is usually described as being about the nobility of work and the social importance of clean water.

We have all heard about the Victorian work ethic and 'cleanliness is next to Godliness' and this painting is based on those ideas and so to understand the painting as it was understood at the time we need to understand these Victorian values.

The main theme and the title is the ennobling nature of work which is expanded upon in Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present*. One of Carlyle's extended metaphors likens work to digging an ever widening river that drains a pestilent swamp of ignorance.

The workers divide into groups as we saw earlier including the idle rich and the 'brain workers', Thomas Carlyle on the left and F. D. Maurice, holding a bible on the right.

F. D. Maurice the Christian reformer created Working Men's Colleges at which Ford Madox Brown lectured. Maurice gave lectures on the 'Great Unwashed' and the relationship between cleanliness and godliness.

Thomas Carlyle wrote in *Past and Present*,

Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work! Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like helledogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man.

In the same book Carlyle creates the character of Bobus Higgins, a corrupt sausage maker who uses horsemeat in his product to undercut competitors.

In the painting the billboards being carried down the road read 'Vote for Bobus'. Bobus is being portrayed as a corrupt politician.

The other influence was Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (3 volumes in 1851, a fourth by 1861) and his 1849 article in the *Morning Chronicle* in which he wrote, 'I shall consider the whole of the metropolitan

poor under three separate phases, according as they will work, they can't work and they won't work'.

## Notes

### Form

Note there is a distinction between 'form' as a shorthand for the formal properties of a painting and 'form' meaning, for example, the shape of a figure in the painting.

### Ford Madox Brown's Pamphlet Describing Work

This picture, on account of which, in a great measure the present exhibition has been organised, was begun in 1852 at Hampstead. The background, which represents the main street of that suburb not far from the heath, was painted on the spot.

At that time extensive excavations, connected with the supply of water, were going on in the neighbourhood, and seeing and studying daily as I did the British excavator, or navvy, as he designates himself, in the full swing of his activity (with his manly and picturesque costume, and with the rich glow of colour, which exercise under a hot sun will impart), it appeared to me that he was at least as worthy of the powers of an English painter, as the fisherman of the Adriatic, the peasant of the Campana, or the Neapolitan lazzarone. Gradually this idea developed itself into that of "Work" as it now exists, with the British excavator for a central group, the outward and visible type of Work. Here are presented the young navvy in the pride of manly health and beauty; the strong fully developed navvy who does his work and loves his beer, the selfish old bachelor navvy, stout of limb, and perhaps a trifle tough in those regions where compassion is said to reside; the navvy of strong animal nature, who, but that he was, when young taught to work at useful work, might even now be working at the useless crank. Then Paddy with his larry and his pipe in his mouth.

The young navvy who occupies the place of hero in this group, and in the picture, stands on what is termed a landing-stage, a platform placed half-way

down the trench; two men from beneath shovel the earth up to him, as he shovels it on to the pile outside.

Next in value of significance to these, is the ragged wretch who has never been taught to work; with his gleaming eyes, he doubts and despairs of every one. But for a certain effeminate gentleness of disposition and a love of nature, he might have been a burglar! He lives in Flower and Dean Street, where the policemen walk two and two, and the worst cut-throats surround him, but he is harmless; and before the dawn you may see him miles out in the country, collecting his wild weeds and singular plants to awaken interest, and perhaps find a purchaser in some sprouting botanist. When exhausted he will return to his den, his creel of flowers then rests in an open court-yard, the thoroughfare for the crowded inmates of this haunt of vice, and played in by mischievous boys, yet the basket rarely gets interfered with, unless through the unconscious lurch of some drunkard. The bread winning implements are sacred with the very poor.

In the very opposite scale from the man who can't work, at the further corner of the picture, are two men who appear as having nothing to do. These are the brainworkers, who, seeming to be idle, work, and are the cause of well-ordained work and happiness in others. Sages, such as in ancient Greece, published their opinions in the market square. Perhaps one of these may already, before he or others know it, have moulded a nation to his pattern, converted a hitherto combative race to obstinate passivity, with a word may have centupled the tide of emigration, with another, have quenched the political passions of both factions—may have reversed men's notions upon criminals, upon slavery, upon many things, and still be walking about little known to some. The other, in friendly communion with the philosopher, smiling perhaps at some of his wild sallies and cynical thrusts (for Socrates at times strangely disturbs the seriousness of his auditory by the mercilessness of his jokes—against vice and foolishness), is intended for a kindred and yet very dissimilar spirit. A clergyman, such as the Church of England offers examples of—a priest without guile—a gentleman without pride, much in communion with the working classes, "honouring all men," "never weary in well-doing." Scholar, author, philosopher, and teacher too, in his way, but not above practical efforts, if even for a small result in good. Deeply as he is with the axiom that each unit of humanity feels as much as all the rest combined, and impulsive and hopeful in nature so that the remedy suggests itself to him

concurrently with the evil.

Next to these, on the shaded bank, are different characters out of work, haymakers in quest of employment; a stoic from the Emerald Island, with hay stuffed in his hat to keep the draught out, and need for his stoicism just at present, being short of baccy—a young shoeless Irishman, with his wife, feeding their first-born with cold pap—an old sailor turned haymaker, and two young peasants in search of harvest work, reduced in strength, perhaps by fever—possibly by famine.

Behind the Pariah, who never has learned to work, appears a group, of a very different class, who, from an opposite cause, have perhaps not been sufficiently used to work either. These are the rich, who have no need to work,—at least for bread—the "bread of life" being neither here nor there. The pastry-cook's tray the symbol of superfluity, accompanies these. It is peculiarly English: I never saw it abroad that I remember, though something of the kind must be used. For some years after returning to England I could never quite get over a certain socialistic twinge on seeing it pass, unreasonable as the feeling may have been. Past the pastry-cook's tray come two married ladies. The elder and more serious of the two devotes her energies to tract distributing, and has just flung one entitled "The Hodman's Heaven, or drink for thirsty souls," to the somewhat unpromising specimen of navvy humanity descending the ladder: he scorns it, but with good nature. This well-intentioned lady has, perhaps, never reflected that excavators may have notions to the effect that ladies might be benefited by receiving tracts containing navvies' ideas! nor that excavators are skilled workmen, shrewd thinkers chiefly, and, in general, men of great experience in life, as life presents itself to them.

In front of her is the lady whose only business in life as yet is to dress and look beautiful for our benefit. She probably possesses everything that can give enjoyment to life; how then can she but enjoy the passing moment, and like a flower feed on the light of the sun? Would any one wish it otherwise?—Certainly, not I, dear lady. Only in your own interest, seeing that certain blessings cannot be insured for ever—as for instance, health may fail, beauty fade, pleasures through repetition pall—I will not hint at the greater calamities to which flesh is heir—seeing all this, were you less engaged

watching that beautiful tiny greyhound in a red jacket that will run through that lime, I would beg to call your attention to my group of small, exceedingly ragged, dirty children in the foreground of my picture, where you are about to pass. I would, if permitted, observe that, though at first they may appear just such a group of ragged dirty brats as anywhere get in the way and make a noise, yet, being considered attentively, they like insects, molluscs, miniature plants, &c, develop qualities to form a most interesting study, and occupy the mind at times when all else might fail to attract. That they are motherless, the baby's black ribbons and their extreme dilapidation indicate, making them all the more worthy of consideration, a mother, however destitute, would scarcely leave the eldest one in such a plight. As to the father, I have no doubt he drinks, and will be sentenced in the police-court for neglecting them. The eldest girl, not more than ten, poor child! is very worn-looking and thin, her frock, evidently the compassionate gift of some grown-up person, she has neither the art nor the means to adapt to her own diminutive proportions—she is fearfully untidy therefore, and her way of wrenching her brother's hair looks vixenish and against her. But then a germ or rudiment of good housewifery seems to pierce through her disordered envelope, for the younger ones are taken care of, and nestle to her as to a mother—the sunburnt baby, which looks wonderfully solemn and intellectual as all babies do, as I have no doubt your own little cherub looks at this moment asleep in its charming basinet, is fat and well-to-do, it has even been put into mourning for mother. The other little one though it sucks a carrot in lieu of a sugar-plum, and is shoeless, seems healthy and happy, watching the workmen. The care of the two little ones is an anxious charge for the elder girl, and she has become a premature scold all through having to manage that boy—that boy, although a merry, good-natured-looking young Bohemian, is evidently the plague of her life, as boys always are. Even now he will not leave that workman's barrow alone, and gets his hair well-pulled, as is natural. The dog which accompanies them is evidently of the same outcast sort as themselves. The having to do battle for his existence in a hard world has soured his temper, and he frequently fights, as by his torn ear you may know; but the poor children may do as they like with him, rugged democrat as he is, he is gentle to them, only he hates minions of aristocracy in red jackets. The old bachelor navvy's small valuable bull-pup, also instinctively distrusts outlandish-looking dogs in jackets.

The couple on horseback in the middle distance, consists of a gentleman, still young, and his daughter. (The rich and the poor both marry early, only those of moderate incomes procrastinate.) This gentleman is evidently very rich, probably a Colonel in the army, with a seat in Parliament, and fifteen thousand a-year, and a pack of hounds. He is not an over-dressed man Of the tailors dummy sort—he does not put his fortune on his back, he is too rich for that; moreover, he looks to me an honest true-hearted gentleman (he was painted from one I know), and could he only be got to hear what the two sages in the corner have to say, I have no doubt he would be easily won over. But the road is blocked and the daughter says we must go back, papa, round the other way.

The man with the beer-tray, calling beer ho! so lustily, is a specimen of town pluck and energy contrasted with country thews and sinews. He is humpbacked, dwarfish, and in all matters of taste, vulgar as Birmingham can make him look in the 19th century. As a child he was probably starved, stunted with gin, and suffered to get run over. But energy has brought him through to be a prosperous beer-man and "very much respected," and in his way he also is a sort of hero; that black eye was got probably doing the police of his master's establishment, and in an encounter with some huge ruffian whom he has conquered in fight, and hurled out through the swing-doors of the palace of gin prone on the pavement. On the wall are posters and bills; one of the "Boy's Home, 41 Euston Road," which the lady who is giving tracts will no doubt subscribe to presently, and place the urchin playing with the barrow in; one of "the Working Men's College, Great Ormond Street," or if you object to these, then a police bill offering £50 reward in a matter of highway robbery. Back in the distance we see the Assembly room of the "Flamstead Institute of Arts," where Professor Snoox is about to repeat his interesting lecture on the habits of the domestic cat. Indignant pussies up on the roof are denying his theory in toto.

The less important characters in the background require little comment. Bobus, our old friend, "the sausage-maker Of Houndsditch," from PAST AND PRESENT, having secured a colossal fortune (he boasts of it now), by anticipating the French Hippophagie Society in the introduction of horse flesh as a cheap article of human food, is at present going in for the county of Middlesex, and, true to his old tactics, has hired all the idlers in the



neighbourhood to carry his boards. These being one too many for the bearers, an old woman has volunteered to carry the one in excess.

The episode of the policeman who has caught an orange-girl in the heinous offence of resting her basket on a post, and who himself administers justice in the shape of a push, that sends her fruit over the road, is one of common occurrence, or used to be—perhaps the police now "never do such things."

I am sorry to say that most of my friends, on examining this part of my picture, have laughed over it as a good joke. Only two men saw the circumstance in a different light, one of them was the young Irishman, who feeds his infant with pap. Pointing to it with his thumb, his mouth quivering at the reminiscence, he said, 'that, Sir, I know to be true.' The other was a clergyman, his testimony would perhaps have more weight. I dedicate this portion of the work to the Commissioners of Police.

Through this picture I have gained some experience of the navvy class, and I have usually found, that if you can break through the crust of *mauvaise honte* [bashfulness], which surrounds them in common with most Englishmen, and which, in the case of the navvies, I believe to the cause of much of their bad language, you will find them serious, intelligent men, and with much to interest in their conversation, which, moreover, contains about the same amount of morality and sentiment that is commonly found among men in the active and hazardous walks of life; for that their career is one of hazard and danger, none should doubt. Many stories might told of navvies' daring and endurance, were this the place for them. One incident peculiarly connected with this picture is the melancholy fact, that one of the very men who sat for it lost his life by a scaffold accident, before I had yet quite done with him. I remember the poor fellow telling me, among other things, how he never but once felt nervous with his work, and this was, having to trundle barrows of earth over a plank-line crossing a rapid river at a height of eighty feet above the water. But it was not the height he complained of, it was the gliding motion of the water underneath.

I have only to observe in conclusion, that the effect of hot July sunlight attempted in this picture, has been introduced, because it seems peculiarly fitted to display work in all its severity, and not from any predilection for this

kind of light over any other. Subjects, according to their nature, require different effects of light. Some years ago, when one of the critics was commenting on certain works then exhibiting, he used words to the effect that the system of light of those artists was precisely that of the sun itself—a system that would probably outlast, & &. He might have added, aye and not of the sun only, but of the moon, and of the stars, and, when necessary, of so lowly a domestic luminary as a tallow candle! for tragedies dire as the Oedipus, and tender joyful comedies melting to tears, have ere now been acted to no grander stage-light, I imagine.

For the imperfections in these paintings I submit myself to our great master, the public, and its authorised interpreters, pleading only that first attempts are often incomplete. For though certainly not solitary, attempts of the kind have not yet been so frequent as to have arrived at being out in academic plans. But in this country, at least, the thing is done, "la cosa muove," and never again will the younger generations revert to the old system of making one kind of light serve for all the beautiful varieties under heaven, no more than we shall light our streets with oil, or journey by stage-coach and sailing-packet. "Lo que empieza el hombre para si mismo, Dios le acaba para lo otros." "Ce que l'homme commence pour lui, Dieu l'acheve pour les autres," ["What man begins for himself, God completes for others"] being in a somewhat more Christian if less Catholic tongue, for the benefit of those who, like myself, don't read Spanish.

Finally, if in this Catalogue, I have been somewhat profuse in assigning dates, be it borne in mind that strictly, my only claim is, not to plagiarise. Poor must be the country that could boast of only one original thinker for each profession; but England, I rejoice to know, owns many a glorious painter.

Ford Madox Brown  
**Work**



Ford Madox Brown, **Work**

The **language of flowers** wove together Victorian social codes and scientific observation, and **Ford Madox Brown** embraced it with the rigour of a committed botanist-gardener. Decoding his floral symbolism demands caution, though — contradictory Victorian floral dictionaries meant meanings shifted, a confusion **Charles Dickens** satirised in *\*Nicholas Nickleby\**. In **Work**, a young labourer offers an apple, invoking the Fall and God's punishment of labour, whilst simultaneously affirming labour's dignity through that same symbol of original sin. Beside him, a red-haired girl holds a carrot, red hair being long associated with the Irish — and a substantial proportion of England's navvies were Irish, displaced by the **Great Famine of 1845 to 1848**. The potman's buttonhole of fuchsias and sweet peas signals taste and departure, reinforcing Brown's note that his wares are transitory against the infinite virtue of water. The tract distributor's **hepatica** announces confidence, cementing her haughty character. The **chickweed seller**, or Botany Ben, carries straw — a device **William Hogarth** used to signify madness — suggesting, as **Henry Mayhew** documented, that the poorest sometimes performed eccentricity to earn sympathy. And the orphaned child, modelled on Brown's son Arthur, carries **daisies**: flowers of childhood and innocence.

## Notes

Many Victorians and Victorian artists were obsessed with the 'language of flowers', including Thackeray, Edward Lear, John Ruskin and Christina Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Particularly the Pre-Raphaelites including Ford Madox Brown.

It linked contemporary polite social with scientific observation.

Brown was a keen gardener and always painted with botanical accuracy.

Decoding flowers must be used with care as there were many contradictory floral dictionaries in the Victorian period. Charles Dickens makes fun of this in *Nicholas Nickleby*. His mother asks Nicholas what she should do about the attentions of her next door neighbour who has been throwing cucumbers over their garden wall and Nicholas says, with a certain pre-Freudian naivety, he knew of no 'language of vegetables which converts a cucumber into a formal declaration of attachment'.

A young labourer carrying a pail full of water holds out an apple, this symbol of Temptation and original sin reminds the Victorian that work is part of God's punishment and it leads to redemption from original Sin. The apple emphasises the dignity of labour.

Next to him a girl with red hair holds a carrot, long associated with red hair. Red hair was a fetish of the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly Rossetti. Red hair was also associated with the Irish and a large proportion of the navvies in England were Irish. The Great Irish Famine of 1845-8 resulted in millions over Irish families emigrating. On the bank to the right Brown shows an unemployed 'young shoeless Irishman' and his wife. As they were so poor the Irish were often the first to contract cholera and fever. In fact many thought the Irish were responsible for generating and communicating diseases. Two of the peasants on the bank Brown tells us are reduced in strength by fever.

The young orphaned child modelled by Brown's son Arthur (who died in infancy prior to the completion of the painting) carries daisies, the flowers of childhood and innocence.

The elm trees in the background are symbols of dignity and frame the dignity of work.

The potman wears a small buttonhole of fuschias and sweet peas, emblems of taste and departure. This supports Browns comment that he has 'vulgar tastes' and his wares (beer) are transitory compared with the infinite nature of

water.

The labourer on the left shovelling chews the stem of a china or species rose, symbolising beauty and emphasising the beauty of his labours.

The tract distributor wears a spray of Hepatica flowers in her bonnet a symbol of confidence used to establish her haughty character.

The woman in front modelled on James Leathart's wife Maria (on Brown's wife Emma in the Manchester painting) holds a leaf-shaped parasol and feminine beauty as Brown notes is a 'flower that feeds upon the sun'. But it is a symbol of Vanitas, Brown warns 'health may fail, beauty fade, pleasures through repetition pall—I will not hint at the greater calamities to which flesh is heir.'

On the left is a chickweed seller or what was colloquially called a 'Botany Ben'. Brown tells us he lived in 'Flower Street' and sold wild flowers and herbs for culinary, medicinal and decorative purposes. In his hat is a spray of wild grain, straw and plantain and he carries chickweed, symbol of ingenious simplicity to match his 'effeminate gentleness'. The straw was often used, for example, by Hogarth in his painting of Bedlam Hospital, to signify madness and Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861, Vol. 4) tells us that beggars and those on the bottom rung of society often feigned madness to gain sympathy and greater sales.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)  
**The Hayfield**  
 1855-6  
 Tate Britain, London

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *The Hayfield*, 1855-6, Tate Britain, London

**Ford Madox Brown** began walking fourteen miles twice a week from July to September **1855** to paint *\*The Hayfield\** on the spot at the **Tenterden estate in Hendon**, arriving at five each evening to catch the precise quality of twilight light. This dedication was inseparable from the **Pre-Raphaelite** commitment to truth to nature, and Brown's own diary records his pride in achieving what he called the greeny greyness of unmade hay against the warmth of uncut grass. The composition looks east across rolling fields as the full moon rises and the setting sun catches a distant house on its western face. To the left, a farmer on horseback speaks with haymakers nearing the end of their day; children wait in the haycart for the ride home. Brown himself rests against a small haystack in the left foreground. The harvest appears complete — the **Mell**, that last stand of corn whose cutting ended the season and began the feast, is down. Brown's dealer **White** refused the picture, complaining the hay was too pink. Brown retouched it and sold it to **William Morris** for forty guineas while Morris was still an Oxford undergraduate. Morris clearly recognised what White missed: an image of rural labour as serious in purpose as Brown's urban **Work**.

## Notes

This dreamlike view of the countryside is by Ford Madox Brown and is called The Hayfield. In it he shows us a hayfield in the evening with the full moon risen and the sun just setting in the west.

He painted much of the scene on the spot and had to 14 miles a day twice a week every evening from July to September 1855.

Farm workers sometimes worked by the full moon to gather the corn before the weather changed.

To the left of the picture, a farmer on horseback talks to the haymakers, who have almost completed the day's work. Another farm worker tends the horses, while a group of children await a lift home in the haycart.

The last patch of corn or wheat standing in the fields was known as the "Mell" or "Neck". Cutting it signified the end of the harvest and the beginning of the feast sometimes called the Mell-supper.

It was bad luck to be the person to cut the last stand of corn and so farmers and workers would race against other farms to be first to complete the harvest, shouting to announce they had finished.

In some counties the last stand of corn would be cut by the workers throwing their sickles at it until it was all down, in others the reapers would take it in turns to be blindfolded and sweep a scythe to and fro until all of the Mell was cut down.

It looks here as though the harvest is in and therefore it is time to celebrate.

However, even though he includes himself in the painting as another worker I don't think the celebration will include him as it is getting late and he has seven miles to walk home. Perhaps he will get a cab home, as he admits in his diary he occasional did.

## Notes

The 'moon piece' as Brown called it in his diary.

This is the rural counterpart of the urban labour shown in Work.

The total time he spent painting was 100-120 hours.

In September he found the sky had cracked probably because he did not prepare the zinc white underpainting sufficiently well and he had to repaint it.

In keeping with the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic of 'truth to nature', much of this landscape was painted entirely on the spot.



It is a twilight view, looking east across rolling green fields on the Tenterden estate at Hendon in Middlesex.

In the left foreground the artist himself rests against a small haystack, his equipment scattered about him.

A full moon has just risen, and the setting sun strikes a distant house on its west side.

Brown's aim in this picture was to achieve the effect of evening light, 'the wonderful effects...in the hayfields, the warmth of the uncut grass, the greeny greyness of the unmade hay in furrows or tufts' (Surtees, p.145).

He began work at 5pm each evening, returning to the same spot about twice a week from the end of July until early September 1855.

In October, after moving from Finchley to Kentish Town, he returned on several more occasions, and was sometimes forced to walk the fourteen miles there and back.

During the winter months Brown worked in the foreground details. He sketched a hay cart at Cumberland market. He then painted in the artist and his props, working from a set in his conservatory, but he apparently used no models for the farmer, workmen and children.

Many of these later features lack the freshness of the landscape setting.

The picture attracted criticism because of its unusual palette. In his 1865 catalogue Brown explained that 'the stacking of the second crop of hay had been much delayed by rain, which heightened the green of the remaining grass, together with the brown of the hay. The consequence was an effect of unusual beauty of colour, making the hay by contrast with the green grass, positively red or pink, under the glow of twilight' (quoted in Parris, p.134).

Brown's dealer, White, refused to buy the picture, claiming that the hay was too pink. Brown retouched (darkened the hayfield) the picture and later sold it to his friend and fellow artist, William Morris (1834-96), for 40 guineas while Morris was still an Oxford undergraduate.

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



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

Having established how industrialisation reshaped British society, we turn now to how leisure itself became a subject worthy of serious art. **William Powell Frith's** *\*Ramsgate Sands\**, painted in **1854**, arrived at precisely the right cultural moment. Britain's population had more than quadrupled across the nineteenth century, and the shift from rural to urban life was dramatic: by **1881**, three quarters of the population lived in towns. The railways, reaching Ramsgate by **1846**, placed the seaside within reach of the middle classes for the first time, transforming sea bathing from an aristocratic privilege into a shared social ritual. Frith's contemporaries were scathing. Fellow artists dismissed the work as vulgar Cockney business, yet the public response was overwhelming: the **Royal Academy** had to install a guard rail to hold back the crowds. **Queen Victoria** purchased it for a thousand pounds. What makes the painting remarkable is its ambition. Frith presents a teeming cross-section of Victorian society — mixed sexes, ages, and classes — while maintaining the period's rigid social hierarchies. The scene is animated but decorous: no bathers appear, and a self-portrait of Frith himself peeks from the far right. Crucially, this celebration of **modern life** predates the **Impressionists** by

twenty years.

## Notes

### Leisure

The nineteenth century was a time of massive population growth (Britain grew from 9 million in 1801 to about 41 million in 1901 despite about 15 million emigrating) and a move from the countryside to the towns (20% lived in towns in 1801, 50% by 1851 and 75% by 1881).

In the 1840s the railways started to provide low cost access to the countryside. This associated with higher wages and more time off created leisure time.

The railways enabled people to travel and take holidays and weekend breaks by the seaside. Previously it had only been the wealthy who could benefit from what were considered to be the healthy pursuit of sea bathing but now an increasing number of middle class could participate.

This is William Powell Frith's *Ramsgate Sands*, a painting that caused a sensation.

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.

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 and 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.

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.

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 bathing machine was developed in Margate about 1750 when most people bathed naked. Legal segregation of bathing areas did not end until 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.

Queen Victoria bought it for £1,000 and had stayed in the tall house, Albion House.

He used real people and friends rather than models. Can you see the self-portrait? (pop-up)

Key point: an important painting that reflected the way in which Victorian life was starting to change.

## Notes

It was bought from the artist by Messrs Lloyd who sold it to Queen Victoria the same year, 1854, for £1,000. 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 in Ramsgate before she became Queen. This is the highest house in the middle of Frith's painting. Victoria had also entered the sea from a bathing machine in Osborne, Isle of Wight for the first time in 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.

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.



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893)  
*An English Autumn Afternoon*, 1852-1853  
Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham



Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *An English Autumn Afternoon*, 1852-1853,  
Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham

By the mid-nineteenth century, the railways had transformed Britain, and a new culture of leisure was within reach of the middle classes for the first time. Against that backdrop, **Ford Madox Brown** painted what he called a literal transcript of the scenery around London at three in the afternoon in late October **1853**, viewed from the first floor of his Hampstead flat looking across the Heath towards Highgate. The original title, *\*An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead – Scenery in 1853\**, anchored the work in a precise time and place. Dropping that designation later turned it into something broader: a meditation on landscape and leisure. The couple in the foreground are ordinary, middle-class, and unheroic — Brown himself walked this route regularly to visit his partner Emma in Hendon. **John Ruskin** saw the painting at the **British Institute in 1855** and asked why Brown had chosen such an ugly subject. Brown replied that it lay outside his back window. The exchange exposes a real disagreement: Ruskin sought scenic beauty or moral instruction, while Brown celebrated the unpretentious and immediate. The **Pre-Raphaelite** commitment to truth to nature, combined with the democratisation of public open land, makes this painting a precise document

of a society finding its footing after decades of hardship.

### Notes

By the 1850s social conditions were beginning to change, harvests improved, the economy improved, conditions slowly improved and we enter a more modern period particularly for the middle class. The concept of leisure was created and the railways enabled far more people to get into the countryside as a pleasurable, leisure activity.

At the beginning of the century the countryside was visited by a few wealthy people looking for the picturesque. By mid-century workers in London could afford to travel to Margate or Southend for a day out.

But there were still many social issues and the Crimean War was about to start in October 1853 but I think we can leave this happy couple contemplating the peaceful scene with a feeling that British society had come through a disastrous period but was about to enjoy a period of relative prosperity.

Art had also come a long way. At the beginning of the century it was dominated by the Royal Academy and the ideal landscape was based on copying the style of the Old Masters such as Claude and Poussin. By mid-century the Pre-Raphaelites had dramatically changed things with their 'truth to nature', bright colours and acceptance of the beauty of the everyday, modern world.

Ford Madox Brown was an artist ahead of his time and ahead of John Ruskin. Ruskin's advice to artists was to paint a scene, 'rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, scorning nothing' but after seeing this painting exhibited at the British Institute in 1855 Ruskin commented:

What made you take such a very ugly subject? It was a pity, for there was some nice painting in it.

Brown replied contemptuously: 'Because it lay out of a back window.'

Perhaps he meant that if we follow Ruskin's advice and go to nature scorning nothing then we see all nature is beautiful.

Ruskin wanted paintings to teach us a moral lesson but Brown celebrates the ordinary and unpretentious.

There is also a little known sub-text. The aristocratic owner of Hampstead Heath



wanted to build villas where the sandy path can be seen and there was a public outcry and a debate about whether land was for the privileged few or open to all. As we know Hampstead Heath is still an open space for the public.

We have come a long way from the Napoleonic Wars, turnip growing to feed the nation, land enclosures, the Hungry Forties, to the workhouse. We have seen riots, starvation and emigration but through it all the artist has found ways to represent the land, tell a story and show the beauty of the English countryside.

Thank you.

## Notes

The painting is also concerned with the democratisation of leisure.

The couple are an ordinary middle-class couple taking pleasure in the open land and Brown would often walk across the Heath to visit Emma in Hendon.

Many of the 'modern' subjects Brown chose to paint were inspired by places and events from his own life but Ruskin looked for scenic beauty or historical associations.

Brown described this as a literal transcript of the scenery around London at 3:00pm in late October. It was his largest and most ambitious painting painted from the first floor window of his flat in Hampstead looking across the Heath to Highgate. He painted it over two autumns and finished it the following year. He painted a 'literal transcript' rather than the 'scenic effectiveness' of a Claudian landscape. He has a high horizon, strong colours in the distance, he has two competing areas of attention and a horizontal band of foliage with no repoussoir or framing device. The oval shape mimics the human visual field but the two figures looking over the scene is a traditional device to lead the viewers eye into the picture.

It was originally called An English Autumn Afternoon, Hampstead – Scenery in 1853, a very specific time and place and by dropping the that designator he turned it into a generalized scene about landscape and leisure.



David Cox (1783-1859)  
**Rhyl Sands**  
c.1854  
Tate Britain, London

David Cox (1783-1859), Rhyl Sands, c.1854, Tate Britain, London

We close this lecture with a landscape that reframes everything we have discussed. **David Cox** painted **Rhyl Sands** in **1854**, twenty years before French Impressionism entered public consciousness, and a full decade before **Monet**, **Renoir**, **Sisley**, and **Bazille** even met as students under **Charles Gleyre** in Paris. Cox was a central figure in the **Birmingham School** of landscape painters, and primarily a watercolourist who took up oils seriously only around 1840, initially studying the medium under William Müller. That late transition produced something extraordinary. His loose, sketch-like handling and light palette in the Rhyl Sands oils are unlike anything else in British landscape painting of the period. Cox himself felt the anxiety of it — his friend and biographer William Hall recorded that Cox suspected something was *\*wrong\** in his technique, that the oil painters held secrets they refused to share. There were no secrets. Cox had simply arrived somewhere new by his own instinct. Painted when he was seventy-one, the Rhyl Sands oils distil decades of observational discipline into an approach that looks spontaneous precisely because it is so confident. Terry Riggs, writing for the Tate, judges Cox's method in these works **unique in British landscape painting of the 1850s**.

## Notes

I end with a different type of English landscape. This is by David Cox and was painted in 1854, twenty years before the Impressionists came to prominence. It was ten years before four young painters—Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, and Frédéric Bazille—met while studying under the academic artist Charles Gleyre.

David Cox was an English landscape painter, one of the most important members of the Birmingham School of landscape artists and an early precursor of impressionism. He is considered one of the greatest English landscape painters who painted over 300 works in oil towards the end of his career. His oils are now considered "one of the greatest, but least recognised, achievements of any British painter."

He had earlier painted Rhyl sands in watercolour in 1842 but his later oil paintings of Rhyl sands painted in 1854 when he was 71 are considered his greatest works.

## Notes

Terry Riggs, Tate website (1998): Three oils by Cox of Rhyl sands have survived, although it is known from sales records that he made others. Closest in style to the Tate's painting is the picture in Manchester City Art Gallery, which shares the same light palette and sketch-like handling. In the Manchester version the buildings at the right of Rhyl Sands are seen from a wider angle and given greater prominence, while the sky is more uniformly painted and less broken up by clouds. A much larger and more conventionally finished canvas, dated 1854-5, is in Birmingham City Art Gallery. Unlike the Manchester and Tate pictures, this shows Rhyl sands at or near high tide. The sea is a principal feature of the composition and the figures are concentrated on what remains of the beach at the right-hand side. The date of the Tate Gallery and Manchester paintings is not known, but the pictures may well have been the starting point for the more elaborate Birmingham canvas of 1854-5 and can therefore reasonably be associated with Cox's visits to Rhyl in 1854. Neither appears to have been sold in Cox's lifetime. Several watercolours by Cox of Rhyl sands are known, including one, dated 1854, which corresponds approximately in composition to the Manchester and Tate paintings. It is difficult to say whether this or possibly other watercolours were used in any way as preparations for the two oils or

whether the latter were painted directly on the spot, which is the impression they give.

Primarily a watercolorist, Cox only took up oil painting seriously around 1840, when he took lessons from William Moller. Rhyl Sands shows him working with total mastery in the medium. According to his friend and second biographer William Hall, Cox 'had misgivings that his method of working was not in accordance with the accepted practice - he cherished the notion that there were secrets which "the oil men" would not tell him ... He suspected that something was wrong, or at least odd and unusual in the manipulation, or in the laying on of his colours' (J.T. Bunce, ed., *A Biography of David Cox*, 1881, pp.153-4). Cox's technique in the Tate and Manchester pictures, and indeed his whole approach, is certainly unique in British landscape painting of the 1850s.

## 23-02 THE POLITICS OF EARLY 19THC LANDSCAPE



David Cox (1783-1859), Rhyl Sands, detail, c. 1854

social upheavals of the eighteen fifties. From Constable's suppressed rural tensions to Turner's ambiguous industrialism, from Morland's honest poverty to Brown's navvies elevated to history painting, we have seen how landscape was never neutral ground. Every composition made an argument about who belonged to the land — and who did not.



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