

A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk



- Hi, I'm back again with my free course on the History of Western Art and this is one of over 250 talks that I have arranged chronologically starting with cave art through to art produced in the last few years

GENERAL REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as Perplexity, ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story
- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information



23-03 VICTORIAN ART

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

- This is Section 23 on Victorian Art and this talk is an overview of the art produced during the nineteenth century, sometimes called the long Victorian period. This talk is based on the paintings in Tate Britain as they have an excellent collection of British nineteenth-century art and this talk and my notes form the basis of a personal tour. Check before visiting if you want to see a particular painting as they are sometimes not on display, for example when this was recorded a number of Turner and Constable paintings are being removed for an exhibition.

NOTES

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Ploughing Up Turnips near Slough*, 1808

John Constable (1776-1837), *Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River)*, 1816–7

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *The Field of Waterloo*, exhibited 1818

Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), *Punch or May Day*, 1829

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

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)*, 1849–50

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Ophelia*, 1851–2

William Dyce (1806-1864), *Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of October 5th 1858*, ?1858–60

Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925), *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857

Augustus Egg (1816-1863), *Past and Present*, 1858

William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *The Derby Day*, 1856–8

James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne: Blue and Gold - Old Battersea Bridge*, c 1872-75

John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885-6

Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victorian_painting



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, exhibited at Turner's Gallery in 1809

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*, exhibited at Turner's Gallery in 1809

- I start with a little known painting by Joseph Mallord William Turner called *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*. I selected it as it is an enigma which I believe tells us a lot about one of most important artists of the Victorian period.
- For **170 years** historians regarded it as a **pastoral landscape** with an early morning view of Windsor Castle. So, at first glance, an **uncontroversial** piece of work and it was praised at the time for its '**poetically heightened atmospheric effects**' of the early sun reflecting off the morning mist.
- In 1983 an art historian (John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*) pointed out that this was painted during the **Napoleonic Wars** at a time when European ports had been blockaded by the French navy and the country was short of food. 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. It was the beginning of the agricultural revolution which went hand-in-hand with the Industrial Revolution and English agriculture was **amongst the most advanced** in the world.
- However, more recently, **in 2004**, another art historian looked at the painting **more closely** and found a number of puzzles. The central part of the picture shows **three men standing by a broken plough**. If this represents agricultural productivity why does Turner show a broken plough?
- Secondly, **why turnips?** Turnips had become a key crop supporting **four-crop**

rotation which dramatically increases the productivity of the land by using it all the time rather than letting it lie fallow for a year. Although turnips were the latest scientific wonder crop that had other associations. The king, George III was known as '**Farmer George**' and was associated with turnips. He was known for his miserliness and **no one would eat turnips unless they were starving**, they were regarded as winter food for **sheep and cattle**. Turnips could not be grown well in the **boggy soil** shown here. We know the soil is boggy as the plough needs **four horses** to pull it and it has broken down. In the centre of the **lit area is a patch of weeds and a bottle**. At this time drunkenness was a major problem and it reduced productivity.

- The other part of the title of interest is '**Slough**'. Today, Slough is a **well-known commuter town** but in 1809 it was not even a town, it was a **tiny hamlet** of a few cottages. No one referred to Slough and **this view** of Windsor Castle was a **very well-known** and was from **Salt Hill** on the road from London to Bristol. It was so well-known that a few years later the **Prince Regent hosted a breakfast** in the inn on Salt Hill for the **King of Prussia** and his three sons. **So why Slough?** Perhaps, because in the most popular book at the time **John Bunyan's, *The Pilgrim's Progress*** [of 1678] the **Slough of Despond** is a boggy place made from the filth of sin.
- If we then consider the broken plough, the weeds, the bottle, and the Slough of Despond we get a different reading. Rather than patriotic it suggests **the terrible conditions and the plight of the rural worker**. It is about **rural discontent**.
- My view is that Turner's genius has combined **all three readings**—it is an **idyllic scene** of early morning sun, it is a **celebration of agricultural productivity** and it is showing the **problems of the rural poor**. Bear in mind these deep meanings when you next see a Turner.

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.
- Interpretations. Turner's painting supports many levels of analysis. It will limit this to three levels as I slowly unravel this intriguing painting.

- Pastoral. The painting was first exhibited April 1809 in Turner's gallery. For many years it was simply seen as an example of the pastoral or more specifically the Georgic. However, most descriptions of the painting were formal and stylistic, for example, focusing on Turner's success in representing sunlight seen through haze and the 'poetically heightened atmospheric effects'. It is known as Georgic based on Virgil's (70 BCE-19 BCE, an ancient Roman poet of the Augustan period) *Georgics*, a poem about agriculture and animal husbandry which was very popular in the eighteenth century. The poem describes man's struggle against a hostile natural world and how hard work and animal husbandry can overcome setbacks (published 29BCE). It was related to the Greek Hesiod's *Works and Days* regarding man's relationship to the land and the importance of hard work.
- Patriotic. The art historian John Barrell in *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (1980) was the first to point out its celebration of progressive English agriculture. It was during the Napoleonic Wars and the French had blockaded our ports so we depended on farmers to produce our food. 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. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of increased agricultural productivity resulting from new scientific agricultural practices. The academic John Barrell was the first to draw attention to the labourers and subsequently it was seen as supporting progressive English agriculture that was helping us win the war against France. This needs some explanation. The painting was first exhibited in 1809 at the height of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815, started when Napoleon seized power in 1799 apart from the one-year Peace of Amiens in 1802). In 1805 Nelson beat the French fleet at Trafalgar and in response the French blockaded European ports to stop food being imported into England. It therefore became critical for England to grow all its own food and agricultural productivity became critical for the war effort. The painting would therefore have been seen as patriotically supporting the war. The Tate 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'. There is a lot of history that was very significance at the time tied up in this sentence.
- Political. The third level of meaning was suggested by the art historian Michele Miller in 2004. She found anomalies in the work that suggested a different interpretation. Let us examine these anomalies one by one.

- Enclosure. First it is necessary to understand the importance of the turnip. The most significant agricultural advance made in the eighteenth century was crop rotation. This was first practiced 8,000 years ago in the Middle East but ancient practice involved letting a field lie fallow for part of the year. The big advance was four-field rotation which was first used in England in the 18th century and was promoted by Turnip Townsend, Viscount Charles Townshend. It consists of growing wheat, then turnips or swedes (winter fodder), then barley and then clover or ryegrass (gazed) 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 crops in the autumn and the turnip 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 over winter. 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. The smallholders and commoners became dependent on poor relief and had to buy food. The main food of the poor was bread and in 1815 the Government passed Corn Laws that fixed a high price for wheat which increased the price of a bread. At the same time land was being enclosed in the name of improved agricultural productivity. Four crop rotation enabled fields to be productive all they time, they no longer needed to lie fallow. However, the poor needed the common land to eke out their existence. It enabled them to grow crops and even keep a cow for milk and cheese. 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. That was still in the future when this was painted but unrest was growing because of bad harvests and the enclosure of common land. 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-fed cattle for the monied classes.

- Broken Plough. In the distance we see Windsor Castle, a palace of George III, 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 a man 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. But the group of men directly below Windsor Castle are looking at a broken plough. The King promoted the new intensive agriculture which was particularly important as food supplies had been cut off by the French blockage. This was painted at the height of the Napoleonic Wars. By 1808 all foreign food had been cut off and for the previous nine years the harvest had been poor to terrible. For this reason, it has been interpreted as a patriotic painting showing a symbol of the King and the agriculture workers working hard to save the nation. But if this were true, why is the work so disorderly, why is the plough broken and the workers dispirited. The open fields of common land did not allow turnip growing as your neighbour's livestock would eat all your turnips. Turnips therefore called to mind enclosure. Lord Winchelsea 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.
- Slough. Turner has made the castle more prominent than it would be from the site and for a while it was known as 'Windsor' but Turner explicitly named it as 'near Slough' even though the site is nearer Eton than Slough. Slough was a very small hamlet until the railway came in 1836 when it was known as the station nearest to Windsor. The site was known at the time as offering a fine vantage point to view Windsor. The word 'slough' means a muddy or boggy place. 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.
- Boggy Soil. 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).

- Weeds. 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.
- Bottle. 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.
- Women Workers. 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 (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.
- Turnips = Extreme Poverty. 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. I believe it is these levels of meaning and this ambiguity that makes it a masterpiece.



John Constable (1775-1837), *Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River)*, 1816–7, 101.6 x 127 cm

John Constable (1775-1837), *Flatford Mill (Scene on a Navigable River)*, 1816–7, 101.6 x 127 cm

- Along with Turner, John Constable **raised the profile** of landscape painting at a time when the public and the art establishments preferred portraiture and historical subjects.
- Constable was one of the pioneers of ***en plein air*** oil painting in England. He became **convinced around 1802** that he should **paint in oil outdoors**, believing that Claude Lorraine had done so, even though Claude actually used only water-based media or drawing tools in his outdoor work.
- Constable was **not Turner, he was not illustrating the social conditions** of the countryside but **evoking childhood memories**. He had enjoyed an **idyllic boyhood** that he wanted to **capture that feeling**. He wrote that for him **'painting is but another word for feeling'**. These childhood scenes, in his own words, **'made me a painter, and I am grateful'; 'the sound of water escaping from mill dams etc., willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork, I love such things.'**
- He also wrote, **"When I sit down to make a sketch from nature, the first thing I try to do is to forget that I have ever seen a picture"**, by which he meant an Old Master with their prescribed composition and brown foliage and grass.
- Although he eventually became a Royal Academician he was **not commercially successful** and sold **only twenty paintings in England in his lifetime**. Critics found his **colours too bright** and objected to **'spotting the foreground all over with whitewash'** and his 'snow'. However, **he won a gold medal in Paris for *The Hay Wain* in 1824**, had a profound influence on the **French Romantic painters** and sold **twenty paintings there in just a few years**.

NOTES

- **Social Background.** This is Flatford Mill by John Constable. What can we see? An idyllic scene of a summer's day in rural Suffolk. In the foreground two boys are untying two barges from the tow horse to pole them under Flatford bridge to the left, just out of the picture. We see a wonderful Constable sky with scudding cumulus clouds against a pale blue sky. Unlike earlier artists Constable showed real places, the bright colours of nature and natural skies and sunlight.
- **Hunger.** However, the scene is misleading as 1816, the year it was painted, was known as the 'Year Without a Summer'. The previous year, the Indonesian volcano Mount Tambora exploded in the largest eruption in recorded history. Forty-one cubic kilometres of ash were sent into the upper atmosphere, blocking the sun and cooling the planet. In England, this resulted in a cold summer, heavy rains, bright yellow skies and the failure of the harvest. Thousands of ex-soldiers returning from Waterloo added to the families travelling across the UK begging for food and famine was common in the north and southwest Ireland.
- **Corn Laws.** To make matters worse, following the end of the Napoleonic War, Corn Laws were introduced and these fixed the price of corn and therefore the price of bread at an artificially high level. This favoured farmers and millers like the Constables as it meant their prices could not be undercut by cheap foreign imports. The result was famine, dissent and riots which led to the Peterloo massacre, a suspension of habeas corpus, restrictions on press, new Poor Laws which introduced the workhouse, and in the 1830s the Swing Riots and the Tolpuddle Martyrs.
- **Marriage.** In 1816, Constable has other things on his mind. In 1809, he had fallen in love with his childhood friend Maria Bicknell but their engagement was opposed by her grandfather as Constable's allowance was insufficient to maintain her and he considered the Constable's socially inferior. In 1816, Constable's father and mother died and he inherited a sixth of the estate. The marriage was approved and they married in October [at St Martin-in-the-Fields]. Their honeymoon was a tour of the south coast including Weymouth and Brighton and it was during his honeymoon that he developed a new technique of using brighter colours and freer brushwork. The summers of 1816 and 1817 were the last time he lived in East Bergholt for an extended period and the last time he painted the Suffolk countryside direct from nature.

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/constable-flatford-mill-scene-on-a-navigable-river-n01273>



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), The Field of Waterloo, exhibited 1818, 147.3 × 238.8 cm

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), The Field of Waterloo, exhibited 1818, 147.3 × 238.8 cm, Tate Britain

- Back to Turner. For the first time **we see a British artist painting an anti-war painting** (Goya did the same a few years before).
- Turner **emphasises war's tragic consequences** for the victims **on both sides**. Before this painting artists would paint heroic scenes inspiring nationalistic fervour. Here Turner paints the consequences. In the catalogue he included this quote from the then controversial **anti-war poem by Byron called 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'**,
 - **'Rider and horse—friend, foe,— in one red burial blent!'**
- While Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Walter Scott all produced celebratory poems in the wake of Waterloo, Byron conceived his verses as way of reminding the public of the terrible toll of victory, 50,000 died.
- Byron was making a point in his poem, he thought Napoleon should have won but **Turner is not so simplistic**. Turner raises the question and asks us to come up with the answer. Sometimes asking a question is more powerful than pushing an answer. To find out more about Turner and Constable listen to my talks on the individual artists.
- The women searching through the dead bodies could be seen as wives looking for their husbands. However, looting was a major problem even just a few hours after the battle. Bodies were stripped and everything was stolen to sell as souvenirs, Even the teeth of the dead. For years afterwards false teeth were known as "Waterloo teeth" and were worn with pride.

NOTES

- **Description.** This is The Field of Waterloo by Joseph Mallord William Turner. He exhibited the painting three years after the battle took place when **he was 43 and well established**. We can see **a group of women** searching through the dead bodies left after the battle. The scene is lit by their torch and by a flare in the background. On the right is the burning remains of the **Château of Hougoumont**. This building was regarded by both the Duke of Wellington and Napoleon Bonaparte as the key to the battle and so Wellington threw resources at it to hold it and Napoleon sent his best troops to capture it.
- **Looting.** The **women** are holding babies and are **looking through the pile of bodies of English and French soldiers** for their loved ones. In reality, **looting was a major problem** and within hours many corpses had been stripped of valuables, weapons and clothing, and **even their teeth**. The blood-soaked artefacts were later sold as memorabilia to the tourists who flocked to the scene. The teeth were sold for **years afterwards** as **false teeth known as 'Waterloo teeth'** and worn with pride. The bright flares were sent up after the battle to discourage looting.
- **The Battle.** England had been at war with France, on and off, for over twenty years when the Battle of Waterloo took place. It ended the war, but **the cost was enormous**, it is estimated that on this single day about **65,000 men were killed, wounded or missing and 15,000 horses**. Turner is showing us not the heroism and glory of war but the horror and pain.
- **Anti-war?** Turner is our greatest British artist and he was recognised as such in his lifetime both in Britain and abroad. He was a **shrewd businessman** and became **very wealthy**. Later in life he started to paint what he wanted to paint and although he was **not a political revolutionary** many of his paintings **comment on the flaws of society**. When Turner exhibited this painting, he quoted from Lord Byron's anti-war poem 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'. One line reads, 'Rider and horse—friend, foe, in one red burial blent!' In other words, the dead belong to no nation.
- **Criticism.** Many saw the victory at Waterloo as **vindicating traditional British social values and the class system** over meritocracy and the revolutionary French ideals "Liberté, égalité, fraternité". This was one of the first British paintings to display the **horrors of war** rather than heroic deeds. As a result, when it was exhibited the painting was **controversial** and the press divided. Some papers thought it showed a **'drunken hubbub'** and made fun of what they described as **'kitchen wenches looking with torches for a lost lodger'**, others thought it was an 'abortive attempt'. On the other

hand, many thought there was grandeur and that it was an honest portrayal of anxious wives searching for slaughtered victims.

- **War wounded.** After the war, many **ex-soldiers returned home wounded** and jobless having lost limbs and eyes. There was **no social care system** and only the antiquated **Elizabethan Poor Laws** so many resorted to **begging**.
- The Battle of Waterloo was fought on **Sunday, 18 June 1815**, near Waterloo in Belgium. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) had been deposed the year before and **exiled to Elba but he returned**, took Paris and **ruled for a Hundred Days**. He decided to go on the offensive and take Brussels in what was then the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, resulting in the Battle of Waterloo and his **exile to the remote island of St. Helena** where he **died six years later** of either stomach cancer or arsenic poisoning.
- Francisco Goya (1746–1828) created The Disasters of War series between 1810 and 1820 and his The Third of May 1808 (1814) was the first truly ground-breaking and revolutionary anti-war paintings.
- Joseph Mallord William Turner was born in 1775, a year before John Constable. He was the son of William Turner, a barber and wig maker and was born in Maiden Lane, Covent garden. He was a child prodigy and sold drawings placed in his father's shop window. Around 1786, aged 11, he was sent to Margate where he produced a series of drawings of the town and surrounding area. His first watercolour painting A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth was accepted for the Royal Academy summer exhibition of 1790 when Turner was 15. He entered the Royal Academy School aged 14 and was admitted to the life class in 1792, aged 17. He was elected Associate of the Royal Academy in 1799 and Academician in 1802 and was recognised as a prodigy who promised to be the outstanding painter of his generation. He travelled widely around the country and specialised in topographical landscapes and architecture. He also travelled around Europe and studied at the Louvre and in Italy. His mother died, probably in Bedlam in 1805. He grew more eccentric as he grew older and he few close friends except for his father. At the Royal Academy he could be bumptious, pushy or rude, at times trading insults with colleagues. His father looked after him and died in 1829. Turner never married but had a relationship with an older widow, Sarah Danby and it is believed he fathered two daughters. He died of cholera in the house of his lover Sophia Caroline Booth in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.
- **Turner travelled to the continent two years after the Battle of Waterloo** and spent a day on the site of the battle sketching in 1817.



Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), *Punch or May Day*, 1829, 150.5 x 185.1 cm, Tate Britain

Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), *Punch or May Day*, 1829, 150.5 x 185.1 cm, Tate Britain

- This changes the mood. It is *Punch or May Day* by **Benjamin Haydon**. It is set in Marylebone ('maa-luh-bn') in 1829, the end of the Regency period and shows a mixture of the wealthy and the poor.
- (It is set in New Road, Marylebone and it is a little past noon as we can see from the clock of the church.)
- There is a Punch and Judy show at the left and we see **Punch beating his wife**, a common feature of every Punch and Judy show. It has drawn the crowds and blocked the road resulting in a marriage coach nearly colliding with a hearse.
- Sitting on the kerb is a **poor fruit seller** who has arranged her meagre fair on a small table.
- A more **wealthy farmer** is so engrossed by the Punch and Judy he does not notice his pocket being picked by a small hand. Notice how the **well dressed woman** is shielding him with her shawl and distracting the sailor with her smile.
- A **child chimney sweep** is posing like an actor on stage with his broomstick slung across his shoulder.
- On the right three figures are **Morris May Day dancers**. One is dressed as a **tree**, the other has a **blackface** and the third is a **woman in a red dress** holding a spoon or ladle. **The Green Man**, or, Jack in the Green, is a popular participant in traditional May Day festivals in which a person covers themselves

in a tree-like costume, sometime pyramidal or conical in shape. **The origin of the blackface boy** is unknown but there have been various ideas put forward.

- One idea is based on the name, why morris dancing? It is mentioned in the late 15th century and at the Tudor court. Some think **Morris is derives from moorish dance** and the Moors of Morocco and and it was brought back by soldiers celebrating their **victory over the Moors in Spain**. (Some think the soldiers were imitating Moorish Sufi dancing which is still very similar today.)
- Another possibility is that **farm workers blacked their face** in the 14th century so they could beg food in the winter without being recognised. This may seem far fetched but in the 18th century, England passed the Waltham "Black Act," which made appearing "in disguise, either by mask or by blackened face" a capital offence.
- The face paint may have symbolised the coal dust or soot that covered the faces of miners and chimney sweeps after a day's work.
- Another popular explanation is that it is a nineteenth century invention based on copying minstrel shows where white performers used blackface to caricature Black people. Minstrel shows were an American export that were first brought to Europe in 1836 so post dating this painting which is evidence for an earlier origin.
- The various Morris societies in the UK have now agreed to stop the use of full black face paint and green, blue or yellow are now used.
- Haydon knew all the great artists and writers of the age but lived hand-to-mouth for years. An attempt he made to interest the public in his noble paintings resulted in debts of £3,000. Rather than go into debtors prison again and because his sight and mind were deteriorating he decided to commit suicide. He bought a gun and wrote a will but even this failed. He shot himself in the head but the ball failed to penetrate his brain so with characteristic determination he slit his throat to kill himself. He left his diary open at the last entry read "'**Stretch me no longer on this rough world**' – Lear".

NOTES

- It captures a moment in the day-to-day life of Regency London. It is now in Tate Britain and Haydon would probably have been appalled to see it displayed in a national gallery as he dedicated his life to raise British art 'to

honour and glory' by promoting large-scale history paintings of noble subjects. He was driven to paint subjects like Punch or May Day to pay the bills. He had hoped the King would buy the painting as he asked for it to be sent to Windsor Castle but it was returned, a setback he blamed on the actions of the Keeper of the King's Pictures, William Segulier

- Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846) was born in Plymouth the son of a prosperous printer. He showed an aptitude for study and went to Plymouth Grammar School. When he was 18 he left for London and entered the Royal Academy School and when he was 21 exhibited for the first time. His financial difficulties began in 1810 when his father stopped his allowance as although he had had some commercial success it did not pay well enough and he entered into disputes with his patrons. He painted large history paintings that did not or were hard to sell. In October, 1821, he increased his commitments when he married Mary Hyman, a widow with two young children, whom he had known for some years. In 1823 he spent two months in debtors prison.
- "Haydon had ambitions to be a history painter, but after some early successes struggled to find patrons or public support for his huge canvases of noble themes from history or scripture. In the late 1820s, after repeatedly falling into debt and even being imprisoned, he painted several subjects of contemporary life that he hoped would be more commercial. This richly detailed composition is intended to capture the energy of contemporary London. A crowd mingles with a costumed procession in the Marylebone Road. Haydon thought of calling this picture simply 'Life', suggesting that he retained a sense of ambition even in painting such a lowly subject."
(Tate)

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/haydon-punch-or-may-day-n00682>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/great-works-punch-or-may-day-1830-by-benjamin-robert-haydon-8679006.html>

http://www.like2do.com/learn?s=Benjamin_Haydon

http://www.mustring.org.uk/articles/jack_gre.htm

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/9781442681453> requires a JSTOR account



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

- This represents an **important turning point** in the Victorian's view of the poor.
- In **1843**, the **Punch Christmas Album** published a poem by **Thomas Hood** called ***The Song of the Shirt***. It is impossible today to understand the **enormous impact** the poem had. William Makepeace **Thackeray** (1811-1863) described it as '**the most startling lyric in our language**'. It was set to music, the subject of a play and of many sermons. Articles appeared saying **British citizens** were being subjected to a **form of slavery** and a German living in England called **Friedrich Engels** wrote to his friend Karl Marx who was living in Paris about the horror of the situation.
- This painting by Richard Redgrave is *The Sempstress*, a reaction to the poem. It was accompanied in the exhibition catalogue by these lines from the poem,

Oh! men with sisters dear
Oh! men with mothers and wives,
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives.
- Up to then most painting **avoided showing the reality of poverty** but this painting was the turning point of a whole tradition of Victorian social realist painting. It introduced the idea of the deserving poor—like this woman here.
- Let us look at the painting. You can see it is **2:30 in the morning**. The lit windows opposite indicate that the same thing is happening all over London.

The seamstress's **eyes are swollen** and inflamed as she must do close work by the light of a single candle. Sempstresses often **went blind** and if a single stitch was faulty their wages were docked. The **morsel of food** on the plate indicates she has to eat while she is working and on the mantelpiece you can see medicine bottles. One has a label saying 'The Mixture' and it is supplied by Middlesex Hospital.

- This was terrible but it was **not what moved society**. The point that struck home is that they woke up to the fact that the poor **could be their own sisters, mothers and wives**. In Victorian society the man was nearly always the sole breadwinner and there were few morally acceptable jobs for women. So if the sole breadwinner died the dependents could be **thrown on the streets** and go from being wealthy to poor overnight. The distinction between the **deserving poor and the underserving poor** started to become established. The deserving poor were those who no fault of their own were unable to afford to house, clothe and feed themselves and their family.
- Another aspect of this painting was the **fallen woman**, a big issue for the Victorians. The hypocrisy was enormous, London is estimated to have had between 8,000 and 80,000 prostitutes depending on how it was defined but it was spoken about in polite society. This woman is looking up to heaven for support as she tries to **make a morally acceptable living** and avoid becoming a fallen woman even if it means she goes blind and eventually dies.

NOTES

- Public discontent grew and in the countryside combined with the impact of the agricultural revolution. This led to the Swing Riot in the 1830s.
- In 1832, Reform Act was passed increasing the franchise but still leaving many without the vote.
- In 1834 the Tolpuddle Martyrs were six English farm labourers who were sentenced to transportation to a penal colony in Australia for seven years. All they had done was to create a Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. The same year a 'New Poor Law' was introduced to reduce the cost of housing and feeding the poor, which introduced the workhouse.
- During the 1840s the harvests were very poor and the decade became known as the Hungry Forties.
- Richard Redgrave was an Academician, art director of the South Kensington

Museum (now the V&A), received the cross of the Legion of Honour and was surveyor of crown pictures for 24 years and produced a 34 volume catalogue. He declined a knighthood in 1869. He had created a new category of painting but it is not based on visiting the poor but the interior is borrowed from a 17th-century Dutch work and the swollen eyes looking heavenward is typical of many Baroque images of swooning saints. Redgrave realised that unless he made the subject respectable it would not be accepted. He succeeded brilliantly.

- This is one of the first paintings in which art is used to campaign for the poor. The artist Richard Redgrave did not come from a wealthy family and his sister had been forced to leave home and find a job as a governess. She became ill when in service and had to be nursed by his family until she died.
- The first painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy the year after the poem appeared but is now lost. This is a second version of the painting by Redgrave.



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)*, 1849–50, 86.4 × 139.7 cm, Tate Britain

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)*, 1849–50, 86.4 × 139.7 cm, Tate Britain

- **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.** In 1848, three young artists—the slim, blond child-prodigy, **John Everett Millais**, the red-haired, intellectual womaniser, **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** and dark-haired, muscular boxer, **William Holman Hunt**—together with four colleagues, formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They rejected the art of the Royal Academy and sought inspiration from the early masters who worked before Raphael, that is before about 1500.
- **Description.** This was painted the following year and was **one of their most controversial works**. You might be wondering why. Let us look at it closely, it shows the **Holy Family at work in a carpenter's shop**. Jesus has just cut his hand on a nail and the blood has dripped onto his foot foreshadowing the crucifixion. He is comforted by the Virgin Mary in blue while Joseph holds his hand and St Anne, Mary's mother, looks on. A young boy later identified as John the Baptist brings in a bowl of water to wash the wound. An assistant representing the future Apostles witnesses the event. There are other symbols such as the ladder representing Jacob's Ladder, the dove representing the Holy Spirit and the sheep the future Christian flock.
- **Revolutionary.** The painting was revolutionary although it is **not clear that Millais intended to shock**. The **public were appalled** and **Charles Dickens** review [in *Household Words* on 15 June 1850] indicates the widespread feeling,
 - **'Wherever it is possible to express ugliness of feature, limb, or**

attitude, you have it expressed. Such men as the carpenters might be undressed in any hospital where dirty drunkards, in a high state of varicose veins, are received. Their very toes have walked out of Saint Giles's.'

- Saint Giles was an area that was well known for its crime and had 'the worst living conditions in all of London's history'. Dickens described Mary as 'horrible in her ugliness' and Christ as 'hideous, wry-necked, blubbing' and the whole painting 'mean, odious, repulsive, and revolting'. Such terms were rarely used by critics to describe fine art as they knew the artist reputation depended on good reviews and artists had a living to make. The reason for all this anger and these insults is made clear by the Art Journal [Ralph Wornum] which wrote 'the most beautiful soul must have the most beautiful body'. Society would only accept an idealised Holy Family as their beauty indicated their moral worth. So, an ugly Holy Family was blasphemous although no one would have used that word as blasphemy was a serious crime. As late as 1921 someone was imprisoned for blasphemy and it was an offence until 2008.
- **Modernism.** The attack on social and religious conventions is an indication of the beginning of a new type of painting. Previously, paintings were mostly portraits, landscapes, still life or amusing genre paintings. The idea of a painting attacking social conventions was demonstrated fourteen years later, in Paris, when Edouard Manet caused a similar reaction with his painting Olympia (1863, exhibited 1865). This time it was not an attack on religion but on bourgeois notions of respectability. Impressionism is often seen as the first revolutionary modern art style yet British art was shocking the nation 25 years before the first Impressionist exhibition.
- By the way, don't worry about whether this painting destroyed Millais's career. He was made an Associate Academician three years later and he became part of the art establishment eventually becoming President of the Royal Academy. So, it did him no harm at all probably because everyone knew he was a hard-working, sociable artistic genius.

NOTES

- Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine wrote that this painting contained 'Ricketty children, emaciation and deformity' and 'we can hardly imagine anything more ugly, graceless, and unpleasant'. The Times critic wrote that the picture 'is, to speak plainly, revolting' and there was 'no conceivable

omission of misery, of dirt, and even disease, all finished with the same loathsome minuteness'. The Athenaeum also wrote that 'we recoil with loathing and disgust' at the 'pictorial blasphemy'. By the end of the nineteenth century society had changed and it was 'passionately admired, and even loved'.

- Christ has red hair, which was traditionally associated with Judas Iscariot and red hair regarded as both 'ugly' and a 'sign of degeneration'. Mary's eyes are almost closed and ringed in black and her brow is heavily lined, which combined with the twist of her neck, gives her a distorted appearance and Joseph's arms are veined and muscular, his nails are dirty, his left knee is damaged and his toenails are broken.
- The room is unnaturally bright and evenly lit and the source of the light is on the left. In Millais's preparatory sketches, there is a window on the left, which is cut off in the final painting and is the notional source of the light. The figures have the idiosyncratic features associated with particular people and we know that they were modelled by Millais's family and friends. Millais went to a carpenter's shop in Oxford Street to sketch its interior in order to represent a carpenter's tools and method of working accurately. The tools are those of a nineteenth-century carpenter and the clothes are a mixture of Middle Eastern, conventional religious symbolism, such as Mary's blue dress and St. John's animal fur, with nineteenth-century additions, such as Christ's smock.
- By associating themselves with artists that pre-dated the formation of Protestantism the Pre-Raphaelites linked themselves with Puseyism, the Oxford Movement, and the widely resisted move towards Catholicism. This was reinforced by their unconventional approach to religious symbolism. The painting was therefore seen to be subversive and an attempt to undermine Protestant beliefs.
- Towards the end of the nineteenth century Max Nordau, in his book *Degeneration* singled out the Pre-Raphaelites as the beginning of the disease of mental instability and degeneration that he believed had swept the modern world.
- There were seven members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the other four were the writer and critic William Michael Rossetti, the artist James Collinson, the art critic Frederic George Stephens and the sculptor Thomas Woolner. The members went their own ways and by 1853 it had ceased to exist as a brotherhood, but their work continued to influence artists such as

Edward Burne-Jones and John William Waterhouse for the rest of the nineteenth century. The only one of the original brotherhood who stayed true to the aims was Holman Hunt.

BIOGRAPHY MILLAIS

- Millais was, above all, an artistic prodigy who from an early age could paint and draw in any style. He was honest, sincere and other artists were awed by his talents and charmed by his personality. He was committed to art and according to Hunt he never wasted a moment in his dedication to painting. He was sociable and loved by everyone. He claimed never to have read a book and was easy going but could be very intense. He was sporty and jovial and in later life he enjoyed field sports. He was a straightforward English country gentleman, described as a 'good sort'. He became financially extremely successful and an accepted member of the art establishment.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-christ-in-the-house-of-his-parents-the-carpenters-shop-n03584>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_in_the_House_of_His_Parents



John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Ophelia*, 1851-2, Tate Britain

John Everett Millais (1829-1896), *Ophelia*, 1851-2

- **Criticism.** This is *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais. It is one of the most popular paintings in Tate Britain and it was a popular subject at the time but Millais's treatment was not liked by many critics, The Times wrote that '**there must be something strangely perverse in an imagination which souses Ophelia in a weedy ditch, and robs the drowning struggle of that lovelorn maiden of all pathos and beauty**'. In other words, they did not like the realism and the lack of idealisation.
- The painting was the result of **enormous physical effort**. The river and bushes were painted in the open-air painting on the banks of the Hogsmill River [near Tolworth in Surrey] a few miles from where I live. Millais was a fast painter and yet he said that he could only paint an area 'no larger than a five-shilling piece' each day. He painted for 11 hours a day, six days a week over a five-month period in 1851 and suggested to a friend that it would be '**a greater punishment to a murderer than hanging**'. In the summer, he was bitten by flies all day and by November it started to snow and Millais had a hut built by the river to enable him to finish the landscape. As the painting took so long to produce, it conflated time, which produced anachronisms in the plants and the painting became an assembly of minutely observed yet disconnected parts.
- He left the painting of Ophelia until he reached his **studio**. The model was **Elizabeth Siddal**, who later married Dante Gabriel Rossetti, another of the Pre-Raphaelites. Millais painted her in a **bath heated by candles** but it is said that one day the candles went out and Millais did not notice she was freezing cold.

She **developed a severe cold** and her father sent Millais a **letter demanding £50** for medical expenses, about twice the annual salary of a live-in servant. He eventually accepted a lower sum.

- Millais was promoting a new way of looking at the world in precise, scientific detail. He was motivated by the innocent observation of the artists who worked before Raphael and so the style was called Pre-Raphaelitism. He was supported by the **leading Victorian art critic John Ruskin** who described the principal role of the artist is '**truth to nature**'. The strength of feeling of the Pre-Raphaelites and their dislike of the Old Masters is shown by their description of the former President of the Royal Academy Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) as 'Sir Sloshua'. They wanted to work directly from nature but took a different approach to Turner and the Impressionists, who came much later. Rather than their free brushwork they represented what they saw in photographic detail. Ophelia demonstrates Millais's commitment to this idea through his sheer hard work. Every inch of the canvas is worked on in minute detail producing a flat tapestry of colour that flattens the picture by assigning every object in the foreground, middle ground and background equal prominence. Although controversial this approach influenced many artists for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

- Ophelia is a character in Shakespeare's Hamlet who drowns herself after Hamlet denies he loves her and kills her father. The relevant lines from Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act IV, Scene vii are,
- There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke; When down her weedy trophies and herself
- Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide, And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
- Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes, As one incapable of her own distress,
- Or like a creature native and indued
- Unto that element; but long it could not be
- Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay To muddy death.
- Millais is now thought to have sat in the 'Six Acre Meadow on the west bank

at the bottom of the Manor House garden in Old Malden', as reported by Richard Savill, 'Mystery of Location of Millais' Ophelia Solved' in The Telegraph, 30 June 2010. Holman Hunt worked on his The Hireling Shepherd nearby. The studio was at 7 Gower Street which still remains and has a blue plaque outside.

- There was a water rat swimming in the river but in December 1851 relatives of Holman Hunt did not recognize what it was so Millais painted it out.
- The flowers are the one's mentioned in Hamlet except for the red poppies which signify sleep and death. The human skull many have seen in the bushes was not intended to be a skull. The roses near Ophelia's cheek and dress, and the field rose on the bank, may allude to her brother Laertes calling her 'rose of May'. The willow, nettle and daisy are associated with forsaken love, pain, and innocence. Pansies refer to love in vain. Violets, which Ophelia wears in a chain around her neck, stand for faithfulness, chastity or death of the young, any of which meanings could apply here. The poppy signifies death. Forget-me-nots float in the water. Millais purchased the dress secondhand for £4.
- Another review in The Times said that 'Mr. Millais's Ophelia in her pool ... makes us think of a dairymaid in a frolic'.
- In 1936 Salvador Dalí wrote, 'How could Salvador Dalí fail to be dazzled by the flagrant surrealism of English Pre-Raphaelitism'.
- The painting has a cult following in Japan but when it was exhibited in Tokyo in 2008 the gallery was afraid to show the painting on posters in case its power would cause young women to take their own lives.
- It was bought on 10 December 1851 by Henry Farrer for 300 guineas. It was sold and resold and continued to increase in value, it is now estimated to be worth at least £30 million.

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia_(painting))



William Dyce (1806-1864), *Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of October 5th 1858, ?1858-60*, Tate Britain

William Dyce (1806-1864), *Pegwell Bay, Kent - a Recollection of October 5th 1858, ?1858-60*, Tate Britain

- This painting has been analysed in various ways. One interpretation is that it is **about time** and it therefore invokes **feelings of the sublime** concerning the **vast age of the earth**. Critics at the time described it as a travesty of the sublime because its microscopic detail prevents an overall unified view.
- It shows the **middle-class interest in geology**. Charles Lyell had published his *Principles of Geology* in three volumes between 1830 and 1833, and the entire scientific community was interested in the controversial attempt to reconcile the implications of geological time with Biblical scripture.
- The variety of ages in the figures may represent the passage of time, while the **setting sun** and the autumnal chill in the air serve as a reminder of death.
- Dyce's painting was the product of a **trip he made in the autumn of 1858** to the popular holiday resort of **Pegwell Bay near Ramsgate**, on the east coast of Kent. It shows his wife, her two sisters and his son gathering shells and fossils.
- The artist's interest in geology is shown by his careful recording of the flint-encrusted strata and eroded faces of the chalk cliffs.
- **The barely visible trail of Donati's comet** in the sky places the human activities in far broader dimensions of time and space. The artist-scientist on the right is holding a telescope.
- Discovered by Giovanni Donati on June 2, 1858, after the Great Comet of 1811 it was the brightest comets to appear during the 19th century. It has a period of

about 2,000 years.

- The geologically unstable cliffs along much of England's south coast were (and still are) a paradise for those in **search of fossils**, including the famous fossil hunter **Mary Anning** (1799-1847) of **Lyme Regis**, who is credited with the discovery of the first plesiosaur skeleton.
- The *Illustrated London News* considered the work to be
 - **'a very curiosity of minute handiwork ... being painted in the finest of fairy like lines ... with a completeness and exactness which render every microscopic detail palpable to the naked eye'**
- but concluded that the ultimate effect of such representation was **'a rapid descent from the sublime to the droll'**. William Dyce
- William Dyce (1806-1864) was born in Aberdeen, Scotland. After studying at the Royal Academy Schools in London and in Rome, Dyce became well known for his paintings, and between 1837 and 1843 was Superintendent of the Government School of Design. He later won a competition to complete fresco paintings for the newly rebuilt Houses of Parliament, a project that occupied him almost until his death. However, Dyce was also interested in intellectual and scientific pursuits, for example, writing a prize-winning essay on electro-magnetism in 1830.
- As a **deeply devout High Anglican**, Dyce probably intended these figures to elicit **feelings of wonder** in the viewer – an idea that connects with the poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge's notion of the sublime in which individual consciousness is subsumed by a sense of the eternal. On the other hand, the estrangement between the figures and between the figures and the scene could be seen to undermine the reference to the sublime.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pegwell_Bay,_Kent_-_a_Recollection_of_October_5th_1858



Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925), *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857, Tate Britain

Emily Mary Osborn (1828-1925), *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857, Tate Britain

- This painting illustrates the **problems of being a woman artist in the Victorian period**. We can see it is a wet, dismal day outside and the woman has come into an art dealer's shop to see if she can sell her work. She is wearing mourning clothes and so we guess her parents have died and she must earn money to look after herself and her brother alongside her. She nervously pulls on a piece of string as the art dealer disdainfully judges her work, but this may be just a ploy to get a better price as the young assistant on the ladder looks impressed. Two 'swells' are sizing her up while ogling a print of a ballet dancer whose bare legs suggest they might have other things in mind than helping a desperate young lady.
- The artist was Emily Mary Osborn and it is called in full, *Nameless and Friendless*. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, etc." - Proverbs, x, 15. Osborn was one of the most important artists associated with the campaign for women's rights in the nineteenth century. She was a successful artist. She began showing her work at the Royal Academy when she was 23 and when she was 27 sold a portrait for 200 guineas and another work to the Queen that year and she continued to exhibit over the next 40 years. Despite her success she was never made an Academician as women were banned.
- Women artists were at an enormous disadvantage and to try to help them Osborn helped found The Society of Female Artists the year this painting was exhibited. One disadvantage was that there were no life drawing classes for women so they could never learn to paint the most lucrative pictures involving

people. This was regarded as an obvious restriction by society. As one journal put it in a review of women artists, 'we have no school for the instruction of ladies in painting from the living model. Labouring under such disadvantages as the female student does, we are not disappointed to see here so many drawings of flowers, fruit, and still-life objects'. In other words, it was accepted that women could never attend life drawing classes and it was thought inappropriate not just for prudish reasons but, as another journal put it, because 'Strength of will and power of creation belonging rather to the other sex [that is, men], we do not of course look for the more daring efforts in an exhibition of female artists'.

NOTES

- The Society of Female Artists. The difficulties experienced by women in exhibiting and selling their works led to the formation of the Society of Female Artists in 1857, the year *Nameless and Friendless* was first exhibited at the Royal Academy. Emily Mary Osborn was a member of this group and one of the artists associated with Barbara Bodichon's Langham Place circle and campaign for women's rights. Despite the problems faced by women artists Osborn went on to develop a successful career.
- Mary Brunton (1778-1818). It has been suggested that this painting relates to Brunton's novel *Self-Control* published in 1810 but republished in 1850. This describes the struggles of a self-motivated female artist to sell her pictures to help save her father from financial ruin. Brunton was a Scottish novelist who was taught languages and music by her parents (Colonel Balfour) and eloped to marry a Scottish minister. They did not have children until she became pregnant at 40 and died after giving birth to a stillborn son. She wrote *Self-Control* (1811), *Discipline* (1814) and *Emmeline* (1819). Popular at the time for their strong moral and religious stance combined with sexuality (what Jane Austen called 'vulgarity').
- Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) was a leading artist, educationalist, feminist and activist for women's rights. She was the extra-marital child of a milliner and the Whig politician Leigh Smith. Her summary of the laws concerning women (1854) helped with the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1882. In 1857 (aged 30) she married an eminent French physician (Bodichon) and from then on wintered in Algiers. She set up the *English Women's Journal* (1858). In 1866, she helped set up a scheme for giving women university education, first at Hitchin and this

developed into Girton College, Cambridge. She studied painting under William Holman Hunt and exhibited at the Royal Academy and showed originality and talent and was admired by Corot and Daubigny. She was George Eliot's most intimate friend.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/osborn-nameless-and-friendless-the-rich-mans-wealth-is-his-strong-city-etc-proverbs-x-15-t12936>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/emily-mary-osborn-12441/how-painting-campaigned-womens-rights>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/626348>



Augustus Egg (1816-1863), *Past and Present: No. 1 Misfortune*, 1858, 63.5 × 76.2 cm

Augustus Egg (1816-1863), *Past and Present: No. 2 Prayer*, 1858, 63.5 × 76.2 cm

Augustus Egg (1816-1863), *Past and Present: No. 3 Despair*, 1858, 63.5 × 76.2 cm

- The theme of the triptych is the discovery of the woman's infidelity and its consequences. In this first scene the wife lies prostrate at her husband's feet, while he sits grimly at the table and their children (the older girl modelled by William Frith's daughter) play cards in the background. The husband is holding a letter, evidence of his wife's adultery, and simultaneously crushes a miniature of her lover under his foot. The setting is an ordinary middle-class drawing room, but closer observation reveals that the room is full of symbols.
- The second painting shows a night scene, several years later, in a dark and sparsely-furnished bedroom shortly after the death of the heartbroken husband. The children are older now: the younger one kneels in a white nightgown, weeping into the lap of the elder, who sits in a black mourning dress, looking out of a window at rooftops and a clouded moon. The same small portraits of the husband and the wife decorate the bedroom wall.
- The third painting is also a night scene. The details of the cloud and moon show it is the same evening as depicted in the second painting. The fallen wife is resting in the detritus-strewn shadows beneath the Adelphi Arches, by the River Thames. She clutches a bundle of rags from which protrude the emaciated legs

of an infant, perhaps the fruit of her affair, either asleep or dead. Posters on the wall ironically advertise two contemporary plays, 'Victims' by Tom Taylor and 'The Cure for Love' by Tom Parry, both tales of unhappy marriages, and also 'Pleasure excursions to Paris', perhaps a reference to the novel by Balzac in the first picture. She looks up from her place in the gutter to the moon and stars above.

NOTES

- A similarly watery destination for fallen women was depicted in Rossetti's Found, GF Watts's Found Drowned and Abraham Solomon's Drowned! Drowned!, all inspired by Thomas Hood's 1844 poem, The Bridge of Sighs.
- Egg was clearly influenced in his approach by Holman Hunt's The Awakening Conscience of 1853 (Manchester City Art Galleries).
- The house of cards is collapsing, signifying the breakdown of the couple's marriage. The cards are supported by a novel by Balzac - a specialist in the theme of adultery.
- An apple has been cut in two, the one half (representing the wife) has fallen to the floor, the other (representing the husband) has been stabbed to the core.
- As a parallel, the two pictures on the wall depict the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (labelled The Fall); and a shipwreck by Clarkson Stanfield (labelled Abandoned). The couple's individual portraits hang beneath the appropriate image.
- In the background of the picture the mirror reflects an open door, denoting the woman's impending departure from the home.
- The position of her arms and the bracelets round her wrists give the impression that she is shackled. In Victorian England a man could safely take a mistress without fear of recrimination, but for a woman to be unfaithful was an unforgivable crime. As Caroline Norton, an early feminist, wrote, 'the faults of women are visited as sins, the sins of men are not even visited as faults' (quote in Lambourne, p.374).
- The set of pictures was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1858 with no title, but with the subtitle, **"August the 4th - Have just heard that B - has been dead more than a fortnight, so his poor children have now lost both parents. I hear she was seen on Friday last near the Strand, evidently without a place to lay her head. What a fall hers has been!"**

BIOGRAPHY

- Augustus Leopold Egg (1816-1863) was a member of a group of artists known as The Clique and he is best known for this modern triptych, Past and Present, which depicts the breakup of a middle- class Victorian family. His father was a wealthy, well-known gunsmith who had emigrated from Alsace. He was a friend of Charles Dickens and like him sought to combine popularity with moral and social activism following in the footsteps of Hogarth. Unlike most members of The Clique he admired the Pre-Raphaelites.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/egg-past-and-present-no-1-n03278>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Past_and_Present_\(paintings\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Past_and_Present_(paintings))



William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *The Derby Day*, 1856-8, 101.6 cm × 223.5 cm, Tate Britain

William Powell Frith (1819-1909), *The Derby Day*, 1856-8, 101.6 cm × 223.5 cm

- I selected this to show you the type of art that was the most popular with the majority of Victorians. This is *Derby Day* by William Powell Frith. It has been described as '**arguably the definitive example of Victorian modern-life genre painting**'.
- We can see a **cross-section of Victorian Society**. On the left is the tent of the **Reform Club** outside of which rich, city gentlemen surround the table of a 'thimble-rigger' who is busy cheating them. Further left, a **young country man** in smock is being held back by his wife to prevent him from joining in, as an accomplice tempts him to play by showing him the note he was just won. In the centre, an **acrobat** is ready to perform with his son, but the attention of the thin young boy has been distracted by a lavish picnic banquet that is being laid out. Spectators throng behind, **drinking champagne in their carriages**, with the racecourse grandstand visible in the background.
- At the far right, a well-dressed man slouches back against his carriage in which his **young mistress sits**. Echoing her position, a well-known horse woman called **Annie Gilbert**, in brown riding clothes is on the extreme left, one of many that could be seen each day riding in **Rotten Row, Hyde Park**. Their skilful horsemanship led to them being dubbed '**the pretty horsebreakers**'. Many, such as Catherine 'Skittles' Walters, were courtesans but it appears Miss Gilbert was not. To the right, a thief can be seen stealing a gold watch from a man with his hands in his pockets. Also visible are a group of musicians, and a group of beggars, and street vendors selling their wares. One art historian has identified

almost **one hundred distinct social types** distinguished by Frith by their clothing and physiognomy.

- The painting was **commissioned by Jacob Bell**, who owned Tattersalls (the race horse auctioneer), to paint a large, five to **six-foot canvas for £1,500**. Later, Frith painted a smaller version which is in the Manchester Art Gallery. Frith began by hiring models for all the major figures, including a jockey and an acrobat, and **paid a photographer to take** 'as many queer groups of figures as he could' from the roof of a cab. Also, many of the female models, such as Annie Gilbert were introduced to Frith by Jacob Bell.
- The painting was first exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1858, where it **became so popular that a rail was needed protect it** from the thronging crowds. This was only the second time that a rail was installed at the Royal Academy exhibition: the first was in 1822 for David Wilkie's The Chelsea Pensioners reading the Waterloo Dispatch.
- The painting was controversial only because it was so popular. He was criticised for his artistic philistinism by **John Ruskin, Oscar Wilde and James McNeill Whistler**.

NOTES

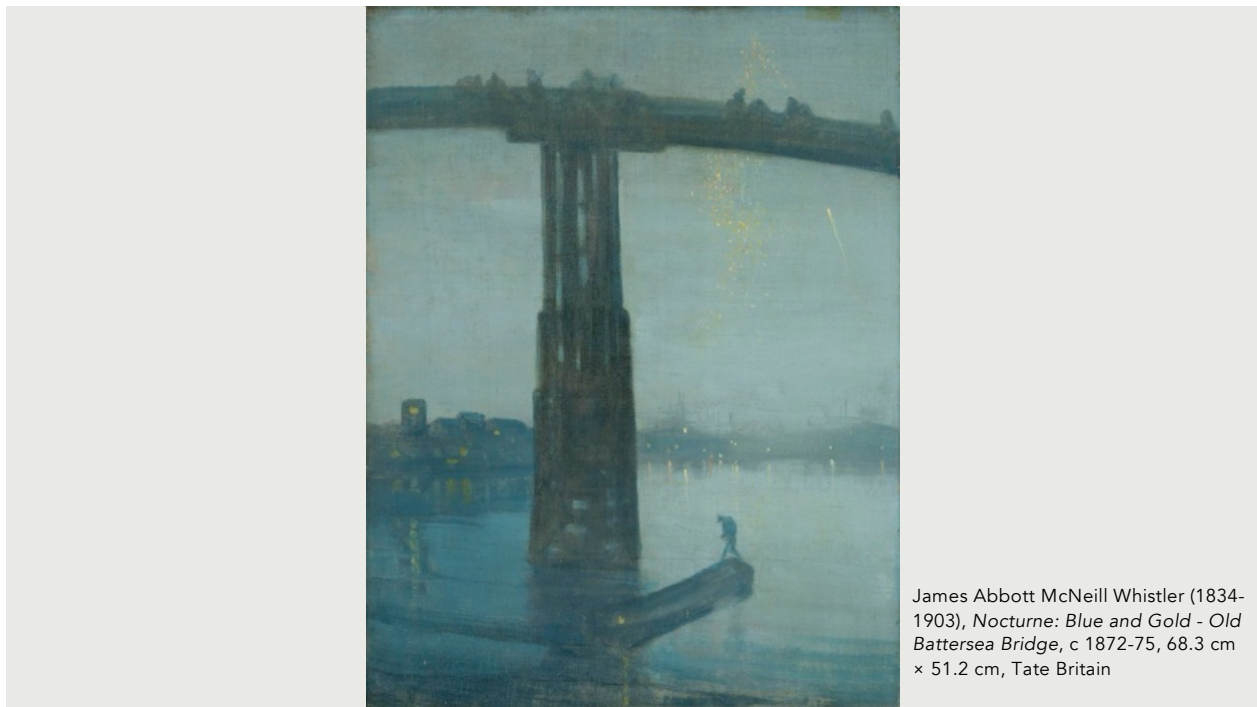
- William Powell Frith (1819-1909) was born in Yorkshire to a house steward and cook and his parents took a keen interest in art. He was sent to school in Dover where he indulged in drawing. His formal training was at the Sass Academy and then the RA School in 1837 (aged 18). His father died and his mother moved to London and he made money portrait painting (Lincolnshire farmers at 5-15 guineas). He was a member of the Clique, which included Augustus Egg, Richard Dadd and Henry O'Neil and rapidly established himself as a genre painter. His painting was at odds with the RA but his character and incident, sparkling detail and high finish made his work popular and suitable for engraving. 1840 travelled abroad and had his first painting exhibited at the RA. He was made an ARA in 1845 and an RA in 1852 (aged 33). He was friends with Charles Dickens and centre of the literary life of London. In 1851, he visited Ramsgate and decided to take a commercial risk investing in Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside) and it was a success and sold to Lloyd then Queen Victoria for £1,000. His second panorama, Derby Day was a stroke of genius, few paintings have ever earned such universal acclaim. For The Railway Station (1862) Frith was paid an astonishing £5,250. He had a wife with 12 children and a mistress with 7.

He was an artist with a well- developed business sense and he remained in the news throughout his life. Six of his paintings had to be railed off including his three most important works, Ramsgate Sands, Derby Day, and The Railway Station. He was criticized for his artistic philistinism by John Ruskin, Whistler and Oscar Wilde, and later Roger Fry and he was a staunch reactionary criticising the Aesthetic Movement, Oscar Wilde and Impressionism.

- One of the best known Victorian courtesans who rode each day down Rotten Row, Hyde park, was Catherine 'Skittles' Walters (1839-1920), a fashion trendsetter and horsewoman who was associated with intellectuals, political leaders, aristocrats and a member of the Royal Family. She was renowned for her horse control and for wearing nothing under her tight-fitting riding habit that was tailored in Savile Row. Such women were known as 'The Pretty Horsebreakers'.
- Fifteen 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. Frith was an astute businessman and knew 'pictures of contemporary life and manners have a better chance of immortality than ninety-nine out of any hundred of the ideal and so- called poetical pictures'.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Derby_Day



James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne: Blue and Gold - Old Battersea Bridge*, c 1872-75, 68.3 cm × 51.2 cm

- This is ***Nocturne: Blue and Gold - Old Battersea Bridge*** by James Abbott McNeill Whistler, an American artist who spent most of his career in London and Paris.
- This painting gave rise to one of the **central artistic controversy** of the Victorian period, known as the **Whistler v. Ruskin trial**. The trial tells us a lot about how the Victorians regarded art and the nature of the changes Whistler helped bring about. The controversy was about what is art and what is truth in art.
- It was **exhibited in the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877**, the year it opened, and it was **criticised by John Ruskin**, the leading Victorian art critic [in his publication *Fors Clavigera* on July 2, 1877]. Ruskin wrote **"I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."**
- Whistler responded by suing Ruskin for libel and the essence of the trial revolved around **whether a painting should demonstrate skill** by accurately representing objects in the world. When asked **'Are those figures on the top of the bridge intended for people?'** Whistler replied, **'They are just what you like.'** When the judge asked if it was a barge beneath the bridge, Whistler replied 'Yes, I am very much flattered at your seeing that. The picture is simply a representation of moonlight. My whole scheme was only to bring about a

certain harmony of colour.'

- Whistler stressed the colour rather than a harmony of form and the form is suppressed by the overall similarity in tone and hue; with the exception of the gold dots the painting is **a wash of blue**, in places a thin wash that allows the canvas to show. Whistler mixed large quantities of the predominant tone that he called his 'sauce', and although he started on an easel, he often had to throw the canvas on the floor to stop the sauce running off. The sky and water were rendered by 'great sweeps of the brush of exactly the right tone.'
- Whistler won the libel case but was **awarded damages of a farthing, a quarter of one penny**, and had to pay his legal fees which bankrupted him and forced him to sell all his possessions.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/whistler-nocturne-blue-and-gold-old-battersea-bridge-n01959>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nocturne:_Blue_and_Gold_-_Old_Battersea_Bridge



John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885-6, Tate Britain

- This painting is called *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* by John Singer Sargent. The unusual title came from a popular song at the time and the painting became **his first major success in England**.
- Sargent had **just moved from Paris** to a **house in the Cotswolds** and he decided to paint his **friend's daughters** in the garden. The two young girls who are lighting lanterns are 11-year-old **Dolly** [Barnard] on the left and 7-year-old **Polly** [Barnard] on the right. It is a masterly recreation of the subtle evening glow just before sunset. If you look closely you will see the painting consists of what look like quick, effortless brushstrokes but these were the result of hard work. To capture the right light, **he painted outdoors** between August and early November over two years in the short period between 6:35 and 7:00 in the evening on the days when the light was just right. He would often scrape all the paint off the canvas after a day's painting. Over the months the flowers died as summer turned to autumn and he had to replace them with artificial flowers. Also, while working on it he changed the shape of the canvas by cutting two feet, about 60 cm, from the left side.
- Sargent described it later as a '**fearfully difficult subject ... Paints are not bright enough & then the effect only lasts ten minutes.**' The seemingly effortless solution is the result of Sargent being willing to scrape off and redo his efforts again and again. The technique he used is called *alla prima*, Italian for 'first attempt' or *au premier coup* (at the first touch) and in this work he has taken it to an extreme level that has rarely been attempted before or since.

Cross-sectional analysis of the paint shows that he even painted **wet paint directly on top of wet paint** for the final touches on the faces, something few other artists would ever attempt. The painting also has an unusual perspective—are we looking down on the girls or are we at their eye level—it seems to be both.

- It was **exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1887** and caused some controversy. Although Sargent was combining elements of Pre-Raphaelite painting, the popular fashion for aestheticism and beauty with French Impressionism **many critics thought it was too French**, too 'Frenchified' and it was painted by some '**clever foreigner**'. Many critics and artists thought that **Impressionism** was a '**mistaken idea**' and was '**shallow, pretentious and untrue**'.
- One critic wrote '**Could we fancy anyone a hundred years hence caring to possess such a picture as this**'. It is now, of course, one of the most popular paintings in the Tate. However, many leading artists realised its quality and it was controversially purchased by the Chantrey Bequest, which was administered by the Royal Academy, and later permanently placed in the Tate. Sargent had a natural talent and became the most successful portrait painter. After his death, he was largely ignored by art historians until recently when his reputation has continued to grow.

NOTES

- John Singer Sargent's father was an eye surgeon but when Sargent's older sister died aged two his mother (Mary née Singer) had a breakdown and they travelled through Europe for the rest of their lives. Sargent was born in Florence in 1856. He had no official schooling but grew up speaking fluent French, Italian and German and accomplished in art, music and literature. He began his art studies with Carolus-Duran a French portrait painter with bold techniques and modern teaching methods. He taught painting alla prima or au premier coup (at the first touch) which involved working directly on the canvas with a loaded brush derived from Diego Velázquez. In 1874, he gained entry to the École des Beaux-Arts at his first attempt and won a silver prize. However, his Portrait of Madame X (1884, actually Virginie Amélie Avegno Gautreau) caused a scandal rather than the positive publicity he was expecting. Sargent moved to the Cotswolds to escape the scandal and painted Carnation, Lily, Rose.
- He was considered the 'leading portrait painter of his generation'

specialising in Edwardian aristocracy. He was prolific and painted about 900 oil paintings and 2,000 watercolours. He was a master of drawing with the brush and his portraits were painted in the grand manner but his landscapes were influenced by Impressionism.

- Chantrey Bequest. On his death Sir Francis Legatt Chantrey (1781-1841) left £150,000 to the Royal Academy for the purchase of 'works of Fine Art ... executed in Great Britain'. The first purchase was made in 1877 following the death of Lady Chantrey. Although the Trustees of the RA still decide on the selection of the purchases, the exhibition and preservation of the collection has become the responsibility of the Tate Gallery.
- It divided opinion at the time and 'artists almost came to blows over this picture'. In 1887, The Pall Mall Gazette (a paper widely read by the middle classes) featured Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose in the category "Pictures You Would Least Like to Live With", as voted by the readers. However, in a write-up of the show in the Magazine of Art, the painting was praised as an 'extremely original and daring essay in decoration.'
- There have been many interpretations of the paintings meaning. It has been read as a botanical allegory of flower-maidens, with subtle sexual overtones of lighting a lantern (slang in French for vagina), and the taper as a symbolic paintbrush (also used to hand-pollinate flowers) used to illuminate the paper of the lantern in the same way that a painter uses a paintbrush to create an image on a canvas.
- The unusual title comes from a popular song 'Ye Shepherds Tell Me' (also called 'The Wreath') by Joseph Mazzinghi.

BIOGRAPHY SARGENT

- A natural talent who worked hard with concentration and stamina. He stood out with his fine manners, perfect French and consummate skill and had early success. When he gave up portrait painting, he said, 'Painting a portrait would be quite amusing if one were not forced to talk while working...What a nuisance having to entertain the sitter and to look happy when one feels wretched.' He was a lifelong bachelor and recent research shows he was a complex and passionate man, with his art being shaped by a sexual identity that included affairs with both men and women. His reputation declined towards the end of his life and he was dismissed as an anachronism. Camille Pissarro described him as 'an adroit performer', Walter Sickert talked about 'Sargentolatry'. This criticism of Sargent has

been linked to his sympathy towards the Jews and he was criticised as 'the painter of the Jews' in the 1890s. Since the 1950s his reputation has steadily increased.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/sargent-carnation-lily-lily-rose-n01615>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnation,_Lily,_Lily,_Rose



Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate Britain

Luke Fildes (1843-1927), *The Doctor*, 1891, Tate Britain

- We see a **sick child** being tended by a doctor as the **distraught parents** watch. Fildes chose a rustic interior and we see the boy's father resting his hand on the shoulder of his wife whose hands are clasped in prayer. The man is bravely looking into the face of the thoughtful doctor trying to read any sign of recovery. They are poor, there is a scrap of carpet on the floor and the **child's makeshift bed** is two mismatching chairs pushed together. The parent's clothes are **ragged** but the child has been **given medicine** and the bowl and the jug of water used to try to reduce his temperature. The scraps of paper on the floor could be prescriptions made out by the doctor and now taken. Of course, this was before antibiotics when the only hope was the natural immunity of the child.
- In 1890, **Henry Tate commissioned** a painting from Fildes for the then **vast sum of £3,000** and he left the subject to the artist's discretion. Fildes chose to recall a **personal tragedy** of his own, when in 1877 his first son, Philip Luke, had **died at the age of one** in his Kensington home. Another of Fildes's sons and his biographer wrote, '**The character and bearing of their doctor throughout the time of their anxiety, made a deep impression on my parents. Dr. Murray became a symbol of professional devotion which would one day inspire the painting of The Doctor**'. To make the picture convincing Fildes **constructed a cottage interior in his studio**. He began work at dawn each day to catch the exact light conditions. The image of an ordinary doctor's quiet heroism was a huge success with the late-Victorian public. A year later it was

exhibited at the Royal Academy and an engraving was published that sold more than a million copies in America alone. It became one of the most profitable prints Agnews had ever produced.

- So, how should we interpret the painting? At face value, it was produced by Fildes in gratitude for the care, albeit unsuccessful, that the doctor provided for his own son. However, it appeals to our feelings to gain our sympathy for what is an example of the **power of the Victorian, male, middle-classes and the medical profession**. The implication is that the doctor is a different class from the family, a thinking class, that holds the power of life or death.
- In 1949 the American Medical Association displayed 65,000 posters of this work as part of their campaign to prevent a national health service being set up by President Truman in America. They told the public that matters of health were best left to kindly-looking physicians.

NOTES

- Why do many critics and art historians find sentimental Victorian art unforgivable? It might be that art historians look down on art that appeals to popular taste or because the emotional themes – childhood and especially child death, forsaken love, animals, sunsets, heart-rending stories and pathetic scenes – now seem hackneyed or trivialised. It is sentimental and so trivialises deep human emotions. Sentiment reduces all emotions to comfort and warmth. In the 18th century sentimentality was the reliance on feelings as a guide to truth and was much in vogue among the polite. By the end of the 19th century however it was seen as false and in modern times, as Oscar Wilde said, '**A sentimentalist is one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it**'. Alternatively, it could be that we see Victorian subject painting as trying to manipulate us by the use of emotion and manipulative images. We are used to being manipulated by advertising as so Victorian art could be seen as debased by similar motives. In this case not for commercial gain but to persuade us that the religious, social and political systems are in our best interests. For example, the 'deserving poor' are shown in a way that convinces us that everything is being done to correct the situation.
- Society has always had mixed views about the role and benefit provided by the doctor. In the **Middle Ages doctors were massacred for failing to cure the Black Death**. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the patient was the primary source of information and the doctor, as an

Enlightenment thinker, applied reason to the patient's description of their problem to determine the treatment. Over the course of the nineteenth century the doctor's diagnosis became evidence-based and the stethoscope and thermometer were widely used. It is interesting that neither instrument is evident in the painting. This change altered the relationship between patient and doctor and diagnosis became 'scientific'. This meant there was no longer a need for lengthy vigils by the patient's bedside as the treatment followed immediately from the 'facts'. The painting may therefore hark back nostalgically to the old days when doctor would spend long hours comforting the patient. This role is still valid today, a famous surgeon once said the doctor's role is, **'to cure sometimes, to relieve often, to comfort always.'** Though a poor family like this were unlikely to be able to afford so much of the doctor's time.

BIOGRAPHY FILDES

- Sir (Samuel) Luke Fildes (1843–1927, his name is pronounced to rhyme with 'childs') was an illustrator and genre and portrait painter. He is well known for five large social realist paintings, praised for their realism but criticized as inappropriate subject matter for fine art. Fildes married Fanny Woods the daughter of his friend Henry Woods (1846-1921) and they had six children. He was compassionate, caring and loving. affectionate. He was admired by Van Gogh. He took up portrait painting late in life and his main rival was John Singer Sargent.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fildes-the-doctor-n01522>
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Doctor_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Doctor_(painting))



23-03 VICTORIAN ART

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK

James Whistler (1834-1903), *Nocturne: Blue and Gold - Old Battersea Bridge*, c 1872-75

- Thank you for your time and attention and I look forward to giving my next talk in the series



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

Dr Laurence Shafe www.shafe.uk

