



A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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- Welcome. I have finished the History of Western Art as I originally planned it, but I found some lectures that I gave a few years ago. Rather than delete them I decided to use Claude, Heygen and ElevenLabs to convert them to my new design, improve the text and use a clone of my voice and face to give them.

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Claude Lorrain, *Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah*, 1648, National Gallery

23-13 VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING PART 1

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Victorian landscape painting was never simply a record of scenery. This talk examines the ideals, the institutions, and the social pressures that shaped how British artists chose to represent the land across the nineteenth century. From Reynolds and the Royal Academy's debt to Claude Lorrain, through Turner's warnings of imperial decline, to Constable, the picturesque, the panorama craze, and paintings confronting famine, rural poverty, and the contested right to the countryside itself.



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

Opening from our framing point about landscape as construction, the question becomes: whose aesthetic values determined what a constructed landscape should look like? The answer, in nineteenth-century Britain, begins with **Sir Joshua Reynolds** and the authority of the **Royal Academy**. Reynolds delivered fifteen **Discourses** between 1769 and 1790, and they functioned as the institutional bible of taste. He was unambiguous: nature herself was not to be too closely copied. As he put it, "there are excellences in the art of painting, beyond what is commonly called the imitation of nature." The good landscape was one filtered through the imagination — idealised, ennobling, and modelled on the **Old Masters**. Chief among those masters was **Claude Lorrain**, born Claude Gellée in the Duchy of Lorraine around 1600. His ***Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah***, painted in 1648, became something close to a template: repoussoir trees framing the left, classical ruins balancing the right, a winding river drawing the eye to a luminous horizon, figures in biblical costume. John Constable called Claude "the most perfect landscape painter the world ever saw." Reynolds praised precisely this capacity to idealise — to remove the particular and replace it with the poetically universal. Yet for all that prestige, landscape still ranked fourth in the academic hierarchy, beneath history painting, portraiture, and genre. Ambition and constraint operated simultaneously.

Notes

I start by considering a major influence on nineteenth-century landscape painting – the landscapes of the Old Masters.

The importance of the Old Masters was emphasized by the teaching of the Royal Academy and by the Discourses, a series of 12 annual lectures over 15 years given by the first President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds.

The Old Masters of landscape included, in particular, the Flemish Baroque painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and the French Baroque artists Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) and Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). There is a typical example of an academic landscape by one of the Old Masters, Claude Lorrain.

The landscape was the second most popular type of painting, after portraits, but the second lowest category of academic painting.

This is Claude's Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah produced 150 years before the period we are considering. And it 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 Gainsborough for a want of 'precision and finishing'.

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

Notes

Rubens was a proponent of an extravagant Baroque style that emphasised movement, colour, and sensuality. He is well known for his Counter-Reformation altarpieces, portraits, landscapes, and history paintings of mythological and allegorical subjects.

John Constable described Claude as "the most perfect landscape painter the world ever saw", and declared that in Claude's landscape "all is lovely – all amiable – all is amenity and repose; the calm sunshine of the heart".

Poussin's work is characterized by clarity, logic, and order, and favours line

(Florentine *disegno*) over color (Venetian *colorito*). Until the 20th century he remained a major inspiration for such classically oriented artists as Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Paul Cézanne.

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

Most artists, including Turner, followed these 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.

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'.

He criticized Richard Wilson for introducing gods and goddesses into a landscape that looks too natural to receive them

Claude Lorrain (c. 1600-1682)

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



Joseph Mallord William Turner
(1775–1851)
Dido and Aeneas
1814
146 x 237.2 cm
Tate

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Dido and Aeneas*, 1814, 146 x 237.2 cm, Tate

That tension between ambition and constraint finds its clearest expression when we turn to **J. M. W. Turner**, whose ***Dido and Aeneas*** of 1814 arrived almost exactly 166 years after Claude's *Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah* — and the debt is unmistakable. Repoussoir trees to the left, classical architecture to the right, a luminous horizon drawing the eye deep into the picture plane. Turner had studied Claude obsessively; he left works to the nation on the condition they hang beside Claude's paintings in perpetuity. The subject comes from **Virgil's *Aeneid***. Aeneas, a Trojan prince who fled the fall of Troy, is shipwrecked at Carthage and falls in love with its queen, **Dido**. Turner shows the radiant morning of their courtship — the hunting party assembling, figures moving through golden light with an ease that suggests nothing can go wrong. The tragedy, of course, lies just offstage. Aeneas carries a divine obligation to travel on to Italy and found Rome, and when duty finally overrides desire, Dido's grief destroys her. She takes her own life. Turner understood that Claude's format was not merely decorative — it was morally weighted. The beauty of the scene makes the coming devastation more acute, not less.

Notes

This is an example of an artist, Turner, who followed in the tradition of the Old Masters. It was painted 166 years after the previous painting.

This story comes from Virgil's *The Aeneid*. Aeneas was a prince who fled Troy at the end of the Trojan War and was shipwrecked in Carthage. He fell in love with the queen, Dido. He had been told it was his destiny to become the founder of Rome but his love for Dido made him delay his final journey to Italy.

Turner shows the blossoming of their love, as they set out to go hunting in the woods. When Aeneas finally left Carthage the heartbroken Dido killed herself.



Joseph Mallord William Turner
(1775–1851)
The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire
1817
170.2 x 238.8 cm
Tate, London

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire*, 1817, 170.2 x 238.8 cm, Tate, London

The morning scene of **Dido and Aeneas** was, then, only one half of Turner's argument. Its companion piece, ***Dido Building Carthage***, painted in **1815**, shows the empire at its confident dawn — and the two works are designed to be read against each other. Set them side by side and you see Turner's grand thesis: that empire rises, and empire falls, and the arc is as inevitable as the movement of the sun across the sky. The setting sun in the 1814 painting is not incidental; it is the structural point. Turner had watched the Napoleonic wars reshape Europe, and he drew a pointed conclusion. The fate of Carthage was not ancient history — it was a warning aimed squarely at **Britain**. Victory over Napoleon offered no immunity from the cycle; it simply placed Britain at the top of the wheel, which is precisely the most dangerous position to occupy. His bequest makes the argument permanent. ***Dido Building Carthage*** hangs in the **National Gallery** alongside a **Claude**, exactly as Turner stipulated. He wanted posterity to see the comparison directly, not in reproduction. The student stands between Claude's serenity and Turner's ambition, and the distance between them measures the weight of history pressing down on the Victorian imagination.

Notes

Claude Lorrain was Turner's favourite old master painter. This is one of his greatest essays in Claude's style. It is part of a pair of paintings showing the rise and fall of

a great empire; here, Carthage's decline is symbolised by the setting sun.

Turner saw the rise and fall of once-great empires as a historical inevitability, confirmed by the fall of Napoleon, but threatening to overtake the victorious British. Today, the other half of the pair Dido building Carthage; or the Rise of the Carthaginian Empire hangs, at Turner's request, alongside a painting by Claude in the National Gallery.



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

From Turner's grand historical vision, we turn to a different relationship with the English landscape — one grounded in place, in accurate observation, and in the peculiar pressures of war. **Topographical landscape painting** records a specific location faithfully, and its roots lie partly in the Grand Tour tradition, where wealthy young men returning from **Rome** or **Venice** brought back painted souvenirs of the cities they had visited. By **1800**, however, the Napoleonic Wars had slammed that route shut, and the market for illustrated travel guides to **Britain** itself expanded rapidly to fill the gap. Artists who could produce accurate, engraved views of the British countryside found ready employment. **Thomas Girtin** represents this tradition at its finest. His **White House at Chelsea**, painted in **1800**, shows a particular stretch of the **Thames** looking upstream toward **Battersea** — the old wooden bridge to the right, **Battersea Old Mill** rising against the sky, and the white house itself standing quietly on the far bank where Battersea Park would later be laid out. But Girtin's achievement goes well beyond topographical accuracy. The **Art Journal** in **1852** credited him with transforming the merely documentary into something evocative — and this painting demonstrates exactly that. The stillness, the fading light, the reflective hush over the water: these are not incidental effects but the point of the picture entirely.

Notes

Thomas Girtin (1775-1802, died aged 27), The White House at Chelsea, 1800, watercolour, Tate Britain

Henry Edridge (1769-1821), Thomas Girtin, watercolour on ivory, c. 1796
Anon, Old Battersea Mill, 1800, engraved by William Henry Prior (1812-1882), published in "Old and New London" about 1880; the colouring is modern

We move on to topographical landscape`s. These show 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. Before photographic topographical paintings were used to record a location.

I have chosen this painting by Thomas Girtin to represent a topographical landscape.

One reason I chose it is that it was painted in the first year of the century and another reason is that many regard it as one of the great landscapes of the nineteenth century.

It is called The White House at Chelsea and 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. 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 but in 1800 we were at war and although this idyllic scene gives no hint of the conflict abroad it does inspire 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.

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.

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 (Henry St John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke 1678-1751). 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.

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.

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. He was welcome as a houseguest at his patrons’ country houses and the following year he spent five and a half months in Paris. In spring and summer

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>



John Mallord William Turner (1775–1851)

A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth

1790

Watercolour

Indianapolis Museum of Art,
Indianapolis

John Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth*, 1790, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis

Girtin and Turner were exact contemporaries, and **Thomas Malton** was tutor to both. Where Girtin's watercolours dissolved into atmospheric stillness, Turner's earliest exhibited work shows a different preoccupation — precision, structure, and the confident command of architectural space. ***A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth*** was accepted by the **Royal Academy** in **April 1790**, the month Turner turned fifteen. Over the next sixty years he would exhibit **267 paintings** there — but this is where it begins. The work is a demonstration of Malton's topographical method: buildings set at sharp angles to one another, perspective handled with complete assurance. Malton's own reputation rested on his illustrated survey, *A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster*, with its hundred aquatint plates, and his influence on Turner's early draughtsmanship is unmistakable. The watercolour also reveals Turner's technical discipline with tone. Working light to dark — as watercolour demands — he would mix a wash, apply it across multiple drawings, then deepen the tone progressively, building the final image in carefully controlled layers. The scene itself looks across to **Lambeth Palace**, the Archbishop of Canterbury's residence since around **1200**, with **Westminster Bridge** visible in the distance. In **1790**, Lambeth sat entirely outside London proper — a semi-rural shore about to be transformed beyond recognition.

Notes

This is a typical topographic landscape, it is A View of the Archbishop's Palace, Lambeth and was the first Turner artwork to be accepted for the Royal Academy's annual exhibition in April 1790, the month he turned fifteen. In the next 60 years Turner displayed 267 paintings at the Royal Academy.

The image is a technical presentation of Turner's strong grasp of the elements of perspective with several buildings at sharp angles to each other, demonstrating Turner's thorough mastery of Thomas Malton's (1748-1804) topographical style. Malton was a tutor of both Girtin and Turner and he is best known for the book 'A Picturesque Tour through the Cities of London and Westminster', illustrated with a hundred aquatint plates.

By the late 1780s Turner was working for various architects, including Malton, and architectural topographers. He had been interviewed by Sir Joshua Reynolds the previous year (1789) and admitted as a student. Until 1816 the Royal Academy only taught drawing not painting. A student would normally spend two and a half years drawing casts before being allowed to enter the life class.

The watercolour demonstrates Turner's early ability to control tonal variation. With watercolour it is necessary to work from light to dark and Turner learnt to mix a light one and then apply it across a number of drawing before mixing a slightly darker tone and applying that until he had added the darkest tone to all the paintings.

London's Bridges

For 600 years the nearest bridge to London Bridge was Kingston Bridge

Then Putney Bridge 1729

Old Westminster bridge, in the background, was built between 1732 and 1750.

London Bridge was widened and houses were pulled down in 1760

Kew Bridge (1759), Battersea Bridge (1773) and Richmond Bridge (1777) followed.

The current Lambeth Bridge was not built until 1862. It was built on the site of the horse ferry by Peter Barlow and Charles Dickens considered it 'on the whole, the ugliest ever built'. The current bridge was opened in 1932.

History

Lambeth Palace is the official home of the Archbishop of Canterbury and was acquired in about 1200. The oldest remaining part is the Lollard Tower which dates from 1435-1440. The front is an early Tudor brick gatehouse built by Cardinal John Morton and completed in 1495.

In 1790 anything south of the river such as Southwark and Lambeth were not part of London and Westminster on the other side of the river was regarded as a separate city from London.

The horse ferry was on the left. It was a flat bottomed boat that had many accidents. The road on the right is Horseferry Road (now on the other side of the river). The river was so low here it could sometimes be crossed at low tide. In the eighteenth century this area was used for fairs and public entertainment. Just to the right there was a windmill and behind us another two.

This was just about to become an area of massive expansion in the next ten years the number of houses doubled and from 1778 to 1822 it increased six-fold.

In the nineteenth century Lambeth Bridge was built, the Swan pub was pulled down and the area became full of factories and slums including the first factory of John Doulton which became Royal Doulton. The population increase from 25,000 in 1800 to 300,000 in 1900 (12-fold). It becomes industrialized and massively overcrowded.

Opposite, where Tate Britain (1897) is now, was the massive Millbank Penitentiary (1816-1890). Millbank Penitentiary was purchased for the Crown by Jeremy Bentham to build a panopticon but this idea was abandoned. It was unhealthy as it was built on marshy land and the labyrinthine corridors so complex even the warders got lost. It was replaced by Pentonville (1842) but continued to be used as a holding prison for 4,000 inmates awaiting transportation until the practice was abandoned in 1853-1867 when it became a local prison and then a military prison.

In 1848 the railway cut through alongside the Ragged School that taught 800 poor children. Pigs and chickens still ran through the streets. In 1850 this whole area was flooded as the Thames (London's sewer) regularly burst its banks.

It is now a roundabout and Westminster Tower and Parliament View apartments. Westminster Tower contains the Al-Jazeera TV channel and the International Maritime Organization.



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

From Turner's precise topography at Lambeth, we move to a painting that raises a harder question: what does accuracy actually mean in landscape? **Wivenhoe Park**, painted by **John Constable** in **1816**, looks, at first glance, like an exemplary topographical record. The brushwork is tighter than in his later paintings, the perspective expansive, the light crystalline — what Constable himself called the "**chiaroscuro of nature**". Major-General **Francis Slater Rebow**, a friend of Constable's father, commissioned it as a portrait of his Essex estate. In the far left distance, Rebow's eleven-year-old daughter **Mary** drives a donkey cart with a companion — a detail the patron evidently required. Yet **Ernst Gombrich**, visiting the site in **1959** and photographing it, demonstrated that the house and the lake shown together in the painting cannot in fact be seen simultaneously from any single viewpoint. Constable even added strips of canvas on both sides to accommodate everything Rebow insisted upon, writing: "the great difficulty has been to get so much in as they wanted to make them acquainted with the scene." The lesson is not that Constable deceived anyone. It is that every landscape representation — painted or photographed — involves choices of position, framing, and emphasis. There is no single true likeness.

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.

In the distance we can even see Mary Rebow, his daughter, driving a donkey cart with a friend (Mary was 11 years old, when 7 Constable had painted her portrait which is now lost).

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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'.

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. His parents Golding and Ann Constable approved the match but thought he should wait until he was financially secure. They died in 1816 and Constable inherited a fifth share of the business, became financially independent and married the same year. His father had made his money by inheriting from his childless uncle and from Ann's dowry. They were not gentry but Ann knew Lady Beaumont who lived in Dedham. The whole family were Tories and objected to the sale of land to Whigs.

In 1827 Maria's father died leaving her £20,000 in Spring 1828 which Constable invested poorly. Maria died on 23 November 1828.

He only sold 20 paintings in England but 20 in France in just a few years but he fell out with his French dealer Arrowsmith.

RA student in 1799, first exhibited 1802, ARA in 1819, Academician 1829.

Leslie wrote in 1824 'You have long lain under a mistake; men do not purchase pictures because they admire them, but because others covet them...'

Art is a construction that needs an art world to define and recognise it and Constable was always at odds with the Royal Academy aesthetic. Constable work was criticized for its 'lack of finish', Constable wrote,

'My art flatters nobody by imitation, it courts nobody by smoothness, it tickles nobody by pettiness, it is without either fal-de-lal or fiddle-de-dee: how can I therefore hope to be popular?'

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.

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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

We now know that 'The Year Without a Summer' 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.

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.

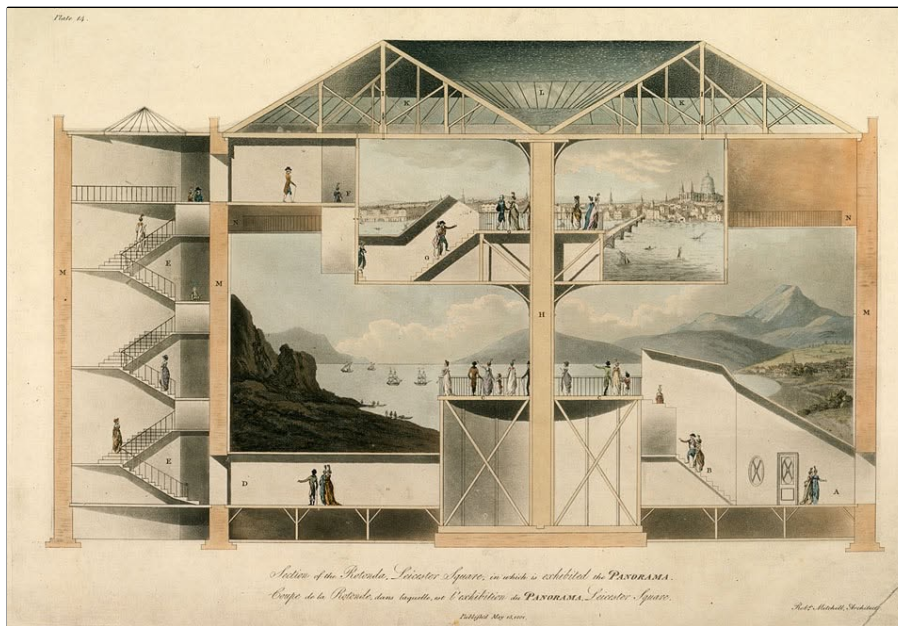
The sheep were cold and hungry and many starved to death,

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."



Cross-section of the Rotunda in Leicester Square, 1801

Cross-section of the Rotunda in Leicester Square, 1801.

The conclusion Gombrich's experiment points to — that framing is always a choice — finds its most spectacular Victorian expression in the panorama craze, a phenomenon that gripped Britain from the **1790s** through the middle decades of the nineteenth century. **Robert Barker** coined the word panorama in **1792**, deriving it from the Greek for "all view," and opened the first purpose-built panorama rotunda in **Leicester Square**. Visitors paid three shillings to stand on a central platform beneath a skylight, surrounded on every side by an enormous painted canvas. Barker grew wealthy, and dozens of rival venues followed. The **Museum of London** has recorded **126 panoramas** exhibited between **1793 and 1863** alone. The related **diorama** added lighting effects to the spectacle. **Louis Daguerre**, later the inventor of the daguerreotype, brought the format to London in **1823**, having trained directly with panorama painters — a genealogy that links these popular entertainments directly to the invention of photography. **Thomas Girtin** exemplifies the serious artistic ambition behind the form. Stationed on the roof of the British Plate Glass Manufactory opposite St Paul's, he spent three months producing a complete **360-degree survey** of London, painting it onto an enormous canvas in oils. When it opened, the **Treaty of Amiens** had just been signed, and Girtin travelled to Paris to make the engravings he sold alongside the exhibition.

Notes

In a way the ultimate topographical painting was the panorama. A craze in the late eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries. The scenes were landscapes, often painted by landscape artists and they became very popular.

The Eidometropolis was an example of a panorama, which became very popular in Regency England.

The first purpose built panorama building in the world was in Leicester Square. Visitors paid three shillings to stand on a central platform under a skylight to examine the panorama on the circular wall surrounding them. Barker became rich and many panorama followed.

Key point: the panorama craze last through much of the nineteenth century and was eventually replaced by the cinema

The Panorama Craze

Robert Barker (1739-1806) coined the word panorama in 1792 meaning 'all view'.

The Museum of London has recorded 126 panorama's exhibited between 1793 and 1863.

Another exciting experience was the diorama, an elaborate scene in an artificially-lit room-sized box first taken to London in 1823 by Louis Daguerre (inventor of the Daguerreotype), who had trained with a painter of panoramas. Eventually, these public spectacles were replaced by moving pictures and the cinema.

Panoramas were produced by artists or teams of artists positioned on the roof of a tall building. Girtin drew a panorama from the roof of the British Plate Glass Manufactory Company's warehouse which was opposite St. Paul's Cathedral. He took three months and completed a 360 degree view. He then painted from his drawings onto an enormous canvas in oils rather than the distemper that was often used. As he was completing the panorama Britain and France agreed a peace treaty called the Treaty of Amiens and Girtin, and other artists, took the opportunity to travel to Paris. He made engravings of Paris and when the panorama was exhibited he offered the engravings for sale.



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

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

Girtin's panoramic ambition belonged to a culture hungry for new ways of seeing landscape — and no set of ideas shaped that hunger more decisively in the late eighteenth century than the **picturesque**. The term was codified by **William Gilpin**, an Anglican cleric and artist, in his **Observations on the River Wye**, published in **1782**. Gilpin drew on **Edmund Burke's** earlier distinction, from his **1757** philosophical enquiry, between beauty — smooth, gentle, reassuring — and the sublime — vast, obscure, terrifying. The picturesque, for Gilpin, occupied the middle ground: roughness, irregularity, sudden variation in form and light. Standing before **Tintern Abbey**, he famously complained that its gable end hurt the eye with its regularity, and suggested taking a mallet to it. The ruin needed more ruin. The idea caught fire. Jane Austen mocked it affectionately in *Northanger Abbey*. Yet Gilpin's deeper argument was serious: Britain itself contained scenery worthy of artistic attention, making the **Grand Tour** unnecessary. Picturesque tourism turned landscape-looking into something closer to sport. Gilpin compared his followers to big-game hunters, tracking wild scenes, fixing them as pictorial trophies. One dedicated tourist, **James Plumptre** of Clare College Cambridge, walked over seventeen hundred miles in pursuit of views, pedometer in hand.

Notes

The picturesque was defined by William Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye*

(1782) and it became so fashionable it was satirized by Jane Austen.

This is a picturesque view of Tintern Abbey from that book. 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 1,777 $\frac{1}{4}$ 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,



Joan Hassall (1906–1988)
View of Bath from Beechen Cliff
 1957–1962
 Folio Society, London



Joan Hassall (1906–1988), *View of Bath from Beechen Cliff*, 1957–1962, Folio Society, London

Austen's mockery of the picturesque was affectionate, but it had a precise satirical target — the way the vocabulary of connoisseurship could substitute for genuine feeling. The passage Laurence just read turns on exactly that irony: Catherine Morland becomes so well-drilled in **foregrounds**, **side-screens**, and **second distances** that she dismisses the whole city of **Bath** as pictorially inadequate. The joke is on the system, not the girl. The view she and Henry Tilney share from **Beechen Cliff** is the same one rendered, entirely without irony, by **Thomas Hosmer Shepherd** across his topographical watercolours of the **1830s** to **1860s**. Shepherd was a professional view-maker in the most literal sense — prolific, accurate, commercially minded — and his Bath sits tidily within the picturesque formula: middle distance, framing foliage, the city disposed pleasingly below. There is no mallet taken to it. **Joan Hassall's** 1957 illustration for the **Folio Society** edition returns to that same cliff-top prospect, now filtered through a mid-twentieth century wood-engraving sensibility — precise, affectionate, gently retrospective. Two artists, separated by over a century, measuring themselves against the same scene that Austen had already measured against a theory.

Notes

Illustration by Joan Hassall (1906-1988), *View of Bath from Beechen Cliff*, Folio Society, London. Hassall illustrated English literary classics. Produced for a limited

edition Austen produced by the Folio Society 1957-62.

Thomas Hosmer Shepherd (1792-1864), Bath from Beechen Cliff, 1830-1864, Shepherd was a well-known topographical watercolour artist

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.

I will now play you an excerpt from the novel. It is Catherine, she, 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).



Titian (Tiziano Vecelli, c. 1488/1490–1576), formerly attributed to Giorgione (born Giorgio Barbarelli da Castelfranco; c. 1477/8–1510)
Pastoral Concert (*Fête Champêtre*)
 c. 1509
 Louvre, Paris

Titian (Tiziano Vecelli, c. 1488/1490–1576), formerly attributed to Giorgione (born Giorgio Barbarelli da Castelfranco; c. 1477/8–1510), *Pastoral Concert (Fête Champêtre)*, c. 1509, Louvre, Paris

From Bath's picturesquely framed rooftops, we move to the deeper roots of landscape as a mode of feeling — to the **pastoral**, and to what it meant long before Victorian painters made it their own. The pastoral is, at its core, the dream of a golden age. **Hesiod**, writing in the eighth century BC in **Works and Days**, described that earliest era as one of perfect harmony between humanity and nature — no toil, no conflict, only abundance. That idea never entirely left Western art, and it reached the Victorian period carrying centuries of accumulated longing. **Titian's** painting from around **1510**, now thought to be his rather than Giorgione's, shows just how ancient the tradition is. In the background, a shepherd tends his flock and plays a pipe — the pastoral's defining image. In the foreground, the figures form an allegory of poetry and music: the lute-player representing lyric poetry, sung to the lyre in ancient Greek practice, the two women as muses of tragedy and pastoral comedy respectively. **Aristotle**, in the **Poetics**, drew precisely this distinction between elevated and ordinary verse. What the painting holds together — divine and profane, nature and art, shepherd and singer — is exactly the tension the pastoral always negotiates. It offers not realism, but a remembered paradise.

Notes

Pastoral

We come to the Pastoral: A literary or other artistic work that portrays or evokes rural life, usually in an idealized way. The pastoral harks back to a golden age which was described in ancient Greek texts, such as Hesiod's *Works and Days*.

I start with this early sixteenth century painting now thought to be by Titian to show that the idea of the pastoral landscape had a long tradition. The painting shows the shepherd in the background playing a bagpipe and tending his sheep, a key aspect of the pastoral. The pastoral is an idyllic landscape set in some other worldly, classical landscape, a type of earthly paradise.

In the foreground Titian has what could be an allegory of poetry and music. The women could be divine or imaginary beings representing ideal beauty created from the men's inspiration. The woman with the glass vase would be the superior muse of tragic poetry and the other comedy or pastoral poetry. The man with the lute would represent lyric poetry, which in the ancient Greek period was poetry sang to a lyre. The other man would be an ordinary poet, a distinction made by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. It represents the close relationship between man and nature, poetry and music and the divine and the profane.

Notes

The ancient Greeks believed there were five ages, the golden, silver, bronze, iron and human. During the golden age there was a perfect relationship between man, typically represented as a shepherd and nature. It is associated with the Garden of Eden.



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

That pastoral dream of abundance Hesiod described — of land yielding freely without struggle — meets its bleak inversion in **Turner's** painting of **1809**, exhibited at his own gallery and known as **Thomson's Aeolian Harp**, though he later titled it more precisely as a view near **Slough**. The location matters enormously. Turner places us at Salt Hill, a celebrated vantage point, with **Windsor Castle** dominating the distance — more prominent than the actual geography warrants, a deliberate choice. The art historian **John Barrell** was first to read the painting as patriotic celebration: the castle representing monarchy, the labourers below it feeding a nation whose ports **Napoleon** had blockaded since **1806**. The **Tate** describes it as depicting efforts to maximise yields for a wartime economy, and on that first level the reading holds. But **Michele Miller**, writing in **2004**, identified troubling anomalies. The plough is broken. The harvest amounts to a small barrowful of turnips beside a sprawling mass of weeds. A bottle sits conspicuously in the brightest patch of light — and contemporary audiences knew exactly what that signalled about the undeserving poor. The soil is boggy, and as **Arthur Young** noted for the **Board of Agriculture in 1794**, turnips grown in the wrong soil do more injury to the land than the crop is worth. Turner named the site near Slough deliberately. To literate viewers, Slough meant one thing above all: **Bunyan's** Slough of Despond, the place that resists all mending however long the King's labourers work upon it.

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.

The painting was first exhibited April 1809 in Turner's gallery. At first glance we see a Romantic painting of the pastoral or bucolic type. That is it shows the herding of livestock. It is also 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). Related to the Greek Hesiod's Works and Days regarding man's relationship to the land and the importance of hard work.

My talk on Turner and Turnips explains that there is much more to this painting than at first meets the eye. I don't have time to go into detail here but it is pastoral, patriotic and political.

First Level - Pastoral

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'.

Second Level - Patriotic

The art historian John Barrell 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 significant at the time tied up in this sentence.

Third level - Political

The third level of meaning was suggested by 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 the 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 produce grain-fed wheat 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 neighbours livestock would eat all your turnips. Turnips therefore called to mind enclosure. 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.

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.

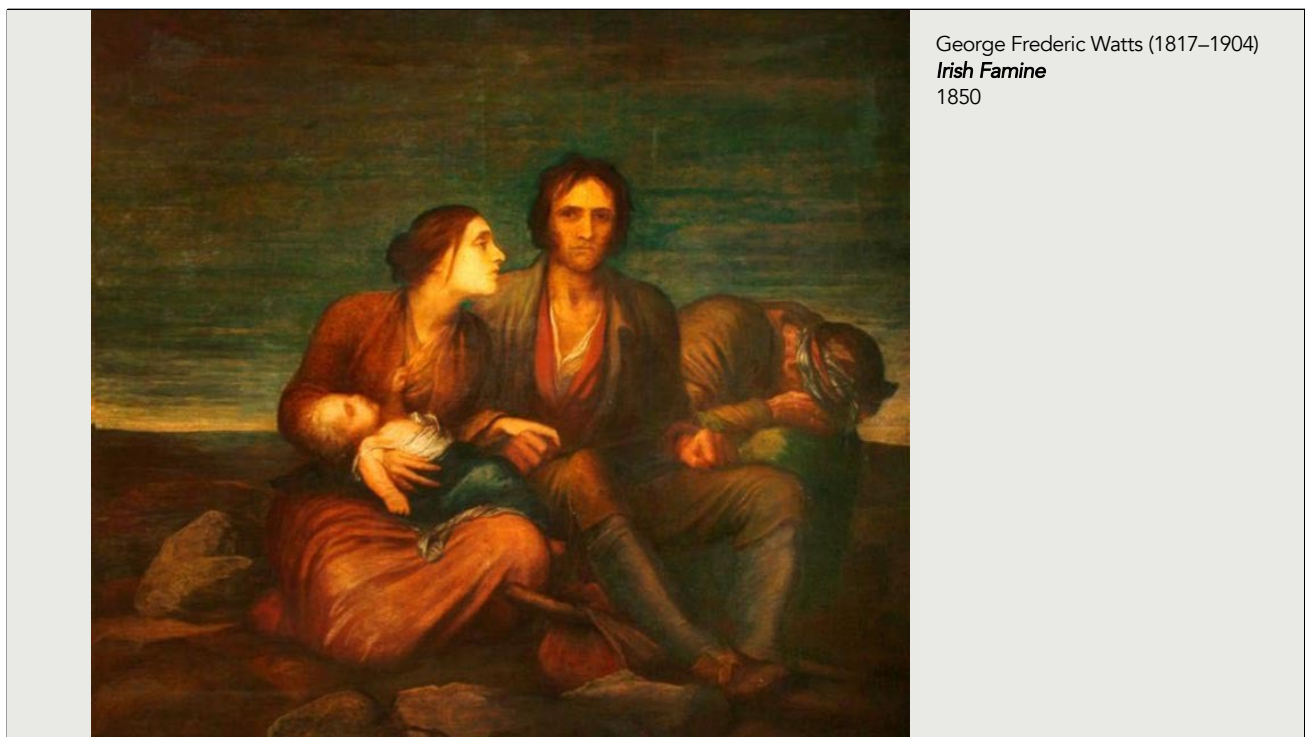
Turnips = Extreme Poverty

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.

Summary

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.



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

Turner's broken plough and boggy turnip fields speak to rural misery in England, but the **1840s** brought catastrophe on an entirely different scale across the Irish Sea. The **Great Famine of 1845 to 1852** killed more than a million people and drove roughly two million more to emigrate, reducing Ireland's population of eight million by nearly a quarter. What made this not merely a natural disaster but a political atrocity was a simple fact reported throughout in **The Illustrated London News**: sufficient grain was being exported from Ireland to feed the entire population even as people starved. **John Mitchel** gave this its sharpest formulation: "The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the Famine." The famine burned a hatred of English rule into the Irish diaspora worldwide, making eventual independence, achieved in **1922**, a near-inevitability from that moment forward. Few painters confronted the subject directly. **George Frederic Watts** was the rare exception, and his painting simply titled **Irish Famine** shows why social realist work of this period places figures at the centre, with landscape reduced to a bleak backdrop — the land itself no longer the subject, but the site of suffering. The **Quaker relief worker Joseph Crosfield**, visiting in **1846**, described children "worn to skeletons, their features sharpened with hunger."

Notes

With social realism it is the figures that are significant and so the landscape is often

in the background but forms an important social context.

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 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 Famine, Irish independence was inevitable. More than 1 million of Ireland's 8 million people perished of starvation or disease. Another 2 million Irish emigrated. The population of Ireland was thus 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 had created a burning hatred toward the English, both among those who survived in Ireland and the immigrants who fanned out around the world.

In 1801 the Kingdom of Ireland united with the Kingdom of Great Britain (which had been formed by the union of England and Scotland in 1707) to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

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 feed 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..



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

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

From the bleak Irish landscape as a site of suffering, we move to a painting where landscape becomes something more complex — a place of leave-taking, memory, and bittersweet hope. **Richard Redgrave's** **The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home**, painted in **1858**, shows a family pausing on **Leith Hill** in Surrey, where Redgrave owned a cottage and spent his summers. He knew this ground intimately. The father carries a carpenter's bag — Redgrave himself described the figure as a modern Joseph, escaping with his family to a new land and life. Across the valley, villagers have gathered on the opposite hill to wave farewell. A crippled boy stands halfway down, forlorn, unable to follow; he seems to look towards a girl who half turns back, urged onward by her sister. Redgrave had earlier made his name with unflinching social realism — **The Sempstress** of **1844**, **The Outcast** of **1851** — but here the mood is gentler. Sunshine floods the scene, and **John Ruskin** praised its beautiful distance. After visiting the **Paris International Exhibition of 1855**, Redgrave noted that French landscapes were full of passion, strife, and bloodshed; British landscapes, by contrast, offered the peaceful scenes of home. The English countryside had become, in Wordsworthian terms, an icon of peace — which may explain precisely why painters so rarely showed the suffering hidden within it.

Notes

This landscape is about the family emigrating.

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

Redgrave's *Emigrants* look back at a Surrey landscape suffused with hope. **John Brett's** *The Stonebreaker*, painted in **1857-58**, shows us the same Surrey countryside stripped of consolation. Brett was born in Reigate, trained under **James Duffield Harding** and later under **Richard Redgrave** himself, then entered the Royal Academy Schools in **1853**. He was a scientist as much as a painter — he later became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society — and his excitement about **Ruskin's** writings drew him firmly into the Pre-Raphaelite orbit. The painting shows a boy, modelled by Brett's younger brother Edwin, breaking flints on a hillside above the **Mole Valley**. Box Hill rises across the valley; a milestone marks twenty-three miles to London; a railway embankment cuts the middle distance. Every detail of the Surrey chalk landscape is rendered with geological exactness, and Ruskin declared the work went beyond anything the Pre-Raphaelites had achieved, singling out the thistledown, the chalk hills, the elm trees, and the far clouds. Brett inscribed a preparatory sketch with the words "**Outside Eden**", and the painting carries that weight. **Marcia Pointon** reads the flint pile as a memento mori — the deep time of the earth set against the brevity of one child's labour — a reading that the blasted tree and the caged bullfinch's contrast with the open sky quietly confirms.

Notes

This landscape overlooking Box Hill is about the poor and the workhouse.

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.

He shows a young boy breaking flints in bright sunlight. Across the Mole Valley we see Box Hill and the milestone shows the distance to London. There is a railway bridge in the middle distance and we are looking down on St. Michael's Church. The painting reflects Brett's interest in geology but it also comments on the work given to the poor and destitute by local Parish boards. 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.

Every detail of this Surrey valley are captured with scientific accuracy. 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 (signifying death) 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.

Down below the yew trees surround Druid's Grove, reputedly haunted by evil spirits. Brett includes Mickleham Church even though it cannot be seen from this angle so the painting may have religious significance.

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.

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.

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.

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.

John Brett

Born in Reigate, the son of an army vet. Began lesson with James Duffield Harding, landscape painter. Also studied with Richard Redgrave. Entered RA School in 1853 aged 23.

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

John Ruskin said of a later work by Brett (*Val d'Aosta*), 'I never saw the mirror so held up to Nature;¹ 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.



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

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

The coincidence of title is striking: in the same Royal Academy exhibition of **1858**, Brett's boy breaks flints under an open sky, and **Henry Wallis's** **The Stonebreaker** shows us the terminus of that same labour. Where Brett's figure is a child with a future, Wallis's is a man for whom the future has closed. The figure wears the clothes of an agricultural labourer — the class hardest hit by the **Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834**, which abolished outdoor relief and drove the destitute into the workhouse. Many early viewers assumed the man was resting after a long day's work, and Wallis never publicly contradicted them. But the painting insists otherwise. The frame carried a line paraphrased from **Tennyson's** **A Dirge**, written in **1830** — "Now is thy long day's work done." The setting sun drains the palette of warmth. His hammer has not been laid aside; it has slipped from a hand that can no longer hold it. And a stoat — barely visible on close inspection — has climbed onto his right foot, drawn by the stillness of something that will not move again. The painting is a quiet indictment: rural England's forgotten poor, worked to death beyond the reach of any safety net.

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

The working poor haven't left our view yet. **Hubert von Herkomer's** **Hard Times**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy in 1890**, extends the same moral territory as Wallis — but where Wallis gave us a man at the end of his labour, Herkomer gives us a family still in the middle of theirs, or rather, waiting for it to begin. Herkomer's sympathy was not abstract. Born in Bavaria in **1849** into genuine poverty, he attended school for only two months, and that early precariousness never left him. He settled in **Bushey, Hertfordshire**, and it was the migrant agricultural labourers he observed near his home who inspired this scene: a road now called **Herkomer Road**, though in 1890 it was still **Coldharbour Lane**, open and bleak. The family depicted was real — labourer **James Quarry**, his wife Annie, and their two sons — posed indoors at Herkomer's art school, while the landscape behind them was painted in the open air. Herkomer believed painters had a social obligation, and credited illustrated newspapers — above all **The Graphic**, founded in **1869** — with transforming what English artists thought worthy of depicting. The husband's expression reads as watchful, even hopeful; the wife's as exhausted resignation. Herkomer leaves the verdict with us.

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



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

From social hardship, we turn now to social pleasure — and to a coastline that Victorian Britain was only just learning how to reach. **William Powell Frith's** **Ramsgate Sands**, exhibited at the **Royal Academy in 1854**, arrived at a precise historical moment. Britain's population had surged from nine million in 1801 to well over thirty million by mid-century, and the shift from countryside to town was equally dramatic — only twenty percent of people lived in urban centres in 1801, but fifty percent did by 1851. The railways transformed what ordinary people could do with what little leisure they had. Trains reached **Ramsgate in 1846**, and the station sat close enough to the beach that a day trip from London was suddenly imaginable for the middle classes. Frith's fellow artists were contemptuous. One dismissed the painting as "a piece of vulgar Cockney business." The public disagreed emphatically: the **Royal Academy** installed a guard rail to hold the crowds back, and **Queen Victoria** bought it for a thousand pounds. She had a personal connection — she had stayed at **Albion House**, the tall building prominent at the canvas's centre. What makes the painting historically significant is its subject itself. Frith populated the beach with mixed sexes, ages, and classes — a genuinely modern crowd — a full **twenty years** before the Impressionists theorised that ambition.

Notes

This is a landscape of the seaside and it illustrates how leisure was incorporated in

landscape.

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 an 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*, 1852-3, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham

Ford Madox Brown (1821-1893), *An English Autumn Afternoon*, 1852-3, Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham

Frith's beach crowd celebrated access to the coast; **Ford Madox Brown's** **An English Autumn Afternoon** makes the same argument about the land itself. Brown painted it from the first floor of his Hampstead flat, looking across the Heath towards Highgate at precisely **three o'clock on a late October afternoon in 1853**. He worked over two successive autumns to complete it — his largest and most ambitious painting — and the result is a deliberate rejection of every Claudian convention. There is no repoussoir, no framing device, no scenic foreground theatre. Instead a high horizon, vivid colour in the distance, and a horizontal band of foliage that simply stops the eye. Brown knew **Ruskin's** dictum — paint nature "rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, scorning nothing" — and took it more seriously than Ruskin himself did. When the picture appeared at the **British Institution in 1855**, Ruskin asked Brown: "What made you take such a very ugly subject?" Brown replied, "Because it lay out of a back window." The exchange is perfect. Ruskin wanted moral instruction or scenic grandeur; Brown wanted a literal transcript. The couple in the foreground are neither aristocrats nor tourists — they are the **middle-class public** whose right to stand on this ground was actively contested. The Heath's owner was pressing to develop it with private villas, and that sandpath Brown painted sat at the centre of a real political argument about land, access, and who the countryside belonged to.

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.

Pre-Raphaelite Landscape

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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.

Brown followed John Ruskin's advice 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.'

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 celebrates the ordinary and unpretentious. The painting is also concerned with the democratisation of leisure. The aristocratic owner of the 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. 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.

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23-13 VICTORIAN LANDSCAPE PAINTING PART 1

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Ford Madox Brown,
*An English Autumn
Afternoon*, detail,
1852-3, Birmingham Art
Gallery



Victorian landscape painting, as this talk has shown, was never simply the passive recording of scenery. From Reynolds's academicism through Turner's imperial warnings, Constable's compositional negotiations, and the panorama craze, to the social realism of Brett, Wallis, Herkomer, and Brown, landscape carried ideology, class conflict, and moral argument. Whether depicting famine, forced emigration, seaside leisure, or a Hampstead backstreet, Victorian painters consistently asked whose countryside this was — and who had the right to inhabit it.



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