

## The Romantic Age

- The Romantic period started in the eighteenth century but was at its peak between **1800 and 1850**. Among the greatest Romantic painters were **Henry Fuseli** (1741-1825), **JMW Turner** (1775-1851), **John Constable** (1776-1837), and overseas, Francisco Goya (1746-1828), Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), Theodore Gericault (1791-1824) and Eugene Delacroix (1798-63).
- The Romantic movement can be seen as a way of liberating human personality from the limitations of social convention and social morality. 'Man is born free and everywhere is in chains'—Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). He later stated during a controversial essay that 'Man is naturally good, and only by institutions is he made bad'. However, 'The Social Contract' was even more dangerous for it advocated democracy and denied the divine right of kings: thus bringing Rousseau a storm of social condemnation.

## **Romantics:**

- **Value emotions.** Romanticism regards **intense emotions** as providing an **authentic source of aesthetic experience** and social validity. This included emotions such as **horror and awe** which were associated with a new aesthetic category, **the sublime**. **React against reason** and the 'Age of Enlightenment' with its assumption that all problems can be solved through the application of reason. Romanticism also created and valued childhood as an age of innocence whereas previously children were simply young adults who had not yet grown up.
- **Value nature.** **William Wordsworth** and **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** presented poetry as an expression of personal experience filtered through an individual's emotion and imagination. They believed the truest experience was to be **found in nature** and the sublime strengthened this through an appeal to the wilder aspects of nature where the sublime could be experienced directly. In search of the sublime, romantic poets wrote about **the exotic, the supernatural and the medieval**. But they also found beauty in the lives of simple rural people and aspects of the

everyday world. The **second generation** of romantic poets included John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and George Gordon, Lord Byron. In Keats's great odes, intellectual and emotional sensibility merge in language of power and beauty. Shelley combined soaring lyricism with an apocalyptic political vision. His wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, wrote the greatest of the Gothic romances, *Frankenstein* (1818). Lord Byron was the prototypical romantic hero, the envy and scandal of the age. He has been continually identified with his own characters, particularly the rebellious, irreverent, erotically inclined Don Juan. Note that although the **Jane Austen** could be described as a Romantic author as she wrote during the romantic era but her work cannot be classified so easily. With exquisite subtlety she used irony to delineate human relationships within the context of English social life. Sir Walter Scott, Scottish nationalist and Romantic, made the genre of the historical novel widely popular. **React against academia**. It can be seen as a reaction against academic art and romanticism in the visual arts often involves a return to nature including plein-air painting, a belief in the goodness of humanity and justice for all and an emphasis on the importance of the sense and emotions rather than reason and intellect.

- **Value the past.** Romantics **valued the past** which had a charm and a beauty that had been destroyed by the industrial revolution. This nostalgia was focused on the medieval period of chivalric knights and brave deeds. Romantics value Ancient Greece and Rome a greatness which 'cannot pass away' (Shelley). This backward looking approach can be contrasted with the forward looking ideas of the Enlightenment and the ideas of progress. Romantics **reject progress**. It was partly a **reaction to the scientific reductionism** of the age and the **negative aspects of the Industrial Revolution**.
- **Value the 'Hero'.** Intuition and emotion were regarded as more valid experiences to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement therefore placed a high value on the experiences of the individual, particularly **the 'hero'**. The French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon turned many Romantics away from the hero towards supporting freedom and embracing **the politics of the people**. It is most clearly seen in the arts but can also be associated with the **politics of liberalism and radicalism** and even the emergence of **Romantic nationalism** in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century where the nation is defined by the common cultural practices of the people rather than from the monarch downwards. **Reject monarchy** and the old top-down class system.
- **Value mysticism.** Romanticism was also **associated with mysticism** because mysticism rejected the need to understand everything. Romantic love has its roots in the Romantic movement and although marrying for love has ancient origins the Romantic movement gave the idea philosophical validity. **Reject technology** and the negative effects of progress.

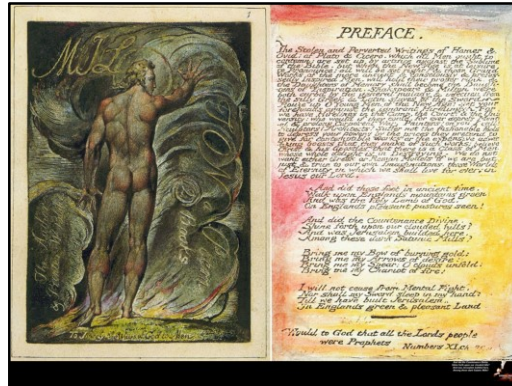
## Romanticism

## Summary of the chapter on the 'Romantic Movement' from Bertrand Russell's *The History of Western Philosophy* (1945)

- From 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day ideas have been influenced by the Romantic movement.
- It was not initially connected to philosophy but its essential form was a **revolt against existing ethical standards**.
- The French **followers of Rousseau valued sensibilité**, such a person would be **moved to tears by the poor** but would **reject any rational plan** to improve their lot.
- It was thought the **poor possessed more sensibilité** than the rich.
- The Romantic dreamt of retiring to a **peaceful rural existence**.
- This **Romantic ideal** goes back to the classical period and appears in the **work of Shakespeare and Pope**.
- The **poor were regarded as noble** and rural, never urban or industrial.
- The Romantics **rejected convention in dress and moral conventions**. Their morals were sharp and clear and they rejected chaos. According to Rousseau **prudence** was a supreme virtue as a weapon against fanatics, as were **polished manners** as a defence against barbarism. [Classical prudence or right judgement was a cardinal virtue but Romanticism promoted instinctive ethical solutions based on taking in the whole scene which therefore makes a virtue of the senses. Romanticism therefore continually devalued classical prudence until it became what it is today, a mere shadow of its former self—namely, over-exaggerated caution, hesitancy and a lack of imagination.]
- The Romantics believed the **role of education was to introduce restraint**.
- The **French Revolution changed everything**.
- The Romantics aimed at a **passionate life** and **rejected industrialism**. They were nationalists.
- **Romantics rejected utility**. The earthworm is not beautiful but useful. The tiger is beautiful but not useful. Darwin praised the earthworm, Blake praised the tiger.
- They had a preference for **wild, decaying scenes and Gothic architecture**. Johnson was not a Romantic and admired London.
- Rousseau, being Swiss, **admired the Alps**.
- Romantics **valued the useless, the destructive and the violent**. These ideas have entered the modern world as we admire the Alps and the Niagara Falls rather than to gentle meadows.
- They **liked ghosts, ancient decayed castles, pseudo-sciences** such as Mesmerism and **lawless individuals** such as pirates. They liked the grand and the remote.
- The Realists rejected Romanticism.
- Romantics **sometimes found science interesting** if it led to something amazing and **awe inspiring**.
- Romantics **liked remote, exotic places**, such as the Orient.
- A Romantic **could become a Catholic if they were born Protestant but not**

**otherwise** as it had to combine revolt with Catholicism. Their individualism was inherently Protestant however.

- In Sheridan's *Rivals* of 1775 the heroine wants to **marry a poor man for love** but the rich man pretends to be poor to woo her.
- Jane Austen made fun of the Romantics.
- Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* of 1799 was one of the **first Romantic poems**.
- Wordsworth became reactionary but the Romantic movement was continued by Shelley, Byron and Keats.
- In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* the **monster is at first a gentle being but is driven to violence by the horror he sees** and other people's reaction against his ugliness. His demand for a female partner was rejected by Frankenstein so the monster decided to murder everyone he loved including his maker, Frankenstein, but his sentiments remained noble.
- Romantics **admire all strong passions whatever the outcome**, including hatred. The Byronic Romantic is violent and passionate.
- Romantics felt a god-like passion by rejecting the conflict between the individual feeling and social convention. This is the **realm of the mystic**. We could all enjoy this feeling if we lived a solitary life and did not need to work.
- Romanticism was intimately **associated with the individual and close family members**, the closer the better. **Nietzsche loved his sister**, **Wagner** wrote about **Siegfried** loving his sister as the closer someone is to ourselves the easier it is to love them as a Romantic.
- The **Romantic outlook is aristocratic and rejects capitalism** for different reasons than the socialist. **Byron**, for example, **blamed** the problems of capitalism on **the Jew**.
- Romanticism encouraged a new **lawless ego**. But other people have their own egos which leads to **confrontation and violence**. Man is not a solitary animal but a social animal.



William Blake (1757-1827), title page of 'Milton a Poem', 1805

William Blake (1757-1827), preface, 'And did those feet in ancient times'

- This poem by William Blake tells us a lot about Romanticism.
- The legend was that Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus to visit England between his early years and when he was about 30. Joseph of Arimathea only turns up in the Bible after Jesus has been crucified when he offers the tomb he plans to use for his family to house Jesus's body for a short period. The implication is he was a friend of the family and so might have taken Jesus on a trip when he was young.
- "And did those feet in ancient time" is a short poem by William Blake from the preface to his epic *Milton a Poem*, one of a collection of writings known as the Prophetic Books. The date of 1804 on the title page is probably when the plates were begun, but the poem was printed c. 1808. Today it is best known as the anthem 'Jerusalem', with music written by Sir Hubert Parry in 1916.
- In summary Romantics:
  - Had a deep respect for nature and solitude.
  - Valued emotions (sensitivity) and the imagination over reason and rationality.
  - Celebrated individuality.
  - believed that science was risky and dangerous.
  - Were nostalgic for a distant past when everything was perfect

### Notes

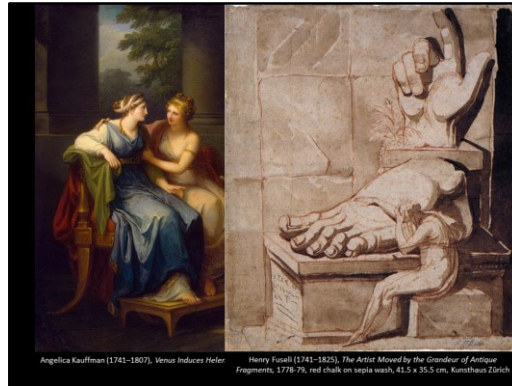
And did those feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon England's mountains green:  
And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On England's pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,

Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my Arrows of desire:  
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!  
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,  
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green & pleasant Land



Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807), *Venus Induces Helen to Fall in Love with Paris*, 1790, 102 x 127.5 cm, Hermitage Museum

Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), *The Artist Moved by the Grandeur of Antique Fragments*, 1778-79, red chalk on sepia wash, 41.5 x 35.5 cm, Kunsthau Zürich

### Romanticism v. Neoclassicism

- The Romantic is often contrasted with the Neoclassical although if we look at individual painters the distinction is often eroded.
- This painting by **Angelica Kaufmann** is a history painter in the **grand style** and is **neoclassical**.
- ‘Neoclassicism is a revival of the styles and spirit of classic antiquity inspired directly from the classical period, which coincided and reflected the developments in philosophy and other areas of the Age of Enlightenment, and was initially a reaction against the excesses of the preceding Rococo style. While the movement is often described as the opposed counterpart of Romanticism, this is a great oversimplification that tends not to be sustainable when specific artists or works are considered.’
- The Romantic spirit is conveyed by this drawing by **Henry Fuseli** (1741-1825) showing the **overwhelming despair of an artist confronted with the grandeur of the classical period**. A grandeur which is moving and can never be recaptured or repeated. Romantics valued Ancient Greece and Rome and Percy Bysshe Shelley *Ode to Liberty* described their greatness as one which ‘cannot pass away’ and which returned as ‘Saxon Alfred’ and Milton.
- **Neoclassicism** was about **hierarchy and people** and **Romanticism** was about **nature and feeling...**

### Notes

- The Judgement of Paris is a story from Greek mythology about the events that led to the Trojan Wars, and later the foundation of Rome. There are various versions

but in one version Zeus, king of the gods, held a banquet to celebrate a marriage and did not invite Eris, goddess of discord. She arrived with a golden apple from the Garden of Hesperides which she threw into the party as a reward for the most beautiful guest. Three goddesses claimed it, Hera (in Roman mythology Juno), Athena (Minerva) and Aphrodite (Venus) and Zeus was asked to judge so he appointed Paris who had not selected his own prize bull in a contest. The three goddesses try to bribe Paris by making him king of Europe and Asia (Hera), wisdom and skill in war (Athena) and the love of the world's most beautiful woman, Helen of Sparta, wife of the Greek king Menelaus (Aphrodite). Paris accepted Aphrodite's gift and awarded the apple to her, receiving Helen as well as the enmity of the Greeks and especially of Hera. The Greeks' expedition led by Agamemnon (brother of Menelaus) set out to retrieve Helen from Troy where Paris had taken her and this is the mythological basis of the Trojan War.

- The foot and the hand are from the *Colossus of Constantine*, a statue of the late Roman emperor Constantine the Great (c. 280–337) that once occupied the west apse of the Basilica of Maxentius near the Forum Romanum in Rome. Portions of the Colossus now reside in the Courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori of the Musei Capitolini, on the Capitoline Hill, above the west end of the Forum. Strangely, in the ruins, two right hands were found and it is speculated that the hand was remade to change it from holding a sceptre to a Christian symbol. The seated statue would have been about 12 metres (40 feet) high.
- Romanticism is easier to define in literature with William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the much older William Blake, followed later by the isolated figure of John Clare. Also such novelists as Jane Austen, Walter Scott and Mary Shelley, and the essayists William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb.
- In the visual arts, Romanticism first showed itself in landscape painting, where from as early as the 1760s British artists began to turn to wilder landscapes and storms, and Gothic architecture.
- The best known English Romantic painter was **J.M.W. Turner** and **John Constable**. Other groups of artists expressed feelings that **verged on the mystical**, many largely abandoning classical drawing and proportions. These included **William Blake** and **Samuel Palmer** and the other members of the Ancients in England
- In Europe the Romantics were Francisco Goya (Spain), Théodore Géricault (France), Eugène Delacroix (France), Philipp Otto Runge (Germany), Johan Christian Dahl (Norway).





John Constable (1776-1837), *The Hay Wain*, 1821, 130 x 185 cm, National Gallery

- **Nature was the principle subject** matter of Romantic painting and the **people were secondary figures** in the background.
- You all know this painting so I thought I would use it as the typical Romantic painting before looking at the pre-history of Romanticism.
- It shows a golden age before industrialization and today is uncontroversial. However, in his day Constable was revolutionary in the way he depicted nature and earned a great deal of criticism. They described his 'disagreeable', 'disfigured' and 'mannered' surface and complained his scenes were scattered with 'a huge quantity of chopped hay'. *The Times* noted his habit of 'scattering white spots over the surface of his picture', a criticism later applied to Turner. There was great resistance to Constable using lighter shades of green, there is a legend that his patron, George Beaumont, criticized him for not making the grass in the foreground the required mellow brown of an old violin. Constable, took a real violin and put it on the grass to show his patron the difference.
- Constable was born in East Bergholt in 1776, a year after Turner. He was an articulate painter who defined his personal philosophy as '**I should paint my own places best**' and '**painting is but another word for feeling**', both Romantic notions. He was never financially successful in his own lifetime and was not made an academician until he was 52. His work was successful in France where it inspired the Barbizon School.
- But this is not all there is to Romanticism. **There is a darker side...**

### Notes

- Constable painted *the Hay Wain* in 1821 and it was exhibited by the Academy that year where it was seen by Théodore Géricault on a visit to London. He praised Constable in Paris and a dealer called John Arrowsmith bought four paintings, including *The Hay Wain*. It was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1824, winning a gold

medal.

- Delacroix repainted the background of his 1824 *Massacre de Scio* after seeing the Constables at Arrowsmith's Gallery.
- In his lifetime, Constable sold only 20 paintings in England, but in France he sold more than 20 in just a few years. Despite this, he refused all invitations to travel internationally to promote his work, writing to Francis Darby: '**I would rather be a poor man [in England] than a rich man abroad.**' A Romantic sentiment.
- The shadowy figure in the centre foreground was originally a man on a horse which was changed to a barrel and then painted out. The paint has become more transparent over time so the shadow of the underpainting can now be seen. The dog was added late in the composition but is an essential part of the balance as it leads the eye across over the hay wagon into the distance scene.
- Driving a hay wagon through water had a practical benefit as in hot weather the metal rim expanded and the wooden wheel dried out and shrank. The water cooled the metal which shrank and it expanded the wood as it absorbed water thus ensuring the metal rim became a tight fit.
- The flash of red on the fisherman (right, middle distance, in the reeds) and on the horse intensify the green by the juxtaposition of its complementary colour.
- The cottage was owned by Willy Lot a local tenant farmer admired by Constable as he lived in the cottage for 80 years and only spent four nights away. He was a deaf, eccentric tenant farmer and the smoke from the chimney shows his unseen presence. The woman outside is probably gathering water using a jug as she is too far above the water surface to clean clothes effectively. The men in the distant field are gathering hay in a manner that had been abandoned in Suffolk 20 years earlier. Constable is presenting a traditional, reactionary view of the countryside that invokes the nostalgia of the previous century. In fact, his brother Abram wrote in 1822 about, 'never a **night** without seeing **fires** near or at a distance'.

## References

- Michelle Facos, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Art*



William Hogarth (1697–1764), *Satan, Sin and Death (A Scene from Milton's 'Paradise Lost')*, c.1735–40, 61.9 x 74.5 cm, Tate Britain

### The Sublime

- Let us go back 80-90 years and examine this work by Hogarth in order to approach Romanticism from a different direction.
- This is an early illustration of the sublime, which later becomes an important element of Romanticism.
- This painting by **Hogarth predates Edmund Burke's** (1729-1797) **book** (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757) and shows that **John Milton's** (1608-1674) seventeenth century ideas are related to the discourse on the sublime in the eighteenth century. It is the earliest known painting of this theme from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). From its publication Milton's poem was associated with the sublime which was known from antiquity. The first study of the sublime is Pseudo-Longinus *On the Sublime* (1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE).
- The painting follows Milton's text and shows **Satan, on the left, confronting Death** who bars his way from hell to earth. **Between them is Sin**, shown as a naked woman. She reveals to Satan that **she is his daughter**, and that **Death is their incestuous child**.
- I have a short guide to **Edmund Burke's view of the sublime...**

### Notes

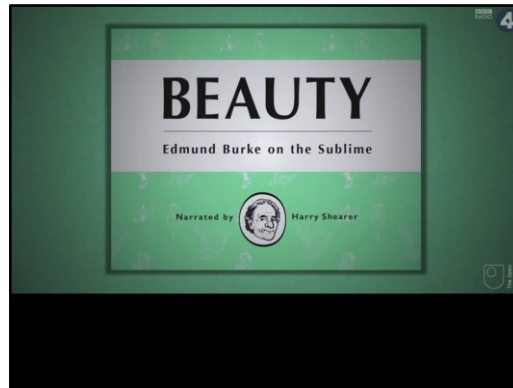
- In John Milton's (1608-1674) *Paradise Lost*, Sin is described as a beautiful woman who was born out of the left side of Satan's head. Satan raped his offspring and she gave birth to Death and he lower half was changed into that of a serpent. Death raped Sin who gave birth to a pack of hellhounds. Death would destroy Sin

but knows this would destroy him. Death is described as a dark formless shape who wears a crown, to symbolise his rule over all living beings, and carries a 'dart' (dagger) with which to pierce his victims.

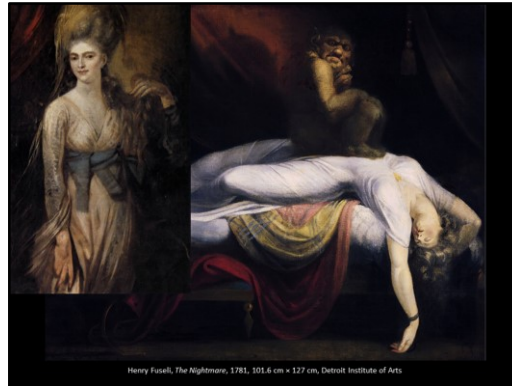
- The idea of the sublime was taken up by Immanuel Kant and the Romantic poets including especially William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.
- The so-called '**second generation**' **Romantics employed the sublime** as well, but as the early Romantics had different interpretations of the literary sublime, so too did Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and John Keats. In many instances, they reflected the desire for Enlightenment that their predecessor showed, but they also tended to stick closer to the definition of the sublime given by Longinus and Kant. They tended to focus on the terror in the sublime, and the ecstasy found there.

### **References**

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime>



- **The Romantic movement is connected to the sublime.**
- In **1750** Jean Jacques **Rousseau** (1712-1778) in his book ***Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*** describes how we are born good but corrupted by civilisation. This was associated with a **return to nature** and the idea of the **noble savage**. Rousseau describes the 'great principle that nature made man happy and good, but that society depraves him and makes him miserable....vice and error, foreign to his constitution, enter it from outside and insensibly change him'.
- In **1757** Edmund Burke wrote *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* a treatise on the aesthetic in which he separates the idea of beauty from the sublime. Briefly, the beautiful, according to Burke, is related to the passion of love and is associated with the small, smooth and delicate. It calms the nerves and the original cause is God's providence. The sublime is related to the passion of fear, especially the fear of death, and is related to vastness, infinity and magnificence. It causes tension in the nerves and its original cause is the battle between God and Satan.
- **The preference for the sublime over the beautiful was to mark the transition from the Neoclassical to the Romantic era.** Although the Romantics were concerned with beauty there was often an undercurrent, explicit or implicit, of terror and awe.



Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), *The Nightmare*, 1781, 101.6 cm × 127 cm, Institute of Arts, Detroit

Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), *Portrait of a Young Woman*, 1781, on the reverse of *Nightmare*, Institute of Arts, Detroit

- Romanticism had a darker side associated with a lack of restraint, violence, passion, ghosts and satanic practices.
- ***The Nightmare*** was painted in 1781 by Anglo-Swiss artist Henry Fuseli (1741–1825). It was exhibited in 1782 at the Royal Academy and ‘exited ... an uncommon degree of interest’ and it has remained his best known work ever since. The engraved version sold widely and the painting was parodied in political satire. Due to its fame, Fuseli painted at least three other versions of the painting.
- Interpretations of *The Nightmare* have varied widely. The canvas seems to portray simultaneously a dreaming woman and the content of her nightmare. The **incubus** and the **horse's head** refer to contemporary belief and **folklore about nightmares**, but have been ascribed more specific meanings by some theorists. Contemporary critics were taken aback by the **overt sexuality** of the painting, which has since been interpreted by some scholars as **anticipating Carl Jung's ideas** about the unconscious (some way Freud's ideas). Unlike Freud Jung believed the libido was not just sexual energy but a generalized psychic energy and that the psyche is made up of the ego, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is a uniquely Jungian idea. It is shared with other members of the human species and consists of latent memories from our ancestral and evolutionary past. ‘The form of the world into which [a person] is born is already inborn in him, as a virtual image’ as a result of evolution.
- An **incubus** is a **male demon** that according to legend **lies on sleeping women** in order to **engage in sexual activity**. Its female counterpart is a **succubus**. Her position was believed to encourage **nightmares** and the horse or mare reinforces

this interpretation. The etymology of nightmare does not relate to horses but to Scandinavian mythology and **spirits sent to suffocate sleepers** and the early meaning of nightmare included the experience of having a **heavy weight on the chest** while asleep and a **feeling of dread**. The Old English word *mære* means incubus.

- Fuseli was an **ordained minister** and he painted other scenes involving sleep but his other paintings had biblical, mythological or literary references.
- The original painting sold for twenty guineas but the **engraving earned the publisher** more than **£500**. The engraving included a short poem by Erasmus Darwin called 'Night-Mare'.

*So on his Nightmare through the evening fog  
Flits the squab Fiend o'er fen, and lake, and bog;  
Seeks some love-wilder'd maid with sleep oppress'd,  
Alights, and grinning sits upon her breast.*

- Many contemporary critics found the work **scandalous** because of its sexual associations. It has been suggested that the painting is autobiographical and represents **Fuseli's suppressed lust for Anna Landholdt**, a young woman fell passionately in love with in 1779. Landholdt or Landolt was the niece of Fuseli's friend Felix Lavater and Fuseli wrote to him a passionate letter containing the passage, 'Last night I had her in bed with me, tossed my bedclothes hugger-mugger wound my hot and tight-clasped hands about her, fused her body and soul together with my own, poured into her my spirit, breath and strength. Anyone who touches her now commits adultery and incest! She is mine, and I am hers. And have her I will.' However, the love was one-sided and came to nothing but it may have been the inspiration for the painting. Further circumstantial evidence is a sketch of a girl on the back of the painting.
- *The Nightmare* may have **influenced Mary Shelley** as the scene in *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) when the **monster murders Frankenstein's wife** describes her thrown across a bed with her **head hanging down** and her pale distorted features half covered by hair. She would have known the painting as her **parents Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin were friends of Fuseli**.
- **Henry Fuseli** (1741–1825) was a Swiss painter, draughtsman and writer on art who spent much of his life in Britain. Many of his works, such as *The Nightmare*, deal with supernatural subject-matter. He held the posts of Professor of Painting and Keeper at the **Royal Academy**. His style had a considerable influence on many younger British artists, including **William Blake**. Fuseli's father was a portrait painter and author and Fuseli was educated as a minister. He had to flee Switzerland after exposing a corrupt magistrate. He arrived in England in 1765 and supported himself by writing until he met Joshua Reynolds who convinced him to

devote himself to art. Between 1770 and 1778 he studied art in Italy. In 1778 he married and in 1779 he returned to England and joined the Royal Academy. The early feminist **Mary Wollstonecraft**, whose portrait he had painted, planned a trip with him to Paris, and **pursued him** determinedly, but after his wife's intervention the Fuseli's' door was closed to her forever. Fuseli later said '**I hate clever women. They are only troublesome**'.





Philip James De Loutherbourg (1740–1812), *An Avalanche in the Alps*, 1803, 109.9 x 160.0 cm, Tate Britain

- Later in the century the sublime was refined into **ideas of awe and terror**.
- The Alps were a familiar landscape for generations of British travellers, but it was only in the **later part of the eighteenth century that their rugged and immense qualities were appreciated for their Sublime associations**. De Loutherbourg adds human drama to the avalanche's awesome power by means of the terrified people. The bridge they were about to cross has been swept away and they are just about to be overwhelmed. One person flees, another prays and a third appears to be transfixed by the sublime spectacle.
- De Loutherbourg's exploration of sublime effect was assisted by his work as a theatre **set designer**. He also created the 'Eidophusikon', a miniature theatre where landscapes were animated and accompanied by music and sound effects.
- De Loutherbourg was not Swiss but was born in Germany of Polish origins and trained in Paris, settling in London in 1771. He seems to have visited Switzerland c. 1769–71, again in 1787, and perhaps in 1802–3 in the short period of peace following the Treaty of Amiens.

## References

- Tate website



Claude Joseph Vernet (1714-1789), *A Shipwreck in Stormy Sea*, 1773, 114.5 x 163.5 cm, National Gallery

- This is a pre-Romantic work by a French painter that shows all the features of a **Romantic seascape**. The sea as a source of terror and violence became an important subject for Romantic painters. Vernet often used figures in the foreground to add another layer of interest to the painting in a similar way to do Louthenberg. Notice that the figures are subsumed and overwhelmed by the raw power of nature.
- **Claude Joseph Vernet** was a French painter who, when he was 14, started to help his father with his painting. He worked in Rome and was renowned for his honest depiction of the weather, landscapes and the sea. He worked in Rome for 40 and was popular with British aristocrats on the Grand Tour and in 1745 he married an Englishwoman. He was recalled to Paris to paint the French seaports which are now in the Louvre. He said, 'Others may know better how to paint the sky, the earth, the ocean; no one knows better than I how to paint a picture'.

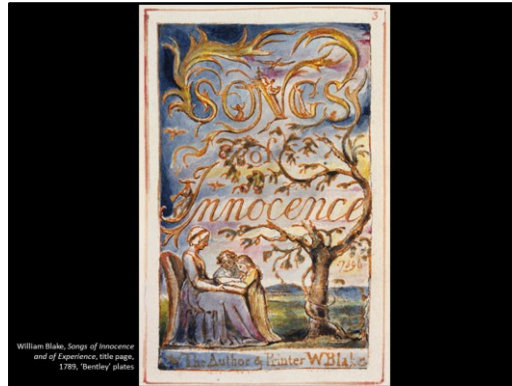


William Blake (1757-1827), *Newton*, 1795, colour print with pen & ink and watercolour, Tate Britain

- We started with William Blake as one of the first Romantic painters. Blake started seeing visions in his childhood and these images infused his poetry and painting. He poured scorn on the traditional veneration of Greek and Roman art. He wrote in a preface to Milton's work, "We do not want either Greek or Roman models if we are but just and true to our own imaginations".
- Blake's *Newton* (1795) demonstrates his opposition to scientific materialism: Newton fixes his eye on a compass (recalling Proverbs 8:27, 'When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth', an important passage for Milton) to write upon a scroll that seems to be connected to his own head.
- Blake was born in Soho, the son of a hosier and he was taken from school when he was ten because of his headstrong nature. He was enrolled in a drawing school in the Strand. Blake was influenced by the Bible from his early years and he started engraving copies of drawings of Greek antiquities purchased by his father. He discovered the works of Raphael, Michelangelo and Albrecht Durer. He was apprenticed to an engraver when he was 15 for seven years and became an engraver. When he was 22 he attended the **Royal Academy School** and came to **detest Joshua Reynolds**. Blake **married Catherine** Boucher in 1782 and taught her to read and write and to engrave and she worked as his assistant through her life. Blake opened a print shop and mixed with Joseph Priestley, John Henry Fuseli, Mary Wollstonecraft and Thomas Paine. He had great hopes of the French Revolution but changed his views, like many others, following the Reign of Terror. In 1800 Blake moved to a cottage in Felpham Sussex and in 1804 started work on *Milton*. In 1818 he met a young artist, **John Linnell**, and through him **Samuel Palmer**. His last work were illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Close to death

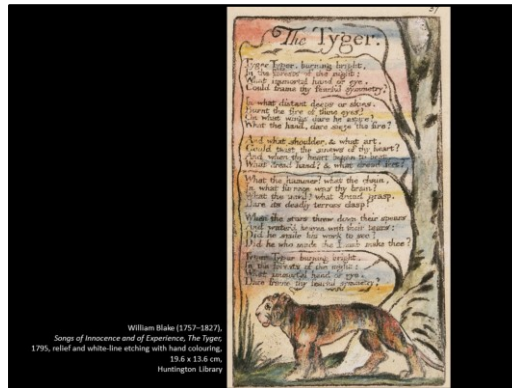
he **bought a pencil with his last shilling** and continued working up to the day he died. It is reported that he ceased working and turned to his weeping wife and said, '**Stay Kate! Keep just as you are – I will draw your portrait – for you have ever been an angel to me.**' He lay down his pencils and began to sing hymns and at six in the evening he died. A female lodger who was present said, 'I have been at the death, not of a man, but of a blessed angel.' His wife had to borrow the money from John Linnell to bury him.

- Blake was largely **unrecognised in his lifetime** he is now considered the **most significant figure** in the history of poetry and the visual arts of the **Romantic Age**. One critic recently described him as the **greatest artist Britain ever produced**. This was on the basis that he is one of the few British artists to tackle all the most difficult questions of life and death, moral absolutes, the limits of perception and the tragedy of the dishonest way we live our day-to-day lives. Blake wrote 'Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor'.
- From a young age, William **Blake claimed to have seen visions**. The first may have occurred as early as the **age of four** when, according to one anecdote, the young artist '**saw God**' when God 'put his head to the window', causing Blake to break into **screaming**. At the age of eight or ten in Peckham Rye, London, Blake claimed to have seen '**a tree filled with angels**, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars.' According to Blake's Victorian biographer Gilchrist, he returned home and reported the vision and only escaped being thrashed by his father for telling a lie through the intervention of his mother. Though all evidence suggests that his parents were largely supportive, his mother seems to have been especially so. Blake claimed to experience visions throughout his life. They were often associated with beautiful religious themes and imagery, and may have inspired him further with spiritual works and pursuits.
- Blake was ignored for a generation but following the publication of his biography in the 1860s he was taken up by the **Pre-Raphaelites**. He influenced the **British surrealist artists** such as Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland and in the **1950s** the **beat poets**, such as Allen Ginsberg.



William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, title page, 1789, 'Bentley' plates  
 Versions are held by, amongst others, the British Museum, Yale, Library of Congress, Huntington, Fitzwilliam

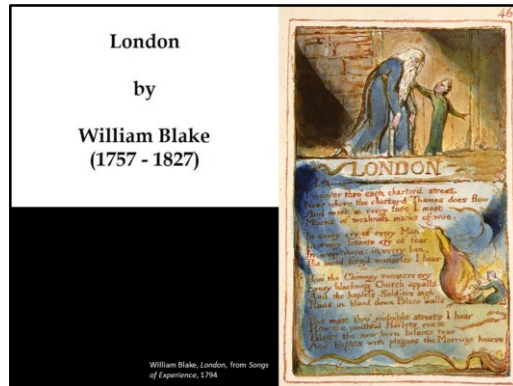
- Songs of Innocence and Experience are an illustrated collection of poems written, illustrated and published by William Blake over a number of years. 'Innocence' and 'Experience' are Blake's reinterpretation of Milton's mythic states of 'Paradise' and the 'Fall'. Blake is describing modes of perception that would be adopted by the Romantics. Blake believed that **childhood** is a state of **protected innocence** rather than original sin, but **not immune** to the fallen world and its institutions. This world sometimes impinges on childhood itself, and in any event **becomes known through "experience"**, a state of being marked by the **loss of childhood vitality, by fear and inhibition**, by social and political corruption, and by the manifold **oppression of Church, State, and the ruling classes**.
- Blake did not believe in any organised religion.
- The work includes the poems 'The Fly', 'Tyger' and 'London'.



William Blake (1757–1827), *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, The Tyger*, 1795, relief and white-line etching with hand colouring, 19.6 x 13.6 cm, Huntington Library

“White line” etching is a process where intaglio line etching plates are printed using surface rolling, creating prints with white not black lines. The crude look it produces was criticized at the time but was intentional. Blake may have intended to give an antique or primitive look that suggests the ancient origins of the text.

- Romanticism was a rejection of the ideas of the **Enlightenment**, the ‘Age of Reason’ (1620s to 1780s). **The Enlightenment** believed that scientific progress and reason could solve all problems and it rejected conventional structures and figures of authority. It was promoted and discussed in coffee houses and Masonic lodges. It challenged institutions particularly the Catholic church. It believed society could be reformed with toleration, science and scepticism.
- Philosophers including Francis Bacon (1562–1626), René **Descartes** (1596–1650), John Locke (1632–1704), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), **Voltaire** (1694–1778), **David Hume** (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Sir **Isaac Newton** (1642–1727). Enlightenment ideas were spread by Denis Diderot’s *Encyclopedia* (1751–72) and Voltaire’s *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764).
- It was associated with the scientific revolution, spearheaded by Newton, and an increase in literacy. Some of these ideals proved influential and decisive in the course of the **French Revolution**, which began in 1789. After the Revolution, the Enlightenment was followed by an opposing intellectual movement known as **Romanticism**.



William Blake, *London*, from *Songs of Experience*, 1794

- *London* is a poem by William Blake, published in *Songs of Experience* in 1794. It is one of the few poems in *Songs of Experience* which does not have a corresponding poem in *Songs of Innocence*.
- The use of the word 'Chartered' is ambiguous and goes against control and ownership. It may express the political and economic control that Blake considered London to be enduring at the time of his writing. Blake's friend **Thomas Paine** had criticised the **granting of Royal Charters to control trade** as a form of **class oppression**. However, 'chartered' could also mean 'freighted', and **may refer to the busy or overburdened** streets and river, or to the licensed trade carried on within them.

### Notes

- A ban is a prohibition or any form of restriction. So, 'In every voice: in every ban, The mind-forg'd manacles I hear' can be interpreted as meaning that in everything he hears said and in restriction and prohibition the person's mind is being shackled by their own constricted thinking and beliefs. So people are imprisoned not just by poverty but by the way they think.

### *London* by William Blake

I wander thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

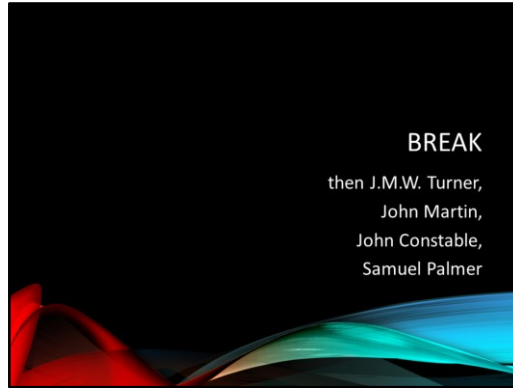
In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,

In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls,  
And the hapless Soldiers sigh  
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlots curse  
Blasts the new-born Infants tear  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse







J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Hannibal and his Men crossing the Alps*, 1810-1812, 144.7 × 236 cm, Tate Britain

- **Hannibal** was a Punic (Carthaginian) military commander generally considered one of the **greatest military commanders in history, a Romantic 'hero'**. One of his most famous achievements was at the outbreak of the **Second Punic War**, when he **marched an army**, which included **elephants**, from Iberia **over the Pyrenees** and the Alps **into Italy**. In his first few years in Italy, he won **three dramatic victories**, in which he distinguished himself for his ability to determine his and his opponent's strengths and weaknesses, and to play the battle to his strengths and the enemy's weaknesses—and won over many allies of Rome. Hannibal **occupied much of Italy** for **15 years**, but a Roman **counter-invasion of North Africa** forced him to return to **Carthage**, where he was decisively **defeated** by Scipio Africanus at the Battle of Zama.
- The painting depicts Hannibal's struggle to **cross the Alps in 218 BCE** opposed by nature and local tribes. A black storm cloud dominates the sky and threatens to swamp the soldiers while an **avalanche descends** on the right. We are looking **from the Alps down into the sunlit plains of Italy** and at the front of the army it might be Hannibal riding an elephant. The rear of the army is **fighting Salassian tribesmen** (Italian Celts) as described in histories of the period. Turner saw parallels between **Hannibal and Napoleon** and between the Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome and the Napoleonic Wars between Britain and France. **Identifying Napoleon and France with Hannibal and Carthage was unusual** because as a land power with a relatively weak navy, France was more usually identified with Rome, and the naval power of Britain drew parallels with Carthage.
- Possible influences are Jacques-Louis **David's portrait of Napoleon Crossing the Alps**, of Napoleon leading his army over the Great St Bernard Pass in May 1800, which Turner had seen during a visit to Paris in 1802. Also, possibly an oil painting

of Hannibal's army descending the Alps into northern Italy by watercolourist John Robert Cozens, *A Landscape with Hannibal in His March over the Alps, Showing to His Army the Fertile Plains of Italy*, the only oil painting that Cozens exhibited at the Royal Academy. Thomas Gray speculated that Salvator Rosa could have painted "Hannibal passing the Alps" and another spur could have been the visit of a delegation from the Tyrol to London in 1809, seeking support to oppose Napoleon.



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Snow Storm, or Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, (full title: *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth Making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the 'Ariel' left Harwich*), c. 1842, 91 x 122 cm, Tate Britain

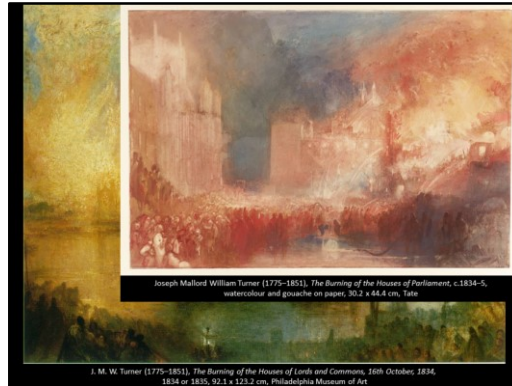
- Although criticized by contemporary critics, one described it as '**soapsuds and whitewash**', John **Ruskin** commented in *Modern Painters* (1843) that it was '**one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist and light, that has ever been put on canvas**'. Reportedly Turner was hurt by the criticism, repeating 'soapsuds and whitewash' over and over again, and saying, 'What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it'. Ruskin commented, '**It is thus, too often, that ignorance sits in judgment on the works of genius**'. More recently, art historian Alexandra Wettlaufer wrote that the painting is one of Turner's '**most famous, and most obscure, sublime depictions**'.
- There is a story that Turner asked to be **tied to the mast** of a steam-ship during a nocturnal storm at sea, to experience the feeling of it, and was there for four hours. He **was 67 years then**. Some later **commentators doubt the literal truth** of this account. Other critics accept Turner's account, and one wrote, 'He empathized completely with the dynamic form of sovereign nature.' This inscription allows us to better understand the scene represented and the confusion of elements.
- The paddle steamer '*Ariel*' was formerly called the '*Arrow*', being built in 1821-1822. In 1837 she was acquired by the Admiralty and renamed '*Ariel*', and was used as the Dover packet up to 1846. This is a **late Turner** when he was at the **peak of his ability to capture the terror and awe** caused by the power of the sea during a violent storm. Turner uses different layers of paint which are brought to life by the intensity of his brushstrokes. The palette is limited to similar tones of greens, browns and greys and Turner draws us into the central action by using pale, silvery grey wrapped in the dark brown smoke from the steamship and its hull.



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying — Typhoon coming on ('The Slave Ship')*, 1840, 90.8 × 122.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

- This perhaps most famous seascape after *The Fighting Temeraire*, he was inspired to paint *The Slave Ship* in 1840 after reading *The History and Abolition of the Slave Trade* by Thomas Clarkson. In 1781, the **captain** of the slave ship Zong had **ordered 133 slaves to be thrown overboard** so that **insurance payments could be collected**. This event probably **inspired Turner** to create his landscape and to choose to coincide its exhibition with a meeting of the British Anti-Slavery Society. Although slavery had been outlawed in the British Empire since 1833, Turner and many other abolitionists believed that slavery should be **outlawed around the world**.
- The sails are furled as it prepares for a typhoon. There are a number of chained bodies in the foreground indicating they are slaves thrown overboard. One can see fish and sea monsters swimming in the water. Objects are defined by their colour rather than by their outlines and the predominant colour is red of blood and death.
- The indistinct shapes, the emphasis on colour and emotion are typically Romantic and the focus is on nature as superior to man. The tiny figures and small shift further place the emphasis on the power of nature and the insignificance of man. This is enhanced by the quick, frenzied brushstrokes. The idea of the sublime is demonstrated by the utter powerlessness and terror of humanity in the face of nature.
- Some have seen the painting as an allegory of the exploitation of human labour associated with capitalism and the storm is either the coming collapse of capitalism as it is overwhelmed by its own immorality or the storm demonstrates that all man's efforts are insignificant before the power of nature.
- **John Ruskin**, who was the first owner of *The Slave Ship*, wrote, '**If I were reduced**

**to rest Turner's immortality upon any single work, I should choose this.'**



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16th October, 1834*, 1834 or 1835, 92.1 x 123.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art  
 Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, c.1834–5, watercolour and gouache on paper, 30.2 x 44.4 cm, Tate

- Turner painted **two oil paintings of the fire that broke out** in the Palace of Westminster on the evening of 16 October 1834. Turner witnessed the fire from the south bank at Westminster and made sketches from different points, including **possibly from a rented boat**. The first painting was exhibited at the British Institution in February 1835 and shows the fire consuming the chamber of the House of Commons in St Stephens Hall. In the distance the towers of Westminster Abbey can be seen illuminated by the fire.
- The distorted perspective of Westminster Bridge intensify the drama. The next day *The Times* wrote 'Shortly before 7 o'clock last night the inhabitants of Westminster, and of the districts on the opposite bank of the river, were thrown into the utmost confusion and alarm by the sudden breaking out of one of the most terrific conflagrations that has been witnessed for many years past....The Houses of the Lords and Commons and the adjacent buildings were on fire.'
- Many saw this as divine retribution for the passing of the Reform Act of 1832 and the fortuitous destruction of the poor architecture of some extension buildings by others. The House of Lords had recently been rebuilt in a mixture of neo-Classical by Sir John Soane and neo-Gothic by James Wyatt and some saw the burning as God's displeasure with the resulting aesthetic mess.
- Some thought the fire was an arson attempt but it was caused by the excessive burning of 'tallies'. These are square hazelwood sticks notched to show amounts of tax paid or deposited and then split in half to record the transaction. The system went back to William the Conqueror. Two cartloads of tallies had accumulated and the Board of Works decided to burn them in stoves. The two workers assigned were overly enthusiastic and despite warnings from the housekeeper who told

them that two tourists could not see the tapestries for the thick smoke, they continued to pile on the wood. They left at five o'clock and by six some oak panels had ignited. Within nine hours all the buildings except the Westminster Hall had been destroyed. Some of the destroyed buildings dated back to Edward the Confessor.

- Benjamin Robert Haydon wrote, 'The terrify burning ... from the bridge it was sublime ... The feeling among the people was extraordinary—jokes and radicalism universal.'
- Among the spectators were Charles Barry (1795-1860) who realised a new building would be required and Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) who rejoiced in the destruction of Soane's mixtures and Wyatt's heresies.



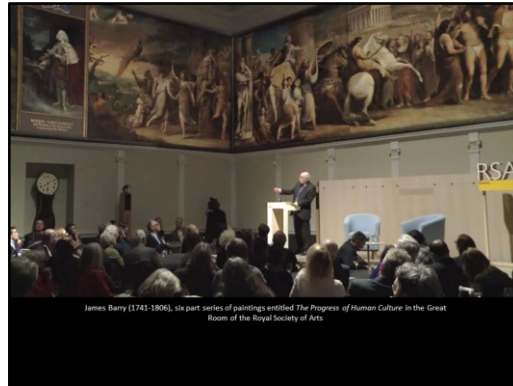


- The Palace of Westminster is a victory for Romanticism. Following intensive debate it was decided to rebuild The Palace of Westminster in Neo-Gothic style rather than Neo-classical. It was thought this was more true to the history of the country.
- The other strand of Romanticism was Neo-Gothic architecture as promoted by **Augustus Pugin** (1812-1852). Sir **Charles Barry's** (1795-1860) collaborative design for the Palace of Westminster uses the Perpendicular Gothic style, which was popular during the 15th century and returned during the Gothic revival of the 19th century. Barry was a classical architect, but he was aided by the Gothic architect Augustus Pugin. Westminster Hall, which was built in the 11th century and survived the fire of 1834, was incorporated in Barry's design. Pugin was displeased with the result of the work, especially with the symmetrical layout designed by Barry; he famously remarked, 'All Grecian, sir; Tudor details on a classic body'. Neo-Gothic architecture was focused on Romantic ideas that harked back to what was believed to be the **creativity and individual free work of the medieval craftsman** compared with the rigid symmetry of classical architecture.

### Notes

- The Palace of Westminster has three towers the largest of which is the Victoria Tower at 323 feet. At the north end is the more famous **Elizabeth Tower**, commonly known as Big Ben at 316 feet. The clock was built by Edward John Dent and is accurate to a second. It has four 23 feet faces and the minute hand is 14 feet long. Elizabeth Tower was designed by Augustus Pugin and built after his death. The largest bell is officially called The Great Bell of Westminster and generally as Big Ben.
- In 1852 aged 40 Pugin was travelling by train when he suffered a complete breakdown from overwork and was unable to speak or recognise anyone. He lived

in an asylum for four months and was taken home and recovered slightly but died the same year in Ramsgate. Some suggest he died from hyperthyroidism and others from syphilis. His death certificate says he died from 'convulsions followed by a coma'.



James Barry (1741-1806), six part series of paintings entitled *The Progress of Human Culture* in the Great Room of the Royal Society of Arts

Art historian William L Pressly offers an in-depth analysis of James Barry's murals depicting the progress of human culture and knowledge.

- James Barry (1741–1806), Irish painter, active mainly in England. In 1763, in Dublin, he met Edmund Burke, an Irish-born statesman and writer (see *Sublime*), who encouraged him to move to London and financed a lengthy Continental visit (1766–71), which he spent mainly in Rome. There Barry was overwhelmed by the work of the great masters of the Renaissance, underlining his ambition to paint elevated subjects with moral messages. In a British art world dominated by portraiture there was little patronage for this type of picture, but Barry pursued his independent path with fervour—he was the only British artist of his time who adhered consistently to Reynolds's precepts for history painting in the Grand Manner.



John Martin (1789-1854), *Belshazzar's Feast*, 1820, 80 x 120.7 cm, Yale Center for British Art

- English Romantic painter, engraver and illustrator
- **John Martin began life in poverty** in a one room cottage in a small Northumberland town called Haydon Bridge. He met an Italian drawing master and travelled with his son to London. We don't know how he learned to paint but he earned a living painting on porcelain and glass. He set himself up as an artists and started submitting works to exhibitions. To get himself noticed he painted large, spectacular paintings of Old Testament scenes. *The Fall of Babylon* of 1819 got him noticed and a year later he painted *Belshazzar's Feast*. This was Martin's triumph from which he never looked back. He boasted beforehand, 'it shall make more noise than any picture ever did before... only don't tell anyone I said so.' **Five thousand people paid to see it.** It was later nearly ruined when the carriage in which it was being transported was struck by a train at a level crossing. It embodies Ancient Egyptian and then hardly known Indian architecture and is painted in shades of red.
- Balthazar or Belshazzar was the last king of the neo-Babylonian empire ; as recounted in the book of Daniel, he dared to drink wine from the gold vases taken from the temple in Jerusalem. A hand then appeared and wrote a message on the wall of the royal palace which no one could decipher. Finally, Daniel was called to help and explained that the inscription "counted, weighed and divided" meant that God had counted the king's reign and ended it, the king had been weighed in a basket and found of little import, and his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medians and the Persians.



John Martin (1789–1854), *The Last Judgement*, 1853, 196.8 x 325.8 cm, Tate Britain

John Martin (1789–1854), *The Great Day of His Wrath*, c. 1851, 196.5 x 303.2 cm, Tate Britain

John Martin (1789–1854), *The Plains of Heaven*, c. 1851, 198.8 x 306.7 cm, Tate Britain

- John Martin could also painted **mythological idyllic scenes** such a *Clytie* and landscapes, such as *Richmond Park*, 1850 but perhaps his best known work is the triptych *The Last Judgement* (c. 1849-1853), *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851-1853) and *The Plains of Heaven* (1851-1853). After he died, the three paintings travelled around the United Kingdom before going on display in New York and then as far away as Australia in 1878-1879 ; it is said they were seen by over **eight million people around the world**.



John Constable (1776–1837), *Weymouth Bay*, c. 1816, 53 × 75 cm, National Gallery

- In 1799, aged 23, he persuaded his father to let him pursue a career in art and he entered the Royal Academy School where he studied Thomas Gainsborough, Claude Lorrain, Peter Paul Rubens and Jacob van Ruisdael.
- By 1809 he had fallen in love with his childhood friend **Maria Elizabeth Bicknell** but their marriage was opposed by her grandfather, the rector of East Bergholt as he thought the Constables were his families social inferiors. His parents, who supported the marriage, died in 1816 and Constable inherited a fifth of their estate. This enabled permission to be obtained for the marriage which took place in **October 1816 and their honeymoon** was a tour of the **south coast including Weymouth and Brighton**.
- This landscape of **Chesil Beach** was painted on their honeymoon and shows a new freedom in the brushwork and the use of brilliant colours. He did not sell his first painting until *The White Horse*, in 1819, the year he became an associate academician.



John Constable (1776–1837), *Sketch for 'Hadleigh Castle'*, c.1828–9, 122.6 x 167.3 cm, Tate

John Constable (1776–1837), *Hadleigh Castle, The Mouth of the Thames-Morning after a Stormy Night*, 1829, 121.9 x 164.5 cm, Yale Center for British Art

- He quarrelled with Arrowsmith, his dealer in France, in 1825, perhaps due to the worry of his **wife's ill-health**, his dislike of living in Brighton and the pressure of many outstanding commissions and as a result he lost his French outlet.
- After the birth of their seventh child in January 1828, **Maria fell ill and died of tuberculosis at the age of 41**. Intensely saddened, Constable wrote to his brother Golding, "**hourly do I feel the loss of my departed Angel**—God only knows how my children will be brought up...the face of the World is totally changed to me". After that, he dressed in black and was, according to Leslie, '**a prey to melancholy and anxious thoughts**'. He cared for his seven children alone for the rest of his life. Shortly before Maria died, her father had also died, **leaving her £20,000**. **Constable speculated disastrously with the money**, paying for the engraving of several mezzotints of some of his landscapes in preparation for a publication. He was hesitant and indecisive, nearly fell out with his engraver, and when the folios were published, could not interest enough subscribers.

### Notes

- This is a full-size oil sketch for the painting now in the Paul Mellon Collection at the Yale Center for British Art. Constable submitted the finished work to the Royal Academy exhibition in 1829, the year in which he was elected an Academician. He began painting six-foot canvases in 1818, in emulation of the works of the past masters of landscape such as Claude, Poussin and Rubens. He saw these **large pictures as a means to gain further recognition** as an artist, and **to elevate** what many considered the mundane subject matter of rural scenery. Unable to paint from nature on this scale, he turned increasingly to invention, and these large

studio sketches enabled him to work out the compositional problems he was encountering in the preparation of his exhibition pieces. The oil sketch would be made either prior to, or simultaneously with, the finished picture.

- Constable made a small pencil sketch of **Hadleigh Castle** near Southend in Essex in 1814, on his only visit to the area, when he wrote to his future wife Maria: 'At Hadleigh there is a ruin of a castle which from its situation is a really fine place - it commands a view of the Kent hills, the Nore and North Foreland & looking many miles to sea' (letter of 3 July 1814; in R.B. Beckett, ed., *John Constable's Correspondence*, II, Ipswich 1964, p.127). **He returned** to the pencil sketch **fifteen years later**, to develop the six-foot painting. He made a small preparatory **oil sketch**, probably in 1828 (Paul Mellon Collection, Upperville, Virginia), based on the drawing, but with the addition of a shepherd and his flock at the bottom left. In a pen and ink drawing made at around the same time (collection David Thomson), the composition has become decidedly more horizontal, having been extended on the right to include the distant Kent shore. A dog has replaced the shepherd's flock, and a tree has been added beside the castle's left-hand tower. The **Tate's large oil sketch** introduces cows in the middle-distance and gulls flying above the sea.
- Constable's wife Maria died in November 1828, and the **sombre, desolate tone** of the work is generally assumed to **reflect his mood** at this time. In a letter of 19 December of that year, he wrote to his brother Golding: '**I shall never feel again as I have felt, the face of the World is totally changed to me**' (in C.R. Leslie, ed. Hon. Andrew Shirley, *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable*, R.A., London 1937, p.234).



Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), *In a Shoreham Garden*, c. 1830, watercolour, V&A



- **The Romantic and the mystical.**
- This is Samuel Palmer's *In a Shoreham Garden*.
- **Samuel Palmer** was another born artist, although he had little formal training he first exhibited at the Royal Academy when he was only 14.
- In 1822, when he was 17 he met the artist **John Linnell** who introduced him to **William Blake** in 1824.
- Like Blake, Palmer had **visionary experiences** from childhood and the effect of Blake was to **intensify** his inherent **mystical leanings**.
- In 1826, he moved to Shoreham, near Sevenoaks, where he became the central figure of a Blake-inspired group of artists known as the Ancients.
- Palmer was an old-fashioned high Tory, he thought the Tories gave '*liberty to the poor*' but the Whigs were more cruel than the worst papists. He was deeply distrustful of any revolutionary principles. The ancient institutions, such as the Anglican Church, were sacred.
- In 1832 he wrote a pamphlet in support of his local Tory candidate who came last in the poll.
- Although his politics were reactionary his art was revolutionary.
- Graham Sutherland who was influenced by Palmer described him as '*essentially the English Van Gogh*', a comparison also made by Kenneth Clark.

## Notes

### Voting Reform

By the 1830s dissent had grown into the Swing Riots and part of the discontent was with the voting system. Birmingham and Manchester had no MPs to represent them yet Old Sarum returned two MPs to represent an abandoned medieval town. Lord Grey's Whig Government presented a reform bill in 1831 but it was rejected and eventually despite opposition the Great Reform Act of 1832 was passed. It gave the vote to only 18% of the total adult male population (in towns everyone whose home's rateable value was over £10 pa). Seats with less than 2,000 voters were removed.

### Samuel Palmer – Visionary Landscapes

- Samuel Palmer was an **important artist** whose most original period was when he worked in Shoreham, near Sevenoaks in Kent. He purchased a rundown cottage he called '**Rat Abbey**' but later moved to a Queen Anne house called **Waterhouse**, which still stands. He lived in Shoreham there from **1826 to 1835**, producing some of his **greatest work**. He had little formal training but first exhibited Turner-inspired works at the Royal Academy at the age of fourteen. He met William Blake in 1824 and his Shoreham work is influenced by Blake's visionary and mystical approach.
- In Shoreham he fell in love with fourteen-year old **Hannah Linnell**, daughter of the then famous artist John Linnell and married her when she was nineteen. In 1832 what he described as his 'primitive and infantile feeling' began to fade and after returning to London in 1835 and **marrying** Hannah Linnell in **1837** we went on a **two-year honeymoon** to Italy. When he returned the break with his visionary period was complete and he painted more **conventional** topographical and pastoral paintings for the rest of his life. It is generally assumed he painted this way in order to sell the paintings more easily in order to support his wife and children. Tragically his eldest son died at the age of 19, a blow from which he never recovered.
- Samuel Palmer was largely forgotten after his death. In 1909, many of his Shoreham works were destroyed by his surviving son Alfred Herbert Palmer, who burnt "*a great quantity of father's handiwork ... Knowing that no one would be able to make head or tail of what I burnt; I wished to save it from a more humiliating fate*". The destruction included "*sketchbooks, notebooks, and original works, and lasted for days*". It was not until the 1950s that his reputation began to recover and his rediscovered Shoreham work had a powerful influence on many English artists including Graham Sutherland and Eric Ravilious.



Samuel Palmer, *Cornfield by Moonlight*, c. 1830, 19.7 x 29.8 cm, British Museum

Samuel Palmer, a little known, but one of the most profound of the mystical Romantics.

- From *Samuel Palmer: Vision and Landscape*. One of the **largest and finest 'moonlights'** from Palmer's early Shoreham period, this shows a man in a smock, broad hat and staff travelling with his dog through a cornfield that has already been cut and stacked in sheaves. The sky has a **large waxing sickle moon** and **evening star** (Venus). The ethereal nature of the work is heightened by the **glimmering light**, which is stronger than any that could have been cast by a sickle moon and has more of the character of full-moon light. There is no specific location indicated in this work, but the rounded hills are highly reminiscent of the **Shoreham area** where this work was doubtless painted.
- While the design of the picture is **carefully composed**, the **handling is extremely free**, Palmer using **vigorous strokes** to depict the sheaves of corn. Its rich tonalities show how much Palmer developed as a colourist around 1830. Indeed, much of the allure of the work comes from the vivid way in which broadly applied areas of light interact with emphatic draughtsmanship. It was this kind of **vivid representation of light and nature** that so attracted Palmer to the **Neo-Romantics** in Britain in the **mid-twentieth century**. This particular work was **owned by Sir Kenneth Clark**, a great **admirer of Palmer** and supporter of Neo-Romantics such as **Graham Sutherland** in his early years.
- Lister suggests that this picture reflects the mood of the opening passage of **Virgil's 'Georgics'**, quoting from the 1790 translation by Joseph Davidson; 'What makes the fields of corn joyous; under what star, Maecenas...O most radiant lights of the firmament, that guide through heaven the gliding year.'
- **Virgil was one of Palmer's favourite poets**. In later life he made a complete translation of the 'Eclogues', and his ink painting of 1825 'A Rustic Scene' had a

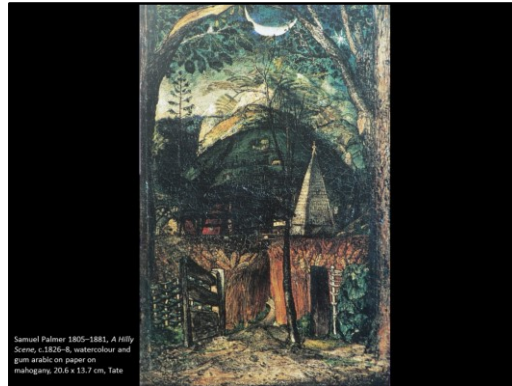
passage from the Georgics attached to it. In this case, however, the inspiration appears to be general rather than specific. There is, perhaps too, a more religiously-orientated contemplative awe in the picture than is suggested by Virgil's celebratory panegyric. Commentators in recent decades have been struck by the affinity of mood between works such as this and contemporaneous religiously-inspired **scenes of figures contemplating the moon** by the German Romantic painter **Caspar David Friedrich**. Palmer never came closer to Friedrich than in this picture - though in technique their methods were utterly different.

- Palmer **depends on shadows** for his best effects. In a letter, Palmer wrote that when he was 'less than four years old' and standing with his nurse, as he was '**watching the shadows on the wall from branches of elm behind which the moon had risen**, she transferred and fixed the fleeting image in my memory by repeating the couplet, "Vain man, the vision of a moment made,/ Dream of a dream and shadow of a shade."' He continued, '**I never forgot those shadows**, and am often trying to paint them' - implying that they signify the retrieving and re-enactment of a time of lost innocence which suggest transience and mortality. It is a sober picture with a mood of contentment and the mystical passing of time signified by the waxing moon becoming, in our minds, the full moon. For Palmer, shadows created a land of lost content that is under threat from the modern age.

### References

Andrew Motion, *The Guardian*, 24 September 2005

William Vaughan, *Samuel Palmer: Vision and Landscape* (2005), pp. 124-5.



Samuel Palmer 1805–1881, *A Hilly Scene*, c.1826–8, watercolour and gum arabic on paper on mahogany, 20.6 x 13.7 cm, Tate

- 'This is one of **Palmer's finest works**, painted shortly after he settled in Shoreham in Kent. The Darent valley appeared to Palmer a **perfect, neo-Platonic world** and he called it the '**Valley of Vision**'.
- In this picture he creates an ideal image of **pastoral contentment**, unaffected by the outside world. The **unseasonal combination** of **flowering horse-chestnut** and **huge ripe heads of wheat** symbolise fertility and the richness of the soil, and Palmer may have been inspired by Edmund Spenser's lines from the *Faërie Queene* (1596), Book iii, Canto VI, beginning '**There is continual spring, and harvest there**'.
- The prominent **church spire** signifies a **divine presence** within the landscape. This is emphasised by the **gothic arch created by the branches** at the top of the composition, which relates closely to *Coming from Evening Church* (1830). In the background, the characteristic **rounded hills of Shoreham** and the crescent moon, here **shown on its back**, were later adopted as **motifs by artists** of the mid-twentieth century. Inspired by John Milton's poetic evocations, the moon in its various phases became a recurring feature in Palmer's work.
- Palmer's pictures of this period are **intensely personal**, but often have a **mystical, even visionary quality** comparable to the work of **William Blake** (1757-1827). Palmer was greatly inspired by Blake's illustrations to Ambrose Philips' imitation of Virgil's *First Eclogue* (1821), and could have been describing his own work when he wrote of the Blake engravings: '**They are visions of little dells, and nooks, and corners of Paradise**; models of the exquisite pitch of intense poetry...There is in all such a **mystic and dreamy glimmer** as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul' (A.H. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer*, 1892, pp.15-16). In *A Hilly Scene* Palmer adopts a **fresco technique** (really a form of tempera) which is comparable to Blake's 'fresco' panels such as *The Ghost of a Flea*, and to which the brilliant star shining through the branches at the top right appears to refer.

- The Shoreham works are characterised by a **deliberate medievalism** and stylistically they were **influenced by** the work of such Northern European artists as **Breughel and Dürer**. This particular picture is packed with detail, **reminiscent of the miniatures** found in **illuminated manuscripts**. Palmer may also have been inspired by works such as Mantegna's *The Agony in the Garden* (1460, National Gallery).

### **References**

Frances Fowle, Tate



J. M. W. Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, first exhibited 1844, National Gallery

- I am finishing with the great English Romantic painter Turner. This is a painting you have seen a number of times but I am showing it again to present it in a slightly different light. As a Romantic painting one would expect nature to dominate and for progress and the industrial revolution to be criticized. However, as we have discussed the painting is ambiguous. The painting could be seen to be celebrating progress and steam or it could be a rejection of the railways as a destroyer of nature, such as the hare, as old ways, such as the dancing figures on the shore.
- The Pre-Raphaelites and their celebration of the medieval period can be seen as a Romantic movement.

### J. M. W. Turner

- This is an example of one of Turner's late landscapes. It is not clear whether some of his late landscapes are finished works that were intended to be displayed but this is clearly the case with *Rain, Steam and Speed*.
- Turner redefined landscape painting by pushing the boundaries of how we appreciate colour and light. In this painting, a **conventional** interpretation is that it is a celebration of **power and progress** and the new scientific age. It shows Maidenhead Railway Bridge, across the River Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead and the view is looking east towards London.
- The **bridge** was designed by **Isambard Kingdom Brunel** (1806-1859, died aged 53 of a stroke) and completed in **1838**. The Great Western Railway was one of a number of private British railway companies created to develop the new means of transport.
- A **tiny hare** appears in the bottom right corner of the painting. Some have interpreted this as a **positive statement** about technology as the train is able to **outrun** what was the fastest animal before the steam train. Others see the hare

**running in fear** of the new machinery and Turner warning us of the **danger** of man's **new technology** destroying the beauty of nature. My view is that this is a masterpiece precisely because it contains both contradictory interpretations.

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





- Next week we talk about the industrial revolution and paintings that illustrate the changes or celebrate progress.