WESTALL'S PEASANTS:
BRITISH IDENTITY AND THE CRISIS OF NATION IN 1799

by

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ABSTRACT

For much of the population of Great Britain at the end of the eighteenth century, the upheavals and anxieties associated with the 1790s were not limited to recurrent threats of invasion brought about by the ongoing war with revolutionary Republican France or to the realities of the 1798 Irish Rebellion. They also stemmed from the continuing transformation of Britain into the first modern industrial nation. Such changes, which produced widespread fears of popular uprisings against the existing social order, were particularly unsettling for the privileged sectors of society who were the purchasers of quality reproductive art prints.

This thesis examines a set of stipple engravings representing groups of peasants and the rural countryside in four regions of the British Isles. The prints - *English Peasants, Welch [sic] Peasants, Scotch Peasants* and *Irish Peasants* - were published in 1799 and reproduced paintings by Richard Westall, R.A., a popular English artist known for his idealized depictions of rustic genre subjects. In the course of the thesis I argue that contemporary interest in the impending union of Britain and Ireland, following the Irish Rebellion of 1798, would have been a major factor in the decision to publish these images as an expensive set of four at a time when the market for English engravings had been devastated by the war with France. Appearing at a moment when both British unity and social stability were matters of urgent public concern, the prints worked to mediate a range of potentially divisive cultural, religious and class differences to create a sense of shared identity.

This study explores how Westall's reassuring representations of an ostensibly contented peasantry enabled an English audience to "see" and consume the so-called "Celtic
Isles, which were recognized and distinguished as separate from the English centre, had recently become a focus of picturesque tourism, at its height in the 1790s, and the prints situate the rural poor of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland according to a new conception of national identity. While effacing current challenges to existing hierarchies and accommodating regional differences, the prints, through subtle aspects of imagery, reassert the political and cultural dominance of England within a new and expanded union.
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INTRODUCTION

In an essay that explores the relationship between European nationalism and the rise of the novel as a literary form, Timothy Brennan has described modern nations as "imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role."\(^1\) The visual arts can have an equally significant impact, and much has been written in recent years on the importance of paintings and prints to the production of national identity in eighteenth and nineteenth century England.\(^2\) Still, surprisingly little attention has been given to the relationship between works of art and the political and cultural unification of what are now commonly referred to as the British Isles.\(^3\) The purpose of this thesis is to illuminate a small section of this important subject by examining a set of four stipple engravings depicting the peasants of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (figs. 1-4). The prints were published in London on October 1, 1799, only six months prior to the passage of the bill that would ultimately destroy the Irish parliament and establish the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, a legislative union with its centre of power at Westminster.\(^4\)


\(^4\) Proposals were laid before the Irish Parliament on February 6, 1800, and on March 28 the terms of union were accepted by the House of Commons and the House of Lords. These then passed through the British Parliament, (continued...)
The publisher of the prints was J.R. Smith, a mezzotint engraver, print publisher and dealer whose manufactory and shop were fashionably located at 31 King Street, Covent Garden. Smith specialized in quality reproductive prints for the luxury market, and this particular set had been engraved and printed in colour by Antoine Cardon after paintings by the popular figure painter Richard Westall (1765-1836). The original works remain untraced, but their titles: English Peasants, Welch [sic] Peasants, Scotch Peasants, and Irish Peasants, are listed among the twenty pictures that the artist exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1791, one year prior to his election as an associate member. He advanced rapidly, becoming a full Academician in 1794, and by 1799 was well known for his paintings of historical, literary, and rustic genre subjects, the last a contemporary term that referred to what were generally highly idealized representations of the daily lives of rural labourers and their families.

Westall’s English Peasants depicts a cheerful family of four who appear to be returning home from market day in a nearby town or village, indicated by a church spire in the distance. The young woman rides a donkey and carries a small child in her arms, while her husband and son accompany her on foot. Welch Peasants also represents a family group, but in this picture we see a sentimental domestic drama taking place against a scenic landscape of rugged coastal mountains. A young man is shown taking leave of his two

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4(...) continued
and royal assent was given August 1. The union of Great Britain and Ireland was finally consummated on January 1, 1801. For a detailed summary of the negotiations, see G.C. Bolton, The Passing of the Irish Act of Union: A Study in Parliamentary Politics (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

5 Cardon was a Flemish refugee who had emigrated to London in 1792. See Michael Bryan, Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers, 2nd ed. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1921), p. 250.

sisters and his elderly parents, who sadly bid him farewell as he heads off down the hill from the family cottage.

In *Scotch Peasants* Westall has depicted a handsome Highlander with his pretty young wife and their two small children. The man is a shepherd, and some of the sheep he has been tending are nearby, but he and his family have stopped to listen to a cottager who is playing a tune on the bagpipes. Behind the couple stand the ruins of what appears to have been a castle, and further away the misty Highland mountains are visible. Lastly, in *Irish Peasants* a group of women and children, again gathered outside a cottage, are approached by an Anglican curate. He has a rather stern expression, and the women listen intently as he informs them of the reason for his visit. Behind the curate is a landscape of rolling hills, and, as in the Scottish picture, the viewer’s eye is drawn to a ruin in the distance.

It should be pointed out that the use of idealized peasants to represent England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland in images relating to British union was not a common practice during this period. According to Fintan Cullen, in the works of art produced in Britain around 1800 which contain explicit references to union, England’s relationship with the Celtic lands is generally represented by soldiers and statesmen or by the allegorical maidens of traditional history painting. For example, a set of three ceiling panels installed in 1792 in Dublin Castle’s St. Patrick’s Hall, where the city’s most glittering banquets and balls were held, included subjects that ranged from history to allegory. A little known Italian

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7 My identification of this figure as an Anglican curate is based on the similarity of his costume to that of the central figure in an English print entitled *The Curate of the Parish Return’d from Duty*. Engraved after a painting by Henry Singleton, it was published in 1793, along with its companion image, *The Vicar of the Parish Receiving his Tithes*. According to *The Oxford Reference Dictionary*, the parish was a district constituted for the administration of local government, chiefly related to Poor Law and highways, and a curate was the assistant to a parish priest. For reproductions of the Singleton prints, see Arthur Ackermann and Son, *Pleasures and Pastimes, Bosoms and Breeches: An Exhibition of Fine Engravings* (London: Arthur Ackermann and Son, 1991), p. 10.
artist, Vincent Waldre, was commissioned to paint St. Patrick Converting the Irish to Christianity, King Henry II receiving the submission of the Irish Chieftains, and George III, supported by Liberty and Justice. Cullen points out that within their specific physical and historical context these images have a "unity of purpose [that] is readily discernible: an ancient culture both Christian and loyal, Ireland can reap untold benefits while remaining firmly within the imperial orbit."8 Less rarefied forms of visual culture could carry a similar message. A commemorative medal struck in 1801 shows the classically dressed figures of Britannia and Hibernia shaking hands, and the Latin inscription reads: "Their resources are united, the Kingdom is strengthened."9

For the first half of the eighteenth century most of the engravings sold in Britain were imported from continental Europe, but during the 1760s English engravers achieved a technical proficiency that had previously been confined to France.10 By the late 1780s more engravings were being exported than imported, and Smith had become one of England’s leading print publishers. The other was John Boydell, and between them the two supplied dealers in continental Europe with mezzotints, line and stipple engravings worth more than £200,000 per year.11 Largely due to the efforts of Smith, the most popular exports included coloured prints of rustic genre subjects.12 Sentimental cottage scenes by Francis Wheatley were often engraved with both French and English captions to accommodate buyers on both sides of the Channel, while George Morland’s large

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12 Godfrey, Printmaking in Britain, p. 53.
international following meant that scores of engravers were often required to meet the demand for his animal pictures and scenes of country life.\textsuperscript{13}

The foreign print trade suffered when the French Revolution began in 1789, and it was almost completely destroyed four years later when France declared war on England. Apart from a brief interlude of peace in 1802, the hostilities continued for over two decades, and while Boydell managed to stay in business, Smith was finally forced to close his doors in 1805. The continental market had absorbed a full three-fifths of his entire output as a publisher, and without it he found himself unable to survive.\textsuperscript{14} By publishing Westall’s representations of the peasantry in 1799, Smith demonstrated his confidence that, despite the current condition of the English art market, the domestic appeal of these images would prove broad enough to compensate for diminished foreign sales. The fact that the prints represent the four major regions of the British Isles also suggests that Smith may have been seeking to widen his domestic market. By the 1790s most every large town in Britain had at least one print shop, and while there is no evidence that these particular works were sold outside of London, there is no reason to suppose that they were not.

It was not only the print trade, however, but the entire English art market that was suffering. To the profound frustration of native artists like William Hogarth, British collectors had favoured works by continental painters throughout the eighteenth century. The war with France greatly reduced their access to contemporary European art, but any positive effects for English artists were counteracted by the large number of old masters and old master imitations which soon became available at auction in England, as continental

\textsuperscript{13} Godfrey, \textit{Printmaking in Britain}, p. 54.

aristocrats sold off art collections in an effort to avoid fines or confiscation by the invading forces of Napoleon.\textsuperscript{15} To make matters worse, anxieties caused by the war were aggravated by the Irish Rebellion of May 1798, and the market for art became so depressed that a tax reduction for Royal Academicians and Associates was specified that year by the Prime Minister, William Pitt, in his Assessed Taxes Bill.\textsuperscript{16}

Under such conditions it is highly unlikely that Smith's decision to publish a set of images eight years after their original exhibition was based solely on the artist's reputation or the popularity of rustic genre pictures. In all probability, most collectors of fine prints in 1799 would have recognized immediately that the publication of Westall's images could be understood as an optimistic metaphor for the political futures of the regions represented. Like Wales in 1536 and Scotland in 1707, Ireland was soon to be politically united with England, and it had therefore become necessary to incorporate the Irish into an expanded formulation of British national identity. The union with Ireland would not be ratified until 1800, but a proposal had been laid before the British Parliament in January 1799, and the subject of union, together with the Rebellion of the previous spring, made Irish affairs a focus of public attention in England for the rest the year.\textsuperscript{17}

In his ground-breaking 1991 study, \textit{Imagined Communities}, Benedict Anderson argues that the political and social upheavals that marked the closing decades of the eighteenth century in Europe coincided with the emergence of nationalism as an important

\textsuperscript{15} Kay Diane Kriz, "Genius as an Alibi: The Production of the Artistic Subject and English Landscape Painting, 1795-1820" (Ph. D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1991), p. 59.


form of collective identity. At the same time, European culture was in the midst of a paradigm shift from the dominant intellectual trends of the Enlightenment to those associated with Romantic modes of inquiry. Nationalism and Romanticism are concepts that will assert their presence throughout this study, and while they are obviously vast subjects which cannot be adequately summarized here, it seems prudent to acknowledge that they are interrelated. It is equally essential to recognize that concepts of identity are never fixed or static but always in the process of formation. National identities must continually be adjusted in response to competing interests, including other forms of belonging such as race, religion and class. All three of these come into play in Westall’s peasant pictures.

Eighteenth century British interest in the subject of race stemmed not only from increased contact with non-Europeans, but also from a fascination with origins, a desire to search out the forgotten and unknown sources of the national character that was to become a feature of the Romantic movement. No educated citizen of the time was unaware of the dual origin of British culture in ancestral Celtic and Germanic peoples. The first of these groups were the original inhabitants of the British Isles, who prior to the 1800s were generally known as Britons. Ancient authors had used the name Celts to refer to a semi-barbarous continental people latterly concentrated in Gaul, but in the eighteenth century it began to be applied to all Celtic speaking groups, including the modern descendants of the ancient Welsh, the Highland Scots and the Irish. The second group were the Saxons and

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other Germanic or Scandinavian invaders.¹⁹

Beginning in the 1740s, a myth of genealogical descent was gradually elaborated by antiquarians, linguists and literary scholars that traced the "truly" English or British racial community of the present day to an idealized Saxon ancestry, and back through this group to an assortment of glorified Biblical and Homeric ancestors. As a result of what was thought to be a superior moral inheritance, that which was Anglo-Saxon, Gothic or Teutonic in origin was favourably contrasted with that which was French, Gallick, Norman or, increasingly, Celtic.²⁰ According to Sam Smiles, a firm Anglo-Saxon bias is noticeable in writings on British history from about 1775.²¹ But while a hierarchical attitude to racial difference would become the linchpin of English demonization of the Irish in the high Victorian period, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Celtic past was regarded by many as equal in achievement to the legacy of the Saxons.²²

Religion was a far more divisive factor than race in late eighteenth century Britain, particularly in the case of Ireland. Its predominantly Catholic population was as effectively isolated by religious difference as they were by the Irish Sea. Moreover, Ireland's ties to

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²¹ The most influential of these was Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, the first volume of which was published in 1799. An immensely popular study, it was in its seventh edition by the 1850s, the start of what Smiles refers to as "the heyday of European nationalism." Smiles, The Image of Antiquity, p. 26, 126.

²² In the eighteenth century the word "race" was understood to refer to descent or lineage. Dominant theories of human progress held that all nations had originated in barbarism, and racial differences were the result of historical circumstances. While these traits were maintained over generations, they were not thought of as permanent. Primitive peoples were regarded as less mature in their social and cultural development than the European races, but the powerful belief in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority that supported the denigration of the Celts in the Victorian era was not possible until the nineteenth century, when race came to be defined as an immutable biological characteristic. See Smiles, The Image of Antiquity, pp. 118-120; and Michael Banton, The Idea of Race (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), p. 18.
France made it a serious threat to British security when war broke out in 1793. Irish political dissidents, both Catholic and Protestant, had a history of seeking aid from France, and the Irish coastline appeared to offer French troops an ideal position from which to launch an attack on the British mainland. While Ireland was unique in the degree of religious intolerance it faced, religious differences also existed within Britain, and within its component parts. Both religion and class are primary forms of identity that will reappear at various points throughout my discussion of Westall’s peasant images.

In Britain the growing importance of the urban middle class towards the end of the eighteenth century was accompanied by the development of a modern social structure.23 Up until that time the number of wealthy merchants, bankers and industrialists had been small enough for them to be absorbed easily into upper class society. By the 1790s such men were becoming increasingly aware of themselves as a class, a more cohesive and clearly defined identity than that of a "middle rank" between the upper and lower orders.24 The aristocracy and gentry, the traditional ruling classes whose wealth and power were based on the ownership of land, would continue to dominate parliament until well after the passing of the 1832 Reform Act, but industrialization had already begun to alter the political balance to accommodate middle class interests. For much of the late eighteenth century the rising middle class had sought to differentiate themselves from landed society, but the turmoils of the 1790s brought on a crisis in the articulation of class

23 According to Raymond Williams, a new social structure is revealed at this time in the changing use of the word "class." He writes: "It is only at the end of the eighteenth century that the modern structure of class, in its social sense, begins to be built up. First comes lower classes, to join lower orders, which appears earlier in the eighteenth century. Then, in the 1790's, we get higher classes; middle classes and middling classes follow at once; working classes in about 1815; upper classes in the 1820's." (Williams' italics). Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1780-1950 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958), p.xv.

identity. As the events of the French Revolution cast their shadows across the English Channel, members of the rapidly expanding urban bourgeoisie united with the landed classes in fearing that widespread popular discontent at home might also result in violent unrest. Tensions were further increased by the onset of war. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars were the last in a series of major conflicts between Britain and France that began in 1689 and ended with the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and Linda Colley has convincingly demonstrated that this extended period of hostility provided motivation for the forging of a new British nation. While identities based on older regional and national loyalties were not erased, the men and women of England, Wales and Scotland were encouraged by a century of conflict with a foreign power to set aside their differences in order to unite against a common enemy.25

In order to be widely marketable in 1799, any pictorial representation that seemed to positively reference union would also have been obliged to neutralize the dangers posed by a variety of internal differences. To a large extent, Westall’s depictions of the peasantry did just that. Viewed together, the four prints presented an idealized image of four distinct peoples and regions, united for their mutual benefit without threatening the political and cultural dominance of the English centre over what is now commonly referred to as the Celtic fringe. While this term is convenient as a shorthand for Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and I will use it in that sense, I do not intend to imply any kind of Celtic homogeneity. According Richard Faber’s study of Anglo/Celtic relations, High Road to England, it is difficult to extract from contemporary assessments very much that was seen as being

25 See Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992). Colley’s study has been an important source of information for this thesis, but due to what she regards as fundamental differences between Ireland’s relationship to Britain and those of Wales and Scotland, her analysis of the emergence of British national identity does not include Ireland.
common to all three regions during the period in question. Their circumstances were different, as were their relationships with the English.²⁶ Even after the various Acts of Union they remained (and remain) culturally distinct.

Wales had been incorporated into the English state by Acts of Union passed in 1536 and 1543. It had virtually ceased to exist as a separate entity, retaining no capital or governmental systems of its own. While the Acts were not entirely unopposed at the time, they seem to have been widely supported by the Welsh, who were granted full equality with the English under law - enough of a gain to overshadow perceived disadvantages.²⁷ Most official legislation aimed at assimilating the Welsh was concerned with language reform, but it was largely unsuccessful. While much of the gentry was highly Anglicized by the end of the eighteenth century, the population as a whole remained 90 percent Welsh speaking. When the lower classes did embrace English in the latter part of the nineteenth century it was very much their own initiative, and contrary to the wishes of the educational elites in London, who were at that time promoting the use of the native Welsh language.²⁸

For most of the eighteenth century Wales was seen by many as a sleepy rural backwater, its political lethargy remarkable even by the quiet standards of Hanoverian Britain.²⁹ To borrow a phrase from the Welsh historian Gwyn Williams, "politics in Wales begin with the American Revolution." The war with the Thirteen Colonies turned a

²⁶ Faber, High Road to England, p. 152, 173.
broad range of people who shared a belief in the liberties being fought for into "spiritual Americans within British society."\textsuperscript{30} The first serious Welsh democratic and popular movements were established at this time, but following a surge of radical activity in the early 1790s, Pitt's government moved swiftly to pass repressive legislation aimed at reformers in Wales, England and Scotland.\textsuperscript{31} Furthermore, with industrial Wales increasingly serving as the export sector of an imperial British economy, many Welshmen joined the English in regarding their union as a source of economic opportunity. As a result, while Welsh patriotism certainly existed, it was channelled into a cultural renaissance, rather than political agitation.\textsuperscript{32}

The 1707 Scottish Act of Union was much more recent than the Welsh, and from the point of view of British politicians there had been two major motives behind it. The first of these was the necessity of securing Scottish support for the new Protestant dynasty which England and Wales had already agreed to import from Hanover upon the death of the childless Queen Anne (1702-1714). England and Scotland had shared the same monarch since the Union of the Crowns in 1603, but it was feared that unless a formal, political union was cemented, the Scots might decide to rally behind James Edward Stuart, Anne's exiled Roman Catholic half-brother. The second crucial factor was that Scotland's historical antipathy toward England and "auld alliance" with France, which had existed in the sixteenth century and might be resumed in the eighteenth, meant that its continued

\textsuperscript{31} Williams, \textit{When Was Wales?}, p. 170.
independence could jeopardize Britain's internal stability and overseas expansion.33

The Scottish Parliament was abolished in 1707, and while the size of Scotland's population was never accurately reflected at Westminster, under the terms of union the survival of such key institutions as the Presbyterian Kirk of Scotland and the Scottish legal system were ensured. Still, political union did not stop the Scots from presenting a serious threat to English interests. In 1715, and again in 1745-46, attempts were made by the Scottish Jacobites to restore the exiled Catholic Stuarts as the rightful rulers of Britain. Although few of the clans were still Catholic, support for the Stuarts came mainly from the Highlands, and following the final defeat of the Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden the culture of the Highlanders was ruthlessly suppressed.34

Colley has argued that for the economic and military advantages of the Anglo-Scottish Union to be realized, it was necessary for the English to overcome deeply held prejudices.35 Others have pointed out, however, that while acceptance on both sides of the Scottish border certainly increased over the decades, even at the end of the eighteenth century the ancient antagonisms that divided the Scots and the English had not been completely extinguished.36 They clearly remained active in the mind of Horace Walpole, a well known author and former English M.P.; for in 1780 he wrote:

But what a nation is Scotland; in every reign engendering traitors to the state and false and pernicious to the kings that favour it the most! National prejudices, I


know, are very vulgar; but, if there are national characteristics, can one but dislike the soils and climates that concur to produce them?\textsuperscript{37}

Nonetheless, as with Wales, the union with Scotland was widely regarded as a success, and as such was often called upon by British politicians and economists to justify union with Ireland.\textsuperscript{38}

Late eighteenth century Ireland has been described by historian Eric Hobsbawm as "an unhappy island which combined the disadvantages of the backward areas of Europe with those of proximity to the most advanced economy."\textsuperscript{39} In addition to their poverty, the Catholic peasantry were marginalized by religious difference. Ireland was governed by and for the landowning and professional classes, identified from the 1780s as the Protestant Ascendancy. Catholics were not permitted to vote until 1793, and even then they could not be elected to Parliament. Despite their isolation from the Catholic majority and their dependence on England, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy saw themselves as thoroughly Irish, and within the House of Commons an oppositional faction dedicated to increasing the independence of the Irish Parliament emerged during the 1760s.\textsuperscript{40} The Patriots, as they were known, slowly gathered momentum over the next two decades, and their ideals were shared to some extent by members of the Protestant middle class. However, they explicitly

\textsuperscript{37} Quoted in Smiles, The Image of Antiquity, p. 117.


\textsuperscript{39} Hobsbawm, Age of Revolution, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{40} Marianne Elliott, Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 10.
excluded the expanding Catholic middle class as well as the peasantry.\textsuperscript{41}

The American War of Independence, which interfered with Irish trade and was unpopular there from the start, provided the Patriots with an opportunity to voice their demands, and when France entered the war in 1778 the pressure on Westminster was further increased. The Patriots benefitted from the strength of the Protestant \textit{Volunteer} movement, which was established in 1778 for the purpose of defending Ireland against a possible French invasion, but rapidly transformed itself into a vehicle for political self-determination.\textsuperscript{42} Concessions were not long in coming, with Ireland being granted free trade in 1780. In 1782 the Dublin Parliament was given legislative autonomy, and while this was a significant gain, important administrative offices remained under British control, and the Irish House of Commons was highly susceptible to their influence.\textsuperscript{43}

The French Revolution brought a new sense of wariness to the aristocratic members of the Patriot movement and inspired a new generation of reformers. Interestingly, it was in 1791, the same year Westall exhibited his four peasant paintings at the Royal Academy in London, that a group of Protestants in Belfast formed the United Irish Society, an extra-parliamentary reform body with the goal of uniting Irishmen of all creeds to press for complete religious equality and a radical reform of Parliament. A Dublin chapter was established later the same year, and similar groups soon sprang up throughout the

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country. Although the United Irish Society was not initially a militantly anti-English, anti-monarchical republican organization, it did not take long to become one, especially after the group was driven underground by the onset of legal counter-attacks against known radicals in Britain and Ireland in 1794. Members of the Society were drawn from the revived Volunteers, professionals, merchants, artisans and skilled urban workers, and while its most active leaders were Protestant, the group also attracted many Catholics.\footnote{Beckett, \textit{The Making of Modern Ireland}, p. 248.}

In 1795 several leading members of the United Irish Society travelled to Paris to appeal for assistance in a revolt against English rule, and over the next three years five invasion forces and vast quantities of arms were dispatched to Ireland from France.\footnote{For a detailed account of the formation of the United Irish Society, see Elliott, \textit{Partners in Revolution}, pp. 17-34.} In late December 1796 a French expedition arrived in Bantry Bay, on the Southern tip of Ireland. A raging snowstorm and disagreement among the commanders prevented any attempt at landing, and after a few days the fleet sailed harmlessly away. Still, the government was dismayed, and the United Irishmen were encouraged by the fact that the French had been able to reach the coast, despite the British navy.

The activities of the United Irish Society had thoroughly alarmed the Ascendancy from the beginning. Its members were well aware that their power lay in the ownership of confiscated land that had been redistributed to English colonists under Acts of Settlement in 1652 and 1662. The Society’s attempts to forge an alliance between the politically literate Presbyterian minority and the rural Catholic majority threatened to provide Catholics with the leadership necessary to turn their passive resentment into violent revolution and

\begin{itemize}
\item Beckett, \textit{The Making of Modern Ireland}, p. 248.
\item For a detailed account of the formation of the United Irish Society, see Elliott, \textit{Partners in Revolution}, pp. 17-34.
\item Elliott, \textit{Partners in Revolution}, p. xiv.
\end{itemize}
revenge. The United Irishmen were dedicated to political, as opposed to social, reform, and did not support a reversal of the land settlement or revenge of any kind against the Protestant dispossessors. However, in pursuit of their ideal of uniting all religious persuasions into a genuinely national movement, they struck up an alliance with a group who did harbour such motives, the militantly Catholic Defenders.

This was enough to convince the Ascendancy that Catholics and democrats were conspiring against them. The combined effect of an alliance between United Irishmen and Defenders, knowledge that a hostile French government was poised to assist in their joint rebellion, and outbreaks of sectarian violence between Defenders and Protestants in Ulster in 1796 provoked a campaign of brutal military repression that was, in the end, largely responsible for causing the insurrection that it was intended to prevent. The uprising was delayed as the rebels waited for news of a French landing, and factions within the United Irish Society argued over the wisdom of proceeding without the French, but eventually their hand was forced. The Irish Rebellion broke out on May 23, 1798, and with most of its army and fleet already engaged in fighting the British in Egypt, France was not in a position to be of much assistance.

The revolt lacked all coherence, but thousands of peasants participated, and they secured some remarkable early victories under the leadership of Catholic clergymen. France did agree to send a small number of troops to the Irish coast, but before the first ships arrived on August 22, the revolution, with all of its high ideals, had degenerated into

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47 Elliott, *Partners in Revolution*, p.xvii. On Defenderism and the Protestant backlash see pp. 35-50. French involvement in the United Irish cause is the focus of Elliott's important study, see especially pp. 77-162, 214-240.


a bloody sectarian war that was rapidly crushed by the army and the yeomanry. The Irish Rebellion was a bitter failure, but even before it was over Pitt had decided to use the crisis to further his plans for union.51 By the time Westall’s images were published on October 1, 1799, an Irish Act of Union was widely regarded by the British as both necessary and inevitable.

While it is my contention that Smith’s decision to publish this set of images was primarily based on Britain’s impending union with Ireland, the fact that they are rustic genre pictures would also have been a crucial factor in predicting their commercial success. As important studies of the rustic tradition in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century English painting by John Barrell, Ann Bermingham and others have shown, the hunger, deprivation and physical hardship that dominated the lives of the rural poor in this period were rarely acknowledged by artists.52 Created for a primarily urban audience, paintings and prints of rustic landscape and genre subjects more often functioned as vehicles for enduring myths about country life than accurate representations of contemporary realities. In the face of widespread anxiety over the possibility of revolution that took hold in Britain after 1789, cheerful rural folk were typically shown at work in the fields or tending to daily chores outside well-kept cottages, accompanied by groups of smiling, healthy children.

A stipple engraving of 1794 entitled The Happy Cottagers (fig. 5) is a typical example of a variety of imagery in which peasant families were celebrated as proof of the contentment that the poorest person could achieve by rejoicing in the simple life, instead of

envying the wealthy. In this print, as in many others, the Christian basis of rustic
ccontentment is emphasized by the juxtaposition of church and cottage, and an
accompanying verse drives home the moral message:

What happiness the rural maid attends,
In chearful labour while each day she spends!
No homebred jars her quiet state controul,
Nor watchful jealousy torments her soul;
With secret joy she sees her little race
Hang on her breast, & her small cottage grace...53

Westall’s depictions of the peasants of Britain and Ireland rely to a great extent on
this kind of conventional rustic genre motif. What will be made clear in the following
chapters, however, is that by placing his groups of figures within scenic landscape settings
Westall effectively combined two categories of rural imagery, each with its own highly
developed system of pictorial and interpretive conventions. At one level, these landscapes
must have reminded viewers of the illustrated travel accounts, guidebooks and treatises on
landscape associated with picturesque tours of Britain. The "cult of the picturesque" was at
the height of its popularity with middle class tourists in the 1790s. At the same time,
revolution and war in Europe put a stop to foreign travel and the aristocratic tradition of the
Grand Tour, forcing even the very wealthy to find alternative destinations.

In choosing to publish Westall’s images, Smith probably relied on the popularity of
rustic genre imagery and picturesque tourism with both the upper and middle classes as an
indication that his venture would prove commercially successful. Still, the lack of a clear
demarcation between aristocratic and middle class tastes at this time does not guarantee that

the same works of art were always purchased for the same reasons.\textsuperscript{54} Multiple readings are possible when paintings and prints circulate as cultural commodities with various available meanings, and in Westall’s case the widely varying contemporary assessments of his style provide a colourful example of what Barrell has called "the politics of taste in eighteenth century Britain."\textsuperscript{55}

It is important to emphasize that the images discussed in this thesis were created by a well-known English artist and later reproduced and sold by a prominent English publisher. The focus of inquiry, therefore, will not be Welsh, Scottish or Irish self-representation, but the attitudes of a predominantly English print-buying public toward the so-called "Celtic fringe." It is not known whether the prints were sold in other British centres, such as Edinburgh, Glasgow or Dublin. Even if they were only available in London, it is quite possible that members of the Celtic elites also saw the set of images, and some probably purchased it for their own collections. London was the centre of government and commerce, and the Welsh, Scottish and Anglo-Irish gentry mixed regularly in London society, often maintaining a residence there. Many were English educated, some married into English families, and by the last quarter of the eighteenth century increasing numbers were competing for office, both within Great Britain and throughout the Empire.\textsuperscript{56} Without suggesting that English dominance resulted in any kind of uniform upper class culture, I will proceed on the assumption that, in the years around 1800, even

\textsuperscript{54} Andrew Hemingway, \textit{Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in Early Nineteenth Century Britain} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 47.

\textsuperscript{55} John Barrell, "The Public Prospect and the Private View: The Politics of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain," \textit{Reading Landscape}, ed. by Simon Pugh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Barrell’s essay is concerned with the ways in which an ideal of correct taste in landscape art was used in this period to legitimate political authority, particularly within the terms of the discourse of civic humanism. My interest is in examining how notions of taste were taken up by Westall’s critics and supporters as signs of national and class identities.

\textsuperscript{56} Colley, \textit{Britons}, pp. 155-163, 193.
the most regionally patriotic Welsh or Scottish gentleman shared many of the interests and attitudes of his English peers.

While a brief discussion of colonialism is included in Chapter Three, I have endeavoured to use the term sparingly. In a well known study of British national development that explores the subordination of the Celtic periphery by the English centre, Michael Hechter uses the term "internal colonialism" to describe England's historical relationships with Wales, Scotland and Ireland.\(^57\) There is no doubt that Ireland was treated by the British as a colony prior to union, but when it is applied to eighteenth century Wales and Scotland the internal colonial model becomes somewhat problematic. Philip Yorke, a future Lord Chancellor, made the status of the native and Anglo-Irish very clear in 1721 when he declared that,

> the subjects of Ireland were to be considered [by London] in two respects, as English and Irish ... the Irish were a conquered people and the English a colony transplanted hither, ... a colony subject to the law of the mother country."\(^58\)

For almost two centuries prior to 1801 England had imposed a steady succession of Penal Laws in an attempt to eradicate the Gaelic language and the practice of Roman Catholicism.\(^59\) When a formal union was proposed it was endlessly debated in Dublin, but the political interests of most of the rural population were limited to abolishing rents and the payment of tithes to a church that was not their own. Those aware of the possibility of union with Britain had little cause to mourn the demise of the Irish

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\(^{58}\) Quoted in Colley, *Britons*, p. 386, n. 10.

\(^{59}\) Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, p. 76.
Parliament, and no reason to believe that the laws under which they lived would be any less oppressive if they were made in London.\textsuperscript{60}

Many members of the Irish Parliament were not in favour of union. In addition to opposing the loss of their already limited political independence, they feared that the rapid development of Irish industry would cease once protections against English competition were removed. It was also widely believed that the eventual extension of civil rights to Catholics would undermine the Protestant political monopoly.\textsuperscript{61} A proposal that Parliament should promise to consider strategies for union was defeated in January 1799, but with the help of patronage, bribery and the dismissal of officials who refused to support government policy, a parliamentary majority was soon secured. On March 28, 1800 the terms of union were finally accepted by both Houses of the Irish Parliament, and the Irish Act of Union went into effect on the first day of 1801.\textsuperscript{62}

Although subsequent to their respective unions, Ireland, Wales and Scotland were individually represented at Westminster, all three regions were subject to England’s political and cultural dominance. Prior to union, however, Wales and Scotland had held exclusive rights to determine their own governmental policies. They were in control of their destinies and chose to become part of Britain. Despite having its own parliament, Ireland had never been wholly independent. Moreover, while Ireland was poor in 1800, and poorer still for much of the nineteenth century, for Wales and Scotland membership in the British union was profitable in the eighteenth century and after. Hechter cites the economic


\textsuperscript{61} Beckett \textit{The Making of Modern Ireland}, pp. 271-272; Hechter, \textit{Internal Colonialism}, p. 68, 73.

backwardness of a nation’s peripheral region in relation to the centre as one of the signs of internal colonialism, but in the peak period of coal industrialization Wales was better off than most of England.\(^6^3\) As for Scotland, it prospered as a result of free trade and the modernization of agriculture and industry. According to E.W. McFarland, by mid-century most Scots accepted the union not just as a political \textit{fait accompli,} but as one with positive economic and social benefits.\(^6^4\) While it is true that these benefits were mainly enjoyed by Lowlanders, many middle class landlords, merchants, clergymen and professionals joined Scottish intellectuals like the philosopher and economist Adam Smith in supporting even closer ties to England.\(^6^5\)

As Hechter has argued, it was not so much through direct state intervention as through the co-option of regional elites into a truly British ruling class that England was able to maintain control over Wales and Scotland in the late eighteenth century.\(^6^6\) Members of the Welsh and Scottish gentries were often quite willing to be drawn into British national and imperial patriotism in order to secure greater parity for their respective countries within the British Union, as well as greater titles, positions and pensions for themselves.\(^6^7\) The English, Welsh and Scottish upper classes were further united during the 1790s by a shared fear of popular radicalism. An enhanced sense of Britishness

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\(^{66}\) Hechter, \textit{Internal Colonialism}, p. 122.

resulted from threats to their political and social dominance, much as the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy eventually became convinced that an act of union was a necessary compromise if they wished to ensure their survival. As Faber has observed, the Welsh and Scottish gentries may have felt compelled to divide their loyalties between reason and emotion, but theirs was an ideal position from which to look both ways, and maintain a dual system of political/economic unity and cultural/sentimental separateness.\(^68\)

\(^{68}\) Faber, *High Road to England*, p. 188.
CHAPTER ONE

The Artist, the Academy and the Marketplace

Before turning to an analysis of Richard Westall’s peasant pictures in relation to the political and social transitions underway at the time of their publication, it is important to situate the artist and his works within the structure of the late eighteenth century art world. By 1799 Westall was a popular artist, known best for his treatments of historical, literary and rustic genre subjects. Like many contemporary English painters, he occasionally relied on portrait commissions to supplement his income, but the fact that he did so infrequently is evidence of a newly expanded and diversified market for art. Prior to the 1760s artistic patronage in England had been dominated by an aristocracy who were scarcely aware of their native painters as anything other than portaitists. Upper class tastes gradually shifted during the latter half of the century, but it was primarily the growing affluence of the middle class that vitalized English art production.69

New opportunities for commercial success began to appear around the middle of the century with the establishment of the first public spaces in London for the exhibition of art. These venues, together with a number of galleries showing works by contemporary painters and sculptors, were instrumental in generating widespread interest. Annual exhibitions began to be held during the 1760s by the Society of Artists of Great Britain, the Free Society of Artists and the newly formed Royal Academy of Arts, and these too were highly effective in introducing artists to a larger, more varied public. The Royal Academy was the

69 As David Solkin has shown, the development of English art in this period was tied to economic expansion. In Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century England (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993) he offers an account of how visual culture came to be shaped by and for the purposes of commerce.
most important artistic institution of the period. Founded in 1768 with George III as its patron and Sir Joshua Reynolds as its first president, the Academy provided the training and official accreditation not previously available to English artists. However, its guiding principles were largely incompatible with the need for the modern English artist to compete within a capitalized economy.\textsuperscript{70}

Within the institutional structure of the Royal Academy, pride of place was given to history painting in what Reynolds referred to as the \textit{grand style}. Regarded throughout Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the noblest branch of art, history painting was held to be the only form of painting truly capable of communicating the ethics of civic public life. This was the model of artistic achievement to which students were taught to aspire, but in reality there was little demand for large scale public works of art in Britain.\textsuperscript{71} Far more suitable for private homes, particularly those of middle class collectors, were smaller works such as landscapes and genre paintings. The hierarchy of subject matter maintained by the Academy ranked these well below the heroic narratives represented in history paintings, but they offered artists the financial rewards that more prestigious forms of art could not. Like many other artists, Westall found himself obliged to develop strategies that allowed him to reconcile the aesthetic and philosophical ideals of the Academy with the practical demands of the marketplace.

Born on January 2, 1765, the eldest son of a Norfolk beer brewer, Westall had


moved to London in 1779 to begin his artistic training as an apprentice to a heraldic engraver. Having endured economic hardship as a child after his mother died and the family brewing firm became bankrupt, he was intent on achieving success in his career as a painter. In 1784, following a period of study at an evening school of art, Westall contributed a work to the Royal Academy's annual exhibition.\(^{72}\) Admitted to the Academy Schools the next year, he immediately began to paint historical pictures, exhibiting the first of many in 1787.\(^{73}\)

Westall produced many paintings of historical or literary subjects, but the majority are small scale works in watercolour. While he did produce a number of oil paintings with classical themes, very few are examples of the grand style promoted by Reynolds. They are decorative works that emphasize the charm and elegance of their subjects, rather than attempting to communicate any elevated moral ideal. Some are richly coloured cabinet pictures - sensuous images evolved from the rococo tradition and intended for private viewing by connoisseurs. For example, both Flora Unveiled by Zephyrs (1807, fig. 6) and Orpheus (1811), were commissioned by the well-known antiquarian, connoisseur and picturesque theorist Richard Payne Knight, who probably owned more of Westall's work than any other collector.\(^{74}\)

It has been argued that it was during the eighteenth century that cultural products, including works of art, first became widely available commodities, suitable for consumption

\(^{72}\) Richard J. Westall, "The Westall Brothers", Turner Studies, 4 (Summer, 1984), 23.

\(^{73}\) Mary, Queen of Scots, taking leave of Sir Andrew Melville on her way to execution, R.A. 1787 (No. 205).

by private individuals through the medium of rational discussion. As David Solkin has recently pointed out, at first such discussion was necessarily conducted in accordance with an established set of criteria for good taste, one which took its authority from the sanction of an aristocratic elite with a long history of using art and literature as a means of representing their own authority and social status. However, with the growth of a middle class public for art, these evaluative standards were called into question, along with their proponents’ claims to be exclusively qualified to act as arbiters of taste. A growing body of critics and theorists valorized the intellectual and moral capacities of middle class art consumers while serving as guides in their pursuit of culture.

When studying Westall’s early career, one encounters three categories of art writing which, although they continually played off each other, remained ideologically distinct. The first of these, academic theory, took the form of speeches and lectures to students which were subsequently collected and published. The purpose of academic theory was to articulate the various precepts that governed the practice of academic artists, and to increase their prestige by insisting that theirs was an activity of the mind, as opposed to a manual skill. In addition, academic theory was intended to guide the artistic judgement of viewers, but the refined taste that leading academicians like Reynolds regarded as necessary for aesthetic enjoyment was the product of education and culture, and therefore only available to those of high rank. Reynolds was not only president of the Royal Academy, he was the most widely read art theorist of the period. As Andrew Hemingway has argued, many of his views were representative of a general consensus among late eighteenth and early

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76 Solkin, Painting for Money, p. 3, pp. 247-257.
nineteenth century academicians, and it is in that sense that they will be included here.\textsuperscript{77}

Art criticism was the second category of writing, and, as mentioned above, it was specifically directed to a middle class audience. Westall’s most ruthless detractor, Anthony Pasquin (a pseudonym for John Williams), was one of the most interesting and influential critics of the period.\textsuperscript{78} His pronouncements on Westall’s works were frequently caustic, but not necessarily unjustified. For example, in 1796 he remarked of Westall’s watercolours:

I never saw a tinted drawing by Mr. Westall, without recurring to the idea of a pretty painting upon a fan or china. I could not perceive in any, those touches or traits which characterise the productions of a potent imagination.\textsuperscript{79}

A well known essayist, Pasquin was a staunch supporter of Whig policy and an outspoken advocate of social reform. He produced most of his art criticism between 1795 and 1797, and like all of his writing it was heavily laced with satire, social commentary and radical politics. His art reviews appeared in newspapers and in the Critical Guide to the Present Exhibition at the Royal Academy, which he issued in 1794, 1796 and 1797. The avowed purpose of the guides was "to improve the national taste," and they exerted a significant amount of influence on the tastes of exhibition visitors, partly because the Academy’s own catalogues were nothing more than bare lists of artists and titles. Pasquin’s guides sold for the relatively low price of one shilling, making them affordable to the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{77} Hemingway, Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture, pp. 79-80.
\textsuperscript{79} Anthony Pasquin [John Williams], Memoirs of the Royal Academicians and An Authentic History of the Professors of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture who have Practiced in Ireland, 1796 (London: Cornmarket Press, 1970), p. 139. (Pasquin’s italics.)
\end{flushright}
middle class audience he most wished to reach.\textsuperscript{80}

The element of class is equally important in understanding the function of the third category of art writing. Known in Britain as philosophical criticism, it was addressed to an ideal type of virtuous country gentleman, and its standard literary form was the essay on the nature and principles of taste.\textsuperscript{81} As Hemingway has pointed out, most of the major contributions to this field were written by Scottish intellectuals. Richard Payne Knight was among the few authors who were actually members of English landed society, and his 1805 essay, \textit{An Analytical Inquiry Into the Principles of Taste}, was based on Scottish models.\textsuperscript{82} The aspect of philosophical criticism most relevant to Westall’s peasant pictures is the body of theory that developed around the aesthetic category that was known as the picturesque. Since Knight was both an influential picturesque theorist and Westall’s most loyal patron, his anti-academic views should be seen as a warning against relying too heavily on academic theory when studying Westall’s work.\textsuperscript{83}

In addition to Knight, the key figures in the discourse on the picturesque were the Reverend William Gilpin and Uvedale Price. Published during the 1780s and 1790s, Gilpin’s essays and illustrated accounts of his tours to England’s Lake District, Wales and Scotland popularized the picturesque as a mode of viewing and depicting landscape scenery. He was also largely responsible for establishing the visual component as an important part of the written travel narrative. Gilpin encouraged viewers to study real landscapes as if


\textsuperscript{81} Hemingway, \textit{Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture}, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{82} ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} On the incompatibility of Knight’s views with academic doctrines see Michael Clarke and Nicholas Penny, eds., \textit{The Arrogant Connoisseur: Richard Payne Knight, 1751-1824} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp 89-92; and Kriz, \textit{The Idea of the English Landscape Painter}, pp. 53-56.
they were pictures, admiring the beauties of domestic scenery, but at the same time using the rules of art to compare and judge their aesthetic merits. Primarily intended for middle class readers, his books initiated a large audience to the cult of the picturesque.

In contrast, Knight and Price were both Whig landowners and theorists of the garden who wrote for the cultivated gentleman, the "man of taste" whose wealth and status provided him with the opportunities for education and leisure that enabled him to fully engage in cultural pursuits. Their works were widely read at all levels of educated society, but practical application of theories on picturesque gardening required the ownership of an estate and the desire to effect "improvements" to one's property. Touring and sketching, on the other hand, were activities enjoyed by both the upper and middle classes.

The discourse on gardening exemplifies how the picturesque could become an intensely political aesthetic. Knight composed his didactic poem The Landscape in September 1793, and included verses deploring the violence of the French Revolution and the impending fate of the imprisoned queen. Before the work was published, in 1794, he added a footnote that explicitly set his landscape projects within the context of contemporary events in France. The poem represents society as a diversified landscape; the overgrown picturesque garden, "where every shaggy shrub and spreading tree/ Proclaim'd the seat of native liberty," is a metaphor for English freedoms. However, The Landscape was misunderstood, and Knight was attacked for his "radicalism" by more conservative Whigs like the connoisseur and author Horace Walpole, who thought that he

85 Knight, The Landscape, p. 33, lines 39-40.
was advocating revolution.  

In actual fact, Knight was a strong supporter of traditional hierarchies. Like many other English country gentlemen, he had supported the colonists in the American War of Independence but firmly opposed the political ideals of the French Revolution.  

Both Knight and Price, whose *Essay on the Picturesque* was also published in 1794, drew parallels between the "smooth, unvaried scenes" created by such celebrated English garden designers as Lancelot (Capability) Brown and the "levelling tendencies" of the French Revolution.  

"I own it does surprise me," wrote Price,

that in an age and in a country where the arts are so highly cultivated, one single plan, and such a plan, should have been so generally adopted; and that even the love of peculiarity should not sometimes have checked this method of levelling all distinctions, of making all places alike; all equally tame and insipid.

Westall’s most well known painting, *Storm in Harvest* (1796, fig. 7) was purchased by Knight, who praised it in his widely read treatise, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805), and compared it to Benjamin West’s history painting *The Death of General Wolfe* (R.A. 1771), in which the figures are in modern costume. The subject of Westall’s work is a group of peasants in the midst of an autumn storm, anxiously waiting for it to pass so they can continue with the harvest. Kay Diane Kriz has recently

suggested that this particular theme would have been very reassuring to Knight at a time when Edmund Burke and other British commentators had metaphorically cast the Revolution in France as a natural cataclysm. Images of natural disasters occurring during or shortly after the harvest became common in peasant paintings of the 1840s and 1850s that explored Romantic themes. Like Westall’s picture, they tend to represent country folk of all ages and both sexes participating in the harvest, making it appear that agricultural labour is not only a harmonious union of man and nature, but also of man with man.

Having attended the Academy Schools during the presidency of Reynolds, who held the position until his death in 1792, Westall was well versed in the generalized language of classical idealism that was the foundation of the grand style. The principles that governed the Academy at this time were thoroughly articulated by Reynolds in his famous Discourses on Art, lectures delivered to students and members on the occasion of the annual prize giving. In his discourses, Reynolds equated truth and beauty with the general idea: "that central form ... from which every deviation is deformity." In the "lower" genres, as well as in history painting, artists were instructed to seek perfection in the physical world but to eliminate whatever was particular, that is, specific and individual, when depicting the objects exhibited to them by nature, in order to reveal "an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original."

94 Reynolds, Discourses, III, line 119.
In many respects Westall’s pictures of the British peasantry adhere to the central precepts laid down by Reynolds. As is the case in much of Westall’s work, the figures in the 1799 prints have been generalized almost to the point of blandness. At first glance it seems that the same men and women are depicted in each of the four images; apart from their costumes some are scarcely distinguishable from one another. Their facial expressions are either cheerfully blank or grimly restrained. Even the Welsh peasants exhibit little emotion, despite being pictured at a dramatically charged moment, as a young man takes leave of his home and family. Westall has relied on conventional gestures to indicate thoughts and feelings, but these are also poorly differentiated. The same raised hand used to bid farewell in the Welsh image seems to serve a rhetorical function in the picture of Irish peasants.

The use of ethnic costumes may at first appear to directly oppose Academic tenets regarding generalized form, but Reynolds acknowledged in his fourth discourse that "It would be ridiculous for a painter of domestick scenes, of portraits, landschapes [sic], animals, or of still life, to say that he despised those qualities which has made the subordinate schools so famous."95 A portrait painter himself, he was prepared to admit that "such of us who move in these humbler walks of the profession, are not ignorant that, as the natural dignity of the subject is less, the more all the little ornamental helps are necessary to its embellishment."96

Some of these "ornaments" were even deemed worthy of attention from history painters. Reynolds argued in his seventh discourse that, while they varied among nations, habits of dress and hairstyle were not inconsequential. When sanctioned by custom, as

95 Reynolds, Discourses, IV, lines 421-424.
96 Reynolds, Discourses, IV, lines 418-421.
opposed to the whims of fashion, they could serve as a means of marking out characteristic national differences without concealing the essential truths of human nature.\textsuperscript{97} Comparing the dress of a contemporary European with that of a Cherokee Indian, Reynolds suggested that the two were equally removed from nature, and one therefore should not be preferred above the other. The same would apply to the dress of "any particular nation.... All these fashions are very innocent; neither worth disquisition, nor any endeavour to alter them; as the change would, in all probability, be equally removed from nature."\textsuperscript{98}

John Barrell has convincingly argued that at least some of the motivation for Reynolds' rather tentative endorsement of including some aspects of the customary in English painting lay in recent appropriations of the discourse of universal human nature by political reformers in England, France and America.\textsuperscript{99} By the 1790s the universal ideal had become part of a radical republican ideology that was powerfully expressed in the writings of Thomas Paine, whose emphatically pro-French, anti-monarchical and anti-aristocratic Rights of Man (1791-2) played an important role in creating the atmosphere of political repression that existed in Britain throughout the 1790s. Within counter-revolutionary political discourse, effectively articulated in Edmund Burke's treatise, Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), human nature was understood to be best served by the existing "customary" order of culture and society, which had slowly evolved over time. Abstract "French principles" of government were seen as incompatible with the true nature of civil society, which was complex and multi-dimensional. Although the

\textsuperscript{97} Reynolds, Discourses, VII, lines 567-586.

\textsuperscript{98} Reynolds, Discourses, VII, lines 641-657.

discourse of custom did not function in exactly the same way in politics as it did in artistic theory, support for conservative appeals to the customary included the particular and local features which societies had acquired over time, and which rendered them distinct from one another.\textsuperscript{100}

The growing commitment within the Academy to the development of an English school of painting also indicates a turning away from the earlier theoretical emphasis on universal norms. Some aspects of the universal aesthetic, most notably the preference for idealized or general form, remained dominant academic tenets well after the 1790s. However, in addresses given in the late 1770s and 1780s Reynolds abandoned the conviction that painters working in the grand style should avoid betraying their national origins. In 1771 he had recommended that artists should choose subjects from the scriptures or from classical literature and history, themes that would be "familiar and interesting to all Europe, without being degraded by the vulgarism of ordinary life in any country."\textsuperscript{101} From 1776 onward he increasingly employed the discourse of custom in supporting an attention to ornament in painting, and as Barrell has pointed out, the basis for his new argument was the capacity for ornament to display national characteristics and peculiarities.\textsuperscript{102}

In a lecture commemorating Thomas Gainsborough, delivered at the Royal Academy in 1788, Reynolds spoke of an English School as something that had not yet come into being, but that he hoped would exist in the future.\textsuperscript{103} His call for a distinctively national

\textsuperscript{100} Kriz, "Genius as an Alibi," p. 110.
\textsuperscript{101} Reynolds, \textit{Discourses}, IV, lines 29-31.
\textsuperscript{102} Barrell, \textit{Political Theory of Painting}, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{103} Reynolds, \textit{Discourses}, XIV, lines 30-42.
style in painting reflects a growing recognition within British society that great nations are known by their cultural legacies. The veneration of classical learning and continental old masters was beginning to be gradually modified, making space for British genius within the creative pantheon. This change of attitude is apparent in Reynolds' discourse on Gainsborough, in which he officially recognized his colleague as having attained the status of an authentic English master. While continuing to refer to portraits, landscapes and genre paintings as "the lower rank of art," Reynolds praised Gainsborough's "genius" in these less exalted subjects as more worthy of admiration than "the works of those regular graduates in the great historical style." The example of Gainsborough is evident in Westall's depictions of the peasants of the British Isles, and I would like to suggest that Reynolds' public endorsement of Gainsborough in 1788 offered an artist like Westall a potential solution to the ongoing challenge of attempting to reconcile academic theory with the realities of the art market.

During his lifetime, Gainsborough's preference for what he once referred to facetiously as "little dirty subjects" had marginalized him to some extent in relation to Academic tenets. One of the original members of the Academy, he never showed much interest in it except as a place to exhibit his work. He was nevertheless a highly respected artist, and Reynolds' greatest rival in portraiture. His interest in rustic subjects made him an important precursor to picturesque landscape painting and the "natural" style.

104 Reynolds, Discourses, XIV, lines 27-33.
105 Reynolds, Discourses, XIV, lines 75-78.
106 In a letter to Sir William Chambers dated April 27, 1783, quoted in Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, p. 44.
that followed it. In an extensive study of Gainsborough's landscapes, John Hayes has argued that they were more influential than has generally been supposed, particularly in the decade immediately following his death. His sentimental rustic motifs, especially the theme of the "cottage door," were copied and reworked repeatedly by the next generation of rustic genre painters, including Westall, Wheatley and Morland.

It was noted earlier that Westall's *Storm in Harvest* was owned by Richard Payne Knight. The collection of this connoisseur and picturesque theorist contained at least two other paintings by Westall of rustic genre subjects: *An Old Peasant smoking at a Cottage Door* and *An old Peasant in a Storm.* Knight had well-defined ideas about what constituted correct taste in the representation of the rural, and in his 1805 treatise on the picturesque he wrote:

...we are delighted with neat and comfortable cottages, inhabited by a plain and simple but not rude or vulgar peasantry; placed amidst cultivated, but not ornamented gardens, meads, and pastures abounding in flocks and herds, refreshed by bubbling springs, and cooled by overhanging shade.

This is a clear statement of Knight's preferences, and it sounds very much like a description of the rustic genre paintings of either Gainsborough or Westall, which have been referred to as the "cottage picturesque."

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112 Garside, "Picturesque Figure and Landscape," p. 153.
Westall seems to have recognized quite early in his career that it would not be practical to align himself too closely with history painting. All newly elected Royal Academicians were required to provide a Diploma Work, a representative sample to be placed in the Academy’s permanent collection, and in 1794 Westall chose to submit a painting of a ragged young peasant (fig. 8). A Peasant Boy is strikingly similar to Gainsborough’s images of indigent country children (fig. 9). Painted in the 1780s, at the end of Gainsborough’s career, these works proved to be far more marketable than his earlier, less sentimental treatments of rural subjects.\footnote{Gear, Masters or Servants?, p. 7.} Their popularity with the buying public and with Reynolds, who admired their "interesting simplicity and elegance" in 1788,\footnote{Reynolds, Discourses, XIV, 69-70.} may have encouraged Westall to use his Diploma Work to announce his intention to pursue rustic genre painting as his specialty. During the 1790s he produced numerous paintings of rustic subjects that take up the example of Gainsborough. A Peasant Boy was followed by many more images of country children, which often have themes and titles borrowed from Gainsborough’s childhood scenes.

A writer in the Monthly Magazine in April 1801 acknowledged a connection between the two artists when he praised Westall for continuing a tradition, established by Gainsborough in his rustic landscape paintings, of representing English figures set within English scenery.\footnote{"Retrospect of the Fine Arts," Monthly Magazine (April, 1801), n.p., cited in Kriz, "Genius as an Alibi," p. 101, n. 67.} Although we are now able to judge the 1791 paintings only by the 1799 prints, it is clear that Westall intended the four groups of peasants to be the dominant subjects. However, as in many of his treatments of rustic figures, he also devoted
considerable attention to the surrounding landscapes. As Barrell has noted, it is often impossible to confidently state that Gainsborough's pictures are either landscape or genre pieces, and his influence is equally evident in later works by both landscape specialists and artists who were known as figure painters.116

A landscape by Westall exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1793 was described by one critic as "a very charming imitation of the late Gainsborough in design, effect, and the manner in which the whole is produced."117 The opinions of this writer were not shared by many of his contemporaries, however. The majority of critics preferred to emphasize what they regarded as "foreign" elements in Westall's style, and in attacking his overly bold colouring, "glittering surfaces" and excessive mannerism they often called upon notions of cultural patriotism. As Kriz points out, "to embrace the gaudy and artificial in art [was] to abandon one's social and national identity by taking on the vices and affectations of a debased Other - an Other which ... was at this moment almost invariably characterized as French."118

While many writers implied that Westall's work was un-English, at least one made the basis of his hostility explicit. In 1807 the True Briton published a review in which John Taylor complained that Westall's Flora Unveiled by Zephyrs had "all the spangle and catching light of Watteau's work." Taylor went on to assert that "of all the styles of painting, the French is the lowest and most contemptible. It has nothing of nature to please the eye, nothing of sentiment to gratify the mind: its frippery and tinsel please Frenchmen

117 Quoted in Whitley, Artists and their Friends, p. 178.
118 Kriz, The Idea of the English Landscape Painter, p. 46. Kriz notes that Venice, Holland, and Carthage were also offered occasionally by artists and critics as historical examples of the negative impact of commerce on the arts.
alone.\textsuperscript{119}

The collective refusal to acknowledge connections between Westall and other English artists cannot simply be taken at face value. As seen in the criticisms aimed by Knight and Price at Brownian landscape design, anti-French sentiment was not simply a means to discredit England’s military enemy and cultural rival. It was regularly taken up by factional interests within English society as a means of discrediting their domestic rivals. The political interests of individual writers often determined their positions on particular artists, and from about 1795 to 1805, when British fears of invasion and counter-revolutionary rhetoric were at their peak, the tendency to apply the negative descriptor "French" to everything from "gaudy" styles of painting to licentious behaviour and unwelcome political ideas was present across the political spectrum.\textsuperscript{120}

For much of the eighteenth century the tastes and manners of the English aristocracy had been distinguished by their imitation of the French. Part of a spirit of worldly sophistication known as cosmopolitanism, their attachment to Gallic culture played a significant role in rationalizing and maintaining their power as the "natural leaders" of British society.\textsuperscript{121} For many members of the middle classes, aristocratic consumption of French fashions, cuisine, literature and art reinforced societal boundaries that they had long resented. Not surprisingly, when their own power and influence began to increase, they based many of their efforts toward self-definition and self-promotion on their opposition to French taste. The aristocracy were also beginning to doubt the wisdom of allowing

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\textsuperscript{120} Kriz, \textit{The Idea of the English Landscape Painter}, p. 34, 52.

\textsuperscript{121} An extensive discussion of cosmopolitanism is included in Newman, \textit{The Rise of English Nationalism}, pp. 1-47.
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themselves to be so heavily influenced by a foreign culture. However, it was the French Revolution and the onset of war in 1793 that finally convinced the landed classes that it would be in their interest to emphasize their affinity with the lower orders and devote their energies and resources to the betterment of the national community.  

In addition to Knight and other connoisseurs, including Horace Walpole and Thomas Hope, Westall could count George III among his distinguished admirers. However, in the years around 1800 his work met with persistent criticism from art critics writing for publications with diverse political and cultural views, as well as from artists like John Constable and Paul Sandby, and the prominent connoisseur and amateur painter George Beaumont. Despite, or perhaps because of, his popularity with the public, published accounts in support of Westall's work were brief and infrequent. His harshest critic, Pasquin, seems to have avoided associating Westall's work specifically with "French" tastes, but like Taylor and other critics he based many of his barbs on the notion that Westall's "tawdry" colouring and overly affected style were suitable only for an uneducated and morally dubious viewer. For example, despite the dignity of its subject-matter, Westall's Hesiod Instructing the Greeks (R.A. 1796, No. 670), was dismissed by Pasquin as "such an effort, as no person, possessing taste and knowledge, can regard with satisfaction; yet it involves that trickery and finery which is so captivating to vulgar minds." Writers who did find something to praise in Westall's work often focused on his

122 Kriz, "Genius as an Alibi," p. 32.
123 Kriz, The Idea of the English Landscape Painter, p. 48. According to Shelley Bennett, some of the positive assessments which did appear, in both radical and conservative publications, were actually paid for by Westall. The practice of exchanging money for flattering reviews, known as "puffs," was very common at the time, and Pasquin also participated in it. See Bennett, "Anthony Pasquin and the Function of Art Journalism," 199-202.
achievements in watercolour, but here too he encountered opposition.  

Westall did not produce a great many oil paintings during his career, but instead chose to focus on small-scale watercolours, drawings and book illustrations. While it is not known for certain that his 1791 paintings of the British peasantry were done in watercolour, his preference for this medium and the fact that the pictures were exhibited as a set of four suggests that this was probably the case. The elevation of watercolour paintings from their former lowly status as "tinted drawings" to that of autonomous works of art, in what was often thought of as a singularly British medium, contributed greatly to the expansion of the domestic art market.

While it was landscape specialists who were at the centre of the interest in watercolour, the medium also held considerable appeal for figure painters like Westall, who were able to charge more for their work. Even elaborate and highly finished watercolours like The Rosebud (fig. 10), which Westall exhibited at the Academy in 1792, could be produced much more quickly and cheaply than oil paintings, and their lower prices made them more accessible to middle class collectors. In addition, some wealthy connoisseurs preferred watercolours over oils. Richard Payne Knight was one of them. For years he collected only watercolours, and while he seems to have purchased his first picture by Westall in about 1790, he did not commission any oil paintings until 1807.

One of the most frequent complaints made by watercolour artists exhibiting at the

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126 Gear, Masters or Servants?, p. 162.
128 Gear, Masters or Servants?, p. 183.
Academy was that their pictures were poorly displayed. They tended to be placed in awkward and badly lit locations, and were overshadowed by the larger and more dramatic oils that were hung in the same galleries. In paintings like *The Rosebud* Westall experimented with the use of bodycolour, an opaque technique that was closer to oil than to watercolour in its method of application, to give his works the added richness and depth that would enable them to compete for viewers' attentions, and in later works he also employed gum arabic to darken his shadows.\(^{129}\) For the former practice he was taken to task by Pasquin in 1796:

> Mr. Westall's drawings appear to more advantage in the Exhibition, than they do out, which is derived from their gaudiness of tinting.... There is nothing more certain, than that a picture chastely coloured, may be ruined in character by being placed next to a glaring composition, in such an assemblage.\(^{130}\)

By characterizing colouring as "chaste" the critic invokes the discourse of sexuality, effectively condemning Westall's "gaudy" colouring as immoral, as well as unpleasant to the eye. As Kriz has pointed out, this sort of tactic had a long history of use by art critics and writers on aesthetics, as did the gendering of colour and of painterly effects.\(^{131}\)

The latter strategy was used by Pasquin in his 1796 *Memoirs of the Royal Academicians*, in which he likens Westall's use of colouring to the tendency of young women to be more concerned about the external graces of their lovers than their morality of action. "Had I known the private history of this gentleman less," Pasquin writes, "I should have believed that he had been exclusively educated among ladies." An overly mannered


style like Westall's was generally interpreted by contemporary critics as evidence that an artist was overly motivated by commercial self-interest, but Pasquin is even more critical of the public that supports "this light and trivial kind of study." In his view the artist is less deserving of blame than the viewer, who is more easily motivated by superficial display than by "the interests of modesty and merit."\(^{132}\)

Despite the fact that body colour and gum had been in use since the 1770s by Gainsborough, Sandby and others, Westall was celebrated by some of his peers as an important innovator. James Northcote, for one, insisted that "Westall is as much intitled to share in the honour of being one of the founders of the school of water-colours, as his highly gifted contemporaries, Girtin and Turner."\(^{133}\) The paintings themselves hardly seem to justify such high praise, but as Jane Bayard has pointed out, by claiming that Westall’s achievements were equal to those of two of England’s most highly esteemed landscape painters Northcote probably hoped to gain increased recognition for his own field, figure painting. Westall’s real contribution to watercolour lay in combining his strengthened technique with a fashionable figure style that united rococo and neoclassical elements.\(^{134}\)

This synthesis also enabled him to attain great success as a literary illustrator. Many famous authors and poets had their books illustrated by Westall, especially after 1800. They included the Scottish writers Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott, as well as Englishmen like William Cowper, George Crabbe, and Lord Byron.\(^{135}\) During the 1790s

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\(^{133}\) Quoted in Bayard, *Works of Splendor and Imagination*, p. 19.
\(^{134}\) Bayard, *Works of Splendor and Imagination*, pp. 43-44.
\(^{135}\) Westall, "The Westall Brothers", 31.
Westall was commissioned to provide illustrations for John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, Thomas Macklin's Poets' Gallery and the short-lived Milton Gallery of Johann Heinrich Fuseli. These galleries represented a new kind of commercial patronage in which leading artists were engaged to paint scenes from literature that would be exhibited to the public and eventually sold as prints. Although ultimately all of these ventures failed financially, their existence at this time is an indication of growing interest in English literature, art and history, all important aspects of a national culture that took on an increased importance during the French wars.

The support of print publishers like Boydell and Smith was instrumental in freeing many English artists from complete dependence on aristocratic sponsorship. Combining the roles of patron and dealer, they made it possible for paintings to be seen by a much larger portion of the educated public. In addition to commissioning works, publishers in London would purchase pictures from exhibitions, have plates made from them, and then resell the originals. The fact that Westall exhibited his 1791 peasant paintings as a set of four, strongly suggests that they were created with the print market firmly in mind.

For the first half of the eighteenth century most of the engravings sold in England had, like paintings, been imported from either Italy or France, but with the growth of the urban middle class the domestic print trade entered an era of remarkable productivity and expansion. An explosion of consumer activity took place in eighteenth century England, as newly acquired fortunes enabled a greater percentage of the population than ever before to experience the pleasures of "getting and spending." In an effort to raise their social status,

wealthy members of the bourgeoisie engaged in what Neil McKendrick has dubbed "emulative spending," furnishing their homes with luxury items that included paintings and other works of art. Increasingly, middle class patronage was extended to include female buyers, and print publishers were quick to respond to their presence by investing in works by artists who were associated with so-called "feminine" tastes.

The fashion for reproductive engravings that swept the country during the second half of the century was not, however, limited to members of the middle classes. No gentleman professing to taste could be without a print collection, and established guidelines regarding the physical arrangement of works of art meant that even this relatively accessible and inexpensive form of visual culture could be made to function as a sign of refined taste and social distinction. In the homes of the elite, codes of aesthetic taste based on hierarchies of genre and medium dictated where and how artworks were displayed. Like other works on paper, prints were not hung on walls, but stored in folios to be viewed in private or by intimate groups. In upper middle class drawing rooms scrapbooks full of reproductive engravings were a common means of entertaining and impressing one's guests. For the lower middle class, who could not afford to decorate their houses with paintings, framed prints provided acceptable substitutes.

Attracted by the demand for quality reproductive prints that arose in England during the 1750s, many French engravers took up residence in London. This made it possible for native engravers to assimilate their techniques and eventually attain a level of skill that had


previously only existed on the Continent. At the same time, the development of innovative processes designed to facilitate more accurate reproduction of paintings, drawings and watercolours allowed for a variety of visual effects that also sparked the interest of connoisseurs. One of these was stipple engraving, a French invention which was introduced into England during the 1760s, and soon became something of a national specialty.

A tonal process originally designed to recreate the soft modelling of oil painting, stipple engraving, when combined with colour, also proved to be an effective method of reproduction for paintings in watercolour. The softness of surface and tone that could be achieved with stipple made it particularly suitable for engravings of "feminine" subjects, and the artist who first recognized its commercial potential was Angelica Kaufmann. In England, the new technique was popularized by Kaufmann, who embraced it as the ideal vehicle for bringing her work to the public. Reproduced in colour, her works became widely affordable and sold extremely well.

The stipple technique replaced engraved lines with clusters of dots and flicks that were produced with a roulette, a punch and a special curved burin in a combination of etching and engraving. The dotted plate, which developed out of the crayon manner (a method devised in France in the 1450s to imitate the delicate appearance of chalk drawings) could be engraved more quickly and easily than a line engraving or mezzotint. It could

140 See Bruntjen, John Boydell, p. 18; and Godfrey, Printmaking in Britain, p. 43.
141 Beginning in the early 1760s the existing techniques for engraving, line engraving and mezzotint, were enriched by the successive introduction of the crayon manner, stipple engraving, aquatint and soft-ground etching. Godfrey, Printmaking in Britain, p. 43.
142 Godfrey, Printmaking in Britain, p. 54.
also print far more impressions before beginning to show signs of wear, and when it did begin to deteriorate it was ideal for printing in colour.

Unlike the engraving process, the method used for colour printing was neither fast nor easy, but it had the advantage of allowing a single plate of the entire design to be engraved, inked with as many colours as necessary and then printed in a single pull of the press. Using a watercolour drawing as a guide, the printer would first apply a light ground-tint over the whole surface of the plate, as if he were preparing to print in monochrome. But rather than wiping the ink lightly into the lines or dots, he wiped it out of them, leaving only a slight tinge of neutral colour on which to build his picture.

Next came the brighter colours, which were applied to the appropriate sections of the plate and then worked into the incised lines and stipple. Once the principle colours had been painted or inked in, the ground was generally completely removed wherever flesh tones were to be used. A different ground-tint was substituted, and over it the flesh tones were built up and modelled and the facial features added. Finally, all the details were adjusted and the colours carefully blended into one another at their edges.

Because the dabber used resembled a rag doll, this technique was known as inking "à la poupée." In effect the plate was completely repainted for each impression to be printed, and when it was wiped great care had to be taken so as not to mix the colours. It was a laborious procedure that required a skilled craftsman, so engravings printed in colour were generally more expensive than those that had been printed in black and white and then coloured by hand. The latter was also a time consuming process, but one that could be accomplished cheaply using unskilled workers. Often the two methods were combined, as was the case in Cardon’s engravings of Westall’s peasant pictures, where details such as lips, eyes and hair have been touched up with watercolour.
A 1773 watercolour by J. Elwood (fig. 11) provides a glimpse of a typical London printseller's establishment. Large multi-paned bow windows encouraged passersby to enjoy a varied display of current prints and prompted a German visitor in the late 1790s to remark that "print shops are real galleries." The rapid expansion of the print market increased the variety of subject matter found in English paintings, as works which might well have gone unsold in the past began to be purchased at exhibitions and commissioned directly by print publishers. One result of this flurry of activity was that reproductive prints quickly became a more rapid and precise indicator of contemporary taste than oil paintings, where the claims of tradition continued to exert a powerful conservative influence. The category of imagery that is discussed in the following chapter, the rustic genre picture, was among those that benefitted most from the popular interest in reproductive engravings.

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145 Bruntjen, John Boydell, p. 32.
146 Webster, Francis Wheatley, p. 57.
CHAPTER TWO
The English Peasant in Rustic Genre Paintings and Prints

The tendency to favourably contrast rural life with the perceived corruption of the city or the restrictive world of the court has been a feature of Western European culture since classical times or earlier. Despite the great variety of rural and urban settlements that have existed over the centuries, certain generalized beliefs, or myths, have persisted. One of the most enduring is the idea of the countryside as a refuge for such qualities as simplicity, innocence, and virtue, which are seen as having been undermined by the worldliness and ambition associated with city living. Although it tends to be associated with the pastoral tradition, like all myths this one has assumed various forms in response to historical circumstances. In late eighteenth century England it took on a specific moral character and, as Raymond Williams has shown, was gradually shaped "in the direction and in the interest of a new kind of society: that of a developing agrarian capitalism."

As industrial expansion sharpened distinctions between the urban and the rural, the countryside was increasingly contrasted not only with the city but also with the new industrial towns, where it was feared the appalling living conditions of workers were sure to lead to immorality and riotous behaviour. It was in rural areas, however, that outbreaks of food riots erupted due to shortages and high prices in the mid 1780s, the mid 1790s, and again at the turn of the century. The sense of instability that prevailed was...

147 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), p. 22. For a more detailed analysis of these developments, see pp. 13-34.
149 Pamela Horn points out that the extensive literature on food riots should not lead to the assumption that violent outbreaks were common, even in periods of severe hardship. In addition, it is now clear that it was not...
aggravated by demands for political reform. First heard during Britain's war with the American colonies, the calls for change intensified dramatically during the 1790s, resulting in a conservative backlash. In the words of historian W.E. Houghton, from 1790 until 1850 British society was "shot through, from top to bottom, with the dread of some wild outbreak by the masses that would overthrow the established order and confiscate personal property."

In Houghton's view "British society" was evidently limited to members of the propertied classes, but these groups were indeed drawn together by a generalized fear of the urban and rural poor. Of the four prints published in 1799, Westall's *Irish Peasants* is the only one to depict any kind of overt class interaction, and in it the Catholic peasants appear to be passive and respectful of the visiting Anglican curate - a representative of Protestant authority. I will argue in Chapter Three that the absence of men in this print effectively neutralized the threat that an image of the Catholic peasantry would have presented to British viewers following the Irish Rebellion of 1798. My concern here, however, is to examine the broader rural myths and values that provided a vocabulary for the rustic genre tradition as a whole, and to uncover additional layers of meaning which they acquired in the 1790s.

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149(...)continued

rural labourers, but industrial workers and inhabitants of market towns that relied on outside sources of food, who were most likely to be involved in riots. See Pamela Horn, *The Rural World, 1780-1850: Social Change in the English Countryside* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1980), pp. 45-46.


152 For the basis of my identification of this figure as an Anglican curate see footnote #7 in the Introduction.
In literature and in art, the traditional pastoral has its origins in the poetry of Theocritus and Virgil. It is usually set in a non-agricultural countryside, often in a mythical golden age when people did not need to till the soil, and shepherds and shepherdesses led happy lives purportedly filled with music and flirtation. A highly artificial convention, the pastoral later came to be associated with the world of the court, where it served to provide escapist entertainment for European aristocrats seeking freedom from the societal restraints that governed their own privileged world. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the pastoral tradition was localized by English poets, who transformed it into an idealized description of actual rural conditions. Painters lagged behind poets to some extent, but by the latter part of the century the classical tradition in pastoral painting, established by Claude and Poussin, and the European pastorals of Watteau and Boucher had been reshaped by Gainsborough and others into a form of rural imagery that was understood to be more true to life and, no less importantly, more English.¹⁵³

Without referring explicitly to earlier historical periods, in their images of the countryside England’s poets and painters celebrated a set of values that are often vaguely referred to as "traditional." A more evocative term would be feudal, that is, based on a pre-capitalist system of fixed, reciprocal social and economic relations between landowners and peasants.¹⁵⁴ Beginning in the 1780s, the growing popularity of rustic genre pictures resulted in the production of a vast number of idealized images in which the daily lives of the rural poor are associated with hard work, familial affection, religious piety and deference to rank. In scenes where class interaction is depicted these signs of peasant


¹⁵⁴ Williams, The Country and the City, p. 35.
virtue tend to be complemented by paternalism and charity, which were considered to be admirable qualities in those who were designated as "superior" within the social structure of the late eighteenth century. As noted earlier, rustic genre pictures appealed to both upper and middle class patrons. It is not surprising, therefore, that difficulties arise when attempts are made to attach the new imagery of English country life to a single class ideology. For example, Christiana Payne has argued that this vision of the social order was particularly attractive to those who supported the political dominance of the aristocracy and gentry at a time when it was under threat from an increasingly powerful middle class.\textsuperscript{155} While this was no doubt true in some cases, other art historians have correctly pointed out that the fundamental values of bourgeois society are embodied over and over again in images of peasants.\textsuperscript{156}

It was during the late eighteenth century that the English middle class began to actively assert its presence. Its members were highly diverse, but encouraged by pressures from a growing body of wage labourers, the fluctuation of trade cycles and the turbulence of war, they gradually recognized common interests and sought to distance themselves from aristocratic mores.\textsuperscript{157} No truly unified set of values existed for any class, rural or urban, but the centrality of work, family and religion within the value system of an emergent middle class intent on self-definition is crucial to understanding the significance of rustic genre.

During the 1780s, the demand for images of rural life that were more realistic than

\textsuperscript{155} Payne, Toil and Plenty, pp. 24-25, 45.
\textsuperscript{156} See, for example, Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, pp. 81-82.
\textsuperscript{157} The "oppositional culture" of the middle class in relation to aristocratic values is examined by Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall in Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850 (London: Hutchinson, 1987), pp. 18-28.
those of the traditional pastoral was increasingly accompanied by an insistence that they be images of work. As Barrell has shown, such scenes of rustic labour were not merely descriptive, but prescriptive. It was important to depict the poor at work, "not only because that is what they do, but because that is what they ought to do."\(^{158}\) This did not imply that agricultural labourers should never be shown at rest, but that any moments of leisure they were granted by artists must appear to have been honestly earned. While it was acceptable to show a worker relaxing during a meal break or after a day in the fields, his tools should always remain nearby as an indication of industry. Where he chose to take his leisure was also an issue; if he was to represent the virtues of country living, it followed that he could not be depicted in the alehouse.\(^{159}\)

It seems clear that images of rural life that emphasized the importance of hard work, honesty, thrift and sobriety would have appealed to the interests of middle class entrepreneurs. However, a number of Gainsborough's English pastorals were purchased by members of the peerage, and Morland's paintings were admired by the Earl of Derby, one of the richest men in the country. It may be that the appreciation by the landed elite of these representations of rustic labour reflected their changing role in England's social and economic life.\(^{160}\) From about 1750 landowners were increasingly involved in the efficient management of their estates, as well as in manufacturing and many other commercial enterprises.\(^{161}\)

As interpreted by visual artists, the new rural ideal was essentially domestic. In the

\(^{158}\) Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape, p. 77. (Barrell's italics).

\(^{159}\) Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape, p. 21.

\(^{160}\) Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape, p. 8.

landscape paintings of the 1780s the flirting couples of the pastoral tradition have largely been replaced by family groups, while countless rustic genre pictures celebrate the joys and comforts of a happy home life. Wheatley and Morland, two of the most popular rustic genre painters of the day, often combined domestic themes with images of work (figs. 12 and 13). Other artists preferred to depict the positive effects of domestic labour - a neatly kept cottage and healthy, well dressed children, for instance - rather than work itself. This is the case in Westall’s set of pictures, where the peasants are shown with evidence of their day to day activities (a basket of potatoes and a shovel, a spinning wheel, sheep and goats), but none of them are actually working.

In this sense, though not in their idealized appearance, Westall’s figures reflect the influence of the picturesque on representations of rural life in the 1790s.\(^{162}\) In *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (1786) Gilpin declared that,

> In a moral light, the industrious mechanic is a more pleasing object than the loitering peasant. But in a picturesque light it is otherwise. The arts of industry are rejected; and even idleness, if I may so speak, adds dignity to a character.\(^ {163}\)

The Scottish and Irish peasants in Westall’s images seem to be particularly inclined to take some time away from their work to enjoy a few moments of music or conversation. In addition to reflecting current picturesque tastes, their leisurely attitudes conform to contemporary English perceptions of the Celtic fringe. Wales, Scotland and Ireland were generally seen as economically backward and incapable of progress without "superior" economic management, a view which served to justify continuing English interference in


\(^{163}\) Quoted in Roger Young, "George Walker’s *Costume of Yorkshire* (1814): The representation and negotiation of class difference and social unrest", *Art History*, 19 (September, 1996), 396.
their agriculture, industry and trade.

What Evans has referred to as "the new moral economy" of late eighteenth century Britain cannot be fully understood outside a religious context. During this period almost every denomination was touched by a religious revivalism that had middle class men and women at its centre.\textsuperscript{164} Ties between Christianity and the family provided the moral authority for codes of behaviour that were an essential part of middle class values. In the cottage scenes of Wheatley and Morland, for example, we can already see the effects of an ideology of separate spheres for male and female that would become one of the defining characteristics of the Victorian era.\textsuperscript{165}

The affection and devotion that supposedly characterized the peasant family could also serve as a positive example for upper class behaviour. Influenced by the urban gentry and the upper middle class, some members of the aristocracy had begun earlier in the century to embrace a more domesticated lifestyle.\textsuperscript{166} In the 1770s and 80s they were further encouraged by writers like Locke and Rousseau, who seriously reconsidered the theoretical and practical aspects of childrearing. Rousseau, in particular, emphasized the advantages of breast-feeding and personal maternal care, and urged mothers and fathers to interact more playfully with their young children.

It was widely believed that the children of peasant mothers were healthier and happier than "artificially" reared city children, and the prevalence of this myth was exploited by James Gillray in a 1796 print. Entitled \textit{The Fashionable Mamma, - or - the}

\textsuperscript{164} See Evans, \textit{The Forging of the Modern State}, pp. 45-55.

\textsuperscript{165} Davidoff and Hall, \textit{Family Fortunes}, p. 74. The doctrine of separate spheres was what allowed the middle class home to be seen as a haven from the market, but as Habermas has argued, it was based on the separation of commerce and family life, which were, in fact, fundamentally connected. The contradictory nature of middle class domesticity is examined by Habermas in \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere}, pp. 43-51.

\textsuperscript{166} Davidoff and Hall, \textit{Family Fortunes}, p. 21.
Convenience of Modern Dress (fig. 14), the image ruthlessly satirizes the revival of breast-feeding among the upper class English disciples of Rousseau. Gillray was the most famous and popular caricaturist of the time, and his satires were collectors items from the moment of publication. This allowed him more freedom than most of his contemporaries, but his works were still commercially motivated and thus serve as a valuable guide to the interests and attitudes of educated upper and middle class Londoners. They were sold in the more exclusive print shops, and both plain and hand-coloured versions were well out of the average working man’s price range. Here Gillray has depicted a noblewoman dressed in the current "natural" style, whose conveniently raised slit pockets allow her to take a brief moment to suckle her child before departing in the coach that awaits outside the window. The woman’s thin frame and bored expression are contrasted with the full bosom and sweet smile of the nursemaid, and with the peasant mother in a picture labelled "maternal love" that hangs on a nearby wall.

Many English paintings and prints of the period pay tribute to loving mothers, not only in peasant families, but also in such classical legends as the story of Cornelia, Mother of the Gracci, who valued her children above jewels. The women in Westall’s English and Irish images are part of this tradition. Portraits of famous contemporaries and their children also sold very well as prints. Reynolds, especially, was admired for his ability to capture aristocratic mothers and children in apparently unstudied poses, but their very informality was, in part, a self-conscious display of fashionable attitudes toward


168 This subject was a favourite in the 1780s, and was painted by many artists. One of them was Angelica Kauffmann, who produced versions for collectors in England, Naples and Poland. On Kauffmann’s work see Albert Boime, Art in an Age of Revolution, 1750-1800 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 108-116.
A landed family might choose to adopt a "natural" approach toward childrearing, but this was considered mandatory by middle class women, who scorned the wet nurses and boarding schools that were still the norm in aristocratic circles.\textsuperscript{170}

Even without any knowledge of the historical circumstances surrounding their production, the images of peasant life found in paintings by Westall and most of his contemporaries appear highly idealized to a late twentieth century viewer. Some eighteenth century critics were also quick to point out their inaccuracies. Reviewing the Royal Academy's 1794 exhibition, Anthony Pasquin directed the following criticism toward such overly decorative approaches to the artistic representation of the rural British countryside, as seen in the work of Francis Wheatley:

Whenever Mr. Wheatley presents us with a rural Nymph whom he wishes to be peculiarly impressive, he decorates her head with a profusion of party coloured ribbands, like a maniac in Coventry, which play in the breeze, offensive to thought and propriety. As this is not the character of our village Daphnes, why make them so prodigiously fine at the expence of truth?\textsuperscript{171}

The discrepancies between artistic representations and the harsher realities of rural existence do not seem to have bothered artists or their patrons. The purpose of rustic genre paintings was not to inform or educate, but to mediate the anxieties of urban viewers by locating their fears of a popular uprising within the agricultural labour force, rather than the new industrial working class, and then working to reassure those viewers that the rural poor

\textsuperscript{169} For more on this portrait, painted in 1784-5 and entitled Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, with her Daughter, Lady Georgiana Cavendish, see Penny, Reynolds, p. 311.

\textsuperscript{170} Davidoff and Hall, Family Fortunes, p. 21, 335.

\textsuperscript{171} Anthony Pasquin [John Williams], "A liberal critique of the present exhibition of the Royal Academy", 1794, pp. 31-32, quoted in Webster, Francis Wheatley, p. 79.
were virtuous and content. For example, Morland, despite his great popularity, was regarded by some as dangerously honest in his representations of country life. As a result, his peasants were often "prettied up" for the print market.\textsuperscript{172} The rustic figures of Wheatley and Westall did not require such alterations. The self-conscious mannerism of their poses and their delicate or classicized facial features assured that they would not be seen as threatening.

The fundamental importance of rural stability was summed up by the agrarian reformer Arthur Young in 1771. "Agriculture," he wrote:

\begin{quote}
 is the grand product that supports the people.... Both public and private wealth can arise only from three sources, agriculture, manufactures and commerce.... Agriculture much exceeds both the others: it is even the foundation of their principal branches.\textsuperscript{173}
\end{quote}

If agriculture was the basis for the nation's wealth, then the rural labourer was essential, and thus potentially dangerous. By the 1770s industrialism had begun to challenge the economic pre-eminence of agriculture in England. After 1775 the percentage of the population living in towns of more than 2500 increased slowly but perceptibly, especially in the Midlands and parts of the north.\textsuperscript{174} In certain areas large numbers of rural people were also being drawn into some form of manufacturing production by the growth of cottage industries, but the majority continued to rely on farming for their primary source of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{172} Barrell, \textit{The Dark Side of the Landscape}, pp. 121-22.  \\
\textsuperscript{173} Arthur Young \textit{A Six Months' Tour Through the North of England}, (2nd ed.; London, 1771), vol. 4, p. 364, 372, quoted in Horn, \textit{The Rural World}, p. 13. (Young's italics.)  \\
\end{flushright}
Income until well into the nineteenth century.175

The gradual decrease in the number of rural labourers was brought about by the enclosure movement and the development of capitalist farming. Increased efficiency and productivity in agriculture became the basis for success throughout the economy by allowing the non-agricultural work force to grow, eventually facilitating the transfer of workers to the industrial sector. The ancient collective system of farming based on common land continued to exist in the remote Highlands of Scotland, in Wales and northwestern England, and in most of Ireland, but by 1790 only 10-15 percent of all cultivated land in Britain was owner-occupied.176 The growing popularity of rustic genre pictures corresponded to what Ann Bermingham has described as "a familiar pattern of actual loss and imaginative recovery,"177 for in many parts of Britain the traditional peasantry no longer existed in reality.

Through four thousand acts of Parliament, 8 million acres of land were enclosed in England between 1760 and 1820. Enclosure consolidated open fields to facilitate large scale farming, and this enabled landlords, together with a rising class of medium-sized tenant farmers, to implement crop rotation and other advanced agrarian techniques in the most financially profitable manner possible. The resulting improvements made it possible for farmers to meet the demand for food created by a population that expanded from 6.5 to 12 million during the same sixty year period.178 The spiralling inflation of cereal prices

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177 Bermingham, Landscape and Ideology, p. 9.
during the French wars resulted in 42 percent of all parliamentary enclosures taking place between 1793 and 1815.\textsuperscript{179} This allowed for the increased output that averted starvation, but while the rents and profits of landlords and farmers nearly doubled between 1790 and 1820, with war-time inflation the wages of farm labourers often fell below the subsistence level.\textsuperscript{180}

Just how severely the majority of the rural population was affected by enclosure is debated by twentieth century historians, but most agree that the number of landless labourers, men forced to depend on seasonal employment by farmers, must have increased considerably.\textsuperscript{181} Small freeholders were often given a small part of the enclosed fields as compensation, but most could not afford to fence and develop their few acres. They were therefore obliged to sell them to the large landowners, and the long ladder of ranks and degrees of wealth that had previously characterized rural society was transformed into a three-tiered structure of landlord, farmer and labourer. Arable land that had been held in common and wastelands that had previously thought unsuitable for cultivation were converted into private holdings. As a result, cottagers lost their small garden plots and the right to graze cattle and sheep on common pastures, as well as their access to the woods and wastelands where they had gathered fuel.

One of the most famous contemporary assessments of the effects of enclosure on the lives of the poor was made by Arthur Young, the agrarian reformer whose views on the importance of rural stability were cited earlier in this chapter. Young had actively supported the enclosure movement because of the stimulus that it provided for agricultural

\textsuperscript{179} Horn, The Rural World, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{181} See Payne, Toil and Plenty, p. 10, and p. 69, n. 29 for a brief summary of this debate.
improvements, but in 1801 he wrote:

By nineteen out of twenty Enclosure Acts the poor are injured, in some grossly injured.... The poor in these parishes may say, and with truth, 'Parliament may be tender of property; all I know is, I had a cow, and an Act of Parliament has taken it from me.'

Increasing rural poverty was reflected in the amount of money spent annually on poor relief, which rose in England and Wales from just over £1.5 million in 1776 to more than £7 million in 1820. The money was collected through taxes, known as the poor rates, which were imposed on the more prosperous members of a community in order to support the needy. Despite the number of workers being recruited into manufacturing and canal building unemployment and underemployment increased during the 1790s. Low wages and the practice of hiring "by the task" meant that most agricultural labourers were, at one time or another, forced to rely on poor relief. Nevertheless, the number of people on the land continued to grow. Modern scholars generally attribute the increase in poor relief to population growth, but contemporary observers placed much of the blame on enclosure.

The worst of the food riots took place in 1795, when the failure of the grain harvest caused the price of bread to become exceptionally high. Most of the counties in England and Wales responded to the crisis by adopting measures like Berkshire’s Speenhamland system, which provided for relief to be distributed in the form of cash allowances,

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calculated on a sliding scale according to the price of bread and the size of a labourer's family. Others areas used their poor rates to subsidize grain and potato purchases for the poor.\textsuperscript{186} The use of such systems may help explain why most of the rustic genre prints published in the 1790s depict rural families with just a few children, as opposed to the extended peasant families often found in pictures a few years earlier.\textsuperscript{187} The large extended family was, perhaps, more picturesque, but it also imposed a much greater burden on the taxpayer.

Westall's \textit{English Peasants} depicts a cheerful family of four, apparently returning home from market day in a nearby town or village, which is indicated by a church spire in the distance. It is unlikely that they are on their way to market, since the baskets in which they would carry goods for sale appear to be empty. In a discussion of Gainsborough's \textit{Peasants Going to Market: Early Morning} (c. 1767-8, fig. 16), Barrell has remarked that the frequency with which painters in the latter part of the eighteenth century depicted rural figures on horseback gives an erroneous impression of widespread rural prosperity. In Westall's \textit{English Peasants}, as in Gainsborough's work, the peasants appear to possess both a means of transportation and a reason for going to market. Significantly, in the 1790s, even more than in the 1760s, most rural labourers had neither.\textsuperscript{188}

For middle class viewers in particular, the movement of the English family may have triggered thoughts of economic and class mobility. It was a source of some pride that

\textsuperscript{186} Horn, \textit{The Rural World}, pp. 48-49.

\textsuperscript{187} For example, in Gainsborough's \textit{Cottage Door with Children Playing}, c. 1778, Barrell counts twelve dependents, including the dog, and only one adult male. See \textit{The Dark Side of the Landscape}, p. 70. According to Horn, households where several generations lived together were actually rare in England. The size of labourers' families varied, but most frequently numbered between five and seven persons during the mid-1790s. See Horn, \textit{The Rural World}, p. 17; and Mingay \textit{Land and Society}, pp. 95-97.

\textsuperscript{188} Barrell, \textit{The Dark Side of the Landscape}, p. 54.
this sort of upward movement was considerably more common in England than in other parts of Europe at this time.\textsuperscript{189} The travels of this family of English peasants may also have registered the overall relocation of population, industry, towns and wealth over the course of the century.\textsuperscript{190} When Westall’s images are viewed together as a set, the English family appears to have been granted a mobility that is denied to the peasants of the Celtic fringe, who are bound to their tiny cottages and to what a predominantly middle class and English viewing public would have perceived to be anachronistic customs.

On the other hand, what seems at first to be the most positive of Westall’s peasant pictures might have implied just the opposite. His English peasants could have been understood as migrants, the victims of widespread enclosures or chronic rural underemployment. High unemployment in some parts of the country meant that rural labourers often chose to relocate in search of work or a better wage. Migration to London or emigration to the colonies should not be wholly discounted, but most working men remained within ten miles of their birthplace, moving only as far as a neighbouring village or the nearest industrial or market town.\textsuperscript{191} A labourer with a family to support took a great risk by choosing to leave his parish, as poor relief was given only to those who could satisfy certain residency requirements.\textsuperscript{192}

In addition to the permanent migration of workers, there was a great deal of temporary movement. This had always been true at harvest time, but growing agricultural specialization resulted in increased demands for short-term labour. Some members of the

\textsuperscript{190} Porter, \textit{English Society}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{192} Kitch, "Population Movement and Migration," p. 69.
rural poor were continuously on the move. Their nomadic way of life was depicted by Wheatley in several works, including one which was published as a print in 1797 (fig. 17). The otherwise restrictive Settlement Laws did allow for this kind of temporary relocation, but in economically depressed areas itinerant workers were often faced with riots and disturbances directed against "foreigners" willing to work for reduced wages.¹⁹³

Westall’s English peasants are not carrying their belongings with them, so it seems unlikely that they were intended to be taken for migrants. Still, this sort of interpretation probably would have occurred to some viewers of the print. Many would have been familiar with Oliver Goldsmith’s The Deserted Village, a poem that describes the devastating effects of enclosure on an English village, and the varied fates that may await the families forced to leave their homes.¹⁹⁴ Westall exhibited a picture of one of the characters from the poem at the Royal Academy in 1792, and in 1795 he provided illustrations for a collection of works by Goldsmith and Thomas Parnell.¹⁹⁵ First published in 1770, The Deserted Village was still widely read in the 1790s, but by then its blend of nostalgia and protest had been embraced by some advocates for political reform, and could no longer be regarded as safely sentimental by those who supported the status quo.¹⁹⁶ This change is worth considering in relation to the variety of readings that Westall’s English Peasants may have suggested in 1799. The print buying public was, as

¹⁹³ Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, p. 140.
¹⁹⁴ For useful discussions of The Deserted Village see Williams, The Country and the City, pp. 74-79, and Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape, pp. 77-82.
we have seen, primarily middle class. Most politically radical intellectuals were also of middle class origin and, in the earlier 1790s especially, so were a great many of their followers.  

For members of the privileged classes in Britain, the stability of the "lower orders" was certainly a source of anxiety before the 1790s, but their fears of popular unrest were magnified by the events of the French Revolution. For the most part Britain's political leaders and the upper and middle classes reacted positively when the Bastille fell in July 1789. Many believed that, at worst, their old enemy would be weakened, and, at best, that the French were on their way to establishing their own constitutional monarchy.  

It was the overthrow of the French monarchy in August 1792 that decisively signalled the end of the old social order, forcing British conservatives to recognize the full implications of what was taking place across the Channel. A few weeks later, many who had previously supported parliamentary reform also denounced "French principles" after the sans culottes of the Paris sections massacred prisoners in the city's jails, and the execution of the French king in January 1793 produced a general sense of outrage that was shared by conservatives and moderates in Britain.  

As Clive Emsley has pointed out, the impact of the French Revolution on British politics was twofold. It revived the hopes of radical reformers, and generated the fears that produced the conservative backlash of the 1790s. When Edmund Burke's powerful statement of political conservatism, Reflections on the Revolution in France, was first

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197 Gear, Masters or Servants, p. 100.
published in 1790, it had little immediate impact. In contrast, the enormous popular enthusiasm that greeted Thomas Paine’s reply to Burke, which appeared in two parts, in 1791 and 1792, polarized British politicians and society as a whole.\textsuperscript{201} Paine’s \textit{Rights of Man} helped to stimulate the growth of political radicalism in every part of Britain, penetrating even to isolated Welsh villages, the Scottish Highlands and, a little later, most of Ireland.\textsuperscript{202}

Paine’s pamphlet was outlawed in May 1792, and other repressive measures aimed at curbing the spread of radical ideas with which it was associated soon followed. In November of the same year the Association for Protecting Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, also known as the Crown and Anchor Society after the pub where the meetings of the group had first been held, was founded with government backing. In Scotland, where the penalties for sedition were harsher than they were in England, two men found guilty in 1793 of promoting works that included Paine’s \textit{Rights of Man} were sentenced to be transported to Australia. This injustice led to increased activity on the part of the Friends of the People, a Scottish radical association founded in 1792, just one year after the dissident United Irish Society was established in Belfast and Dublin.\textsuperscript{203} In 1794 a committee of secrecy that included Prime Minister Pitt and other leading ministers was formed to investigate the new radical societies; as a result of their efforts

\textsuperscript{201} ibid. Also see Christie, \textit{Stress and Stability}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{202} Evans, \textit{The Forging of the Modern State}, p. 68. There have been many studies of late eighteenth century English radicalism; the two that I have found most useful are Evans, pp. 66-74; and Thompson’s classic study \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}, especially pp. 17-25 and 77-185. Agitation for democracy in Scotland and independence in Ireland were even more intense. See Henry Meikle, \textit{Scotland and the French Revolution} Glasgow: 1912; R. Jacob, \textit{The Rise of the United Irishmen, 1791-4}, (London: 1937) and McDowell, \textit{Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution}.

\textsuperscript{203} Cullen, "A Kingdom United," p. 124.
twelve men were tried for treason. All of them were either acquitted or released, but the evidence gathered was enough for Pitt to persuade Parliament to suspend Habeas Corpus until 1802.

As Eric Evans has pointed out, some English aristocrats had advocated political reform before the French Revolution, and a few had even called for universal male suffrage. No one had ever thought it necessary to imprison these upper class radicals, but in the 1790s it became impossible to safely confine political debate to a privileged circle of propertied individuals.204 By far the most threatening aspect of Paine’s Rights of Man was that it was a cheaply priced best-seller aimed at skilled workers and artisans, and it was these men who became the driving force behind the radical movement. Most of the groups were known as Corresponding Societies, and their function was to circulate letters, pamphlets and propaganda promoting the cause of political liberty, and to call for orderly debate on proposals for reform. The vast majority of their supporters were not in favour of violence, but from the point of view of the political establishment the democratic aims of the radical Societies were implicitly revolutionary.

It has often been argued by historians the Societies were never large enough to pose a serious threat, but adherents and sympathizers were always far more numerous than formal members, and between 1793 and 1795 they staged impressive shows of support at outdoor protest meetings.205 In 1795 the level of popular discontent rose as a result of harvest failures and high wheat prices, and in October the King’s coach was stoned by an angry mob as he was on his way to open a new session of Parliament. Pitt took this as an opportunity to launch a new offensive against the radicals, and in December the

204 Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, p. 66.
205 Christie, Stress and Stability, p. 50, 51.
Treasonable Practices and Seditious Meetings Acts put an end to free discussion within political organizations and public meetings of more than fifty persons.

With the popular societies driven underground by the Two Acts of 1795, more of the radicals recognized the importance of strengthening ties to the British offshoots of the United Irish Society. Over the course of the eighteenth century thousands of Irish had emigrated to England and Scotland in search of work, and most members of the United Englishmen and United Scotsmen were members of these communities. Government repression was at its most severe from 1797-99, when it became apparent that these three groups were joining with British extremists in espousing conspiratorial means to republican ends.\textsuperscript{206} Popular support for their cause was naturally highest during periods of economic instability, and in 1797 harvest failures again brought inflation and widespread unemployment. To further complicate matters, in 1797 Britain was closer to military defeat than at any other time during the French wars.\textsuperscript{207}

Early in 1798 an Irish priest, Father James O’Coigly, was executed for plotting a joint British and Irish uprising, to be carried out with French assistance.\textsuperscript{208} Following weeks of brutal military repression in the Irish countryside, an insurrection did take place in May of 1798. Once the rebels were defeated the outcry against sedition became louder than ever before, and the government responded in 1799 by outlawing named groups, including the Corresponding Societies and the United Irishmen. Extraordinary measures were taken to restrict the press, and London’s prisons became filled with political offenders. At the same time, Napoleon’s continental blockade was causing British industry to stagnate,

\textsuperscript{207} Evans, \textit{The Forging of the Modern State}, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{208} See Thompson, \textit{The Making of the English Working Class}, pp. 169-172.
unemployment to rise and food prices to soar, ensuring that the dissatisfaction of the
general population would continue until the Peace of Amiens in April 1802.

Keeping all of this in mind, it may be useful to once again compare Westall’s
English Peasants with Gainsborough’s Peasants Going to Market: Early Morning (fig. 16).
Gainsborough’s picture was produced about twenty years before Westall’s original painting,
but whether or not Westall actually modelled English Peasants on Gainsborough’s work is
less important than the differences that exist between the two images. The works share a
number of formal and thematic similarities, as well as significant differences, and can
therefore provide insights into social and economic tensions that were prevalent in British
society throughout the 1790s, and that tended to be associated with the rural poor.

In both images a group of peasants appear on a hilltop that is indicated by a
diagonal line, sloping gradually upwards toward the right from the bottom left corner. On
the left a distant landscape can be seen below a broad expanse of open sky; on the far right
is a large tree, which Westall has made only partly visible. In Gainsborough’s picture
several men and women are shown on horseback, and a woman sits by a pond at the side
of the road with a baby in her arms and another child asleep against her knee. The centre
of each composition is occupied by a woman riding, although in Westall’s image she is
represented as a young mother on a donkey. She also holds a sleeping child, and her
husband and an older son accompany her on foot.

Westall has eliminated most of the adult figures, which has the effect of representing
the English peasants as a nuclear family. While poorer than Gainsborough’s peasants - they
have only a single donkey, rather than several horses - they seem cheerful and content. A
peasant family like this one, with the attentions of its members clearly directed toward one
another, would have been a reassuring sight for viewers fearing lower class unrest.

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Labouring men were encouraged to focus inward, to consider their obligations to the well-being of their families, instead of thinking of themselves as members of a larger group with interests and grievances in common. To further counteract the appeal of politically radical ideas, the patriarchal structure of the family or household could be called upon to naturalize the hierarchical structure of the state and its repressive policies.²⁰⁹

There were two clear advantages to persuading the worker to think of himself primarily or exclusively as the family bread-winner. First, a heightened sense of his responsibilities might encourage him to work harder, which would benefit his wife and children and ensure that they depended as little as possible on poor relief. Second, and particularly important during the 1790s, when the fear of radical political views resulted in widespread governmental repression, the labourer might see that his energies were best directed toward the betterment of his own family, and not of his class as a whole.²¹⁰

Even in the case of prints, however, it was obviously not the labouring poor who were purchasing rustic genre pictures, so their primary function was to provide reassurance and naturalize social hierarchies, not to dictate behaviour. It has been suggested by Barrell that the prevalence of happy rural families in late eighteenth century English art should therefore be seen as part of an attempt to actively resist or deny the emergence of a working class consciousness.²¹¹ Working men who were "true to the domestic affections" were regarded as less likely than others of their class to indulge in drunkenness, crime or sedition, and it was hoped that they could also be relied upon to raise their


²¹¹ Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape, p. 73.
children to become productive, law abiding citizens.\textsuperscript{212}

In light of prevailing fears about lower class instability, Westall’s emphasis on the family unit in his representations of the British peasantry is understandable. But, in addition to being the only one of the four prints to represent the modern, nuclear family, the English image further elaborates this theme. By portraying a young woman with an infant, riding a donkey while her husband walks alongside her, Westall encourages the viewer to associate the English peasant family with the Christian Holy Family, and specifically with the Biblical story of the flight into Egypt. Associations with rural poverty, forced migration or other hardships that might have arisen in the 1790s are balanced by this Biblical reference, which suggests that the sufferings of the poor are directed toward a higher purpose, or at any rate have "been allotted to them by the hand of God."\textsuperscript{213}

The widespread belief in the moral superiority of rural existence was given its classic literary expression in William Cowper’s 1785 poem \textit{The Task}, which includes the following lines:

\begin{quote}
God made the country, and man made the town  
What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts  
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught  
That life holds out to all, should most abound  
And least be threaten’d in the fields and groves?\textsuperscript{214}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{212} Payne, \textit{Toil and Plenty}, p. 32.
\textsuperscript{213} This phrase was used by William Wilberforce, a well known Evangelist, who wrote in the 1790s that Christianity taught the lower classes "[that] their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences; that the present state of things is very short... that their situation in life, with all its evils, is better than they have deserved at the hand of God; [and] finally that the true followers of Christ will all, as children of the same father, be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance." From \textit{A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians} (1797). Quoted in Gear, \textit{Masters or Servants}, p. 149.
In Westall's *English Peasants* the viewer's gaze is drawn to the church by a small white bird. Chased by the peasants' dog, it takes flight and soars off toward the far left. As in Hamilton's *Happy Cottagers* (fig. 5), the presence of the church serves as a consoling reminder of the essential religiosity that was, and to some extent still is, attributed to rural people by urban myths. Lower class unbelief carried with it the threat of revolution; the connection between the two was very clearly articulated by Arthur Young in 1798. Urging Parliament to build more churches for the labouring classes, he declared "the true Christian will never be a leveller, will never listen to French politics, or to French philosophy."\(^{215}\)

The official state church, the Church of England, was the nation's largest and wealthiest institution, but while a nominal Anglican presence continued to exist throughout all of England and Wales, in some areas in the latter part of the eighteenth century its hold on the ordinary worshipper was growing steadily weaker. Although church attendance should not be taken as an accurate measure of belief, it is worth noting that even in the most isolated rural areas the bulk of the labouring population were not necessarily church-goers. Attendance among the lower classes was further reduced with the population growth and urbanization that occurred during the 1790s.\(^{216}\)

Many lower class parishioners joined middle class Anglicans in turning to dissenting Protestant sects. Sectarian Dissent was traditionally attractive to the middle ranks of English society, and for the most part this pattern was maintained in the late eighteenth century.\(^{217}\) Methodism ministered to the lower orders and the poor, but also attracted

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\(^{215}\) Quoted in Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, p. 72, n. 25.

\(^{216}\) Porter, *English Society*, pp. 174-175.

\(^{217}\) In contrast, members of the Catholic and Puritan gentries were often attracted to the Established Church. With religious denomination increasingly regarded as a mark of social position, it was becoming inconvenient to be an English gentleman without also being an Anglican. Porter, *English Society*, pp. 178-9, 184.
many better-off farmers, skilled workers and artisans. The Welsh were particularly receptive to Methodism, and towards the end of the century the Independents and Baptists also expanded there. The national church of Scotland was, and still is, the Presbyterian Church, and Ireland was home to dissenting Ulster Presbyterians in addition to the governing Ascendancy.

The only revival that began and remained within the Established Church was Anglican Evangelicalism, which appealed primarily to the lower gentry and middle class. Its message was as much about social stability as moral reform, and this no doubt contributed to its remarkable success among the ruling classes during the 1790s.

William Wilberforce, an English member of Parliament and a prominent exponent of Evangelism, argued that shortcomings in religious observance among the privileged were a poor example to the lower orders, and dire political consequences would arise from such laxity. In an influential book published in 1797, when a French invasion appeared imminent, he declared that it was "to the decline in Religion and morality [that] our national difficulties must both directly and indirectly be chiefly ascribed."

The point I wish to make is not that the doctrines of these various sects were at odds with those of the Church of England, but rather that, despite their many differences, they were united by their shared Protestant identity. Traditional animosities between Anglicans and Dissenters remained, but by the early nineteenth century serious Christians had created

218 John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, detested Dissent and did not intend to separate from the Anglicans. His followers, however, officially seceded immediately after his death in 1791. For the history of Welsh Dissent see Morgan and Thomas, Wales: The Shaping of a Nation, pp. 155-177.

219 Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, p. 47.

220 Quoted in Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, p. 49. The complete title of the book, A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country contrasted with Real Christianity (1797), gives a good sense of its intended audience.
networks that encouraged both groups to recognize their common goals and work together to improve their communities.\textsuperscript{221} Anglicans were, admittedly, privileged. Universities and public offices were among the important areas of the state that were technically open only to members of the established church. In reality, however, it was not uncommon for Dissenters to be elected as members of Parliament, aldermen or mayors, as long as they were willing to demonstrate "occasional conformity" by now and then receiving Anglican communion.\textsuperscript{222}

Colley has argued persuasively that Protestantism played a crucial role during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in enabling the culturally diverse populations of England, Wales and Scotland to think of themselves as a single, British nation. In a period marked by a succession of major wars with France, British Protestants discovered a common identity with which to define themselves and their interests in opposition to a Catholic enemy.\textsuperscript{223} They were drawn together, in other words, not by a strong sense of consensus, homogeneity or centralism at home, but by their need to be different from, and superior to, the French.

It is important to emphasize, however, that a sense of Britishness that was first and foremost Protestant excluded the vast majority of Irish men and women, and Catholic minorities throughout the British Isles. To be Catholic in Britain was to be treated as an outsider. Catholics were not permitted to vote or hold political office and were forbidden to possess weapons. Their freedom to worship was limited, and in England those who

\textsuperscript{221} Davidoff and Hall, \textit{Family Fortunes}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{222} Porter, \textit{English Society}, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{223} The importance of Protestantism to the formation of British identity is one of the major themes of Colley’s \textit{Britons}. See in particular pp. 10-54.
refused to attend Anglican church services were subject to fines until 1791. In addition to the divisions which were formally enshrined in law, Catholics could be faced with assault or loss of personal property as a result of popular intolerance. Such occurrences were particularly common during periods when Britain was at war with Catholic France, and Catholics in Britain became scapegoats for the fear and anger of their Protestant neighbours.224

During the later 1790s recurrent threats of invasion made the British more sensitive than ever to the ongoing conflict with France. According to Colley, they drew strength and dignity from a deeply entrenched Protestant world-view that assured them that they would eventually secure victory under God. Over the past one hundred years they had emerged triumphant from every serious conflict except the War of American Independence, and in British minds it was hardly a coincidence that in that case their initial enemy had been Protestant, rather than Catholic.225 By studying the Bible, listening to sermons, and reading or hearing others read such classics of Protestant literature as John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs, containing an account of the sufferings and death of the Protestants in the reign of Queen Mary*226, British Protestants learned that suffering and exposure to danger were signs of grace. Their trials and troubles were the necessary fate of a chosen people, and would ensure salvation if met with fortitude

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224 For more on British expressions of anti-Catholic sentiment, see Colley, *Britons*, pp. 19-23; and Porter *English Society*, p. 171.


226 *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was first published in London between 1678 and 1684, and had reached its fifty-seventh edition there by 1789. It was also issued by all of the major Scottish presses, and there were several Welsh-language editions. Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* was first published in 1563. It had a great impact in England and Scotland at that time, but it was even more widely read in the eighteenth century and later, due to increased literacy and the availability of cheap editions which could be purchased in installments. For more on these books see Colley, *Britons*, pp. 25-29.
and faith.

Stella Cottrell has further noted that patriotic broadsheets published during the invasion crisis of 1803 regularly drew upon Old Testament imagery including the Pharaoh, the Red Sea, locusts and plagues, and the notion of a people chosen by God. With such rallying cries as "To your Tents, O Israel - for Britons will never be slaves," they urged the populace to ready themselves for the arrival of French forces. If we are willing to accept that faith in Biblical prophecy and the chosen status of British Protestants was a common approach to interpreting current events, then it follows that viewers in 1799 might have understood the conflation of the Holy Family with Westall’s English Peasants as implying that English Protestants were divinely sanctioned, and thus favoured in their struggles with Catholic France.

The French Revolutionary War began in 1793, and the number of rustic genre paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy suddenly increased to about three times what it had been for the previous five years. Observing that this trend continued for the duration of the war, dipped slightly during the brief cessation of hostilities in 1802, and was resumed when Britain returned to fighting the French in 1803, Barrell has suggested that rural subjects were regarded, in this period of crisis, as inherently nationalistic. Although Westall’s original image was painted prior to the war with France, it is my contention that when the prints were published in 1799 the majority of viewers would have understood his English Peasants as a representation of the nation itself. Family life, the image suggests, is England’s greatest strength, for children are its future.

The tendency to depict the peasant family as a symbol for the nation as a whole was

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227 Cottrell, "The Devil on Two Sticks," p. 271.
mimicked by Gillray in an anti-invasion print published in 1795 (fig 18). Dedicated "to the people and the Parliament of Great Britain," it was circulated by the Crown and Anchor Society. In the print Gillray has adopted the visual vocabulary of rustic genre painting in order to contrast the blessings of peaceful pre-war Britain, represented by a peasant family, with the devastating effects of a future French invasion. "Such Britain was," reads a caption above the images, "such Flanders, Spain, Holland, now is!"

The first image depicts the interior of a cottage. A robust young farm worker, sickle in hand, has returned from the fields and is welcomed by his wife and children. He is surrounded by the benefits of his labours: a loving family, a comfortably furnished cottage, even a faithful dog. A well-stocked farmyard is visible through the door, and an elder daughter is about to serve a magnificent English roast beef, a sort of national emblem, frequently seen in contemporary anti-French propaganda. In a caption the blessings of peace are defined as "prosperity and domestick happiness," and these are contrasted with "the curses of war, invasion, massacre and desolation." In the second image the wife and children surround the murdered master of the house. He lies before his own threshold with his sickle beside him, a French bayonet through his heart. The cottage has been destroyed, and in the background the French are marching to their ships, leaving the village and its church in flames.

Although Gillray's cottagers are quintessentially English in appearance, dress and diet, the print claims to represent not only England, but Britain as a whole. To be British is thus to be normatively English, for it is assumed that the peasant family is automatically able to represent both groups. As will become clear in the following chapter, this would

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229 A song entitled The Roast Beef of Old England seems to have served as a sort of national anthem during this period. See Williams, When Was Wales?, p. 140.
not be the case was the peasant family identifiable as either Welsh or Scottish. In addition to their apparent social and economic backwardness, the labouring populations of the Celtic regions were marginalized by ethnic difference. When Westall’s depictions of the British peasantry are viewed together, *English Peasants* sets itself apart, both compositionally and by its reference to the Holy Family. An Anglocentric viewpoint is clearly in evidence, lending credence to one modern historian’s claim that during the eighteenth century "Great Britain" was merely a euphemism for "greater England."\(^{230}\)

\(^{230}\) Porter, *English Society*, p. 34. Porter points out that no eighteenth century English monarch ever visited Wales, Scotland or Ireland. It should be mentioned, however, that the term "Britain" has long been regarded by some English nationalists as a Scottish invention.
For the English governing classes, the Tour of Britain first became popular as an alternative to European travel in the early 1760s, when the Seven Years War temporarily put a stop to the aristocratic tradition of the Grand Tour. \(^{231}\) Towards the end of the eighteenth century, what had previously been the prerogative of the nobility and gentry also became a fashionable pursuit for the upwardly mobile urban bourgeoisie. While many contemporary writers contributed to creating a demand for both fictional and non-fictional accounts of foreign travel, the most successful in promoting interest in domestic tourism was undoubtedly the Reverend William Gilpin, an English schoolmaster and country clergyman. His illustrated accounts of the picturesque tours he made in the 1770s to the Wye Valley, the English Lake District, Scotland and North Wales were published between 1782 and 1802, and quickly gained a large middle class following. \(^{232}\) The scenic backgrounds in Westall’s Welsh, Scottish and Irish images are similar in many ways to the aquatint views included in Gilpin’s travel accounts (fig. 19), a resemblance which I will argue is very significant given the importance of picturesque tourism to the development of national identity.

The illustrations in Gilpin’s books were developed from sketches he made on his various tours and were intended to aid readers in visualizing the places described. In this

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\(^{232}\) For assessments of Gilpin’s popular appeal, see Malcolm Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 56; and Bermingham, "System, Order and Abstraction," pp. 86-87.
sense they are different from Westall’s landscape backgrounds, which do not appear to be based on direct observation and are clearly not meant to depict specific locations.\textsuperscript{233} Westall’s images of the Celtic landscape are, nonetheless, reminiscent of conventional picturesque views, and as such they imply a connection with picturesque tourism that is not apparent in his picture of English peasants. This is a significant difference, and one that provides an entry point to a discussion of the 1799 prints in relation to national identity, the impending union of Britain and Ireland, and contemporary English attitudes toward the Welsh, Scottish and Irish. It should be noted, however, that while the picturesque tourist addressed by Gilpin and other writers was generally assumed to be English, this does not imply that no Welsh, Scottish or Irish travellers were caught up in the search for the picturesque.

For a social class just beginning to find a voice within the political sphere, domestic tourism provided an important sense of entitlement. By viewing the different regions of Britain, either in person or through Gilpin’s illustrations, middle class men and women could symbolically claim membership in the nation by taking possession of it visually. As Peter Womack has pointed out, late eighteenth century Britain was a society governed by landowners, one in which all cultural values could be understood as referring back to the land itself.\textsuperscript{234} The central importance of land can be seen in the intersection between dominant concerns with "improvement" and what Womack refers to as "the distinctive arts of the Georgian ruling class."\textsuperscript{235} Landscape gardening, forestry, architecture and

\textsuperscript{233} I have encountered no evidence that Westall ever visited Wales, Scotland or Ireland.


\textsuperscript{235} ibid. When used in an eighteenth century British context, \textit{improvement} is a charged term with various possible applications: social, aesthetic, moral, juridical or religious. Womack argues that all of these are (continued...)
landscape painting "occupy a space where the aim of enhancing the capital value of an estate coincides with making it beautiful."\textsuperscript{236}

In Gilpin's first tour book, \textit{Observations on the River Wye} (1782), he announced "a new object of pursuit" for the tourist, whom he encouraged "to examine the face of a country by the rules of picturesque beauty."\textsuperscript{237} In his early writings Gilpin makes no distinction between the picturesque and the beautiful as separate aesthetic categories, but in a later theoretical essay, "On Picturesque Beauty" (1792), he attempts to clarify his position. Gilpin argues that beautiful objects or scenes are those which "please the eye in their \textit{natural state}," whereas those which are picturesque "please from some quality, \textit{capable of being illustrated in painting}."\textsuperscript{238} He goes on to explain that beauty in \textit{"real objects,"} for example in elegant architecture or improved pleasure grounds, is distinguished by smoothness and neatness. Beauty in \textit{"picturesque representation"} is distinguished by roughness and irregularity, as seen in the outline and bark of a tree or the sides of a craggy mountain.\textsuperscript{239}

Such issues were at the centre of the discourse on the picturesque, which reached its peak in the 1790s. Interest in the subject was stimulated in part by the publication of Gilpin's theoretical essays and also by an ongoing and very public dispute between Richard Payne Knight and his friend and neighbour Uvedale Price over the precise meaning of the

\textsuperscript{235}(...continued)

transferences of its basic, economic meaning - the cultivation of an asset in order to profit from it. Womack, \textit{Improvement and Romance}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{236} Womack, \textit{Improvement and Romance}, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{237} Quoted in Andrews, \textit{The Search for the Picturesque}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{238} William Gilpin, \textit{Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscapes} (London, 1792), p. 3 (Gilpin's italics).

\textsuperscript{239} Gilpin, \textit{Three Essays}, pp. 4-8 (Gilpin's italics).
The writings of all three men, and the whole concept of the picturesque as an aesthetic category, are heavily indebted to Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). In his treatise Burke describes the sublime as the strongest, most direct emotion, encompassing ideas of terror, awe, and vastness. Among the qualities of the beautiful, according to his principles, are symmetry, smoothness and gentleness. As an aesthetic response to landscape, sublime feelings were inspired by the rugged mountain scenery of the Alps, while the beautiful was to be found in the Roman Campagna. It is important to recognize that unlike Burke's sublime and beautiful, the picturesque was originally thought of as a uniquely British aesthetic category. It was understood to be most fully embodied in the humble English landscape, with its rivers, woodlands and winding country lanes.\

Carole Fabricant has observed that guidebooks published in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries celebrate the tour of the English countryside as "an activity conferring a wide range of moral, psychological, and aesthetic benefits on the individual tourist, as well as producing political and economic advantages for the country as a whole." Represented in such a way, domestic tourism became "a patriotic enterprise, if not indeed a patriotic duty." Gilpin's writings can also be seen as patriotic. In addition to the appreciation of British landscape scenery, he promoted the moral benefits of having young men of means remain at home to complete their education, instead of

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240 For a summary of this dispute see Clarke and Penny, eds. *The Arrogant Connoisseur*, pp. 82-86.
243 ibid.
exposing them to "foreign seductions" via the Grand Tour.\textsuperscript{244}

The fashion for picturesque touring reached a peak in the 1790s, when war with France once again prevented continental travel. Armed with sketch-books and travel diaries, upper and middle class men and women set out to explore the scenic beauties of their native Britain. The Devonshire Coast, the Isle of Wight and other parts of southern England were the first areas to be frequented by tourists, but as the cult of the picturesque grew, its devotees began to venture further afield. The Lake District, North Wales and the Scottish Highlands became favorite scenic destinations, in part because they were less accessible than the standard English summer resorts, and thus remained somewhat exclusive. Guidebooks published in the 1790s continued to refer to all three regions as "the remotest parts of Britain," despite the fact that the Lake District had by this time become a highly popular picturesque locale.\textsuperscript{245}

The method advocated by Gilpin for the study of native scenery was one that any tourist could easily follow to transform an unremarkable landscape into a picturesque view. Its guiding principle was the imaginative organization of landscape scenery into three distances: a background, a middle or second distance, and a foreground. His prescriptions for sketching landscapes, which were taken up by both amateur and professional artists, relied on the same tripartite structure. Adopted by Gilpin from the works of Claude Lorrain and Gaspar Dughet, two old masters of European landscape painting, it was often set off by a \textit{repoussoir} object, such as a tree, a ruin, or a mountainside, which acted as a framing device and prevented the eye from straying outside the picture. Westall's Welsh, Scottish

\textsuperscript{244} See Kim Ian Michisaw, "Nine Revisionist Theses on the Picturesque," \textit{Representations}, 38 (Spring, 1992), 84.

\textsuperscript{245} Colley, \textit{Britons}, p. 173.
and Irish images incorporate all of these compositional elements. However, unlike picturesque landscapes, which often employ a darkened foreground to push the gaze of the viewer back to a strongly lit middle distance, all of Westall’s works are organized so that visual interest is focused on the shallow foregrounds, which are dominated, of course, by the groups of peasants.

Westall’s combination of rustic genre imagery and scenic landscape distinguishes his works from those of his contemporaries, Wheatley and Morland, and the differences in their approaches emerge when the 1799 Westall prints are compared with pictures of country cottagers by the other two artists (figs. 12 and 13). As in Westall’s Welsh, Scottish and Irish images, the main subjects in Wheatley’s and Morland’s works are groups of peasants gathered just outside their cottages. However, both Wheatley and Morland have extended the surrounding foliage so that the cottages and their inhabitants become almost inseparable from the vegetation. The tendency to make the peasant appear to be literally part of the natural order is particularly evident in Morland’s picture. Like Wheatley, he includes an abundance of overhanging greenery and has one figure carry a supply of twigs for the fireplace, but Morland further integrates the figures with their environment by giving the small girl on the left a toy wagon filled with straw, and fixing a spray of leaves to a young boy’s hat. Morland’s picture allows the viewer no access to the countryside around the cottage, and Wheatley’s provides only a glimpse of the sky beyond the woodland setting.246

In his Welsh, Scottish and Irish images, Westall has also made rustic cottagers his primary subjects. At the same time, in each of these works he places little visual emphasis

246 My reading of Morland’s painting is based on Gear, Masters or Servants?, p. 38.
on the cottage, and instead makes the secondary focus of interest a picturesque landscape background. In so doing, Westall combines two artistic categories within a single image. Each image, in turn, is part of a larger set of four, and at a certain level the publication of this particular set of images in 1799 must have worked to remind politically sensitive viewers of the importance of the Celtic peoples and their lands to the future of Britain as a nation. This interpretation could have come about through the association of the prints with the imagery of domestic tourism or it may have arisen independently. Westall’s peasants emphasize the disparate and contested physical and cultural geography of the nation, but what I wish to argue is that the publication of the works in 1799 and their subsequent viewing as a set of four served to unite these distant regions imaginatively and visually, just as the 1801 Act of Union would soon unite them politically.

If Westall’s depictions of Wales, Scotland and Ireland have been constructed to appeal to an upper or middle class viewer familiar with picturesque travel and its supporting texts, then it is worth suggesting that the English peasants may have been understood, on some level, to represent a particularly modern characteristic with which such a viewer could readily identify. In a sense, the freedom of movement enjoyed by the English peasants links them to the picturesque tourist, just as it clearly differentiates them from their Celtic counterparts, who appear to be bound as tightly to their dreary cottages as they are to their traditional ways of life. With the notable exception of the young Welshman shown leaving home, Westall’s Welsh, Scottish and Irish peasants are frozen in place and arranged like the figures in a tableau vivant, a theatrical form which was moving from the British stage to the fashionable drawing room at just this point in its history.247

247 Womack, Improvement and Romance, p. 47.
As Elizabeth Helsinger has pointed out, to be the subject, and never the viewer, of a picturesque landscape was to be fixed in place "like the rural labourer." Confined to a narrow, circumscribed locality and social position, the picturesque figure was unable to comprehend the larger entity - Britain - which presented itself to the tourist and consumers of landscape imagery. In an aesthetic sense, the idea of landscape implies the kind of separation and observation that are not available to the inhabitants of a countryside, but to an "objective" onlooker who is socially, and often literally, elevated. In keeping with this ideal, for most of the eighteenth century landscape painting in England was dominated by raised prospects of the sort found in works by Claude. The graduated, progressive unfolding of space associated with the prospect landscape was, as we have seen, advocated by Gilpin in his writings on the picturesque. At the same time, however, he recommended using a low viewpoint when representing picturesque scenery. In the aquatint illustration of his Wye Valley tour, for example, Gilpin has placed the viewer above the river, but well below the ruined castle on the hillside and the mountain peaks behind it.

The preference for a low viewpoint grew increasingly common among amateur and professional landscape painters towards the end of the century, and seems to have influenced Westall in his Welsh, Scottish and Irish compositions. The background scenery in these works is depicted from a slight elevation, but the depth and breadth of each view is limited by the surrounding hills. Gilpin had cautioned artists to avoid the panoramic landscapes associated with topographical draftsmen. An overly expansive view, he warned,

249 Williams, The Country and the City, p. 120.
threatened to turn a picture into a map.\footnote{251} He was determined to distance his techniques for picturesque landscape sketching from those used in topographical drawing, regarded as the lowest sub-genre of landscape art. Despite the fact that his illustrations were meant to depict particular locations for the benefit of his readers, he often altered the features of a landscape to make it appear more picturesque.\footnote{252}

Catherine Nash has argued that the map can be understood as a manifestation of the desire for control that is fundamental to the implementation of colonialist policy.\footnote{253} Similarly, an elevated viewpoint enables an artist or spectator to "command" a view of the countryside, to exert control over a landscape by taking possession of it visually. Over the last ten to fifteen years, a substantial body of scholarship has developed that focuses on relationships between picturesque ways of seeing and colonialist dehumanization and exploitation of native peoples and their homelands. Some of this work has proved very useful in illuminating Westall’s peasant images, which clearly support the political and cultural dominance of the English centre.\footnote{254} At the same time, the low viewpoints and restricted prospects used in Westall’s landscape backgrounds suggest that an uncomplicated colonialist stance toward Wales, Scotland, and even Ireland was no longer possible for the English in the 1790s. It would be wrong to suggest that every prospect view that was sketched or painted during the eighteenth century inevitably inscribes colonialist aspirations.

\footnote{251} Kriz, The Idea of the English Landscape Painter, p. 158, n. 53.
\footnote{252} Bermingham, "System, Order, and Abstraction," pp. 87-88.
However, as the following example demonstrates, the relevance of territorial considerations to a landscape image that employs a "dominant overseeing eye" is sometimes very apparent, and not necessarily incompatible with British subject matter.\textsuperscript{255}

In Scotland the ruthless suppression of the final Jacobite uprising of 1745-6 was followed by the imposition of martial law. Fugitive Jacobites were hunted down and killed, the houses and cottages of suspected sympathizers were burned, and their cattle were driven from the glens. A period of sustained terrorization, carried out by the Lowland regiments as well as English troops, resulted in nearly seven hundred men, women and children dying in prison. Two hundred more were banished, and almost a thousand were sold to American plantations.\textsuperscript{256} Anxious to prevent any further violent outbursts by Scottish Jacobites, the government attempted to eradicate the culture of the Highlanders. Acts of Parliament passed in 1746 prohibited the possession of weapons and deprived the clan chiefs of their hereditary jurisdictions. Survey expeditions were organized and new roads built in order to improve military access and promote cultural assimilation through increased trade.

As part of this project, the English landscape painter Paul Sandby was employed as an official draftsman for the Board of Ordnance from 1747 to 1755. A comparison of one of the sketches he made in Scotland at that time with an engraved version of the same scene published in 1780 shows significant changes in prevailing attitudes toward landscape (fig. 20). Sandby's original drawing is an accurate rendering of the farming region of

\textsuperscript{255} Charlesworth, "The Ruined Abbey," pp. 70-71. It is worth noting here that Westall's younger half-brother William was a landscape draftsman who received his artistic training from Richard. He took part in several major voyages to the colonies, beginning in 1801 when he was appointed to document the first ever circumnavigation of Australia. He also produced drawings and watercolours of British scenery for numerous collections of topographical and picturesque views published during the early nineteenth century. For more on William Westall, see Richard J. Westall's essay on his ancestors, "The Westall Brothers;" and Charlesworth, "The Ruined Abbey."

\textsuperscript{256} Prebble, \textit{The Lion in the North}, pp. 301-2.
Strathay, but in the print the rolling hills have been dramatized to appeal to picturesque
taste, and some fir trees, sheep and a kilted Highlander have also been added in the
foreground.

The goal of the Ordnance Survey was, of course, to map the countryside for
practical use. The picturesque, on the other hand, was concerned with an aesthetic response
to landscape. As Malcolm Andrews has pointed out, "utility in a picturesque view becomes
antagonistic to beauty.... The picturesque eye is habitually drawn to the humble,
uncultivated parts of nature and human society." This preference was not limited to a
taste for idle peasants and tumbledown cottages. The desolate, melancholy grandeur of the
Highlands and North Wales greatly appealed to the Romantic sensibilities of late eighteenth
century tourists, who had begun to develop an appreciation for landscapes that seemed
beyond the reach of the "improvements" that had transformed so much of the English
countryside in the preceding half century. When Joseph Hucks set out with his friend
Samuel Taylor Coleridge on a pedestrian tour of North Wales in 1794, for example, he
announced that his goal was "to explore the hidden beauties of nature unmechanized by the
ingenuity of man."  

Sites of commercial activity were not generally considered picturesque in
themselves, but they often appear in contemporary travel accounts, and some were
specifically featured in tourist itineraries. Travellers on their way to the Lake District or to
Wales often stopped to see the pottery works of Josiah Wedgewood at Etruria, for instance.
those who wished to experience the "industrial sublime" could take in such famous sites as
the coal mines and iron forges of Coalbrookdale, which were depicted by many painters of

257 Andrews, The Search for the Picturesque, p. 64.
Romantic, untamed scenery may have been the current fashion, but in England especially even "wild" landscapes tended to contain some evidence of economic activity. One of the reasons that the mountains of Scotland and North Wales became valued as scenery was because their unamenable scale and barrenness provided what Peter Womack has called a "limit-text" for the picturesque, a taste which sought to unify and reflect "the success of the land's productive use and the extra-social integrity of its being." 

Despite improved roads, distant areas like the Highlands were relatively difficult to reach, and therefore expensive to visit, but this only added to their appeal among the nouveau riche. There were also some hardy, adventurous types like the Reverend James Plumptre, an educated member of England's upper middle class who toured North Wales, Scotland and the Lake District on foot in the 1790s. By that time the popularity of the Highlands and North Wales had made the sublime an almost commonplace aesthetic emotion, but to some extent the capacity to view rugged mountain scenery through the categories of the sublime and picturesque remained a sign of cultural distinction.

As early as 1759 the Scottish Lord Breadalbane had written to his daughter from Taymouth that "it has been the fashion this year to travel into the highlands, many have been here this summer from England, I suppose because they can't go abroad." 

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260 Womack, Improvement and Romance, p.62.


1773 he was beginning to lose his patience. "Being on a tour thro [sic] the Highlands," he wrote "...is becoming Le bon ton, but sometimes a little troublesome. Being always in a crowd is not agreeable." He was no doubt exaggerating somewhat, for challenging terrain and notoriously foul weather were enough to discourage many would-be visitors to the Highlands. Even at the height of picturesque tourism in the region, in July 1798, one gentleman reported that he was three weeks into his tour before he encountered a single fellow traveller.

More than one tourist visiting Wales in the late eighteenth century complained that the Welsh were so much like the English that "all the curiosity of travel was undone," but for many it offered a pleasing blend of the foreign and the familiar. The mountainous scenery of North Wales was certainly not like the English countryside, and linguistic difference gave the people a distinctive, foreign quality. The ethnic costumes worn by the peasants in Westall's Welsh, Scottish and Irish pictures are also signs of cultural difference, but they do not imply a recognition of separate political entities. On the contrary, they celebrate cultural diversity as contributing to and strengthening British unity.

Tourists who visited Wales in the late eighteenth century often noted that the peasants there were about sixty years behind the English in their style of dress. Many distinctive patterns and fabrics were noted, and the tendency for Welsh women to wear mannish black hats, as they do in Westall's picture, was usually mentioned. However, visitors never described a specific national costume. According to Prys Morgan, none existed until the 1830s; it was then that the tall black hats and voluminous tweed cloaks

263 ibid.
265 Morgan, "From a Death to a View," p. 43. Also see Faber, High Road to England, p. 42.
that have come to be associated with Welsh women today were deliberately made into a national costume as part of the Romantic revival of "folk traditions." Like their Welsh counterparts, Westall's Irish and English peasants could not be provided with readily identifiable national costumes. He has simply depicted them in styles of dress that they typically wore in the years around 1800.

The Scottish philibeg, or short kilt, is another invented tradition, but unlike the Welsh national costume it was firmly established by the late eighteenth century. In the 1790s it was generally believed that the kilt had been worn by Highlanders since time immemorial, but it was actually created around 1730 by an English Quaker industrialist named Thomas Rawlinson. He devised the kilt as a practical and inexpensive garment for the men he employed to fell the trees and work the furnace at his iron forge near Inverness. It was soon being worn throughout the Highlands, but died out quickly after 1746, when the wearing of kilts, tartans and plaids was outlawed as part of the British government's attempt to destroy the ancient Highland way of life. By the time Johnson and Boswell made their famous tour of the Highlands in 1773 there was not a kilt to be seen, and Johnson recorded that even the bagpipe had begun to be forgotten. In Scotch Peasants, Westall was able to make use of a recognizable national costume to emphasize the exoticism of the Highlander, while simultaneously playing to nostalgic sentiment. Cultural difference could thus be rendered palatable and non-threatening, and a far away region, only recently made part of the nation, became accessible to English viewers.

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266 See Morgan, "From a Death to a View," pp. 79-81.
A fascination with local, provincial and national customs, particularly if these were
exotic and colourful, was one of the hallmarks of the developing Romantic movement.
While no serious ethnographical studies would be published in Britain until after 1840,269
by the end of the eighteenth century there was growing general interest in "the life of the
folk." Books on traditional customs were especially popular with middle class readers, who
sought to learn more about modes of behaviour that they might witness themselves in their
contacts with the lower orders, and which could seem irrational or dangerous if not
represented and explained in a comfortable and understandable form.270

A few studies of ancient poetry, music and history appeared in the 1760s, and their
great success led to more being published in the 1780s and 1790s.271 Most eighteenth
century antiquarians made little or no distinction between historical fact and legend, and the
bits of information that survived on the ancient Celts were embellished with claims based
on studies of their literary works, some of which were actually modern forgeries. The most
famous of these were the poems of Ossian, the so-called "British Homer" whose works
were "collected and translated" by a Scottish schoolmaster, James MacPherson, during the
1760s.272 Travellers in Scotland in the 1790s continued to be inspired by the cult of
Ossian to search out the sublime among the mountains and lochs of the Highlands, and

269 Richard and Caroline Bretell give the exact date as 1846, the year that the German word volkskunde was
translated as the English folklore. See Bretell and Bretell, Painters and Peasants, p. 62.
270 Young, "George Walker's Costume of Yorkshire," 405.
271 The popularity of Evan Evans' Some Specimens of the Poetry of the Antient Welsh Bards (London, 1764)
prompted others to follow his lead. Their works include Charlotte Brooke, Reliques of Irish Poetry (1789) and
Francis Grose, The Antiquities of Ireland (London, 1797). On British interest in the ancient past during the
eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see Prys Morgan, "Keeping the Legends Alive," Wales, The Imagined Nation:
Studies in Cultural and National Identity, ed. Tony Curtis (Mid Glamorgan: Poetry Wales Press, 1986); as well
as Morgan, "From a Death to a View," and Smiles, The Image of Antiquity, both cited previously.
272 For a brief summary of the controversy surrounding the poems of Ossian, see Andrews, The Search for the
Picturesque, pp. 203-205.
often included a copy of his works as part of their baggage.

In Scotland and Wales an interest in ancient history, partly driven by a quest for a pre-colonial past, was growing throughout the eighteenth century. The so-called "Celtomania" of the 1760s had largely been inspired by Ossian, and the 1790s were a high point for Welsh cultural myths (fig. 21). In the midst of a decline in traditional ways of life, Wales began to show signs of a cultural revival. Paradoxically, the same cultural renaissance that encouraged some modern descendants of the Celts to define themselves as separate from the English also caught the attention of English antiquarians, poets and artists. Tales of druids and Welsh or Scottish bards offered a vibrant, native alternative to Greek and Roman models. As a result, the ancient Celts were, to a great extent, appropriated by English writers as part of their ongoing attempt to emancipate British culture from classical authority.

In the early nineteenth century popular interest in the ancient Celts was nurtured by the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. Scott directly influenced picturesque tourism through his ballad-epic The Lady of the Lake (1810), which established Loch Katrine as the prime destination for British tourists visiting the Highlands. Westall was among the major illustrators of Scott’s poems and novels, and while their collaboration proved highly successful commercially, Scott initially had reservations about Westall’s ability to capture the character of his "iron race." Upon learning that arrangements had been made with the artist by his publishers, he confessed his doubts in a personal letter:

274 Morgan, "From a Death to a View," p. 57.
275 Faber, High Road to England, p. 156.
276 Womack, Improvement and Romance, pp. 155-156.
...if Westall who is really a man of talent fail'd in figures of chivalry where he had so many painters to guide him, what in the Devil's name will he make of Highland figures. I expect to see my chieftain Sir Rhoderick Dhu in the guise of a recruiting sergeant of the Black Watch and his Bard the very model of Auld Robin Grey upon a japand tea-tray.\textsuperscript{277}

The Romantic interest in history that made Scott a leading literary figure also manifested itself in the so-called "cult of ruins," which turned crumbling churches and castles into popular tourist attractions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. "Is there a greater ornament of landscape, than the ruins of a castle?," asked Gilpin rhetorically in his 1792 essay "On Picturesque Beauty."\textsuperscript{278} As seen in figure 19, he often included ruins in his own sketches and aquatints. In addition to their inherent visual interest, a complex variety of associations were available to the educated viewer who chose to ponder an image of ruins. A taste for the sublime, for instance, might encourage the indulgence of feelings of melancholy and horror. Ruined architecture could signify a return to the state of nature, and thereby acquire a positive value for an advocate of Romantic primitivism. In a moral sense, the ruin often served as a \textit{memento mori}, provoking a meditation on the Vanity of Human Wishes (a favourite eighteenth century theme) or on the inevitable transience of all worldly achievements.\textsuperscript{279}

If interpreted as historic evidence of the triumph of nature over tyranny, ruins could take on a political significance, and it is this response that is most relevant to Westall's images of Scotland and Ireland. When seen in this light, the ruined castle could be associated with the demise of Gothic feudalism, while its religious counterpart, the abbey,

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\textsuperscript{278} Gilpin, \textit{Three Essays}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{279} This brief summary is based on Andrews, \textit{The Search for the Picturesque}, pp. 45-50.
\end{flushleft}
might be understood to represent the release of the English people from the control of the Roman Catholic Church. Writing about ruined abbeys, Uvedale Price combined an aesthetic and a political response when he declared that "the ruins of these once magnificent edifices are the pride and boast of this island: we may well be proud of them; not merely in a picturesque point of view: we may glory that the abodes of tyranny and superstition are in ruin." The possibility that the ruins in Westall’s images could be viewed in this way has important implications in the context of political tensions between England and Ireland. If seen as the ruins of castles, they might imply the death of viable political autonomy for Scotland and Ireland. If seen as abbeys, they would almost certainly suggest that the Catholic faith, which had almost completely vanished from the Highlands, would eventually disappear in Ireland as well.

It is notable that of all the figures in the set of four, the Irish peasants are the only ones shown barefoot. Westall seems to be acknowledging the country’s terrible poverty, but at the same time, he represents a group of well-dressed women and children and includes a basket of potatoes to make it clear they are not going hungry. The situation of the peasantry in Ireland was one in which a handful of Protestant landlords, the majority of whom were absentee Englishmen, exploited a vast population of Catholic tenants by charging extortionate rents for what amounted to subsistence farming. Following the introduction of the potato, which became the staple food for most of the rural population during the latter half of the eighteenth century, the population increased alarmingly. Between 1781 and 1801 it rose by 29 percent - more than twice the rate of England and

280 Quoted in Andrews, *The Search for the Picturesque*, p. 46. Also see Charlesworth, "The Ruined Abbey: Picturesque and Gothic Values."
Wales. On the British mainland economic growth and diversity were sufficient to sustain a growing number of people in reasonable comfort, but this was not the case in Ireland, and it was the peasants who suffered most.

According to Richard Faber, before 1800 the English knew less about Ireland than about any other country in Europe. Their interest increased along with the likelihood of union, and the Romantic fascination with folk traditions and exotic behaviour was gradually combined with a sense of responsibility for what was generally regarded as a backward society. In a preface to the first edition of his Letters on the Irish Nation, published after he visited there in 1799, a young English law student named George Cooper wrote, "I thought it a laudable curiosity to inquire a little into a nation with which Great Britain was about to become most closely united." Novels of Irish life became very popular in Britain during the late 1790s, and beginning in 1800 there was a new vogue for Irish travel.

After the wars and upheavals of the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century had been a relatively peaceful period for Ireland, and while it was not included as part of the picturesque itinerary, it was not an uncommon destination for British travellers. Published accounts invariably comment on the poverty of the Irish peasantry, the miserable state of their cottages, and the ubiquity of the potato. The large number of ragged children in poor Irish families was often noted, but many writers were surprised by their generally healthy appearance. The agriculturalist Arthur Young, on tour in 1780, observed pointedly

281 Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, p. 92.
282 Faber, High Road to England, p. 105.
284 Harrington, ed. The English Traveller in Ireland, p. 15.
that "an Irishman and his wife are much more solicitous to feed than to clothe their children: whereas in England it is surprizing to see the expence they put themselves to deck out children whose principal subsistence is tea." Young also noted a tendency for women and children to go barefoot, which suggests that Westall did have some interest in what he may have understood to be an authentic representation of the Irish when he produced his original paintings in 1791.

Another feature of rural life that was almost invariably remarked upon by English visitors to Ireland was that most of the peasants shared their cottages with their livestock. Like many tourists, Cooper regarded this as a sure sign of barbarism. He noted with some distaste that "the whole family are obliged to live under the same roof. Children and pigs may indeed, and always do, eat, drink, and sleep together." John Carr, who toured the country a few years after the union, was considerably more diplomatic. He likened the typical Irish cottage to "a little antediluvian ark; for husband, wife, and children, cow and calf, pigs, poultry, dog, and frequently cat, repose under the same roof in perfect amity."

Some contemporary accounts, notably Cooper’s letters, are also rife with anti-Catholic sentiment. As noted previously, the status of Irish Protestants was conceptualized not simply as religious superiority, but also politically. Catholics were not

286 Young, A Tour in Ireland, in Harrington, ed. The English Traveller in Ireland, p. 179.
288 John Carr, The Stranger in Ireland, Or, A Tour in the Southern and Western Parts of that Country In The Year 1805, excerpt in Harrington, ed. The English Traveller in Ireland, p. 203.
permitted to sit in the Irish Parliament, and when they were finally given the right to vote in 1793 it was only because the British government sought to ensure their cooperation in the struggle against the French Revolution.\textsuperscript{290} The 1790s were a crucial decade in Irish rural history, one that witnessed the breaking down of the paternalistic, deferential chain of the old social order. This resulted in a decisive swing towards violent forms of protest that could not be controlled as easily as the riots of the past, which had tended to follow a more conventional pattern.\textsuperscript{291}

Changes of this nature may partially explain the need for such exaggerated displays of deference as the one represented in Westall's Irish image. According to historian J.C. Beckett, the collection of tithes in support of the Anglican clergy in Ireland was a source of deep resentment among the predominantly Catholic peasantry.\textsuperscript{292} The attitudes of Westall’s peasants toward the Anglican curate clearly indicate that he is regarded as an authority figure, and contemporary viewers would also have recognized him as a powerful symbol of British dominance. Apart from the curate, no men are included in the picture, and the absence of any adult males is crucial to reinforcing British dominance. In the Irish print, as in many artistic and literary representations of colonial contact, gender becomes a primary means of signifying relationships of power.\textsuperscript{293} Viewers in 1799 probably speculated on whether the men were away at work, or had perhaps been killed in the Irish Rebellion the year before. Another possible reading may have been that they were serving in the British armed forces; recruits in the war against France included many Irishmen, as

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\textsuperscript{290} Asch, "The Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland," p. 177.
\textsuperscript{291} Asch, "The Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland," p. 182.
\textsuperscript{293} Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", American Historical Review, 91 (December, 1986), 1069.
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well as Hanoverians and foreign mercenaries.\textsuperscript{294} Still, where the men are is much less important than where they are not, and they are evidently not present in Westall’s depiction of the Irish peasantry.

It is important to acknowledge that Westall’s image is not simply a propagandistic celebration of Irish deference to British rule. As in his \textit{English Peasants}, closer observation reveals a certain amount of ambiguity. The apparent passivity of the Irish peasants is disrupted when we notice that a fourth woman seems to be hiding in the shadows just inside the door of the cottage. A similar sense of uncertainty is created by the dramatic narrative presented in Westall’s \textit{Welch Peasants}. At first glance the image seems to suggest the Biblical story of the prodigal son, but it seems more likely that the young man’s leave-taking is the result of local poverty. During the 1790s grain shortages and inflated food prices caused serious problems for the Welsh peasantry. As the family’s only male provider, he could be leaving to search for work in one of the industrial centres of South Wales, or even to seek his fortune in America.

When the print was published in 1799, however, many viewers would probably have assumed that this unhappy Welshman had been forcibly recruited for the militia or had decided, against the wishes of his father, to enlist in the regular forces. In the latter case, once he had left his village and joined his regiment or ship he would be unlikely to have much contact with his family until his tour of duty had ended.\textsuperscript{295} This would account for the emotional tone of Westall’s image, since the young man’s elderly parents would be forced to wait anxiously, not knowing for certain if he were alive or dead. Joining the military has always been a last resort of the poor, and it was the labouring classes in Britain

\textsuperscript{294} Horn, \textit{Life and Labour in Rural England}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{295} Horn, \textit{The Rural World}, p. 62.
that supplied the majority of men for the wars with Revolutionary France. Each county was required to raise a quota of recruits, and appeals to a man's sense of family were one effective method of persuasion. Britain never resorted to mass conscription, but the possibility was repeatedly held up as a threat in order to pressure single young men to enlist voluntarily. They were led to believe that their doing so would help prevent conscription, and thus spare those with wives and young children to support. Stella Cottrell has further observed that in much of the patriotic literature and propaganda published during the war, "the nation was modelled on the family, and was an extension of it. The King was the loving father. The country, as Britannia, was the mother."  

All able-bodied men were subject to forced recruitment by the county militias, but unlike the regular army and navy, the militias could not be asked to serve outside the British Isles, and the parish poor rates provided for their families while they were away. Recruiting was done by ballot, a fair system in theory, but in practice many more troops were drawn from rural areas than from the industrial towns. Moreover, the system was easily corrupted, and even when it was carried out faithfully any man who found himself ballotted was permitted to decline if he was able to provide a substitute. For those who could afford the cost it was not usually difficult to find someone willing to be paid to take their place. Partly due to this kind of loop-hole, even men who considered themselves patriots were often highly resistant to the prospect of forced service. Towards the end of 1796, for example, as the threat of a French invasion grew more and more intense, the government introduced bills for raising supplementary auxiliary troops which would

296 Cottrell, "The Devil on Two Sticks," p. 264.
297 ibid.
298 Horn, The Rural World, pp. 60-61, 64-65.
reinforce the militias in the event of invasion, and free regular soldiers for offensive action. The passing of the bills in November resulted in major riots in England and Wales that continued throughout the winter, and the extension of the Militia Act to Scotland in 1797 was also greeted by rioting.\(^{299}\)

In addition to the regular forces and the militias, many areas established volunteer corps of privately raised recruits led by gentleman officers.\(^{300}\) Because the volunteers had more freedom of action than members of the army, navy or militia, membership was at first limited to the upper and middle classes. Somewhat ironically, successful farmers, merchants, businessmen, and the like, who would seem to have had more to lose than their poorer neighbors in the event of a French invasion, generally proved less willing to join the volunteers. Still, concern about arming the peasantry delayed their admission until the invasion crisis of 1797. With Napoleon’s Army of England reportedly encamped along the French coastline, a desperate search began for men who were willing to fight, and their social status ceased to be an important issue.\(^{301}\)

In 1799 a print that appeared to acknowledge Welsh military involvement, particularly in a coastal region like the one seen in Westall’s image, would no doubt have evoked viewers’ memories of Fishguard. A small French expeditionary force had made an unexpected landing there in February 1797, but the French troops were disorganized and poorly led, and they were rounded up in two days by local militiamen and volunteers. Nonetheless, British fears intensified as a result of these events. It was the first time during

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300 Westall himself was a member of the St Pancras corps, which also included Joseph Farington and several other prominent English artists. See Ford, *Ackermann, 1783-1983*, p. 238, n. 28.
the war that a French force had actually reached the British mainland, and no one knew then that it would also be the last. I would argue, therefore, that Westall’s image would have elicited a positive, patriotic response from those who saw in it a reference to Welsh manpower, but that it was the inability of the Welsh to present a serious threat to British unity that made it possible for Westall to represent this peasant family in what was quite clearly a negative set of circumstances.

To represent the more numerous and militaristic Scots in the same way would have been regarded as unacceptable, and perhaps even subversive. In the collective English imagination Scotland could still be associated with the primitive savagery of the Highlanders, who were variously characterized as fools, rogues and beggars, or as barbarians and predators. A different list of traits, some positive and some negative, were attributed to Lowlanders, who were generally thought of as being more like the English. Many Lowlanders shared the English contempt for the Highland way of life, and prided themselves on having broken with the feudal and clannish past which the figure of the Highlander was often seen to represent.

Nevertheless, the easily identifiable Highland costume was used indiscriminately by many artists, as well as in the English theatre. As is the case in Westall’s Scottish image, internal divisions were ignored, and as a result not only Highlanders and Lowlanders, but also the Scottish gentry and the poor were often conflated in a single stereotype. A

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302 On the stereotypes of the fool, the rogue and the beggar see Womack, *Improvement and Romance*, pp. 7-20. On the barbarian see pp. 27-29.


304 Colley, *Britons*, p. 114. The Highland stereotype overlooked the well-known sophistication of Edinburgh, which had, after all, produced the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. It also ignored the fact that the education system in Scotland was recognized as far superior to England’s, and many aristocratic English families sent their sons to Scottish universities. See Hobsbawm, *Age of Revolution*, p. 48.
striking example of this tendency is Gillray’s 1779 print *Sawney in the Bog-House*, which satirizes the supposed primitivism of the Scots (fig. 22). While it is clearly a Highlander that is pictured, the caption plays on the dual geographical and social significance of the words "high" and "low" when used in a Scottish context. The inverted crown with a thistle that appears in the upper left corner of the print is an allusion to Jacobite rebelliousness, and its presence here shows the Scots were not yet free of the shadow of 1745. The motto, however, is a sign of Scottish assimilation. It belongs to the Order of the Thistle, a distinctively Scottish order of knighthood which was revived in 1707, the year of the Scottish Act of Union.305 Interestingly, Westall’s *Scotch Peasants* also contains a thistle, the heraldic emblem of Scotland, which the artist has placed inconspicuously near the lower right corner.

The Highland costume worn by the men in Westall’s Scottish picture is an excellent example of a previously threatening sign of difference which had been appropriated for British interests prior to the 1790s, and thus rendered safe for inclusion in an English work of art. When the government outlawed the wearing of tartans, plaids and kilts in the wake of the Jacobite uprising of 1745, the Highland regiments of the British army were specifically exempted from the ban. As a result the Highland costume quickly became associated with them, and thus with British military strength. A very early example is a 1745 print that celebrates the "Highland hero" James Campbell (fig. 23). By the time Westall’s images were published in 1799 kilted figures would have triggered more recent memories of Highland fighting power, specifically the disproportionate number of Scottish troops that had participated, as members of His Majesty’s forces, in crushing the Irish

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Beginning in 1757 Britain systematically appropriated the fighting power of the Highland regiments for its own military interests in fighting the Seven Years War (1756-63). First among these was the expansion of the Empire, and the Highland regiments participated in British wars in India and America with an enthusiasm that some historians have suggested reflected a desire to confirm their still controversial British identity. Not surprisingly, as Womack notes, "the barbarism of the clans, deplorable when perceived as a cause of domestic bloodshed, became an asset if it could be deployed in the far bloodier wars of imperialist expansion."

By 1770 the Lowlands had become an important recruiting ground for the new colonial elite, as the younger sons of the Scottish gentry found career opportunities in India that would not have been available to them at home. In 1782 the ban on Highland dress was lifted and Scottish civilians were once again permitted to wear their "traditional" costume. The common people had, however, become accustomed to trousers, and few returned to the kilt. Instead the Highland costume "became the affectation of their anglicized lairds, the fancy dress of the Lowlanders, and the uniform of the King’s Gaelic soldiers."

The British government was well aware that regional identity was not necessarily a negative virtue, but rather one that it might do well to encourage, as long as

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309 Womack, Improvement and Romance, p. 29.
310 Colley, Britons, p. 129.
311 Prebble, The Lion in the North, p. 302.
the peripheries were under control and their loyalty to the English centre was not in doubt.

In an important study of modern nationalism, Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out how "the heritage of sections, regions and localities of what had become 'the nation' could be combined into an all-national heritage, so that even ancient conflicts came to symbolize their reconciliation on a higher, more comprehensive plane." Sir Walter Scott, for example, built a single Scotland on territory soaked in the blood of warring Highlanders and Lowlanders, and he did so by emphasizing their ancient divisions in his poems and historical novels.\footnote{Eric Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality}, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 90.} The Highland costume is another example of this process, but one with roots in a much more recent past. By the 1790s the Scottish Highlander could be seen as a colourful symbol of successful assimilation, and held up by the English as a model for the new Celtic trouble-spot, Ireland.\footnote{This was the English view; as Colley has noted the Scots "brought their own ideas and prejudices to bear on the business of being British." See Colley, \textit{Britons}, p. 131.}
CONCLUSION

While every historical period can be thought of as transitional, in some the speed and scale of change make it difficult for individuals and communities to maintain a sense of identity that is felt to be meaningful and secure. For much of the population of Great Britain the upheavals of the 1790s were not limited to threats of a French invasion or the realities of the Irish Rebellion, but included the ongoing transformation of Britain into the first modern industrial nation. The populace had endured war and revolution before, but the changes taking place within British society at the end of the eighteenth century were unprecedented, and particularly unsettling for the privileged sectors of society who were the purchasers of quality reproductive prints.

This thesis has examined a set of coloured stipple engravings that represent groups of peasants and the rural countryside in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Published by J.R. Smith on October 1, 1799, the prints reproduce paintings by Richard Westall, a popular English artist known for his idealized depictions of rustic genre subjects. I have argued that widespread contemporary interest in the impending union of Britain and Ireland would have been a deciding factor in Smith’s decision to publish these works as an expensive set of four at a time when the market for English prints had been devastated by the ongoing war with France. By mediating potentially divisive cultural, religious and class differences, Westall’s images served as a reminder to British viewers that they shared many common interests, the most pressing of which was maintaining domestic security in the face of a threatened invasion.

When viewed as a set, the prints situate the rural poor of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland within an idealized conception of collective national identity that would have
been especially meaningful at a moment when British unity was a matter of urgent concern. This study suggests that the combination of rustic genre themes and landscape backgrounds in Westall’s peasant images served in part to underline the double-meaning of the word "nation" as a term which signifies not only a group of people, but their claims to a specific territory. At the same time, the complexity of Westall’s peasant images and their ability to encourage multiple readings through the use of ambiguous genre-like narratives has been emphasized throughout.

Benedict Anderson has argued convincingly that the development of print capitalism was one of the major catalysts in the emergence of modern concepts of national identity at the end of the eighteenth century. Anderson’s theory is easily extended to include the commodification of printed imagery, and while the set of prints discussed here were luxury items and not as widely circulated as newspapers, magazines or novels, they nonetheless had the potential to reach a much broader audience than Westall’s original paintings. As noted earlier, Smith was a dominant force in the late eighteenth century English print market, and his publications were instrumental in establishing the popularity of rustic genre subjects.

The fact that Westall’s pictures were sold as prints links them to the emergence of British national identity, but the broad availability of printed imagery also increases the likelihood of diverse interpretations. This thesis has addressed how this set of prints made it possible for an English viewer to "see" and consume the peripheries, but has not discounted the possibility that they may also have been admired by collectors in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Although these images were produced by an English artist, and

314 Anderson, Imagined Communities, pp. 33-47.
reveal Anglo-centric attitudes toward the Celtic fringe, some non-English viewers probably appreciated the opportunity to recognize themselves in an idealized representation of a unified Britain.

The English reformer John Bright declared in 1858 that "the nation in every country dwells in the cottage." In addition to linking nationalist sentiment to a rural vision, Bright's statement suggests that he considered "nation" and "country" to be separate entities. His use of the word "country" seems to correspond to the land or territory, while "nation" connotes what Anderson has usefully dubbed an "imagined community." Because national consciousness lies in a realm above practical politics, nationalism often cuts across traditional party alignments. In the 1790s, for example, appeals to nationalist sentiment were made by both conservatives and radicals. In a similar sense, Westall's pictures were constructed to appeal to an English viewer, but may have been equally attractive to members of the Welsh, Scottish or Anglo-Irish elite or middle classes. As has been pointed out, it was not uncommon for these groups to support the practical aspects of union, while at the same time remaining loyal to a separate ethnic or regional identity.

This study has shown how Westall's depictions of the peasantry served to reassure an urban audience who feared that Britain's agricultural workers, along with their counterparts in the industrial towns, might rise up to challenge the existing social order. Despite their economic and political differences, during the 1790s members of the middle class, the landed gentry and the aristocracy were united in their commitment to secure their property and authority against a possible attempt by the labouring classes to follow the example of the French. In Westall's images the threat of popular revolution is negotiated

316 Anderson, Imagined Communities, pp. 6-7.
through a focus on rustic simplicity and regional tradition, as are contemporary concerns about industrialization, enclosure, and rural depopulation, which were rapidly changing the face of the countryside.

Writing on English literature, Bruce King has observed that:

Nationalism is an urban movement which identifies with the rural areas as a source of authenticity, finding in the ‘folk’ the attitudes, beliefs, customs and language to create a sense of national unity among people who have other loyalties. Nationalism aims at ... rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas.317

The frequency with which Anthony Pasquin and a number of other English critics attacked Westall for his use of "gaudy" colour and excessive mannerism supports King’s argument regarding the rejection of foreign influences. In contemporary art criticism such stylistic traits were frequently discussed as indications of a so-called "Frenchified" taste associated with an uneducated and morally suspect viewer. Despite the tendency for hostile critics to seek out "foreign" elements in Westall’s style, I have argued that the artist’s rustic genre images were in keeping with a popular demand for representations of the rural world that could convey a sense of simplicity and honesty. Such qualities were understood to be vanishing from modern urban life, and they were therefore projected on the countryside, which was constructed as a haven for moral virtue and traditional culture.

In addition to providing an urban audience with reassuring images of ostensibly contented rural labourers, Westall’s images of Welsh, Scottish and Irish peasants place these idealized rustic figures within scenic landscape settings. This encourages the viewer to respond to these images as he or she would to illustrations in a picturesque travel

narrative, that is, to visually possess the various regions of the nation. In 1802 an English writer on a tour of northern England and the Scottish borderlands described "those scenes of Nature... which the general voice have [sic] pronounced to be beautiful" as "the common property of the public."\(^{318}\) Such activities as the viewing and sketching landscape scenery were enjoyed by a varied public, but for the middle classes in particular, the picturesque tour of Britain provided an opportunity to lay claim to the aesthetic nation well before political reforms redefined the conception of property to admit them to the franchise.\(^{319}\)

I have pointed out that travel accounts and guidebooks of the period frequently represented domestic tourism as a patriotic enterprise. By purchasing Westall's peasant prints, viewers would also be supporting a British artist, and, for middle class viewers in particular, this had a certain patriotic cachet. A number of wealthy middle class men of business had already amassed large collections exclusively devoted to British art, collections which asserted their interest in national culture and their parity with (or superiority to) those members of the landed elite who continued to favour works by European masters.\(^{320}\) The same hint of self-righteousness is apparent in the enthusiasm of the middle classes for domestic travel and their negative attitudes toward the European Grand Tour, an activity perceived by many at the end of the eighteenth century to be the ultimate expression of an aristocratic cosmopolitanism no longer regarded as a universal cultural ideal.

While the landscape enthusiast might be Welsh, Scottish, or Irish, the centrist bias of


\(^{320}\) For some specific examples of such collections of British art see Colley, "Whose Nation?" pp. 110-111.
British culture and its tendency to ignore or belittle the inhabitants of the Celtic fringe meant that the model picturesque tourist was understood to be English. Although Wales had been part of the United Kingdom since the sixteenth century, and the union with Scotland was nearly one hundred years old in 1799, both could still be perceived as foreign countries by the English visitor.321 Much like overseas travel, tours of Wales, Scotland and Ireland encouraged a late eighteenth century public to indulge an appetite for the exotic, but by remaining within Britain they were able to experience an unfamiliar culture in a relatively safe and accessible manner. During the 1790s the vogue for picturesque tours of the more isolated regions of Britain fostered an illusion of cultural diversity, but at the same time reinforced the continued ethnocentricity of English culture.322 The "quaint" customs and local colour found in Wales, Scotland and Ireland could be celebrated as examples of the cultural diversity of the nation, preferably without these having any reciprocal effect on the practical workings of British government or society. Art historian Fintan Cullen maintains that as the United Kingdom was expanded in the eighteenth century to include Scotland and Ireland, it became necessary to establish what he refers to as "a culture of acceptance," a notion of British identity that allowed for difference, as long as it was kept in check and did not interfere with imperial dominance.323

In the spring of 1798 the tensions that lay beneath the surface of an impoverished society organized on the basis of religious divisions and legal privilege finally exploded into violence. As I have pointed out, the Irish Rebellion convinced the British government that a Dublin parliament composed of wealthy land-owning Protestants could never

effectively represent the Irish people, and, in wartime especially, an unsettled Ireland posed a serious threat to Britain. Many members of the Protestant Ascendancy who had previously opposed the idea of a legislative union were similarly persuaded by the sectarian bitterness that dominated the 1798 Rebellion that such a measure would be in their best interest. Still, the initial bill of union was rejected by the Irish Parliament in January 1799. It took until March 1800 for the terms to be accepted, and the Act of Union between Britain and Ireland did not take effect until January 1, 1801.

Nevertheless, by the time Westall’s representations of the peasantry were published in October 1799, it would have been clear to informed viewers that the Irish Parliament would soon be a thing of the past. The British government was determined, and its motives are stated bluntly in the following passage from a letter to Prime Minister Pitt, written by an undersecretary in 1799:

By giving the Irish a hundred members in an Assembly of six hundred and fifty, they will be impotent to operate upon that Assembly, but it will be invested with Irish assent to its authority.... The Union is the only answer to preventing Ireland becoming too great and powerful.  

Pitt recognized that a union, if it was to bring lasting peace, could not simply be a formal joining of parliaments but must also unite the peoples of Britain and Ireland. In order to achieve this goal, it was essential that concessions be made to the Irish Catholics. The possibility of securing Irish loyalty rested upon two key issues: an accommodation on the question of church tithes, and "Catholic emancipation," as the admission of Roman Catholics to Parliament was commonly called at this time.

324 Quoted in Hechter, Internal Colonialism, p. 73.
No bill that would reform the tithe to the satisfaction of the Irish was likely to be passed by Parliament, and the subject was scarcely raised in the debates regarding union.\footnote{Bolton, The Passing of the Irish Act of Union, p. 91, 199.} However, it was part of Pitt’s plan that Catholic emancipation and the Irish Act of Union should take place together. While he was forced by strong opposition within his own cabinet to abandon his original objective of including emancipation in the terms of union, he meant for it to follow shortly after. The Irish were led to believe that Catholic emancipation would be forthcoming, and as a result the Roman Catholic bishops supported union, as did the majority of land-owning and middle class Catholics.\footnote{Beckett, The Making of Modern Ireland, p. 274.} The most formidable obstacle facing Pitt was the intransigence of George III, who was vehemently opposed to Catholic emancipation. Realizing that the measure could not be carried, Pitt resigned as Prime Minister in 1801. Catholic emancipation was delayed until 1829 and tithe commutation until 1838, by which time it was too late for Britain to buy the loyalty of Ireland.\footnote{Evans, The Forging of the Modern State, p. 98.}

In 1803, when war with France had resumed and the British were once again facing the possibility of invasion, a patriotic broadsheet entitled \textit{From John Bull to Brother Patrick in Ireland} declared unequivocally that "in defence of his native land, an Englishman, a Scotchman, a Welshman, and an Irishman, are one and the same people."\footnote{Quoted in Stella Cottrell, "The Devil on Two Sticks: Franco-phobia in 1803" in Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, ed. by Raphael Samuel, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), vol.1, p.261.} The need to direct such a claim to an Irish reader suggests, of course, that the union had not been embraced whole-heartedly by every Irishman. That the Irish continued to be regarded as a
marginal group is indicated by the fact that, unlike the Welsh and the Scots, they were never considered to be even nominally British. The 1801 Act of Union created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Unlike the 1799 prints, patriotic broadsheets were generally aimed at a working class audience, but a similar optimism that divisive regional differences would eventually be overcome is evident in Westall’s peasant pictures. The need for images of British unity that also recognized diversity continued in the nineteenth century, and is exemplified by the Scottish artist Sir David Wilkie’s painting, *Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Gazette of the Battle of Waterloo* (fig. 24), a work which met with great public acclaim when it was first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1822. Wilkie was best known for his paintings of Scottish peasants, but this work records the response of an imaginary group of military veterans, their wives, children, neighbours and passers-by to the official news of Britain’s triumph over the forces of Napoleon. The 1815 victory at Waterloo had been won by Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, and it was Wellesley, an Anglo-Irishman, who commissioned Wilkie’s painting.

Wilkie’s festive street scene celebrates the existence of a patriotism that transcends the boundaries of ethnicity, class, gender and age. On the left, a group of soldiers greet a horseman from a Welsh regiment who delivers the news of the victory, and next to them several men and one woman search the casualty list for the names of friends and loved ones. The soldiers include Englishmen, an Irishman, several members of Highland regiments, and even a black military bandsman. Onlookers peer from windows and doorways on the opposite side of the street; some of the women wave their handkerchiefs, and one soldier lifts a baby, who appears to be captivated by the excitement and activity. By including soldiers from the four major regions of the nation, Wilkie invokes the
mythology of loyalty and encourages the viewer to believe that Britain has been unified by war.\textsuperscript{330} By combining these military men with a diverse group of ordinary people ranging from well dressed women to ragged workers, his painting suggests that the prolonged struggle against a common enemy has enabled the British people to overcome economic, as well as ethnic differences.

Of course, this illusion could only hold for a brief moment. The divisive issues that were raised or deflected by Wilkie’s \textit{Chelsea Pensioners} and Westall’s images of the British peasantry would continue to reassert themselves throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As soon as the war with Napoleon ended, British radicals resumed their fight for political reforms, once again making it difficult for the country’s ruling elites to ignore the existence of class conflict. Within a generation of the Irish union, religious sectarianism was made manifest in widespread Anglican resistance to Catholic emancipation,\textsuperscript{331} and anti-Irish prejudice grew with the continuing influx of working class Irish immigrants to the British mainland.\textsuperscript{332}

Westall’s images of the peasantry were published at a time when Great Britain was threatened by revolution, war, and the possibility of a foreign invasion. Still, the uncertainty about national identity that informs the 1799 prints remains current, even after two centuries. Similar concerns are evident today in British debates on issues related to European Union, uncertain attitudes regarding the impact of global culture on trade and

\textsuperscript{330} Linda Colley points out that Wilkie also evokes previous wars between Britain and France through his use of street signs, military costumes and other visual references, which he explained in a key to the painting that he published in 1822. See Colley, \textit{Britons}, pp. 364-367.

\textsuperscript{331} See Evans, \textit{The Forging of the Modern State}, pp. 204-206.

\textsuperscript{332} Hechter, \textit{Internal Colonialism}, p. 186. Also see L.P. Curtis Jr., \textit{Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England} (Bridgeport, Conn.: Conference on British Studies at the University of Bridgeport, 1968).
communications, and recurrent challenges to the national whole from the peripheral regions, particularly Northern Ireland. The steady erosion of Britain's imperial status, together with internal challenges to English political and cultural hegemony, have resulted in widespread questioning of what constitutes British and national identity.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Figure 1

English Peasants. Stipple engraving printed in colours by Antoine Cardon after a painting by Richard Westall. Published October 1, 1799 by J.R. Smith, No. 31 King Street, Covent Garden, London. Private collection.
Figure 2

*Welsh Peasants.* Stipple engraving printed in colours by Antoine Cardon after a painting by Richard Westall. Published October 1, 1799 by J.R. Smith, No. 31 King Street, Covent Garden, London. Private collection.
Figure 3

Scotch Peasants. Stipple engraving printed in colours by Antoine Cardon after a painting by Richard Westall. Published October 1, 1799 by J.R. Smith, No. 31 King Street, Covent Garden, London. Private collection.
Figure 4

Irish Peasants. Stipple engraving printed in colours by Antoine Cardon after a painting by Richard Westall. Published October 1, 1799 by J.R. Smith, No. 31 King Street, Covent Garden, London.
Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

J. Elwood, A Crowd Outside a Print Shop, 1798. Pen and watercolour. British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings.
Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

The Fashionable Mammy, or The Convenience of Modern Dress.
Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

James Gillray. Anti-invasion print, published in 1795 by the Association for Protecting Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers. Trustees of the British Museum.
The Blessings of PEACE,
PROSPERITY & DOMESTICK-HAPPINESS.
To the PEOPLE & the PARLIAMENT of GREAT-BRITAIN, this Print is dedicated,
by the Crown & Anchor Society.

The Curses of WAR,
INVASION, MASSACRE & DESTRUCTION.
Figure 19

William Gilpin. Illustration from Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye, and several parts of South Wales, &c. relative chiefly to Picturesque Beauty: made in the summer of the year 1770 (London, 1782). Watercolour over aquatint.
Figure 21

Druidical Remains in Anglesey, an engraving by J. Smith from William Sotheby's *A Tour Through Parts of Wales* (1794).
Figure 22

James Gillray, Sawney in the Bog-House. Published June 4, 1779.
SAWNEY in the BOG-HOUSE.

'Tis a bri' benny Seat, o'me Soul, Sawney cries,
I never behold'd this place with my Eyes.
Such a place in an Scotland I never could meet,
For the Highe & the Lowe, howe'er in the Street.

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Figure 23

The Highland Hero: James Campbell, 1745. An anonymous print celebrating a member of the British army’s earliest Highland regiment.
Figure 24
