

PAINTING AND POLITICS AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY EXHIBITION OF 1832

by

BRIDGET JANE ELLIOTT

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Department of Fine Arts

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date September 23, 1982

ABSTRACT

The Royal Academy exhibition of 1832 opened in London in the midst of a political crisis over the passage of the Great Reform Bill. An analysis of the critical response to four of the leading pictures in the exhibition: A Family Portrait by C.R. Leslie, The Preaching of Knox by David Wilkie, The Destroying Angel by William Etty, and Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy by J.M.W. Turner, provides evidence that the ongoing political conflict permeated the Academy exhibition. In an atmosphere of increasing tension caused by parliamentary deadlock and street rioting, art critics argued about the pictures' quality and meaning in highly politicized terms.

This investigation focuses upon these four pictures and their critical reception, in order to probe the extent to which art and politics were connected at that specific historical moment. Documentary evidence of viewer responses is provided by anonymous reviews of the pictures which were published in ten major London newspapers and journals during the weeks following the opening of the show. The bias of each publication is carefully examined since, during the 1830's, most publications were highly partisan

affairs, often receiving direct subsidies from particular interest groups.

The analysis of these paintings offers a new perspective on the tensions, alignments, shifts, and ambiguities of British social classes and political parties in 1832. While the reception of Leslie's portrait points out the short-term divisions between Whigs and Tories over the issue of parliamentary reform, that of Wilkie's history painting demonstrates that despite their differences, these two groups were united by a shared fear of the radical working class. Etty's academic sketch provides an example of how members of the conservative upper class rationalized rejecting the notion of reform, while Turner's landscape reveals how progressive middle-class reformers challenged tradition with a positive assertion of modernity. By examining the response to these pictures, one finds there is no clear separation between political and artistic spheres.

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INTRODUCTION

The judgment formed upon a hasty glance at the walls of the Academy on the day of the private view has since been confirmed by a more careful examination of the individual works of which the exhibition is composed, although for such indulgence the turmoil of politics has given us but little mental leisure.

Review of the Royal Academy Exhibition,
Morning Post (May 29, 1832)

As indicated by the arts critic of the Morning Post, "the turmoil of politics" was unavoidable in London during May of 1832. Evidently the ongoing political crisis over the Great Reform Bill overshadowed the reviewer's task of assessing the Royal Academy's sixty-fourth annual exhibition of British artists which officially opened to the "public" on Monday morning May 7th, 1832.

The exhibition held at Somerset House consisted of 1,229 works which were divided into three main categories: painting, sculpture and architectural design. Painting dominated the exhibition both by virtue of its traditional preeminence at the Academy and in terms of sheer volume - 981 of the entries were paintings, occupying five of the seven galleries.¹ The exhibition was the most prestigious

annual artistic event in London. The private view, held two days before the "public" opening was restricted by invitation to the upper echelons of the nobility and wealthy who were special friends and supporters of the Academy.² In practice, "public" entry was limited to those who could afford the two shilling fee for admission and catalogue, and who felt socially comfortable in the imposing atmosphere of Somerset House. The exhibition was discussed in many of London's leading newspapers and journals as an important social and artistic occasion--reviewers commented on both those attending the private view and the paintings that were exhibited.³

According to the exhibition reviews, which were published during May and early June, four of the most important works in the show were C.R. Leslie's A Family Picture (fig.1), David Wilkie's The Preaching of Knox (fig.5), William Etty's The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil (fig.8), and J.M.W. Turner's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy (fig.13).⁴ The fact that these four pictures received so much attention can be explained by both the leading status of the academicians who painted them, and the fact that all of the paintings exemplified genres that were traditionally important in academic circles (i.e. the grand manner group portrait, history painting, the nude, and classical landscape).⁵

All ten of the exhibition reviewers seem to have taken the importance of these pictures for granted, and they discussed them at considerable length (regardless of whether they actually liked the works or felt that they were well executed).⁶

Each one of the paintings was received quite differently, revealing the existence of partisan factions within the academy public: Leslie's Family Picture created a split between conservative and liberal critics; Wilkie's Preaching of Knox was interpreted in contradictory ways; Etty's Destroying Angel seriously offended progressive middle-class reviewers; while Turner's Italy particularly upset upper-class conservatives. The shifting pattern of the critical reception reveals that in the highly charged political context of 1832, exhibited works at the Royal Academy exhibition were anything but transcendent or neutral art objects. Instead these pictures raised contentious social and political issues that were argued out by the exhibition reviewers in an atmosphere of increasing crisis.

In the afternoon of May 7th, while people were flocking to opening day at the Royal Academy, an event occurred in the House of Lords which rapidly heightened

existing tensions surrounding the passage of the Great Reform Bill--Lord Lyndhurst, a leading Tory peer, introduced a motion that attempted to sabotage the Reform legislation. The Reform Bill was basically a Whig proposition to enfranchise commercial and industrial middle-class males by redistributing parliamentary seats and reducing electoral property qualifications. It had passed three readings in the elected House of Commons only to be obstructed in the appointed House of Lords. The notorious Lyndhurst motion felled the Whig government, creating a serious constitutional impasse: the Whig ministry was compelled to resign because it refused to drop the Reform legislation, while the Tory opposition was equally unable to form a government because it lacked the necessary support in the House of Commons. The temporary stalemate between the Whigs supported by the House of Commons and the Tories backed by the House of Lords focused public attention on the particularly thorny question that was central to the Reform Crisis: which group and/or groups should be allowed to participate in the political power structure--the landed aristocracy, the rising middle class, and/or, the industrial working class?

Different London newspapers presented answers that were vigorously supported by competing factions within English society in 1832:

The Peers can only save us from total wreck by striking fearlessly at the democratic clauses of the Bill;...

Morning Post (May 12, 1832)

The Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill, we repeat the cry.

Spectator (May 12, 1832)

The Bill; or more than the Bill, is now the cry...in so delaying Whig Reform he (Lord Grey) has advanced Radical Reform, to which we have incomparably a stronger preference.

Examiner (May 6, 1832)

The Tory Morning Post advocated suppressing the Reform Bill entirely, leaving the government in the hands of the landed interest, while the Whig Spectator approved of the Bill and its limited enfranchisement of propertied middle-class males. In contrast, the Radical Examiner sought more than the Bill, arguing strenuously for universal (i.e. male) suffrage, despite the solid opposition of both Whigs and Tories to the principle of any concessions to the working class.

The crisis of 1832 seriously threatened the old ruling elite by dividing it into reforming Whigs and reactionary Tories, both of whom sought to preserve the establishment's existing hegemony through antithetical short-term political tactics. The Whigs believed that the proposed concessions were necessary to prevent total revolution, and that by extending voting rights to the middle class they could form an alliance to control the working class; on the other hand, the Tories argued that any concessions would open the floodgates to universal suffrage and mob rule. Both Tory and Whig positions represent conflicting strategies of power--strategies that were formulated in response to increasing pressure from the two excluded classes who demanded a larger role in the political process. In general, the middle class whole-heartedly endorsed the Whig proposition and formed special pressure groups to lobby for reform. By contrast, the working class was split into those who supported the Whig proposal as a step towards universal suffrage, and those who maintained that the Bill would simply further empower the middle class to achieve its goal of oppressing and exploiting working people.⁸

The constitutional deadlock stemming from the Lyndhurst motion of May 7th unleashed a wave of popular disturbances in London. Whig supporters, temporarily aided by a sector of working class Radicals, once again mobilized mass demonstrations, circulated angry political leaflets and started organizing a run on the banks to overcome the Tories' last stand in the House of Lords.⁹ Through mounting public pressure, the Whigs and their Radical allies aspired to persuade the King to assist Lord Grey and the passage of the Bill by appointing a majority of new Whig peers to the House of Lords. Meanwhile, the Tories hoped that the King would back the Duke of Wellington's efforts to form a minority Tory government which would initiate as little reform as possible. During the remainder of the month, complicated political manoeuvring ensued, ultimately culminating in a Whig victory with the final passage of the Bill on June 7th, 1832.

The conflict surrounding the Reform Bill at the height of the crisis in May, and during the aftermath in June, was not restricted to the Houses of Parliament, political articles and the streets of London. It was also actively conducted on other levels and fronts--an important one being the public arena of the Royal Academy exhibition. The following investigation will analyze how this conflict was waged

at the Academy, focusing upon the leading participants, their motives, and the politically charged function of the four most widely discussed and debated paintings in the show. In this study, the emphasis is on probing the extent to which politics permeated the critical reception of the four previously cited pictures.

The critical discourse surrounding these pictures appeared in highly partisan newspapers and journals that catered to specific social classes and interest groups within the general public.¹⁰ By the early 1830's, professional journalists were increasingly replacing amateurs in the production of published art criticism.¹¹ The careers of these professionals depended upon their skill in appealing to their papers' buyers. An arts reviewer largely functioned as an intermediary between exhibited work and reading public--describing judging, and explaining the work to his/her readers in terms they would understand and appreciate. It should be noted that because the circulation of some publications far exceeded the exhibition attendance, the Academy show was indirectly presented to the more numerous and varied audiences who read the wide range of reviewing publications (i.e. traditional monthlies, Whig and Tory newspapers, and recently introduced arts and science weeklies).¹² An analysis of the format, content,

and circulation of the individual reviewing publications will be used to answer important questions concerning how the critical commentaries functioned in guiding their readers' responses to the Academy, the exhibition of 1832, and to specific images in the show.

It must be noted that as reviews, the critics' commentaries never formed a final end in themselves. In addition to being addressed to particular groups of readers, the reviews were simultaneously directed towards and limited by the paintings they discussed. Therefore, an investigation of the form and content of these pictures is essential if one is to understand the nature of the object to which the critic and his/her public responded. However, the art historian's tools of formal and thematic analysis must be strictly controlled by the specific historical framework surrounding the exhibition. The purpose is to analyze what the paintings' formal qualities and subject matter represented to a specific audience in 1832, not to describe the paintings' appearance in twentieth-century terms. In other words, these methodological tools will be used to read between the lines of the reviews to provide a basis for evaluating what the comments and silences of the critics signify.

The constellation of agreement, discussion, difference, discord, silence and outright hostility among the critics provides crucial information for understanding how these paintings operated for various groups in society. It should be noted that the relationship between works of art on the one hand, and class and/or party divisions on the other, is not confined to periods of intense social conflict such as May of 1832. But by bringing these divisions to the surface, the Reform Crisis makes the complexities of social interaction easier to unravel and analyze on both the political and artistic fronts.

Footnotes

¹This information is provided by the catalogue of the Exhibition of the Royal Academy MDCCCXII The Sixty-fourth.

²The private view took place on Saturday, May 5th and was discussed by the reviewers of the Morning Post, the Morning Chronicle and the Morning Herald.

³The private view of the Royal Academy Exhibition formed an important event in the elite social calendar of the London social season. This is discussed by Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles, Society, Etiquette and the Season (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1973), p. 28. She mentions how the closed and exclusive atmosphere of the private view particularly suited the taste of the ruling establishment.

⁴The full titles and catalogue entry for each painting are provided in Appendix A. Certainly by twentieth-century art historical standards, there were other important paintings in the exhibition, including several works by John Constable (e.g. Waterloo Bridge, from Whitehall Stairs, June 18, 1817), other works by J.M.W. Turner (e.g. Staffa, Fingal's Cave) and entries by A.W. Callcott and E. Landseer to cite only a few. However, these works received considerably less public attention than the four works I have selected, being overlooked by many reviewers entirely. Although in this study only four of the 981 paintings have been selected for detailed analysis, this can be justified by their special status as the stars of the show according to the academy public of 1832.

⁵All four painters contributed more than one work to the exhibition. For a list of their other contributions consult Appendix B. In the case of each painter, however, the works discussed in the text appear to have been the most "academic" or conventional in terms of genre and execution. This will be further explained in the following study of the individual pictures.

⁶The ten reviews were published in the Athenaeum, Examiner, Fraser's Magazine, Library of the Fine Arts, Literary Gazette, Morning Chronicle, Morning Herald, Morning Post, Spectator and Times.

⁷For a brief and useful discussion of the events surrounding the passage of the Reform Bill, see Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1959) chaps. 4-5. These chapters also provide further references to the extensive bibliography of the Reform Bill Crisis, as does R.J. Morris, Class and Class Consciousness in the Industrial Revolution 1780-1850 (London: Economic History Society, 1979).

⁸The connected emergence of radical working class consciousness and the Reform Bill is discussed by E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963; revised ed., Pelican Books, 1968), chap. 16. The divisions within the radical working class are typified by the positions of Francis Place, a London tailor and leading labour organizer who was one of the most important leaders of the Radical Campaign to support the Reform Bill during the May crisis, and Henry Hetherington, Editor of the illegal unstamped Poor Man's Guardian, a penny paper published for the urban working class which carried several articles denouncing the sham legislation. For information on the activities of Place and Hetherington and the two diverging streams of Radical activity consult D.J. Rowe, ed., London Radicalism 1830 - 1843; A Selection from the Papers of Francis Place (Chatham: W. & J. Mackay & Co. Ltd., 1970) and Patricia Hollis, ed., The Poor Man's Guardian 1831 - 1835, vol. 1 (London: Merlin Press, 1969); see both the introduction by Hollis on Hetherington and the reprints of the original journal for the months of April and May of 1832.

⁹Further details are provided by Derek Fraser, "The Agitation for Parliamentary Reform," in Popular Movements 1830 - 1850, ed. J.T. Ward (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1970), pp. 31-53.

¹⁰Several important studies have discussed the role played by the London press during the Reform Crisis, analyzing the relationship of individual papers to specific parties and social organizations. An important nineteenth century source is H.R. Fox Bourne, English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism, 2 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1887; reprint ed., 1966). Modern studies on this topic include: A. Aspinall, "The Circulation of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century," Review of English Studies 22 (January, 1946): 29-43; A. Aspinall,

Politics and the Press 1780 - 1850 (London: Home & Van Thral Ltd., 1949), and Richard Altick, The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800 - 1900 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

¹¹The rise of a new professional art criticism was typified by writers like Allan Cunningham, who is discussed in Leslie Marchand, The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), pp. 57 and 178-181, and in Henry Ladd, The Victorian Morality of Art (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1932; reprint ed., 1968) pp. 39-43.

¹²Clearly the detailed descriptions which prefaced the reviewers' discussions of individual works were intended to acquaint readers with the important features of images they had never seen.

CHAPTER I

A Family Picture by C. R. Leslie

Few critics remained ambivalent in their assessment of C.R. Leslie's group portrait of the Grosvenor family, commissioned by the Marquess of Westminster in 1831. The painting's full title--A Family Picture; containing portraits of the Marquess and Marchioness of Westminster, the Earl and Countess Grosvenor, the Earl and Countess of Wilton, Lord and Lady Robert Grosvenor, Viscount Belgrave, the Ladies Grosvenor, and Lady Mary Egerton (fig. 1), lists the ranks of the fifteen fashionably dressed family members (including the five daughters of the Earl and Countess Grosvenor). The painting was ordered to commemorate the Marquess of Westminster's new title which had been conferred in William IV's coronation honours of 1831.¹

Leslie depicts the family gathered for an amateur musical performance in Old Grosvenor House, their principal London residence.² The family's wealth and social importance is emphasized by their costly clothing and surroundings. The monumental scale of the classical columns and

frieze suggests that this is no ordinary home--a fact which is reinforced by the women's profusion of fashionable and expensive satins, laces, jewellery and accessories. Sparkling highlights reflect from the musical instruments, silverware, polished furniture, clothing and jewellery. Yet despite the imposing nature of the architecture and vast array of material possessions, Leslie has managed to capture a surprising air of informality. The family does not seem to pose for the viewer, instead they are pre-occupied with watching the two young girls dancing in the foreground.

The Grosvenors were one of the most powerful families in England. In 1819, Lord Grosvenor (later the Marquess of Westminster) had been cited as one of the country's four richest men with a net annual income far exceeding £700,000.³ Much of the family fortune derived from owning and developing large tracts of real estate in central London. Befitting his status, the Marquess had amassed an enormous private art collection, including four huge religious canvases by Rubens, which necessitated the building of a new art gallery and special Rubens Room that were added to Old Grosvenor House in 1827.⁴ Leslie presented the family in the midst of their new gallery,

surrounded by important paintings, sculptures, pieces of silverware and other collector's items. To the left of the Marchioness hangs Velasquez's, Don Baltasar Carlos on Horseback⁵, while the Marquess sits under his largest painting by Rubens, Abraham Receiving Bread and Wine from Melchizedek, which provides a backdrop for the entire scene.

Since the portrait was commissioned, Leslie's options were limited from the outset. The extent to which the Marquess of Westminster dictated the terms of the picture's appearance is not known, but in all likelihood he was responsible for selecting the family members to be depicted, the location, and general conversation-piece arrangement. The portrait recalls the great tradition of eighteenth century conversation-pieces which had been established by such earlier artists as William Hogarth, Arthur Devis and Johan Zoffany. The conversation-piece with its emphasis on informality, domestic furnishings and family life has frequently been discussed as a bourgeois alternative to formal or state portraiture which focused on the sitter's worldly rank (i.e. court, army, government or church).⁶ However, in England the conversation-piece was also commissioned by the nobility from the early eighteenth century onward, reaching a high point with Johan Zoffany during

the 1760s - 1780s. Zoffany's Sir Lawrence Dundas and his Grandson of 1770 (fig. 2) exemplifies the tradition upon which Leslie drew over sixty years later.⁷ Despite differences of fashion and family size, certain essential features are shared: the relaxed family patriarch is shown seated with his grandson and future heir in the magnificent surroundings of his home. Identifiable paintings and art objects attest to the patron's wealth, cultural pursuits and good taste.

A juxtaposition of formality and informality underlies the entire structure of Leslie's picture: the discipline of the dancing girls is countered by the group of smaller children playing with the parrot, and Lady Mary Egerton sprawled across her father's lap; the restraint of Belgrave and Lady Robert is balanced by the relaxed positions of Lord Wilton and Lady Elizabeth; and Lord Robert, formally attired in his court uniform as Comptroller of the Household, casually leans against a table. The hereditary line of male descent traced from the Marquess to his eldest son and grandson is presented in the low-key context of a private family gathering, which in turn seems strangely out of place in the imposing classical architecture of the gallery.

The Grosvenor's activities and art collection similarly connote both informal domestic values and formal worldly ones. Although the family is shown relaxing at home, it is significant that they are not idle. Several of the women present their acquired musical and dancing skills for the approval of their husbands and fathers. The women's virtuous accomplishments and the demonstrated affection among family members (i.e. Hugh Lupus at his grandfather's knee, Lord Wilton gazing affectionately at his wife and supporting his young daughter) reveals that even in private this is an industrious and happy family. Yet the musical performance, surrounding art collection, monumental architecture, costly clothing, court uniform, and dignified poses of the adults, immediately remind the viewer that these are people of a superior social class. These status symbols not only advertise the family's wealth, good taste, and position at court, they also demonstrate the Grosvenors' loyalty to the monarchy and social responsibility for maintaining society's high level of culture.⁸ This alternate stressing and downplaying of the family's rank and prestige merits further investigation.

This particular blend of formality and informality may have stemmed from the fact that this type of commission

was essentially a new venture for the artist. The Marquess' selection of Leslie for this project seems somewhat unusual considering that Leslie's reputation was based upon anecdotal literary and historical scenes which appealed primarily to middle-class reviewers and buyers.⁹ In fact, Leslie seldom executed aristocratic portraits, and evidently felt somewhat pressured by the Grosvenor commission, according to a letter he received from his friend, John Constable, in June of 1831. After discussing Leslie's progress on "The Grosvenor Gang", Constable reassured him:

Still it is a bad thing to refuse the "Great". They are always angered--and their reasoning powers being generally blinded by their rank, they have no other idea of a refusal than it is telling them to kiss your bottom.¹⁰

Although Constable's letter does not shed any light on the Grosvenors' expectations, it nevertheless conveys some sense of the difficulties Leslie encountered when painting this enormously powerful family. While Leslie was clearly impressed by the Grosvenors' status which he meticulously recorded, he was more accustomed to a middle-class lifestyle and audience. Thus the artist could have unintentionally transported some middle-class values into Old Grosvenor House. On the other hand, it is also conceivable that the Marquess deliberately selected Leslie's more relaxed approach in preference to the formal styles of traditional artists

such as William Beechey and George Hayter, who specialized in this type of commission... There is certainly reason to believe that the Grosvenors, as a leading Whig family, wanted to see themselves in a modern, socially progressive light, despite the fact that they were still interested in retaining as many of their privileges as possible.

Firmly believing that political reform was necessary, the Marquess nonetheless had much to lose through the impending reorganization of parliamentary ridings. Lady Elizabeth Grosvenor, his daughter-in-law (seated second from the left in Leslie's picture), described the situation in a letter of 1831:

The boroughs are completely knocked up, which Lady Grosvenor and I maintain is a very good thing. As to Lord Grosvenor (soon to be the Marquess of Westminster), he takes it with as much good humour as if he had gained £150,000 instead of losing it, which he says thereby he has. Anybody but him would be vexed at themselves for all the annoyance and immense expense he has entailed upon himself for nothing. However, that will all be ended and I imagine that the great towns will be soothed. It will be odd to hear of the member for Marylebone, Holborn etc. This will clip the aristocracy, but a good deal must be sacrificed to save the rest.¹¹

Responding to growing pressure from the middle class, aristocratic ideology was undergoing the slow process of revision. Many bourgeois values (i.e. diligence, temperance, domestic harmony, respectability) were

gradually being adopted by the aristocracy and used to justify their social superiority.¹² This ideological shift was an essential part of Whig Reform strategy: as Lord Grey commented, the point was to prove that "in these days of democracy and Jacobinism, it is possible to find real capacity in the aristocracy."¹³ An aristocracy that could also lay claim to middle-class merits would be sufficiently strengthened to weather the storms of reform.

However, if the portrait had been intended to present an updated and more acceptable image of the aristocracy, it is ironic that its only admirers were Tory critics writing for limited circulation Tory publications (i.e. Fraser's Magazine, the Literary Gazette, the Morning Post and the Library of the Fine Arts) who defended the work as "tasteful", "elegant", and "discriminating". This group of writers was impressed by the formal elements of the Grosvenors' paintings, furnishings and fashions. The Literary Gazette concluded that "All appear in their proper places; naturally, tastefully and elegantly brought together."¹⁴ For this reviewer the image signified the natural social order with aristocrats like the Grosvenors occupying their traditional place at the top of the pyramid.

Although Tories refused to question the aristocracy's supremacy in 1832, there were plenty of other groups eager to take up the challenge. In fact the Whig Reform Bill was designed to partially redress the political imbalance of power between the aristocracy and middle class by extending voting rights to the ten-pound middle-class householder, and redistributing parliamentary seats in a move towards equalizing the number of voters in each riding.¹⁵ The proposed elimination of many "rotten" or "pocket" boroughs greatly concerned a large proportion of the aristocracy who were the major owners and purchasers of votes in these corrupt ridings.¹⁶ As the main beneficiaries of the "rotten" borough system, and principal source of opposition to the Reform Bill in the House of Lords, the aristocracy were repeatedly portrayed as the real enemies of reform (even though many leading Whig politicians were aristocrats).

Countless verbal and visual attacks on the aristocracy's monopoly of privilege were mounted in articles, letters, cartoons and caricatures of the Reform press.¹⁷ A typical example of such an attack is the caricature, John Bull and His Burdens, published in the radical Figaro in London during January of 1832 (fig. 3). An accompanying

text explained the caricature:

The above caricature represents the present state of Poor John Bull, who really must excuse us for comparing him to an ass overburdened with the weight of aristocracy, which he has for a long time consented to carry. While the Tory peers would render him stupid by assailing his head, bishops, placemen, and pensioners combine to overload his back, while Hunt and his adherents worry the poor animal at the tail.¹⁸

In this caricature the strong connection between the aristocracy and Tory party is established by the presence of the Duke of Wellington, the leader of the Tory government, who sits facing backwards leisurely smoking his pipe. Such widespread criticisms of the social and political roles of the aristocracy suggest that portraits of leading aristocrats were potentially contentious material during the Reform Crisis.

Considering the widespread opposition of the aristocracy to the Reform Bill, it is hardly surprising that Leslie's portrait of the Grosvenors was in no way palatable to more progressive middle-class critics who supported the Reform cause. The Athenaeum writer read the picture as an offensive assertion of aristocratic prerogative. The critic mockingly offered Leslie some advice:

...but as you wish for either (money or fame), never paint a family picture of people of mark and condition again. We have heard of a nobleman who claimed for his family that kind of far descended glory both in beauty and blood which the Arabs claim for their horses; we know not that the Marquis of Westminster carries his notions of caste so far; but of this we are certain, that an unwonted awe has oppressed the pencil of the artist in this domestic picture, and that his colouring is heavy--his diversity of character little--and his postures generally made up and affected.¹⁹

Although the critic was less than complimentary towards the Grosvenors, his/her main objections to the picture seem to have been based on stylistic grounds. The Times critic spelled out the problem quite clearly:

The personages represented are very genteel, amiable-looking folks, and the young ladies in their red frocks, very pleasant and aristocratic children, with a healthy well-bred air; --everything, in short, that could be desired. The only fault is having them painted in this style.²⁰

Evidently the Whigs' objections were not to aristocratic subjects per se. In fact many portraits of leading aristocrats such as those by Thomas Philips, H.W. Pickersgill, and E.H. Landseer seems to have been popular with a number of Whig reviewers. Landseer's portrait of the Duke of Devonshire (fig. 4) which presented a three quarter view of the duke sitting in his theatre box watching a play, was singled out as particularly admirable. In spite of the program before him, and the

viewing glasses in his hand, several critics seem to have mistaken the location, thinking that the Duke was simply looking out of a window. Their confusion possibly stemmed from the Duke's extremely plain clothing and surroundings. Nothing beyond the title of the picture and the face of the sitter identified the subject as a person of great wealth or rank--no uniforms, personal possessions, or fellow family members. Landseer's only allusion was to the Duke's cultural pursuits, but this was subtle enough to be entirely overlooked by several reviewers. While Tory writers were less than enthusiastic about the picture, it was especially praised by Whig reviewers for being natural as opposed to the charge of "affected" which they levelled at Leslie's work. The Spectator concluded that "the artist appears to have struck off the resemblance at once, so unconscious are you of effort or manner."²¹

In contrast, the same group of progressive critics was obviously irritated by Leslie's style. The Athenaeum had objected to Leslie's "oppressed pencil" and "unwonted awe", while the Times and the Examiner expressed a similar distaste for the constraints placed on Leslie's genius and good taste.²² All three reviewers much preferred his only other work in the exhibition, A Scene from the Taming of the Shrew, which was praised for its dramatic narrative

and wide range of characters and emotions. Best known for such literary subjects which he regularly exhibited at the Royal Academy, the critics seemed to realize that Leslie was essentially experimenting with the large family portrait of the Grosvenors.²³ It was an experiment that Whig critics did not want repeated - not only was it a genre they disliked, it was corrupting the talents of an artist they usually admired.

The Examiner was particularly annoyed by the wealth of status symbols cluttering the picture:

If unable to exercise his invention, fancy and good taste, he (Leslie) has carefully represented everything placed before him--ladies, gentlemen, children, gowns, coats, bonnets, feathers, flounces, musical instruments, French clocks--in a word, all the household stuff, living and dead, usually collected in the principal apartment of a wealthy nobleman's residence. The work is consequently glittering, trim, polished, and unmeaning--a display of matter, not mind,...²⁴

The charges levelled in the last sentence summed up the critic's impression of the painting in particular and the paper's views on wealthy noblemen in general. Throughout the early months of 1832, the Examiner had regularly printed extracts from, The Tour of a German Prince, by Prince Puckler Muskau, a recently released book criticizing the English nobility, exposing their enormous wealth and

flashy but morally bankrupt lifestyle. In a lengthy review of the work, the Examiner dwelled on the aristocracy's exploitation of their social inferiors:

Philanthropy, in the vocabulary of our beau monde, means subscriptions to charities, perhaps the giving away of a score of blankets and a cauldron of coals at Christmas; but by no means admits of sympathy with folks of another class. On the other hand, no idea is more familiar than that of the great destroying the little for the gratification of their appetites;...²⁵

The Examiner's frequently articulated hostility towards the aristocracy's showy displays and conspicuous consumption must have coloured the critic's response to Leslie's picture. This conclusion is borne out by analyzing the precise wording of the review. The use of the term "glittering" probably referred to Leslie's metallic highlighting on the clothing, picture frames, silverware, and musical instruments, while "polished" described both the shiny satin surfaces of the women's dresses, and the highly glazed finish of the work. This critic (and several others) also carped about the work's "heavy" or "gaudy" colouring, primarily the predominance of red.²⁶

Metallic highlights, brilliant satin surfaces, and vivid colour schemes seem to have been devices closely associated with Sir Thomas Lawrence, and there is reason

to believe that Whig critics objecting to these features in Leslie's painting made this connection. Evidently there was a widespread conviction in academic circles that Lawrence's death in 1830 had left a vacuum in the field of portraiture. Several Whig writers seized what they considered a golden opportunity to press for an improved new school in this branch of art. In its review of the exhibition, the Morning Chronicle discussed why upcoming portrait painters should steer clear of Lawrence's dangerous influence:

Sir Thomas Lawrence was well in himself--sui generis--but his thin milk will not bear reducing. The showy, the meretricious, and the unreal genius may do in the hands of a single genius in this line, but it will not bear imitation, and is not bearable caeteris non paribus.²⁷

In March of 1832, the Examiner had also attacked Sir Thomas Lawrence condemning him as a "cringing pet of the aristocracy...painting their stupid faces, the only branch of art which they encourage because it ministers to their conceits."²⁸ The Examiner objected to Lawrence's servility as something which reinforced the aristocracy's inflated self-image.

Both of these criticisms indicate that Whig reviewers felt that the heyday of Lawrence's showy displays and

Leslie's "glittering" portrait of the Grosvenors was over. Both belonged to the aristocracy of a bygone era. Despite the fact that the Grosvenors supported the Reform Bill, Whig critics seem to have read Leslie's picture as an antiquated assertion of aristocratic grandeur. In other words, they objected to an image of the unreformed aristocracy which connoted opposition to their aspirations for upward social mobility. Such an image was particularly offensive in the context of the Royal Academy, an institution that many members of the middle class suspiciously regarded as a bastion of aristocratic privilege.

In spite of the fact that large numbers of the middle class attended the academy exhibition, or at least read reviews of the paintings, they still felt snubbed as second-rate participants. An incident at a British Institution exhibition of 1831 which included some paintings from the collection of Thomas Hamlet, a wealthy goldsmith, demonstrated the survival of an aristocratic prejudice against the middle class. In a review of the show, the Literary Beacon felt obliged to remind Thomas Hamlet of his place in society:

By the catalogue it (a painting) appears to be the property of "Thomas Hamlet, Esq."--now we would ask any dispassionate person why this quackery is suffered to exist? Mr. Hamlet is of a class of persons highly respectable, but

why, because he has been successful in trade and has sense enough to buy good pictures and tact enough to sell them at a good price, is he to be dubbed an esquire? "Mr. Hamlet" would read much better in the catalogue.²⁹

Retaliating against attitudes like this one, and the institutions that fostered them, criticisms of the aristocracy's cultural elitism anonymously appeared in letters, and articles published by such papers as the Times and the Athenaeum from 1830 onwards.³⁰ A series of charges were levelled at England's three leading arts institutions-- the Royal Academy, the National Gallery and the British Institution.³¹

Progressive critics wanted a reformed government (in which the middle class would have a voice) to oversee the operation of various arts institutions, eliminating many of their long standing discriminatory practices.³² "Public" access (i.e. middle-class access)³³ was essential, as the Athenaeum's preface to its review of the Academy exhibition of 1831 pointed out:

The Academy is a corporate and a chartered body-- it grubs on in the dark--it toad-eats the aristocracy. Who are the men invited to their annual festival? men eminent in literature-- men of informed minds, the associates of the academicians in private life, the glory and boast of England? No; but my Lord A and B; and other nonentities. This is the interchange between

corporate art and patronage. There must be more life got into the Academy; as we said once before, we must rattle its old bones about. The public must, somehow or other, be allowed to take an interest in its proceedings. Had it not been for the annual Exhibition and the public press, we should have sunk below the Knellers and Hudsons of our forefathers.³⁴

Specifically, this critic and others disliked the Royal Academy's ingrown, self-elected structure.³⁵ Existing academicians elected new members, formed the school's teaching staff, juried the selection and hanging of works in the annual exhibition, and voted on the distribution of prizes to its members.³⁶ Also condemned was its large share of private funding which enabled the academy to refuse a public or government auditing of its accounts. A final source of considerable irritation was the academy's obvious pandering to the upper echelons of society. Especially galling from a middle-class vantage point was the private view, an exhibition preview that was restricted by invitation only.³⁷ As the Athenaeum had observed, invitations were the privilege of aristocratic birth, not middle-class merit.

While on one hand middle-class critics attacked the academy's openly discriminating practices, they were also anxious to display their recently acquired aesthetic qualifications in a bid to secure the aristocracy's approval.

This ambivalent response towards the old establishment characterized both the middle class' reformist social position and their art criticism which alternated between angry denunciations and obsequious acceptance of the aristocracy's value structure. The majority of the progressive middle class did not question the aristocracy's basic right to exist. Instead, they were seeking a more equal partnership with the old upper class that had traditionally dominated government, society, and institutions like the Royal Academy. Essentially, they sought an alliance with the aristocracy to safeguard their position from working-class encroachment. Nevertheless, in order to gain the concessions they demanded, middle-class Whigs were prepared to condemn blatant forms of aristocratic resistance. While they did not object to the Grosvenors per se, they resented the traditional aspects of Leslie's style which carried eighteenth-century connotations of the aristocracy's monopoly of power.

Footnotes

¹Gervas Huxley, Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors: Life in a Whig Family 1822-1839 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 28.

²For a discussion of the architecture and renovations of Old Grosvenor House consult John Cornforth, "Old Grosvenor House," Country Life 154 (November 15, 1973): 1538-1541.

³Huxley, Lady Elizabeth, p. 2.

⁴Huxley, Lady Elizabeth, p. 59 and Cornforth, Country Life, p. 1539. The four paintings were Gathering the Manna, A Procession of the Four Latin Fathers of the Church, The Four Evangelists and Abraham Receiving Bread and Wine from Melchizedek.

⁵Twentieth century art historical scholarship has re-attributed this work to Mazo who is believed to have copied several originals by Velazquez, see August Mayer, Velazquez: A Catalogue Raisonne of the Pictures and Drawings (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), number 267. However, in the nineteenth century the painting was considered to be the original by Velazquez.

⁶Mario Praz, Conversation Pieces (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), see the introduction "The art of the Bourgeoisie".

⁷Here I am discussing the general genre of conversation pieces, and not the precise function of each painting which was certainly very different.

⁸The Grosvenor Collection was open to selected members of the public on special days. In his letters, Constable frequently cited trips to this collection which seems to have been mainly visited by artists and other friends of the academy. The collection was probably never attended by large sectors of the public--members of the working class and lower middle class probably being unaware of its existence.

⁹Leslie's middle class origins and popularity are discussed to some extent in Jeffrey Daniels, "C.R. Leslie: A Rediscovery," Art and Artists 11 (January 1977): 12-15.

¹⁰R.B. Beckett, ed., John Constable's Correspondence, Vol. 3: The Correspondence with C.R. Leslie R.A. (Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1965), p. 41. In spite of his irreverent comments about the aristocracy in this instance, Constable, like Leslie, was quite conservative and vehemently opposed to the Reform Bill, and its social implications. However, the quotation does demonstrate the social gulf separating the artist and patron in a commission of this kind.

¹¹Huxley, Lady Elizabeth, p. 98

¹²This is discussed by Mark Girouard, The Victorian Country House (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 3. This shift gathered considerable momentum by the middle of the decade. Its development is discussed by Davidoff, The Best Circles, chaps. 1-2; Stella Margeton, Victorian High Society (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1980), and David Spring, "The English Landed Estate in the Age of Coal and Iron: 1830 - 1880," Journal of Economic History 11 (Winter 1951): 3-23. Spring discusses how economic necessity forced many aristocrats to adopt a more temperate lifestyle in order to afford the upkeep of large family estates.

¹³Briggs, Age of Improvement, p. 298

¹⁴Literary Gazette (May 12, 1832), p. 298.

¹⁵Briggs, Age of Improvement, pp. 263-264.

¹⁶According to Lord John Russell's reform proposal the "rotten" boroughs to be eliminated were ridings of less than 2,000 voters. Most of the votes in these small boroughs were either owned or directly influenced by a particular local patron. The majority of "rotten" boroughs, which were located in the agricultural south, were to be redistributed to the larger towns of the industrial north. Such was the famous case of Old Sarum which had seven votes that went to local property owners because nobody had lived on the old village site for years. See Briggs, Age of Improvement, p. 102. John Croker, a prominent Tory, estimated that the Tories held 203 "rotten" boroughs, while the Whigs controlled 73, see Raymond G. Cowherd, The Politics of English Dissent (New York: New York University Press, 1956), p. 186, n. 65.

¹⁷ Many anti-aristocratic cartoons are recorded in M. Dorothy George, Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, Vol. 11: 1828 - 1832 (London: Printed by Order of the Trustees, 1954). Numbers 16673 The Dissolution of Aristocratic Tyranny or Vox Populi, - Vox Dei and 16946 The Great Comet of 1832 are typical examples.

¹⁸ The Figaro in London (January 28, 1832), p. 30.

¹⁹ Athenaeum (May 19, 1832), p. 324.

²⁰ Times (May 8, 1832).

²¹ Spectator (May 26, 1832), p. 496. The Examiner felt that the portrait was "marked by that look of life, natural action, and truth of colour, which contribute to make his various performances so generally admired." - Examiner (July 1, 1832), p. 421. It is interesting to note that Tory writers seem to have found the work too plain. Neither the Library of the Fine Arts, nor Fraser's Magazine liked the picture. In this case the divided response to the picture seems to have had little to do with the Duke's aristocratic status or his personal stance on the reform question, since he was widely known to have had little interest in government and political affairs.

²² Although these terms would have held specific connotations for the review readers, they were applied to a wide variety of works. In this instance the implications were that had Leslie been left to his own devices, he would have painted his typical literary subjects.

²³ Aside from his later Library at Holland House of 1841, this was the only conversation piece portrait that Leslie ever exhibited at the Royal Academy.

²⁴ Examiner (June 3, 1832), p. 358.

²⁵ "Review of A Tour of a German Prince," Examiner March 4, 1832), pp. 147-149. Brief extracts from this book were printed in the Examiner's "Notabilia" column during February, March and April.

²⁶The Examiner used the word "gaudy". Leslie's extensive use of red was also criticized by the Spectator, the Times and the Athenaeum, all of which were papers of the reform press. Their attacks provoked the conservative Morning Post critic writing later on June 9th, to defend Leslie's colouring:

It is not always in the power of an artist who agrees to execute a commission of this kind to prescribe to his fair sitters the colours or fashions of their garments, and if he must introduce a scarlet frock or a bright lilac gown, he must not leave such colours by their eclipsing splendour to absorb every other colour in the piece. Such colours must be repeated, and carried in bigger or lesser patches into every corner of the composition.

²⁷Morning Chronicle (May 5, 1832)

²⁸Examiner (March 4, 1832), p. 148.

²⁹William Whitley, Art in England 1821 - 1837 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 214.

³⁰Later on in the decade, as the charges accumulated, leading Whig and Radical politicians (i.e. Lord John Russell, William Ewart and Joseph Hume) took up the cause of cultural reform. Affairs finally culminated in the Select Committee Inquiry of 1835 which was set up to examine the Academy's general performance, and the specific grievances of B.R. Haydon, George Clint, John Martin, George Foggio and others. See Quentin Bell, The Schools of Design (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), chap. 3 "Haydon and the Radicals" and chap. 5 "The Select Committee of 1835", and Sidney Hutchinson, The History of the Royal Academy 1786 - 1968 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1968), p. 101.

³¹Whitley, Art in England, pp. 206-207, and 220-222. He cites several specific attacks on the National Gallery and the British Institution.

³²This was proposed by the Times (July 20, 1830).

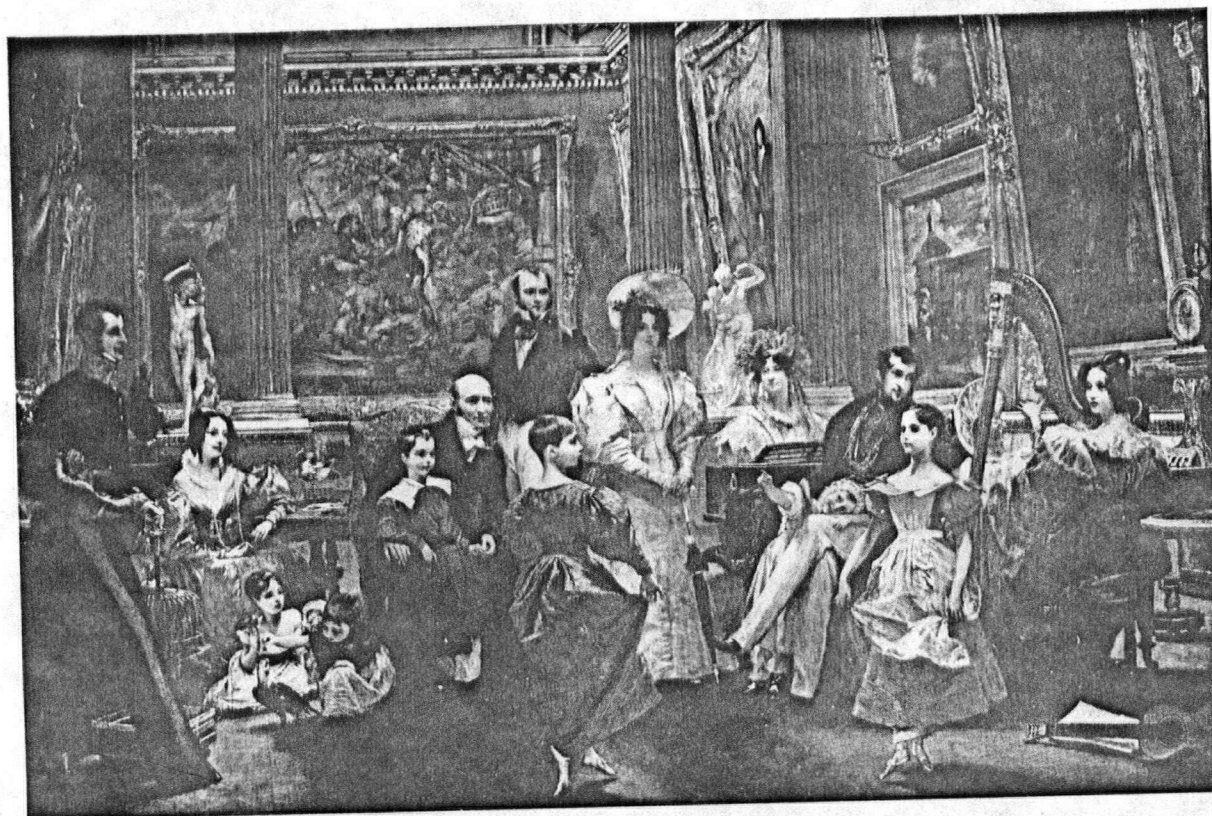
³³Nobody, except the radical Examiner, even considered that the working class should be included in either the government or the operation of the Academy.

³⁴The Athenaeum (May 14, 1831), p. 315.

³⁵The Examiner (January 8, 1832), p. 20. The Examiner called the Academy a "self-elected and self-controlled tribunal of the Arts".

³⁶Examiner (December 18, 1831), p. 804

³⁷In 1832 the private view was bitterly attacked by the Whig Morning Chronicle before the exhibition was reviewed.



The Grosvenor Family in Grosvenor House, 1831

(from left to right) Lord Robert, Lady Elizabeth, Elizabeth, Caroline, Evelyn, Hugh Lupus, Marquess of Westminster, Belgrave, Eleanor, Lady Robert, Marchioness of Westminster, Lord Wilton and daughter, Mary, Lady Wilton

Figure 1. C.R. Leslie, A Family Picture, 1832
Collection of the Duke of Westminster
(Gervas Huxley. Lady Elizabeth and the Grosvenors.
London: Oxford University Press, 1965. Frontispiece.)

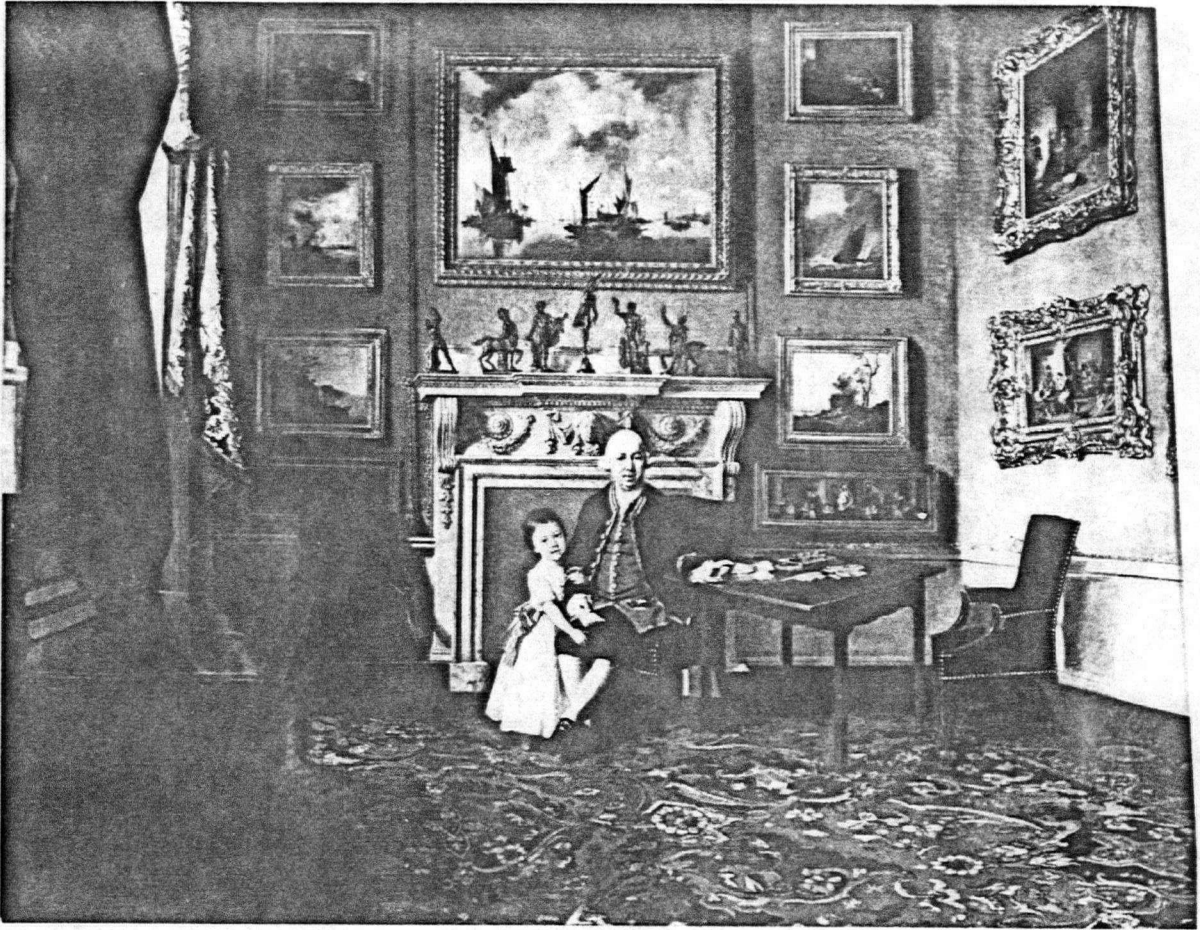


Figure 2. Johan Zoffany, Sir Lawrence Dundas and His Grandson, 1770
 Collection of the Marquess of Zetland
 (Mary Webster. Johan Zoffany 1733 - 1810. London:
 National Portrait Gallery, 1976. Plate 56.)

JOHN BULL AND HIS BURDENS.

Figure 3. Robert Seymour, John Bull and His Burdens,
1832
Figaro in London, (January 28, 1832), Page 30.



Figure 4. E. H. Landseer, William Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, 1832
Collection of the Duke of Devonshire
(Anthony Blunt. Treasures from Chatsworth: The Devonshire Inheritance. International Exhibitions Foundation, 1979. Page 110.)

CHAPTER II

The Preaching of Knox by David Wilkie

Unlike the sharply divided reaction to Leslie's painting, virtually all of the reviewers considered David Wilkie's, The Preaching of Knox Before the Lords of the Congregation 10th June 1559 (fig. 5), the most successful work in the entire exhibition. It was hailed in glowing terms as the "lion of the gallery" and the "polar star which attracts all eyes".¹ The relatively small (48½x65 inches), highly finished historical panel portrays John Knox, the Presbyterian reformer, delivering his historic sermon in St. Andrew's church in Fifeshire. Denouncing the Catholic government of Scotland's Queen Regent, and defying threats of assassination, Knox urged his Protestant followers to purge the church of its profiteers. After Knox's sermon, his adherents stripped the local Catholic churches of their possessions, destroyed the priory, and levelled all of the monasteries in the town. This sermon, long considered the crucial turning point in the Protestants' resistance to the Catholic crown, led to the final victory of Presbyterianism which replaced Catholicism as Scotland's official religion.²

Wilkie depicted Knox at the pulpit in the midst of his fiery sermon with his left arm outstretched and his right hand gripping the Bible in determination. The force of his oratorical gesture causes his black cape to fly out behind him. While the elevated figure of Knox at the pulpit forms the focal point, his chief Catholic opponents, the Archbishop of St. Andrews, Bishop Beatoun and the Abbot of Cross Raguel, who are situated under the ornate canopy in the left middle ground, provide a counterweight to the preacher. However, their lower and strategically less important position in the church, and their passive attitudes reinforce Knox's dominance. In fact, all of Knox's audience, including his fellow reformers and the Protestant Lords of the Congregation remain motionless as they listen to the sermon. The passivity of his listeners, who seem virtually anchored to the church architecture, and the open space around the figure of Knox, combine to make his actions seem even more impressive. Several listeners near Knox draw back from the force of his preaching (i.e., the man and boy at the railing, the woman and baby, and Lord James Stuart at the table in the left foreground). A particularly striking contrast is drawn between the simple black and white robes of the Presbyterian ministers and the elaborate glittering costumes of the Catholic bishops, while another more direct

visual indication of the ensuing religious conflict is the presence of armed guards and the many weapons carried by the Lords of the Congregation.. Lord James Stuart and the Earl of Morton clasp swords and a dagger and an ivory-handled pistol lies on the table next to the open Bible and religious books.

Although the painting was started in 1822, several major interruptions delayed its completion until 1832 when it was first publicly exhibited at the Royal Academy. Wilkie's completion of the work was delayed by a nervous breakdown, Continental recovery tour, and a change of patrons. Originally the work was commissioned by Lord Liverpool, the Tory Prime Minister of England from 1812 to 1826. In terms of Wilkie's first patron, there can be little doubt that the picture's theme of a Protestant victory must have held considerable appeal for Lord Liverpool, who was firmly opposed to granting English Catholics any relief from the legal limitations placed upon their worship and participation in public life. The question of official toleration for Catholics was one of the most pressing issues facing the Tory government throughout the twenties until the Catholic Emancipation Bill finally passed through parliament in 1829 (after Lord Liverpool's death).³ Throughout his term of office, Lord Liverpool

remained one of the staunchest defenders of the Corporation and Test Acts which effectively barred Catholics (and other non-Anglicans) from civil and military offices by requiring all office holders to receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England.⁴

After Lord Liverpool's death in 1828, the work was taken over by Sir Robert Peel, another leading Tory politician, for the large sum of £1,300.⁵ Ironically, it was Sir Robert Peel who led the Tories to reverse their stand on the Catholic question, and forced the Catholic Emancipation Bill through parliament in 1829. Peel's motives for purchasing the picture remain unclear, although he was known to have generally liked Wilkie's work, and to have been a major patron of contemporary British artists.

For Wilkie, a Scottish artist working in London, the subject represented an important episode of his own national history. He was actively committed to the revival of Scottish literature and history and worked towards establishing a Scottish school of painters.⁶ As the devout son of a Presbyterian minister, this historical event must have had a further personal significance for the artist. In order to explain the scene to his London audience, the

painter added an excerpt from his historical source, Thomas McCrie's, Life of Knox, to the exhibition catalogue (see Appendix A).⁷ The text identified the major figures and discussed how Knox had defied the Archbishop of St. Andrews' threats to have the reformer assassinated if he dared to preach in the bishop's church.

Yet despite Wilkie's intentions, the lengthy catalogue description, and his efforts to represent the event accurately, virtually all of the exhibition reviewers extrapolated quite different meanings from the picture--meanings that were more closely related to the Reform Crisis than the Scottish Reformation. It seems that the intervening time between the painting's inception and exhibition substantially altered its public meaning. Only one reviewer from the Examiner discussed the picture mainly as a question of religious controversy, but, ironically, this one writer who seemed to understand what the artist had originally tried to convey, was totally opposed to Wilkie's viewpoint and critical of the picture in general. This exceptional negative review will be analyzed further, after the positive assessments of The Preaching of Knox have been investigated.

The other nine academy reviewers achieved consensus on two basic grounds for championing Wilkie's picture:

first on the basis of its patriotic British subject, and second as a fine academic history painting. The critics were especially moved by the "national and spirit-stirring subject".⁸ Speaking for most of the reviewers, the Times critic observed:

It is a picture of which the artist may well be proud, and which, while it excites the warm applause of the spectators, suggests the feelings of congratulation that we can, as a nation, give the world assurance of a painter who may challenge competition with any living, and with the works of those departed men who have devoted their genius to this branch of Art.⁹

Since Wilkie's return from the Continent in 1828 he had exhibited an increasing number of Spanish and Italian scenes--in fact so many that several critics had expressed concern lest he abandon his former interest in British subjects altogether.¹⁰ The Wilkie episode of the Athenaeum's series on living artists, published in January of 1831, had typically expressed this point of view:

We like him (Wilkie), because he is at once natural and national.- ...Scotland and England share him between them, and though Italy and Spain have had him worshipping there for a season he has now returned to his duty and allegiance, and is busied with his magnificent picture of John Knox subduing the Scarlet Lady.¹¹

For this writer and others, Wilkie's Preaching of Knox marked a timely return to the national themes they preferred.

Not that these nine critics believed Wilkie's Continental tour had been a waste of time. On the contrary, they felt that his travels and studies of the European old masters had greatly refined his style. This refinement was a crucial element in supporting their second claim that the picture was a fine academic history painting. Like Leslie, Wilkie was presenting the academy public with a lesser known side of his work. His reputation was not based on history painting, but rather on his scenes of Scottish and English low life. As one reviewer unkindly remembered, his previous two attempts at history painting had failed miserably.¹² By turning to a learned and morally elevating historical theme, Wilkie was attempting to enhance his artistic status, since in academic circles history painting was considered superior to all other genres. More than any other category, history painting required the full range of academic skills: the painting had to be highly finished, the subject suitably stressed, and human figures had to be correctly proportioned, harmoniously grouped, and noble in character. Emphasis was to be placed on ideal forms rather than specific details.

In the minds of the exhibition reviewers, Wilkie's three-year study of the old masters had equipped him with the

necessary skills to make the important transition from genre to history painter. The Literary Gazette observed:

It not infrequently happens that our artists, in their visits to the celebrated galleries of the continent, have contrived to weaken the powers which they carried with them: Mr Wilkie has not only strengthened his, but appears to have awakened talents hitherto dormant, of a higher character than the public supposed him to possess.¹³

The writer was referring to the evolution of Wilkie's mature style which was characterized by darker colouring, looser brushwork and heavier glazes. Wilkie credited his Spanish experience for developing what he considered a faster, bolder and more effective style, which was better suited for larger scale history painting than his earlier more laborious technique.¹⁴ Wilkie's new interest in artists like Rubens and Velasquez must have contributed to the unprecedented dynamism and monumentality which the Spectator detected in the picture:

We feel a little personal exultation at Wilkie's success in a picture of this class; because, when we saw his sketches of Spanish subjects...wherein he gave the first indications of that power and grandeur of which characterize the present picture, we...hailed them as manifestations of a soaring genius and anticipated for him the fame of an historical painter.¹⁵

However, despite the critics' enthusiasm for historical pictures, by 1832 they seem to have been a dying

breed in academy exhibitions.. This fact evidently worried the majority of critics, like the writer for the Morning Herald, who commented on their disappearance:

It is greatly to be regretted that in this land of wealth and luxury there is found so little right feeling or encouragement for historical painting, that men of high and original genius are obliged to abandon this intellectual walk of art to live by painting portraits. The picture before us is another proof of what our native school can achieve in the higher grades of this interesting profession.¹⁶

Actually, with the exception of The Preaching of Knox, there was only a handful of other quasi-historical subjects in the whole exhibition. However, these were variously dismissed as serious contenders: two being only sketches, another more of a marine painting, and a third entirely lacking heroic sentiments.¹⁷ This meant that Wilkie was essentially competing in a class by himself, as the Spectator pointed out, "Wilkie's picture is the finest, nay almost the only real historical picture in the Exhibition".¹⁸

Under these circumstances, one wonders why historical painting was defended and even promoted in the face of its apparent demise. It seems that critics writing for Tory and Whig papers had different motives for applauding Wilkie's picture.. Tory critics used Wilkie's success

as a counter-offensive manoeuvre to defend the academy against mounting Whig and Radical demands for its reform. Old standards like that of history painting were revived to protect the academy from new challenges. The success of the picture demonstrated the continuing viability of the existing academic structure--after all, it still produced the finest examples of British art.

While Whig critics shared the Tories' patriotic sentiments, they seem to have held a slightly different view of the situation. They dwelled on Wilkie's achievements as an outstanding exception to the academy's dismal rule of mediocrity. Furthermore, for several Whig writers Wilkie seems to have represented the classic middle-class success story. The Athenaeum's article on Wilkie had focused on his humble Scottish origins, emphasizing that "he was disciplined in no school and trained in no academy".¹⁹ The article continued to outline how Wilkie, an outsider, had won academic status through a combination of hard work and natural ability. On this level, Wilkie's accomplishment was an inspiration for all socially aspiring members of the middle class--if he could acquire an influential position at the Royal Academy, then so could they in the Academy, fashionable society, and even in parliament.

The progressive political connotations of Wilkie's picture were also an essential ingredient in the Whig critics' positive assessment of the image. Three Whig papers enthusiastically praised Knox's role in the Reformation, an event which corrected many abuses in the old Catholic administration. Discussion focused on the figure of Knox as a dynamic agent of reform and progress, as the Spectator recorded:

Knox...appears like a great black eagle about to swoop down on the priestly band before him; he leans over the pulpit, from which he is launching forth his denunciations, his eyes flashing fire, and his hands clenched as if he would seize upon their gilded mitres in his fanatic rage. Nothing can be finer on conception or better expressed than this figure; it is at once characteristic of the man and his sect.²⁰

The words "characteristic of the man and his sect" are particularly revealing. The Reform Crisis had provoked a renewed outbreak of religious conflict between the official Anglican church on the one hand and Roman Catholics and the pre-1828 dissenting sects (including Presbyterians in England) on the other.²¹ The Anglican church strongly supported the Tory party's opposition to reform, while Catholics and dissenters united behind the Whigs to form a powerful reform lobby. As the Reform Crisis intensified, the Anglican church became increasingly unpopular since many Anglican bishops sat in the House of Lords and actively endorsed the Lyndhurst motion to delay the Reform Bill.

A cartoon entitled Reform and Reformation (fig. 6) by John Doyle, published by McLean in November of 1831, ridiculed the Anglicans' unpopularity. Doyle depicted an angry crowd of reformers attacking what they believed was an Anglican bishop's coach, but instead it was a Catholic bishop inside who was able to claim, "I am the reform bishop not the Protestant bishop".²² In 1832 even the most orthodox Catholics were more socially progressive than the Anglican church. The subject of Presbyterian reform similarly carried strong pro-reform connotations in 1832, since after all Presbyterians were part of this active outspoken reform lobby.²³ By praising Knox's reform as characteristic of his sect, the *Spectator*, and the other papers in this group implied approval of progressive Presbyterian activities both historically and in 1832.²⁴

However, the picture's appeal was not limited to a Whig audience. Critics writing for Tory publications were also quite enthusiastic, although the subject of Presbyterian reform with its pro-Reform Bill connotations must have required a certain amount of rationalizing from Tory reviewers. The Literary Gazette nervously voiced some misgivings:

It is impossible to contemplate this pictorial record of an historical fact without being awfully sensible of the powerful effects which have, in former times, resulted from the oratory of the pulpit.²⁵

Expressing a similar anxiety, the Fraser's critic called Knox an "apostle of denunciation and terrors".²⁶ Nevertheless, these conservative critics managed to neutralize the painting's pro-reform connotations by focusing upon the passive reactions of Knox's genteel, largely aristocratic audience. The critics writing for Tory papers claimed that Wilkie had successfully moderated Knox's vehemence by surrounding the preacher with quiet, gentle, female figures who absorbed his energy (i.e., the two women and baby who almost timidly draw away from the speaker, and the Countess of Argyll and her female attendant in the centre). As the Morning Post writer noted:

The figure and action of the preacher are wrought to the highest pitch of pictorial energy, which is skilfully diffused in the lessening characters throughout the crowded congregation, until it is at length entirely lost in the repose of the unconscious babe in its mother's arms.²⁷

By confining the activity to Knox and emphasizing the refined quality of the audience, the Tory critics effectively dismantled the potentially dangerous connotations of the subject. A respectable group of aristocrats

and ecclesiastics could hardly be equated with revolutionary rabble, and furthermore, the situation could not have been very dangerous with noble ladies and children in attendance. In fact, the Tory writers seem to have believed that Knox's well-dressed, politely attentive listeners were firmly rooted to their seats and incapable of forming the angry mob which attacked a number of Catholic churches after the sermon. Despite the inaccuracy of this interpretation (Knox's sermon did incite his followers to such acts), the Tory critics' comforting illusion of calm, stability and gentility enabled them to extrapolate a different structure of values from the painting; a structure which stressed the importance of authority, respect and the maintenance of order. These were important concepts in Tory ideology and key words in Tory anti-reform rhetoric in 1832. In the eyes of these reviewers, Wilkie had depicted a religious reform movement carefully directed by its leader and the upper echelons of society; a movement which bore little resemblance to the Reform Crisis with its mass agitation from the lower and middle classes.

Although Wilkie's picture was praised by both Whigs and Tories, it held considerably less appeal for the critic of the radical Examiner. The first sentence of the

Examiner's review condemned the subject of Wilkie's picture for being "sectarian and exclusive...and therefore not so well calculated to gratify the general taste".²⁸ In contrast to its frequently negative implications in conservative language to mean the debased taste of the lowest common denominator, in this instance "general taste" connoted the positive qualities of all social classes. Instead of claiming that The Preaching of Knox represented the British nation, the Examiner pointed out that the painting had a limited and exclusive appeal. Here the critic seems to have been referring to the fact that certain religious groups, particularly Catholics, would have been unable to appreciate the image. In addition, and even more important from this writer's point of view, was the fact that both the academy and the type of high art it championed (i.e., Wilkie's painting) were beyond the reach of the working masses.

The Examiner reviewer disapproved of the "sectarian" nature of the subject for specific reasons. In contrast to Whig writers for whom the concept carried progressive connotations of the Presbyterian reform lobby, the Examiner critic found it carried retrogressive associations of religious intolerance, particularly the repression of Catholics--an issue about which the paper

was most sensitive. As discussed earlier, official toleration for Catholics had been a burning political issue throughout the late twenties. The Examiner had led the crusade for Catholic Emancipation, vigorously denouncing the Anglican establishment for resisting the measure. Evidently the Examiner critic read Wilkie's picture as an old-fashioned and dangerously narrow-minded pro-Protestant statement. Confronted with Wilkie's picture, the critic felt it necessary to explain that although Knox's religious intolerance was excusable in the sixteenth century, it was unfortunate that such views persisted in the 1830s.

...if while opposing intolerance and opposition in others, he (Knox) was himself occasionally both intolerant and oppressive, it must be remembered, that justice in matters of religion was a virtue unknown to his age, and is one, which has hardly taken root in the present.²⁹

By supporting the cause of religious toleration, the Examiner critic indicated his/her support for political reform. In 1832 the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts and Catholic Emancipation were directly linked to political reform, being considered major steps towards securing a new constitution. The radical unstamped Figaro in London published a cartoon on June 16th, 1832

entitled, The Reform Mill Grinding the Old Constitution Young, which illustrated this connection (fig. 7). The rungs on the reform ladder labelled Emancipation and Test Acts lead to a mill. An old hag personifying the corrupt old system which is supported by the "rotten" borough crutches of Sarum and Gratton falls into the mill where she is transformed into a young lady by the power of the Whig leaders, Lords Grey and Brougham, while John Bull watches the procedure with approval. The Examiner certainly supported the notion of progress that this cartoon depicted. However, the paper detected no evidence of such progressive sentiments in Wilkie's Preaching of Knox.

In addition to criticizing Wilkie's picture for its limited appeal and intolerant subject, the Examiner unhesitatingly pointed out a number of formal flaws:

Had the light been more concentrated, the figures less crowded, some vacant space left to relieve the eye and show off to advantage the different groups - had the gallery not come so forward in the picture, the effect would have been improved.³⁰

Although the reviewer praised Wilkie for attempting an historical picture, clearly she/he did not think it was very successful. Unlike the other nine critics, the Examiner felt Wilkie's talents were better employed painting popular genre subjects:

It (The Preaching of Knox) is by an artist who has obtained a name by works of a very different class, and to which, we suspect, he will in the end be mainly indebted for his deservedly high reputation.³¹

The deviant nature of the Examiner's review can be largely explained by the fact that it appeared in England's most radical legally published newspaper. Although the Examiner was produced and read mainly by middle-class utilitarians, it allied itself with the working class on many issues, including universal suffrage, for which it was often praised by the Poor Man's Guardian, one of the largest, most outspoken and influential unstamped newspapers.³² The Examiner's support for universal suffrage and the unstamped press significantly separated this paper from the more moderate Whig and Tory positions of the other nine publications reviewing the exhibition.

Support for Wilkie's picture and interest in the academy exhibition in general came from a particular sector of the press--the legal stamped newspapers and prestigious monthly journals. In the early 1830s the English press was divided into two distinct and mutually hostile categories: the legal stamped press of the establishment which paid the four penny tax on each paper sold and the illegal radical unstamped press which was vigorously prosecuted by

the government on the grounds of tax evasion.³³ However, the government's real reason for suppressing unstamped newspapers was the threat they posed to public order through their persistent attacks on property and privilege, demands for universal suffrage and cheap knowledge, and enthusiastic support for socialist and radical labour organizations.³⁴ During the Reform Crisis, unstamped newspaper sales skyrocketed, far surpassing those of the stamped press.³⁵ Predictably it was the stamped press that covered events at the fashionable Royal Academy. Readers of the unstamped penny press, members of the urban working class and lower middle-class Radicals, had little interest in an exhibition that was financially and socially beyond their means.³⁶ The unstamped press generally seems to have regarded art and literature as the contaminated property of society's elite. An advertisement, published in the Poor Man's Guardian in October of 1831, promoted the first and only unstamped cultural review, the Literary Test, by stating that this paper was designed to judge literature and the fine arts with improved independent standards that would be relevant to all social classes.³⁷ As the advertisement pointed out, their new approach was warranted since the existing reviews in the stamped press spoke only for the upper classes. The purpose of the journal was to:

...expose the cruel and oppressive fallacies which support the present outrageous system of inequality, and which it is the aim of almost all the past and present literature to establish:...up to the present time, both authors and reviewers have invariably belonged to the upper classes of society, to whose views and interests they have naturally conformed themselves, not only from inclination, but also for the sake of patronage on which they have been so dependent...but their dependence is unfortunately degenerated into the most abject slavery; and they are content to become the hireling scribes of interested parties...³⁸

Even though readers and writers of the unstamped press neither attended nor reviewed the academy exhibition, the nine establishment critics defended Wilkie's picture in response to the threat they believed this group posed. Their paranoia was based on the surrounding atmosphere of political crisis. Radical groups in the lower middle and working classes were marching out in the streets demanding the right to vote and participate in a government that had traditionally governed them--a fact which terrified Tories who firmly rejected universal suffrage. Even moderate Whigs were growing more anxious about the mounting expressions of Radical discontent during May of 1832.³⁹ For respectable academy viewers of both parties, the demands of the Radicals had frightening implications--if granted political power, surely these new groups would demand a share in the establishment's property and positions.

In terms of the academy, they would also expect to exercise aesthetic judgements which would undermine the existing form of high culture. The conservative critic of Fraser's Magazine voiced these fears:

Our modern reformers on the contrary of all classes, reverence nothing - not even themselves. No sympathy have they with aught that is generous in feeling or dignified in sentiment; and whatever is not decidedly in unison with their sympathies, that do they sullenly hate. Of our present illuminati, newspapers and caricatures constitute almost exclusively their whole of literature and of art; and these, again, are popular in proportion as they are brutal and ferocious. Unless something occurs to interpose a timely check to our present unnatural position, the million will, ere long, be the principal if not sole arbiters in all matters of taste...⁴⁰

The Fraser's reviewer demonstrates a type of cultural defence mechanism often employed to safeguard the establishment's hegemony. In the same review, popular art forms (caricatures) were attacked for their biased position, while the establishment's art at the academy was praised for transcending specific interests and representing the entire British nation. Such claims were clearly ideological because in reality academic art was equally one-sided embodying the interests of an elite that was increasingly threatened by impending changes in the balance of power.

The only paper to point out the partisan nature

of academic art was the Examiner which was critical of both Wilkie's art and the academy in general. The Examiner's readers sought more than simply their own access to the House of Commons and the Royal Academy. In fact, during the six months preceding the exhibition, the Examiner had systematically attacked the Academy, not for excluding the middle class from its previews and dinners, but rather as part of a larger oppressive power structure. In one article the Academy had been sarcastically compared to the House of Lords:

...the Royal Academy makes the painter, and not the painter the title; just as patents for peerage make fitness for legislation, and not fitness for legislation peers.⁴¹

Both institutions required sweeping alterations to make them publicly accessible to all members of society and not the property of a select few. For the Examiner critic it was neither imperative to promote Wilkie's picture, nor to protect the Academy, instead both were sharply criticized for their limited appeal and antiquated values.

The response to Wilkie's Preaching of Knox demonstrates a new level of conflict at the Royal Academy. Aside from direct criticism by the Examiner reviewer who objected to the Academy in general, and to Wilkie's shift to a more academic genre and style in particular, the

painting appeared to transcend the partisan divisions which characterized the reviewers' responses to Leslie's picture. Certainly the nine reviewers from the stamped press shared an aversion to the increasing radicalism of the lower classes and sought to protect the Academy against this threat by rallying to defend the old academic standard of history painting. However, despite the united opposition of Whigs and Tories against the agitation of the working class, their conflicting solutions to this threat led the two groups of critics to extrapolate opposite meanings from the image. For Tories, the painting justified the status quo, while for Whigs, it represented their aspirations for reform. Exposure of the critic's contradictory motives shatters the illusionary consensus. Furthermore, the differences between Whig and Radical positions indicate that even the progressive middle class was far from homogeneous.

Footnotes

¹The first comment appeared in the Times (May 8, 1832) and the second in the Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 449. Unfortunately, Wilkie's extensive use of bitumen glazes during this period has caused extensive damage to the painted surface, primarily in terms of cracking, flaking, and darkening which have almost destroyed some parts of the picture entirely. For a discussion of Wilkie's later disastrous technique, see Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, Sir David Wilkie (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), pp. 88-88, and David and Francina Irwin, Scottish Painters at Home and Abroad 1700-1900 (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 183. Whitley, Art in England, pp. 233-234 includes an account from a contemporary witness, Salomon Hart, who commented on the deterioration of the Knox panel between the time he saw it on Wilkie's easel and when it was later purchased for the National Gallery in 1871:

The colouring was brilliant and rich, and the shadows, even in the extreme depths, pure and transparent. Now alas! How changed, and how painful is the memory of that change! It can hardly be realized, save by one who saw it on the easel. The composition, the drawing, the character, of course remain, but the tone has become black and the "keeping" destroyed.

Nevertheless, in the foreground area one can still see the pains Wilkie took to render accurately the surfaces and textures of the garments, furnishings, and architectural details.

²For a discussion of the importance of this sermon, consult Jasper Ridley, John Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 324-327.

³Catholic Emancipation meant that the Roman Catholic service was no longer illegal and that Catholics could now legally inherit property, give their children a Catholic education, hold office, initiate legal action, live in London, and not be banished for their religious faith. For further details, consult Cowherd, Politics of English Dissent, chap. 2 "The Growth of Religious Liberty".

⁴It was mainly on account of Lord Liverpool's strenuous objections that Canning's Catholic Relief Bill failed to pass parliament in 1822. For a discussion of this and other of Lord Liverpool's acts opposing Catholic toleration, consult The Dictionary of National Biography under Robert Banks Jenkinson, Second Earl of Liverpool (1770 - 1828), pp. 748-752.

⁵According to the Irwins, Scottish Painters, p. 176, Wilkie first tried to interest King George IV in the Knox subject, but the King apparently disliked the subject, expressing a strong preference for something humorous. Gower mentions £1,300. as the price Peel paid for the commission, see Gower, Wilkie, p. 75.

⁶Wilkie's nationalism is discussed by the Irwins, Scottish Painters, chap. 10. Among other things, the Irwins mention Wilkie's membership in various Scottish nationalist societies (i.e. The Highland Society), and cite his willingness to help young Scottish artists secure patrons, admission to famous collections and good locations for their pictures in the Royal Academy exhibition. In 1827 at a dinner given in his honour in Rome, Wilkie gave a speech about the common purpose and identity of Scottish painters.

⁷The Life of John Knox by Thomas McCrie was first published in 1814. By 1831, a fifth edition of this biography had been released. According to various book reviews of the fifth edition, this seems to have been considered the most accurate and informative biography on Knox, by both Whig and Tory reviewers.

⁸Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 449.

⁹Times (May 8, 1832).

¹⁰Of the fourteen pictures that Wilkie had exhibited at the Royal Academy since his return from Spain in 1828, nine were Spanish and Italian subjects.

¹¹(Allan Cunningham), "The Living Artists No. IV: David Wilkie," Athenaeum (January 1, 1831), p. 11.

¹²Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 449 cited his pictures of Alfred and The Visit of George the Fourth to Holyrood as evidence of his previous failures. The former was not exhibited at the Royal Academy, while the latter met with widespread criticism at the Royal Academy exhibition of 1830.

¹³Literary Gazette (May 12, 1832), p. 298

¹⁴Gower, Wilkie, pp. 64-65

¹⁵Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 449

¹⁶Morning Herald (May 7, 1832).

¹⁷The first sketch was W. Etty's Destroying Angel which will be discussed later. Although the critics felt the work was very important, they treated it as a religious or mythological vision, rather than as a historical subject. In addition, its "unfinished" qualities ruled it out from being a serious contender to Wilkie's painting. The other sketch was C. Arnald's Battle of Naseby (no. 37), and the history - marine painting was J.M.W. Turner's The Prince of Orange, afterwards William III, landing at Torbay, November 5th, 1688 (no. 369) which was discussed with Turner's three other marine paintings Staffa, Van Tromp's Shallop and Helvoetsluys as a sea piece. Constable's Waterloo Bridge from Whitehall Stairs (no. 279), commemorating the opening of the bridge, was hardly an elevated historical theme, and George Jones' Death of Sir John Moore (no. 7) seems to have been rejected for its lack of heroic sentiments. It was only summarily mentioned by a couple of critics.

¹⁸Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 450.

¹⁹Athenaeum (January 1, 1831), p. 10.

²⁰Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 449.

²¹Under the Act of Union (1707), England and Scotland had retained their different official religions,--Anglicanism in England and Presbyterianism in Scotland. Presbyterians were considered dissenters in England until 1828.

²²Doyle drew the idea for the cartoon from an incident which is believed to have taken place near Bath when a mob attacked the coach of the Catholic Bishop of Cork, mistaking him for an Anglican bishop. See G.M. Trevelyan, ed., The Seven Years of William IV: A Reign Cartooned by John Doyle (London: Avalon Press and William Heinemann Ltd., 1952), no. XXV.

²³Although the subject of the Presbyterian Reformation simultaneously carried connotations of Catholic repression, only the conservative Morning Herald (May 7, 1832) used the opportunity to criticize the "priestly tyranny and usurpation". Instead Whig papers dwelled on the Reform theme.

²⁴For a discussion of the important role of the dissenting sects in agitating for the Reform Bill, see Cowherd, Politics, chap. 5 "The Reform Bill of 1832".

²⁵Literary Gazette (May 12, 1832), p. 298.

²⁶Fraser's Magazine (July, 1832), p. 717

²⁷Morning Post (May 5, 1832).

²⁸Examiner (June 3, 1832), p. 357.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Examiner (May 27, 1832), p. 340.. The fact that the Examiner critic accepted the high status of history painting, and admired Wilkie's genre subjects, which presented a fairly patronizing view of the lower class, seems at odds with the paper's support for the Radical cause. To some extent, this contradiction can be explained by the paper's peculiar position, as a respectable middle-class stamped newspaper, which supported equality for the working class.

³²The Examiner's support for universal suffrage was cited in an article by Henry Hetherington entitled "Mr. Carpenter and the Reform Bill," The Poor Man's Guardian (November 19, 1831).

³³The illegality of the unstamped press stemmed from the Six Acts of December 1819 which followed the confrontation at Peterloo. The Six Acts tightened up the definition of a newspaper, and required all papers to pay a four penny tax. The laws were primarily directed towards suppressing cheap radical working class tracts and newspapers.

³⁴Useful discussions on the unstamped press can be found in J. Holland Rose, "The Unstamped Press 1815 - 1836," English Historical Review 12 (October, 1897): 711-726, and in Patricia Hollis, The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³⁵Sales figures for Henry Hetherington's Poor Man's Guardian, the leading unstamped newspaper during 1832 - 33 ranged from 12,000 - 15,000 copies per issue, while figures for the stamped press are estimated as follows: the Times was approximately 10,000 copies, the Morning Herald was 7,000 copies and both the Morning Post and Morning Chronicle hovered around the 5,000 copy mark, see Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 123. Rose, English Historical, p. 721 estimates the Poor Man's Guardian's circulation to be 16,000 copies in 1833. Of course, the number of readers was much higher than the sales figures indicate. Stamped newspapers circulated in reading-rooms, coffee and public houses and private clubs, while unstamped newspapers were exchanged at working-class coffee houses east-end public houses, and read to groups at work. It is estimated that the unstamped newspapers were read twenty times for each paper sold. The figure for stamped newspapers would have been considerably less since more stamped readers could afford their own copy.

³⁶The editor of the Poor Man's Guardian, James O'Brien, estimated that about 3,000 of the paper's 12,000 - 15,000 buyers belonged to the middle class. See Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 123.

³⁷The Literary Test only put out four issues in the month of January of 1832 and then ceased publication, which suggests that literature and the arts were not top priority issues for penny press readers in 1832, see Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 322.

³⁸Poor Man's Guardian (October 8, 1831)

³⁹The Whigs' mounting anxiety during the "days of May" is discussed by Derek Fraser, "The Agitation for Parliamentary Reform," in Popular Movements 1830 - 1850, ed. J.T. Ward (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1970), pp. 46-47. The first two weeks of May saw an unprecedented number of popular demonstrations, rallies and protest meetings supporting the Bill, which attracted enormous crowds. Fraser estimates that in only one week five hundred meetings were held and nearly one thousand petitions were produced.

⁴⁰Fraser's Magazine (July, 1832), p. 711.

⁴¹Examiner (January 8, 1832), p. 20.

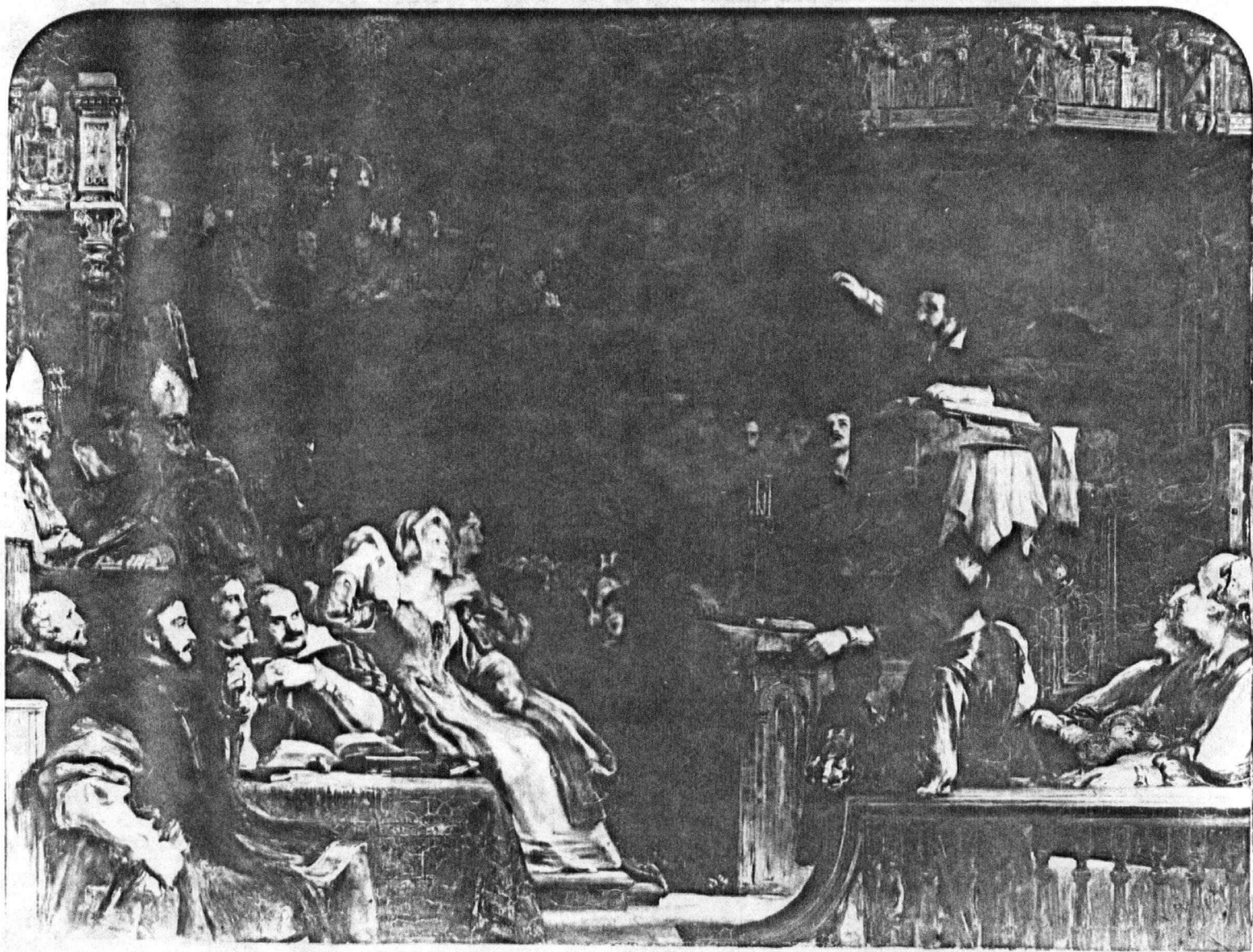
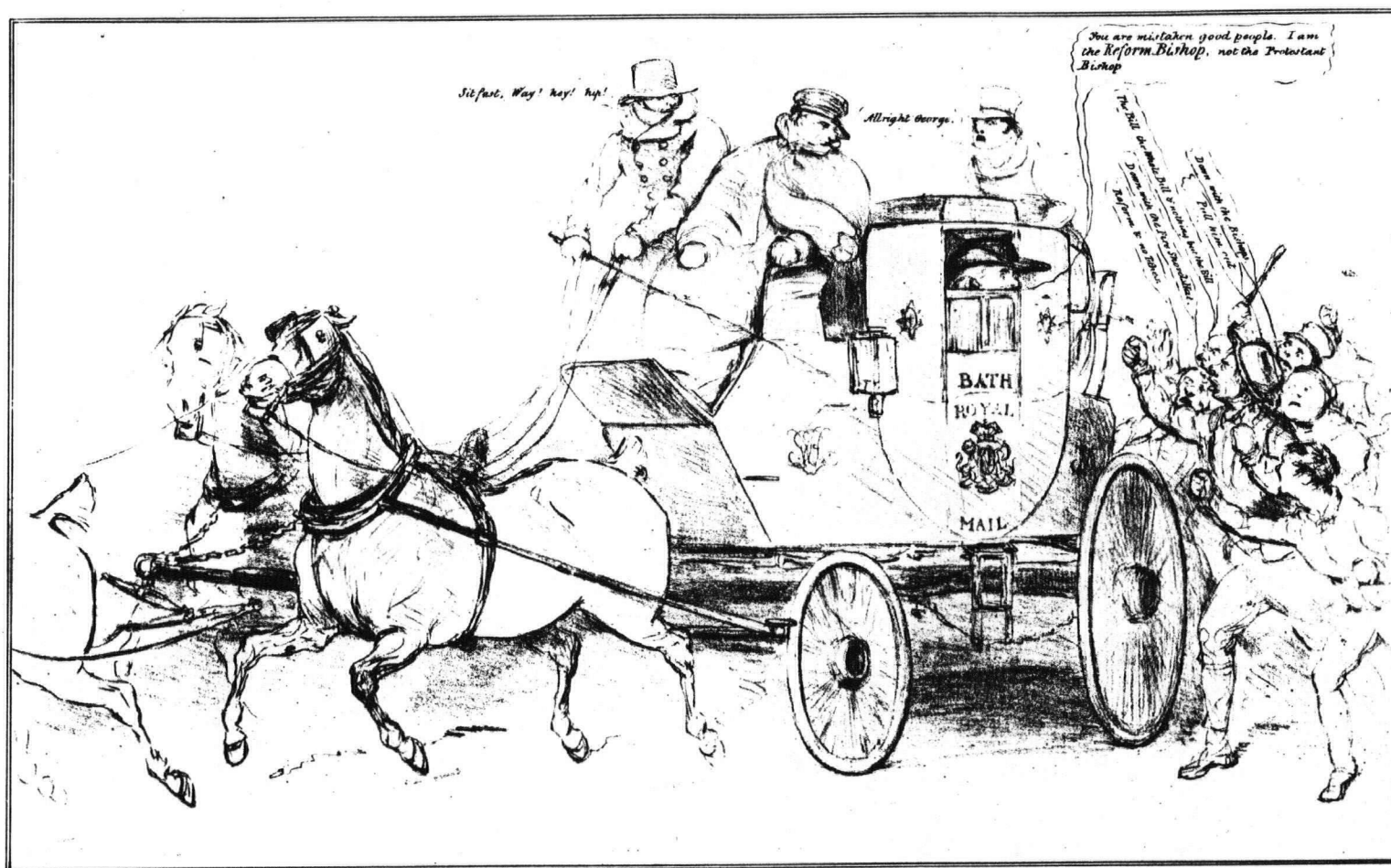


Figure 5. David Wilkie, The Preaching of Knox, 1832
Tate Gallery



REFORM AND REFORMATION

Figure 6. John Doyle, Reform and Reformation, November 18, 1831
(G. M. Trevelyan, ed. The Seven Years of William IV:
A Reign Cartooned by John Doyle. London: Avalon Press
and William Heinemann Ltd., 1952. Plate 25.)

**THE REFORM MILL FOR GRINDING THE OLD
CONSTITUTION YOUNG.**



Figure 7. Robert Seymour, The Reform Mill for Grinding the Old Constitution Young, 1832
Figaro in London (June 16, 1832), Page 115.

CHAPTER III

The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil by William Etty

Further divisions within the ranks of the progressive middle class surfaced during the discussion surrounding William Etty's three contributions to the Royal Academy exhibition, the most controversial being The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate. "A finished sketch of that class of compositions called by the Romans "Visions" not having their origin in history or poetry."¹ (fig. 8). This paper on canvas "sketch" was quite large (36 x 46 inches), and highly finished in terms of colouring and details. It had been commissioned by Henry Payne of Leicester, about whom little is known other than that he paid £130. for the picture,² and apparently gave Etty the freedom to select both the subject and style, according to a later review of the painting by the critic, William Carey (under the pen-name Ridolfi) published in the Yorkshire Gazette in November of 1832.³ Alexander Gilchrist, Etty's first biographer, noted that a preliminary sketch of the subject dated from 1822, although the final version was not started until 1831.⁴

The sketch depicts the destruction of a crowd engaged in the "vicious" activities of gambling and sexual indulgence in a Roman temple of pleasure--or vice as Etty described it.⁵ The destroying angel descends on the temple striking down its walls with bolts of lightning, while the demons of evil assist by seizing and chaining various men and women. Etty captured the moment of greatest intensity--the building is collapsing, the demons are forcibly abducting their victims, while other humans flee in fear. The prevailing panic and confusion is heightened by clouds of smoke, swirling draperies and flailing gestures. The composition is carefully constructed according to the rules of grand manner academic painting which means that Etty paid homage to the great tradition of the old masters. Although Etty's sketch was never intended for large scale execution, its curved shape, composition, and structure of the background architecture, nevertheless echo that of Raphael's Stanze frescoes in the Vatican. The three large arches springing from piers and engaged Corinthian columns particularly recall Raphael's Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple (fig. 9). Etty had seen the Stanze frescoes in 1822, the same year that he started the preliminary study for his sketch. Etty's figures, like those of his Renaissance

predecessor, were carefully arranged to both fill in the stage-like architectural space and contain the dramatic scene.⁶ The muscular proportions of the male figures, especially the destroying angel possibly derived from Etty's appreciation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling which he had also admired in 1822.⁷

Beyond the obvious importance of such Renaissance models, Etty also seems to have drawn inspiration from seventeenth-century Flemish painting. The crowded, overlapping arrangement of the figures and the diagonal lines of their gestures resemble Rubens's Last Judgement altarpieces (fig. 10)--a comparison which was drawn by contemporary reviewers.⁸ Finally one should note that the varied types and poses of Etty's figures clearly belonged to the academic practice of life-drawing and copying from Antiquity. Etty included several quotations from classical sculpture which some of the exhibition reviewers recognized. The male head in the lower left was modelled on the Laocoon, the seated male in the centre turned away from the spectator recalls the Belvedere torso, and several other figures were believed to have been inspired by metopes from the Elgin Marbles, particularly the demon striding off with a fainting woman thrown over his shoulder.⁹

Etty's apocalyptic vision was part of a widespread interest in such themes during the early 1830s. Paintings and engravings by John Martin, essays by Thomas Carlyle and sermons by Henry Irving which prophesied the end of the world attracted huge followings.¹⁰ The great controversies surrounding Catholic Emancipation, the July Revolution in France and the Great Reform Bill made Whigs, Tories and Radicals feel as though they were standing on the brink of a new social order--for better or worse. Although Etty's sketch generally projected a timely theme of chaos and destruction, it also carried rather more specific connotations for different groups, not all of whom liked the image.

Conservative critics heartily approved of Etty's vision of super-human vengeance. For them it aptly illustrated their own gloomy belief that England, like Etty's Roman scene, was doomed to ruin. This theme of national decline was discussed at great length in an anonymous Tory article on the subversion of ancient governments which appeared in the Quarterly Review in July of 1831. The article basically argued that "...the fatal blow to the liberties of both Athens and Rome was dealt through the violated rights of the privileged orders."¹¹ Only divine

intervention could turn back the advancing tidal wave of democracy that threatened to engulf them. In June of 1831, another Tory article in Blackwood's Magazine articulated these concerns:

...By whatever means the infection of democratical frenzy had been communicated, we certainly have caught it: - the poison rushes through the veins of the country producing like effects of vast and intemperate folly; and it is only in the providence of God to say where it shall have an end, and what shall bring back the hearts and minds of this people to a healthful state, if indeed, that can be hoped at all, without a fearful interval of scourging and suffering.¹²

The writer discussed the impending catastrophe which was beyond human control, capable of resolution only by the "providence of God". She/he evidently believed that the "vast and intemperate" folly of the reformers might well invoke divine retribution.

The punishment of such intemperance was a key factor underlying the Tories' support for Etty's picture. During the early nineteenth century sexual morality was widely believed to be both a cause and a consequence of revolution. Many writers dwelt upon the sexual and social excesses of the French Revolution, which were considered inextricably connected.¹³ During the Reform Crisis, the Tories exploited this idea, charging the Whigs and other reformers with

immorality. By tampering with the constitution and "natural" social order, they claimed the Whigs were further endangering the already precarious moral fabric of society.

All of the Tory critics praised Etty for teaching a fine moral lesson. The picture vindicated their conservatism--pointing out that the roads of vice, intemperance, and Whiggism inevitably led to destruction. The Literary Gazette's review opened with a Biblical quotation from Mark 3:25: "'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' Satan is here destroying his own work; an operation in which we heartily wish him success."¹⁴ The selection of this quotation seems to be a thinly veiled comment on the crisis within English society. During this period, the word "divided" was almost invariably associated with the Reform Controversy--in fact, so much so, that Etty, a worried Tory, refused to use the word, explaining why in a letter to a friend dated August 16, 1831. Discussing his travels, Etty wrote:

..By which means, as I was last week at Brighton, at one extremity of our dear Island, I shall cut through it - though not divide it, - from one end to the other. It is in fact divided enough. I am like yourself, sick of the hackneyed phrase REFORM; fear it will, like the Whigs, never do much good for us.¹⁵

Etty's own conservatism further suggests that his sketch may well have been designed to function in the way that Tory critics read it.¹⁶

The form of Etty's academic exercise appealed to the Tory critics as much as his moral message. They particularly admired his vigorous drawing, harmonious colouring and varied poses of the figures. The Morning Post considered Etty "the best pictorial anatomist of the age" and highly approved of the fact that he had "...drawn largely upon the classical stores of his mind;"¹⁷ the Literary Gazette compared him to Michelangelo, and William Carey discussed the classical sources for Etty's figures at considerable length.¹⁸ As supporters of the Academy and its teaching techniques, these critics appreciated Etty's classical quotations and traditional composition. They also greatly relished his sensual depictions of the nude female victims. The Literary Gazette happily observed that their "flesh is painted with a fulness and luxuriance of pencil".¹⁹ William Carey lingered over the special charms of the women's "round voluptuous forms and tender pearly colouring".²⁰ For him the most appealing figure was that of the passive fainting female flung over the shoulder of her aggressive abductor. Evidently such vicarious sexual pleasures were still possible within the larger moral meaning of the work.

The apparent contradiction in the moral stance of these critics can be explained by their adherence to the ethical code of the leisure class for which they wrote. While the critics firmly approved of Etty's theme of the punishment of widespread public immorality and the threat it posed to the social order, they did not object to the private gratification of one's desires. This distinction between public and private sexual codes was especially crucial to the aristocracy's standard of acceptable behaviour in the early 1830s. Mounting pressure for moral reform had primarily originated in the middle class who objected to what they perceived as the open moral laxity and degenerate behavior of the aristocracy on one hand, and as the bestial sexuality of the working class on the other.²¹ While most middle-class morality movements were directed against the "smut" of the poor, pressure was also exerted upon the aristocracy urging them to clean up their public behaviour and set a good example for their social inferiors.²² As the middle class progressively secured greater economic and political power, the aristocracy became increasingly willing to conform outwardly to more stringent middle-class sexual codes. However, in the 1830s, this conformity was still at an early, fairly superficial stage. The moral laxity of the Regency era was not

yet forgotten, and the propriety of the Victorian court not yet established.²³ During this period of transition, Tory reviewers writing for elite papers did not see a contradiction between enjoying Etty's erotic figures and approving of his moral condemnation of sexual indulgence. While the public, morally conformist and politically charged interpretation received more emphasis, the presence of such arousing imagery was something that conservative, pro-aristocratic readers could still openly appreciate.

However, the explicit erotic content of Etty's picture was precisely what the Whig Spectator and radical Examiner critics could not tolerate. They found all three of Etty's exhibition entries morally offensive. Writing for a middle-class readership that included many dissenters and moral reformers, these critics were quick to condemn Etty's public display of lust and naked flesh, which in the context of the Royal Academy must have carried connotations of aristocratic decadence. Instead of being reassuring, Etty's highly academic approach to such a scandalous scene must have magnified the critics' doubts about the existing structure of the Academy and its teaching methods. The Spectator directed much of its hostility towards Youth on the Prow (fig. 12) concluding that, "It is physical voluptuousness of not the most fascinating kind."²⁴ This

verdict was extended to The Destroying Angel which the same critic dismissed with the comment, "...as a whole we cannot appreciate it highly".²⁵ The Examiner was more explicit:

It is called a "vision", and is suggested, we suppose by Rubens's "Fall of the Damned", or one of Breughell's frightful fancies. Such subjects are not in accordance with the feelings of the present age. Mr. Etty should not treat the fair sex in this harsh and wanton manner.²⁶

Evidently these critics found the women's round voluptuous forms so indecent that they did not even consider the possibility that the sketch also carried a larger moral meaning. This is significant because the fall of Rome was an ideological construct employed by both Tories and Whigs to support their position on the reform question. While the Tories ascribed Rome's fall to the violated rights of the patricians, the Whigs reversed the argument, claiming that the unfair oppression of the plebeians had led to numerous uprisings and internal instability.²⁷ However, in this specific instance, Etty's highly academic and erotic forms seem to have prevented the Examiner and Spectator critics from imposing a Whig interpretation on the picture which could have just as logically been read as the divine punishment of Tory excesses. Instead Whig critics flatly rejected it as the corrupt property of the aristocracy.

The displeasure of the Examiner critic was also revealed by the writer's claim that Etty's "vision" had been drawn from Ruben's "Fall of the Damned". Although the suggestion was quite credible since Etty's rich colouring, violent activity and heavily proportioned figures and demons, do resemble Rubens's Last Judgments the comparison was primarily intended to be insulting. Throughout the twenties and thirties, Rubens's depictions of women seem to have been considered vulgar by a wide range of critics. On one occasion a Tory critic from Blackwood's Magazine had found Rubens's women typically fat and overfed,²⁸ while other articles in the Examiner had detected a consistent coarseness.²⁹

There also seems to have been a general critical consensus that the figures of classical and Renaissance artists were suitably chaste. Therefore, in the case of Etty's picture, the disagreement over the morality of his figures appears to have been translated into an argument over stylistic sources: the Examiner claimed that the artist had used immoral northern models, while the Tories emphasized that he had selected respectable Italian prototypes. In this instance, all of the critics (including the Examiner writer) seem to have agreed on the basic standards of assessment which reveals an underlying thread of

continuity among critics writing for the stamped press. However, they clearly applied these standards in a partisan way.

Further proof of this lies in the judgement of the moderate upper-middle class Whig critics of the Athenaeum and the Times who straddled the Tory and more extreme Whig positions. Fully prepared to praise Etty's grand manner, academic style which they proudly recognized, these critics were clearly uncomfortable with the picture's content which they discussed in a vague and rather confused fashion. The two critics realized that Etty was attempting to illustrate what the Athenaeum called "a great moral lesson", but they claimed his message was incomprehensible.³⁰ The Athenaeum did not understand why the demons of evil were punishing the vicious and intemperate instead of encouraging them while the Times was confused by Etty's term "vision" and his "wild unmeaning subject". Although their final verdict was glossed over with compliments on Etty's drawing skills, both writers concluded that the picture would not appeal to their readers. It is significant that neither reviewer explained what was unappealing about the picture nor discussed the presence of Etty's contentious sensual nudes. These constraints on their discourse merit further investigation.

Throughout the twenties and thirties the nudity in Etty's painting posed a recurring moral dilemma for many of his upper middle-class reviewers. Were Etty's works decent? Papers had great difficulty establishing consistent guidelines, as demonstrated by two reviews of Youth on the Prow published by the Times. In 1822 the Times commented on a sketch of the work exhibited at the British Institution:

We take this opportunity of advising Mr Etty... not to be seduced into a style which can gratify only the most vicious taste. Naked figures when painted with the purity of Raphael may be endured; but nakedness without purity is offensive and indecent, and in Mr. Etty's canvas is mere dirty flesh.³¹

Yet by 1832 when the finished painting was exhibited at Royal Academy, the Times detected nothing offensive and vaguely praised its "rich beauty" and "graceful fancy", although again the critic found the subject incomprehensible. In this instance the ten-year interval and likelihood of different critics do not totally account for the shift. Throughout this period the Times and other papers were frequently changing their minds. In fact, in the Times review of the Royal Academy exhibition of 1830, Etty's four contributions were highly praised in the May preview notice but condemned in the more detailed review of July:

We have often bestowed the most unqualified praise upon Mr. Etty; indeed, we admire his devotion to art, and his attainments in colour and execution; but he must pay more attention to design, and purify his feelings for the naked form,....³²

Apparently many upper-middle-class critics seem to have been torn by the conflicting desire to defend their rigid moral standards without appearing aesthetically ill-informed or gauche. The Fraser's critic, writing in July of 1832, pointed out the difficulties involved in criticizing Etty's work:

Etty has the art of insinuating the loosest ideas without actually alarming modesty, - of being impure without being gross, - nay; without laying himself open to the charge of indelicacy, - dexterously managing so as to keep in reserve a retort of "prudery", "squeamishness" against his censors.³³

The charges of "prudery" and "squeamishness" seem to have deterred the Times and the Athenaeum from raising any moral issues, however uncomfortable they might have been with Etty's images. Their nebulous terms of praise and confused treatment of the subject suggest attempts to avoid the naked sexual facts. Any discussion of Etty's nudes would have been hopelessly awkward for these upper-middle-class critics. Unlike their Tory counterparts they did not even mention, let alone enjoy Etty's nude women. On one

hand, the more stringent middle-class morality of their readers made it impossible to approve openly of such figures, and yet, on the other hand, their readers' keen aspirations to be accepted by the aristocratic elite that dominated the Academy made it equally undesirable to denounce directly the values of their social superiors. Hence the critics of the Times and the Athenaeum refused to commit themselves to either position and remained uncomfortably silent.

It is worth noting that the two most evasive Whig critics wrote for papers which catered to the upper echelons of the middle class and were politically more moderate than the other Whig publications reviewing the exhibition.³⁴ Vigorously supporting reforms for greater middle-class access to the government and institutions like the Royal Academy, this upper sector of the middle class was nevertheless more inclined to compromise with the status quo on issues that did not directly thwart their ambitions. After criticizing Etty's lack of purity in 1830, the Times seems to have consistently found his paintings more respectable. Since other more progressive papers continued to question Etty's morality, this shift seems to be largely explained by the Times' growing aesthetic and political conservatism. After the passage of the Reform Bill, the Times shifted its allegiance back to the Tory party in 1834.³⁵

The emerging divisions within the ranks of the middle class over Etty's pictures reveals that the conflict within the Academy was more complicated than indicated by the simple Whig versus Tory split over Leslie's portrait of the Grosvenors, and the conflicting political interpretations of Wilkie's picture of Knox. Even during the height of the Reform Crisis, a growing rapprochement between aristocratic and haute bourgeois values was occurring. Mounting Radical working-class pressure was driving their interests together, whether or not the two groups realized it. While aristocrats like the Grosvenors were adopting various middle-class values to reinforce their threatened social position, moderate Whig critics were increasingly prepared to adapt to the aesthetic codes of the ruling elite in order to prove their suitability for political and social promotion. However, more extreme Whigs and Radicals from the lower ranks of the middle class were clearly less conciliatory.

Footnotes

¹Etty's two other paintings in the exhibition were no. 196 Youth on the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm and no. 360 Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake, see Appendix B.

²Between the Februaries of 1832 and 1833, three letters were exchanged between Payne and Etty concerning the payment, shipment, and framing of the picture which was intended for Payne's drawing-room. Unfortunately the letters shed little light on the reasons motivating Payne's purchase. These letters are in the North Yorkshire County Library. Their exact dates are February 16, 1832, August 4, 1832, and February 8, 1833. They are cited by Dennis Farr, William Etty (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 132.

³William Carey, a Conservative art critic who wrote for various journals (i.e. the Literary Gazette and the New Monthly Magazine), personally championed the genius of William Etty, claiming that he had been the first to recognize the artist. Responding to what he considered unfair criticisms of this picture in the exhibition reviews he wrote three letters to the editor of the Yorkshire Gazette in November of 1832 defending the painting under the pen name Ridolfi.

⁴Alexander Gilchrist, Life of William Etty R.A. (London: David Bogue, 1955), p. 345.

⁵According to Farr, Etty, p. 132, Etty had called the picture The Destruction of the Temple of Vice, although it was not listed by this title in the Royal Academy catalogue.

⁶Note the repoussoir functions of the demon seizing a woman in the lower right and the fallen couple in the left, and the placement of various figures facing inwards including a demon and three raised statues.

⁷This was Etty's first trip to Rome and he was especially enthusiastic about the work of Raphael and Michelangelo which he praised in a letter to his brother. Although the sketch was not completed until 1832, it seems to retain Etty's enthusiasm for the works of these painters, see Farr, Etty, p. 36.

⁸Examiner (June 10, 1832), p. 373.

⁹Note the similarities between Etty's demon and South Metope VII of the Elgin Collection (fig. 11). William Carey was particularly interested in identifying the classical sources for Etty's figures.

¹⁰For a discussion of these apocalyptic themes see Patrick Brantlinger, The Spirit of Reform (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1977), chap. 1 "The Literature of the 1830s".

¹¹Anon., "Outlines of History: Subversion of Ancient Governments", Quarterly Review 45 (July 1831), p. 469.

¹²Anon., "Letter from the Whig-Hater on the Late Elections," Blackwood's Magazine 29 (June 1831), p. 1012.

¹³Edward Bristow, Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain Since 1700 (London: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1977), p. 40. Bristow has studied the development of a counter-revolutionary ideology among the founders of the Vice Society (i.e. William Wilberforce, the Bowdlers, Hannah More and Zachary Macaulay), an organization which persecuted all forms of immorality from pornography to prostitution throughout the twenties and thirties. Although much of the impetus for moral reform came from middle-class Whigs and dissenters, the majority of morality groups were not directly connected to a particular political party.

¹⁴Literary Gazette (May 19, 1832), p. 314.

¹⁵The italics and capitalization are part of the original letter of which an excerpt is published in Gilchrist, Etty, p. 325.

¹⁶Farr, Etty, pp. 59-60, discusses Etty's conservative social stance.

¹⁷Morning Post (June 9, 1832).

¹⁸Literary Gazette (May 19, 1832), p. 314, and Ridolfi (William Carey), "Fine Arts Letter 3," Yorkshire Gazette (November 17, 1832).

¹⁹Literary Gazette (May 19, 1832), p. 314.

²⁰Ridolfi (William Carey), "Fine Arts Letter 2," Yorkshire Gazette (November 10, 1832).

²¹For a discussion of the middle class' objection to the sexual codes of both the aristocracy and the working class, consult Ronald Pearsall, The Worm in the Bud: The World of Victorian Sexuality (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), pp. xi-xvii and chaps. 1-2.

²²The precedents for this type of pressure were the writings of Hannah More, Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society (1788) and Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World (1791) which continued to be very popular in moralistic circles throughout the early nineteenth century.

²³Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1976), pp. 168-179. He discusses this transitional period and the play of values between the increasingly powerful middle class and the old aristocracy.

²⁴Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 450.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Examiner (June 10, 1832), p. 373.

²⁷The Whig interpretation of this event played an important role in the assessment of J.M.W. Turner's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy which will be discussed later.

²⁸"Ignoramus on the Fine Arts," Blackwood's Magazine (March, 1831), p. 521. Despite the title, the article was intended to be serious.

²⁹"Review of Rubens' Chapeau de Paille," Examiner (March 16, 1832), p. 186.

³⁰It is also quite likely that they did not want to understand Etty's politically conservative statement.

³¹"Review of the British Institution," Times (January 29, 1822).

³²Times (May 1, May 4, and July 12, 1830).

³³Fraser's Magazine (July 1832), p. 719.

³⁴The Morning Chronicle, Spectator and Examiner were all edited by Benthamite utilitarians who were more progressive than the Whigs. However, The Examiner was by far the most radical. See Bourne, English Newspapers, 2, pp. 38-51.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 79-81.



Figure 8. William Etty, The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil, 1832
Manchester City Art Gallery
(Dennis Farr, William Etty. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
Limited, 1958. Plate 44.)

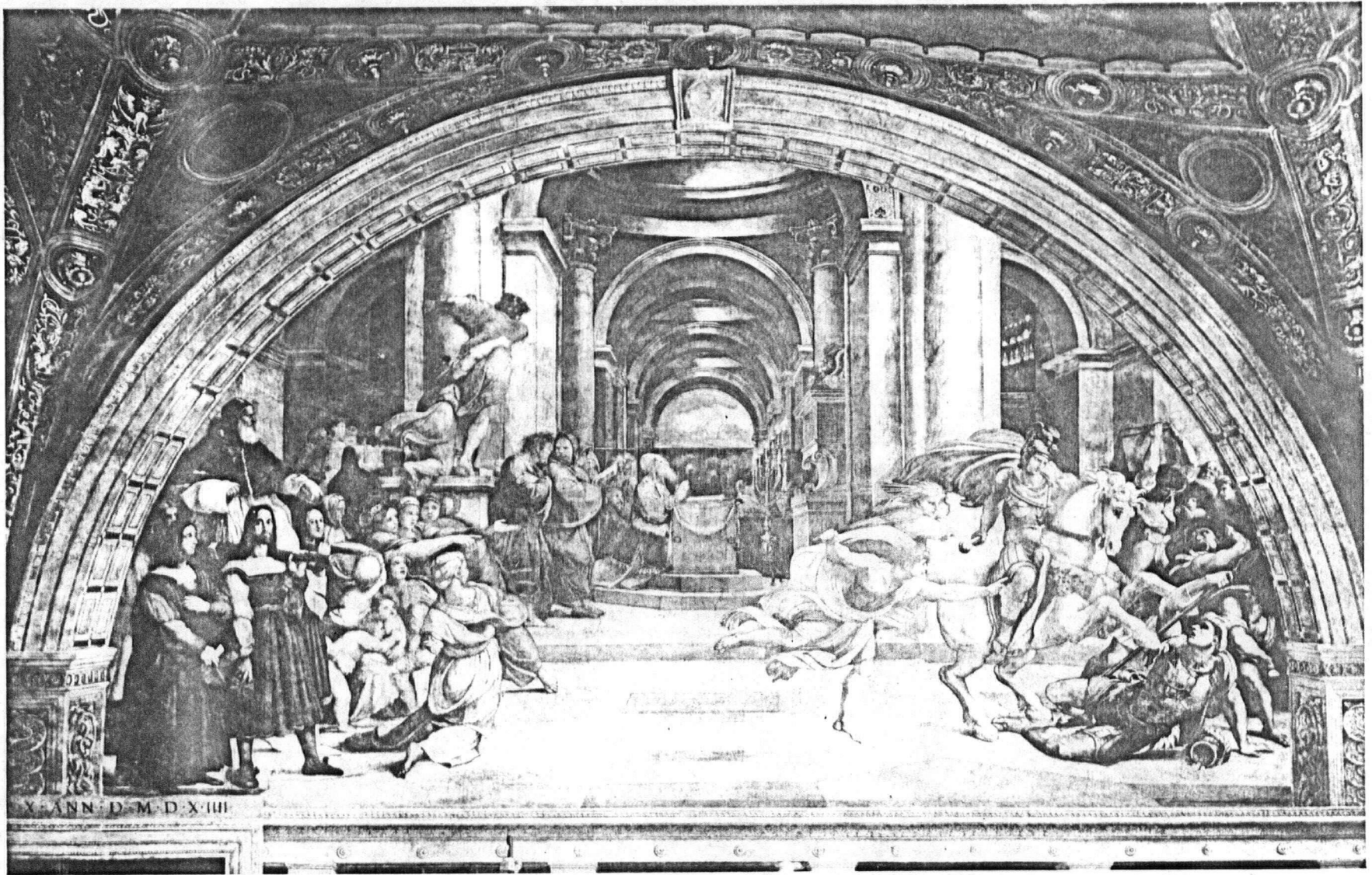


Figure 9. Raphael, The Expulsion of Heliodorus, c.1511-1514
 Vatican, Stanza d'Elidoro
 (Luitpold Dussler. Raphael. London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1971. Plate 135.)



Figure 10. P. P. Rubens, The Great Last Judgment, 1615-1616
 Munich, Alte Pinakothek
 (P. P. Rubens; des Meisters Gemälde.
 Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt,
 n.d. Page 118.)



Fig. 1. South Metope VII (Elgin Collection).



Fig. 2. "Carrey's" Drawing of South Metope VII.

Figure 11. South Metope VII
 Elgin Collection, British Museum
 (Jacob Rothenburg. "Descensus Ad Terram":
The Acquisition and Reception of the Elgin
Marbles. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.,
 1977. Plate 10.)

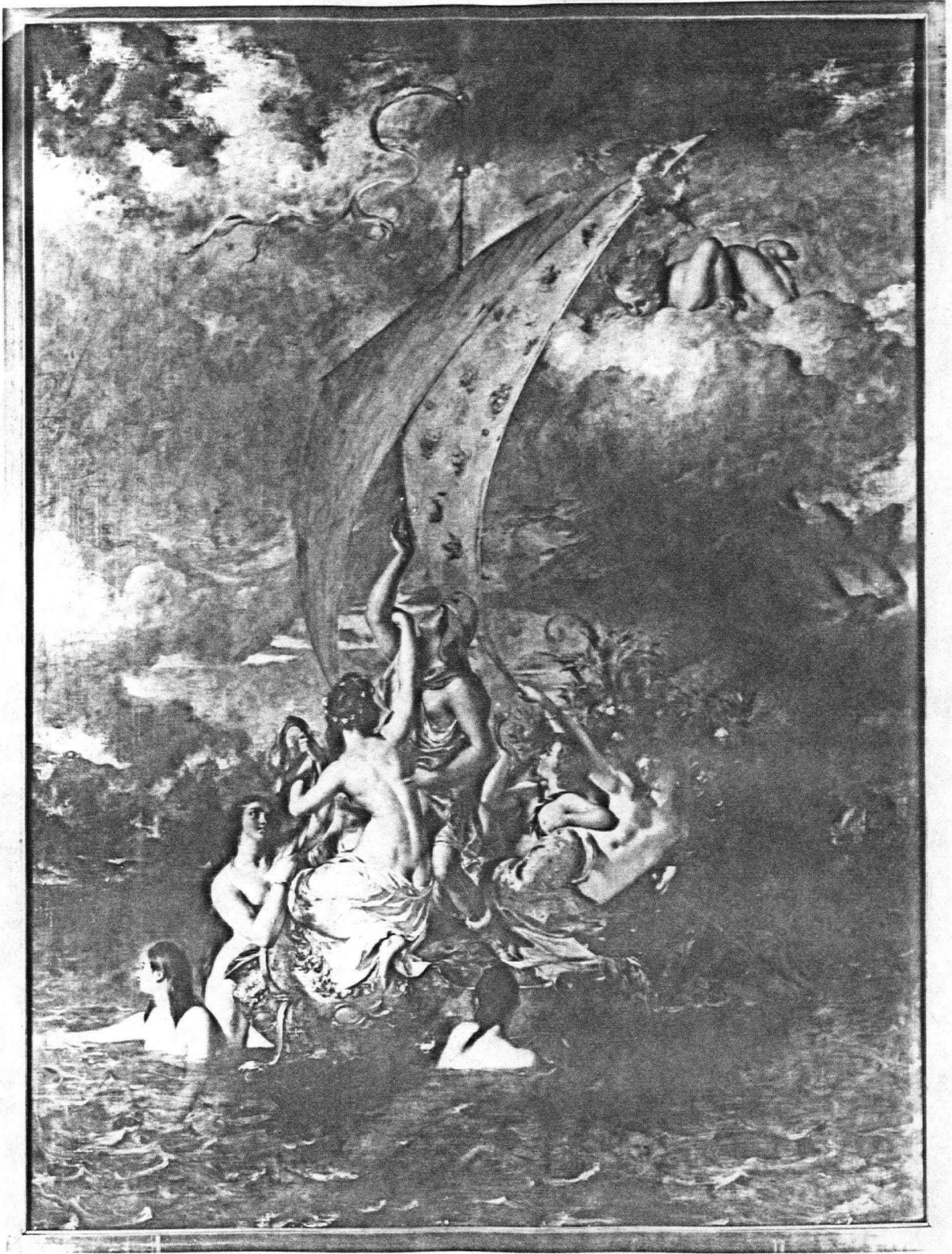


Figure 12. William Etty, Youth on the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm, 1832
Tate Gallery

CHAPTER IV

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy by J.M.W. Turner

The Whigs' answer to the conservative images by Leslie and Etty was J.M.W. Turner's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy (fig. 13), a landscape, which attracted almost as much attention as David Wilkie's Preaching of Knox. The Spectator cautioned its readers to visit the exhibition when it opened at eight o'clock in the morning, in order to avoid the huge crowds which gathered around these two paintings between the hours of eleven and five.¹ Italy was Turner's largest (56 x 97½ inches) and most prominently displayed exhibition entry.² The painting's title referred to Byron's poem, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage of 1818, in which the poet meditated upon the beauties of the Italian countryside. Turner also added an excerpt from the twenty-sixth stanza of Canto IV to the exhibition catalogue:

and now, fair Italy!
 Thou art the garden of the world.
 Even in thy desert what is like to thee?
 Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
 More rich than other climes' fertility:
 Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
 With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.³

According to some later notes by Ruskin, the painting was based on Turner's recollections of the ruins near Narni.⁴

However, if this was the case, Turner did not identify the site for his viewers either through the title or depiction of specific landmarks. Instead he presented an idealized variation of a landscape based upon a well-known Claudean theme.

Paintings by Claude had been prized by English grand tourists and art collectors since the beginning of the eighteenth century. His compositions were valued as ideal representations of the order and stability underlying the seemingly chaotic forces of nature.⁵ Order was imposed on nature through a series of artistic devices (i.e. framing trees, measurable distances, harmonious colouring). Time was suspended in a tranquil arcadia where people led simple pastoral lives. The introduction of figures from ancient history or mythology and the ruins of specific monuments provided intellectual stimulation for the connoisseur who could identify them. The Royal Academy had long upheld this type of ideal Italianate landscape as the highest form of landscape painting, as opposed to the more realistic representations of the Dutch school.⁶

Turner recorded his own admiration for Claude in his lectures as Professor of Perspective, and even more importantly through a number of canvases in which he deliberately set out to rival the Italian old master.⁷ His painting of Italy can be compared to Claude's Landscape with the Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (fig. 14) from which he probably derived the figures in the foreground. Despite some minor alterations by Turner, there are striking similarities between the dancing couples and arrangement of the onlookers into three seated groups and two standing figures.⁸ In both paintings baskets of food, jugs and musical instruments indicate that the figures are leisurely enjoying a picnic and musical entertainment. Certainly Turner and his academy public would have been familiar with this particular painting by Claude since it was part of the Angerstein Collection which had been purchased for the National Gallery in 1824.⁹

On a more general level, the organization of Turner's landscape continues to utilize the basic Claudean structure. A broad vista extends from a low foreground across an undulating middleground to a far distant mountain range. A calm curving river with vaulted Roman ruins along its hilly left bank unifies the landscape by drawing the viewer's attention back towards the glowing horizon. The

receding frames of landscape and architecture are further tied together by the large pine tree and medieval bridge. In the lower left the detailed treatment of the ground vegetation and toppled classical vase emphasize the presence of life among the decaying ruins of Antiquity, a device frequently used by Claude. Furthermore, Turner has captured the tranquil evening atmosphere and pervasive golden light of sunset which he and other English connoisseurs particularly associated with the Roman painter.¹⁰

In spite of these unmistakable similarities, Turner's departures from the Claudean tradition are equally significant. One of the most important differences is his diffused handling of light. Although Turner retains the convention of overlapping sections of light and shade, his shadows are more realistic, being fragmented by stray shafts of sunlight which break down and blur surfaces and outlines. Less clearly articulated receding frames and the absence of framing trees challenge the Claudean sense of order and stability. In Turner's landscape a boundless panorama unfolds before the viewer.

Another significant alteration is Turner's extensive use of bright colours--particularly the glowing reds and yellows in the landscape. It should be noted that

this vivid colour scheme was even more conspicuous in the thirties than it is at present.¹¹ In Italy warm and cool colours are played off against one another in a shifting relationship--as one comes forward, the other recedes. This perpetual movement, often on the same plane, further upsets Claude's clearly delineated system of perspective which relied upon gradually cooling colour transitions to indicate increasing distance (i.e. from a brown foreground to a green middleground ending in a blue horizon). Turner's bright colours also underline his departure from the subdued tonalities of old master paintings. In fact, Turner takes considerable pains to emphasize that Italy is a modern painting situated in the nineteenth century rather than in a timeless arcadia. The most visible temporal indicator is the modern clothing of the foreground figures, while further in the distance, the white-washed buildings of a contemporary village peek out behind the ruins on the left bank.

The critical reception of Turner's Italy overturned the pattern of academy criticism that has been traced up to this point: in this instance Whig reviewers enthusiastically hailed the picture, while their Tory counterparts found much to criticize. An especially revealing contrast can be drawn between the responses to Turner's Italy and to

Etty's Destroying Angel, both of which dealt with the fall of Rome, but which were championed by opposing political factors. As discussed in connection with Etty's picture, the destruction of empires theme was an ideological construct used by both parties during the Reform Crisis. While Etty's picture seems to have held conservative associations, Turner's work appears to have carried a number of aesthetically and politically progressive connotations.

It seems that these progressive connotations were even powerful enough to override the Whig critics' strong distaste for Turner's personality.¹² Their chief objections were directed towards his excessive prices (which they could not afford) and his complete lack of social graces (which offended their acute sense of decorum). The Morning Chronicle believed that "great patronage" and inflated prices were responsible for corrupting Turner's talent:

He (Turner) is a tubby little man, and has every mark of feeding well, and "sleeps o'nights". Like Vandyke, the progress of his earlier stages was wonderful but pecuniary rewards made him wanton and careless....Great patronage never improved a painter.¹³

The critic resented the fact that both Turner and his wealthy patrons had little regard for public (i.e middle-class) taste. Yet although Turner was criticized for

painting for the aristocracy and the wealthy, his appearance and behaviour were considered embarrassingly plebeian. Turner's working-class London background jarred with the middle-class perception of high art. In an article on the artist published in April of 1831, the Athenaeum complained:

...we never heard one (Turner) who floundered so sadly in conversation. He is altogether deficient in courtesy of address; and the little he ventures to do or say in the councils of the Royal Academy, is recommended by no grace either natural or acquired.¹⁴

However, in this instance the middle class' basic objection to Turner's personality does not seem to have dampened their enthusiasm for his picture.

The Whig critics of the Athenaeum, Morning Chronicle and Spectator were particularly enthusiastic about the work's natural colouring, expansive view and poetic qualities. The Spectator carefully instructed its readers how to view the canvas in order to experience the maximum poetic effect:

Let the reader first go close up to the Italy of Turner, and look at the way in which it is painted; and then, turning his back (as one does sometimes to the sun) till he reaches the middle of the room, look round at the streaky, scrambled, unintelligible chaos of colour, and see what a scene has been conjured up before him as if by magic. Let him dwell upon it till the ruddy hues begin to

burn and become brilliant with light, and the retiring parts of the picture appear to come forward, so that the perfect keeping of the whole has mellowed its refulgent tone into one rich harmonious whole...He will feel that it is the poetry of art and nature combined - that it bears the same relation to the real scene as does Byron's description.¹⁵

The Spectator critic clearly felt Turner's innovative colouring and handling of light were particular strengths that admirably captured Byron's description. For this writer, the shifting relationship between foreground and background and warm and cool tones poetically transformed Turner's "chaos of colour" into a beautiful landscape. Like nature, Turner's transitory scene was in a perpetual state of motion. The Spectator especially admired the way the artist had captured nature's fleeting effects, singling out the sunlight reflecting from the buildings and the mist hovering over the mountain-tops.

The Whig reviewers appreciated the fact that Turner's depiction of nature belonged to the modern world of the nineteenth century. The Spectator stated that an appreciation of Turner's truth and beauty called for the same sensibility that Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony (1809) and Haydn's Creation (1801) required from their listeners.

The Morning Chronicle compared Turner to Paganini who astounded London audiences during the early 1830s with his flashy technical virtuosity and incredibly emotional violin performances. "He (Turner) is a sort of Paganini, and performs wonders on a single string--is as astonishing with his chrome, as Paganini is with his chromatics."¹⁶ These comparisons to leading contemporary musical composers and performers were used to assert both Turner's genius and modernity.

Certainly one of the most important aspects of the notion of modernity was Turner's connection with Byron. The fact that Turner's Italy was seen through the eyes of Childe Harold was a crucial factor in the Whigs' favourable assessment of the image. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage was one of the poet's most intense personal statements of his belief in social and political freedom. Although the first two cantos described the journey of Childe Harold, a thinly disguised Byronic surrogate, by the third canto, Byron had abandoned this ruse and recorded his own sentiments directly. During this canto, Byron made his well-known defence of Napoleon whom the poet saw challenging the old ruling dynasties and oppressive governments of Europe. The fourth canto, from which Turner excerpted the lines for his picture, contained reflections

on the ruined empires of Venice and Rome. Recalling Italy's glorious past, Byron pointed out that the decay of empires was inevitably connected to a corresponding loss of freedom:

There is the moral of all human tales;
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First Freedom, and then Glory - when that fails,
Wealth, vice, corruption, - barbarism at last.¹⁷

Sentiments like these made Byron's poetry very popular in English Whig circles. Although many leading Tories admired the form of his poetry, they invariably found its content disturbing.¹⁸ Byron, who was connected with the elite Whig leadership of the Holland House circle, assumed his seat in the House of Lords as part of the Whig opposition in 1809. Although he was never a dedicated politician, he firmly supported a range of progressive measures including Catholic Emancipation and early proposals for parliamentary reform.¹⁹ After leaving England, Byron's involvement first with the Carbonari, a militant Italian nationalist movement for a united independent Italy, and finally his support for the Greek resistance to the Turks, solidified his radical reputation. This reputation steadily grew after his death in Greece at Missolonghi in 1824. During the next decade mounting public interest in the poet stimulated numerous biographies and collected anthologies of his work.²⁰

Turner provided landscape illustrations for three such editions of Byron's works, the most important being his seventeen vignettes for the fourteen volume series by Thomas Moore entitled The Works of Lord Byron: with his Letter and Journals, and his Life which was published by Murray from 1832 - 1843.²¹ Nor surprisingly a copy of this work was included in Turner's library.²² However, Turner's apparent familiarity with Byron's poetry, and the fact that he exhibited several large oil paintings on Byronic themes suggests that the painter's interest was more than that of a professional illustrator. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy was the second of Turner's six oil paintings from this poem shown at the Royal Academy between 1818 and 1844.²³ There can be little doubt that Turner had a free hand in executing Italy which was neither commissioned nor ever sold.²⁴ In contrast to the fairly straightforward illustrations of specific topographical views, Turner's large oils were clearly intended to convey more complex meanings.

The fact that Turner chose to exhibit a Byronic subject with strong Whig connotations becomes significant in the context of the surrounding political debate in 1832. The picture greatly appealed to Whig supporters who saw themselves as the proponents of liberty, arguing that the creation of a strong and free middle class would safeguard

the interests of the British Empire. Opposing aristocratic tyranny, Whig politicians urged the Tory opposition to consider the historic consequences of refusing reform. In a speech in the House of Commons on March 2, 1831, Thomas Macaulay defended the principles of the Reform Bill by threatening the Tories with the lesson of Rome:

All history is full of revolutions produced by causes similar to those which are now operating in England. A portion of the community which has been of no account expands and becomes strong. It demands a place in the system, suited, not to its former weakness, but to its present power. If this be granted, all is well. If this is refused, then comes the struggle between the Plebeians and the Patricians of Rome.²⁵

Essentially Macaulay was drawing the same connection between tyranny and the decline of empires that Byron had poetically discussed in Canto IV of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.

Beyond these rather general associations between Byron and the Whigs, more specific connotations accompanied Turner's linking of Byron and Italy. Between 1830 and 1834, the political situation in the Italian states was extremely volatile. In 1815 the Congress of Vienna had redivided Napoleon's Italy into the ten former kingdoms and duchies of the eighteenth century. All constitutional concessions of the Napoleonic period were revoked and absolute monarchies were imposed on the Italian states by Austrian

military power. The Carbonari and Young Italy societies led periodic uprisings against the oppressive governments of various states (i.e. Piedmont, Modena and the Papal States) in a bid to secure liberal reforms and the unification of Italy.²⁶ In England, throughout the early thirties, the Italian situation was a contentious political football. On one hand, the Whigs felt England should support the nationalists arguing that it was intolerable for the reactionary government of Austria to suppress the Italian states which had experienced a long history of democratic self-rule, while on the other hand, the Tories firmly opposed English intervention and condemned the subversive activities of the "revolutionaries." Conservatives believed that the weak democratic structure of the historic Italian states had made foreign intervention inevitable. In an article entitled "Sismondi and Italian Liberty" published in the October issue of Blackwood's Magazine in 1832, an anonymous Tory writer cautioned English reformers to learn from the Italian example:

Shall we, need we, dare we, apply the lesson? England has for centuries been the freest, happiest, and wealthiest country in the world. She has latterly grown dissatisfied with her prosperous condition. A craving for power - an unnatural and morbid appetite - produced by unwholesome stimulants - has seized upon some of her children, who are by education and occupation, least qualified to exercise it. A great, an enormous concession

has been made to them (the Reform Bill); and as we foretold, they are as ravenous, as dissatisfied as before. Must we proceed? Civil war we doubt, cannot but be the result. But to what will that fearful result lead? Be it our daily prayer to Heaven, that for once civil war and not in despotism!²⁷

However, the Whigs refused to take heed. Instead they enthusiastically recalled Byron's inspirational political activities in Italy, where he had joined the Carbonari and participated in the Neapolitan Uprising of 1822. Byron had even taken the additional risk of securing arms for the nationalists and establishing a clandestine arsenal in his home.²⁸ A typical Whig article in the Edinburgh Review in July of 1832 entitled "The Political Condition of the Italian States" articulated their position:

Austria is to Italy what Turkey was to Greece. The Italians feel it to be so. So does the rest of Europe. We see no distinction. Lord Byron saw none, and would have shed his blood as gladly in one cause as in the other. Until Austria returns within her own boundaries, and until her system of domination over Italy is renounced, Austria must make up her mind to be detested as an oppressor,....²⁹

Several pages of the article discussed the importance of Byron's Italian observations and political convictions. Advancing the same argument that was made in Canto IV of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, the Edinburgh writer stated

that Italy's previous contributions to European civilization made her present situation deplorable:

If there is a time for all things, thank God, ours bids fair to be the time for freedom. In this case shame will not permit Europe much longer to abandon the barbarian insolence and oppression that Italy by which our quarter of the globe was started in its career or glory. To her we owe both the science and practical example of every art - intelligent agriculture, liberal commerce, - the revival of ancient learning - the creation of modern literature - the first schools of medicine, theology, and jurisprudence - artist, poets, and philosophers,...³⁰

This time the writer drew positive parallels between liberty for Italy and reform in England, stating that since England had achieved liberal reforms, it was essential to help the Italians do likewise.³¹

Considering the controversy surrounding Byron and Italy, it is difficult to believe that Turner could have been unaware of the liberal implications of his Italy. It has been suggested that three of his five other paintings in the exhibition were also illustrations of reform themes.³² Although there is no specific evidence demonstrating which side, if any, Turner supported during the Reform Crisis, evidently Whig critics interpreted his Italy as a progressive statement.³³ They admired his theme of Byron and liberty which was visually reinforced by the painter's innovative handling of form. Contrasts between ancient and modern

objects, warm and cool tonalities, light and dark areas, and foreground and background spaces were perpetually changing. The play of opposites became a positive value which challenged the carefully contained and ordered Claudean framework. Arcadia was transformed into a nineteenth-century world where a new order was possible. For Whig critics, the chief value of Turner's new order seems to have been its negative questioning of the status quo, rather than its positive definition of a modern value structure. By challenging the Claudean tradition through an assertion of his own originality, Turner was paving the way for future experimentation. However, the picture represented freedom, not licence. By handling Claude respectfully, Turner was not totally rejecting the past, he was simply reforming it.

However, even the most enthusiastic Whig critics were aware of the picture's limited appeal. The Morning Chronicle predicted that Turner's canvas would be a failure with viewers who lacked imagination, or in other words-- "no small number in the Bull family".³⁴ The Spectator critic also defended Turner against anticipated attacks:

...this is no meretricious trick of art - no mad freak of genius - no mere exaggeration of splendour - no outrage of propriety - but an imaginative vision of nature.³⁵

An unexpected source of criticism came from the Examiner critic who dismissed the picture with two short sentences:

Mr Turner's Italy, no. 70, has little to recommend it as a composition. Its colouring is gorgeous, but monotonous.³⁶

The critic made no effort to extrapolate the progressive associations praised by the Whigs. Yet she/he did not experience the Tories' annoyance with the picture's bright modern colour scheme. Instead the writer simply considered the painting dull and unworthy of prolonged consideration. Discrediting works by leading academicians seems to have been a popular pastime with this critic. As previously discussed, the Examiner reviewer had been critical of the works by Leslie, Wilkie and Etty. The reviewer generally seems to have promoted pictures by lesser known associates of the Academy, or by artists who did not belong at all. On this basis, it seems reasonable to suggest that the Examiner's particular hostility towards the institution made its reviewer unwilling to compliment pictures by its leading painters.

Certainly the picture aroused considerable hostility from "unimaginative" Tory writers who found the theme too elaborate and Turner's style exceedingly artificial.

Uncomfortable with the progressive associations of Byron and his poetry, these writers carefully directed their criticism towards Turner, rather than attacking the more famous poet. Byron's post-humous preeminence in the literary circles of the thirties made it awkward to condemn his poetry, so instead contemporary conservative critiques of Byron used different tactics, repudiating his personal excesses and immorality. However, such factors were scarcely relevant to the lines accompanying Turner's painting, and furthermore would have been inappropriate material for an academy review. Nevertheless these critics found indirect ways of expressing their disapproval. The Morning Herald countered the Whigs' enthusiasm by simply dismissing the painting for lacking the grace and dignity of Byron's poem.

The Morning Post took a different tack and accused Turner of committing a "capital misdemeanor in an art which is essentially imitative".³⁷ The critic found Turner's bright colouring especially offensive when measured against the "truth" of Claude:³⁸

Fortunately we have a few Claudes in the Galleries of this country to instruct our untravelled eyes in the true features and hues of the classic land, or we might be bourn down by the authoritative assertion of certain pilgrims of art, who would persuade us that there are no colours beyond the Alps but the colours of the rainbow.

Mr Turner makes an unusual attempt to impose this belief upon his English admirers by the parrot plumage in which he dresses out his Italian scenery; but for our parts we are determined obstinately to persevere in rejecting his seductive efforts as unholy and defamatory libels.³⁹

It appears that the Morning Post writer was upset because Turner had broken the rules of ideal landscape art which was considered the most noble form of imitating nature. By departing from the conventions of Claude, who as the acknowledged genius of this medium best imitated nature, Turner's landscape was only a shadow twice removed from the truth of nature.

Of course, in reality the ideal landscapes of Claude were no less contrived than those of Turner, but by promoting Claude as a standard of truth in 1832, the Morning Post writer was adhering to tradition and expressing a conservative preference for the ordered tranquillity of an imaginary past. This vision catered to the views of the elite Tory readership of this paper,--a small sector of society that was highly interested in defending the values of their old master paintings and the force of tradition in general.⁴⁰ Yet ironically, the recognizably Claudean framework of Italy was precisely what made the image so disturbing for these conservative viewers. It

was a Claudean composition, turned upside down. Rather than ordering a superficially chaotic world, the forces of nature played havoc with the controlling devices. Instead of supporting traditional aesthetic values, Turner respectfully undermined them.

The inordinately hostile language of the Morning Post writer suggests more than the question of aesthetic taste was at stake. By rejecting Turner's Italy, the critic was defending the force of tradition against the threatening concepts of originality, modernity and change. Essentially the critic accused the artist of spreading lies about Italy--lies that had to be firmly rejected despite their seductive appearance. A parallel argument had been used by Tory political writers to reject that Whigs' support for the Italian nationalists--no matter how tempting liberty and democracy looked, they ultimately brought ruin to those who accepted their principles.

The response to Turner's painting once again underlines the tremendous gulf separating Whig and Tory supporters in 1832. By raising the contentious issues of Byron and the Italian states, Turner presented the academy public with a picture that was hard for most critics to ignore.

His highly innovative handling of the conventional Claudean formula led the majority of critics to read the picture as a progressive statement, fuelling the Whigs' cause for the modernization of existing aesthetic and political structures.

Footnotes

¹Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 450.

²Turner's other five entries are listed in Appendix B. For details concerning these paintings, consult Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy was the first and most prominently hung of Turner's paintings in the Great Room which was the most prestigious area of the exhibition.

³The catalogue excerpt condensed these lines from Byron, omitting one line. The original reads:

Thou art the garden of the world, the home
Of all Art yields, and Nature can decree;
Even in they desert,...

⁴John Ruskin, Notes on the Turner Gallery at Marlborough House 1856-7 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1857), p. 49.

⁵For a discussion of how ideal landscapes are intended to function, consult J. Barrell, The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), chap. 1; also M. Kitson, The Art of Claude Lorrain (London: Arts Council, 1969), pp. 5-8.

⁶In his thirteenth discourse (December 1786), Joshua Reynolds had discussed the superior qualities of the ideal landscape. Consult Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses on Art, ed. Stephen O. Mitchell (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), pp. 200-201.

⁷Turner acknowledged the importance of Claude in the last lecture of a series on perspective which he gave at the Royal Academy from 1811-1816. The text of this lecture appears in Jerrold Ziff, "'Backgrounds, Introduction of Architecture and Landscape' A Lecture by J.M.W. Turner," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 26 (1963): 124-147. Turner's sense of rivalry with Claude has been widely discussed, see in particular two recent articles by

Phillip Fehl "Turner's Classicism and the Problem of Periodization in the History of Art," Critical Enquiry 3 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 119-120, and Kathleen Nicholson, "Turner's 'Appulia in Search of Apulus' and the dialectics of the Landscape Tradition," Burlington Magazine 122 (October, 1980): 679-686. Some of Turner's most directly Claudian compositions include: Crossing the Brook (1815), Appulia in Search of Apulus (1814), Dido Building Carthage (1815) and The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire (1817)

⁸Turner reduced the total number of figures, and made more of them female. He also reversed the location of the dancing couple and standing viewers, and made some variations in the poses and gestures of various individuals.

⁹The National Gallery was first located in Angerstein's house in Pall Mall. It opened its door in May of 1824, and within the first six months some 24,000 people had visited its collection. For further information consult Gregory Martin "The Founding of the National Gallery Part 3," Connoisseur 186 (May 1974): 124-128.

¹⁰In his "Backgrounds" lecture, Turner praised the "golden orient or the amber-coloured ether" of Claude Lorrain, see Ziff, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, p. 144.

¹¹John Ruskin commented at length on the deterioration of the picture's surface which began to deteriorate two decades after its completion. See his Notes on the Turner Gallery, pp. 46-49. He mentioned that the upper colours had sunk into the ground, and that extensive cracking and flaking had taken place. Butlin and Joll cite the missing span of the bridge as further evidence of serious deterioration. See Butlin and Joll, J.M.W. Turner, p. 176.

¹²Turner's personality did not seem offensive to the Tory critics who only referred to him as a highly respected academician or as the Professor of Perspective.

¹³Morning Chronicle (May 7, 1832).

¹⁴Anonymous. "The Living Artists: No. V Turner," Athenaeum (April 23, 1831), p. 266. The article was written by Allan Cunningham.

¹⁵Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 450.

¹⁶Morning Chronicle (May 7, 1832)

¹⁷Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Other Romantic Poems, John D. Jump (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1975), p. 119 Canto CVIII.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁹Anthony Burton and John Murdoch, Byron, Victoria and Albert Museum May 30 - August 25, 1974 (London: HMSO, 1974), pp. 38-41.

²⁰Between 1828 and 1832 several major editions on Byron appeared which were widely reviewed in the press. The most notable of these included: Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), John Galt, The Life of Lord Byron (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), E. Bagnell, Lord Byron with Remarks on His Genius and Character (Oxford: Talboys, 1831), and the well known multi-volume series on Byron by Thomas Moore, The Works of Lord Byron with His Letters and Journals, and His Life 14 vols. (London: Murray, 1832-34). For some idea of the outpouring of work on Byron during this period, consult the bibliography of Samuel C. Chew, Byron in England (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965 reprint of 1924). Generally speaking, the more sympathetic biographies were written by Byron's Whig and Radical associates (i.e. Thomas Moore), while the more critical ones were primarily by conservative authors. There were individual exceptions (i.e. Leigh Hunt's bitter personal attack on Byron), but a general pattern is discernable.

²¹The other two Byron editions containing Turner illustrations were Lord Byron's Works 11 vols. (London: Murray, 1825), and Finden's Landscape and Portrait Illustrations to the Life and Works of Byron 3 vols. (London: Murray and Till, 1833-34), which included the seven illustrations of 1825 with two additional new plates. For further information, consult Mordecai Omer, Turner and the Poets, Greater London Arts Council, April 12 - June 1, 1976 (London: Greater London Arts Council, 1976).

²²For a list of the contents of Turner's library, see Bernard Falk, Turner the Painter: His Hidden Life (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1938), p. 258.

²³These paintings were The Field of Waterloo (1818 - lines from Canto III 28th verse), The Bright Stone of Honour (Ehrenbreitstein) 1835 - lines from Canto III 56th verse), Modern Rome - Campo Vaccino (1839 - lines from Canto IV 27th verse), Venice the Bridge of Sighs (1840 - lines from Canto IV 1st verse), and Approach to Venice (1844 - lines from Canto IV 27th verse).

²⁴Butlin and Joll, J.M.W. Turner, p. 176. The painting formed part of the Turner Bequest.

²⁵Thomas Macaulay, excerpt from a speech in the House of Commons, March 2, 1831 quoted in Sydney W. Jackman, ed., The English Reform Tradition 1790 - 1910 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 58-59.

²⁶For a discussion of the Italian situation, consult G.F.H. Berkeley, Italy in the Making 1815 - 1846 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), chaps. 1-2. The ten re-established Italian states were the Kingdom of Lombardo-Venetia, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the Duchies of Modena, Parma, Massa, Lucca and Carrara, the Papal States, and the Kingdoms of Sardinia (or Piedmont) and the Two Sicilies. Austrian Hapsburg rulers controlled Lombardo-Venetia, Tuscany, Modena, Parma, and Massa.

²⁷Anon., "Sismondi and Italian Liberty," Blackwood's Magazine (October 1832), p. 524.

²⁸Burton and Murdoch, Byron, pp. 101-2.

²⁹Anon., "The Political Condition of the Italian States," Edinburgh Review (July, 1832), p. 367.

³⁰Ibid., p. 396

³¹The article's final paragraphs drew attention to the fact that Italians in Perugia and Umbria had publicly celebrated when Lord Grey was recalled to office to re-introduce the Reform Bill. This incident was used to demonstrate how much the Italian population loved liberty, which further emphasized how oppressed they were under Austrian domination.

³²This suggestion has been made by Jack Lindsay, The Sunset Ship: The Poems of J.M.W. Turner (London: Evelyn Adams & Mackay Ltd., 1966), pp. 61-63. The paintings are: The Prince of Orange, William III, who is shown landing at Torbay which marked the beginning of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, an event Whigs often cited as a precedent for the Reform Bill; Staffa, an image of a modern steamship defiantly weathering a storm at sea; and Nebuchadnezzar, which showed three faithful Jews resisting tyrannical rule.

³³A.J. Finberg, The Life of J.M.W. Turner, R.A. 2nd ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 353.

³⁴Morning Chronicle (May 7, 1832).

³⁵Spectator (May 12, 1832), p. 450.

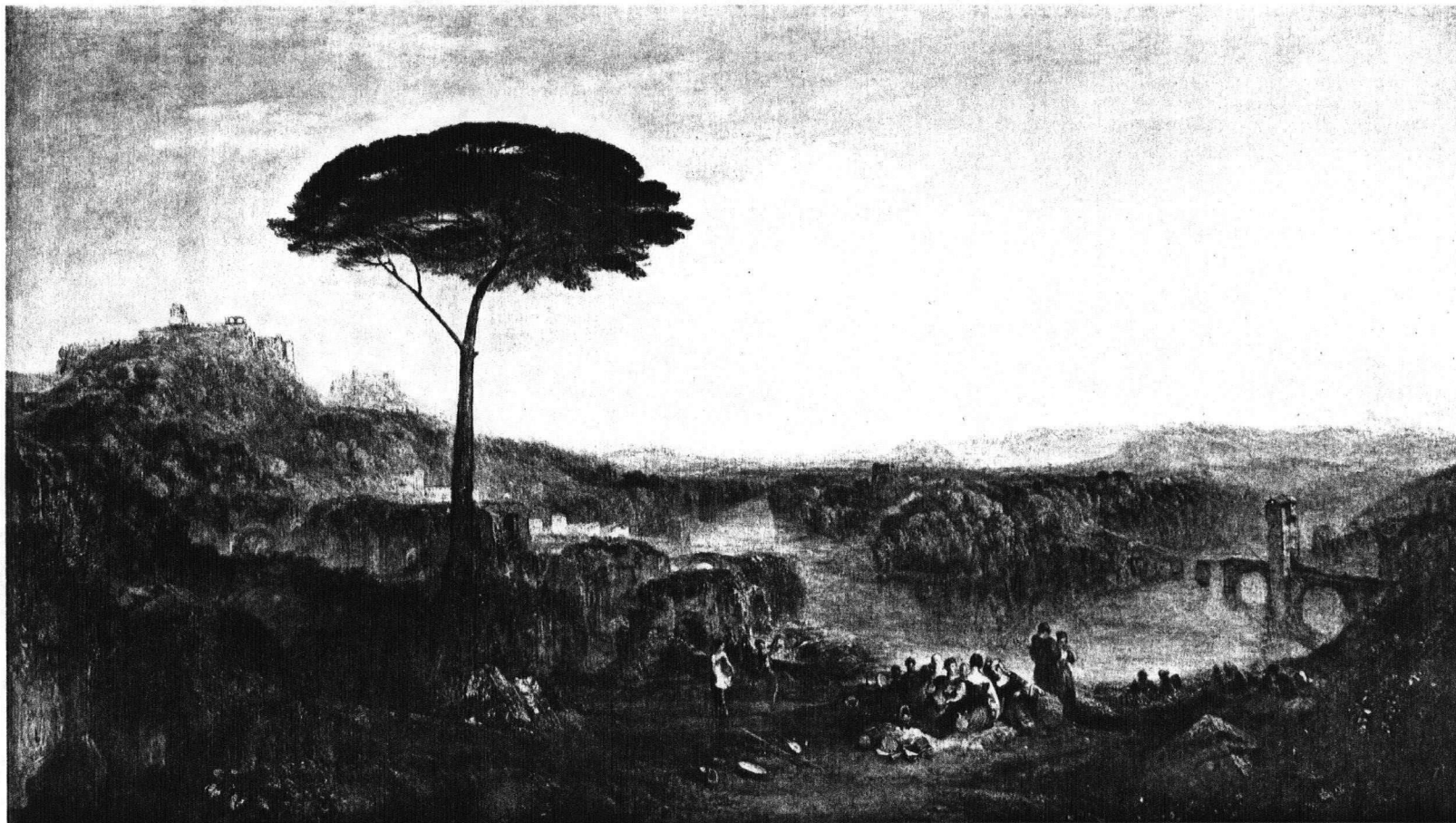
³⁶Examiner (July 15, 1832), p. 453.

³⁷Morning Post (May 27, 1832).

³⁸Turner's heavy use of red and yellow offended all of the Tory reviewers. The Library of the Fine Arts felt that the warm tones in the landscape did not harmonize with the cool blue of the sky, while the Morning Herald found the recurring red laky glow fatiguing.

³⁹Morning Post (May 27, 1832).

⁴⁰The Morning Post was estimated to have a circulation well under 5,000, see Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 123. Writing some fifty years later, H.R. Fox Bourne characterized the Post of the thirties as a "dispenser of 'fashionable intelligence' and aristocratic tittle-tattle". It was well known for its extremely reactionary stance, see Bourne English Newspapers, 2, p. 19.



326. (Cat. 342) *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage—Italy*, exh. 1832; Tate Gallery

Figure 13.

J. M. W. Turner, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy*, 1832
Tate Gallery

(Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll. *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977. Plate 326.)



Figure 14. Claude, Landscape: The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah, 1648
London, National Gallery
(Pierre Courthion. Claude Gellée dit Le Lorrain. Paris:
Librairie Floury, 1932. Plate 27.)

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the preceding pictures and their critical reception indicates that the Royal Academy exhibition provided an important public forum for advancing integrally connected aesthetic, moral and political beliefs. We have seen that the close relationship between individual critics and the interest groups for which they wrote was of crucial importance for understanding how the pictures functioned for specific sectors of the viewing and reading public. Whether or not the artists intended their works to be interpreted in a partisan way, the pictures provided vehicles for the extension of contemporary arguments over the issues of parliamentary and social reform.

The most striking division to emerge from the critical response was the split between the critics writing for openly committed Whig and Tory publications. While the content of the pictures was often open to conflicting interpretations by both sides, assessments of their formal qualities were more limited. In general, stylistic judgements were closely linked to the critics' perceptions of the Academy. Conservative reviewers, who

supported the institution's existing structure, clearly preferred the conventional style of Etty who used his academic training to perpetuate the forms and genres of the old masters.. In contrast, Whig reviewers, who wanted a reformed and more accessible academy, particularly admired Turner's formal innovations which challenged the status quo without entirely devaluing it.

Although the conflict between Whigs and Tories was highly publicized during the Reform Crisis, other social alignments and divisions played an important role in shaping critical opinion. The most significant factor in the minds of Academy reviewers was the threat of universal suffrage which divided the middle class into a predominantly Whig majority who firmly opposed the notion, and a Radical minority who fully supported it. In spite of frequently bitter arguments, Tories and Whigs from the upper and middle classes were drawn together by the frightening prospect of the working class gaining social and political equality.. Many Whigs shared the fear of the conservative Fraser's reviewer that the masses' participation in high culture would initiate a drastic deterioration of existing literary and aesthetic standards. After all working-class political caricatures and academic

oil paintings remained poles apart on the critics' scale of aesthetic quality. (A scale whose biases still permeate twentieth-century art history.)

Even during the height of the Reform Crisis in May, growing signs of compromise appeared within the ranks of the peerage and upper middle-class. At the Academy exhibition, the increasing alignment of these interests explains on one hand, the conciliatory positions of Whig peers, such as the Grosvenors, who accepted limited reforms in order to preserve many aristocratic privileges, and on the other hand, the unwillingness of many upper middle-class writers to challenge the aristocracy directly, except where their upward social mobility was actually blocked. This spirit of compromise facilitated a peaceful transformation within the ruling elite from the old peerage to a new hybrid establishment of reformed aristocracy and the upper middle class. By the 1830s, the gulf between their values and lifestyles had narrowed considerably: the aristocracy had long been involved in commerce and the middle class equally interested in the acquisition of property. While certain rights were still denied to the upper middle class, particularly equal access to parliament and full acceptance by high society, they

preferred to throw in their lot with the aristocracy, even at the risk of being second-rate partners until further concessions could be won. An aristocratic alliance was clearly more appealing than the prospect of sharing their property and accumulated capital with the hungry hordes below. Upward social mobility was infinitely more desirable than the descent to social democracy.

In sharp contrast, the views of the radical middle-class minority were represented by the Examiner, which was consistently more critical of the Academy and its artists than any of the other publications. Regardless of whether the middle class had full access to the institution, the Examiner believed that the Academy fostered an unpleasant exclusivity among its members and patrons, and elitist attitudes toward art. Typical of the Examiner's writer's alienation was his/her negative comments on the paintings of Wilkie and Turner which appealed to Whig reformers as progressive. The fact that these works were executed by two of the Academy's leading painters seems to have made the Examiner reluctant to praise them, for fear of crediting both the Academy and the establishment which patronized it.

Although the social and political divisions surrounding the Reform Crisis had a significant impact on the Royal Academy exhibition, the exhibition seems to have had a much less dramatic effect on the resolution of the political crisis. It was parliamentary manoeuvres, mass demonstrations, and the king's actions that made the headline stories, while exhibition reviews appeared in small print on the inside pages. Yet the exhibition's influence was subtle rather than negligible. On one level, the show was a demonstration of the ruling elite's supreme self-confidence. Attending their private view in the midst of protests and street riots, the upper strata of society presented an imperturbable image to their hostile social inferiors. However, in the pages of the press that reviewed the exhibition at Somerset House, the atmosphere was less tranquil. Here lively discussions and heated debates broke out, especially in response to the four pictures under investigation. Factions within the upper and middle classes adopted different strategies of power arguing over who painted good pictures, who should have access to the Academy, who should set the standards of culture, and ultimately who should govern England. The vision of each group was conditioned by their social position and political perspective, but the process of encountering the pictures and discussion surrounding them,

was also a formative experience. It is here that the lines separating art, daily life, and even politics begin to blur and break down.

Entries from the Catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1832

70 Childe Harold's pilgrimage—Italy . *J. M. W. Turner, R.A.*

“ ——— and now, fair Italy !
Thou art the garden of the world.
Even in thy desert what is like to thee ?
Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
More rich than other climes' fertility :
Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.”

Lord Byron, Canto 4.

121 A family picture, containing portraits of the Marquis and Marchioness of Westminster, the Earl and Countess Grosvenor, the Earl and Countess of Wilton, Lord and Lady Robert Grosvenor, Viscount Belgrave, the Ladies Grosvenor, and Lady Mary Egerton . . . *C. R. Leslie, R.A.*

134 The preaching of Knox before the Lords of the Congregation, 10th June, 1559. . . *D. Wilkie, R.A.*

In Dr. Mc'Crie's Life of this extraordinary person is described the event this picture is intended to represent, which took place during the regency of Mary of Guise, in the parish church of St. Andrews in Fifeshire, where John Knox, having just arrived from Geneva after an exile of thirteen years, in defiance of a threat of assassination, and while an army in the field was watching the proceedings of his party, appeared in the pulpit and discoursed to a numerous assembly, including many of the clergy when “such was the influence of his doctrine, that the provost, bailies, and inhabitants harmoniously agreed to set up the reformed worship in the town. The church was stripped of all images and pictures, and the monasteries were pulled down.”

Close to the pulpit on the right of Knox are Richard Ballenden, his amanuensis, with Christopher Goodman, his colleague ; and, in black, the Maltese Knight, Sir James Sandilands, in whose house at Calder the first Protestant sacrament was received. Beyond the latter, in the scholar's cap and gown, is that accomplished student of St. Andrews, the Admirable Crichton. Under the pulpit is Thomas Wood, the precentor, with his hour-glass ; the school-boy below is John Napier, Baron of Merchiston, inventor of the logarithms ; and further to the right is a child which has been brought to be baptized when the discourse is over.

On the other side of the picture, in red, is the Lord James Stuart, afterwards Regent Murray ; beyond, is the Earl of Glencairne ; and in front, resting on his sword, is the Earl of Morton ; behind whom is the Earl of Argyll, whose Countess, the half-sister of Queen Mary, and the lady in attendance upon her, make up the chief light of the picture. Above this group is John Hamilton, Archbishop of St. Andrews, supported by the Bishop Beaton, of Glasgow, with Quinten Kennedy, the Abbot of Cross Raguel, who maintained against Knox a public disputation.

In the gallery is Sir Patrick Learmonth, Provost of St. Andrews and Laird of Dairsie, and with him two of the bailies. The boy on their left is Andrew Melville, successor of Knox ; and beyond him, with other Professors of the University of St. Andrews, is the learned Buchanan ; at the back of the gallery is a crucifix, attracting the regard of Catholic penitents ; and in the obscurity above is an escutcheon to the memory of Cardinal Beaton.

215 The destroying angel and dæmons of evil, interrupting the orgies of the vicious and intemperate. A finished sketch of that class of compositions called by the Romans “Visions,” not having their origin in history or poetry.

W. Etty, R.A.

APPENDIX B

Other Works Exhibited at the R.A. of 1832 by Etty, Leslie,

Turner and Wilkie¹

William Etty

- 196 Youth on the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm
- 215 The Destroying Angels and Daemons of Evil
- 360 Phaedra and Cymochles, or the Idle Lake

C. R. Leslie

- 121 A Family Picture
- 140 A Scene from the Taming of the Shrew

J. M. W. Turner

- 70 Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Italy
- 153 The Prince of Orange, William III
- 206 Van Tromp's Shallop at the Entrance
of the Scheldt
- 284 Helvoetsluys - The City of Utrecht, 64,
Going to Sea
- 355 Then Nebuchadnezzar Came Near to the Mouth
of the Burning Fiery Furnace
- 453 Staffa, Fingal's Cave

David Wilkie

- 71 His Majesty King William IV
- 134 The Preaching of Knox

¹Information was compiled from the catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1832.

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