

## Romanticism IV: Turner and Constable – The Making of Landscape

The recognition of landscape painting as an independent genre, that could compete with history and portraiture painting was still in its infancy, when Turner and Constable were children. Yes, Richard Wilson, the Welsh painter, generally regarded as the father of British landscape painting had revitalised the genre, not to overlook his Welsh protégé Thomas Jones and of course Gainsborough, who wistfully regarded landscape painting as a happy diversion from his career as a portrait painter. There were also many lesser known 18<sup>th</sup> century painters, water colourists, Paul and Thomas Sandby, Alexander Cozens, John Varley, John Crome and Thomas Girtin, who painted small exquisite watercolours in the Picturesque tradition of the Rev. John Gilpin. Alongside this the Grand Tour tradition of young aristocrats, travelling to Italy in search of a Classical past, where visits to Rome with the Roman Forum, Tivoli and the Lake's Albano and Nemi, captured so beautifully in paint by Claude Lorrain and of course Venice with its Gothic architecture and magical light, beautifully depicted by Canaletto and Guardi, encouraged a growing interest in man's relationship with Nature and his surroundings in general.

Landscape painting was given an additional impulse with the publication in 1757 of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of the Sublime and Beautiful*, by Edmund Burke, the Irish born statesman and philosopher, where in its simplest terms, he defined the beautiful as that which is well-formed and aesthetically pleasing, whereas the Sublime is that which has the power to compel and destroy us. The increasing preference for the Sublime over the Beautiful was one of the principal philosophical factors marking the transition from the Neoclassical to the Romantic periods and was with the Revd John Gilpin's Picturesque, the primary drivers for the style of landscape painting of the latter decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. By virtue of the subject matter, whether it be epic Biblical scenes by Francis Danby, or depictions of Natural phenomena such as avalanches, by Loutherbourg, or further afield the symbolic pictures of the German Romantic Caspar David Friedrich, *The Wanderer above the Mists*, or *The Sea of Ice*, such images of the Sublime were better portrayed on the grand scale of oil on canvas, whereas the medium of watercolour was best suited to scenes of the Picturesque.

Those giants of 19<sup>th</sup> century English Romantic Landscape painting, John Mallory William Turner and John Constable came from quite different backgrounds. Turner was born on the 23 April 1775, the son of William Turner, a Covent Garden barber and wig maker and mother, Mary *nee* Marshall. Constable was born in rural East Bergholt, a village on the river Stour in Suffolk, just a year later than Turner, father Golding Constable, a wealthy corn merchant and mother Ann *nee* Watts. Ann came from a similar social stratum, her father being a well-to-do London cooper. Turner's mother Mary came from a family line of London butchers and shopkeepers. A sister to the young Turner, Mary Anne, was born in 1778, but died in 1783, just before her fifth birthday, a bereavement which may have contributed to her mother's deterioration in mental health.

On the other hand, Constable came from quite a large family, John being the fourth of six children, of whom three were girls. At such time that Golding Constable's family began to expand, he built a large brick house in East Bergholt, where the painter was born, two years after its occupation. Whereas Constable was able to enjoy the benefits of a close knit family life, Turner, was not so fortunate, his mother already exhibiting signs of mental instability whilst he was still a youngster, eventually being institutionalised at Royal Bethlem Hospital in 1800, where she later died in 1804. As a result, he was sent to stay with uncles at Brentford in 1785: the earliest known exercise from this period is a series of simple colourings of engraving plates from Henry Boswells, *Picturesque View of the Antiquities of England*. His next move in 1786 was to Margate, where he attended school and where he was already producing drawings of the town and surrounding area and finally to Sunningwell in 1787.

Turner's artistic career commenced early, his father encouraging his talent from probably as young as eight, or nine-years-old and by the age of nine, or ten, the young Turner was showing promise as a painter of landscapes and buildings; *View of minster, Isle of Thanet*, pen and watercolour, 1784. Before Turner was a teenager, his father was exhibiting drawings in his shop, selling them for a shilling/each.

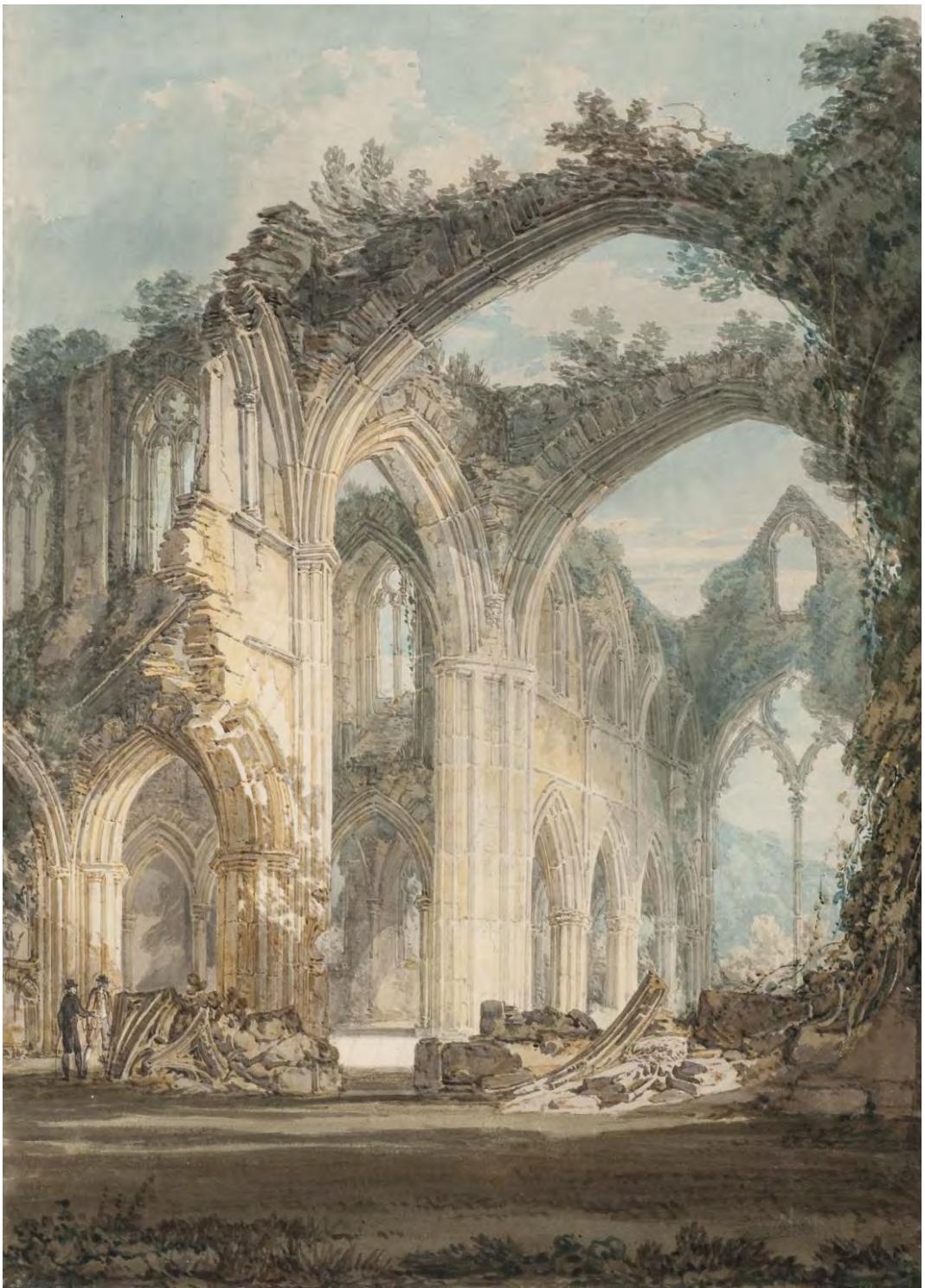
By the age of eleven, or twelve, he was attending lessons in perspective given by Thomas Malton Junior, an architectural designer and draughtsman, followed by a spell with the architect Thomas Hardwick. Thus by the age of twelve, Turner appeared to be launched on a lucrative career as an architect, but within a few years, he settled for the more humdrum trade of a topographer. Fortunately for the future of landscape painting that was not to be, as following the intervention of Thomas Malton and other early patrons of his work, he was in 1789, after a terms probation, accepted at the Royal Academy Schools, where he progressed from the Plaster Room, drawing casts of antiquity, to the life class in 1792. By this time the young Turner's steady focus was on becoming a landscape painter. However, in the early 1790's the priorities of the Royal Academy, were still firmly focussed on the Italian Renaissance and the French Academy of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in particular the human figure as the repository of action and moral expression, where landscape could, at best, serve only as a humble background, or support. As a means of filling this gap in training and to earn money, he also worked in the evenings at a house in Adelphi Terrace, the residence of Dr Thomas Munro, a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, an amateur painter and patron of many artists, including also John Sell Cotman, Thomas Girtin and Peter de Wint. Here for a period of several years, Turner and his contemporary, Girtin for half a crown and a plate of oysters worked in collaboration, copying and colouring in drawings by Robert Cozens and Edward Dayes; such was Turner's development up to his late teens.

Meanwhile, Constable's schooling, was begun unhappily at a private boarding school in Lavenham, where like the rest of the pupils, he was severely ill-used, followed by local schooling at Dedham under a Dr Thomas Grimwood, who was both scholarly and kind. He did not however do well enough in his studies to justify his seeking a career in the Church, as apparently his father wished and so he was directed into the family business, becoming known locally, according to his biographer, C. R. Leslie, as the handsome miller. In 1796, he went to London to continue his apprenticeship, staying with maternal relations, the Allens. It was here that any ideas that he may have fostered as becoming a painter, evidenced by some conventional sketching and copying, were given a stronger impetus, as a result of becoming acquainted with John Thomas Smith, an engraver, drawing master and antiquarian, later Keeper of Prints at the British Museum. This acquaintance must have encouraged and stimulated Constable's interest in the type of scenery, which had been the background of his childhood, for he began to acquire books on art and his pictures became more ambitious, copying paintings by such Dutch Golden Age masters as Jacob van Ruisdael. However, reaching his majority in 1797, he had no realistic expectation that these efforts would provide anything other than recreation. Three months before, he wrote to Smith, 'And now I see it will be my lot, to walk through life in a path contrary to that which my inclination leads me.'



*Clare Hall and Kings Chapel, from the Banks of the Cam*

By contrast, Turner had by 1790 exhibited a watercolour at the Royal Academy, the beginning of an almost unbroken series of annual showings at the institution over a period of sixty years. In 1791, he stayed with friends of his father in Bristol, where he spent so much time scrambling about Avon Gorge in search of viewpoints that they nicknamed him, 'The Prince of the Gorge'. Five sketching tours to Wales followed over succeeding years, his last being in 1799. In the meantime, he had produced watercolours, utilising his skills as an architectural draughtsman, a good early example from 1793 being



***Chancel and Crossing of Tintern Abbey***, pencil and watercolour, 1794, Turner Bequest

***Chancel and Crossing of Tintern Abbey, looking towards the East Window***, resulting from one of his early Welsh tours, is one of Turner's best known examples of the picturesque, with its crumbling, ivy covered walls, set against the wooded slopes of the River Wye. He visited Tintern on two of his tours through Wales, in 1792 and 1798, which coincidentally closely coincided with the visits of William Wordsworth to the Abbey in 1793 and 1798, who after his second visit wrote his *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*.

***Newport Castle***, followed from his second tour of 1795, when he made a drawing of the castle in his South Wales sketchbook. The castle is viewed across the River Usk, with its prominent central tower bathed in a shaft of gold sunlight and small boats clustered artfully around the Watergate at its base.



*Newport Castle*, pencil and watercolour, 1796, British Museum



*Fishermen at Sea, The Cholmeley Sea Piece*, 1796, oil on canvas, 36x48 inches, Tate Britain

Up to now, Turner's principal output had been in watercolour, but in 1796, in addition to several important watercolours, he exhibited his first oil painting at the Royal Academy, a luminous moonlit seascape entitled, *Fishermen at Sea*. It is a highly accomplished example of the tradition of moonlit scenes established by Claude Joseph Vernet and Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg. Turner's interest in light was to become a passionate obsession throughout his career. Although watercolour was to remain very important to Turner all his life, his technical development in the medium was profoundly affected by his increasing experience with oil, just as his watercolour work was later to be reflected in his oil technique. Oil was considered as the more 'serious' medium, a factor which he had to come to terms with early in his career since, at that time, it was only possible to gain membership of the Academy by exhibiting oil paintings. So it was, that several years after this important work, Turner was elected as an Associate Member of the Royal Academy, to be followed by full membership in 1802.

Being an Island Nation, so dependent on its sea-power for both commerce and protection, Marine painting had become in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a very sought after genre for collectors. Even now, on visits to most aristocratic houses, it will be commonplace to see Dutch Golden Age paintings by the likes of Porcellis, Willem van de Velde, or Backhuysen and later 18<sup>th</sup> century examples by Claude Joseph Vernet. So it is no surprise that Turner should wish to tap into this market, made all the potentially more lucrative by the potential threat from across the channel.

The scene, Sublime in nature, is supposedly of the Needles off the Isle of Wight and is especially notable for its almost spotlight effect of the moonlight on the centrally placed fishing boat amidst a maelstrom of waves, an effect that Turner would often return to in his later marine paintings.



Exhibited in 1800 and offered by Turner as his Diploma Work, when he was elected as an Academician in 1802, *Dolbadarn Castle* was approved unanimously. With the painting, were for the first time, some lines of poetry, apparently written by himself:

'How awful is the silence of waste,  
Where nature lifts her mountains to the sky  
Majestic solitude, behold the tower  
Where hopeless OWEN, long imprison'd,  
pined,  
And wrung his hands for liberty, in vain.'

The poetry and inclusion of a specific historical figure, pictured being taken prisoner at the bottom centre of the picture adds high status History to what is essentially a landscape painting, confirming that Turner was learning the game he had to play to gain recognition for himself and for the recognition of landscape painting within the Academy. Thomas Jones' painting of *The Last Bard*, the narrative taken from Thomas Gray's poem of 1757, *The Bard*, may well have been an influence. As well as referring to the particular case of Owen, the poem introduces a general idea of liberty, a topical subject for a number of artists at the Academy, who were very alert to the suppression of liberty in Britain. Having distinct elements of the Sublime, the dwarfing of the group of figures by the towering mountain sides, much exaggerated for

effect, critics have likened it to the style of Richard Wilson, who in turn was influenced by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque landscape painter, Salvator Rosa.

By this time Turner had also acquired several influential friend-patrons, Sir Richard Colt-Hoare of Stourhead, an antiquarian, archaeologist and amateur painter and William Ramsden Fawkes of Farnley Hall being two of the earliest, both of whom took an interest in his rapidly developing career. However, undoubtedly the most important patron for the young Turner in the longer term, was the patronage of George Wyndham, third Earl of Egremont, himself an amateur painter, who bought many works between 1802-13. Later the friendship and hospitality extended to him at Petworth House, between 1828-37, included the provision of his own studio and his incorporation into the life of the great house, immortalised in the works designed specifically for the Grinling Gibbons Room.

With Turner now a full Academician, the time has come to return to Constable's life as he reached the age of majority. Whether, or not John Thomas Smith's visit to East Bergholt in the Autumn of 1797 had any effect in encouraging Constable's determination, or influencing his father, it was decided that he should at least be given the chance of discovering whether his enthusiasm and slight talent could be nursed into a permanent and profitable vocation.

At the beginning of 1799, Constable went back to London with an introduction to Joseph Farington, a man well qualified to be a guide and adviser by reason of his natural good will, his experience of artistic affairs and his own practice in landscape. On the 4<sup>th</sup> February, Constable was admitted to the Royal Academy as a student, his father having given him an allowance to cover his expenses. 'I shall not have much to show you on my return', he wrote to his East Bergholt amateur painter companion, John Dunthorne, 'as I find my time more taken up with seeing than in painting. I hope by the time the leaves are on the trees I shall be better qualified to attack them than I was last Summer.'

It was to be three more years, before he was able to win his father's consent to his becoming once and for all a painter and not a miller, acquiring in East Bergholt, a small building opposite the family house as a studio. That consent was given in June 1802 and the nature of the case he must have proposed to his family can be judged from the letter he wrote to Dunthorne, a few days before leaving Suffolk for London. This and much correspondence to follow over his lifetime, reveals Constable's life-long self-confessing nature, anxious to declare his motives and difficulties.

'For these last few weeks I believe I have thought more seriously on my profession than at any other time of my life, that is, which is the surest way to real excellence. And this morning I am more inclined to mention the subject having just returned from a visit to Sir George Beaumont's pictures. I am returned with a deep conviction of the truth of Sir Joshua Reynolds' observation that, "there is no easy way of becoming a good painter." It can only be obtained by long contemplation and incessant labour in the executive part.'

'And however one's mind may be elevated and kept up to what is excellent, by the works of the great masters, still Nature is the fountain's head, the source from whence all originally must spring and should an artist continue his practice without referring to Nature, he must soon form a *Manner* and be reduced to the same deplorable situation as the French painter mentioned by Reynolds, who told him that he had long ceased to look at Nature for she only put him out.'

Constable continues in the same vein:

'For these two years past I have been running after pictures and seeking the truth second hand. I have not endeavoured to represent Nature with the same elevation of mind... I am come to a determination to make no idle visits this Summer, or to give up my time to common-place people... I shall make some laborious studies from Nature and I shall endeavour to get a pure and unaffected representation of the scenes that employ me. There is little, or nothing in the exhibition worth looking up to for a natural painter.'

‘The great vice of today is bravura, an attempt at something beyond the truth. *Fashion* always will have its day, but *Truth* in all things only will last and have just claim on posterity.’

This letter sums up what would be Constable’s, life-long passionate vision, to faithfully represent Nature as he witnessed it in all its beauty throughout the seasons and he never waivered from that course.



**Dedham Vale,**  
1802, oil on  
canvas, 44x34  
cms, V&A

**Dedham Vale**, is one of his earliest paintings of Dedham, with the centrally placed church tower, the scene framed to a greater, or lesser extent by the trees on either side of this portrait format. The idea for the composition undoubtedly followed from his having seen the painting, *Landscape with Hagar and The Angel*, by Claude Lorrain in Sir George Beaumont’s collection. It was the first painting to be accepted for exhibition by the Royal Academy and as such a very important step forward for Constable and was painted at a time when he had reached his decisive thinking about landscape, as declared in his 1799 letter to his friend Dunthorpe.



*Landscape with Hagar and The Angel*, oil on canvas, 1635, Claude Lorrain, N.G.

This was one of the paintings that Sir George Beaumont most loved, so much so that he held onto it until after his death, although much of his collection he had earlier bequeathed to the National Gallery, prior to its opening in 1824. Beaumont was one of the leading arbiters of artistic taste in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Claude has used the trees and shrubbery on either side to frame the scene, in a composition, which is essentially a landscape, with two figures, added both to provide foreground interest, but more importantly for the time, to raise the status of the painting, beyond 'Tame delineation', as Henry Fuseli, Constable's contemporary once said. Note also the nuanced aerial perspective, the technique that may have been equalled, but never bettered.

Ruben's *Autumn Landscape Het Steen* (page 9), was another of the paintings to which Constable was referring to, when he spoke of visiting Sir George Beaumont's collection in Coleorton Hall, Leicestershire, one of several visits, the first in 1795, organised by the young painter's mother, at a time when the aristocratic collector, had been visiting his own mother in Dedham. Being himself a proficient amateur artist, he also gave Constable advice on drawing techniques and would in time become a vital supporter and patron.

Like Constable, Rubens had a deep appreciation of the poetry of Nature. With its pendant *Rainbow Landscape, Het Steen*, in the Wallace Collection, these are two of the greatest landscape paintings of the Baroque period. These paintings are not simply Naturalistic records, rather an idyllic vision of Rubens's native Flemish countryside and what he felt about it emotionally. Of Rubens, Constable wrote, 'In no other branch of the art is Rubens greater than in landscape; the freshness and dewy light, the joyous and animated character, which he has imparted to it, impressing on the monotonous scenery of Flanders all the richness, which belongs to its noblest features.'

It took some considerable time before Constable was able in his on way to produce that same authenticity to Nature, that he felt Rubens had achieved and so we now move on a decade, or so, to when he began to paint expansive scenes with greater confidence. *Landscape, Ploughing Time, Summerland*, was one of the first of these, being exhibited at the Academy in 1814.



*Autumn Landscape Het Steen*, 1635, oil on panel, 54x93 inches, Peter Paul Rubens, N.G. London



*Landscape, Ploughing Time, Summerland*, 1814, oil on canvas, 50x76 cms, private

Constable knew this scene well, from just outside the grounds of Old Hall East Bergholt, with the villages of Langham on the left and Stratford-St-Mary on the right. The term Summerland, refers to a field that was ploughed and harrowed in the Spring, left fallow over the Summer months as part of a two-year crop rotation scheme, ready for manuring in the Autumn and sowing in the Winter.

This version was bought by John Alnutt, a Clapham wine merchant and collector. Surprising as it may seem, this sale of a picture at an Academy exhibition, was a first and the purchase may have persuaded Constable to continue painting, at a time when his morale was especially low, no doubt in part due to the difficulties he was having in his courtship with Maria Bicknell. Maria was the daughter of Charles Bicknell, solicitor to the Admiralty and his second wife, Maria Rhudde, whose father, the Revd Dr Rhudde, was rector of East Bergholt and several other adjacent parishes and Chaplain in Ordinary to George III. According to his friend and biographer, Charles Leslie, Constable had met Maria much earlier in 1800, as a 12 year-old and by 1809, the two had formed a close relationship. However, due to family opposition, especially from Revd Rhudde, her Grandfather, it would be 1816, before they were able to marry, by which time Constable was forty and Maria 28.

Constable was unique for his time, in that he wished only to record faithfully the countryside closely surrounding his rural haven. However, this is a cleaned up and beautified, but nevertheless rustic landscape, undisturbed by evidence of rural poverty and social unrest. It is a landscape of nostalgia, for a time that was only in the minds of those like Constable, whose lives were comfortable, who either did not recognise the plight of the poor, or who chose to ignore it. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century at the Academy, such landscape painting was still deemed prosaic and not sufficiently intellectually elevated.



*The Stour Valley and Dedham Church*, 1814, oil on canvas, 22x30 inches, 1814, Boston



A similar agricultural scene, *The Stour Valley and Dedham Church* was painted as a commission for Thomas Fitzburgh, Deputy Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Denbighshire, who was to marry Philadelphia, the daughter of Peter Godfrey, Lord of the Manor of East Bergholt, the Godfrey's being enthusiastic supporters of Constable. The painting was intended as a wedding present and presumably as a reminder of the parental home.

*Dedham Vale with the River Stour in Flood, from the Grounds of Old Hall, East Bergholt*, was also commissioned by Thomas Fitzburgh as a wedding present for his future wife, Philadelphia.

The painting appears to have been commenced en plein air, before completion in the studio. It's a painting much influenced by Aelbert Cuyp, whose bucolic cattle scenes were very popular amongst the English aristocracy; certainly one of Constable's most successful paintings to date.



*Dedham Vale with the River Stour in Flood*, 1814-17, oil on canvas, 22x39 inches, Private



*Wivenhoe Park, Essex*, 1816, oil on canvas, 22x40 inches, National Gallery of Art, Washington

The two most productive summers of 1813 and 1814, sketching in the open air marked a much more successful and professionally satisfying period for Constable. His confidence now higher than at any time previously, he began to produce a string of beautiful works. Major-General Francis-Slater Rebow commissioned the pendant paintings, *Wivenhoe Park*, and *The Quarters behind Arlesford Hall*. In the

former, it is easy to imagine Constable on a quiet summer afternoon, under the shade of the unseen trees on the right, where the painter may have set up his easel. The, placid surface of the water disturbed only by swans and the fishermen setting their net across the lake. In the adjacent field cows graze and in the distance on the far left is Mary Rebow, daughter of the estate's owner, driving a donkey and cart with a friend, having just crossed the stone dam from the main house perched at the top centre of the canvas, bathed in sunlight.



*The Quarters behind Arlesford Hall*, 1816, oil on canvas, 13x20 inches, N.G. of Victoria, Melbourne

In *The Quarters behind Arlesford Hall*, the wonderfully captured scene in this small picture, is the little fishing house, known as 'the Quarters', for Slater Rebow's father-in-law. The closely observed details, the dappled light, the lilies on the still water and the skimming swallows, indicate not only the season, but also the time of day, a late summer's afternoon.

However, Constable was now to enter into one of the most emotionally demanding periods of his life. In June 1815, his mother died; his absence from her funeral should be explained not by a lack of devotion, for he loved his mother dearly, but perhaps by fear of the anguish that the sight of her burial would have caused this highly emotional man. Much of the rest of that year, however, was spent at home in Suffolk, not so that he could as customary, spend the spring and Summer painting, but to support his grieving father, whose health was in severe decline; Golding Constable died the following May. One consequence of his father's death, was to assure for the future a small increase in the income, which the painter had been receiving as an allowance and this combined with the encouraging progress of his work and Maria's decision to at last liberate herself from her family objections, led to their marriage at St-Martins-in-the-Fields in October 1816. They spent part of their honeymoon in Revd. John Fisher's vicarage at Osmington, Dorset, close to Weymouth Bay and as Fisher himself had married only three months before, this must have been a particularly joyful interlude. The happy resolution of this long emotional conflict and the need to provide for a hoped-for family, seems to have generated a new-found energy, for Constable then set about enlarging the scope and scale of his work.



*Golding Constable's Flower Garden*, oil on canvas, 1812-16, 13x20 inches, Ipswich



*Golding Constable's Vegetable Garden*, oil on canvas, 1812-16, 13x20 inches, Ipswich

The two paintings of the parental home, *Golding Constable's Flower Garden* and *Golding Constable's Vegetable Garden*, were commenced before the death of his parents in 1815 and 1816, but may not have

been completed until thereafter. They would have been an important reminder of the happy childhood spent with a loving father and mother.



*Flatford Mill, Scene on a Navigable River*, 1817, oil on canvas, 40x50 inches, Tate Britain

**Flatford Mill** was the first of his major oil paintings on the life of the Stour. Constable began to paint this canvas mainly outdoors, a few months before his marriage to Maria Bicknell. The summers of 1816 and 1817 were the last occasions upon which Constable spent any length of time at East Bergholt and the last in which he painted directly from the scenery of his native Suffolk and its thought that this painting was completed in the studio. The buildings of the Suffolk Mill, which belonged to Constable's father, are depicted in the distance, lying behind the lock. Further depicted, are two barges, travelling upstream, in the process of being disconnected from the tow-horse, on the Essex side, so that they can be poled underneath the footbridge, the edge of which can just be pictured on the lower left hand corner. It was the first painting to depict the working life of the Stour, which by this time had been in part canalised to allow the passage of barges. This is one of the first examples of a major work, exhibited in 1817 and then reworked, on this occasion, the upper foliage and most of the sky and then exhibited again. Note the men fishing off the towpath and also the botanical detail in the right foreground.

A few years earlier, in 1811, Constable first visited Salisbury, to stay at Bishop Fisher's Palace, where he met Fisher's nephew, the then Revd John Fisher for the first time. Fisher, who lived at Leadenhall, became Constable's close friend, confidant, confessor and most ardent advocate. Constable would make regular visits to both Salisbury and to Gillingham, in Dorset, where Fisher was also the vicar;

Fisher later became Archdeacon of Berkshire; there is a funerary monument to Fisher in Salisbury Cathedral. Relations between the Fishers and Constables were such that Constable's biographer C.R. Leslie based much of Constable's biography on their correspondence over their nearly twenty-year friendship. Constable would also go on to produce some of his most memorable paintings, those of Salisbury Cathedral, but more of that later.

So, having followed John Constable's developing career up to 1817, as he begins to enjoy the company and support of his devoted wife, starts a family and anticipates a new chapter in his professional life, with his 'six-footers', we turn our attention back to Turner, who became a full Royal Academician in 1802. Wishing to enhance his reputation at the Academy, Turner embarked on a series of large oil paintings to follow up on his first success with *Fishermen at Sea*.



*The Fifth Plague of Egypt*, 1800, oil on canvas, 49x72 inches, Indianapolis Museum of Art

This is Turner's first real essay in the Grand Manner, an Old Testament scene of death and destruction, painted in the style of Nicholas Poussin and exhibited at the Academy un 1880. It is also a painting very much in the manner of the Sublime, to be followed by many such like treatments of various themes over the following decades. The picture was bought for 150 guineas by William Beckford, owner of the *Altieri Claude*s and builder of Fonthill Abbey, five watercolour views of which by Turner were exhibited at the R.A. in the same year.

In *Calais Pier, with French Poissards preparing for Sea*, a cross-channel ferry (a packet), fully laden with passengers and flying a British Flag, is approaching the port of Calais. Around it small French fishing boats (poissards) head out to sea. The painting is based on an actual event, Turner experienced when he crossed the channel from Dover to Calais on his first trip abroad, made possible by the 'Peace of Amiens.' This was the first safe opportunity for many painters since the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, to travel to the continent.



*Calais Pier, with French Poissards preparing for Sea: English Packet Arriving*, 1803, oil on canvas, N.G.

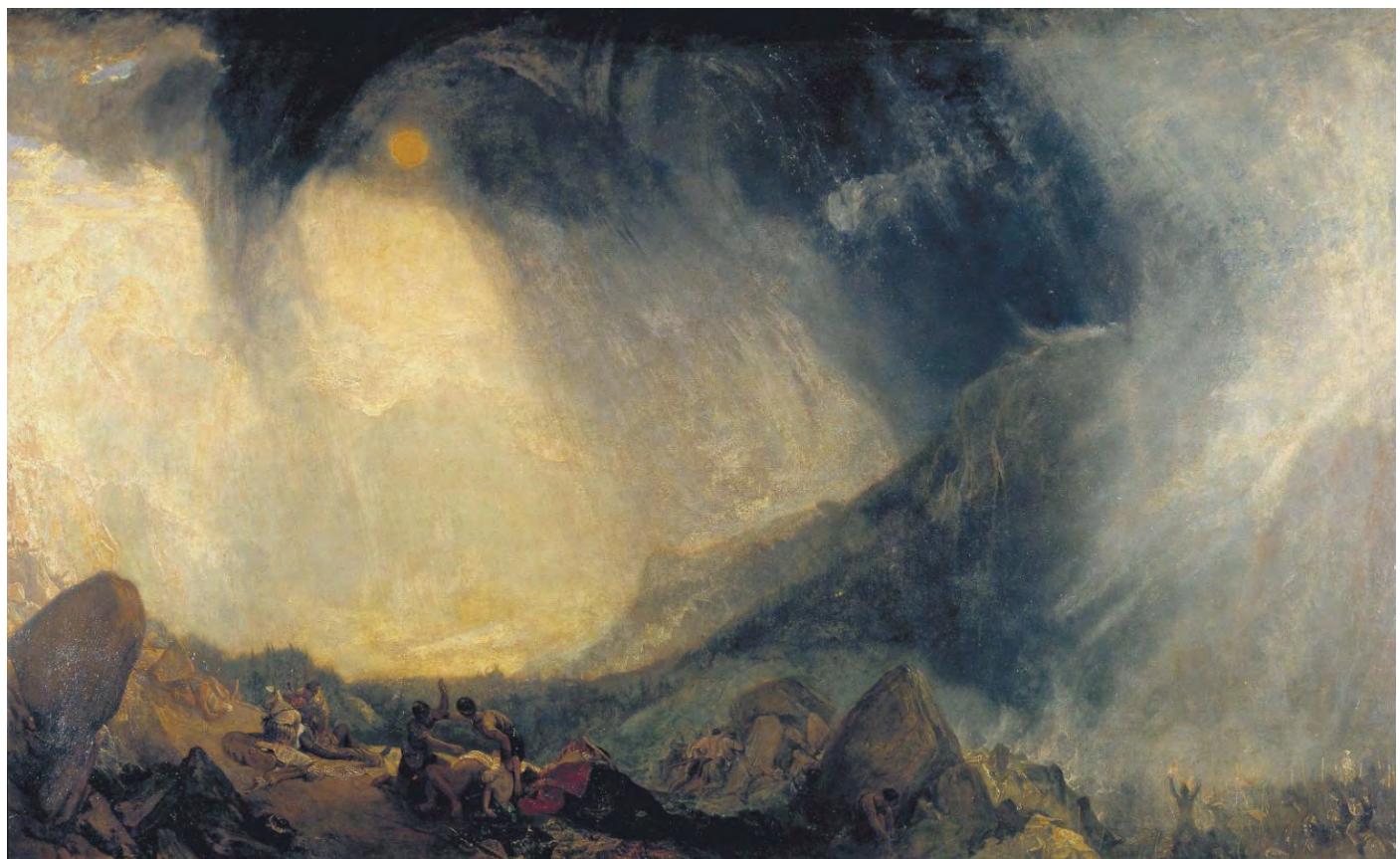


*Chateaux de St Michael, Bonneville, Savoy*. 1803, oil on canvas, 36x48 inches Yale Centre for British Art

As with *Fishermen at Sea*, his first major oil painting of the sea, Turner has demonstrated his ability to portray the Sublime nature of the windswept scene, with ominous rainclouds overhead and a churning

sea threatening to overturn vulnerable boats. He has elevated a genre scene, coupled with his own first hand experience, to an unprecedented scale (68x94 inches), claiming for it equal rank with the Biblical Plagues and great marines of this and the previous two years. These personal experiences are enshrined in the 'Calais Pier' sketchbook, which includes several drawings with such inscriptions as 'Our Landing at Calais. Nearly swampt.' Following exhibition, there was only qualified praise from Benjamin West, Henry Fuseli and Sir George Beaumont, the principal caveat being the perceived lack of finish in the foreground.

A series of varied narratives followed this relatively brief 1802 continental tour, where he travelled as far as Switzerland and returned via Paris to visit the Louvre, whose collection was swelled by art looted by Napoleonic conquests. *Chateaux de St. Michael, Bonneville, Savoy* (page 16) resulted from sketches completed on this first continental tour. Exhibited at the 1803 Academy exhibition, this painting garnered much more favourable critical comment, from no less a person than Sir Thomas Lawrence, who commented, 'that in Turner's pictures there are his usual faults, but greater beauties' and this picture, 'He though remarkably fine.' Here there is an especially Poussinesque treatment of the painting, applied to a straightforward landscape, but without historical, or mythological pretensions. Progression into depth is achieved by both solid forms and bands of light placed parallel to the picture plane and the colours have a sharpness and clarity attuned to this classical composition and may have a precedent in general principles to Poussin's, *Landscape with a Roman Road*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, which passed through the London salerooms in 1802.



*Snow Storm: Hannibal and His Army crossing the Alps*, 1812, oil on canvas, 5x8 ft, Tate Britain

Hannibal's crossing of the Alps in 218 BC was a common source of Romantic and proto-Romantic inspiration. John Gage, the prominent art historian has suggested that Turner saw a parallel between the struggle of Rome and Carthage and that between England and Napoleonic France. On his visit to Paris in 1802, Turner had visited David's studio and seen his iconic painting, *Napoleon on the St. Bernard Pass*, in which Napoleon is portrayed as the modern Hannibal. However, another source of inspiration was a violent storm witnessed at his patron Walter Fawkes house, Farnley Hall in Yorkshire in 1810.

Turner's insistence that the picture should be hung low on the wall, reveals his understanding of the novel effect of his vortex-like composition, which draws the viewer into its swirling depths. The picture was well received by the critics, as an example the critic for the *Examiner* wrote on 7<sup>th</sup> June, 'This is a performance that places Mr Turner in the highest classes, for it possesses a considerable portion of that main excellence of the sister Arts, Invention.....This picture delights the imagination by the impressive agency of a few uncommon and sublime subjects in material nature and of terror in its display of the effects of moral evil.' The critic of the *Repository of Arts, Literature, Commerce* for the 12<sup>th</sup> June added, 'Almost led to describe it as the effect of magic, which this Prospero of the graphic arts can call into action and give to airy nothing a substantial form.....All that is terrible and grand is personified in the mysterious effect of the picture; we cannot but admire the genius displayed in this extraordinary work.'

Finally, in this essay we turn our attention briefly to the principal source of Turner's energy in the years 1806-19, that is his *Liber Studiorum*, conceived in part as a response to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Claude Lorrain's volume of drawings, entitled *Liber Veritatis*, of which prints were published in three volumes by the well known publisher, John Boydell. The principal purpose of the *Liber Veritatis* was to provide Claude with a private record of his finished oils and their respective owners, which also served the purpose of providing a reference by which genuine works could be distinguished from forgeries. Turner, however, always intended his work to be published.

These prints were an expression of his intentions for landscape art and categorised the genre into five basic types: Marine, Mountainous, Pastoral, Historical and Architectural, although Turner frequently used the term Epic Pastoral as an additional category, at the expense of the others. In total, seventy prints were issued in fourteen parts between 1807-19, for which he first produced sepia watercolour drawings, then etched outlines onto copper plates. There were five plates in each part and collaborating engravers then worked the etched plates in mezzotint. Like Durer and Rembrandt and many other lesser masters before, the publication of prints was the principal way in which painters might achieve the widest publicity for their work. On his continental tour of 1802, Turner visited the Thunersee in the



Swiss Alps and he would have based this print on one of his many sketches, complete with annotations of the weather. The *Lake of Thun*, would also have been based on a large watercolour version. The zig-zag bolt of lightning of Biblical proportions, was probably added for effect and would have enabled Turner to nominate it as an example of Epic Landscape.

*The Lake of Thun*, 1807, etching, drypoint and mezzoprint, J.M.W. Turner & Charles Turner



***The Calm***, 1807, etching, aquatint and mezzoprint, J.M.W. Turner & Charles Turner



***Dutch Ships in a Calm Sea***, 1665, oil on canvas, 14x17 inches, Rijksmuseum

*The Calm*, was undoubtedly based on one of the many Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century marine paintings by both William van de Velde and Jan van de Cappelle, the two greatest exponents of serene seascapes, many of which were to be found in aristocratic collections, or alternatively he may have just seen a print, which were also widely available. Whilst a small painting, *Dutch Ships in a Calm Sea*, is quite justly one of the most renowned of such themes.



*Rivaux Abbey*, 1812, etching and mezzoprint, J.M.J. Turner & Henry Dawes

The village of Rivaux is in North Yorkshire. The abbey was founded in 1131 and ruined following the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1538. The trees and build-up of earth and rubble have since been cleared away, but otherwise the view has changed little. In *Modern Painters*, John Ruskin, who would later prove a stalwart supporter, saw the composition as one of Turner's records of human pride. The painter would return to the subject from different viewpoints, producing both watercolours and engravings.

At this stage in 1818, the careers of the two painters were such that whilst Constable was yet to achieve his goal of becoming an Academician, his fortunes were definitely on the rise and in the next decade, or so, he would produce the paintings which defined his career and legacy. Meanwhile, Turner's meteoric advance, now meant that he had become a full Academician in 1802, had opened his own London Gallery in 1804 and was elected Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy in 1807. His first tour to Italy in 1819 would begin a new phase in his career, one that would mark him out as one of the greatest innovators in the history of landscape painting.