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In memory of Frank M. Turner, 1944–2010

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved.

Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*

‘Could I not be preparing myself now to be more useful?’ said Dorothea to him, one morning early in the time of courtship; ‘could I not learn to read Latin and Greek aloud to you, as Milton’s daughters did to their father, without understanding what they read?’ ‘I fear that would be wearisome to you,’ said Mr. Casaubon, smiling, ‘and, indeed, if I remember rightly, the young women you have mentioned regarded that exercise in unknown tongues as a ground for rebellion against the poet.’ ‘Yes; but in the first place they were very naughty girls, else they would have been proud to minister to such a father; and in the second place they might have studied privately and taught themselves to understand what they read, and then it would have been interesting. I hope you don’t expect me to be naughty and stupid.’

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Thus the question is not how to reconstruct aristocratic society, but how to make liberty proceed out of that democratic state of society in which God has placed us.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*



1 Despite his life being cut short by tuberculosis, Richard Parkes Bonington (1802–28) was a central figure in English Romantic landscape painting. *A Sea Piece* (1824) depicts commercial shipping in the English Channel, probably observed from Dunkirk. The smaller craft to the right is in distress and the brisk swell, low horizon and huge sky are typical of Bonington and also typically Romantic. Frank Turner was well acquainted with this painting not only as part of the Wallace Collection in London, but also as a preparatory watercolour sketch that resides at the Yale Center for British Art. The sketch is inscribed *ad naturam* (from nature) and was a conscious departure from academic values.



2 John Constable (1776–1837) was a major figure in English Romantic painting. Embodying the artist's belief that 'painting is but another word for feeling', *Hadleigh Castle* (1829) depicts a ruined castle at the mouth of the Thames Estuary east of London. At once forlorn and picturesque, the medieval ruin marks the changed sensibility of the age towards the Middle Ages discussed in Chapter 5, and may have helped Constable's election to the Royal Academy the following year. Art historian Angus Trumble notes, 'While dwelling on the decay of the medieval building in its pastoral setting and causing the Thames Estuary to shine under grand shafts of light, Constable perhaps also alludes to the ancient Christian metaphor of death: all his boats point downstream, and, receding, sail out to sea.'



3 William Holman Hunt (1827–1910) was an English painter and one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The intention of the group was to reject a mechanistic approach to art, emphasising spiritualism over materialism and nature over artifice. They found inspiration for both in medievalism. Inspired by Alfred Lord Tennyson's 1832 poem, 'The Lady of Shalott', Hunt's depiction captures the moment after she has broken the rule of the curse forbidding her to look directly at the outside world. Her unravelling tapestry is symbolic of a world that is collapsing and will lead to her death. It can also be read as echoing the Fall from the Garden of Eden. Equally, the picture, as the poem, narrates an everyday world from which women are banished, and which they enter at their peril.



4 John Martin (1789–1854) was an English Romantic painter. He invoked Old Testament narratives to conjure the sublime, as depicted here in *The Deluge* (1834), his rendering of Noah's flood, simultaneously an image of vast punishment and divine protection. It shares with other Romantic work of the period a dramatised nature and naturalised apocalypse consistent with Martin's defence of deism and natural religion, early evolutionary thinking, and rationality. Preoccupied with technology, Martin cannot be easily categorised merely as a Romantic. He was a major figure of his generation and spanned the Enlightenment as well.



5 J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) took Romanticism to an almost abstract expression long before abstraction was categorised. In *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846) he depicts the Archangel Michael appearing on the Day of Judgment with flaming sword. It evokes religiosity in a dazzle of atmospheric light but without exactly being religious: a personal expression consistent with a period in which religion and art alike were becoming creatures of subjective interpretation.



6 Joseph Wright (1734–97) replaces a religious narrative (such as the Nativity) with a mechanical one – an orrery – in the meticulous painting *A Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery* (1766). An orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system which illustrates the relative position of planets and moons. Wright is celebrating the rational miracle, as he saw it, of technology. The dramatic source of light is neither the sun nor God: it is a man-made lamp.



7 Caspar David Friedrich (1744–1840) paints his wife looking out of a part-shuttered window onto a harbour. There are numerous commentaries on *Woman at a Window* (1822), which by the late twentieth century had become a celebrated instance of German Romantic painting. Aside from the contemplative air it clearly shows a female confined to a strictly ordered interior, while life – symbolised by the ship's mast – literally passes her by.



8 In *The Good Mother* (c. 1777), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806) paints an idealised, even idyllic rendering of the desired social role of a woman as a devoted mother, the mature counterpart to her role as coquette, as shown in *The Swing* (Plate 9).



9 Fragonard was a French painter associated with the final decades of the Old Regime, before the French Revolution. *The Swing* (c. 1767) shows a young man watching a woman on a swing, being pushed by an elderly man. As a depiction of gender roles, it shows her the objectified plaything of men, her only destination in life the status of wife or lover or mother. She has no role outside of those designations.



10 The preeminent artist of his generation and enormously influential in France, Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) represented the academic, historical tradition of painting that is associated with the final years of the Old Regime before the French Revolution. In *The Death of Socrates* (1787) he reproduces the scene in which Socrates took his own life, depicting a calm, stoical death shorn of Christian symbolism and presented in an equally calm, Neoclassical style. The stern tone contrasts with Fragonard's Rococo flippancy while also offering an example of salon painting against which Romantics would rebel.



11 Having succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy and establishing the Roman Republic, Brutus is forced to condemn to death his own sons for taking part in a plot to restore the monarchy. The unsubtle point of re-evoking the classical scene in *Lictors Bring Back to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (1789) was to impress upon France – in the year of revolution – the importance of reason embodied in civic duty, attuned to the purposes of the Republic. David himself aligned with the Revolution and his reputation rose accordingly. He would later trim his position with successive changes of leadership, eventually becoming an exile.





12 Augustus Egg (1816–63) scored a hit with this sensationalist instance of Victorian social moralism, *Past and Present, nos. I, II and III* (1858), a triptych showing the complete fall of a woman from middle-class respectability to homelessness. In the first painting a family remains together but the drawing-room scene is full of dread portents, the husband having just received proof of his wife's infidelity. In the second image, five years later, the two girls are orphans, the father dead and the mother gone. The third painting is synchronous with the second, as shown by the moon, and depicts the mother shivering under a railway arch, with an infant, the offspring of the affair, now long over. The triptych embodies the Victorian double standard. As Caroline Norton, an early feminist, wrote, 'the faults of women are visited as sins, the sins of men are not even visited as faults'.



13 George Clausen (1852–1944) painted this group portrait, *Schoolgirls, Haverstock Hill* (1880), when he was still single. There is an implicit tension in the frank gaze of the ‘schoolgirls’, who look more like young women than children. The opposite of Friedrich’s turned-away, wistful wife, they are in the public sphere and not afraid to look you in the eye; they are educated and they are unmarried. The picture is all the more remarkable for its consideration of class tension, the flower-seller and milkmaid confined to working roles and marginalised within the composition.



14 One of at least a dozen portraits of one of the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century, this one painted in 1865 by Irish portraitist Sir Frederic William Burton (1816–1900) is notable for its colour. George Eliot, in her novel *Middlemarch*, captures a world in which women were largely denied an education. Published as a single volume for the first time in 1874, it came five years after the founding of the first women’s college at Cambridge (Girton), but four years before that at Oxford (Lady Margaret Hall). Virginia Woolf described *Middlemarch* as ‘the magnificent book that, with all its imperfections, is one of the few English novels written for grown-up people’.

