

VICTORIAN PAINTING- A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: History acknowledges art as an essential element of a culture, in close connection with the living standard of the individuals. Apparently, art reveals a paradoxical statute: while its expressiveness is indeed direct, its meaning frequently refuses transparency and turns ambiguity into a main feature of a large number of art works. Considered, at turns, as an artist's individual expression, as a mirror of a certain milieu, or as communication, implying artist and audience, as well, art seems to encompass personal space to the extent to which it approaches social environment. Nineteenth-century British art, and more specifically, British painting, displaying a variety of subjects and styles, either of classical descent or attempting at bringing forth new developments, may be seen as the setting that brought together a wide range of artistic options, which concerned both imagery and forms. From battlefield scenes provided by the Napoleonic or Greek wars to subjects inspired by the Industrial Revolution and foreign countries to portraits, genre and landscape painting, the vast subject matter was approached in varied forms by the different artistic movements and styles of the period.

Keywords: art, Victorian painting, artistic movements, style, subject

As Geraldine Pelles makes it explicit in *Art, Artists and Society: Origins of Modern Dilemma; Painting in England and France, 1750-1850*, art is widely perceived as an opponent to technology (which, at its turn, is assumed to oppose to human values), owing to its being the expression of the free will and of spontaneous conduct, capable of releasing energies so constantly censured both out of constraint or out of self-criticism, or owing to its being a device to be handled by power entities in order to “raise the spiritual tone of the community”. (1963: 2)

Apparently, art reveals a paradoxical statute: while its expressiveness is indeed direct, its meaning frequently refuses transparency and turns ambiguity into a main feature of a large

number of art works. Considered, at turns, as an artist's individual expression, as a mirror of a certain milieu, or as communication, implying artist and audience as well, art seems to encompass personal space to the extent to which it approaches social environment. Attempts have been made to establish associations between the styles of art and the defining characteristics of societies and art has even come to be analyzed according to its capacity of setting forth elements relevant to the universal constants of form, which refuse time or space limitation. (Pelles, 1963: 3)

Art, as an expression of a certain society, may often refuse analyses, and the finding out of a general pattern able to equate art styles with environment remains an issue which cannot be easily carried through. Modern art, too, with its multitude of styles, appears to refuse the assertion of a direct relation with its rapidly changing milieu, which, at its turn, seems to give reason for the variety of coexisting genres and subject approaches. Nonetheless, the starting point of modern art coincide with "a dramatic quickening of pace ... which signaled a new era in artistic as well as in social, economic, and political life. ... Particularly in the 1820s and 1830s, the apparently negative factors of alienation and ambiguity became for many persons positive attractions. ... Change itself became a virtue together with independence, originality, boldness, and spontaneity among the criteria which, through the years, have constituted a canon by which works and whole styles of art are created." (Pelles, 1963: 4-5)

Under the previously mentioned circumstances, nineteenth-century British art, and more specifically, British painting, displaying a variety of subjects and styles, either of classical descent or attempting at bringing forth new developments, may be seen as the setting that brought together a wide range of artistic options, which concerned both imagery and forms. From battlefield scenes provided by the Napoleonic or Greek wars to subjects inspired by the Industrial Revolution and foreign countries (which became easily attainable, owing to the new and more rapid means of transport and which exerted their attraction especially due to their distinctive environment), to portraits, genre and landscape painting, the vast subject matter was approached in varied forms by the different artistic movements and styles of the period.

Authors consider that during the opening years of the nineteenth century, Neoclassical art (mid-nineteenth century and early-nineteenth century), which "restrains figures in a

monochromatic world centered within the picture frame, where clearly delineated shapes are traced in simple planes of action” (Pelles, 1963: 11-2), confronted with Romantic art, which emerged as a newer stylistic choice, making use of sparse lights and shadows, additions of colour, and sinuous contours; meanwhile, by mid-nineteenth century, realism came to assert itself as a means of disclosing facts according to a direct and explicit manner, without conforming to the rules of formal artistic theory. Later on, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Romantic tradition continues with Symbolism, considered to imbue art with a strange sensitivity and mysticism, in the vein of the former British Romantic painter John Henry Fuseli (1741-1825).

Inspired by earlier Greek art and Republican Roman art and observing the principles of order and reason, while following strict academic painting standards, Neoclassicism (approached, in Britain, by J. H. Mortimer - 1740-1779, J. Barry – 1741-1806, T. Stothard – 1755-1834, J. Hoppner – 1758-1810, etc.) focused on historical and mythological subjects, producing somber and dispassionate paintings, generally meant to display moral narratives.

Often considered as a reaction against Neoclassic rigidity, Romanticism (late-eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century), which is closely associated with J. M. W. Turner, J. Constable, and William Blake, developed as an expression of the individuals’ emotional reaction to life and centered on a series of principles, including the confidence in justice and the kindness of humanity, the faith in emotions and senses, as well as the praise of imagination. Nonetheless, Romanticism did not completely replace Neoclassicism, so that, around 1800, both styles came to exert their influence upon a series of artists of the period.

Although theorists (Pelles, 1963: 27-8) consider that English painting “had been virtually dormant from the Middle Ages until the eighteenth century, when it revived in the art of Hogarth”, and despite governments’ insignificant sponsorship of the arts (mostly until 1769, when the Royal Academy was founded), nonetheless, art succeeded in having exerted its attraction as a profession upon a large number of young people throughout the nineteenth century, and also witnessed an important increase of the number of painters showing their works in the exhibitions organized by the Royal Academy and the private galleries.

It appears, on the one hand, that the artist's free option was turned into a precondition for real art and could be overtly perceived in certain painters' resentment towards patronage (Blake, for instance, refused to paint portraits in order to satisfy his protector) and their belief in the artist's statute as a commander of his own talent and not as a follower of the public's taste, while, on the other hand, there were artists who considered approaching different styles with equal success, for a different audience: it is the case of Turner, who had a paying public for his engravings of English landscape and architecture, and a different one that admired and paid for his bolder artistic achievements, later in his life.

The early years of the nineteenth century were also a time of artistic unorthodoxy, which, besides displaying a certain costume (the group of the Ancients) or behavior (dandyism), developed simultaneously with the switch from Neoclassicism to Romanticism, generating a change from conventional formality towards originality and individuality. Meanwhile, both Romantic painters and Neoclassicists preferred to bring to forth the issues of their age in terms of past time, which seemed to pair with a longing for the grand style in art, considered to have its origin in the painters' eccentricities as well as in the demand for noble subjects, owing to aspiration of the middle class towards a life style emulating that of the upper classes.

Though, apparently, heroic figures were no more focused upon, the painters operated, in fact, an alteration of the meaning of the hero, lowering it from an embodiment of traditional, dignified ideals to images of average people represented in day by day circumstances. This sort of "democratization" of the hero passed extraordinary qualities to ordinary men "as carriers of truth, intensity, and the tragic character of human condition..." (Pelles, 1963: 122)

The interest in violent scenes (Benjamin West's *Death of the Pale Horse*, 1817, James Ward's *The Moment*, 1831), in war or in the aggressiveness of the elements (Turner's *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842), the use of animal imagery, with a view to conceal or enhance impressionability, a taste for suffering shifted into sentimentality (David Wilkie's *A Sick Lady Visited by Her Physician*), representations of both fragile and dangerous women pointing to their equivocal social image in the epoch, the increased popularity of sensual themes and the female nude (William Etty's *The Sirens and Ulysses*, 1837), were approached by most of the nineteenth-century English painters, irrespective of their stylistic affiliation.

The dominance of the Romantic Movement in the British art, at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, included artists like James Ward (1769 – 1859), whose large-scale landscape, entitled *Gordale Scar*, is considered a masterpiece of English Romantic painting, Joseph Wright of Derby (1734 – 1797), and John Martin (1789 – 1854).

Originated in the 1760s, British Romanticism developed its characteristics in opposition with the stylistic configuration and subject matter of the conventional figurative art of the time, while setting forth strange, affecting, or bold themes and exploiting dramatic variations of light and shade as well as linear drawing. The movement witnessed the geniuses of William Blake (1757 – 1827), the early English romantic painter, who developed a deeply personal style impregnated by forceful and grandiose images, John Constable (1776 – 1837) and J. M. W. Turner (1775 – 1851), who handled colour and light in order to turn landscape painting into grandiose scenes. All of them are considered as having hugely influenced both the British artists and the foreign movements in the decades to follow. Accordingly, Turner was credited to have exerted his influence on the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist movements, while Blake was acknowledged as having influenced the group of the Ancients (which included Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert, and George Richmond as key members) as well as subsequent modernist painters.

The most important artists among the Ancients (which, besides the three painters nominated previously, also comprised Frederick Tatham – 1805-1878, F. O. Finch – 1802-1862, and Henry Walter – 1786-1849) were either students of the Royal Academy of Art or exhibitors at the Royal Academy and, by 1824, they came together, founding one of the first artistic associations in English art. The Ancients, who used to meet at William Blake's place (Wilcox, 2005: 18) and in Samuel Palmer's house, at Shoreham, in Kent, are considered to have opposed to the academic art establishment of their time, while reacting to its hierarchical structure, and, together with Blake, are acknowledged as a source of inspiration for certain modernist artists of the twentieth century, including Paul Nash, Graham Sutherland, and Dora Carrington.

The artists chose their subject-matter from the Bible, or from a glorified rural past, producing intense pastoral scenes, which, although generally accepted at the Royal Academy exhibitions

“stimulated no critical enthusiasm and were evidently not considered sufficiently threatening to provoke outrage, as the Pre-Raphaelites were to do a generation later.” (Vaughan, 2005: 20)

Most of the Ancients were closely connected with John Linnell (1792-1882), who, although was never a member of the group, introduced Samuel Palmer and his fellow-Ancients to William Blake. In the epoch, Linnell was considered a rival of John Constable, with a preference for Renaissance Northern European art, and he made his name as a landscapist, portrait painter, and engraver.

Turner, whose style evolved from an Italianate tradition towards its final characteristics displayed by the painter's wild landscapes exploring the effects of light, was supported by John Ruskin who, in the first volume of *Modern Painters* (first appeared in 1843), defended Turner's painting besides setting forth the idea that 'truth to nature' should be the fundamental goal of all artists. He went further by asserting that, unlike the Old Masters belonging to the period succeeding Renaissance, who praised pictorial convention, the new landscapists (Turner included) were closer to the so-called 'truth to nature' principle. And Ruskin conceived it as a material and moral truth deriving from artists' close observation of nature, which was opposed to studio inventions. (Ruskin, 1888: 20-1)

While Pre-Raphaelite painting encountered a divided reception in the epoch, the most known and well paid painters of the Victorian period included several artists that specialized in rendering a various range of subjects: from sentimental animal subjects (E. H. Landseer - 1802-1873) and 'beauties' in exotic or classical settings (Sir Frederic Leighton – 1830-1896, Lawrence Alma-Tadema – 1836-1912), to allegorical works (George Frederic Watts – 1817-1904) and scenes of social life (W. P. Frith – 1819-1909). Despite the fact that the subjects approached by most of these artists were characterized as “low key”, owing to the fact that they mainly focused on figure and landscape painting, Victorian painting owed part of its importance to the previously mentioned painters.

It is generally considered that the nineteenth century was largely an epoch of landscape painting throughout Europe, and the British were no exception to this observation: the beginning of the Victorian age was tremendously marked by the geniuses of two landscapists, J. M. W. Turner and John Constable, who, although displayed a different approach to nature, nonetheless

shared the common ground of having been the forerunners of modernism. In the opinion of art historians, Constable attempted at rendering the freshness of nature, in a manner that the previous painters failed to develop, and the first and most pregnant instances, showing his glittering display of natural landscape, could be found in his small sketches worked in the open air. Though he succeeded in maintaining that freshness in his larger studio paintings, his drafts from nature and preparatory works set forth more effectively his method of adding solid touches of pure white to the surface of the canvas in order to enhance the light, a method called “Constable’s snow”, which induced a sensation of fresh paint.

J. M. W. Turner, who, in 1802 was nominated the youngest full member of the Royal Academy, is valued as the most original English landscape painter and acknowledged to having initiated a completely different approach to landscape painting, owing to the fact that he raised the genre to the status of historical painting. And he managed to do that through displaying historical actions (for instance, *Snow Storm: Hannibal and His Army Crossing the Alps* – 1812) or natural forces (for example, *The Burning of the House of Lords and Commons* – 1835) within his landscape pictures. The painter’s style, dramatic and romantic, during the 1800s, evolved towards free representations of the land and sea, exploiting atmospheric effects (in the 1840s), and, ultimately, towards compositions of light and colour, prefiguring Impressionism.

Nineteenth-century landscape painting also owes its reputation to several artists (John Crome – 1768-1821, John Sell Cotman – 1782-1842, W. J. Muller – 1812-45, and Peter de Wint – 1784-1849), whose works represent important achievements in the history of English oil landscape painting. Other Victorian landscapists of a lesser value (Clarkson Stanfield – 1793-1867 or David Roberts – 1796-1864) are mainly known today owing to their mentioning in Ruskin’s *Academy Notes 1855 – 1888*.

Another important source of subjects for Victorian painters was British history, which provided them with a widely appreciated stuff that approached either the Middle Ages, the reign of Elizabeth I, the character of Mary, Queen of Scots, or the English Civil War (1642 - 1651) (for example, Ford Madox Brown’s *Cromwell on his Farm* - 1874, Millais’s *The Boyhood of Raleigh* - 1871). A feature that appeared to become a characteristic of most of the paintings inspired by the British history was the increased accuracy in representing the settings of the

period of time represented by the artists; with that end in view, the artists began to study books as well as art collections hosted by the Victoria and Albert Museum, founded in 1852 and named after Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

In a century when nation and State appeared to play an important role, a part of the Victorian history inspired paintings referring to war representations. The reign of Queen Victoria contains innumerable data regarding the military deeds of the British army in a series of conflicts worldwide and the Victorian public came to be acquainted with them, owing to the art renderings of either the wars or the colonial conflicts and rebellions fought by the nation's military force (William Simpson, *The Cavalry Affair of the Heights of Bulganek – The First Gun – 19th September 1854*).

Victorian painters also paid considerable attention to history subjects inspired by ancient Rome that provided them the background allowing the rendering of their varied interests. According to George Landow (1984: 1), although inferior British classes were under the influence of the Bible and reading was mainly encouraged with a view to being able to read the Scriptures, the upper and middle classes of the British society were largely accustomed with Roman history as well as with Latin, which appeared to come second, after English. With the emergence of a new power and wealth pattern, that gave lower and middle classes representatives the opportunity to acquire new social and material positions, a conflict context also showed up, opposing the Scriptures-based cultural mentalities to those relying on the classical past.

Nineteenth-century painters were attracted by Rome in a way that resulted not only in representations of the classical past, but also in pictures dealing with issues of the mediaeval Rome and nineteenth-century city, where the past is employed so as to enable a commentary upon the important issues of the epoch's English society. William Holman Hunt's *Rienzi* – 1849, for instance, approached a subject from the 1830s novel of Bulwer-Lytton and renders the conversion of the young scholar Rienzi to political life, after his younger brother is killed by rival noblemen; nonetheless, the painting has also been considered as a means of politically initiating the painter's nineteenth-century fellow citizens.

According to George Landow (1984: 4), a series of Victorian ideas were often presented in Roman costume by the painting of the era; it is the case, among others, of Sir Edward Poynter's canvas entitled *Faithful unto Death* (1865), exhibiting a Roman sentry at his post, despite the threatening eruption of Vesuvius, whose message has come to be understood as an appeal to an appropriate behaviour required to Victorian colonial administration.

In a similar vein, *The Romans Leaving Britain* (1865), by John Everett Millais, is considered as a representation of the call of duty as well as of the possible connection between Rome and Britain, which the Victorians often saw as a modern inheritor of the ancient power.

Especially during the years of middle and late Victorianism, a series of major painters (Lawrence Alma-Tadema, J. E. Millais) as well as minor ones painted scenes of what they imagined to be the everyday life of ancient Rome which "showing the Romans at home, as opposed to the Romans in the Forum and the battlefield, ... encouraged the Victorian viewer to identify with the inhabitants of the heroic age precisely by making that age less heroic. Thus, however much Carlyle urged that men and women in the age of Victoria desperately needed heroes and other models for greatness, painterly realism and the emphasis upon genre detail in Victorian pictorial representations of ancient Rome tend to produce singularly unheroic views of ancient greatness." (Landow 1984: 35): Alma-Tadema's *The Juggler* (1870), *The Armourer's Shop* (1866), *A Visit to the Studio* (1873), etc.

Meanwhile, apart from this meaning-conveying manner of resorting to Roman past, Victorian painting also approaches a different view of the topic, which treats Rome-inspired subjects mainly aesthetically, as pure expressions of form and colour, as in Frederic Lord Leighton's *Flaming June* (1895) and Alma-Tadema's *Young Woman in a Garden* (1866).

Social subjects were also approached by Victorian painting, in a manner considered to have derived from Hogarth, often focusing on a perennial concern of the time: "fallen" women: H. Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853), A. Egg's *Past and Present* (1858), D. G. Rossetti's *Found* (1853), G. F. Watts' *Found Drowned* (1849-50) or Richard Redgrave's *The Outcast* (1851). During the Victorian epoch, women were frequently perceived to be exposed to social evils, which seemed to require their protection from the threatening outside world. At the same time, the faults of the 'fallen' women, sexually seduced due to their own weakness, were

considered unpardonable, and such paintings came to be quite popular in their display of moralizing lessons.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the so-called “problem picture” used to leave the details of the painting’s narrative ambiguous and restrained from providing final answers, so that the viewers were free to speculate on what they saw before their eyes. The genre, which is scarcely resorted to nowadays, was quite trendy at the time of the yearly shows of the Royal Academy, in late nineteenth-century England (Fletcher, 2003). Besides, such paintings centred on sensitive social issues, which could not have been debated directly, frequently representing women in doubtful situations. Although, at the time, the viewers appeared to enjoy the genre, offering plausible narratives through letters addressed to the painters or through competitions organized by newspapers, modern art subsequently rejected it as low art and ranged it within popular culture. One of the earliest problem pictures in Victorian art was considered to be John Everett Millais’ *Trust Me* (1862).

Painters that included Frederick Walker (1840-1875, *The Vagrants*-1868), Luke Fildes (1843-1927, *The Village Wedding*-1883), and George Clausen (1852-1944, *The Girl at the Gate*-1889) approached the social condition of the poor through the mediation of rural scenes, where human misery appeared, to a certain extent, softened by the enviroing landscape. The milieu of heavy industry, on the other hand, was not widely represented and few were the painters who focused on subjects derived from the industrial field (William Bell Scott, 1811-1890, *Iron and Coal*, 1855-60).

Other painters including John Frederick Lewis (1804-1876, *The Coffee Bearer*, 1857), Edward Lear (1812-1888, *Masada*, 1858), Frederick Goodall (1822-1904, *The Finding of Moses*), David Roberts (1796-1864, *The Great Sphinx and Pyramids of Girzeh*, 1839), and Richard Dadd (1817-1886, *The Flight out of Egypt*, 1849-50) developed the so-called British Orientalist painting of the period, which primarily exploited subjects connected with foreign countries, and, more specifically with the Middle East.

Before coming into fashion, during the nineteenth-century, Orientalism appeared to have been inspired by the taste for exoticism, which could be traced long before this period. According to Lynn Thornton (Introduction to *Eastern Encounters*, the catalogue of an 1978

exhibition), images of far lands inhabitants, wearing turbans, were a stereotype of the European painting previous to the nineteenth-century conjunction between the Western and the Eastern civilizations, owing to colonial expansion, travelling, commercial connections, and the writings of the Romantics. Certain of the painters inspired by the Orient chose to spend several years in the East, either living with the nomads or in the larger cities, or even accompanying military and scientific expeditions; others remained there only for a few months, but continued to paint Oriental subjects after their returning home, relying upon their sketches or photographs, while others produced pictures of the Orient although they had no first-hand knowledge of the Eastern regions.

British Orientalist painters appear to have had their points of interest in regions like India, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. And, while topographical artists (Owen Jones, Bartlett, Page, etc.) travelled to Persia and Arabia in order to better chart the territories and sometimes published their work as engravings, a large number of Victorian painters showed an interest in the East owing to the fact that the area gave them the opportunity to use its landscapes in their religious paintings. Accordingly, for its most part, the origins of the British nineteenth-century Orientalism in painting may be considered connected with religion, as artists, like the Pre-Raphaelite William Holman Hunt (*The Scapegoat* – 1856, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* – 1860, *The Shadow of Death* – 1871), David Roberts (*Sketches in the Holy Land and Syria* – 1842-49), and even Frederick Goodall (*On the Banks of the Nile* – 1895), were religiously motivated when travelling to the Middle East.

Meanwhile, during the Victorian age, with its rejection of pictures of the nude body, originating in an all-pervasive code of respectability, Orientalism also appeared to supply a pretext for painting erotic scenes, which focused on dancers, chained slaves, or harems; it is considered that such paintings, despite their focusing on female naked body, found acceptance in the epoch, as they were most often attributed titles explicitly connected with Eastern regions or mythology that foreshadowed the painting's erotic nature.

During the Victorian age, artists of different stylistic extraction approached subjects derived from myths, symbol and folklore and took an insight into fairy painting, either as an exploit of a lifelong passion (Richard Dadd, Joseph Noel Paton) and a manner to assert and gain recognition

of their artistic careers (Daniel Maclise), or as a way of exploiting the popularity of the genre (Joseph Mallord William Turner, William Etty, Edwin Landseer, John Everett Millais, William Bell Scott, and Arthur Hughes). Fairy paintings were exhibited on a regular basis at the Royal Academy shows throughout the nineteenth century, and the artists extracted their subjects from various sources that included Shakespeare's plays (*The Tempest*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*), the poetry of Milton and Spenser as well as folklore and fairy tales.

With the mid-nineteenth-century spread of illustrated books and the important increase of fairy pictures audience, a series of painters (George Cruikshank, Richard "Dicky" Doyle, Arthur Hughes, Arthur Rackham, J. D. Batten, R. A. Bell, etc.) reconsidered their following of an academic career that could bring them public recognition, and, instead, laid the foundations of the Victorian fairy illustration, which developed popular media through satirical journals (*Punch*), novel illustrations, engraved folios, and fairy tale collections.

The nineteenth-century art also witnessed an expansion of portrait painting, which is assumed to have its origins in several factors of various extraction: the large number of wealthy middle-class landowners and traders, who made their fortunes owing to the new industrial and commercial context, the increase use of oil colours and canvases as well as the augmented demand for visually recording people and places.

According to Jeremy Maas (1969: 211), most painters of the Victorian period, including Wilkie, Etty and Landseer, approached portraiture and, although, they were primarily subject painters (John Collier – 1850-1934, Luke Fildes – 1844-1927, James Tissot – 1836-1902, etc.), they, nonetheless, "achieved, to a greater or lesser degree, distinction as portraitists." (Maas, 1969: 211) George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), who considered himself primarily as an allegorical painter, was generally ranked as the most accomplished Victorian portrait painter while Leighton, Poynter and Alma-Tadema created portraits in a neoclassical manner.

The Pre-Raphaelites and their associates (D. G. Rossetti, F. M. Brown, E. Burne-Jones, Holman Hunt, and Millais) gave remarkable portraits, too, which are considered to have been painted according to their distinctive vision and to bear the imprint of their particular subjectivity.

In accordance with the theories of visual art, genre painting encompasses those pictures that represent scenes and situations of everyday life comprising interiors, domestic settings and mealtimes, farming and herding scenes, tavern and market renderings, celebrations, household labour, street scenes, etc. The most evident characteristic of this kind of painting resides in the realistic presentation of the scenes displayed, which may be perceived as opposed to the classical tradition that used to attribute noble or dramatic features to the scenes depicted. While sometimes it is difficult to delineate genre painting from landscapes (which, as a rule, do not give particular significance to human figure) or still life interiors (that, although presenting domestic scenes, rely upon a posed configuration of items), it is widely admitted that genre painting sets forth a representation of habitual events, where human figure is an important element.

Victorian England, with its remarkable changes brought to manufacture production, farming, and living conditions, inspired a series of painters to exploit visually the habitual life events of common people. Among them, David Wilkie (1785 – 1841) and William Powell Frith (1819 – 1909) were two of the most widely known genre painters of the epoch; Wilkie is acknowledged as the initiator of the nineteenth-century school of British genre painting, besides having been acknowledged as a portrait artist and a “pioneer of the interpretation of Scottish history” (Collins: 2014) and part of his work (*The Letter of Introduction – 1813, Distraint for Rent – 1815*) is being exhibited at the National Gallery of Scotland. As far as his dedication to genre painting is concerned, he is attributed a significant influence both on the Scottish painters of his time (Alexander Fraser – 1785-1865, William Lizars – 1788-1859, William Kidd – 1790-1863) and on the subsequent generation that included: John Phillip (1817-67) and Erskine Nicol (1825-1904).

Frith, a full member of the Royal Academy beginning with 1853, considered one of the most important British painters of social history, produced several large-scale genre paintings: *Life at the Seaside – 1854*, (which critics range among the most accurate pictorial representations of the Victorian Age), *Derby Day – 1858*, and *The Railway Station – 1862* that contains a large amount of details, which seem to have exerted a huge appeal on the painter’s contemporaries.

Also ranging within the category of the nineteenth-century genre painting, the paintings of Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-73) approached animal rendering with a fresh vision, which relied upon the insertion of “sentimental anecdotes” and upon attributing human emotions to animal world; his canvases also emphasized the representation of animal furs and hairs and attached emotional touches to the paintings.

Victorian painting, with its wide range of subjects and styles, approached by the different artistic movements of the period, not only managed to exert its attraction upon a large audience, but, even more important, it fully succeeded in raising “the spiritual tone of the community”.

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