

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award at any other educational institution.

Alan Bean

*'NATURAL PIETY' AND SENTIMENT: CHILDREN, LANDSCAPE AND RELIGION IN THE PAINTINGS
OF WILLIAM COLLINS, R.A. (1787-1847)*

By

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Abstract

Very little has been written about the work of the painter William Collins, R.A. (1787-1847) despite the fact that his contemporaries considered him to be one of the leading artists of his time. Most of his paintings are unknown to modern scholarship, with the result that an assessment of his significance for nineteenth-century British art has never been properly undertaken. Whilst a number of his contemporaries, such as David Wilkie, William Mulready, Charles Lock Eastlake, William Dyce and John Rogers Herbert have been the subject of detailed examination, and their contributions recognised, Collins has not.

This thesis fills that gap in art historical scholarship of the period, first by identifying as many of Collins's paintings as possible, and then by undertaking a close reading and detailed visual analysis of them. It establishes the links between his painting and the social, literary and religious cross-currents of his time, and demonstrates that Collins was actively involved in the fields of genre, landscape and coastal painting, and that in all these fields he gave children an unusual agency. Between 1838 and 1843, during the first phase of the Oxford Movement, he produced a series of paintings which reflected major Tractarian pre-occupations. During that same period, towards the end of his life, he painted a number of biblical subjects which demonstrate that he was at the forefront of attempts to establish a distinct Protestant approach to religious art. Many features found in his approach were adopted a few years later by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who knew the Collins family well.

I conclude that the currently understood histories of nineteenth-century British art need re-evaluation, so as to include Collins's significant contributions to landscape painting, the portrayal of children, paintings of the coast, and religious art of the period. I also make the case for regarding Collins as a Pre-Raphaelite precursor.

Dedication

For Sibyl Ruth

Acknowledgements

It is now over fifty years since I handed in the report which I submitted as part of my Master's degree from the Courtauld Institute of Art. The prospect of applying to do a doctoral thesis on William Collins, after all that time, was quite daunting. A number of people encouraged me along that road. I should particularly like to thank Andrew Gasson and Paul Lewis of the Wilkie Collins Society, and the Society's patron Faith Clarke (William Collins's great-great-granddaughter), and Christiana Payne of Oxford Brookes University for their early encouragement. I received valuable advice from Sarah Victoria Turner and Martin Postle of the Paul Mellon Centre, from Martin Myrone whilst at Tate Britain, and from Rosie Dias of the University of Warwick. I am very grateful to Thomas Ardill, Michaela Giebelhausen and Nancy Langham Hooper for making available to me their unpublished PhD theses.

Curators of the art galleries and museums which hold Collins's work were most helpful in facilitating my visits to their stores, and close examination of the paintings in their care, as were staff at a number of stately homes where Collins's paintings are still located. I am particularly grateful to Alex Patterson at Liverpool Museums, and to Jeremy Johnson and James Giffin at Guildhall Museum and Art Gallery. Staff at Bonhams, Christies and Sotheby's were very helpful in contacting past buyers, with a view to them contacting me. I am most grateful to those private collectors who responded; they were happy to facilitate a detailed examination of their paintings, to share their own enthusiasm, and to offer me hospitality, as were the collectors that I was able to contact direct.

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- 6.9. William Collins, *The Two Disciples at Emmaus*. Detail of bread and figs.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis constitutes the first in-depth examination of the paintings of William Collins, R.A. (1787-1847) since 1848, when his son Wilkie Collins published a biography of his father.¹ That remains the only book published about the artist. The overarching question that the thesis addresses is what Collins contributes to our understanding of British art in the nineteenth century. The thesis identifies three key aspects of his paintings which he developed at distinct points in his career and which are of importance to that understanding: his portrayal of children between 1809 and 1846; his contribution to landscape and coastal painting between 1816 and 1846; and his late paintings, post 1838, which are either overtly of a religious theme, or have an iconography which would have been recognised by contemporaries as such.

Section One of this Introduction charts his descent from fame into obscurity, an obscurity from which the limited scholarship on Collins has hitherto failed to rescue him. By demonstrating his importance to nineteenth-century British art history, this thesis aims to bring him to scholarly attention and to ensure his significance is duly recognised. In Section

¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A., with selections from his Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848 [hereafter '*Memoirs*']. Wilkie Collins miscalculated the year of his father's birth, stating on page four of Volume I that he was born on 18 September 1788. Since the publication of his biography of his father, his birth year has almost invariably been given as 1788, and not 1787. However, his death certificate records his age at death on 17 February 1847 as 59, which is not consistent with his having been born on 19 September 1788, and he gave his age as 19 when enrolling in the Royal Academy schools on 15 January 1807. I am grateful to Paul Lewis, secretary of the Wilkie Collins Society, for drawing my attention to the baptismal record of St Marylebone church which shows his baptism on 21 October 1787, and records his date of birth as 19 September 1787. Those details are duplicated in the Bishop's Transcript. The actual day of birth may have been wrongly recorded, or misremembered, since William Collins himself celebrated his birthday on 18 September (His wife's entry in her Italian journal for Monday 18 September 1837 begins 'Wm's birthday', and Wilkie Collins also gives that as his father's birthday), but there can be no doubt about the month and year of his birth. Paul Lewis was instrumental in securing the appropriate amendment by the Royal Academy of Arts to their records. Collins's baptismal record and death certificate both record his full name as William John Thomas Collins, but in practice he only used his first forename.

Two I analyse the small amount of existing scholarly literature which refers to Collins, and point to its limitations. Section Three explains the sources I have drawn upon in my research. Section Four explains the approach I have adopted in this thesis. Section Five provides a summary of the argument in the six chapters of the thesis.

Section One: The descent from fame into obscurity

Collins was unquestionably one of the most celebrated artists of his day. Towards the end of his life, the *Illustrated London News* ran an article entitled 'Portraits of Eminent Living Painters' and selected J.M.W. Turner and Collins to represent the older generation.² Ten years earlier his friend and fellow artist John Linnell wrote of Collins: 'Of his style of painting in general it may be said that though there may be some artists who are more intensely admired by a few there is no one who has more admirers & few so many'.³ The positive critical response to his artistic output can be traced year by year in the reviews of the annual exhibitions of the British Institution and the Royal Academy, where he exhibited his paintings over a forty year period between 1807 and 1846.⁴ His total earnings from selling paintings amounted to almost £24,000.⁵ At his death, his estate exceeded £11,000.⁶ Success and

² *Illustrated London News*, No. 158, 10 May 1845, 291.

³ John Linnell to Alaric Alexander Watts, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, Linnell Archive, 55303-2000, reproduced with minor alterations in Alfred T. Story, *The Life of John Linnell*, 2 vols, London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1892, 287.

⁴ He exhibited 124 paintings at the Royal Academy and 45 at the British Institution; see Algernon Graves, *The Royal Academy of Arts; A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904*, 8 vols, London: George Bell & Sons, and Henry Graves & Co., 1905, II, 112-14; Algernon Graves, *The British Institution, 1806-1867: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from the foundation of the institution*, London: George Bell & Sons, 1908, 111-12.

⁵ William Collins, AMS Notebooks, 2 vols, London, National Art Library, V&A, Special Collections 86.EE.31. They are referred to in the National Art Library's catalogue as 'List of pictures and paintings'. I refer to them, throughout the thesis, as his 'Notebooks', since they contain much more than a 'list of pictures and paintings'. On fols. 35^v and 36^r (the endpaper) of vol. I there is a list of receipts from 1809 to 1846, totalling £23,915 14s 6d.

⁶ William M. Clarke, *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*, London: W. H. Allen & Co. Plc., 1988, 52.

popularity enabled him to sell almost his entire *oeuvre* of paintings during his lifetime; three only, dating from 1843 to 1845, remained unsold at his death. These were included in a posthumous sale at Christie, Manson & Woods in 1847, which comprised approximately 800 drawings, oil sketches, and copies by him of Old Master paintings.⁷ Around fifty of his paintings were engraved during his lifetime, some with very substantial print runs.⁸ The collectors who bought his paintings included most of the notable collectors of the day, for example the Marquess of Lansdowne, Sir Robert Peel and John Sheepshanks. Many of them indeed acquired a number of his paintings.⁹

His death at the beginning of 1847 was immediately acknowledged by the British Institution; five of his paintings were included in their 1847 loan exhibition of Old Masters, as opposed to the single examples of other deceased contemporaries.¹⁰ Two major exhibitions of British art were held within fifteen years of his death, the 1857 Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition and the 1862 International Exhibition in London. Eleven of his paintings were

⁷ Christie and Manson, *Catalogue of the exquisite Works in Oils, Water Colours, and Chalks, of that charming and estimable artist William Collins, R.A., Deceased, Sale Catalogue*, 31 May to 5 June 1847, (hereafter referred to as 'the posthumous Collins sale').

⁸ According to his son, one of the engravings from his *Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* had a print run of over 14,000: Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 50.

⁹ Collins's Notebooks include details of the persons who bought or commissioned his paintings. These included (multiple acquisitions in brackets):- The Marquess of Stafford, Sir Thomas Heathcote (4), the 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne (3), Sir John Leicester, the 4th Duke of Newcastle (8), the Prince Regent/George IV (2), Sir George Beaumont, The Earl of Liverpool (4), William Wells (3), Sir Robert Peel (4), the 13th Duke of Norfolk (2), Sir Thomas Baring (5), Robert Vernon (2), Jacob Bell (3), John Sheepshanks (9), John Gibbons (2), George Young and Joseph Gillott (5). Gibbons acquired three more, indirectly, making five in all, see Paul Spencer-Longhurst, 'John Gibbons, a distinguished Victorian collector', introductory essay to Philips, auctioneers, sale catalogue K 1403, *The Contents of Elm Hill, Worcestershire*, 10 January 2001. Gillott acquired two more, indirectly, making seven in all, together with a number of sketches: see Jeanie Chapel's detailed inventory of his collection, held in the Joseph Gillott papers, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, special collection 860080.

¹⁰ British Institution, *Catalogue of pictures by Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch, French and English Masters, with which the proprietors have favoured the Institution: June 1847*. Amongst the Old Masters exhibited in one of the three exhibition rooms (the South Room) were fourteen paintings by artists who had died since 1819. Seven artists were represented by one paintings, one by two, Collins by five.

exhibited in the 1857 exhibition, and twelve in the 1862 exhibition.¹¹ However, despite his stature while a living artist, and his initial posthumous reputation, his paintings—in particular his late paintings of Italian subjects and biblical paintings—became the subject of progressively negative comments. William Cosmo Monkhouse, writing in 1869, and Frederick Peter Segulier, writing in 1870, were perhaps the last writers to express admiration for Collins's work. Monkhouse commented that 'for their refined expression of all that is sweet in rustic life, and for their sense of sympathy between the joy of children and the beautiful world they inhabit, they are almost incomparably dear'.¹² Segulier observed that Collins's 'best pictures are landscapes with figures, and figures in landscapes at the same time', and that 'as a painter of rustic children Collins stands very high in the English School'.¹³

Writing shortly before Monkhouse and Segulier, in 1866, the Redgrave brothers were critical of Collins's work, characterising him as 'a very indifferent draughtsman... often sadly deficient in drawing', and adding that in 'his Italian sketches...his drawing and execution were still more timid and feeble. Then again, his draperies are often merely rags'.¹⁴ In 1885, Ernest Chesneau described two of his biblical paintings as 'miserable imitations of the worst

¹¹ David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, 208, Table 2B; Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *A Walk through the Art-Treasures Exhibition at Manchester, under the guidance of Dr. W.*, London, 1857; Tom Taylor, *Handbook of the Pictures of the International Exhibition of 1862*, London, 1862, 95. From Robertson's Table 2B it is apparent that his 'tally' at these exhibitions was equalled or exceeded by very few other artists. In 1857 the only other artists to reach double figures of exhibited paintings were Sir David Wilkie (18), William Etty (14), and Edwin Landseer (22). In 1862 the only other artists to reach double figures were John Constable (11), Sir David Wilkie (14), William Etty (13) and C.R. Leslie (12).

¹² William Cosmo Monkhouse, *Masterpieces of English Art, with sketches of some of the most celebrated of the deceased painters of English school from the time of Hogarth to the present day. Illustrated with twenty-six photographs*, London: Bell and Daldy, 1869, 105.

¹³ Frederick Peter Segulier, *A Critical and Commercial Dictionary of the Works of Painters*, comprising...sale notes of pictures and...original notes on the subjects and styles of various artists who have painted between ...1250 and 1850, London, 1870, 45.

¹⁴ Richard Redgrave and Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School; with critical notices of their works, and an account of the progress on Art in England*, 2 vols, London: Smith, Elder, 1866, II, 421.

paintings one can think of in this class of subject'.¹⁵ Sir Isidore Spielmann, in his catalogue for the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition in London, followed the Redgraves and Chesneau in describing Collins 'as admirable in his coast-scenes as he was feeble in his historical subject pictures'.¹⁶ What might be regarded as the *coup de grace* was delivered in 1925 by Maurice Harold Grant.¹⁷ He begins with the assertion that Collins was 'fortunate in many things, but in nothing more than in that famous literary son who made it his pious duty to commemorate his father' so that 'the artist has been preserved more appreciatively, and of course more skilfully, than has fallen to the lot of many a greater man and better painter'.¹⁸ His bias is apparent both from his tone and use of the phrase 'pious duty'. He goes on to describe Collins as 'an indifferent, even a bad draughtsman', asserting that he 'loved children, yet he could not draw them; he loved the sea, but its contours and even its perspective was beyond him'.¹⁹ Of Collins's late paintings he observed: 'His subjects from Holy Writ [are] mere illustrations, the conceptions of an orthodox, unvigorous mind. His imaginative genre is even worse, lacking in imagination but not lacking the vulgarity which seemed inseparable from every Victorian allusion to the Church of Rome'.²⁰ Whether Grant actually saw any of Collins's late paintings is questionable, given his subsequent reference to 'Confessionals' and 'Acolytes', neither of which feature in Collins's work. He ends with the withering comment that 'He is one of the few painters of whom forgeries, and they are legion, are almost as

¹⁵ Ernest Chesneau, *The English School of Painting*, translated by L. N. Etherington, London: Cassell & Co, 1885, 75.

¹⁶ Sir Isidore Spielmann, *Catalogue of the Fine Arts Section, Franco-British Exhibition*, London, 1908, 21.

¹⁷ Maurice Harold Grant, *A Chronological history of the Old English Landscape Painters (in oil) from the XVth Century to the XIXth Century*, 3 vols, London: Hudson & Kearns Ltd, 1925, II, 297-98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 297.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 297.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 297.

good as their original'.²¹ Grant's assessment is repeated in identical terms in his revised edition (1960).²²

Such a decline in Collins's reputation has, of course, to be seen against the broader background of the changes in taste, and changing patterns in art writing during the Victorian period, away from narrative and genre painting and towards, first 'aesthetic' subject matter, and then into modernism. These changes resulted in the rejection of almost all nineteenth-century art apart from Turner and Constable. Arriving in London in 1936 the German artist Fred Uhlman could observe that he 'agreed with nearly everyone in Paris that England had not produced a single great artist since Constable and Turner'.²³ Unsurprisingly, perhaps, such changes and appraisals meant that the Tate Gallery's major exhibition in 1973, *Landscape in Britain c.1750-1850*, neither exhibited nor referenced Collins.²⁴ In 1990, Michael Rosenthal could observe, in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*: 'Collins we have practically forgotten'.²⁵ Not only had Collins become a victim (along with many of his contemporaries) of what Martin Myrone has recently described as 'the hugely deforming influence of modernist priorities on the past, the difficulty of escaping its influence and the ongoing challenge of establishing alternative histories of art'.²⁶ He had disappeared from sight even in an exhibition devoted to landscape painting of his time.

²¹ Grant, *A chronological history of the Old English Landscape Painters*, II, 298.

²² Maurice Harold Grant, *A chronological history of the Old English Landscape Painters (in oil) from the XVIth Century to the XIXth Century* (new revised and enlarged edition), 8 vols, Leigh-on-sea: F. Lewis, 1957-61, VII, 592-95.

²³ Fred Uhlman, *The making of an Englishman: An Autobiography*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1960, 196-97.

²⁴ Leslie Parris, *Landscape in Britain c.1750-1850*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, 20 November 1973 to 3 February 1974, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1973.

²⁵ Michael Rosenthal, 'The Fine Arts', Boris Ford, ed., *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, vol. 6, Romantics to Early Victorians, Cambridge, 1990, 120.

²⁶ Martin Myrone, '1845: The Slaughterhouse of Art History', essay accompanying the online catalogue to the 1845 Royal Academy Exhibition, www.chronicle250.com accessed 31 August 2023.

Section Two: The existing literature and its limitations

The obscurity into which Collins fell had two related consequences. First, the corpus of his known output shrank drastically. His paintings had been dispersed to private collectors, and relatively few found their way into public collections.²⁷ Second, he became of such little interest to art historians that almost nothing was written about him. He does not feature in key bibliographies, such as *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, and has only a short entry in the *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*.²⁸ To date, there is no monograph on Collins, and no catalogue of his paintings. Two MA dissertations have considered aspects of Collins's work. Magdalena Salvesen's, in 1968, looked at Collins, together with William Mulready as contributors to genre paintings involving children.²⁹ Diane Perkins examined his landscapes and posthumous reputation in 1992.³⁰ Josephine Gear's PhD thesis (1976), published in 1977, devoted a chapter to Collins.³¹ The opening lines of that chapter do indeed refer to matters with which this thesis is very much concerned: 'Of all English painters William Collins...was the most poetic and the most successful in painting and in evoking poignant

²⁷ Where, sadly, they came to languish in the basements and off-site stores; in 2016 all four of the Tate's Collins paintings, eight of the nine paintings held at the V&A, and five of the six paintings held by the Guildhall Art Gallery and Museum were in store.

²⁸ *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*, Paris: Gründ, 2006, III, 1249-50.

²⁹ Magdalena A. Salvesen, 'William Collins and William Mulready, the increase of child genre', unpublished M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1968.

³⁰ Diane Perkins, 'William Collins R.A. (1788-1847): an examination of his work and reputation', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Birkbeck College, 1992. Deposited copy missing from Birkbeck and Senate House. I am grateful to Diane Perkins for enabling me to see her personal copy. In charting the decline of Collins's reputation, above, I have drawn upon on her very helpful citations of nineteenth and twentieth century publications referencing Collins contained in chapter IV: 'Collins's posthumous reputation', 34-44. She also wrote the entry for William Collins in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published 23 September 2004, and updated to show his correct year of birth on 11 November 2021.

³¹ Josephine Gear, *Masters or Servants?: A study of selected English painters and their patrons of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1977, Chapter II, 123-56.

childhood memories'.³² However, Gear's focus was on the relationship between Collins and his patrons, and she did not develop either Collins's links to poetry or the manner in which Collins achieved his evocation of childhood memories. She references twenty-seven Collins paintings, but twenty-two of these are cited in connection with either the price they were sold for or Collins's relationship with the collector who acquired the painting, and she discusses and illustrates four only.³³

Little other published scholarship refers to Collins. Only one article specifically devoted to him has been published. This was Edward Morris's 1972 article, 'William Collins and Sorrento', published in a journal not readily available to subsequent scholars and not cited by any of them.³⁴ Morris's focus was on Sorrento as a place of pilgrimage by writers of the Romantic period, Collins's stay in Sorrento in 1837 and the identification of the convent in Collins's painting *Poor Travellers at the door of a Capuchin convent, near Vico, Bay of Naples* (1839). Morris does not analyse what interpretation of the scene Collins might have wanted to encourage, nor does he discuss any of the other Italian subject paintings which Collins exhibited.

Collins is mentioned in only a handful of subsequent publications. In her 1980 monograph on William Mulready, Kathryn Heleniak makes peripheral reference to Collins in the context of Mulready's artistic and social circle, and references a number of collectors who bought paintings from each of them.³⁵ She characterises Collins's work as sentimental,

³² Gear, *Masters or Servants?*, 123. At 125 she points to a very early, lost work *Gray's Elegy* (1808) as an example of Collins's interest in poetry, and at 125, n.3, she refers to Collins as having met Coleridge and Wordsworth, but this is not explored further.

³³ I comment on her observations when discussing the paintings in question, *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1816), *Returning from the Haunts of the Sea Fowl* (1833), *Rustic Civility* (1832) and *Happy as a King* (1836) in chapters Two, Three and Four.

³⁴ Edward Morris, 'William Collins and Sorrento', *Studi e ricerche francescane*, Anno 1, No.2, 1972, 124-34.

³⁵ Kathryn Moore Heleniak, *William Mulready*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980, 15, 18, 51.

using Collins as a foil to her assessment of Mulready: ‘the sentimental nature of Collins’s paintings of children with animals provides an instructive comparison with Mulready’s work’.³⁶ Heleniak positions Mulready’s children as embodying ‘his more pessimistic view of human nature’.³⁷ She likewise uses Collins as a foil in the context of their respective paintings of portrayals of ‘Rustic Charity’, contrasting Mulready’s ‘exotic beggars, dark and mysterious’ which ‘troubled the public’, with the ‘benevolent charity’ of Collins and others, where ‘women and children ... graciously give alms to the even weaker, pathetic poor, presenting quite a charmingly virtuous scene’.³⁸ In Chapter Two of the thesis, I will argue that both Heleniak’s categorisation of Collins’s paintings as ‘sentimental’ and her interpretation of Collins’s ‘benevolent charity’ are misplaced.

In *British Landscape Painting* (1982), Michael Rosenthal only mentions Collins in one context, that of artistic representation of the rural poor. He references a single painting by Collins, *Rustic Civility* (the 1833 version), characterising it as a painting where ‘the mawkish sentimentality is compounded by the lad pulling his forelock’, and a painting which stands ‘at the beginning of a series of sweet and completely unreal cottage scenes glutinously climaxed in the work of Myles Birket Foster’.³⁹ I devote Chapter Four of the thesis to an analysis of the painting and its context in order to arrive at a quite different view to Rosenthal.

E.D.H. Johnson, in his *Paintings of the British Social Scene from Hogarth to Sickert* (1986), refers briefly to Collins, characterising his work as sentimental and popular.⁴⁰ He

³⁶ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, 96.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁹ Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1982, 118 and 124. Myles Birket Foster (1825-1899) is best known for his idealised scenes of rural life, some being utilised by the chocolate manufacturers Cadburys for the decoration of their chocolate boxes, hence the expression ‘chocolate box art’.

⁴⁰ Edward Dudley Hume Johnson, *Paintings of the British Social Scene from Hogarth to Sickert*, New York: Rizzoli, 1986, 194.

illustrates *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1813) as an example of his assessment of Collins as providing ‘a bridge between the sentimentality of the late eighteenth century and its re-emergence in Victorian painting’. I will explore the question of whether the terms ‘sentimental’ and ‘sentimentality’ (as opposed to ‘sentiment’) are the appropriate terms to use of Collins’s work in Chapter Two. Johnson was the first of a number of scholars to dismiss Collins as a serious artist by emphasising his popularity and quoting John Constable’s highly prejudiced opinions of Collins.⁴¹ Significantly, by the time Johnson was writing, Constable’s correspondence had been published.⁴² His antipathy towards Collins, both as an artist and a man, emerges clearly in that correspondence. In 1836, in describing to C.R. Leslie a visit to John Sheepshanks’s collection, and of the Collins paintings in the collection, which included *Rustic Civility* (1834) and *The Stray Kitten* (1835), Constable wrote: ‘Collins looks as having nothing to do with *art* — vapid, raw, and if they have any sentiment it is of the most vulgar kind’.⁴³ Constable’s antipathy to Collins is well documented in a series of barbed comments in his correspondence following Collins’s election as an Academician in November 1819. Up until that time they appear to have been on friendly terms.⁴⁴ His jealousy is clear in subsequent correspondence with Fisher.⁴⁵ Constable evidently relished the prospect of Collins’s ruin following his clandestine marriage to Harriet Geddes in Scotland.⁴⁶ His animosity towards Collins was fuelled in March 1823 when Collins signed a document

⁴¹ Johnson, *Paintings of the British Social Scene from Hogarth to Sickert*, 179 and note 35.

⁴² John Constable, *John Constable’s correspondence*, ed. R.B. Beckett, 6 vols, Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1962-1968; *Further Documents and Correspondence*, ed. Leslie Parris, London and Ipswich: London: Tate Gallery Publications; Ipswich: Suffolk Records Society, 1975.

⁴³ *John Constable’s correspondence*, III, 143.

⁴⁴ See, for example, letter from Constable to John Fisher dated 13 August 1819 in which he asks Fisher to write to Collins to arrange to meet him at the start of Collins’s tour of the West Country (ibid., III, 286).

⁴⁵ See, for example, letter from Constable to John Fisher dated 1 April 1821 (ibid., VI, 65).

⁴⁶ Ibid., XII, 97-8.

exonerating John Linnell from allegations made about Linnell by a Mr. Read, which Constable had circulated.⁴⁷ Early in 1824 he approached Collins's brother, rather than Collins directly, to ask the favour of a loan of Collins's 1813 study of Sir Joshua Reynolds *Infant Academy*.⁴⁸ Subsequent barbs include describing Collins's *Kitley, Devon, a seat of E.P. Bastard, Esq ., M.P.* (1825) as 'a landscape like a large cow-turd'.⁴⁹ In a letter to W.H. Carpenter written in 1829, he observed 'I despise no man — but Collins the Royal Academician'.⁵⁰

Graham Reynolds's *Victorian Painting* (1987) devotes two sentences to Collins.⁵¹ Whilst also noting that Constable detested him, he appears to endorse Constable's opinion that Collins was 'a painter of the suburbs than of real landscape', observing that 'indeed there is something neat, contrived and tidied up about his country scenes'.⁵² Of Collins's paintings of children Reynolds confines himself to saying that 'a sympathetically seen detail like the little group of children pressed into the soil in "Seaford" gives a greater sense of actuality to his picture than the unemphatic sky'.⁵³

Andrew Hemingway's, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain* (1992) considers eight of Collins's coastal paintings, and illustrates three.⁵⁴ He acknowledges the hybridity of some of Collins's work in terms of their inclusion of elements of both genre and landscape painting, but regards the figures as fulfilling an 'essentially

⁴⁷ Alfred T. Story, *The Life of John Linnell*, 2 vols, London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1892, I, 135.

⁴⁸ *John Constable's correspondence*, IV, 291.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, VI, 197.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, IV, 140.

⁵¹ Graham Reynolds, *Victorian Painting*, London: Herbert, 1987, 16.

⁵² His understanding of Constable's view that Collins was a painter of the suburbs is probably derived from Constable's comment, in a letter from Constable to John Fisher dated 1 April 1821, about a painting he had seen at Collins's studio of a Lake District scene which he thought was more like 'Bagnage Wells' (in the suburbs of London) than the Lake District (*John Constable's correspondence*, VI, 65). The painting he was talking about can be identified from the context as *Scene in Borrowdale, Cumberland* (1821) (fig. 2.11).

⁵³ *Seaford, Sussex* (1844) is illustrated at fig. 3.40.

⁵⁴ Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

formulaic function'.⁵⁵ Whilst he also acknowledges Collins's contemporary critical acclaim in terms of embedding his figures in the landscape, he does not analyse the significance of this, choosing rather to close down consideration of Collins by reference to Constable's highly partisan views on Collins.⁵⁶ He introduces the chapter featuring the majority of his references to Collins as 'concerned with the problems of representing the modern as constituted in the development of the seaside resort'.⁵⁷ His observations about Collins are accordingly viewed through that lens, using Collins to draw a distinction between a group of artists he considers 'progressive' (Chalon, Turner and Constable) and a group, including Collins, that he considers 'conservative'.⁵⁸ The progressive approach, for Hemingway, is characterised thus: 'Truth to particulars with selection, it engaged with the real features of places, and thus fed off topographical imagery, and possibly the natural sciences'.⁵⁹ The conservatives 'develop sentimentalized or ennobled figures and play down references to place'.⁶⁰ Hence Hemingway's observations on Collins regarding 'saccharine narratives', 'candy-box sentiment', 'anodyne wares' connoting 'a mythology of the coast and its inhabitants as it would have been nicer to think them, and were understood as so doing'.⁶¹ He does, in passing, acknowledge that Collins's approach 'to landscapes and rustic figures in the second decade of the century places him firmly within the naturalistic tendency' but does not refer to the large number of naturalistic coastal scenes painted by Collins between

⁵⁵ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 152.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁸ The other artists placed by Hemingway in his 'conservative' group are Joshua Cristall and Augustus Wall Callcott.

⁵⁹ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 214.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 151, 181, 190 and 193.

1820 and 1846.⁶² Chapters Two and Three of my thesis will argue that the figures in Collins's landscape and coastal paintings are not there to fulfil an 'essentially formulaic function'. They will also argue that Collins did not 'develop sentimentalized or ennobled figures and play down references to place', and that Hemingway's characterisation of Collins as a purveyor of 'saccharine narratives', 'candy-box sentiment', and 'anodyne wares' is very wide of the mark.⁶³

Christiana Payne considered aspects of Collins's contribution to landscape painting in her introductions to two exhibitions held in the 1990s: *Toil and Plenty* (1993) and *Rustic Simplicity* (1998).⁶⁴ In *Toil and Plenty*, she positions Collins as giving 'visual form to the myth of the virtuous peasant', intent on emphasising 'the social harmony of the countryside directly and unambiguously'.⁶⁵ Collins's painting *Rustic Civility* (1832) featured in both exhibitions. In Chapter Four I analyse this painting in detail, and challenge Payne's assumptions both about the overall meaning of the painting and her interpretation of details within it, which support her positioning of Collins in *Toil and Plenty*.⁶⁶ In *Where the Sea meets the Land* (2007), Payne provides a more balanced and sympathetic view of Collins's coastal paintings than does Hemingway, referencing three of his coastal paintings and

⁶² Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 178.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 151, 181, 190.

⁶⁴ Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: images of the agricultural landscape in England 1780-1890*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993; Christiana Payne, *Rustic simplicity: scenes of cottage life in Nineteenth century British Art*, exhibition catalogue, Nottingham, Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham; Penzance, Penlee House; Nottingham: Lund Humphries, 1998.

⁶⁵ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 29 and 57.

⁶⁶ See Payne, *Rustic simplicity*, 58, for her interpretation of details such as the approaching rider, the buildings and the children. In *Rustic simplicity*, 59 and 60, Payne provides a commentary for two other paintings by Collins exhibited: *Sunday* (1836) (exhibited as *Sunday Morning*), and the engraving made after *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1813). Her commentary, however, is confined to reviews of the paintings, and possible artistic influences. These paintings are discussed in Chapters Two and One, respectively. In *Toil and Plenty*, 99-101, Payne provides a commentary for another painting by Collins exhibited: *Scene in a Kentish hop garden* (1829) (exhibited as *Sketch in a Kentish Hop-Garden*). This is discussed in Chapter Two.

illustrating one.⁶⁷ She credits him, correctly in my view, with inventing ‘a whole range of subjects which were to be taken up by later artists’.⁶⁸ She adopts Hemingway’s thesis that Collins ‘suppressed evidence of modern development’, but distances herself from Hemingway’s generally dismissive approach to Collins and points to the need for a re-examination of his work: ‘In recent times, Collins’ coastal scenes have generally been regarded as unrealistic and over-sentimental, but there are elements of genuine feeling and observation in his work which deserve closer scrutiny’.⁶⁹ However, she does not include Collins as an artist who depicted coastal visitors, asserting that Collins (amongst others) ‘resolutely ignored holiday-makers at the coast’.⁷⁰ Nor does she regard Collins’s figures as realistic portraits.⁷¹ I will argue in Chapter Three that both of these assertions require re-evaluation.

In *Painting out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2008), David Solkin begins by explaining that the book’s main subject is ‘the new forms of painting of daily life that emerged to great acclaim in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars and their immediate aftermath’.⁷² In that context, while he observes that the pioneering figure in this movement was David Wilkie, he states that Wilkie was soon joined by several other artists, including Collins. His book analyses two early

⁶⁷ Christiana Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land : Artists on the Coast in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Bristol, 2007, 89, 91, 91 n.19, 179-181, 185, and 186.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 89 and 181.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷¹ When discussing one of Collins’s undoubted followers, James Clarke Hook, she observes, in the context of Hook’s indebtedness to Collins, that ‘His [Hook’s] fishermen and women are portraits of identifiable individuals...not generalised rustic types’, with the clear implication that Collins’s fishermen and women *are* ‘generalised rustic types’: Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 186.

⁷² David H. Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, New Haven & London, 2008, 1.

paintings by Collins, *The Tempting Moment* (1810) and *May Day* (1812).⁷³ *The Tempting Moment* appears briefly as an example of anti-pastoral themes in an urban setting. *May Day* appears as an example of how far artists could go in using ‘vulgar comedy’ to catalogue the behaviours of the English poor at carnival time. However, the scope of *Painting out of the Ordinary* did not permit Solkin to examine how these paintings relate to Collins’s overall output between 1809 and 1812; rather, they are chosen as subjects which serve to illustrate the broad points he makes in the chapters within which they appear.

A recent opportunity to revive interest in Collins was not taken up; the 250th anniversary of the foundation of the Royal Academy of Arts was celebrated by the creation of a website containing the catalogues of each annual exhibition, with an accompanying scholarly essay for each year.⁷⁴ None of those essays contain a single reference to Collins, other than as a correspondent of Sir David Wilkie, although many other ‘forgotten’ artists of his period were discussed.⁷⁵

A number of general points emerge from this review of the literature. The first is that modern scholars have relied upon a very small number of his paintings. My research indicates that Collins painted 289 oil paintings.⁷⁶ If one discounts his early student paintings (1806-1809), none of which with one exception are known (a total of fifty-five paintings), together with copies he subsequently made after Sir Joshua Reynolds, John Hoppner and Old

⁷³ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 103-07, and 168-71.

⁷⁴ <https://chronicle250.com/> Accessed 31 August 2023.

⁷⁵ Quite apart from the canonical painters (J.M.W. Turner is referenced in 17 essays, Constable in 6) many other artists made the cut, including Sir David Wilkie (5), William Etty (2), William Hilton (2), Henry Perronet Briggs (3), Edwin Landseer (4), William Mulready (3), Benjamin Haydon (3), Sir Augustus Wall Callcott (2), Henry Howard (2), Sir Martin Archer Shee, Sir Thomas Lawrence, Richard Westall, Sir William Beechey, George Dawe, Edward Villiers Ripplingille, William Frederick Witherington, Daniel Maclise, Gilbert Stuart Newton and even the amateur Sir George Beaumont.

⁷⁶ See section three of this Chapter for further details of his *oeuvre*.

Masters (a total of twenty-two paintings), this leaves 212 paintings.⁷⁷ I shall refer to these as his 'known works'. Of these, only twenty have been considered by scholars mentioned above.⁷⁸ Of those, only fifteen have been illustrated (including those in Morris's article).⁷⁹ Accordingly, much of the groundwork underpinning this thesis has involved the preparation of a catalogue of his paintings. This is ongoing, but to date I have been able to locate, in respect of 129 of his known works, either the paintings themselves, or an image of the painting or engraving made from it. As a result of this research an image is now available in respect of over 60% of his known works, as opposed to the 6% which was previously readily available to scholars. Sixty-seven of Collins's paintings are illustrated in this thesis.

The second general point to be made about the literature is that there are no recognised 'Collins' experts, in the sense that there are recognised experts in the work of canonical nineteenth century artists such as Constable and Turner, or, more recently, artists such as Mulready and Wilkie, who have been rescued from obscurity by the work of Heleniak and Nicholas Tromans.⁸⁰ This has implications both for the comprehensiveness of modern scholarship, and the history of British art. My thesis attempts to remedy this. The sixty-seven paintings illustrating this thesis are catalogued in the Appendix to this thesis,

⁷⁷ The only pre-1810 painting currently known is *Boys Bargaining for a Bird's Nest* (1809), which is discussed in Chapter One.

⁷⁸ That is, considered, rather than merely listed.

⁷⁹ The thirteen paintings illustrated by Gear onwards are *The Tempting Moment* (1810) [CAT.65], *May Day* (1811) [CAT.72], *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1813) [CAT.79], *The Reluctant Departure* (1815) [CAT.105], *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1816) [CAT.110], *Prawn Fishers at Hastings* (1825) [CAT.179], *Prawn Fishers* (1829) [CAT.195], *Scene in A Kentish Hop-garden* (1829) [CAT.198], *Rustic Civility* (1832) [CAT.212], *Returning from the Haunts of the Sea Fowl* (1833) [CAT.218], *The Stray Kitten* (1835) [CAT.221], the repetition of *Happy as a King* (1836) [CAT.237], and *Sunday* (1836) [CAT.32]. Morris additionally illustrated *Poor Travellers at the Convent Door*, *Vico* (1839) [CAT.241], and Collins's quarter-sized version of *A scene taken from the caves of Ulysses at Sorrento, the birth-place of Tasso* painted for John Sheepshanks (1843) [CAT.267] but, as stated, it appears that subsequent scholars were not aware of his article. Catalogue number references in square brackets refer to the draft catalogue entries in the Appendix in respect of the sixty-seven paintings by Collins illustrating this thesis.

⁸⁰ Heleniak, *William Mulready; Nicholas Tromans, David Wilkie: The People's Painter*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

‘Catalogue of William Collins’s oil paintings illustrated in this thesis’. That Appendix constitutes a draft catalogue raisonné in respect of those paintings, the intention being to provide a firm foundation for future scholarship.

A third general point which emerges from the literature is that, perhaps due to the very small percentage of Collins’s *oeuvre* hitherto known to scholars, there has been little or no examination of how his work can be related to the literary or religious context within which it was produced. Whilst there is now a substantial amount of modern scholarship stressing the importance of these two aspects in order to understand and appreciate nineteenth-century art, this has not hitherto been applied to Collins.⁸¹

Exhibition reviews throughout his career praised the ‘poetic sentiment’ of his work, but no connections have been made between his landscape and coastal paintings and leading poets who Collins knew, and with whose work he was familiar, particularly William Wordsworth. These aspects are explored for the first time in Chapters Two, Three and Four. I demonstrate the link between poetry and painting enabled by associationism, the leading aesthetic theory of Collins’s time. As to the religious context of his art, Collins had significant connections to leading members of the Oxford Movement, but there has been no examination of his religious beliefs and how those may have impacted his work. In Chapter

⁸¹ For painting and poetry, see for example, Jerrold Ziff, ‘Turner’s First Poetic Quotations: an examination of intentions’, *Turner Studies*, 2 (1), 1982, 2-11, *passim*; Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, Chapter One: ‘The Poetry of the Sea’, 21-40, *passim*. For painting and religion, see for example, Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006; Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2007; Geoffrey N. Cantor, *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Thomas Ardill, ‘Between God, Art and Mammon: Religious Painting as a Public Spectacle in Britain, c. 1800–1832’, PhD diss., Courtauld Institute, 2016. For poetry and religion, see Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, and ‘The Influence of the Oxford Movement on Poetry and Fiction’, *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown and Peter B. Nockles, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 410-26.

Five I explore this in relation to the Italian subject paintings that he painted between 1838 and 1844, following his journey to Italy in 1836-38. In Chapter Six I examine his biblical paintings, created during the same period, and explain how these can be related to the contemporary search for a way forward in creating a specifically Protestant religious art. My thesis thus aims to situate and understand Collins within early to mid-nineteenth-century influences and interests, and in particular to demonstrate the significance in his work of contemporary developments in both poetry and religion.

Section Three: Sources utilised

My starting point has been Wilkie Collins's biography.⁸² In writing this, he clearly had considerable assistance from his mother, Harriet Collins, née Geddes (1790-1868) [hereafter 'Harriet']. She would presumably have been the principal source for his descriptions of Collins's paintings, at least those painted before the family's visit to Italy, by which time Wilkie was aged twelve and taking an active interest in art.⁸³ Following Collins's death she would have had possession of a number of documentary records which she enabled her son to draw upon. First would have been Collins's two autograph manuscript Notebooks, held at the National Art Library, London.⁸⁴ In these he recorded 261 oil paintings together with

⁸² This was Wilkie Collins's first published book. He went on to have a highly successful career as a novelist.

⁸³ Other contemporary artists may also have assisted in this respect; the Preface to the biography thanks the following artists for their assistance: C.R. Leslie, C.L. Eastlake, E.V. Ripplingille, William Etty, James Stark, George Richmond and Thomas Uwins. For an example of Wilkie Collins's early drawing, see his pen and ink drawing of boats at Sorrento in 1837, British Museum 1872, 1012.3350.

⁸⁴ William Collins, AMS Notebooks, catalogued as 'List of pictures and paintings', 2 vols, Special Collections 86.EE.31. I refer to them, throughout the thesis, as his 'Notebooks', since they contain much more than a 'list of pictures and paintings'. They were presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum by W. Martin, 48 Goldsmith Avenue, W., on 30 July 1908 (Museum Archives, MA/34/34, 207.)

sketches for those paintings which were subsequently sold by him.⁸⁵ Notebook I covers the years 1808 to April 1827, and records 163 paintings by calendar year. Notebook II begins in April 1827, and lists the paintings 'from Exhibition to Exhibition', that is, Royal Academy exhibitions.⁸⁶ Notebook II accordingly records oil paintings completed between April of one year to April of the next from 1827 to 1846, a total of 103. From 1818 onwards Collins listed his paintings in chronological order as they were completed.⁸⁷ The entries in both Notebooks give Collins's title to the painting (generally, but not always, the title given in the exhibition catalogue), who it was painted for, if commissioned, and the buyer, if not commissioned, together with the price paid. As well as listing Collins's completed paintings, the Notebooks include other significant material, including some commissions, technical notes on materials used in his early work, ideas for future paintings and total receipts from the sale of his paintings.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ The end section of Notebook I (fols. 30^v to 35^r) consists of technical notes made by Collins in the period 1808 to 1811 about the paint vehicles and media he had used in particular paintings. Most of these refer to paintings which are listed in the chronological list for those years, but a handful do not. These include a portrait of Thomas Phillips R.A. (1808), a self-portrait (1809), and a portrait of his uncle, the Revd. James Collins (1810), probably the portrait offered at Bonhams, London, 10 October 2005, lot 95, oil on canvas, 44.7 x 35 cm, not sold. The earlier ones were presumably overpainted or destroyed. The portrait of his uncle was probably a gift to him, and so not recorded. In addition to the oil paintings, the Notebooks record the occasional sale of a 'drawing', that is, a work in watercolour, pen and wash or graphite. The difference between the total number of paintings he painted (289) and the number he recorded from 1808 onwards (266) is accounted for by paintings pre-dating 1808 and identifiable by other documentary evidence, the paintings referred to only in the technical notes, and two portraits, painted in 1816 and 1818, which were gifts from Collins. One painting, *The Bird Trap* is known only from the fact of its exhibition at the British Institution (1821 B.I. No. 15) and a mezzotint subsequently made by Finden. That this painting was not recorded by Collins does highlight the possibility that other paintings went similarly unrecorded.

⁸⁶ William Collins, Notebook II, fol. 1^r.

⁸⁷ Note by Collins to that effect at the bottom of Notebook I, fol. 16^r.

⁸⁸ The list of commissions covers the periods 1827-33, 1835-36, 1839-41, and 1843-44. It is not a complete list, since there are paintings not included in these lists which are noted in the annual list of paintings finished as having been commissioned. There was no further space in Notebook II to record later commissions. A list of commissions outstanding in April 1845 was compiled separately, appears to have been retained by Wilkie Collins and is now in a private collection.

Wilkie Collins utilised the Notebooks in drawing up a list of 221 of his father's pictures contained in the Appendix to his biography.⁸⁹ He omitted many of his father's very early paintings and chose, for reasons which are unclear, to record them in a different order. My catalogue raisonné, in progress, follows the order in which Collins set them down.⁹⁰ The paintings illustrating this thesis, set out in the Appendix, are captioned with the catalogue number.

Collins also kept a journal for most of his life, copious extracts from which were quoted by his son, covering the period 1812-1845. Unfortunately the original journal was either destroyed or is missing.⁹¹ This is a serious loss. There can be little doubt that it contained a great deal of information which would be invaluable to the art historian. A journal entry for 21 January 1814, quoted by Wilkie Collins, refers to his intention also to keep a 'common-place book'.⁹² A fragment of this, covering the period 21 January 1814 to 1 February 1814 has survived, and it may be that he then abandoned the idea of a separate book.⁹³ In this fragment he recorded comments of his fellow-artists, generally and about his own paintings, and thoughts about how he could improve.

Harriet kept diaries, two of which have survived. One is her diary for the year 1835.⁹⁴ In it she recorded, inter alia, Collins's professional engagements and travels, and the family's

⁸⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 341-352.

⁹⁰ The dates of unlisted painting are known, and they have been inserted at the appropriate points.

⁹¹ With the exception of a fragment covering the period 1 January 1814 to 10 February 1814, which appears to have been retained by Wilkie Collins, and is now in the same private collection as the April 1845 commission list.

⁹² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 56.

⁹³ This fragment also appears to have been retained by Wilkie Collins and is in the same private collection as the April 1845 commission list, and the surviving journal fragment.

⁹⁴ Harriet Collins, AMS Diary, 1835, London, National Art Library, Special Collections, 86.EE.33. Presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum by W Martin, 48 Goldsmith Avenue, W., on 29 January 1912 (Museum Archives, MA/34/37, 244), so some three and a half years after he presented the Museum with Collins's Notebooks.

social engagements. This provides a valuable insight into Collins's private and professional life, and the family's religious affiliations at that date. When the family travelled to Italy, Harriet kept a journal, detailing the places they visited, the people they socialised with, and how Collins spent his time when they were apart.⁹⁵ The journal covers the period from their departure from England in September 1836 until the end of 1837. They returned in August 1838. It is probable that Wilkie Collins had access to the journal's contents, either directly or indirectly through conversations with his mother, when writing his biography. Collins's own journal entries appear to have been punctuated by long gaps, and his son does not provide any quotations from it for 1837. In 1853, some years after Collins died, Harriet wrote an autobiographical memoir of her life up to the point of their marriage in 1822.⁹⁶ It provides useful information about both her own religious background, and Collins's early interest in religion prior to their marriage.

A considerable amount of Collins family correspondence has survived, most of it held in the Morgan Library, New York.⁹⁷ Wilkie Collins certainly had access to that correspondence, and quotes extensively from it in his biography. A large proportion of the correspondence he quotes from (including the entire correspondence between his father and paternal grandmother) has not been traced, and has probably been destroyed. However,

⁹⁵ Harriet Collins, AMS journal, 1836-37, London, National Art Library, Special Collections, 86.BB Box. Purchased for £1 10s by the Victoria and Albert Museum from C. Eskell van Noorden, on 30 December 1914 (Museum Archives, MA/34/40, 115).

⁹⁶ Harriet Collins, AMS Autobiographical memoir (1853), Austin, Texas, Texas University, Harry Ransom Centre, Wilkie Collins collection., container 6.1-2. References in this thesis are to the typescript of the AMS memoir in container 5.13, prepared by the Wilkie Collins scholar, Catherine Peters.

⁹⁷ New York, Morgan Library and Museum, Department of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, Correspondence relating to William Collins, MS 3154.1-115, 3156.1-8, 3159.

some of Collins's correspondence with others, outside the family, has survived in various collections.⁹⁸

I have also drawn upon the diaries, letters and reminiscences of Collins's contemporaries. The archives of the Royal Academy of Arts include letters referencing Collins by Joseph Farington, George Richmond, William Calder Marshall and Penry Williams. The published diaries of Joseph Farington R.A. contain numerous references to Collins, as does the correspondence of John Constable. Mentions can be found in many published autobiographies, for example those of Solomon Alexander Hart, William Holman Hunt and Charles Robert Leslie.⁹⁹

A broad range of newspapers, magazines and journals published reviews of the British Institution and Royal Academy annual exhibitions, where Collins almost exclusively exhibited.¹⁰⁰ These sources are listed in the bibliography. The Paul Mellon Centre holds a collection of reviews of genre painting between 1806 and 1833 which has been of great

⁹⁸ Correspondence with the artist and family friend John Linnell is held by the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Linnell Archive, MS 55303-2000, 3541-2000 to 35559-2000). Sir Robert Peel's papers in the British Museum contain a number of letters passing between the two (Peel papers, Add. MS. 40403, 40489, 40496). The William Mulready papers held by the National Art Library include a letter from Collins to Mulready (National Art Library, MSL/1961/44461/33). Princeton University holds two letters, AM 20157: Collins to unidentified recipient, whom I have identified as Edward Rose Tunno (1794-1863), and Ms. AM. 19696, f.2 : Collins to Alaric Watts. A few letters are held in private collections.

⁹⁹ Solomon Alexander Hart, *The Reminiscences of Solomon Alex. Hart, R.A.*, ed. Alexander Brodie, London: Wyman & Sons, 1882, 73-6; William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1905, 59, 309-10; Charles Robert Leslie, *Autobiographical recollections by the late Charles Robert Leslie R.A.*, ed. Tom Taylor, 2 vols., London: J. Murray, 1860, 41.

¹⁰⁰ Only two paintings, unsold at the London exhibitions, appear to have been exhibited by him during his career at provincial art centres. *Boy at Breakfast* (1809) was exhibited at the Liverpool Academy in 1814 (No. 46), see Edward Morris and Emma Roberts, *The Liverpool Academy and Other Exhibitions of Contemporary Art in Liverpool, 1774-1867: a history and index of artists and works exhibited*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998, 152. There is, however, no evidence that it was sold; see Notebook I, fol. 4^r, which provides no details of a sale price or purchaser. *Returning from the Haunts of the Sea Fowl* (1833) was apparently exhibited at Birmingham in 1834, but was sold in London in 1837 or 1838 (whilst Collins was in Rome) by his brother-in-law W.H. Carpenter acting on his behalf. For the arrangements to send the painting to Birmingham see Collins's letter to John Linnell, 18 August 1834 (Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 3556-2000). For the eventual sale, see Notebook II, fols. 7^v and 8^f.

assistance.¹⁰¹ Reviewers' descriptions have been particularly useful where paintings are missing, and no image is currently available. Their frequently detailed descriptions are occasionally determinative in identifying a painting or alternatively, dismissing it as a genuine work by Collins. For example, the painting exhibited in Bury Museum and Art Gallery as *The Minnow Catchers* can be identified as *Forenoon* (1814), (Chapter Two, fig. 2.1), due to the detailed description by the critic for the *Repository of Arts*.¹⁰²

The London Metropolitan Archives hold the historic archive relating to the London church where Collins and members of his family worshipped from the time of their return from Italy in August 1838.¹⁰³ The family feature as contributors to the building fund in 1836, in the pew rental accounts and in details of Confirmations. The Preacher's Book lists many prominent Tractarian visiting preachers, and the archive as a whole is an important source for my argument in Chapter Five.¹⁰⁴

In terms of image sources, my starting points have been the Courtauld Institute's Witt Library, and the Public Catalogue Foundation's images via Art UK.¹⁰⁵ For paintings coming on to the art market during the period 1985 to 2012 I have supplemented the Witt Library's collection from two of the leading auction databases, Artnet and Artprice.¹⁰⁶ From 2013 to 2023 I have monitored auction sales registered with Artprice and with The Saleroom.¹⁰⁷ I have physically examined all but two of Collins's paintings held in public collections in the

¹⁰¹ Hamish Miles, David H. Solkin and Greg Smith, 'Reviews of Genre Painting', (no date), The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, London, Information Files – Exhibition Reviews.

¹⁰² *Repository of Arts*, April 1814, 214-15.

¹⁰³ London, Metropolitan Archives, P90/CTC2: deposited archives in respect of Christ Church Albany Street.

¹⁰⁴ Detailed references to these matters are given in Chapter Five.

¹⁰⁵ www.artuk.org

¹⁰⁶ www.artnet.com ; www.artprice.com

¹⁰⁷ www.the-saleroom.com

United Kingdom, and I have been able to examine all of his paintings in the United Kingdom held in those private collections where I have been granted access.¹⁰⁸

The visual source material outlined above has enabled me to identify approximately two-thirds of Collins's oil paintings created in the period 1810 to 1846. I expand on this in Section Four. This has provided a much clearer picture of his output than that previously available to scholars and has enabled me to identify distinct themes in his genre and landscape paintings. It has made possible, for the first time, a critical examination of the nature and significance of his late Biblical paintings. It has also made possible a comparison between different versions of a painting by Collins. Four such paintings are discussed in the thesis.¹⁰⁹ Some of these differences are significant, as will appear from my analysis of them.

I have utilised a wide range of documentary source material dating from Collins's time, from poetry and novels, sermons and theological journals, to parliamentary papers and child mortality rates. These sources are not, individually, unusual in terms of art historical studies of this period, but might collectively be considered to indicate an unusually broad approach. In part, this can be explained by reference to the neglect of Collins as a subject of study, and hence the need to examine the many facets his *oeuvre* presents. Partly this can be explained by my methodology, to which I now turn.

¹⁰⁸ The two paintings which I have not examined are the portrait of Collins's mother, in the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI.648) which is probably the portrait passed down to Wilkie Collins, sold by his executors at Christie, Manson & Woods, 22 February 1890, Lot 61, and Collins's diploma painting, held off site in the Royal Academy of Arts' stores.

¹⁰⁹ *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (discussed in Chapter One), *A Scene in Borrowdale* (discussed in Chapter Two), *Rustic Civility* (discussed in Chapter Four), and *The World or the Cloister?* (discussed in Chapter Five).

Section Four: Methodology

The first task in attempting to analyse Collins's output has been to define that output, by locating as many of his paintings as possible, and weeding out misattributed ones.¹¹⁰ This task has been considerably simplified by the existence of Collins's Notebooks, and the fact that his posthumous sale at Christie and Manson in 1847 contained only three oil paintings, all readily identifiable. In considering whether a painting is genuinely by Collins or not, I have used a range of tools. Many paintings attributed to him clearly bear a forged signature.¹¹¹ If dated, a painting which does not correspond with a matching subject recorded in the Notebooks is unlikely to be genuine. Paintings of subjects which cannot be linked with the subjects listed in the Notebooks are suspect. I have utilised Wilkie Collins's descriptions, and descriptions in reviews, to ensure that the composition of a given painting broadly corresponds. Ultimately, my view of whether a painting is by Collins has depended on my assessment of its palette, composition, line, and portrayal of children, animals, vegetation, and paraphernalia. To such an assessment I bring ten years of experience in examining the originals of his documented paintings. Insofar as my approach can be regarded as connoisseurial it is, of course, open to challenge.¹¹² Nevertheless it is a valid approach to adopt provided one remains alive to broad changes in style which Collins made during his

¹¹⁰ Twenty-nine of the eighty-four artworks listed by the Public Catalogue Foundation as being by Collins are not, in my opinion by him. Of the forty-two oil paintings and oil sketches which have come on to the art market from the beginning of 2000 to August 2023, only eleven are, in my opinion, genuine.

¹¹¹ Whilst there is some variation (in respect of paintings with a complete provenance) in the size of his signature, and the degree of slope of the lettering, he invariably signed 'W. Collins', with the letters separated, and not cursive. Any cursive signature is suspect. The only variants I have found are (1) in a second version, where he distinguished it from the original by signing William Collins, or Wm Collins, e.g. second version of *The Cherry Seller* (1824), fig. 2.6, second version of *Cottage Hospitality* (1844), fig. 2.26, and (2) when signing on the stern of a boat or on a stone pier, where he signed in capitals e.g. *The Young Fifer* (1810), fig. 1.4, *Preparing for a Voyage* (1817), fig. 3.39, and *Leaving Home* (1836), fig. 3.29.

¹¹² Michael Hatt, and Charlotte Klonk, *Art history: a critical introduction to its methods*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, 60.

career, and which are readily apparent from those of his works which have a clear and complete provenance.

I have not discussed Collins's portraits of adult sitters at all in the thesis. Almost all of them are early career portraits, and reflect the fact that portraiture formed artist's bread and butter at this time, much to the disgust of reviewers who lamented year after year the high proportion of portraits in the Royal Academy's annual exhibitions. Only three of his twenty-one portraits of adults are known.¹¹³ His portraits of children, on the other hand, are an integral part of his output discussed in the first three chapters.

My principal approach has been to undertake a close reading and detailed visual analysis of Collins's paintings, embedding them in the social religious and literary context within which they were produced. This is essentially a social history of art approach as exemplified in T.J. Clark's groundbreaking *Image of the People* (1973), and subsequently utilised by successive generations of historians of British nineteenth-century art.¹¹⁴ I have used this approach throughout the thesis to analyse the themes of childhood which emerge in his early work (1809-17), his output of landscape and coastal paintings throughout his life, and his late paintings (1838-1844). The insights to be gained by a social history of art approach are demonstrated in Chapter Four, which examines in detail Collins's most famous (or notorious) painting, *Rustic Civility* (1831-32), and offers a wholly different understanding from its received interpretation of deferential children courteously opening a gate for their 'betters'.

¹¹³ Collins's uncle, Revd. James Collins (1810); James Campbell (1812), exhibited 1813 R.A. No. 78; Collins's mother, Margaret Collins (1815).

¹¹⁴ Timothy James Clark, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1973.

Where relevant to the themes Collins engaged with, I have also borne in mind the growing body of scholarship relating to nineteenth-century orientalism and postcolonial studies. Any analysis of biblical paintings of the 1830s and 1840s necessarily involves an examination of how, if at all, a particular artist engaged with contemporary perceptions of the Holy Land and its inhabitants.¹¹⁵ Collins's *Leaving Home* (1835-36) is one of the earliest 'emigration' paintings, and so requires some consideration of how this might relate to colonialism.¹¹⁶ However, rather than using such studies as distinct approaches to Collins's work, I have regarded them as providing additional perspectives to the social history of art approach that I have adopted. I have drawn upon the literature in the field of gender studies in the same manner, when considering contemporary attitudes to the different behaviours to be expected of boys and girls, and, in dealing with his late paintings, contemporary attitudes towards the Virgin Mary.¹¹⁷

The adoption of a social history of art approach has necessarily involved an interdisciplinary element. My interpretation of Collins's landscape and coastal painting has been substantially enhanced by engagement with the writings of the Lake poets and other writers of the period. The interpretations of Collins's paintings after his return from Italy I

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture, 1799-1917: Palestine and the Question of Orientalism*, Oxford: Clarendon, 2005, and Nicholas Tromans, 'Palestine: Picture of Prophecy', *Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite vision*, ed. Katharine Lochnan and Carol Jacobi, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008, 135-58.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Fariha Shaikh, *Nineteenth-Century Settler Emigration in British Literature and Art*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, the discussion of gender roles of children in Mary Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief and Magic: Children's Literature in England from Its Beginnings to 1839*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, and the discussion of attitudes towards the Virgin Mary in Carol Engelhardt Herringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary: Religion and Gender in England, 1830-1885*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008.

have put forward could not have been reached without some understanding of the religious history of the period, and in particular the early history of the Oxford Movement.

To an extent, my approach has also been biographical, recognising that ‘most of today’s art historians acknowledge that ... biographical ... approaches have useful, often indispensable, contributions to make’.¹¹⁸ I have highlighted in my thesis the significance of some personal events in Collins’s life, and the relevance to his output of his beliefs, his friendships and acquaintances, and aspects of his character which have not been discussed in his son’s biography. There are limits to the comprehensiveness of that biography, written as it was so soon after his father’s death, with the intention of paying tribute to his father’s life and art, and with the co-operation of his mother. A comparison of the printed version of the letters with those originals which have survived demonstrates that Wilkie Collins was selective in his quotations, and left out elements both of a highly personal nature, and passages which demonstrate Collins’s sense of the absurd and sense of humour.¹¹⁹ In doing so, he suppressed aspects of his father’s character which do have significance in understanding his paintings. Likewise, a comparison of the printed and manuscript letters shows that Wilkie Collins edited out passages which refer to aspects of his father’s religious

¹¹⁸ Hatt and Klonk, *Art history: a critical introduction to its methods*, 20.

¹¹⁹ For example, his references in a letter to his wife of August 1841, to her as a ‘little hard-hearted minx’ and to their good friends the Otter family as ‘the “amphibious animals”’ (Letter from Collins to his wife Harriet dated 10 August 1841, New York, Morgan Library and Museum, Department of Literary and Historical Manuscripts, Correspondence relating to William Collins, MS 3154.52, part quoted in Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 196 as being contained in a later letter dated 14 August 1841.) A letter to his wife, when both Wilkie Collins and his mother were on holiday at the seaside in 1843, begins: ‘Dear Mrs Pert, ’Tis no use bouncing and flaunting and flouncing, a couple of idle, pleasure hunting gormandizing sea porpoises as you are – we poor drudging/grudging/trudging/ mechanics cannot leave London until Thursday morning’. (Letter from Collins to his wife Harriet dated 20 June 1843, Morgan Library and Museum, MA 3154.67). In quoting from his father’s letter to Harriet, whilst she was visiting the Otters in 1844, Wilkie Collins omits the paragraph in which Collins urges her to steal the Otters’ peaches and Chinese ornaments! (Letter from Collins to his wife Harriet dated 4 January 1844, Morgan Library and Museum, MA 3154.68, part quoted in Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 245-246).

beliefs. In doing so, he cut passages which shed light on his biblical paintings. And, of course, there is also a considerable amount of archival and primary printed material the existence and content of which Wilkie Collins would not have been aware of. Accordingly, my research has uncovered material which adds to our knowledge both of the artist and his work.

Section Five: Summary of the thesis chapters

Chapter One examines Collins's contribution to the artistic movement in the early years of the nineteenth century (generally associated with Collins's lifelong friend Sir David Wilkie) of painting everyday life in such a way as to make each picture tell a story. Collins's role is important and largely overlooked. I demonstrate that his distinctive contribution was to foreground children in the narrative, producing paintings in which the story was told almost entirely by children, almost to the exclusion of adults. Collins gives his children an agency which appears to be unique in paintings of the Romantic period, and reflects developments in Romantic literature, most clearly seen in Wordsworth's poetry.

Chapter Two examines Collins's landscape paintings. I build upon the contributions to landscape scholarship made by Hemingway and Kay Dian Kriz to explain the influences which informed these, and analyse what Collins's paintings were intended to convey to his viewing public, and the important role which continued to be played throughout his career by the children in his paintings. I also draw connections between his interests in landscape and poetry. After his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1814 Collins moved in circles which brought him into contact with the Lake poets Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey, and secured for him the patronage of major collectors. I explore how the poetry of

Wordsworth finds expression in the two versions of his Lake District painting *Scene in Borrowdale* (1821 and 1823).

Chapter Three examines his coastal paintings. I explore how, contrary to the view expressed by Hemingway, Collins intended his viewers to identify, and relate to the particular coastal area concerned—a portrayal of the sentiment of place. In depicting scenes set on foreign shores, I argue that his paintings display an interest in differentiating what he perceived as elements of national character. Of all the painters of the seashore of the first half of the nineteenth century, Collins appears to have been the most innovative. He explored the liminality of the shoreline and the many dualities thrown up by its role as a boundary between land and sea: the shore as a boundary between safety and danger, life and death, between humanity and the infinite, but also a place of freedom, recreation and fun, and an area in which traditional boundaries imposed by social hierarchies dissolve.

Chapter Four examines a number of his paintings executed during the earlier part of the 1830s—a time of great social upheaval in England—and, particularly, the painting referenced and illustrated most frequently in modern scholarship, *Rustic Civility* (1831). Collins has been characterised by modern scholarship as socially conservative, and a subscriber to the myth of rural contentment and ‘social harmony of the countryside’.¹²⁰ Michael Rosenthal, as stated above, has interpreted his painting as endorsing an image of the subservient poor.¹²¹ My analysis of the painting challenges these interpretations. It suggests that the reality is very different, and that Collins was actively engaging with social issues of the day from a quite different standpoint. I propose this in relation to other

¹²⁰ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 29-30.

¹²¹ Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, 118.

paintings Collins executed in the early 1830s which indicate an interest in exploring innovative and modern subject matter.

Chapter Five deals with the group of subject pictures which Collins exhibited between 1839 and 1844, following a lengthy stay in Italy with his family between 1836 and 1838. I suggest that whilst this group are ostensibly of Italian subjects, they can all be linked with major preoccupations of Tractarian thought on religion and social policy. I examine the strong links between Collins and leading members of the Oxford Movement and propose that these paintings should be seen as a significant group, not only by historians of the Oxford Movement, but also more broadly by historians of nineteenth-century art and religion, and the intersection between the two.

Chapter Six examines the biblical paintings Collins exhibited during that same period, 1839 to 1844. It considers Collins's role in the search during the 1830s by Protestant critics, writers and artists, for a new style of Protestant Art. I look at particular features of Collins's paintings which, as with his Italian subject pictures, demonstrate sympathy with Tractarian thought, and show him to have been an innovative and leading player in that search. Moreover, many features of this group of paintings prefigure the interests and stylistic elements adopted by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood nearly a decade later. The chapter examines these, and the personal links between the Collins family and members of the Brotherhood, and concludes that Collins ought to be acknowledged by historians as one of the precursors of the Pre-Raphaelites.

My Conclusion establishes that, in the light of the contributions Collins made to nineteenth-century British painting, as analysed in the body of the thesis, historians of the period 1810 to 1845 should now re-assess and acknowledge his importance. I also suggest

what further work on Collins could usefully be undertaken in order to enhance our understanding of his work and its significance.

CHAPTER ONE

1807-17: 'The epic of everyday life' and the phenomenon of childhood

Introduction

In this chapter I examine Collins's artistic aspirations, and how these were diverted by the cross-currents in British art during his first ten years of practice. Well before he began his formal training at the Royal Academy schools in 1807 he wanted to be a landscape painter, but he was diverted from this course for some years by becoming deeply involved in developing the style of painting which David Solkin has characterised as 'the new forms of painting of daily life that emerged to great acclaim in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars and their immediate aftermath'.¹ In developing these paintings of daily life, artists were heavily influenced by Netherlandish art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was recognised at the time.² However, contemporary analysts of the new style noted that what differentiated it from its Netherlandish models was that it added 'humour and sentiment' to the portrayal of its human figures, and told a distinct story, to which all participants in the painting contributed.³ I will show that Collins's distinctive contribution to this new style of painting was to concentrate on depicting aspects of the lives, and interactions of children, almost to the exclusion of adults, giving them an agency which is unique in the art of this period.

¹ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 1.

² *Ibid.*, 37

³ Francis Ludlow Holt, 'The Arts', *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 9 April 1809, 119, cited in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 37, and n.1 and 2.

Section One examines his aspiration to become a landscape painter. In Section Two I explore the societal background to the depiction of children's lives in order to show how Collins capitalised on a new focus within pedagogical literature, and literature generally, on children's lives and upbringing. Section Three examines his output between 1809 and 1812, and shows how the themes he chose were linked to that literature. In Section Four I will discuss the marked change in the character of his depiction of children's lives which followed the sudden death of his father in 1812, and how his aspiration to become a landscape painter began to express itself in his paintings executed in the following two years. Section Five explores the uniqueness of this contribution to British art of that period. Section Six examines how, during the period 1814 to 1817, against the background of the post-Napoleonic economic slump, Collins's aspirations were temporarily thwarted. Economic reality led him to cast around in a number of different directions. I will look at his 'paintings of everyday life' in that period to show how he moved away from the didacticism reflected in his earlier work, towards an exploration of how ordinary situations in children's lives could involve different perceptions, often with a humorous result. Finally, I look at the humour in the two paintings he produced after his first journey abroad in 1817, and the abrupt conclusion to this significant phase in the artist's output.

Section One: Collins's artistic aspirations

Collins began recording his paintings in 1808, the year after his admission as a Royal Academy student. By that time he was aged twenty. The previous year, he had two paintings accepted for the summer exhibition. Neither is known, beyond their titles. From these it is apparent that they were local landscapes, by the Thames at Millbank, a familiar subject both

for artists and the exhibition going public.⁴ For clues about his training and aspirations prior to 1808, we are reliant on two published family sources, Wilkie Collins's biography of his father, and William Collins's father's biography of George Morland.⁵ Both refer to Collins being taken to Morland's studio in 1803 and watching Morland paint.⁶ His father repeatedly tried to persuade Morland to take his son as a pupil. He records that in 1804 Morland finally agreed. This was on the strength of his son having done a painting in Morland's style so successfully that Morland racked his brains trying to remember when he himself had painted it.⁷ Sadly, within a few months Morland was dead. Both biographies recount Collins's attendance at Morland's funeral, and his son includes the reminiscences of Collins's school-friend John Kirton as to the reverence Collins felt for the deceased artist.⁸ Collins painted the portrait of Morland, the engraving of which formed the frontispiece of his father's biography of Morland.⁹

Wilkie Collins states that his father had played down his indebtedness to Morland, in terms of his formation as an artist. He himself considered that his father was far more indebted to his own father, William Collins senior.¹⁰ This could well have been the case with regard to Collins's wish to become a landscape artist. His father made available to him

⁴ The paintings were entitled *Morning: A view near Millbank* (1807 R.A. No. 425), and *A view near Millbank* (1807 R.A. No. 784). J.M.W. Turner had exhibited *A Study at Millbank* ten years earlier (1797 R.A. No. 136, now London: Tate Britain).

⁵ William Collins, *Memoirs of that celebrated, original and eccentric genius, the late George Morland, an eminent painter, drawn from an authentic source of twenty years intimate acquaintance with his family and connections*, London, 1806.

⁶ William Collins, *Memoirs of that celebrated, original and eccentric genius, the late George Morland*, 126-7; Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁹ The engraving of Morland at his easel by William Ward, shows the artist as 'W.Collins Jun^r Pinx^t', see British Museum, 1910,0610.123.

¹⁰ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 22.

paintings by Richard Wilson which passed through his hands as an art dealer.¹¹ One of Collins's 1808 paintings was of Castel Gandolfo, apparently based on one of these.¹² Collins's Notebooks show that in 1808 he also made copies of landscape paintings by, or then attributed to Poussin, Ruysdael and Cuyp, and the following year he copied two more paintings by Richard Wilson.¹³ The entries in his Notebook for these earliest years also show him experimenting with different atmospheric conditions, and the light at different times of day, just as other artists were doing in what John Gage and subsequent scholarship has identified as the period of English Naturalism.¹⁴ From this, we can deduce that Collins's earliest ambitions were to become a landscape artist. However, landscapes would not bring Collins his early critical success. The niche position he achieved by 1813, which resulted in his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy in November 1814, was based on a very different type of painting, paintings of children.

Section Two: Childhood as a fit subject for Art

Writing in 1811 about Collins's painting *The Young Fifer* (1810), the reviewer Robert Hunt praised Collins, but clearly regarded his subject-matter, children, as simply a step on the way to painting adults, rather than as a suitable subject-matter in its own right:

Although he has hitherto exhibited little more than the juvenile character, he has executed it with so true a portraiture of nature, and possesses so nice a discernment of the prominent features of early life, that it is impossible not to suppose that so correct and discriminating an eye could take a wider range along the more extended characteristic portraiture of maturer age.¹⁵

¹¹ See Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick & Angus Macintyre, New Haven; London, 1978-84, IX, 3327, entry for 9 August 1808.

¹² William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 3^r: *Landscape and figures view of castle gondolpho at Rome from Wilson*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, fols. 2^r, 3^r and 4^r.

¹⁴ John Gage, *A Decade of English Naturalism 1810-1820*, Norwich, 1969, 16, 24, and 30, cited in Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, 16.

¹⁵ *Examiner*, 24 March 1811.

Embedded in Hunt's observation appears to be a sense that children, as a subject for paintings, are not worthy of serious art. The same approach can also be seen in contemporary literary criticism. Two years later, in 1813, the *Morning Post's* reviewer observed, of Collins's painting *The Burial of a Favourite Bird* (1812): 'he has depicted the infant mind with great ability. Nothing can be more faithfully expressed than the sorrowful faces of the little mourners'. However, he went on: : 'We regret, however, that Mr. C. [sic] had not selected a subject of somewhat more interest, than that of little children burying their favourite bird'.¹⁶ This precisely echoed the criticism which had greeted Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807) that he 'confines his muse to such trifling subjects'.¹⁷

The reviewers' mind-set can perhaps be seen as a reaction against what Ann Rowland, in the context of British literature, has described as 'the infantilization of British literary culture'.¹⁸ It appears to be common ground amongst social, visual and literary historians that the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century saw, as Rowland summarises it, 'a period in which a set of social factors and cultural practices cohered to bring children and childhood into greater focus and importance in the larger culture than previously seen'.¹⁹ This phenomenon has been variously described by art historians in such terms as 'the New Child', 'Romantic Childhood', and 'the discovery of childhood'.²⁰

¹⁶ *Morning Post*, 27 February 1813.

¹⁷ George Gordon Byron, Lord Byron, 'Review of Wordsworth's "Poems in Two Volumes"', *Monthly Literary Recreations*, August 1807, 293-95, cited in Ann Wierda Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood: The Infantilization of British Literary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 2.

¹⁸ Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood*, Subsidiary title and Introduction.

¹⁹ Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood*, 6.

²⁰ James Christen Steward, *The New Child: British art and the origins of modern childhood, 1730-1830*, University of California, Berkeley, 1995; Anne Higgonet, *Pictures of Innocence: the history and crisis of ideal childhood*, London, 1998, 9; Rowland, *Romanticism and Childhood*, 6-12.

In non-fiction, this is apparent from the large number of publications on the manner in which children should be brought up or educated. James Steward states that in relation to Rousseau-influenced treatises alone, at least 200 were published in Britain between 1762 and 1800.²¹ The decade before Collins began his career saw the publication of a cluster of educational publications and stories for children.²² As Matthew Grenby has observed: 'By the end of the eighteenth century there were children's bibles, children's chapbooks, children's poetry and plays, as well as children's didactic books ranging across almost all subjects'.²³ By the time Collins began his career, these were being distributed through specialist children's bookshops, of which there were at least four in London.²⁴ Poetry exploring childhood, published in that decade, included Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* (1800), and Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807).²⁵ But the fact that much more was being written about children did not automatically translate into acceptance into the literary canon.

A similar tension is apparent, in terms of paintings of children, between their very low ranking in the academic canon, and the place they occupied in the actual output, and recorded thoughts of leading artists. Gainsborough and Reynolds both evidently enjoyed painting children.²⁶ At the time Collins entered the Royal Academy schools James Northcote

²¹ Steward, *The New Child*, 145.

²² For example, Maria Edgeworth's *Practical Education* (1798), Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), and Elizabeth Hamilton's *Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education* (1802). Stories intended for children included Thomas Day's picaresque, but also highly didactic *The History of Sandford and Merton* (1783-89, but regularly reprinted), Maria Edgeworth's *The Parent's Assistant or Stories for Children* (1796), and her *Moral and Popular Tales* (1800), as well as fantasy works such as William Roscoe's *The Butterfly's Ball and The Grasshopper's Feast* (1807), and *The Elephant's Ball and Grand Fete Champetre* (1807).

²³ Matthew Grenby, *The Child Reader 1700-1840*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 137.

²⁴ Grenby, *The Child Reader*, 147 and 149-50.

²⁵ For example, Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' and 'The Idiot Boy', published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1798).

²⁶ Steward, *The New Child*, 145.

had been an Academician for twenty years and was shortly to write his biography of Reynolds.²⁷ Northcote's own positive opinions about children as subjects are recorded in his conversations with William Hazlitt: 'It seems to me that it is the absence of all affectation or even of consciousness, that constitutes the perfection of nature or art'.²⁸

Moreover, children's unselfconscious changeability and mobility of expression fitted well with the developing interest of this period in physiognomy. As Erika Langmuir has observed: 'Visual art assigns the process of human character formation to an age at which it can be most readily depicted, mobile, expressive, imitative and educable *pueritia*'.²⁹ David Solkin has shown in his analysis of David Wilkie's *Village Politicians* (1806), that the period around 1806 coincided with a heightened interest in physiognomy, and how using a variety of facial expression, with their associated meanings, could add depth to the viewer's enjoyment of the scene depicted.³⁰ Whether Collins and his cohort ever discussed children as a subject for art with Northcote is not known, but clearly at the time he began his studies there was a great interest amongst established Academicians in the potential of children as art subjects. As I demonstrate in the next section of the chapter, Collins appears rapidly to have grasped the potential, for a young artist who wanted to make his mark, of this prevailing emphasis on childhood, and interest in physiognomy. What enabled him to seize that potential was the fact that his arrival at the Royal Academy schools in January 1807 coincided with the development within the ranks of his fellow-students of a new direction, in

²⁷ James Northcote, *The Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, London, 1813.

²⁸ William Hazlitt, *Conversations with James Northcote, R.A.*, in *the Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, Ed. P.P. Howe, London, 1930-1934, Vol. XI, 225.

²⁹ Erika Langmuir, *Imagining Childhood*, New Haven & London, 2006, 181, in the context of Mulready's *The Butt: Shooting a Cherry* (1848) and *Train up a Child in the Way He Should Go and When He is Old He Will Not Depart from It* (1841).

³⁰ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 22-35.

which the traditional hierarchy of themes, established in the Royal Academy by Reynolds, was abandoned in favour of the portrayal of scenes of everyday life.³¹

Section Three: The Epic of Bringing Up Children

Collins formed life-long friendships with his fellow students, David Wilkie (1785-1841), and William Mulready (1786-1863). As Solkin has noted, those two and Collins, together with two older artists Edward Bird (1772-1819) and Thomas Heaphy (1775-1835), were the leading players in this group of artists.³²

Collins and Mulready would certainly have seen the earliest paintings representative of this new school exhibited by Wilkie and Heaphy in the period 1806-1808. These included Wilkie's *Village Politicians* (R.A., 1806), *The Blind Fiddler* (R.A., 1807), Heaphy's *Robbing a Market Girl* (SPWC, 1807), *Inattention* (SPWC, 1808), and *Return from the Baker's* (SPWC, 1808).³³ In 1808, both Mulready and Collins began painting scenes of 'daily life'. Mulready painted *The Rattle*, showing two children in an interior (figure 1.1).³⁴ He already had a track record in relation to images of children, since he had supplemented his income prior to enrolling as a Royal Academy student by providing the designs for children's book illustrations.³⁵ He also painted *A Carpenter's Shop and Kitchen* (figure 1.2).³⁶ Almost all of Collins's output that year consisted of portraits, landscape studies and copies of Old Masters, but in December 1808, he painted for exhibition at the British Institution in 1809 a

³¹ Collins was admitted to the Royal Academy schools on 15 January 1807.

³² Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 1.

³³ All these are discussed and illustrated in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*.

³⁴ 1808, B.I. No. 93, see Heleniak, *William Mulready*, New Haven & London, 1980, cat. no. 37.

³⁵ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, 29.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 42. This does not appear to have been exhibited.

greengrocer's market stall, by candlelight which appears to have been his first attempt at a painting of daily life.³⁷ Also exhibited by him in 1809, at the Royal Academy, were two paintings involving children. One was *A Boy at Breakfast*, probably a small interior, kitchen view.³⁸ The other, more ambitious work was *Boys Bargaining for a Bird's Nest* [hereafter '*Boys Bargaining*'] (figure 1.3).³⁹ Whilst the cottage setting is classic picturesque, with cracked, crumbling rendering, exposed brickwork and ancient windows, a distinctly modern, naturalistic scene is being played out, but which represents, as in the expression coined by F.L. Holt, in his 1809 article on the new style of painting he identified as having sprung up around David Wilkie, an example of 'the EPIC of common life ... a MINOR FABLE...(in which) all the figures are exhibited as doing *something* – what is done by each being the different parts of the same action'.⁴⁰

In front of the steps are a group of three boys and a girl. The clothing of the boy lying on the ground is somewhat ragged compared with the other three children. Unlike them, he is barefoot, and his trousers end at the knee. We can take it that he has brought the bird's nest, and is negotiating a price. One of the boys holds a nest, full of hatched chicks. His expression is one of delight. Perhaps he has just won the bidding and bought the nest. Close to him, on his left, a girl smiles happily, bringing her hands together in joy. To his right, at a slight distance, the other boy in that group has downcast eyes, and looks disappointed.

³⁷ William Collins, Notebook I, fol.3^r, as *The candlelight scene with many additions*, exhibited at the British Institution (1809, B.I. No. 74) as *A Green-stall – A Night Scene*.

³⁸ 1809, R.A. No. 50. Its whereabouts, and content (beyond what is suggested by its title) are not known. It was subsequently exhibited at Liverpool, with an asking price of £10, (Trevor Fawcett, *The rise of English provincial art: artists patrons and institutions outside London, 1800-1830*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, 204.)

³⁹ 1809, R.A. no. 108 & 1810, B.I. no. 113. An MS note in the index to the Paul Mellon Centre's collection of reviews of genre paintings 1806-1836, compiled c.2004, indicates that this painting was then in a private collection.

⁴⁰ *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 9 April 1809, 119, cited in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 37.

Probably he has been outbid. On the cottage threshold step, a toddler is pointing out the nest to (presumably) her mother. Her rigid stance and pointing finger express disapproval of the whole business. Her mother evidently does not approve either. However, she presents an image of weary resignation. Her hand is wrapped protectively around the toddler's shoulder. But for the newly hatched chicks there will be no protection from the other children, or the boy who stole the nest. Without their adult parents, the chicks will die. Meanwhile, to their right, is a further scene of unkind behaviour. A boy is clapping his hands at the sight of two animals squaring up to each other for a fight, and is egging them on. He clearly has the power to intervene, and call off the dog, but he chooses to let nature take its course. The boys bargaining for the nest have interfered with nature when they should not have done, and this boy has not interfered with nature when he should. The mother could put a stop to both, but is too weak to do so. Will she protect her toddler, or are we witnessing a subtle reworking, for modern times, of Hogarth's *First Stage of Cruelty* (1751)?⁴¹ In any event, the attentive viewer, who was familiar with the educationalists of the time such as Sarah Trimmer or Mary Wollstonecraft, or had read *The History of Sandford and Merton* would be well aware that teaching children to be kind to animals was a key part of the process of training them to be considerate to others.⁴²

⁴¹ This was the first in Hogarth's series *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751) showing the fictional character Tom Nero's progression from the first stage of torturing a dog as a boy, to beating a horse as a man in stage two, progressing to robbery and murder in stage three, and ending up in stage four as being handed over following execution to the anatomists for dissection.

⁴² Sarah Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories*, London, 1786; Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories, from Real Life with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*, 1788; Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton: A Work intended for the Use of Children*, 1783-89, and thereafter regularly reprinted well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

In 1811, Collins exhibited two further paintings foregrounding children tempted to stray from morally acceptable behaviour: *The Young Fifer*, and *The Tempting Moment*.⁴³ In *The Young Fifer* (figure 1.4), six children and a dog are outside a building. Only part of this is visible, but a water pump is attached to the wall, and the older girl with her back to the viewer is carrying a pitcher, doubtless to be filled there. The three children on the left, respectively standing, kneeling and sitting on a broad step, are well-dressed and may be siblings. Sitting cross-legged on the step is the fifer. His clothing is torn, with a gaping hole at the knee. His toe is poking out of his shoe, and his hat, decorated with ribbon and sprigs of dried flowers, is battered and holed. He is looking, with a very direct gaze, at the girl holding the pitcher. Although she and her companion have their backs to the viewer, they are evidently listening attentively, distracted from their task of filling the pitcher. The theme of ill consequences stemming from distraction from the job in hand was one which Thomas Heaphy had explored in *Inattention* (SPWC, 1808) and *Return from the Baker's* (SPWC, 1808) (figure 4.9), and which Mulready was to portray many years later in his well-known *The Butt – Shooting a Cherry* (1848).

The oldest of the first group of three, standing on the left, has his eyes downcast. His expression and body language appear melancholy, almost fed up. They do not suggest rapt attention to the music. Perhaps he can see that the girl's attention is focussed exclusively on the fifer, or perhaps he can see the mischief that the two younger children are up to, and is deliberately cutting himself off. The older child is gleefully watching the youngest child poke

⁴³ William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 6^r. 1811, B.I. No.51; *Ibid.*, fol. 6^r, 1811, B.I. No. 59. The whereabouts of the original painting of *The Tempting Moment* are unknown, and the illustration is of the engraving made by Henry Chawner Shenton in 1830.

her finger into the end of the fife, no doubt hoping that she will sabotage the performance.⁴⁴ Collins here goes a step further than Wilkie had done two years earlier, in *The Blind Fiddler* (figure 1.5). There the boy on the right, rudely mimicking the fiddler with a pair of bellows and a fireiron, is regarded by his teenage sister with what Solkin describes as ‘a mixture of disapproval and amusement’, but here the boy is egging on the younger child to participate directly, and unhelpfully in the performance.⁴⁵ As with *Boys with a Bird’s Nest*, the painting tells a story that can only be unpicked by the viewer paying close attention to the expressions of the children and their body language.

The Tempting Moment (figure 1.6), deals with apples and temptation. The references to Genesis, and The Fall were, and remain obvious. To the contemporary viewer this would have connoted a history painting, a true ‘Epic’. Painting on an epic scale, as opposed to painting ‘common life’ was generally understood by viewers familiar with Reynolds’s *Discourses* and later academic lecturers to involve subjects drawn from great historical events, including scenes from the Bible—the subject set for the Royal Academy’s History Prize was often a biblical subject—and, in depicting noble or reprehensible behaviour would be regarded as illustrating edifying moral truths. But this was unquestionably a scene from ‘common life’. In a parody of the Garden of Eden, Collins moves the setting from Arcadia to what Solkin characterizes as ‘the most squalid region of the metropolis’.⁴⁶ Certainly it is,

⁴⁴ From the position of the fifer’s fingers, with the ring and little fingers of his right hand raised, he appears to be playing an ‘E’. The probable effect of the girl’s action would be to alter the tone of the note slightly, and reduce the volume. However, only a musician viewer would have appreciated that the effect might have been slight, and both the gleeful sibling and the general viewing public would believe that the toddler’s curiosity would spoil the performance. I am grateful to my fellow PhD student Christopher Hill for his explanation of the probable effect of the toddler stopping up the end of the fife.

⁴⁵ The teenager, although dressed in women’s clothing, is considered to be a self-portrait of Wilkie: see Tromans, *David Wilkie*, 87 and n. 102.

⁴⁶ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 105.

uniquely in Collins's *oeuvre*, an urban setting, perhaps only a few hundred yards from his home.⁴⁷ The setting for *The Tempting Moment* appears to be a market, since, as well as the woman in the foreground selling roasted apples, there is a stall at the far left. There is a pile of cabbages at the lower right hand corner. The kneeling boy is wearing an apron and has with him implements for clearing up – a shovel and a broom. Collins appears to have derived some elements of his composition from Jan Steen's *The Effects of Intemperance* (c.1663-5), (figure 1.7). The posture of the intoxicated apple seller and boy on all fours in the foreground of *The Tempting Moment* mirror that of the intoxicated woman and the girl on all fours in the foreground offering a glass of wine to the parrot, in the Steen painting. But if the stage setting is the picturesque old city, there is nothing picturesque about the players. Solkin characterises the boys as 'a gathering of tattered urchins' but their clothing and footwear do not exhibit the same holes and tears as are found in e.g. the vendor in *Boys Bargaining*, or the fifer in *The Young Fifer*.⁴⁸ As they are reasonably dressed, we are to understand that their stealing is not out of desperation, but, as the title indicates, because they have fallen into temptation. The central group are already eating. In front of them, two boys are in the act of stealing apples, their gaze fixed intently on the woman selling them. She is slumped on her chair, her head bowed and her eyes closed. A bottle is sticking out of her pocket. She is drunk and has fallen asleep.

The *Examiner's* reviewer, Robert Hunt, not having noticed the bottle, wrote witheringly about Collins's choice of subject-matter: 'This piece possesses all the merit of the former [*The Young Fifer*], but is of a much less pleasing, if not a disgusting subject, as it

⁴⁷ The three addresses at which he is known to have lived between his birth and 1826 (Great Titchfield Street, 118 Great Portland Street and 11 New Cavendish Street) were less than 500 yards apart.

⁴⁸ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 104.

depicts the early depravity of human nature, — that of boys stealing'.⁴⁹ When it was pointed out to him that the apple seller was drunk, Hunt was able to see a positive moral in the story being told in the picture, and published a correction the following week, placing the blame on the woman, not the boys, and exonerating Collins.⁵⁰ It seems probable that the viewing public would have brought a range of opinions on the relative moral failings of the apple seller and the boys, and would have reflected upon the borderline between normal boisterous behaviour of children—'Boys *will* be boys'—and behaviour requiring correction. Looking at the painting might also prompt reflections around the contemporary philosophical and religious discourse as to whether children were inherently innocent and morally good, but liable to be corrupted, particularly in the town or city (the Rousseauist position), or inherently bad, as a result of the Fall, and therefore requiring constant moral education (the Evangelical position).

The strong moral content of the painting, and its use of the conventional history mode as a source of inspiration may have been the reason why, a few months after finishing *The Tempting Moment*, Collins was encouraged by a senior Academician to enter for the following year's History Prize. Collins's mentor Joseph Farington advised against doing so, noting Collins's distinct 'own line in which He was manifestly improving'.⁵¹ Collins did not compete for the 1812 History Prize and evidently followed Farington's advice.

The first painting executed by Collins in 1811 (i.e. around the time he was exhibiting *The Young Fifer* and *The Tempting Moment* at the British Institution) was a painting entitled

⁴⁹ *Examiner*, 24 March 1811, cited in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 105.

⁵⁰ *Examiner*, 31 March 1811, cited in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 105.

⁵¹ *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, XI, 3921, diary entry for 30 April 1811.

A Public House Door.⁵² Unfortunately this is untraced, so we do not know if, like Mulready's 1809 painting *Returning from the Ale-house* (figure 4.6), it featured children and intoxicated adults. If so, it would have formed a further commentary on the bad influence of drunkenness on impressionable minds. Solkin observes that 'the combination of taverns, drunkenness and children was an explosive one' at this period, and such images were not 'something that most people wanted to hang on their walls'.⁵³

In May 1811, at the Royal Academy exhibition Collins exhibited *The Weary Trumpeter, or Juvenile Mischief* (figure 1.8).⁵⁴ The Trumpeter has stopped for the night whilst travelling. The remains of his dinner are on the table and, exhausted, he has fallen asleep. Up steps to the left we see an elderly woman sitting by a window, sewing, probably the children's grandmother. On the floor, in front of the Trumpeter, lie his sword and belt. The sword is not out of its scabbard, but the fact that two of the children have got hold of his pistol and are attempting to operate it does not bode well. A girl is trying to restrain her brother, who has grabbed the hapless Trumpeter's trumpet and climbed on to a chair in order to blow a blast into his ear. Her left hand is raised, as if remonstrating with him, and her right hand is grasping his pocket, trying to pull him down. Another person is hovering at the back of the kitchen, holding a mop which he has just soaked in the pitcher of water. It is unclear if he is a teenage sibling or a young adult, but far from intervening, he is clearly waiting his turn to join in the fun. The scene of pandemonium is completed by the dog, who

⁵² William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 7^r. Collins sold the painting for twelve guineas, but the date at which it was sold, and the purchaser are unknown.

⁵³ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 150.

⁵⁴ 1811, R.A. No. 128, and 1812, B.I. No. 59.

is taking advantage of the chaos by pulling the tablecloth off the table, so as to get at the bone.

Is the Trumpeter to blame for not putting his trumpet, sword and pistol somewhere safe, and, like the apple-seller in *The Tempting Moment*, for falling asleep? Is it a matter of 'boys will be boys'? Or does the fact that the girl has tried to intervene suggest that there may be something wrong in the way the boys have been brought up? What appears to be a ballad is pinned on the wall above the Trumpeter's head and hints that the boys' moral upbringing is defective. The potentially negative effects of Ballads on household economy and behaviour were constant themes in the stories written by Hannah More. Writing about *The Sunday School*, Susan Pederson observes:

Mrs. Jones (Hannah More in disguise) chastises Farmer Hoskins for having loose songs and ballads in his kitchen, saying, 'It would be better for your young men and maids, and even your daughters, not to be able to read at all, than to read such stuff as this.'⁵⁵

Where are the adults? Should the grandmother be intervening, or is occasional pandemonium a facet of normal family life? A viewer familiar with Barbauld's poetry would have known her poem *Washing Day*, and her description of household pandemonium, tempered by the image of calm presented by the writer's grandmother :

So I went
And sheltered me beside the parlour fire;
There my dear grandmother, eldest of forms,
Tended the little ones, and watched from harm;⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Susan Pedersen, 'Hannah More Meets Simple Simon: Tracts, Chapbooks, and Popular Culture in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 90, citing Hannah More, *The Works of Hannah More*, London: T. Cadell, 1830, III, 302.

⁵⁶ *Washing Day*, lines 66-69, published in the *Monthly Magazine*, December 1797, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *Selected poetry and prose*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, Peterborough; Ormskirk: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002, 146.

Clearly, this is not happening here. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that one of the children is remonstrating. As with the toddler in *Boys with a Bird's Nest*, Collins introduces a child who is doing what is morally right. Moreover, she is a girl. This raises the questions of whether Collins intentionally differentiated between the reactions of the different sexes and, if so, how that should be interpreted. Groups of boys behaving badly were common enough in art, as were groups of boys scaring girls.⁵⁷ Here, however, Collins has a girl actively intervening. That it should be girls who are attempting to moderate the behaviour of their male siblings is in keeping with the pedagogical literature and children's literature of the time. Mary Jackson has charted the trend in children's stories, from 1780 onwards, to distinguish between propriety for boys and for girls: 'Self-expression heretofore considered appropriate or even becoming was now forbidden respectable females, so as to mold them into guardians and weathervanes of social morality in general and of men's morals in particular, by "soft persuasions" only, however'.⁵⁸ Since Collins, in this series of paintings appears to be actively engaging with that literature, I suggest that Collins's use of girls to intervene in restraining boys was quite deliberate. But he appears to go further than the literature suggests, in that the girl here is actively intervening, not softly persuading.

Between April and October 1811 it appears that Collins devoted all his energies to a substantially more ambitious work, *May Day* (1811), 1812, B.I. 71. (figure 1.9).⁵⁹ This features six distinct groups of figures, all of which contain children. Solkin discusses this

⁵⁷ For example, Morland's *Boys Robbing an Orchard* (1790), or Hamilton's *Winter's Amusement* (boys throwing snowballs at retreating girls, 1789), and his *Summer's Amusement* (naked boys jumping out of a stream to the horror of passing girls, 1789).

⁵⁸ Mary V. Jackson, *Engines of Instruction, Mischief, and Magic*, 139, discussing Mary Ann Kilner's *Adventures of a Pincushion* (c.1780), and *The Memoirs of a Peg-Top* (c.1781).

⁵⁹ Collins recorded the dates upon which he began and finished the painting in Notebook I, fol. 30^v.

painting in his chapter on Carnival.⁶⁰ On the left, a carpenter who appears the worse for drink, is making advances to a shrimp-girl, 'a figure traditionally identified with vulgar and transgressive sexuality'.⁶¹ A group of three boys are in the act of removing his stool, watched by a laughing man seated at a table, clearly enjoying the prank. His wife is trying to stop this. In the foreground a girl is comforting her younger brother, who is clutching his broken kite and crying. She wipes away his tears with her pinafore. Behind them are a drummer, and a young woman dancing, both with feathered hats. Solkin identifies her as the 'Queen of the May'. Their performance is being watched by five children. At the foot of the public house's external staircase, and descending it, are four chimney sweeps, holding out their hats to raise money. What they collect will find its way to the money box held by the doll sitting on the basket in front of the garland. Two of the group are soliciting donations from the group of first floor customers, while two small children are peering over the balcony for a better look. A hopeful sweep stands with his hat held out next to the final group on the right, a woman seated with a very tired child with its head in her lap and a young boy staring at the various entertainments unfolding in front of his eyes. In that *May Day* includes at least ten adults it is clearly something of an outlier in terms of the other paintings which form part of this early group of paintings, and is much closer to the type of fairground scenes and musical groups painted by David Wilkie and Edward Bird.⁶² However, there are a number of echoes of themes Collins had explored in previous paintings, for example the intoxication of the carpenter, encouraging boys to misbehave, the attempt by the man's wife to intervene, and the girl modelling good behaviour by comforting her little brother. That Collins never

⁶⁰ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 168-71.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶² See Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 145-89.

attempted another such scene was certainly not due to any difficulty selling it—it was purchased off the exhibition wall by a British Institution Director for 150 guineas.⁶³ We know from Joseph Farington's Diary that the strain of painting *May Day* made Collins ill.⁶⁴ If he had any ambitions to execute another painting of the same sort, this was overtaken by events a few days after Farington spoke to him, events to which I will turn shortly.

A feature of all the paintings considered above is the failure of adults, or older children to intervene in a given situation so as to prevent children from transgressing. So, the mother in *Boys Bargaining* fails to save the chicks or prevent the boy from egging on the dog. The older boy in *The Young Fifer* fails to prevent the fifer from distracting the girls from their task or the younger children from sabotaging the fifer. The apple seller in *The Tempting Moment* is drunk and incapable of preventing the boys from stealing her apples. In *The Weary Trumpeter* the Trumpeter has fallen asleep, the oldest boy actively participates in the 'Juvenile Mischief' and the grandmother does nothing. In *May Day* the carpenter is drunk, and the laughing man does nothing to prevent the boys from removing his stool. In his next painting, however, *Children playing with puppies* (1811-12) (figure 1.10), Collins used a commonplace theme, children playing with pets, in order to demonstrate how children's upbringing could cause them to respond in very different ways to the same situation.

Paintings of children and their pets were not novel. The series of engravings of children after Morland includes *Guinea Pigs* (after 1789), a family group of two parents and two children.⁶⁵ Engravings were made after William Hamilton (1751-1801) of *A visit to Chloe*, and *A visit to Puss* (figure 1.11). Those feature groups of little children clustered around

⁶³ William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 7^r; purchased by the Rev. Sir S.C. Jervoise, Bart.

⁶⁴ *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, XI, 4059, entry for 4 January 1812.

⁶⁵ See the engraving by Jacques Phillippe Levilly, after George Morland; British Museum 1875,0710.935,.

puppies, kittens and their mothers. However, Collins's approach is far more complex and layered with meaning. The setting is a barn. Through the barn's main door a tiny strip of the outside world is visible. The painting was commissioned by Sir Thomas Heathcote and the setting may be Hursley Park, his home.⁶⁶ We know from Farington's diary that Collins visited Hursley Park and made oil sketches there.⁶⁷

There are three groups of children in the painting. Each group has a puppy, but the manner in which they are engaging with it is different. The group on the left are sitting quietly (figure 1.12). The two boys are looking at the puppy, while the girl, who is older, and is wearing a décolleté dress, has her right arm around the boy's shoulder. Her left arm is gently holding the puppy, supporting its back. The pair are well-dressed. The boy's clothes appear neat, he is well shod and he has a hat, although it is temporarily containing the puppy. The girl wears a necklace. By contrast, the other boy is seated lower, on the barn floor, is barefoot, and his clothing is coming apart at the seams. Probably we are intended to view him as the child of a farm labourer, and the other two as children of the proprietor. A comparison with an early, related oil sketch made by Collins shows that he made a number of changes to this first group (figure 1.13). Apart from altering the children's clothing, upon transferring the scene indoors, and moving the dog elsewhere, there are two significant changes. What appears as a sibling group of three in the sketch, becomes a group where clearly two are of higher status than the third. The girl's demeanour has also changed. In the sketch she is seated well to the right of her brother. He holds the puppy while she merely looks on. In the finished painting she has become both fraternal (with her arm around her

⁶⁶ William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 8^r.

⁶⁷ *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, XII, 4170, entry for 11 August 1812.

brother), maternal (in her support of the puppy) and, given that she appears now to be on the verge of puberty, and is looking at her brother rather than at the puppy, there is also the suggestion of the two siblings' matrimonial future. In terms of the group's behaviour, as derived from how they are relating to their puppy, they appear to be modelling appropriate behaviour, kind to the animal, and kind/appropriately respectful (in terms of contemporary class distinctions) towards each other.

The second group comprises three boys (figure 1.14). One is focussed on the puppy's mother. He has taken his hat off and knelt down in front of the mother who is licking his chin, much to his contentment. The other two are playing with the puppy. The younger, hatless boy has picked the puppy up and placed it on its mother's back and is holding it carefully. The older boy has put out his index finger to see if the puppy will lick it. They are both completely focussed on the puppy. Some might think the boys are 'messaging about', but they are not behaving unkindly. Both dog and puppy appear quite happy. The hat worn by the older boy is somewhat battered, but otherwise the group's clothing appears in reasonable condition.⁶⁸

The third group is very different (figure 1.15). Here, an older boy is holding a puppy by the scruff of its neck, just out of the reach of a young girl. This cannot be pleasant for the animal, and the girl is clearly upset. He stands with his hand on his hip, indifferent to the animal's suffering and the girl's distress. One reviewer of the 1812 Royal Academy Exhibition dismissed Collins's painting in these words: 'an artist of deserved reputation, but most unfortunate in the choice of this subject. To see animals teased and in pain, can never be

⁶⁸ It appears to be the same hat as worn by the boy in the preparatory oil sketch for the left hand group.

pleasing'.⁶⁹ However, the reviewer had clearly missed the point. In this particular example of 'the EPIC of common life', all the children were indeed 'exhibited as doing *something* –what is done by each being the different parts of the same action'. The cruel actions of the boy in this group form a deliberate counterpoint to the other groups. A particular feature is his clothing. His jacket is holed at the elbow and, unlike the other older boys, who all have hats, he wears a cap trimmed with fur, perhaps rabbit fur. It is reminiscent of the hat worn by one of the thieving ballad sellers in Heaphy's 1808 watercolour *Inattention*. Most probably he is already working full time, outdoors. Children of agricultural labourers could expect to be working full time on the land by the age of nine or ten.⁷⁰ Unlike the other children he has not had the benefit of being brought up to care for animals, or to show kindness to younger children.

Children playing with puppies accordingly represents a detailed commentary on the theme of children's behaviour, a theme which Collins had pioneered, and quarried for three years. We do not know where he stood in relation to the wider philosophical debate on whether children were inherently innocent and morally good, or inherently bad. But the behaviour of the second group of children in the painting suggests that there is room for children simply to have fun. They are enjoying themselves, and neither the puppy nor its mother are being harmed. No-one comes to harm in *The Young Fifer*. Even the dog is enjoying the music. If the apple seller in *The Tempting Moment* has lost some apples, it may encourage her to take more care. The mother in *Boys Bargaining* may be at her wits' end, but the remonstrating toddler may persuade her to intervene. The Trumpeter will certainly

⁶⁹ From an unidentified review dated 31 May 1812 (National Art Library, British newspaper cuttings, II, 8).

⁷⁰ Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed : Working-Class Children In Nineteenth-Century England*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994, 12.

now wake up and deal with the mayhem round him. The carpenter in *May Day* gets his just desserts.

Section four: Death, grief and anger

Collins's next two paintings, and the change of direction they represent, cannot I suggest be understood without reference to Collins's personal circumstances. The year 1812 began disastrously with the death, following a short illness, of William Collins senior on 9 January. Although he had been unwell for a few weeks, his death was sudden and unexpected.⁷¹ Collins had now to take financial responsibility for his whole family, and deal with his father's debts. The seizure of almost all the family's furniture and possessions are graphically described by Wilkie Collins.⁷² Particularly painful for Collins would have been the need to sell a large number of his early paintings, in order to satisfy his father's creditors.⁷³ His immediate priority was to finish *Children Playing with Puppies*. Sir Thomas Heathcote had made a down payment of forty-two guineas when commissioning the painting and Collins recorded that it was only about a quarter finished at the time of his father's death. The pressure was accordingly on, and Collins began working again on the picture on 4 February. Heathcote had called the previous day and, learning of the family's distressed circumstances first offered to pay the balance immediately, and then offered a loan of £50, both of which Collins declined.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 44-46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I, 46-49.

⁷³ Wilkie Collins includes an excerpt from his father's diary for 3 March 1812, stating that these contributed £57 to the creditors' fund. Paintings which were recorded in the Notebook, which had to be sold, are marked 'given' by Collins. They all date from 1808. The prices obtained for these recorded paintings only totals £37 5s 6d, which suggests that whatever he included from his earlier, unrecorded, pictures would have been sold for around £20.

⁷⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 47.

Significantly, the two paintings which Collins executed, once he had finished *Children Playing with Puppies*, *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* (1812) and *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1813) each embody one of the classic emotions associated with sudden bereavement, grief and anger. As Patricia Jalland has observed: ‘Sudden deaths are more likely than other deaths to leave the bereaved feeling guilty and angry, full of regrets, as well as shocked and sad’.⁷⁵ Late nineteenth century commentators on Collins found no difficulty in relating these paintings to his personal circumstances. An 1899 article on Collins commented, of *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb*, that it was ‘a subject very likely suggested by his having had to dispose of the furniture and other household effects in order to pay off his father’s debts’.⁷⁶ These two paintings represent a move by Collins away from his exploration of children’s misbehaviour, to portraying their capacity to show their feelings.

In *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* eight children have assembled to bury one of their number’s pets, a robin (figure 1.16).⁷⁷ They are by the banks of a stream flowing through a dark wood which fills the left side of the painting. In the foreground group four children and a dog cluster around the pet’s owner, who sits on a raised bank looking at the robin lying face up in a basket on her lap. (figure 1.17). They all look utterly bereft. In the second group a boy kneels by the side of the path, digging the robin’s grave with a trowel. (figure 1.18). A girl, holding woodland flowers to place on the grave, comforts the boy kneeling next to the gravedigger.

⁷⁵ Patricia Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, Oxford, 1996, 66.

⁷⁶ ‘The Royal Academy in the present century: William Collins R.A.’, *Art Journal*, 1899, 139.

⁷⁷ William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 8^r, 1813, B.I. No.10. The painting was completed by Collins on 29 December 1812. In 1809 Henry Thomson (1773-1843) exhibited a painting entitled *Dead Robin* (1809, R.A. No. 140). This painting is presently unlocated, and it is accordingly not possible to say whether it had any relevance to Collins’s painting.

Various features of the painting are freighted with symbolic meaning. Both mourning and burial take place at a crossroads. The mourners are placed by a diagonal path that leads from right to left, through the gloom of the forest. The burial party are digging just beyond a path that runs from the wooden bridge at right angles to the first path, and which disappears behind the foliage at the lower left corner. On the right hand side, beyond the footbridge, a track leads into the open air, across fields, and bifurcates to an almost infinite horizon in each direction (figure 1.19). Although the sky we can see is grey, casting a dark shadow over the area near the children, the more distant part of the fields, and the two pathways are bathed in sunlight. Beyond grief, there is hope. Robins are linked, in Christian iconography, to the Crucifixion, and symbolise spring, growth and renewal. Another element of the painting, linked to Collins's own emotional state, arises from the fact that part of the anger in the process of grieving is frequently self-directed; the feeling that one could and should have done more. The fact that the children appear utterly bereft may also be due to their attempt to make a domestic pet out of a wild bird, and to cage the robin rather than simply put out food for it. Contemporary pedagogical literature abounded with warnings against attempting this.⁷⁸ William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* (composed c.1803 but unpublished in his lifetime) includes the well-known couplet: 'A Robin Red breast in a Cage | Puts all Heaven in a Rage'.⁷⁹ In that case, the scene would suggest the children's grief at their wrongdoing, an attempt to atone for it, and the open landscape could relate to the bird's liberation.

⁷⁸ For example, Sarah Trimmer, *Fabulous Histories, designed for the instruction of children, respecting their treatment of Animals*, London, 1786.

⁷⁹ 'Auguries of Innocence', William Blake, *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1965, 404, lines 5-6.

Modern viewers of the painting are likely to perceive sentimentality; an unreal and inappropriate transposition into a child's world of adult emotions. The expressions 'sentiment', 'sentimental' and 'sentimentality' are slippery terms to pin down. Marie Banfield's 'From Sentiment to Sentimentality' provides considerable assistance.⁸⁰ I use the understanding of those terms, as they might be applied to paintings, set out in the 1827 revision of Dr Johnson's Dictionary:

Sentiment (3): sensibility; feeling;
Sentimental (3) : affecting sensibility, in a contemptuous sense;
Sentimentality: Affectation of fine feeling or exquisite sensibility.⁸¹

Contemporaries certainly did not regard *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* as 'affecting sensibility'. As one reviewer put it:

The children, which form the composition of this scene, call forth recollections of our early feelings, and cannot be viewed without emotions of sympathy. The story is truly affecting - sorrow is faithfully depicted on the countenances of the infantile mourners, and the picture has considerable pathos.⁸²

The reviewer evidently regards the painting as evoking 'sensibility; feeling'. The sentiments portrayed, grief, probably mixed with guilt, are powerful. However, contemporary children were exposed to death to a degree inconceivable now. The combined infant/early childhood death in 1800 has been calculated as 17%.⁸³ No child growing up could be untouched by the death of a sibling or friend of the family. Collins's older sibling, a sister, died shortly before his birth.⁸⁴ Learning how to manage death was important.

⁸⁰ Marie Banfield, 'From Sentiment to Sentimentality: A Nineteenth-Century Lexicographical Search', 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007) www.19.bbk.ac.uk, 6-7.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸² *Repository of Arts*, vol IX, 1813, 155.

⁸³ Carlo A. Corsini and Pier Paolo Viazzo, 'The Decline of Infant Mortality in Europe, 1800-1950: Four national case studies', *Historical Perspectives* (2), Florence: UNICEF and Istituto degli Innocenti, 1993, 37.

⁸⁴ Diane Perkins, 'William John Thomas Collins (1787-1847), landscape and genre painter' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 11, Oxford University Press.

Children also needed to learn to manage frustration and anger and to accept that sometimes life can be very unfair. Collins explored this in *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1812-13) (figure 1.20). This was swiftly bought, at exhibition, and Collins also received a commission for a slightly smaller repetition of the subject (1813). I will refer to them respectively as 'the first version' and 'the second version'. A preliminary sketch for the first version has survived (figure 1.21). In the first version the background is a dilapidated cottage. Money is clearly tight. At the front door a transaction is in progress between the mother of the five children portrayed and the butcher. He is handing over some coins in payment for the lamb. The five children are arranged in a diagonal row. First there is the weeping child with its hand on its mother's arm. Next, squaring up to the much larger butcher's boy, a small son is trying to push him away and prevent him tying a halter around the lamb's neck. Behind the lamb a boy is kneeling, his left arm flung protectively around the lamb and an expression of anger on his face. Another boy is standing next to him, pointing towards a track leading away from the house. Evidently he is proposing flight. Finally, kneeling before the lamb is the youngest child, offering the lamb a bowl. This may be its last drink. The preliminary sketch is broadly similar to the painting as executed, but Collins made a number of significant changes. The demeanour of the boy kneeling behind the lamb changes, from uncontrolled weeping to angry protectiveness, and he has added a boy who suggests removing the lamb to safety. Collins also sharpened the contrast between the butcher's boy and the child attempting to push him away. In the sketch, the child wears shorts and is bigger (his hands reach part way up the butcher's boy's jacket). In the finished painting the child is smaller (his hands are right at the bottom of the jacket) and younger (he has not yet been breeched). The dog is now placed firmly in the butcher's camp, standing by his master's side,

adding a touch of menace. Collins also changed the posture of the girl offering the bowl, from standing to kneeling, suggesting a posture of prayer. While possibly a compositional afterthought, he may have intended to strengthen the religious symbolism of the lamb led to the slaughter. This interpretation is strengthened by the changes to the composition of the sky. In the sketch the sky fills all the space behind the tree, whereas in the finished painting, the tree fills most of the sky with dense shadow, and the largest area of sky, and so light visible, is placed directly above the lamb.

Collins may also have intended a reference to Wordsworth's poem, 'The Pet-Lamb' (1800): 'With one knee on the grass did the little Maiden kneel, | While to that Mountain Lamb she gave its evening meal'.⁸⁵ There was certainly one poem which Collins referenced directly, when the painting was re-exhibited at the British Institution. There, an extract from Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* accompanied the painting's entry in the exhibition catalogue:

Though unoffending innocence may plead,
Though frantic ewes may mourn the savage deed.
...
For lo, the murd'ring butcher with his cart
Demands the firstlings of the flock to die,
And makes a sport of life and liberty.⁸⁶

The exhibition critics were unanimously bowled over. William Hazlitt praised the 'exquisite feeling' of the painting, commenting on its 'natural pathos and touching simplicity, which

⁸⁵ William Wordsworth, 'The Pet-Lamb', *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 222-25, lines 7-8.

⁸⁶ Robert Bloomfield, *The Poems of Robert Bloomfield*, 2 vols, 1809, 'The Farmer's Boy; A Rural Poem', Part I, *Spring*, lines 341-342 and 346-348. For the exhibition catalogue entries, see: chronicle250.com *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCXIII, The Forty-fifth*, 11, No. 191 (where there is no reference to the poem) and Algernon Graves, *The British Institution, 1806-1867; A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from the foundation of the institution*, London: George Bell & Sons, 1908, 112 (1814, No. 15).

we have never seen surpassed in any picture of the kind. It may easily draw tears from eyes, at all used to the melting mood'.⁸⁷

Over forty years later, the author of a four page article about Collins in the *Art Journal* recalled the sight of children weeping in front of the painting, describing it as 'full of incidents which when it was exhibited, "possessed themselves, unresisted, of the feelings of all who beheld them"'.⁸⁸ Moreover, the painting dealt with a theme that would have been a familiar part of country life in Collins's day, as the Redgrave brothers carefully explained in 1866, in describing the background to the painting for their readers.⁸⁹

The second version of the painting was smaller, and the canvas used by Collins was squarer (figure 1.22).⁹⁰ Although listed by Collins as a 'Small Copy' of the original, there are a number of compositional changes, which appear to be of considerable significance.⁹¹ The potentially threatening dog, and the boy proposing resistance and flight have gone. The weeping child is no longer attempting to intercede with her mother. She is now placed closer to her siblings, turned away from them to cry by herself. A more open landscape appears on the left side of the painting, in which the view across the bridge and the fields ends with a village church. A strong diagonal line connects the kneeling girl proffering a final drink to the lamb, with the church. These changes introduce a concept not present in the original version, namely that while the scene being played out is desperately sad for those involved,

⁸⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, 5 February 1814.

⁸⁸ *Art Journal*, May 1855, 142.

⁸⁹ Richard Redgrave & Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School; with critical notices of their works, and an account of the progress on Art in England*, 2 vols, London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1866, II, 414.

⁹⁰ The original version measures 79.1 x 100.3 cm. The commissioned version measures 53.5 x 66.5 cm.

⁹¹ William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 9r.

consolation is to be sought in the Divine purpose. Such changes could well have reflected Collins's own feelings, as he moved through the grieving process.

Common to both *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* and *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* is the greater emphasis placed on the surrounding landscape. Collins's original aspirations, although temporarily laid aside whilst he was painting his series of 'Fables', can be seen surfacing during 1811 in the preliminary oil sketch for *Children playing with puppies* (figure 1.12), where the three children are seated in an extensive landscape. Just at the point of achieving major critical recognition for his two 1813 works—perhaps *because* he had achieved it—Collins now attempted to change direction and return to his early aspiration to make his name as a landscape painter. Children remain a vital part of the landscape, but the landscape, as first intimated in *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird*, with its view away from the gloom of the forest to the sunlit prospect beyond, now opens out.

Section Five: Children in the work of other artists

On 2 April 1813, a reviewer of the British Institution's Exhibition, which included *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* wrote that 'Of the artists of the present day, no one in his peculiar walk brings his subjects more completely home than Mr Collins'.⁹² In referring to 'his peculiar walk' the reviewer was evidently referring to his particular type of 'painting out of the ordinary', that is, scenes where the characters were almost entirely made up of children. That the reviewer refers to other artists indicates that he was clearly comparing their productions in selecting Collins as outstanding in that field. Certainly there were other artists

⁹² National Art Library, Press cuttings 1686-1835, vol. III, 871, source not stated but headed 'Fine Arts/British Institution exhibition (concluded)' and (in ink) '2nd April 1813'.

who were exhibiting genre paintings of children during the years 1807-1813, but few came to the notice of reviewers, and no artist apart from Collins appears to have devoted himself almost exclusively to that theme during those years. Charles Christopher Coventry (active 1802-19), for example, exhibited one painting during that period which attracted critical attention, his *Infant Washerwoman* (R.A., 1809, 275). A reviewer wrote:

One would hardly think that anything like interest or character could be conveyed under so simple a title. Yet this piece contains both...A picture of youthful industry is exhibited by a little girl who is washing the dress of her doll. She is assisted by her sister; while a mischievous boy, probably their brother, is slyly cutting the line on which some of their fine things are hanging to dry.⁹³

Collins may have had Coventry's painting in mind when he began work on *The Young Fifer* the following year. But this appears to have been a one-off exploration by Coventry in respect of children's behaviour towards each other. Thomas Stewardson (1781-1859) exhibited a pair of paintings at the British Institution in 1810, *Boys playing at beggar my neighbour* and *Boys playing at chess*.⁹⁴ A review of the latter included the observation: 'The expression in the faces of the young students, in this difficult game, is such as indicates anxiety and indecision on the one hand, opposed to thoughtless confidence on the other', indicating that Stewardson, like the major players in the 'painting out of the ordinary' movement had an understanding of physiognomy and portrayal of character.⁹⁵ As with Coventry, however, this appears to have been a one-off venture. Michael William Sharp (d.1840) enjoyed some critical success in 1809-11 with painting which featured children, but here the presence of the child was secondary to the behaviour of the adults present. *The Music Lesson* (1809)

⁹³ *Public Ledger*, 22 May 1809.

⁹⁴ 1810. B.I. 286 and 287.

⁹⁵ *Public Ledger*, 26 May 1810.

showed adults reacting to the screeching sound of an early violin lesson. In *A Bunch of Keys* (1810), parents are attempting to distract a bawling child. The old man in *The letter O* (1811) is demonstrating, in an absurd manner, the letter 'O' to an unresponsive child with his fingers and mouth.⁹⁶ Various other artists used children in scenes of absurdity. A reviewer of C.C. Coventry's *The Tight Shoe* (1810) described it as 'another attempt at the light comedy or rather farce of the pencil. The grotesque countenance of the boy, who is trying to get on a new shoe in a shoemaker's shop, is an irresistible provocation to risibility'.⁹⁷

Collins's early work in the period 1809 to 1813 accordingly differs from his contemporaries in its consistent focus upon children's interactions with each other, rather than upon adult reactions to children. That consistent focus appears to have influenced Mulready. As noted at the beginning of Section Three, Mulready had begun to paint children at approximately the same time as Collins (figure 1.1). During the years 1809-1812 Mulready made a number of sketches and paintings which involved children, painted in a naturalistic style, without any obvious sub-text or message. These included *Heston* (1809) described by Heleniak as 'A cottage, with boys playing outside. A horse is looking over the gate'; *Boys playing cricket* (1810); and *The Mall, Kensington Gravel Pits* (1811-12), in which three boys are pulling two others in a wheeled truck; and *Boys Fishing* (1812-13).⁹⁸ However, around 1814, the theme Collins had explored for several years, issues around the upbringing of children, was now picked up by Mulready. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the two artists and friends appear to have swapped direction. As I explore in Chapters Two and Three, Collins went on to explore themes of children in the landscape. Mulready developed a

⁹⁶ *The Music Lesson* (1809, B.I. 29), *A Bunch of Keys* (R.A. 1810, 104), *The letter O*, (B.I. 1811, 11)

⁹⁷ B.I. 1810, No. 87, reviewed in the *Weekly Register and Political Magazine*, 28 April 1810.

⁹⁸ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, cat. 54; cat. 63; cat. 78; cat. 81, respectively.

lasting interest in Collins's theme of the representation of boys' behaviour and its consequences and, inevitably, how that might reflect their upbringing. This theme appears in many of his well-known pictures.⁹⁹ Interestingly, in terms of Collins's preceding track record, Mulready's *The Wolf and the Lamb* features a young girl raising the alarm (figure 1.23). The content of Mulready's paintings certainly supports Heleniak's opinion that Mulready's view was that

children, like humanity in general are intrinsically weak, indolent, irresponsible, tardy, even cruel; their very nature demands constant vigilance and care ... this pessimistic, pre-enlightenment view of human nature as embodied in childhood is perhaps most evident in his scenes of children fighting.¹⁰⁰

This was essentially the Evangelical, as opposed to the Rousseauist position. As I have suggested, Collins's position was somewhat different, acknowledging the possibility of harmless fun, and reflecting a more optimistic view of children than Mulready's. Heleniak does not refer to any of Collins's paintings of 1809-1812, but Mulready's indebtedness to Collins's work of that period is, I would argue, an obvious one, which ought now to be recognised.

Section Six: Painting out of the ordinary – the final phase, 1814-1817

In the depressed economic conditions for art which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars, critical acclaim did not result in sales. Early in 1816, Collins recorded in his journal that he found himself 'with one sixpence in my pocket, seven hundred pounds in debt, shabby

⁹⁹ For example, *Idle Boys* (1815), *The Fight Interrupted* (1815-16), *The Wolf and the Lamb* (1820), *The Careless Messenger Detected* (1821), *A Dog of Two Minds* (1829-30), *Giving a Bite* (1834), *Train Up a Child in the Way he should go; and When He Is Old He Will Not Depart from It* (1841), and *The Butt – Shooting a Cherry* (1848). All these are illustrated in Heleniak, *William Mulready*.

¹⁰⁰ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, 89.

clothes...and without a single commission of any kind whatever'.¹⁰¹ A few months later he was obliged to apply to Sir Thomas Heathcote for a loan to tide him over.¹⁰² Between 1814 and 1817, and in an attempt to cope with the uncertainty in the art market, he cast around in a number of directions, painting portraits of children set in the outdoors, and spending the summers of 1815 and 1816 sketching on the coast, in an attempt (ultimately highly successful, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three) to make a name for himself as a coastal painter. He also continued to build on the foundations laid by his 'epic of common life' paintings, by painting subject pictures which featured children. However, he abandoned both the exploration of 'good' and 'bad' upbringing of his earlier work produced between 1809 and 1812, and the intense emotions of his two 1813 paintings. The reasons for this are nowhere recorded, but one might speculate that he had outgrown, or felt that he had exhausted, the themes of his earlier paintings, and that the passage of two years had enabled him to work through the emotions consequent upon his father's death. Instead, he explored situations, still rooted in children's everyday experience, which for the adult viewer contained an element of humour, absurdity or folly.

Unfortunately the paintings in this group are, for the most part, currently missing and known only through descriptions and comments in contemporary reviews. *The Town Miss visiting her country relations* (1814) dealt with a city teenager displaying airs and graces:

The Town Miss is just arrived, and seated in all her paraphernalia of pomp and dress in the farmer's cottage. She is turning with a fine air of pretended or real disgust from the willing offer of ale handed to her by a boy, whose mother, with a cherub infant in her arms, shews signs of disgust at the affronting haughtiness of her rich relation.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 82.

¹⁰² Letter from William Collins to Sir T.F. Heathcote, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 87-89.

¹⁰³ Exhibited 1814, B.I. No. 25. *Examiner*, 27 March 1814, 206.

The 'mother' appears to have been an elder sister, and the 'boy' might have been a younger sister, since the critic for *New Monthly Magazine*, writing in similar terms refers to 'the kind attention of her beautiful infantine sister' and the 'disappointment and poignant grief of the elder sister'.¹⁰⁴ The reviewer in the *Repository of Arts* expressed himself in similar terms, adding that:

We are much pleased to see this dramatic style of art cultivated by our young artists. The admired talents of Wilkie, it appears, have given rise to this branch, which promises to rival similar works of the Flemish and Dutch schools in the executive part, and to excel them in thought and expression.¹⁰⁵

In 1815, Collins exhibited *Half-holiday muster*.¹⁰⁶ When he painted this, Collins, together with all his contemporaries, believed the Napoleonic Wars to be over; Napoleon did not escape from his exile in Elba until March 1815. The battle of Waterloo did not take place until June, so the Royal Academy exhibition opened in May 1815 against a background of renewed conflict and uncertainty. The reviewer for the *New Monthly Magazine* described the painting as Collins's 'best picture: it is finely executed. The subject is pleasing; but we could have wished for a little more archness and fun in the character of the boys'.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that there might have been a degree of ambiguity in Collins's approach to the theme of war. This will be explored further in Chapter Three, in the context of another painting by Collins in the same exhibition, *The Reluctant Departure* (1815).¹⁰⁸ Such ambiguity is certainly apparent in what may be a preliminary sketch for the painting (figure 1.24).¹⁰⁹ A boy, all dressed up for the occasion with a plumed hat and flag, is standing with his free

¹⁰⁴ *New Monthly Magazine*, I, April 1814, 277.

¹⁰⁵ *Repository of Arts*, April 1814, 214-15.

¹⁰⁶ 1815, R.A. No. 307.

¹⁰⁷ *New Monthly Magazine*, III, 1 July 1815.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter Three, Section Two, *Safety and Danger*.

¹⁰⁹ Probably lot 515 in the posthumous Collins sale.

hand on his hip, looking exasperatedly at the seated boy, whose thoughts appear to be far away, and who evidently does not want to join in. Absent the finished painting, the attribution to Collins must remain tentative. However, if it is indeed a preliminary sketch, the presence of such a group might explain the critic's reservation about the absence of 'archness and fun'. Such a group might have brought home to viewers the reality of war and the likelihood that the seated boy is thinking of a relative who has been killed or injured in the fighting. The social relevance and prominence of such themes at this juncture is obvious.

In 1816 Collins exhibited *An Argument at the Spring* (1816).¹¹⁰ The subject is succinctly described by the reviewer for the *Annals of the Fine Arts*: 'By the side of one of those health inspiring springs, so common in the country, a little urchin is stript to be bathed, and the argument is between an older child and the hesitating infant'.¹¹¹ The *Repository of Arts* gave rather more detail of the background: 'The cool, limpid spring, stealing through sedges, is beautifully expressed. The picturesque ruin, and illuminated stump in a dark wood, excite the most charming rural sensation; it captivates the imagination'.¹¹² For the *Examiner*, Robert Hunt expressed his admiration as follows:

The pictures of the new Associate, Mr Collins, are more estimable than ever in their rich colour, sunny glow, delicate profusion of touch as we see in vegetable nature, and in their disclosure of the moral and physical peculiarities of the juvenile age.¹¹³

Evidently, Collins was regarding the landscape background as equally important as the subject of the two siblings.

¹¹⁰1816, R.A. No. 308.

¹¹¹*Annals of the Fine Arts*, vol I, no. 1, July 1816, 79

¹¹²*Repository of Arts*, March 1816, new series, vol I, 355.

¹¹³*Examiner*, 19 May 1816.

The following year, 1817, Collins exhibited the last of his paintings in this group of humorous children's subjects, *The Young Cottager's First Purchase* (1816).¹¹⁴ The theme appears to have involved a contrast between the ambivalent reactions of the boy who has handed over the money, and a younger sibling's unqualified enthusiasm: 'The thoughtfulness of the boy, who has emptied his purse to make the purchase, is finely contrasted with the lively emotion of the child, who appears to enjoy it'.¹¹⁵

In the summer of 1817, Collins went to Paris with his fellow artists Charles Robert Leslie and Washington Allston. This visit produced the material for Collins's final two genre paintings, both exhibited the following year: *A scene on the Boulevards, Paris*, and *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen*.¹¹⁶ The visit also gave Collins an opportunity to reflect on his art. These reflections are, fortunately, quoted extensively in his son's biography.¹¹⁷ They include observations by Collins about Dutch painting which are illustrative both of what he had been attempting to achieve, and also of the direction he would come to take in the future. Whilst he accepted the technical excellence of the Dutch Old Masters, he deplored their choice of subject matter as 'gross vulgar and filthy' featuring characters 'such as degrade the human species beyond the level of the brute creation'.¹¹⁸ That he aimed to refine the coarse humour those paintings contained, and indeed succeeded in doing so, is apparent from the reception of two paintings resulting from this journey. *A scene on the Boulevards, Paris* unfortunately appears to have been destroyed by fire in the nineteenth century.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁴1817, B.I. No. 2.

¹¹⁵Repository of Arts, new series, vol III, March 1817, 164.

¹¹⁶ 1818, B.I. No. 127, and 1818, R.A. No. 84.

¹¹⁷ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 112-15.

¹¹⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 112.

¹¹⁹ The 1879 fire at Clumber Park. The painting does not appear in W.J. Hipkin, *Catalogue of paintings at Clumber Park*, London, 1910.

Repository of Arts singled out the work as ‘a most attractive novelty, full of genuine character in the subject’, and went on:

it is a representation of familiar French character, as is seen in one of the greatest thoroughfares of the Parisian capital. There is as much truth and humour in it as illustrative of the gambols of our continental neighbours, as we see of common character among ourselves in Hogarth’s lively piece: it is fair broad humour, well described and diversified, but not put in caricature.¹²⁰

The artist’s ‘fair broad humour’ and the absence of caricature was echoed by the reviewer of *New Monthly Magazine*: ‘This is a very clever representation of French habits, and although descriptive of their peculiarities, has nothing offensive or ill-natured about it; you have the force of a caricature, without its defiance of nature’.¹²¹ The same type of comment greeted Collins’s other French scene, *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen* (1818)(figure 1.25). In its preliminary notice of the exhibition, the *Examiner* singled out the painting as one of its gems.¹²² The reviewer for *Annals of the Fine Arts* described the work as: ‘Replete with humour, truth and incident; the hurrying couple almost too late for the vehicle, the buck with one boot on and his lady with the other in her hand, reminding him of his forgetfulness, is a comic trait of rich invention’.¹²³ When the *Examiner* subsequently wrote a full review of the painting, it enthused:

We never saw a picture in more genuine costume; it is essentially French. The heavy diligence, the gentleman hastening with his lap-dog, with one boot on and followed by his wife carrying the other; the coachman pulling out an interloper from the inside, the pretty girl in a handkerchief head-dress taking a letter &c, &c, and all in their native eagerness of manner, place us at once before a French inn and among French people.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *Repository of Arts*, new series, V, March 1818, 167.

¹²¹ *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol IX, 1818, 257.

¹²² *Examiner*, 10 May 1818, 301.

¹²³ *Annals of the Fine Arts*, 1818, 294.

¹²⁴ *Examiner*, 31 May 1818, 347.

I return to the perception that Collins had succeeded in catching aspects of the French national character in these two paintings in Chapter Three, in discussing the fruits of his second stay in France, in 1829.¹²⁵

Immediately after his comments about the coarse nature of Dutch subjects and characters, Collins's journal commented on what, for him, was the inadequacy of their background landscape. He wrote: 'And further, is the selection of scenery in these works remarkable (or is not the reverse) for any of those features which delight either in Nature or Poetry?'¹²⁶ From 1817 onwards, 'Nature and Poetry' were, I will argue, the driving forces behind Collins's output for the next twenty years. *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen* was to be his last painting in the nature of a 'scene of ordinary life' until 1845 when, increasingly ill himself, and regularly consulting doctors, he exhibited *Fetching the Doctor* (1845) (figure 1.26).¹²⁷ Since it was a commission for the Birmingham industrialist and ironmaster John Gibbons (1777-1851), it is of course possible that Gibbons specifically wanted in his collection something akin to Collins's early work, but it may have been that Collins was casting a retrospective eye over his career and reflecting on that early stage, and its abrupt conclusion. In any event, the *Art-Union* (usually a stalwart supporter of Collins's output) could not understand why he had painted it. Their reviewer wrote: 'This incident is most circumstantially related; but it is a low tone of subject, unworthy of the artist ... Mr Collins should leave such themes as this to Mr Kidd; his mind is infinitely too delicate and refined to deal with them'.¹²⁸ The contrast between this comment and the reviews that Collins received

¹²⁵ See Chapter Three, Section One, *Foreign Shores*.

¹²⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 112.

¹²⁷ 1845, R.A. No. 200.

¹²⁸ *Art-Union*, June 1845, 184. 'Mr. Kidd' was William Kidd (c.1796-1863), painter of comic genre scenes.

for his work between 1814 and 1817 could scarcely be greater, and suggests that by the end of his life Collins's great reputation as a painter of landscape and the coast had totally effaced his earlier contribution.

Conclusion

From the start of his training, Collins's ambition was to become a landscape painter.

However, his arrival at the Royal Academy schools coincided with David Wilkie's arrival in London, and immediate critical acclaim for painting scenes of ordinary people and ordinary life, which came to be described in terms of 'the Epic of common life'. This involved telling a story in paint. That story, which would contain an element of humour, could be read by the viewer looking at the actions of the various participants.

In broader, societal terms, the emergence of this new painting style coincided with a far greater interest than previously in children, and how they should be brought up, and an explosion in literary and pedagogical writing about, and for children. A number of specific influences might have steered Collins towards the possibility of using children as the main, if not exclusive characters, when painting in the new style. These may have included the senior Academician James Northcote and through him, Sir Joshua Reynolds, with their positive views of children as proper and rewarding subject-matter. His fellow student and friend William Mulready may also have provided an impetus, but by 1814 Collins was influencing Mulready in a way which has not hitherto been recognised.

Whatever influences impelled Collins temporarily to abandon his early ambitions, it is clear that between 1809 and 1812, Collins carved out a unique path within the new style, producing a series of paintings the main characters in which were all children. Any adults

present have largely abdicated responsibility. It is the children who have agency, whether for good or bad. A comparison with the work of other artists exhibiting paintings including children during that period indicates that he was the only person consistently exhibiting such paintings, and that, in effect, his was a unique contribution. The two major paintings he exhibited in 1813 have a very different feel from his earlier work. They cannot properly be understood, I have argued, without taking into account Collins's bereavement in 1812, which accounts for the new, and highly charged themes of grief and anger which they explore. His output between 1809 and 1813 is quite distinct from that of his contemporaries. Current histories of British art, whether of art and childhood, art and animals, or art and sentiment, omit any reference to the contributions he made during this period.

Having achieved that success, Collins produced two landscape paintings for exhibition in 1814. The great critical success of these two paintings, on top of the mounting success of his paintings of groups of children in the previous years, ensured his recognition by the Royal Academy and his election in November 1814 as an Associate. Those paintings will be considered in the next Chapter which deals with his landscape paintings. That he did not immediately capitalise on the success of these landscapes is probably due to the general economic difficulties which followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and their effect on art sales. Collins appears to have had financial difficulties in the period 1815 to 1817, and reacted by casting around for new directions, including coastal scenes and portraits of children. He continued to paint subject pictures of children, but in these later works he abandoned both the exploration of 'good' and 'bad' upbringing of his earlier work produced between 1809 and 1812, and the intense emotions of his two 1813 paintings.

Instead, he explored situations, still rooted in children's everyday experience, which demonstrate alternative viewpoints of a given situation. The juxtaposition of these differing perspectives provided the adult viewer with an element of humour, absurdity or folly. Twenty-seven years were to elapse before Collins exhibited another such painting. So firmly established was he by then in the public's mind as a celebrated landscape artist that such a production was then considered by the critics to be beneath him.

CHAPTER TWO

Encounters in the landscape

Introduction

This chapter discusses Collins's contribution to English nineteenth-century landscape painting. For these purposes, I use the terms 'landscape painting' and 'landscape' to refer to his paintings of inland scenery. I deal with his contribution to paintings of coastal scenes separately, in Chapter Three. Sam Smiles has argued that the significance of landscape painting of Collins's period was 'its reworking of the landscape genre to become the site where the preoccupations of the age could be explored'.¹ I will demonstrate the applicability of this argument to Collins's landscape output.

His contemporaries had no difficulty in recognising that his contribution was a significant one. Writing some ten years after the series of paintings by Collins considered in Chapter One, the critic for the *New Monthly Magazine*, in reviewing the Royal Academy's summer exhibition for 1823, expressed his strong dislike for Turner's now celebrated painting *Bay of Baiae* (1823).² He went on to compare it with a Collins on the opposite wall:

If the spectator would compare the height of what is false with the perfection of what is true, let him pass from the above picture immediately to (88) *A Scene in Borrowdale* by Collins.³

By that date Collins had succeeded in establishing himself as one of the country's pre-eminent landscape painters, and year on year his exhibited paintings attracted critical acclaim, so much so that by 1832 the exhibition reviewer for the *Library of the Fine Arts*,

¹ Sam Smiles, 'Landscape Painting, c.1770-1840', *A Companion to British Art 1600 to the Present*, ed. Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 407.

² 1823, R.A. No. 77, now Tate Britain.

³ *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 June 1823, 254.

writing of his *Rustic Civility* (a painting discussed in detail in Chapter Four) could express the view that ‘Mr Collins is decidedly the artist to whom we should refer if asked for an instance of the genuine English school: for he gives us English scenery and English manners in all their varieties with peculiar truth and perception’.⁴

In considering the means by which he achieved that reputation, and in what the originality of his contribution consisted, I set out, in Section One, how he built upon the foundations he had laid between 1809 and 1813. I will infer that he realised his particular strength with the portrayal of children could not only be incorporated successfully into landscape painting, but could produce a distinct, and original style and composition. Between 1814 and 1846 Collins painted seventy-three finished landscapes. The composition of sixty-six is known, either through an image or description. Almost 90% of these featured children and, in more than half of those, no adult is present.⁵ In Section Two, I examine a number of different influences which enabled him to develop his individual style, namely aspects of his formal training, and contemporary writing and lectures on the aesthetics of painting and poetry. I argue that his success lay in his ability to paint landscapes which evoked, in the viewer, multiple intellectual and emotional responses connected with place, literature, religious feeling and childhood. In Section Three I argue that a key point in this process came about in 1818 when, as a result of being ‘taken up’ by Sir George Beaumont, he met William Wordsworth. I discuss his two versions of *A Scene in Borrowdale* which, I argue, engage with themes explored in Wordsworth’s long philosophical poem *The*

⁴ *Library of the Fine Arts*, III, July 1832, 513.

⁵ Fifty-nine landscapes feature children, either by themselves or accompanying an adult. This is 89% of the known landscape compositions. Thirty-one of the landscapes featuring children are of children unaccompanied by adults.

Excursion (1814). Finally, in Section Four, I examine how his use of such chains of association played out in his broader landscape *oeuvre*. I focus on two particular themes relating to childhood reflected in those works—aspects of the child at play, and aspects of the child’s transition to adult responsibilities. In so doing, I demonstrate that Collins’s interest in children’s upbringing, manifested in the early works discussed in Chapter One, remained a continuing source of inspiration for him throughout his mature period.

Section one: The transition to landscape painting

What prompted the reawakening of Collins’s early aspiration to make his name as a landscape painter is unclear, but certainly his success with *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* and *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* appears to have opened many doors for him. His son observed, in describing his father’s life during 1814: ‘The painter’s circle of friends now began to widen. Men of genius and reputation sought his acquaintance’.⁶ That would have operated both as a stimulus and an impetus. That year he exhibited two landscapes foregrounding children, *Forenoon* (1813-14) (figure 2.1), and *Birdcatchers – Morning* (1814) (figure 2.2). Both were critically acclaimed, particularly the latter. The art critic Robert Hunt, reviewing *Forenoon*, described the painting’s ‘vivid feeling, delicacy and truth’.⁷ Of *Birdcatchers – Morning*, he referred to viewers’ imaginations as being ‘warmed by the radiance that is reflected from the sky’ and to the ‘display of familiar nature, whose nature is increased by the purely rustic boys in the summer meadow, engaged in decoying the airy minstrels of the

⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 66.

⁷ *Examiner*, 27 March 1814, 206.

morning'.⁸ William Hazlitt described the effect of the painting as 'almost magical'.⁹ The *Inquirer's* reviewer wrote of 'feeling the most exquisite sensations of delight on beholding this charming picture'.¹⁰ *Birdcatchers – Morning* was bought by the Marquess of Lansdowne, an important collector and patron of contemporary art. Six months later, Collins was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy.

Collins's success, however, coincided with the end of the Napoleonic wars, and a substantial depression in the art market. In April 1817 Collins's mentor, Joseph Farington, visited his studio. He was impressed by the paintings Collins was getting ready for the Exhibition, 'which I told Him, I thought were the best He had painted'.¹¹ Collins evidently told Farington this was not translating into sales, and that he might change direction again: 'He [Collins] now proposed to paint Portraits of Children, making a subject for each picture, which might, perhaps, answer'.¹² Collins had tried this in 1814 with *Portraits of the children of Leveson Gower Esq^{re} MP as Blackberry Gatherers* and in 1817 he also painted portraits of three young children playing cards - *Portraits of Master and Miss Martin and Master Meyer playing at 'Beat my neighbour'* (figure 2.3).¹³ Significantly, both showed the children engaged in activities, outdoors.

Also during 1817 he painted *The Bird's Nest* (figure 2.4). This painting may well represent portraits of two more children.¹⁴ However, its chief interest, for my purposes, is that it demonstrates the extent and manner in which Collins had moved away from his early

⁸ *Examiner*, 22 May 1814.

⁹ *Champion*, 22 May 1814, 165.

¹⁰ *Inquirer*, No 2, 1814, 185.

¹¹ *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, XIV, 4994, entry for 1 April 1817.

¹² *Ibid.*, XIV, 4994, entry for 1 April 1817.

¹³ *Portraits of the children of Leveson Gower Esq^{re} MP as Blackberry Gatherers* is presently untraced.

¹⁴ If so, their identity is not presently known.

'epic of common life' subject matter, towards subject matter which encouraged imaginative, poetic sentiments in the viewer. When auctioned in 2021 it was described in the catalogue as *Young boys in a forest presenting a bird's nest to a young girl*.¹⁵ Doubtless that is how it might appear to a twenty-first century viewer. However, those who saw it at the 1818 British Institution exhibition would have perceived it very differently. It would have been apparent to the mass of middle and upper class exhibition-goers, brought up on tales for children such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories, from Real Life*, that it was closely related to the scene in the first chapter of *Original Stories*, where the children meet a boy who has taken a nest full of eggs. One of the two girls in the story, Caroline, offers him a sixpence if he will show them where he got the nest. She then puts it back.¹⁶ A close examination of the central scene in the painting serves to demonstrate this literary connection. The boy at the back is pointing up into a tree. This gesture makes no sense whatsoever if the nest has just been removed from the tree. It does make sense if the intention is to replace it. Collins added a further boy in place of the older sister in the story. Perhaps this was because the painting doubled as a portrait. Perhaps it was a compositional issue –the original story skates over the details of how the nest was replaced, but infers that Caroline herself replaced it. That might not (in the artist's view) have translated well into a painted image. Moreover, a girl scrambling up a tree could be considered unseemly by the contemporary viewing public. However, by producing an imaginative reconstruction of the scene, missing from the Wollstonecraft story, Collins invested it with a powerfully charged, almost spiritual atmosphere. The off-white outdoor play clothes of the principal children stand out

¹⁵ Waddingtons, Toronto, online auction 16 September 2021, lot 27.

¹⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories, from Real Life with Conversations, Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*, London, 1788, Chapter One, 5.

dramatically against the dark of the woodland. It is as though the children are enacting a scene of atonement for the original theft of the nest by the boy behind them. The girl is kneeling. She may have carried the eggs in her pinafore, and just have finished replacing them in the basket, held by her brother. Or she may have carried the whole basket on a layer of cloth in her pinafore. Either way, her kneeling position echoes that of the girl giving the lamb a final drink in Collins's *Disposal of a Favourite Lamb*.¹⁷ The painting thus appears to have religious allusions, associated with atonement, kneeling, darkness and light. *The Bird's Nest* is evidently a world away from his 1809 painting *Boys bargaining*.¹⁸ His earlier paintings' relationship to cultural trends had been one of generic reference to pedagogical themes. Literary allusions, if present, related to small details in a painting (the kneeling child in *The Sale of the Pet Lamb*, the grandmother in *The Weary Trumpeter*). Here, in *The Bird's Nest*, there is a direct allusion to a specific literary work, but Collins has here taken Wollstonecraft's edifying children's story, and created a scene of mystery and imagination. The *Inquirer*, reviewing *Birdcatchers – Morning*, had described it as a 'representation by the hand of a painter, who beheld it with a poet's eye'.¹⁹ That description appears likewise to fit *The Bird's Nest*.

Evidently, contemporaries began identifying this quality in Collins's work in the mid-1810s. To understand how his move to landscape painting informed that change it is helpful to look at his formal training, and the views of those writers on aesthetics which Collins would have known either as part of that training or through his own studies.

¹⁷ Discussed in Chapter One, Section Four, *Death, grief and anger*.

¹⁸ Discussed in Chapter One, Section Three, *The Epic of bringing up children*.

¹⁹ *Inquirer*, No 2, 1814, 185.

Section Two: Collins's training and reading on aesthetics

Collins's formal training

In terms of his formal training at the Royal Academy, insofar as that related to landscape painting, the two most significant influences upon Collins are likely to have been Henry Fuseli and J.M.W. Turner. Fuseli was Keeper of the Royal Academy, and, together with Northcote, responsible for Collins's admission as a student.²⁰ He held the position of Professor of Painting from 1801 to 1805, and from 1810 to 1825. Collins is known to have attended his lectures.²¹ In terms of aesthetic theory, Collins would have heard Fuseli endorse Lessing's analysis, in *Laokoon*, of the essential difference between the arts of painting and poetry.²² John Opie, who held the Professorship of Painting between 1805 and his death in April 1807, shared Fuseli's views. In a lecture delivered on 23 February 1807, he observed, of this distinction that the 'diversity in their modes and means of exerting their powers' was so great 'that the study of one can, at best, be considered as a general only, and, not at all, as a technical help to invention in the other'.²³

However, such comments by Fuseli and Opie were made in the context of 'history' painting and not landscape. The references to landscape painting in these early lectures which Collins would have heard were few and far between, which reflected the hierarchy of subject-matter adopted by the Royal Academy since the time of Sir Joshua Reynolds's lectures. From Fuseli's lecture 'On Design' Collins would have grasped that 'Nature is a

²⁰ For Joseph Farington's letter of recommendation to Henry Fuseli, see *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, VIII, 2805-2807, entries for 7, 8 and 9 July 1806.

²¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 54.

²² Quoted by Frederick Burwick, 'Lessing's "Laokoon" and the Rise of Visual Hermeneutics', *Poetics today*, 20 (1999), 219-72, at 244, citing *Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, 3 vols, edited by John Knowles, London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831, III, 133-4.

²³ John Opie, *Lectures on Painting*, London, 1809, 61-2, quoted by Burwick, 'Lessing's "Laokoon" and the Rise of Visual Hermeneutics', 245.

collective idea and...can never in its perfection inhabit a single object'.²⁴ From his lecture 'On Invention' he would only have learned, in the main, how *not* to paint a landscape, that is by eschewing a topographical approach: 'Landscapes of the [great artists] spurn all relation with this kind of map-work'.²⁵ The only positive guidance Fuseli's lecture contains is the brief passage following on from the above quotation: 'To them nature disclosed her bosom in the varied light of rising, meridian, setting suns; in twilight, night and dawn'. Collins indeed practised hard at this, as can be seen from his early subject list for the year 1808, which included 'sun rise, a sketch', 'the effect of a cloudy day', 'twilight over the Thames', 'small sun set', 'candle light scene', and 'small twilight scene'.²⁶

For positive guidance as to the possibilities of landscape painting, Collins would have derived more from J.M.W. Turner. Appointed Professor of Perspective in December 1807, he did not deliver his lectures until 1811. We can be reasonably sure that Collins would have attended them. We know from a surviving journal fragment that Collins was attending his lectures as late as February 1814.²⁷ From Turner's 1811 lecture on landscape painting, Collins would have heard that 'To select, combine and concentrate that which is beautiful in nature and admirable in art is as much the business of the landscape painter in his line as in the other departments of art'.²⁸ Turner's lecture, as analysed by Jerrold Ziff, 'presents a case for a landscape art capable of stimulating the imagination much as a history painting might. Stress is placed upon the capacity of landscape to act as an expressive vehicle for ideas, sentiments

²⁴ Henry Fuseli, *Lectures On Painting*, London, 1848, Lecture VII, 495.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Lecture IV, 435.

²⁶ William Collins, Notebook I, fol. 2^r.

²⁷ William Collins, MS fragment of journal for 1814 (private collection). Entry for 7 February 1814 : 'Went to Turner's weak lecture in the E^g'.

²⁸ Lectures delivered at the Royal Academy of Arts by J.M.W. Turner in 1811, British Library, Add. MS. 46151.G (Perspective) and 46151.I (Landscape).

or emotions'.²⁹ In making that point, Turner was expanding upon views stated earlier by Reynolds, where, speaking briefly of 'inferior' branches of art (i.e. portraiture, landscape) he observed that paintings were finer 'in proportion as the artist departs more or less from common nature, and makes it an object of his attention to strike the imagination of the spectator by ways belonging specially to art, – unobserved and untaught out of the school of its practice,' and that 'the great end of all these arts is, to make an impression on the imagination and the feeling'.³⁰

Turner's 1811 lectures also repeated the warning as to the limitations of attempting to translate poetic descriptions of nature into the medium of paint. However, his observations went further than Fuseli's repetition of Lessing's theories, and were of more practical application. He ended his lecture on perspective by choosing two passages of poetry that he himself had appended to exhibited paintings, many years previously, in order to show the limitations of attempting directly to link painting and poetry. The artist, using colour rather than words, has to quarry nature using his own observation, rather than mine the poets. But, as Ziff observes in relation to Turner's paintings, this does not mean that a particular poem cannot provide the initial impetus for the artist's creative processes.³¹ For Turner, it was also perfectly legitimate to treat that impetus as a springboard for something different, and original.³² Collins did the same, as can be seen in *The Bird's Nest*, and other

²⁹ Jerrold Ziff, "Backgrounds, Introduction of Architecture and Landscape': A Lecture by J.M.W. Turner', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1963, 131, quoted in Hemingway, Andrew, *Landscape Imagery & Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 87.

³⁰ Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy*, Ed. Roger Fry, London: Seeley & Co, 1905, Discourse XIII, 359 and 365.

³¹ Jerrold Ziff "Turner's First Poetic Quotations: an examination of intentions." *Turner Studies*, 2 (1), 1982, 2-11, 6.

³² James A. W. Heffernan, *Cultivating Picturacy: Visual Art and Verbal Interventions*, Waco, Texas : Baylor University Press, 2006, 139.

paintings discussed later in this chapter. The stress placed by Reynolds, and subsequently Turner, upon the need to make an impression upon the imagination and feelings of the viewer probably played the most significant role in Collins's development as a landscape painter.

Writers on aesthetics

Kay Dian Kriz considers that in terms of writers on aesthetics, the most influential writer at the time of Collins's training and practice was Archibald Alison, whose *Essays on the nature and principles of taste* had been first published in 1790, with a revised edition in 1811.³³ We know that Collins went to hear Alison preach, when at Edinburgh in 1818, and that Alison officiated at his marriage there in 1822 and waived his fees.³⁴ This suggests a personal connection between the two already existed. According to Alison, 'unity of effect' was the overarching goal of the landscape painter: 'The intensity of our aesthetic response depends upon a unity of effect, which derives from the principle of resemblance'. The significance of Alison's aesthetics for English landscape art has long been recognised. As Hemingway put it, 'the painter can create even greater unity of effect by leaving out all distracting details and choosing the appropriate atmospheric effect to draw out a single unifying mood'.³⁵ Alison also encourages painters to include human activity in landscape:

Above all, the occupations of men, so important in determining, or in heightening the characters of Nature ... afford him the means of producing

³³ Archibald Alison, *Essays on the nature and principles of taste*, 1790, revised ed. 1811, 2 vols.; Kay Dian Kriz, *The idea of the English landscape painter*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997, 83.

³⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 130, journal entry for 20 September 1818; *ibid.*, I, 214, where Wilkie Collins specifically refers to Dr. Allison as the 'author of the celebrated work on Taste'.

³⁵ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery & Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, 65.

both greater strength, and greater unity of expression, than is found either in the rude, or in the embellished state of real scenery.³⁶

Accordingly, the inclusion of human activity, appropriate to the landscape depicted, can actually enhance a landscape and provide 'greater unity of expression'. In Collins's case, it is possible to see how these principles were put into practice by comparing the preliminary sketch made at Turvey, Bedfordshire, for his painting *The Cherry Seller*, and the final finished painting (figures 2.5 & 2.6).³⁷ The proportions of the trees have been increased, the built landscape has been reduced in size and the distinction between areas of light and shade is much sharper. The group of figures has been moved back from the picture plane, and additional interest in the portrayal of the children provided by the introduction of a small child peering into the bowl of cherries (figure 2.7). Collins's originality, I would argue, stemmed from his understanding that the activities of children were fully as significant, in this context, as 'the occupations of men'.

Alison also provides an explanation of how 'the capacity of landscape to act as an expressive vehicle for ideas, sentiments or emotions' operates in practice: As Kriz summarises:

Within this scheme the imagination is the primary mental faculty, conceived of a vast storehouse of memories; when any one memory is stimulated, it is capable of triggering a chain reaction of other thoughts and feelings that are related to the first one. The nature and intensity of the emotional response to an external object is governed by a range of circumstances particular to the viewing subject.³⁸

³⁶Alison, *Essays on the nature and principles of taste*, I, 125-26, cited in Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery & Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, 65-6.

³⁷ The whereabouts of the original version, exhibited in 1824 (1824. R.A. No.20) are unknown. I have used the version painted for John Marshall in December 1824.

³⁸ Kriz, *The idea of the English landscape painter*, 83.

I will argue that Collins's landscapes were indeed intended to trigger 'a chain reaction of other thoughts and feelings'.

Another contemporary, and highly influential, writer and lecturer on aesthetics was Samuel Taylor Coleridge. We know from Sara Fricker Coleridge, Coleridge's estranged wife, that, whilst at Keswick in 1818, Collins professed himself to be a great admirer of Coleridge.³⁹ Collins's close friend Washington Allston was likewise a great admirer. He had known Coleridge since 1806, and his admiration for Coleridge was clearly reciprocated.⁴⁰ We do not know if Collins, while a student, had attended any of the lectures Coleridge gave at the Royal Institution between January and June 1808, including his first lecture on 15 January 1808 'On Poetry and the Principles of Taste'.⁴¹ But it would be reasonable to suppose, given his expressed admiration for Coleridge, that he attended his 1818 lecture on the same topic. If he did, he would have heard Coleridge state:

to place these images [of nature], totalized, and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate, to make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature, this is the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts.⁴²

³⁹ Sara Fricker Coleridge, *Minnow among Tritons: Mrs S.T. Coleridge's Letters to Thomas Poole 1799-1834*, ed. Stephen Potter, London, 1934, 68.

⁴⁰ Letter from Coleridge to Allston dated 25th October 1815: Washington Allston, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, ed. Nathalia Wright, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1993, 84.

⁴¹ '1808 Lectures on the Principles of Poetry', in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 5, Part I, ed. R.A. Foakes, Princeton University Press, 1987, 27-41. This, despite the reference to 'poetry' ranged across the spectrum of fine arts.

⁴² Lecture delivered 10 March 1818: 'On Colour, Sound, and Form in Nature, as connected with POESY: the word "Poesy" used as the *generic* or class term, including Poetry, Music, Painting, Statuary, and ideal Architecture, as its Species,' in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol.5, Part II, Princeton University Press, 1987, 'Lectures 1808-1819 On Literature', 42.

Put another way, great works of art arise from the fusion of an artist's observation of nature with their interpretation of the spiritual expression underlying the particular scene in nature they are observing.⁴³

That Collins succeeded in mastering that 'mystery of genius', so as to set off in viewers that train of association and thought referred to by Alison and Coleridge can be seen from his correspondence with William Danby. Danby (1752-1833), was a scholar and writer who bought three of Collins's paintings, the last of which was *Scene on the Brent* (1822) (Figure 2.8). Upon receiving this, he wrote a long letter of thanks to Collins, which included the observation that the painting contained 'everything that can be desired ... the general repose and harmony of the whole have really a sort of magical effect, in reminding me of what I have seen of Nature in her happiest states'.⁴⁴

The ability of landscape to trigger associations with childhood were also explored in contemporary journalism by William Hazlitt, in his 1814 article 'On the Love of the Country', published in the *Examiner*. This is because 'natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things'.⁴⁵ It seems probable that Collins read Hazlitt's article. Assuming he already knew, or took the trouble to follow up Hazlitt's quotations from poetry in that article he would also have been familiar with William Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems in Two Volumes*, in particular his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. To illustrate one of his associationist points, Hazlitt quotes

⁴³Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria vols 1-2, Edited with His Aesthetical Essays by J. Shawcross*, Oxford, 1907, Introduction, 85.

⁴⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 224-225.

⁴⁵ William Hazlitt, 'On the Love of the Country', *Examiner*, 27 November 1814, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, London : J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930-1934, IV, 18-19.

the final two lines of the *Ode*: 'I might say, in the words of the poet, "To me the meanest flower that blows can give | Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears"'. He goes on to quote from *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey*: — 'Nature never did betray | The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege, | Through all the years of this our life, to lead | From joy to joy'.⁴⁶ Given Collins's close friendship with Washington Allston, who knew and admired Wordsworth, it would indeed be surprising if Collins was not familiar with these.⁴⁷ What is certain, however, is that by 1817 Collins had come to the notice of Sir George Beaumont and that in 1818, through Beaumont, he met, and spent time with the Southey and Wordsworth families.

All these writers, from their different standpoints, whether Coleridge's stress on the intellect's response to nature, Alison's associationist theories, or Hazlitt's highlighting of the emotional response to nature, would have encouraged Collins to strive to produce in his pictures an effect which engaged the thoughts and feelings of the viewer, or, to put it in the language of Collins's contemporaries, to produce pictures that were 'full of sentiment'.

Section Three: The Beaumonts, the Lake Poets and the paintings of Borrowdale

Given his rising reputation and the development of his landscape painting discussed above, it is unsurprising that Collins came to the notice of Sir George Beaumont, co-director of the British Institution, patron of artists and writers, and in particular the Lake Poets. It is unclear when they first met. Joseph Farington noted in his diary in May 1817 that Collins was one of

⁴⁶ Hazlitt, 'On the Love of the Country', *Examiner*, 27 November 1814, 20.

⁴⁷ Letter from Allston to Collins 23 August 1818, in which Allston, knowing that Collins is shortly to meet Wordsworth in the Lake District, asks Collins to give his 'respectful compliments' to Wordsworth and his family: *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, ed. Nathalia Wright, Lexington, Kentucky, 2014, 123.

three other guests at a dinner he attended at Sir George and Lady Beaumont's.⁴⁸ However, their meeting may have been considerably earlier, since Beaumont had previously met and commissioned paintings from two of Collins's closest friends, David Wilkie in 1809, and Washington Allston in 1812.⁴⁹

Jessica Fay has explored the particularly close links between William Wordsworth and the Beaumonts.⁵⁰ By the time Collins came into the Beaumonts' orbit, they would have been in a position to introduce him to a wealth of Wordsworth's poetry, including unpublished parts of *The Prelude*, *Poems in Two Volume* (1807), *The Excursion* (1814), and *Collected Poems* (1815). In the period following its publication, the Beaumonts were particularly keen to encourage an appreciation of *The Excursion*. They regularly read parts of this to their guests.⁵¹ It is quite possible that this occurred when Farington, Collins, Benjamin West and George Dance went to dinner with the Beaumonts in May 1817. By 1818 it seems that Collins was regularly dining with the Beaumonts; Farington recorded Constable telling him in April 'that Collins is in high favour with Sir G. Beaumont & in frequent habit of dining with him'.⁵² In May 1818, Beaumont purchased Collins's painting *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen* (1818) (figure 1.25), and invited Collins to join him in the Lake District in late August.⁵³

⁴⁸ *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, Vol. XIV, 5022.

⁴⁹ Wilkie's *The Blind Fiddler* (1807), Tate Britain, was commissioned by Beaumont. Beaumont commissioned Allston to paint an altarpiece for Coleorton church: *The Angel releasing St. Peter from Prison* (Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Massachusetts); Washington Allston, *The Correspondence of Washington Allston*, 61.

⁵⁰ Jessica Fay, 'A Question of Loyalty: Wordsworth and the Beaumonts, Catholic Emancipation and Ecclesiastical Sketches', *Romanticism (Edinburgh)*, 22 (2016), 1-14; 'Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Sir George Beaumont: Collaboration and the 'Sketcheresque'. *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 49 (2017) 35-43; 'Sketching and the Acquisition of Taste: Wordsworth, Reynolds and Sir George Beaumont', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 69 (291), 2018, 706-24; *The Collected Letters of Sir George and Lady Beaumont to the Wordsworth Family, 1803-1829: With a Study of the Creative Exchange between Wordsworth and Beaumont*, Liverpool, 2021.

⁵¹ Fay, *The Collected Letters of Sir George and Lady Beaumont to the Wordsworth Family*, xv, 22, 45, 147, 151.

⁵² *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, XV, 5185, entry for 6 April 1818.

⁵³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 122 and 127. Collins's *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen* (1818) is discussed in Chapter One, Section Six, *Painting out of the ordinary – the final phase, 1814-1817*.

Before leaving London in June, Collins had been commissioned by Sir John Leicester, an important collector and, like Beaumont, a highly influential arbiter of taste, to produce a Lakeland pendant to a painting by Richard Wilson that Leicester had bought.⁵⁴ Collins spent three weeks with the Beaumonts at Keswick, much of it in the company of the Coleridge and Southey families.⁵⁵

Whilst there, Collins began a portrait of *Sara Coleridge*, as '*The Highland Girl*', that is, the subject of Wordsworth's poem *To a Highland Girl* (1807) (Figure 2.9).⁵⁶ In referencing a Wordsworth poem, Collins may well have been following Beaumont's lead. As Fay has observed, Beaumont had himself painted three pictures after poems by Wordsworth, between 1806 and 1808.⁵⁷ Significantly, in terms of Beaumont's possible influence upon Collins, Beaumont had in *Peter Bell* (1807) painted a scene which did not in fact feature in Wordsworth's poem, and had changed the lighting of the scene from moonlight to early morning.⁵⁸ Collins's painting of Sara directly alludes to a poem, but as with *The Bird's Nest* he used his literary source as a point of departure only. There are certainly some parallels – the Highland Girl is aged 14, Sara was 15. The poet expresses the wish: 'Thy elder Brother I would be, | Thy Father—anything to thee!', and Coleridge was, of course, Sara's father, but was estranged from his family and had not seen her for many years. Collins does not attempt to include in his painting all the topographical features referred to in the poem – there is no cabin or waterfall. However, the expression is reminiscent of the poem's closing lines:

⁵⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 149. Sir John Leicester had bought Collins's coastal scene, *Sunrise*, at the British Institution exhibition in early 1818.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 129.

⁵⁶ William Wordsworth, 'To a Highland Girl (at Inversneyde, upon Loch Lomond)', William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes; and other poems 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis, Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983, 194.

⁵⁷ *The Thorn* (c. 1805), *Peter Bell* (1807) and *The White Doe of Rylstone* (1808); see Fay, *The Collected Letters of Sir George and Lady Beaumont to the Wordsworth Family*, 24, 29, 32 and 224, n.110.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

For I, methinks, till I grow old,
As fair before me shall behold,
As I do now, the cabin small,
The lake, the bay, the waterfall;
And thee, the spirit of them all!⁵⁹

Collins presented it to Coleridge, later that year.⁶⁰ Coleridge wrote to Collins in November 1818 to thank him. It was a picture which he is known to have kept above his desk for the rest of his life. He described it as an 'exquisite picture' which had, since he first saw it, 'quite haunted my eye...taken as a mere fancy piece, it is long since I have met with a work of art that has so much delighted me....Your landscape, too, is as exquisite in its correspondence with the figure as it is delightful to the eye, in itself'.⁶¹ He enclosed, with his letter, admission tickets to his forthcoming lecture series.

After a visit to Edinburgh during September 1818, Collins returned to Keswick and accompanied the Beaumonts to Ullswater, on a visit to the Marshall family, with whom Collins appears to have formed an instant attachment.⁶² As we shall see, various members of that family became patrons and friends of Collins. From Ullswater they went to the Wordsworths, with whom Collins stayed for three days.⁶³ Given the Beaumonts' enthusiasm for Wordsworth's poetry, they are likely to have read Wordsworth's work together and furnished Collins with the opportunity to read extensively from Wordsworth's works before this visit. As stated above, Wordsworth's most recent publication, *The Excursion*, was one which the Beaumonts admired and were keen to disseminate. The three weeks spent in the Lakes in the company of the Beaumonts, the Lake poets and their families clearly

⁵⁹ 'To a Highland Girl', lines 73-6.

⁶⁰ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 129, 137, 144-145.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, I, 144-5.

⁶² *Ibid.*, I, 130-131.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I, 130.

represented a significant experience for Collins. In a letter dated 4 November 1818 to his friend Washington Allston, Collins expressed himself as 'charmed' with the 'scenery of the North' and observed that he stayed for some days with Wordsworth, 'with whom I am very much delighted'.⁶⁴ The question is what effect, if any, did that experience have on his approach to landscape painting and output? I suggest that it served to consolidate trends that we can already see in Collins's paintings before that visit, in which children's activity no longer serves a didactic purpose, but takes place within a landscape to produce additional layers of association and meaning.

On returning to London he duly worked on Sir John Leicester's commission, *A Mill in Cumberland* (figure 2.10). Leicester's attempts to get Collins either to modify the painting, or start again from scratch, caused Collins a considerable amount of upset.⁶⁵ The painting was not finished in time for the 1819 exhibition, was delivered direct to its purchaser, and so was never seen by the public. Accordingly, the only fruits of his Lake District experience to be exhibited were his two versions of *Scene in Borrowdale*. The first was painted for John Marshall, whom he had visited at Hallsteads, Ullswater in 1818. His wife, Jane Marshall was, from childhood, a close friend of Dorothy Wordsworth. This version was completed in 1821 (figure 2.11). The second, painted two years later, was likewise a commission, probably on the back of the critical success of the first (figure 2.12). There are a number of minor differences between the two versions of this painting. In the 1821 version, which is in 'portrait' orientation, there are three children only, the older boy fishing and the two younger children. The youngest child is square on to the picture plane, and the wooden

⁶⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 137-8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 150-153.

bridge is more or less parallel to the picture plane. In the 1823 version, which is in 'landscape' orientation, the bridge is longer, and aligned somewhat at an angle to the picture plane. This, together with added demarcation between areas of light and shade, creates a more recessive effect. The change of orientation enabled Collins to add two additional children near the left hand end of the bridge, and a dog seated next to the older boy. Some of the trees have considerably darker foliage, and the fell rising behind the mill and houses appears steeper and higher than in the 1821 version.

All the children appear to be reasonably well clothed. None of their garments are ragged, and the older boy in particular seems well dressed—in both versions his shoes are in good condition, their soles well studded, and his coat or jacket lies on the bank next to him. The houses visible in the background appear substantial. Smoke rises gently from their chimneys, suggesting an atmosphere of warmth and comfort. The overall impression is one of idyllic calm. Broadly speaking, the setting for the paintings may be Comb Gill, located between the villages of Rosthwaite and Seatoller, with the summit of Glaramara visible top left. We know that Collins passed the entrance to Comb Gill on 25 August 1818 when, accompanied by Sir George Beaumont, he made one of the excursions recommended by Wordsworth in his *Guide to the Lakes*, namely the circular route from Keswick and back via Borrowdale, Buttermere and the Newlands Valley.⁶⁶ This would have been made on horseback (the circuit is well over 25 miles) and the road from Rosthwaite to Seatoller passes within three hundred yards of the mill in Comb Gill.

⁶⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 129; Rev. Joseph Wilkinson (William Wordsworth), *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire*, London, 1810.

By the time Collins executed these paintings, a tour of the Lake District was a common summer excursion for those able to afford it, and Borrowdale was one of the main attractions. Twenty years previously, in his play *The Lakers*, set around Keswick and its environs, Joseph Plumptre had satirised hunters after the Picturesque in his creation of the egregious Miss Beccabunga Veronica.⁶⁷ In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth Bennet's aunt and uncle had originally intended to take her on a tour of the Lakes.⁶⁸ Prints and descriptions of Lakeland scenery were widely available.⁶⁹ Those persons who appreciated natural scenery were also likely to participate in exhibition culture, and so were likely to attend the Royal Academy's summer exhibitions.

Of course it remains possible, and must always have been possible, for a viewer to see *Scene in Borrowdale* merely as a reminder of a pleasant day's excursion from Keswick. But many visitors to the Royal Academy Exhibitions—the main market-place for Collins's paintings—would have read Hazlitt in the *Examiner*, and many of them would have read Alison and Coleridge and would have been familiar with associationist principles. And any viewer of *Scene in Borrowdale* who had read Wordsworth would experience an associationist response to the painting. For Wordsworth, to be in a landscape formerly lived in as a child would be sufficient in itself to set off a train of association with childhood and renewal:

No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,

⁶⁷ James Plumptre, *The Lakers : A comic opera in three acts*, London, 1798.

⁶⁸ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. James Kinsley, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Vol. II, 119.

⁶⁹ For example, Thomas West, *A Guide to the Lakes*, London, 1778; Thomas Hartwell Horne, *The Lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland, Delineated in Forty-Three Engravings, from Drawings by J. Farington. With Descriptions, Historical, Topographical, and Picturesque, the Result of a Tour Made in 1816*, London, 1816.

And all the earth is gay;⁷⁰

Indeed, by 1800 such a train of thought was a well-established connotation of revisiting the landscape of one's childhood. Writing in that year about his home landscape of Cromer and its environs, Edmund Bartell commented on associations produced by that landscape with 'the amusements and the friendships of our youth'.⁷¹ But by the time Collins visited the Lakes, it was being argued that such trains of association did not necessarily depend on revisiting a *specific* landscape. In his 1814 essay in the *Examiner*, discussed above, Hazlitt broadens his argument, relating to association of nature with childhood experience and pleasures: 'But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class'.⁷² For many of Collins's viewers, an image of children fishing in a river or stream would evoke memories of their personal childhood. Certainly fishing was associated with childhood, both through pastoral poetry and contemporary art, e.g. *Boys Fishing* (George Morland, 1801). Whether, as a child growing up in Marylebone, London, this had been Collins's personal experience is not known, but Wilkie Collins's observation, in respect of his paternal grandparents, about their 'uncommon enthusiasm ... for the charms of natural scenery', suggests that it was.⁷³ Collins had painted such a scene for the first time in *Children Fishing* (1810). *Forenoon* (1814) featured a boy fishing, while two other children examine the catch, held in a large bottle. Indeed his diploma

⁷⁰ William Wordsworth 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', *Poems, in Two Volumes*, 1807, lines 26-29.

⁷¹ Edmund Bartell, *Observations Upon the Town of Cromer Considered as a Watering Place, and the Picturesque Scenery in Its Neighbourhood*, London, 1800, 30.

⁷² Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, IV, 18-19.

⁷³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 19.

work, upon election as an Academician, was *Boys watching a Bite* (1820) and, in the early 1820's, he was commissioned to paint three more studies of children fishing.⁷⁴

A reviewer of *Children Fishing* observed that: 'the little parties are rendered interesting by the happy correctness with which their anxiety in their pursuit is depicted'.⁷⁵ Here, in the two versions of *Scene in Borrowdale* all the children are certainly absorbed in their pursuits, but there is an atmosphere of stillness, as they each in their different way, look into the water. The more literal minded observer might only see two groups (or three, in the 1823 painting) looking at the end of their fishing line, looking into their bowl and looking into the stream as it begins to flow over the rocks. However, the more imaginative observer could share the views of the reviewer for the *London Magazine*, who wrote: 'The little children at the brook are sweetly introduced; and we could say, as Wordsworth says of the House-lamb child, "have almost received the heart into our own", of that little fair-headed, Sir Joshua-headed thing leaning over the pan of fish'.⁷⁶ For this reviewer the painting was able to evoke not only the poetry of Wordsworth but, in the person of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the R.A. establishment.

By positioning the children in a Lake District valley, as in *Scene in Borrowdale*, Collins could not only rely on a train of association with children in general, but also on a particular train of association specifically related to the 'Lake Poets'. Moreover, a viewer who was familiar with the final two books of *The Excursion* could draw on further levels of meaning,

⁷⁴ *Scene on the Brent* (1822), *View on the Decoy pond Hendon* (1823) and *Scene on the Brent at Hendon* (1823). None were exhibited.

⁷⁵ *Weekly Register and Political Magazine*, I, 24 March 1810.

⁷⁶ *London Magazine*, vol. 7, January-June 1823, 102. The quotation is from Wordsworth's *The Pet-Lamb*, where the narrator records his emotional reaction to the child 'That I almost received her heart into my own' in line 12, repeated in the final line.

embarking on a succession of trains of thought, brought about by the boy fishing, and the landscape in general.⁷⁷ Significantly, by the time the first version of *Scene in Borrowdale* was painted, *The Excursion* was available in a considerably cheaper edition, published 1820.⁷⁸ Wordsworth's philosophical poem is concerned with an excursion in the course of which four characters, each with different lived experiences and correspondingly different outlooks on life—the Poet, the Wanderer, the Solitary and the Pastor—meet with each other and converse. Their discourse is wide-ranging, but the final two parts, Books VIII and IX, range from laments over the passing of 'Old England' and the evils of industrialisation, the benefits and drawbacks of an upbringing in the countryside, through to the lack of a proper system of education. The Solitary widens the debate to include the child enured at an early age to labour in the fields. He is just as damaged as the child brought up in the industrialised town. The Solitary points to the boy's complete lack of education and nurture.⁷⁹ He ends by challenging what England has done for him: 'His Country's name, | Her equal rights, her churches and her schools, | What have they done for him?'.⁸⁰ The first intimation of an answer comes, perhaps, after the travellers have eaten lunch at the Parsonage with the arrival of the Pastor's son and his friend, 'two lusty Boys' who have come from the river, 'laden with their spoil'.

Triumphant entry this to him!—for see,
Between his hands he holds a smooth blue stone,
On whose capacious surface is outspread
Large store of gleaming crimson-spotted trouts;⁸¹

⁷⁷ References in this thesis to Wordsworth's *The Excursion* are from the following edition: William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 1814, ed. Sally Bushell & James A. Butler, Ithaca, N.Y., London, 2008.

⁷⁸ W. J. B. Owen, 'Costs, Sales and Profits of Longman's Editions of Wordsworth', *Library*, 12, 1957, 97 and 101.

⁷⁹ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 270, VIII, lines 424-29.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 270, VIII, lines 432-34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 274, VIII, lines 564-67.

They are robustly healthy, and full of vitality: 'But oh! The animation in the mien | Of those two Boys!'.⁸² Here at least, in a Lake District valley, children could be children. Wordsworth expands upon this in Book IX. He returns to his theme, first invoked in *The Rainbow*, of the need to return to one's childhood as a source of inspiration and rejuvenation. That poem ends with the well-known lines (used as the epigraph to his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*) 'The Child is father of the Man; | And I could wish my days to be | Bound each to each by natural piety'. Through the Wanderer, Wordsworth begins Book IX by describing the 'active principle' which permeates all creation.⁸³ The Wanderer refers back to the two boys who have been out fishing. Because of their active *joie de vivre* they will continue to find other excitements:

—in which course
Their happy years spin round. The Youth obeys
A like glad impulse; and so moves the Man
Mid all his apprehensions, cares and fears, --
Or so he ought to move. Ah! Why in age
Do we revert so fondly to the walks
Of childhood – but that there the Soul discerns
The dear memorial footsteps unimpaired
Of her own native vigour – .⁸⁴

When the Solitary tries to return the conversation to rural poverty and children, the Wanderer sidesteps the issue dismissing it as 'A standing grievance, an indigenous vice | Of every country under heaven'.⁸⁵ He returns to the two fishing children:

But let us rather fix our gladdened thoughts
Upon the brighter scene. How blest that Pair
Of blooming Boys (whom we beheld even now)
Blest in their several and their common lot!
A few short hours of each returning day

⁸² Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 274, VIII, line 582.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 276, IX, lines 1-3.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 276, IX, lines 32-40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 280, IX, lines 187-88.

The thriving prisoners of their Village school;
And thence let loose, to seek their pleasant homes, |
Or range the grassy lawn in vacancy,
To breathe and to be happy, run and shout
Idle,--but no delay, no harm, no loss;⁸⁶

This leads on to his solution to the problem. He advocates universal education: 'So shall licentiousness and black resolve | Be rooted out, and virtuous habits take | Their place; and genuine piety descend, | Like an inheritance, from age to age'.⁸⁷ Education, accordingly, ultimately fulfils a religious purpose. As readers of *The Excursion* would have appreciated, towards the end of Book IX, the final book of the poem, the Pastor holds a 'Vesper service' in which he gives 'Vocal thanksgivings to the eternal King', on behalf of its inhabitants, for the beauties of his valley.⁸⁸ Likewise, those familiar with Alison's *Essays on the nature and principles of taste* would have been aware of the linkage made by Alison, towards the end of his work, between the beauty of the natural landscape and 'the power, wisdom and beneficence of nature's Divine Creator'. So, a further train of association set off by Collins's painting could have been thoughts and emotions regarding the Creator, and His creation. That, in turn, might cause the many viewers familiar with Wordsworth's *Ode* to recall the lines:

Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, 282, IX, lines 254-63.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 285, IX, lines 361-4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 295, IX, lines 728-745.

⁸⁹ Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, lines 164-170.

And the recollection of those lines could return the viewer to the painting they were contemplating, depicting as it did an inland scene of great calm.

That the capacity of a painting to set off a chain of associations in the viewer had, by 1830, extended well beyond writers such as Coleridge and Hazlitt, and was well understood and a commonplace, can be illustrated by the use which Thomas Babington Macaulay made of this, by way of analogy, in the course of his excoriating, and well-known review of Robert Southey's *Colloquies* (1829). Writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, he accuses Southey of judging

a theory or public measure, of a religion, a political party, a peace or a war, as men judge of a picture or a statue, by the effect produced on his imagination. A chain of association is to him what a chain of reasoning is to other men; and what he calls his opinions, are in fact, merely his tastes.⁹⁰

I suggest, accordingly, that it is not only possible, but highly probable that educated exhibition viewers of Collins's day, experienced an associationist response to his landscape paintings. To be able to experience a train of such responses by viewing either version of *Scene in Borrowdale* must have enhanced the painting's impact considerably, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Collins intended his work to have that effect.

Section Four: Re-creation through memories of childhood

In the previous section I focussed on the associationist responses that could be evoked by a specific landscape painting by Collins, *Scene in Borrowdale*. However, Collins's landscapes with children in the English countryside provided the viewer with the opportunity to

⁹⁰ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Southey's Colloquies on Society', *Edinburgh Review*, (50), January 1830, 528, cited in Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the question of 'culture'*, Oxford, 2001, 2. Macauley was reviewing Robert Southey's *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, London, 1829.

reconnect with childhood, as envisaged by Wordsworth at the start of Book IX of *The Excursion*, whether or not they were personally familiar with a particular landscape such as that of the English Lakes. In this section I look at a selection of these paintings and identify in them two distinct themes of childhood Collins engages with: aspects of the child at play, and aspects of the child's gradual transition to adulthood and its responsibilities. In doing so, I do not intend to suggest that Collins was following a particular programme. The paintings discussed are not in chronological order. The intention is to demonstrate the wide range of landscape images Collins created, and to explore the similarly wide range of potential responses to them in the viewer.

The Child at Play

Children of all times have got up to mischief while playing. The recollection of past minor deviations from adult expectations is a universal part of human memory, and of parents' memories of their own children's upbringing. Collins celebrated this in a portrait of two aristocratic children, then aged four, which he began in 1818, just before his visit to the English Lakes. He had been commissioned by the Duke of Newcastle to paint a number of scenes at the Duke's seat, Clumber Park, together with a number of family portraits. These included *Portraits of Lords Chas. & Thos. Pelham Clinton, twin sons of His Grace the Duke of Newcastle* (figure 2.13). The twins are in the ducal library. Through the French windows, the landscape of Clumber Park and its lake can be seen, whilst a large red curtain, and the corner of an oil painting in an elaborate frame provide further evidence of their aristocratic status. On one level, the painting operates as an expression of their lineage, and the family ownership of land. However, the twins are clearly up to no good. There is no adult present

to guide them in any intellectual pursuit, as in, for example, Johann Zoffany's *The Reverend Randall Burroughs and his son Ellis* (1769), which shows a young boy being educated by his father by reference to a contemporary book on architecture (figure 2.14). In any case, they are clearly too young. They are looking, with expressions of wide-eyed innocence, at a person or persons who have just entered the room, from the right of the viewer. Probably they are not allowed in the library at all. Their expressions of innocence are perfectly understandable, given what they are up to. Four books have already been tossed aside, unceremoniously, and they appear to have ripped one engraving out of the volume nearest to the picture plane. The position of their hands, resting on the book which they have open, on the seated twin's lap, does not bode well for the fate of that illustration either. Undoubtedly they are in big trouble. It is difficult to imagine that Collins could have painted such a picture, for such an exalted family, without the Duke and Duchess's express approbation. But as with *Scene in Borrowdale* the underlying associations of the painting were not necessarily obvious to the viewer—the *Examiner* commented: 'This artist has a charming taste in whatever he paints, and this is a pleasing picture; but the subject does not afford sufficient scope for his fancy or feelings'.⁹¹

Children hurt themselves in play. David Wilkie had painted such a scene, to considerable critical acclaim, right at the start of Collins's career, with his *The Cut Finger* (1809) (figure 2.15). Collins's version of a hurt child, *Taking out a Thorn*, was painted in 1828. From its price, we can deduce that it was a substantial landscape painting. Last seen at an auction in 1842, it is known from a surviving sketch, and an engraving by the French engraver Louis Marvy, made around that time (figures 2.16 and 2.17). Children have been playing out

⁹¹ *Examiner*, 27 June 1819.

in the fresh air, on open heathland, and a thorn has lodged in the hand of one of the girls. The child is crying into her pinafore, but not in the exaggerated, comical fashion of Wilkie's child. The thorn is being calmly removed by a furze-cutter, who has broken off from his work and sat down by the side of the track to sort out the problem. He, together with two other siblings, and a boy with a donkey (who may be a passer-by) form a protective ring around the injured child. The reviewer for *Belles Lettres* described the painting as:

Interesting, as well from its simplicity as from the skill with which it is executed. The little rustic group, accompanying their suffering companion, and the aged operator, are all in keeping with the scene. Everything is unaffected, and as it should be.⁹²

For this reviewer, Collins has evidently achieved Alison's 'unity of effect' in terms of its simplicity and all its detail being 'in keeping with the scene'.

The sketch appears to be the heathland to the north of the metropolis, probably Hampstead Heath which Collins sketched many times. The finished painting differs in a number of respects. Most striking is the greater differentiation between the terrain of the foreground and the distant, and more recessive, background. The latter now has the appearance of a coastline with a river estuary, perhaps in Devon, while the foreground has been made considerably wilder and more folded. Collins positions the viewer in a landscape which is untamed, uncultivated, and wild. This fits well, in associationist terms with concepts of danger, mishap, and hurt. It would be hard to imagine the scene working as well in, say, the more gentle landscape of *A scene in Borrowdale*, or on a country lane.

But the active child could also express exuberant enjoyment, and a sense of freedom. The latter can be seen in *The Nutting Party* (1830-31) (figure 2.18). Four children have been

⁹² *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 17 May 1828, 314.

out in the autumn sunshine foraging, and now, seated on the path beneath a massive beech tree, they have stopped to munch the nuts they have collected. The reviewer for the *Literary Gazette* enthused: 'Old as we are we should like to make one among this merry group. The secluded and sylvan scenery, and the mellow-toned autumnal tints, came upon us at this inclement season with tenfold attractions'.⁹³ Collins perhaps alludes to Wordsworth's poem 'Nutting' (1805).⁹⁴ The poetic quality of *The Nutting Party* was noted by the *New Monthly Magazine*, whose reviewer regarded it as 'full of the poetry of this artist's pencil'.⁹⁵

The transition to adulthood and its responsibilities

Many of Collins's landscapes depict stages along the path to adulthood. An early stage, consistently stressed by the late eighteenth century educationalists was, as we have seen in Chapter One, children learning to accept responsibility by caring for animals generally, and particularly their pets. In this, they can learn also from their older siblings. Collins's *Portraits of the Children of H. Rice, Esq.* is an unsentimental portrayal of Henry and Mary Rice feeding their rabbits (figures 2.21 and 2.22). It was recognised by the *New Monthly Magazine's* reviewer as capturing something special: 'the portraits of the children, introduced into a home, out-of-doors scene ... are given with an exquisite feeling for the subject'.⁹⁶ Henry, the younger child, has his pinafore full of carrots and salad leaves, and is watching intently as his sister Mary feeds a lettuce leaf to one of their five rabbits. In his biography of his father, Wilkie Collins used this painting as the basis for his observations about his father's depictions

⁹³ *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 5 February 1831, 89.

⁹⁴ 'Nutting', William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 218-20.

⁹⁵ *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol XXXIII, March 1831, 123.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 July 1824, 300.

of children, including the comment that ‘Under his pencil, children retained their play-ground clothes, preserved their play-ground occupations, and were connected visibly and pleasingly with the surrounding landscape’.⁹⁷ Put another way, Collins attempts to achieve the ‘unity of effect’ sought from artists by Alison, and ‘the mystery of genius in the Fine Arts’ as defined by Coleridge, by intimately connecting the activities of the children with the landscape they inhabit. A comparison with Edwin Landseer’s 1839 painting of the same theme highlights Collins’s approach (figure 2.23). Landseer’s impeccably dressed children appear to engage more with the adult viewer than their surroundings and his version has a sentimentality quite absent in Collins’s painting.

From learning to care for a pet, there is a natural progression to helping younger siblings and frail elderly relatives. Collins’s painting *Sunday* is generally seen in the context of a religious painting (figure 2.24). I discuss it in that context in Chapter Six. However, it is very much about family life and caring, too. Whilst the husband and wife are engaged in helping their mother/mother-in-law down the steps, the children are helping as well. The smallest is still caring for animals. He is feeding an apple to the horse, perhaps in consideration of the animal’s responsibility to bear two adults to church. But an older child is lacing up the shoes of the next smallest, and the oldest boy has the responsibility of placing the chair so that his grandmother can mount. In this painting the Wordsworthian connection between a good upbringing and piety is made explicit.

Another phase of a child’s development is to learn how to approach or respond to strangers. In June 1833, Collins recorded in his Notebook a commission from his patron and friend John Marshall of Hallsteads, Ullswater, with whose family he had spent nearly a

⁹⁷ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 234.

month in the previous year. It was to be 'A picture of the Weary Traveller'.⁹⁸ Given the Marshall family's close connections with the Wordsworths, it is probable that this was a reference to Wordsworth's *Old Man Travelling*.⁹⁹ Wordsworth's poem concentrates on the man:

A man who does not move with pain, but moves
With thought – He is insensibly subdued
To settled quiet: he is one by whom
All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
Long patience has such mild composure given
That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
He has no need. He is by nature led
To peace so perfect, that the young behold
With envy, what the old man hardly feels.¹⁰⁰

Collins's entitled his painting *Cottage Hospitality* (figures 2.25 and 2.26). His focus, as suggested by his title, is as much on the behaviour of the children, as on the demeanour of the man. His portrayal of the weary traveller may be considered to do justice to the first eight of Wordsworth's lines as quoted above, but evidently Collins chose to move away from the poem's ninth line and tell a quite separate story centred on the children. His painting demonstrates an imaginative departure from the text to which allusion is made, in favour of a more pictorially legible scene. As Reynolds had observed in comparing poetry and painting, 'What is done by Painting must be done at one blow'.¹⁰¹ Collins's contemporary, Turner, as noted above, likewise departed from his canonical historical and literary texts. Here, rather than looking at the old man travelling 'with envy', the younger children are learning the duty

⁹⁸William Collins, Notebook II, fol. 30^v. Commission received 8 June 1833.

⁹⁹'Old Man Travelling', William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, and Other Poems, 1797-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 110.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., lines 6-14.

¹⁰¹Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses Delivered to the Students of the Royal Academy*, Ed. Roger Fry, London: Seeley & Co, 1905, Discourse VIII, 226.

of hospitality to strangers. The dog leads the way. The older girl follows it, her right hand proffering a pitcher to the man. In her left hand she holds something else, probably something to eat. By her side is her sister, but she has her weight on her back foot, as though unsure about approaching further and, from her expression, we can see that she is a little scared. The small brother hangs back, crouching down behind his sisters. Perhaps the two younger children will learn from their older sister to overcome their fear.

Conspicuously, the group of children are doing it by themselves—the mother is shown doing domestic tasks in the kitchen, with her back to her children. This is in marked contrast to other contemporaries' paintings portraying the exercise of charity. George Morland's portrayal in *The Squire's Door* (1790) involves adults only. William Redmore Bigg's portrayal shows children with adult supervision, as does Mulready's (figures 2.27 and 2.28).¹⁰² This distinction by Collins, demonstrating that children have agency, has not been made in the existing scholarship; Heleniak, for example, categorises Collins as one of a number of artists dealing with themes of 'benevolent charity' in whose paintings 'women and children—the supposedly innocent, good but also weak and protected members of English society—graciously give alms to the even weaker, pathetic poor, presenting quite a charmingly virtuous scene'.¹⁰³

Two of the final steps towards adult responsibility are to encounter the world of work and the expectations that society had at this time of children approaching adulthood. A number of Collins's landscapes feature children engaged in some form of work. They show

¹⁰² George Morland, *The Squire's Door* (1790); William Redmore Bigg, *A Lady and her Children relieving a Distressed Cottager* (1779); William Mulready, *Train Up a Child in the Way he should go; and When He Is Old He Will Not Depart from It* (1841).

¹⁰³ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, 101; Steward, *The New Child*, 169, merely paraphrases Heleniak's observations.

children collecting firewood, guiding travellers, ferrying travellers across a river, offering goods to pub customers, delivering milk or helping their mother to glean at harvest time.¹⁰⁴ Two of his paintings feature hop picking. This was, of course, seasonal, and has been described as relatively light work which enabled mothers from the metropolis to take their children into the better air of the hop gardens of Kent.¹⁰⁵ It is with these two paintings that I conclude this section. The first was *Hop-pickers (children)* (1825) (figure 2.29). Here four children are sitting on the ground, around a hop pole which has been brought down for them. The two boys and two girls each have a basket to fill, but the children are listless, and the atmosphere is languid, expressive of a stiflingly hot day. If this is what work entails, then evidently the children would rather be doing something else.

Collins's other painting, ostensibly of hop harvesting, was *Scene in a Kentish hop garden* (1829) (figure 2.30). In the middle distance two children can be seen, helping their mothers. The main interest, however, is in the foreground group where a woman is very gently laying a baby into a cradle. To their right, a young woman kneels, apparently ready to rock the baby to sleep. Collins painted it for Bernard Howard, 12th Duke of Norfolk (1765-1842), who had previously commissioned Collins to paint his four grandchildren, then born, playing on the beach.¹⁰⁶ Compositionally, as Christiana Payne has suggested, Collins may well have been giving a nod in the direction of such Old Master Nativity subjects as Corregio's *La Notte*.¹⁰⁷ However, the scene is both contemporary and highly naturalistic; the cradle itself,

¹⁰⁴ Respectively, the two versions of *Rustic Civility* (1832, 1834), *Welsh Guides* (1842), *The Ferry* (1819), *Skittle Players* (1832), *Milk girls, Chichester* (1821) and *Scene at Hampstead* (1823).

¹⁰⁵ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 19-20.

¹⁰⁶ *Scene in Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight* (1827-8), 1828, R.A. No. 256. This painting is discussed in Chapter Three, Section Two, *Safety and danger*.

¹⁰⁷ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 100.

according to Wilkie Collins was a distinctively local “hop-cradle”, formed of clumsy sticks covered with a red cloak, and used by the women to hold their children when they are at work’.¹⁰⁸ The most striking feature, however, and one which suggests that the painting has an underlying, allegorical meaning, is the ambiguity in the relationship between the figures. Who exactly is the mother of the child? And who is helping whom? The young woman has elaborately dressed hair, and is wearing a finely worked necklace. She evidently does not inhabit the same world as the other woman. How are we to interpret this painting? I suggest that a possible interpretation is that here, in the foreground, the young woman is coming, or has just come of age. In Chapter One I discussed the allegorical significance in Collins’s depiction of the girl in his 1812 painting *Children playing with puppies*. There, her future role as an adult is hinted at. Here, the young woman has passed through childhood and the time has arrived for her to raise a new generation. That will be her work. An alternative reading, given Payne’s observations about the composition, and the fact that a hole in the tree canopy, letting in the light, is placed so as to illuminate the foreground figures, might be that Collins intended his viewers to perceive the painting as a modern ‘Adoration’ with the girl kneeling before the infant Jesus. As discussed in Chapter One, Collins had transposed the Garden of Eden to a modern-day urban setting in *The Tempting Moment*, and he had used the device of a hole in the tree canopy to illuminate the lamb and the kneeling girl in the second version of *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb*.¹⁰⁹ Either way the painting would have provided a rich seam of associations for the educated viewer.

¹⁰⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 316-7.

¹⁰⁹ See the discussion of this painting in Chapter One, Section Four, *Death, grief and anger*.

Conclusion

Collins, as Turner had counselled, did not attempt literally to translate lines of poetry into paint. However, as will be clear from the analysis of paintings such as *The Bird's Nest*, *A scene in Borrowdale* and *Cottage Hospitality*, many of Collins's paintings contain allusions to literature, particularly poetry, and specifically the poems of Wordsworth. Through these allusions viewers could be encouraged to embark upon trains of thought that reflected many aspects of contemporary culture. These trains of thought arose from the viewer's responses to the presence of children in a landscape. Their presence, and the specific activity they were engaged in, encouraged the viewer to embark on associationist trains of thought, whether that might relate to their own childhood, or the childhood of their own children.

The children occupy the landscape in a manner which contemporary critics unanimously regarded as 'natural', in the sense that their presence was integral, and not some form of staffage. They belong in the particular landscape they inhabit. That contemporary critics saw this is acknowledged by Hemingway in his observations about Collins's critical success. However, it is not a theme which he develops any further.¹¹⁰ According to Archibald Alison, 'unity of effect' was the factor upon which 'the intensity of our aesthetic response depends, while for Coleridge, ' the 'mystery of genius in the Fine Arts' lay in the artist's ability 'to superinduce upon the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate'.

Collins's incorporation of children into the landscape modified the landscape genre so as to endow it with the Romantic dimension of memory, reflection and moral improvement. Arguably, this achievement was responsible not only for his remarkably high

¹¹⁰Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 181.

reputation in his life-time, but also for the fact that his reputation progressively declined during the nineteenth century. His paintings no longer fitted the conventional classifications of the canon. They were not portraits; Collins does not merit a mention in Carpenter's 1906 *The Child in Art*.¹¹¹ They were not pure landscapes. The link between his landscapes and the poetry which would have been widely read by his contemporaries had been lost. His paintings accordingly lost their intelligibility. By 1992, the children's presence came to be seen by Hemingway as expressions of 'saccharine narratives' and 'candy-box sentiment'.¹¹² The time has surely now come to recognise Collins's individual, and unique contribution to nineteenth-century landscape painting.

¹¹¹ Margaret Boyd Carpenter, *The Child in Art*, London: Methuen & Co., 1906.

¹¹² Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 151 and 181.

CHAPTER THREE

Encounters on the Shore

Introduction

Between 1815 and 1846 Collins painted seventy-four finished coast scenes. This represents over one-third of his known works.¹ Of these seventy-four, images of fifty-six are now available, and the composition for a further eleven are known through description. This chapter represents the first detailed exploration of this group of paintings. I argue that the current narrative of British nineteenth-century coastal painting requires reconsideration, so as to include Collins's major contributions.

There can be no doubt that nineteenth-century, posthumous commentators on Collins's work regarded his coastal paintings as a very significant, if not the outstanding achievement of his career. The *Art-Union*, in 1847, spoke of: 'the esteemed painter, who has given a sweetness unexampled to the slight passages of seashore scenery, whereon he has founded a lasting fame'.² In the following year the same publication commented that 'perhaps no class of his works obtained greater popularity than his "Coast Scenes"'.³ In 1859 F.W. Fairholt wrote: 'Never was the sea-side ... of England better painted than by William Collins'.⁴ More than fifty years after his death, an 1899 commentator wrote of his coastal paintings: 'it is more than likely that on the pictures of this class, too numerous to mention, that his future fame will chiefly rest'.⁵

¹ Seventy-four out of 212.

² 'The Vernon Gallery', *Art-Union*, 1 November 1847, 367.

³ 'Crossing the Sands', *Art-Union*, 1 May 1848, 144.

⁴ F.W. Fairholt, 'Tombs of English Artists: No. 12. – William Collins, R.A.', *Art Journal*, 1859, 44.

⁵ 'The Royal Academy in the present century: William Collins R.A.', *Art Journal*, 1899, 139.

There is now a considerable body of modern scholarship devoted to coastal painting in general and nineteenth-century British coastal painting in particular.⁶ Nevertheless, despite his evident importance to his contemporaries, very little reference has been made to Collins's work. I have suggested in the thesis Introduction, a number of reasons why his work generally has been largely ignored.⁷ In terms of coastal paintings, modern scholarship has concentrated on the coastal paintings of the two canonical artists of the period, Turner and Constable. The catalogue for the Tate's 1981 exhibition of A.W. Callcott's paintings notably devotes twelve pages to Callcott himself, and twenty-six pages to the links between Callcott and J.M.W. Turner. It is as though other artists of the early nineteenth century are visible only insofar as they have been perceived to play a supporting role to canonical artists. A further reason is that Collins's coastal paintings do not sit easily with successive historiographical pre-occupations of modern scholarship relating to coastal painting, for example the search for precursors of modernity, visual aspects of empire, or defence of the nation.⁸ Collins's paintings do not overtly display any interest in the ideology of the coast as a defensive national boundary, an interest shared by both Turner and Constable. There is, for example, not a single warship or coastal defence fortification to be seen in any of his paintings of the

⁶See, for example, Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, London: Penguin, 1994, 165-66; Andrew Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture in early nineteenth-century Britain*, Cambridge 1992, Chapter Eight, 155-215; Geoffrey Quilley, "'All ocean is her own": the image of the sea and the identity of the maritime nation in eighteenth-century British art', in *Imagining nations*, ed. by Geoffrey Cubitt, Manchester, 1998, 132-152; Geoffrey Quilley, *Empire to Nation: Art, History and the Visualization of Maritime Britain, 1768-1829* : New Haven, Conn., & London, 2011; Christiana Payne, 'Our English Coasts: Defence and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in Tricia Cusack, *Art and Identity at the Water's Edge*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, 212-36; Christine Riding and Richard Johns, *Turner and the Sea*, London, 2013; Christiana Payne, 'A breath of fresh air : Constable and the Coast', in Matthew Ingleby, and Matthew P. M. Kerr, *Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 51-68.

⁷ See Introduction, Sections One and Two.

⁸See Hemingway *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*; Quilley, "'All ocean is her own'"; Quilley, *Empire to Nation*; Payne, 'Our English Coasts'; Payne, 'A breath of fresh air'.

English coast. Nor do his paintings include, on the face of them, elements of interest to researchers into aspects of empire such as ports, shipping, or details referable to trading links. Although, as I will demonstrate below, Collins was certainly interested in human interaction at the seaside, he appears to have shown no interest in depicting aspects of 'modernity' such as the physical expansion of resorts.

The remainder of the chapter provides a detailed analysis of Collins's coastal paintings and will demonstrate the originality of many of his ideas and themes. In Section One I examine his interest in conveying a feeling, or 'sentiment' of place in his paintings, both through its geography and natural features, and through its inhabitants. In Sections Two and Three I look at Collins's exploration of the liminality of the shoreline and the many dualities thrown up by its role as a boundary between land and sea. The shore is a uniquely liminal area, in which the sand, stones and rock of which it is composed alternate twice each day between being dry land and being water. Section Two deals with what might be considered the darker, or more serious aspects of that liminality: the shore as a boundary between safety and danger, life and death, between humanity and the infinite. Section Three considers the lighter aspects of the shore's liminality: the shore as a place of freedom, recreation and fun, and an area in which traditional boundaries imposed by social hierarchies dissolve. All of these themes appear in contemporary literary culture, but the manner in which these themes were expressed in paint by Collins was, I will argue, innovative.

Section One : The sentiment of place – English Coasts and Foreign Shores

As with his early work and his landscapes, Collins was primarily interested in character and situation, or 'scene' as many of his paintings were entitled. I will argue that this interest led

Collins to portray his understanding of national character, both of 'English' character, with which he was most familiar, but also, from his experience of travelling abroad, of 'French' character and 'Italian' character. I suggest that this form of engagement with notions of national identity (and, through that, an allusive rather than direct reference to themes such as defence of the nation, and of empire) appears to stem from Collins's interest in the lives and peculiarities of ordinary working people. I will also argue that far from 'play[ing] down references to place' (as asserted by Hemingway), Collins took considerable trouble to encapsulate in his paintings both the topography and the 'feeling' of a particular location.⁹ I shall illustrate this with a range of examples from the coastal paintings discussed in this chapter.

English Coasts

From reviews of Collins's exhibited coastal scenes, it is evident that they were regarded by contemporaries as quintessentially English. His obituary in the *Athenaeum* began by referring to him as 'This thoroughly English artist, in the best and truest sense of the word'.¹⁰ The author did not expand on what he meant by 'best and truest'. In her book *The idea of the English landscape painter* (1997) Kay Dian Kriz characterises the ideal of Englishness, in the early nineteenth century, as 'boldness, imagination, independent-mindedness, sensibility and manliness'.¹¹ However, I suggest that, for the *Athenaeum's* obituarist, the use of that phraseology also implied that viewers of Collins's work immediately associated his paintings with their own memories of the landscapes and coasts depicted. See, for example, the

⁹ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 214.

¹⁰ *Athenaeum*, 20 February 1847, 200.

¹¹ Kriz, *The idea of the English landscape painter*, 5.

observations as to Englishness and Collins's work made by the *Library of the Fine Arts's* critic in 1832, referred to in Chapter Two.¹² Thirty years later, the Redgrave brothers observed that Collins 'has been followed in his peculiar walks by Hook and others, who, perceiving the thoroughly English character of his art, have adopted it not with servility but with feelings of their own'.¹³ Collins's 'peculiar' (i.e. distinctive) approach can be illustrated by comparing Turner's *The Sun rising through Vapour* (1809) with Collins's *A Fish Auction on the south coast of Devonshire* [hereafter '*A Fish Auction*'] (1823) (figures 3.1 and 3.2). In Turner's painting fish are being unloaded and prepared on the beach in the foreground. To the left is a counterbalancing group of boats round a wooden jetty. The eye is led to the large naval vessel and navy hulk in the centre midground, while more naval vessels are visible in the distance. Fishing is taking place under the protection of warships. The location is unclear to the viewer.¹⁴ Nothing indicates contemporaneity. The painting is very much in the Dutch coastal tradition with a conventionally picturesque flavour. By contrast, Collins's painting shows a specific and contemporaneous scene occurring at a particular place: the entry in the catalogue to the 1823 Royal Academy Exhibition gives the title, together with explanatory note as 'A fish auction on the south coast of Devonshire, where it is the custom of the fishermen to substitute the dropping of a stone, for the stroke of the auctioneer's hammer'.¹⁵ Numerous elements in the painting contribute to an overall impression of naturalism. The fisherman, his boy and the three participants in the auction are positioned

¹² Chapter Two, Section One, referring to the review in *Library of the Fine Arts*, III, July 1832, 513.

¹³ Richard Redgrave & Samuel Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School; with critical notices of their works, and an account of the progress on Art in England*, 2 vols, London, 1866, II, 422.

¹⁴ From the existence of a relevant sketch in Turner's Spithead sketchbook, it may be in the environs of Southampton Water, which would be logical; see Martin Butlin & Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner*, 2 vols, New Haven & London, 1984, cat.no.95, 68-9.

¹⁵ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, M.DCCCXXIII, The Fifty-fifth*, London, 1823, 6, No.67.

against the backdrop of a stark and rocky headland, rather than a picturesque landscape. The figures themselves look like real people (Figure 3.3). A weather-beaten fisherman, hand on hip, holds the stone. His boy displays the lot being offered. His jacket is coming apart at the seam, the seat of his trousers is polished through wear, and the leg frayed. The man wearing an apron struggles to follow the bidding. A hard-faced woman stares at the stone, whilst a self-satisfied man to her right reaches into his coat for his purse. A jumble of boats occupies the right centre-ground, their sails patched. The overall impression is one of a precarious, but stubbornly maintained way of life.

This quality of naturalism in his father's paintings was commented on by Wilkie

Collins:

His villagers and fishermen are ... genuine poor people in every line of their countenances, every action of their forms, and every patch in their garments; characters, stamped with the thorough nationality of their class, whether ... as the combined exponents of a rustic story, or as the individual types of a marked and interesting race.¹⁶

That assessment suggests that people depicted in his father's paintings were intended to be seen by the viewer as the actual inhabitants of the scene in which they feature. The extent to which they were, in fact, accurate portraits of local people is impossible to gauge.

Hemingway describes Collins's paintings as 'connoting a mythology of the coast and its inhabitants as it would have been nicer to think them'.¹⁷ That Collins could at times make adjustments to facial features is clear from a comparison of his preliminary sketch for *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1815) with the finished painting (1816) (figures 3.37, 3.36). But there are no

¹⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 314.

¹⁷ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 193.

indications in, for example, contemporary reviews that his figures were seen as idealised portrayals.¹⁸

Wilkie Collins's assessment also suggests that the class and nationality of the persons depicted would be apparent to the viewer of his father's paintings. Robert Young has observed that, by the middle of the nineteenth century (when *Memoirs* was written) being English 'involves an attachment to the landscape...together with a certain class mobility whereby the middle-class youngster is brought up as one of the village folk, Saxons all'.¹⁹ Whilst the notion of a specifically Saxon race as defining Englishness may not have impacted upon Collins's generation, there can be little doubt that the lengthy wars against France during Collins's formative years encouraged a sense of English nationality. What distinguishes Collins's painting from Turner's painting (and indeed the paintings of other leading coastal painters of the period such as Callcott and Bonington) is the specificity of the scene, and the interplay between its actors. Turner, Callcott and Bonington's beach figures are not related to each other in such a way as to form a narrative; rather they populate a view, as in, for example, Bonington's *French Coast with Fisherfolk* (1824) (figure 3.4). By contrast, all the figures in Collins's *A Fish Auction* contribute towards the 'rustic story'.

During the 1820s Collins painted two more scenes of fish being sold on the beach. Both featured a single fisherman selling his catch. Since, as we shall see, he did portray large groups of figures on a beach, we may assume that this was a deliberate choice. His intention

¹⁸ Contemporary reviewers were astute in noticing mismatches between figures and subject-matter: e.g. William Owen's *The Children in the Wood* (1806 R.A. No. 220) was criticised for its rendering of the children with 'Arcadian elegance', (*Public Ledger*, 13 May 1806); Henry Thomson's *The Cottage Door* (1808 B.I. No. 55) was similarly criticised on the basis that its principal character was an elegant girl who was clearly no cottager (*Review of Publications of Art*, II, 1808, 112).

¹⁹ Robert J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, Oxford, 2008, 9.

appears to have been to focus on the encounter between the seller and the buyers. For example, *Buying fish on the beach, Hazy morning* (1825) portrays an encounter between a mother with her two children, and the fisherman (figure 3.5). The fisherman has just sold a large fish to his well-dressed customer, who looks pleased with her purchase (figure 3.6). But, as critics observed, the show is stolen by her two children (figure 3.7). The older child has taken hold of a small fish and dangles it in front of his young sibling, who looks quite disgusted. ‘How naturally a child shrinks from the wriggling fish held to him in “Buying Fish on the Beach”’, the *Examiner* commented.²⁰ Critics also praised the simplicity, and ‘truth to nature’ of the painting, two of them specifically contrasting it with what they saw as the artificiality of Turner’s *Harbour of Dieppe* (figure 3.8). The *Literary Gazette* described ‘Turner’s brilliant experiment upon colours, which displays all the magic of skill at the expense of all the magic of nature. On the opposite side of the room we were glad to contemplate the more chastening scene of a beech [*sic*] on a hazy morning, by Collins’.²¹ The two paintings were similarly juxtaposed by *La Belle Assemblée*’s critic who opined that ‘to splendour of effect [Turner] has sacrificed much of the truth of nature ... his lights and shadows are artificial rather than natural’. He contrasted this with the Collins painting, which he described as ‘a picture of extraordinary merit’.²²

That Collins consistently chose to portray a single fisherman may also reflect the contemporary attitude of respect for British fishermen, described by Christiana Payne, in terms of their independence and perceived moral character.²³ That attitude can be seen in

²⁰ *Examiner*, 19 June 1825, 432.

²¹ *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1825, 298.

²² *La Belle Assemblée*, 3rd series, I, 1825, 273.

²³ Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 171.

an 1810 article in the *Examiner*, about George Morland. The author describes Morland's coast scenes in these terms: 'His sea-shores and its inhabitants were the hardy race enured to danger, employing themselves on their vessels, their nets, selling their fish, or looking out for the expected squall'.²⁴ Collins is known to have read Scott's novel, *The Antiquary*, which features the hardy Mucklebackit fishing family making a precarious but independent living, within months of its publication in 1816.²⁵ He spent many weeks observing fisher folk in the summers of 1815 and 1816, at Cromer and Hastings respectively.²⁶

Collins's ethnographic interest in the inhabitants of the shore appears to be unusually early.²⁷ Such an interest in English customs had appeared in Collins's *oeuvre* as early as 1811, when he painted *May Day*.²⁸ David Solkin, in analysing that painting, comments that elements of the painting give the scene 'something of the character of an ethnographic record – a document of the peculiar habits of an exotic species who just happen to be the English poor'.²⁹ Collins's paintings of fishermen on the shore, are likewise a record of a characteristic national and social type and, to a certain extent, as with all 'ethnographic records', a creation in keeping with the public's perception, as formed by contemporary journalism and literature.

²⁴ *Examiner*, 2 September 1810, 553.

²⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 99, journal entry for 26 October 1816.

²⁶ For Cromer in 1815, see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 75-79; for Hastings in 1816 see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 91-97.

²⁷ Payne cites an 1865 publication about fisher-folk: James Bertram, *The Harvest of the Sea. A Contribution to the Natural and Economic History of the British Food Fisheries*, London: John Murray, 1865. (Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 171, n.2.)

²⁸ *May Day* is discussed in Chapter One, Section Three, *The epic of bringing up children*.

²⁹ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 171.

Foreign Shores

Collins's paintings set on the French and Italian coasts are very different from his English coastal scenes, and differ from each other. This, I suggest, reflects his own perceptions of differences in national character. Well before he painted the French coastal scenes, he had achieved critical success in his delineation of French character with the two paintings which resulted from his 1817 excursion to Paris.³⁰ At that time critics had enthused over his success in capturing 'familiar French character' and producing 'a very clever representation of French habits ... descriptive of their peculiarities'.³¹ They described Collins's 'fair broad humour' stopping short of caricature. Wilkie Collins describes his father's later preoccupation, when with his family at Boulogne in 1829, with 'the different physiognomy, manners and habits between the French fishermen whom he was then studying, and the English fishermen whom he had formerly studied'.³² The three paintings he exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year were all Boulogne scenes: *Mussel Gatherers*, *Les Causeuses* and *Awaiting the arrival of the Fishing Boats* (figures 3.9, 3.10 and 3.11). Their most striking feature is that all three portray groups of fisherwomen talking to each other. *Mussel Gatherers*, as originally conceived, foregrounds a group of three women. What appears to be a preliminary sketch for the group shows them in conversation with a fisherman (figure 3.12). However, he does not feature in the finished painting, where the women are talking amongst themselves. Judging by the empty baskets, they have not got very far with their work and are engrossed in conversation. The woman on the right is making a point, jabbing her right index finger into

³⁰ These are discussed in Chapter One, Section Six: *Painting out of the ordinary – the final phase, 1814-1817*.

³¹ See the reviews of *A Scene on the Boulevards*, referred to in Chapter One, from *Repository of Arts*, March 1818, New Series, V, 167, and *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol IX, 1818, 257.

³² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 328.

her left palm. The woman on the left has her hands on her hips and listens attentively. The woman in the centre has her hands clasped in front of her and has an unhappy expression. Essentially, the painting appears to deal with the women's day to day troubles, rather than the gathering of mussels.³³ In *Les Causeuses* a conversation is in progress between two women (figure 3.13). They have put down their empty baskets. One is sitting on the rocks, and her friend is kneeling on the sand next to her. The body language and the position of the hands of the woman on the right indicates a personal matter is being discussed. The posture of the kneeling woman suggests she is listening sympathetically. The proximity of the figures to the picture plane gives the onlooker an almost uncomfortable feeling of eaves-dropping. Again, the painting has little to do directly with fishing activities. It represents a more intimate portrayal of women's lives, set in the context of their daily work. *Awaiting the arrival of the Fishing Boats* also features two women in conversation. One is stretched out on a jetty, her back propped against one of the wooden posts. She is shading her eyes to see her companion, who is carrying a small child in the empty basket on her back. An older boy aged perhaps six or seven is standing next to her, also with a basket. The women are again very close to the picture plane. What appears to have interested Collins, and led him to paint three separate paintings of women talking on the beach was, I suggest, how differently he perceived the French to be from the English. Collins's English women went to the shoreline

³³ The finished painting in oil is said by Wilkie Collins to have had an additional figure added to it, at the insistence of the client, Sir Thomas Baring. He had liked a sketch by Collins of a French fisherman, and wanted him included: Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 337-39. However, the painting was photographed whilst at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857, and the photograph does not feature the fisherman (*Gems of the Art Treasures Exhibition*, Manchester, 1858, Index, No. 36, [title] Sea Coast; [artist] W. Collins R.A.; [lender] Samuel Ashton, Esq.). Accordingly, it appears that Wilkie Collins was mistaken on this point, and that his father had his way.

to buy fish. His French women went to the shoreline to work, but also—perhaps even more importantly, given their still empty baskets—to talk to each other.

Collins only painted two Italian scenes relating to fishing activities. Both are set on the island of Ischia where he spent a month convalescing in 1837, *Ischia, Bay of Naples* (1841), and *Sun rise, a scene at Ischia* (1846) (figures 3.14 and 3.15). Here what appears to have attracted Collins's attention were the crowds of people, and fishermen working together co-operatively. In *Ischia, Bay of Naples* (1841) there are three fishermen involved in unloading the boat and selling, and six buyers (including the man on horseback) crowding round the catch. In *Sun rise, a scene at Ischia* eight buyers (including the woman in a pink dress, white shawl and bonnet in the earlier painting) are crowded around the two fishermen and the two baskets of fish packed in straw, while others are helping to carry up a third basket. Six more are gathered next to a second boat. These scenes of co-operation and bustle are quite different, again, to the working pattern of the English fisher folk, and the manner in which Collins chose to portray French fisher folk. These paintings indicate Collins's interest in 'the different physiognomy, manners and habits' of a different culture and appear to be an attempt to encapsulate what, for him, seemed to be its most typical features. The English sea-shore features ruggedly independent fishermen, the French sea-shore is dominated by gossiping women, and the Italian sea-shore appears crowded and chaotic. Whilst such expressions of difference might now be perceived as crudely stereotypical, such a perception is, I suggest, ahistorical.

Collins's references to place

Hemingway suggests that Collins 'play[s] down references to place'.³⁴ However, his paintings consistently portray specific features of a particular piece of coastline. Considering, for example, the paintings already discussed in this chapter, his *Fish Auction* (figure 3.2) is described as being on the south coast of Devon. At the end of August 1819 Collins spent over a fortnight with the Holdsworth family in Dartmouth and Widdicombe House, near Beesands.³⁵ A person familiar with that stretch of coast would recognise the rocky headlands and the coves to the west of Start Point such as Lannacombe Beach and Blackpool Sands, and a keen eye would note that Collins has included, on the horizon, the Great Sleaden Rock, off Start Point (figure 3.16). A town can be seen in the centre background of *Buying fish on the beach*, *Hazy morning* (figure 3.5). Its indistinctness is surely appropriate, given the title. The Napoleonic Fort de l'Heurt at Boulogne-sur-mer can be seen at close quarters in *Les Causeuses* (figure 3.10), and in the background of *Waiting the Arrival of Fishing Boats* (figure 3.11). *Ischia, Bay of Naples* is located on the shore below the village of Forio, with its distinctive castle and machicolated parapet rising above the cliff, and the island of Ventotene shown on the horizon (figure 3.14). The location for *Sun rise, a scene at Ischia* can be pinpointed to the north coast by reference to the range of hills rising behind the large vessels, and the view, out at sea, of the island of Procida (figure 3.15).

Collins did not, of course, aim at topographical accuracy. Ray Lambert observes in relation to Constable: 'Constable's most natural seeming pictures were made up of observed and invented parts, integrated into convincing wholes. Naturalism is a style'.³⁶ As discussed in

³⁴ Hemingway, *Landscape Imagery and Urban Culture*, 214.

³⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 157.

³⁶ Ray Lambert, *John Constable and the Theory of Landscape Painting*, Cambridge, 2005, 120.

Chapter Two, the training that Collins and his contemporaries received specifically eschewed topographical accuracy in favour of a process of selection and recombination of features. So as better to capture the feeling, the 'sentiment' of a place, Collins drew on significant features which a person who had walked along a particular stretch of shore would recognise, and so associate with his own experience. The individual components are not necessarily all visible from a single place, as in a photograph. *A Fish Auction* is not intended as a topographical rendering of the landscape around Start Point. This manipulation of features can be seen in Collins's treatment of the coastline in the south-west corner of the Isle of Wight, which he visited in the summer of 1827, having been commissioned by the Duke of Norfolk to paint his grandchildren in a beach setting.³⁷ A comparison between photographs of Alum Bay, and a preliminary sketch for a possible scene there, illustrates this point (figure 3.17).³⁸ The principal geological features in the sketch are a spur of rock, against which one of the boys is leaning, the contiguous ledge of rocks, and the cliff which leads to the Needles. All these elements are indeed present at Alum Bay, but they have been substantially rearranged. Figure 3.18 shows similar rocks and the equivalent stretch of cliff represented in the sketch. Figure 3.19 shows the spur of rock and the left hand section of the long cliff leading to the Needles, together with the right hand section. From these photographs it is evident that Collins brought together in his composition only a small part of the cliffs nearest to the Needles, and amalgamated the rock spur and the ledge of rocks, taking out the pebble

³⁷ See Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 293. Although the painting is described in Collins's Notebook and in the R.A. Exhibition Catalogue for 1828 as *Scene in Freshwater Bay*, there can be little doubt, given Collins's anxiety to meet up with the Duke at Cowes and the ages of the four grandchildren then born, that they are the children depicted.

³⁸ Since this sketch features four children, it may well have been one of a number of sketches Collins made so that the Duke could make a choice of setting for his painting.

beach altogether. A similar process of selection and recombination can be seen in the finished *Scene in Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight* (1828) (figure 3.20). Freshwater Bay is essentially a large cove, where the cliffs are substantially lower than the cliffs to the west (towards The Needles) and the east (towards Brighstone) (figure 3.21). The background to the painting combines the high cliffs leading to the Needles with, on the extreme right, a distinctive spur of grey rock located near Brighstone (figure 3.22). These examples demonstrate that, whilst eschewing strict topographical accuracy, Collins took considerable pains to provide specific visual elements which served as an anchor, for the viewer, of the painting's location. That this approach worked can be gauged from the *New Monthly Magazine's* review of *Scene in Freshwater Bay*, which described it as 'another admirable little landscape by Collins, and is a very true portrait of Freshwater Bay in the Isle of Wight'.³⁹

Section Two : Liminality of the shoreline – the darker side

The shore is a liminal area, using that term in the sense of being 'characterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp. by being transitional or intermediate between two states, situations, etc'.⁴⁰ Or, as Alain Corbin puts it, less drily, in the context of painters of the Romantic period: 'They paid particular attention to the strand, that territory in which the elements were supremely ephemeral and undefined, and which encouraged pantheistic reverie'.⁴¹ As a liminal area, the shore is capable of giving expression to many dualities, beyond the purely physical fact of its being constantly in a state of transition as the tide flows

³⁹ *New Monthly Magazine* XXIV, 1 June 1828, 255.

⁴⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, sense (2), accessed 15 August 2022.

⁴¹ Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 165. 'Strand' used in this context has the meaning of 'shore' (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/strand> accessed 4 September 2023).

in and out. In this section I explore what can perhaps best be described as the 'darker' or more serious dualities which Collins engaged with in his paintings: the shore as a boundary between safety and danger, life and death, the human and the infinite.

Safety and danger

In *Scene in Freshwater Bay* (figure 3.20), the solidity of the cliffs and spur of rock represent the safety of dry land. Meanwhile the sea threatens to engulf the small patch of dry sand where the children are crowded together. The tide is coming in; a figure can be seen returning with his basket across the wet sand. The oldest child is pointing out to his sister the need to leave. He has slung his basket over his shoulder and his body language expresses some urgency. Tidal waters can be death-traps; Collins and his viewing public would have been familiar with George Crabbe's account of the nearly fatal boating excursion in *The Borough* (1810), beginning:

Sometimes a Party, row'd from town will land
On a small islet form'd of shelly sand,
Left by the water when the tides are low,
But which the floods in their return o'erflow:⁴²

Tidal estuaries, with large areas of sand exposed, provide safe passage at low tide, but can be extremely dangerous as the tide rises. Collins became familiar with such estuaries following a summer spent travelling in North Wales in 1834. In 1835 he exhibited *Welsh Peasants Crossing the Sands to Market* (figure 3.23). The returning family have reached the safety of the dunes, having crossed the estuary from Gest (now Borth-y-Gest). Behind them can be seen the wet sands of the estuary of the Afon Dwyrdd and the characteristically conical hill of

⁴² George Crabbe, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Norma Dalrymple-Champneys, 3 vols, Oxford, 1988, I, 446, *The Borough*, 'Letter IX, Amusements', lines 206-09.

Moel y Gest. They would know the sands, and the times at which they could be safely crossed.

But if tidal sands had their dangers, contemporary literature and painting reinforced the much greater dangers of voyaging across sea, or working at sea. It has been estimated that, in the early nineteenth century, five thousand British people lost their lives annually at sea.⁴³ This fed into both literature and visual representation. Carl Thompson has described the enormous public appetite at the time for 'shipwreck narrative', being 'a distinct subgenre within the larger genre of Voyages and Travels', describing its frequently gruesome accompaniments of hunger, disease and other misfortunes.⁴⁴ Such material was drawn upon by contemporary poets, e.g. Coleridge in 1798, and Byron in 1819.⁴⁵ Geoffrey Quilley has commented upon the impact on public consciousness made by the wrecks of three East India Company's ships, the *Grosvenor* (1782), the *Halsewell* (1786) and the *Earl of Abergavenny* (1805), and the use of these as subject-matter by numerous painters, 'seeking to exploit the ready market attached to such disasters'.⁴⁶ As Collins would have known, William Wordsworth's brother John had been captain of the *Earl of Abergavenny* and died in the 1805 disaster.⁴⁷ Artists such as Turner frequently exhibited dramatic storms and shipwrecks at sea. Collins, however, never painted such a direct representation of the perils of the sea. This may have been due to a conscious decision that such scenes were best left to marine painters, or indeed to the impresarios of large scale spectacles; in April 1816, shortly before

⁴³ J. G. Dalyell, *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea*, 3 vols, London, 1812, I, Introduction, cited in Payne (2007), 141, n.4.

⁴⁴ Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination*, Oxford, 2007, 61.

⁴⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', *Lyrical Ballads*, London, 1798; Lord Byron, 'Don Juan', Canto II, *Lord Byron: the major works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁴⁶ Quilley, *Empire to Nation*, 147.

⁴⁷ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, 239-40.

Collins left London to spend the summer at Hastings working on coastal painting, the Strand Theatre in London was exhibiting, twice-weekly, 'Panoramic and Mechanical accurate representation' including a 'Storm at Sea...accompanied by all the characteristic Phenomena'.⁴⁸

Collins did, however, execute a number of paintings which explore the transition from land to sea as a place of danger. Rather than depicting storms and shipwrecks, he appears to have wanted to focus on individuals' reactions to the risks involved in leaving the safety of dry land to voyage across, or work at sea. By examining this group of paintings in chronological order it is possible to detect an evolution in his paintings from an allusive suggestion of such dangers to an increasingly direct, and unmistakable, reference to danger and mortality.

In *The Reluctant Departure* (1815), a mother is saying goodbye to her infant before getting into a boat, alone (figure 3.24). Why she is setting off alone is not made explicit. Clues can be found in the setting for the painting, and the timing of its execution and exhibition. The setting is probably the coastal dunes of the New Forest, near Britain's major naval base at Portsmouth.⁴⁹ The painting was executed in early 1815, when Napoleon had returned from exile and England was again on a war footing. It was exhibited six weeks before the battle of Waterloo. Is the woman the relative of an officer, either returning injured or about to set off again on active service? Clouds are massing out at sea, and although the setting sun

⁴⁸Matthew Ingleby, and Matthew P. M. Kerr, *Coastal Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, Edinburgh, 2018, p.9 and fig. I.2. For the financial pressure he was under in April 1816, and the consequent need to seek a new direction, see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 82, journal entry for 13 April 1816, and Chapter One, Section Six: *Painting out of the ordinary – the final phase, 1814-1817*.

⁴⁹ Collins had stayed at T.H. Heathcote's seat near Southampton in autumn 1811, and is not known to have made any other visits to the coast until the summer of 1815.

is still shining, there are ominously dark clouds overhead. The boatman is frowning as he contemplates the sky. It is not going to be a calm passage. But rather than refer directly to the war by, for instance including naval personnel or a warship, Collins preferred an allusive and understated reference. As in his earlier genre paintings considered in Chapter One, he is firmly anchored in 'painting out of the ordinary' and in the exploration of his characters' feelings. A similar allusiveness of approach is found in the novels of Jane Austen. Both *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Persuasion* (1818) contain naval families, but as Brian Southam puts it: 'there is no triumphalism in Jane Austen, no narrative of national victory, on land or sea ... Her attention as a novelist was not upon great events but upon private lives'. Naval heroism, he observes, 'is kept strictly off-stage'.⁵⁰ A similarly low-key allusiveness is seen in Collins's *Fishermen on the Lookout* (1819) (figure 3.25). Here, a fisherman is scanning the horizon and the shore at dawn, looking for boats returning from a night's fishing. The sea appears unruffled – as one reviewer put it: 'the morning is warm and calm; the radiance is golden, and the clouds almost motionless: its enchanting simplicity and chastity are its spell'.⁵¹ However, from the fact that the fisherman is scanning the horizon, we are to understand that the return of the fishing boats is overdue, suggesting altogether different weather overnight.

Then, in 1821, Collins experienced at first hand the terrible toll extracted by the sea from fishing communities. On Thursday 4 October a severe storm took the lives of thirty Clovelly fishermen, at a time when Collins was travelling in Devon and had reached the

⁵⁰ Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*, London, 2000, 3.

⁵¹ *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 66, 1 July 1819, 546.

nearby town of Great Torrington.⁵² He decided to visit Clovelly at once, and wrote movingly to his mother of his visit, referring to seeing boats torn to pieces, and witnessing one of the funerals.⁵³ A few months later, he exhibited *Clovelly, North Devon* (1822) (figure 3.26).

Conspicuously, and consistent with Collins's allusive style, this did not feature shattered boats or other direct signs of the tragedy which Collins witnessed. The events had occurred only six months previously, and the name itself would have sufficed to remind exhibition goers of what had occurred. However, the sea in the painting is dark and turbulent, with a large area in shadow. Collins presumably considered that the darkness of his sea and the waves breaking on the shore were a sufficient allusion to what had taken place. He may also have intended to show that fishing had to carry on, despite the risks.

That he was affected at a personal level by what he had seen at Clovelly, is reflected in an increasingly direct portrayal of danger at sea and the impact it had on families. In 1825 he began *Leaving Home for the Night Fishing* (figure 3.27). Seven members of a fishing family are outside their home. A fisherman is kissing goodbye to his toddler. His wife, with a baby in her lap, looks at him, or perhaps her older son to his left, with an apprehensive look. The oldest daughter, with her arm on her sister's shoulder, is looking at her grandfather, perhaps for some reassurance. He looks back impassively, as if to tell her this is how it has to be. Her younger sister looks away, worried. The older boy, who holds a lantern and other paraphernalia, is wearing sea boots and is evidently going out with his father. He looks very scared. Even the dog has his tail down. This is a dangerous business, and the family know it.

⁵² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 183 refers to forty deaths, but the figure of forty appears to have referred to the number of fishing boats, with thirty-one fatalities leaving 19 widows and sixty-one orphans. See Peter Christie, *The Great Storm of 1821*, <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/DEV/Clovelly/Salver1821>, accessed 5 June 2022.

⁵³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 183-84.

The theme was continued in *Doubtful Weather* (1828). Currently untraced, it was described in a review of the 1828 Royal Academy Exhibition in these terms: 'A fisherman on the beach, a figure whose cloudy brows denote a storm which his hesitating look seems endeavouring to disperse; his faithful dog anxiously watching his master's eye, and his assistants in the boat are fearful of commencing preparations'.⁵⁴ The following year Collins depicted the consequences of going out in such weather in *Morning after a Storm* (1829). Likewise currently untraced, it is known through the descriptions by Wilkie Collins and contemporary reviews. Collins describes the composition as having as a background a turbulent sea, and 'wild broken clouds'. On the left side sits a fisherman's wife with a baby at her breast, and a small child clinging to her. She is anxiously watching the sea. Near her a man is scanning the horizon with a telescope. The outlook is not good. As a critic put it: 'The telescope, elevated to the eye of the experienced mariner, "gives no sign", and the straining gaze of the sad and anxious female at his side in vain seeks for some faint indications on which to found hope'.⁵⁵ In *The Mariner's Widow* (1835), Collins moved from forebodings of tragedy, to its aftermath. The assembled group reflect upon what has occurred (figure 3.28). The widow sits dressed in black. On her lap, an infant leans over to pat the dog. He is too young to understand, but the young boy standing to his right, clinging to an adult's arms, does understand, and looks on sadly. His trousers are torn. Possibly he is an older sibling, and there is little money around, now that the breadwinner has perished. Or perhaps he is the child of the young couple, their

⁵⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1828, 538.

⁵⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 314-16; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 23 May 1829, 344.

heads bowed in sympathy. The 1835 exhibition catalogue quoted William Cowper's lines: 'Some chord in unison with what we hear| Is touched within us, and the heart replies'.⁵⁶

The mariner in question was evidently a seaman, rather than an inshore fisherman. The perils of sailing across the seas was very familiar from the contemporary literary genre of shipwreck narrative. In *Leaving Home* (1836), however, the woman and her family are leaving home, never to return (Figure 3.29). The boat and its boy are evidently there to take the family to a waiting ship. This painting is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. For the purposes of the discussion here, it is sufficient to observe that the flapping sail, dark clouds, and strong wind creating white horses and choppy water in the foreground all contribute to an atmosphere of foreboding, visible in the expressions of the mother and children behind her. Collins's most dramatic expression of such dangers was *Prayer: A family about to leave their native shores imploring Divine protection.* (1842).⁵⁷ This may also be an emigration painting, involving an ocean voyage, or perhaps a journey across the Mediterranean to another country. It was described as: 'The sea-shore at night-fall. Group of peasants, consisting of a man, three women and two children, are earnestly praying before an image of the Virgin fixed to a rude wooden pillar and illuminated by a rough lantern suspended from it'.⁵⁸ In any event there is no doubt that the journey requires divine oversight.

⁵⁶ William Cowper, *The Task, and other selected poems*, ed. James Sambrook, Harlow: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1994, 196, *The Task*, Book VI, Winter Walk at Noon, ll. 4-5. In 1834, the year before Collins painted *The Mariner's Widow*, Auguste Hervieu (1794-1858) had exhibited *Fisherman's widow after a wreck* [R.A. 1834, No. 378]. This is untraced.

⁵⁷ This work is discussed in detail in Chapter Five, Section Two, *Devotional Sentiment and the role of the Church*.

⁵⁸ G.E. Ambrose, *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures belonging to the Marquess of Lansdowne. K.G., at Lansdowne House, London, and Bowood, Wilts.*, London, 1897, No.224.

Human life and eternal life

That the transition from dry land to ocean symbolised a boundary between life and death, human life and eternal life, was a well-known literary theme from the eighteenth century onwards.⁵⁹ Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-45) had counselled that:

Our hearts should...Walk thoughtfull on the silent, solemn Shore
Of that vast ocean It must sail so soon;
And put Good-works on board; and wait the Wind
That shortly blows us into Worlds unknown;⁶⁰

In 1819 Byron referred to the ocean as 'the image of eternity, the throne | of the Invisible'.⁶¹ Collins's *Summer Moonlight* (1829) may well contain an allusion to Young's *Night Thoughts* (figure 3.30). Ostensibly this shows two boys pushing a tub containing a frightened toddler, reassured by its older sister, across a pool on the sands, watched by a youth returning from prawn fishing (figure 3.31). However, there are also two adult figures present, by the boat at the far left, a fisherman leaning over the side of his boat, and a stooped elderly woman walking down the beach (figure 3.32). It is difficult to make sense of these two figures other than as participants in an allegorical dimension. The man is working. The woman indeed appears to 'Walk thoughtfull on the silent, solemn Shore | Of that vast ocean'. Arguably, what Collins represents on the shore are four stages in human life: childhood, youth, maturity and old age. The children in and around the tub are setting out on their voyage of life. The youth

⁵⁹ The best-known nineteenth century literary example being Lord Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar* (1889).

⁶⁰ Edward Young, *The Complaint: or, Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality*, London, 1742-45, Book V, lines 664, 669-672, quoted in Payne, *Where the Sea Meets the Land*, 26-7. The 1797 edition of *Night Thoughts*, illustrated by William Blake, was in Wilkie Collins's library and may have belonged to Collins (Puttick and Simpson, *Library of the late Wilkie Collins, Esq., to be sold at auction by Messrs Puttick and Simpson, on Monday January 20th 1890*, lot 239).

⁶¹ Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, stanza clxxxiii, *Lord Byron: the major works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 200, lines 1644-45, (cited in John William Patrick Bourke, *The Sea as a Symbol in English Poetry*, Eton: Alden & Blackwell, 1954, 33.)

returns from an early expedition. The man engages in his occupation. The woman goes to meet her Maker.

Collins would also have been familiar with Wordsworth's version of that literary theme, the well-known passage in his *Ode*, considered in Chapter Two, including the lines: 'Though inland far we be, | Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea | Which brought us hither'.⁶² As noted throughout the thesis, there are allusions to Wordsworth poems right across Collins's *oeuvre*. *Summer Moonlight* (1829) was painted for the Revd. R.A. Thorp, a fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The likelihood that it contains an allusion to Wordsworth increases when one considers that Revd. Thorp's next commission for Collins was *The Nutting Party* (1831). As discussed in Chapter Two, viewers of that painting may have sensed within it an allusion to Wordsworth's poem 'Nutting'. Collins certainly displayed an interest in depicting the 'voyage of life' at this time. This will be clear from the discussion in Chapter Two of *Scene in a Kentish hop garden*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1829, the same year as *Summer Moonlight*. If my interpretation is correct, it is noteworthy that *Summer Moonlight* encapsulates, on a single canvas, the themes in Thomas Cole's well-known four part series *The Voyage of Life* (1842). Collins's approach is allusive, and literary, as opposed to the outright emotional, even sentimentalised approach of Cole's series, as analysed by William Stroup.⁶³

In this section I have considered Collins's engagement with some of the darker aspects of the shore's liminality, namely its literal position as a boundary between safety and

⁶² William Wordsworth, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, lines 164-170. See also Chapter Two, Section Three.

⁶³ William Stroup, 'Embarrassing Displays of Devotion in Nineteenth-Century Paintings', *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics: Affect and Ecology in the Nineteenth Century*, Ed. Lisa Ottum & Seth T. Reno, Durham, New Hampshire, 2018, 61 and 68-9.

danger, life and death, and its symbolic position as a boundary between the human and the infinite. These were all contemporary literary themes, which find expression only to a very limited degree in the work of Collins's contemporary painters. They are far more evident in the work of later nineteenth century artists such as James Clark Hook, Frank Holl, Walter Langley and Frank Bramley.⁶⁴ That contemporary viewers could contemplate Collins's work and see this darker side is apparent in a review of Collins's *Morning - Fishermen on the Lookout*.⁶⁵ The reviewer reflected that:

The sublime image of man's immortal spirit hastening to the bosom of his Creator, or of time pressing forward to merge in eternity, presents itself to the imagination, on beholding a mighty body of waters rolling onwards to lose itself, as it were, in immeasurable space.

But the shoreline was also a place of recreation and enjoyment, and the next section discusses Collins's important contribution to these themes.

Section Three : Liminality of the shoreline – the lighter side

If standing on the shoreline could prompt thoughts and feelings of danger and mortality, it could equally prompt thoughts and feelings of liberation, freedom from the usual restrictions of everyday life, and a space within which to reassess one's direction in life. The sense of freedom provided by contemplation of the sea from the safety of the shore was given poetic expression by a number of Collins's contemporaries. Wordsworth described the voice of the sea as: 'thy chosen music, Liberty!'.⁶⁶ He described John Milton as having had: '--a voice

⁶⁴ See e.g. Hook's *A Widow's Son going to Sea* (1857), Holl's *No Tidings from the Sea* (1870), Langley's *But Men must Work and Women must Weep* (1883), and Bramley's *A Hopeless Dawn* (1888), all referred to and illustrated in Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*.

⁶⁵ *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 66, 1 July 1819, 546.

⁶⁶ William Wordsworth, 'Thoughts of a Briton on the subjugation of Switzerland', *Poems dedicated to National Independence and liberty*, London, 1802, Part One, XII, l.4. (Cornell edition: *Poems in Two Volumes*, and other poems 1800-1807, ed. Jared Curtis, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, 164).

whose sound was like the sea: | Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free'.⁶⁷ Coleridge wrote of his sense of freedom, whilst standing on a cliff: 'And there I felt thee!—on that sea-cliff's verge, |... | O Liberty! My spirit felt thee there'.⁶⁸ Byron described the ocean as '— boundless, endless, and sublime | The image of eternity—'.⁶⁹

Alain Corbin refers to 'Romantic creative artists' as having 'powerfully enriched the means of enjoying the beach, and stimulated the longing inspired by this fluctuating boundary'.⁷⁰ Speaking of the beach as representing a fine line, Corbin observes that 'treading this line became an invitation to reassess one's life periodically'.⁷¹ Certainly the beach had this effect on Collins himself. In the summer of 1816, he spent six solitary weeks sketching on Hastings beach. At the end of his stay, he made a solemn resolution, recorded in his journal, 'for the improvement of my powers as an artist and a man...to adopt a more strict and periodical examination of my conduct'.⁷² And, of course, the exposure of great areas of sand and rocks at low tide enabled the visitor to wander freely—a privilege increasingly restricted inland, as enclosures ate away at common land, leaving little more than highways and byways unaffected by the rights of private property.⁷³

To articulate such feelings and emotions through the medium of poetry and journal writing is one thing. Collins had to demonstrate pictorially the sense of freedom the shore produced, and to rely upon the viewer's response to the expression, on the canvas, of such

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth, 'Milton', *Poems dedicated to National Independence and liberty*, London, 1802, Part One, XIV, ll. 10-11. (Cornell edition: *Poems in Two Volumes*, and other poems 1800-1807, 165.)

⁶⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *France: An Ode*, 1798, V, lines 15,21. See *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poetical Works Vol I.I.* Princeton, 2001, 467, lines 99, 105.

⁶⁹ George Gordon Byron (Lord Byron), 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', *Lord Byron: the major works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 200, stanza 183, lines 1643-44.

⁷⁰ Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 163.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁷² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 97.

⁷³ This aspect is discussed in Chapter Four, Section One, *Interpreting the paintings*.

freedom. It cannot be coincidental that all his paintings of recreation on the beach, without exception, feature children, and almost always children without adults. He portrayed children in eighty-five per cent of his coastal paintings.⁷⁴ As with his landscape paintings, Collins relied upon both the viewer's familiarity with coastal scenery in general, and the viewer's specific recollections of childhood to maximise the associationist effect of his paintings. As F.W. Fairholt put it, in 1859, 'it is a pleasure to look upon his pictures in the foggy winter days of a London December, and dream of visiting some such pleasant spots...when June comes round again'.⁷⁵ As with his landscape paintings, none of his coastal scenes failed to sell.

Collins's children by the sea

Clearly Collins was not the first artist to exhibit a painting of a child on a beach. Henry Howard had done this, with critical success, in 1810 with a portrait of his eldest daughter listening to the sound of the sea notionally produced by a sea-shell (figure 3.33).⁷⁶ The following year, 1811, Turner published an engraving of *Marine Dabblers*, showing a group of boys attempting to launch toy boats in the surf (figure 3.34).⁷⁷ In 1813 Henry Thomson exhibited a painting of members of the Grey family by the seashore with a donkey (figure 3.35).⁷⁸ However, as with his paintings of fish being sold on the beach, Collins broke new

⁷⁴ Fifty-seven out of sixty-seven paintings whose composition is known.

⁷⁵ F.W. Fairholt, 'Tombs of the English artists: No. 12, William Collins, R.A.', *Art Journal*, 1859, 44.

⁷⁶ *Girl picking up shells on the coast*, 1810, R.A. No. 120, present whereabouts unknown. For the identification of the girl as Howard's daughter see: Henry Howard, *A course of lectures on painting, delivered at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts*, edited with a Memoir of the Author by Frank Howard, London, 1848, p. lxxviii. For the painting's critical success, see, e.g., *Examiner*, 17 June 1810, 380.

⁷⁷ One of his *Liber Studiorum* studies, watercolour on paper, 17.6 x 26 cm., London, Tate Britain, D08133, etching and mezzotint published in June 1811.

⁷⁸ 1813, R.A. No. 212.

ground, right from the beginning. Two features are common to all Collins's paintings of children. The first is that the children engage with each other, and not the viewer. They appear, for that reason, to be entirely lacking in self-consciousness, a state not only consistent with their enjoyment of the shore, but also one which could be expected to resonate with the viewing public and trigger a train of associations. The second is that there is, in each case, an event which connects them. As I analyse below, this could be simply a conversation, a beach activity, or an adventure but once more, as with his early genre paintings, and his landscapes, there is a story being told. We, the viewers, are drawn into the scene Collins creates, recognising the interactions which accordingly appear to us to be naturalistic, 'true to nature' in contemporary phraseology. As the *Gentleman's Magazine* put it, in 1849, describing his approach to the models he used for his figure subjects:

He conversed with them and with their children; he studied their manners and way of life, and sketched them at some happy and fortunate moment; and, as a consequence, the picture which was the result of these studies presented a faithful and speaking delineation of the scene which he wished his pencil to describe.⁷⁹

The use of the word 'faithful' evidently connotes terms understood by Collins's contemporaries such as 'true to life', 'naturalistic'. The reviewer does not expand by what he meant by 'and speaking', but I suggest the intention was to suggest both a dialogue between the figures portrayed, and between the painting and the viewer (in terms of the train of thoughts and feelings experienced by the viewer). In this section I analyse a number of different categories of paintings of children on the shore which Collins pioneered: children in conversation, children playing on the beach, children playing in the shallows at low tide, and children having adventures on the cliffs. All of

⁷⁹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, April 1849, 385, reviewing Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins*.

these were, I suggest, calculated to produce reactions in the viewer similar to that expressed above by the *Gentleman's Magazine's* reviewer.

In Collins's first coastal scene of children, *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1816) the tide is out (figure 3.36). On the exposed sands, two groups of children are either digging out or searching in the water for marine life. At the end of what appears to be a jetty, three boys and an infant are congregated. The boy who is standing, and the boy sprawled on the ground both have a flat wicker basket and are paying attention to the boy seated with a younger sibling kneeling next to him, her hand on his shoulder. She, too, is looking at his cupped hands in which he is holding a few shrimps. He may be explaining some technique. It is instructive to look at the small changes that Collins made when transposing that group from an oil sketch that he made in Norfolk in 1815 to the canvas (figure 3.37).⁸⁰ In the finished work the standing boy now has his head slightly to one side, to emphasise his intent listening. The seated boy now has his hands clearly cupped. The girl has put her shrimps down, and has her hand on her brother's shoulder.⁸¹ Collins has removed the shrimps in the girl's lap and in front of the group, and the vegetation. This enables the viewer's eye to move, without distractions, to the group of children and enhances the sense of connection between the children.

In *Scene on the Coast of Norfolk* (1818) Collins focussed on two adolescents, deep in conversation (figure 3.38). In front of a cottage built just above the beach, a fisherman has just finished unloading his catch, depositing it just by the boys. In the distance, on the beach,

⁸⁰ Collins wrote to his mother from Norwich, in in requesting his mother to add in to a parcel she was sending 'two, three, four, (or more,) smooth, small panels. I wish to make some studies more finished than I choose to do so on millboard. I do not wish them large'. See Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 77.

⁸¹ Gear, *Masters or Servants?*, 141-42, analyses this painting in rather different terms, interpreting the few shrimps in the basket as indicating 'a poor day's catch' and that 'the boys will all go hungry to bed that night'.

nets are being hauled up, fish are being loaded on to a horse or donkey, and a woman is approaching with a small child to buy fish. One of the two adolescents is sitting on a bank. His companion sprawls on the ground, his right hand on one of the fish. He appears to be idly playing with it, rather than making some point about the fish. Their calm conversation contrasts neatly with the bustle around them. The two boys are momentarily in a world of their own, and it is their world which Collins privileges.

The beach is, of course, a natural playground. In *Preparing for a Voyage* (1817) two boys are playing by the water's edge, near a harbour full of fishing boats (figure 3.39). They are smartly dressed and wearing identical blue play clothes with a red lining (the boy on the left has taken his off). We can deduce that they are siblings or school friends, and that they are the children of visitors to the town. They have found an old fisherman's seaboot, and are trying it on for size – it is clearly much too big. From the title Collins chose for it, they are evidently imagining going out to sea themselves. The painting 'speaks' of the pleasures of beach-combing and make-believe. The make-believe aspect appears also in *Scene in Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight*, discussed above (figure 3.20). Henry, the future 14th Duke of Norfolk, wears something on his head approximating to an admiral's hat, which suggests that the boys have been playing at naval battles. Sand and dunes also provide opportunities for activities such as donkey riding, and making toy boats. *A scene at Aberystwith [sic], Cardigan Bay* (1842) shows Edmund Antrobus's three daughters about to set off on donkeys. *A scene at Seaford* (1844), shows three children, two boys and a girl, on dunes above the sweeping beach (figure 3.40). The overall impression is one of scorching heat. There is no wind, and the only active child is the youngest. He is fitting the mast to his toy boat, watched by the other two. To the children's right, a chine leads down to the beach and the opportunity to

sail it. Whether all four of these paintings double as portraits is not known at present, but producing portraits of children in an outdoor setting had been one of Collins's intentions from 1814 onwards.⁸² Certainly it was an approach which was critically acclaimed; the *Art-Union* enthused, of *A scene at Aberystwith* about 'several children in the foreground with precisely such heads as Reynolds would have delighted in painting. This is a method of treating the portraits of children, which succeeds beyond all others'.⁸³

The shallows left by the retreating tide gave endless opportunities for contemporary children to play, and to search for and collect shrimps, crabs and other living organisms and their shells, as indeed children do today. In *Children examining the contents of a net* (1826), a boy holds his net lowered so that the smaller child can see inside (figure 3.41). The focus is on the differing reactions of the two children examining the contents. The girl in the middle puts her hand in fearlessly to pick up the crab, but the younger child looks very doubtful. Here the children are just looking at what another child has found. The composition is extremely simple; some cliffs, sand, a rockpool and the children. That simplicity increases the associative impact of the scene on the viewer; there is nothing to distract from the group of children and the memories such a scene might evoke. Writing in 1847 of *Prawn Fishing* (1829), (figure 3.42), the *Art-Union's* critic observed:

Coast scenery of this kind has been extensively dealt with by some of the most celebrated of our artists; but they have never assumed to themselves a method of treating it so distinct and so exquisitely sweet as we find it here. There is literally nothing of a subject: the background is a low breadth of flat shore at low water, but it is brought forward with a tenderness rarely seen save in the work of Collins.⁸⁴

⁸² See Chapter Two, Section One.

⁸³ *Art-Union*, June 1842, 125.

⁸⁴ 'The Vernon Gallery', *Art-Union*, November 1847, 370.

The critic accordingly acknowledged that Collins's style was different, and distinctive. There are no boats at sea, there is the merest indication of a fishing village at the foot of the cliffs, and no people, boats or paraphernalia on the exposed sands. Hence there is 'literally nothing of a subject'. This serves to focus attention on the children and their activity, and elicit in the viewer sentiments which are 'exquisitely sweet'.

Prawn Fishing contains three children, but Collins was able to obtain the same effect using fewer or, alternatively more participants. In *The Young Shrimp Catchers* (1824), a girl has found something interesting and reaches into her pinafore for it (figure 3.43). She is wearing a coral necklace, popular and inexpensive at the time. Marcia Pointon refers to the contemporary beliefs that the wearing of coral served to ward off evil, and that it was associated with the Virgin Mary.⁸⁵ She stands on the wet sand, surrounded by shallow water, her brother kneeling at her feet. In *Prawn fishers at Hastings* (1825) children are either asking an older boy for some of his spoils, or being offered them (figure 3.44). The setting is the beach at low tide, with the town some way off in the background. A teenager with a fishing line stands with a basket in his hand and another slung at his back. To his left are a group of three children. One is a slightly younger boy who is holding his infant sibling on his back. He appears to be encouraging his sister, who wears a pinafore over her dress, to hold it out. She looks a little doubtful, but the teenager has his hand in his basket and seems happy enough to give her a few of his prawns.

Perhaps the most innovative, and certainly the most dramatic of the new subject-matter that Collins introduced involved children having adventures – scaling and descending

⁸⁵ Marcia R. Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery*, New Haven, Conn. & London, 2009, 129,134,135.

the cliffs that overlooked that sea. In *Returning from the Haunts of the Sea Fowl* (1833) four boys are descending the cliff, in pairs (figure 3.45). Between the two pairs is a cliff overhang, with a precipitous drop to the beach below. A fifth boy, with just his hat visible, has already started the descent to the beach. To the right stands a girl with a pinafore. She may be a sister, who hasn't undertaken the rather dangerous-looking final ascent. Or she may have been out walking the dog, perhaps in the company of us, the viewers. In any event, as Wilkie Collins pointed out in his biography of his father, she is pointing in alarm at the boy attempting to find a foothold on the edge of the overhanging rock.⁸⁶ Collins's representation of a precipitous descent attracted considerable attention from the critics. One commented that 'the scene has the extension of a vast and almost boundless horizon', another observed that 'the distance of the sands below the cliff is well represented', and a third admired the representation of 'the precipice ... the boys descending and the anxious countenance of the little Girl below'.⁸⁷ In *Scene at Ventnor* (1845), a group of three boys are climbing a cliff, accompanied by a dog (figure 3.46). Two of them, together with the dog, have already reached the summit. One of the boys is lying near the edge to give a helping hand to the third boy, who is poised with the right hand and feet on the final three footholds. Both boys are barefoot. The other boy is performing a dance on the high point of the cliff top. He has both hands raised above his head in triumph. Far below them on the sand a couple walking along the beach look up and point at the boy still climbing the last section of cliff. The boys

⁸⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 24. Gear, *Masters or Servants?*, 143, provides a less prosaic interpretation of the scene than mine: 'Two more sea creatures appear in *Returning from the Haunts of the Sea Fowl* [i.e. the boys she goes on to refer to]. Like intermediaries between gods and mortals, suspended between earth and sky in the sphere of the sea fowl wheeling and dipping around them, two boys descend a winding cliff path to marvelling companions below: their limbs are less well defined, their appearance more ragged and elfin-like, and altogether, they are less substantial and more ethereal'.

⁸⁷ *New Monthly Magazine*, June 1833, 235; *Spectator*, May 11th 1833, 432; *Arnold's Magazine of the Fine Arts*, June 1833, 188.

have with them two baskets and a pole with an iron hook at the end, so they appear to have started out the day shrimping, but have decided to do some scrambling. One critic wrote:

While it is admirable as a painting, it is eloquent as a story; how capital characteristic is the group of boys climbing up the cliff; one can absolutely hear the joyous huzza of the urchin who has reached the top; nor will it be very difficult to catch the murmurs of alarm which come from the venerable couple approaching from the background — full of terrors lest the adventurous rogues should fall.⁸⁸

This particular reviewer appears to have encapsulated Collins's approach in producing what the *Gentleman's Magazine* characterised (above) as 'a speaking delineation of the scene'. His paintings tell a story, in addition to depicting coastal scenery, and the viewers who can read the story being told can draw on, and relive their own experiences of playing as children by the sea.

This quality distinguishes Collins's work from that of, for example, the French coastal paintings of Bonington. Bonington's name has been linked by Patrick Noon with that of Collins. Noon observes that 'there are striking similarities between Collins's mature style and that which Bonington was evolving after his London visit [i.e. in 1826], and the possibility of Collins having modestly influenced his development at this stage cannot be dismissed'.⁸⁹ However, if one looks at late Bonington paintings, e.g. *A Picardy coast scene with children – Sunrise* (1826), (figure 3.47), or *On the côte d'Opale, Picardy* (c.1826-7), (figure 3.48), neither contain the two features which I have identified as characteristic of Collins's work. The first indeed includes two small children looking at fish, but they are not interacting either with

⁸⁸ *Art-Union*, June 1845, 183.

⁸⁹ Patrick J. Noon, *Richard Parkes Bonington: On the Pleasures of Painting*, Exhibition Catalogue: Yale Center for British Art, 13 November 1991 – 19 January 1992; Petit Palais, Paris, 5 March to 17 May 1992, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991, 52-3. At note 131, Noon suggests 'the possibility of Bonington having influenced Collins, which is less likely, cannot be ruled out since Collins was in Paris in the summer of 1824 and could have seen Bonington's Salon oils', but there appears to be no evidence to support the suggestion that Collins visited Paris in 1824.

each other or directly with the fish. The painting has a somewhat static quality, very different from, e.g. *Children examining the Contents of a Net* (figure 3.41). The second, *On the côte d'Opale*, certainly contains a number of individual elements featured in Collins's work, such as a leaning boy, other children, baskets, abandoned equipment – compare, for example, Collins's *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1816) (figure 3.36). However, in Bonington's painting there is no interaction between the children, no 'scene'. In that respect, his later beach paintings do not appear to differ from his earlier works of 1824 and 1825.

Turner did not exhibit an oil painting of children on a beach until 1840. His *The New Moon; or, 'I've lost My Boat, You shan't have Your Hoop'* does indeed show (albeit almost incidental to the dominant portrayal of sand, sea and sky) a mother trying to calm her two squabbling children (figure 3.49).⁹⁰ Being at the seaside is not always an idyllic experience. It is possible that, in deciding to exhibit a painting of squabbling on the shore, Turner was reacting to Collins's painting, exhibited the previous year, of Italian children 'playing nicely' by the shore, in *Naples; Young Lazzaroni playing the game of Arravoglio* (figure 3.50).⁹¹ But given Collins's track record of beach scenes by that date, *The New Moon* can perhaps be seen as a slightly rueful tribute. It was Collins who had established the subject-matter of children on the beach as a category of coastal painting, and by 1840 many artists were treading in his footsteps.⁹²

⁹⁰ Exhibited 1840, R.A. No. 243.

⁹¹ This painting is discussed in Chapter Five, Section Two, *Rest days and (holy)days and the role of the Church*.

⁹² For example, William Shayer, Henry Perlee Parker, Thomas Sword Good.

Social boundaries at the seaside

A final aspect of Collins's engagement with the idea of the shore as a liminal place is his portrayal of it as a place where social boundaries are washed away. Collins's career coincided with a significant expansion in recreational visits to the coast and in the infrastructure of coastal resorts.⁹³ As Payne has observed, at the coast it was not practicable to preserve the social distinctions between classes maintained in the town or country: 'On the beach, aristocracy and gentry could find themselves sitting in close proximity to tradesmen and clerks'.⁹⁴ This aspect, coupled with the opportunity to see both sexes in various stages of undress and nudity, gave rise to a rich vein of humour, both in literature and graphic art. In literature, this was explored in Jane Austen's unfinished novel *Sanditon* (1825), and by Charles Dickens in his satirical short story 'The Tuggses at Ramsgate' (1836).⁹⁵ With respect to graphic art of the Regency period, Payne refers to Thomas Rowlandson's *Summer Amusements at Margate, or a Peep at the Mermaids* (1813).⁹⁶ She goes on to discuss the mid-Victorian period, beginning with William Powell Frith's *Ramsgate Sands* (1854) and the cartoons in *Punch* by John Leech in the late 1850s, which 'kept the idea of the seaside as a place for pretension, embarrassment and absurdity at the forefront of the public mind'.⁹⁷

However, Collins painted a gently satirical portrait of the beach resort a generation earlier than Frith and Leech in his *The Morning Bath* (1831) (figure 3.51). The scene is probably Ramsgate, which had been a popular bathing resort for many years. The Collins

⁹³ John Walton, *The English seaside resort: A social history 1750-1914*, Leicester, 1983, 18.

⁹⁴ Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 87.

⁹⁵ Published 31 March 1836 in Chapman and Hall's *Library of Fiction*, vol. I, no.1, see Michael Slater, ed., *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism: Sketches by Boz, and other early papers, 1833-39*, London: J.M. Dent, 1994, vol. I, 327.

⁹⁶ Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 100.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87,95.

family were holidaying there from 1829, at the latest.⁹⁸ Benjamin West had painted a similar scene during the 1780's, an engraving of which Collins would probably have seen (figure 3.53).⁹⁹ Both paintings feature an unwilling looking infant, a mother and what appears to be a professional bathing woman. In West's picture, it seems that the infant is about to be handed over for a dip (it is clutching its mother's sleeve), and the bathing woman is young, and lightly dressed. Collins has kept West's main group but the bathing woman is older and remarkably over-dressed for the task, evidently a satirical reference to the unflattering but commonly held view of such persons, as expressed, for example, by Constable in a letter to John Fisher of 1824: 'those hideous amphibious animals the old bathing women, whose language both in oaths and voice resembles men'.¹⁰⁰ She is handing the infant back to its mother. Another older girl, who may be the infant's sibling or perhaps the child of the adult behind, stands barefoot on the sand. She does not appear to be happy, and is almost certainly next in line for the bathing woman's attentions.

There is nothing to suggest that Collins shared Constable's particularly forthright view of bathing women, but the contrast in dress of the characters involved clearly gave scope for visual humour. A strand of humour runs through all of Collins's early work, as discussed in Chapter One above, and it comes to the surface in this, and many other coastal paintings. It can be seen, e.g. in the group bidding in *A Fish Auction* (figure 3.3). Whilst the portrayal of the hard of hearing tradesman might well offend modern susceptibilities, contemporary reviewers appreciated it: according to *New Monthly Magazine* 'the deaf listener is

⁹⁸ Letter from Harriet and William Collins to Francis Collins, 13 September 1829, Morgan Library, MA3156.2.

⁹⁹ Center for British Art, Yale, Paul Mellon Collection, OOC, 35.5 x 44.5 cm., dated between 1780 and 1788, and in West's possession 1791. Engraved: 'stipple engraving (4 1/16th x 5 in.) by William Birch, pub. By Birch, 1 Dec.1788, and illustrated in Birch's *Delices de la Grande Bretagne* (1791).

¹⁰⁰ *John Constable's correspondence*, VI, 171, cited in Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 91.

excellent'.¹⁰¹ Humour is plain to see in *Buying Fish on the Beach* (1825) (figure 3.7). Collins's three scenes of Boulogne fisher women likewise have a humorous aspect; no work is being done but there is a great deal of talk (figures 3.9, 3.10, 3.11 and 3.13). Collins's addition of humour appears to be in sympathy with the characters he portrays, rather than ridiculing them or showing unkindness. Any viewer who had attended an auction could be expected to sympathise with a deaf person attempting to follow the bidding. A small child is unlikely to want to pick up a slippery dead fish, and the disparity in size between the substantial fish which has been purchased and the fish proffered by the brother adds to the visual humour. A beach with no one in earshot and no work to do is a good place to exchange gossip. In adding a humorous twist to his scenes, Collins appears very much in step with the views of contemporary commentators on humour in literature, such as Barbauld, Lamb and Hazlitt, as analysed by Matthew Ward.¹⁰² Ward observes that, in his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge expressed his 'belief in the artist's responsibility to display the commonplace in such a way as to remain truthful to nature yet awaken new sympathetic feelings in the audience'.¹⁰³ A sense of the ridiculous in the commonplace is apparent in Collins's *A Windy Day* (1843) (figure 3.53). A fisherman stands on the edge of the water, bracing himself against a stiff breeze coming off the sea. His catch of fish is piled on the shore in front of him. A woman and child stand in front the fish, their hair and clothing streaming out behind them. Behind them is their dog, with his ears back and his tail out behind him.

¹⁰¹ *New Monthly Magazine*, 1823, 254.

¹⁰² Matthew Ward, 'Laughter, Ridicule, and Sympathetic Humor in the Early Nineteenth Century', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol. 57 (4), 2017, 733-38.

¹⁰³ Ward, 'Laughter, Ridicule, and Sympathetic Humor', 740.

One consequence of residents and visitors mingling on the coast was the opportunity it gave for the children of visitors to mix with, and fraternise with the children of residents, and indeed working fishermen. The extent to which visitors' children were left to their own devices in playing and rock-pooling on the beach is not clear but, conspicuously, Collins's children at the coast invariably roam free from adult supervision. From the analysis of Collins's early work in Chapter One it will be apparent that Collins used clothing as a means of denoting class distinctions between children, and this frequently assists in decoding what social background the children in his coastal paintings are intended to be seen as coming from. Sometimes it is very clear as to whether he is portraying visitors or local children. *The Morning Bath* (figure 3.52) evidently shows visitors, as does *Preparing for a Voyage* (figure 3.39). We know that *The Young Shrimp Catchers* (figure 3.43) are fisher children since they are so described in Collins's Notebook.¹⁰⁴

But in other cases it does appear that children from different backgrounds are mixing. In *Returning from the haunts of the sea fowl* (figure 3.45) the lower pair of boys sport shoes and a satchel respectively, and are not carrying hooks and baskets, which suggest that they may be visitors. The upper pair of boys are carrying all the equipment, their clothing appears to be of poorer quality and one of them is barefoot. The viewer is left to speculate as to whether this is a joint expedition, or whether money has changed hands to enable the city boys to have an adventure. In *Scene at Ventnor* (figure 3.46), the boy doing a triumphal dance at the top is wearing shoes. The other two are barefoot, and the child being given a helping hand has torn trousers. This suggests that they are respectively visitor and fisher

¹⁰⁴ William Collins, Notebook I, f.23^r.

children. In *Prawn fishers at Hastings* (figure 3.44), the teenager with the prawns wears a fisherman's hat and so can be taken to be from a resident fishing family. The other three appear to be visitors. The older boy has been paddling and has his trousers rolled up, but is wearing a hat. His sister is well-dressed, with shoes and a pinafore. In some paintings the position is more ambiguous. In *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (figure 3.36), the boy doing the demonstration wears a fisherman's cap, and the boy he is talking to, sprawled on the ground, is barefoot and his clothing is torn at the shoulder. We are evidently to see them as local residents. The boy on the left, however, could be a visitor. He has shoes on, and is wearing a jacket. The fisher boys may well be explaining to him, before he sets off with his basket, what he needs to do.

Payne identifies the decade of the 1850s as the time at which artists began to engage with the issues of social mixing at the seaside, and the resulting opportunities for humour.¹⁰⁵ In her chapter 'Seaside Visitors', she discusses Frith's *Ramsgate Sands* (1854), Abraham Solomon's *A Contrast* (1855), and the *Punch* illustrations, 1849-64, of John Leech, but she does not reference Collins in this context. I would argue, however, that with a series of paintings of the seaside spanning almost three decades, from *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1816) and *Preparing for a Voyage* (1817) to *Scene at Ventnor* (1845) Collins explored many of the same themes. The fact that he did so in an understated way, compared with the artists of the 1850s and 1860s may, of course, have contributed to their significance being lost.

¹⁰⁵ Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 87, 95.

Conclusion

Collins's paintings of the coast were considered by contemporary reviewers and collectors to be exceptionally fine, but his name rarely features in modern studies of nineteenth-century coastal painting. Such reference as has been made has focussed on a very small part of his output. Partly this has been due to the limited number of his works in public collections. Partly it has been due to the concentration of scholarship on the work of canonical artists, and the perception that Collins's work cannot easily be linked with scholars' successive historiographical interests, e.g. in modernity, colonialism or the ideology of the coast as a defensive national boundary. This focus on themes which could not be discerned in Collins's work, given his allusive style, has I suggest led to his marginalisation, and to dismissive generalisations about the style and content of his coastal paintings. However, by considering his output of coastal paintings as a whole (90% of which is now known either through image or description) it is possible to distinguish the themes which particularly interested him.

His coastal paintings reveal a clear intention to convey what can be described as 'the sentiment of place', that is, the perception by the viewer of a familiarity with the landscape depicted. Collins sought to achieve this, not by topographical correctness, but by referencing key visual features of an actual stretch of coastline whilst re-arranging the overall composition in accordance with the associationist principles underpinning his landscape paintings. The impression of naturalism was strengthened by the inclusion of figures who could be perceived as real people, as opposed to stock figures – e.g. the buyers and sellers in his paintings of fishermen on the beach. The different portrayal of English, French and Italian coastal scenes by Collins demonstrates not only an interest in the sentiment of place, but an

early ethnographic interest in ‘the different physiognomy, manners and habits’ of different nationalities.

In his coastal paintings Collins incorporated two distinctive features of his landscape paintings. First was his extensive use of children, calculated to increase the associationist impact on the viewer. Also, his paintings told a story, thus producing a dialogue not only between the figures in the painting but between the painting and the viewer. To the extent that the story is not immediately obvious, or is ambiguous, the viewer is invited to construct their own narrative.

His paintings explore many different aspects of the shoreline’s liminality, a borderline between safety and danger, life and death, the human and the infinite. In his paintings of incoming tides, dangerous sands, venturing into the sea either to journey or to work as a fisherman, many allusions to contemporary literature can be found. Many of these paintings, e.g. *Leaving Home for the Night Fishing*, *Morning after a Storm* can be seen as direct forerunners of later nineteenth-century representations of the perils of the sea, and the anguish of those who wait on land. His painting *Summer Moonlight* appears to contain not only literary references but an allegory of the voyage of life. In his paintings of children talking, playing, rock-pooling and adventuring on the beach, Collins invented entirely new categories of painting, expressing on canvas the feelings of liberation, and freedom from the usual restrictions of everyday life that contemporary poetry celebrated and which are still felt today by visitors to the shore.

Paintings portraying the mixing of classes at the seaside, and the breakdown of contemporary social conventions gave the artist an opportunity to elicit in their viewers a range of reactions from disapproval to laughter. The appearance of this subject-matter,

certainly in Royal Academy exhibitions, is currently dated to the 1850s. However, Collins's satirical portrayal of a seaside scene in *A Morning Bath* was exhibited a generation earlier in 1831. Children pay less attention to class distinctions than their parents, of course, and numerous coastal paintings by Collins spanning the period 1816-44 show the poorer children of the seaside communities engaging with the wealthier children of visitors.

The analysis undertaken in this chapter of his coastal paintings serves both to explain the very high regard in which Collins was held by contemporaries, and to highlight the need to rethink the current narrative of nineteenth-century English coastal painting. That narrative, I suggest, requires extensive revision so as to include Collins as a leading player.

CHAPTER FOUR

1831 to 1836: Collins's response to social upheaval

Introduction

Writing in 1855, the author of an *Art Journal* essay on Collins, in its series on British artists, characterised him as 'Foremost among the class of artists whom we described last month...as "sunshine painters"'.¹ Explaining that term, the writer continued:

His pencil, unlike that of Constable, was never dipped in the colours of the thunderstorm; it delighted not in the warring elements: the fierce passions of humanity were never perpetuated by it, nor the miseries to which Providence sometimes subjects the good.²

This suggests that Collins was perceived as an artist who deliberately chose anodyne subjects, avoiding any reference to contentious or difficult issues of his day. This chapter examines four of Collins's paintings, executed in the period 1831 to 1836, in order to show that, far from being an artist wholly disengaged from the darker side of life, his work in the early 1830's demonstrates an awareness of, and engagement with the social upheaval surrounding him, and great sympathy for the plight of ordinary people.

Most of my focus in this chapter will be on a single painting, *Rustic Civility* (1832), (figure 4.1).³ In Section one, I will argue that the traditional view of this painting as representing a false image of rustic harmony in the countryside is misguided. On the contrary, *Rustic Civility* should be seen as an indictment by Collins of conditions in the countryside, of rural poverty, lack of education and opportunity. In Section two, I look at three other paintings Collins exhibited in this period: *Skittle Players* (1831-32) (figure 4.17),

¹ 'British Artists: Their Style and Character, with engraved illustrations. No. V. William Collins, R.A.', *Art Journal*, May 1855, 141.

² *Ibid.*, 141.

³ Exhibited 1832 R.A. No. 29.

Happy as a King (1835-36) (figure 4.18), and *Leaving Home* (1835-36) (figure 3.29).⁴ All three paintings, I argue, reinforce my interpretation of *Rustic Civility*, in that they likewise demonstrate an understanding of, and engagement by Collins with social issues of his day. All these paintings demonstrate that, contrary to the *Art Journal's* characterisation of Collins as a 'sunshine painter', Collins was concerned with the 'fierce passions' and 'miseries' of everyday life, albeit his concerns are depicted in an allusive manner.

Section One: Rustic Civility (1831, 1833)

Collins painted two versions of this work. The original was painted for exhibition at the Royal Academy (figure 4.1). From its position in Collins's Notebook, we can deduce that it was painted in the late summer and autumn of 1831.⁵ It was purchased at the 1832 Exhibition by the Duke of Devonshire.⁶ No engravings were made from that painting. It has been exhibited three times, in 1897, 1995 and 1998.⁷ In 1833, Collins was commissioned to paint a smaller copy, by the collector John Sheepshanks (figure 4.2).⁸ The tone of this smaller version is noticeably brighter. Engravings were made from this version. In addition to differences in size, and tonality, there are small differences of detail between the two versions of the

⁴ Exhibited 1832, R.A. No. 112, 1836, R.A. No. 194, and 1836 R.A. No. 175.

⁵ William Collins, Notebook II, f.7^r. It comes immediately after three paintings specifically stated to have been completed in June and July 1831.

⁶ The painting is at Chatsworth, having passed by descent since 1832. It was almost certainly at Chatsworth from the time it was acquired, rather than the Duke's London residence, since it is otherwise difficult to make sense of a letter Collins wrote to Edwin Landseer in 1834, as to the London based engraver John Outtrim having to use the smaller, 1833 version in order to engrave the painting (letter William Collins to Edwin Landseer, 23 June 1834, Morgan Library, MA 3519).

⁷ Diamond Jubilee Exhibition, London, Guildhall, 1897; *Gombrich on Shadows, Exhibition Catalogue*, London, National Gallery, 26 April to 18 June 1995; Payne, *Rustic simplicity*, University of Nottingham, 26 September to 8 November 1998 and Penlee House, Penzance, 25 November 1998 to 9 January 1999.

⁸ William Collins, Notebook II, f.9^r. The Notebook records that it was begun in the summer and finished in December 1833. The size of Sheepshank's painting is 45.6 x 61 cm. The original measures 71.6 x 91.7 cm.

painting; to distinguish between them, where this is necessary, I shall refer to them as ‘the Devonshire version’ and ‘the Sheepshanks version’.

I begin with a description of the paintings. I then explore the history of their reception by contemporaries, and the guides to the collections containing them prepared during the following thirty years. I deal then with the views expressed in modern scholarship. I go on to analyse a number of elements of the paintings, linking these to the social and political background against which Collins painted them, in order to question the interpretation (which has been more or less consistent) of these paintings. I conclude that they are highly ambiguous paintings, and offer a new interpretation that revises established critical opinion.

Description of the paintings

The following description applies to both paintings unless otherwise stated. A person or persons are approaching a gate on a country lane. The first person is mounted, since the shadow of the horse’s head appears on the ground, together with the shadow of its rider, and their hat. There are no other clues to their identity. The lane leads past the gate through an avenue of trees and bears to the left. On the right hand side is a fence of wooden palings. It appears very regular, relatively new. A striking feature is the abruptness with which it cuts off the fine tree overhanging the road. The gate is a simple, five-barred gate. It is unclear whether it has been opened by the children, or whether they have simply congregated around it. The title to the painting might suggest that their ‘civility’ extends to their having opened it specially, but perhaps it only extends to standing aside. A bundle of faggots tied to a carrying pole lies close by. It is reasonable to assume the oldest child has put this down. On

the left, a grassy track leads upwards from the lane. In the Devonshire version this track ends abruptly at a wall, in which a stile is set. Beyond this are three structures. On the left is what appears to be a dwelling, since it has a simple porch. If so, it is a very humble one. There is no sign of a chimney, or of smoke rising from any hearth. No windows are visible. The walls appear to be constructed of tree branches or, perhaps, crudely finished planks. The roof is of the simplest thatch. Immediately to the right there is another very simple structure, which may be another thatched dwelling. The third structure, behind and to the right of the dwellings, is a barn of equally basic construction. In the Sheepshanks version the track leads to another gate. The structures have been reduced to two: the dwelling with the simple porch, and the barn. To the left of the track, and between the dwelling and the lane, both versions show a flat grassed area in front of the dwelling, which drops steeply to the lane.

Around the gate are grouped three children and a small dog. The oldest child, a boy, stands in front of the gate. A little girl, presumably his sister, stands close by his side. Behind the gate, holding a bar, and with his foot on a lower bar, is another younger child, presumably a brother. The dog stands close to him. Neither boy has shoes and the older boy's clothing is in a very poor state. The right sleeve and shoulder of his shirt are ripped. His waistcoat is frayed, torn and most buttons are missing. His trousers are similarly ragged. His little brother is wearing a garment which is much too big for him. The girl's clothes appear to be in slightly better condition, and she has shoes. Slung around the older boy's left shoulder is a satchel.⁹ All three children, and the dog also, are looking intently at whoever is approaching.

⁹ This can be clearly seen in the Devonshire version.

The Reception history of the paintings

Previous chapters on Collins's landscape and coastal painting have discussed the associationist impact Collins' paintings could have had upon their viewers, particularly in terms of stimulating their memories of English landscapes they were familiar with. Critics of *Rustic Civility* explicitly made the link with familiar landscape. As the *Library of the Fine Arts* put it:

Mr Collins is decidedly the artist to whom we should refer if asked for an instance of the genuine English school: for he gives us English scenery and English manners in all their varieties with peculiar truth and perception. The 'Rustic Civility' is what everyone has witnessed in real life.¹⁰

Or, as this reviewer wrote: 'It would not be too extravagant to characterise this as the gem of the year's exhibition ... The whole picture is redolent of nature'.¹¹ To this extent, *Rustic Civility* was seen as one of his most successful portrayals of the English landscape. Twenty-five years later, when the Sheepshanks version came to the South Kensington Museum as part of the Sheepshanks gift, Richard Redgrave commented of the landscape paintings comprised in the gift: 'Some of these are so peculiarly English in subject, and in their treatment of it, that their works appeal strongly to English feelings'.¹² This echoes the *Library of the Fine Arts*, quoted above.

However, three other aspects of the paintings appear to have shaped the way in which *Rustic Civility* has been understood since its exhibition in 1832. I look at these in turn.

¹⁰ *Library of the Fine Arts*, July 1832, 513.

¹¹ Review from a publication, at present unidentified, June 1832, 540, a copy of which is in the series of binders of reviews of genre paintings 1806-33, held at the Paul Mellon Centre, London.

¹² Richard Redgrave, *Introductory addresses on the Science and Art Department and the South Kensington Museum, No.2, on the Gift of the Sheepshanks Collection, with a view to the formation of a National Gallery of British Art*, London, 1857, 9.

First was the artist's ingenuity in portraying the oncoming horse and rider using only their shadow cast in front of them. The *Athenaeum's* reviewer for the 1832 Royal Academy Exhibition concluded with: 'We could not describe the work without speaking of the rider, but the artist has told all that we have told, and more, without painting him'.¹³ For *Bell's Weekly Messenger* this was: 'A beautiful representation of rustic nature, painted with great vigour of effect. The introducing of the shadow of the coming traveller on horseback adds an interest to the subject, and is a just and forcible touch of nature'.¹⁴ The 6th Duke of Devonshire himself, in his 1845 guide to Chatsworth, wrote: 'People are amused at having to find out what is coming through the gate, which few do, till the shadow on the ground is pointed out to them'.¹⁵

Second was the deference apparently being shown by the children, evidently regarded as appropriate, to the oncoming rider. As the *Athenaeum* put it:

Three peasant children have been gathering sticks, and are come to a gate, towards which a rider of rank approaches — the youngest squats unconcerned on the ground, while the eldest, with a singular mixture of bashfulness and awe in his face, puts his hand to where his hat should be, and makes an obeisance with his looks.¹⁶

That such 'appropriate deference' was in the natural order of things was an aspect picked up also by the reviewer for the *Examiner*: 'a little boy is preparing to open a gate for an approaching passenger, with the air of shyness and respect so natural to a timid cottage youth'.¹⁷ Third was the perceived willingness of the children to oblige. Implicit in many of the

¹³ *Athenaeum*, 12 May 1832, 309.

¹⁴ *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 10 June 1832.

¹⁵ William George Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, *Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick*, London, 1845, 64.

¹⁶ *Athenaeum*, 12 May 1832, 309.

¹⁷ *Examiner*, 1 July 1832, 421.

reviews quoted above, it emerges most clearly in the *Atlas*, where the reviewer describes the painting as ‘a pleasing scene: the actors, peasant children. The ruddy glow of health and natural benevolence of disposition shine together, and blend in beauty on their good-humoured faces’.¹⁸

Only one or two reviewers picked up on potentially ominous aspects of the painting. The reviewer who regarded *Rustic Civility* as ‘the gem of the exhibition’ noted an ambiguity about the demeanour of the children, referring to them as ‘half-laughing, half-frightened peasants’.¹⁹ The reviewer for the *Literary Gazette* observed: ‘Mr Collins might, with reference to this picturesque and Gainsborough like performance, have aptly quoted Campbell’s well-known line: “And coming events cast their shadows before”’.²⁰ On the assumption that he intended the reader to put that line in context he showed, as I will go on to argue, a singular ability to swim against the tide of critical opinion. The line comes from Thomas Campbell’s poem *Lochiel’s Warning* (1801), in which towards the end of the poem, the wizard, despairing of convincing Lochiel not to commit himself to the fatal battle of Culloden says:

’Tis the sunset of life gives me mystical lore,
And coming events cast their shadow before.
I tell thee, Culloden’s dread echoes shall ring
With the bloodhounds, that bark for thy fugitive king.²¹

The reviewer’s poetical reference is accordingly a reference to a portent of danger ahead.

¹⁸ *Atlas*, 27 May 1832.

¹⁹ Review from a publication, at present unidentified, June 1832, 540, a copy of which in the series of binders of reviews of genre paintings 1806-33, held at the Paul Mellon Centre, London.

²⁰ *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 19 May 1832, 314.

²¹ Thomas Campbell, *The Poetical Works of Thomas Campbell, Reprinted from the Early Editions*, London & New York: Frederick Warne and Co., 1874, 104. The battle of Culloden saw a decisive defeat for the Young Pretender’s army by the Duke of Cumberland, and marked the end of the Jacobite uprising. The reprisals which followed were brutal.

Following the 1832 exhibition, reception of the paintings followed the tracks established by the overwhelming majority of the reviewers. Wilkie Collins refers to the 'beautiful woodland landscape', the two smaller children 'roguishly ambushed behind the bars of the gate' and 'peeping out with wild shyness' respectively, and the 'novelty of the manner in which the approach of the traveller...is indicated'.²² Echoes of the same points emerge in the commentary provided by the artist Richard Redgrave in the late 1850's following the arrival of the Sheepshanks version at the South Kensington Museum. In his 1858 catalogue of the paintings, Redgrave's entry for the Sheepshanks version states: 'Three children hold open the gate of a green lane for a passenger, whose shadow is projected on the foreground. The picture is very agreeable for colour, and the actions of the children simple and natural'.²³ In 1865 the *Art Journal* published a short piece about the Sheepshanks version, which echoes the comments of Redgrave and the original reviewers.²⁴

The modern catalogue of the V&A's paintings repeats the 6th Duke of Devonshire's comment about the shadow in his 1845 Guide, quoted above, and adds:

A great part of the charm and popularity of the picture is indeed due to the way two of the village children (one touching his forelock in deference) gaze at the approaching gentleman on horseback, whose shadow only is included in the painting, whilst the smallest child looks directly out at the spectator.²⁵

Modern scholarship has interpreted the painting as demonstrating Collins's attachment to the landed interest and the preservation of a hierarchical rural structure. Josephine Gear, in her 1976 PhD thesis, described the Sheepshanks version of *Rustic Civility* as containing 'more

²² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 10-11.

²³ Richard Redgrave, *A Catalogue of the Pictures, Drawings, Etchings, &C. In the British Fine Art Collections Deposited in the New Gallery at South Kensington : Being for the Most Part the Gift of John Sheepshank*, London, 1858, 36, No.27 *Rustic Civility*.

²⁴ *Art Journal*, August 1865, 234, 'Selected pictures, from the Sheepshanks Collection, National Gallery: *Rustic Civility*'.

²⁵ Ronald Parkinson, *Victoria & Albert Museum: Catalogue of British Oil Paintings 1820-1860*, London, 1990, 36.

than a hint of lower-class deference in the eldest child's gesture', pointing out that this delighted the critics (by reference to the *Athenaeum's* review) and positioning the work as appealing to early nineteenth-century taste and consciousness of social distinctions.²⁶

Michael Rosenthal, writing in 1982, expressed himself more forcefully in dismissing the Sheepshanks version in the following terms:

After Palmer agricultural landscape is hardly distinguished. Collins showed one way of confronting the poor in *Rustic Civility (Plate 119)* of 1833, where the mawkish sentimentality is compounded by the lad pulling his forelock. At least Stubbs's poor had not sunk to such subservience.²⁷

In 1985 the V&A described their painting as illustrating:

an age-old state of society, by no means obsolete during the first half of the 19th century [*sic*], when ragged, shoeless children of the poor could earn a copper by performing small services...the oldest child of the little group touches his forehead as a sign of subservient respect for the mounted 'gentleman', whose shadow falls across the path in the foreground of the painting.²⁸

Whilst the opening lines are doubtless correct as a general comment, there is nothing within the painting itself to indicate a payment for services is being sought, or offered. Rather, the writer adopts the assumptions made by the majority of contemporary reviewers. In the 1990s Christiana Payne discussed the Devonshire version in the catalogues to two exhibitions, in 1993 and 1998-99.²⁹ In the 1993 exhibition, *Toil and Plenty: Images of the Agricultural Landscape in England 1780-1890*, she introduces the painting as one of 'a few

²⁶ Gear, *Masters or Servants*, 147-48.

²⁷ Michael Rosenthal, *British Landscape Painting*, Oxford, 1982, 118.

²⁸ Victoria and Albert Museum, *A hundred great paintings in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 1985, 126.

²⁹ Christiana Payne, *Toil and Plenty: images of the agricultural landscape in England 1780-1890*, New Haven and London, 1993, Exhibition Catalogue, Nottingham University Art Gallery 7 October to 14 November 1993, Yale Center for British Art 15 January to 13 March 1994, 29-30; Payne, Christiana, *Rustic simplicity: scenes of cottage life in Nineteenth century British Art*, Exhibition Catalogue, Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham, 26 September to 8 November 1998; Penlee House, Penzance, 25 November 1998 to 9 January 1999, 1998, cat. 7, 57-58.

paintings from this period [which] emphasise the social harmony of the countryside directly and unambiguously'.³⁰ Since *Rustic Civility* does not show an agricultural landscape, it appears that this reference to the Devonshire version was included in the 1993 catalogue in order to illustrate her commentary on the prevalence of the myth that the countryside, as opposed to the town, was a happier place populated by morally better persons – 'People evidently liked to believe in the social hierarchy of the countryside, to see it as a site of stable social relationships'.³¹ In the 1998-99 exhibition, *Rustic Simplicity: Scenes of Cottage Life in Nineteenth-Century British Art*, the painting is described as a 'now-notorious' and 'explicit' portrayal of 'a framework of paternalism and deference, already coming to be seen as old-fashioned and patronising in the mid-nineteenth century, hopelessly outmoded now'.³² In essence, this is a restatement, albeit in rather more measured language, of the view expressed by Rosenthal in 1982. However, I shall argue that a closer examination of the painting itself (in particular the Devonshire version with its darker tones), the social and political background and the contemporary limitations on artistic expression, demonstrate that *Rustic Civility* is a far more ambiguous work than Payne asserts. I argue that its portrayal of class, rural poverty and its effect upon children, reflect serious contemporary social concerns, which Collins was well aware of.

Interpreting the paintings

Many elements of these paintings either hint at, or more explicitly reference social and economic exclusion. Take, for example, the fence, and the way in which it presses against the

³⁰ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

³² Payne, *Rustic simplicity*, 7.

tree. It appears to slice through the landscape, working against nature rather than with it. From the bundle of faggots lying by the gate, it is evident that the children have been collecting firewood. Has the land behind the fence been enclosed, so restricting the local populace's access to such essentials as firewood? Rioting, unrest and protest, because of the consequences of enclosure on the rural poor, continued well into the nineteenth century. As J.M. Neeson has explained in *Commoners*, woodlands were a particularly important source of firewood, foraged food, and material for craft and construction purposes.³³ Even when such unrest had subsided, a legacy of hostility and anger towards the landowners responsible for enclosures remained.³⁴

One of the boys in the painting is positioned behind the gate. There would evidently have been room for Collins to have placed him to the left of his brother, in front of the gate, had he wished to do so. How are we to interpret his position behind the bars, and the posture he has adopted, seemingly wanting to climb out from behind it? Are they merely naturalistic touches, or should we interpret this as an image of a child who is shut out, excluded in some way? If we look at the clothing, it is obvious that these children are from a very impoverished family. Perhaps one of the very basic dwellings up the track behind them, is their home. It is telling that no smoke rises from any hearth. We are a very long way indeed from *A Scene in Borrowdale* with its well-dressed children and lit hearths (figure 2.11). Do their family own the home, and the barn? If so, they have clearly fallen a long way. If the family rent it, they are evidently struggling, as so many of the rural population at the time did, to make ends meet, and pay the rent so as to avoid eviction and absolute

³³ J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England 1700-1820*, Cambridge, 1993, Chapter 6 : 'The Use of Waste', *passim*.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

destitution. An indication that the family might indeed have become increasingly impoverished, so as not to be able to clothe the children properly, could be the satchel slung around the older boy's left shoulder. While a satchel had many uses, its use as an accessory signifying school age goes back at least to Shakespeare's time.³⁵ The boy is of an age where he should be going to school, but evidently he is not there. He is gathering firewood and looking after his siblings. He has no proper clothes to wear to school, in any event. Perhaps the satchel has been turned to other uses. Perhaps it conceals game, unlawfully poached, but providing essential sustenance. The Game Act 1831 made the problem worse by transferring the ownership of game from the occupier of land to the landowner.³⁶ The Act was being debated in the summer of 1831, that is, just as Collins was starting work on the painting.³⁷

Careful study of the demeanour of the children (and, indeed, the dog) in both versions suggests rather different conclusions from those reached by the critics (figure 4.3). If the person or persons approaching them are known to them, their attitude towards those persons is in no way friendly. The body language, posture and gaze of the two younger children and the dog appear almost hostile. If that person or persons are strangers (as at least one of the reviewers assumed) then their attitude is not one of welcoming assistance but of suspicion. Certainly the demeanour of the older child is more complicated. He gives a sidelong glance at the oncoming party or parties, but makes a polite gesture nonetheless. If

³⁵ Jacques' soliloquy 'All the World's a Stage': 'Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel|And shining morning face, creeping like snail |Unwillingly to school'. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene VII, lines 145-7.

³⁶ Harry Hopkins, *The Long Affray : The Poaching Wars, 1760-1914*, London, 1985, 197.

³⁷ The committee stage was deferred on 26 July 1831, and the report stage was reached on 31 August 1831: *Hansard*, HC Deb 26 July 1831 vol 5 c387, & HC Deb 31 August 1831 vol 6 cc 954-55.

he knows the oncoming person, then he appears to be afraid of him for some reason. Trespassing on the land of the oncoming rider in order to gather firewood, and perhaps forage for nuts, berries or small game would of course have been unlawful, with serious consequences if one was caught in the act, which might well account for the ambiguity of the older child's response. If he does not know him, his demeanour appears to be that of someone who thinks that it might be prudent, for whatever reason, to make a polite gesture. The differentiation between the older child and his younger siblings is significant also in signalling that these children are emphatically not to be seen as a 'picturesque group', in terms of Richard Payne Knight's characterisation, where he writes: 'The dirty and tattered garments, the disheveled [*sic*] hair, and general wild appearance of gypsies and beggar girls are often picturesque'.³⁸ The faces of the individual children display differing reactions and their hair is not dishevelled. The state of their clothing is a clear indicator of their poverty.

Finally, there is the shadow of the approaching rider. One could interpret this simply as a clever device, as did most contemporary critics. There are, however, good reasons to see the approaching shadow as bearing a secondary, and more unsettling meaning. In terms of the distribution of light and shade in the painting, both the rider and the way forward past the gate either are, or lie in, shadow. This contrasts with the ragged children, the structures behind, and the enclosing fence which are in full sunlight. Whilst this might be interpreted as a compositional distribution of light and shade, it can also be seen as subverting what John Barrell has described as a 'basic rule of landscape composition in the eighteenth century',

³⁸ Richard Payne Knight, *An Analytical Inquiry into the Principles of Taste*, London, 1805, 194, cited in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 84.

namely 'that the rich and their habitations must be illuminated, and the poor and theirs be left in the shadows of the "dark side of the landscape"'.³⁹ In *Rustic Civility* it is the poor who are in plain sight while those who own the land are a dark, and shadowy presence. The contrast of light and dark can also be viewed, from a religious perspective, as showing the outcast children as 'children of light' as opposed to the oncoming shadow as representing darkness and sin. Of course, this stands conventions of rural painting on their head. However, there is evidence to suggest that Collins was quite comfortable with doing just that. In 1825 he had painted *Sketch of a Boy at Turvey* for T.C. Higgins of Turvey Abbey (figure 4.4). This portrayed a boy, sitting under a tree in the classic compositional arrangement of portraits of the landowner, holding the hunting dogs, next to which lie a variety of dead game animals. The landowner himself is reduced to a tiny figure in the middle distance, in conversation with an estate worker.

Such interpretations do, of course, assume (as did the critics, the 6th Duke and later commentators) that the oncoming rider is the local landowner. That assumption may not be correct. In summer 1831, Collins was painting against the background of the most serious political and social unrest in a generation. Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé have demonstrated, in their analysis of the 'Captain Swing' protests, that between June and November 1830 a wave of rick burning, threshing machine wrecking, and rioting, together with demands for ready money, higher wages and lower tithes swept rapidly across southern

³⁹ John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Paintings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, 22. At note 40 to page 22 Barrell explains that his book title comes from 'an unsigned review of Crabbe's *The Village* in the Gentleman's Magazine, December 1783, LIII, 1041-2' in which 'the reviewer remarks that Crabbe represents "only the dark side of the landscape, the poverty and misery attendant on the peasant"'.

and eastern England.⁴⁰ Collins would have been fully aware of these developments which filled the newspapers on a daily basis. The unrest did not spread along national lines of communication and towns along the way, but 'the complex system of smaller veins and capillaries, which linked each parish to its neighbours and to local centres'.⁴¹ Rumours abounded as to who was orchestrating the unrest. Strangers driving or riding on horseback around the countryside became objects of suspicion, so much so that *The Times* could reprint a notice urging local people to report people who looked like gentlemen, travelling on horseback.⁴² In late 1830 and early 1831 Special Commissions, appointed to deal with those arrested, sentenced more than 200 people to death and hundreds more to transportation.⁴³ If, in *Rustic Civility* the approaching rider is a complete stranger, that could account equally well for the children's demeanour and the ambiguity of the older child's response.

There is also a third dimension to the interpretation of the shadow, given that the horse and rider are on the viewer's side of the picture plane. It could be an invitation for viewers to put themselves in the position of the rider casting the shadow, and question their own response to the sight of such ragged and impoverished children. Collins is perhaps alluding to Wordsworth's *The Excursion*. Originally published at two guineas in 1814, by 1832 it was available in substantially cheaper editions.⁴⁴ Readers may well have reflected on two of the Solitary's question to his companions. They have been talking of poverty and

⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé, *Captain Swing*, Harmondsworth, 1973.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁴² The notice urged people 'to apprehend and deliver to the peace officers...all suspicious persons having the appearance of gentlemen, or others, travelling in carriages, or on horseback, who may inquire of you the names of any of your fellow-inhabitants or neighbours, or the particulars of their property'. *The Times*, 25th November 1830, quoted in Hobsbawm & Rudé, *Captain Swing*, 168.

⁴³ Hobsbawm & Rudé, *Captain Swing*, chapter 13. Although most of the death sentences were commuted, this was by the by, in terms of the amount of newspaper column inches devoted to the uprisings.

⁴⁴ See W. J. B. Owen, 'Costs, Sales and Profits of Longman's Editions of Wordsworth', *Library*, 12 (1957), 97,101,103,104. Substantially cheaper editions were published in 1820, 1827 and 1832.

degradation in towns, but the Solitary moves the conversation on to poverty in the countryside, asking:

if there are not, in our far-famed Isle,
Multitudes, who from infancy had breathed
Air unimprisoned, and had lived at large;
Yet walked beneath the sun, in human shape,
As abject, as degraded?⁴⁵

Some lines later he follows this up with two more searching questions:

His Country's name,
Her equal rights, her churches and her schools,
What have they done for him? And, let me ask,
For tens of thousands uninformed as he?
In brief, what liberty of mind is here?⁴⁶

Of this passage, Robert Ryan has observed: 'In one of the more dramatic silences of *The Excursion* this critique is not answered by any other character. Wordsworth left this indictment of Church and State, of England's political and religious complacency, ringing in the air, unqualified, unchallenged, unrefuted'.⁴⁷ Unanswered at the time Wordsworth published *The Excursion*, the same questions remained for the viewer of *Rustic Civility* in 1832. The questions would now have had added urgency. If the summer of 1830 was blighted by the uprisings in the countryside, 1831 was little better. Agrarian protests and incendiarism continued, amplified in the febrile political atmosphere generated by the progress of the first and second Reform Bills.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, VIII, lines 344-8. Quoted, but in the context of the factory child and not the rural child, by Jonathan Cook, in *Romantic Literature and Childhood*, Aers, D., Cook, J. and Punter D., London, 1981, 55.

⁴⁶ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, VIII, 429-432.

⁴⁷ Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation : Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824*, Cambridge, 1997, 110.

⁴⁸ Roger Wells, 'The Moral Economy of the English Countryside', in *The Moral Economy and Popular Protest : Crowds, Conflict and Authority*, ed. Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth, Basingstoke, 1999, 209-271, at 243.

To interpret a painting as reflecting contemporary social, economic and political upheavals taking place at the time of its execution inevitably raises the question of what we know about the artist's personal views. Obviously, artists were not immune to the effects of such instability, whatever their politics. It affected exhibition going, and sales. John Constable made this explicit, in a letter he wrote to C.R. Leslie in November 1831. An 'Ultra-Tory', Constable's views on the labouring classes appear to have hardened following the agrarian unrest in his home county in 1822.⁴⁹ He characterises the Reform Bill as 'a tremendous attack on the constitution of the country' and describes Lord Chancellor Brougham as 'having ruined the art as well as everything else— & I who am in landscape fell first of all'.⁵⁰ Collins's position is not so clear cut. Although inclined to conservatism, there is evidence that, by the early 1830s, his views were changing. His success as an artist resulted in paintings being commissioned from him by a broader range of patrons, many of whom were Whig politicians or persons with Whig sympathies. In October 1835 whilst staying at Weston House in the company of a number of leading politicians, he wrote to his wife: 'so here, you see, I am in the midst of the Whig Ministry and if pleasant manners and all absence of the would-be great man could convert me from my Toryism I should soon change my politics, I think I am neutralizing'.⁵¹ It may also be relevant that by this date the older generation of Collins's conservative acquaintances and patrons, such as Lord Liverpool and Sir George Beaumont, had passed away.

⁴⁹ Michael Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and His Landscape*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1983, 144, 210-11.

⁵⁰ Constable to C.R. Leslie, 26 November 1831, *John Constable's Correspondence*, III, pp.51-2, quoted in Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and His Landscape*, 230.

⁵¹ Letter dated 4 October 1835 from William Collins to Harriet Collins, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 55.

Further, there is no indication in any of his surviving letters or journals of any animus towards the rural population. He was well aware by 1831 of conditions in the Kent countryside, where the Captain Swing disturbances had begun. His patron and friend William Wells frequently invited him to stay on his Penshurst estate. From his correspondence we know that Collins visited Penshurst every year between 1823 and 1827, and there may, of course, have been other visits of which no record has yet been identified.⁵² His most recent visit had been in October 1830. An undated letter he wrote to his wife can be linked with the family's move to 30, Porchester Terrace, London in autumn 1830, and was probably written on 7 October 1830.⁵³ Penshurst itself was unaffected by the rural uprisings of 1830, perhaps because, in common with the gentry of many other localities similarly unaffected, Wells appears to have had a sense of social responsibility for relieving poverty in his neighbourhood. During his 1824 visit, Collins had written to his wife of how his host's 'kindness in every way, has much impressed me in his favour. To the poor he is a most invaluable friend'.⁵⁴ That Collins was in the Kent countryside at the very time of the unrest may well have been a significant factor in the germination of *Rustic Civility*.

Collins probably finished work on *Rustic Civility* by mid-October 1831.⁵⁵ In November, he wrote to his patron, the Reverend R.A. Thorp, to stress that Thorp's omission from the guest list for the pre-exhibition dinner at the Royal Academy at the beginning of May was something he deplored and enclosing a sketch for a painting. He goes on to write about the two things uppermost in his mind, in terms of current affairs: an outbreak of cholera, and the

⁵² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 237 (1824); *ibid.*, I, 251 (1825); *ibid.*, I, 275 (1826); Morgan, MA 3154.17 (1827).

⁵³ Letter from Williams Collins to Harriet Collins, Morgan, MA3154.79.

⁵⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 237.

⁵⁵ He wrote to his wife on 17 October 1831 offering to collect her from Brighton: Morgan Library, MA3154.22, fol. 1^r.

serious rioting during October, in London and many other cities and towns—a response to the rejection by the House of Lords of the Second Reform Bill.⁵⁶ Like Constable, Collins was naturally concerned about art sales – from personal experience he knew that turmoil affected sales—but he expressed himself in a way which suggests he viewed the position philosophically and with an element of humour:

I have, since the spring, as usual, projected many *great* works. What is to become of them; whether we shall have another Exhibition at all, or whether, if we do, ‘The House of Delegates’ will demand the produce of it, —or whether the present aspect of affairs in Art may brighten after starvation has thinned the ranks of the artists, I know not; but as I am unfit for anything but painting, I go on.⁵⁷

Christiana Payne relies on this passage to suggest that Collins ‘was worried that revolution might lead to the confiscation of property at the very time he was working on the picture’.⁵⁸ Such a firmly expressed conclusion may not be warranted. The tone of Collins’s letter is distinctly ironic. Further, the evidence indicates that he had by then finished the painting. Immediately above this, Payne quotes the *Athenaeum* review, referred to above, and observes ‘This was written in 1832, the year the Reform Bill was passed, and it is significant that the writer uses the archaic, feudal word *obeisance*, as if recognising that the painting is a tribute to the paternalistic system threatened by reform’.⁵⁹ That may well have been the interpretation of the *Athenaeum*’s critic, but to assume that Collins intended his painting to be such a tribute is, I would argue, unwarranted. I have described above a number of features of the paintings which cast doubt on whether they can in any way be regarded as

⁵⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 2-3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 3-4.

⁵⁸ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30. The 1832 Reform Act received Royal Assent on 7th June 1832.

emphasising 'the social harmony of the countryside directly and unambiguously'.⁶⁰ On the contrary, *Rustic Civility* can be interpreted as a coded statement about things that were going very wrong in the countryside.

Painting social disharmony

A comparison of the paintings Collins exhibited in 1832 with those of the previous year, 1831, may serve to reinforce the point that Collins was quite capable of painting scenes of social harmony, and that *Rustic Civility* stands out as being very different. For the 1831 exhibitions he had painted two scenes set in the countryside.⁶¹ *The Nutting Party* (figure 2.17) shows four children, and a dog, sitting down near a wood to eat nuts. The children are all well dressed and shod. The boys have hats. It is a scene of great contentment, which might have been inspired by Mary Russell Mitford's description of her pleasure in a village nutting expedition: 'All is beautiful that the eye can see; perhaps the more beautiful for being shut in with a forest-like closeness'.⁶² *The Venturesome Robin* is set by a village well (figure 4.5). A mother and her two children are watching a robin approaching a saucer, containing crumbs. All the children's clothes are neat. The older boy wears a hat. The youngest child, a toddler, is barefoot, but the two other children whose feet are visible are both well shod. To the left are two crouching children who evidently have other ideas. They intend to catch the bird using salt as bait. Accordingly, the scenes depicted in these two paintings could be

⁶⁰ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 29.

⁶¹ He also painted two coastal scenes but I have confined myself here to the inland landscapes. One of the coastal scenes was *The Morning Bath*, discussed in Chapter Three, Section Three, *social boundaries at the seaside*.

⁶² Mary Russell Mitford, *Sketches of rural character and scenery*, London, 1824, 241. *The Nutting Party* is discussed in Chapter Two, section four, *The Child at Play*.

interpreted *either* as a Mitford-style village portrait, *or* as indulging the type of rural myth described by Payne. They in no way suggest rural poverty. In terms of overall style, they appear to be a blend of naturalism and the picturesque – naturalism in terms of the groups of figures, picturesque in terms of the dilapidated fences in *The Nutting Party*, and the somewhat tumbledown cottage, and the scattering of pots and implements by the well in *The Venturesome Robin*. These are among the list of items considered to be quintessentially picturesque by John Thomas Smith, in his *Remarks on Rural Scenery*.⁶³ That both these paintings were commissions may well be of significance in explaining their style, since their future owners may have influenced that.⁶⁴ By contrast, Collins's work for the 1832 exhibition contains very little of the picturesque. As we have seen in *Rustic Civility*, the structures, fences and gates all are very simple, but sound. The manner in which the fence palings along the road crowd the tree strikes a naturalistic, almost jarring, note. All the emphasis is on the children and the approaching rider.

If my interpretation of *Rustic Civility* is correct, this leaves a substantial question to be answered. Why did contemporary critics (with one or two possible exceptions), together with the Duke of Devonshire and the cataloguer of the Sheepshanks version interpret the paintings in the way that they did? The answer, I suggest, lies in the received boundaries of acceptable expression – what could, and could not be said or portrayed about the rural poor in the period spanned by Collins's lifetime. Contemporary discourse in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was certainly capable of, and did include commentary on rural

⁶³ John Thomas Smith, *Remarks on Rural Scenery, with Twenty Etchings of Cottages from Nature, and Some Observations and Precepts Relative to the Picturesque*, London, 1797, 9.

⁶⁴ *The Nutting Party* (1831, B.I. no. 29) for the Reverend Robert Alder Thorp; *The Venturesome Robin* (1831, R.A. No. 25) for James Pickering Ord, as a pendant to *Waiting the arrival of fishing boats*.

poverty. In the context of Romantic poetry, Gary Harrison has explored the very considerable amount of non-fiction devoted to the problem of the poor in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶⁵ Around 1800 it was estimated that one million people, out of a total population of nine million, were vagrants.⁶⁶ William Cobbett, writing in 1829, described a shocking deterioration in the living conditions of those at the bottom of the economic and social ladder.⁶⁷ Moreover, as explored above in discussing the viewer's potential response to *Rustic Civility*, Wordsworth in *The Excursion* (1814) uses the persona of 'The Solitary' to comment, in excoriating terms, on the situation of the children of the rural poor. The Solitary demands to know:

by what power
of language shall a feeling Heart express
Her sorrow for that multitude in whom
We look for health from seeds that have been sown
In sickness and for an increase in a power
That works but by extinction?⁶⁸

Nevertheless, this is only one point of view in a philosophical argument between *The Excursion's* characters. 'The Wanderer' responds to the Solitary's laments with the trite 'A standing grievance, an indigenous vice |Of every country under heaven'.⁶⁹ The Solitary's words were not necessarily what people wanted to hear. The prevailing discourse remained, as Payne has stated, that of the pastoral tradition, the countryside as a haven of tranquillity. Payne describes the myths surrounding rural contentment as dominant until the 1840's, while the counter-myth of rural misery, touched on by Crabbe, and expanded upon by Disraeli in his

⁶⁵ Gary Lee Harrison, *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse : Poetry, Poverty, and Power*, Detroit, 1994, *passim*.

⁶⁶ William Clarkson, 'Inquiry on pauperism and poor rates', *Pamphleteer*, 8, 1816, 390, cited in Sean Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast : The urban poor in the Cries of London*, Manchester, 2002, 183, note 64.

⁶⁷ William Cobbett, *The Poor Man's Friend*, London, 1829, cited in Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast*, 183, n. 65.

⁶⁸ Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, Book IX, lines 139-144.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Book IX, lines 187-8.

novel *Sybil* (1845), becomes the dominant theme in the 'social realism' of the second half of the century.⁷⁰ The counter-myth, she maintains, was easier for writers than for artists.⁷¹

However, as Raymond Williams has observed, even Crabbe backed away from speaking truth to power. 'In the first book of the Village he cleared a space for independent observation and for moral appeal. Yet in the end the morality is separated from the social relationships which breed poverty and indifference'.⁷²

For artists the position was more delicate still. They needed to get their paintings on the exhibition walls, and avoid condemnation by the critics. It was all very well for Martin Archer Shee, R.A. to rail in 1809 against that prevailing discourse, by writing:

It may suit the purposes of Utopian theorists, and poetical philosophers, to represent the country as an Arcadia, and every clown a Corydon [literary term for a shepherd]; to make every hamlet the abode of happiness and peace, and describe its inhabitants as the purest models of beauty and virtue; but a little experience quickly dissipates these delusions...We soon find that vice can pervade the cottage as well as the palace and that it is very possible to be ignorant and awkward, without being innocent or picturesque.⁷³

Artists needed to tread warily in challenging those myths, or depicting vice. David Solkin demonstrates this in relation to Mulready's *Returning from the Ale-house* (1809) (figure 4.6). 'The combination of taverns, drunkenness and children was an explosive one'.⁷⁴ Solkin quotes a contemporary educationalist who observed that sins such as drunkenness were 'greatly aggravated when they are exhibited to the view and hearing of infants', and observes that it

⁷⁰Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 43-45.

⁷¹Ibid., 44. 'The emphasis on rural misery was always more suited to literary than artistic expression. Writers could exploit the contrasts between pastoral poetry and contemporary reality, but artists had a vested interest in making their images attractive'.

⁷² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1973, 94.

⁷³ Martin Archer Shee, *Elements of Art: A Poem; in Six Cantos*, London, 1809, 53n, quoted by Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 79.

⁷⁴ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 150, 152.

took Mulready more than thirty years to find a buyer for the painting, and then only after changing the title to *Fair Time*.⁷⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, Collins himself had experienced a near disaster very early in his career when Robert Hunt reviewed *The Tempting Moment* (1810), lamenting that artists should descend to such a level.⁷⁶ Collins only attempted on one further occasion to include a reference to intoxication, in his carnival painting *May Day* (Figure 1.9) which features an amorous and evidently intoxicated carpenter, about to have his stool removed by a group of mischievous boys.⁷⁷ That he should have returned to the subject at all suggests that he remained interested in the potential of the subject-matter; in the same year as he painted *May Day* he also made a small painting entitled *A Public House Door*, but the composition is not known.⁷⁸

Very few artists attempted to paint the ‘counter-myth’. Two artists who did, George Morland and Thomas Heaphy, were duly castigated by the critics for crossing the boundary of what was considered acceptable. In Morland’s case, John Barrell has pointed out that his engravers in effect ‘sanitised’ his oil paintings to make the subject matter more acceptable, portraying ‘a more idealised image of the English peasantry than his oil-paintings offered’.⁷⁹ But even in Morland’s original *The Door of a Village Inn* (figure 4.7), his miserable looking children are better dressed than those in *Rustic Civility*.⁸⁰ Only in the early watercolour paintings of Thomas Heaphy, as compellingly analysed by Solkin – for example, *Robbing a Market Girl* (1807) (figure 4.8), *Return from the Baker’s* (1808) (figure 4.9) – do we find the

⁷⁵ Patrick Colquhoun, *A New and Appropriate System of Education for the Labouring People*, London, 1806, 59, quoted by David H Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 150,152.

⁷⁶ *Examiner*, 24 March 1811, cited in Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 105. For the earlier discussion, see Chapter One, Section Three.

⁷⁷ *May Day* is discussed in Chapter One, Section Three.

⁷⁸ William Collins, Notebook I, fol.7^r.

⁷⁹ Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, 8 and 103.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 118 and 121. The painting was executed in or before 1793.

torn clothing and feet sticking out of shoe-leather illustrative of the rural 'counter-myth'.⁸¹ But, as Solkin demonstrates, reviewers of these paintings were unrelentingly critical of Heaphy's 'delight in disgust and depravity', failing to see the strong Evangelical Christian morality underpinning his work. Solkin concludes that 'the vast majority of contemporary viewers missed the point and could find no justification whatsoever for Heaphy's choice of such unpleasant and disturbing subject-matter'.⁸²

Heaphy's watercolours were submitted to public scrutiny and the pens of the critics at London exhibitions, and accordingly were very much in the public eye. But society's strictures as to what could, and could not be said, also operated in less rarefied artistic circles than the Royal Academy and Society of Painters in Water Colours. As Shesgreen has charted in *Images of the Outcast*, even the specialized *Cries of London* print market required artists to sanitize and gloss over the realities of poverty. This is typified by Francis Wheatley's immensely popular, and extraordinarily anodyne *Itinerant Trades of London*. Wheatley, in effect, imports the myth of the pastoral into the city. As Shesgreen points out, some of his prints do feature mendicants and idle hawkers as shadowy presences, very much in the background, but he foregrounds improbably wholesome village beauties, clearly the industrious and deserving poor, engaging with charitably inclined upper class patrons.⁸³ For artists as for writers, the prevailing discourse was consistent, clear and unchanged for over half a century. The prevailing social order must be shown to be working. The industrious poor will receive assistance from a beneficent upper class, and the idle poor have only

⁸¹Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, Chapter 3: *Arcadia Lost*, 79-109.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 90-2, 97.

⁸³ Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast*, 180, 184.

themselves to blame. People's sensibilities are not to be shocked. As Anna Barbauld had put it, in 1775:

Poverty, if truly represented, shocks our nicer feelings; therefore, whenever it is made use of to awaken our compassion, the rags and dirt, the squalid appearance and mean employments incident to that state, must be kept out of sight.⁸⁴

Against this background, it becomes understandable that no contemporaries of Collins who aspired to, or became Associates or Members of the Royal Academy painted rural poverty. Neither William Mulready's *The Travelling Druggist* (1825) (figure 4.10), a scene at a cottage door, nor his *The Last In* (1835) (figure 4.11), showing the last boy to arrive for school, with a well-founded look of trepidation, feature such desperately poor children as Collins depicts in *Rustic Civility*.⁸⁵ (Notably, the schoolmaster in *The Last In* makes a mock 'obeisance' to the late arrival—an 'obeisance' is not always to be taken at face value). Richter's *A Picture of Youth or The Village School in an Uproar* (1809, 1823) features boys running riot in the classroom, but they are properly dressed, nonetheless (figure 4.12).⁸⁶ Collins's inclusion of ragged clothing is, as discussed in earlier chapters, used to distinguish children with different social backgrounds within his paintings.

As Linda Nochlin has shown, it was not until the advent of illustrated magazines in the 1840's, and a journalistic insistence on bringing home to the public the horrors of the Irish hunger and its accompanying dispossessions by landlords, that engravings of barefoot

⁸⁴ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, *An Inquiry into Those Kinds of Distress Which Excite Agreeable Sensations*, Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose. Ed. John and Lucy Aikin, London, 1775, cited in Harrison, *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse*, 61.

⁸⁵ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, 110 & 86.

⁸⁶ Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary*, 116-7.

families dressed in rags began to circulate.⁸⁷ Even then, Nochlin observes, very few artists tackled these difficult subjects in an exhibition context, as opposed to journalism. The earliest example she provides of an exhibited painting dates from 1847.⁸⁸

A similar public reaction to the portrayal of the ‘unpleasant and disturbing subject-matter’ in the work of Heaphy is still apparent forty years later at the end of the 1840s, shortly after Collins’s death – Payne cites the fulminations of a contributor to *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in 1848:

Is the man of business, in this weary turmoil of the daily world, to return to his house, after his labour is over, and see upon his walls nothing but scenes of distress, of poverty, of misery, of hard-heartedness – when he should indulge his sight and his mind with everything that would tend to refresh his worn spirits...⁸⁹

If the critics, and indeed the 6th Duke, failed to see the counter-myth at work in *Rustic Civility*, this is not surprising. The visitor to the 1832 Royal Academy exhibition stepped into a world which, on the surface at least, had no point of reference at all to the political and social unrest which had paralysed the country for two years. Whatever individual artists’ personal engagement with those themes may have been, it is a fact that the 1832 Exhibition catalogue does not list a single painting, the title of which suggests that it deals explicitly with these matters.⁹⁰ If exhibited paintings did make some such reference it had to be a carefully coded one. In that context it is helpful to recall that Constable had exhibited, the

⁸⁷ Linda Nochlin, *Misère*, London, 2018, 46-47, for the 1846 illustrations from the short-lived *Pictorial Times*, and 31-46 for the engravings by James Mahony in the *Illustrated London News*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-49. Daniel MacDonald’s *Irish Peasant Family Discovering the Blight of their Store* was exhibited at the British Institution in 1847.

⁸⁹ John Eagles ‘Subjects for Pictures: A letter to Eusebius’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, No.63, February 1848, quoted in Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 44, n.67.

⁹⁰ *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy*, MDCCCXXXII, London, 1832, The Royal Academy Summer Exhibition: A Chronicle, 1769-2018 : <https://chronicle250.com>. Jacqueline Riding’s essay accompanying the catalogue for the 1832 Exhibition confines itself to a discussion of the rivalries at that time between Turner and Constable, and their respective exhibited paintings *Helvoetsluys* and *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*.

previous year, his *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, a painting which has long been acknowledged by scholars to contain an element of political allegory (Figure 4.13). Despite the ostensibly pastoral title, storm clouds surround the cathedral, and lightning strikes the cathedral itself. The Church is under attack.⁹¹ Collins could no more have asked that *Rustic Civility* be catalogued for the 1832 exhibition as ‘The Collapse of our Countryside’ than Constable could have described *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* as ‘Our National Church under Attack’.

Furthermore, in terms of how a painting by Collins himself might be viewed, it was perhaps impossible by 1832 for the experienced critic or exhibition-goer to conceive of an artist with his eminence and reputation exhibiting a painting intended to indicate that all was not well in the English countryside – he was, after all, in the words of the *Library of the Fine Arts*’ reviewer for that year ‘decidedly the artist to whom we should refer if asked for an instance of the genuine English school: for he gives us English scenery and English manners in all their varieties with peculiar truth and perception’.⁹² T.J. Clark observes that a social history of art approach requires the study of ‘blindness as much as vision’.⁹³ Critics and those with a vested interest in a particular interpretation, see what they want to see.

Finally, it is instructive to consider the various engravings made of *Rustic Civility*. These show alterations in the demeanour of the group of children and the dog which reinforced the interpretation of the painting favoured by the earlier reviewers. The engraver John Outrim was in discussion with Collins in June 1834 about the possibility of having the Devonshire

⁹¹ Michael Rosenthal, *Constable: The Painter and His Landscape*, 227 and n. 26; 230. Exhibited 1831, R.A.No.169.

⁹² *Library of the Fine Arts*, Vol. III, July 1832, 513.

⁹³ Clark, *Image of the People*, 15.

version engraved, or alternatively of making the engraving from the rather more accessible Sheepshanks version but then dedicating the engraving to the Duke of Devonshire.⁹⁴ Collins wrote to Edwin Landseer, expressing doubts as to whether either scheme was feasible, but nevertheless asking his advice, observing that Landseer was 'so well acquainted with the peculiar feelings' of both the owners.⁹⁵ In the event Outrim's engraving was made from the Sheepshanks version, rather than Collins's rather darker, original version, and was printed as the frontispiece for the *Literary Souvenir* (1836), accompanied by a three page article on Collins's work (figure 4.14). Outrim's engraving is relatively faithful to the Sheepshanks version.⁹⁶ However, two further engravings dating from the 1860s were not. The engraving by William Luson Thomas was made for publication in the *Illustrated London News* around 1861, that is, after the painting had entered the collection of the South Kensington Museum (figure 4.15).⁹⁷ The group of children now have rather vacant expressions, showing perhaps mild interest, while the dog appears a little mournful. The engraving by Charles Cousen was made for publication in the *Art Journal* for 1865 (figure 4.16).⁹⁸ Here, the boy has his head slightly lowered and he is no longer staring at the oncoming party. The dog's head is similarly slightly turned away, and has lost its expression of suspicion. The boy with his foot on the gate now looks excited, rather than suspicious. The girl's mouth and eyes have lost the wary expression they have in the painting. This suggests that by the 1860s an appreciation of the artist's intentions, in painting the group of children as he originally did, had been entirely lost.

⁹⁴ Letter from William Collins to Edwin Landseer, 23 June 1834, Morgan Library, MA 3519.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ John Outrim, engraved November 1835, frontispiece for the *Cabinet of Modern Art, and Literary Souvenir*, 1836. For the dating of his engraving, see the inscription content to the copy in the British Museum: 1850,0211.403. .

⁹⁷ William Luson Thomas, published in the *Illustrated London News* on 16 February 1861, 154.

⁹⁸ Charles Cousen, published in the *Art Journal*, 1 August 1865, facing page 234.

Section Two: Beer and skittles, the left-behind, and emigration

The interpretation of *Rustic Civility* that I have put forward finds additional support in other paintings executed by Collins in this period 1831 to 1836. I argue that these also demonstrate engagement by the artist with contemporary social issues. In this section I examine three paintings together with their social background: *Skittle Players* (1831-32), *Happy as a King* (1835-36), and *Leaving Home* (1835-36). I deal with them in turn.

Skittle Players was Collins's other major painting in the 1832 Royal Academy exhibition (figure 4.17).⁹⁹ This shows a game of skittles in progress in a garden, with one of the participants in the act of bowling. It is unique in Collins's landscape *oeuvre* in that it is the only painting he executed of adults at play. It was a subject which had only been exhibited at the Royal Academy four times since 1800.¹⁰⁰ From its position in Collins's Notebook, immediately after *Rustic Civility* we can deduce that it was painted between the late autumn of 1831 and spring 1832. Like *Rustic Civility* it received critical acclaim. The review in the *Original* was typical of reviewers' comments: 'A very interesting bit of nature, both in the scene and its animated tenants. It is also nicely finished and exhibits the beauties of a Dutch picture, divested of its vulgarity'.¹⁰¹ However, a closer look at the social and political background suggests that, as with *Rustic Civility*, there may have been more to this painting than met the critics' eyes. In August 1831 Parliament was debating The Beer Act Amendment Bill, and questions of public nuisance in general and skittle grounds as a particular example were being discussed. As Richard Soloway has noted, the Bishop of London's contribution to

⁹⁹ 1832, R.A. No. 112. His other exhibited painting was *Fisher Boys*, 1832, R.A. No.142, which appears to have been very much in line with other critically acclaimed coastal paintings of the 1820s.

¹⁰⁰ Edward Fox, *The Skittle Ground* (1815, R.A. No. 489); William Ingalton, *The Skittle Players*, 1817, R.A. No. 240; J. Hammond, *Skittle Ground*, 1817, R.A. No. 254; and W M Craig, *Skittle Players*, 1823, R.A. No. 544.

¹⁰¹ *Original*, May 1832, 188.

the debate was to propose a clause banning skittle playing altogether at beer-houses.¹⁰² This was because, in his view, it ‘was a kind of game which encouraged vast numbers of the working classes to resort to them, and the most pernicious consequences followed’.¹⁰³ He felt sufficiently strongly about the issue that: ‘He would, if he stood alone, persist in pressing a clause to prevent retail beer-houses from having skittle-grounds attached to them’.¹⁰⁴ Collins’s choice of such an unusual subject, at that particular time, seems unlikely to have been purely coincidental. *Skittle Players* can be seen as a critique of attempts to circumscribe adult recreation. Adults of the working classes, too, needed play and recreation. Otherwise, how would they be enabled to reconnect with their childhood selves?¹⁰⁵ And, from a religious perspective, if they did not reconnect with their childhood selves, how would they comply with the precondition for entry into the kingdom of heaven?¹⁰⁶

One of Collins’s most popular, and widely reproduced and copied, creations was *Happy as a King* (1835 and 1836) (figure 4.18).¹⁰⁷ Collins’s original title for the painting was *Rustic Joy*.¹⁰⁸ Some resonances with *Rustic Civility* are immediately apparent. There is the same gate, lane, and absence of picturesque detail. These are evidently the children of the rural poor. Their clothing is patched, and somewhat frayed, and not all are shod. This time,

¹⁰²Richard Allen Soloway, *Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783-1852*, London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969, 174.

¹⁰³*Hansard*, HL Series 3, col.212.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, col.214.

¹⁰⁵This aspect, namely the spiritual rejuvenation experienced by reconnection with one’s childhood has been discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁰⁶Matthew, 18, 1-3, at verse 3: ‘Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’.

¹⁰⁷Exhibited 1836, R.A.No.194. The painting’s present whereabouts are not known, but a repetition made by Collins in 1836, for the purposes of engraving, is in Tate Britain. The image used here is from the repetition.

¹⁰⁸ See William Collins, Notebook II, fol.11^r.

however, they are children at play. It might appear to the viewer that fresh air, autumn sunshine and a well-constructed gate are, it seems, all that such children presently need.¹⁰⁹ At least, that is the immediate impression, and one which reviewers praised. The *Athenaeum* described the children as ‘those merry-tongued, stout-limbed, honest-hearted urchins, which make us so proud of leading foreigners through our hamlets and homesteads’.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, it appears that Collins intended the painting to be read as an allegory of societal distinctions. E.D.H. Johnson references a commentary by the sculptor Thomas Woolner about *Happy as a King*:

In “Happy as a King”, our artist, to carry out the fancy of his title, has judiciously placed his little rustic king swinging on the top of the gate, with his arms spread aloft in delight. Also riding, but on lower rails, are a boy and a girl, who, supporting his state, look up to him for countenance, and do duty as grace and strength: labour is embodied in the sturdy boy running the gate to and fro, and who is using his utmost energies for the others’ enjoyment. While unnoticed by either, on the ground lies a small weakling, who has fallen; hinting at the feeble and neglected classes.¹¹¹

Woolner was one of the founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and several of his co-founders knew the Collins family very well, so his analysis requires to be taken seriously.¹¹² It suggests that Collins was foregrounding social inequality. The inclusion of the ‘small weakling, who has fallen’ is hardly consistent with an endorsement by Collins of rural hierarchy.

¹⁰⁹ Gear, *Masters or Servants?*, 148-150, suggests that in this painting Collins was ‘espousing philosophies consciously or unconsciously designed to keep the working man in his place’ in painting a scene suggesting ‘that the best things in life are free and available to all’.

¹¹⁰ *Athenaeum*, 14 May 1836, 348.

¹¹¹ Johnson E.D.H., *Paintings of the British Social Scene from Hogarth to Sickert*, New York 1986, 174, n.33. Unfortunately Johnson gives no citation for this quotation. It is almost certainly from the MS essay Woolner wrote on Collins in 1889, referenced in Amy Woolner, *Thomas Woolner, R.A., Sculptor and Poet: His Life in Letters*, London, 1917, 346, but currently untraced.

¹¹² The relationship between members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Collins family is discussed in Chapter Six, Section Three.

Furthermore, Collins chose to accompany the painting with a highly ambiguous literary allusion, not referred to in the 1836 exhibition catalogue, but evidently placed with the exhibited painting: ‘Such was the country boy, poor simple thing, |who only wished to be a king:| So meanly modest was his prayer to fate, |to eat fat pork and ride upon a gate’.¹¹³ This is clear from the review in the *Literary Gazette*, which commented: ‘we love to see subjects of this lively class come in contrast to those we have just mentioned. “To eat fat bacon and swing upon a gate,” was the answer of a rustic, when asked what would be his supreme delight’.¹¹⁴ However, the rustic in question was not just any rustic; he was the former King, George III. Collins took the lines from John Walcot’s (*alias* Peter Pindar’s) biting satire, casting George III as a country simpleton, as his springboard for a celebration of simple pleasures.¹¹⁵ It appears probable that Collins intended his painting to operate on a number of levels, literal, satirical and a commentary on ‘the neglected classes’.

Collins painted *Leaving Home* for the pharmacist Jacob Bell (1810-1859), later the founder of the Pharmaceutical Society (figure 3.29). Although there are circumstances surrounding the painting’s commissioning, and details within it, which might suggest that only a temporary departure from home is depicted, I argue that this is, in fact, a very early emigration painting, and so linked with the contemporary social problems of rural poverty.

Although born in London to a Quaker family of pharmacists, Bell had been sent away to school near Darlington in County Durham, and was educated there from the age of twelve,

¹¹³ See the catalogue to the exhibition at the Liverpool Academy, 1840, where the second version of the painting was exhibited: Edward Morris and Emma Roberts, *The Liverpool Academy and Other Exhibitions of Contemporary Art in Liverpool, 1774-1867: a history and index of artists and works exhibited*, Liverpool, 1998, 152.

¹¹⁴ *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 7 May 1836, 298.

¹¹⁵ The lines are adapted from the concluding four lines of John Walcot’s 1795 satirical poem *The Royal Tour, or Weymouth Amusements*, see: Peter Pindar, *The Works of Peter Pindar, Esq. With a Copious Index : To Which Is Prefixed Some Account of His Life*, London: Walker and Edwards, 1816, 60, lines 387-390.

at a very considerable distance from home, until 1827.¹¹⁶ On the corded box, which the small boy at the far left of the group is sitting on, can be found the initials, “JB” (figure 4.19). Clearly, the theme of someone leaving their home, would have resonated with him, personally. However, this detail, difficult to see without close examination, appears to be a private joke between Collins and Bell; another humorous touch appears in the way the painting was signed by Collins— there is no full signature, only ‘W. COLL’ on the left hand side of the boat’s stern.¹¹⁷ Wilkie Collins put a different slant on the potential meaning of the painting, observing that this was one of the last pictures painted by Collins before his departure, with the family, for Italy in September 1836. He states that ‘the incident...was naturally suggested by the painter’s own situation at the time it was composed’.¹¹⁸ Against such an interpretation is the fact that Collins was leaving England with his wife and two sons, then aged twelve and eight, and not six children, and that the genesis of the painting would have been over a year before the departure.¹¹⁹

While the personal circumstances of patron and painter may have added some personal resonances for them, examination of the painting indicates that *Leaving Home* is about leaving home permanently, emigrating. The long line of chalk cliffs indicates that this is a departure from the south coast, probably Sussex. It is a cloudy day, with a particularly dark sky above the head of the only adult present, a woman with an infant at her breast. She is guiding her next youngest child down the steps of a wooden jetty, to a small boat with a sail

¹¹⁶ Juanita Burnby, ‘The family history of Jacob Bell’, *Pharmaceutical Journal*, 1983 (230), 584.

¹¹⁷ This was clearly a feature of the original painting, since the engraving by Joseph Phelps, dated 1838 (British Museum, BM 1847,0811.2.) shows precisely the same layout of signature to the left side of the stern, and coiled rope to the right side.

¹¹⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 63.

¹¹⁹ Jacob Bell visited the Collins’s house twice early in 1835: Harriet Collins, 1835 Diary, entries for 17 March and 7 April.

which is evidently the means of transfer to a larger vessel. Whilst she is clearly occupied with the two youngest, she looks sad, thoughtful. Her shawl is billowing out behind her, indicating a strong breeze, and the water is choppy. The boat boy strains with his grappling hook to hold the boat against the jetty's iron ring. Behind the mother and her two youngest children are a slightly older girl and her brother. The girl looks apprehensively towards her brother. The brother, who has a bundle of possessions slung over his shoulder on a pole, has the same sad, thoughtful expression as his mother. Behind them are two more boys, no doubt in charge of the two corded pieces of luggage. The boy on the left is pointing, perhaps to someone they know. The boy on the right is waving goodbye and is tearful. This is not a happy leave-taking. It is almost certainly forever. The state of the children's clothing (the tear in the little girl's pinafore, the rips at the seams of the boys' clothes) indicates that this family is poor. They are leaving because they have no future.

The early 1830s saw significant initiatives in terms of assisted emigration to British colonies, in particular Canada and Australia. Architects of the scheme such as Edward Gibbon Wakefield were in no doubt that it was one way to ameliorate rural poverty: "An agricultural labourer and a pauper – these words are synonymous", Wakefield cried in a speech in 1830 in which he advocated the clean break of emigration to South Australia'.¹²⁰ Collins would have been well aware of the momentum building up. In 1832, whilst staying at Hallsteads, Ullswater with his patron and friend John Marshall, he had been presented by Julia Marshall with a copy of her recently published *Poems*.¹²¹ Her collection includes a poem entitled 'Emigration', in which she encourages the country's surplus population to emigrate and

¹²⁰ Hopkins, *The Long Affray*, 19.

¹²¹ William Collins to Harriet Collins dated 8 September 1832, Morgan Library, MA 3154.28. The letter is included in Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 14-17, but Julia Marshall's name has been taken out.

spread the word of Christ to heathen parts of the globe, bearing the benefits of their English homes to foreign parts.¹²² As Fariha Shaikh has observed, by 1834 there was ‘a vast amount of literature available’, and the Poor Law Amendment Act enabled poor relief funds to be utilised to pay emigration expenses ‘of poor persons having settlements in such parish, and willing to emigrate’.¹²³ Shortly before the passing of the South Australia (Foundation) Act in August 1834, the South Australia Association had organised a huge public meeting at Exeter Hall in London to spread awareness about the proposal for the new province and emigration scheme. Whilst a great deal was being written about emigration, it appears that very few paintings involving emigration as a subject were exhibited during the 1830s, and that Collins’s *Leaving Home* may be the earliest surviving example. Patricia Hardy has listed 431 emigration paintings exhibited between 1835 and 1895. Only four predate 1840, not including *Leaving Home*, which is not listed by her.¹²⁴

All three of the paintings considered in this section show Collins to have been an artist who was engaged with the difficult issues of his day. He was by no means exclusively a ‘sunshine painter’. At a period of great political turmoil and social upheaval he chose to exhibit, not only *Rustic Civility*, but paintings which dealt with contemporary attempts to circumscribe adult recreation, class structures and the neglect of the ‘feeble and neglected classes’, and the circumstances which were leading to increasing numbers of people being uprooted from their lives and emigrating.

¹²² Julia Anne Marshall, ‘Emigration’, *Poems (Poems on Sacred Subjects)*, London, 1832, 147-151.

¹²³ Fariha Shaikh, *Nineteenth-Century Settler Emigration in British Literature and Art*, Edinburgh, 2018, 5, 9.

¹²⁴ Patricia Hardy, ‘Victorian Images of Emigration 1840-1880’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2008, Appendix 1. The earliest listed are: George Chambers, *Emigrants going off to an American ship, Rock Fort, Liverpool*, 1835 B.I. 88, untraced; Paul Falconer Poole, *Farewell, Farewell*, “A boding voice is in mine ear, We part to meet no more” (Burns), 1837 R.A. 495, and *The Emigrant’s Departure*, 1838 R.A. 266; Robert Farrier, *Leaving Home*, “Turn on the neighbouring hill, once more to see the dear abode”, 1839 B.I. 375.

Conclusion

As with his landscape and coastal paintings considered in Chapters Two and Three, the paintings considered in this chapter demonstrate two strands running through Collins's work, namely his interest in associationism, and his allusive style. *Skittle Players*, *Happy as a King* and *Leaving Home* are all capable of setting off, in the minds of their viewers, trains of association about the state of English society at the time they were painted, but they do so in a manner which is perhaps more difficult for a modern viewer to read than the more overtly 'realist' paintings of the Victorian period.

In *Toil and Plenty* Christiana Payne makes her final comment about Collins in discussing the Pre-Raphaelite Walter Howell Deverell's 1854 painting *The Irish Vagrants* (figure 4.20).¹²⁵ This features a woman of the upper classes, mounted on horseback, pointedly ignoring a distressed family. Payne characterises Deverell's painting as having the appearance of 'a deliberate comment on Collins's *Rustic Civility*, replacing an image of deference and paternalism with one showing callous indifference on the part of the gentry and sullen defiance on the part of the poor'.¹²⁶ However, if my analysis of *Rustic Civility* is correct, Deverell is Collins's heir rather than his detractor. Only after the public and the critics had digested the profound shaking given by the Pre-Raphaelites to the concept of what could and could not be shown, could such an overt commentary as Deverell's become possible. As Harrison puts it in relation to Wordsworth's stance on poverty, seen in the context of his day, 'To ask for more is to engage in a kind of romantic ideology and an ahistoricism'.¹²⁷ This applies to Collins also.

¹²⁵ Johannesburg Art Gallery. Painted in the last year of the artist's brief life, and not exhibited.

¹²⁶ Payne, *Toil and Plenty*, 45.

¹²⁷ Harrison, *Wordsworth's Vagrant Muse*, 52.

Given the societal conventions on what could, and could not be portrayed, *Rustic Civility* should be recognised as a complex piece of social commentary. In 1832 England was a troubled land. Those who preferred to see an attractive landscape populated with children politely opening a gate for the local landowner could see that if they wished, and be reassured that, despite all the upheavals, all was well. For those astute enough to see, however, Collins's invisible rider casts his shadow, literally and metaphorically, over rural tranquillity, potentially setting off in the viewer a profusion of trains of thought. These might have been of recent events, rural deprivation, and the uneasy relationships between landowners and the rural dispossessed and jobless. Moreover, the expressions on the faces of the individual children are plain to see. The viewers of the Devonshire version, with its deeper shadows, and subdued tones, might also have pondered questions of education and upbringing – what could the future hold for these particular children in terms of their moral development, with such abdication of responsibility? Such issues were increasingly being interrogated, in the early 1830s, by the leading members of the religious revival which came to be known as the Oxford Movement. Collins's involvement in this, and the effect that it had on his painting, is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

1838-1844: The Italian paintings and the Oxford Movement

Introduction

My two concluding chapters are concerned with Collins's late work, that is, the paintings executed during the period 1839-1844, following his return from a journey to Italy with his family between 1836 and 1838. Chapter Six examines his Biblical paintings during that period. This chapter is concerned with his eleven Italian subject paintings, almost all of which reference contemporary religious life whether through portraying people connected with religious institutions, religious symbols and prayer, or events with a religious connotation.¹ I make the case for regarding this particular group of Collins's paintings as a reflection of, and significant contribution to the influence of the Oxford Movement on the culture of this period.

As Geoffrey Cantor has demonstrated, in *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851* (2011), establishing linkages between material culture in general and particular religious denominations is fraught with difficulty.² This problem is exacerbated, in relation to the interpretation of an artist's work, due to the inherent difficulties described by Graham Howes in *The Art of the Sacred* (2007), in establishing 'the hard evidence for any triangulation between a specific religious context, the beliefs and practices of a particular artist, and the

¹ In addition to these subject paintings, Collins painted a view of the Bay of Naples *A scene taken from the caves of Ulysses at Sorrento, the birth-place of Tasso*, 1841. R.A. No. 384, oil on canvas, 81 x 121 cm, present whereabouts unknown, together with a small copy of this for the collector John Sheepshanks, 1843, oil on panel, 40.6 X 63.5 cm, London, V&A, and two small landscapes for John Sheepshanks, *Sorrento, Bay of Naples*, 1842 R.A. No. 240, oil on panel, 40.6 x 29.8 cm. London, V&A; *Villa D'Este – Tivoli* (1842), 1842 R.A. No. 241, oil on panel, 40.6 x 30.2 cm. London, V&A.

² Cantor, *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851*, 17 and 196.

art he or she produces'.³ Such difficulties are clearly illustrated by past attempts to establish a link between the Oxford Movement and the Pre-Raphaelites. The existence of such a link was proposed by Alastair Grieve in 1969 and Edward Morris in 1970.⁴ In 1979 Herbert Sussman expressed the more cautious view that in the late 1840s Dante Gabriel Rossetti 'seems to have been caught up in the resurgence of religious feeling brought about by the Oxford Movement'.⁵ However, Tractarian influences were subsequently questioned by Grieve himself in 1984. They were decisively rebutted as a significant factor by Michaela Giebelhausen in her 1998 DPhil thesis, and not explored by her in *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain* (2006).⁶

The difficulties described by Howes no doubt account for the fact that whilst a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the influence of the Oxford Movement, or 'Tractarianism', on literature (especially poetry), architecture, social and political thought and, of course, nineteenth-century religion, almost nothing has been written about its influence on artists.⁷ Notably, whilst the Introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford*

³ Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of Art and Belief*, London, 2007, 91.

⁴ Alastair Grieve, 'The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Anglican High Church', *Burlington Magazine*, 111 (1969), 294-5; Edward Morris, 'The Subject of Millais's Christ in the House of His Parents', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 33 (1970), 343-345.

⁵ Herbert L. Sussman, *Fact into Figure: Typology in Carlyle, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, Columbus, Ohio, 1979, 34.

⁶ Alastair Grieve, 'Style and Content in Pre-Raphaelite Drawings of 1848-50', in Leslie Parris, ed., *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1984, pp.23-43; Michaela Giebelhausen, *Representation, Belief and the Pre-Raphaelite Project, 1840-1860*, unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1998, 186 and 188; Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible: Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain*, Aldershot, 2006.

⁷ For Tractarianism in literature, see G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, 1981; Simon A. Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England': The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement*, Oxford, 2004, 65-86; Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, Oxford, 1998, 63-76; Hilary Fraser, *Beauty and Belief: Aesthetics and Religion in Victorian Literature*, Cambridge, 1986; Gregory H Goodwin, 'Keble and Newman: Tractarian Aesthetics and the Romantic Tradition', *Victorian studies*, 30 (1987), 475-94. For Tractarianism in architecture, see Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry*, 138-66. For Tractarianism in social and political thought, see Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*.

Movement (2017) promises the reader ‘a consideration of the broader cultural expressions and influences of the Oxford Movement, including ... architecture and the visual arts’, the only mention of painting comes in Elizabeth Ludlow’s contribution: ‘Christina Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites’, and is confined to references to the views of Grieve in ‘The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Anglican High Church’, with regard to Tractarian influence on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and to William Dyce as the painter of the chancel frescoes at All Saints, Margaret Street during the 1850s.⁸ There is no literature at all which attempts to analyse influences on artists of the first phase of the Oxford Movement, between 1833 and 1843. This chapter attempts to fill that void, by presenting the case for regarding Collins as an artist influenced by the Oxford Movement, and contributing to that Movement’s very considerable influence on the culture of this period.

Despite the lack of documentary evidence which unequivocally establishes the triangulation between Collins’s religious views, Tractarian thought, and Collins’s Italian subject paintings, there is very clear evidence as to what the main preoccupations of Tractarian thinkers and writers were, and compelling evidence both about Collins’s religious beliefs and his links with leading Tractarians. Graham Howes observes that the hard evidence for linking an artist’s religious belief, the art they produce and a specific religious context, ‘often exists – where it exists at all – within the artwork itself rather than in personal memoranda or in remarks recorded by contemporaries’.⁹ Accordingly my approach has been to set out in detail in Section One the evidence for Collins’s beliefs and his links with

⁸ *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereiro, Oxford, 2017, 5 and 428, 434.

⁹ Graham Howes, *The Art of the Sacred*, 91.

Tractarians. I summarise the main preoccupations of Tractarian thinkers and writers, and make the case that Collins would have been familiar with these.

In Section Two I examine the content of the paintings themselves to see how far that content corresponds with, or develops Tractarian thought.¹⁰ Almost all of them were exhibited in the annual exhibitions at the Royal Academy, which was Collins's preferred marketplace.¹¹ In order to provide some context for Collins's particular choice of themes, I begin with a summary of the types of Italian paintings which other artists exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1832 and 1843. This period encompasses the years prior to his departure for Italy in 1836, during which time he would have had the opportunity to consider how Italy was represented by his contemporaries, and the date at which he began his final Italian work. I then move to a close analysis of his paintings, to demonstrate how Collins's Italian subject paintings can be related to Tractarian critical discourse. While some can be viewed as expressing themes which were of concern to a wider constituency than Tractarians I conclude that, taken as a group, his Italian paintings reflect a Tractarian agenda, intended, in the words of the leading Tractarian writer Samuel Richard Bosanquet (writing in the context of his analysis of whether English society had indeed improved over time) to 'hold up the mirror to society'.¹²

¹⁰ I deal with the Oxford Movement's particular interest in the early Christian Church in Chapter Six, since that aspect has particular relevance to his Biblical paintings.

¹¹ After 1820, with only two exceptions, he only exhibited paintings at the British Institution which had not immediately sold at the previous year's Royal Academy Exhibition.

¹² Samuel Richard Bosanquet, 'The Age of Unbelief', *British Critic*, xxxi, 61 (Jan.1842), 91: 'in particulars we may praise or blame, and hold up the mirror to society, and show to it its features in all their beauty and deformity actual and comparative'.

Section One : the background

Collins's position in relation to religious issues has not previously been examined in any secondary literature.¹³ Although there is no direct evidence about Collins's religious upbringing, or the views of his parents, it is possible, given his father's authorship of an anti-slavery poem and his uncle's acceptance in 1818 of the position of chaplain at Cape Coast Castle that the family were associated with the evangelical wing of the Anglican church.¹⁴ As I have argued in Chapter One, Collins's 1812-1813 paintings *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird*, and both versions of *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* contain non-denominational Christian symbolism, which needs to be understood in the light of his emotional state following the sudden death of his father.¹⁵ By 1816 he is known to have been discussing religion with his close friend, the artist friend Washington Allston.¹⁶ It is evident that he had evangelical leanings by 1817, since, according to Harriet, he went twice that year to hear the Scottish Evangelical, Thomas Chalmers, preach, and was studying such evangelical classics as William Wilberforce's *Real Christianity* (1794), 'and other striking books, that had affected his mind so as to deeply impress him with many momentous truths he had formerly treated as of small importance'.¹⁷ This suggests an alignment with what Grayson Carter characterises as

¹³ I have previously referred to some of the material in this section in my pamphlet 'Wilkie Collins's Religious Upbringing' distributed in 2016 as an occasional pamphlet by the Wilkie Collins Society.

¹⁴ William Collins senior was the author of *The Slave Trade; A Poem. Written in the year 1788*, London: J. Desmond, 1793, referred to in Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 5, which is suggestive of an evangelical affiliation. For the Reverend James Collins's posting to Cape Coast Castle, see Collins's letter dated 4 November 1818 to Washington Allston, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 138, and for his death there from illness in 1820, see *ibid.*, 168. Appointments to the chaplaincy appear to have been organised by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

¹⁵ See Chapter One, Section Four for the sudden death of his father.

¹⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 99, journal entry for 3 November 1816.

¹⁷ William Wilberforce, *A practical view of the prevailing religious system of professed Christians in the higher and middle classes of this country contrasted with real Christianity*, London, 1794; Harriet Collins's autobiographical memoir, 153. Collins would have heard Chalmers preach during his visit to London in 1817.

‘serious religion’, an alignment shared by many people who went on to become leaders and adherents of the Oxford Movement.¹⁸

Between 1822 and 1825 Collins twice met the charismatic preacher Edward Irving, once when Irving was visiting Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and once at David Wilkie’s home.¹⁹ Also from an evangelical background, and linked to both Irving and Coleridge through their mutual interest in Prophetic studies, interpreted in the light of current political events and social concerns, was the Revd. William Dodsworth.²⁰ The clearest link between Collins and the Tractarians is his long involvement, and that of his family, with Dodsworth. Dodsworth was the minister at the Margaret Street Chapel, Marylebone, between 1829 and 1837, when, following appointment by the Bishop of London, he took up his position as the Perpetual Curate of the newly constructed Christ Church, Albany Street. Stephen Young has demonstrated the importance of Dodsworth both as a contributor to the Tractarian discourse of the 1830s and 1840s, and as a leading exemplar of Tractarian practice, first at Margaret Street Chapel, and then at Christ Church Albany Street.²¹ Young’s assessment of Dodsworth’s importance as a distributor of Tractarian thinking has been endorsed by James Pereiro, who observes that Dodsworth ‘had made Tractarian ideas his own and, as a popular preacher, introduced many to them, his chapel becoming a centre for Tractarian sympathizers in

¹⁸ Grayson Carter, ‘The Evangelical Background’, *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereiro, Oxford, 2017, 38.

¹⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 249; Allan Cunningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie : with his journals, tours and critical remarks of Works of Art and a selection from his correspondence*, 3 vols, London, 1843, III, 98. Wilkie Collins places the meeting with Irving at Coleridge’s home in 1825; the meeting at Wilkie’s home may well have been earlier, since one of Irving’s contacts on moving to London in 1822 was Wilkie, and Wilkie was Collins’s lifelong friend.

²⁰ For Irving and Dodsworth’s interest, see: Stephen Edward Young, ‘William Dodsworth 1798-1861 : The Origins of Tractarian Thought and Practice in London’, unpublished PhD thesis, Open University, 2003, 5, 48, 51 and 60-66. For Coleridge’s interest, see: Jon Mee, *Romanticism, enthusiasm, and regulation : poetic and Romanticism, enthusiasm, and regulation: poetics and the policing of culture in the Romantic period*, Oxford, 2003, 131-172; Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*, Oxford, 1999, 91-153.

²¹ Young, ‘William Dodsworth 1798-1861’, 2003, 1.

London'.²² The involvement of Collins with Dodsworth extended from, at the latest, 1831 (and quite possibly earlier) until his death in 1847. For his family, the connection continued until Dodsworth's conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1851. In a letter home from Paris to his mother, written in September 1845, the young Wilkie Collins made a teasing reference to his father being 'a lamb of Mr. Dodsworth's flock', reflecting his perception of the close connection between the two men.²³ Collins's journey to, and stay in Italy between 1836 and 1838 coincided with the building and dedication of Christ Church, Albany Street, but Collins contributed five pounds to the building fund.²⁴ Collins rented a pew at the new church until December 1845, by which time his failing health meant that he was hardly able to attend.²⁵ Both his children were prepared for confirmation by Dodsworth, and subsequently confirmed, Wilkie Collins in 1841 and Charles Allston Collins in 1844.²⁶

That Dodsworth was in the vanguard, in terms of the practical application of Tractarianism, can be gauged from George Herring's description of the electrifying effect that *Tracts for the Times* (1833 onwards) had on many of the parish clergy. He cites the example of the Tractarian T.T. Carter, ordained in December 1833, who promptly visited Dodsworth's Margaret Street Chapel and 'was captivated, as what he saw "struck one with a new idea of the service"'.²⁷ Dodsworth, indeed, appears to have been not only a distributor, but an

²² James Pereiro, 'A Cloud of Witnesses', *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, ed. Stewart J. Brown, Peter B. Nockles and James Pereiro, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 120.

²³ William Wilkie Collins, *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters*, Ed. William Baker, Andrew Gasson and others, 4 vols, London, 2005, letter no. [0027].

²⁴ London, London Metropolitan Archives, *Christ Church Albany Street*, P90/CTC2/106.

²⁵ The pew rental book covering the period 1837 to 1843 has not, unfortunately, survived, but Collins rented a five seater pew from March 1844 to December 1845, and after his death Harriet continued to rent pew space at Christ Church, Albany Street until June 1858: London Metropolitan Archives, *Christ Church Albany Street*, P90/CTC2/159 and P90/CTC2/161-2.

²⁶ London Metropolitan Archives, *Christ Church Albany Street*, P90/CTC2/019.

²⁷ George Herring, *The Oxford Movement in Practice: The Tractarian Parochial Worlds from the 1830s to the 1870s*, Oxford, 2016, 2.

originator of some Tractarian ideas.²⁸ Collins had been attending Margaret Street chapel for at least two years by the time of Carter's visit, and quite possibly longer.²⁹ By 1832, at the latest, the Collins family were socialising with Mr and Mrs Dodsworth.³⁰ In Harriet's surviving diary for 1835 there are specific references to attendance at Dodsworth's services, together with eight references to socialising with Mr. and/or Mrs Dodsworth.³¹ One of these occasions was a religious meeting at Dodsworth's home, attended by the visiting Bishop of Illinois, Bishop Philander Chase. He refers to Collins's presence in his own autobiography.³² Collins subsequently painted Chase's portrait, and presented it to Dodsworth.³³

In January 1836, Dodsworth met the leading Tractarian John Henry Newman. They had frequent meetings over the next six months.³⁴ It is quite probable that Collins met Newman, either at Dodsworth's home, or at Margaret Street Chapel, where Newman attended and stayed to take communion in July 1836.³⁵ Another leading Tractarian whom Collins probably met was Edward Bouverie Pusey. He was closely associated with Dodsworth from 1836 until 1850.³⁶ Pusey preached at Collins's church on a number of occasions in the

²⁸ Young, 'William Dodsworth', at 81-4, highlights as practices introduced by Dodsworth prior to *Tracts for the Times*, a weekly communion service, preceded by singing, in a pattern of worship firmly based on the Prayer Book seasonal scheme and its offices, and cites J.H. Newman's letter to Dodsworth in 1851 describing Anglicanism's debt to Dodsworth for having led the way in calling for weekly communion.

²⁹ Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins, October 17, 1831, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 2.

³⁰ Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins, 22 August 1832: '[PS] Have you seen Mrs Dodsworth and have you sent her the picture to finish while I am away?', Morgan Library, MA3154.25, fols.2^v and 2^v.

³¹ London, National Art Library, Special Collections 86.EE.33, Harriet Collins, Diary for 1835.

³² Philander Chase, *Bishop Chase's Reminiscences: An autobiography*, Second edition, 2 vols, Boston, 1848, II, 264, diary entry for 24 November 1835.

³³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 349. The painting is currently untraced.

³⁴ Young, 'William Dodsworth', 110 and 112-13.

³⁵ Newman attended the Margaret Street Chapel and stayed to take communion on Sunday 31st July 1836, see *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, edited by Thomas Gornall, S.J., Oxford, 1981, Vol.V,329. The Collins family did not leave London until 19 September 1836: Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 74.

³⁶ Young, 'William Dodsworth', 95.

early 1840's.³⁷ That Collins sympathised with Pusey following his suspension from preaching by the university authorities in 1843 is clear from his correspondence with Harriet.³⁸ He was one of the purchasers of Pusey's offending sermon.³⁹ The following year, whilst staying with the President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Collins heard the Tractarian R.G. Macmullen being examined, and rejected for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, and wrote to Harriet that 'the candidate was one of Newman's friends, his essay was masterly devout and as I thought unexceptionable it belonged however to the school and poor Mr Macmullen was rejected'.⁴⁰

By 1844 Collins was subscribing to a moderate Tractarian publication, the *English Churchman*.⁴¹ It had begun publication the previous year with the stated intention of appealing to an audience believing in the 'brotherhood in the one Catholic and Apostolic church' and with an editorial policy of including 'articles containing opinions which may be opposed to those of the *English Churchman* in many instances, but which articles we think it desirable that our readers should see'.⁴² Advertisements placed in the magazine during 1844 reinforce its Anglo-Catholic sympathies.⁴³ Collins's reaction to the Pusey and Macmullen

³⁷London Metropolitan Archives, *Christ Church Albany Street, Preacher's Book*, P90/CTC2/026: 2nd Sunday after Easter 1842, 3rd and 6th Sundays after Trinity 1842, 23 April 1843.

³⁸Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins, 9 June 1843. Morgan Library, MA3154.65.

³⁹Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins, 13 June 1843. Morgan Library, MA3154.66.

⁴⁰Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins, 19 April 1844. Morgan Library, MA3154.73 [the underlinings in the quotation are Collins's]. This letter is printed in Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 250, but is conflated with an earlier letter from Collins to Harriet dated 16 April 1844, MA3154.72. Wilkie Collins amended 'the school' in the passage quoted to '*the Newman school*'.

⁴¹Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins, 4 October 1844. New York, Morgan Library, MA3154.76.

⁴²*English Churchman*, No. 1, 5 January 1843, 8 and 3.

⁴³For example (*English Churchman*, 3 October 1844): an advertisement for an Oxford graduate 'of Anglo-Catholic principles' seeking 'a Title for Holy Orders at the Lent Ordination, stipend no object'; 'A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, anterior to the division between east and west. Translated by Members of the English Church'; an advertisement by the firm of Gilbert J French for an engraved catalogue of Altar cloths, communion linen etc, and 'stoles of the size and form used in the English church during the 14th and 15th Centuries'.

controversies clearly place him in the Tractarian camp in the early 1840s. This positioning would have been reinforced by the many prominent Tractarian preachers and authors that Collins heard, and almost certainly met after his return from Italy. These included Frederick Oakeley, who preached at Collins's church five times in autumn 1838 and 1839, Henry (later Cardinal) Manning who preached frequently at Christ Church from June 1839, Walter Farquhar Hook, and William Gresley.⁴⁴ From Collins's lengthy and continuous involvement with Dodsworth, and evidence of his links with other prominent Tractarians, it is clear that he would have been thoroughly familiar with first generation Tractarian thought, and writing.

To what extent would viewers of Collins's works have been aware of Tractarian thinking? In his ground-breaking study, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'* (2004), Simon Skinner observed that 'social criticism was neither a marginal nor latent but an organic element of first-generation Tractarianism, one aggressively articulated across a broad polemical front'.⁴⁵ Themes articulated by the movement's main thinkers and leaders were expressed in tracts, sermons, and articles in leading journals, particularly the *British Critic*.⁴⁶ Skinner has highlighted the importance of the polemical novel in disseminating Tractarian themes during the period 1838-1843 when the *British Critic* was controlled by Tractarians.⁴⁷ That period corresponds precisely with the period during which Collins executed his Italian paintings. As Skinner observes: 'Very early...Tractarians recognised the need to stake [the

⁴⁴ Collins returned to London on 15 August 1838 (Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 154): Oakeley preached on the 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th Sundays after Trinity in 1838, and on Septuagesima and 15 March 1839 ('Christ Church Albany Street, Preacher's Book', London Metropolitan Archives, P90/CTC2/026); Hook preached on 2nd Sunday after Trinity 1839, 3rd Sunday after Easter 1840 and 3rd Sunday after Trinity 1842 ('Christ Church Albany Street, Preacher's Book'); Gresley preached on 1st Sunday after Trinity, 1840 and 2nd Sunday after Trinity 1842 ('Christ Church Albany Street, Preacher's Book').

⁴⁵ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 1-2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-65.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 65-81.

Oxford Movement's] own claims within the rapidly expanding field of the social novel'.⁴⁸ Of these, William Gresley's first two novels were the earliest published.⁴⁹ Many of the exhibition-going public, Collins's viewers, would have been aware of those themes through the contemporary print media, and would have been astute in observing references to, and a commentary upon those themes when visiting the Royal Academy exhibitions. As Solkin has demonstrated, the annual exhibitions at the Royal Academy provided an opportunity for artists to encourage their more sophisticated viewers to reflect on relatively complex issues within contemporary culture.⁵⁰ I argue that Collins's 'Italian' paintings were intended to do just that. I expand on these Tractarian themes in detail in Section Two, when analysing the particular paintings which, I argue, can be linked with them. The principal themes, which each have a sub-section devoted to them, are: The Poor and the role of the Church; Holidays (Holy Days) and the role of the Church; Spirituality and the role of the Church; and Female Religious Orders and the critique of the Roman Catholic model.

Section Two : the paintings

The paintings in context: Italian scenes by other Royal Academy exhibitors, 1832-1843

In considering the relationship between Collins's Italian subject pictures and Tractarian thinking, it is helpful to provide some context about how other artists represented Italy at this time. Relatively few of these paintings are now traceable, and the best evidence presently available is the title provided in the exhibition catalogues, together with any

⁴⁸ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 67.

⁴⁹ *Portrait of an English Churchman* (1838) and *Clement Walton; or, The English Citizen* (1840).

⁵⁰ David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England*, New Haven and London, 1992, 213.

accompanying explanatory text. Paintings of Italy exhibited by artists other than Collins during this period can be divided broadly into seven categories.⁵¹ By far the largest group (128, exceeding all others combined) were paintings of Italian scenery and views of towns or ruins, typified by Callcott's numerous paintings of Italian lakes, rivers, ports and coastlines (figure 5.1). For an English audience, these represented an unfamiliar landscape for those who had not been to Italy, and a reminder of their travels for those who had. The two next largest groups comprise approximately forty paintings each. One group is of Catholic religious houses, practices or personnel. For non-Catholic audiences in England, these represented foreign personnel and practices, for example a workshop manufacturing images of saints, visitors being shown relics, processions to first communions or to give thanks for recovery from illness, pilgrims, a penitent being presented to the Cardinal Grand Penitentiary at St. Peter's.⁵² The other group comprises portraits of one or more Italians. A fourth group (twenty paintings) is a group of 'festa' scenes of gaiety, flirtation and dance, exemplified by the paintings of Thomas Uwins and Penry Williams (figures 5.2 and 5.3). A fifth group (ten paintings) are of scenes from Italian history. A small sixth group (six paintings) comprises *banditti* scenes, and scenes related to sensational murders, so providing exhibition viewers

⁵¹ My analysis is based upon titles of works given in the catalogues of Royal Academy of Arts exhibitions from 1832 to 1843 inclusive. This is necessarily a broad-brush impression since titles only provide limited information, and it is difficult to classify some of them; for example L. Hick's painting *Italian Hospitality* (1837 R.A. No. 397) is evidently an Italian painting, but gives nothing away as to how it should now be categorised, and the numbers I give below are approximate, for that reason.

⁵² Respectively: Thomas Uwins, *The Saint-manufactory, Naples* (1832 R.A. No. 239); W. Simson, *A Camaldolese monk shewing the relics in the sacristy of the convent, Rome* (1838 R.A. No. 363); A. W. Callcott, R.A., *A finished sketch of Italian girls going in procession to their first communion* (1832 R.A. No. 332); Penry Williams, *Il Voto, or the convalescent* (1842, R.A. No. 379); Charles Lock Eastlake, R.A., *Italian scene in the year of the Jubilee. Peasants on a pilgrimage to Rome, first coming in sight of the Holy City* (1835 R.A. No. 144), and Edward Villiers Ripplingille, *The presentation of a penitent in St. Peter's at Rome, during Holy Week, to the Cardinal Grand Penitentiary, before offering himself for confession, attended by his family and some of his associates* (1842 R.A. No. 378).

with Italian exoticism combined with a frisson of sensationalism.⁵³ A final group, comprising three paintings only, featured either peasants showing respect to members of religious orders, or members of religious orders helping the poor (figure 5.4).⁵⁴ As I shall demonstrate, this group in particular resonates with religious themes which interested Collins, to which I now turn.

The Poor and the role of the Church

In arguing that Collins's Italian paintings reflect Tractarian pre-occupations, my analysis groups Collins's pictures thematically, according to the particular Tractarian concerns, rather than in chronological order. However, I begin with the group he first exhibited after his return from Italy in October 1838. I argue that Collins intended that these should be seen as, if not precisely a manifesto, then certainly a powerful statement about his experience of Catholic Italy, and how that might relate to contemporary English society. As his son explained some years later, Collins discussed which works to create for the next Royal Academy exhibition with David Wilkie. Together they decided on 'three designs, which [they] thought well calculated to open the Italian campaign with due completeness and decision'.⁵⁵ This indicates that the Collins's Italian subject paintings should be seen as a programme, or 'campaign', and not isolated works.

⁵³ Thomas Uwins, A, *The confessional of the black crucifix* (1836 R.A. No.207); Edward Matthew Ward, *Reminiscences of a scene in the prisoners' lock of the tribunal at Naples in 1838, representing a monk, priest and accomplices on their trial for murder* (1840, R.A. No. 153).

⁵⁴ C. L. Eastlake's *The salutation to the aged friar*, 1840, 1840, R.A. No. 61, (figure 5.4); T. Boddington, *Convent Hospitality. A nun is offering refuge in an adjoining convent to two sisters who, at the end of a long journey, had fallen faint by the way-side*, 1838 R.A. No.1027; E. W. Dallas, *The daily distribution of soup to the women and children at the gate of the Ara-Coeli (Capuchin) convent, on the Capitol hill, Rome*, 1839. R.A. No. 209.

⁵⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 157.

The first two paintings were *Poor travellers at the door of a Capuchin convent, near Vico, Bay of Naples* (1839), (figure 5.5) [hereafter 'Poor travellers'], and *A scene near Subiaco, Roman States* (1839) [hereafter 'Subiaco']. In *Poor travellers* a mother and her four children have arrived at the door of a convent. From the incidence of shadows, one can deduce that the scene is taking place late in the day. They are all evidently exhausted. The smallest child has fallen asleep on its mother, the next oldest has her head buried in her mother's skirts. An older boy stands behind his mother, looking very bedraggled. He has taken his hat off, presumably out of respect. The older girl has sat down on the convent step, her eyes closed with tiredness. All the family with the exception of the boy are barefooted. The boy has some kind of makeshift bandaging on his lower legs, through which two of his toes are projecting. It would appear that his legs are in a poor condition, perhaps injured. The family are evidently very poor, and in need of sustenance. In the open door stands a monk. His hands are clasped around what appears to be a loaf of bread. He has answered the family's need. No doubt, if they also need shelter for the night, he will direct them to a part of the convent where they can stay.

The exhibition-goer who took time to consider how an impoverished family travelling across England would fare in such circumstances could not fail to be struck forcibly by the difference. Such a family was liable either to be sent back to where they came from, or arrested and conveyed by the parish beadle to the local prison.⁵⁶ This was the subject of David Wilkie's *The Parish Beadle* (1820-23), with its preposterously self-important eponymous dignitary (figure 5.6).⁵⁷ Mark Bills has pointed to the figure in the hat, apparently

⁵⁶ Settlement Act 1662, Vagrancy Act 1824.

⁵⁷ An informal system existed whereby travellers could obtain a pass from a local magistrate enabling them to obtain help and subsistence along the way, but at the very time Wilkie was painting *The Parish Beadle* a

turning away, as indicating an uncaring attitude to the scene being played out in front of him, but it may be just as significant that he is looking towards the parish church. The Church does not intervene either.⁵⁸ Mounting concerns over the cost of relieving the poor subsequently led to the passing of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, its centralizing and statist approach to the issue wholly at variance with Tractarian principles.⁵⁹ Collins, as discussed in Chapter Four, is known to have had concerns about the treatment of the poor in general, and the 1834 Act in particular.⁶⁰ Such concerns were not, of course, limited to persons connected with the Oxford Movement. Criticism of the harshness and injustice of the Act was widespread. The year of Collins's return from Italy had seen the publication of the book version of *Oliver Twist* (1838), the opening chapters of which form an excoriating critique of the new regime.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it was a particular preoccupation of the Tractarians, who linked it specifically to a failure by the Anglican Church to fulfil its duty to the poor.

Tractarians repeatedly stressed the religious nature of the duty to relieve the poor, set out in both the Old and New Testaments, and the Anglican church's perceived failings in this respect.⁶² In an 1837 sermon criticizing the spirit of the times Pusey asked: 'is it therefore not more blessed to deny self, and build temples to our God, or give to Christ in His

Parliamentary Select Committee was reporting on the widespread abuse of this system. It was set up on 14 March 1821 (see: HC Deb 14 March 1821 vol 4 cc1216-9), and led to the passing of the Vagrancy Act 1822. The beadle is described by Nicholas Tromans (correctly, in my view) as 'preposterous' in *David Wilkie: The People's Painter*, 47.

⁵⁸ Mark Bills (ed.), *Dickens and the Artists*, Exhibition Catalogue, New Haven & London, 2012, 170.

⁵⁹ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 228-54.

⁶⁰ See Chapter Four, Section One, *Interpreting the paintings*.

⁶¹ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, introduction and notes by Stephen Gill, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, chapters I to IV, 1-31.

⁶² Frederick Oakeley, *The dignity and claims of the Christian Poor : Two sermons*, London, 1840, Sermon I, Luke, 6, 20; Samuel Bosanquet, 'Pauperism and Almsgiving', *British Critic*, 28 (55), July 1840, 242, quoting Deuteronomy, 15, 11.

poor?'.⁶³ Tractarians adamantly opposed the transfer of responsibility from the parish to Poor Law Unions brought about by the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834. That legislation was passed as a response to an increase, year on year, in the global amount of the poor rate. But, as the Tractarian Samuel Bosanquet pointed out, the issue was not so much that the cost of poor relief was rising, but that the overall amounts being provided for charitable relief were dismally low, especially when compared with continental Europe.⁶⁴ The new Poor Law was 'a prop to a falling house' and radical reform was required.⁶⁵ The first step was to reverse the 1834 legislation and return responsibility to the parishes.⁶⁶ Bosanquet stressed the pivotal role that the clergy could play both in obtaining funds and ensuring that they were utilized properly.⁶⁷

In advocating these steps, the Tractarians were following in the footsteps of Thomas Chalmers, whom Collins had heard preaching in 1817. Chalmers had published two articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1817 and 1818 proposing the transfer of responsibility for all poor relief in Glasgow to parish churches, funded by the wealthier members of the parish, and legislation to extend such a scheme across Britain.⁶⁸ As Skinner points out, the feasibility of such proposals had been ridiculed by the *British Critic* in the early 1830s, but by the end of

⁶³Edward Bouverie Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, 3 vols, London, 1883, II, 'Sermon XVI. Christian kindness and charity. St Barnabas. Acts 4, 36-7', 386.

⁶⁴ Bosanquet, 'Pauperism and Almsgiving', 223-34.

⁶⁵ Samuel Bosanquet, 'Private alms and poor law relief', *British Critic and quarterly theological review*, 28 (56), October 1840, 447.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 454.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 469-70.

⁶⁸ Thomas Chalmers, 'The Connexion between the Extension of the Church and the Extinction of Pauperism' *Edinburgh Review*, xxviii, March 1817, 1-31; and 'Causes and Cures of Pauperism', *Edinburgh Review*, xxix, February 1818, 261-302; cited in Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*, Oxford, 1982, 118-120.

the decade, they were being put forward as a serious practical proposition.⁶⁹ By January 1841 Frederick Oakeley could pose the question:

What if we had more frequent Communion, and even when there is no Communion, the Offertory, as seems to be intended by the rubric? What, if all alms were lodged with the Church, consecrated on the Altar, and distributed by the Clergy?⁷⁰

Bosanquet and Oakeley were putting forward ideas that Dodsworth, in his inaugural sermon at Christ Church, Albany Street in 1837, had made clear he intended to implement from the start.⁷¹ He regularly dedicated the church's substantial weekly offertory towards poor relief in his parish, either directly for the poor and those who had fallen on hard times, or indirectly, for dispensaries and the district visitors.⁷²

Tractarians consistently traced the origins of the church's failure to deal with the poor back to the dissolution and seizure of the monasteries in Henry VIII's time. They regarded the dissolution as a social and religious catastrophe in terms of pastoral care, and support for the surrounding populations and travellers. This was not a novel perception; Skinner observes that 'Hostility to the Reformation, and nostalgia for the ecclesiastical and especially monastic beneficence it was held to have effaced, were staples of anti-commercial sentiment in this period'.⁷³ Nor was it necessarily historically accurate. Skinner describes a

⁶⁹ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 239.

⁷⁰ Frederick Oakeley, 'Ancient and Modern Ways of Charity, *British Critic*, 29 (57), January 1841, 55. The reference to the 'rubric' is to the provisions of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

⁷¹ William Dodsworth, *Correlative Claims of the Church and Her Members. A Sermon preached in Christ Church St Pancras on Sunday, July 16th 1837, being the First Sunday after the Consecration of the Church*, London, 1837, 19-20.

⁷² London Metropolitan Archives, *Christ Church Albany Street, Preacher's Book*, P90/CTC2/026, 6th Sunday in Lent.1839, St Pancras dispensary (£83-15-0); 2nd Sunday after Epiphany 1839, district visitors; Good Friday 1840 district visitors, £50-5-0; Epiphany Sunday 1840, district poor £76-12-6; 2nd Sun after Epiphany 1841, poor, £122-18-10; Ash Wed 1841, poor, £21-0-6; 12 December 1841, poor, £112-2-8; 26 June 1842, distressed manufacturers, £126-16-2; 19 November 1843, poor, £111-15-10.

⁷³ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 204.

‘romantic idealization of the wide welfare functions notionally discharged by the monasteries’.⁷⁴ This ‘romantic idealization’ was shared by writers from backgrounds as diverse as those of Wordsworth, in *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), the radical Tory William Cobbett in *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, 1824-26*, and the Catholic convert A.W.N. Pugin in *Contrasts* (1836).⁷⁵ This was, likewise, what Tractarians believed. Pusey referred to the plundering of the monasteries in these terms: ‘The patrimony of the poor was scattered among the rich, or taken to bear the burdens of the state, which the rich should bear’.⁷⁶ He claimed to have researched the subject thoroughly, and concluded ‘that almost every case of inadequate provision for our poor people had its root in the transfer of monastic property’.⁷⁷ This perception of the role of the monasteries clearly served to bolster Tractarian arguments about the failure of the Anglican church to look after the poor. By the early 1840s it was a perception which was frequently adopted in contemporary novels. In the Tractarian preacher William Gresley’s novel, *Clement Walton* (1840), Mr Walton’s inaugural lecture at the new Institute extols the historic Roman Catholic church as ‘the great instrument of civilisation’ and monasteries as ‘the only place of refuge for the traveller’ where the poor and the sick ‘had their wants relieved, and their diseases cured’.⁷⁸ In *Coningsby* (1844), Mr Lyle organises twice-weekly alms-giving for the local

⁷⁴ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 205.

⁷⁵ William Wordsworth, ‘Dissolution of the Monasteries. Continued’, *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), Part II, XVI, lines 8-11, in *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845 by William Wordsworth*, Ed. Geoffrey Jackson, Ithaca, N.Y.; London, 2004, 172; William Cobbett, *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, 1824-26*, William Cobbett: selected writings, ed. Leonora Natrass, Vol. V, London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998, 158; Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *Contrasts: Or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; shewing the present decay of taste*, Second edition, 1841 (Cambridge, 2013), 19 & 22.

⁷⁶Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, 3 vols, London, 1883, II, ‘Sermon XII. The Sin of Judas. Palm Sunday, Matthew, 27,3-5’, 197 at 202.

⁷⁷Henry Parry Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, 4 vols, London, 1894, III, 172, cited in Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 207.

⁷⁸ William Gresley, *Clement Walton; or, The English Citizen*, London, 1840, 51.

populace.⁷⁹ In *Sybil* (1845), contemplation of the ruins of Marney Abbey elicits the narrator's observations that monasteries had been 'a point of refuge for all who needed succour, counsel and protection' and that with their destruction 'the gate of the poor was to be closed forever, and the wanderer was no more to find a home'.⁸⁰ Accordingly, the setting for *Poor travellers* at the door of a convent would, I suggest, have acted as a prompt, setting off a train of association both with monastic institutions, as they were believed to have functioned in England, and with Tractarianism.

Of course, it remains perfectly possible, and must always have been possible, for a viewer to see *Poor Travellers* simply as a landscape painting – a view of the Bay of Naples seen from the door of an Italian convent. The only modern scholar to consider *Poor travellers* confined himself to identifying the convent concerned, and the comments of some reviewers.⁸¹ Certainly, none of the exhibition reviewers considered what the scene represented. Two critics focussed on formal aspects, such as whether Collins's figures were too large and dominated the landscape, or whether, on balance, the characterisation and drama in the scenes made that acceptable. Both reviewers wondered whether or not the colours accurately represented the 'sunny south' or were too reminiscent of 'the cool greys and greens of our native land'.⁸² However, they evidently missed the point that a certain ambiguity as to the geographical setting of the painting only served to highlight the very different manner in which the poor were treated in England.

⁷⁹ Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby* (1844), ed. Bernard N. Langdon-Davies, London & Edinburgh, 1904, 174-76.

⁸⁰ Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil*, 1845; ed. Bernard N. Langdon-Davies, London & Edinburgh, 1904, 83, 78.

⁸¹ Morris, 'William Collins and Sorrento', 132-33.

⁸² *Examiner*, 4 August 1839, 486, and *Morning Chronicle*, 7 May 1839, 6.

My argument that *Poor Travellers* should be seen as very much more than a picturesque landscape image is reinforced by an entry in Collins's Notebook, which suggests a link between *Poor travellers* and a key work of Tractarian literature, Newman's *Lyra Apostolica* (1836). Collins's Notebook contains a list of possible subjects for paintings which he had, by 1838, jotted down. One of these reads: 'From Lyra Apostolica', and transcribes the opening lines of Newman's poem 'The Good Samaritan' (up to 'Of service').⁸³ The entire poem reads:

O that thy creed were sound!
For thou dost soothe the heart, Thou Church of Rome,
By thy unwearied watch and varied round
Of service, in thy Saviour's holy home.
I cannot walk the city's sultry streets,
But the wide porch invites to still retreats,
Where passions thirst is calmed, and care's unthankful gloom.

There on a foreign shore
The homesick solitary finds a friend:
Thoughts, prisoned long for lack of speech, outpour
Their tears; and doubts in resignation end.
I almost fainted from the long delay,
That tangles me within this languid bay,
When comes a foe, my wounds with oil and wine to tend.⁸⁴

It is not easy to see, immediately, how the opening lines of 'The Good Samaritan' or indeed the entire poem might be represented pictorially, as Collins evidently intended. However, *Poor travellers* features not only a very broad threshold step in front of the convent (a 'wide porch') but also a view of the Bay of Naples, and a smaller bay, with an apparently very calm sea – a 'languid bay' – and that it is there, 'on a foreign shore' that a representative of the

⁸³ William Collins, Notebook II, fol.28^v. The poem was first published in the *British Magazine and monthly register of religious and ecclesiastical information, parochial history*, February 1836, 147, as 'The Latin Church', and subsequently printed in *Lyra Apostolica*, Derby, 1836, poem number CLXXII, under the main heading 'Disappointment', as 'The Good Samaritan'.

⁸⁴ *Lyra Apostolica*, 1836, 230.

‘foe’, a Roman Catholic monk, gives succour to the exhausted family, their ‘wounds with oil and wine to tend’. *Lyra Apostolica* has been described by G.B. Tennyson as ‘A consciously didactic and polemic product of the Oxford Movement’.⁸⁵ That Collins should have been aware of its contents is unsurprising, given his close personal relationship with Dodsworth, and Dodsworth’s relationship with Newman.⁸⁶

It is instructive to compare Collins’s approach to portraying the role of the monastery with that of the painter John Rogers Herbert (1810-90). By 1838 Herbert had converted to Roman Catholicism.⁸⁷ In 1840, he exhibited *The Monastery in the Fourteenth Century, Boar Hunters refreshed at St Augustines, Canterbury* (figure 5.7). Here was a representation of hospitality for the upper classes of society provided by a religious institution five hundred years ago, whereas Collins’s painting exhibited the previous year was a representation of hospitality provided by a religious institution for the poorest members of society, in the here and now. It was perhaps Herbert’s Catholicism that led him to exhibit at this stage in his career paintings, the subject-matter of which were pre-Reformation rather than modern, and so less likely to offend Protestant susceptibilities. He was concerned, as Nancy Langham Hooper has explained, to reference the Catholic origins of England.⁸⁸ Collins, however, as an established Anglican, was free to comment on the positive nature of contemporary Roman Catholicism in a way in which Herbert was not. Collins’s approach can be seen as ‘Tractarian’

⁸⁵ G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, 1981, 114.

⁸⁶ Dodsworth had met Newman in January 1836, and they held frequent meetings over the next six months. See Young, ‘William Dodsworth’, 110, 112-13.

⁸⁷ Nancy Marie Langham (Nancy Langham Hooper), ‘“The Splendour and Beauty of Truth” : John Rogers Herbert, R. A. (1810-1890)’, unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2012, 15.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

both in showing the monastery as providing relief from poverty, and in the fact that he eschews England in medieval times as a paradigm, in favour of the Italian here and now.

The whereabouts of *Subiaco*, the second of Collins's paintings exhibited in 1839, are unknown. Wilkie Collins describes its composition as follows:

Near a rude penthouse chapel, to the right of the composition, stands an old begging friar, holding in one hand his tin money-box, and raising the other to bless two lovely little peasant children, who are giving him a small copper coin, while their mother stands at a little distance, looking at the group. This incident the painter had often observed in Italy.⁸⁹

From the description, the children are being encouraged by their mother to give to the poor, something frequently seen by the Collins family during their visit to Italy. There are echoes of Collins's earlier painting *Cottage Hospitality* (1834).⁹⁰ Here, however, the exhibition catalogue entry includes, after the title: '*Elemosina per la Madonna*'.⁹¹ As with *Poor travellers*, the painting can be read as a commentary on the difference of approach in English and Italian society towards charitable relief of the poor. After the 1834 Act, poor relief was to be provided exclusively through the workhouse system, whereas Italian society expected the Church to play a leading role. As discussed above, the aspiration that the Anglican Church should resume this role was a major pillar of Tractarian social policy. The friar raising money for his monastery is playing his part in the Catholic model, with the general population providing support through charitable contributions, according to their means. The fact that the contribution is being handed over by the child of a (presumably) relatively poor peasant not only reflects Collins's interest in portraying children's agency, but Tractarian indignation at the trope, common in English discussion of poverty, of the poor as merely recipients of

⁸⁹Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 159-160.

⁹⁰ That painting is discussed in Chapter Two, Section Four, *The transition to adulthood and its responsibilities*.

⁹¹That is, '*Alms for the Madonna*'.

charity; as Samuel Bosanquet put it, in 1840: 'above all the poor are capable of charity. The alms which they give are a greater amount, and are a perfect shame to their richer neighbours'.⁹² In return for contributions, the monastery will provide social and spiritual benefits to the community.

That the role of the Catholic Church includes the provision of moral authority and guidance for the poor can be seen in *The Peace-maker* (1841, R.A. 1841, No. 195).⁹³ Its current whereabouts are unknown, and no image is available. However, its composition is known through the description given by Wilkie Collins and by exhibition reviewers. The scene was set on a balcony overlooking the Bay of Naples.⁹⁴ According to Collins's son, it showed:

... a brawny Neapolitan fisherman; his arms are crossed doggedly over his bare swarthy breast; his sulky face expresses a temporary and ungracious submissiveness; his heavy brows are knit with a sinister lowering expression – he is the sort of man, of whom any woman would declare at once, that he would 'make a bad husband:' and a bad husband he is; as the suffering, forlorn expression of his wife's countenance, turned imploringly on his averted face, evidently shows... Between the refractory husband and the ill-used wife stands the Peace-maker—a bare-headed monk, (mediator in all family disputes, like the rest of his fraternity,) indignantly reproving the offender.⁹⁵

A depiction of the moral authority exercised, and pastoral care given by the Roman Catholic church to ordinary people emerges from this description. Wilkie Collins goes on to describe 'the brutal respect in the countenance of the husband, as he submits to the all-powerful moral ascendancy of his "spiritual pastor and master"'. From the *Athenaeum*, we know that Collins also depicted children present: 'while his children play on the floor at his feet'.⁹⁶ It is, I

⁹² Bosanquet, 'Pauperism and Almsgiving', 222.

⁹³ Originally entitled by him *The monk's remonstrance*: William Collins, Notebook II, fol.15'.

⁹⁴ *Art-Union*, 1841, 77.

⁹⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 188-89.

⁹⁶ *Athenaeum*, 15 May 1841, 388. The reviewer regarded them as unaffected by domestic strife: they are playing 'in the fulness of the gaiety of their innocent years, but transiently touched by strife or sorrow even

suggest, difficult to imagine such a story being told at that point in time, 1841, by transposing the scene to England with an Anglican clergyman expostulating in such an interventionist manner. I suggest that Collins wanted to encourage his audience to consider the extent to which, in their home country, priests were embedded in their community so as to exercise the moral authority and provide the pastoral care that the Church once did. This was the Tractarian ideal, as set out in Dodsworth's manifesto for Christ Church, Albany Street, in which he emphasises his intended pastoral role.⁹⁷ For this reason, *The peace-maker* can likewise be seen in Tractarian terms as holding up a mirror to the contemporary Anglican church's perceived failure to deliver adequate pastoral care to the community through its parish priests.

Rest days and (holy) days, and the role of the Church

The third painting Collins exhibited in 1839 was *The Game of Arravoglio* [hereafter 'Arravoglio'] (figure 3.50). The setting is the Bay of Naples. From the shadows, and the well-known geography and orientation of the Bay, we are to understand that it is late afternoon. In the foreground, a family group are relaxing by the shoreline. A mother is lying on her side, propped up on one elbow, holding an infant. In front of her two boys are playing 'Arravoglio', a game involving knocking a ball through a circular hoop with a curved bat. On the low wall which separates the viewer from the beach are a spare bat, a pitcher and a stringed musical instrument. It is a scene of recreation and harmony. Exhibition viewers might have

among their parents'. Whether that was the artist's intention or the exhibition viewer's understanding is, of course, another matter.

⁹⁷ William Dodsworth, *Correlative Claims of the Church and Her Members*, 1, 17.

interpreted it as a transposition of Collins's coastal scenes, discussed in Chapter Three, such as *Prawn Fishers at Hastings* (1825) or *Searching the Net* (1826), to a southern Italian setting. However, Collins's English beach paintings exclusively feature children, and here Collins portrays a family. Also, the presence of the musical instrument indicates that the family have been to a *fiesta*, a Catholic feast day.

Scenes of *fiestas* themselves were, by this time, a regular feature of Royal Academy exhibitions (see figures 5.2 and 5.3). Collins's friend, and companion on many sketching expeditions during the summer of 1837, Thomas Uwins, exhibited no less than three such paintings in 1839.⁹⁸ Collins, however, rather than depicting a *fiesta* itself, or a crowd going or coming from a *fiesta*, has chosen in *Arravoglio* an allusive reference to a *fiesta* in the shape of the stringed instrument, portraying a family enjoying the calm aftermath of the 'Holy Day' and a time for recreation. It is very different from the 'fiesta' works of other artists, which portray colourful and picturesque scenes and processions. The painting conveys Tractarian criticism of the inadequacy of holidays for the general population, resulting in insufficient rest days and leisure. That, in turn, was considered to be the reason for a perceived growth in non-observance of the Sabbath. The lack of holidays was not an entirely novel focus of attention. The Tractarian Thomas Mozley, reviewing Lord John Manners' *A Plea for National Holy-days* (1843), references Manners' quotation from Robert Southey, who, as early as 1807, had written 'They reproach the Catholic religion with the number of its holy days,

⁹⁸ No. 119, *Young Neapolitans returning from the Festa of St Antonio*; No. 180, *Neapolitans dancing the tarantella*; and No. 210, *The Bay of Naples; A group of peasants going to the Villa Reale, on the morning of the festa of the Pie de Grotta*).

never considering how the want of holy days breaks down and brutalises the labouring class, and that where they occur seldom they are uniformly abused'.⁹⁹

If the Anglican church was to take the lead in reinstating Holy Days, then it would need funding to do so. Collins addressed the Catholic church's approach in his 1842 painting *Dominican monks returning to the convent – Bay of Naples* [hereafter '*Dominican Monks*'].¹⁰⁰ *Dominican monks* is known only through descriptions provided by reviewers and Wilkie Collins, who wrote: 'The monks have been out, levying contributions from the larders of the pious laity; and ... have succeeded in loading mules, lay-brothers, and peasant boys, with provisions for half the feast-days in the year'.¹⁰¹ His light-hearted description, and further references to 'gastronomic brigade', unctuous good-fellowship' and 'capital dinner' might suggest that the painting is a commentary on what might be described as the 'down side' of a system where contributions for religious personnel are sought from the local population. As Harriet put it, in a long diary entry reflecting on the year 1837: 'money the grand object of the priests and monks the poor subject to the most grinding extortion'.¹⁰² No doubt many observers saw it in that way. The *Literary Gazette's critic* certainly did, also adding some helpful description of the composition:

It is a very delightful painting: the bay spread out in all its beauty, the convent perched upon its rocky summit, and the worthy brethren, enjoying their mulish and refreshing ride with all the gusto of that description of persons of whom it is written,

'No earl, or squire, or knight of the shire

⁹⁹ Thomas Mozley, 'Lord John Manners' "Plea for National Holy Days"', *British Critic*, April 1843, 33 (66), 417. The quotation is from Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella (Robert Southey), *Letters from England*, 3 vols, London, 1807. See, *Letters from England*, ed. Carol Bolton, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2015, Letter LXVII.

¹⁰⁰ R.A. 1842, No. 529.

¹⁰¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 204.

¹⁰² Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, undated final entry.

Lives half so well as a holy friar.¹⁰³

His use of the refrain written by the comic opera librettist and dramatist John O’Keefe (1747-1833) likewise suggests an interpretation of the painting as a light-hearted swipe at clerical gluttony.

However, another interpretation is possible. Collins began the painting in the autumn of 1841.¹⁰⁴ In January of that year Frederick Oakeley had published a twenty-six page review in the *British Critic* entitled ‘Ancient and Modern Ways of Charity’, which he used as a springboard for a wide-ranging review of the Anglican Church’s shortcomings, including the ignoring of stipulated festivals which would provide additional holidays for the poor.¹⁰⁵ He extols the virtues of catholic holy days as providing much needed rest days for those on the labouring treadmill.¹⁰⁶ He proposes that all alms should be distributed by the clergy.¹⁰⁷

In looking back towards how things might have been in England before the dissolution of the monasteries, Tractarians necessarily looked to current practice in Roman Catholic countries. In Italy the holy days were *festas*. They depended heavily on the churches and monasteries both for the ceremonial religious element and in terms of provisioning the festive element of the holiday. So whilst the monks returning to the convent, ‘with provisions for half the feast-days in the year’, may well have enjoyed a good dinner that night, there can

¹⁰³ *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts*, 7 May 1842, 316. The two lines quoted refer to the refrain from ‘I am a friar of orders gray’ (‘What baron or squire, | Or knight of the shire, | Lives half so well as a holy friar?’).

¹⁰⁴ This can be inferred from its position in the list of paintings painted from April 1841 to April 1842 in Collins’s Notebook (Notebook II, fol. 16’).

¹⁰⁵ *British critic, and quarterly theological review*, 29 (47), January 1841, Art. II, ‘Ancient and Modern Ways of Charity’, 44-70, reviewing Arthur H.G. Acland, *A letter to the right reverend fathers in God, the Lords Bishops of Exeter and Salisbury, and through them to their clergy, on the present state of Religious Societies and the mode of obtaining Contributions in aid of Christian Objects*, Second edition, Exeter & London, 1840.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

be little doubt that the great bulk of the provisions would have been redistributed in the coming *festas*. As with *Poor travellers*, the painting thus sets in train, in the mind of the attuned observer, reflections on whether or not the Anglican church has something to learn, or rather, relearn from Roman Catholic practice. Just as *The Game of Arravoglio* (1839) could be seen as the aftermath of the *festa*, *Dominican monks* can be seen as the necessary precursor – collecting the wherewithal so that it can be ‘distributed by the clergy’.

In 1840, Collins exhibited *The passing welcome, Naples*.¹⁰⁸ Collins recorded the subject in his Notebook as ‘Going to a Festa’.¹⁰⁹ It accordingly represents an earlier stage in the Festa than *Arravoglio*, above. Its present whereabouts are unknown. The composition is broadly known from Wilkie Collins’s description: ‘Two handsome gaily-attired peasant girls, leaning over the balcony of a vine-dresser’s cottage, and offering a bunch of grapes to a young fellow stopping to talk to them, as he passes on horseback to the “Festa”’. He also refers to ‘the gaudy accoutrements of the young peasant’s horse’.¹¹⁰ The reviewer for the *Literary Gazette* was less certain as to the status of the various participants:

The passing welcome is seen on a group of females on an elevated, vine-clad, terrace, bestowing a bunch of delicious grapes on a traveller who has halted below to receive the gift; but whether this is a general custom, or a particular favour, we are left to guess.¹¹¹

That the reviewer hesitated to attribute a class element to the ‘group of females’ suggests that the participants might well have been of different social classes. That might encourage the viewer to reflect on whether a parallel scene in England was likely, or possible, given the

¹⁰⁸ 1840, R.A. No. 256.

¹⁰⁹ Willam Collins, Notebook II, f.29^v.

¹¹⁰ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 170.

¹¹¹ *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1840, no.1218, 23 May 1840, 332. This appears to be the only review of this painting.

absence of social occasions when classes would mingle. This would serve to highlight the increased social cohesion which might follow if the Anglican church reinstated the Holy Days provided for in the Book of Common Prayer. Roman Catholic ceremonies witnessed by Harriet during Holy Week 1837 had included scenes in which nobles and cardinals (and the Pope himself) washed the feet of pilgrims and waited on them at table, a ceremony that the Collins's would have been aware of from their friend David Wilkie's portrayal in *A Roman Princess Washing the Feet of Pilgrims* (1827).¹¹²

The passing welcome was commissioned in May 1839 by Collins's friend and patron John Marshall, the Leeds industrialist, for his son James Marshall.¹¹³ The family had just acquired an estate for James, and this painting was evidently intended for the new home.¹¹⁴ As it was a commission, the subject was probably chosen by the Marshalls, and this would have been the case in respect of the companion piece commissioned from Collins the following month.¹¹⁵ The subject of the companion piece was to be 'Lazzaroni', a term graphically explained by Wilkie Collins as applying to 'those easy-living vagabonds, who, forming a marked and original body in the population of Naples, have acquired an European reputation, as the most illustrious and genuine idlers in the ranks of "the human family"'.¹¹⁶ *Lazzaroni (Naples)* (1841), [hereafter '*Lazzaroni*'], is unfortunately missing, like its companion piece.¹¹⁷ On the face of it, it is not easy to see what connection this painting might have had with Tractarian themes, and of course it is possible that the Marshalls wanted a light-hearted

¹¹² Harriet Collins, 1837 journal, 'Memorandums of Holy Week Ceremonies', Thursday 23 March 1837.

¹¹³ William Collins, Notebook II, f.29^v: '1839/...May/an Italian subject for James Marshall Esq about 150 guineas. Going to a Festa'.

¹¹⁴ The Monk Coniston estate, Coniston, now owned by the National Trust.

¹¹⁵ William Collins, Notebook II, f.29^v: '1839/June 14. A picture ¾ size – Lazzaroni Naples – as a companion already begun. For James Marshall Esq.'.

¹¹⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 189.

¹¹⁷ Exhibited 1841 R.A. 349.

and picturesque painting of those ‘illustrious and genuine idlers’. However, we do know from his son’s description of the painting that Collins chose, as the setting for *Lazzaroni*, a church portico—according to Wilkie Collins ‘their [the lazzaronis’] favourite haunt’.¹¹⁸

Tractarians constantly inveighed against barriers to the poor accessing Anglican churches, which they perceived as having been erected by the post-Reformation Anglican church. That Dodsworth should have stressed the fact that Roman Catholic churches were open all the time is unsurprising.¹¹⁹ It was a constant and vociferous complaint of Tractarians that Anglican churches were only open for the Sunday service.¹²⁰ This was of particular importance to the poorer classes of society: ‘It is manifest that the systematic neglect of daily worship must very greatly affect the whole tone and temper of a population’.¹²¹ Even when an Anglican church was physically open, its layout with rented pews meant that poorer people were discriminated against, and discouraged from attending.¹²² A group of idlers eating their lunch in the portico of an English parish church would be a highly improbable subject for an artist. Even if it were physically possible for them to access the portico, it would be seen as an intolerable affront to religion. By situating the idlers in the portico of a Roman Catholic church, Collins may have been intending to portray that church as a centre, religious and social, for everybody, even those on the edge of society, in much the same way as the convent in *Poor travellers* is available to all.

¹¹⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 190.

¹¹⁹ William Dodsworth, *Allegiance to the Church: A Sermon (on I Cor. xiii. 20)*, London, 1841, 20.

¹²⁰ Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 157-60.

¹²¹ William Gresley, *A Short Treatise on the English Church*, 1845, 42-44, cited in Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 157.

¹²² Oakeley, ‘Ancient and Modern Ways of Charity’, 55; Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 167-182.

To summarise, *Arravoglio*, *Dominican Monks*, and *The Passing Welcome* can be interpreted as a commentary upon the social benefits of reinstating ‘Holy Days’, which everyone, particularly the poor, can participate in; a distinctly Tractarian theme. Even *The Passing Welcome’s* companion piece, *Lazzaroni*, can be seen as highlighting the difference between the Roman Catholic church as a religious and social centre, open to all, and the typical Anglican parish church as rarely open, and unwelcoming to poorer people.

Devotional sentiment and the role of the Church

Wilkie Collins made a point of contrasting the atmosphere of ‘gaiety, action and sunlight’ in *Dominican monks* with what he perceived as the ‘devotional sentiment’ of his father’s other painting exhibited in 1842, *Prayer. A family about to leave their native shores imploring Divine protection*.¹²³ This section deals with this painting, together with two other Italian subject paintings which depict devotional sentiment. In these paintings, I argue, Collins explored both the differences, and the common ground between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism.

An overarching theme, which the first generation Tractarians repeatedly stressed, was that there was much that was good in contemporary Roman Catholicism, which contemporary Anglicanism had lost sight of. In a sermon delivered in 1841, for example, Dodsworth begins by setting out three of the most objectionable ‘corruptions’ of the Roman Catholic church: the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the cult of the Virgin Mary, and worship of images.¹²⁴ But he then makes it clear that ‘the way to stop the progress of the Romish

¹²³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 204, 203.

¹²⁴ Dodsworth, *Allegiance to the Church*, 13.

schism in this land is to exhibit whatever is excellent in it in a purer form'.¹²⁵ He goes on to enumerate such excellent Roman Catholic practices as churches being open every day, frequent communion, holy commemorations and kneeling in prayer.¹²⁶ Tractarians considered that the church of the early Christian Fathers was a purer Christian church. Although it had subsequently been corrupted by Rome, Roman Catholicism nevertheless had continued with much that was valuable, and which was also prescribed, but no longer followed, in the liturgy of the Anglican Church. To that extent, the present Anglican church needed to relearn from the Roman Catholic church. That Dodsworth's views were entirely representative of mainstream Tractarianism can be seen from the opening editorial, in January 1843, of the *English Churchman*, committing the new periodical to the principle of 'brotherhood in the one Catholic and Apostolic church'.¹²⁷ A return to first principles as set out in the early Christian church, and re-adoption of the best features of the contemporary Roman Catholic church, including its spirituality and devotion, was required.

In 1840, Collins exhibited *Ave Maria - scene near Tivoli* (figure 5.8). On a rocky outcrop in the foreground of an extensive and hilly landscape, with a town in the middle distance, a teenage girl, eyes uplifted, plays a stringed instrument while her younger sibling, lying by her side, listens dreamily. A dog lies at her feet. Exhibition goers would have known, from literary allusions and travel, that *Ave Maria* was a universally said, or sung, prayer

¹²⁵ Dodsworth, *Allegiance to the Church*, 19.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

¹²⁷ *English Churchman*, 5 January 1843, 8.

throughout the Catholic world.¹²⁸ The Collins family would appear to have witnessed it on a daily basis outside their lodgings in Rome.¹²⁹ The prayer translates as follows:

Hail Mary, full of grace,
The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners, now,
and at the hour of our death. Amen.¹³⁰

Lines one to four are scriptural and appear in Early Christian liturgies, the reconnection to which was of fundamental importance to Tractarians.¹³¹ As Carol Herringer has pointed out, a number of prominent Tractarians, including Keble, promoted the recitation of this part.¹³² The final three lines were not officially adopted by the Roman Catholic Church until 1568, and, being a prayer to the Virgin to act as intercessor constituted 'unacceptable idolatry' in Protestant terms.¹³³ This was the Tractarian viewpoint also; Herringer refers to Newman's Tract Seventy-five (1837) in which Newman rejects the use of the prayer as tending to encourage the direct worship of the Virgin Mary and Saints.¹³⁴

Accordingly 'Hail Mary' was an inherently problematic subject from the standpoint of acceptable 'Protestant' art, which perhaps explains why, between 1806 and 1840, only two paintings with that title were exhibited at the British Institution or Royal Academy, and then

¹²⁸ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick* (originally published 1768, Paul Goring, ed. Penguin Books, London, 110: at Moulines, Maria 'took her pipe, and played her service to the Virgin'.

¹²⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 92.

¹³⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Hail Mary". Encyclopaedia Britannica, 30 Aug. 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hail-Mary-prayer>. Accessed 28 October 2022.

¹³¹ Ibid., Lines 1-3 appear in Luke, 1.28. Lines 3-4 appear in Luke, 1.42, except for 'Jesus'.

¹³² Carol Engelhardt Herringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary: Religion and Gender in England, 1830-1885*, Manchester, 2008, 60-61.

¹³³ Clare Haynes, *Pictures and Popery: Art and Religion in England, 1660-1760*, Aldershot : Ashgate, 2006, 77.

¹³⁴ John Henry Newman, Tract 75, *On the Roman Breviary as embodying the substance of the devotional services of the Church Catholic*, London, 1837, 10, cited in Herringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary*, 61, n.218.

only in 1836 and 1837.¹³⁵ Collins may have attempted to reduce the negative connotations the subject might have had by linking it, in the exhibition catalogue, to contemporary poetry.

The painting's title is followed by an extract from Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24):

Ave Maria! Blessed be the hour,
The time, the clime, the spot where I so oft
Have felt that moment in its fullest power,
Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft. – Byron¹³⁶

This, of course, deflects attention from the prayer to the Virgin Mary to the time at which the prayer is generally said, in the early evening before sunset, and the accompanying feelings which contemplation of a landscape gives rise to at the end of the day.¹³⁷

Collins's responses to his immersion in Roman Catholic culture, between 1836 and 1838, are difficult to gauge; the loss of, or destruction of almost all of his diaries means that there is no first-hand evidence of his views. His wife's journal from the time of leaving England in 1836 until the end of 1837 does survive, however.¹³⁸ In her final entry, she expresses her strong disapproval of idolatry and worship of the Virgin Mary in terms very much in tune with long-established Protestant antipathy towards Roman Catholicism, and the views of contemporary female travellers in Italy.¹³⁹ However, she made a point of attending as many of the Holy Week ceremonies as possible, mostly with the whole family.

¹³⁵ Thomas Boddington, H., *Ave Maria*, 1836 R.A. No. 282. Its composition is unknown; Edward H Fryer (fl. 1834/43), *Ave Maria*, 1837 R.A. No. 132. Its composition is unknown, and as it was exhibited in 1837, Collins would not have seen it.

¹³⁶ Lord Byron, *Lord Byron: the major works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 516, *Don Juan*, Canto III, stanza 102, lines 1-4.

¹³⁷ That Collins felt able to include a quotation from *Don Juan* is probably accounted for by the availability by this date of 'sanitised' selections from Byron's work; see Clare Bucknell, *The Treasuries: Poetry Anthologies and the Making of British Culture*, London: Head of Zeus Ltd, 2023, 89. The lines quoted by Collins were available, for example, in the extract headed 'Twilight' in J.W. Lake, *The Beauties of Byron*, Paris: Baudry; Bobée & Hingray, 1829, 201.

¹³⁸ London, National Art Library, Special Collections 86.BB Box, Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37.

¹³⁹ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, undated entry, probably for 1 January 1838; Haynes, *Pictures and Popery*; Isabel Baudino, 'Nothing Seems to Have Escaped Her': British Women Travellers as Art Critics and Connoisseurs (1775–1825), in *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2019(28).

providing a lengthy description of these in a separate eight page memorandum.¹⁴⁰ Her diary gives tantalising glimpses of religious discussions both with Roman Catholics and Protestant fellow visitors but, unfortunately, provides no detail as to their content.¹⁴¹ With regard to their own religious observance whilst abroad, they went to church each Sunday in cities where there was a resident Anglican community.¹⁴² When this was not possible they had house prayers.¹⁴³ Whilst they interacted with Roman Catholic ceremonies as tourists, and not as worshippers, they were nevertheless happy to visit the English Cardinal Weld's lying in state, and subsequently attended both his funeral and his requiem services.¹⁴⁴ Evidently they enjoyed the music which frequently accompanied Roman Catholic ceremonies.¹⁴⁵ When staying in the Naples region, they attended a *fiesta* at the Catholic church in the village of Cocumella, and 'heard part of the sermon'.¹⁴⁶ There are, however, passages in his son's biography which indicate that Collins's views on Roman Catholic culture were not so dismissive as those of Harriet. For example, she was revolted by the annual ceremony of

¹⁴⁰ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 'Memorandums of the Holy Week Ceremonies', inserted in the journal between the entries for Wednesday 22 and Thursday 23 March 1837.

¹⁴¹ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 2 May, 1 and 2 July, 29 September, 1 November 1837. There was evidently a heated exchange over religion on 29 September 1837, since Harriet refers to a religious discussion with a Mr. Hills as ending with Mr. Hills 'going off in a fret' and the Collins's other guests leaving shortly afterwards.

¹⁴² Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, *passim*. In Rome, they attended the 'English church' from the date of their arrival, presumably All Saints church, via Babuino. In Naples they attended church each Sunday.

¹⁴³ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, May to October 1837, *passim*.

¹⁴⁴ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 12, 14 and 22 April 1837. Cardinal Thomas Weld (1773-1837) came from a Catholic family of English landowners, but renounced his estates to become a Catholic priest in 1821. Rising with great rapidity through the hierarchy he was made a Cardinal in 1830. His funeral oration was delivered by Nicholas (later Cardinal) Wiseman.

¹⁴⁵ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 22 April 1837; Harriet Collins, 'Memorandums of the Holy Week Ceremonies', 22 March 1837.

¹⁴⁶ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 23 July 1837. It is possible that while Collins was seriously ill at Cocumella they, or at least Harriet, attended a service there on Sunday 10 September 1837, but the entry 'had prayers of church in even^g' is ambiguous, and may refer to prayers being offered up for the sick in general, or Collins in particular, at the church.

blessing the animals outside the church of St. Antonio.¹⁴⁷ According to her son, however, it 'was a subject my father never entirely resigned the hope of painting'.¹⁴⁸

Whilst it is difficult to gauge Collins's position, as opposed to that of his wife, in relation to popular devotion towards the Virgin Mary and invocation of her, seeing faith in action abroad could result in a perspective which was rather more nuanced than that displayed by Dodsworth. Heringer has noted this in relation to M.H. Seymour's visit to Rome, ten years after Collins's visit, and his ambivalent reaction to witnessing Marian devotion. Whilst Seymour 'almost "wept to think of the deep darkness and ignorance" such devotion revealed', he nevertheless 'displayed the same longing for those women's devotion, sense of purpose, and willingness to withdraw from the world to pray'.¹⁴⁹ For a perspective which is contemporaneous with Collins's visit, it is helpful to look at William Wordsworth's reactions to his immersion in Italian culture. Collins and Wordsworth met again, by chance, in Rome in April 1837, and spent time together during the final four days of Collins's first stay there, Wordsworth even accompanying the Collins family to church on the Sunday morning, and then to vespers at St Peter's Basilica.¹⁵⁰ Both men's experiences appear to have enabled them to take a tolerant attitude towards Roman Catholic popular practice during their respective visits to Italy, and focus on the underlying spirituality they observed. Collins was happy to take lodgings in Rome with a landlady who assured him that his rooms were protected 'by the Virgin, whose image was placed on the outside of the house wall, and was

¹⁴⁷ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 23 January 1837.

¹⁴⁸ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 96. Apart from his wife's distaste, the exhibition in 1842 by H & W Barraud of *The annual benediction of the animals at Rome, on the feast of St. Anthony* (1842, R.A. No. 280) may have influenced him not to paint the scene.

¹⁴⁹ Heringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary*, 106-07, citing M. Hobart Seymour, *A Pilgrimage to Rome*, London 1848, 381. Michael Hobart Seymour (1800-1874) was an Anglo-Irish Protestant cleric and polemical writer and lecturer opposed to Roman Catholicism.

¹⁵⁰ Harriet Collins's journal, 1837, entries for 28, 29 and 30 April 1837, and 1 May 1837.

sung to at evening by the pious of the neighbourhood'.¹⁵¹ Wordsworth, in his poem 'At Albano' (1842) respected the simple faith of the peasant who assured him better weather was on the way following the previous day's procession of the Virgin.

I smiled to hear,
But not in scorn:--the Matron's Faith may lack
The heavenly sanction needed to ensure
Its own fulfilment; yet her upward track
Stops not at this low point, nor wants the lure
Of flowers the Virgin without fear may own,
For by her Son's blest hand the seed was sown. (lines 8-14)¹⁵²

He later observed, in relation to this poem that:

They who reflect, while they see and observe, cannot but be struck with instances which will prove that it is a great error to condemn in all cases such mediation as purely idolatrous. This remark bears with especial force upon addresses to the Virgin.¹⁵³

Tractarians were certainly very keen to co-opt Wordsworth to their cause. As G.B. Tennyson observed 'In the Tractarian view, Wordsworth was virtually a Tractarian, a designation even now not entirely inappropriate for the later Wordsworth, though the Tractarians saw all of Wordsworth in this light'.¹⁵⁴ Jessica Fay has noted that, in 1844, Wordsworth was happy to allow the Tractarian Frederick Faber to reprint his 'Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat off St Bees' alongside Faber's contribution to Newman's *Lives of the English Saints*.¹⁵⁵ Fay points to Faber's note, describing the Wordsworth poem as a 'fresh instance of the remarkable way in which [Wordsworth's] poems did in divers places anticipate the revival of catholic doctrine

¹⁵¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 92.

¹⁵² *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845 by William Wordsworth*, ed. by Geoffrey Jackson Ithaca, N.Y.; London, 2004, 762.

¹⁵³ *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis, London, 1993, 71, quoted in Jackson, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, 802.

¹⁵⁴ G.B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode*, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, 1981, 21.

¹⁵⁵ Jessica Fay, 'Presbyterianism and Tractarianism: William Wordsworth and the Nonconformist Meeting House at Hawkshead', *Notes and Queries*, 61 (2014), 45-6.

among us', as publicly proclaiming Wordsworth as 'the poet of the Oxford Movement'.¹⁵⁶

Whilst, as Fay argues, Wordsworth appears to have been keen to distance himself from particular religious affiliations as controversy over some Tractarians' defections to Rome mounted, he never sought to distance himself from the Movement's underlying devotional sentiment.¹⁵⁷ His lengthy poem 'Musings near Aquapendente' (1842) demonstrates a clear dissatisfaction with Anglicanism's lack of spirituality.¹⁵⁸ This was reinforced by his personal observations on the Oxford Movement. These included the comment that 'I would draw cheerful auguries for the English Church from this movement, as likely to restore among us a tone of piety more earnest and real, than that produced by the mere formalities of the understanding'.¹⁵⁹

That Collins, like Wordsworth, supported the Oxford Movement's wish to restore 'a tone of piety more earnest and real' will be clear from the analysis of his Tractarian links. Like Wordsworth also, he was open to acknowledging that such piety existed in contemporary Roman Catholic Italy. In 1842, the same year as Wordsworth published 'At Albano' and 'Musings near Aquapendente', Collins's exhibited *Prayer. A family about to leave their native shores imploring Divine protection* [hereafter '*Prayer*'].¹⁶⁰ Its current whereabouts are unknown, and no image is available, but its composition is known through the description

¹⁵⁶ Fay, 'Presbyterianism and Tractarianism', 46, citing John Henry Newman (ed.), *Lives of the English Saints* (London, 1844–5), pt. 7, 181–82.

¹⁵⁷ Fay, 'Presbyterianism and Tractarianism', 46.

¹⁵⁸ William Wordsworth *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* London, 1842, *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems*, 2004, 755 (lines 321–30).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 790–91.

¹⁶⁰ R.A. 1842, No. 104. This painting is discussed in Chapter Three, Section Two, *Safety and Danger*, in the context of the danger of the sea.

given by Wilkie Collins, exhibition reviews and the Bowood catalogue.¹⁶¹ According to Wilkie Collins, *Prayer* had its genesis in a scene which his father witnessed in Rome in April 1837, in the Colosseum as night fell.¹⁶² Three figures, a woman, a monk and a penitent, prayed in front of a tall crucifix. According to Wilkie, 'It impressed the painter with emotions not easily forgotten', and he expressly states that his father embodied that scene's 'sentiment of prayer' in this painting.¹⁶³ Piecing together the various descriptions one arrives at the following composition:- the setting is by the shore, at twilight. A large wooden crucifix is placed on rising ground, its back to the viewer, but with Christ's limbs partly visible. A lamp, hung at the top of the crucifix, illuminates a man, three women and an older child kneeling beneath it. There is also an infant in arms, and a younger child who is too young to understand and is 'looking at [the kneeling figures] in silent surprise'.¹⁶⁴ The Bowood catalogue adds an extra dimension, describing the group as 'earnestly praying before an image of the Virgin fixed to a rude wooden pillar'.¹⁶⁵ This additional piece of information is picked up by the *Athenaeum*:

(104) — a group of Italian peasants kneeling before the Madonna, ere commencing a voyage. This is a very beautiful picture after its kind, the story is clearly and pathetically told, the separate figures are characteristic, their combination is picturesque, while an air of poetry is thrown over the whole.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 202-04; *Athenaeum*, 7 May 1842, 409; *Art-Union*, June 1842, 121; Ambrose, G.E., *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures belonging to the Marquess of Lansdowne. K.G., at Lansdowne House, London, and Bowood, Wilts.*, London, 1897, No.224.

¹⁶² Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, 22 April 1837; Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 97. Although not stated by Wilkie, he also appears to have witnessed it, since he accompanied his father to the Colosseum.

¹⁶³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 97.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures belonging to the Marquess of Lansdowne*, No.224.

¹⁶⁶ *Athenaeum*, 7 May 1842, 409.

Evidently an image of the Virgin Mary has been affixed to the back of the wooden crucifix. That the reviewer described the painting as ‘a very beautiful picture after its kind’ suggests a certain queasiness, not perhaps with the subject matter, but with the perceived Catholic overtones. An image of prayer being offered to an image of Christ was not, essentially, idolatrous in terms of Anglican susceptibilities, but it was wholly unfamiliar, and probably explains the reviewer’s homing in on the ‘Madonna’. As Catherine Roach points out, in her discussion of a painting by Collins’s sister-in-law, Margaret Carpenter, *Devotion*, exhibited at the British Institution in 1821, portraying a young man devoutly contemplating a crucifix, ‘Reviewers of the exhibition remained silent about the religious implications of Carpenter’s *Devotion*, while praising its formal qualities’.¹⁶⁷ Certainly it would have been possible to interpret the respective orientation of the crucifix itself and the image of the Virgin Mary in the same way as Harriet did, when she wrote of her experience of religious practice in Italy: ‘how is [Christ’s] blessed name affronted his mother exalted on every occasion above him’.¹⁶⁸ From what we know, however, of the genesis of the painting, and Collins’s focus on the inherent spirituality of the scene in the Colosseum, I suggest that his intention was, once again, to hold up a mirror to English society and express the same critique of the Anglican church as Wordsworth expressed in *Musings near Aquapendente*.¹⁶⁹ The painting’s sentiment of spirituality was certainly noted by the *Athenaeum*’s reviewer. After reviewing the adjacent painting by William Simson, *Hagar and Ishmael*, he wrote: ‘Greater than in this Hagar is the amount of spirituality thrown by Mr Collins into a far less pretending composition’.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Catherine Roach, ‘The Ecosystem of Exhibitions: Venues, Artists, and Audiences in Early Nineteenth-Century London’, *British Art Studies*, Issue 14, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-14/croach>, figure 11.

¹⁶⁸ Harriet Collins, journal 1836-37, undated final entry.

¹⁶⁹ As discussed above in relation to Collins’s painting *Ave Maria*.

¹⁷⁰ *Athenaeum*, 7 May 1842, p.409.

A comparison with Landseer's critically acclaimed 1845 painting, known as the *Good Shepherd* or *Shepherd's Prayer*, highlights the potentially problematic nature of demonstrating spirituality in a Roman Catholic setting (figure 5.9).¹⁷¹ Here, too, there is a crucifix, but it is now placed in a more acceptable 'pastoral' setting. This transposition left viewers free to impose their own interpretation of the subject-matter (no subject was identified in the catalogue), the identity of the 'shepherd' and the significance of the crucifix. But on the face of it, it represented a familiar English landscape, complete with shepherd, dogs and a flock of sheep. It is probably no coincidence that the intervening two year period between Collins's and Landseer's paintings saw panic within the Anglican church as a number of high profile Tractarians converted to Roman Catholicism.¹⁷²

Collins's final Italian scene was *The Catechist – Church of S. Onofrio, Rome (the burial place of Tasso)*, (1844) [hereafter 'The Catechist'].¹⁷³ A catechism is, and was in Collins's time, a publication which explains the beliefs of the Christian religion. As such, it is common to both Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, although the contents of the catechisms are naturally different. It was necessary for children of both denominations to learn their catechism, as a precondition of full acceptance as members of their church. A person who teaches the catechism is called a 'catechist'. As a potential subject, it would certainly have resonated personally with Collins since the catechist for his own children was William

¹⁷¹ Exhibited R.A. 1845, No. 141.

¹⁷² Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 133-34.

¹⁷³ Collins visited the church of S. Onofrio, together with fellow artists George Richmond, Thomas Uwins and Joseph Severn, and John Baring (the son of Collins's patron, and commissioner of this painting, Sir Thomas Baring) in the spring of 1838 on his second visit to Rome (Raymond Lister, *George Richmond : A Critical Biography*, London, 1981, 41).

Dodsworth himself, and Collins's younger son Charles was confirmed by the Bishop of London on 13 May 1844, a few days into the exhibition of *The Catechist*.

The painting's present whereabouts are unknown, and no image is available, but its composition is known through the descriptions provided by Wilkie Collins, and exhibition reviews.¹⁷⁴ A monk is seated in one of the church's side chapels taking two girls through their responses, and awaiting a reply from the younger child, while their mother listens 'at a short distance'.¹⁷⁵ Wilkie Collins describes the younger girl as 'evidently puzzled to reply to some question', whereas her sister is looking up at the monk 'with an arch intelligent expression, as if she longed to solve at once the difficulty that embarrasses her timid little sister'.¹⁷⁶ I suggest that Collins was deliberately referencing Wordsworth's sonnet 'Catechizing' (1822). This includes the lines: 'Some spake, by thought-perplexing fears betrayed | And some a bold unerring answer made:'.¹⁷⁷ That difference in ability to respond appears to be echoed in Collins's painting, while in both the poem and the painting, the children's mother looks on: 'How fluttered then thy anxious heart for me, | Beloved Mother!'.¹⁷⁸

Certainly Collins would have had a motive for wanting to demonstrate his Anglican credentials, since the controversy over Puseyism had grown extremely heated by the time Collins worked on *The Catechist*. Wordsworth had been keen to stress his unimpeachable Anglicanism in the published rider to 'Musings near Aquapendente', and Collins may have taken the view that a literary allusion to 'Catechizing' would perform the same function for

¹⁷⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 251-252; *Athenaeum*, 11 May 1844, 434; *Art-Union*, June 1844, 156; *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, No. 1425. 11 May 1844, 306.

¹⁷⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 251.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 251.

¹⁷⁷ William Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sketches*, 1822, Sonnet XIII, *Catechizing*, ll. 6-7, in *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845 by William Wordsworth*, ed. Geoffrey Jackson, Ithaca, N.Y. and London, 2004, 195.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 8-9.

him.¹⁷⁹ The critics were content to see *The Catechist* as ‘an Italian reminiscence of great feeling and beauty’ or, more generally, as ‘[belonging] to another class [than his coastal paintings], but ... equally proof of the artist’s great talent’.¹⁸⁰ However, two of the reviewers questioned whether the girls were English rather than Italian, without considering whether this was deliberate and, if so, what that might be intended to convey.¹⁸¹ I would argue that this was clearly a deliberate choice on Collins’s part, and the key to an understanding of the painting. Collins brought back from Italy a great many sketches and drawings of Italian people.¹⁸² It is unlikely that, had he intended the children to look like Italian children, they would not have done so. I suggest *The Catechist* was intended by Collins to demonstrate the commonality between Anglican and Roman Catholic practice in teaching the essential elements of their respective faiths.

As a group, the three paintings discussed here can be seen as a contribution towards Tractarian thinking on the relative importance of spirituality within Italian and English culture, and a reflection on how that sense of spirituality develops from the early stages of learning one’s catechism.

Female Religious Orders and the critique of the Roman Catholic model

Nowhere were the fault lines in Tractarian thinking more apparent than in relation to the revival of Anglican sisterhoods. This section argues that this is reflected in Collins’s painting,

¹⁷⁹ For the rider, see Wordsworth, *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842), *Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820-1845*, 790.

¹⁸⁰ *Athenaeum*, 11 May 1844, 434; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 11 May 1844, 306.

¹⁸¹ *Art-Union*, 1844, 156: ‘they have the blue eyes of the north’; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 11 May 1844, 306: ‘the young Catechist is more of a pretty English than Italian child’.

¹⁸² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 138. Collins divided his drawings and oil sketches into two parts, the better to avoid problems with border customs officials, sending half of them (387 items) back to England by sea.

exhibited in 1843, *The World, or the Cloister?* He painted two versions, the 'landscape' oriented, exhibited version, and a smaller, commissioned 'portrait' oriented version, painted in 1844 (figures 5.10 and 5.11). In the courtyard of a nunnery, an abbess and a nun are conversing with a smartly dressed young woman. The open door across the further courtyard leads to what appears to be a chapel. To their left, two more nuns are bringing refreshments. Clearly, an interview is in progress. From the abbess's expression and position of her hands, it appears that a difficult question has been asked to which no answer has been given. The accompanying nun looks fixedly at the young woman (her expression is markedly more severe in the smaller version). The young woman sits with downcast eyes, looking towards the small crucifix on the table, apparently unable to answer.

To interpret this painting, it is helpful to contextualise it within contemporary social attitudes to nuns and sisterhoods. The painting appears to have been started in the summer of 1841, but put to one side while Collins painted *Prayer* and *Dominican Monks*.¹⁸³ This hiatus is of some significance, since it means that Collins's choice of subject matter cannot be linked with the founding, in 1843, of the Park Village Sisterhood, in which Dodsworth played a leading role. Rather, it should be viewed against the background of two significant developments in English society. The first, enabled by the passage of the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829, was the setting up of Roman Catholic foundations in England during the period 1831 to 1841.¹⁸⁴ The second was that, despite the acceptance in principle, amongst Anglican thinkers, including leading Tractarians, of the societal value of reintroducing some

¹⁸³ Referred to by Collins in a letter to his wife dated 14 August 1841 as 'my new picture' and identified by his son in an author's footnote as *The World, or the Cloister?*, see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 197.

¹⁸⁴ Catherine McAuley, who had in 1831 established the congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin in 1831, went on to establish two further foundations in England, first at Bermondsey in 1839 and then at Birmingham in 1841.

form of Anglican sisterhoods many concerns were being raised by the time Collins started this painting in 1841.

Whilst Tractarians were clear in their view as to the drastic effect of the dissolution of the monasteries, and the need for the church to step up to the plate and redress the problem, the question of what place there might be in this scheme of things for a revival of monasticism was a more controversial one. For British Catholics, the position was relatively straightforward, exemplified in Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), by Sybil's father, who declines ultimately to stand in her way, in wanting to become a nun.¹⁸⁵ For Tractarians, the position was more complicated. Dodsworth himself appears to have been openminded about the possibilities of re-establishing religious orders in England, but in a qualified manner. In 1841, he addressed his congregation in these terms:

Are there openings for the more devout to give themselves to prayer without ceasing, or to works of charity, in ecclesiastical order and with unity of purpose? Why should not this, with due restrictions, such as experience teaches us to be needful, exist amongst ourselves also?¹⁸⁶

Significantly, however, he qualified this with the need for 'due restrictions' and, unlike Newman or Pusey, he played no part in the establishment of male religious communities. He did, however, play an important part in the establishment of the first sisterhood to be established in England since the Reformation. Founded in 1843, in honour of Robert Southey, the Park Village sisterhood was located some four hundred yards from Collins's church, Christ Church, Albany Street. Also closely involved with the project was Edward Pusey. Pusey's biographer, Henry Liddon, wrote that the absence of sisterhoods had been 'a traditional source of uneasiness among the gentry and

¹⁸⁵ Disraeli, *Sybil*, 383.

¹⁸⁶ Dodsworth, *Allegiance to the Church*, 20.

middle classes in England ever since the Reformation' due to the 'difficulty of finding suitable employment for many unmarried women' and that, certainly from the late 1810s, thoughts about the utility of sisterhoods 'were, so to speak, in the air'.¹⁸⁷ In 1819, Robert Southey commented, apropos the dissolution of the nunneries, that the failure to convert them 'into Protestant establishments' had created obvious and serious damage to 'the present state of society ... as it affects women'.¹⁸⁸ Southey wholeheartedly endorsed the principle of creating new Anglican sisterhoods in 1829.¹⁸⁹ However, a 'red line' between the nature of Roman Catholic institutions and the proposed Anglican foundations was firmly drawn at this early stage by Southey in terms of the taking of permanent vows. As Michael Hill has explained : 'Southey was concerned very explicitly with orders of women engaged in *practical* works of charity and piety. Otherwise he shares the prejudices of every Protestant-minded Englishman of his day in thinking of nunneries as prisons'.¹⁹⁰ In 1835 J.H. Newman wrote approvingly of sisterhoods as a means of protecting single women unable or unwilling to marry, but he did not express any view as to the permanence of such arrangements.¹⁹¹ Edward Pusey clearly went much further in supporting the celibate state.¹⁹² Significantly, in view of his close pastoral and personal relationship with

¹⁸⁷ Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, III, 2.

¹⁸⁸ Robert Southey, 'British Monachism', *Quarterly Review*, 22 (90), July 1819, cited in Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, III, 2, n.2.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, 2 vols, London, 1829, II, 330-31 (Robert Southey, *Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society*, ed. Tom Duggett and Tim Fulford, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, vol. I).

¹⁹⁰ Michael Hill, *The Religious Order: A Study of Virtuoso Religion and Its Legitimation in the Nineteenth-Century Church of England*, London, 1973, 169.

¹⁹¹ John Henry Newman, 'Letters on the Church of the Fathers', *British Magazine*, 6 June 1835, 667.

¹⁹² Susan P. Casteras, 'Virgin Vows: The Early Victorian Artists' Portrayal of Nuns and Novices', *Victorian studies* (1981), 159-60.

Collins, Dodsworth himself followed the Southey line, writing to Pusey: 'Nothing has ever been simply restored, and so we never can have Nuns again; though we may have something resembling them: We cannot bring back medieval religion'.¹⁹³ In taking this position, Dodsworth was also in line with the committee of laymen behind the Park Village project.¹⁹⁴

Underpinning this 'red line' lay a widespread and public debate about the dangers perceived to be inherent in closed religious orders. Susan Casteras has shown that by the 1850s, public awareness and concerns included fears about economic exploitation of postulants, who might be forced to hand over their entire dowries to the sisterhood.¹⁹⁵ She points out that also in play, in terms of women's societal role within a patriarchal society, was a deep-seated repugnance against the notion 'that holy celibacy could be a more honourable spiritual state than matrimony—or that women possessed any right to dedicate their bodies and souls to God instead of to a husband'.¹⁹⁶ Such issues were in fact being explored in contemporary literature well before Collins began his painting. Miriam Burstein's analysis of early nineteenth century religious novels demonstrates that the setting up of Roman Catholic foundations was explored in Grace Kennedy's *Father Clement* (1823), and the concerns raised by this formed part of the plot in E. C. Agnew's *Geraldine* (1837-39).¹⁹⁷ A further strand contributing to the febrile nature of the debate over sisterhoods at the time was the lurid account of nuns' vulnerability within closed communities to all manner of abuses, including

¹⁹³ Letter from William Dodsworth to E.B. Pusey, 23 November 1845, Pusey House, Oxford, cited in Young, 'William Dodsworth', 203. The underlinings are Dodsworth's.

¹⁹⁴ Liddon, *The Life of Edward Bouverie Pusey*, III, 18.

¹⁹⁵ Casteras, 'Virgin Vows', 162-63.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 164-65.

¹⁹⁷ Grace Kennedy, *Father Clement: A Roman Catholic Story*, Edinburgh, 1823; Elizabeth Constantia Agnew, *Geraldine*, London, 1837-39, both cited in Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, 'Father Clement, the Religious Novel, and the Form of Protestant-Catholic Controversy', *Br. Cathol. Hist.* 34 (2019), 396-423, 403.

rape and murder, and its attempted refutation.¹⁹⁸ The red line with regard to taking permanent vows is also seen in John Neale's *Aytoun Priory* (1843), a novel highlighted by Kirstie Blair as having a central character, Sir John Morley, who 'defends the role of monasteries, and discourses with an astonishing amount of learning for a country squire on various other points of Oxford Movement doctrine'.¹⁹⁹ Sir John opines that 'vows for life are out of the question, at least in the present state of the Church'. He proposes temporary vows, with a minimum period of three months, and a maximum five years, renewable at the end of each period.²⁰⁰

How, against this background, is *The World, or the Cloister?* to be read? Collins's son describes the young woman as 'a beautiful girl...whose melancholy expression denotes that her experience of "the world," short as it is, has already been tinged with disappointment' and that the abbess, 'taking advantage of the effect produced on her mind by some recent slight ... is exhorting her with earnest gesticulation, to "forsake the pomps and vanities of this wicked world" and seek consolation in the "cloister"'.²⁰¹ He may well have been following the lead of the *Art-Union's* reviewer, who speculates that the young woman has been 'disappointed in the fidelity of her lover, or been eclipsed at a ball' and that 'the two *religieuses*...are earnest and urgent in exhorting the other to the veil'.²⁰² Significantly, in my view, despite the evidently Italian setting, the principal figure, the girl, appears to be English. Her complexion, hair colouring and facial features suggest northern and not southern

¹⁹⁸ Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures by Maria Monk, of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*, New York, 1836; William L. Stone, *Maria Monk and the Nunnery of the Hotel Dieu: being an account of a visit to the convents of Montreal, and the refutation of the "Awful Disclosures."* *Audi Alteram Partem*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1837.

¹⁹⁹ Kirstie Blair, 'The Influence of the Oxford Movement on Poetry and Fiction', *The Oxford Handbook of the Oxford Movement*, 419.

²⁰⁰ John Mason Neale, *Aytoun Priory; or The Restored Monastery*, London, 1843, 186-90.

²⁰¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 230.

²⁰² *Art-Union*, June 1843, 163.

European. This was not lost on the reviewer for the *Illustrated London News*, who indignantly described all three figures as ‘a group of Sussex fisherwomen, in the costume and surrounded by the circumstances of an Italian convent’.²⁰³ As with *The Catechist*, I suggest that this was evidently a deliberate choice on Collins’s part and likewise holds the key to an understanding of the painting. The setting, the chapel, and the incidentals in the painting such as the nuns’ garments and illuminated book represent, I would argue, the Roman Catholic nun’s commitment to life-long marriage to Christ. If the young woman is read as English, the painting accordingly poses the question: is the Roman Catholic way appropriate for an Englishwoman? Should the young woman be taking permanent vows? Dodsworth clearly thought not, and it is difficult to imagine that Collins thought otherwise. The Tractarian position was to support sisterhoods, partly to offer a meaningful way of life without having to enter into an unsuitable or unwanted marriage, and partly to service the outreach requirements of the Tractarian parish, as conceived and indeed implemented by Dodsworth at Christ Church, Albany Street.²⁰⁴

Some support for my interpretation is lent by what Collins wrote to his wife in August 1841: ‘I have found a title for my new picture, as well as a motto for it; the latter being in “Measure for Measure”’.²⁰⁵ No further clues are available as to what the motto was, but it seems likely that Collins was thinking of ‘Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure’.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ *Illustrated London News*, vol. 2, issue 56, 27 May 1843.

²⁰⁴ Those are the ostensible reasons. They do not detract from the natural revulsion, pointed to by Casteras, that men in a patriarchally organised society might feel towards a system in which women could make themselves permanently unavailable for marriage.

²⁰⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, Vol II, page 197, together with an editorial asterisk and a footnote at the bottom of the page by Wilkie Collins: ‘This refers to the picture, called “The World or the Cloister.” then designed, but not exhibited until 1843’.

²⁰⁶ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act V, scene 1, lines 411-12, *The Duke*: ‘Haste still pays haste, and leisure answers leisure | Like doth quit like, and Measure still for Measure’. William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. N. W. Bawcutt, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 223. The plot as a whole is entirely

He may also have had in mind, in the context of leisure, the proverb, originating from Congreve's 1693 play *The Old Batchelour*: 'Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure: | Married in haste, we may repent at leisure' since, in effect, the decision to enter a nunnery constitutes a decision to enter into a marriage with Christ.²⁰⁷ The indignant reviewer for the *Illustrated London News* complained that Collins 'has fallen wholly short of the religious sentiment of his subject', but I would argue that he missed the point; it was not intended as a serious depiction, but as a cautionary tale. Collins's painting portrays the position before any irrevocable decision is made and, in the title, begs the question. His painting may have inspired his colleague C. L. Eastlake to paint the aftermath, shortly afterwards. Eastlake's *The Visit to the Nun* (1844), (figure 5.12), portrays the visit of the nun's nieces to their aunt Theresa. The setting and the clothing are Italian, but the people are English. Theresa's sister and her older daughter look upset. But it is too late. Aunt Theresa has taken her vows.

In *The World, or the Cloister?* Collins engaged with a controversial subject which, essentially, defined the boundary between those accommodations Tractarians could make with Roman Catholicism, and those they could not. All of his other Italian subject paintings referenced themes which Tractarians wholeheartedly endorsed: the need for churches to be open all the time, and welcoming to everybody, irrespective of their means or social standing, encouragement of that greater sense of spirituality and devotion found in Roman Catholic worship, the reclaiming of pre-Reformation festivals so as to provide proper rest to

apposite since it begins with Isabella about to enter a nunnery and questioning whether the Rule is strict enough, and ends in effect with her about to marry the Duke.

²⁰⁷ William Congreve, *The Old Batchelour*, Act V, Scene 1, ll. 327-28 : *The Complete Plays of William Congreve*, edited by Herbert Davis, Chicago; London, 1967, 105.

the working population and to encourage Sunday Observance, and the restoration of the Church's position as protector and provider for the poor. But whilst Tractarians also believed that the dissolution of the monasteries had been a social and religious catastrophe (in terms of pastoral care, support for the surrounding populations, the sick, and travellers) the question of whether or not it was possible or desirable to restore such institutions, particularly nunneries, was highly controversial. The notion of women taking permanent vows was regarded as a bridge too far. In *The World, or the Cloister?* Collins can be said to have addressed that issue and come down firmly on Southey and Dodsworth's side.

Conclusion

This chapter contributes to the extensive scholarship analysing the impact of the Oxford Movement on English culture during its first phase, that is, from the early 1830s until the wave of conversions by high profile Tractarians to Roman Catholicism in the period 1843 to 1845. That scholarship has elucidated the significant impact made by the Movement on contemporary literature (both prose and poetry), architecture, music, and political and social thought. However, it has not hitherto addressed the question of what influence the Movement might have had on artists' work prior to Pre-Raphaelitism.

There is ample evidence to demonstrate Collins's engagement with leading members of the Oxford Movement, and with such a degree of exposure to leading Tractarians it is inconceivable that he would not have been aware of Tractarian writers and preachers and the criticisms they levelled at the contemporary Anglican Church.

I have argued that Collins's eleven subject paintings have very little in common with almost all the Italian themed work that other artists were exhibiting during the period 1832

to 1843. His paintings can all, to a greater or lesser extent, be understood in terms of their relationship with the thinking of leading members of the Oxford Movement, whether the perceived lack of spirituality within the contemporary Anglican church, its failure to help the poor, the sick and the needy, the failure to honour the feast days set out in Book of Common Prayer and so provide working people with proper holidays, the failure to keep churches open and welcoming to the poor, or the issues over the revival of Anglican sisterhoods. Collins's manner of referring to these themes is allusive; his paintings require reflection on the part of the viewer to tease out their meaning. This is an aspect of his approach to painting which can be seen in the work discussed in the previous chapters, also. Such an indirect and allusive approach has been characterised by Lesa Scholl as intrinsic to Tractarian poetry:

the poet attempts to bring the audience to a place of empathy without crossing into the language of abject disgust or sensationalism. The point is to give the reader pause for thought...This structure of reserve affects and directs the way in which representations of social inequality and hunger are experienced through poetry.²⁰⁸

Collins's use of Italy as the setting for exploring the themes covered by his 'Italian campaign' can be seen in analogous terms, acting as a filter for the controversial, and potentially explosive messages they convey. The viewer of *Poor Travellers* or *The peace-maker*, for example, could more easily arrive at a 'place of empathy' with the Tractarian message for the reason that the painting does not directly challenge the absence of proper provision for the English poor, or proper pastoral care. Such a conclusion requires reflection on the viewer's part.

²⁰⁸ Lesa Scholl, *Hunger, Poetry and the Oxford Movement: The Tractarian Social Vision*, London, 2020, 13-14.

Collins was almost certainly not the only artist to be influenced by the Oxford Movement. I referred above to three paintings by other artists, exhibited between 1838 and 1840, which do indeed resonate with Collins's choice of themes. That C.L. Eastlake, R.A. should be one of three artists involved is, perhaps unsurprising. He obviously knew Collins, and had exhibited two paintings before Collins left for Italy of pilgrims *en route* to Rome.²⁰⁹ Wilkie Collins acknowledges Eastlake's assistance in the preface to the biography of his father, which suggests that Collins and Eastlake discussed their work. Eastlake's painting *The salutation to the aged friar*, 1840, (figure 5.4), may well reflect the concerns with poverty and the embedding of religious personnel in the community which appear in Collins's works. His *The Visit to the Nun* (1844), (figure 5.8), appears closely related to Collins's *The World, or the Cloister?* (1843), (figure 5.6). Very little is known about the work of the other two artists, Thomas Boddington and Elmslie William Dallas. But Boddington's *Convent Hospitality* (1838) and Dallas's *The daily distribution of soup* (1839) seem likely to have reflected similar concerns to those which are apparent in Collins's *Poor travellers*. Further research may throw light on the extent of the Oxford Movement's impact on painting of the period. What makes Collins's contribution unique, I suggest, is the number of his Italian subject paintings which can be linked with Tractarian themes, the breadth of themes they cover, and that fact that they were painted and exhibited by a senior Academician. His contribution ought now to be recognised in the narrative of the Oxford Movement's impact on English culture. It should likewise be reflected in those narratives of nineteenth-century British art which are concerned with religion and society.

²⁰⁹ *Italian scene in the year of the Jubilee. Peasants on a pilgrimage to Rome, first coming in sight of the Holy City*, 1835 R.A. No. 114; *Italian scene in the Anno Santo –peasants on a pilgrimage to Rome, first coming in sight of the Holy City. Painted for the panel of a room*, 1836 R.A. No. 327.

CHAPTER SIX

Towards a new Protestant Art: Collins's biblical paintings

Introduction

This chapter will argue that, late in his career, Collins was at the forefront in exploring a new style of Protestant religious painting. I argue that he opened up new possibilities for Protestant religious art and influenced members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood [hereafter 'PRB'] to the extent that he should be regarded as a precursor of the Pre-Raphaelites.

During the period 1839 to 1844, that is, the same period in which Collins painted his Italian pictures, he also painted and exhibited at the Royal Academy at least four biblical paintings, and contemplated other biblical subjects. Four paintings were self-evidently biblical: *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple* (1839-40), *The Two Disciples at Emmaus* (1841), (Figure 6.6); *The Virgin and Child* (1843), (Figure 6.11); and *A Patriarch (Abraham)* (1843-44).¹ I will argue that a fifth painting, *A girl of Sorrento, spinning* (1842-43) was in fact a representation of the adolescent Virgin Mary (Figure 6.21).² The fact that he painted biblical subjects in this period at all is, in itself, extraordinary; he had only attempted one biblical painting in his career, some thirty years previously in his student days.³ By the time he began to paint them, he was a senior Academician whose reputation was firmly and exclusively based upon the landscape and coastal paintings discussed in chapters Two, Three and Four. Accordingly, I examine in some detail his reasons for choosing, at this late stage of

¹ Exhibited 1840, R.A. No. 74; 1841, R.A. No 106; 1843, R.A. No. 309; and 1844, R.A. 258.

² Exhibited 1843 R.A. No. 457.

³ *Christ besought for the recovery of Peter's wife's mother* (1811-12).

his career, to enter an unfamiliar field. Also, an understanding the background in terms of the contemporary discourse around the making of religious art (specifically Protestant religious art) will provide a context within which to analyse his biblical paintings and contemplated subjects. I address these two issues in Section One. I analyse the paintings in Section Two, and in Section Three I consider the relationship between Collins's work and the PRB.

Collins has hitherto received no attention in the modern scholarship on English religious art of the first half of the nineteenth century. That is unsurprising given that all four of the self-evidently biblical paintings had disappeared from view by the early years of the twentieth century, and that the two which resurfaced in 2017 remain in private collections. This study is accordingly the first examination of those paintings to be undertaken. I will demonstrate that Collins was a significant figure in charting a possible direction for Protestant religious art. Since my focus will be the decade from 1834 to 1844 (the years leading up to Collins's departure for Italy, to the end of the period in which he executed these paintings) my intention is to fill what I perceive to be a gap in the scholarship, between Thomas Ardill's 'Between God, Art and Mammon: Religious Painting as a Public Spectacle in Britain' and Michaela Giebelhausen's *Painting the Bible : Representation and belief in Mid-Victorian England*.⁴

Ardill was concerned with the period 1800-32, focussing on the 1810s and 1820s, and so concludes just before the period I will be examining.⁵ Giebelhausen's focus is on 'the role the PRB played in challenging and invigorating the practice of religious painting,' and she

⁴ Thomas Ardill, 'Between God, Art and Mammon: Religious Painting as a Public Spectacle in Britain, c. 1800–1832', PhD diss., Courtauld Institute, 2016; Michaela Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible : Representation and Belief in Mid-Victorian Britain*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

⁵ Ardill, 'Between God, Art and Mammon', 28.

accordingly concludes that ‘The period from the mid-1840s to 1860 was indeed the crucial time during which religious painting was rethought and in which a naturalist Protestant practice –best exemplified in the orientalist works of William Holman Hunt—emerged’.⁶ The contemporary critical literature she discusses post-dates Collins’s death at the beginning of 1847.⁷ In Chapter Two of *Painting the Bible*, her focus is on the Royal Academy ‘as the major site for the theory and practice of art and the arena in which the Pre-Raphaelite controversy was staged’.⁸ Her analysis is important in terms of the position of the Academy, exhibition culture and the effect of the market, and the impact these factors had in limiting the extent to which the artists she analyses were prepared to step outside the parameters of the academic paradigm.⁹ However, she does not consider (since her focus does not require her to do so) what might have constituted a specifically Protestant approach to religious painting during the decade 1834 to 1844. Nor does she consider the radical new approach adopted by Sir David Wilkie (Collins’s lifelong friend and artistic *confidant*), whose practice as a genre painter took him outside the academic paradigm. That particular gap in the scholarship was filled by Nicholas Tromans and Jo Briggs. Tromans characterised Wilkie’s journey to the Holy Land in 1840-41 as having been ‘undertaken as a dramatic new strategy for achieving a modern Protestant art form’.¹⁰ This was developed by Briggs in her article ‘“A Martin Luther in Painting”’: Sir David Wilkie’s Unfinished Christ before Pilate’.¹¹ Briggs quotes extensively

⁶ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 1 and 11.

⁷ Nicholas Wiseman, ‘Art. XI., *Sketches of the History of Christian Art*. By Lord Lindsay, 3 vols. Murray, 1847’. The *Dublin review*, 22 (1847) 486-515; Ralph N. Wornum, ‘Romanism and Protestantism in Their Relation to Painting’, *Art Journal*, 1850, 133-6, discussed in Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 4-7.

⁸ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 21.

⁹ The artists considered by Giebelhausen, whose work appeared during Collins’s lifetime, are Benjamin Robert Haydon, Charles Lock Eastlake, William Dyce and John Rogers Herbert.

¹⁰ Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie: The People’s Painter*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 196.

¹¹ Jo Briggs, ‘“A Martin Luther in Painting”’: Sir David Wilkie’s Unfinished Christ before Pilate’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 12 (2011), 33-56.

from Sir David's correspondence with Collins (the passage about the need for a Martin Luther in painting indeed comes from a letter to Collins) and observes that 'finally, at the very end of his artistic career, Wilkie returned to a land empty of art and perceived as religiously devout in order to redeem his practice by giving it a wholly religious function'.¹² This chapter will demonstrate that Collins's career trajectory likewise involved a focus on religion during the last years of his life.

The fact that scholars were unaware of Collins's paintings may account for a certain lack of curiosity as to the artistic relationship at this point in time between Collins and Sir David Wilkie: why was he writing in these terms to Collins? Why was Wilkie so involved in working with Collins after his return from Italy on Collins's 'Italian campaign'?¹³ Why were two of the three oil sketches which Wilkie made in Jerusalem the same subjects Collins himself had already painted or was to paint?¹⁴ Why, in his letter to Collins of April 1841, did Wilkie refer to 'our Art' (as opposed to 'Art' or 'my proposed paintings') as assisting Bible readers to 'imagine rightly' the scene in question?¹⁵ I suggest that Collins, clearly a man who took his religion equally seriously, was in effect on a parallel mission in the period 1839 to 1843 to achieve 'a modern Protestant art form'.

What Protestant art might look like at this point in time was an unresolved issue. There were ideas in the air, but critics at this juncture had considerable difficulty answering this question. I examine this aspect in detail in Section One. Wilkie's own hawing, in his

¹² Briggs, "A Martin Luther in Painting", 50.

¹³ For the 'Italian campaign', see Chapter Five, Section Two, *The Poor and the role of the Church*.

¹⁴ The two Wilkie sketches were *Supper at Emmaus*, 1841, oil on board, 59.7 x 49.5 cm, Private Collection, reproduced in Nicolas Tromans, *David Wilkie: 201*. His sketch *Nativity* is untraced. Wilkie's other sketch, *Christ before Pilate*, is set against the background of the *Ecce Homo* arch, Jerusalem, and is illustrated in Briggs, "A Martin Luther in Painting", 35.

¹⁵ For the letter from Sir David Wilkie to William Collins dated 2 April 1841, see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 183.

correspondence and journal entries, over the question of whether or not accurate depictions of Holy Land landscape and costume were really necessary, demonstrate the difficulty in charting a way forward.¹⁶ My analysis of the contemporary discourse, and examination of Collins's paintings (executed and projected) will constitute a case study for exploring a distinct Protestant aesthetic at this particular juncture, namely the late 1830s and early 1840s. This is a significant moment, since it coincides with the first phase of the Oxford Movement, a movement with which, as I explored in Chapter Five, Collins was significantly involved. It was a period during which Protestant attitudes towards Roman Catholicism had not hardened as they were to do in the later 1840s and early 1850s with the Maynooth Grant (1845), the exodus to the Church of Rome of many prominent Tractarians (1843-50), and the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England (1850).¹⁷ Accordingly, while Collins's biblical paintings are Christological and avoid both Mariolatry and any suggestion of a cult of saints, they demonstrate an interest in the early Church and align closely with Tractarian thought on that issue. As will become apparent, they contained a blend of deliberate archaisms coupled with realistic elements. They contained symbols and attributes, and their subject matter displayed a manifest interest in typology. These elements are considered by Giebelhausen to be key elements of the pictorial language of the PRB. Collins has not hitherto been considered by scholars who have examined the PRB's artistic roots, and precursors.¹⁸ In

¹⁶ David Wilkie, journal entry for 30 January 1841 (Allan Cunningham, *The life of Sir David Wilkie : with his Journals, Tours and critical remarks on works of art*, 3 vols, London, 1843, III, 376); letter from David Wilkie to Sir Robert Peel, 18 March 1841 (ibid., 415); David Wilkie, journal entry for 11 April 1841 (ibid., 448).

¹⁷ See: Lindsay Errington, *Social and Religious Themes in English Art 1840-1860*, New York & London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984, 50-53, and 308-09; Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, 25-6; Cantor, *Religion and the Great Exhibition of 1851*, *passim*.

¹⁸ He is not referred to in *Pre-Raphaelites: Victorian avant-garde*, Exhibition Catalogue, ed. Tim Barringer, Jason Rosenfeld and Alison Smith, London: Tate Publishing, 2012, other than as the father of Charles Allston Collins.

Section Three I make the case for Collins now to be considered as a precursor, alongside the now established names of Ford Madox Brown, William Dyce, and John Rogers Herbert.

Section One : the background to Collins's biblical paintings

The possibilities for Protestant religious art in the period 1834-43

Underpinning the debate about Protestant art in England were two long-standing and related questions: Was religious art appropriate at all in an officially Protestant country? If so, what form should it take? The production of all religious painting in England at this period, and indeed since the Reformation, had taken place against the background of a historic suspicion and fear that the religious image, as opposed to text, was synonymous with 'Popery' and 'idolatry'. Clare Haynes has charted the persistence of these concerns through the eighteenth century.¹⁹ Artists themselves were divided in their opinion. Sir Joshua Reynolds evidently thought that there was a place for Protestant religious art.²⁰ James Northcote thought otherwise.²¹ As at 1830, it appeared that there was little future for the aspiring painter of Protestant religious art. Ardill observes: 'By 1830 the various gambits attempted by the artists discussed in this thesis had been exhausted'.²² Despite this downbeat assessment, as Giebelhausen has demonstrated, by 1834 an upward trend can be seen emerging in the number of religious paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy.²³ Between 1834 and 1846 the

¹⁹ Clare Haynes, 'In the Shadow of the Idol: Religion in British Art Theory, 1600–1800', *Art history*, 35 (2012), 62–85.

²⁰ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *A Journey to Flanders and Holland, Edited by Harry Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), cited in Haynes, 'In the Shadow of the Idol', 73.

²¹ William Hazlitt, 'Conversations with James Northcote, R.A.', *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1930–1934, Vol. XI, 268.

²² Ardill, 'Between God, Art and Mammon', 292.

²³ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 31.

number of such paintings exhibited annually approximately doubled.²⁴ While the reasons for this are not entirely clear, it may be due, as Giebelhausen suggests, to ‘the prominence [religious painting] was given in the press, which repeatedly commented on both the noticeable increase in religious works exhibited at the R.A. and the importance of this branch of art’.²⁵ It may also be due to an increasing interest in religion in English society generally. The Oxford Movement was an important manifestation of this, and its first phase broadly coincides with that period of growth in numbers.

Certainly the question of Protestant religious art was very much in the air at this time. The initial impetus to reconsider the position of religious art in England appears to have come from Roman Catholics. This is perhaps unsurprising, in view of the substantial changes in their status following the Catholic Relief Act 1829, which permitted Catholics to vote, to sit in Parliament and to be appointed to most civil and military Crown offices.²⁶ In July 1835 Parliament had debated a motion ‘That a Select Committee be appointed to inquire into the best means of extending a knowledge of the Fine Arts, and of the Principles of Design among the people—especially among the manufacturing population of the country’.²⁷ In that debate, it was the Roman Catholic MP Daniel O’Connell who urged the case for encouraging religious painting, endorsing and expanding Sir Joshua Reynolds’s thinking: he observed, of religious paintings in continental churches, that ‘the poorer classes of the people had habitual opportunities of seeing works of art, by which their taste was refined, whereas in England the opportunity of viewing such works formed only the

²⁴ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 32, (Graph 2.1).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ ‘An Act for the Relief of His Majesty’s Roman Catholic Subjects’, 10 Geo. 4, c.7.

²⁷ Hansard, *Hc Deb.*, 14 July 1835, Vol 29, col. 555.

exception to the general rule of exclusion,' and that 'the effect of contemplating works of high art in the continental churches was to raise and soften the public mind, religious enthusiasm becoming mingled with an admiration of art'.²⁸ Accordingly improvements in 'knowledge of the Fine Arts' could serve moral and religious purposes also. Such arguments had also been put forward by Sir George Beaumont in his campaign for the foundation of a National Gallery, and would have been very familiar to Collins.²⁹

A year later, the editor of the *Dublin Review*, Nicholas Wiseman, set out the Catholic position on what religious art should look like in the modern era.³⁰ Reviewing Alexis-François Rio's recently published work *De La Poésie Chrétienne* (a book on Italian painting between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries), Wiseman asked: 'why in the interminable catalogues of our modern exhibitions, we find no traces of Christian art?'. In fact, ten religious paintings had been exhibited in the 1835 Royal Academy exhibition and eight in 1836, but Wiseman goes on to explain what, in his view, constitutes 'Christian Art' and why almost none, in his opinion, was currently being produced:

But where are the pictures which purify and exalt the soul and raise it above the ephemeral conditions of time and space, into the eternal regions of real being? Where are the pictures which embody the sublime emotions of Christianity, and open to us the celestial city? Where are the Madonnas which call forth the tribute of prayer, or affect us as those of the fifteenth century.³¹

Wiseman devotes most of the remainder of his review to extolling the Nazarenes generally, and Overbeck in particular, as representing the way forward. The Nazarenes were a group of

²⁸ Hansard, *Hc Deb.*, 14 July 1835, Vol 29, col. 561.

²⁹ Fay, *The Collected Letters of Sir George and Lady Beaumont to the Wordsworth Family, 1803–1829*, 52. Collins's engagement with the Beaumonts is discussed in Chapter Two, above.

³⁰ Nicholas Wiseman, 'Art. VI. De La Poésie Chrétienne Dans Son Principe, Dans Sa Matière, Et Dans Ses Formes, Par A. F. Rio.-Forme De L'art, Seconde Partie', *Dublin Review*, 1, 1836, 435-60.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 456.

German-speaking artists who congregated in Rome, whose output was intended to revive a sense of spirituality in painting. Wiseman observes that 'The Christian school of Germany has persevered, and is prevailing ... and we hope to see its influence cross the channel'.³²

The response to Wiseman's Catholic perspective was made by the anonymous, but clearly Protestant reviewer of Rio's book in the *Athenaeum* for April and May 1837. They begin by criticising Rio's focus on 'religious' art as an art confined to Christianity in general, and Catholic art specifically.³³ They go on to produce their own definition of Rio's 'mystical style': 'that which seeks to affect us in an eminent degree, through the medium of our sympathies, and believed relations with another world'. This is, indeed, a very broad definition, but leaves open the possibility of creating a specifically Protestant aesthetic. They consider that very few religious paintings actually carry off the mystical style, but give a nod in the direction of Raphael's *Transfiguration*, and speak highly of the Sistine Chapel, that is, major works in the contemporary academic canon. The reviewer then castigates their countrymen for failing to appreciate the spirituality in Roman Catholic paintings because of their own religious beliefs.³⁴ They dismiss such 'Protestant' objections by drily observing that to appreciate the qualities of an artwork embedded in a different religious context, the spectator is not required to convert to that religion: 'admiration of mysticism in Italian paintings requires the same kind of conversion to Popery that it does to Polytheism in the Elgin marbles'.³⁵ They do note that Rio 'justly observes ... that we cannot feel the full charm of works in this style unless we be penetrated with the faith that matched them'. Despite

³² Nicholas Wiseman, 'De La Poésie Chrétienne', 457-60.

³³ *Athenaeum*, April 1837, 'Christian Art', 274.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 276.

such difficulties, the reviewer states their intention to proceed 'in our endeavour to naturalise the idea of mystical art among our contemporaries, and to create a nascent interest about it *because we think it may serve hereafter to exalt the British school of painting and sculpture* [my italics].³⁶ Evidently the reviewer wanted to encourage public support for the development of a Protestant school of religious painting.

Continuing the following month, the reviewer summarised the content of Rio's book, from Cimabue to Benozzo Gozzoli and Raphael. Finally, they state that they had intended to discuss contemporary religious painting and, in essence, the way forward, 'but we must reserve our design, at least for the present'.³⁷ Frustratingly, they never followed this up. It was evidently easier for a Catholic reviewer to point to a way forward, than for a Protestant reviewer. Such inability by 'Protestant' critics to articulate a way forward continued throughout Collins's lifetime. There was a sense that something was missing, that something needed to be done, but quite what that might be was another matter. As Giebelhausen has explained, the same floundering for a way forward can be seen three years after Collins's death in Ralph Wornum's article, in which he 'affirmed the need for a "Protestant development, which is yet in embryo"'.³⁸

No assistance in charting a way forward for Protestant religious art could be sought from the Royal Academy at this point. Giebelhausen demonstrates the conservatism of the Royal Academy's Professor of Painting Henry Howard, who held that position throughout the period under discussion, from 1833 to 1847.³⁹ As she puts it: 'No artist could ever hope to

³⁶ *Athenaeum*, April 1837, 'Christian Art', 276.

³⁷ *Athenaeum*, May 1837, 341.

³⁸ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-5.

surpass the work of Michelangelo, Raphael or Leonardo da Vinci. In his view, there was neither room nor need for reinterpretation. Perfectly rendered subjects retained their validity over time and continue to be meaningful even to contemporary audiences'.⁴⁰

Collins and biblical painting

Prior to 1839 Collins himself had only made one foray into biblical painting. This was in 1811, in his student days. Between October 1811 and January 1812 Collins worked on *Christ besought for the recovery of Peter's wife's mother*. It was not exhibited, and is untraced. Whether he was disheartened by the results, distracted by the shock of his father's unexpected death, or buoyed up by his success in selling the paintings he did exhibit in 1812 is unclear but, in the event it was his last foray into religious art before his return from Italy twenty-six years later. Whilst there are many religious allusions within his subsequent paintings (as discussed in Chapters One to Four) he did not produce an overtly religious painting until 1835-36, when he painted *Sunday* (figure 2.23). This features a family getting ready to set off to church, while the clergyman and other members of the congregation converge on the parish church.⁴¹ Collins included in the exhibition catalogue lines from George Herbert's *The Temple* (1633) to reinforce, by association, its Anglican credentials:-

O day most calm, most bright,
The fruit of this, the net world's bud,
The indorsement of supreme delight,
Writ by a friend, and with his blood;
The couch of time, Care's balm and bay;
The week were dark but for thy light
Thy torch doth show the way.⁴²

⁴⁰ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 23.

⁴¹ For the discussion of this painting in the context of children within the landscape, see Chapter Two, Section Four, *The transition to adulthood and its responsibilities*.

⁴² George Herbert, *The Temple : Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, 1633, 'Sunday', lines 1-7.

Herbert was a seventeenth-century clergyman of the Church of England, revered for his devotional poetry by leading Tractarian poets such as John Keble and Isaac Williams. *The Temple* had been highly recommended to Collins by Coleridge in 1818.⁴³ Accordingly, although *Sunday* was essentially a landscape painting, it also had an underlying devotional message. Wilkie Collins stated that his father had intentions to paint religious subjects from early days, and played down the suggestion that this was a result of his Italian experiences.⁴⁴ I suggest, however, that he was mistaken in thinking this, as a result of misinterpreting entries in his father's Notebooks. He appears to have formed his opinion on the basis that 'Among the MS. notes of contemplated pictures, scattered through his papers of early dates, are several plans for illustrating passages in the Old and New Testaments—here and there expanded into a rough sketch'.⁴⁵ Certainly there are two pages in Notebook II, headed 'Subjects', on which six in scenes from the Old and New Testaments have been jotted down in pencil, together with other non-biblical subjects, but these entries can firmly be dated no earlier than 1836-37.⁴⁶

⁴³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 148-49.

⁴⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 167.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁶ One of them, 'Lyra Apostolica', must post-date February 1836, see Chapter Five, note 83., in respect of its publication date. Another, 'A pilgrim worshipping early morning the shadow of the crucifix coming on the fore ground' is directly related to an incident witnessed by Collins in Rome on 22 April 1837: see the discussion of *Prayer* in Chapter Five, Section Two, *Devotional sentiment and the role of the Church*. Collins's Notebook II does indeed two rough sketches, but one is of 'frozed out gardeners', and the other is a sketch for the frame of a coastal scene. (Notebook II, fols.34^r, and 17^v.) There was no room left to record further subjects in Notebook II, so it would appear that two other subjects which can be found pencilled on a blank page in Notebook I, under the heading 'Subjects I purpose', namely 'Flight into Egypt. Morning|Our Saviour preaching from the vessels to the People on the Beach', were further thoughts jotted down c. 1838, rather than during the period 1808-1827. In this context it is also relevant that Collins's payment receipts list at the end of Notebook I, referred to in the Introduction, covers his entire career and is not limited to receipts 1809-1827. It seems most likely that Collins jotted down potential subjects wherever there was space in his Notebooks to do so.

Collins's correspondence with Sir David Wilkie whilst he was in Italy also indicates that his decision to embark on biblical paintings was only taken in 1837-38. In March 1837 his correspondence shows that his thoughts were clearly focussed on the landscape of the Campagna.⁴⁷ Wilkie, however, clearly wanted Collins to set his sights higher. In his reply, he asked Collins why, since he was 'now in the prime of life and height of your faculties and fame', he should not aspire to developing 'a new style of art for yourself'.⁴⁸ Thirteen months later, in May 1838, towards the very end of Collins's time in Italy, Wilkie wrote to Collins expressing the following view: 'We only want you to come home and surprise us by a new style of Italian art... On your return, I am quite sure that you will bring with you new subjects, and a new style of art, which the public will be full of expectation to receive'.⁴⁹ Collins received a further impetus from his month's stay in Venice during May and June 1838. Replying to Wilkie shortly before his departure homewards, a clear interest in figure painting emerges:

One thing I am more convinced of every day; namely that the fine pictures of the schools I am surrounded by are built upon what is called common nature; the inhabitants of the streets furnishing the guest-table; and there playing their parts with a dignity to be found only amongst the people.⁵⁰

Just before this passage he commented on his perception that 'everything in Italy, has been so besketched, that little remains, unless the old way of doing things be resorted to, by way of novelty'. These observations do not chime at all with his 'Italian paintings' discussed in Chapter Five, but do resonate with the biblical paintings he began to paint in 1839, containing as they do, references to the Venetian school and 'the old way of doing things'.

⁴⁷ Letter from Collins to David Wilkie dated 7 March 1837, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 99.

⁴⁸ Letter from David Wilkie to Collins dated 31 March 1837, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 102.

⁴⁹ Letter from David Wilkie to Collins dated 7 May 1838, Cunningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie*, III, 245-6.

⁵⁰ Letter from Collins to David Wilkie dated 21 June 1838, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 144.

That is not to say Collins had no interest in religious art before going to Italy. Such interest did not spring from nowhere. His close friendship with Wilkie must have made that interest inevitable. As early as 1826, Wilkie had observed that 'The art of painting seems made for the service of Christianity; would that the Catholics were not the only sect who have seen its advantages'.⁵¹ Some insight into his thinking by the time he began *Sunday* in 1835 is provided by his chance encounter that August with Gustav Friedrich Waagen, the Director of the Berlin Museum, whilst Waagen was travelling through England examining major art collections in order to produce his monumental catalogue, *Works of Art and Artists in England* (1838).⁵² They met at the home of Collins's friend and patron Sir Thomas Baring where, at dinner, Waagen was introduced to 'Mr Collins, the painter, a very agreeable man, and a highly respectable clergyman, both from London'.⁵³ Waagen describes a conversation about 'the mode of treating religious subjects in works of art, and the propriety of admitting such works into churches'. The clergyman did not think religious subjects were at all suitable for art, and should not be placed in churches. Waagen confined himself to a mention of the Raphael cartoons. Significantly, he adds: 'I left the further defence of religious art to Mr. Collins, who conducted it with zeal, and was seconded by Sir Thomas'.⁵⁴ Collins could hardly have impressed Waagen unless his observations had demonstrated both considerable knowledge and interest. Waagen recorded his own views on the issue, namely that it was nonsense to say (as the clergyman had contended) that Protestant artists could not paint religious subjects, and that the artists involved in the revival of religious painting during the

⁵¹ Cunnningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie*, II, 376, cited in Lindsay Errington, *Social and Religious Themes in English Art 1840-1860*, 31.

⁵² Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, 3 vols, London: John Murray, 1838.

⁵³ Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, III, Letter XXIV, Salisbury, 27 August 1835, 28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

past few years in Germany ‘belong as well to the Protestant as to the Roman Catholic Church’. He opines that this revival will come to England too.⁵⁵

Certainly influential patrons wanted to see a school of Protestant religious art established and were pleased with the increasing number of religious paintings being exhibited. The Marquess of Lansdowne, for example, who commissioned Collins’s *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple* (1840), addressed the R.A. annual dinner in May 1841 ‘congratulating [members of the R.A.] on the tendency of the English school towards the sublime subjects of Scripture’.⁵⁶ But in the absence of a lead either from contemporary art critics or from the Academy, an artist with the ambition to found a school of Protestant religious painting had to chart their own path. In those circumstances, it is perhaps unsurprising that Wilkie and Collins, two artists with strong religious convictions and no track record of painting religious art, should have stepped forward.

Whilst both artists held strong religious views, Wilkie’s were consistently rooted in Scottish Presbyterianism whilst Collins was at this period clearly influenced by the Oxford Movement in general, and William Dodsworth in particular. The impact of Tractarianism, in terms of spirituality, and the role of the Church in wider society has been discussed in Chapter Five. In terms of doctrine, one of the key strands of the Oxford Movement was its emphasis on the role of the early Christian Church, and early Christian writings. This included Catholic and apocryphal writings which did not form part of the Protestant Bible. I will demonstrate the links between these and three of Collins’s biblical paintings in Section Two.

⁵⁵ Waagen, *Works of Art and Artists in England*, III, Letter XXIV, Salisbury, 27 August 1835, 31-2.

⁵⁶ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 179.

Another important strand within Tractarianism which is significant for an understanding of Collins's paintings, was a belief in some form of Premillennialism, which is the belief (based on Revelation, 20.6, and passages in the Old Testament) that Jesus will return to earth in physical form and usher in a thousand years of peace.⁵⁷ Such belief is clear from a letter Collins wrote to his wife in August 1833 whilst staying with Sir Thomas Baring. Of his host, he commented: 'He is a genuine Christian we agree perfectly about that most important doctrine, the personal reign of our Lord which you know is an everlasting theme of delight'.⁵⁸ Collins had by then known Sir Thomas Baring at least three years.⁵⁹ Since Baring knew Dodsworth, they may have met through the Margaret Street Chapel, where Dodsworth preached between 1829 and 1837. It is probable that Dodsworth, Baring and Collins all arrived at Premillennial beliefs through the preaching of Edward Irving, and/or his book *The Last and Perilous Times of the Gentile Dispensation* (1828). There Irving set out a scenario in which, as Chene Heady has put it: 'after the fall of Gentile Christianity, God bestows the Holy Spirit on the Jews, who are converted to Christianity not by Gentile missionaries but, miraculously, by the direct action of God himself'.⁶⁰ Collins evidently intended at some point to paint a Premillennialist picture, namely: 'A pair. The present

⁵⁷ Tim Fulford has maintained that by 1832 millennialism was a spent force (Tim Fulford (ed.), *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002, 10). This was not, however, the case for Tractarians. Two of the leaders of the Oxford Movement, John Keble and John Henry Newman, consistently preached sermons which reflect Premillennialist thinking (see W.H. Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, 142 and 145). Dodsworth himself published a tract on the Second Coming in 1835 (see William Dodsworth, *The Second Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ, With an Appendix on Jesus Christ As the Destroyer of Antichrist, by a clergyman of the Church of England*, London : James Burns, 1835).

⁵⁸ Letter from William Collins to Harriet Collins dated 14 August 1833, Morgan Library 3154.32.

⁵⁹ Baring had commissioned *Muscle [sic] Gatherers, coast of France* (1830), a painting discussed in Chapter Three, Section One, *Foreign shores*.

⁶⁰ Chene Heady, "'The Last and Perilous Times of the Gentile Dispensation": Edward Irving's The Last Days and the Conversion of the Jewish Conversion Trope', *Prose Studies*, 25:3, 2002, 41-57 at 49.

dispensation and the next dispensation. The lion lying down with the lamb. The chld &c'.⁶¹ He also painted at least one, and probably two oil sketches of an unusual scene from the New Testament which dealt with a Jewish community both receptive to Christianity, and interested in exploring prophecy. This was the community at Berea, in Northern Greece.⁶² Paul's visit to Berea is described in Acts, 17. The Bereans could be regarded as exemplary Jewish converts since, unlike the Jews of Thessalonika, 'they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily'.⁶³ I look at Collins's approach to Judaism and Jews in more detail in Section Two, when discussing *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple*.

It might be thought, bearing in mind Waagen's views on the prospects for Protestant English art in 1835, and Collins's belief in Premillennialism, that Collins would have been influenced by the Nazarenes. In *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism* (2009) Cordula Grewe makes a number of observations about the Nazarenes that resonate with themes in Collins's biblical paintings. Noting that, in the temporal structure of the Christian doctrine of Salvation 'the present occupied an uneasy position as a transitional period that bridged the gap between Christ's Incarnation and his Second Coming', she observes that 'the spirit of Nazarene art could be described aptly as a marriage of Christian and artistic millennialism'.⁶⁴ Grewe points to the 'complex layering of temporal levels' in Overbeck's *Christ's entry into Jerusalem* (1824).⁶⁵ Whether Waagen shared his own positive view of the

⁶¹ William Collins, Notebook II, fol.28^v. How Collins intended to depict the 'present dispensation' is not known; the 'next dispensation' is a reference to Isaiah, 11, 6.

⁶² Lot 264: 'Bereans searching the scriptures'; lot 772: 'Jews examining a manuscript', both in the posthumous Collins sale. Present whereabouts unknown.

⁶³ Acts, 17.11.

⁶⁴ Cordula Grewe, *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009, 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

Nazarenes with Collins after that dinner in 1835 is not known, but it is reasonable to suppose that Collins was well aware of their work before he went to Italy. However, the evidence of his lack of engagement with them suggests that although he shared their Millennialist views, and no doubt respected their piety and focus on religious art, his particular vision of Protestant art was his own. He visited numerous studios in Rome, but not Overbeck's.⁶⁶ His son's biography makes explicit his antipathy to their work, which he studied on his route home from Italy: 'he had little sympathy with the productions of the modern German school, at any time of his life', and even that little 'tended considerably to lessen, during his stay at Munich'.⁶⁷

David Wilkie appears to have been equally dismissive of the Nazarenes, as a way forward for English art, when he visited Munich two years later. In October 1840 he wrote to Collins, saying that he did not see how Nazarene art could work in England: 'the imitation of an art of an early age, almost to the exclusion of the attainments of art in modern times, certainly would not lead to any good'.⁶⁸ He made the same observation when writing to Sir Robert Peel in March 1841.⁶⁹ In responding to the challenge of creating a new school of 'Protestant' art, Wilkie sought inspiration from his journey to the Holy Land. Briggs points to a number of difficulties in interpreting Wilkie's intentions in his biblical oil sketches, given that they were unfinished, are all missing and no colour photographs exist.⁷⁰ However, from the black and white images available, it appears that Wilkie was content to utilise

⁶⁶ Harriet Collins's journal refers to visits to the following studios: James Inskipp (15 April 1837); Joseph Severn (15 March 1837) and Bertel Thorwaldsen (29 April 1837). Social visits to numerous other English painters and sculptors are mentioned.

⁶⁷ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 153.

⁶⁸ Cunningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie*, III, 325.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 416.

⁷⁰ Briggs, 'A Martin Luther in Painting', 36-7.

compositions by canonical Italian artists, and that the innovative elements in his sketches were confined to establishing the setting as the Holy Land as opposed to Western Europe through the depiction of Jerusalem buildings and the costume of its present inhabitants. Collins adopted a very different path, as an examination of his paintings, to which I now turn, will demonstrate.

Section Two : analysis of Collins's biblical paintings

Protestant Christology and Typology: Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple (1839-40)

Collins chose to postpone starting a biblical scene until after the opening of the 1839 Royal Academy exhibition in May. This may have been because finishing three 'Italian paintings' in the months between his return from Italy and the 1839 exhibition was a more realistic prospect than starting on the first history painting he had done for nearly thirty years.

Alternatively, he may have been in discussion with the Marquess of Lansdowne, who had commissioned *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple*.⁷¹ The painting's location since 1904 is unknown and it was not engraved or photographed. It is presently known only through the description provided by Wilkie Collins and contemporary reviewers. For this reason it is not possible accurately to comment on details within the painting. My analysis will accordingly attempt to piece together what the painting may have represented for

⁷¹ William Collins, Notebook II, fol. 14^r records that it was 'Painted for the Marquess of Lansdowne'. There is no indication of the date of the commission, but it was evidently after Collins's return from Italy in August 1838, and its position in the Notebook (first item for the year April 1839 to April 1840) indicates that he began it promptly after the opening of the 1839 Royal Academy Exhibition.

Collins and his contemporaries, through an analysis of the composition, its contemporary meaning, the critical responses to it, and Collins's own approach to religion.

The composition appears to have been as follows: the young Jesus 'sits at the centre of a table, round which the doctors are grouped'.⁷² There were at least five doctors. These included a 'haughty, sneering Pharisee, openly expressing his scorn'; 'the juster and wiser doctor, listening with candour and patience'; 'the old man, of less vigorous intellect, lost in astonishment at the Divine question he has just heard'; 'the subtle philosopher, consulting with his companion for the triumphant answer that no one has yet framed'. Mary and Joseph are shown entering through a door, in the background. Jesus is described as having a 'serious, enquiring, holy' face, and his 'calm dignity' is contrasted with a 'dramatic energy of action, and vigour of expression' of the doctors. Critics highlighted the powerful effect this painting had upon them. The *Athenaeum* observed that 'composition, colour and expression are all set forth with a power for which we were not prepared'.⁷³ The *Art-Union* stated: 'as a first effort in a new path its effect is startling. It is such a work only as a man of unquestionable genius could produce'.⁷⁴ The *Examiner* described the painting as 'very striking'.⁷⁵ There appears to have been a consensus that here was something new and different from the usual offerings of Old and New Testament scenes.⁷⁶

Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple was a subject of fundamental Christological and typological significance. The term typology, in the context of scripture,

⁷² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 168.

⁷³ *Athenaeum*, 9 May 1840, 373.

⁷⁴ *Art-Union*, May 1840, 74.

⁷⁵ *Examiner*, 3 May 1840, 278.

⁷⁶ There were a total of ten biblical paintings in the 1840 Royal Academy exhibition, four Old Testament scenes and six from the New Testament.

refers to the belief that events recounted in the Old Testament (and even the life of Christ) are related to, and foreshadow events in the life of Christ himself. Typological connections, or types, would have been apparent to all those of Collins's viewing public who were practicing Christians.⁷⁷ The particular importance of the scene depicted in *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple* is explained by George Landow, writing of William Holman Hunt's painting of the same subject, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-60):-

The instant that Christ realises his mission (and perhaps his future as well) is to enforce upon the spectator that this is the moment at which Christ as Messiah enters human history. This is the point at which all types and prophecies converge.⁷⁸

It was undoubtedly a suitable subject for Protestant art. Benjamin West had intended it as one of the subjects for the decoration of the 'chapel of revealed religion' at Windsor Castle (1780-1802).⁷⁹

In the absence of a photograph or an engraving of Collins's painting, it is difficult to be clear about the sources that Collins used in deciding on his composition. As a subject, it was rarely exhibited. Only three versions had been exhibited at the Royal Academy or British Institution during Collins's time, none of which are known.⁸⁰ However, there was a distinct difference between Catholic and Protestant approaches to the subject. The account in the Gospel describes Jesus's parents as finding him 'in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions'.⁸¹ The account continues: 'And all

⁷⁷ George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, New Haven and London, 1979, 11-13.

⁷⁸ Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 101.

⁷⁹ Jerry D. Meyer, 'Benjamin West's Chapel of Revealed Religion: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Protestant Religious Art', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (June 1975), 264.

⁸⁰ Richard Westall, *Christ, when a child, reasoning with the doctors in the temple* (B.I. 1814, No.23); W.M. Craig, *Our Saviour among the Jewish doctors* (1815, R.A. No.424); Henry Singleton, *Christ in the Temple with the Doctors, sketch for a large picture* (1831, R.A. No.320).

⁸¹ Luke, 2, 46.

that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers'.⁸² The account in the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* gives an expanded account which suggests that essentially the doctors were put to flight by Jesus: 'And all paid attention to him and marvelled how he, a child, put to silence the elders and teachers of the people, elucidating the chapters of the law and the parables of the prophets'.⁸³ This leaves open the question of how receptive the doctors were to Jesus. Protestants preferred to view the doctors' attitude as oppositional, even threatening. The Catholic view was of a triumphant Jesus dominating the encounter. These differences of approach were reflected in paintings of the subject.

Of Catholic paintings, Collins would have known the version in Antwerp Cathedral by Franz Francken I, having visited in September 1828 (Figure 6.1).⁸⁴ He probably also knew the recently published engraving by Karl Koch of Overbeck's version (1839) (Figure 6.2). Of Protestant depictions, the one most likely to have influenced Collins was probably Albrecht Dürer's version, *Christ among the Doctors*, (Figure 6.3). Now in Madrid, it was in the Barberini collection until 1934, so Collins would have had the opportunity to see it there during his stays in Rome in 1837 and 1838.⁸⁵ Some support for such influence is provided by the critic for *Bells New Weekly Messenger* who found 'much character in this picture' in Collins's painting, but thought that 'its effect is spoiled by the monotony of the group of doctors. They are all too big and ugly. There is a fine expressive countenance on the right'.⁸⁶ The description of them as 'big and ugly' certainly chimes to some extent with the Dürer

⁸² Luke, 2, 47.

⁸³ J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, Oxford, 1993, 'The Infancy Gospel of Thomas', 19.2, 80.

⁸⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, I, 309.

⁸⁵ Jan Bialostocki, "'Opus Quinque Dierum": Durer's 'Christ among the Doctors' and Its Sources', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 22 (1959), 17-34, 17 n. 4.

⁸⁶ *Bells New Weekly Messenger*, 17 May 1840.

painting. Collins would also have known Luini's *Christ among the doctors*, then at the National Gallery, London (Figure 6.4).⁸⁷ This, however, does not demonstrate the powerful effect noted by the critics, nor the variety of response amongst the doctors in the Collins version. The apparent 'ugliness' of the doctors does raise, however, the issue of Collins's attitude to Judaism and the Jews.

One aspect of 'Protestant' painting which has been explored in recent scholarship is the extent to which nineteenth-century art which is demonstrably Protestant in nature is also demonstrably anti-Semitic. This was considered by Caroline Kaye in relation to William Holman Hunt in her recent PhD thesis (2022) which concludes that Hunt's painting *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1860) is indeed anti-Semitic.⁸⁸ However, as Cordula Grewe has explained in *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism* it is essential in that context to distinguish between 'anti-Judaism' and 'anti-Semitism'.⁸⁹ In terms of Christian religious doctrine, although the Old Testament was significant from a typological perspective, Christianity always had to trump Judaism. As Grewe concisely puts it: 'Typology asserts the significance of Christianity's mother religion, while simultaneously dismissing Judaism as a superseded stage in the evolution of God's economy of Salvation'.⁹⁰ To that extent practising Christians were all essentially anti-Judaic. Nevertheless, if Collins was an 'Irvingite' in his understanding of Premillennialism, he would have had to accept that Jews had a major future role, ordained by God. Dodsworth's tract on the Second Coming explicitly endorses

⁸⁷ Bequeathed to the National Gallery in 1831 by the Revd. W H Carr, see *A Popular Handbook to the National Gallery*, ed. Edward T. Cook, London: Macmillan and Co, 3rd edition, 1890, Appendix Two, 719.

⁸⁸ Caroline Kaye, 'The Disputation: The Enduring Representations in William Holman Hunt's "The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple," 1860', Doctoral thesis (PhD), Manchester Metropolitan University, 2022, 29, 67-8.

⁸⁹ Grewe, *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism*, 259.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

the role of the 'Jewish nation' in what he describes as 'the great day of deliverance'.⁹¹ A lecture published by the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Among the Jews a year after its founding in 1842 makes clear 'That the Jews are to be restored to their own land' and that 'It is God's purpose to restore the Jews'.⁹² Accordingly, for Collins as for other Premillennialists, the Jews had a fundamental role in God's purpose which was yet to be played out.

Whether or not that role would involve their conversion to Christianity was unclear.⁹³ There is some evidence that Collins may have taken an interest in conversion. Wilkie Collins's library contained a volume which was almost certainly acquired by his father, James Wood Johns, *The Anglican Cathedral Church of St James, Mount Zion, Jerusalem* (1844).⁹⁴ This was connected to the decision in 1840 by the British government to establish an Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem, an event which appears to have fired Wilkie's imagination in terms of his vision for the future possibilities of Protestant religious art.⁹⁵ Also, Collins planned, but did not execute, a painting which was directly related to conversion, namely Paul before Agrippa. His Notebook records, as a potential subject: "Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian" Paul addressing...'.⁹⁶ These are the words of King Agrippa, after Paul has presented his defence.⁹⁷ Paul's exposition to Agrippa, a Jew, is regarded by modern biblical

⁹¹ Dodsworth, *The Second Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 5-6.

⁹² Rev. James Hamilton, 'the destination of the Jews', in *Lectures on the Conversion of the Jews. By Ministers of Different Denominations. Published under the Sanction of the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Jews*, London: W. Aylott, 1843, 3.

⁹³ Dodsworth, *The Second Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 5, which envisages a parallel 'great day of deliverance' for both the 'Jewish nation' and the 'Christian Church'.

⁹⁴ Puttick and Simpson, *Library of the late Wilkie Collins, Esq.*, lot 245.

⁹⁵ Letter from David Wilkie to Sir Robert Peel dated 18 March 1841, in which he imagines these events might 'open a new field for the genius of British artists to work upon'. (Cunningham, *The Life of Sir David Wilkie*, III, 418.)

⁹⁶ William Collins, Notebook II, fol. 28^v.

⁹⁷ Acts, 26, 28.

criticism as ‘the conflict of Judaism against the Christian mission, which Paul represents as its victorious agent’.⁹⁸

There was, of course, an ancient tradition, stemming from the earliest Christian writings, of laying the blame for the death of Jesus at the door of the Jewish people.⁹⁹ As a doctrine, this evidently had the potential to lead to an anti-Semitic frame of mind, but this was by no means always the case, as Grewe has demonstrated in relation to the Nazarenes.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, as David Feldman has argued, in considering the position of the mid-nineteenth century Jewish community in England, ‘while “substantial prejudice and insensitivity” remained, there was no “broadly based opposition to the entry of Jews into English society.”’¹⁰¹

The evidence relating to Collins suggests that his subscription to religious doctrine relating to the Jews did not influence him in his everyday dealings. Certainly there is nothing in his correspondence to suggest he held anti-Semitic views. In 1836, when the family were held up at Nice on their way to Italy due to cholera restrictions, Collins hired a Jewish tutor for his son.¹⁰² This distinction between matters of religious doctrine and everyday life is neatly encapsulated, with regard to Collins, in an anecdote told by Solomon Alexander Hart. Hart (who was Jewish) was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in November 1835, and an Academician in February 1840. In his autobiography he describes visiting Collins at his

⁹⁸ Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles : A Commentary*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971, 691.

⁹⁹ 1 Thessalonians, 2,15.

¹⁰⁰ Grewe, *Painting the Sacred in the Age of Romanticism*, 278-82.

¹⁰¹ David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: social relations and political culture 1840-1914*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994, 26-7, quoting Todd Endelman, ‘The Englishness of Jewish Modernity’, in J.Katz, ed., *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, New York, 1987, 237-43, at 237-39. However, a Jew could not be admitted to Parliament until the passage of the Jews Relief Act 1858 (21 & 22 Vict. c. 49).

¹⁰² Harriet Collins, Italian journal, entries for 15 and 21 November 1836.

home, where he had been invited following his election, and being introduced to his sons in this way:

This is Mr. Hart, whom we have just elected an Academician. Mr Hart is a great friend of your aunt Margaret Carpenter. Mr Hart is a Jew, and the Jews crucified our Saviour; but he is a very good man for all that, and we shall see something more of him now. He has abstained from coming here, although he has been asked, but we understand the reason for his absence, for which there will be now no cause.¹⁰³

Hart went on to explain that a mortified Collins had asked Margaret Carpenter for her help in apologising to him. He ended the anecdote by saying that 'I was afterwards often at his house'. Collins's older son Wilkie would then have been aged 16, while Charlie would have been aged 12. At an impressionable age, and liable to absorb all sorts of prejudices from their peers, the encounter can, I suggest, be read as a clumsy attempt by their father to impress upon them the clear distinction between religious teaching and conduct in real life. I conclude that the available evidence broadly supports the view that Collins made a distinction between his religious attitude towards Judaism and his social interactions with Jewish people. Accordingly, while it can be argued that all representations of Jesus with the Doctors can be seen as potentially anti-Semitic, it would appear that Collins's painting is firmly anchored in the Christological and historically anti-Judaic elements of the scene, and that his characterisation of the doctors was intended to demonstrate a variety of responses by them.

In the absence of the painting itself, or any engraving or image of it, it is clearly not possible to comment accurately on details within *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple*. Given the significance which can be attached to details within the other paintings discussed

¹⁰³ Solomon Alexander Hart, *The Reminiscences of Solomon Alex. Hart, R.A.*, ed. Alexander Brodie, London. 1882, 73-4.

in this chapter, it seems highly likely that, should this painting resurface, there will be more to say. However, even in the absence of the painting it is clear both from its overall composition, Christological focus, and contemporary reception, that it represented a clear statement by Collins as to the possibilities for Protestant art.

Realism, symbols and the suspension of time: The Two Disciples at Emmaus (1841)

This painting was not engraved, and its whereabouts unknown between 1897 and 2017. It remains in a private collection, where I have had the opportunity to study the work (figure 6.5). As with Collins's *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple* it was, and remains a subject of fundamental Christological and typological significance. The narrative is contained in Luke's Gospel.¹⁰⁴ The two disciples, Cleophas and his companion, are walking in the wrong direction, both literally and metaphorically. They are walking away from Jerusalem, and away from their calling. On the way to Emmaus, about eight miles from Jerusalem, they meet Jesus but do not recognise him. Jesus then gives them a masterclass in prophetic studies referencing himself.¹⁰⁵ They invite him to eat with them. During the meal he breaks bread, evidently in the manner of the Last Supper, which finally enables the disciples to realise who they have been talking to: 'And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight'.¹⁰⁶ The two disciples then return to Jerusalem and to their calling.

Collins's painting is set at the point of realisation, and disappearance of Jesus. As a subject, it was rarely exhibited; only two paintings shown during Collins's career had

¹⁰⁴ Luke, 24, 13-35.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 31.

depicted this moment.¹⁰⁷ He would have known the Caravaggio version, recently presented to the National Gallery in 1839. However, he evidently chose, as the basis for an important part of the composition—the reactions of the disciples—Rembrandt’s 1654 etching of the *Supper at Emmaus* (figure 6.6). There are striking similarities in composition. There is a table, and the participants are sitting on a bench with cushions. The disciples express their astonishment, one by rising and bringing his hands together (as does Collins’s disciple on the right) and the other by drawing his hands apart (as does Collins’s disciple on the left). However, in Rembrandt’s etching, Jesus is the focus of attention, notwithstanding the expressions of astonishment of the disciples. In Collins’s painting, by contrast, all that is left of Jesus is the empty cushion on the right. The focus is firmly on the two men and their realisation, and, in effect, salvation.

There are no other paintings or engravings apart from the Rembrandt which Collins is likely to have seen which depict the scene in this way. I suggest that this is an example of Collins reimagining the scene as it might have actually happened, with the disappearance of Jesus coinciding with the disciples’ sudden revelation. This ‘realism’ as it might be described, is also apparent in the positioning of Jesus, who evidently had occupied the empty cushion to the right of the disciples. He was a guest of the two disciples, certainly, but he was not the honoured guest, the divine guest who takes his place in the centre. He had been sitting to one side of the two principal participants. That serves to make the final realisation more unexpected, more compelling. Further, Jesus’s absence from the scene provides space for the viewers’ imagination to come into play, in reconstructing the event for themselves.

¹⁰⁷ Fuseli’s *Christ disappearing at Emmaus* (1806, B.I. No.55) and Singleton’s *Christ and the Two Disciples at Emmaus* (1824, R.A. No. 369).

But if Collins's overall conception of the scene is novel, other features of the painting show what appears to be a deliberate mixture of artefacts from different time periods. The disciples are shown seated with their backs to a low wall, beyond which a valley and hills can be seen in a distinctly Italianate landscape stretching into the distance. It is, perhaps, the sort of inn terrace with which the Collins family would have sat at during their travels through Italy. Collins's palette, the clothing of the two disciples and the diaphanous tablecloth reflect Collins's admiration for the Venetian masters, whilst the hat of the right-hand disciple both serves to remind the viewer of the disciples' ethnicity, and to add a modern touch; the hat is not the typical portrayal of Jews in Christian art, with a pointed or domed centre, but appears to be of the flattened sort of hat familiar from *Cries of London*.¹⁰⁸ (Figure 6.7). The *Athenaeum*'s critic was clearly puzzled. They described the painting as 'a work singularly composed' and found much to praise, but complained that the 'handling' was not 'such as befits a strictly historical subject'.¹⁰⁹ The mixture of time periods suggests that Collins may have been intending to show 'these sacred events as belonging to all times, and still, as it were, passing before our eyes'.¹¹⁰ That was how Anna Jameson, in 1845 was to describe her understanding of Bennozo Gozzoli's frescoes at the Campo Santo, Pisa, paintings which Collins knew and greatly admired.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Cries of London*, No. 7, *Old Cloaths, any Old Cloaths*, Henry Merke, after Thomas Rowlandson, London: R. Ackermann, 4 May 1799. On the traditional portrayal of Jewish hats, see Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History*, London: SCM Press, 1996, 141 and *passim*.

¹⁰⁹ *Athenaeum*, 15 May 1841, 388.

¹¹⁰ Anna Brownell Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters and of the Progress of Painting in Italy: From Cimabue to Bassano*, 2 vols, London, 1845, 128, cited in Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017, 125.

¹¹¹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 86.

Perhaps the most original feature of the painting was its symbolic content. This was a feature which reviewers of the time completely overlooked, unused as they were to seeing symbolic references in a Protestant work of art. On the table in front of the disciples can be seen the skeletons of fish, a platter of figs and bread (figures 6.8 and 6.9). Bread, of course, is central to the Gospel narrative, but there is no mention of either fish or figs. These are Collins's own additions. Fish are a powerful Early Christian symbol 'referring to Christ in the Eucharistic meal'.¹¹² They are also a symbol of baptism as an essential element of Christian belief.¹¹³ Figs are a symbol of the Second Coming of Christ.¹¹⁴ This was, as discussed in Part One, a subject close to Collins's heart. A platter of figs appears in Gozzoli's *Departure of Hagar from the House of Abraham* (1472), both the original and print of which Collins was familiar.¹¹⁵ The early Christian symbolism, sacramentalism and typology contained in this painting all align with Tractarian thought.¹¹⁶

It seems unlikely to be mere coincidence that the 1841 Royal Academy exhibition featured another painting containing symbolic references. This was Eastlake's *Christ Lamenting over Jerusalem* (1841).¹¹⁷ Giebelhausen refers to the puzzlement of the *Athenaeum* critic over the 'accessories that were prominently displayed in the foreground'.¹¹⁸ They evidently did not notice Collins's symbols, doubtless because these were on the table,

¹¹² National Gallery, *The Image of Christ*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery London 26 February to 7 May 2000, London: National Gallery Company Ltd, 2000, 10.

¹¹³ George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961 (paperback edition), 19.

¹¹⁴ Matthew 24, 27-33.

¹¹⁵ Carlo Lasinio, *Pitture a Fresco Del Campo Santo Di Pisa*, Florence, 1812. The Royal Academy purchased John Flaxman's copy of this in 1813.

¹¹⁶ Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement*, Cambridge, 1990, 8, 28 and 41-2.

¹¹⁷ 1841, R.A. 75.

¹¹⁸ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 50-1, citing the references to 'a sheaf of corn, a sickle, a few bright flowers, and a pair of doves' in *Athenaeum*, 1841, 367.

where food could be expected. Eastlake did not repeat the experiment in later paintings. The artistic connections between Eastlake and Collins have been discussed in Chapter Five, in relation to Collins's Italian paintings.¹¹⁹ Wilkie Collins acknowledged Eastlake's assistance in the Preface to his biography of his father, and that assistance is likely to have extended to an appreciation of his father's biblical paintings, upon which he places considerable store when summarising his father's achievements.¹²⁰ Eastlake appears to have followed Collins's lead in their respective Italian paintings, so it may be that the impetus for Eastlake's single attempt at inclusion of symbolic references emerged from conversations with Collins. The traffic was probably not all one way; Collins doubtless saw the nimbus around Christ's head in Eastlake's *Christ blessing Little Children* (1839), and one of the few details that we do know about *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple* is that 'a mysterious purple halo' encircled Jesus's head.¹²¹

The Two Disciples at Emmaus represented another important contribution by Collins to a new Protestant art. Its subject-matter was of central Christological significance, and it included symbolic Christian references. It blended realism (portraying the event as it might actually have occurred) with a deliberate mixture of artefacts from different time periods. That appears to indicate an intention by Collins to show 'these sacred events as belonging to all times, and still, as it were, passing before our eyes'. These features can all be identified in Collins's next biblical painting, *The Virgin and Child*. This painting, however, added an additional element, namely archaism.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter Five, Section Two, *Female Religious Orders and the critique of the Roman Catholic model*, and Conclusion.

¹²⁰ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 316.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 168. *Christ blessing Little Children* was exhibited, 1839, R.A. No. 103.

Realism, archaism and the suspension of time: The Virgin and Child (1843)

This painting was not engraved, and its location was unknown between 1890 and 2017. It remains in a private collection, where I have had the opportunity to study the work (figure 6.10). As with Collins's *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple*, the subject of *The Virgin and Child* was, and remains a subject of fundamental Christological and typological significance. It was an acceptable Protestant theme, but one which could, as with William Dyce's *The Madonna and Child* (1838), run the risk of being seen as 'unapologetically devotional'.¹²² If so, a line might be crossed beyond which the subject became unacceptable to Protestants. It was clearly important to Collins, in seeking to produce a Protestant version of the scene, to distance himself from representations which could be regarded as Catholic. He inserted in the exhibition catalogue the final stanza of Milton's *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, which certainly bolstered the 'Protestant' element:-

The Virgin blest
Hath laid her babe to rest.
* * *
Heaven's youngest teemed star
Hath fix'd her polish'd car,
Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending. – *Milton*¹²³

Collins would have been aware of Milton's suitability, as a suitable reference point for artists, for many years. John Flaxman, appointed Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy whilst Collins was a student, had encouraged students to reference Milton's work, stressing both its British and Christian elements.¹²⁴

¹²² Marcia R. Pointon, *William Dyce, 1806-1864: A Critical Biography*, Oxford, 1979, 36. *The Madonna and Child* was exhibited in 1838 while Collins was in Italy, 1838, R.A. No. 452.

¹²³ *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, XXVII, lines 237-38, 240-42 (stanza redacted by Collins so as to eliminate the reference to a stable), John Milton, *Complete shorter poems*, ed. John Carey, second ed., London: Longman, 1997, 116.

¹²⁴ Caroline Jordan, "'The very spirit of purity and chastity": *Eve at the Fountain* by Edward Hodges Baily', *Sculpture Journal*, 2006, Vol.15(1), at 21-22.

Wilkie Collins certainly stressed the Miltonic link; by 1848, in terms of Protestant sensibilities, that would have been a safer approach.¹²⁵ However, in 1842 when Collins began to paint *The Virgin and Child*, the start of the Protestant backlash against the Virgin Mary, described by Carol Engelhardt Herringer in *Victorians and the Virgin Mary* (2008), was still several years away. Whilst there were one or two lone voices belittling her importance Herringer dates the beginnings of a concerted Protestant backlash to the late 1840s.¹²⁶ As discussed in Chapter Five, Tractarians accepted the special and important role of the Virgin Mary, provided she was not seen as an intercessor. It may be significant that 1842 also saw the publication of sermons preached before Queen Victoria in 1841-42 by Samuel Wilberforce, one of which, was on 'The Character of the Virgin Mary'.¹²⁷ This took as its text: 'But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart', the context of which was her reaction to the shepherds' account of being visited by an angel who announced the Saviour's birth and was then accompanied by 'a multitude of the heavenly host'.¹²⁸ Wilberforce imagines how Mary might have felt, understanding so little of what was happening to her: 'When would the mystery begin to unfold itself? As yet it lay upon her thick and impenetrable; all was dark and impenetrable'.¹²⁹ Herringer interprets Wilberforce as describing an 'uneasy Nativity in which a humble and awestruck Mary made a futile attempt to understand her newborn son'.¹³⁰ However, Wilberforce goes on to stress Mary's strength of character, in dealing with such uncertainty, and how that is an example to us

¹²⁵ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 229.

¹²⁶ Herringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary*, 2008, 2.

¹²⁷ Samuel Wilberforce, *Four Sermons preached before Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria in 1841 and 1842*, London: James Burns, 1842, 27-47. The sermon on 'The Character of the Virgin Mary' was delivered on 2 January 1842.

¹²⁸ Luke, 2, 9-14 and 19.

¹²⁹ Wilberforce, *Four Sermons*, 31.

¹³⁰ Herringer, *Victorians and the Virgin Mary*, 83.

all.¹³¹ Wilberforce accordingly provides a very positive view of the Virgin Mary, which attempts to explain her emotional response to unfolding events. Collins's portrayal of the complex expression in the Virgin's face appears to demonstrate the same qualities highlighted in Wilberforce's vision (Figures 6.10 and 6.21).

Wilkie Collins stressed the originality of his father's painting: 'it was necessary to depend entirely upon his own resources, avoiding all imitation of the peculiarities of any particular schools'.¹³² The most striking feature is the setting at the mouth of a cave. The Virgin Mary is seated with her back to the outside world. In terms of its iconography this is highly unusual. Pictorial sources which Collins saw in Italy include Giorgione's *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1505-10), but there the viewer is looking from outside into the cave.¹³³ He almost certainly saw Andrea Mantegna's *Virgin of the Quarry* (1488-90), at the Uffizi (figure 6.11). Although this features a rock pillar and a quarry, rather than a cave, Collins may have taken note of the rock formation, and the complex expression on the face of Mantegna's Virgin when he visited the Uffizi in 1836.¹³⁴

There are, however, two highly plausible written sources for a cave setting. As a person familiar with Tractarian thinking, and closely connected with William Dodsworth, Collins may well have been aware of the contents of the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, part of the

¹³¹ Wilberforce, *Four Sermons*, 35.

¹³² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 228-29.

¹³³ Owned at the time of Collins's visit to Rome by the Roman resident Cardinal Joseph Fesch, sold 1845 at Palazzo Ricci sale. Harriet Collins's journal entry on 1 February 1837 begins as follows: 'out after breakfast with Messrs Gibson Williams and Dunbar to see Cardinal Fesch pictures'. Collins may have had in mind *Virgin of the Rocks*, attributed to Leonardo da Vinci and others (1495-1508), but this did not reach the National Gallery until 1880 and, although in England from the 1780s onwards, it is unclear whether Collins had seen it. The background is an elaborate rock structure, rather than a cave and, as with Giorgione's *Adoration of the Shepherds*, the viewer is looking from outside into the rock structure.

¹³⁴ Collins visited the Uffizi on 28 and 30 December 1836. See Harriet Collins's journal entries for those dates. The cubic formation of the rock arch and front wall of the cave in *The Virgin and Child* are certainly reminiscent of the rock formations in the *Virgin of the Quarry*.

Roman Catholic Apocrypha, which provides *inter alia* details of the early life of the Virgin and the Nativity, and explains how Jesus came to be born in a cavern.¹³⁵ It also explains the move, after the birth, to a stable.¹³⁶ Secondly, it is highly probable that, like Sir David Wilkie, Collins knew of the descriptions and illustrations of the Holy Land published by John Murray between 1834 and 1836, together with the smaller, single volume version, *The Biblical Keepsake*, published in 1835.¹³⁷ The text concerning the Church of the Annunciation at Nazareth refers to two grottos there occupied by the Virgin Mary.¹³⁸

In choosing a cave setting, Collins demonstrates a Tractarian interest in parts of the Bible and Apocrypha which formed no part of the post-Reformation Protestant canon, but which are linked to early Christian texts and traditions. That could be interpreted as progressive (in terms of a move to greater historical accuracy in religious painting); it could also be interpreted as archaic (in terms of abandoning a centuries old iconographical tradition of Christ's birth taking place in a stable). Several other features of *The Virgin and Child* hover at the cross-roads between archaism and realism. One is the shaft of light which illuminates Jesus which, on the face of it, is manifestly archaic. This also appears to reflect the account in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*: 'when the blessed Mary had gone into it [the

¹³⁵J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament : A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 93: the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, Chapter 13. This was available in the early nineteenth century in the English translation of the *Protoevangelium of James* by W. Hone, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, London, 1820, 33, and it appears plausible that Dodsworth, either directly or through his contacts, would have had access to J. C. Thilo's publication of the full text in his *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Leipzig, 1832, 339-400.

¹³⁶J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 94, Chapter 14.

¹³⁷ *The Biblical Keepsake: or, Landscape Illustrations of the Most Remarkable Places Mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, Arranged in the Order of the Several Books and Chapters, Made from Original Sketches taken on the Spot, and Engraved by W. and E. Finden*, London, 1835. For Wilkie's use of the illustrations, see Jo Briggs, 'A Martin Luther in Painting': Sir David Wilkie's Unfinished Christ before Pilate', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 12 (2011), 39.

¹³⁸ *The Biblical Keepsake*, 114.

cave], it began to shine with as much brightness as if it were the sixth hour of the day'.¹³⁹ In considering how to portray that, Collins may have drawn upon Benozzo Gozzoli 's *Le Tavole de la Legge* in the Campo Santo at Pisa (figure 6.12).¹⁴⁰ The engraving was in the Royal Academy Library, as was an engraving made in 1712 of David Bruce (1695-1770), commemorating his rescue from drowning (figure 6.13).¹⁴¹ Again, in terms of interpreting the biblical story, this feature could be perceived simultaneously as archaic and realistic. A counterpoint to the supernatural depiction of the shaft of light is the natural depiction of the six stars visible at the top of the rock arch, which are the well-known group, in the constellation of Leo, known as 'The Sickle'.

Another feature is the Virgin's clothing. Whilst the blue cloak draped over the sill to the entrance of the cave, behind the Virgin, gives a nod to traditional representation, Collins depicts her wearing a green bodice and dress, over which she wears a crimson mantle with leg-of-mutton sleeves. The cut of these could have been recognised as distinctly modern; see, for example, portraits by Collins's sister-in-law, Margaret Carpenter, whom he saw very regularly (figures 6.14 and 6.15). Nevertheless, the overall effect of the Virgin's layers of clothing is one of sixteenth century Venice. Collins may indeed have intended to reference Raphael's *La Donna Gravida* (c.1505-6).¹⁴² She has both leg-of -mutton sleeves and a straight line top to her bodice.

¹³⁹ J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 93, Chapter 13.

¹⁴⁰ Engraved in Lasinio, *Pitture a Fresco Del Campo Santo Di Pisa*.

¹⁴¹ Engraved by George Vertue after Pierre Berchet (1659-1720), Library of the Royal Academy, bound volume of prints : 'British School: I'.

¹⁴² In the Palazzo Pitti, which Collins visited on 29 and 31 December 1836 (see Harriet Collins's journal for those dates). The painting was in the Palazzo Pitti well before 1750, see the provenance section of Luitpold Dussler, *Raffaël: Kritisches Verzeichnis der Gemälde, Wandbilder und Bildteppiche*, Munich: Bruckmann, 1966, No.37.

Finally, rather than placing the infant Jesus directly on her lap, Collins shows him lying in a shallow rectangular basket or box, perhaps a donkey pannier. This is covered with a cloth to form a crib. Again this could be interpreted as a piece of realism, with Collins revisualizing the scene (to use Ruskin's words, in relation to the PRB) in order to show 'what [he supposed] might have been the actual facts of the scene [he desired] to represent'.¹⁴³ Simultaneously, the crisp whiteness of the cloth, and clothing of the infant can be seen as symbolising the sacrament of baptism.

Another significant feature of the painting, as originally exhibited and now restored, was the manner in which it was framed. The top of the frame was curved (figure 6.16).¹⁴⁴ It is possible to interpret this feature as demonstrating an intention by Collins to allude to Italian religious painting prior to 1500, in the same way as PRB members used it between 1850 and 1853.¹⁴⁵ The intention, it is reasonable to suppose, would have been to emphasize the spiritual nature of the painting, by reference to early Christian Art. It seems probable that Collins wished to encourage *The Virgin and Child* to act upon the viewer 'as a focus for prayer or religious meditation' — to quote Elizabeth Prettejohn, writing about Pre-Raphaelite innovation — in effect a Protestant devotional painting.¹⁴⁶ This would certainly

¹⁴³ John Ruskin, letter to the Editor of *The Times*, 13 May 1851, *The Works of John Ruskin* eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols, London: George Allen and Sons; New York :Longmans, Green & Co, 1903-12, vol. 12, 321-22, quoted in Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer, eds., *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites: Text, Context, Subtext*, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2009, 1-2.

¹⁴⁴ Conservation Report dated 12 March 2018 by Ruth Bubb Ltd., 3: 'Removal of overpaint from the upper part of the painting revealed a curving line of losses in the paint, indicating the arched shape of a previous, possibly original frame opening. The outer spandrels, which would have been concealed by the frame, are painted in a very sketchy, transparent manner. This indicates that the arched frame was envisaged by the artist. The line of paint losses along the sight edge also suggest that the painting may have been fitted in the frame while the paint was still tacky'. The original sight line can be seen at the top right of figure 6.10.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters: The Art of Imitation from the Pre-Raphaelites to the First World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017, 112. Prettejohn refers to C.A. Collins's *Convent Thoughts* (1850-1), Millais's *The Return of the Dove to the Ark* (1851) and Hunt's *The Light of the World* and *The Awakening Conscience* (1853).

¹⁴⁶ Prettejohn, *Modern Painters, Old Masters*, 109.

tie in with the Tractarian interest in spirituality discussed in Chapter Five, and the ‘devotional sentiment’ of Collins’s *Prayer* (1842).¹⁴⁷

As with *The Two Disciples at Emmaus*, the mix within the painting of archaism and realism, and references to classic depictions, coupled with elements of modernity seems calculated to demonstrate a continuum from the biblical time to the present day. Also present in this painting are symbolic references. The Virgin’s veil signifies her modesty and chastity (figure 6.22). Growing within the cavern are three groups of flowers, one white and two red (figures 6.17 and 6.18). White flowers, such as jasmine, are a symbol of the Virgin Mary. Red flowers, such as anemones and cyclamens in conjunction with the Virgin Mary symbolise her sorrow for the Passion of Christ.¹⁴⁸

Critics’ reactions to *The Virgin and Child* varied between puzzlement and total incomprehension. The *Art-Union* was puzzled by the cave: ‘the artist has assumed the licence of seating the Virgin within a rocky cavern’, but broadly liked it: ‘This picture is in the whole distinguished by a profound feeling which accords to this gentleman a high place among the painters of the poetry of scripture’.¹⁴⁹ However, the *Athenaeum*’s critic summarily dismissed all the religious paintings exhibited in 1843 as timid and vapid.¹⁵⁰ He returned to single out *The Virgin and Child* for particular mention: ‘The Nativity [*sic*] we must pass over, for the reasons already given: it will not do at all’.¹⁵¹ If the critics were looking for a new way forward for Protestant religious painting, they evidently did not find it in Collins’s

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter Five, Section Two, ‘Devotional Sentiment and the role of the Church’.

¹⁴⁸ George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1961 (paperback edition), 183, and 33, 27 and 30.

¹⁴⁹ *Art-Union*, June 1843, 168.

¹⁵⁰ *Athenaeum*, 27 May 1843, 511.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 512.

innovative style. And, of course, they were not to find it, a few years later, in the innovative style of the PRB.

Realism and early Christian sources: A girl of Sorrento spinning (1842-43)

Unlike the three previous paintings discussed, *A girl of Sorrento spinning* has been accessible in a public collection since 1929 (figure 19).¹⁵² Ostensibly it shows a teenage girl, standing on the flat roof of a house overlooking a valley, spinning in a traditional manner. Wilkie Collins describes it as ‘a transcript of a sketch from Nature’.¹⁵³ Why, then, should this painting be regarded as having a deeper, and religious significance?

To begin with, it does not ‘fit’ with any of Collins’s Italian subject paintings, discussed in Chapter Five. All of those contain at least two, and usually a number of figures. That is not to say that Collins might not have decided that a single girl, spinning, would make an attractive subject; it was indeed immediately chosen by the Revd. S. W. Russell as his prize from the *Art-Union* prize draw.¹⁵⁴ However, the fact that it is an outlier, in terms of Collins’s work at that time suggests a deeper enquiry is necessary.

Returning to the *Athenaeum*’s coruscating review of religious paintings in the Royal Academy’s 1843 exhibition, their reviewer had further criticisms to make about Collins’s contributions. They objected to the fact that Collins had used the same model in two of the paintings, referring to *A girl of Sorrento spinning* and to *The World or the Cloister*?¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² The Atkinson Gallery, Southport.

¹⁵³ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 232.

¹⁵⁴ Sold to Revd. Russell by Collins for £136 10s, to include the frame (William Collins, Notebook II, fol. 17’). Russell had won the £150 prize in the *Art-Union*’s prize draw (*Art-Union*, Annual Report 1843, 107)..

¹⁵⁵ *Athenaeum*, 27 May 1843, 512: ‘In two others, *The World or the Cloister*, and 457, the *Girl of Sorrento* [*sic*] Spinning, it is clear that the same face has served as a model— for the Sorrento girl and the young lady of fashion; and the character and intention are so different, that we have reason to complain of such a want of taste and selection; meaning thereby no disparagement to the face itself’.

However, it is obvious from a cursory look at the young woman in the latter painting that the reviewer has confused the two paintings concerned (Figures 6.19, 6.20). He clearly meant to refer to the evident resemblance between the models for *A girl of Sorrento spinning* and *The Virgin and Child* (figure 6.21). As discussed in Chapter Five, Collins brought back hundreds of drawings from Italy. He had been exhibiting at the R.A. for over thirty years. It is extremely unlikely that he would have used the same model either accidentally or carelessly. It is reasonable to conclude that his use of the same model was deliberate. In that case it is hard to avoid the inference that the two paintings are depictions of the same person at different stages of their life, and that the girl spinning in an archaic manner, on the roof, is the teenage Mary.

From Harriet's Italian journal, it is possible to deduce that the model for *A girl of Sorrento spinning* and the Virgin was a teenager called Vincenza, who came to sit for Collins in their garden at Cocumella.¹⁵⁶ In the painting, Vincenza is shown not in a garden, but on a flat roof. In the published Guide to the Holy Land referred to above (*the Biblical Keepsake*), small, flat-roofed houses were a feature of the built landscape. At Nazareth, for example: 'The village stands on the west side of the valley. The houses are small, flat-roofed, and built of a light porous stone'.¹⁵⁷ The painting certainly features a valley, a small flat roof and light-coloured stone.

¹⁵⁶ Harriet Collins's journal, 19 June 1837. Harriet mentions her by name, implying she was a young woman and not the 'little girl' who came to sit for Collins on 17 and 22 June. The son and daughter of the local tailor also modelled on 24 June, 30 June and 3 July: they are probably the pair shown together in a drawing by Collins advertised for sale by Jarndyce, antiquarian booksellers, in February 2016, stock number 62384 (since sold).

¹⁵⁷ *Biblical Keepsake*, 114.

Further, Collins must have known that the paraphernalia involved in spinning had been a pictorial attribute of the Virgin Mary since early Christian times.¹⁵⁸ He could not have spent a year and a half in Italy, immersing himself in Italian art and culture, without realising this. Wilkie Collins observed that his father ‘first saw his model turning the flax on her distaff into thread, in the old patriarchal manner, by rolling her reel off her knee into a spinning motion’.¹⁵⁹ His use of the phrase ‘the old patriarchal manner’ clearly references a very distant, biblical past.¹⁶⁰ The Virgin Mary’s spinning of wool was described in the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, which recounts her extraordinary skill with ‘wool-work’.¹⁶¹ Her selection to spin wool for the Veil of the Temple, and then taking the wool ‘unto her house’ is described in the *Protoevangelium of James*, as is her return to her house immediately before the Annunciation.¹⁶² Another indication is the expression on Vincenza’s face, which is distinctly serious. That would be in keeping with the child Mary’s acknowledged purity and her future role. It is very different from the typical images of Italian girlhood exhibited by Thomas Uwins and other artists discussed in Chapter Five.¹⁶³

Against such an interpretation of this painting, it could be argued that if Collins had intended it to be read in this manner, he would have entitled it *The Girlhood of the Virgin Mary* and not *A Girl of Sorrento spinning*. However, for a Protestant Royal Academician so to

¹⁵⁸ Catherine Gines Taylor, *Late Antique Images of the Virgin Annunciate Spinning: Allotting the Scarlet and the Purple*, Leiden: Brill, 2018, *passim*.

¹⁵⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 232.

¹⁶⁰ As opposed to modern definitions of ‘patriarchy’, ‘patriarchal’. See below, the paragraph relating to *Abraham*, which in the 1844 exhibition was given the title *A Patriarch*.

¹⁶¹ Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 88, *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, chapter six. This chapter is not included in William Hone, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1820, but, as referred to earlier, it appears plausible that William Dodsworth, either directly or through his contacts, would have had access to J. C. Thilo’s publication of the full text in his *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Leipzig, 1832, 339-400.

¹⁶² Taylor, *Late Antique Images of the Virgin Annunciate Spinning*, 4.

¹⁶³ See figures 5.2 and 5.3.

have described his painting in 1843 would, I suggest, have been a bridge too far – it was left to the young Dante Gabriel Rossetti to take the plunge, with his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9) one of two paintings which, with *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, have been characterised as representing ‘the Brotherhood’s most archaic engagement with religious subject matter’ (figure 6.22).¹⁶⁴ As discussed above, Collins was powerfully drawn to the realistic representation of his subject matter: ‘what might have been the actual facts of the scene’. If I am correct in interpreting *A girl of Sorrento spinning* as the fourteen-year-old Virgin Mary it constitutes a considerably earlier interpretation from that of Rossetti; highly naturalistic, and featuring the Virgin Mary’s well understood iconographic attribute (distaff and spindle), technologically authentic for the biblical era.¹⁶⁵ It also predates William Dyce’s illustration for William Whewell’s poem ‘*The Spinning Maiden’s Cross*’ by three years (figure 6.23).¹⁶⁶

Realism and authenticity: A Patriarch (1843-44)

This was to be Collins’s final biblical painting, and represented Abraham.¹⁶⁷ Its whereabouts since 1890, when sold from Wilkie Collins’s collection, are unknown.¹⁶⁸ It was not engraved, and accordingly is known only from Wilkie Collins’s description and reviews. Wilkie Collins described it as a life-size portrayal of the head and upper body of an old man, who was dressed in an ‘oriental robe’ which had been ‘brought by Sir David Wilkie from the Holy Land,

¹⁶⁴ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 93.

¹⁶⁵ The spinning wheel did not reach Western Europe until the thirteenth century.

¹⁶⁶ *Poems and Pictures: A collection of Ballads, Songs and Other Poems with one hundred Illustrations on Wood by English Artists*, London, 1846, 126.

¹⁶⁷ The title given by Collins himself, see Notebook II, f.18^r. *A Patriarch* was exhibited, 1844, R.A. 258.

¹⁶⁸ Christie, Manson & Woods, *Catalogue of the collection of modern pictures, water-colour drawings and engravings of Wilkie Collins*, 22nd February 1890, lot 66. Possibly sold post auction: the auctioneer’s book has a pencil note of 23 ½ guineas, but no buyer.

and presented to Mr Collins by his sister'.¹⁶⁹ Reviews were favourable, but add little to our knowledge.¹⁷⁰ However, the fact that Collins used an 'oriental robe' is significant, since Collins was using costume which would have been regarded as biblically authentic. That could be interpreted as a nod in the direction of Wilkie's mission to the Holy Land and his interest in striving for such authenticity, and would be a logical development from Collins's depiction of the setting in *A girl of Sorrento spinning* in a manner consistent with the recently published description of Nazareth.¹⁷¹

Also in the 1844 exhibition, was Dyce's *Joash shooting the Arrow of Deliverance*, which received critical acclaim for its orientalist details (figure 6.24).¹⁷² Dyce was not elected as an Associate of the Royal Academy until November 1844 and it is unclear as to what, if any, contact there was between Dyce and Collins before that time. However, he evidently had Tractarian sympathies, and by 1842 was in contact with Edward Pusey.¹⁷³ Given that he was working in London as the superintendent of the London School of Design between 1837 and 1843, it is probable that he and Collins would have met before 1844 and shared, perhaps, their common interest in Protestant religious art. *A Patriarch* was to be Collins's last biblical painting. In the spring of 1844 his health deteriorated dramatically.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 253-4.

¹⁷⁰ For example, *Art-Union*, 1844, 159: 'An old man, life-sized, and draped judiciously for broad effect. The head, face and grizzled beard have been studied to good purpose; in short, although not altogether in the style of the artist, the work is one of the best of his recent productions'.

¹⁷¹ *Biblical Keepsake*, 114.

¹⁷² Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 57-58.

¹⁷³ Jennifer Melville, 'Faith, Fact, Family and Friends in the Art of William Dyce', *William Dyce and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Caroline Babington and Paul Hillier, Aberdeen: Aberdeen City Council, 2006, 38-40; Lindsay Errington, *Social and Religious Themes in English Art 1840-1860*, New York & London, Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984, 85.

¹⁷⁴ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 257-264.

Taken as a group, Collins's biblical paintings represent, I argue, a significant contribution to the search for a new Protestant art. Their subject-matter was unimpeachable from a Protestant standpoint, with a strong Christological and typological focus. Whilst they referenced canonical artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they contained symbols and attributes, seemingly entirely absent from contemporary English religious painting, but present in early Italian and Renaissance art. They also featured a blend of archaisms, elements familiar to viewers of Renaissance art, and modern elements, the combination of which appears to have been intended to reflect the timelessness of the painting's message, and to demonstrate a continuum from the biblical time to the present day. They indicate a wish on Collins's part to re-imagine the scenes depicted as they might actually have happened, an approach which Ruskin was to identify some years later in his defence of the PRB. Indeed, many of these elements are generally associated with the innovative style of the early paintings of the PRB. This begs the question of the extent to which PRB members were influenced by Collins's biblical paintings, a question to which I now turn.

Section Three : Collins and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

In *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (1905) William Holman Hunt reflected on the work of leading artists at the time he entered the Royal Academy schools. Having commented in somewhat disparaging terms on each of Landseer, Etty, Mulready, Maclise, and Leslie, he observed: 'William Collins at the last did some admirable pictures, with rustic, Crabbe-like realism; but he had become a figure painter gradually rather than by primal intent, his men and women having been originally but accessories in landscape, and

life sufficed not for his fuller aims'.¹⁷⁵ Whilst Hunt did not elaborate what those aims might have been, the context of the remark implies a degree of sympathy for them. Moreover, as this recollection is not directly related to the history of the PRB, it is unlikely to be tainted by what Michaela Giebelhausen and Tim Barringer have described as the 'policing of the record', and deserves to be taken at face value.¹⁷⁶ It is particularly significant since Hunt, together with Millais, were very well placed to know what those aims were, because of their close connections with the Collins family.

Hunt met Charles Allston Collins (the artist's younger son, hereafter 'Charles') by 1844.¹⁷⁷ Millais would have met Charles at the beginning of 1844.¹⁷⁸ Millais, admitted to the R.A. schools in 1841, would have seen all of Collins's biblical paintings, as exhibited. It is quite possible that both were guests of Charles at his family home before the final illness of his father late in 1846; if so, they would have been shown Collins's painting room. They would also have seen the paintings by Collins that remained unsold at his death, and were retained by the family, which included *The Virgin and Child* and *A Patriarch*.¹⁷⁹ By 1850, Millais had extensive social links with the family, including through the Combe family, Oxford.¹⁸⁰ Before December 1850 he was regularly visiting the Collins household.¹⁸¹ By 1851, he had made himself something of a favourite in the Collins household, apparently flirting with Mrs.

¹⁷⁵ William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, London: Macmillan & Co, 1905, 50. George Crabbe (1754-1832) was an English poet, whose work is generally described in terms of its realism and lack of sentimentality.

¹⁷⁶ Giebelhausen and Barringer, eds., *Writing the Pre-Raphaelites*, 9.

¹⁷⁷ When Hunt was finally accepted as a student at the R.A. schools.

¹⁷⁸ Charles was admitted to the R.A. schools on 13 January 1844.

¹⁷⁹ They passed from Collins's widow to Wilkie Collins, and were included in his sale of paintings at Christie, Manson and Woods, 22 February 1890, lots 64 and 66.

¹⁸⁰ Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, I, 232.

¹⁸¹ John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais*, 2 vols, London: Methuen, 1899, I, 90.

Collins.¹⁸² Hunt himself was certainly dining with the family by 1852. His account of such dinners suggests a great deal of conversation about Collins himself and his contemporaries.¹⁸³ There were also strong religious links between the PRB members and the Collins family. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, his mother and sister attended Christ Church, Albany Street from 1843 onwards.¹⁸⁴ This was of course the Collins family's church.¹⁸⁵ James Collinson likewise worshipped at Christ Church Albany Street, until his conversion to Roman Catholicism.¹⁸⁶ Between 1850 and perhaps until 1854, when he returned to Christ Church, Albany Street to sit with his mother, Charles attended another Tractarian church, St Andrew's Wells Street, together with Millais and the Rossetti family.¹⁸⁷

If, as I have argued, Collins's 'fuller aims' were to contribute to the formation of a 'Protestant' school of religious painting, of a Tractarian nature, then it is not difficult to see why PRB members might have been sympathetic to, and influenced by Collins's religious paintings. They certainly shared Collins's interest in typology, archaism, realism and symbols. As Giebelhausen puts it, in analysing their 'new pictorial language': 'Symbolic realism, which deployed the structures of typological thought, enabled the successful combination of the main operative modes promoted by the PRB: worship and experiment'.¹⁸⁸ The mixture of these ingredients in Collins's paintings cannot have escaped their notice. His use of symbols and attributes in *The Disciples at Emmaus*, the *Virgin and Child* and *A girl of Sorrento spinning* predate canonical works of the PRB and PRB 'precursors' by at least several years,

¹⁸² Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, I, 293.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, I, 309.

¹⁸⁴ Alastair Grieve, 'The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Anglican High Church', *Burlington Magazine*, May, 1969, 294-295.

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter Five, Section One.

¹⁸⁶ Grieve, 'The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Anglican High Church', 294.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁸⁸ Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 74.

for example John Rogers Herbert's *Our Saviour subject to His Parents at Nazareth* (1847), and Millais's *Christ in the House of his Parents* (1849-50).

Both Collins and the PRB members showed an interest in early Italian art. George Richmond, who had spent a considerable time with Collins during his second visit to Rome, wrote to assist Wilkie Collins with his biography of Collins and observed:

Your honoured father valued all schools, and revered all masters ... The productions of early Art were something more than figures standing on tiptoe to him; for he had a heart to feel their tenderness and devotion, and an eye to see, that if they had known how, the painters of the age would have drawn them much better.¹⁸⁹

Collins and the PRB were all particularly impressed by Gozzoli's Campo Santo frescoes.

Collins's delight with them is recorded in his son's biography.¹⁹⁰ For the PRB, their scrutiny of Lasinio's engravings of the Campo Santo frescoes was a 'seminal moment'.¹⁹¹ Where the PRB would have parted company with Collins (at least in the early phase of Pre-Raphaelitism) was in their attitude towards the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Old Masters. Collins remained an artist with a profound reverence for Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian, Tintoretto, and Rembrandt, whereas the Brotherhood's members saw, in the bright colouration, flattened picture plane and absence of chiaroscuro of earlier Christian Art, the way to make their mark. Whilst, as Elizabeth Prettejohn has demonstrated, PRB members showed from the start a respect for the Venetian masters, and alluded to them in their paintings, it was

¹⁸⁹ Letter from George Richmond to Wilkie Collins, Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 132.

¹⁹⁰ Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 86.

¹⁹¹ Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, I, 130-31, quoted in Giebelhausen, *Painting the Bible*, 69.

not until the late 1850s that Rossetti's paintings began to demonstrate significant stylistic borrowings.¹⁹²

Of the PRB members, it is I suggest William Holman Hunt upon whom Collins had the greatest influence. As both were deeply religious Anglicans this is unsurprising. For what George Landow has described as his first painting in his typological programme, Hunt chose the same theme as Collins had started with: *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-60) (Figure 6.25).¹⁹³ Landow describes Hunt's doctors as a gallery of psychological types resistant to Christ's gospel 'who also represent —who prefigure—the resistance his message will meet throughout later ages'.¹⁹⁴ This is, indeed, the classic Protestant interpretation of the scene. Did Holman Hunt have Collins's painting in mind when he composed his version? If one compares F.G. Stephens's well-known description, in 1860, of the doctors in Holman Hunt's painting with Wilkie Collins's description, the answer would appear to be that Hunt did not.¹⁹⁵ However, Caroline Kaye has recently argued that Stephens's description was not founded upon a close examination of the painting itself and accordingly needs to be approached with caution.¹⁹⁶ A comparison between how the doctors in Hunt's painting are actually portrayed, and Wilkie Collins's description of his father's version, suggests that Hunt may well have been indebted to Collins (figure 6.26). Wilkie Collins describes the doctors as a 'haughty, sneering Pharisee, openly expressing his scorn'; 'the juster and wiser doctor, listening with candour and patience'; 'the old man, of less vigorous intellect, lost in

¹⁹² Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'High Renaissance Inspirations: Raphael and the Venetians', Melissa E. Buron, et al. *Truth & Beauty: The Pre-Raphaelites and the Old Masters*, Exhibition Catalogue, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco & Legion of Honor, Munich; New York, 2018, 165, 166 and 168.

¹⁹³ Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism*, 75.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁹⁵ Frederic George Stephens, *William Holman Hunt and His Works: A Memoir of the Artist's Life, with Description of His Pictures*, London, 1860, 63-67. Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 168.

¹⁹⁶ Kaye, 'The Disputation', 55 and Chapter Three *passim*.

astonishment at the Divine question he has just heard'; 'the subtle philosopher, consulting with his companion for the triumphant answer that no one has yet framed'.¹⁹⁷ Looking at the figurers in Hunt's painting, from left to right, the third could be the 'haughty, sneering Pharisee', the fourth 'the juster and wiser doctor, listening with candour and patience', the fifth 'the old man, of less vigorous intellect, lost in astonishment at the Divine question he has just heard', and the second and first 'the subtle philosopher, consulting with his companion for the triumphant answer that no one has yet framed'. Of course, without being able to compare the two paintings it is impossible to reach any firm conclusion. However, given the links between Hunt and the Collins family, it is certainly a possibility that Hunt, in this part of *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, was acknowledging an indebtedness to Collins.

Whether this particular borrowing can be substantiated or not, the social and religious links between the Collins family and members of the PRB make it highly unlikely that the shared interest of Collins and the PRB in mixing realism and archaism, introducing symbolic references, and in typology was merely coincidental. For these reasons I propose that Collins ought properly to be included among the artists considered to have significantly influenced Pre-Raphaelite painting.

Conclusion

Following Collins's return to England in the autumn of 1838 both he and Sir David Wilkie embarked, to some extent in tandem, on a project of developing English Protestant

¹⁹⁷Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs*, II, 168.

religious painting. Wilkie's path in this direction was abruptly terminated by his death at sea on the journey home in 1841. After a year's pause (which may well reflect the sense of bereavement which Collins undoubtedly felt) Collins continued, only to have his attempts in turn frustrated by the serious deterioration in his health in early 1844. As Holman Hunt succinctly put it: 'life sufficed not for his fuller aims'.¹⁹⁸

What Collins would have achieved, and the path he might have followed had his intentions not been frustrated, is impossible to say. Nevertheless, an analysis of the few paintings he did produce makes it clear that he was a significant figure in charting a possible direction for Protestant religious art in England. With a strong Christological and typological emphasis at its core, the direction he took was shaped by the nature of his religious beliefs and his closeness to Dodsworth, which brought him within the orbit of the Oxford Movement. That influenced his interest in early Christian texts, apparent in *The Virgin and Child*, and his willingness to include in his paintings symbols with a long history in pre-Renaissance iconography. His belief in Premillennialism, as well as his study of fifteenth century paintings and the work of Benozzo Gozzoli in particular, may well have induced him to introduce in his paintings elements from different periods of historical time, in order to portray (in Anna Jameson's words) 'sacred events as belonging to all times, and still, as it were, passing before our eyes'.¹⁹⁹ This was a bold, and distinct path in terms of the search for a new, Protestant form of religious painting.

Furthermore, his use of symbols, and his mixing together in his paintings elements of realism and archaism, and of features which evoke biblical, sixteenth-century and modern

¹⁹⁸William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*, 50.

¹⁹⁹Anna Brownell Jameson, *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters and of the Progress of Painting in Italy*, 128.

times would not have escaped the notice of the group of Royal Academy students who were to form the core of the PRB. Strong evidence of this is provided by their religious and social affiliations between 1843 and 1850, and the friendship of Millais and Hunt in particular with Collins's son Charles, and Harriet. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Hunt chose, as the theme for his first major biblical painting, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, the same subject that Collins had begun with twenty years earlier. The comments he made about Collins in his autobiography certainly indicate appreciation, and his reference there to the 'fine heads' which Collins had painted suggest that his own portrayal of the Doctors might indeed have owed something to Collins's earlier work.

I have argued in this Chapter that, during the first phase of the Oxford Movement, Collins was at the forefront in exploring a new direction for religious art which was distinctly Protestant. Although his ability to continue painting was substantially limited after 1843 by increasing illness, and his contribution abruptly ended with his death, early in 1847, the interests he explored in his biblical paintings were taken up within a very short space of time by leading Pre-Raphaelites. His contributions deserve now to be acknowledged both by historians of the Oxford Movement and historians of nineteenth-century English art.

CONCLUSION

I have set out in this thesis the factors which have resulted in an almost complete dearth of scholarship on Collins, and the consequent downplaying of his importance as a nineteenth-century British painter of the type of art he produced, which has been sidelined. The factors of a more general nature were the changes in taste, and changing patterns in art writing during the Victorian period, away from narrative and genre painting and towards, first 'aesthetic' subject matter, and then into modernism. These resulted in the dismissal, and disappearance from view, of almost all painters of the first half of the nineteenth century with the exception of Constable and Turner. Factors specific to Collins included his relatively small output, his success in selling that output to private collectors resulting in his paintings disappearing from sight, a progressive loss of understanding of the originality and meaning of his landscape painting, and the posthumous denigration of his late work.

During the last fifty years, two of Collins's contemporaries, William Mulready and David Wilkie have been rescued from obscurity and their important contributions recognised.¹ With the renewed interest in the Pre-Raphaelites came an interest in the artists who might be considered their precursors. This led to the rediscovery of the work of Charles Lock Eastlake, William Dyce and John Rogers Herbert.² Collins has hitherto received no such re-evaluation. I have argued in this thesis that Collins made a number of significant contributions which ought now to be acknowledged and reflected in our understanding of nineteenth-century art history.

¹ Heleniak, *William Mulready*, 1980; Nicholas Tromans, *David Wilkie*, 2007.

² David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978; Marcia R. Pointon, *William Dyce, 1806-1864: A Critical Biography*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1979; Langham, "'The Splendour and Beauty of Truth": John Rogers Herbert, R. A. (1810-1890)'.

His paintings of children, painted between 1809 and 1813, are quite distinct from those of his contemporaries, both in terms of the agency he gave to children, the use he made of animals, and the breadth and depth of emotions he portrayed. Current histories of British art, whether of art and childhood, art and animals, or art and sentiment, omit any reference to the contributions he made during this period.

Nearly fifty years have elapsed since Josephine Gear opened the chapter on Collins in her thesis with the words: 'Of all English painters William Collins...was the most poetic and the most successful in painting and in evoking poignant childhood memories', without a proper analysis of such a claim being undertaken.³ The present thesis has argued that Gear's general observation was correct. As discussed in each chapter of the thesis, Collins's paintings frequently allude to poems. Allusions to Wordsworth in particular are numerous, from his early portrait of *Sara Coleridge, as 'The Highland Girl'* (1818) through to his late *The Catechist* (1844). Reviewers of his paintings from *Birdcatchers - Morning* (1814) onwards remarked on the poetic quality of his work. As analysed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, looking at his paintings would have triggered in his viewers chains of association with poetry, their own childhoods and with themes connected to childhood, society and religion. Collins should now be recognised as one of the nineteenth century's most significant painters of childhood, whose name ought to be as synonymous with the evocation of childhood memory through the medium of paint, as Wordsworth's is through the medium of poetry.

It is sixteen years since Christiana Payne observed that there were 'elements of genuine feeling and observation in his work which deserve closer scrutiny.'⁴ Unfortunately,

³ Gear, *Masters or Servants?*, 123.

⁴ Payne, *Where the Sea meets the Land*, 181.

since then that closer scrutiny has not been forthcoming, and an opportunity to provide it—the 250th anniversary of the Royal Academy of Art and the creation of a website chronicle of its history—was lost. I have argued, in Chapters Two and Three that Collins made important contributions to both inland landscape painting and to the discovery of the sea-shore as a site for art. In his inland landscape paintings he created, in effect, a novel category of landscape, inhabited by children. They were not conventional landscapes in which figures, if present at all, acted as staffage. Nor were they necessarily portraits of children. The landscape and children have equal weight, and within those landscapes, children have agency. The paintings tell a story, thus producing a dialogue not only between the figures in the painting but between the painting and the viewer. To the extent that the story is not immediately obvious, or is ambiguous, the viewer is invited to construct their own narrative. His coastal paintings explored many different aspects of the shoreline's liminality, its inhabitants, its visitors and their activities. They predated, and most probably influenced later nineteenth-century representations of the perils of the sea, and the anguish of those who wait on land. In his paintings of children talking, playing, rock-pooling and adventuring on the beach, Collins invented entirely new categories of painting, expressing on canvas the feelings of liberation, and freedom from the usual restrictions of everyday life that contemporary poetry celebrated and which are still felt today by visitors to the shore. He painted the mixing of classes at the seaside at a much earlier date than the currently understood date of the 1850s. His different portrayals of character in his English, French and Italian coastal scenes demonstrates an early ethnographic interest in 'the different physiognomy, manners and habits' of different nationalities.

With regard to Collins's late subject and biblical paintings, nearly a century has elapsed without Grant's damning assessment being disturbed.⁵ This thesis has made the case for a radical re-examination of both the content and the meaning of those paintings. Collins was evidently familiar with leading members of the Oxford Movement and I have argued that his eleven Italian subject paintings can only be properly understood in terms of the impact of Tractarianism on English culture during its first phase. As to Collins's biblical paintings, I have argued that following his return to England in the autumn of 1838 both he and his close friend Sir David Wilkie embarked, to some extent in tandem, on a project of developing English Protestant religious painting. What he would have achieved, and the path he might have followed had his intentions not been frustrated by increasing illness, is impossible to say. Nevertheless, my analysis of the few paintings he did produce makes it clear that he was a significant figure in charting a possible way forward. His use of symbols, and his mixing together in his paintings elements of realism and archaism, and of features which evoke biblical, sixteenth-century and modern times would not have escaped the notice of the group of Royal Academy students who were to form the core of the PRB. Following his death early in 1847, those elements were taken up within a very short space of time by leading Pre-Raphaelites. His contributions, both to a search for a new Protestant art, and to the work of the PRB deserve now to be acknowledged both by historians of the Oxford Movement and historians of nineteenth-century English art.

Collins's paintings frequently have an underlying meaning, which is conveyed more or less allusively. This applies to his early genre paintings, many of his landscape and coastal

⁵ Grant, *A chronological history of the Old English Landscape Painters*, 297. Grant's assessment is discussed in the Introduction, Section One.

paintings, and to his Italian subject paintings. His notorious painting *Rustic Civility* (1832) is, I have argued, a case in point. I have analysed it in some detail in Chapter Four in order to demonstrate that it can be 'read' in a very different way from how it has generally been perceived. Together with other paintings executed in the 1830s it suggests a degree of engagement with the issues of his day which is very different from the received impression of him as a Tory anxious to support the landed interest. His personal correspondence reveals a man with much broader sympathies, who combined strong religious belief with an equally strong sense of human folly.

Further work

As a consequence of my research, there are three projects which I suggest could usefully be undertaken in order to further public understanding of Collins's importance to nineteenth-century British art, and facilitate continuing scholarly research. First, an exhibition which foregrounded his work, and placed it in context with paintings by other artists of his period. The exhibition held at the Guildhall Art Gallery in 2019, *Seen and Heard*, featured five of the six paintings in their collection, but unfortunately did not have an accompanying catalogue.⁶ No attempt has been made to bring paintings by Collins together since the substantial exhibitions of British art held in the mid-nineteenth century. It will be some time, and would require a significant re-evaluation of Collins's significance to have taken place, before a major institution could be persuaded to mount a substantial, fully catalogued exhibition of his work. However, there is no reason why a small exhibition could not be mounted at this stage, or why future exhibitions relating to nineteenth-century landscape or coastal painting,

⁶*Seen and Heard: Victorian children in the frame*, Guildhall Art Gallery, 23 November 2018 - 28 April 2019.

Pre-Raphaelite art, or to religious art or children in the nineteenth century should not now feature a selection of his work. There is an opportunity for curators of key collections of nineteenth-century art such as the V&A, Tate Britain and the Guildhall Art Gallery to rethink narratives of British art so as to include Collins paintings from their holdings.

A second project could concentrate on locating missing works. Although a good proportion have now either been located, or have images available, many are still untraced, and the quality of many images is poor. There are, however, many missing paintings which would be likely to enhance our understanding of his work, and some which would certainly do so. Examples of paintings in the first group would include *Half-holiday muster* (1815). The extent to which Collins alluded to the Napoleonic wars would be clearer if this came to light. Our understanding of Collins's transitional period between 1814 and 1817 would be enhanced by the discovery of his other missing paintings from that period. In relation to his coastal paintings, the rediscovery of *Doubtful Weather* (1828) and *Morning after a Storm* (1829) would be useful in furthering our understanding of his series of paintings dealing with the dangers of the sea. Our understanding of his late work would unquestionably benefit greatly from missing paintings coming to light. A good proportion of the Italian subject paintings considered in Chapter Five are missing. As discussed in the Introduction, this group of paintings fared particularly badly at the hands of Collins's critics in the period from the 1860s to the 1950s. Of perhaps the greatest interest would be the re-discovery of *Our Saviour with the Doctors in the Temple* (1839-40). Whilst its critical reception is well-known, its detailed iconography is not, nor is it possible to establish what relationship, if any, that content has to the symbolic content of the two later major biblical paintings analysed in Chapter Six. As the first of his biblical pictures, and the one that received the most critical

acclaim, it would be helpful to our understanding to be able to analyse it in the detail which has been possible with *The Two Disciples at Emmaus* and *The Virgin and Child*. If the painting re-emerges, it will also be possible to reconsider the relationship between Collins's version and that of William Holman Hunt.

A third project would involve further work on the preparation of a catalogue raisonné of Collins's oil paintings. That process would doubtless be speeded up if a major art history institution could agree to facilitate the creation and maintenance of an online catalogue. The availability of this to both the general public and to scholars would almost certainly result in many of Collins's unknown paintings coming to light, and enable better reproductions of many others to be made available. The existence of such a catalogue would increase both private and public interest in Collins, and facilitate future research.

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APPENDIX

CATALOGUE OF WILLIAM COLLINS'S OIL PAINTINGS ILLUSTRATED IN THE THESIS

Notes

1. The numbering of the paintings in Part A refers to the numbering given in my draft catalogue raisonné of Collins's paintings (in progress). An 'S' after a number denotes a sketch for the painting in question.
2. If the painting was exhibited at the time, the exhibition catalogue title is given. If not exhibited at the time, Collins's own title as recorded in his Notebooks (see 'Abbreviations, below) is given. Any alternative title, e.g. the title by which the painting is commonly known, is given in brackets.
3. A reference to the figure number in the illustrations section of the thesis is provided in brackets, after the date.

Abbreviations

BM: British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings.

Collins, W. (1848): Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A., with selections from his Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols, London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848.

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William Collins, Notebook: William Collins's AMS Notebooks, 2 vols, London, National Art Library, V&A, Special Collections 86.EE.31.

PART A : oil paintings and associated sketches

38. *Boys bargaining for a Bird's Nest* (1809) (Fig. 1.3)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 53.9 x 66.8cm.

Provenance: 1810, Thomas Lister Parker; ... ; With Arthur Tooth & Sons, London, bought by Charles Wells; ... ; 1899, in the collection of R. Hall McCormick, Chicago, cat. no. 34; 1920, McCormick sale, New York 15 April 1920; ...

Exhibited: 1809, R.A. No. 108; 1810, B.I. No. 113, as *Boys bargaining for a bird's nest*; 1895, Art Institute of Chicago; 1898, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh; 1900, Copley Hall, Boston.
Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 36-7.

61. *The Young Fifer* (1810) (Fig. 1.4)

Present whereabouts: Dunrobin Castle, Golspie, Sutherland.

Oil on canvas, 76.3 x 63.5 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. COLLINS | 1810' (at the top of the pier to the right hand side).

Provenance: 1811, Purchased at the British Institution Exhibition by George Granville Leveson-Gower, Marquis of Stafford, thence by descent to the present Earl of Sutherland.

Exhibited: 1811, B.I. No.51.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 39-40.

Reviews: *Morning Post*, 26 February 1811; *Weekly Register & Political Magazine*, III, 23 March 1811; *Examiner*, 24 March 1811; *Monthly magazine*, XXXII, April 1811, 261.

65. *The Tempting Moment* (1810) (Fig. 1.6)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, size not known.

Provenance: 1811, Purchased at the British Institution Exhibition by [-] Leeds, Esq. ...

Exhibited: 1811, B.I. No. 59.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 40; Solkin, David H. *Painting out of the Ordinary : Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, New Haven & London, 2008, 104-07.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 24 March 1811, 188, and 31 March 1811, 207-08 (Robert Hunt); *Weekly Register & Political Magazine*, III, 30 March 1811.

Engravings: Engraved by Henry Chawner Shenton, c.1830, for the *Ruby: A Juvenile Forget-me-Not* (1830), (BM 1852,0705.138).

70. *The weary trumpeter, or juvenile mischief* (1811) (Fig. 1.8)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 53.3 x 66 cm.

Provenance: 1812, purchased at the British Institution exhibition by William Mills, Esq.; ... 1992,Christies, lot 33, 17 July 1992, as *The Militiaman's Return*, sold to an unknown buyer; ... 2010, Christies, 8 December 2010, not sold; ... 2013, Christies, 11 April 2013, lot 161, old to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1811, R.A. No. 128; 1812, B.I. No. 59.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 39-40.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 7 July 1811; *Examiner*, 16 February 1812, 106.

72. *May Day* (1811) (Fig. 1.9)

Present whereabouts: New Haven, Yale Center for British Art.

Oil on canvas, 94 x 111.8 cm.

Provenance: 1812, The Rev. Sir S C Jervoise, Bart., ... ; 1979, Sotheby's, 1 October 1979, lot 20, bought Mr and Mrs William J. Harford; 1997, donated by Jean M Harford to the Yale Center for British Art.

Exhibited: BI, 1812, No. 71; 1852, B.I. Old Masters, No. 124.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 49; Solkin, David H. *Painting out of the Ordinary : Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain*, New Haven & London, 2008, 168-71.

Reviews: *Bells weekly messenger*, 1812, 61; *Belle Assemble*, new series, vol. V, 1812, 161; *Examiner*, 16 February 1812, 106.

74. Children playing with puppies (1812) (Fig. 1.10)

Present whereabouts: Bournemouth, Russell-Cotes Museum & Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 74.2 x 62 cm.

Provenance: 1812, Thomas Freeman Heathcote, Esq, thence by descent to the Rev. Thomas Heathcote Tragett; 1890, Sold by the Rev. Thomas Heathcote Tragett (or his executors) at Christies, Manson & Woods, 1 March 1890, lot 153, bought Vokins; ... 1932, purchased January 1932 by Russell-Cotes Museum & Art Gallery from George Knight.

Exhibited: 1812, R.A. No.147

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 87-9.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 31 May 1812.

Engravings: Unpublished etching by William Collins (BM 1866,0407.116), based on a preliminary sketch for the painting, see Chapter One, figure 13.

74S. Early, related sketch for Children playing with puppies (1811) (fig. 1.13)

Present whereabouts: Private Collection.

Provenance: 1848, with Wilkie Collins, when used by John James Hinchcliffe (1805-1875) for the frontispiece illustration to vol. II of *Memoirs*; ... ; 2019, Brightwells, Leominster, 21 March 2019, lot 564 when acquired by the present owner.

78. The burial-place of a favourite Bird (1812) (fig. 1.16)

Present whereabouts: Private Collection.

Oil on canvas, 93 x 80 cm.

Provenance: T.C. Higgins (before 1847); 1853, his sale, Christie, Manson & Wood, as *The Dead Robin*, bought Wallis; ... With Thomas McLean, Haymarket (label attached to stretcher);...; acquired by Richard Hemming, sold Christie, Manson & Woods, 28 April 1894, lot 83, as *The Dead Robin*, bought Gooden;...; (post 1970 label on stretcher) with Thos. Agnew and Sons Ltd.;...; Parke-Bernet, New York, 28 October 1982, lot 233, as *Faithful Friends*;... Skinner Inc., Boston, 22 April 2021, lot 1425, as *A Day in the Country*, when acquired by its present owner.

Exhibited: 1813, B.I. No.10; 1813, Liverpool Academy, No.64; 1857, Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, No. 300.

Literature: Collins (1848), I, 51; II, 342.

Reviews: *Morning Post*, February 3, and 27, 1813; *Repository of Arts*, 1813, 155.

79. The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb (Sale of the Pet Lamb) (1813) (fig. 1.20)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 79.1 x 100.3 cm.

Provenance: 1814, William Ogden, Esq.; Alaric A Watts (by 1837); ... 1876, sold by W A Joyce, or his executors; ... 1895, Sold by the Duchess of Montrose at Christies, Manson & Woods on 4 May 1895, lot 74, as *Sale of Pet Lamb 1813*, sold to Gooden ... Barnet Lewis's sale, Christies, 3 March 1930, lot 176, sold to unknown buyer; ... 1978, Sotheby's, 29 November 1978, lot 18, sold to unknown buyer; ... Sotheby's, 23 June 1981, lot 159, sold to unknown buyer; ... 2022, Sotheby's, 6 April 2022, lot 148, sold to unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1813, R.A. No. 191; 1814, B.I. No. 15.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 49-50; Ford, Boris (ed.) *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, 142; Hemingway, Andrew (1992), 150; Payne, Christiana (1998), 59-60; Redgrave, R. and S. (1866), II, 414-15.

Reviews: *Examiner* 30 May 1813, 49; *Morning Chronicle*, 5 February 1814 (William Hazlitt); *Morning Post*, 3 March 1814; *Repository of Arts*, XI, April 1814, 214-15.

Engravings: Engraved by Charles Rolls, 1829, for an illustration to the *Literary Souvenir*, 1830, 124 (BM 1849,0210.517); engraved by Samuel William Reynolds II, published 31 May 1837, (BM 1853,0112.82).

79S. Sketch for *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1813) (fig. 1.21)

Present whereabouts: City of London, Guildhall Art Gallery & Museum.

Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 cm.

Provenance: Probably lot 537 in the artist's sale, 31 May to 5 June 1847, bought by Gritlea; ... sold by John Hunt at Christies, Manson & Woods on 26 April 1890, lot 96, purchased by Agnew for Charles Gassiott; 1902, bequeathed by Charles Gassiott. to the City of London.

Exhibited: 1926-1927, South London Art Gallery; 2002; *Love, Labour & Loss*, Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery, Carlisle and 2002-2003, Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter; 2019, *Seen and Heard : Victorian children in the frame*, Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery.

80. Small copy of *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (1813) (fig. 1.22)

Present whereabouts: Rochdale, Touchstones.

Oil on canvas, 53.5 x 66.5 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins' (lower left, on the edge of the cart's wooden planks).

Provenance: 1813, James Reed, thence by descent; 1872 Sold at Christies Manson & Woods, 27 May 1872, lot 48, bought Gilbert; ... 1911, Sold at Christies Manson & Woods, 4th February 1911, lot 113, to Robert Taylor Heape and presented by him to the County Borough of Rochdale.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 342; William Collins, Notebook I, f. 9^r.

93. Forenoon (*The Minnow Catchers*) (1813-14) (fig. 2.1)

Present whereabouts: Bury Museum & Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 79.5 x 92.5 cm.

Provenance: Before 1847, Purchased by T.C. Higgins Esq.; 1853, Sold at Christies, Manson & Wood, as *The Young Anglers* to Wallis; ... 1871, bought by Agnew for Thomas Wrigley on 2 May 1871 from Bashall, and recorded as 'Young fishermen/minnow catchers'; 1901, presented to Bury Corporation by Thomas Wrigley.

Exhibited: 1814, B.I. No. 76; 1814, Liverpool Academy, No. 87, as *The Fishing Place*.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 58-59; (MS) Agnews Stock Book 4, 1871, entry 6379, National Gallery Research Centre NGA/27/1/1/4.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 27 March 1814, 206; *Repository of Arts*, Vol. XI, April 1814, 214-15.

Commentary: This painting was only described as 'The Minnow Catchers' by Agnew in 1871. It can be conclusively identified as *Forenoon* from the detailed description given in the *Repository of Arts*: 'On the face of a boy is a just imitation of an incident of light, which marks the observant mind of the painter. This child holds a bottle in his hand, which he has elevated between his face and the sun, with a curious desire to peep at the imprisoned fish; the light passing through the density of the bottle and the water, is reflected on part of his visage, and the pure rays of the sun glance upon the other with the most natural identity'.

94. *Birdcatchers : Morning (1814)* (fig. 2.2)

Present whereabouts: Bowood House, Wiltshire.

Oil on canvas, 98 x 123.5 cm.

Provenance: 1814, purchased by Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, 3rd Marquess of Lansdowne, thence by descent.

Exhibited: 1814, R.A. No. 229; 1862, International Exhibition 1862, No. 318; 1888, R.A. 1888 no.10; 1951, R.A. First Hundred Years, 1951, no. 248; 1954, Thomas Agnew & Sons, Ltd, Loan Exhibition of the Lansdowne Collection, no.36; 1955, British Council, Museum Boymans Rotterdam, *Engelse Landschapschilders Von Gainsborough to Turner*, 1955, no.6; 1968, Royal Academy of Arts Bicentenary Exhibition, 14 December 1968- 2 March 1969, no. 213.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 53-57.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 22 May 1814 (Robert Hunt); *Champion*, 22 May 1814, 165 (William Hazlitt), *Inquirer*, No 2, 1814, 185.

103S. *Sketch for Half-holiday muster (1815)* (fig. 1.24)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on panel, 21.5 x 17 cm.

Provenance: 1847, probably lot 515 in the artist's sale, 31 May to 5 June 1847, bought Gurney; ... 2021, Mallams, Oxford, 20 October 2021, lot 246, when bought by present owner.

105. *The Reluctant Departure (1815)* (fig. 3.24)

Present whereabouts: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 88 x 112.4 cm.

Provenance: c.1816, James Carpenter; ... (after 1848) acquired by Edwin Bullock; 1870, his sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, 21 May 1870, lot 142, bought by Agnew, for N. Holmes; ... 1882, presented by Timothy Kendrick to the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

Exhibited: 1815, R.A. No. 29; 1816, B.I. No. 109; 1888, Glasgow International Exhibition, No. 186; 1955, Arts Council, *British Subject and Narrative Pictures 1800-1848*, No. 4; 1959, Tate Gallery, *The Romantic Movement : Fifth Exhibition to Celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Council of Europe*, No. 58; 1968, Royal Academy, Bicentenary Exhibition 14 December 1968-2 March 1969, No. 209; 1992, Villa Hugel, Essen, *London - World City 1800 - 1838*, No.449.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 69-70.

Reviews: *Examiner* 28 May 1815, 351; *New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register*, III, 1 July 1815; *British Lady's Magazine*, Vol I, June 1815, 437; *Examiner*, 25 February 1816.

110. *Shrimp boys at Cromer (1816)* (fig. 3.36)

Present whereabouts: London, Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 86 x 113 cm.

Provenance: 1816, T.F. Heathcote, Esq., thence by descent to the Rev. Thomas Heathcote Tragett;

1890, sold at Christie, Manson & Woods, 1 March 1890, lot 150, bought by Agnew for Charles Gassiott; 1902, bequeathed by Charles Gassiott to the City of London.

Exhibited: 1816, R.A. no.7.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 80.

Reviews: *Examiner*, no. 438, 19 May 1816; *Annals of the Fine Arts*, 1816, 70.

Engravings: Etching by William Collins, 1816 (BM 1852,0705.114.). Mezzotint by William Ward, A.R.A., 1816 (BM 1847,0811.11 and BM 2010,7081.3941.)

110S. Sketch for *Shrimp boys at Cromer (1815)* (fig. 3.37)

Present whereabouts: Private Collection.

Oil on panel, 14.9 x 18.3 cm.

Provenance: 1847, Probably one of lots 110, 113 or 122 in the posthumous Collins sale; ... 2023, Lacy Scott & Knight (Bury St Edmunds), 17 June 2023, lot 2348, when acquired by the present owner.

119. *Preparing for a Voyage (1817)* (3.39)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 64.3 x 80.6 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W COLLINS 1817' (on the stern of the boat).

Provenance: 1817, Ebenezer Ludlow; 1837, sold at Christie Manson & Woods, 14 April 1837, lot 78, to Marshall; 1868, with William Marshall; ... 1884, bought by Agnew from D. Jardine on 14 May 1884, sold by Agnew on 21 January 1887 to E. Fose White; ... 1895, offered for sale by James Orrock at Christie, Manson & Woods on 27 April 1895, lot 319; 1904, sold by James Orrock at Christie, Manson & Woods, 4 June 1904, lot 62, as *Trying on Father's Boots*, bought A. Smith; ... 1958, sold by the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight at Christies, 6 June 1958, lot 105, bought by Agnews; ... 2004, with Christies, 4 March 2004, when acquired by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1817, B.I. No. 11; 1868, Leeds Works of Art Exhibition, No. 1195.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 110.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 23 February 1817; *Repository of Arts*, March 1817, NS Vol. III, 164;

122. *Portraits of Master and Miss Martin and Master Meyer playing at 'Beat my neighbour' (1817)* (fig. 2.3)

Present whereabouts: Unknown

Oil on canvas, 40.6 x 55.9 cm.

Provenance: 1847, Sold at the artist's sale, Christie, Manson & Wood, 31 May to 5 June 1847, lot 255, to Hogarth; ... 1859, sold by E. Rodgett at Christie, Manson & Wood to Cox; ... 1864,

purchased by Agnew from Rufford, in February 1864 for John Knowles; 1865, his sale, Christie, Manson & Wood, April 1865, bought Agnew for John Pender; 1897, sold by the executors of Sir John Pender at Christie, Manson & Wood, 29 May 1897, lot 24, to A. Smith; ... 1911, offered at auction by Lepke, Berlin on 17 October 1911; 1913, offered again at auction by Lepke, Berlin on 11 February 1913; ...

Exhibited: 1817, R.A.No. 111.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 109.

Reviews: *Annals of the Fine Arts*, 1817, 54.

125. *The Bird's Nest* (1817)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 35.6 cm.

Provenance: 1817, purchased at the British Institution Exhibition by Amabel Hume-Campbell, 5th Baroness Lucas, and (1816) Countess de Grey; ... 2007, sold by Ritchies, Auctioneers, Toronto, Canada, on 7 June 2007, lot 3016, to an unknown buyer; ... 2021, sold by the estate of W.A. Ross MacFadden at Waddingtons, Toronto, 16 September 2021, lot 27, when bought by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1818, B.I. No. 263.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 122.

127. *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen* (1818) (fig. 1.25)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 90 x 75 cm.

Provenance: 1818, Sir George Beaumont; ... Sigilas, Hildrizhausen, Baden-Württemberg, 5 April 2016, lot 274, sold to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1818, R.A. No. 84; 1819, B.I. No. 11; 1888, The Grosvenor Gallery Winter Exhibition, *A Century of British Art from 1737 to 1837*, No. 150, as *The Inn Yard*.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 170; Cunningham, Alan (1843), III, 228.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 31 May 1818, 347; *Repository of Arts*, June 1818, NS, V, 363; *Annals of the Fine Arts*, 1818, 294.

128. *A scene on the coast of Norfolk* (1818) (fig. 3.38)

Present whereabouts: Royal Collection.

Oil on canvas, 89.7 x 115.4 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 1818' (lower right).

Provenance: 1819, The Prince Regent, thence by succession.

Exhibited: 1818, R.A. No. 8; 1819, B.I. No. 85; 1852, B.I. Old Masters, No. 146; 1862, International Exhibition 1862, No.273 .

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 119-20.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 14 June 1818.

131. *Portrait of Sara Coleridge as 'The Highland Girl'* (1818) (fig. 2.9)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.

Provenance: 1818, given by the artist to Samuel Taylor Coleridge; 1834, bequeathed by S.T. Coleridge to Ann Gillman; (?) Bequeathed by Ann Gillman to Derwent Coleridge, thence by descent until c.2000, when it is understood to have passed out of the family's possession.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: Coleridge, Sara Fricker, *Minnow among Tritons : Mrs S.T. Coleridge's Letters to Thomas Poole 1799-1834*, ed. by Stephen Potter (London,1934, 67-68; Jessica Fay, *The Collected Letters of Sir George and Lady Beaumont to the Wordsworth Family, 1803–1829 : With a Study of the Creative Exchange between Wordsworth and Beaumont* (Liverpool, 2021), 284 n.132; *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, III The Middle Years, Part II 1812-1820*, Oxford,1970, 526 at 528.

Commentary: This painting was never exhibited although, according to Sara Coleridge, the intention while Collins was painting it, may well have been to do so. Writing on 27 September 1818 to Thomas Poole, Sara Coleridge wrote that 'the painter likes it, so does his patron [Sir George Beaumont] so it is to be in the exhibition next spring'.

132. A Mill in Cumberland (1818-19) (fig. 2.10)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 96.5 x 142.2 cm.

Provenance: 1819, Sir John Fleming Leicester (afterwards Lord de Tabley); 1827, his sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, 7 July 1827, lot 31, sold to Broadhurst; ... 1987, Offered at Phillips, London, 15 December 1987, lot 26, by an unknown consignor, not sold; ...

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 150-53.

133. Morning : Fishermen on the look-out (1819) (fig. 3.25)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 92 x 122 cm.

Inscriptions:

Provenance: 1819, Robert Jenkinson, Second Earl of Liverpool; ... 2017, sold by Trevor Stone at Stacey's Auctioneers, Rayleigh, Essex, 21 March 2017, lot 1737, as *Scene on the Norfolk Coast*, when bought by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1819, R.A. No. 175; 1825,B.I. exhibition May 1825.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 154-56.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 28 June 1819; *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XI, No. 66, 1 July 1819, 546.

Engravings: engraved by Joseph Phelps, 1825-26, published 1 February 1827, (BM 1868,0822.1700).

134. Portraits of Lords Charles & Thomas Pelham Clinton (1818-19) (fig. 2.13)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on panel, 43.8 x 35.2 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1819' (in the crease of the open book lying on the floor)

Provenance: 1819, Henry Pelham Clinton, 4th Duke of Newcastle, thence by descent until an unknown date after 1910; ... 2016, consigned to Sotheby's, Toronto for sale in London, offered at Sotheby's London, 27 April 2016, lot 897, not sold; 2017, offered at Rosebery's

London, 27 June 2017, lot 1222, not sold; 2017, re-offered at Rosebery's London, 22 July 2017, lot 513, where bought by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1819, R.A. No. 23.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 127 & 155; Hipkin, W.J. Catalogue of paintings at Clumber Park, London, 1910, annotated post 1910 by Messrs. Tyler & Co: Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham, Ne 5 I 4-4/3.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 27 June 1819 .

149. Scene in Borrowdale (1821) (fig. 2.11)

Present whereabouts: London, Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 77 x 65 cm.

Provenance: 1821, John Marshall; ... 1902, Bequeathed by Charles Gassiott to the City of London.

Exhibited: 1821, R.A. no 87; 2019, Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery, *Seen and Heard : Victorian children in the frame*.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 170.

Reviews: *London Magazine*, Vol.4, July -December 1821, 72.

153. Clovelly, North Devon (1822) (fig. 3.26)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 88.5 x 122.9 cm.

Provenance: 1822, George Philips (from 1828, Sir George Philips, Bt.); ... 2004, sold at Tennants, Leyburn, N Yorkshire, 25th November 2004, lot 1193, to an unknown buyer; ...

Exhibited: 1822, R.A. No.60.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 189-90.

Reviews: *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review*, 1 June 1822, 351; *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol VI, 1 June 1822, 256.

158. Scene on the Brent (1822) (fig. 2.8)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 46 x 58.5 cm.

Provenance: 1822, William Danby; ... 2009, sold at Christie's, London as *On the Brent*, 25 February 2009, lot 815; ...

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

159. Scene in Borrowdale, Cumberland (1823) (fig.2.12)

Present whereabouts: Egham, Royal Holloway College.

Oil on canvas, 86.3 x 111.7 cm.

Provenance: 1823, Frederick Ripley, Esq; ... 1881, William Sharp (Endwood Court, Handsworth) his sale, Christie Manson & Woods, 9 July 1881, lot 71, purchased by Mason (*otherwise* Thomas Holloway, founder of Royal Holloway College).

Exhibited: 1823, R.A., No. 88; 1951, R.A. 1951-52, *The First Hundred Years of the R.A. 1769-1868*, No. 315.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 216.

Reviews: *London Magazine*, vol 7, January-June 1823, 102; *New Monthly Magazine*, IX, 1823, 254; *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, 25 May 1823, 164.

160. *A Fish Auction on the south coast of Devonshire (1823)* (fig. 3.2)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 85 x 116 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 1823' (on the boat, to the right of the sails).

Provenance: 1823, George Capel-Coningsby, 5th Earl of Essex, thence by descent to the 6th Earl, Arthur Capel (1803-1892); 1893, offered for sale at Christie, Manson & Woods, 22 July 1893, lot 42, as *The Fish Auction 1823*, but bought in; 1902, sold by an anonymous consignor at Christie, Manson & Woods, 10 May 1902, lot 65, as *The Fish Auction 1823*, Bought by Permain; ... 1930, Barnet Lewis sale at Christie, Manson & Woods, 3 March 1930, lot 175, sold to unknown buyer; ... 1968, sold by Roldan, Buenos Aires, 25 May 1968, to an unknown buyer; ... Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury, 12 August 2021, lot 667, not sold; 2022, re-offered by Woolley & Wallis, 2 March 2022, lot 460, when bought by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1823, R.A. No. 67; 1857, Manchester, Art Treasures Exhibition, No.611.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 215-216.

Reviews: *New Monthly Magazine*, IX, 1823, 254; *Bell's Weekly messenger*, 25 May 1823, 164; Charles Molloy Westmacott, *Descriptive and critical catalogue to the exhibition of the Royal Academy*, London, 1823, No. 67.

166S. Sketch for *The Cherry Seller (1823)* (fig. 2.5)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on panel, 21.6 x 27.3 cm.

Provenance: 1847, lot 108 in the artist's sale, 31 May to 5 June 1847, bought by W.B. White probably for Joseph Gillott; 1872, 1872, Gillott sale 19 April 1872, lot 269, bought Hodgson; ... 1975, with the Fine Art Society; ... 2017, Thomas Watson, Darlington, lot 488, 26 September 2017, when bought by the present owner.

167. *Portraits of the children of H. Rice, Esq. (1824)* (fig. 2.21)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm.

Provenance: 1824, Henry Rice, Esq.; 1860, sold by Rice at Christie, Manson and Woods, 17 May 1860, bought by Agnew for James Reiss (sic); ... 1933, with Ehrich, New York; ...

Exhibited: 1824, RA No. 209 .

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 234-35.

Reviews: *European Magazine*, Vol LXXXV, 1824, 552; *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 July 1824, 300; *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1824, 283.

Engravings: engraved by John Linnell, as *Feeding the Rabbits*, published 21 April 1831 (BM 1847,0811.9).

171. *The Young Shrimp Catchers (1824)* (fig. 3.43)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on panel, 31.2 x 40.5 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 182*' (lower left, final digit indistinct)

Provenance: 1826, Edmund Hungerford Lechmere; (date unknown), acquired by Sir C A H Salmon, Rhynd, Perthshire; 1882, acquired by Mr Charles W Lea; ... 2005, sold at Christies, 7 September 2005, lot 315 to J Collins & Son Fine Art, Bideford; 2006, sold by them 7 November 2006 to Mr. and Mrs. T Stone; 2017, sold by Mr. and Mrs. T. Stone at Stacey's, Rayleigh, Essex on 21 March 2017, lot 1738, when acquired by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1826, R.A. 1826, No. 46; 1882, Worcestershire Exhibition, Fine Art Section, No. 32.

Literature: William Collins, Notebook I, fols. 22^v, 23.

Prints: Engraved by Joseph Phelps, 1825, with the inscription 'Young Shrimp Catchers, From the picture in the possession of Edward Lechmere Esq. Painted by W.Collins R.A. Engraved by J.Phelps Published Feb 1 1826 by Frs. Collins, 11 New Cavendish St'. (BM 1847,0811.4).

173. A second painting of the Turvey Cherry seller (1824) (fig. 2.6)

Present whereabouts: Bury Art Gallery & Museum.

Oil on canvas, 69 x 89.5 cm.

Inscriptions: 'William Collins 1824' (lower right).

Provenance: 1824, John Marshall; ... 1873, sold at Christie Manson & Woods, 22 September 1873, lot 39, bought by Agnew. Sold by Agnew to Thomas Wrigley on 11 December 1873; 1901, presented by Thomas Wrigley to Bury Corporation.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Commentary: From the death of his father in 1812, Collins invariably signed as 'W. Collins' except when painting a repetition. His repetition of *Cottage Hospitality* (1844) [P.271], e.g. is signed 'Wm Collins 1844'.

175. Buying fish on the beach— Hazy morning (1825) (fig. 3.5)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 87 x 111.5 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1825' (on the hatch, beneath the sail).

Provenance: 1825, John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford; ... 1951, with Leggatt Bros., March 1951; 2019, sold by the executors of Lady Marion Dodds at Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury, 6 March 2019, lot 189 to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1825, R.A. No. 48; 1857, Manchester, Art Treasures Exhibition, No. 279.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 242-43.

Reviews: *New Monthly Magazine* XV, 1 June 1825; *Examiner*, 19 June 1825, 432; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1825, 298.

177. Sketch of a Boy at Turvey (1825) (fig. 4.4)

Present whereabouts: Kettering, Alfred East Art Gallery.

Oil on panel, 30.5 x 38 cm.

Inscriptions: W. Collins (on the lower fence rail, immediately to the left of the gun stock).

Provenance: 1825, T.C. Higgins; 1853, sold by T.C. Higgins at Christies Manson & Wood, as *Turvey, boy holding two dogs*, bought Wallis; ... ; 1896, sold by an anonymous consignor at Christies, Manson & Woods, 18th April 1896, lot 127, as *Keepers Boy, Dogs and Game*, bought by McLean; ... ; 1954, purchased by the Alfred East Art Gallery from Thomas Agnew & Son.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 344.

179. *Prawn fishers at Hastings (1825)* (fig. 3.44)

Present whereabouts: Royal Collection.

Oil on canvas, 91 x 116.1 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1825' (lower left)

Provenance: 1825, H.M. George IV, thence by succession.

Exhibited: 1852, B.I. Old Masters, No. 142; 1862, International Exhibition, No. 289.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 252-54, 264.

Prints: Engraved by Arthur Willmore for the 1857 Art Journal (British Museum, 1872, 1012.2278). British XIXc Unmounted Roy, 247 x 335 mm.

180. *Hop-pickers (children) (1825)* (fig. 2.29)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 52.7 x 66 cm.

Inscriptions: sold as signed and dated by Christies in 1994.

Provenance: 1825, William Wells, thence by descent to William Wells of Holmewood; 1890, sold by William Wells at Christie, Manson & Woods on 10 May 1890, lot 14, bought by Agnew for F A Beer; ... 1974, sold by Mrs. J. Collins at Sotheby's, 9 April 1974, lot 94, the property of Mrs. J. Collins, to an unknown buyer; ... 1994, sold at Christies, 11 November 1994, lot 24, to an unknown buyer; ...

Exhibited: 1826, R.A. No. 110; 1857, Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, no. 237, as *Hop Gatherers*.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 268.

181. *Fishermen leaving home for the night (The Fisherman's Departure)(1825-26)* (fig. 3.27)

Present whereabouts: Sudeley Castle, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire.

Oil on canvas, 106.7 x 81.3 cm.

Provenance: 1826, James Morrison, thence by descent until 1915 when transferred to the Trustees of the Walter Morrison Trust.

Exhibited: 1826, R.A. No. 154; 1882, R.A. Old Masters Exhibition, No. 21.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 266-68.

Reviews: *New Monthly Magazine*, XVIII, 1826, 281.

Engravings: Engraved by Charles Rolls for the *Amulet*, 1829, 113 (BM 1868,0822.2891); as *The Fisherman's Departure*, by Joseph Phelps, 1832, (BM 1847,0811.1).

182. *Children examining the contents of a net (Searching the Net) (1826)* (fig. 3.41)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on unknown substrate, size unknown.

Provenance: 1827, Sir Abraham Hume; ...

Exhibited: 1827, R.A. No. 337.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 268.

Reviews: *Morning Post*, 20 June 1827.

Engravings: (1) Etching by William Collins, c.1827 in Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1985-52-16982); (2) Engraved by Joseph Phelps, c.1829 (BM 1847,0811.3). Inscribed 'Searching the Net From the original picture in the possession of Sir Abraham Hume.Bart. To whom this print is respectfully dedicated by his obliged servant W.Collins Executed by W.Collins R.A Engraved by J.Phelps Printed by J.Lahee London Published June 1st 1829 by Francis Collins, 18 Great Marlborough St'.

189. Scene in Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight (1827-28) (fig. 3.20)

Present whereabouts: London, private residence of the Duke of Norfolk.

Oil on panel (?), dimensions not known.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 1828' (lower right).

Provenance: 1828, Bernard Howard, 12th Duke of Norfolk, thence by descent.

Exhibited: 1828, R.A. No.256.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 294-95, 304-05.

Reviews: *New Monthly Magazine* XXIV, 1828, 255.

Commentary: Collins's letter to his wife dated 29 and 30 August 1827 refers to him finding out, when he reaches Cowes, 'where the Duke is staying'. This was evidently a meeting of some importance to Collins since he asks if his brother Frank can check with staff at the Duke's house in St James's Square. He expected to reach Cowes on 'Saturday night', that is on 1st September 1827. After meeting with the Duke, Collins remained on the Isle of Wight until 5 or 6 September. The 12th Duke had only one child, Henry Howard (1791-1856), who was to succeed him as the 13th Duke. In 1827 he was styled the Earl of Surrey. The Earl and Countess of Surrey had five children in all, four of whom had been born by the date of Collins's visit to the Isle of Wight. These were respectively Henry, then aged 11, Edward, aged 9, Mary, aged 4 or 5, and Bernard, aged 2 or 3. There seems little doubt that the painting represents a portrait group of all four children.

190. Taking out a Thorn (1827) (fig. 2.17)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Size and substrate unknown.

Provenance: 1828, Joseph Delafield; 1842, sold at Christie, Manson & Woods to Smith ...

Exhibited: 1828, R.A. No. 86.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 305-06.

Reviews: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1828, 538; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 17 May 1828, 314; *London Weekly Review*, II, 1828, 317; *Athenaeum*, 14 May 1828, 457.

Engravings: Engraved by Louis Marvy, c.1842 (?), (BM 1855,1208.6).

190S. Preliminary sketch for Taking out a Thorn (1827) (fig. 2.16)

Present whereabouts: Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery.

Oil on panel, 13 x 16.5 cm.

Inscriptions: ' No. 11 Sketch for picture of Taking out the thorn | W^m Collins R.A.' (on MS label affixed to panel)

Provenance: 1827-1890 with the artist's family; 1890, Bought in by the executors of Wilkie Collins at Christie, Manson & Woods. 22nd February 1890, lot 44 or 45, subsequently sold to

Richard Godson Millns; 1904, bequeathed by Richard Godson Millns to the Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery.

195. *Prawn fishing (1828-29)* (fig. 3.42)

Present whereabouts: London, Tate Britain.

Oil on panel, 43.5 x 58.4 cm.

Provenance: 1829, Sir Francis Freeling; 1837, his sale, Christie Manson & Woods, 15 April 1837, lot 93, bought by Robert Vernon; 1847, given by Robert Vernon to the National Gallery; 1929, transferred to the Tate Gallery.

Exhibited: 1829, R.A. No. 371; 1929, North East Coast Exhibition, Newcastle upon Tyne, Palace of Arts, May-October 1929; 2008-9, *Coasting: Bonington, Turner and their contemporaries on the shores of the Channel* (Nottingham Castle Museum & Art Gallery 15 November 2008 – 15 February 2009; Ferens Art Gallery, Hull 28 February 2009 to 3 May 2009; Hastings Museum & Art Gallery 17 May 2009 – 30 August 2009).

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 316.

197. *Summer Moonlight (1828-29)*

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 71 x 91 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 182*(indistinct)'.

Provenance: 1829, Revd. R.A. Thorp; ... 2012, with Worldwide Antiques, Malvern, from whom bought by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1829, R.A. No. 296.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 316.

198. *Scene in a Kentish hop garden (1829)* (fig. 2.30)

Present whereabouts: London, private residence of the Duke of Norfolk.

Oil on panel, 39.1 x 49.5 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins' (on the rocker of the cradle).

Provenance: 1829, Bernard Howard, 12th Duke of Norfolk, thence by descent.

Exhibited: 1829, R.A. No.103; 1993-4, 'Toil and Plenty : images of the agricultural landscape in England 1780-1890', Nottingham University Art Gallery and Yale Center for British Art.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 316-17.

Reviews: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1829, 538; *Olio*, 1829, 416.

200S (1). *Sketch for Muscle [sic] gatherers, coast of France (1829-30)* (fig. 3.9)

Present whereabouts: Rochdale, Touchstones.

Pastel on paper, 42 x 57.5 cm.

Provenance: ...; 1929, bequeathed to Touchstones.

Commentary: This sketch corresponds closely to the photograph of the painting at the time of the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition, in 1857, (*Gems of the Art Treasures Exhibition*, Manchester, 1858, Index, No. 36, Sea Coast [title]; W. Collins R.A. [artist]; Samuel Ashton, Esq. [lender]), but there are a number of small differences between the sketch and the photograph, for example in the demeanour of the right hand woman, removal of the more distant cliffs, and addition of more boats.

200S (2). Preliminary sketch for group in *Muscle [sic] gatherers (1829)* (fig. 3.12)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Graphite on paper, 7.5 x 11.1 cm.

Provenance: From a collection of sketches, possibly an 1829 sketchbook, and most probably retained by the artist's family, since it is not referred to in the catalogue of the posthumous Collins sale; ... with Sotheby's (date unknown); ... 2021, purchased by the present owner from Black Cat Curiosities Art/Antiques, U.S.A (eBay), 4 December 2021.

201. *Les Causeuses (1829-30)* (fig. 3.10)

Present whereabouts: London, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Oil on panel, 63.5 x 81.3 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 1830' (lower right).

Provenance: 1830, E.R. Tunno, Esq.; 1863, sold by E.R. Tunno's Executors, as *Boulogne Fisherwomen* to Moore; ... 1864, bought by Agnew in August 1864 at Christie, Manson & Woods as *Fisherwomen*, for James Fenton; 1880, sold by James Fenton as *Les Causeuses* to Ellis; 1882, bequeathed to the Victoria and Albert Museum by John Jones.

Exhibited: 1830, R.A. No. 57.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 333-34.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 1830, 347; *Morning Post*, 7 May 1830.

202. *Waiting the arrival of fishing-boats, coast of France. (1829-30)* (fig. 3.11)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 70 x 90 cm.

Provenance: 1830, James Pickering Ord; 1843, his house sale; ... (date unknown): acquired by A. Colvin Esq; ... 2000, offered for sale at Sotheby's, 22 March 2000, lot 36, as 1830 R.A. 145 (i.e. incorrectly identified as *Muscle gatherers*, No. 200 above), bought in; 2001, sold by Bonhams & Langlois, St Helier, on 20 June 2001, lot 95, as *Cockle girls, 1830*.

Exhibited: 1830, R.A. No. 268.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 333-34.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 1830, 347.

205. *The Nutting Party (1831)* (fig. 2.18)

Present whereabouts: London, Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 69 x 58 cm.

Inscriptions: W Collins 1831 (on the top fence rail, to the right of the boy with the hat).

Provenance: 1831, Rev. R.A. Thorp, thence by descent to his aunt, Jane Thorp; 1870, with William Dickson, as Jane Thorp's administrator; 1871, Sold by William Dickson at Christies on 4 March 1871 lot 113, bought by Agnew and sold later than month to Charles Gassiott; 1902, bequeathed by Charles Gassiott to the City of London.

Exhibited: 1831, B.I. no. 29; Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery, *Seen and Heard : Victorian children in the frame*.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 344.

Reviews: *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 5 February 1831, 89; *New Monthly Magazine*, Vol XXXIII, March 1831, 123.

207. *The Morning Bath* (1831) (fig. 3.51)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on panel, 70.5 x 92.1 cm.

Provenance: 1833, Henry McConnel, thence by descent; 1886, sold by the executors of McConnel, at Christie, Manson & Woods, 27 March 1886, lot 67, to Agnew, on behalf of J Worthington; ... at an unknown date, with Vicars Brothers, London; ... 1952 sold by the Paikin estate at Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, 23 January 1952, lot no 46 to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1831, R.A. No. 138.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 342-44.

Reviews: *La Belle Assemblée*, 3rd Series, vol XIII, January-June 1831, 287; *New Monthly Magazine*, XXXIII, 1 July 1831, 314.

Engravings: Etched and engraved by John Outrim for the *Literary Souvenir* (1837), (BM 1868,0822.2888).

208. *The Venturesome Robin* (1831) (fig. 4.5)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 70 x 91 cm.

Provenance: 1831, James Pickering Ord; ... ; 1874, Sold at Christie Manson & Woods on 19 May 1874, lot 76, by J. Farnworth to Agnew, who sold it on 26 June 1874 to Albert Grant MP; 1877, sold by Albert Grant at Christie Manson & Woods on 28 April 1877, lot 132, to Agnew, who sold it on 15 May 1877 to Mrs Reiss; ... ; 1902, sold by an anonymous consignor at Christies, Manson & Woods, 26 April 1902, lot 77, bought Martin; ... ; 1985, anonymous sale, Sotheby's, 14 June 1985 lot 2459; ... ; 1988, offered for sale at Sotheby's, 13 July 1988, lot 83; ... ; Sold by Peter Nahum (late 1980s) to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1831, R.A. No. 25.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 342-343.

Reviews: *New Monthly Magazine*, XXXIII, 1 July 1831, 314; *Athenaeum*, May 1831, 316.

Engravings: Etched and engraved by Edward Finden, c.1835, (BM 1875,0710.4187).

212. *Rustic Civility* (1832) (fig. 4.1)

Present whereabouts: Chatsworth, Derbyshire.

Oil on canvas, 71.6 x 91.7 cm.

Provenance: 1832, William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, thence by descent.

Exhibited: 1832, R.A. No. 29; 1897, Diamond Jubilee exhibition at London, Guildhall, No.58; 1995, *Gombrich on Shadows*, London, National Gallery, 26 April to 18 June 1995; 1998-9, *Rustic simplicity : scenes of cottage life in Nineteenth century British Art* Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham, 26 September to 8 November 1998; Penlee House, Penzance, 25 November 1998 to 9 January 1999.

Literature: Collins (1848),), II, 10-11 and 347; Gombrich, E.H., *Shadows : The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art*, London, 1995), 53; Payne, Christiana, *Toil and Plenty: images of the agricultural landscape in England 1780-1890*, New Haven and London, 1993, 29-30; Payne, Christiana, *Rustic simplicity : scenes of cottage life in Nineteenth century British Art*, Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham, 26 September to 8 November 1998; Penlee House, Penzance, 25 November 1998 to 9 January 1999, 1998, cat. 7, 57-58.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 1 July 1832, 421; *Athenaeum*, 1832, 309; *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1832, 314; *Morning Post*, 9 June 1832; *Library of the Fine Arts*, III, July 1832, 513.

213. *Skittle Players (1832)* (fig. 4.17)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 86 x 110.5 cm.

Provenance: 1845, sold by Collins on 23rd April 1845 to George Young; 1866, His sale at Christie, Manson & Woods on 19 May 1866, lot 24, bought Agnew, who sold it on 10 August 1866 to James Price; 1868, his sale at Christies, Manson & Woods 20 June 1868, lot 121, bought Agnew, who sold it on 13 November 1868 to J Snowdon Henry; 1871, repurchased by Agnew from J Snowdon Henry on 10 July 1871 and sold to Samuel Mendel on 11 December 1871; 1875, sold by Samuel Mendel at Christie, Manson & Woods on 23 April 1875, lot 9294, and bought by Agnew, who sold it on 28 April 1875 to C.F.H. Bolckow, MP; 1888, sold by H.W.Bolckow at Christie, Manson & Woods, 5 May 1888, lot 29, bought Tooth; ... ; 1907, sold by George Hodgson at Christie, Manson & Woods, 12 July 1907, lot 86, bought Harris; ... ; 2000, offered for sale at Sotheby's 30 November 2000, lot 27, bought in; 2000, purchased from Richard Green & Sons by the present owner.

Exhibited: 1832, R.A. no. 112; 1833, B.I. No. 64; 1862, International Exhibition 1862, No. 293; 1885, Royal Academy, *Exhibition of the Works of the Old Masters and by deceased Masters of the British School*, No. 61.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 346-347; II, 6-10.

Reviews: *Morning Post*, 9 June 1832; *Court Journal* 19 May 1832, 182; *Examiner*, 1832, 324.

218. *Returning from the haunts of the Sea fowl (1833)* (fig. 3.45)

Present whereabouts: Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 127.3 x 102 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1833' (lower left).

Provenance: 1838, William Lamboll Bryant; ... 1848, Sir Thomas Baring's sale, 2 June 1848, lot 58, bought Rought; 1862, in the ownership of John Naylor; ... 1923, Christie, Manson & Woods, 19 January 1923, lot 27, bought Sampson, and acquired shortly thereafter by George Audley; 1925, presented by George Audley to the Walker Art Gallery by George Audley.

Exhibited: 1833, R.A. No. 51; 1834, B.I. No. 138; 1854, Liverpool Town Hall, 23 September 1854, no. 42; 1862, International Exhibition 1862, number 318; 1970, *The Taste of Yesterday*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 23-6.

Reviews: *Athenaeum* 1833, 298; *Arnold's Magazine of the Fine Arts*, Vol I, June 1833, 188; *Metropolitan* VII, 1833, 241.

Engravings: an engraving from one of the two smaller versions of the painting, both painted 1833-34 (P.217 and P.218) was made by James Stephenson in 1834 as an illustration for the *Literary Souvenir* (1835), 68, (BM 1848,0304.116).

222. *A repetition of Rustick civility (small) (1833)* (fig. 4.2)

Present whereabouts: London, V&A.

Oil on panel, 45.6 x 61 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1833' (on the bottom bar of the gate).

Provenance: 1833, John Sheepshanks; 1857, South Kensington Museum: The Sheepshanks gift.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 348; Parkinson, Ronald, *Victoria & Albert Museum, Catalogue of British Oil Paintings 1820 -1860*, London, 1990, 36.

Engravings: Engraved by John Outrim, published November 1835, also as the frontispiece in the *Cabinet of Modern Art, and Literary Souvenir* (1836), (BM 1850,0211.403; BM 1871,0610.934); engraved by William Luson Thomas (1861) for the *Illustrated London News*, 16 February 1861, 154; engraved by Charles Cousen (1865) for the *Art Journal*, 1 August 1865, facing 234 (1872,1012.2441).

223. Cottage Hospitality (1834) (fig. 2.25)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 71 x 95 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins' (lower right).

Provenance: 1834, John Marshall 1868, now owned by William Marshall, who loaned to it the Leeds Exhibition; 1880, bought by Agnew from, or with a provenance from J W Marshall, on 2 July 1880, and sold on 26 July 1880 to James Lees; 1888, sold by James Lees at Christie, Manson and Woods on 16 June 1888, lot 88, bought Tooth; ... 1993, offered at Sotheby's, 14 July 1993, lot 96, but bought in; ...

Exhibited: 1834, R.A. No. 112; 1857, Manchester Art Treasures, No. 246; 1868, National Exhibition of Works of Art, Leeds, No. 1203.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 40-2.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 1834, 378.

227. Welsh peasants crossing the sands to Market (1834-35) (fig. 3.23)

Present whereabouts: London, Guildhall Art Gallery & Museum.

Oil on canvas, 72 x 107 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1835' (lower left).

Provenance: 1841, sold by the artist to Richard Colls, 12 May 1841; ... 1872, sold by Joseph Gillott's executors at Christie, Manson and Woods, 27 April 1872, lot 273, bought T. Agnew & Sons, who sold it to Thomas Walker; 1888, sold by Thomas Walker's executors at Christie, Manson & Woods on 2 June 1888, lot 66, bought by Agnew, for Charles Gassiott; 1902, bequeathed by Charles Gassiott to the City of London.

Exhibited: 1835, R.A. No. 180; 1841, Amateur Artists' Society, Strand, London, February-March 1841.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 47-8.

Reviews: *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1835, 362; *Athenaeum*, 1835, 395; *Spectator*, 16 May 1835, 471.

Engravings: Engraved by William Radclyffe for the *Art-Union* (BM 1872,1012.1891).

228. The mariner's widow (1835) (fig. 3.28)

Present whereabouts: Preston, Lancashire, Harris Museum & Art Gallery.

Oil on panel, 62.7 x 76.3 cm.

Provenance: 1835, Robert Vernon, thence by descent until 1876, bought White; ... 1883, bequeathed by Richard Newsham to the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston.

Exhibited: 1835, R.A. No. 126.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 48-9.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 1835, 395; *Spectator*, 16 May 1835, 471.

232. *Sunday* (1835-36) (fig. 2.24)

Present whereabouts: Tate Britain.

Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 106.7 cm.

Provenance: 1840, George Knott, Esq., 1845, his sale, bought Creswick, possibly for George Bacon, Esq (who owned it by 1848); 1850, his sale, Christies, 5 June 1850, lot 60, bought Hoare; ... W. Wilson, Esq.; ... 1868, bought by Agnew on 27 May 1868 from J Graham, for Sir John Fowler; 1899, his sale, Christie Manson & Wood, 6 May 1899, lot 50, as *Sunday Morning*, bought by Agnew for Charles Gassiott; 1902, bequeathed by Charles Gassiott.

Exhibited: 1836, R.A. No. 135; 1845, Liverpool Academy, No. 101; 1998-9, *Rustic simplicity: scenes of cottage life in Nineteenth century British Art*, Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham, 26 September to 8 November 1998; Penlee House, Penzance, 25 November 1998 to 9 January 1999.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 63-6; Payne, Christiana: catalogue to the exhibition *Rustic simplicity: scenes of cottage life in Nineteenth century British Art*, Nottingham, 1998, 58-9;

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 1836, 348; *Morning Post*, 3 May 1836.

Engravings: Mezzotint by Samuel William Reynolds II, 1836, published January 1837, and republished 1 May 1847 (BM 1853,0112.81).

233. *Happy as a King* (1835-36)

Present whereabouts: unknown.

Oil on canvas, size not known.

Provenance: 1836, 10 August 1836 W & E Finden 'to be engraved'; 1840, acquired by this date by John Clough, of Liverpool; 1852, his sale, Winstanley's, 20 April 1852, lot 24, bought by John Naylor; 1854, offered by John Naylor at Liverpool Town Hall auction, no. 35, not sold, then by descent until at least 1974, when a photograph reproduced in Morris, Edward (1975), fig.43, shows the painting *in situ* at Leighton Hall;

Exhibited: 1836, R.A. No. 194; 1840, Liverpool Academy, No. 56; 1862, International Exhibition, London, no. 274.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 66-7; Edward Morris, 'John Naylor and other collectors of modern paintings in 19th century Britain' in *Walker Art Gallery Annual Report*, V, 1974-5, 72-101; Edward Morris, and Emma Roberts, *The Liverpool Academy and Other Exhibitions of Contemporary Art in Liverpool, 1774-1867: a history and index of artists and works exhibited*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998, 152.

Reviews: *Literary Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1836, 298.

Engravings: Engraved by Edward Finden for *The Royal Gallery of British Art*, published 1 May 1839 (BM 1847,0811.7; 1856,0510.8).

234. *Leaving Home* (1835-36) (fig. 3.29)

Present whereabouts: Private Collection.

Oil on canvas, 71.7 x 91.4 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. COLL' (on left side of the boat's stern)

Provenance: 1836, Jacob Bell; ... ; 1871, Bought by Agnew from Bashall , 2 May 1871 and recorded as 'Collins 1836 Coast scene with boat', sold by Agnew to John Heugh on 17 May 1871; 1874, [? lot 143] in the Heugh sale at Christie Manson & Woods on 24 April 1874. Bought by Agnew, and recorded as 'Yorkshire coast'. Sold by Agnew to T [?Micheau?] on 29 January 1875; ... ; 1978, sold by F.T. Hobbs at Sotheby's, 27 June 1978, lot 48, as *Emigration*, to an unknown buyer; ... ; 2011, sold, by an unknown consignor, at Christies on 10 November 2011, lot 58, as *The Embarcation*, to an unknown buyer; ... ; 2018, sold by an unknown consignor, at Bonhams on 20 March 2018, lot 38, as *The Departure*, to the present owner.

Exhibited: 1836, R.A. No. 175.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 63.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 1836, 348.

Engravings: Engraved by Joseph Phelps, c.1838, (BM 1847,0811.2).

237. *Happy as a King* (1836)

Present whereabouts: London, Tate Britain.

Oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm.

Provenance: 1841, George Knott; 1845, his sale, bought by Norton for Robert Vernon; 1847, Presented to the National Galley by Robert Vernon (transferred in 1929 to the Tate Gallery).

Exhibited: 1847, B.I. Old Masters, No. 151.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 67,69.

240. *Naples; Young Lazzaroni playing the game of Arravoglio* (1839) (fig. 3.50)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1839' (lower right).

Provenance: 1839, John Baring... with Walter Klinkhoff gallery, Montreal; ... ; Waddington's auctioneers, Toronto, 19 May 2019, lot 40, sold to an unknown buyer; 2020, Philip Serrell, Malvern, 16 January 2020, lot 158, sold to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1839, R.A. No. 366.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), Vol. II, 159-161 and 349.

Reviews: *Examiner*, 4 August 1839, 486; *Athenaeum*, 25th May 1839, 396; *Bell's New Weekly Messenger*, 19 May 1839; *Morning Chronicle*, 7 May 1839, 6; *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, No.1167, 1 June 1839, 348.

241. *Poor travellers at the door of a Capuchin convent, near Vico, Bay of Naples* (1839) (fig. 5.5)

Present whereabouts: National Museums Liverpool, Sudley House.

Oil on canvas, 71 X 91.5 cm.

Provenance: 1839, John Marshall, by descent to William Marshall (by 1868), 1880, sold by J.W. Marshall 2 July 1880, bought by Agnew; 1880 sold by Agnew to George Holt, December 4, 1880; by descent to Emma Holt; 1944, bequeathed by Emma Holt to the City of Liverpool.

Exhibited: 1839, R.A. No. 90; 1868, Leeds, Works of Art Exhibition 1868, No. 1208; 1881, Liverpool Art Club, 1881, No. 154; 1887, Manchester, Royal Jubilee Exhibition 1887, No.

654; 1998, Dulwich College Picture Gallery, *Italy and British Art in the Age of Turner*, 4 March to 24 May 1998.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), Vol. II, 159, 161-162 and 349; Morris, Edward, 'William Collins and Sorrento', *Studi e ricerche francescane*, Anno 1, No.2, 1972, 132-33.

243. *Ave Maria (1839-40)* (fig. 5.8)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1840' (lower left).

Provenance: 1840, Sir Thomas Baring ... 2003, Christies, 25 November 2003, lot 50, sold to an unknown buyer; ...

Exhibited: 1840, R.A. No. 115.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 169 and 349.

246. *Ischia, Bay of Naples (1840-41)* (fig. 3.14)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 44 x 59.5 cm.

Inscriptions: Catalogue description (2021 sale): 'indistinctly signed'.

Provenance: 1841, C.S. Dickins; ... 1874, John Heugh's sale at Christie Manson & Woods on 24 April 1874, lot 144, bought by Agnew for Sir William Armstrong and recorded as *Irish Fishing Village*; 1910, sold at the Armstrong sale 24th June 1910, lot 46, as *An Irish Fishing Village*, bought Gooden & Fry; ... (unknown date) acquired Alice Blanche Balfour (1850-1936); ... 1977, possibly *Fishing Village* sold at Christies, New York, 26 May 1977; ... 2021, sold at Tennants, Leyburn, 20 March 2021, lot 1135, to an unknown buyer.

Exhibited: 1841, R.A. No. 475.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), I, 191; Collins Notebook, II, f. 29^v.

Commentary: The artist's Notebook records a commission from a 'Mr Chas Dickens' in April 1839 for 'A Sea shore with figures'. However, this does not appear to have been the novelist Charles Dickens, as both Collins's 1841 record of the painting refers to 'Chas. S. Dickins', and his son's list of his father's works refers to 'C.S. Dickins, Esq'. The novelist's initials were 'C.J.H'. Wilkie Collins refers to the 'Castle of Ischia', suggesting the castle at the town of Ischia itself, but the castle appears to be that at the village of Forio, on the west side of the island.

249. *The Two Disciples at Emmaus (1841)* (fig. 6.5)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 76 x 63.2 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins' (lower right, above the cushion).

Provenance: 1841, George Knott Esq.; 1845, George Knott's sale, sold to Farrant; ... 1886, with Robert Cox, art dealer, 37 Whiteladies Road, Bristol; ... 1897, Sold by the executors of Sir W.W. Burrell at Christie, Manson & Wood on 12 June 1897, lot 12, to White; ... post 1950, acquired by a collector in Galicia, Spain; 2017, Subastas Duran, Madrid, 27 April 2017 lot 198, when bought by present owner.

Exhibited: 1841, R.A. No. 106; 1886, Rifle Drill Hall Exhibition, Bristol.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 187.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 15 May 1841, 388; *Literary Gazette and journal of belles lettres*, 22 May 1841, 331.

259. *The World or the Cloister?* (1841-43) (fig. 5.10)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 121.9 cm.

Provenance: With Richard Colls (before 1847); with Charles Wentworth Wass (1848); ... 1851, sold by Walker to Myers; ...

Exhibited: 1843, R.A., No. 94.

Literature: Collins (1848), II, 196-197, 228, 230-231 and 350.

Reviews: *Art-Union*, 1843, 163; *Athenaeum*, 27 May 1843, 512; *Illustrated London News*, 2 (56), 27 May 1843.

Commentary: As colour reproductions are available on the Internet through companies trading in the USA, the painting appears to have surfaced in recent times. The website of one provider, Ocean's Bridge Oil Painting Reproductions, indicates that it is in a private collection: <https://www.oceansbridge.com/shop/artists/c/cl-cor/collins-william/the-world-of-the-cloister>

260. *A girl of Sorrento spinning* (1842) (fig. 6.19)

Present whereabouts: Southport, Atkinson Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 91.3 x 71.1 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins 1842' (lower left).

Provenance: 1843, Reverend S.W. Russell (Art-Union prize draw, 1843); ... 1874, offered for sale by 'Webb', but bought in; 1875, sold to 'N.N.' ... 1929, Bequeathed by John Henry Bell to the Atkinson Art Gallery.

Exhibited: 1843, R.A., No. 457; 1978, Victorian Centenary Exhibition, Atkinson Art Gallery, Southport, 1978-1979, No. 7.

Literature: Collins (1848), II, 232.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 27 May 1843, 511; *Art-Union* 1843, 172; *Literary Gazette, and Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 3 June 1843, 371.

261S. *Sketch for A Windy Day—Sussex* (fig. 3.53)

Present whereabouts: Private Collection.

Graphite and watercolour on paper, 23.5 x 31.7 cm.

Provenance: 1847, probably lot 486 in the posthumous Collins sale ... purchased by Sir Hickman Bacon from the Shepherd Gallery, thence by descent.

Exhibited (261): 1843, R.A., No. 204.

Literature (261): Collins (1848), II, 231.

Reviews (261): *Athenaeum*, 27 May 1843, 512.

263. *The Virgin and Child* (1843) (fig. 6.10)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 83 x 64.5 cm.

Provenance: 1843-90, with the artist's family; Sold by the executors of Wilkie Collins at Christies, Manson & Wood 22 February 1890, Lot 64, bought in ... 2017, Dobiaschofsky

Auktionen AG, Bern, Switzerland, 10 November 2017, lot 370, when acquired by present owner.

Exhibited: 1843, R.A., No. 309.

Literature: Collins (1848), II, 228-229.

Reviews: *Athenaeum*, 27 May 1843, 511-12; *Art-Union* 1843, 168.

270. *Seaford, Sussex. (1843-44)* (fig. 3.40)

Present whereabouts: London, V&A.

Oil on canvas, 69.9 x 92.7 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W Collins 1844' (lower left)

Provenance: 1844, John Sheepshanks; 1857, South Kensington Museum: The Sheepshanks gift.

Exhibited: 1844, R.A. No. 141.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 251-53.

Reviews: *Art-Union* 1844, 156; *A Guide to the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, MDCCCXLIV. Containing the criticisms of the press on fourteen hundred pictures, paintings and drawings, by the editors of The Daily and Weekly Newspapers*, London, 1844.

274. *The World or the Cloister? (1844)* (fig. 5.11)

Present whereabouts: Leeds City Art Gallery.

Oil on panel, 38.7 x 31.7 cm.

Provenance: With Joseph Hogarth (1844); with Charles Meigh (by 1848); ... 1875, sold by S.W. Barker to an unknown buyer; ... ; 1883, sold by Tierney to McLean; ... ; 1891, gifted to Leeds Art Gallery by J. W. Oxley.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: Collins (1848), II, 351.

Engravings: engraved by Francis Holl, 1845. The copy in the British Museum, BM 1847,0811.8, bears an inscription in pencil 'R.A. Wass' but the engraving as printed has 'F.Holl' (private collection).

275. *A copy, size of the original of 'Rustic Hospitality' (1844)* (fig. 2.26)

Present whereabouts: Accrington, Haworth Art Gallery.

Oil on canvas, 70.8 x 91.1 cm.

Inscriptions: 'Wm Collins 1844' (lower right).

Provenance: 1845, Joseph Hogarth; ... ; Date unknown, acquired by William Howarth, passing in 1912 to his sister, Anne Haworth; 1920, bequeathed by Anne Haworth.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 42.

Engravings: Engraved by John Outrim, 1845 (BM 1870,1008.3002; BM 1847,0811.6).

277. *Undercliff, near Ventnor, Isle of Wight (1844-45)* (fig. 3.46)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 91.4 cm.

Provenance: 1845, George Young, Esq.; 1866, his sale, Christie Manson & Woods, 19 May 1866, lot 19, as *A View at Ventnor with children*, bought Agnew, Sold by Agnew on 18 July

1866 to James Price, repurchased by Agnew from James Price on 10 August 1866 and sold to Ralph Brocklebank on 20 October 1866; 1893, sold by Ralph Brocklebank at Christie, Manson & Woods on 29 April 1893, lot 93, as *The Samphire Gatherers, Ventnor 1845*, bought Agnew. However, Agnew's stock book indicates that it was sold back to Ralph Brocklebank at an unknown date; ... ; 1964, sold at Christies, 20 November 1964, lot 142, bought by Richard Green Galleries, and sold by them at an unknown date to an unknown purchaser.

Exhibited: 1845, R.A. No. 126.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 267-69; Agnews Stock Books, National Gallery Research Centre: 3, 1866, entry 4186, NGA/27/1/1/3; 3, 1866, entry 4279, NGA/27/1/1/3; 8, 1893, entry 6654, NGA/27/1/1/8.

Reviews: *Art-Union* 1845, 182; *Athenaeum* 10 May 1845, 466.

278. Fetching the Doctor (1844-45) (fig. 1.26)

Present whereabouts: Unknown.

Oil on (?) canvas, dimensions unknown.

Provenance: 1845, John Gibbons, Esq'; ...

Exhibited: 1845, R.A. No. 200.

Literature: Collins, W. (1848), II, 267-269.

Reviews: *Art-Union* 1845, 184; *Athenaeum*, 10 May 1845, 466; *Illustrated London News*, No. 158, Vol. 6, 10 May, 1845, 294.

Engravings: Mezzotint by Charles Eden Wagstaff, c. 1845, published 22 June 1846, (BM 1859, 0806.408).

289. Sun rise, a scene at Ischia (1837-1846) (fig. 3.15)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 35.6 cm.

Inscriptions: 'W. Collins' (lower left)

Provenance: 1846, Richard Colls; ... 1960's, with Lower Nupend Gallery, Malvern, when acquired by a Worcestershire private collector; 2018, sold by that collector or their estate at Brightwells, Leominster, 15 November 2018, lot 584, when bought by the present owner.

Exhibited: Not exhibited.

Literature: William Collins, Notebook II, f. 22^r.

PART B : sketches not currently associated with completed oil paintings

PA 49. Sketch for a scene at Alum Bay on the Isle of Wight (1827) (fig. 3.17)

Present whereabouts: Private collection.

Oil on canvas, laid on board, 26/25 x 25 cm.

Provenance: Possibly lot 125 in the posthumous Collins sale, as *Shrimpers Returning*; ... ; 2019, Dukes, Dorchester, 17 October 2019, lot 704, as *Juvenile Shrimpers, Deal*, when acquired by the present owner

FIGURE 1.1

William Mulready, *The Rattle* (1808), oil on canvas laid on panel, 37.5 x 33.7 cm. Tate Britain.



FIGURE 1.2

William Mulready, *A Carpenter's Shop and Kitchen* (1808), oil on canvas, 98 x 75cm.
Whereabouts unknown.

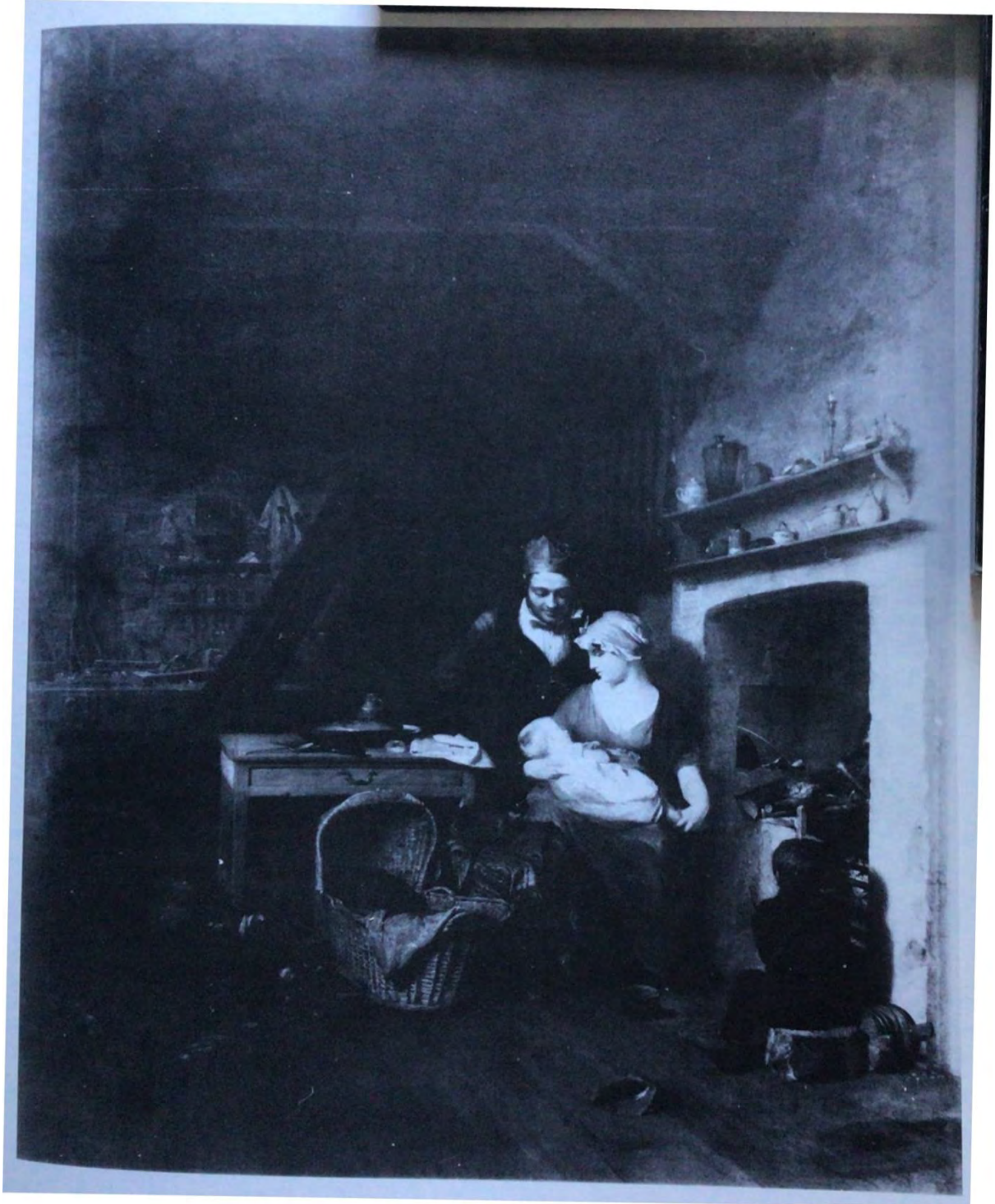


FIGURE 1.3

William Collins, *Boys Bargaining for a Bird's Nest* (1809), oil on canvas, 53.9 x 66.8cm.
Whereabouts unknown. [CAT.38]



FIGURE 1.4

William Collins, *The Young Fifer* (1810), oil on canvas, 75.6 x 63 cm. Dunrobin Castle, Sutherland, Scotland. [CAT. 61]



FIGURE 1.5

David Wilkie, *The Blind Fiddler* (1806), oil on mahogany panel, 57.8 x 79.4 cm. Tate Britain.



FIGURE 1.6

Engraving by Henry Chawner Shenton (1830), after William Collins, *The Tempting Moment* (1810), oil on canvas, size not known. Whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 65]

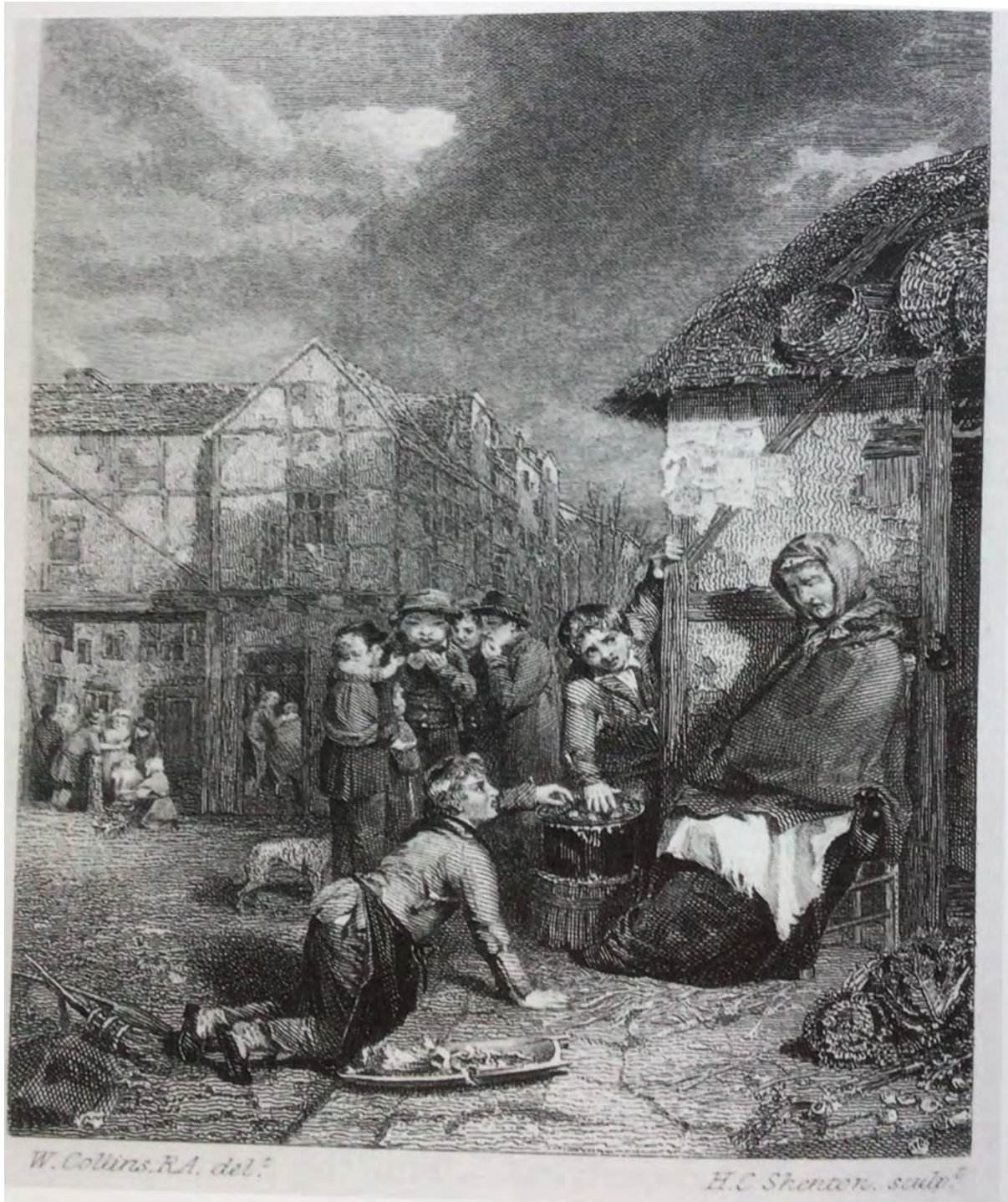


FIGURE 1.7

Jan Steen, *The effects of intemperance* (c. 1663-5), oil on panel, 76 x 106.5 cm. York, York Museums Trust (on loan from the National Gallery, London).



FIGURE 1.8

William Collins, *The Weary Trumpeter, or Juvenile Mischief* (1811), oil on canvas, 53.3 x 66 cm. Whereabouts unknown. [CAT.70]



[33]

FIGURE 1.9

William Collins, *May Day* (1811), oil on canvas, 94 x 111.8 cm. New Haven, Yale Center for British Art. [CAT. 72]



FIGURE 1.10

William Collins, *Children playing with puppies* (1812), oil on canvas, 74.2 x 62 cm. Russell-Cotes Museum & Art Gallery, Bournemouth. [CAT. 74]



FIGURE 1.11

Thomas Gaugain after William Hamilton, *A visit to Chloe* and *A visit to Puss* (both 1789).



FIGURE 1.12

William Collins, *Children playing with puppies* (1812). Detail showing the group of children on the left.



FIGURE 1.13

William Collins, early oil sketch related to *Children playing with puppies*, 1811, oil on canvas, 22.8 x 30.5cm. Private collection.



FIGURE 1.14

William Collins, *Children playing with puppies* (1812). Detail showing the group of children on the right.



FIGURE 1.15

William Collins, *Children playing with puppies* (1812). Detail showing the middle group.



FIGURE 1.16

William Collins, *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* (1812), oil on canvas, 93 x 80 cm. Private collection. [CAT. 78]



FIGURE 1.17

William Collins, *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* (1812), detail of the mourners.



FIGURE 1.18

William Collins, *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* (1812), detail of the gravediggers.



FIGURE 1.19

William Collins, *The Burial Place of a Favourite Bird* (1812), detail of the landscape.



FIGURE 1.20

William Collins, *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (first version, 1813), oil on canvas, 77 X 98 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 79]



FIGURE 1.21

William Collins, Preliminary oil sketch for *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (first version, 1813). Oil on canvas, 36 x 45cm. City of London, Guildhall Art Gallery.



FIGURE 1.22

William Collins, *The Disposal of a Favourite Lamb* (second version, 1813), oil on canvas, 53.5 x 66.5 cm. Rochdale, Touchstones. [CAT. 80]



FIGURE 1.23

William Mulready, *The Wolf and the Lamb* (c.1819-20), 1820, R.A. No. 106, oil on panel, 60 x 51.1 cm. Royal Collection.



FIGURE 1.24

Attributed to William Collins, sketch for a group in *Half-holiday Muster* (1815, R.A. No. 307; 1816, B.I. No. 12), oil on panel, 21.5 x 17 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 103S]



FIGURE 1.25

William Collins, *Departure of the Diligence from Rouen* (1818), 1818, R.A. No. 84, oil on canvas, 90 x 75 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 127]



FIGURE 1.26

Charles Eden Wagstaff, mezzotint after William Collins, *Fetching the Doctor*, (1845), 1845, R.A. No. 200, British Museum, 1859, 0806.408, 544 x 658mm. The whereabouts of the original painting is currently unknown. [CAT. 278]



FIGURE 2.1

William Collins, *Forenoon* (1814), oil on canvas, 79.5 x 92.5 cm. Bury Museum & Art Gallery (as *The Minnow Catchers*). [CAT. 93]



FIGURE 2.2

William Collins, *Birdcatchers – Morning*(1814), oil on canvas, 98 x 123.5 cm. Bowood House, Wiltshire. [CAT. 94]



FIGURE 2.3

William Collins, *Portraits of Master and Miss Martin and Master Meyer playing at 'Beat my neighbour'* (1817), oil on canvas or panel, size stated in 1864 to be 16 x 22 inches. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 122]

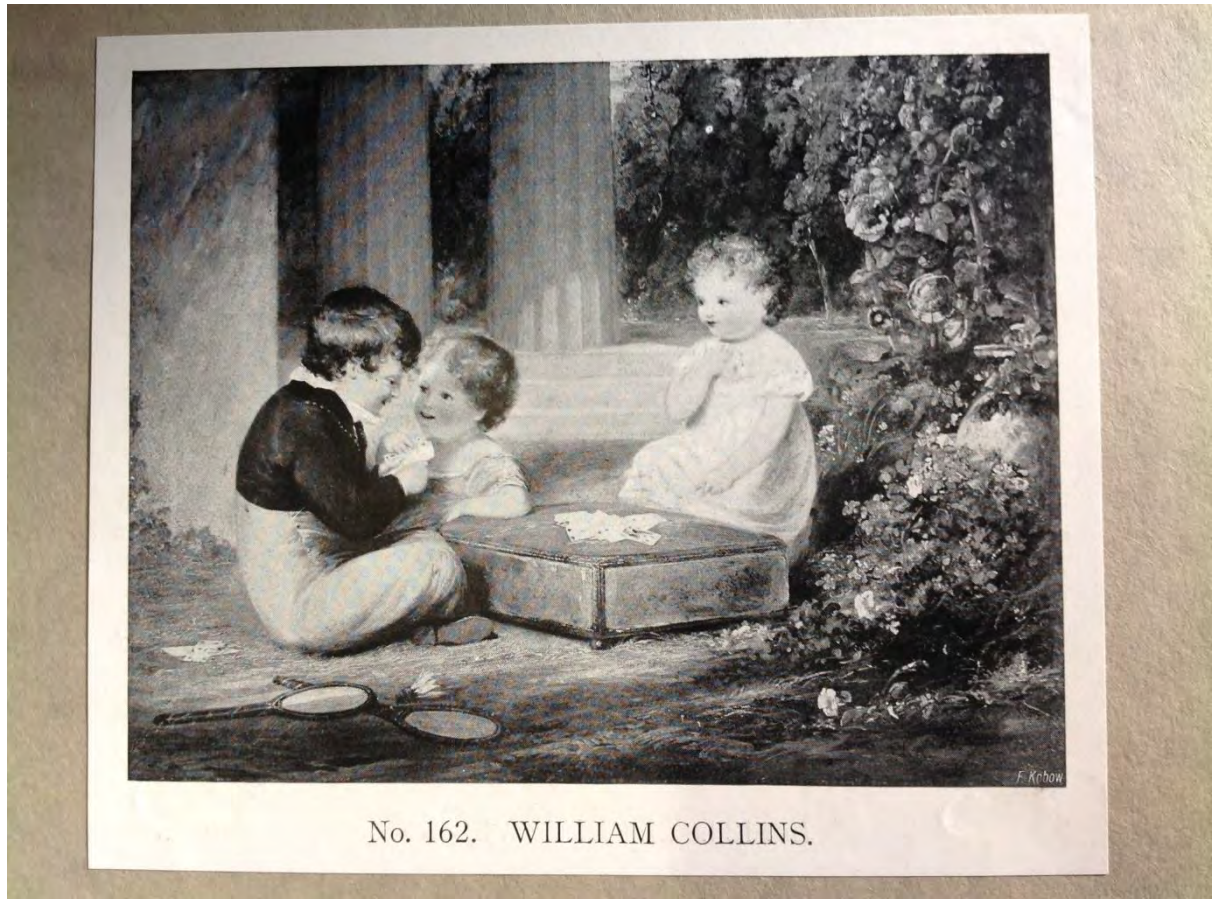


FIGURE 2.4

William Collins, *The Bird's Nest* (1817), oil on canvas, 45.7 x 35.6 cm. Private collection. [CAT. 125]



FIGURE 2.5

William Collins, *plein air* sketch for *The Cherry Seller* (July 1823), oil on millboard, 21.6 x 27.3 cm. Private collection. [CAT. 166S]



FIGURE 2.6

William Collins, repetition of *The Cherry Seller* (1824), oil on canvas, 69 x 89.5 cm. Bury Art Gallery & Museum. [CAT. 173]



FIGURE 2.7
William Collins, detail of *The Cherry Seller* (1824).



FIGURE 2.8

William Collins, *Scene on the Brent* (1822), Oil on canvas, 46 x 58.5 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 158]



FIGURE 2.9

William Collins, *Portrait of Sara Coleridge as 'The Highland Girl'* (1818), oil on canvas, size not known. Present whereabouts not known. [CAT. 131]



FIGURE 2.10

William Collins, *A Mill in Cumberland*, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 142.2 cm. Present whereabouts not known. [CAT. 132]



FIGURE 2.11

William Collins, *Scene in Borrowdale, Cumberland* (1821), oil on canvas, 77 x 65 cm. Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery, City of London. [CAT. 149]



FIGURE 2.12

William Collins, *Scene in Borrowdale, Cumberland* (1823), oil on canvas, 86.3 x 111.7 cm.
Royal Holloway College, Egham. [CAT. 159]



FIGURE 2.13

William Collins, *Portraits of Lords Chas. & Thos. Pelham Clinton, twin sons of His Grace the Duke of Newcastle* (1818-19), oil on panel, 43.8 x 35.2 cm. Private collection. [CAT. 134]



FIGURE 2.14

Johann Zoffany, *The Reverend Randall Burroughs and his son Ellis* (1769), oil on canvas, 71 x 91 cm. Paris, Louvre.



FIGURE 2.15

Sir David Wilkie, *The Cut Finger* (1809), oil on panel, 34.3 x 46 cm. Private collection.



FIGURE 2.16

William Collins, preliminary sketch for *Taking out a Thorn* (1827-8), oil on panel, 13 x 16.5 cm. Nottingham Museum and Art Gallery. [CAT. 190S]



FIGURE 2.17

Louis Marvy (1815-1850), after William Collins, *Taking out a Thorn* (1828). British Museum, 1855,1208.6.



FIGURE 2.18

William Collins, *The Nutting Party* (1830-31), oil on canvas, 69 x 58 cm. Guildhall Museum and Art Gallery, City of London. [CAT. 205]



FIGURE 2.19

Edward Finden, after William Collins, *Happy as a King* (1835-36), British Museum 1847,0811.7 The size and present whereabouts of the original painting are at present unknown. [CAT. 233]



FIGURE 2.20

William Collins, Repetition of *Happy as a King* (1836), oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm. Tate Britain. [CAT. 237]



FIGURE 2.21

William Collins, *Portraits of the children of H. Rice, Esq.* (1824), oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm.
Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 167]



FIGURE 2.22

John Linnell, *Feeding the Rabbits* (1831), after William Collins, *Portraits of the children of H. Rice, Esq*, 455 x 355 mm. British Museum, 1847,0811.9.



FIGURE 2.23

Thomas Landseer, after Edwin Landseer, *Children with Rabbits* (1839). British Museum 1931,0618.22, proof before letters, 1842.



FIGURE 2.24

William Collins, *Sunday* (1835-36), oil on canvas, 81.3 x 106.7 cm. Tate Britain. [CAT. 232]



FIGURE 2.25

William Collins, *Cottage Hospitality* (1834), oil on canvas, 71 x 91.5 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 223]



FIGURE 2.26

William Collins, 1844 copy of *Cottage Hospitality* (1834), oil on canvas, 70.8 x 91.1 cm.
Haworth Art Gallery, Accrington. [CAT. 275]



FIGURE 2.27

William Redmore Bigg, *A Lady and her Children relieving a Distressed Cottager*, oil on canvas, 75.2 x 90.5 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



FIGURE 2.28

William Mulready, *Train Up a Child in the Way he should go; and When He Is Old He Will Not Depart from It* (1841), oil on canvas, 64 x 77.5 cm. Paris, Louvre.



FIGURE 2.29

William Collins, *Hop pickers (children)* (1825), oil on canvas, 52.7 x 66 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 180]



FIGURE 2.30

William Collins, *Scene in a Kentish hop garden* (1829), oil on panel, 39.1 x 49.5 cm. Formerly at Arundel Castle, but currently at the private London address of the Duke of Norfolk. [CAT. 189]



FIGURE 3.1

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Sun Rising through Vapour* (1809), Oil on canvas 69.2 x 101.6 cm. The Barber Institute of Fine Art, Birmingham.



FIGURE 3.2

William Collins, *A Fish Auction on the south coast of Devonshire* (1823), Oil on canvas, 83 x 114.5 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 160]



FIGURE 3.3

William Collins, *A Fish Auction on the south coast of Devonshire* (1823). Detail of the group attending the auction.



FIGURE 3.4

Richard Parkes Bonington, *French Coast with Fisherfolk* (c.1824), Oil on canvas, 64.3 x 96.7cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 3.5

William Collins, *Buying Fish on the Beach, Hazy Morning* (1825), Oil on canvas, 87 x 111.5cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 175]



FIGURE 3.6

William Collins, *Buying Fish on the Beach* (1825). Detail of the two adults.



FIGURE 3.7

William Collins, *Buying Fish on the Beach* (1825). Detail of the two children.



FIGURE 3.8

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The Harbour of Dieppe* (1825), Oil on canvas 173.7 x 225.4 cm. The Frick Collection, New York.



FIGURE 3.9

By or after William Collins, *Mussel gatherers* (1829), pastel on paper, 42 x 57.5 cm.
Touchstones, Rochdale. [CAT. 200S(1)]



FIGURE 3.10

William Collins, *Les Causeuses* (1830), oil on panel, 63.5 x 81.3 cm. V&A, London. [CAT. 201]



FIGURE 3.11

William Collins, *Waiting the arrival of fishing-boats, coast of France* (1830), oil on canvas, 70 x 90 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 202]



FIGURE 3.12

William Collins, Preliminary sketch (1829), related to *Muscle Gatherers*, graphite on paper, 7.5 x 11.1 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 200S(2)]



FIGURE 3.13

William Collins, *Les Causeuses* (1830). Detail of the conversing women.



FIGURE 3.14

William Collins, *Ischia, Bay of Naples* (1841), oil on canvas, 44 x 59.5 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 246]



FIGURE 3.15

William Collins, *Sun rise a scene at Ischia* (1838 and 1846), oil on canvas, 25.5 x 35.6 cm.
Private collection. [CAT. 289]



FIGURE 3.16

William Collins, *A Fish Auction on the south coast of Devonshire* (1823). Detail showing the rock formations off Froward Point.



FIGURE 3.17

William Collins, Preliminary sketch for a scene at Alum Bay, Isle of Wight, oil on canvas backed on to board, 25/26 x 25 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. PA. 49]



FIGURE 3.18

Photograph, from the beach at Alum Bay looking across to the Needles, September 2020.



FIGURES 3.19

Photographs of the beach at Alum Bay, from the spurs of rock to the Needles. September 2020.



FIGURE 3.20

William Collins, *Scene in Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight* (1828), oil on canvas, size unavailable. London, private residence of the Duke of Norfolk. [CAT. 189]



FIGURE 3.21

Photograph of the chalk cliffs at the south-west of the Isle of Wight, with Freshwater Bay at the lowest point. September 2020.



FIGURE 3.22

Photograph of a grey spur of rock on the beach at Brighstone, Isle of Wight. September 2020.



FIGURE 3.23

William Collins, *Welsh Peasants Crossing the Sands to Market* (1834-35), oil on canvas, 72 x 107 cm. Guildhall Art Gallery, London. [CAT. 227]



FIGURE 3.24

William Collins, *The Reluctant Departure* (1815), oil on canvas, 88 x 112.4 cm. Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. [CAT. 105]



FIGURE 3.25

William Collins, *Fishermen on the Lookout* (1819), oil on canvas, 92 x 122 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 133]



FIGURE 3.26

William Collins, *Clovelly, North Devon* (1822), oil on canvas, 88.5 x 122.9 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 153]



FIGURE 3.27

William Collins, *Fishermen Leaving Home for the Night* (1825-6), oil on canvas, 81.3 x 106.7 cm. Sudeley Castle, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. [CAT. 181]



FIGURE 3.28

William Collins, *The Mariner's Widow* (1835), oil on canvas, 62.7 x 76.3 cm. Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston. [CAT. 228]



FIGURE 3.29

William Collins, *Leaving Home* (1836), oil on canvas, 71.7 x 91.4 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 234]



FIGURE 3.30

William Collins, *Summer Moonlight* (1828-9), oil on canvas, 71 x 91 cm. Private Collection.
[CAT. 197]



FIGURE 3.31

William Collins, *Summer Moonlight* (1828-9). Detail of the children.



FIGURE 3.32

William Collins, *Summer Moonlight* (1828-9). Detail of the adults.



FIGURE 3.33

Henry Howard, R.A. *Girl picking up shells on the coast* (1810), 76.2 x 63.5 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.



30 x 25 inches

£450

A MESSAGE FROM THE SEA

1769 HENRY HOWARD, R.A. 1847

Exhibited Royal Academy 1810

FIGURE 3.34

Engraving by William Say, after Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Marine Dabblers* (c.1808), published June 1811 as Plate 29, Part VI of *Liber Studiorum*, 20.8 x 28.9 cm.



FIGURE 3.35

Henry Thomson, *A group on the seashore* (portraits of part of the family of Earl Grey) with a favourite ass. Formerly at Howick Grange, Northumberland.

Mellon Centre Neg No: 73/0424



Howick Grange

FIGURE 3.36

William Collins, *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1816), oil on canvas, 86 x 113 cm. London, Guildhall Museum & Art Gallery. [CAT. 110]



FIGURE 3.37

William Collins, preliminary sketch for *Shrimp Boys at Cromer* (1815), oil on panel, 14.9 x 18.3 cm. Private collection. [CAT. 110S]



FIGURE 3.38

William Collins, *Scene on the Coast of Norfolk* (1818), oil on canvas, 89.7 x 115.4 cm. Royal collection. [CAT. 128]



FIGURE 3.39

William Collins, *Preparing for a Voyage* (1817), oil on canvas, 64.3 x 80.6 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 119]



FIGURE 3.40

William Collins, *Seaford, Sussex* (1844), oil on canvas, 69.9 x 92.7 cm. London, V&A. [CAT. 270]



FIGURE 3.41

Joseph Phelps, after William Collins, *Children examining the Contents of a Net* (1826, engraved 1829 as *Searching the Net*, 28.4 x 32.5 cm, BM 1847,0811.3). [CAT. 182]



FIGURE 3.42

William Collins, *Prawn Fishing* (1829), oil on panel, 43.5 x 58.4 cm. London, Tate Britain. [CAT. 195]



FIGURE 3.43

William Collins, *The Young Shrimp Catchers* (1824), oil on panel, 31.2 x 40.5 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 171]



FIGURE 3.44

William Collins, *Prawn Fishers at Hastings* (1825), oil on canvas, 91 x 116.1 cm. Royal Collection. [CAT. 179]



FIGURE 3.45

William Collins, *Returning from the haunts of the sea fowl* (1833), oil on canvas, 127.3 x 102cm. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery. [CAT. 218]



FIGURE 3.46

William Collins, *Scene at Ventnor* (1845), oil on canvas, 63.5 x 91.4 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 277]



FIGURE 3.47

Richard Parkes Bonington, *A Picardy coast scene with children –Sunrise* (1826), oil on canvas, 43.2 x 54 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.



FIGURE 3.48

Richard Parkes Bonington, *On the côte d'Opale, Picardy* (c.1826-7), oil on canvas, 66.2 x 99 cm. Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire.



FIGURE 3.49

Joseph Mallord William Turner, *The New Moon; or, 'I've lost My Boat, You shan't have Your Hoop'*, oil on panel, 65.4 x 85.3 cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 3.50

William Collins, *Naples; Young Lazzaroni playing the game of Arravoglio* (1839), oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 240]



FIGURE 3.51

William Collins, *The Morning Bath* (1831), oil on canvas, 27 3/4 x 36 1/4 inches. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 207]

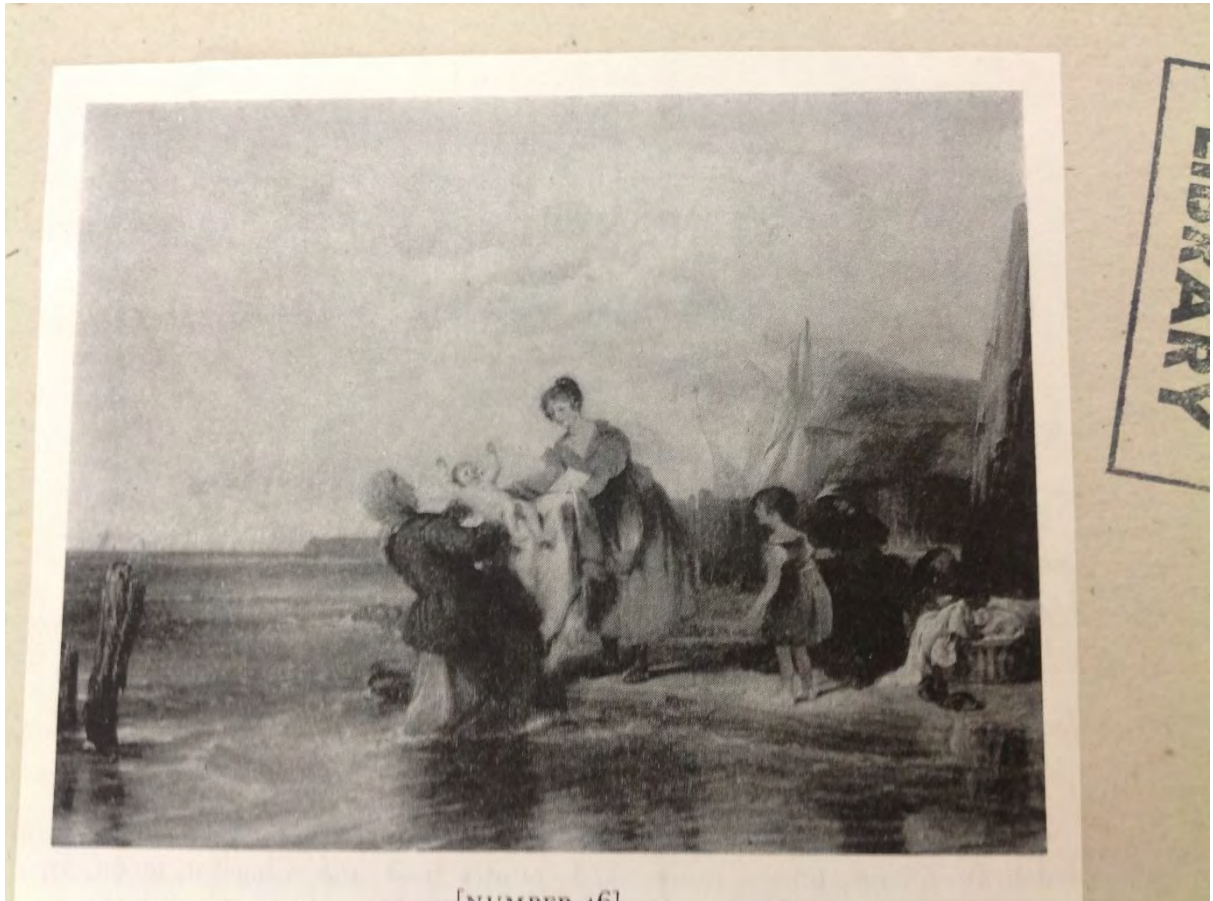


FIGURE 3.52

Benjamin West, *The Bathing Place at Ramsgate* (1780s), oil on canvas, 35.5 x 44.5 cm. Center for British Art, Yale, Paul Mellon Collection.



FIGURE 3.53

William Collins, study for *A Windy Day* (1842-43), graphite and watercolour on paper, 23.5 x 31.7cm. Private collection. [CAT. 261]



FIGURE 4.1

William Collins, *Rustic Civility* (1832), oil on canvas, 71.6 x 91.7 cm. Chatsworth, Derbyshire (the Devonshire version). [CAT. 212]



FIGURE 4.2

William Collins, *Rustic Civility* (1833), oil on canvas, 45.6 x 61 cm. London, Victoria & Albert Museum. (the Sheepshanks version). [CAT. 222]



FIGURE 4.3

William Collins, *Rustic Civility* (1832). Detail of the children and the dog.



FIGURE 4.4

William Collins, *Sketch of a Boy at Turvey* (1825), oil on panel, 30.5 x 38 cm. Kettering, Alfred East Art Gallery. [CAT. 177]



FIGURE 4.5

William Collins, *The Venturesome Robin* (1831), oil on canvas, 70 x 91 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 208]



FIGURE 4.6

William Mulready, *Returning from the Ale-house* (c.1808-9, and c.1840), oil on canvas, 78.7 x 66 cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 4.7

George Morland *The Door of a Village Inn* (before September 1786), oil on canvas, 104.5 × 126.4 cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 4.8

Thomas Heaphy, *Robbing a Market Girl* (1807), watercolour, 60 x 45.3 cm. New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.



FIGURE 4.9

Thomas Heaphy, *Return from the Baker's* (1808), watercolour, 63.5 x 50 cm. Private collection.



FIGURE 4.10

William Mulready, *The Travelling Druggist* (1825), oil on canvas, 79 x 70 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.

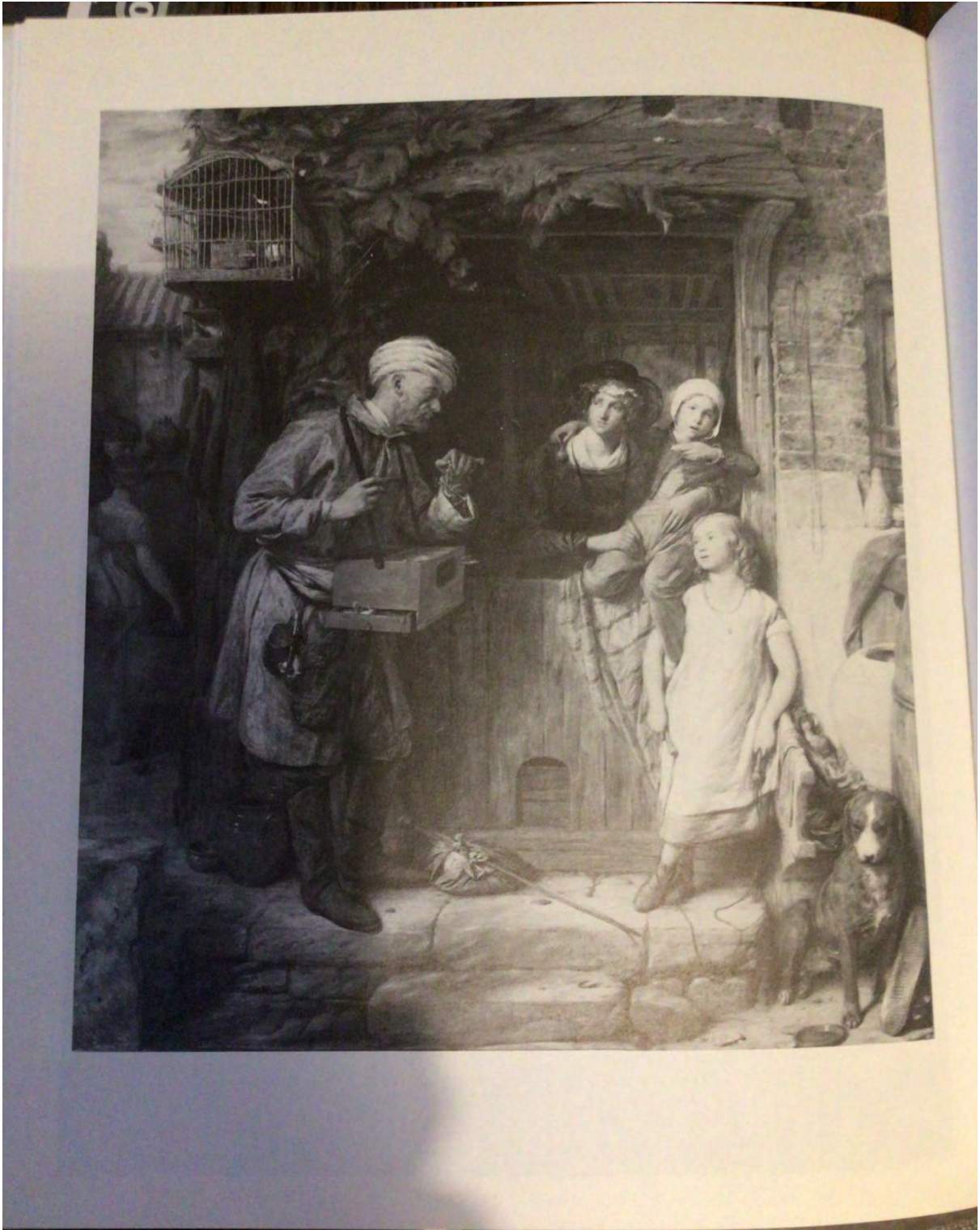


FIGURE 4.11

William Mulready, *The Last In* (1835), oil on panel, 62.2 × 76.2 cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 4.12

Henry James Richter, *A Picture of Youth* (1809), watercolour, 47 x 59 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.



FIGURE 4.13

John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, 1831, oil on canvas, 153.7 x 218.7 cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 4.14

William Collins, *Rustic Civility* (1832). Detail of the engraving made of the Sheepshanks version by John Outrim (1835-36). London, British Museum, 1852,0705.141.



FIGURE 4.15

William Collins, *Rustic Civility* (1832). Detail of the engraving made of the Sheepshanks version by William Luson Thomas (1861). *Illustrated London News*, 16 February 1861, 154.



FIGURE 4.16

William Collins, *Rustic Civility* (1832). Detail of the engraving made of the Sheepshanks version by Charles Cousen (1865). *Art Journal* 1865, facing 234.



FIGURE 4.17

William Collins, *Skittle Players* (1832), oil on canvas, 86 x 110.5 cm. Private collection. [CAT. 213]



FIGURE 4.18

William Collins, *Happy as a King* (second version: 1836), oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm.
London, Tate Britain. [CAT. 237]



FIGURE 4.19

William Collins, *Leaving Home* (1836), Oil on canvas, 71.7 x 91.4 cm. Private Collection. Detail showing the initials 'JB' on the trunk.



FIGURE 4.20

Walter Howell Deverell, *The Irish Vagrants* (1854), oil on canvas, 63.4 x 77.2 cm.
Johannesburg Art Gallery.



FIGURE 5.1

Sir Augustus Wall Callcott, *An Italian Lake*, oil on canvas, 118.5 x 178 cm. Newton Abbot, Bradley Manor (National Trust).



FIGURE 5.2

Thomas Uwins, R.A., *A Neapolitan boy decorating the head of his innamorata at the Festa of the Madonna del Arco* (1840) R.A, 1840. No. 89, oil on panel, 35.5 x 26.6 cm. London, Victoria and Albert Museum.



FIGURE 5.3

Penry Williams, *Festa of the Madonna del Arco* (1836), R.A. 1837, No. 487, oil on canvas, 91 x 191 cm. Cardiff, City Hall.



FIGURE 5.4

Charles Lock Eastlake, *The salutation to the aged friar*, 1840 (1840, R.A. No. 61), oil on canvas, 94.6 x 113 cm. Formerly New York, Forbes collection.



FIGURE 5.5

William Collins, *Poor travellers at the door of a Capuchin convent, near Vico, Bay of Naples* (1839), 1839 R.A. No. 90, oil on canvas, 71 X 91.5 cm. National Museums Liverpool, Sudley House. [CAT. 241]



FIGURE 5.6

David Wilkie, *The Parish Beadle* (1820-23), oil on panel, 59.7 x 89.5 cm. London, Tate Britain.



FIGURE 5.7

John Rogers Herbert, *The monastery in the fourteenth century: boar hunters refreshed at St Augustines, Canterbury* (1840), 1840 R.A. No. 287, oil on canvas, 138 x 209.5 cm. Princeton University Art Museum.



FIGURE 5.8

William Collins, *Ave Maria* (1840), 1840, R.A. No. 115, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 76.2 cm. Present whereabouts unknown. [CAT. 243]



FIGURE 5.9

Frederick Stacpoole and Thomas Lewis Atkinson, after Edwin Landseer, *untitled* but known as *The Good Shepherd* or *Shepherd's Prayer* (1845), 1845 R.A. No. 141. Present whereabouts unknown.



FIGURE 5.10

William Collins, *The World, or the Cloister?* (1843), 1843 R.A. No. 94, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 121.9 cm, approx. Almost certainly in a public collection, presently unidentified.¹ [CAT. 259]



¹ Missing in 1898, when the catalogue in respect of the small version was printed, but evidently resurfaced (colour poster available online). The 1898 catalogue refers to the size of the original version as 'some 30 by 48 inches'.

FIGURE 5.11

William Collins, *The World, or the Cloister?* (*A small copy of the Cloisters*) (1845), oil on panel, 38.7 x 31.7 cm. Leeds City Art Gallery. [CAT. 274]



FIGURE 5.12

Charles Lock Eastlake, *The Visit to the Nun* (1844), 1846 R.A. No. 111, oil on canvas, 52.4 x 69.1 cm. Royal Collection.



FIGURE 6.1

Franz Francken I, *Christ among the Doctors in the Temple* (1587), oil on panel, 250 x 220 cm (centre panel). Antwerp, Cathedral of Our Lady.



FIGURE 6.2

Lithograph by Karl Koch published in Munich in 1839, after Johann Friedrich Overbeck, *Christ disputing with the Doctors in the Temple*, 46.2 x 55.8 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007.109.



FIGURE 6.3

Albrecht Dürer, *Christ among the Doctors* (1506), oil on panel, 65 x 80 cm. Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.



FIGURE 6.4

Bernardino Luini, *Christ among the Doctors* (c.1515-30), oil on panel, 72.4 x 85.7 cm. London, National Gallery.



FIGURE 6.5

William Collins, *The Two Disciples at Emmaus* (1840-41), 1841 R.A. No. 106, oil on canvas, 76 x 63.2 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 249]



FIGURE 6.6

Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Supper at Emmaus* (1654), etching, burin and drypoint (first state), 216 x 16.5 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 41.1.58.



FIGURE 6.7

Cries of London, No. 7, *Old Cloaths, any Old Cloaths*, Henry Merke, after Thomas Rowlandson, London: R. Ackermann, 4 May 1799.



FIGURE 6.8

William Collins, *The Two Disciples at Emmaus*. Detail of fish and bread.

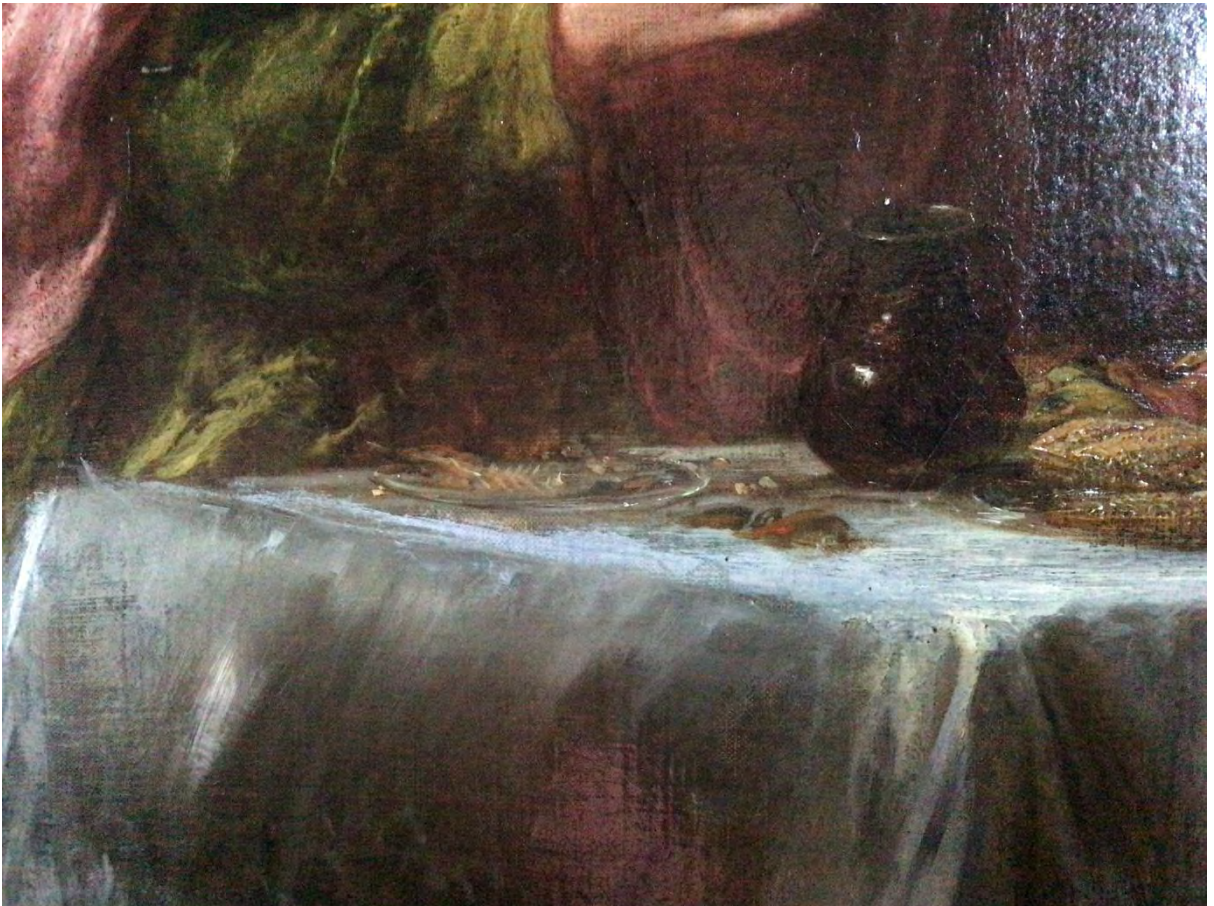


FIGURE 6.9

William Collins, *The Two Disciples at Emmaus*. Detail of bread and figs.



FIGURE 6.10

William Collins, *The Virgin and Child* (1843), (1843 R.A. No. 309), oil on canvas, 83 x 64.5 cm. Private Collection. [CAT. 263]



FIGURE 6.11

Andrea Mantegna, *Virgin of the Quarry* (1488-90), tempera on panel, 32 x 29.6 cm. Florence, Uffizi.



FIGURE 6.12

After Benozzo Gozzoli, *Le Tavole de la Legge*, in Carlo Lasinio, *Pitture a Fresco Del Campo Santo Di Pisa*, Florence , 1812.



FIGURE 6.13

George Vertue, after Pierre Berchet, *David Bruce*. London, Library of the Royal Academy of Arts, bound volume of prints : 'British School: I'.



FIGURE 6.14

Margaret Sarah Carpenter, *Portrait of a Young Lady, possibly the artist's daughter Henrietta* (1834), oil on canvas, 56.2 x 46.3 cm. Present whereabouts unknown.



FIGURE 6.15

Margaret Sarah Carpenter, *Portrait of Mrs. Bird* (pair with Mr. Bird), oil on canvas, 73 x 61cm. Present whereabouts unknown.



FIGURE 6.16

William Collins, *The Virgin and Child* (1843), showing the painting as currently framed, following the original curved sight line of the top part of the slip frame.



FIGURE 6.17

William Collins, *The Virgin and Child* (1843), detail of the red and white flowers on the left hand side.



FIGURE 6.18

William Collins, *The Virgin and Child* (1843), detail of the red flowers on the right hand side.

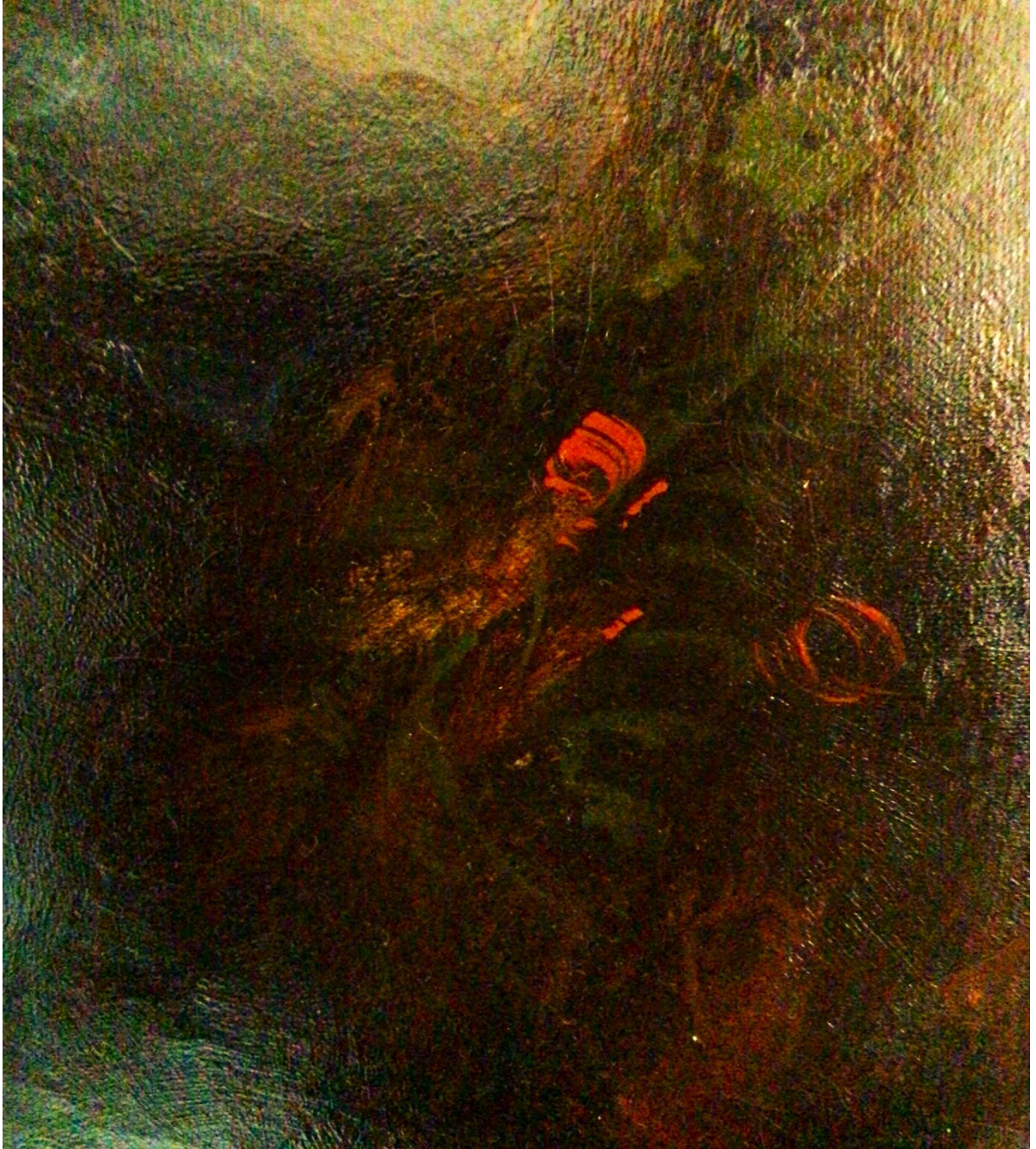


FIGURE 6.19

William Collins, *A girl of Sorrento, spinning* (1843 R.A. No. 457) oil on canvas, 91.3 X 71.1 cm. Southport, Atkinson Art Gallery. [CAT. 260]



FIGURE 6.20

William Collins, *The World, or the Cloister?* (1843), 1843 R.A. No. 94, oil on canvas, 76.2 x 121.9 cm approx. Detail showing the young woman.



FIGURE 6.21

William Collins, *The Virgin and Child* (1843), detail of the head of the Virgin, and William Collins, *A girl of Sorrento, spinning* (1843), detail of the girl's head.



FIGURE 6.22

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848-9), oil on canvas, 83.2 x 65.4 cm. London, Tate.



FIGURE 6.23

William Dyce, illustration for William Whewell's poem 'The Spinning Maiden's Cross', in *Poems and Pictures: A collection of Ballads, Songs and Other Poems with one hundred Illustrations on Wood by English Artists*, London, 1846, 126.



FIGURE 6.24

William Dyce, *Joash shooting the Arrow of Deliverance* (1844), oil on canvas, 76.3 x 109.5 cm. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle.



FIGURE 6.25

William Holman Hunt, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (1854-60), oil on canvas, 85.7 x 141 cm. Birmingham, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.



FIGURE 6.26

William Holman Hunt, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, detail showing the doctors.

