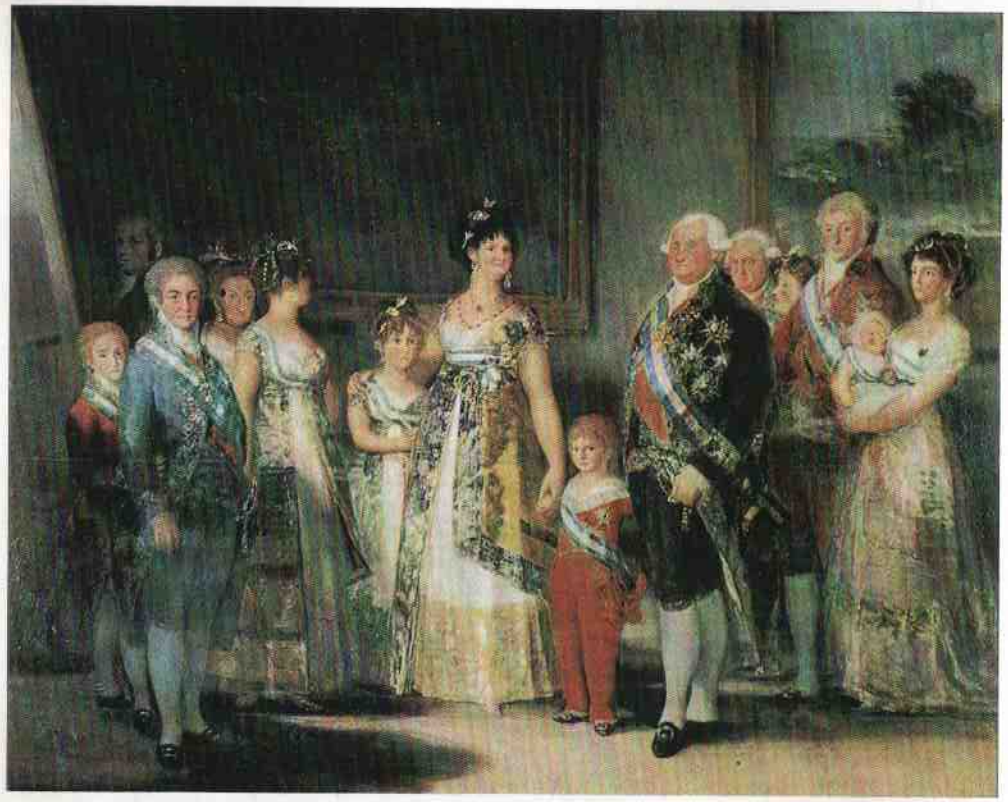
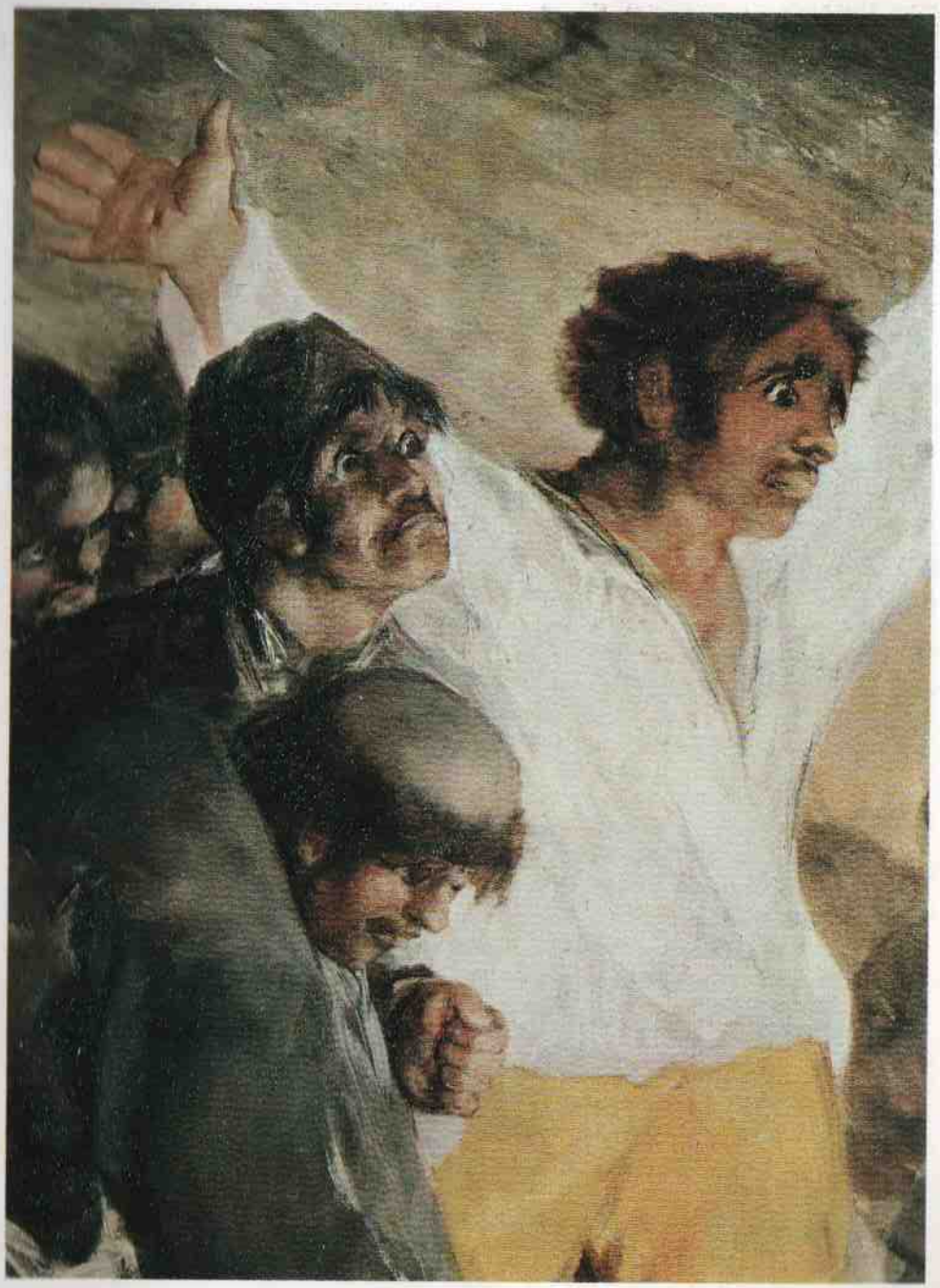


63 GOYA *Charles IV and the Royal Family* 1800

portraits. Thoughts that were only hinted at when he was painting works like the *Duchess of Alba* now appear in full orchestration. When he painted the neglected wife of the dissolute Prime Minister Godoy, he showed her seated in a darkened room, pregnant and cornered, glancing nervously about her like a fieldmouse. With daring expertise he turned his grandest and most
63 formal commission, the life-size portrait of Charles IV and his family, into an exercise in exposure. There is no difficulty in discovering the bluff stupidity of Charles IV in the decorated plum-coloured figure in the right foreground. Nor is there any thought of concealing the overbearing and licentious character of the Queen as she stands in the centre, casting her unlovely face into half profile for the spectator to get a better look. Near the shadows, clothed in blue, is the viperous Ferdinand, who was ready to unseat his father at the bidding of Napoleon and later became one of Spain's most disastrous rulers. Goya himself has borne witness to what he sees by including himself



64 GOYA *Third of May* (detail) 1814

at his easel in the background, no doubt as a tribute to Velazquez's *Las Meninas*. But whereas Velazquez introduces himself to enhance the informal and domestic atmosphere of his royal group, Goya lurks as a disconcerting presence behind the glittering display.

The sheer lack of flattery in this work makes it hard to believe that the artist was not being sarcastic. Yet it does not seem to have caused displeasure. It was accepted and paid for; and, although it was the last official portrait he did for Charles IV, he remained court painter and later painted Ferdinand. Those satisfied with their own appearance and gestures have no reason to see their repetition as character assassination.

Above all the picture is a triumph for Goya's integrity as a reporter in an artistic field in which this is not normally encouraged. This gift was to be tested to the full during the years 1808–14, when Spain was ruled by Napoleon's brother Joseph, and was in a state of continuous and brutal insurrection. Goya himself took no active part in the struggle. He remained in Madrid, swore allegiance to Joseph, painted French officers, and even received Joseph's award, the Royal Order of Spain, in 1811. However, he witnessed enough of the atrocities, enough murder, rape and senseless butchery, to feel compelled to make his own record. As with the *Caprichos*, his chosen medium was etching; though this time the resulting prints, the *Disasters of War*, were not published. Perhaps they represented too deep an indictment of war itself to be acceptable to either side.

For his contemporaries, Goya's view of the war was summed up in two monumental paintings, done in 1814, which commemorate the events that gave birth to the Spanish resistance movement. On 2 May 1808, when French troops were already in occupation of Madrid, the populace in the Puerta del Sol area rioted; in the tumult some of the French were killed. The revenge taken was out of all proportion. During the same night hundreds of civilians – for the most part innocent – were arrested and shot.

Even before Ferdinand returned to Spain, Goya applied to the Regency for financial aid to paint these two great works. No doubt his motive was political; for it was a shrewd move to express such nationalist sympathy at a time when he was being asked awkward questions about that medal he had received from Joseph. Yet they are none the less sincere. Goya was in Madrid when the events took place and, even if he did not witness them, he experienced their consequences. In the *Second of May* he showed a moment of compulsive violence as Spaniards attacked the Mamelukes, the hated Egyptian mercenaries of the French army, dragging them from their horses and stabbing them to death. The expressions on the assassins' faces suggest an act less of heroism than of desperation; and the sharp flashes of colour in the crowd, with the steep perspective of the street, heighten the frenzy.

65 GOYA *Third of May* 1814

The *Second of May* is perhaps the finest of all the battle scenes of the Napoleonic wars; the *Third of May* is beyond classification. No execution scene has ever revealed this extreme moment with such barefaced honesty. What is described here is the heroism of the final and hopeless gesture; of the outstretched arms and staring features of the white-shirted victim as he is mown down by a faceless firing-squad. Unlike the *Horatii*, he is not about to save his country. Unlike *Marat*, his death is absurd, and he knows it. 65 64 38 39

Everything hangs on his gesture. The massacre takes place without witnesses, at the dead of night. There is an unseemly haste in the way the unfortunates are bunched against a wall, with those already killed on one side, and those waiting their turn on the other. The colours are mournful and sombre: black, ochre and olive-green. The only illumination comes from a crude box lantern, turned to expose the victims. Its brightness is met by that of the white-shirted man. And while it is enclosed by the mechanical line of anonymous soldiers, he is the centre of a group of individual people. Some

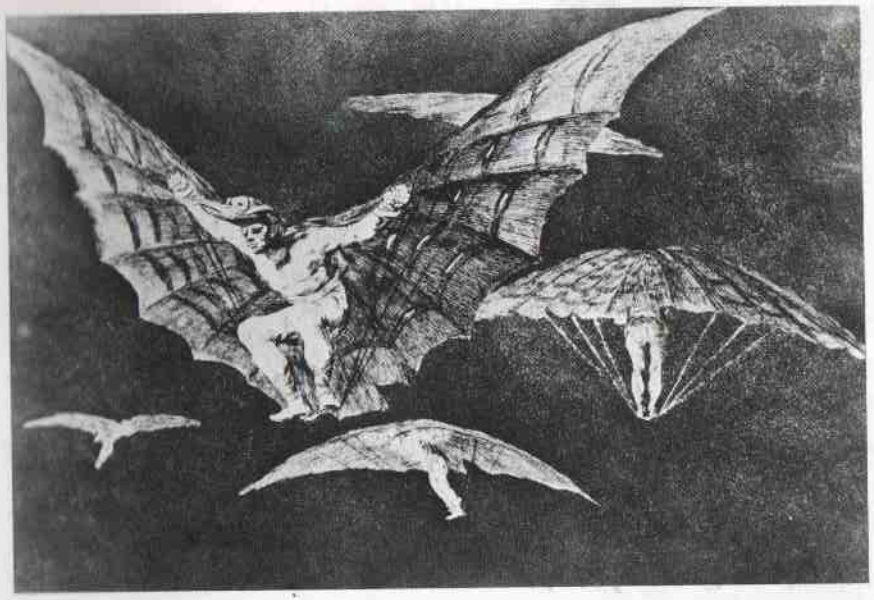
cannot look, some look despite themselves, some stare. But each endures his death in a way that is utterly human.

Goya was reinstated. But by now he was lonely and old, as well as deaf. His wife and many of his closest friends were dead, and he rarely went out in society or painted at court. In 1819 he withdrew to a country house outside Madrid, known, as it happened, as the Quinta del Sordo, 'house of the deaf man'. Here he remained until his departure to Bordeaux in 1823.

66 In a self-portrait of 1815 he examines his features in close-up against a deep brown ground. Both in technique and intention it is close to Rembrandt's portraits of himself in his old age, although what emerges from Goya's face is not ironic resignation but rather a persisting curiosity and energy. Perhaps it is his deafness that makes him stare so hard with his eyes that his mouth hangs slightly open. But the sense of surprise that this conveys is matched by the angle at which he peers round the side of his canvas.

Once more a renewed bout of illness seems to have stimulated his fantasy. 67 *The Disparates* are more curious and dream-like than the *Caprichos*, but also less savagely critical. The themes themselves can often be connected with popular proverbs; Goya was now prepared to accept the force of poetic experience stored up in folk traditions.

66 GOYA *Self-portrait* 1815



67 GOYA *Way of Flying* c.1820

Goya never attempted to have these plates published. Perhaps he used the etching process for its pictorial rather than its reproductive potential; for he had remarkable sympathy for the special qualities of different graphic media. He was the first artist to appreciate the unprecedented freedom of draughtsmanship allowed by the new technique of lithography, and he used it to capture the movement and excitement of the bull-fight in his illustrations to a history of bull-fighting, *Tauromaquia*. For his imaginative visions he preferred the fine lines and deep grounds that could be achieved through his own peculiar combination of etching with aquatint. In *Way of Flying* he gives his wistful aeronauts an insectile delicacy as they flit about their featureless world. 67

Goya's last visions, in the paintings with which he decorated two rooms of the Quinta del Sordo, are 'Black Paintings' both in their macabre subjects and in their sombre colouring. They are executed with a freedom and power that is achieved by only a few artists in their last years – by such men as Michelangelo, Titian and Rembrandt. 68, 69

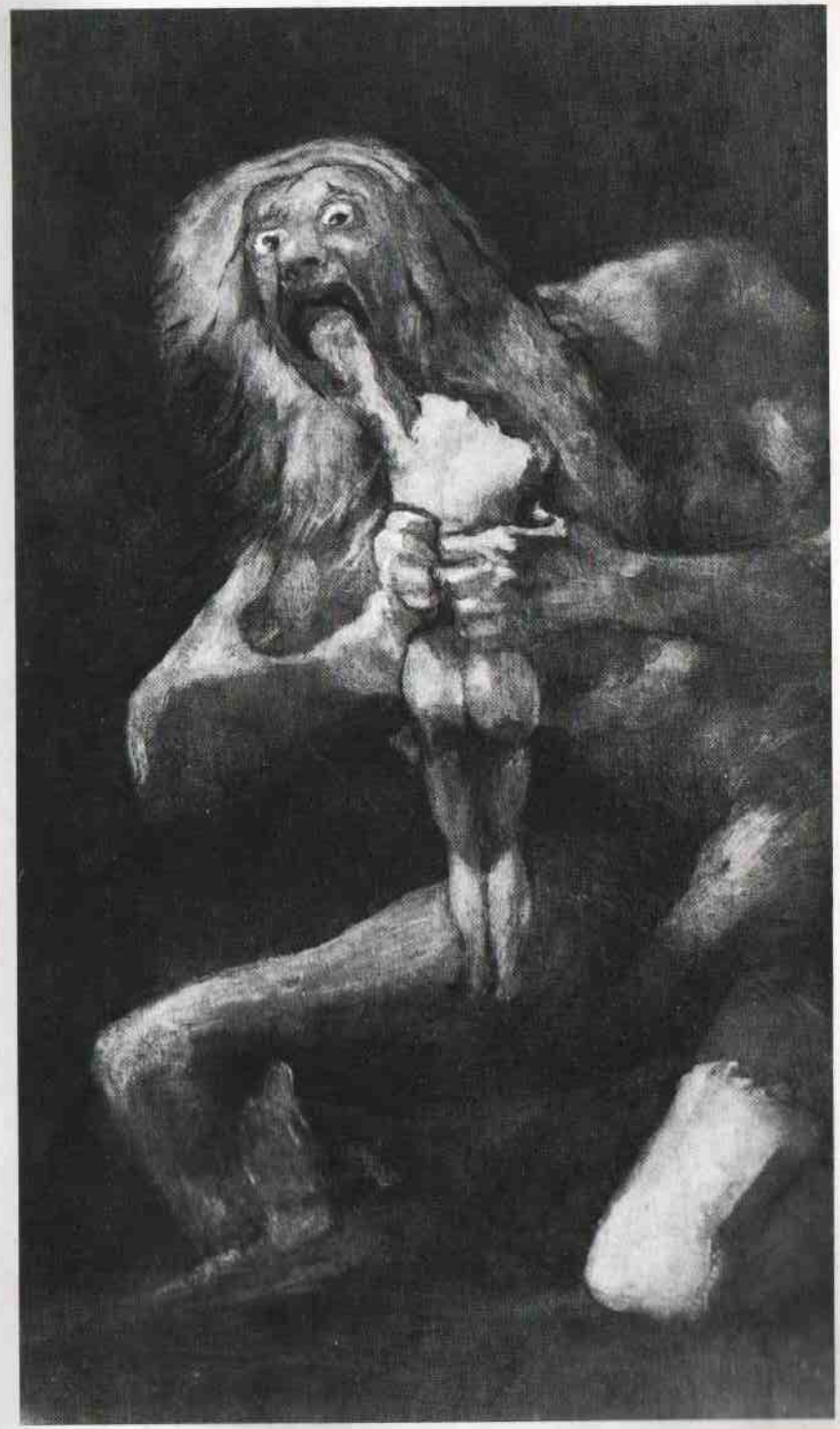
There appears to be no precise programme to the strange mythologies that unfold in them; but there are many points of contact between the works themselves. This must have been even more evident before they were removed from their original location in 1874 to save them from destruction.

68 GOYA *Vision of the Pilgrims of San Isidro* c. 1820–23

Then one could have seen how the scenes in the upper room have the appearance of hallucinations – one shows two giants battling, sunk to the knees in a mountainous landscape, while another has two figures levitating between a sniper and a group of travellers – and how the ones in the room below are darker, more factual and more savage. It was in the latter that he heightened the impact of his subjects by arranging them in contrasting pendants. At one end a youthful full-bodied woman was set against two aged, groping men. On the long walls Christian ritual was compared with
68 that of witchcraft, as the travellers in the *Vision of the Pilgrims of San Isidro* stared open-mouthed towards a *Witches' Sabbath*; and at the other end was the female treachery of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* and the male brutality of
69 *Saturn Devouring One of his Children*. This last is perhaps the most horrifying of these works. Yet, even as Saturn gnaws a mutilated carcass, one can see in his eyes the fear that drove him to commit the horrible act; the fear of being usurped. Goya is seeking to reach beyond myth to human experience.

The 'Black Paintings' have no counterpart in any of the heroic or prophetic art being produced by his contemporaries: perhaps only in music, in the late quartets (1824–26) of Beethoven, was there a comparable exploration of darkness. In many ways these were Goya's last great statement, yet they were not the conclusion of his career. Even in his exile his curiosity remained undiminished. His friend and fellow émigré in Bordeaux, the poet Leandro Fernández de Moratín, described him as 'deaf, old, slow and weak, not knowing a word of French, and so desirous of seeing the world'.

Goya's endurance, like that of Blake, was central to his achievement. For both preserved a sense of humanity that could survive disillusion. With their prophetic and ironic insight they were the first to face a world of passion and absurdity before which conventional heroic art was powerless.



69 GOYA *Saturn Devouring One of his Children* c. 1820–23

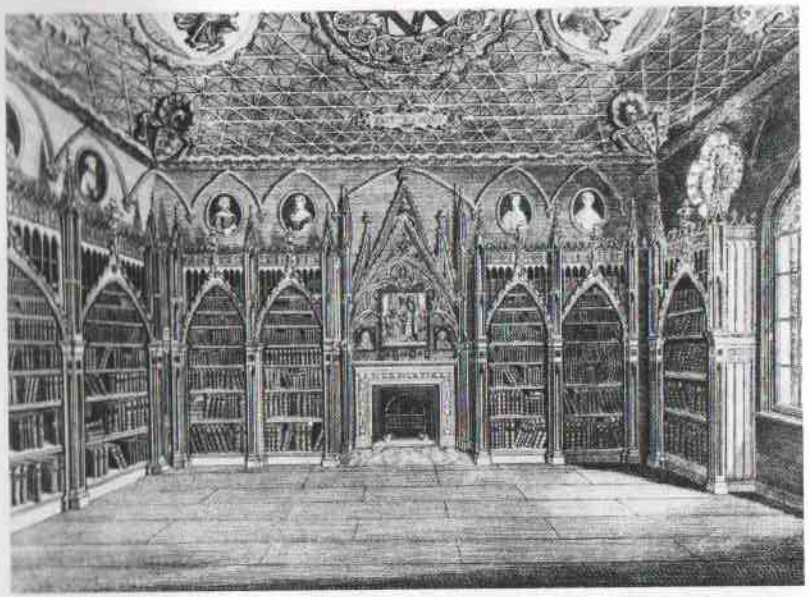
The medieval revival

Dreams and fantasies

By their very name, the Romantics professed a fascination for the Middle Ages. The old romances – censured by the prudish heroine of Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* as 'calculated to *fire* the *imagination* rather than to *inform* the *judgement*' (1740) – became a powerful symbol for those who were seeking to replace rules and taste with inventiveness and enthusiasm; and in the visual arts the fantasy of Gothic and the colourful naïveties of illuminated manuscripts and ancient paintings seemed to offer a comparable release.

This renewed appreciation of the Gothic world bears a superficial resemblance to the growth of interest in other cultures of the past or of distant lands – such as that for Greece or for the Orient. But it was always distinguished from these by its marked ethnic concern: it was presumably for this reason that the medieval was always strongest in Northern Europe. Already by the middle of the eighteenth century, the perennial curiosity of the antiquarian for medieval remains was being supplemented by an

70 BERTHÉLEMY *Retaking of Paris from the English* 1787

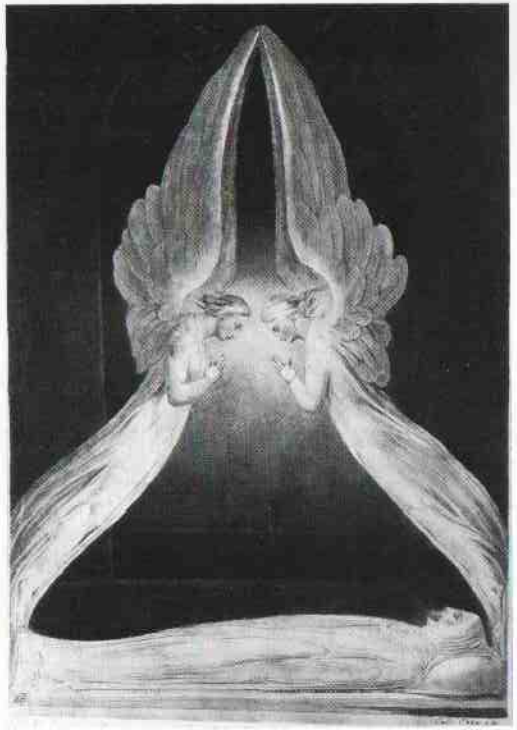


71 CHUTE *Library at Strawberry Hill* 1754

enjoyment of their evocative qualities. These early Gothicists were perfectly prepared to invent where the materials were not to hand. There was no need for the mock ruins that they built in the wilder parts of landscaped parks – such as Sanderson Miller's castle at Hagley (*c.* 1754) – to bear more than a passing resemblance to the real thing. Indeed, the very knowledge of the artifice could heighten the poignancy.

It was in such a mood that Horace Walpole, the dilettante fourth son of the famous British Prime Minister, began to Gothicize Strawberry Hill, his villa at Twickenham, in 1748. The move was a bold one, for he brought the asymmetry and picturesqueness of garden furnishings into his very living quarters. With mounting enthusiasm he and his band of amateur advisers turned his home into a thorough-going medieval domain. And, as they proceeded, so their desire for authentic detail increased. In the library of 1754, for example, the form of the book-cases was scrupulously copied from a tomb in Westminster Abbey.

However arbitrary Walpole's Gothic might seem today, it fulfilled a need for his contemporaries, and his house became a regular tourist attraction. It is equally appropriate that his skill at providing a fanciful alternative to mundane existence should also have led to his revival of the literary romance. His *Castle of Otranto* (1765), the earliest of 'Gothic' novels, opens with the inexplicable appearance of a gigantic gauntlet which, typically, he



72 BLAKE *Angels Watching over the Tomb of Christ* *c.*1806

claimed was inspired by a dream. And his assertion in defence of such irrationalities, that in the modern novel 'the great resources of fancy have been dammed up, by a strict adherence to common life' might have been intended as a riposte to Pamela's strictures on romance.

In these activities Walpole prefigured the Romantic pursuit of new sensations – though with considerably more light-heartedness. He shared none of the sense of tragedy that can be felt in William Beckford, who was to
26 outpace him both in the drama of his mansion at Fonthill and in the excesses of his own book *Vathek* (1782). Nor, indeed, did he approach the insights of some later Gothic novels, such as Mary Shelley's masterly exploration of aberrant personality in *Frankenstein* (1818).

Greek and Gothic

The enjoyment of make-believe also enriched such contemporary medieval subject paintings as West's *Death of Bayard* (1772) or the French artist Jean-
70 Simon Berthélemy's (1743–1811) *Retaking of Paris from the English*. These works evoke an age of chivalry and adventure but reveal scant interest in the styles of medieval art.

73 INGRES *Mlle Rivière* 1806

It was in fact the enthusiasts for Greek art who first responded to a similar archaic quality in the Gothic. When John Flaxman came to Rome to study in 1787 he fell in with such connoisseurs as Humbert de Superville and William Young Ottley, who were beginning to document the art of the Italian Middle Ages. His own famous *Outlines* show the results of such contacts in 5
their engaging eclecticism; they enliven the succinct outlines of the Greek vase with a flowing Gothic linearity.

His friend William Blake – who possibly first influenced him in this direction – was soon to take the Gothic more seriously (*see* p. 80). It was the 'spirituality' of the Gothic that absorbed him; and his most overt reinterpretations of medieval forms are in specifically Christian subjects, such as the *Angels Watching over the Tomb of Christ* from the series he painted 72
for Thomas Butts. The beautiful rhythm that flows down the arch of the angels' wings in perfect symmetry completely releases the design from the anthropocentric bias of Greek art: it is like some vibrant hieroglyph of the Divine.

Blake's understanding of the Gothic was unique; his religious attitude to it can be compared only with that of the German Romantics (*see* p. 106).

Elsewhere, artists with a taste for the archaic came nearer to the position of Flaxman. In France, the Primitifs of David's studio expressed a sympathy for the culture of the North; while there were other pupils of the master – notably Ingres, Girodet, Richard and Granet – who had an undisguised enthusiasm for medieval methods. Indeed, when Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) exhibited his portrait of Napoleon as Emperor and the three portraits of the Rivière family at the Salon of 1806 he was roundly condemned by the critics for being 'Gothic'.

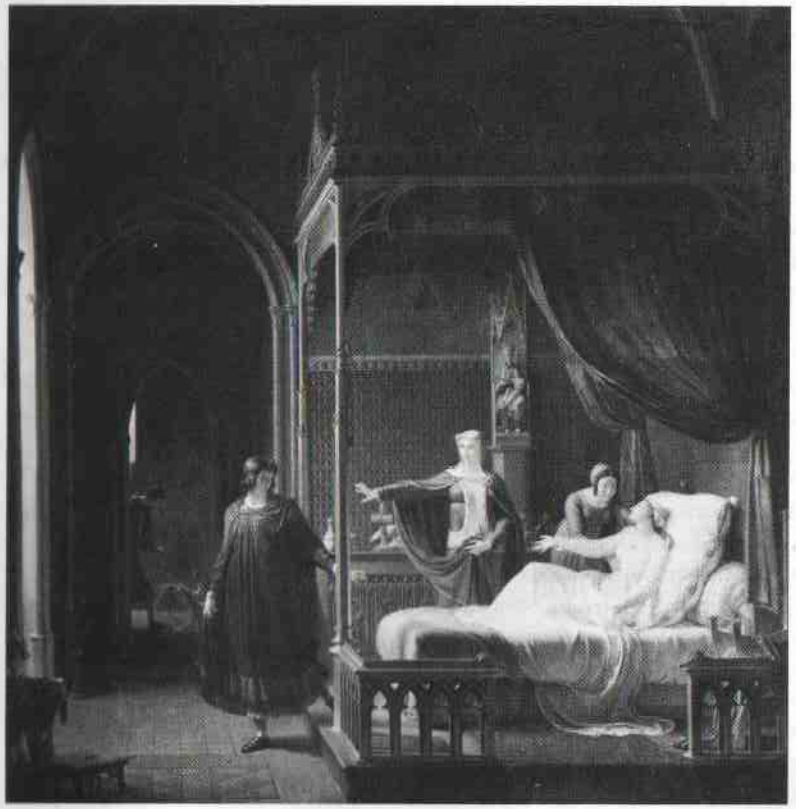
Blake was responding to Gothic art with the spiritual sensuousness of the mystic; but Ingres could find in it the means for a subtle eroticism. Nowhere
73 does he use this more tenderly than in his portrait of Mlle Rivière. The fifteen-year-old girl is viewed in a simple three-quarter pose beneath an arched frame, like some virgin saint. Her innocence is echoed in the pure tone of her white dress and the limpid landscape beyond. But its coolness sends a shiver of premonition through the scene. It is early spring, and just as the trees are in their first leaf so she too is awakening. Her lips are already full, there is a sharp accent to her mustard-yellow gloves, and the undulations of her soft swan's-down boa anticipate her emerging femininity. It was never to be fulfilled, for Mlle Rivière died later the same year.

Despite the attacks on Ingres's style, this brilliantly successful young artist – who had won the Prix de Rome in 1801 at the age of twenty-one and had now painted Napoleon twice – was in fact following a vogue. The reaction that succeeded the excesses of the Terror had led to a widespread yearning for tradition. It was a mood inflamed by a prominent returned exile, the writer Chateaubriand, when he published his *Spirit of Christianity* (1802), an impassioned plea for the rehabilitation of the historic faith that had been undermined by republicanism. It was this feeling that had been so well gauged by Napoleon in 1801 when he made his peace with the Pope and restored Christianity as the official religion of France. Mocking the 'mere dreamers who think that a Republic can be made out of an old monarchy' he had himself crowned with the ancient title of Emperor three years later in a magnificent ceremony in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame. Nor is he likely to have been displeased when, in 1806, Ingres depicted him with a 'Gothic' technique that reminded the critics of Van Eyck, and in a hieratic pose that they considered more appropriate for the representation of *le bon roi* Dagobert.

Napoleon's appeal to the past was calculated; the artists who responded to it had come into contact with medieval art more haphazardly. It had been a fortunate accident that the Museum of French Monuments that had been set up by the National Assembly in 1790 to house the works pillaged from the churches should have been entrusted to Alexandre Lenoir. For it was this

scholarly and imaginative artist who established the pattern for all modern museums, arranging works according to chronology and type. An English visitor, the Reverend William Shepherd, noted how the 'dim religious gloom of the apartments destined for the reception of the recumbent figures of the saints and warriors of the Middle Ages, lends to rude efforts of art an interest which they do not in themselves possess'; while the 'more exquisite productions of the time of François I and Louis XIV' were displayed in 'lightsome halls where their beauties will best be discerned'. Lenoir's dim religious gloom is also reminiscent of the atmosphere in the subject pieces of Fleury Richard (1777–1852) and the darkened cloister paintings of Ingres's 74
friend François-Marius Granet.

74 RICHARD *Louis IX Showing Deference to his Mother* 1808



Lenoir's sculpture collection was soon to be supplemented by a much grander project; the opening of the royal collections in the Louvre to the general public. Eventually this became the Musée Napoléon, and was swelled by the booty that the Emperor brought back from his campaigns. Undoubtedly the main attractions here were the stupendous masterpieces of the Renaissance and antiquity, such as the Vatican treasures, Raphael's
2 *Transfiguration* and the Hellenistic *Laocoön* group. Yet there were also valuable examples of early Italian and Northern art, including the central panels of Van Eyck's *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*. This collection, the sight of which inspired Friedrich Schlegel to proclaim the virtues of 'Christian' art to his fellow Germans in his magazine *Europa* (*see* p. 110), also provided a source book for Ingres and for all his colleagues up to its dispersal in 1816.

The incipient medievalism of this period is felt most pervasively in the gentle *intimisme* of Fleury Richard. Basing his art on illuminated manuscripts, Dutch interiors and the monuments in Lenoir's museum, he retold anecdotes from the history of France with simple rhetoric and a naïve
74 fascination for historic detail. Such works as *Louis IX Showing Deference to his Mother* found approval in the upstart Napoleonic court, and many, including this work, were acquired by the Empress Josephine. Ingres himself occasionally painted essays in what Théophile Gautier was later to name the *style troubadour*; yet his response to the Gothic was on the whole much less overt. He never needed to resolve the stylistic conflict between Greek and Gothic: for the constant tension between irreconcilables – simplicity and exaggeration, intellectual purity and sensuous abandon – is one of the sources of his art's eternal ability to amaze.

National character and devotion

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, the reappraisal of medieval art was widespread throughout Europe. It was among German artists, however, that it first led to a systematic revival, when a group of young students at the Vienna Academy banded themselves together into a 'Brotherhood of St Luke' in 1809 with the intention of restoring the spirit of the Age of Faith in both their art and their lives.

The reasons behind this move lay not so much in any great familiarity with the art of the Middle Ages as in the attitudes that had been adopted towards it by the German Romantic writers and critics. The concept of art as the expression of the character of its creator had already been emphasized by the writers of Storm and Stress. Indeed, this had been the basis of the earliest German defence of the Gothic, Goethe's essay on Strasbourg cathedral, *On German Architecture* (1773). Like contemporary writers in England – and equally incorrectly – Goethe assumed that the Gothic had originated in his

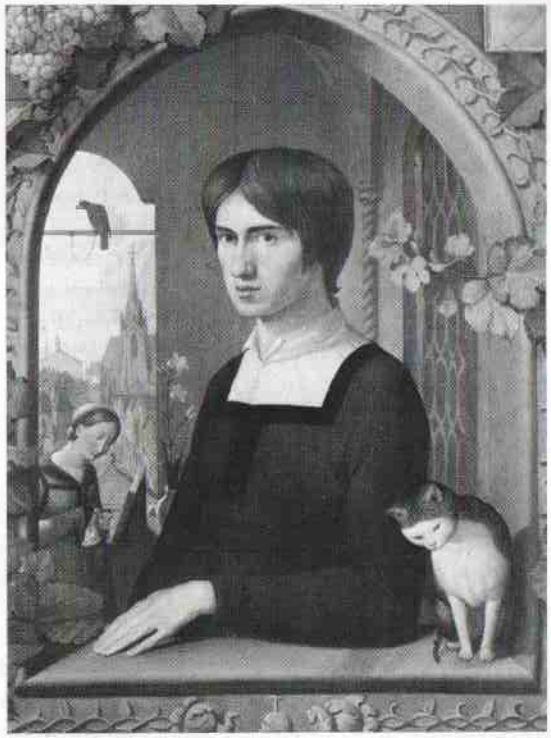
own country. Yet this assumption did not take on its full significance until the idea of national character was developed by his friend Gottfried Herder over twenty years later in his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1793–97). Here Herder argued that nations, like individuals, had a 'character'. Like some great plant, this would gradually unfold through history in accordance with the features that had existed in embryo at the time of its origin. This concept of innate national identity was, in Germany, to become the first step on a tragic path; but Herder's own views were a plea for tolerance. He saw no reason why the Indian should be made to imitate the European; nor, for that matter, why the modern European should have to emulate the ancient Greek.

The relationship between art and national identity had been suggested by Winckelmann, when he had accounted for the supreme qualities of Greek art; but his interest had been in prevailing social and climatic conditions, rather than in any innate 'Greekness'. For the German Romantics, however, inheritors of Herder's doctrine, there was a living German soul, and it was this that Gothic architecture and 'Old German art' expressed uniquely. In much the same way it led in literature to the emulation of the folk-tale and the ballad, and in music to the popularity of the *Lied*.

This attitude was encouraged by the fact that the late Middle Ages actually could be looked upon as a kind of German golden age. For this was the time when Germany had enjoyed a measure of unity under the Holy Roman Empire, before the centuries of political, religious and cultural disintegration that accounted for its present disarray. And it was also the highest point of German art; for it was then that the genius of Albrecht Dürer had flourished.

Convinced that great art was the expression of over-all greatness, the Romantics found that the paintings of Dürer represented (in the words of Wilhelm Wackenroder) 'this upright seriousness and strength of German character faithfully, not only in their faces and external traits, but in their inmost spirit'. And it was taking his rugged forms and obsessive naturalism as their guide that they hoped to encourage the blighted plant of German national character once more to flower. Wackenroder, a sickly and soulful youth, died in 1798 at the age of twenty-five, after having published no more than one slender volume. Yet his *Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-loving Monk* (*Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*) (1797) did more than any other work to stimulate a yearning for the Middle Ages. Indeed, it is a proverbial starting-point for histories of German Romanticism.

Although the climax of Wackenroder's book is the section in praise of 'our venerable ancestor Albert Dürer', he was no more a chauvinist than Herder was: the other great hero of his book was the 'divine Raphael'. His



75 OVERBECK *Franz Pforr* 1811

point about Dürer was rather that this artist had succeeded by developing his own qualities rather than by striving to emulate those that were foreign to him: 'He was not made for the ideal and the noble serenity of Raphael. His delight was in representing men as they really existed all around him, and in this he succeeded admirably.'

It was the sentiment of Wackenroder's book (rather than its information, which was taken from standard sources) that was so influential. This sentiment was not so much one of nationalism as of religious adoration. Wackenroder asserted that there was no hierarchy of styles, but only a truthful expression of the self. All works of art were nevertheless united inasmuch as they were hymns of praise to the Creator: 'Art can be considered as the flower of human feeling. From the different parts of the earth it rises towards Heaven in an everlasting variety of forms, and to our father.'

In his emphasis on emotion, his love of dreams, and above all his view of art as a religious act, Wackenroder came close – as Crabb Robinson noted – to the outlook of William Blake; but there is a crucial difference. Where Blake speaks of vision, Wackenroder speaks of devotion. His is a gentle world; he believes in self-expression, but he is no revolutionary.

This change of mood is one that separates the heroic independence of Blake's generation from the communal yearning of the medieval revivalists. Just as the emphasis had slipped from individual to national character, so the image of struggling genius had given way to the concept of the artist craftsman, working in quiet harmony with the world around him. It was the need for a sympathetic environment that caused the founding of the Brotherhood of St Luke. And if the Brethren could never quite realize their dreams, at least they could share them, as when one of their leaders, Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869), depicted his friend Franz Pforr 'in a surrounding in which he would perhaps feel happiest'. Pforr sits in his medieval garb at a Gothic window. Beside him is his cat, whose meek pose is echoed by that of the young girl devoutly knitting and reading in the chamber behind. Outside is a fairy-tale town, that leads down to the sea. One can well believe that this is a portrait of the youth who declared: 'I feel that I am unfit for the unquiet, large life. A small room, my easel, a few friends, and the necessities of existence satisfy all my wishes. I must confess to you that I should like to achieve something in art, but this is best done in the midst of a quiet retiring life.' 75

Christian Romanticism

In the decade between the death of Wackenroder and the formation of the Brotherhood of St Luke, the medieval revival reached epidemic proportions in Germany. Wackenroder's friend Ludwig Tieck continued the evocation of the past in a series of popular novels and plays, such as *Franz Sternbald's Wanderings* (1798) – an 'artistic romance' about the life of a mythical pupil of Dürer's. A more inspired view was that of the poet Novalis, whose *Christianity, or Europe* (1799) described a vision of a Europe united by the Christian faith and blessed by a harmony of Church and State through the Pope and Holy Roman Emperor. It made a plea similar to that in Chateaubriand's *Spirit of Christianity*, for a return to tradition. Napoleon, whose opportunist support of the revivalist cause soon disillusioned Chateaubriand, became a virtual Antichrist for the German medievalists, especially after he invaded German territory in 1806. From this time they became actively identified with the German nationalist movement which culminated in the War of Liberation of 1814.

Such events provided a positive context for the revival, which was matched in the theoretical sphere by the assertions of the critic Friedrich Schlegel. Schlegel's rigid defence of medieval art and the Christian religion (he converted to Catholicism in 1808) seems something of a retreat from the days in which he had hailed the 'progressive universal poetry' of Romanticism (*see* p. 9). Yet it was also an attempt to preserve something of

positive value from that time of high enthusiasm which – after the death of Novalis in 1801 – could never return.

Schlegel not only brought a greater dogmatism to the revival: he also discussed early Italian and Northern art and its significance for the modern painter in far more specific terms than Wackenroder had. And, once he had seen the Musée Napoléon in 1802, he realized that here lay the spiritual source he had been seeking. With characteristic fanaticism he filled his magazine *Europa* with a lengthy series of 'Descriptions of Paintings from Paris and the Netherlands' (1802–4).

Beginning with the statement 'I am exclusively attuned to the style of the earlier, Christian painters', he goes on to praise these for their positiveness and simplicity: 'No confused heaps of men, but a few isolated figures . . . severe forms, contained in sharp and clearly defined contours; no chiaroscuro or dirt, murk and shadow, but pure relationships and masses of colour.'

Such definiteness seems far removed from any romantic sense of mystique. But Schlegel preserves this, too, contracting his earlier love of indefiniteness and the infinite into the static mystic image: 'A hieroglyph, a symbol of the divine – this is what every worthwhile painting must be.' It is this quality that is missing in Greek art which, despite its simplicity, describes no more than the 'perfection of organic form'.

Friedrich Schlegel, his brother August Wilhelm and Ludwig Tieck were great polemicists. And in the widening circles of their travels these survivors of the *Athenaeum* circle implanted the revised doctrine of 'Christian' Romanticism throughout Germany: in Berlin, Frankfurt, Heidelberg, Dresden and Vienna. Everywhere there seemed to spring up collections of 'Old German' and pious art, the earliest being that of the brothers Sulpiz and Melchior Boisserée in Cologne. The work of the contemporary painters who responded to the Schlegels' exhortations is disappointingly bereft of the spirit of the Middle Ages. Perhaps it was Friedrich Schlegel's cautious qualification that they should 'copy only the truths of the Primitives and not their imperfections' – 'the emaciated hands, the Egyptian position of the feet, the tight clothing, garish colour, squinting eyes or the lapses of draughtsmanship' – that encouraged them to leave all but the surface detail of their academic trainings intact.

No doubt it was the smallness of the step represented by Gottlieb Schick's
76 (1776–1812) *Sacrifice of Noah* that made it seem such a satisfactory synthesis to A.W. Schlegel and Madame de Staël when they saw it exhibited at the Pantheon in Rome in 1805. Schick had travelled far from the art of David (under whom he had studied in Paris); but he had travelled almost exclusively in the direction of the High Renaissance, making a brief stop at

76 SCHICK *Sacrifice of Noah* 1805

Poussin on the way. Yet no one could doubt his good intentions, which Schlegel described as 'the feeling of devotion which had been totally absent from contemporary painting'. It is a picture about piety, not just in the way the figures take up their simple poses like actors in a tableau, but also in its subject; the moment when God renewed his promise to man with that great and natural hieroglyph, the rainbow.

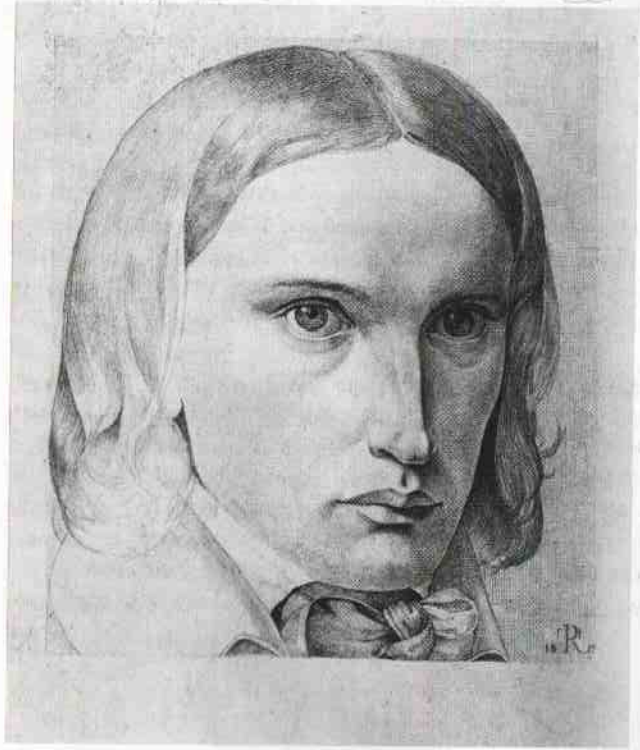
The Brotherhood of St Luke

Only the Brotherhood of St Luke took the emulation of the Primitives to an extreme. For this alone its members would earn an important place in any history of nineteenth-century revivalism. These students of the Vienna Academy may not have been the first to form a breakaway group to challenge official teaching methods and standards; that honour seems to belong to the French Primitifs (*see* p. 104). But they were certainly the first to take secession to the point of establishing an alternative mode of existence.

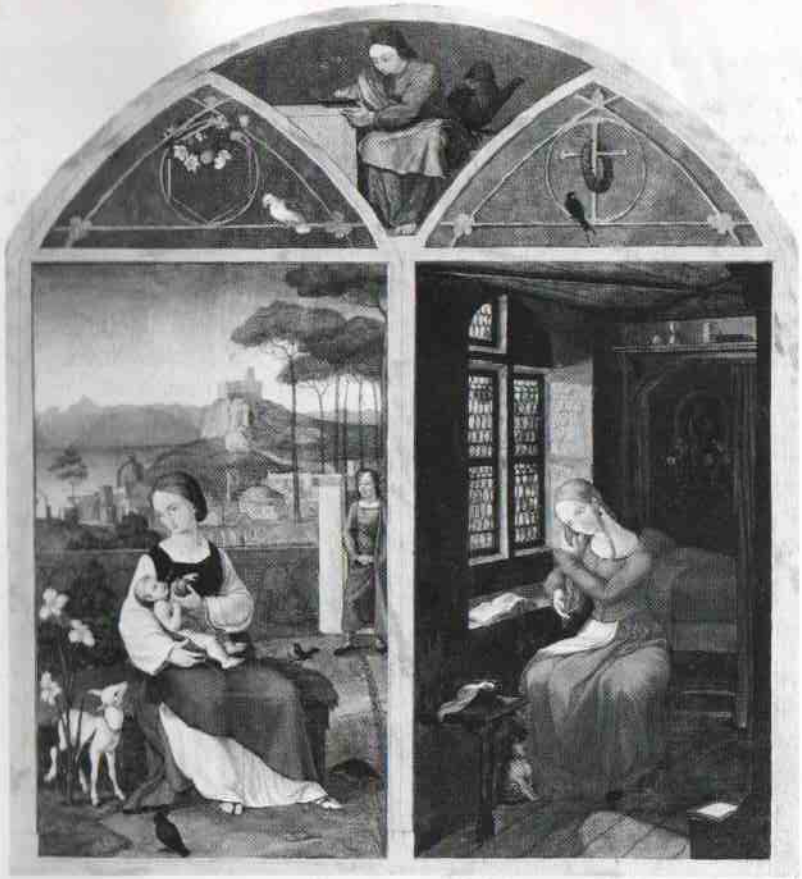
Their involvement with the spirit of the past became so great as to compel those who could afford it – and some who really could not – to make in 1810 the pilgrimage to Rome, their sanctum of Christian art; and to establish themselves there in the disused Monastery of S. Isidoro, where they lived in monk-like seclusion, grew their hair long and dressed in archaic costumes.

Their inspiration stemmed from the person they called their 'leader', Franz Pforr (1788–1812). It was his passionate friendship for Friedrich Overbeck (1789–1869) – who was to be known as the 'priest' of the group – which had been celebrated on the anniversary of their first meeting by the founding of the Brotherhood on 10 July 1809. (The other four original members were, one feels, largely a make-weight.) And it was Pforr's death in 1812, at the age of twenty-four, that precipitated the break-up of their communal monastic existence. Only after this did the appearance of the survivors and their imitators lead the curious Romans to dub them 'Nazarenes', the name under which they returned to conquer the German official art world and dominate religious painting throughout Europe for half a century.

Not long after Pforr's death there began a distinct decline in the emotional pitch of the work of the Nazarenes. Perhaps even the paintings of the leader would not always have retained their sense of wonder, for this depended above all on a pure and unaffected feeling for the naïve.



77 REHBENITZ *Self-portrait* 1817



78 PFORR *Shulamit and Maria* 1812

Although the motifs of Pforr's pictures are largely derivative, his manner is unmistakable. Nothing shows the personal nature of his art more clearly than *Shulamit and Maria*. For this allegory on his friendship with Overbeck 78
(the names come from a 'legend' written by Pforr himself) was the culmination both of his life and his artistic career. Shaped like a private devotional diptych and presided over by the evangelist St John, it symbolizes the different characters and fates of the two artists. On the left is the ideal of Overbeck, the Raphaelesque Shulamit, seated in a peaceful garden; while on the right Pforr's Maria combs her hair in a darkened chamber, reminiscent of the one depicted by Dürer in his engraving of St Jerome. The allusion was not simply because the Brethren were in the habit of calling the tranquil Overbeck their Raphael, and the passionate Pforr their Dürer. It was also to evoke the eternal yearning of the North and the calm fulfilment of the

South. And, more personally, it implied that Overbeck, who is seen entering the garden of Shulamit, would achieve his desire while Pforr, already mortally sick as he painted the work, would not. Despite this note of tragedy (suggested more urgently by the differing tonalities of the two sides), the picture reveals an almost childlike love of simple forms and bright colours, and a fascination with the magic of natural light. Both these interior and exterior worlds are recorded with a feeling for detail and individuality that Pforr described as 'definite character'; and shows how far his ideal of naïveté was from the Neo-classicist's search for pure form.

As Pforr's work suggests, the Nazarene technique was best suited to those who still found painting simply a genuine revelation. It was a young man's art; and, although the original Brotherhood soon drew away from it, other young artists gained inspiration from it as its ideals became known throughout Germany. The meticulous drawing technique, which discarded the easy shading effects of chalk drawing for a network of fine lines, could even coax such minor talents as Theodor Rehbenitz (1791–1861) into rare
77 moments of achievement. For when this artist drew his self-portrait soon after coming into contact with the Roman Nazarenes he recorded every detail and nuance of the head with an almost fanatic persistence. And in doing so he achieved that state of hyper-realism in which the familiar suddenly becomes an awesome revelation, and the minutest feature bears intimations of the infinite.

Monumental art

Overbeck, deeply shaken by the death of Pforr, virtually ceased painting for a year. Then, with the aid of religion (he was to convert to Catholicism in 1813), he gradually returned. Surviving until 1869, he became the 'Prince of Christian painters', as Pugin put it, the representative of the pictorial ideals of the Catholic revival.

The Nazarenes were also to develop in a more secular direction under the influence of Peter Cornelius (1783–1867), who joined them in 1812. He was already familiar with the medieval revival through such acquaintances in his native Rhineland as the Boisserée brothers. Indeed, he had already begun a
79 series of illustrations to the recently published *Faust*, Part 1, of Goethe, in a terse, Dürer-like grotesque. These were little to the taste of Goethe, who became so disturbed by such leanings in young artists that a few years later, in 1817, he persuaded his collaborator, the artist J. H. Meyer, to write an article attacking 'Neo-German Religious-Patriotic Art' in their magazine *Kunst und Alterthum*. In the case of Cornelius, however, he need not have worried. For, when he reached Rome, the artist soon began to revert to the academic training of his youth and produce works in his own severe version of the

79 CORNELIUS *Faust and Mephisto on the Brocken* c.1811

High Renaissance. More than anyone else he was responsible for turning the Nazarene painting from the naïve to the didactic. In 1816 it was he who persuaded the newly appointed Prussian Consul-General in Rome, Jacob Bartholdi, to have the reception-room in his lodgings decorated with murals illustrating the story of Joseph. With characteristic high-mindedness the Nazarene artists involved – Cornelius, Overbeck, Schadow and Veit – insisted on learning the rigorous and archaic technique of pure fresco; and succeeded in mastering it perfectly. In Overbeck's contributions, notably the
80 *Sale of Joseph to the Ishmaelites*, there is still an echo of the fairy-tale world of the Brotherhood of St Luke. Cornelius' main subject, *The Recognition of Joseph by his brothers*, on the other hand, is composed in the standard classical manner, with central dramatic event and chorus of onlookers in a rigid frieze-like arrangement.

It was this series that established the Nazarenes' international fame; though when one reads remarks like that by the English painter Charles Lock Eastlake, 'They have dignified their style by depriving the spectator of the power of criticizing the execution', one wonders whether they were not being praised as much for their intentions as their achievements. In any case the Nazarenes began to be employed as mural painters on a large scale. In Germany their pious, high-minded and strongly traditional art seemed a perfect propagandist organ for the reactionary governments that had become established following the expulsion of Napoleon.

The first German monarch to view the Nazarenes in this light was King Ludwig I of Bavaria, who as Crown Prince came to Rome in 1819, and invited Cornelius to Munich to paint frescoes in the new public buildings he was having erected there. Ludwig was determined to have his capital transformed into an 'art-city', both for reasons of international prestige, and to keep his subjects in a state of sated docility. To contemporaries he seemed to have succeeded; and foreign observers were full of amazement not only at the sumptuous museums, churches and palaces that were going up in Munich, but also at the way in which the peasantry would use the vast frescoes of the exploits of the Wittelsbach dynasty to instruct their children in national history. Despite all this, Ludwig was one of the monarchs whose rule failed to survive the 1840s.

Cornelius spent twenty uneasy years in Munich, during which time he saw his dreams of painting a great religious cycle gradually vanishing as he was first employed on the decoration of museums and then allowed to paint no more than the apse of the Ludwigskirche, the very church where he had set his heart on fulfilling his plan. For Ludwig had soon tired of the Master's ascetic style. He preferred instead the pupils of Cornelius, who, despite their rigorous training, were prepared to paint with all the sensationalism and

80 OVERBECK *Sale of Joseph to the Ishmaelites* 1816

bravura that the Nazarenes had sought to destroy. Finally, in 1840, Cornelius accepted an offer from the Prussian King to come to Berlin and decorate a Campo Santo, a mausoleum for the Prussian royal family. But within a decade of his commission the project had been rendered obsolete by the political changes which followed the uprising of 1848.

Cornelius' ultimate failure to paint his great cycle can be seen as tragic. But what is more tragic is his failure to recognize his own potential for dramatic narrative, which is so clear in early works like *Faust*. Only occasionally does the sheer imaginative force of some theme break through his schematized arrangements, as in his cartoon of the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, one of 82
the designs for the Berlin Campo Santo. Here Cornelius has become so absorbed with the confusion and panic of figures, as the celestial horsemen wreak vengeance on humanity, that he has barely managed to check the diverse movements with his customary symmetry. It is true that the design

81 RETHEL Illustration for the *Niebelungenlied* 1840

82 CORNELIUS *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* 1845

has little of the Gothic fantasy of the woodcut by Dürer on which it is obviously based; yet as a large-scale mural design it has a powerful and convincing rhetoric.

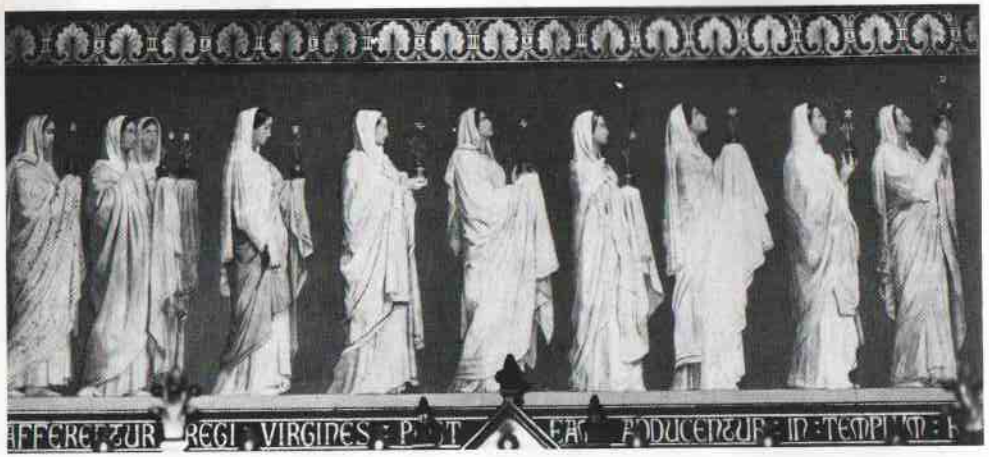
Even at its least convincing, Cornelius' work displays draughtsmanship; and, indeed, the Nazarene movement as a whole was more vigorous in its graphic art than in its painting. It is not surprising, therefore, that they should have made such a fine contribution to book illustration. Cornelius' *Faust* was one of many volumes in which archaic interests did not dull the imagination. Lithography – an invention of the Bavarian Alois Senefelder – was used at this time in Germany primarily to imitate the freedom and complexity of 'Old German' penmanship. Strixner's reproduction of Dürer's border illustrations to the *Prayer Book of the Emperor Maximilian* (1808) precipitated a whole range of Ballad Books with fantastic decorative borders. But it was the growing vogue for wood engraving that led to the finest German production in this genre. For the 1840 edition of the *Nibelungenlied*, illustrated by the Düsseldorf artists E. Bendemann, J. Hubner and Alfred

Rethel, drew directly on the woodcut style of the sixteenth century. And Rethel, at least, achieved designs which were to become a source of inspiration for the English Arts and Crafts movement. 81

Influences abroad

Above all, the Nazarenes impressed their contemporaries with their good intentions. They appealed to those who wished to counter the alarming social and economic changes of the nineteenth century with the image of faith and innocence. For such revivalists the return to the conventions of the Primitives was as much a theological as an aesthetic issue; for Overbeck and his followers had banished all the pagan corruptions – like *putti* for angels – which had crept into religious art during the Late Renaissance and the Baroque.

It was the influence of the Nazarenes that encouraged a strict orthodoxy in nineteenth-century Church art. Even Ingres abandoned his customary ambivalence when fulfilling such commissions as the *Christ Giving St Peter*



83 FLANDRIN *Procession of Virgins*

the Keys for SS. Trinità dei Monti in Rome; while pupils of his like Hippolyte
83 Flandrin took an active part in decorating churches with all the 'Primitive' conventions.

Nazarene art was equally effective on the level of political didacticism. The developments in Munich made a profound impression on those who were responsible for the decoration of public buildings elsewhere. When it was decided in England in 1840 to decorate the new Houses of Parliament with allegorical and historical murals, the outcome was a positive craze for Teutonic art. In the next few years scores of aspiring history painters made the journey to Munich to learn the techniques of fresco and that hieratic symmetrical method of designing that the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt was later to refer to disparagingly as 'the German Balance of composition'.

Art, however lofty its intentions and however sound its theoretical basis, still does not convince by argument, but by the evidence of the eye; and, for the nineteenth century, descriptive accuracy remained the standard of pictorial excellence. Indeed, revivalists had always insisted that the Primitives had observed more truthfully than later generations, whose vision had become clouded by conventions and meaningless displays of expertise. Yet they could not deny that these later generations had also made concrete advances in the interpretation of natural appearances – in the understanding of perspective and anatomy, for example; and their desire to correct the 'faults' of early art while preserving its 'truths' led all too often to a bland and meaningless compromise.

84 NASH Luscombe, Devon, begun 1799

Architecture and revivalism

The revivalist movement in painting was closely paralleled by developments in architecture. There is a similar evolution from the colourful evocations of the generation of Berthélemy and Walpole to a distinct nationalist and religious concern around 1800, and finally to an interest in functionalism in the 1840s.

Behind the inventiveness and irregularity of the first stage lay the idea of the Picturesque. By the late 1790s the taste for actually living in a fantastic environment was sufficiently widespread to support a strictly commerical partnership like that of the landscape gardener Humphrey Repton (1752–1818) and the architect John Nash (1752–1835) between 1795 and 1802. Both specialized in popularizing the irrational. While Repton – who, in the course of his career, improved over four hundred estates – would provide an exciting but well-mannered wilderness, Nash would design a house that was the last word in eccentricity, but nevertheless comfortable in a way that Fonthill can never have been. Houses like Luscombe, Devon, 84
built for the banker Charles Hoare, run Perpendicular-style windows down to the ground to provide a light and airy verandah, have octagons that contain spacious rooms, rather than dank halls and stair wells, and altogether give the suggestion of a castle within the scope of a villa. Nash was equally at home with irregular styles that suggested other Utopias distant in time or space: such jaded tastes as that of Nash's most illustrious patron, the Prince Regent, could be titillated by a bizarre Orientalism, like that in which the Brighton Pavilion was refurbished (1815–21).

Nash was above all a planner of façades; a skill he used to full effect in the masterly classical terraces of Regent's Park. To him the Gothic was a means of achieving a special effect; but there is an appreciation of lighting and surprise throughout his work that suggests that the qualities people found in the medieval were beginning to have a more general application.

The relationship between Greek and Gothic is no less ambiguous in architecture than it was in painting. For both had equal claims to being natural and archetypal. The creation myth that lay behind the reappraisal of Greek architecture was that of a French writer, the Abbé Laugier. In his *Essay on Architecture* (1753) he suggested that the Greek Doric style was still directly connected with the very first type of building, the simple primitive hut with its bare posts supporting a straight cross-bar or lintel. On the face of it, the creation myth surrounding the Gothic seems similar. For it was widely held in the eighteenth century that the Gothic arch was derived from the shape formed by the interlocking of two branches of adjacent trees. Yet, although both these myths refer to the 'naturalness' of Greek and Gothic, they are in fact talking about very different things. The naturalness of Greek architecture is the naturalness of using logical deduction to discover the basic module for construction. In Gothic it is the imitation of forms as they actually can be found growing in nature. Nothing could illustrate Blake's distinction of Greek as 'mathematical' and Gothic as 'living' form more clearly.

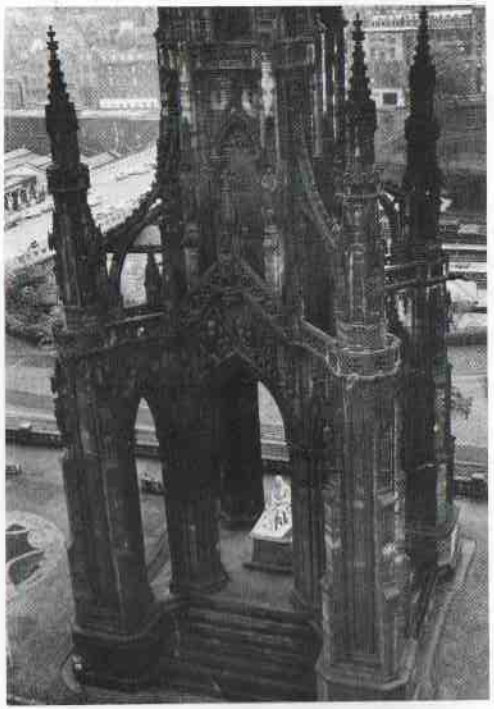
But if the rationales behind the naturalness of Greek and Gothic were thus opposed, there was nevertheless a practical appreciation of the qualities of both. Even Laugier could admit to an admiration for the loftiness and lighting effects of the Gothic, and proposed a combination of such a feeling with Greek construction in churches – a synthesis that was attempted by Soufflot when building the Parisian Basilica of Sainte-Geneviève, now the Panthéon. Time and again, architects like Boullée and Sir John Soane express an interest in the Gothic, not in the forms they use, but in the way they stage their buildings. Soane (1753–1837), the finest English architect of his generation, was consistently disparaging about the purely decorative quality of his rival Nash; yet although his own eclectic classicism shows an integrity and care of a quite different order, its effect still depended upon the evocation of a mood and for this, as Sir John Summerson has pointed out, he leaned on the Gothic. In such interiors as those of the Bank of England or the Court of
85 Chancery, Westminster, he may use the overhead lighting of a Roman bath; but the massiveness of form and lighting is broken up by lantern openings, hanging arches and a slenderness of features that creates an intricate and ethereal atmosphere quite unknown to classical antiquity. Soane was a great admirer of the 'bold flights of irregular fancy' of Sir John Vanbrugh, the

85 SOANE Court of Chancery, Westminster, 1823

86 SCHINKEL *Study for a Monument to Queen Luise* 1810

great successor to Wren who had not only brought English architecture closer to the exuberance of European Baroque, but had also delighted in a fanciful Gothicism. And just as Vanbrugh had created a castellated façade for his own house at Greenwich (1717), so Soane indulged in some harmless Gothic fun in his London home in Lincoln's Inn Fields, building himself a medieval 'monk's cell' and casting himself in the role of its mythical occupant, 'padre Giovanni'

The ethnic interest in the Middle Ages that crystallized into nationalist movements on the Continent during the Napoleonic period concerned Gothic architecture every bit as much as it did 'Primitive' painting. Indeed, Chateaubriand's *Spirit of Christianity* (1802) had been considerably more concerned with the former, associating the Gothic not just with spirituality, but also with the French past. In Germany the Gothic was intimately bound up with the national liberation movement, and the great Neo-classical Berlin architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841) turned during the years of the French occupation of Germany to the design of Gothic buildings, both in his evocative landscape paintings and in such unexecuted projects as the
86 mausoleum for Queen Luise. Schinkel's view of the Gothic, that it 'represents something ideal, in that it blends symbol and reality', fits in completely with the thinking of the Christian Romantics. Yet when he became active as the Chief Architect of the Prussian Department of Works



87 KEMP The Scott Monument, Edinburgh, 1836

88 SALVIN Harlaxton Hall, Lincolnshire, 1835

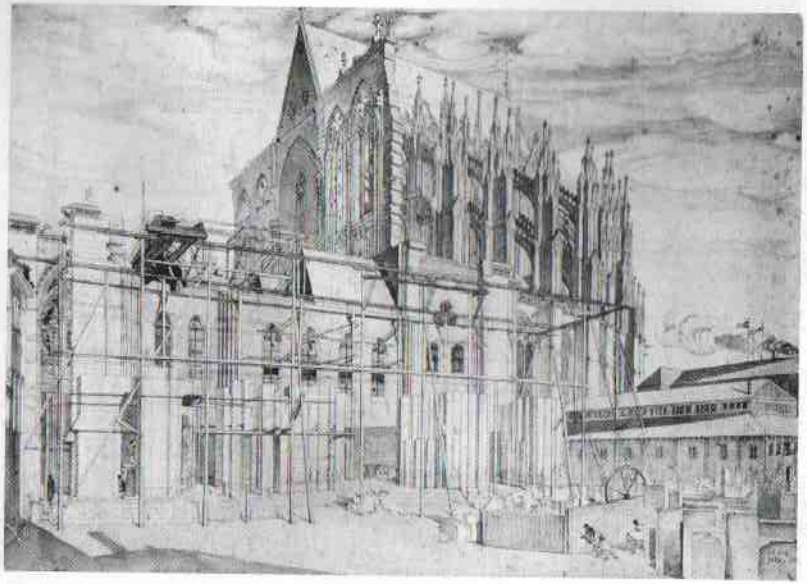
after 1815 he reverted – with the exception of a few churches – to an exclusive exploration of classical radicalism. Perhaps Schinkel sensed that the moment of Gothic idealism had passed in Germany with the dispersal of the liberation movement. In any case, such Gothic as did get built during this period was most uninspired. With a certain amount of disingenuousness the 'Rundbogen' or 'round arch' style became equally accepted as having a national origin; although most of the works that were built in it, such as Friedrich Gärtner's Ludwigskirche in Munich, have as much to do with the Italian Renaissance as they do with any indigenous version of the Romanesque. Like the Nazarene frescoes they so often housed, these round-arched buildings represented the transformation of a medieval dream into a schematized traditionalism.

In Britain, on the other hand, the interest in Gothic as a national style was still gathering steam. Perhaps it was inspired to some extent by the immensely popular medievalizing novels of Sir Walter Scott. Certainly this writer turned his own home of Abbotsford (1812) into a virtual Gothic reliquary, and is appropriately commemorated in the splendid shrine by G.M. Kemp in Edinburgh (1836). In any case, the Gothic of this period is 87
marked by much the same fascination for somewhat forced historical detail as is evident in Scott's novels. No doubt inspired by views of what constituted an English golden age, the Elizabethan style became acceptable as a national style on a par with Gothic, and was as frequently used in the rebuilding of the country houses of the revivalist Tory landowners of the 'Young England' faction. It was for such a society that historical fantasias like Harlaxton Hall, Lincolnshire, were built by the gentleman architect 88
Anthony Salvin (1799–1881).

89 CHARLES BARRY The Houses of Parliament 1840–64

But the greatest event in the establishment of the national styles was undoubtedly the competition for the building of the new Houses of Parliament, launched after the old Houses had been burnt down in 1834. For in this the rules stated quite explicitly that this building for the most important of all British institutions should be in the national styles of either
89 Gothic or Elizabethan. The resulting building by Sir Charles Barry (1795–1860) certainly fulfilled this requirement, although only because he employed the Gothicist Pugin to provide the detailing.

The building is rooted in the Romantic period, for Gothic is being used here as a pure evocation. Pugin himself, with characteristic extremism, dismissed the building as 'pure Grecian'; and he was right to the extent that the Gothic detailing has been grafted on to a plan of classical symmetry and a façade of regular interval. The fact that the design is also a masterpiece of picturesque movement is largely due to a fortunate force of circumstances; for while Barry could be as regular as he pleased with the river façade, he had to adjust the other sides of his building to accommodate the ancient Westminster Hall, which was on a slightly different axis. The style of Gothic chosen for the detail – the Perpendicular – was one that enhanced such movement by the shimmering intricacy of its surface. Although Pugin used it here with great fidelity, it was a style that he was later to tire of as he became more obsessed with the functional aspects of Gothic.



90 RAMBOUX *The Construction of Cologne Cathedral* 1844

Creative archaeology

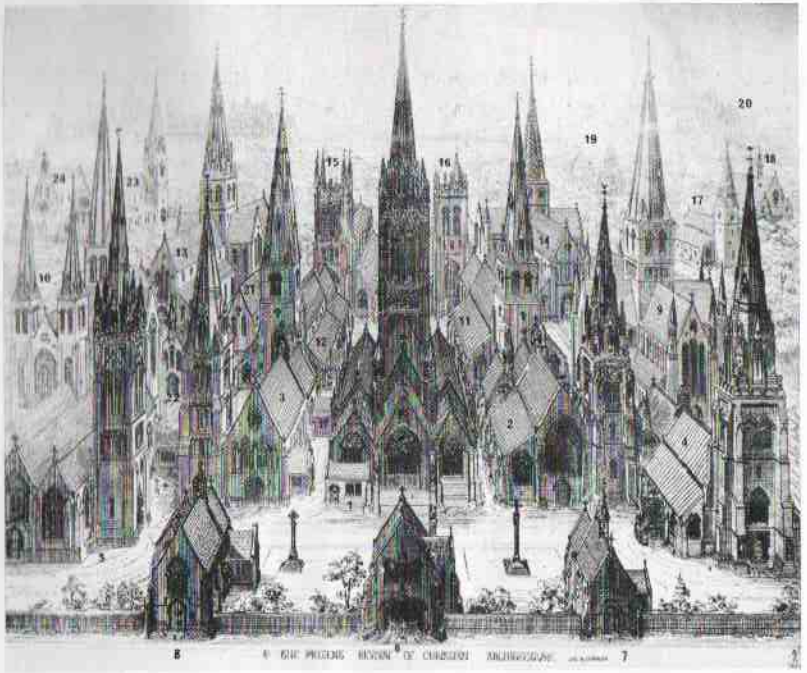
Barry's use of a specialist to provide the detail for his Houses of Parliament is an indication of the growing seriousness with which the Gothic was being taken. A generation earlier this classically trained architect would, like Soane or Nash, have tried it himself, have got it quite wrong, and few would have been any the wiser. Now, however, the publications of a number of distinguished archaeologists and antiquaries had made people aware of how complex and specific the various styles of the Gothic were. Works like John Britton's *Cathedral Antiquities of Great Britain* (1814–35) had provided a detailed pictorial account of the appearance of Britain's greatest medieval monuments, while John Carter's *Ancient Architecture of England* (1798 and 1807) and Thomas Rickman's *Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of English Architecture* (1817) established the historical sequence of styles. Rickman's book was so popular, indeed, that there does not seem to be much likelihood even today of superseding his divisions of 'Early English', 'Decorated' and 'Perpendicular'.

On the Continent the nationalist interest in Gothic had led to independent investigations. In Germany the rediscovery of the plans for the remainder of the incomplete Cathedral of Cologne led to the most remarkable feat of archaeological reconstruction in the century. Championed with great dedication and enthusiasm by Sulpiz Boisserée, it even aroused the interest of

90 Goethe. The actual rebuilding began in 1824, and took three generations of architects to complete. It was viewed from the start as a symbol for the rebirth of Germany, and perhaps it was this that maintained interest in the project over such a long period. And by the time it was completed in 1880 German unification had been achieved.

In France, too, it was largely through such creative archaeology that the Gothic Revival made its contribution; for while Catholic writers such as Charles Forbes de Montalembert strongly supported the Gothic style, most of the Neo-Gothic churches erected were unimaginative. The finest French architect of the movement, Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–79), devoted most of his energies to restoration work. The results he achieved in such famous buildings as the Sainte-Chapelle and Notre-Dame in Paris show a sensitivity that puts most restoration work of the period to shame. Even when he made
91 additions – such as the chapter-house to Notre-Dame – he managed to heighten the picturesqueness and fantasy of a building without noticeably jarring with the original work.

91 VIOLLET-LE-DUC The Chapter House, Notre-Dame, Paris, 1847



92 PUGIN Frontispiece to *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture* 1841

A.W.N. Pugin and functionalism

It seems to have been largely through French writers that Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812–52) enhanced his detailed knowledge of the Gothic with its moral and historical rationale. In view of his origins – he was the son of a French émigré – this seems a natural enough bias; and it was strengthened by his conversion to Catholicism in 1835. His *Contrasts* of the 8, 9
following year cast the whole of the English Gothic Revival into a different light. For whatever vague associations had been made previously between the Gothic religion or nationalism, Pugin now equated artistic style unequivocally with a society's moral condition. He really saw the Greek style as the instrument of paganism, and its employment in churches as a sin. So obsessive was his religious perspective that he considered the contemporary evils of British social life to be due to Protestantism rather than to the Industrial Revolution. Like the Nazarenes – whom he greatly admired – he turned his house into an enclosed Catholic world, and even wore medieval clothes when at home. Not even Cornelius could have matched his boundless energy and irrepressible fanaticism, and it almost

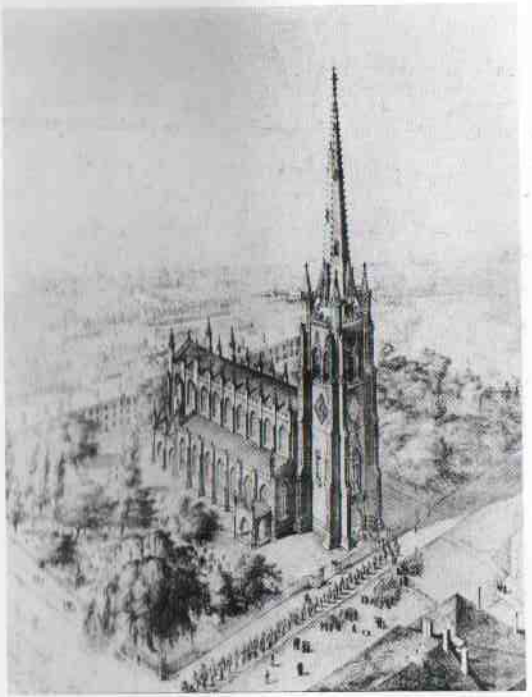
seems inevitable that he should have died as he did of nervous exhaustion at the age of forty.

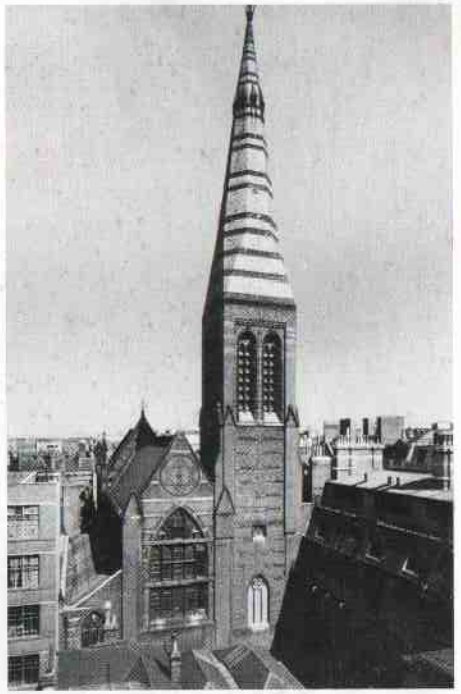
Work on the Late Gothic detail of the Houses of Parliament continued all Pugin's life; but in his own work the emphasis shifted from the Perpendicular of 1350–1500 to the Decorated of 1250–1350, and from the evocative properties of Gothic to its structural fitness for purpose. In this, Pugin was pointing to a stage of the revival to which he himself hardly belonged. He could still convey his Romantic, mystical view of the Middle Ages through the brilliant polemics of his writing and etchings; but his actual buildings were another matter. They do not appear as the magnificent,
92 shining assembly he presented in his *Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture* (1841) but as sober reconstructions, historically impeccable but dull.

It is in the *True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* (1841) – the published lectures that he originally gave at the Catholic seminary at Oscott – that Pugin emerges most fully as a functionalist. For here he appealed to practical sense rather than religious enthusiasm. He gave cogent reasons for the fitness of Gothic to the building requirements in England, emphasized the logic of its construction, and the need to use ornament to enhance, but not to obscure, the form of the building. Above all, he emphasized that planning should be governed, not by aesthetic fashions, but by utility. He stated that 'the external and internal appearance of an edifice should be illustrative of, and in accordance with, the purpose for which it is designed'.

This was intended as an attack both on the Picturesque and on classical symmetry; for he loathed equally the false façades of Neo-Greek and the 'Castellated' style. His call for functional design was soon felt outside Catholic circles. Among the Anglicans, the High Church Ecclesiological Society adopted a similar view of the Gothic. When its magazine, the *Ecclesiologist*, declared, 'The true picturesque derives from the sternest utility', it was sounding the death knell of that movement whose very essence lay in evocation and reverie.

No doubt it was the soundness of these principles from a structural point of view that led to the immense influence of English Gothic throughout Europe and the English-speaking world. Certainly buildings like Richard
93 Upjohn's Trinity Church in New York (1846) show how rapidly the ideas of the *Ecclesiologist* spread to the New World. In England the new aesthetic reached its most positive expression in William Butterfield's (1814–1900) All
94 Saints, Margaret Street; virtually a show church for the Ecclesiologists. There could be no sterner utility behind the irregularity here, conditioned, as it is, by the need to cram a clergy house, a school and a church on to a tiny site in central London. Even the soaring height of the spire had a purpose.





93 UPJOHN Trinity Church, New York, 1846

94 BUTTERFIELD All Saints' Church, Margaret Street, London, 1849–59

Apparently the 'tallest feature of the mid-century London skyline', it served to guide the faithful (or lure the sinner?) to it through the dense mass of urban squalor. Nor could there be anything less ethereal than its 'structural polychrome', the strident patterning of the rich red and slate-grey bricks with which it is built.

In the same year that Butterfield was taking the ecclesiastical revival of Gothic to its logical conclusion, the brilliant if bigoted young critic John Ruskin published *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), the first of his architectural writings which were to provide the Gothic Revival with a deep sense of moral and social commitment and to stimulate the widespread use of Gothic in domestic architecture. Following Pugin, Ruskin emphasized the utility of Gothic using the persuasive rhetoric that gained his writings an international following. The significance of this stand was summed up by the great historian of the Gothic, Paul Frankl, who explained with admirable partisanship that Ruskin's 'recommendation of Gothic as rational was for that day a *good* recommendation; in the Romantic period Gothic was championed because it was irrational'.

Transcendent landscapes

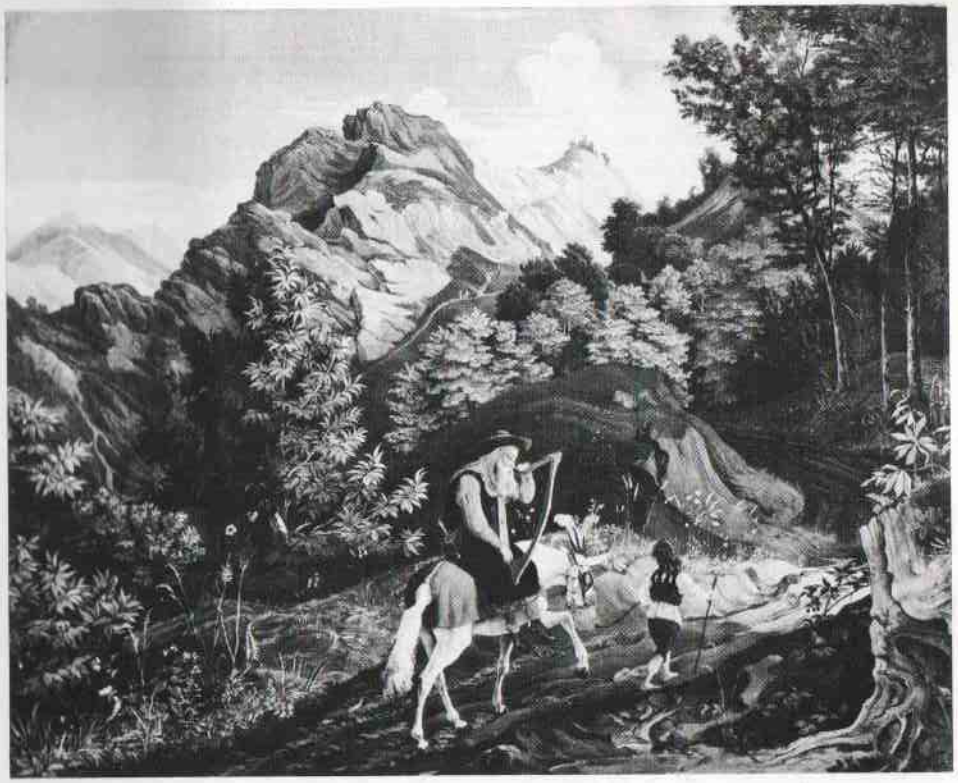
The status of landscape

During the early nineteenth century landscape painting, which had previously been considered one of the 'lesser' genres, emerged as a principal means of artistic expression. No mode of painting contributed more to the radical changes that took place in art in the succeeding century. For it was paradoxically through constant study before nature, the noting of effects of atmosphere and light, that artists gradually moved away from descriptive painting towards the communication of pure visual experiences – a development that culminated in the emergence of abstract art shortly before the First World War.

It was the Romantic artists who first asserted the supreme importance of landscape. When Philipp Otto Runge exclaimed in 1802, 'everything is becoming more airy and light than before, . . . everything gravitates towards landscape', he seemed to be predicting the dominant theme of the century; just as Turner adumbrated it in the way his own art ranged from the precision of his first topographical watercolours to the misty evocations of his last oils.

The Romantic landscape thus suggested a new direction; but it was itself concerned with the more traditional problem of the limitations of the genre. The standard argument given by academic theorists for considering landscape painting to be subordinate to historical painting had been that it was in itself incapable of representing ennobling events or ideas. Titian and Poussin were admired for the way they used nature to articulate some classical, religious or allegorical subject; but those great Dutch painters of the seventeenth century who became engrossed in the simple depiction of a locality were felt to offer little more than a light diversion.

It would be hard to find a painter of the early nineteenth century who would not have asserted the importance of 'content' for landscape: even Constable talked of its 'moral feeling'. The point at issue was whether the representation of the forms of nature could in itself have such deep significance. And it was by asserting that it could that Constable and the other major landscape painters of his generation established the basis of their art.



95 RICHTER *The Harper's Return* 1825

Man and nature

At its simplest, this assertion involved a straightforward challenge to the subordination of nature to man implicit in traditional classical landscape. The Dresden artist Adrian Ludwig Richter (1803–84) – as guileless as the delightful illustrations to ballads and folk-tales by which he is now chiefly remembered – certainly understood this to be the Romantic approach to landscape when, as a student in Rome, he wrote in his diary in 1824: 'For the first time I am going to venture into the romantic field, where man and nature dominate equally, each giving meaning and interest to the other.'

The resulting *Harper's Return* is certainly an instance of this. Both the 95
Harper and the landscape have an autumnal air; yet it would be hard to say which provides the principal theme. The figures – clad in russets and greens similar to those of the surrounding countryside – are certainly in the extreme foreground, yet they are no more prominent than the carefully drawn foliage of the plants and trees. Furthermore, they do not in themselves

provide a subject for the picture. Rather, as Richter suggested, their journey complements that of the landscape, as it rises to the barren mountain peaks and the castle beyond.

Richter's demonstration of the Romantic approach introduced the key issue: that of how far insensate nature could convey thoughts and emotions: how far it could go beyond the custom, familiar in Western art since at least the time of Homer, of using natural imagery to reflect man's actions. It was no coincidence that the members of the generation that became concerned with the expressive potential of landscape were the successors to a philosophy that had completely revolutionized the understanding of perception. For in his *Critiques* Immanuel Kant had drawn attention to the way in which our experience of the world comes only through our faculties of awareness and the organization which already exists in the mind. There is no way of coming to terms with the ultimate reality of the 'thing-in-itself'; all we can know is our impression of it. And this, being conditioned by our own particular situation, is necessarily subjective. It is only in our minds that mountains are distant and blue, or meadow plants small and fragile.

Although Kant himself was insistent that there really was an external reality, an objective world to stimulate our subjective impressions, he had followers who could question this: J.G. Fichte, in particular, felt that there was no world that could be separated from the perceiver, that our awareness was in fact an act of creation. As Coleridge put it:

> *O Lady, we receive but what we give,*
> *And in our life alone does nature live:*
> *Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud.*

Such thinking provided an exciting rationale for the subjectivity and sensationalism of the Romantics: their concern with direct sensory experience. And although Kant was opposed to the liberties that were taken with his theories, he was well aware of the close link between perception and inner being. He provided a highly personal example of this when, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), he talked of looking up in amazement at the vastness of the starry firmament above him and feeling at the same time the existence of a moral law within himself. He acknowledged here not just that the qualities we recognize in nature are ones that are inherent within us, but also that the contemplation of nature can provide the deepest moments of self-discovery.

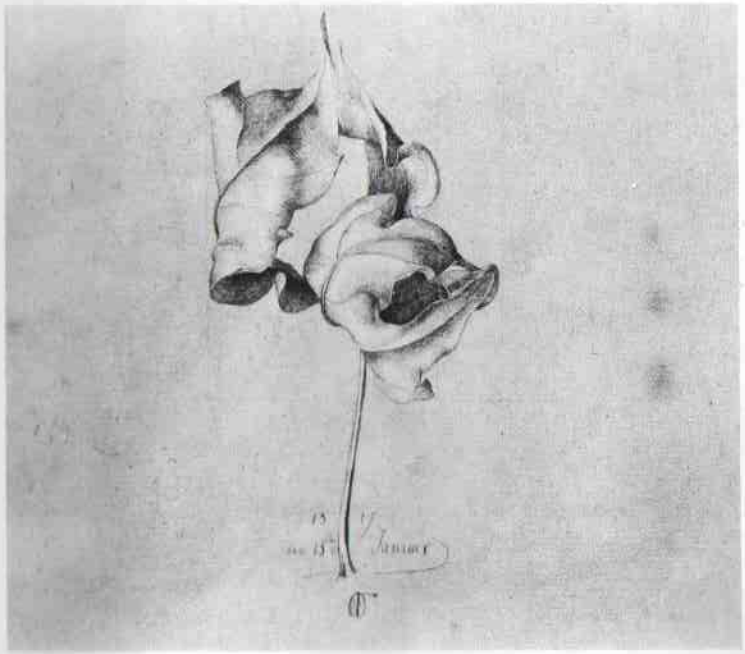
For Kant, the self-knowledge thus achieved was the means of intimating an ultimate reality behind our subjective impressions; and, like Kant, the Romantics could find in such experiences the knowledge not just of a moral law, but also of the Divine. This was certainly the case for William

Wordsworth, with his 'God in Nature', and the philosopher F.W.J. Schelling, with his 'Nature-Philosophy'.

The events that stimulated such intimations had to be approached through an actual sense of revelation; and the landscape painters who explored the relationship between man's understanding and the world around were all concerned with those thresholds of awareness at which the imagination becomes most excited, whether these were of scale, space, distinctness or motion. The important English critic William Hazlitt took up this point in his essay 'Why Distant Objects Please' (1821–22), tracing the motions of the mind as it contemplates such features as 'the misty mountain tops that bound the horizon': 'Our feelings, carried out of themselves, lose their grossness and their husk, are rarified, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty . . . We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothingness.'

And, indeed, it is their atmospheric indistinctness that lends such fascination to the late landscapes of Turner. Hazlitt went on in his essay to associate this allure with distances of all kinds, with far-off lands and the past. Yet the commonplace could be equally mysterious, if examined intently enough. For the poet Novalis, as for Blake, a leaf or a twig could create 'epochs in the soul', as they do in the seemingly endless explorations that Friedrich Olivier made of some withered leaves that he gathered on a winter day in 1817. 96

96 FRIEDRICH OLIVIER *Withered Leaves* 1817

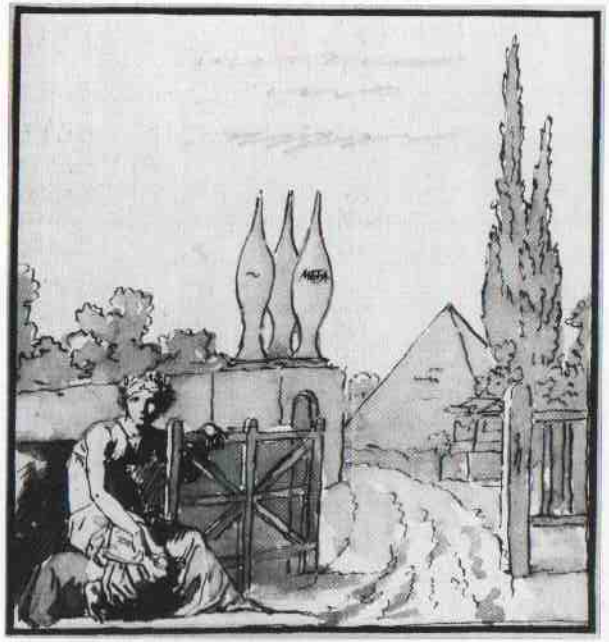


Each artist, in seeking to present this heightened awareness, showed a leaning towards one of two polarities: either to intensify or to overwhelm; to present the contemplation of nature as a visionary or a dramatic experience.

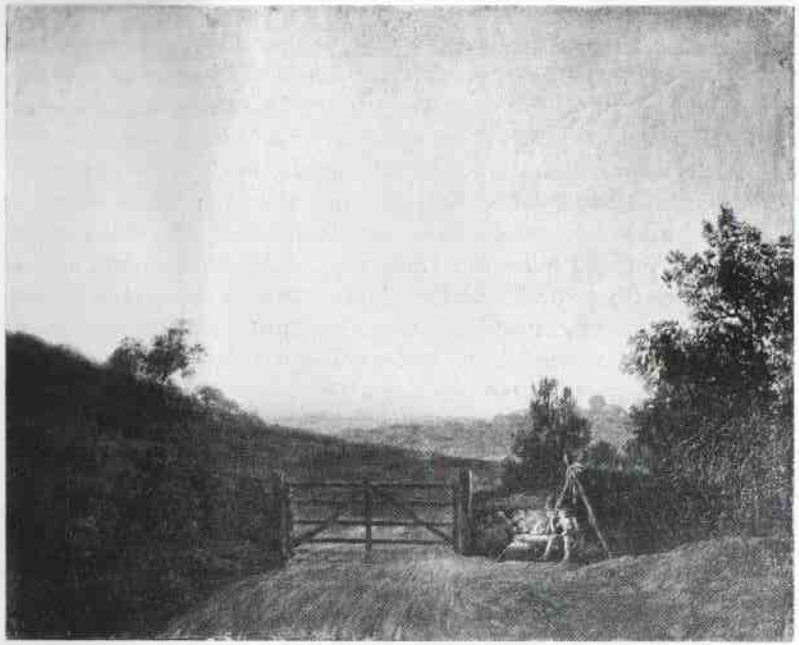
Visionary landscape: allegory and sensibility

It was in Scandinavia and the north of Germany that attempts were first made to infuse landscape painting with a sense of the spiritual. For here the sensibility to nature, awakened by Rousseau and such English poets as Thomson and Gray, became combined with a native mystic tradition. The outcome can be seen in the writings of such poets as L.T. Kosegarten, the Protestant pastor who found in nature the direct revelation of Christ's message, and sought in plants, the weather and the changing seasons resonances with man's spiritual progress.

The practice of painting on such themes appears to have begun in Copenhagen, at the Academy, where the major German symbolic landscape painters Runge and Friedrich were to receive their early training. Even the leading history painter there, Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard (1734–1809),



97 ABILDGAARD *The Meaning of Life c.* 1780–90



98 JUEL *Northern Lights c.*1790

attempted to present such allegories as *The Meaning of Life* by these means. 97
The imagery is heavily dependent on traditional emblems, but Abildgaard has placed these in an actual landscape setting, so that their meaning is expressed in terms of the spatial progression from the seated lady at the open gate to the pyramid and cypresses in the background. The landscape is of the most rudimentary kind. There is little attempt to evoke a mood that would infuse the parable with life.

While Abildgaard was exploring the symbolic use of landscape elements from the starting-point of classical allegory, his colleague Jens Juel (1745–1802) was feeling his way towards a more emotive understanding of nature. Juel was a popular portrait painter who placed his figures in open-air settings with something of the lyricism and intimacy of Gainsborough, who seems to have influenced him directly through his portraits if not through his pure landscapes. Juel's *Northern Lights*, however, shows a hint of some 98
further meaning. The centrally placed closed gate is part of a barrier that firmly separates the tangible foreground from the ethereal light beyond. And beside the gate sits a man in the shadows, illuminated only by the meagre light of a lamp.

Philipp Otto Runge

Two north German students of the Copenhagen Academy, Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810) and Caspar David Friedrich, sought to combine sensibility with allegory, to communicate the intense feelings that they experienced in the presence of nature so clearly that 'this emotion of our soul should become as palpable as a handshake and a glance'.

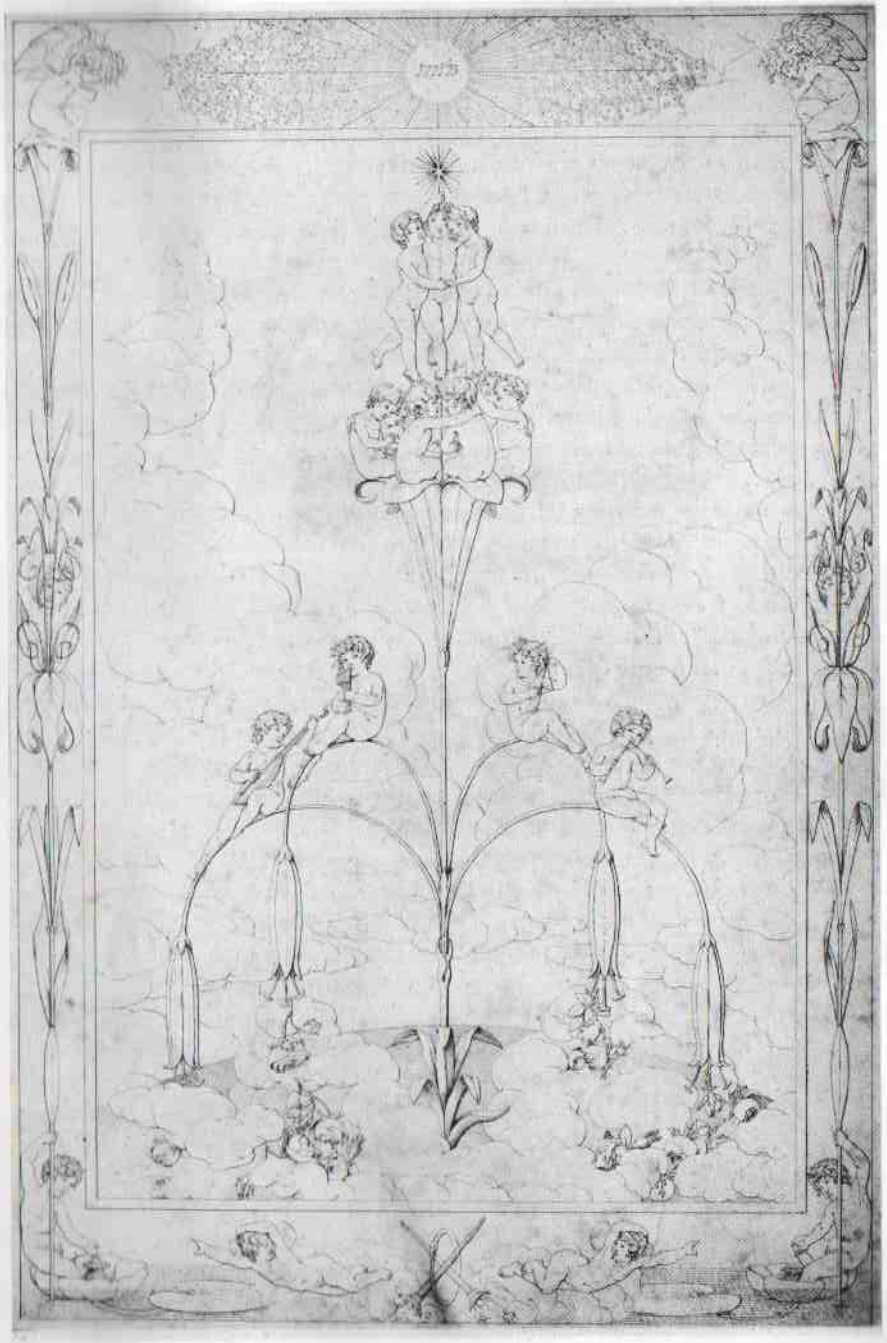
Of the two, Runge was certainly the more ambitious, for he set out to develop a totally new art of symbolic forms and colours. This he referred to as landscape, although it ranged far outside a conventional use of the term to include a combination of childlike genii and flowers arranged in hieratic symmetry. Nature for Runge was a manifestation of the Divine, and he was really seeking to communicate 'this sensation of our kinship with the whole universe': the sense of ecstasy when 'everything harmonizes in one great chord'.

He planned to express the 'great chord' in a cyclical group of paintings, *Times of Day*. These four vast designs would have brought together many complex layers of meaning. They would also have provided a unity of the arts, for he intended to house them in a special building where poems by Ludwig Tieck would have been recited to the accompaniment of music by their friend, Ludwig Berger.

Runge died at thirty-three, with no more than a fragment of his scheme completed. His intense vision can only be glimpsed in the disparate array of
99 portraits, symbolic compositions and detailed studies that he left behind. Yet his writings, published by his brother Daniel thirty years later, leave no doubt about his originality or his mystic awareness of nature: '. . . my soul rejoices and soars in the immeasurable space around me, there is no high or low, no time, no beginning or end. I hear and feel the living breath of God Who holds and supports the world, in Whom everything lives and acts'.

Despite the fragmentary nature of Runge's art, it shows a clear growth of expertise, particularly in the ability to communicate effects of light. As a painter he started late. The son of a self-made merchant in the small Pomeranian town of Wolgast, he did not begin his formal training until he went to study at Copenhagen at the age of twenty-two. Before that he had met the religious approach to nature through the poet Kosegarten, who was for a time his schoolmaster, and who later commissioned him to paint an altarpiece for a shore chapel that he wished to erect for the fishermen in his care, in a small village on the island of Rügen.

Despite the sympathetic relationship that developed between him and Jens Juel, Runge soon tired of the Academy at Copenhagen, which he left in 1801. Nevertheless, he did acquire there the precise linear draughtsmanship that enabled him to record his designs and observations with such care and



99 RUNGE *Morning* from the *Times of Day* 1803

exactitude. It was not until he moved to Dresden in 1801 that he began to feel sure of his direction. His lack of success, in that year, at the annual competition held by Goethe at Weimar for a design on some classical theme, precipitated a reaction in him against conventional subject painting: and this was further augmented when he met the poet Tieck, who introduced him to the ideas of the Schlegel circle. He accepted with enthusiasm the view that art was 'the flower of human feeling' and determined to make his own sensations the centre of his art. By 1803 he had completed a series of outline designs for the *Times of Day* cycle, and two years later he had them engraved. Meanwhile, Tieck, now a firm advocate of medieval revivalism, had become deeply suspicious of Runge's highly personal symbolism. By 1803 Runge had left for Hamburg, where he was supported for the last seven years of his life by his brother Daniel.

At first sight, the outlines of the *Times of Day*, with their rigid symmetry and obscure imagery, seem little more than arcane diagrams. As the central
99 image for *Morning*, Runge chose to show a lily rising above the surface of the earth. While the lower buds scatter roses downwards, the opening flower supports three pairs of genii. Above them is a 'trinity' of further figures, and the design culminates in Venus, the morning star. This mixture of classical and Christian mythology is repeated in the border, where the serpent of eternity triumphs over the downturned torches of death at the bottom, and the name of Jehovah is written across the sun at the top.

In his last years Runge was seeking to turn this synthesis of allegory, mythology and folklore into an expressive painting. He modified but he did not discard the basic imagery, for it was fired by his own personal convictions. He felt flowers to be the natural form to which humans responded most completely: 'inwardly we always connect an emotion with the flower'. His genii – the human figures which mark the meeting-points at which our emotions become one with natural creation – always take the form of young children, for Runge accepted the Romantic notion of childhood as the moment when feelings are still genuine and spontaneous. Yet he was no sentimentalist. In his portraits of children he observes them with an obsessiveness which, far from idealizing them, threatens to distort
100 them with primal energy. In *The Hülsenbeck Children*, Runge has attempted to approach the world of the child by choosing a low viewpoint. The baby emerges from behind the sunflowers as a totally self-absorbed being, instinctively clutching a nearby leaf. The little boy, too, is heedless as he rushes forward. Only the girl, who looks backward and gestures anxiously at the baby, has reached the age of self-consciousness and care. The conception behind this is naïve, but the work shows the most sophisticated understanding of the bright lighting effects and reflections of the open air.

In the first version of the *Times of Day* he had been principally interested in the symbolism of colour: the evening, for example, was represented by a deep red, which also stood for Christ's Passion. But by the time he painted *The Hülsenbeck Children* in 1806 he was already observing the effects of colour and light with painstaking naturalism, and in his book on colour theory *The Colour Sphere (Die Farbenkugel*, 1810), symbolism is far less evident than such phenomena as colour reflections and the different properties of opaque and transparent hues.

When he came to paint the final version of *Morning* he still preserved its altarpiece-like symmetry. But what had previously been presented as an idea was now expressed as an event. The globe of the earth had been replaced by an actual landscape; the symbolic lily of light had become infused with a tangible feeling of illumination, to become the mystic source of the picture.

100 RUNGE *The Hülsenbeck Children* 1806

Unfortunately the work, not quite complete when the artist died, was cut up in later years; but one of the fragments remains the culmination of
103 Runge's career. For in the image of the infant lying in the meadows at dawn, with his hands opening before the light like the leaves of the shrubs, naturalism and symbolism become perfectly fused. For once, emotion and idea are one; and Runge's complex mysticism is conveyed, as he wished it to be, as pure feeling.

Caspar David Friedrich

Runge, in his sense of the infinite and the universal, in his boundless enthusiasm, his fragmentary achievement and his early death – even in the compulsive self-exposure of his writings – was the perfect Romantic artist. It seems impossible that such a man could communicate his limitless sensations through the finite means of the material world. Yet Runge had striven to express his vision in concrete terms precisely because he believed in the continuum of all things. If he could not describe the full range of his experience, he could at least intimate the point of confrontation between the visible and the non-visible.

Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), who shared Runge's pantheism, never attempted a similar encyclopaedic programme. 'Every true work of art must express a distinct feeling', he declared. Runge's most effective picture is a detail, an extract from his cosmology; Friedrich's pictures are
102 single moments. The woman who stands before the rising sun opens her
103 hands to the light as Runge's child does. We see the woman's gesture of ecstasy, even how the light transforms her into a ghostly silhouette. But in Friedrich's vision she is not one with it. She stands forever rooted in the foreground, hiding its source from our gaze. Friedrich painted precisely the paradox Runge wished to resolve: man's yearning for the infinite and his perpetual separation from it.

Friedrich's art, unlike Runge's, began with an intimate knowledge of nature. He first made his name as a topographical draughtsman and only gradually moved to more ambitious work. Throughout his life he remained a faithful student of nature, and never allowed abstractions to replace experience. For, as his friend Dahl said, 'Friedrich saw in a particularly tragic way . . . the limits of what can be represented in painting.'

Born in the Pomeranian harbour town of Greifswald, the son of a prosperous soap-boiler and candle-maker, Friedrich had a material background very similar to Runge's. He, too, came under the influence of Kosegarten through his first drawing-master, J.G. Quistorp.

Kosegarten saw the barren landscapes of the North as being the most spiritual; in particular, he regarded Rügen as the 'land of the soul', once

101 FRIEDRICH *Procession at Dawn* 1805

occupied by prehistoric, Ossian-like heroes. He also discerned a specifically Christian message in the revelations of nature, and this, too, underlies Friedrich's outlook.

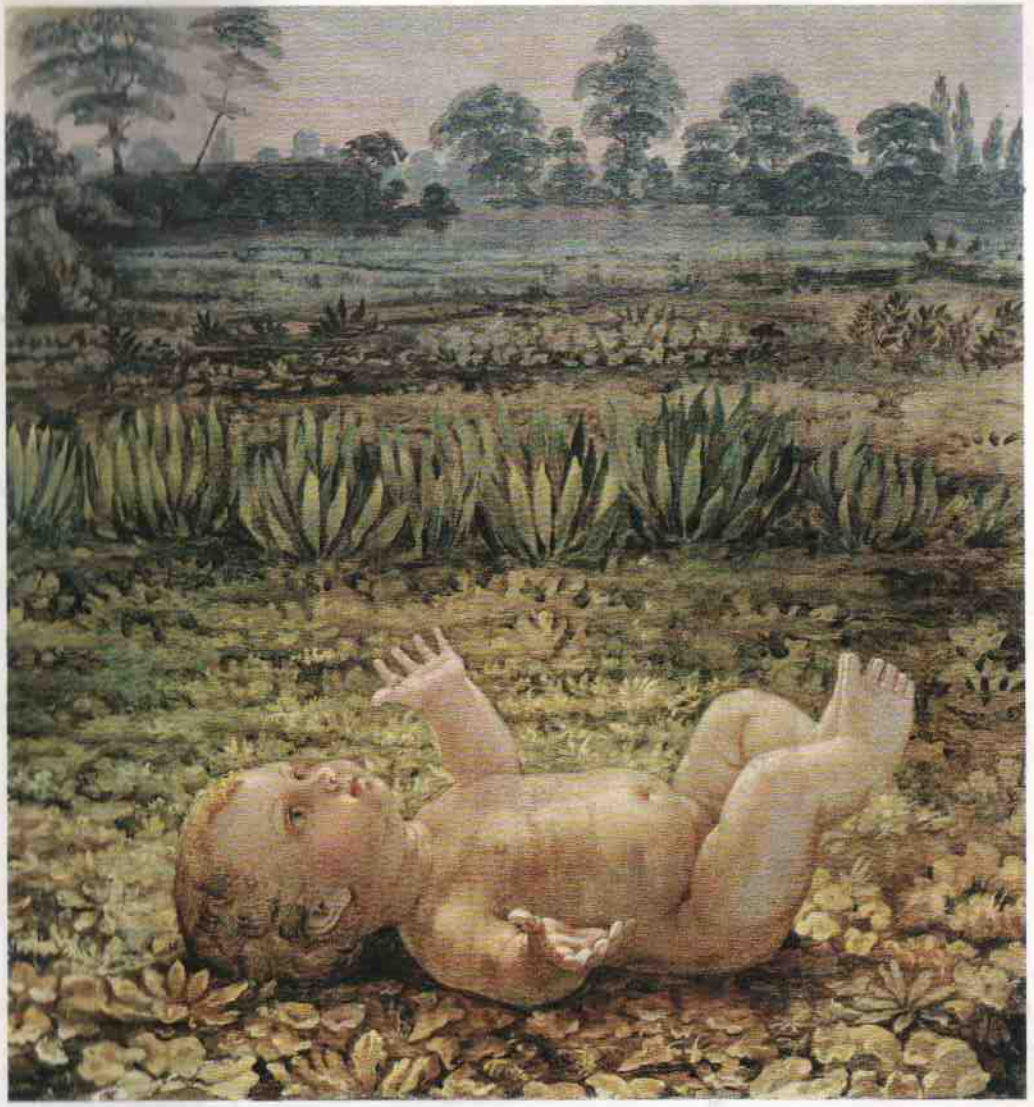
In the four years that Friedrich spent at the Academy in Copenhagen (1794–98), his progress was slow, but he did absorb a precision of outline and a refined sense of tonal gradation. He also painted a number of watercolours of sentimental park-like landscapes, full of evocative images like those of his teacher Juel. He settled in Dresden in 1798 and remained there – with a number of prolonged visits to Pomerania – until his death in 1840. At first he worked mainly in the purely tonal technique of sepia which was then in vogue. His subjects – the wild Baltic coastlands – also appealed to current taste. Gradually, however, he moved towards more provocative themes, under the influence of the Dresden Romantics, Tieck, the Schlegels and their group. Catholic tendencies began to find a resonance in his art, as natural images were placed in juxtaposition to crosses, monks, Gothic buildings and religious processions.

It was with a pair of such sepias that Friedrich achieved his first public success, when he was awarded a prize by Goethe at the Weimar art

102 FRIEDRICH *Woman in the Morning Sun* c.1811

exhibition of 1805. Goethe, who had abandoned his idea of restricting his annual competition purely to classical subjects, made it clear that he admired the prize-winning works for their technical expertise and careful observation rather than for their religious and medievalizing subjects. He continued to value Friedrich as a naturalist even as late as 1816, when he asked him to make some cloud studies for his meteorological investigations. It was only when Friedrich refused that Goethe fully appreciated the gulf that lay between the artist's spiritual intimation of the moods of nature and his own analytical approach.

It was not too difficult for Goethe to choose to ignore the iconography of
101 the *Procession at Dawn*, for the subject of a procession taking a monstrance to a wayside cross is discreetly set within a conventional landscape composition. Even the reference to Gothic architecture in the arch formed by the linked trees through which the priests are about to move is not insisted upon.



103 RUNGE *The Child in the Meadow* 1809

However, no one could have doubted the intentions behind the next work with which Friedrich drew attention to himself. For, in the large oil, *The* 105 *Cross in the Mountains*, the artist took the unprecedented step of using a pure landscape for an altarpiece. The commission was a private one – it was destined for the chapel of Count Thun's castle at Tetschen – but Friedrich made his achievement public by exhibiting the work in his studio at Christmas 1808.

As might be expected, this gesture provoked protests, notably from one local critic, Freiherr von Ramdohr, who accused Friedrich of sacrilege for making 'landscape creep on to the altar'. Ramdohr was equally disturbed by the way that Friedrich attempted to force landscape to express an explicit allegory and by the liberties that he took with the conventions of landscape composition.

While Friedrich, like Runge, adopts the symmetry and much of the symbolic imagery of conventional altarpieces, his compositional methods are very much his own. He has taken care to use a scene that could actually exist. For what is shown on the top of the mountain is not the Crucifixion, but a wayside crucifix, of the kind that was commonplace in the mountains around Tetschen; the fir trees and rocks are based on studies that he made near there. This is not an allegory in the accepted sense that a number of independent symbols are brought together to represent an abstract idea – as 97 they are in the frame, or in Abildgaard's *Meaning of Life*: it is the representation of a coherent landscape. And if the scene suggests an ulterior meaning (in this case Christ as intercessor between man and God the Father), it is because the artist has viewed it in such a way as to concentrate on those ambivalences in representation that provoke reflection. He has abandoned the conventional spatial arrangement of landscape. Instead of the foreground introduction, we are led straight to the central image. And this, too, blocks any further recession, throwing up instead a contrast to the evening sky beyond.

In this organization of the composition, Friedrich has at last found a way to heighten the drama of a landscape so that it no longer requires the presence of some human event to make its meaning explicit. The forms of nature themselves have become the protagonists.

Like Ruisdael and the other great Dutch masters of the seventeenth century, whose work he knew from the famous Dresden Gallery, Friedrich achieved in his mature works a powerful and elemental sense of nature; and his most radical designs appeal on the deepest level through archetypal forms and relationships.

This concern is reflected in the way he worked. His friend the artist and doctor Carl Gustav Carus records how Friedrich would stand before his bare

104 FRIEDRICH *Monk by the Sea* 1809

canvas, waiting until the image of what he was to paint 'stood life-like before his soul', and how he would then immediately sketch it out, and proceed to paint directly. He himself advised the artist to: 'Close your bodily eye, so that you may see your picture first with the spiritual eye. Then bring to the light of day that which you have seen in the darkness so that it may react upon others from the outside inwards.'

The *Monk by the Sea* is one of the few compositions by Friedrich in which 104 alterations can be discerned. In this case, two boats were removed from the sea, leaving the picture dominated by the single unbroken line of the horizon. The monk who stands on the foreground headland thus literally sinks beneath it. Each element, land, sea and air, has become distinct. There is nothing to unite them. Each is endless and without solace. Its starkness is unavoidable, and the writer Heinrich von Kleist, who did not pretend to understand it, could still sense its uncompromising radicalism when he wrote: 'because of its monotony and boundlessness, with nothing but the frame as a foreground, one feels as if one's eyelids had been cut away'.

On its own, this picture seems to suggest a positively existential loneliness, yet it takes on a less modern aspect when one learns that it has a pendant which shows the monk's burial and his reunion in death with the infinite.

105 FRIEDRICH
The Cross in the Mountains 1808

106 FRIEDRICH *Meadows before Greifswald c.*1825

107 FRIEDRICH *The Large Enclosure* 1832

Up to the end of the Napoleonic wars Friedrich frequently painted works in which explicitly nationalist themes can be found. And, just as he had used a landscape to proclaim salvation through Christ, so he celebrated the defeat of the French in 1814 with a picture which showed a French dragoon lost in a German forest of evergreens.

The succeeding years – with his election to the Dresden Academy in 1816 and his marriage in 1818 – were a time of tranquillity. There was a gentler
157 mood in his art as well. Through such younger friends as J.C.C. Dahl, he became aware of the growing naturalist movement. His handling of paint became freer and thicker, and he even made a number of sky studies. His stark contrasts gave way to less dramatic arrangements.

These later works still convey an intense contemplation. His *Arctic*
108 *Shipwreck* may be less arresting in its colouring and lighting than *The Cross in*
104 *the Mountains*. Yet it is still dominated by a central pyramidal structure, which separates the relentless motion of the ice, as it crushes the trapped ship, from the open spaces beyond.

Right through his life he maintained a distinction between the study of individual forms in nature and the fusion of these into a moment of 'distinct feeling': he often combined sketches from different localities in one picture, and made use of studies by other artists of places he had not visited; his annual sketching tours never took him outside central and north Germany.

Friedrich's limited range of experience seems to have helped to preserve his intimate feeling for nature. Certain sketches he used again and again, as though turning to them as mnemonics to recapture some experience. And if his subjects were often melancholy, he could also paint such works of tender
106 intimacy as *Meadows before Greifswald*, a memory of his native town, glinting in the evening light, with two horses frolicking in the foreground.

Among his contemporaries Friedrich achieved a reputation for silent melancholy. This seems to have been a cloak for shyness in his early days, for those who knew him well told of his gentleness and his humour. Yet as his art fell out of favour and began to seem forced and contrived to a generation with different standards of realism, he became embittered. A series of illnesses, which left him nearly paralysed by 1835, added to his misery, and in his last years physical weakness forced him to end as he had begun, as a painter of small sepias. The mock-Gothicism of his early works returned, too, though this time with a grimmer accent.

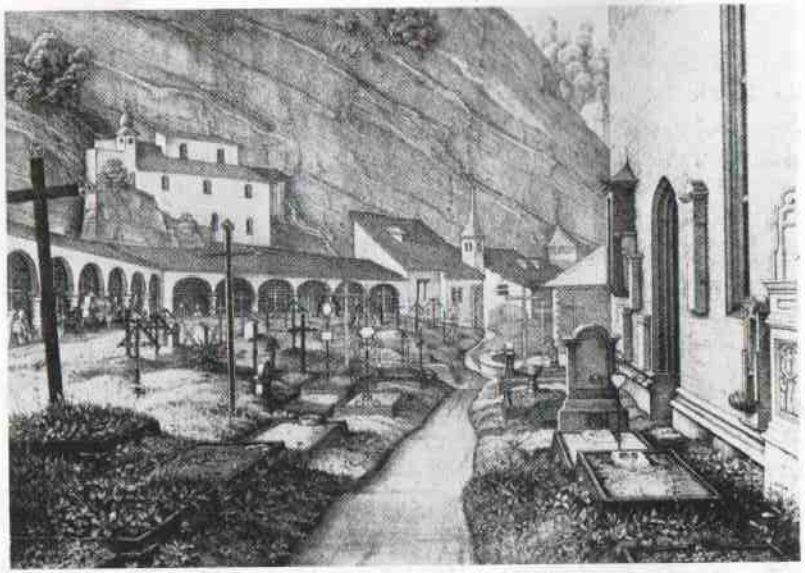
Up to the time of his physical disablement, his powers as an artist in no
107 sense diminished. *The Large Enclosure*, a view over a marshy stretch of land near Dresden, plays on the poignancy of evening light. In the after-glow, everything is changing. The waters, still reflecting the sky, stand out from shady earth, while the dense rows of trees behind are already nocturnal

108 FRIEDRICH *Arctic Shipwreck* 1824

silhouettes. Before them is the pale, solitary sail of a small craft, moving near to the dark centre of the composition, where our eye is held by the insistent curves of the sky and foreground. Here, as in all his best works, Friedrich has touched some pure communication of forms that awakens a new and unsuspected level of awareness.

Devotion and tradition

For both Runge and Friedrich, the study of nature, God's creation, was a religious act. Yet both of them remained rooted in their Protestant upbringing, and neither countenanced a return to the simple piety of medieval art. However, Wackenroder, too, had considered nature to be the language of God, and the Nazarenes (*see* p. 112) insisted on its careful study. There were some of their followers who found in landscape a means of expressing their enthusiasm and devotion.



109 FERDINAND OLIVIER *Saturday* 1818–22

In Vienna, there was a brief flowering of inspired landscape in the wake of the medieval revival. Here the central figure was Ferdinand Olivier (1785–1841), an artist from Dessau who arrived in Vienna in 1812 with his younger brother Friedrich (1791–1859). Ferdinand Olivier was far from being an innocent, having previously studied in Paris and encountered the art of Caspar David Friedrich in Dresden.

Once in Vienna, the Oliviers were inspired by such older revivalists as Koch to paint religious subjects in landscapes that lean heavily on the Danube school and other Old German Masters. But in their drawings they preserved a more personal world. Friedrich Olivier, the less original of the two, could raise imitation to the level of revelation in his studies of withered leaves. Ferdinand recorded the humblest of views with clear-eyed piety. His lithographs, *The Days of the Week*, are like a series of meditations on Holy Week. Each day is represented by a view of the neighbourhood of Salzburg
109 which sets off the appropriate mood. *Saturday* shows the cemetery of St Peter in Salzburg. Viewed close to the ground, the scene is described in a delicate mesh of lines which lays bare the plainness of stone surfaces and captures the delicacy of each plant in the foreground shadows. There is a note of disturbance and grief, heightened by the irregular recession of the pathway and the slight tilt of the shadowed cross on the left. And these prepare one for the funeral that is eventually discovered by the arches at the foot of the mountain.

The fate of the Oliviers' art was similar to that of other German Revivalists who did not die young. Friedrich Olivier went to Rome, Ferdinand stayed in Germany; both drifted gradually into the web of official art, and the heartfelt intimacy of their drawings vanished.

Samuel Palmer and the Ancients

The response to nature as a means of self-discovery, awareness of the infinite and the Divine, was common to the Romantic movement throughout Europe. However, in landscape painting outside Germany, it tended to remain an undercurrent, implicit rather than explicit. Thus, in England, there was among painters a more selfless sensibility, a more outgoing fascination with the moods and multiplicity of nature for their own sake. And although this moved the artists further from the intensive centre of Romanticism, it left them with a more communicable achievement.

In England it was only among the immediate followers of William Blake that spiritual revelation became the explicit theme of landscape painting. No more than a handful of drawings from nature by Blake himself are known; for landscape was to him a matter of synthesis, an inspired transformation of the visible. His own pure essays in the field were the result of a commercial commission. In 1819 he was engaged by Dr Robert Thornton to provide twenty-three of the 232 small wood-engraved illustrations to the third 110
edition of his school version of Virgil's *Pastorals*.

Thornton was himself horrified by the results; some he had re-engraved, and others he could bring himself to include only after encouragement from such sane members of the artistic establishment as the President of the Royal Academy, Sir Thomas Lawrence. That Blake received such distinguished support shows how his vision could appeal even to those who lacked the innocence to emulate it.

The peculiar impact that Blake's landscapes, as opposed to his prophetic works, made on his followers was a matter of content: his pure visions they

110 BLAKE *Cottage by a Stream* from Virgil's *Pastorals* 1820

could only admire, while his re-creation of nature was something they could emulate. The young Samuel Palmer could recognize with joy in the 'visions of little dells, and nooks' a transformation of the world that had become for him all too mundane: 'There is in all such a mystic and dreamy glimmer as penetrates and kindles the inmost soul, and gives complete and unreserved delight, unlike the gaudy daylight of this world.'

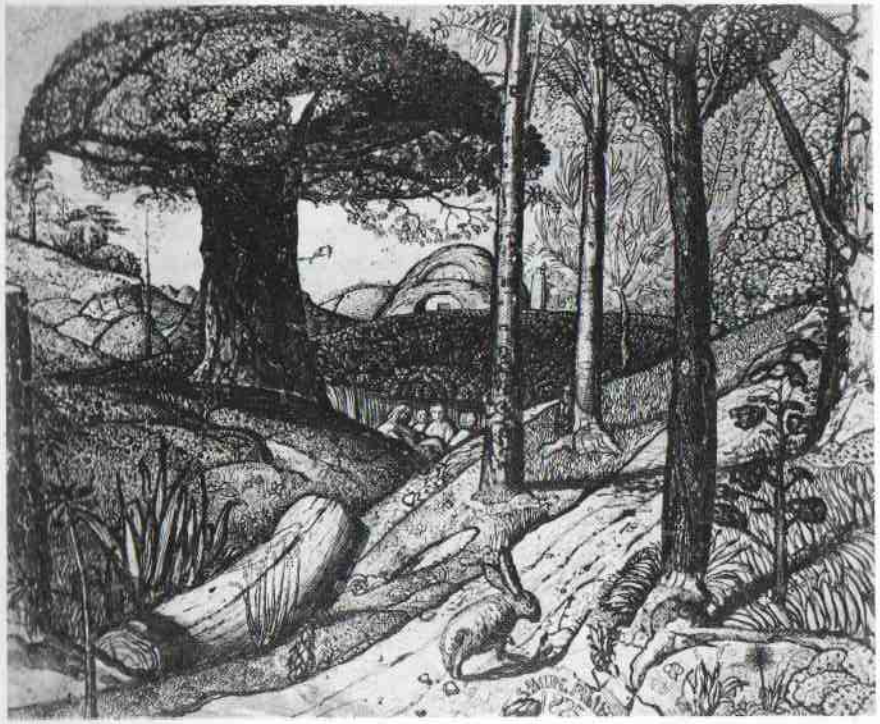
These illustrations to Virgil, and the pastoral scenes in the Book of Job, became a kind of talisman for Palmer during his most inspired years. They did not simply lead him to find his own nooks and dells in the rolling countryside of Kent; they actually showed him how to magnify textures and intensify features in his own drawings. At times Palmer's world is so close to that of Blake that it is as though they were speaking with one voice.

Blake's pastoral vision drew sustenance from the growing interest in the northern Primitives among English painters and connoisseurs. The English revivalist movement possessed its own Boisserée in Charles Aders, an Anglo-German merchant who built up a collection of Flemish and German Primitives after the Napoleonic wars. Aders, the friend of Flaxman and Crabb Robinson, was always willing to show his collection to those interested; and in the 1820s they included Blake and such younger admirers as Palmer, John Linnell, Edward Calvert and George Richmond, who thus came to hear of the Nazarenes and see lithographs after their works.

113 Some of these artists, in particular George Richmond, were tempted to follow the modern Germans in their close imitation of the subjects and styles of art before Raphael; and the decision to form a group known as the 'Ancients' and retire to the rural seclusion of the village of Shoreham may have been encouraged by their knowledge of the Brotherhood of St Luke. But for the most part their response to ancient art was more independent and creative.

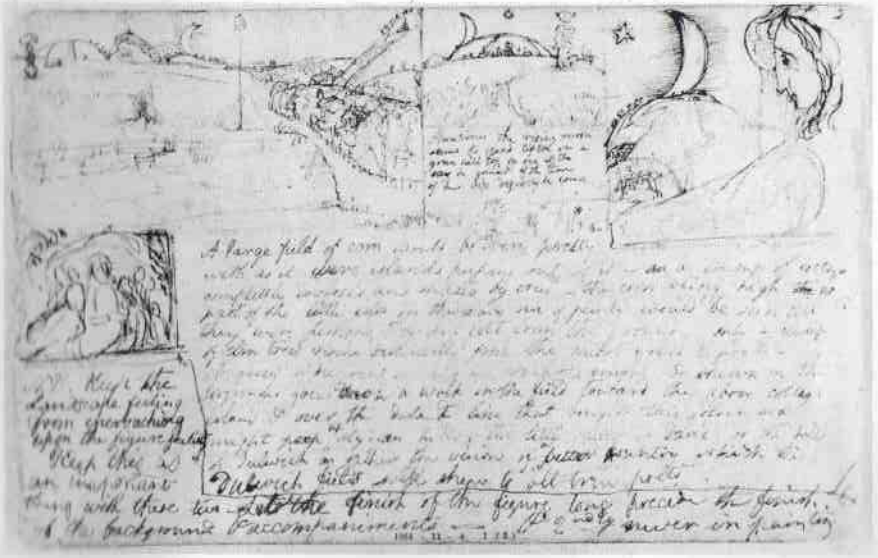
Samuel Palmer actually came into contact with this movement before he got to know Blake. The artist who first provided him with the impetus to work from nature 'with a child's simple feeling and with the industry of humility' was Linnell, whom he met in 1822. By this time, Linnell had known Blake for four years, was a familiar of Aders, and a strong admirer of Dürer's and Lucas van Leyden's engravings. Like Wackenroder, he responded to Dürer as an unfettered realist, and his own conversion came after more than a decade of wide-eyed observation that bordered on the naïve. For Palmer it was Linnell's injunction to look at Dürer and van Leyden that plucked him 'from the pit of modern art'. Two years later Linnell did Palmer an even greater service by introducing him to Blake.

The tragic destruction of much of Palmer's early work by his son has deprived us of the record of his first excitement at his discovery of the



111 PALMER *Early Morning* 1825

112 PALMER Sketchbook 1824



'Primitives'. But this prodigious young painter – who as a fourteen-year-old in 1819 had already exhibited at the Royal Academy under the influence of such English naturalist watercolourists as David Cox – had by 1824 fully accepted the hard lines, clear forms and vigorous textures of Dürer and Lucas van Leyden.

Like Blake, Palmer was as strongly fired by the written word as he was by
112 the visual image. His sketchbook of 1824 – the only one from this period to survive – contains such exhortations to himself as 'look for Van Leydenish qualities in real landscape, and look hard, long and continually'; in other outcries he goads his pictorial imagination with poetic metaphors, seeing a cornfield as a 'waving sea of plenty', or noting how 'the rising moon seems to stand tiptoe on a green hill-top to see if the day be gone and if the time for her vice-regency is come'.

111 The outcome of this interchange is clear in six finished sepia compositions, embellished with quotations from Milton and the Bible, which encase an abundant and fertile earth with thick, vigorous lines. It is a pastoral vision of fulfilment, a world of magic and fable, in which a young rabbit can be encountered, unafraid, on a morning walk.

113 RICHMOND *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* 1828

114 PALMER *Self-portrait* 1827

Palmer's vision, like Blake's, was highly sensuous – at times his imagery is frankly sexual. Yet he did not possess the heroic independence of the older man. A self-portrait of 1827 suggests more a youth filled with the 'negative 114
capability' described by Keats – that receptiveness to every fleeting nuance: overflowing with excitement in the moment, but passive and visionless when it has passed.

In 1827 he lost his mentor with the death of Blake. Earlier in the year he had already decided to settle at Shoreham, aided by a legacy from his grandfather. He was to remain here for nine years, but only in the first five was his inspiration fully sustained. A townsman by birth, he had always enjoyed an idyllic view of rural life, and the Reform Bill of 1832, which threatened the conservatism of the English countryside and was preceded by outbursts of rick burning and social agitation, appears to have come to him as a final disillusionment. In 1837 he married Linnell's daughter, and fell under the spell of his awkward and autocratic father-in-law. The man who had once been his guardian angel was now the demon who urged him to paint in a way that would be profitable. The outcome was a style of nostalgic gentleness, frequently sensitive, but totally lacking in excitement.

The paintings of Palmer's early Shoreham years were more than a continuation of Blake's vision. He had learned to grasp the detail of each individual form, to delight in the large ungainliness of horse-chestnut leaves, the pendulousness of fruits and the roughness of tree-trunks. Often he would work with a mixture of watercolour, pen, tempera and varnish, and achieve thereby a deep luminosity that makes his picture glow like a stained-glass
115 window. In *A Hilly Scene* there is an unearthly illumination, far more pervasive than any that could be cast by the sickle moon.

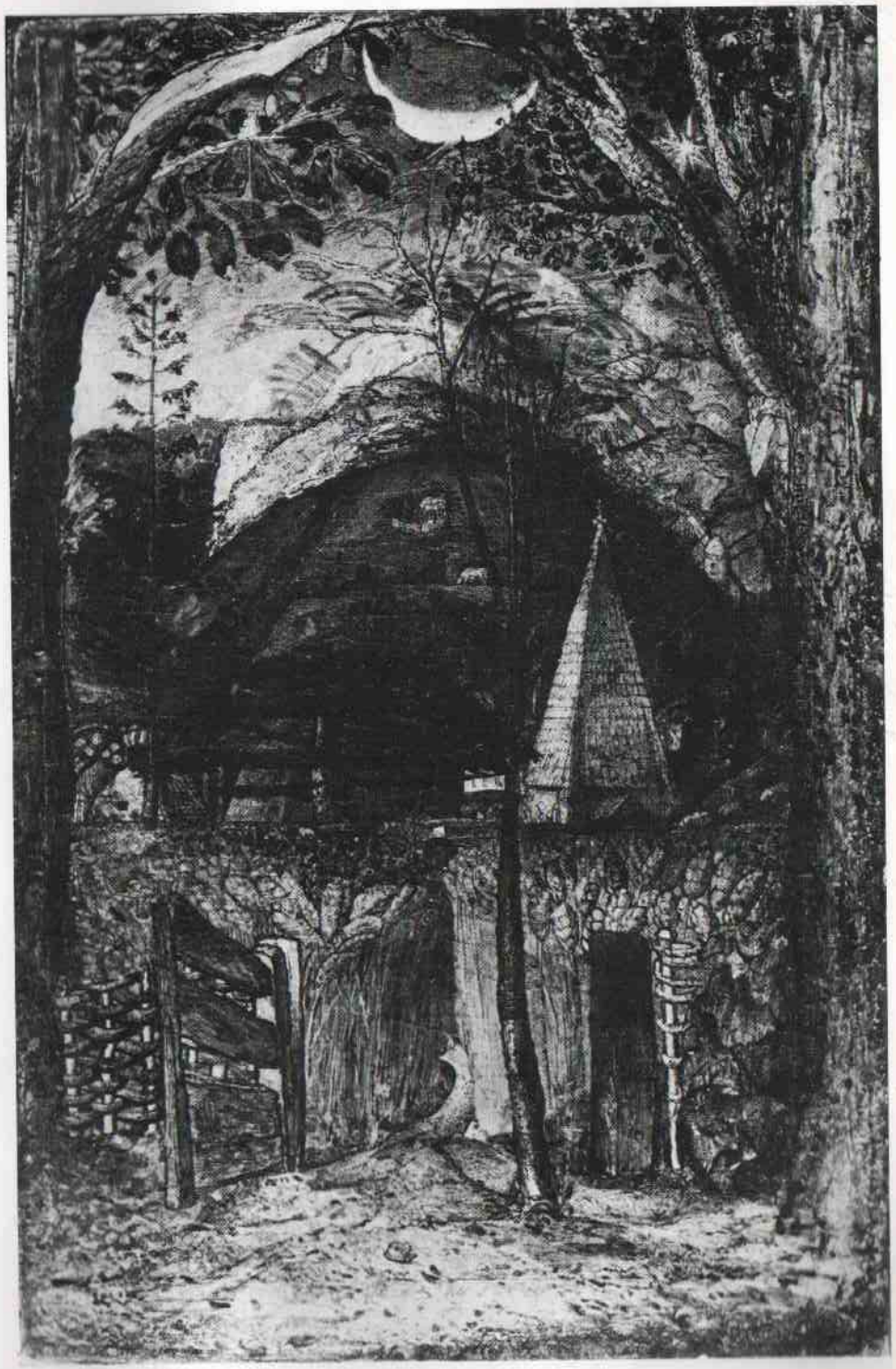
Palmer himself constantly found difficulty in reconciling what he saw with what he envisaged, in bringing together the 'lovely gentleness' of nature with the 'ponderous globosity of art'. It was only his sense of religion – symbolized in the *Hilly Scene* both in the 'Gothic' arch of the tree branches and the church at the picture's centre – that convinced him of the union which underlay all the visionary landscape of the Romantic period; the pure emotion generated through the awareness of nature remained the deepest and closest intimation of God.

J. M. W. Turner

A sense of divinity may be implicit in the whole of Romantic landscape painting. But the fascination with nature need not always linger on this single theme. The exploration can be extensive as well as intensive: the sheer presence and variability of the natural world can become overwhelming.

It was the extensiveness of the universal that obsessed the greatest landscape painter of the age, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851). In sixty years he explored every genre of landscape then conceived, always pushing towards some extremity. His most powerful advocate, John Ruskin, made an observation that could stand for Turner's work as a whole when he remarked that his sea pictures embodied either 'the poetry of silence and calmness' or 'turbulence and wrath'; 'of the intermediate conditions he gives few examples'.

Turner's art was one of extremes, but not of exaggeration. For exaggeration is no more than a shorthand way of alluding to the extraordinary; Turner entered fully into the events themselves. He recorded what he had witnessed, not so much by description as by the creation of pictorial equivalents. There is an actual delicacy and luminosity in his glazes, an actual force in his impastos, an internal cohesion to his compositions and colour harmonies. The literary sources, allegorical references and rhetoric of his subjects are like footnotes to the central fact of paint. The pictorial achievement was to make his art an object of admiration for the Impressionists and their followers – artists for whom the symbolism and subject matter of Romanticism had little meaning.



115 PALMER *A Hilly Scene* 1826–28

Although Turner's art was largely a source of consternation for his contemporaries, his expertise was constantly acknowledged. At twenty-four he was an Associate of the Royal Academy, and he became a full member in 1802, at the earliest possible age of twenty-six. Yet these honours were by virtue of his painting skill alone. A London barber's son, he had no social graces to help him on towards such coveted 'public' honours as a knighthood or Presidency of the Royal Academy.

Turner was both ambitious and miserly; and yet neither passion could override his art. The fortune he amassed by it was used in his later years to support him while working on pictures that were largely unsaleable, and to buy back examples of his earlier achievements. It would also have financed the establishment of a 'Turner Gallery', in which his work would have been on show for the public in perpetuity, had not the terms of his will been set aside by relatives as avaricious as himself. Devoted only to his father, he established no personal ties that would interfere with his art.

Turner's fascination with his own early productions during his last years reflects the underlying continuity of his career. His style certainly changed radically during his life, but this was a cumulative effect, the result of a gradual building up of experience. Already in his earliest watercolours one can detect the preoccupation with atmosphere and luminosity that was to dominate his last paintings; and his celebrated 'vortex' composition, in

116 TURNER *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – the Morning after the Deluge* 1843

117 TURNER *Fishermen at Sea* 1796

which all the features of a picture become swept up in a whirling centrifugal mass, is already implicit in his first exhibited oil, *Fishermen at Sea*. 117

Yet there does seem to have been one moment of crisis in mid-career. This was around 1815, when he seemed to have achieved the height of his ambition, to have outpaced all contemporaries, and emulated the Old Masters to perfection. It was a vital but daunting moment. From then on Turner was learning lessons that only he could teach himself. And, indeed, it took him some years to adjust.

The emulation of the works of other masters was an accepted practice in a society that still believed in a single scale of excellence in the arts, and still felt that the young English school had much to catch up on and learn from the Old Masters. Turner began at the very bottom of the hierarchy, as a colourist for other people's engravings and drawings. From the start his approach was pragmatic; and at much the same time as he entered the Royal Academy School in December 1789 he also began working for the architectural draughtsman, Thomas Malton. There can have been no finer training in

accuracy of observation than to work for a man whose métier was the exact depiction of buildings. And, as Ruskin noted, the sense of precision never left Turner. It is this that makes his exploration of atmospheric effect so telling.

Turner trained as a watercolourist at a time when the technique itself was taking on new importance. The growing fascination with the moods of nature among topographers brought out the special advantages of this fluent and sensitive medium for capturing the feeling as well as the features of a place. It was a quality that had already distinguished the work of John Robert Cozens, and Turner came into close contact with this artist's work when he was set to copy watercolours in the possession of Dr Thomas Monro. For this doctor and amateur painter had Cozens, and many of his works, in his care during the artist's last years of insanity (1794–97). Monro seems to have established a kind of informal academy for young watercolourists, in which they had the advantage of working from his collection and he of acquiring their copies. Turner worked there with the only artist of his generation to rival his expertise in the medium, the short-lived Thomas Girtin. Girtin responded to the way Cozens carefully built up the tone of his pictures with structured layers of small brush-strokes, whereas for Turner Cozens' overall mastery of effect was a stimulus to experimentation. In 1799 he told the Academician and diarist, Farington, that 'he had no systematic process for making drawings . . . By working and occasionally rubbing out, he at last expresses in some degree the idea in his mind.'

It was part of the watercolourists' challenge to oil painters to demonstrate that the medium was powerful enough to sustain a large finished composition. By 1799 Turner was also a master of this type of work, which remained highly popular among his patrons for many years. His five
26 'picturesque' views of Beckford's Fonthill Abbey show the extent to which a sense of the momentary had invaded topography. The *Evening* scene, for example, frames the Abbey with a wooded glade where a glinting rivulet provides a moment of quiet charm to set against the drama of the distant building.

As Turner graduated in the favour of the Academy he also began to adopt the dominant medium of oil, and to emulate the great seventeenth-century masters of landscape. Even at the end his sense of rivalry never left him, for he stipulated in his will that two of his early works should hang beside two Claudes in the National Gallery.

It had been a recommendation of Sir Joshua Reynolds that the artist should assimilate the qualities of some famous work by designing a pendant for it: and Turner was engaged to paint pendants to a number of masterpieces. For Turner, however, such a commission was also a challenge

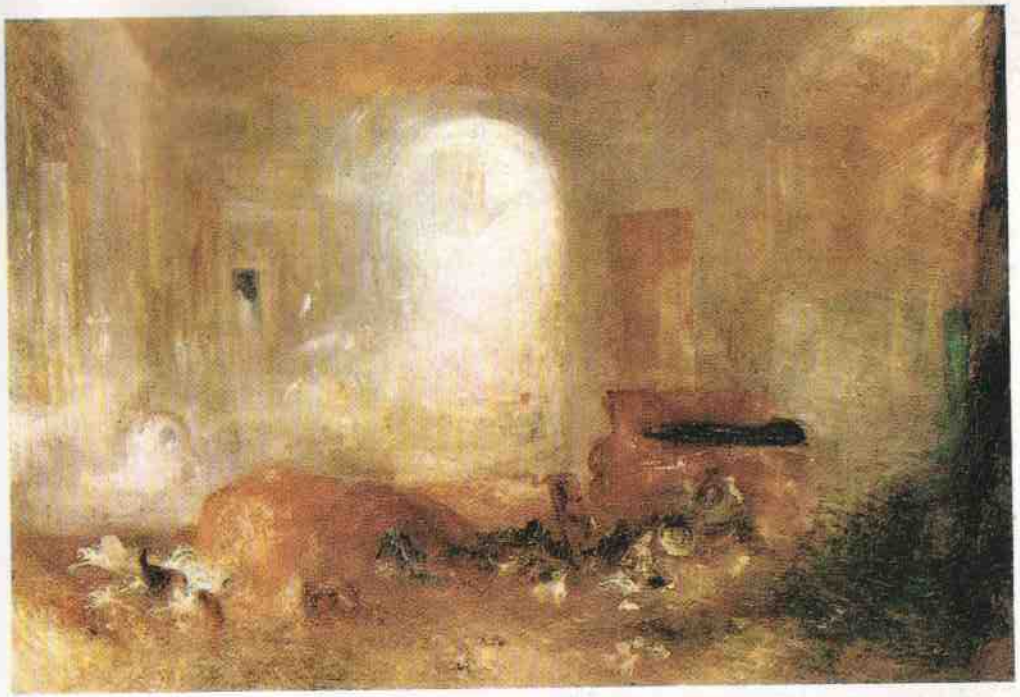
118 TURNER *Wreck of a Transport Ship* 1805–10

to improve on the original; and improvement in contemporary terms meant the demonstration of additional expertise in the rendering of atmosphere and drama. Above all it was the virtuosity of such fashionable artists as De Loutherbourg that Turner emulated at the expense of earlier painters.

It seems hard to believe that the *Wreck of a Transport Ship* was actually the 118
culmination of a series of stormy sea pictures that had begun with a commission from Lord Bridgewater to paint a pendant to his Van der Velde *A Rising Gale* in 1801. In that commission Turner had grasped the way the Dutch master made a keynote out of the dominant tilt of a foreground sail to set up the motion of the wind. In the *Wreck of a Transport Ship* this gale has grown into a storm. Everything now is at the mercy of the sea. Even we are engulfed in it, for our point of view is from the depths of a trough between the waves.

Disaster pictures – particularly shipwrecks – were part of the stock-in-trade of Romantic art, and Turner certainly exploited their sensationalism to the full. Yet the action is conveyed through the presence of the medium.

119 TURNER *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On* (detail of 126)



120 TURNER *Interior at Petworth c.*1837

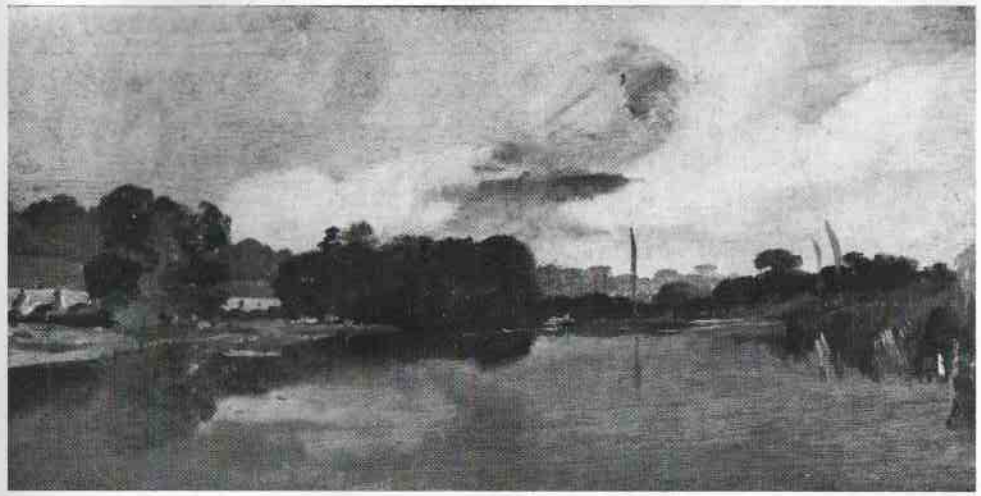
121 TURNER *Rain, Steam and Speed* 1844

Contemporaries were baffled by what they felt was Turner's lack of realism and, in particular, by the lack of transparency in the water. Ruskin could answer that waves really do become weighty and opaque when whipped up by a storm. For Turner, it was only through such tangibility that the force of a tempest could be given an analogue in paint.

While transcending the naturalism of the Dutch, Turner set out to outdramatize the historical landscape. Initially, his first-hand knowledge of such works had depended on the holdings of those private collections to which he had access. But in 1802 he was one of the several British artists who profited from the year and a half of peace with France to make a tour of the Continent. With characteristic astuteness he rushed first to see the most sublime of Europe's natural sights – the Alps – and then returned via its greatest collection – the Musée Napoléon. In the few weeks that he was in Paris he copiously noted the works of Ruisdael, Poussin, Rubens and Titian: all those, in fact, who had explored the association of human drama and nature. Already he had made essays in Biblical disaster in the manner of Poussin; he now came to understand how carefully this master gauged the tonalities of his pictures to accord with their content.

In a sense, this relationship between landscape and event remained the dominant preoccupation throughout Turner's career, though it deepened into a more basic investigation of experience and representation. And any

122 TURNER *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* 1812



123 TURNER *Walton Reach* c.1810

temptation to subordinate landscape to subject had become fully controlled by the time he created *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* in 1812. 122

As a subject this could not have been more to the purpose of historical landscape. For in it nature resounds with human import. The snowstorm that sweeps down on to the Carthaginians as they skirmish with local tribesmen threatens to blot out the image of the fertile plains beyond. Nor did Turner leave the reflection on this portent to the spectator's imagination; for when he exhibited the work at the Royal Academy he appended some verses to the catalogue entry which concluded:

Still on Campania's fertile plain he thought
But the loud breeze sob'd 'Capua's Joys beware'

The verses themselves were portentous. Written by Turner himself, they mark the first appearance of those extracts from his epic *The Fallacies of Hope* which were to accompany so many of his exhibited works. The very title of this poem reveals the morbid fatalism of Turner's thinking. Turner valued the use of poetry to enrich and expand the mood and import of a picture; but it was no more than an extension. There is no reason to suppose that there was ever more to *The Fallacies of Hope* than the 'extracts': that is, small pieces of verse concocted to fit the occasion. The image came before the poem.

If tradition is to be believed, the image also came before the subject. For it was the experience of a snowstorm while staying with a patron and close friend, Walter Fawkes, in Yorkshire in 1810 that is supposed to have been the

124 TURNER *Norham Castle c.*1840

starting-point of the picture. Fawkes' son recorded Turner as having said to him: 'in two years' time you will see this again and call it "Hannibal Crossing the Alps".'

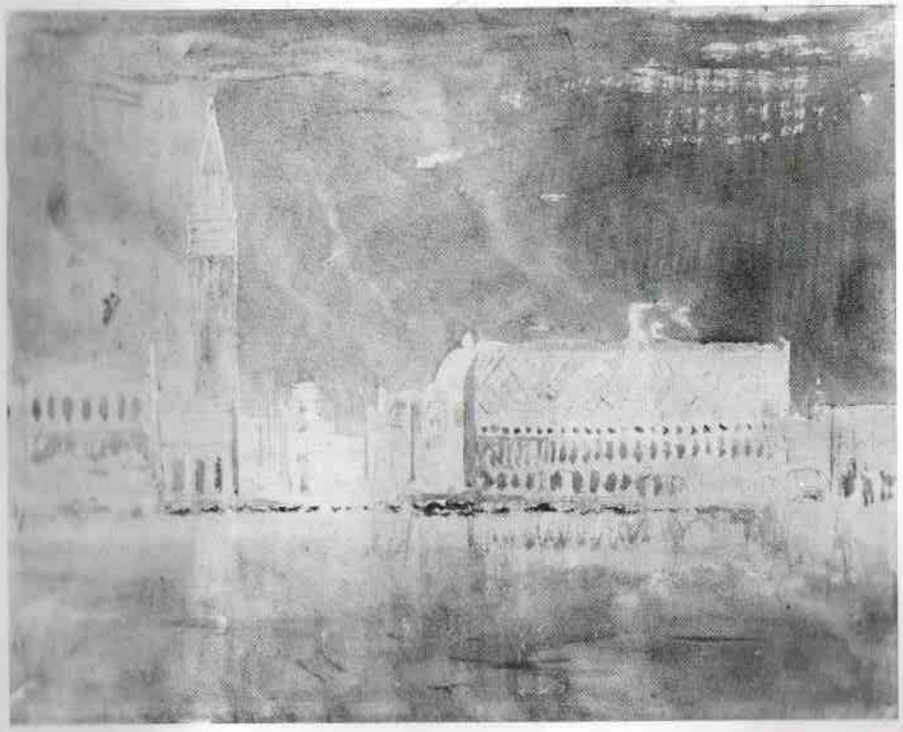
In any case, the storm is evidently the central event of the finished work. Hannibal's men and the tribesmen squabble in the folds of the foreground, their gestures almost indistinguishable among the rocks. And these in their turn are no more than markers for the tremendous sweep of snow-laden air as it arches over our heads, already half-obscuring the sun. It is a war of the elements, deep-toned and massive, with the palette knife freely used to lay on the impasto of snow clouds.

Hannibal Crossing the Alps brought Turner to the brink of hyperbole: 128 although a glance at the work of an emulator like John Martin will show how far Turner remains from the mere multiplication of effect. He did not attempt a scene of similar violence for more than twenty years; and then it was in terms of the revolution he had achieved in the use of colour.

Even while painting the most dramatic of themes, he had never ceased to explore the lyrical tranquillity of Claude and such Dutch masters as Cuyp. The recordings of moments of movement and excitement must, by the very nature of the circumstances, be allusive; the silent and static can be investigated with more care. It was in the quiet English countryside that he turned to the practice, usually associated with Constable and other naturalists, of making direct studies in oils. *Walton Reach*, one of a number of 123 sketches made in the Thames valley, has all the freshness of Constable's open-air sketches, yet its purpose is somewhat different. For, whereas Constable searched for the individual and the momentary, filling his sketches with those little flecks that suggest the passing light and wind, Turner has reduced his forms to broad, evenly applied areas of paint. It is a landscape virtually devoid of narrative, and one of the first works in which his sense of organization comes to the fore.

After the Napoleonic wars Turner became an inveterate Continental traveller; and while he found in France, the Rhineland, the Alps and Central Europe a vast fund of new material, it was Italy that did most to develop his vision. For here he was to trace the light in Claude's pictures to its source, and to find a very different kind of experience.

125 TURNER *The Campanile and Ducal Palace at Venice* 1819



Turner spent most of his six months' journey in Rome and southern Italy, but he visited Venice on his way, and there the freshness of the experience inspired some of his earliest essays in pure colour. Just as the study of *Walton*
123 *Reach* had brought out a sense of the organization of shapes on the picture
125 plane, a watercolour like *The Campanile and Ducal Palace at Venice* combined a similar sense – evident in the radical frontality of the composition – with the use of almost pure primary colours.

In this sketch one can see the dawning of that approach that was to characterize the great works of his later career. Painting, the application of colours on a flat surface, cannot actually copy a three-dimensional world illuminated by light; all it can do is suggest equivalent sensations. And it was by concentrating on the creation of equivalents that he achieved combinations of colour and form of unprecedented force and directness. At the same time as he made his sketch of the Campanile he was beginning the habit of making the kind of compositional studies of pure colour areas since known as 'colour beginnings'. Such watercolours are not 'abstract', for they always move towards the evocation of an atmospheric effect; yet they indicate how the starting-point of his pictures was shifting to the properties of the medium in which they were created.

By the 1830s the practice of making 'colour beginnings' was also firmly established in his oil paintings. There are numerous contemporary accounts of how he would send his works to the Academy 'only just rubbed in' and how he would then work them up into a recognizable subject in the few days set aside for 'varnishing' just before the exhibition opened. Such works as
124 *Norham Castle* are now believed to show the state before this final stage.

If colour harmonies could re-create the brightness of Italian light, they could also reveal the subtler luminosity of shady interiors. A series of prolonged stays in the spacious and relaxed atmosphere of Petworth, the country seat of his patron Lord Egremont, between 1828 and 1837, seems to have stimulated his curiosity in this direction. It was accompanied by a deeper understanding of the inner vibrancy of Rembrandt's pictures. Turner,
120 in such studies as the *Interior at Petworth*, depends much more on the relation of colours than does Rembrandt. But there is some hint of Rembrandt in the way the shapes of red and yellow and green dissolve and float before a changing background of warm and cool tonalities. And there is an almost mystic force to the column of light that bursts through the central arched opening and scatters in the atmosphere. There is a sense, both in the power of effect and in the density of paint, of light as a force superior to material forms.

Turner was deeply concerned with the theoretical side of his art. Between 1807 and 1837 he occupied the Royal Academy's Professorship of Perspective – a surrogate, in his eyes, for a teaching post in landscape. As a

lecturer he was a disaster – the only fully appreciative member of his audience being the painter, Thomas Stothard, a deaf man, who came solely on account of the magnificent diagrams that were used. Yet Turner prepared his material with great care. Not only did he include a résumé of the development and significance of the use of landscape painting in history painting, but he fully explored the problems of light sources and the nature of reflections. After 1830, when he had abandoned lecturing, many of his exhibited paintings contain explicit references to colour theories – notably *Watteau Study by Fresnoy's Rules* (1831), and *Light and Colour (Goethe's* 116
Theory) – the Morning after the Deluge.

The latter picture concerns a further dimension in Turner's use of colour: its emotive potential. Turner had read and carefully annotated Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (*Zur Farbenlehre*) when it appeared in the English translation of his friend, Eastlake, in 1840. He was scornful of the poet's anti-Newtonian bias, although he admired the acuity of his observation of optical effects. *Light and Colour* concerned Goethe's speculation on the associative properties of colour, according to which the 'cool' tones of the spectrum – blue, blue-green and purple – were 'negative', producing 'restless, susceptible, anxious impressions'; while the 'warm' tones – red, yellow and green – suggested 'warmth, gaiety and happiness'.

Light and Colour is a pendant to a picture entitled *Shade and Darkness* which shows the Deluge about to descend, and is painted in 'negative' blues and purples. Yet, although *Light and Colour* is based on the morning after the Deluge and is painted in 'positive' tones, it is not so much a celebration of God's salvation of Noah as a sceptical comment on it. For Turner has conceived the whole scene as encapsulated within a bubble, on whose spherical surface can be seen prismatic refractions of colour – a substitute for the rainbow which occurs in the Biblical account as a symbol of 'God's Promise'. And in the accompanying lines from *The Fallacies of Hope* Turner made it clear that these effects show the falseness of this promise. For the bubble is no more than

> *Hope's harbinger, ephemeral as the summer fly*
> *which rises, flits, expands and dies.*

Turner's disagreement with Goethe is not an attack on colour association so much as an affirmation that it, like every other form of perception, is dependent on the frame of mind of the observer. Goethe saw the power of light as benevolent; Turner saw it as indifferent. The force that gave life was also the force that destroyed.

Light and Colour was essentially a demonstration picture. But Turner had already produced works in which colour association is integral to the

126 TURNER *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On* 1839

119, 126 structure. *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon Coming On* showed the moment when in 1783 the captain of the slave ship *Zong* had diseased slaves thrown overboard so that insurance could be claimed on them for being lost 'at sea'. No picture by Turner is more lurid than this horrifying image, made even more unbearable by the foreground carnage, where the discarded slaves are being devoured by monsters of the sea. Ruskin, who thought it 'the noblest sea that Turner has painted', revelled in the gaudy exposure of '. . . the guilty ship as it labours amidst the lightning of the sea, its thin masts written upon the sky in lines of blood, girded with condemnation in that fearful hue which signs the sky with horror'.

Certainly the bruised, angry feeling of the storm-tinged sunset is unmistakable. Yet there is something disconcerting about the fact that Turner could create out of such a moment so magnificent a discord. Like
189 Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* it betrays an all too voluptuous morbidity.

Even where there is no such explicit symbolism the emotive power of colour in Turner's late works continues to set up associations. In his famous

celebration of that new and revolutionary mode of travel, the railway, there is something satanic about the black fuming engine as it rushes towards us over the viaduct: especially when it is contrasted with the limpid river scene with its peaceful floating boat on the left. Critics like Théophile Gautier could see the work as a positive manifestation of evil; yet there is every bit as much in the title and details of the work to enable one to see it as a panegyric on progress. This ambiguity leaves the central image of the work intact; the metallic intransigence of the train, passing through shimmering mists of pale blue and gold.

It is not difficult to see how Turner's outlook – his fatalism, love of the elemental, of grandeur and decay – accord with contemporary Romantic preoccupations. His ways of painting, too – that suggestive method so often mistaken for indistinctness – seemed to be the epitome of arbitrariness, a brilliant subjectivity only appropriate for those evocative and imaginative subjects known as 'romantic'. When seeing a view of the prosaic town of Dieppe so treated, Crabb Robinson exclaimed: 'If he will invent an atmosphere and play of colours all his own, why will he not assume a romantic *name?* No one could find fault with a Garden of Armida or even Eden *so* painted.'

Robinson was being too neat in tidying the romantic experience away from the commonplace. It was actually a harsher critic who came nearer to the heart of the matter. The most quoted remark the essayist William Hazlitt made about Turner, his dismissive 'pictures of nothing, and very like', was said in the context of a critique that chided Turner for producing paintings that were 'too much abstractions of aerial perspective and representation not properly of the objects of nature as of the medium through which they were seen'.

What is truly extraordinary is that a year later in 1816 Hazlitt wrote an article for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in which he praised Rembrandt precisely for his handling of 'nothing': 'His landscapes we could look at for ever, though there is nothing in them.' For Hazlitt, still a defender of the importance of 'content' in art, the magic of Rembrandt's light saved the inconsequential material of his pictures. And in trying to find a category for this supreme achievement he concluded: 'Rembrandt is the least Classical and most romantic of painters.'

This approach to Rembrandt seems to have been increasingly in Turner's mind during his latter years. Already in 1811, in his perspective lectures, he had made a distinction between the lowliness of Rembrandt's matter and the 'veil of matchless colour' with which he clothed it, so that the eye 'as it were thinks it a sacrilege to pierce the mystic shell of colour in search of form'.

It is the privilege of painters to concern themselves most with that which accords with their own interests in the works of their predecessors. And if Turner looked at Rembrandt above all for his 'veil of matchless colour', a later generation of French artists were similarly selective in praising the English master's chromatic harmonies while condemning the 'exuberant romanticism of his fancy'. Nevertheless, even such tranquil moments as
124 *Norham Castle* have nothing to do with the Impressionist dissection of light. The chance appearance, under certain conditions, of haystacks, façades and ponds, may have provided simply a felicitous visual occasion for the creation of the pure colour poetry of Monet's late works; but Turner could not be so dispassionate. The event still lurks behind the veil, is still at the core of the pictorial equivalent. Colours for Turner are not even the release of pure emotions, as they were to be for the Symbolists. They are the vehicles of an ineffable attitude to being; of the curiosity, wonderment, despair and psychological naïveté of an age which still sought to grasp an intimation, however abstracted or indefinite, of some totality behind the enigma and inconsequence of existence. There was no other artist in that age who could make this so purely visual.

Landscape and melodrama

Any sequel to Turner must have the air of anti-climax. Yet it did not seem so to his contemporaries. Few ventured to follow him in his journey beyond simple descriptiveness; and there were many artists who claimed to have improved on Turner when they had merely exploited and vulgarized the lower reaches of his art.

There was, for example, a whole range of marine painters who negotiated
118 the well-charted regions between *The Transport Ship* and the seascapes of the Dutch. First among these was Clarkson Stanfield (1793–1867), an ex-seaman, who gained his apprenticeship in 'effect' painting working as a scene-painter at the Drury Lane Theatre. His skill in handling atmospherics certainly took in Ruskin, who rashly declared 'one work of Stanfield alone presents us with as much concentrated knowledge of sea and sky, as diluted, would have lasted one old master his life'. But there was a definiteness in his allusions that was far more satisfying to the Victorians than the confusing ambivalences of Turner's themes. And, although an occasional critic of this period could decide that a work like Turner's *The Transport Ship* 'exhibited in a high moral sense the excitement and action of the tempest in its wrath', no one
127 could miss the pathos of Stanfield's *The Abandoned*. This was unequivocal enough for an engraving of it to be used to set the scene in a series of paintings on the consequences of marital infidelity, *Past and Present* (1858, Tate Gallery), by that master of Victorian moral genre, Augustus Leopold Egg.

127 STANFIELD *The Abandoned* 1856

128 MARTIN *The Great Day of His Wrath* 1851–54

The principal heir to Turner's historical holocausts – a field he left wide
122 open after his *Hannibal* of 1812 – was John Martin (1789–1854). This artist came from a Northumbrian family of eccentrics: one brother ended up in a lunatic asylum after having attempted to set fire to York Minster, and another walked the streets of Newcastle as self-styled 'Philosophical Conqueror of All Nations', wielding a home-made gong and wearing a tortoise-shell hat. His own nickname of 'Mad Martin' may have been undeserved; but his pictures made their impact through their extension of scale and effect beyond all probability.

Martin was a self-made man who remained on the fringes of artistic respectability. He became a violent opponent of the Royal Academy, which he felt had slighted him. The antipathy soon became reciprocal, as the men of taste began to witness the mounting popular success of his 'vulgar' art. For such Biblical fantasies as *Joshua Commanding the Sun to Stand Still* (1816) or *Belshazzar's Feast* (1821) became show-stoppers wherever he chose to exhibit them. The latter, for instance, caused the exhibition at the British Institution to be extended three weeks, and then immediately attracted a further five thousand paying visitors when it was shown privately. And if Martin sometimes had difficulty in finding an actual purchaser for his vast canvases, he certainly made a killing out of entry-fees to see them and the mezzotints of them he engraved.

Martin's ingenuity ran to practical suggestions for the much-needed improvement of London's sewage disposal and water supply. His pictures, too, are full of calculations; and the explanatory pamphlets that he wrote for them provided not only full descriptions of the multitudes of people and stupendous buildings in them, but also the actual heights of the towering mountains. Like a modern spectacular or science-fiction film, Martin's fantasies enthralled through their detailed account of the barely believable. In a pre-Darwinian age such accuracy in the description of Biblical holocausts was no mere matter of make-believe. Indeed, the recent discoveries of fossils and buried cities seemed to many scientists actually to confirm the Bible. One such believer, the palaeontologist Cuvier, visited Martin and praised the scientific exactness of his *Deluge*.

It was this fundamentalism that inspired Martin's last great creation, his *Last Judgment* in three gigantic canvases which follow the Book of
128 Revelation to the letter. In *The Great Day of His Wrath* the mountains and rocks actually fall, as bidden in the Bible, on those who seek to hide from the Lord. Some of them take whole cities – already viewed upside-down – into the abyss. It is hardly surprising that such faithful accounts of What Is To Come were on constant tour throughout Britain and America for twenty years after Martin's death.

129 ALLSTON *Elijah Being Fed by the Ravens* 1818

The American Sublime

In America Martin exerted a strong influence, but he is far from being a major reason for the flourishing of a school of imaginative landscape painting there. Since Independence, American painters of talent tended less to seek their fortune – as West and Copley had done – in England. Painters like Washington Allston and Thomas Cole travelled extensively in Europe, but returned to America to establish their careers.

Although there was already at the beginning of the century a strong impetus to depict the native American landscape, artists still leaned heavily on the culture of Europe in their imaginative work. Nathaniel Hawthorne's complaint in *The Marble Faun* of 'the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common prosperity' seems also to have been echoed by painters; neither they nor Hawthorne seem to have thought of the Indian civilizations that provided such a fertile source of romance for European writers and painters.

In one sense this feeling of separation was an advantage. For it intensified the isolation of the Romantic artist. The bizarre fantasy of the stories of

130 COLE *Youth* from *The Voyage of Life* 1840

Edgar Allan Poe, for one, fed upon this distance from the source of their narratives, and this also gave an edge to the art of Thomas Cole.

Washington Allston (1799–1843), a Harvard graduate, spent two prolonged periods in Europe, from 1801 to 1808, and 1811 to 1817. The respect he acquired for historical art was the bane of his life, and the last twenty-five years of it were dogged by his inability to complete the vast Biblical subject *Belshazzar's Feast*. In landscape painting, however, he could give expression to more personal obsessions; and even when he moved into the field of historical landscape, fully equipped with a profound enthusiasm for Titian's 'gorgeous concert of colours', there was little left in it of Old
129 World reticence. *Elijah Being Fed by the Ravens* is in many ways a pastiche of Titian and Rosa; yet no European artist would have conceived so haywire a pair of trees, or such a blatant mimicry of the arched back of the Prophet.

Thomas Cole (1801–48), the leading landscape painter of the early nineteenth century, was equally drawn by the 'gigantic associations of the storied past'. Yet he tried to filter this through an American experience. Born and reared in England, which he left at the age of eighteen, he found the sheer freshness of 'primeval forests, virgin lakes and waterfalls'

131 CHURCH *Landscape with Rainbow* 1866

exhilarating after the sights of Europe, 'hackneyed and worn by the daily pencils of hundreds'.

Despite the unrivalled success of his American views, Cole could never rid himself of the old belief in the supremacy of content in a picture. A trip back to Europe in 1829–32 – during which he actually occupied Claude's old studio in Rome – confirmed his respect for historical landscape. For the rest of his life he loved nothing more than to find the occasion for creating landscape cycles on human destiny, such as *The Course of Empire* (1836) and *The Voyage of Life*. The latter, a sequence of four pictures in which a man passes in a boat along a river and reaches his apotheosis as his battered vessel comes to rest in the sea, is like a fairground ride come real, each turn presenting a new stupendous sideshow. The subject apparently came to Cole as he made a journey along the Genesee, and the spring-time *Youth*, for all its 130
Claudian staging and Martinesque vision in the sky, has an unprecedented sense of newness in the bright, almost metallic, depiction of luxuriant verdure and manifold plants.

Cole's pure landscapes, usually viewed panoramically in dramatic atmospherics, were full of what his public could readily identify as 'true

American feeling'. His most successful pupil, Frederick E. Church (1826–1900), travelled throughout North and South America in search of
131 spectacular scenes which he endows with a symphonic totality that is positively Wagnerian. His all-embracing harmonies of colour, light and atmosphere, handled with breathtaking expertise, at last turned historical landscape into a truly popular art. And the sense of drama and the heroic that emerges here is already close to that of Hollywood.

Dramatic landscape in Europe

There was no full-scale Continental equivalent to the Anglo-Saxon nature drama. Rome had been the earliest centre of the revival of 'heroic' landscape; and it was there that the French painter Girodet (1767–1824) first proclaimed landscape the 'universal genre of painting' in 1793. Yet the artists who worked there rarely ventured to extremes. Girodet's own landscape compositions are charged with poetry, but they never stray far from Gaspard Poussin. The Tirolese painter Joseph Anton Koch (1768–1839) became the dominant representative of 'heroic' landscape in Rome in the
135 decade after he settled there in 1793. His *Schmadribach* certainly conveys something of the *terribilità* that he so admired in Michelangelo, and accords with his own desire to convey a sense of the elemental in landscape similar to that imagined when reading the Bible or Homer. Yet this 'universal picture', with its mighty sweep through the strata of nature from the foreground stream to the snow-capped mountain tops, is above all a feat of control. Each form is embedded in its plane, there is no mystery to the lighting or atmospherics; everything is organized and classified. And, although Koch was often hailed as the reviver of German landscape, the cautious archaism of his later works did as much as anything to dampen the youthful enthusiasm of artists like Fohr and the Oliviers.

This heroic art did develop a more expressive concern in the 1820s. In France Paul Huet (1803–69), the friend of Delacroix and Bonington, painted lowering landscapes, full of deep gorges, darkened woods and silent lakes, which struck Théophile Gautier as 'Shakespearian'. His early scene of a
133 lonely wanderer returning at evening beneath a stormy sky is very much the
95 pessimistic corollary to Richter's sentimental *Harper's Return*. However there is a world of difference between Richter's Koch-inspired inventory of features and Huet's painterly atmospherics. Like Turner and Stanfield, Huet made a speciality of studying the powerful and mutable in nature, and was most admired for his treatment of waves.

Like the followers of Turner, Huet constantly ran the risk of becoming over-theatrical. For it was all too easy to upset the delicate balance between observation and expression on which the Romantic revelation through

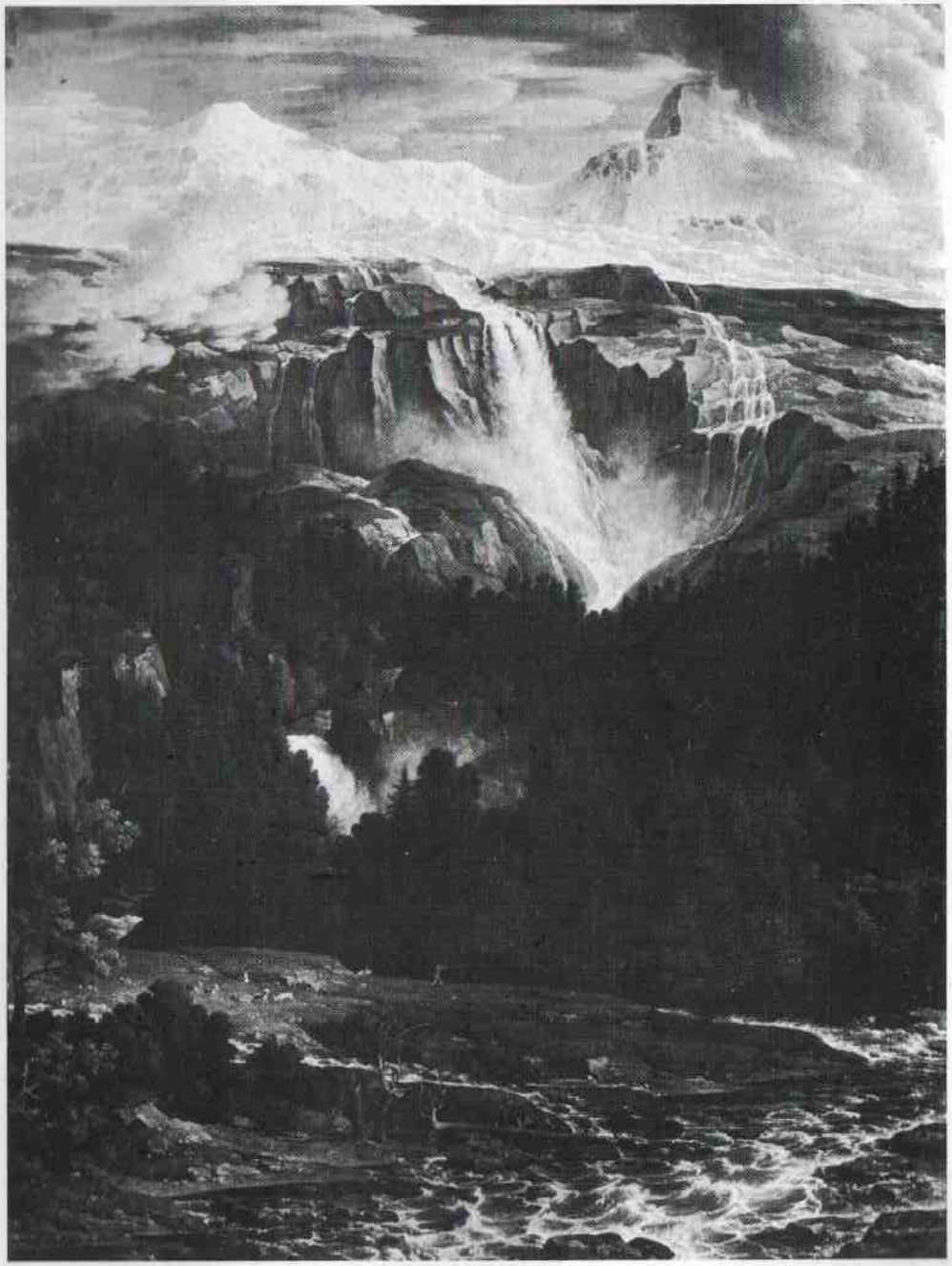
132 NUYEN *Ruin by a River* 1836

133 HUET *Landscape with a Lake at Evening (The Storm)* 1840

134 BLECHEN *Galgenberg c.*1832

nature depended, to replace empathy with simple histrionics. Romantic landscape, as it spread through the academies of Europe, became no more than a set of stock conventions, which even a young artist of talent like the
132 Dutch Wijnandus Josephus Johannes Nuyen (1813–39) could do little to revive.

This dilemma can be felt clearly in the works of the brilliant Berlin painter Carl Blechen (1798–1840). Blechen was aware both of Friedrich and of Turner. A skilled scene-painter, he became fascinated with the study of light effects after a visit to Italy in 1828–29. Yet more often than not the lyricism of his scenes is dispersed by irony, much as his contemporary the poet Heinrich Heine, in his early verses creates idyllic moods only to destroy them. In such
134 spirited landscape studies as *Galgenberg* there is a fatal lassitude, a falling off of attention from the fearful gallows and the impasto of the slaty sky to the aimless strips of colour on the horizon. Romantic landscape painting had become a cliché for Blechen, yet elsewhere there was nothingness: either the nothingness of Turner's formless light, or the nothingness of the naturalists, whose paintings had no subject. In the end, Blechen was drawn, like so many other painters of his generation, towards naturalism.



135 KOCH *Schmadribach* 1808–11