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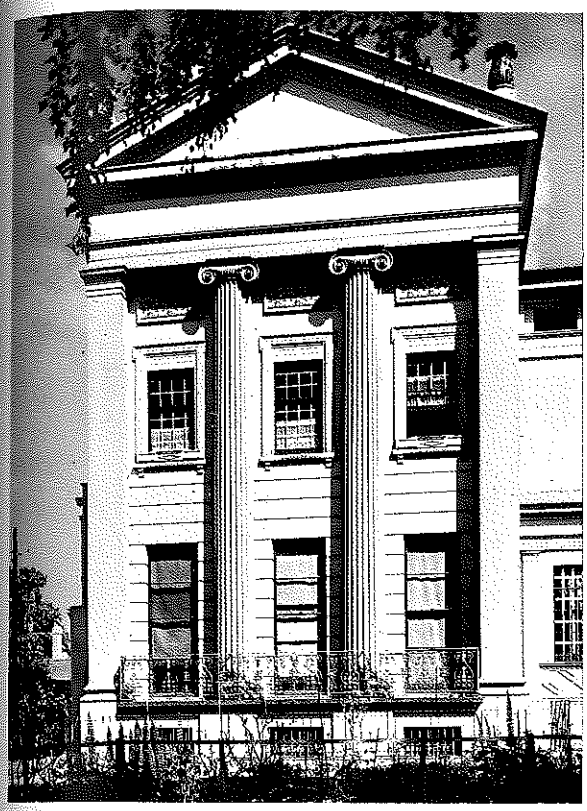
THE BREAK IN TRADITION

England, America and France, late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

In history books modern times begin with the discovery of America by Columbus in 1492. We remember the importance of that period in art. It was the time of the Renaissance, the time when being a painter or a sculptor ceased to be an occupation like any other and became a calling set apart. It was also the period during which the Reformation, through its fight against images in churches, put an end to the most frequent use of pictures and sculptures in large parts of Europe, and forced the artists to look for a new market. But however important all these events were, they did not result in a sudden break. The large mass of artists were still organized in guilds and companies, they still had apprentices like other artisans, and they still relied for commissions largely on the wealthy aristocracy, who needed artists to decorate their castles and country seats and to add their portraits to the ancestral galleries. Even after 1492, in other words, art retained a natural place in the life of people of leisure, and was generally taken for granted as something one could not well do without. Even though fashions changed and artists set themselves different problems, some being more interested in the harmonious arrangement of figures, others in the matching of colours or the achievement of dramatic expression, the purpose of painting or sculpture remained in general the same, and no one seriously questioned it. This purpose was to supply beautiful things to people who wanted them and enjoyed them. There were, it is true, various schools of thought which quarrelled among themselves over what 'beauty' meant and whether it was enough to enjoy the skilful imitation of nature for which Caravaggio, the Dutch painters, or men like Gainsborough, had become famous, or whether true beauty did not depend on the capacity of the artist to 'idealize' nature as Raphael, Carracci, Reni or Reynolds were supposed to have done. But these disputes need not make us forget how much common ground there was among the disputants, and how much between the artists whom they chose as their favourites. Even the 'idealists' agreed that the artists must study nature and learn to draw from the nude, even the 'naturalists' agreed that the works of classical antiquity were unsurpassed in beauty.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century this common ground seemed gradually to give way. We have reached the really modern times which dawned when the French Revolution of 1789 put an end to so many assumptions that had been taken for granted for hundreds, if not for thousands, of years. Just as the Great Revolution has its roots in the Age of Reason, so have the changes in man's ideas about art. The first of these changes concerns the artist's attitude to what is called 'style'. There is a character in one of Molière's comedies who is greatly astonished when he is told that he has spoken prose all his life without knowing it. Something a little similar happened to the artists of the eighteenth century. In former times, the style of the period was simply the way in which things were done; it was practised because people thought it was the best way of achieving certain desired effects. In the Age of Reason, people began to become self-conscious about style and styles. Many architects were still convinced, as we have seen, that the rules laid down in the books by Palladio guaranteed the 'right' style for elegant buildings. But once you turn to textbooks for such questions it is almost inevitable that there will be others who say: 'Why must it be just Palladio's style?' This is what happened in England in the course of the eighteenth century. Among the most sophisticated connoisseurs there were some who wanted to be different from the others. The most characteristic of these English gentlemen of leisure who spent their time thinking about style and the rules of taste was the famous Horace Walpole, son of the first Prime Minister of England. It was Walpole who decided that

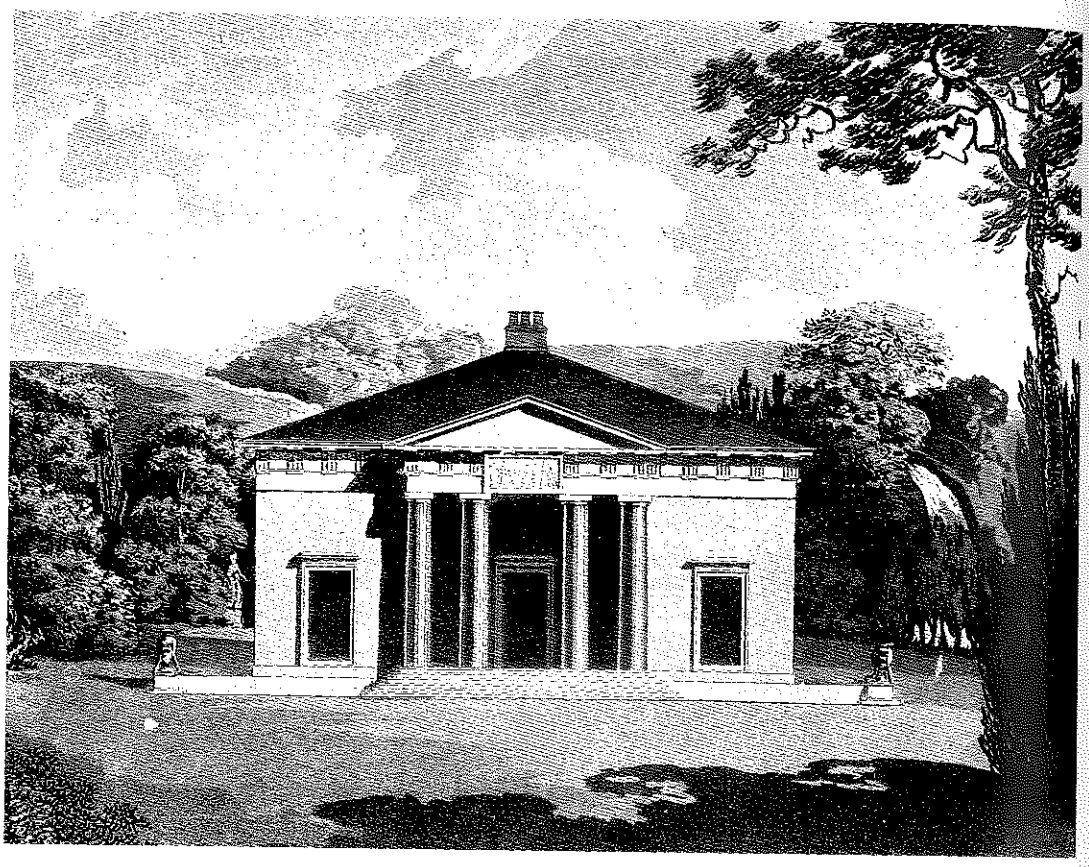


312
John Papworth
Dorset House, Cheltenham, c. 1825
A Regency façade

311
Horace Walpole, Richard Bentley and John Chute
Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, London, c. 1750–75
A neo-Gothic villa

it was boring to have his country house on Strawberry Hill built just like any other correct Palladian villa. He had a taste for the quaint and romantic, and was notorious for his whimsicality. It was quite in keeping with his character that he decided to have Strawberry Hill built in the Gothic style like a castle from the romantic past, *figure 311*. At the time, about 1770, Walpole's Gothic villa passed for the oddity of a man who wanted to show off his antiquarian interests; but seen in the light of what came later, it was really more than that. It was one of the first signs of that self-consciousness which made people select the style of their building as one selects the pattern of a wallpaper.

There were several symptoms of this kind. While Walpole selected the Gothic style for his country house, the architect William Chambers (1726–96) studied the Chinese style of buildings and of gardening, and built his Chinese Pagoda in Kew Gardens. The majority of architects, it is true, still kept to the classical forms of Renaissance building, but even they were increasingly worried about the right style. They looked with some misgivings on the practice and tradition of architecture which had grown up since the Renaissance. They found that many of these practices had no real sanction in the buildings of classical Greece. They realized, with a shock, that what had passed as the rules of classical architecture since the fifteenth century were taken from a few Roman ruins of a more or less decadent period. Now the temples of Periclean Athens were rediscovered and engraved by zealous travellers, and they looked strikingly different from the classical designs to be found in Palladio's book. Thus these architects became preoccupied with correct style. Walpole's 'Gothic revival' was matched by a 'Greek revival' which culminated in the Regency period (1810–20). This is the period in which many of the principal spas in England enjoyed their greatest prosperity, and it is in these towns that one can best study the forms of the Greek revival. *Figure 312* shows a house in Cheltenham Spa which is successfully modelled on the pure Ionic style of Greek temples,



313
Sir John Soane
Design for a country house
From *Sketches in Architecture*, London, 1798

page 100, figure 60. Figure 313 gives an example of the revival of the Doric order in its original form such as we know it from the Parthenon, *page 83, figure 50*. It is a design for a villa by the famous architect Sir John Soane (1752–1837). If we compare it with the Palladian villa built by William Kent some eighty years earlier, *page 460, figure 301*, the superficial similarity only brings out the difference. Kent used the forms he found in tradition freely to compose his building. Soane's project, by comparison, looks like an exercise in the correct use of the elements of Greek style.

This conception of architecture as an application of strict and simple rules was bound to appeal to the champions of Reason, whose power and influence continued to grow all over the world. Thus it is not surprising that a man such as Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), one of the founders of the United States and its third President, designed his own residence, Monticello, in this lucid, neo-classical style, *figure 314*, and that the city of Washington, with its public buildings, was planned in the forms of the Greek revival. In France, too, the victory of this style was assured after the French Revolution. The old happy-go-lucky tradition of Baroque

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Thomas Jefferson
Monticello, Virginia,
1796–1806

and Rococo builders and decorators was identified with the past which had just been swept away; it had been the style of the castles of royalty and of the aristocracy, while the men of the Revolution liked to think of themselves as the free citizens of a new-born Athens. When Napoleon, posing as the champion of the ideas of the Revolution, rose to power in Europe, the neo-classical style of architecture became the style of the Empire. On the Continent, too, a Gothic revival existed side by side with this new revival of the pure Greek style. It appealed particularly to those Romantic minds who despaired of the power of Reason to reform the world and longed for a return to what they called the Age of Faith.

In painting and sculpture, the break in the chain of tradition was perhaps less immediately perceptible than it was in architecture, but it was possibly of even greater consequence. Here, too, the roots of the trouble reach back far into the eighteenth century. We have seen how dissatisfied Hogarth was with the tradition of art as he found it, *page 462*, and how deliberately he set out to create a new kind of painting for a new public. We remember how Reynolds, on the other hand, was anxious to preserve that tradition as if he realized that it was in danger. The danger lay in the fact, mentioned before, that painting had ceased to be an ordinary trade the knowledge of which was handed down from master to apprentice. Instead, it had become a subject like philosophy to be taught in academies. The very word 'academy' suggests this new approach. It is derived from the name of the grove in which the Greek philosopher Plato taught his disciples, and was gradually applied to gatherings of learned men in search of wisdom. Sixteenth-century Italian artists at first called their meeting-places 'academies' to stress that equality with scholars on which they set such great store; but it was only in the eighteenth century that these academies gradually took over the function of teaching art to students. Thus the old methods, by which the great masters of the past had learned their trade by grinding colours and assisting their elders, had fallen into decline. No wonder that academic teachers like Reynolds felt compelled to urge young students to study diligently the masterpieces of the past and to assimilate their technical skill. The academies of the eighteenth century were under royal patronage, to manifest the interest which the King took in the arts in his realm. But for the arts to flourish, it is less important that they should be taught in Royal Institutions than that there should be enough people willing to buy paintings or sculptures by living artists.

It was here that the main difficulties arose, because the very emphasis on the greatness of the masters of the past, which was favoured by the academies, made patrons inclined to buy old masters rather than to commission paintings from the living. As a remedy, the academies, first in

Paris, then in London, began to arrange annual exhibitions of the works of their members. We may find it hard to realize what a momentous change this was, since we are so used to the idea of artists painting and sculptors modelling their work mainly with the idea of sending it to an exhibition to attract the attention of art critics and to find buyers. These annual exhibitions became social events that formed the topic of conversation in polite society, and made and unmade reputations. Instead of working for individual patrons whose wishes they understood, or for the general public, whose taste they could gauge, artists had now to work for success in a show where there was always a danger of the spectacular and pretentious outshining the simple and sincere. The temptation was indeed great for artists to attract attention by selecting melodramatic subjects for their paintings, and by relying on size and loud colour effects to impress the public. Thus it is not surprising that some artists despised the 'official' art of the academies, and that the clash of opinions, between those whose gifts allowed them to appeal to the public taste and those who found themselves excluded, threatened to destroy the common ground on which all art had so far developed.

Perhaps the most immediate and visible effect of this profound crisis was that artists everywhere looked for new types of subject-matter. In the past, the subject-matter of paintings had been very much taken for granted. If we walk round our galleries and museums we soon discover how many of the paintings illustrate identical topics. The majority of the older pictures, of course, represent religious subjects taken from the Bible, and the legends of the saints. But even those that are secular in character are mostly confined to a few selected themes. There are the mythologies of ancient Greece with their stories of the loves and quarrels of the gods; there are the heroic tales from Rome with their examples of valour and self-sacrifice; and there are, finally, the allegorical subjects illustrating some general truth by means of personifications. It is curious how rarely artists before the middle of the eighteenth century strayed from these narrow limits of illustration, how rarely they painted a scene from a romance, or an episode of medieval or contemporary history. All this changed very rapidly during the period of the French Revolution. Suddenly artists felt free to choose as their subjects anything from a Shakespearean scene to a topical event, anything, in fact, that appealed to the imagination and aroused interest. This disregard for the traditional subject-matter of art may have been the only thing the successful artists of the period and the lonely rebels had in common.

It is hardly an accident that this breakaway from the established traditions of European art was partly accomplished by artists who had come to Europe from across the ocean – Americans who worked in

England. Obviously these men felt less bound to the hallowed customs of the Old World and were readier to try new experiments. The American John Singleton Copley (1737–1815) is a typical artist of this group. *Figure 315* shows one of his large paintings, which caused a sensation when it was first exhibited in 1785. The subject was indeed an unusual one. The Shakespearean scholar Malone, a friend of the politician Edmund Burke, had suggested it to the painter and provided him with all the historical information necessary. He was to paint the famous incident when Charles I demanded from the House of Commons the arrest of five impeached members, and when the Speaker challenged the King's authority and declined to surrender them. Such an episode from comparatively recent history had never been made the subject of a large painting before, and the method which Copley selected for the task was equally unprecedented. It was his intention to reconstruct the scene as accurately as possible – as it would have presented itself to the eyes of a contemporary witness. He spared no pains in getting the historical facts. He consulted antiquarians and historians about the actual shape of the chamber in the seventeenth century and the costumes people wore; he travelled from country house to country house to collect portraits of as many men as possible who were known to have been Members of Parliament at that critical moment. In short, he acted as a conscientious producer might act today when he has to reconstruct such a scene for a historical film or play. We may or may not find these efforts well spent. But it is a fact that, for more than a hundred years afterwards, many artists great and small saw their task in exactly this type of antiquarian research, which should help people to visualize decisive moments of history.

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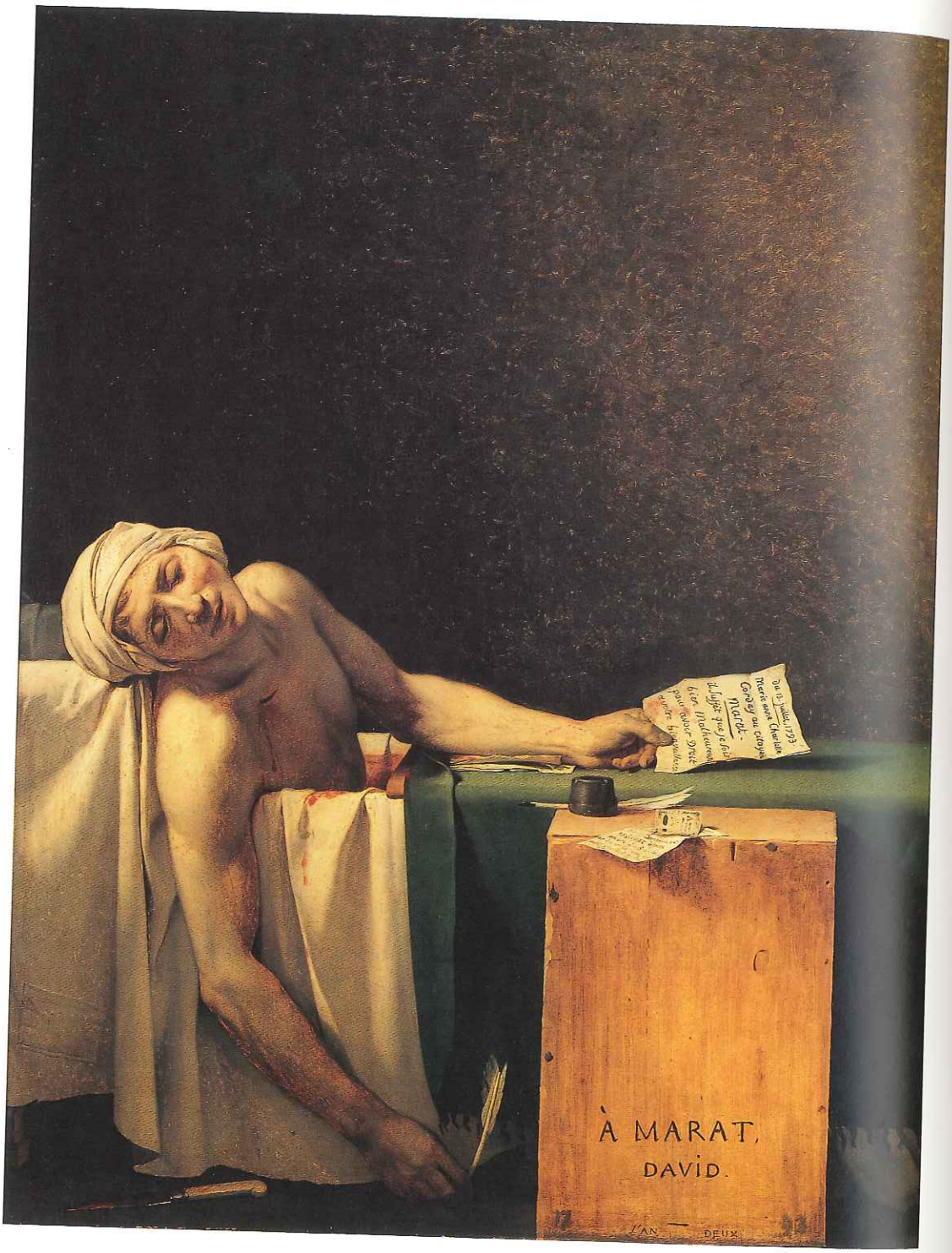
John Singleton Copley
Charles I demanding the surrender of the five impeached members of the House of Commons, 1641, 1785
Oil on canvas, 233.4 × 312 cm, 92 × 123 in; Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts

In Copley's case, this attempt to re-evoke the dramatic clash between the King and the representatives of the people was certainly not only the work of a disinterested antiquarian. Only two years before, George III had had to submit to the challenge of the colonists and had signed the peace with the United States. Burke, from whose circle the suggestion for the subject had come, had been a consistent opponent of the war, which he considered unjust and disastrous. The meaning of Copley's evocation of the previous rebuff to royal pretensions was perfectly understood by all. The story is told that when the Queen saw the painting she turned away in pained surprise, and after a long and ominous silence said to the young American: 'You have chosen, Mr Copley, a most unfortunate subject for the exercise of your pencil.' She could not know *how* unfortunate the reminiscence was going to prove. Those who remember the history of these years will be struck by the fact that, hardly four years later, the scene of the picture was to be re-enacted in France. This time, it was Mirabeau who denied the King's right to interfere with the

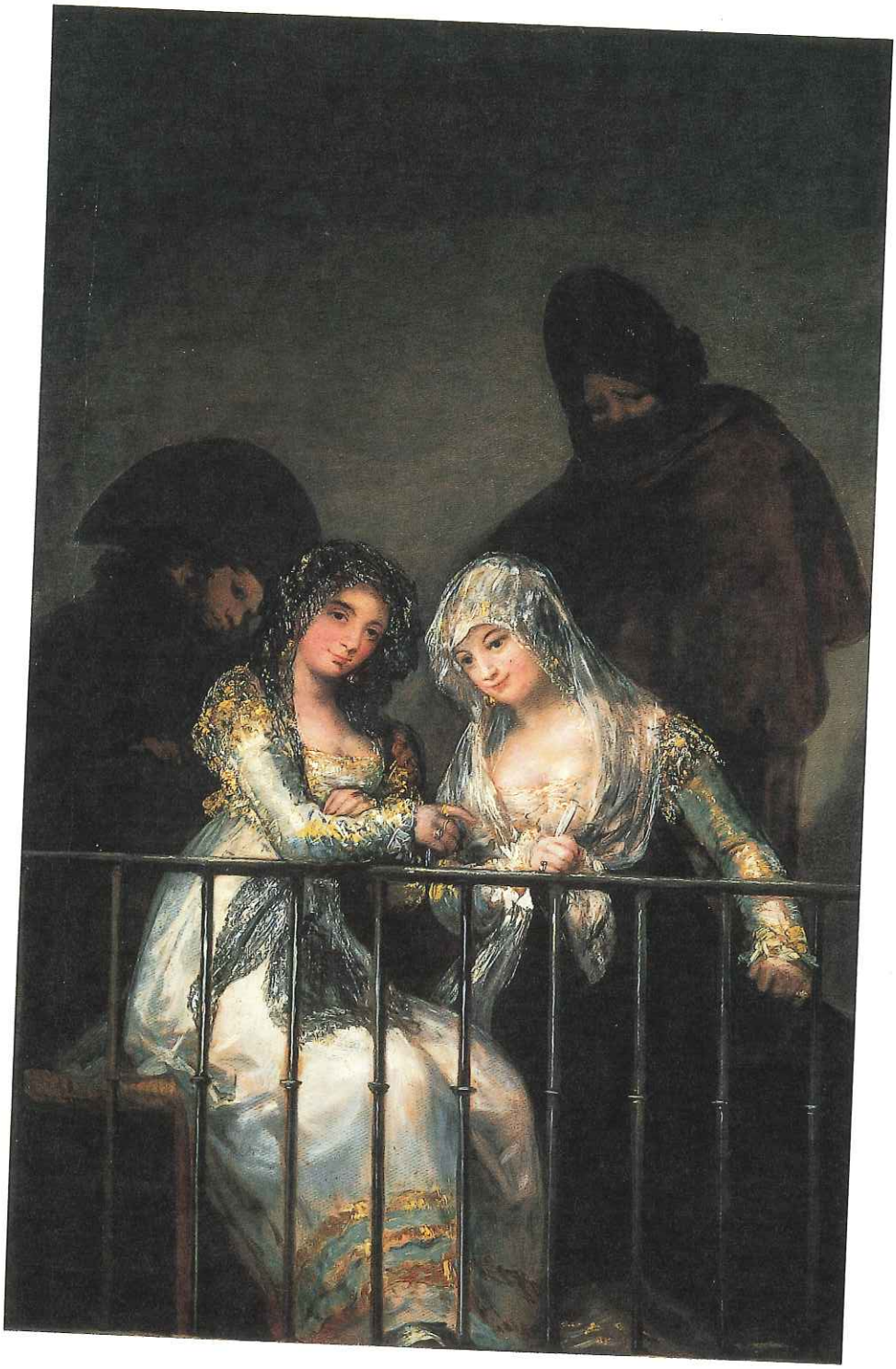

À MARAT,
DAVID.
L'AN — DEUX

representatives of the people, and thus gave the starting signal for the French Revolution of 1789.

The French Revolution gave an enormous impulse to this type of interest in history, and to the painting of heroic subjects. Copley had looked for examples in England's national past. There was a Romantic strain in his historical painting which may be compared to the Gothic revival in architecture. The French revolutionaries loved to think of themselves as Greeks and Romans reborn, and their painting, no less than their architecture, reflected this taste for what was called Roman grandeur. The leading artist of this neo-classical style was the painter Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825), who was the 'official artist' of the Revolutionary Government, and designed the costumes and settings for such propagandist pageantries as the 'Festival of the Supreme Being' in which Robespierre officiated as a self-appointed High Priest. These people felt that they were living in heroic times, and that the events of their own years were just as worthy of the painter's attention as the episodes of Greek and Roman history. When one of the leaders of the French Revolution, Marat, was killed in his bath by a fanatical young woman, David painted him as a martyr who had died for his cause, *figure 316*. Marat was apparently in the habit of working in his bath, and his bath tub was fitted with a simple desk. His assailant had handed him a petition, which he was about to sign when she struck him down. The situation does not seem to lend itself easily to a picture of dignity and grandeur, but David succeeded in making it seem heroic, while yet keeping to the actual details of a police record. He had learned from the study of Greek and Roman sculpture how to model the muscles and sinews of the body, and give it the appearance of noble beauty; he had also learned from classical art to leave out all details which are not essential to the main effect, and to aim at simplicity. There are no motley colours and no complicated foreshortening in the painting. Compared to Copley's great showpiece, David's painting looks austere. It is an impressive commemoration of a humble 'friend of the people' – as Marat had styled himself – who had suffered the fate of a martyr while working for the common weal.

316
Jacques-Louis David
Marat assassinated, 1793
Oil on canvas, 165 × 128.3 cm, 65 × 50½ in; Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels

Among the artists of David's generation who discarded the old type of subject-matter was the great Spanish painter, Francisco Goya (1746–1828). Goya was well versed in the best tradition of Spanish painting, which had produced El Greco, *page 372, figure 238*, and Velázquez, *page 407, figure 264*, and his group on a balcony, *figure 317*, shows that unlike David he did not renounce this mastery in favour of classical grandeur. The great Venetian painter of the eighteenth century, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *page 442, figure 288*, had ended his days as a



317
Francisco Goya
Group on a balcony, c. 1810–15
Oil on canvas, 194.8 × 125.7 cm, 76¾ × 49½ in; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

318
Francisco Goya
King Ferdinand VII of Spain, c. 1814
Oil on canvas, 207 × 140 cm, 81½ × 55⅛ in; Prado, Madrid

court painter in Madrid, and there is something of his radiance in Goya's painting. And yet Goya's figures belong to a different world. The two women who eye the passer-by provokingly, while two rather sinister gallants keep in the background, may be closer to the world of Hogarth. Goya's portraits which secured him a place at the Spanish court, *figure 318*, look superficially like the traditional state portraits of Van Dyck, *page 404, figure 261*, or of Reynolds. The skill with which he conjured up the glitter of silk and gold recalls Titian or Velázquez. But he also looks at his sitters with a different eye. Not that these masters had flattered the mighty, but Goya seems to have known no pity. He made their features reveal all their vanity

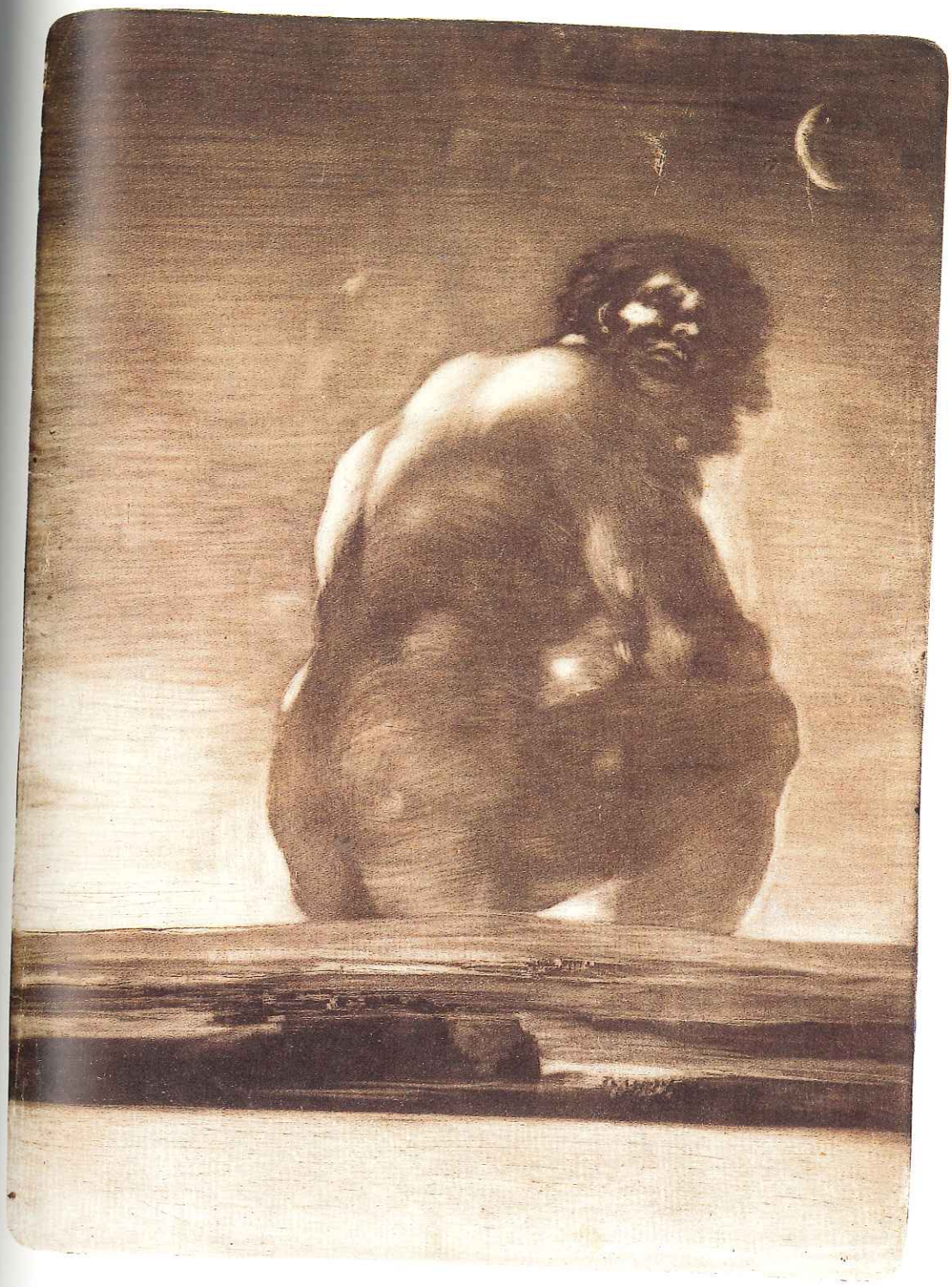
319
Detail of figure 318

320
Francisco Goya
The giant, c. 1818
Aquatint, 28.5 × 21 cm, 11¼ × 8¼ in

and ugliness, their greed and emptiness, *figure 319*. No court painter before or after has ever left such a record of his patrons.

It was not only as a painter that Goya asserted his independence of the conventions of the past. Like Rembrandt, he produced a great number of etchings, most of them in a new technique called aquatint, which allows not only etched lines but also shaded patches. The most striking fact about Goya's prints is that they are not illustrations of any known subject, either biblical, historical or genre. Most of them are fantastic visions of witches and uncanny apparitions. Some are meant as accusations against the powers of stupidity and reaction, of cruelty and oppression, which Goya had witnessed in Spain, others seem just to give shape to the artist's nightmares. *Figure 320* represents one of the most haunting of his dreams – the figure of a giant sitting on the edge of the world. We can gauge his colossal size from the tiny landscape in the foreground, and we can see how he dwarfs houses and castles into mere specks. We can make our imagination play around this dreadful apparition, which is drawn with a clarity of outline as if it were a study from life. The monster sits in the moonlit landscape like some evil incubus. Was Goya thinking of the fate of his country, of its oppression by wars and human folly? Or was he simply creating an image like a poem? For this was the most outstanding effect of the break in tradition – that artists felt free to put their private visions on paper as hitherto only the poets had done.

The most outstanding example of this new approach to art was the English poet and mystic William Blake (1757–1827), who was eleven years younger than Goya. Blake was a deeply religious man, who lived in a world of his own. He despised the official art of the academies, and declined to accept its standards. Some thought he was completely mad; others dismissed him as a harmless crank, and only a very few of his



contemporaries believed in his art and saved him from starvation. He lived by making prints, sometimes for others, sometimes to illustrate his own poems. *Figure 321* represents one of Blake's illustrations to his poem, *Europe, a Prophecy*. It is said that Blake had seen this enigmatic figure of an old man, bending down to measure the globe with a compass, in a vision which hovered over his head at the top of a staircase when he was living in Lambeth. There is a passage in the Bible (Proverbs viii. 22–7), in which Wisdom speaks and says:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old … before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth … when He prepared the Heavens, I was there: when He set a compass on the face of the depths: when He established the clouds above: when He strengthened the fountains of the deep.

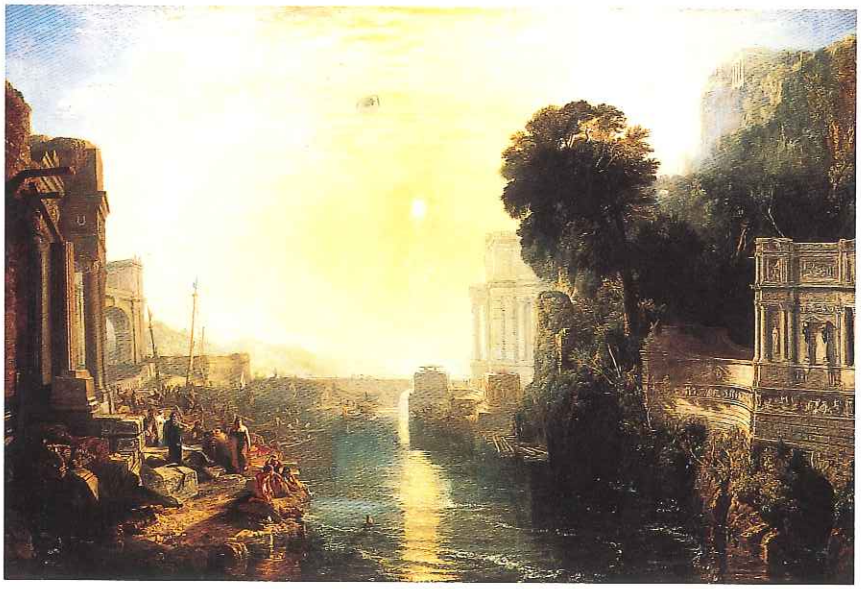
It is this grandiose vision of the Lord setting a compass upon the face of the depths that Blake illustrated. There is something of Michelangelo's figure of the Lord, *page 312, figure 200*, in this image of the Creation, and Blake admired Michelangelo. But in his hands the figure has become dream-like and fantastic. In fact, Blake had formed a mythology of his own, and the figure of the vision was not strictly speaking the Lord Himself, but a being of Blake's imagination whom he called Urizen. Though Blake conceived of Urizen as the creator of the world, he thought of the world as bad and therefore of its creator as of an evil spirit. Hence the uncanny nightmare character of the vision, in which the compass appears like a flash of lightning in a dark and stormy night.

321
William Blake
The Ancient of Days, 1794
Relief etching with watercolour, 23.3 × 16.8 cm, 9¼ × 6⅝ in; British Museum, London

Blake was so wrapped up in his visions that he refused to draw from life and relied entirely on his inner eye. It is easy to point to faults in his draughtsmanship, but to do so would be to miss the point of his art. Like the medieval artists, he did not care for accurate representation, because the significance of each figure of his dreams was of such overwhelming importance to him that questions of mere correctness seemed to him irrelevant. He was the first artist after the Renaissance who thus consciously revolted against the accepted standards of tradition, and we can hardly blame his contemporaries who found him shocking. It was almost a century before he was generally recognized as one of the most important figures in English art.

There was one branch of painting that profited much by the artist's new freedom in his choice of subject-matter – this was landscape painting. So far, it had been looked upon as a minor branch of art. The painters, in particular, who had earned their living painting 'views' of country houses, parks or picturesque scenery, were not taken seriously as artists. This attitude changed somewhat through the romantic spirit of the late eighteenth century, and great artists saw it as their purpose in life to raise this type of painting to new

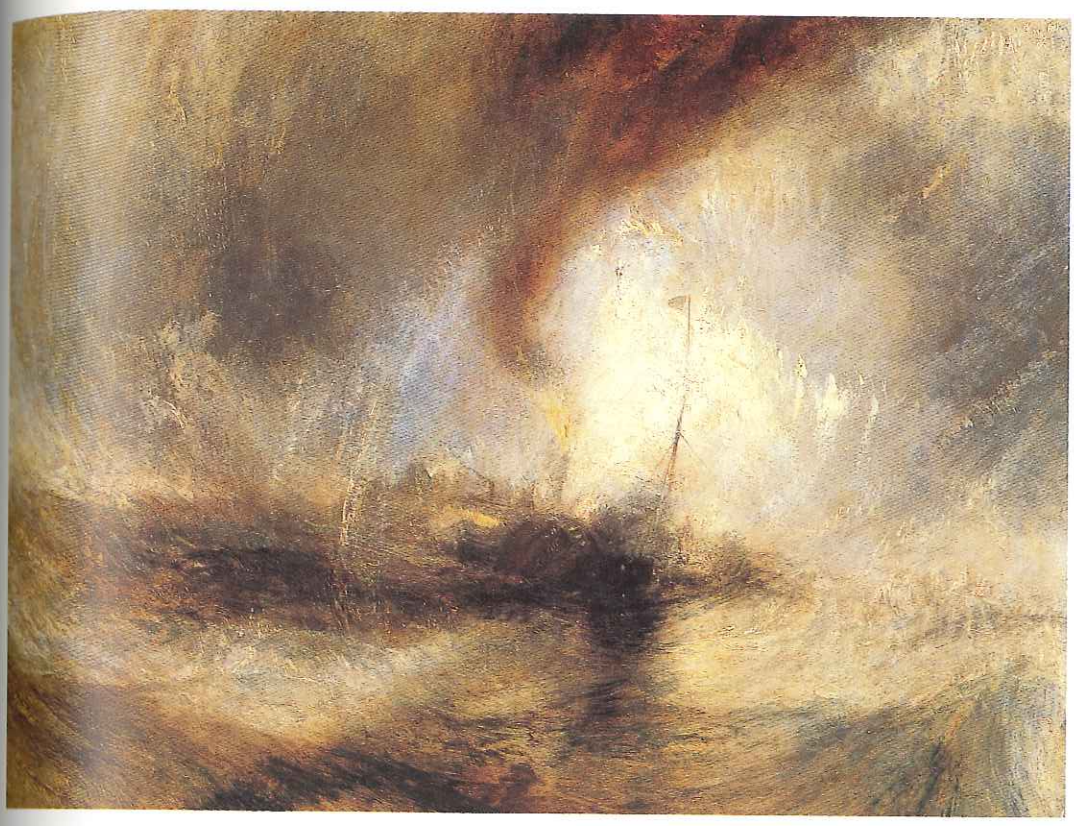
dignity. Here, too, tradition could serve both as a help and a hindrance, and it is fascinating to see how differently two English landscape painters of the same generation approached this question. One was J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851), the other John Constable (1776–1837). There is something in the contrast of these two men which recalls the contrast between Reynolds and Gainsborough, but, in the fifty years which separate their generations, the gulf between the approaches of the two rivals had very much widened. Turner, like Reynolds, was an immensely successful artist whose pictures often caused a sensation at the Royal Academy. Like Reynolds, he was obsessed with the problem of tradition. It was his ambition in life to reach, if not surpass, the celebrated landscape paintings of Claude Lorrain, *page 396*, *figure 255*. When he left his pictures and sketches to the nation, he did so on the express condition that one of them, *figure 322*, must always be shown side by side with a work by Claude Lorrain. Turner hardly did himself justice by inviting this comparison. The beauty of Claude's pictures lies in their serene simplicity and calm, in the clarity and concreteness of his dream-world, and in the absence of any loud effects. Turner, too, had visions of a fantastic world bathed in light and resplendent with beauty, but it was a world not of calm but of movement, not of simple harmonies but of dazzling pageantries. He crowded into his pictures every effect which could make them more striking and more dramatic, and, had he been a lesser artist than he was, this desire to impress the public might well have had a disastrous result. Yet he was such a superb stage-manager, he worked with such gusto and skill, that



322

Joseph Mallord William Turner *Dido building Carthage*, 1815

Oil on canvas, 155.6 × 231.8 cm, 61¼ × 91¼ in; National Gallery, London



323
Joseph Mallord William Turner
Steamer in a snowstorm, 1842
Oil on canvas, 91.5 × 122 cm, 36 × 48 in; Tate Gallery, London

he carried it off and the best of his pictures do, in fact, give us a conception of the grandeur of nature at its most romantic and sublime. *Figure 323* shows one of Turner's most daring paintings – a steamer in a blizzard. If we compare this whirling composition with the seascape of de Vlieger, *page 418, figure 271*, we gain a measure of the boldness of Turner's approach. The Dutch artist of the seventeenth century did not only paint what he saw at a glance, but also, to some extent, what he knew was there. He knew how a ship was built and how it was rigged, and, looking at his painting, we might be able to reconstruct these vessels. Nobody could reconstruct a nineteenth-century steamer from Turner's seascape. All he gives us is the impression of the dark hull, of the flag flying bravely from the mast – of a battle with the raging seas and threatening squalls. We almost feel the rush of the wind and the impact of the waves. We have no time to look for details. They are swallowed up by the dazzling light and the dark shadows of the storm cloud. I do not know whether a blizzard at sea really looks like this. But I do know that it is a storm of this awe-inspiring and overwhelming kind that we imagine when reading a romantic poem or listening to romantic music. In Turner, nature always

324
John Constable
Study of tree trunks, c. 1821
Oil on paper, 24.8 × 29.2 cm, 9¾ × 11½ in; Victoria and Albert Museum, London

reflects and expresses man's emotions. We feel small and overwhelmed in the face of the powers we cannot control, and are compelled to admire the artist who had nature's forces at his command.

Constable's ideas were very different. To him the tradition which Turner wanted to rival and surpass was not much more than a nuisance. Not that he failed to admire the great masters of the past. But he wanted to paint what he saw with his own eyes – not with those of Claude Lorrain. It might be said that he continued where Gainsborough had left off, *page 470, figure 307*. But even Gainsborough had still selected motifs which were 'picturesque' by traditional standards. He had still looked at nature as a pleasing setting for idyllic scenes. To Constable all these ideas were unimportant. He wanted nothing but the truth. 'There is room enough for a natural painter,' he wrote to a friend in 1802; 'the great vice of the present day is *bravura*, an attempt to do something beyond the truth.' The fashionable landscape painters who still took Claude as their model had developed a number of easy tricks by which any amateur could compose an effective and pleasing picture. An impressive tree in the foreground would serve as a striking contrast to the distant view that opened up in the centre. The colour scheme was neatly worked out. Warm colours, preferably brown and golden tones, should be in the foreground. The

background should fade into pale blue tints. There were recipes for painting clouds, and special tricks for imitating the bark of gnarled oaks. Constable despised all these set-pieces. The story goes that a friend remonstrated with him for not giving his foreground the requisite mellow brown of an old violin, and that Constable thereupon took a violin and put it before him on the grass to show the friend the difference between the fresh green as we see it and the warm tones demanded by convention. But Constable had no wish to shock people by daring innovations. All he wanted was to be faithful to his own vision. He went out to the countryside to make sketches from nature, and then elaborated them in his studio. His sketches, *figure 324*, are often bolder than his finished pictures, but the time had not yet come when the public would accept the record of a rapid impression as a work worthy to be shown at an exhibition. Even so, his finished pictures caused uneasiness when they were first exhibited. *Figure 325* shows the painting which made Constable famous in Paris when he sent it there in 1824. It represents a simple rural scene, a haywain fording a river. We must lose ourselves in the picture, watch the patches of sunlight on the meadows in the background and look at the drifting clouds; we must follow the course of the mill-stream, and linger by the

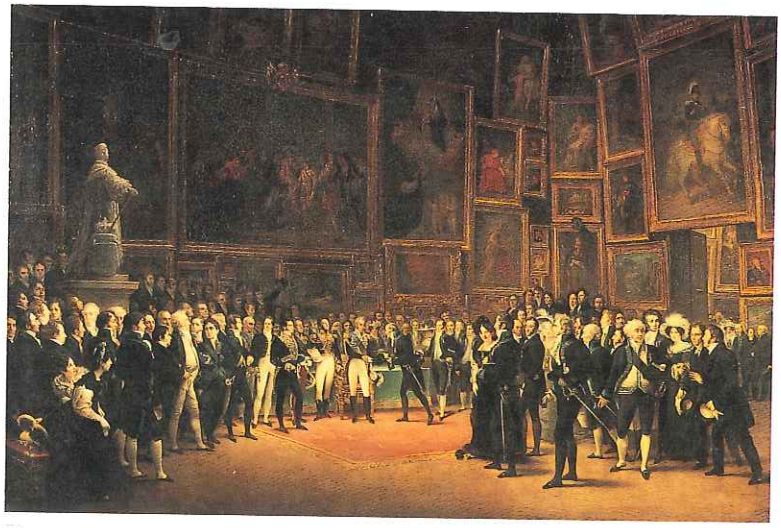
325
John Constable
The haywain, 1821
Oil on canvas, 130.2 × 185.4 cm, 51¼ × 73 in; National Gallery, London

326
Caspar David Friedrich
Landscape in the Silesian Mountains, *c.* 1815–20
Oil on canvas, 54.9 × 70.3 cm, 21⅝ × 27⅝ in; Neue Pinakothek, Munich

cottage, which is painted with such restraint and simplicity, to appreciate the artist's absolute sincerity, his refusal to be more impressive than nature, and his complete lack of pose or pretentiousness.

The break with tradition had left artists with the two possibilities which were embodied in Turner and Constable. They could become poets in painting, and seek moving and dramatic effects, or they could decide to keep to the motif in front of them, and explore it with all the insistence and honesty at their command. There were certainly great artists among the Romantic painters of Europe, men such as Turner's contemporary, the German Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), whose landscape pictures reflect the mood of the Romantic lyrical poetry of his time which is more familiar to us through Schubert's songs. His painting of a bleak mountain scene, *figure 326*, may even remind us of the spirit of Chinese landscape paintings, *page 153*, *figure 98*, which also comes so close to the ideas of poetry. But however great and deserved was the popular

success which some of these Romantic painters achieved in their day, I believe that those who followed Constable's path and tried to explore the visible world rather than to conjure up poetic moods achieved something of more lasting importance.



The new role of 'official exhibitions': *Charles X of France distributing decorations at the Paris Salon of 1824*, 1825–7

Painting by François-Joseph Heim; oil on canvas, 173 × 256 cm, 68⅛ × 100¾ in; Louvre, Paris