

Viewing Abraham Solomon (1823-62): Topicalities in the
Paintings of a London Jewish Artist

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Abraham Solomon. 1823-1862

Abstract

This is the first study to be devoted exclusively to the paintings of Abraham Solomon (1824-1862) whose art is thought to have appealed, and continues to appeal only to a popular, unsophisticated, taste for sentimental, narrative, art.

Solomon's art was secular, Realist, and humanist; he combined narrative with mimetic skill and the aestheticisation of everyday life and objects. His paintings were multi-layered and often political. He was an early proponent of Realism in British art who used topical references to reflect a shared experience with his viewers. These topicalities are the main subject of this study and contribute to an understanding of contemporary viewings of his art as a richer source of imagery and ideas than has hitherto been the case. Solomon used deep depth of field and precise observation, in the Pre-Raphaelite manner, to create an unwavering democratic evenness of vision so that the way he painted and what he painted coalesced to reflect and define his vision of 1850s Britain.

Solomon was an observant Jew, but it is his vision of a moral world, independent of religious belief, which stands out. He sought assimilation, but he was defined and marginalised by others. His sister Rebecca temporarily disappeared in the "great forgetting" of women artists, his younger brother Simeon was shunned because of his sexuality, and Abraham's fate was to be labelled vulgar because of his popular appeal.

This study is based on original research at the British Library, the National Art Library, the Bodleian Library, the London Archives, and the National Archives. Sources have included online collections of newspapers and journals such as the *Times*, the *Art-Review*, and the *Spectator* including census records and street directories. I have purchased original paintings, engravings, drawings, and letters from London galleries, Parisian bouquinistes, autograph dealers worldwide; these are reproduced here.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Tom Woodhouse. 28 Feb 2018.

Introduction

My underlying contention [is] that there is an inherent contradiction between art and vulgarism (or, to confine ourselves to aesthetic terms, between art and realism).¹

(Herbert Read, 1937)

The key question about Courbet and the Realists. Therefore, does not primarily concern his and their particular attitudes toward modernity: all Realists more or less shared Daumier's credo *il faut être de son temps*; all more or less agreed with the novelist, critic, folklorist, and political chameleon Champfleury (Jules Husson) that art must represent the everyday life of common people. Rather, the issue concerns the actual position and function of Realist works within the means and relations of production of their time.²

(Stephen F Eisenman, 2011)

Some readers may object that this study consists merely of a series of sometimes outlandish speculations which exaggerate the significance of commonplace little paintings. Such a criticism implies that for all paintings, particularly genre paintings, there exists a 'true interpretation'. My contention

¹ Herbert Read, *Art and Society* (London and Toronto: Windmill Press, 1937), 180.

² Stephen F Eisenman (ed), *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 259.

is that there is no ‘truth’ even when the painting seems to tell a straightforward story. Paintings of everyday life, such as those by Abraham Solomon are ‘sticky’; they tend to attract instances, references, and illustrations of the present and near present, here called ‘topicalities’. My approach is based on the idea that the first viewers speculated about what they saw in Solomon’s enigmatic paintings and that is where their meanings lie. So, the research involves deducing some of those speculations that contemporary viewers made about these images. This gives greater understanding of how the paintings were originally interpreted and reveals a complexity to these artworks for today’s viewers. The art historian has a ready resource upon which to base these speculations—the presentness of Realist paintings. This reading exploits the phenomenon that Realist paintings of everyday life have embedded within them aspects of the present and near present—topicalities. These topicalities give an insight into the sorts of speculations which initial viewers made. This resultant understanding is only limited by imagination and derives from a total engagement with the image. The results may be messy and contradictory but as the Realist artist might say—that reflects human reality.

For several years this has been a thesis in search of a thesis, it has been a search for a new understanding of what has been defined as a simplistic and prosaic art of mid-nineteenth century Britain. Throughout the 1850s Abraham Solomon was a hugely popular and occasionally populist artist. His Realist-populist painting *Waiting for the Verdict* (fig.1) glorified the “common man”, though more accurately the common woman, in resistance to the indifferent authority of the legal system. This is perhaps his most familiar work. But, despite his fame, Solomon has disappeared into the basements of art history and his paintings have gone into museum storage. Little is known about Solomon the individual or his views on his art. But the paintings that remain tell something of his story and ambitions for his art. During the nineteenth century

there were a number of written references to Abraham Solomon; James Dafforne published in the *Art-Journal* a short appreciation³, Edmund Yates mentions attending an evening party at Solomon's home in his autobiography.⁴ (Yates' recollection can be found at the end of this thesis as Appendix Two) There is a letter from John Ruskin published in the *Liverpool Albion* touching on a prize awarded by the Liverpool Academy.⁵ Otherwise there are reviews and minor diary entries. A few letters from Solomon survive, the most important of which was transcribed in the *Athenaeum* as part of an obituary.⁶ (this letter is to be found as Appendix Five) A letter survives from Solomon's father (transcribed as Appendix One) which helps to place Solomon in the context of the Jewish struggle for freedom from disabilities—important in understanding Solomon as a Jewish artist. In the twentieth century Solomon appeared in Victorian artists' dictionaries, these generally repeated the *Dictionary of National Biography's* entry.⁷ His most important appearance in the twentieth century was as part of an exhibition at the Geffrye Museum to which Lionel Lambourne contributed a biography and analysis.⁸ In that

³ James Dafforne. "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX—Abraham Solomon" *The Art-Journal* (March 1862),73.

⁴ Edmund Hodgson Yates. *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences* (London: R Bentley and Son. 1884), 295.

⁵ Alfred Hunt, "Letters to the Editor", *The Liverpool Albion*, Vol.30, No. 1,659, Jan 11,1858.

⁶ "Abraham Solomon." *Athenaeum*, no. 1836 (3 Jan 1863): 20. Full text Appendix Five.

⁷ Christopher Wood. *Dictionary of Victorian Painters* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Baron Publishing, 1971), 156-7.

⁸ Jeffrey Daniels (ed.) *Solomon: A Family of Painters* (London: Inner London Education Authority,1985), 12-18.

exhibition Abraham was presented as the older and more sensible brother of his siblings. Reflecting the interests of the time Abraham was compared less favourably to Rebecca his sister, an early feminist, and his young brother Simeon who was both gay martyr and more defiantly Jewish than his older brother. The most important critical intervention in the twentieth century came from Lynda Nead when she analysed, from a feminist and Foucauldian perspective, two of Solomon's paintings.⁹ Nead's book is discussed in 'Chapter One' of this work. All these writings on Solomon have in common a failure to discuss his place within art history and the important role he played in developing the Realist sensibility in British art. It is true that a first glance at a painting by Abraham Solomon appears to show a little story, a moral tale, and it is quite legitimate to see his paintings in this, more conventional, way. But it is also possible, on second glance, to see his paintings as representations of "reality"—just simple observations of everyday life. This is to say that his paintings may be thought of as Realist. Through that idea it is possible to enter into a richer imaginative world of his art than has been discussed by past writers.

Abraham Solomon was to say: "All, indeed, I look for is the picturesque", which suggests that he at least thought of his paintings aesthetically rather than mere sermons.¹⁰ More than that he was declaring his belief, in his use of the phrase "look for", that a painting's subject should be

⁹ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1988).

¹⁰ "Abraham Solomon." *Athenaeum*, no. 1836 (3 Jan 1863): 20. Full text Appendix Five.

found in the material world: an interesting scene; an everyday activity; or simply a pile of luggage. A Realist artist such as himself had only to observe the world and select his subject matter from what he saw. In this way he was able to take a slice of ‘real’ life and by reflecting it through the mirror of painting make it into an artwork—and many aspects of the everyday life of his world are contained in the paintings. The paintings are all anchored in the present and as such contain shared topicalities. These topicalities stamped his paintings, for his contemporary audience, as “present.” This, I believe, was a major part of his viewers’ fascination with his art. Solomon’s viewers saw images of themselves and their world and took a simple pleasure either in fame by association or just by being included when in the past they had not.

This Realist sensibility was summed up by Robert Rosenblum as particular to the nineteenth century when he wrote:

But other masters, whether working under the banners of Realism or Impressionism, felt an equal conviction that their primary duty was to explore the point where their personal sensibility touched upon the immediately perceived experience of a world in which events might be no more enduring or consequential than a stroll on ,the lighting of a cigarette, the ripples of a boat on water, or the casting of a glance from one café table to another.¹¹

¹¹ Robert Rosenblum and H W Janson, *19th Century Art* (London: Lawrence King Publishing Ltd., 2005),198.

This almost describes a number of Solomon's paintings; in *A Contrast* (fig. 2) some people walk on a beach and in *Brighton Front* (fig.3) a crowd walking for pleasure and display is portrayed without comment.

Abraham Solomon was one of the first British Realist painters of the nineteenth century. He was not alone; his contemporary William Frith produced a number of Realist paintings of note as did Augustus Egg and John Millais. His Realist art was produced from about 1854 until his death in 1862. Prior to the 1850s his paintings had mostly been of the then fashionable historical style. These paintings have also been called "narrative" paintings thereby tying them to the literary subject paintings of the early century such as those created for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery. The term is mostly used to describe paintings which pictured incidents from poetry and novels.¹² During the mid-century Realism in painting was established in France through the art of Gustave Courbet, Jean-François Millet, and later Eduard Manet. Linda Nochlin offers this definition of Realism "Its aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life."¹³ Stendhal, in 1830, had defined the Realist novel as record of reality unmediated by the intervention of an author. Realism in the visual arts owes some debt to literary realism, or at least the novel, as a precursor:

Ah, Sir, a novel is a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment it reflects to your vision the azure skies, at another the mire of the puddles

¹² Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 3.

¹³ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 13.

at your feet. And the man who carries this mirror in his pack will be accused by you of being immoral! His mirror shews the mire, and you blame the mirror! Rather blame that high road upon which the puddle lies, still more the inspector of roads who allows the water to gather and the puddle to form.”¹⁴

Neither Rosenblum’s nor Stendhal’s definitions challenge the contestable notion of “reality” and assume a common agreement of what constitutes the “real” among readers or viewers. With nineteenth century confidence in science and empiricism the notion that reality might vary according to the circumstances or life experience of the viewer was not a primary concern. This is a negative problematic but the advantages of Realism as a theoretical approach in the nineteenth century outweigh its disadvantages—certainly when discussing the Realist art of Abraham Solomon.

Realism was important in number of ways—it encouraged artists to use all aspects of life in their paintings, and so into the world of art entered the prostitute, the drunk, and the poor of the urban world, so familiar in much nineteenth century art. This was a key characteristic of Realism, and why it was so important. Realism encouraged, in a democratic way, the right for all to be the subject of art. For Solomon the drowned prostitute was just as deserving of the artist’s attention as much as the ladies on the promenade at Brighton. But not just that, uniquely, Realism helped create a way by which most people could talk about art in a simple and straightforward way. Realism, with its emphasis

¹⁴ Stendhal, trans. Margaret R B Shaw, *Scarlett and Black* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953), 365-66.

on the accurate portrayal of the present, meant almost anyone could look at a painting and have something to say about the accessible world in the painting. Even though they might lack the more thoughtful critical language of metaphor or symbolism they were able to talk about accuracy and whether the painting was an accurate representation of reality. It may seem a minimal gain but in this way the pleasure of art was democratised a little and more viewers were given voice to comment. An example of the use of accuracy as a way of discussing the merits of a painting is this *Art-Journal* critic's dismissal of John Millais' Realist painting *The Rescue* (fig.2):

Again, the utmost accuracy in all the circumstances is proposed, but there never was a party rescued from fire under the conditions represented here; there is no smoke—it is impossible that the staircase could be otherwise than filled with smoke. As a mere effect, the picture is triumphant, but the truth of the conditions must not be canvassed.¹⁵

This might seem a preposterous way to talk about an artwork but at least both viewer and critic could share a common language after so many centuries when the uneducated (rich or poor) might be dumbstruck before an image taken from an unfamiliar story from Greek mythology or an obscure passage from the bible.

Realism replaced the notion of the artist having a point of view by the idea that the artist has simply selected a fragment of real life and transferred it

¹⁵ “The Rescue, J E Millais”, *The Art-Journal* (Vol 1, Jan. 1855), 175.

to canvas. Pure artistic neutrality is hardly sustainable, but in an age when photography seemed to be presenting “reality” by mechanical means the idea of the artist as a camera, as a neutral and empirical scientist, must have seemed both modern and plausible.

The ambition of Realist painters to abandon their authorial roles brings in a number of problems in understanding the artworks. The first and probably most important is that the making sense of the painting, the understanding of what the painting is meant to convey is left entirely to the viewer. The absent Realist artist will give no help in interpretation. The viewer whether contemporary or present-day is left to speculate—if they wish to. This idea informs the title of this research *Viewing Abraham Solomon*. In some ways the painting became like a set of building blocks which are arranged by the viewer. This might be a pleasurable activity but is little help to the art historian trying to make sense of what people saw in these paintings in the 1850s. For the art historian interpretation becomes the difficult task of speculation about the speculations that viewers made in the past. To take a Realist painting seriously, in its own terms, one must make a Realist interpretation. This means to take the Realist idea that the painting is a reflection, not an organisation of reality. In this undifferentiated reality every element has equal weight and should be considered when trying to interpret the image.

I want to suggest that one entry into the world of a Realist painting is through the shared topicalities contained within a painting set in the present and reflecting everyday life. A more thorough discussion of topicalities can be found in the following two chapters. Topicalities are important, hence the title of this thesis, because they open a door into informed ideas about what contemporary viewers might have speculated about when they looked at a Realist painting by Abraham Solomon. The painting, the artist, and the viewer are linked by the present and it is through an understanding of the artist and the

viewer in their shared present that we can begin to understand or at least expand our understanding of Solomon's paintings. Through a consideration of topicality, we can hope to recreate something of the experience of the original viewings through a reconstruction of key aspects of the moment in which the painting was produced. And like the Realist painter it is important to give equal weight to all the elements in the painting.

At its simplest the Realist artist presents a picture which is completed, or is claimed to be completed, almost entirely by the beholder. Gombrich's idea of the "beholder's share" may not have been developed specifically for Realism but it is apt when the Realist artist makes a claim to be purely the discoverer of an image from real life and it is the viewer who must give meaning to that image.¹⁶ This is disingenuous of course, the Realist artist chooses the image and so is asking the viewer to see this slice of reality as somehow curious, or informative, or aesthetic. The French Realists, in particular Gustave Courbet saw Realism as a way of widening the subject matter of art to include ordinary people; those who had previously been excluded from any central role in paintings. His ambition was to make the ordinary heroic. On the British side we get novelists such as George Eliot, in a less revolutionary vein, but staunchly defending Realism, writing in her first novel *Adam Bede* (1859): 'It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existence.'¹⁷ Even opera was

¹⁶ E H Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1988), 154-169

¹⁷ George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Ed. Valerie Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 175.

infected with a passion for Realism. Verdi's *La Traviata* (1853) may be said to be an early attempt at 'Verismo' opera, commented on by 'Grove': 'In many senses it [*La Traviata*] is the composers most 'Realistic' drama. The cultural ambience of the subject matter and the musical expression are very closely related: no suspension of disbelief is required to feel that the waltz tunes that saturate the score are naturally born out of the Parisian setting.'¹⁸

While different art forms in different countries may have had different approaches to Realism, there was a common ambition towards, truthfulness, honesty, authenticity, and in particular 'authenticity.' Authenticity became a way of describing or talking about a painting was open to all. Paintings could be said to succeed or fail by their accuracy in representing the material world. In this way everyone might be a critic. No longer was it necessary to know the lives of obscure saints or mythological beings and their symbolism to speak about a painting. Realist paintings highlighted the common experience which was open to anyone to comment on.

By highlighting authenticity everyone could speak of their appreciation of a painting as a true reflection of reality but also, within the exploration of the ordinary, the Realist painter presented viewers with people and objects from the contemporary material world which had previously been disregarded. In Solomon's first great Realist painting, *Second Class; The Parting* (fig....) a wall of posters is arranged in the manner of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition hanging style, and a pile of bags and a hammock have all the colour and textural contrasts of a mossy bank. So, the Realist created new modern aesthetics, often

¹⁸ Stanley Sadie and Christina Bashford (eds.), *The Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol 4 (London, New York: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), 802.

of familiarity, independent of the older slavish devotion to the natural world as the only source of beauty.

One other important point about Solomon and his turn to Realism is that he was Jewish man entering the art world where few other Jews had entered. He had to deal with the long tradition of aniconism amongst Jews but also the prejudice amongst many British people towards Jews and their resistance to the idea of a ‘vulgar’ Jew being an artist-tastemaker. Solomon, in his own way, was revolutionary, but a quiet one—he had little choice given the circumstances of the time. Solomon might have followed in the footsteps of his near contemporary, also Jewish, Solomon Alexander Hart (1806-1881) who restricted himself to historical-narrative paintings and decorative Jewish ceremonial paintings—the two are succeeded by being hardly distinguishable. Solomon seems to have been more ambitious for his art. Realism allowed him to paint contemporary life and may have allowed him to defend himself against anti-Jewish criticism by claiming he was simply portraying the world as it was. So, and this is discussed later, his painting *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig. ??) can be seen as a straightforward image of what any passer-by might see on a typical night at Waterloo Bridge. In this way Solomon may have believed he would be protected not just from the traditional accusations of vulgarity but also the criticism that, as a Jew, he had no right to criticise his ‘host’ culture.

At the heart of this research is a desire to take seriously the work of Abraham Solomon and to treat it on its own terms. The thesis has become a Realist interpretation of a Realist artist. Such pictures are for many present-day viewers some of the most unappealing paintings ever painted. To us they can seem mawkish, crass, and falsely emotive.

We have inherited a view that Victorians were hypocritical, materialist, racist, and snobbish. They were sentimentalists who revered the innocence of

youth while endangering their children's lives as chimney sweeps and miners. The men were misogynist and the women were compliant. Christian superiority justified the subjugation of "native" peoples who were forced to enjoy the "benefits" of Empire. Creativity was stifled by a stuffy middle-class respectability which favoured etiquette over manners. These stereotypes, and many more, of Britain and the British in the nineteenth century were not only the judgement of twentieth century commentators but have their origins in the writings of popular novelists, poets, playwrights and painters of the period. Charles Dickens (1812—1870), William Thackeray (1811—1863), Henry Mayhew (1812—1887), Elizabeth Gaskell (1810—1865) dissected Victorian society in their novels. George Cruikshank (1792—1878), did the same through illustrations to some of these novels. Playwrights such as Dion Boucicault (c.1820—1890) and Oscar Wilde (1854—1900) wrote immensely popular plays which ridiculed Victorian society. Among the painters were William Powell Frith (1819—1909), Luke Fildes (1844—1927), and the subject of this study Abraham Solomon (1823—1862).

With this in mind a first consideration of the work of Abraham Solomon should be that he was part of a process of self-examination and reflection which was characteristic of the nineteenth century and characteristic of the Realist sensibility. Victorians were possibly the first truly all-encompassing self-critical culture. Because of the enormous expansion of cities, particularly London, and the rapid development of a mass press, the popularity of the novel, and public access to art exhibitions and museums, a large percentage of the population could comment on and contribute to ideas about national character and the society in which they lived. This might only be laughing at a joke about a politician or joining in with national mourning, but it meant that, in an admittedly uneven way, mass culture had begun to create a connected culture.

Art was part of this process of involving greater numbers of the population in a dynamic cultural development.

Almost since their creation modern-subject, genre paintings, or paintings of everyday life, have been treated as ephemeral, populist, anecdotal and hardly worth the name of art. All three terms, genre, modern-subject, and everyday life paintings can be used almost interchangeably; 'genre' generally for rural and urban paintings of daily life usually set in the near-past or a clearly grasped present; everyday life paintings are pictures of domestic life set in a recognisable present; modern-subject paintings are paintings of the urban world whose subjects were in some way concerned with the "modern" urban present. These paintings have also been called "narrative" paintings thereby tying them to the literary subject paintings of the early century such as those created for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery and other representations of incidents from poetry and novels.¹⁹ Everyday life paintings have often been considered firstly as stories, homilies, or little moral tales and little else. They have been treated as easily understood or readable at a time when both viewers and commentators thought true fine art should be in part inexplicable, or in Walter Benjamin's view, have an "aura".²⁰ When art-historical interest shifted towards the study of Victorian painting, particularly modern-subject painting, in the later part of the twentieth century Feminist or Marxist theories of art history were dominant. Both positions have sought to explain why people act, or seem to act, against their own interests, Marxism has made use of the concept of ideology and false

¹⁹ Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 3.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Lexington, KY: Prism Key Press, 2010), 3.

consciousness and post-Foucauldian feminism has made greater use of theories of sexuality and discourse. Within these theories modern subject pictures have been read as sets of instructions or warnings to Victorian women or portraying the values and new dominance of the Victorian middle-class ideology; either way these are paintings to be narratively decoded and their aesthetic appeal, imaginative associations, and hidden messages have often been ignored. A confusion has arisen between bourgeois empiricism which claimed to reveal eternal truths and Realism in the arts which made no such claim. Realism in the arts, and this can be seen in Solomon's paintings was concerned to show the variety and undiscovered in the observed world rather than establish eternal verities.

Abraham Solomon was to say: "All, indeed, I look for is the picturesque", which suggests that he at least thought of his paintings aesthetically rather than mere sermons.²¹ More than that he was declaring his belief, in his use of the phrase "look for", that a painting's subject should be found in the material world: an interesting scene; an everyday activity; or simply a pile of luggage. A Realist artist such as himself had simply to observe the world and select his subject matter from what he saw. In this way he was able, like Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* to take a slice of life and by reflection in the mirror of art make it into an artwork. Flaubert who wrote of the Realist significance of the moment: 'An infinity of passion can be obtained in one minute, like a crowd in a small space.'²²

²¹ "Abraham Solomon." *Athenaeum*, no. 1836 (3 Jan 1863): 20. Full text Appendix Five.

²² Gustave Flaubert, trans. Eleanor Marx-Aveling, *Madame Bovary* (London: Collectors Library, 2003), 347.

I have researched Victorian theatre, novels, poetry, opera, the politics of the period, particularly those of John Bright and Richard Cobden, artistic theories of associationism, allegory, English emblem books, and mottos, and other minor routes in an attempt to understand Abraham Solomon's art. All the above have made important contributions. However, a recurring question has been why, during his lifetime, was Solomon's art so popular? One approach to this question has been to consider the range of possible responses that contemporary viewers might have to his paintings, in other words to think of the contemporary viewer's responses as very precisely contextualised. One way of understanding the Victorian viewer's response is through a study of topicalities in Solomon's paintings. I want to suggest that any painting of everyday life draws in the artist's experience of the topical world. And, since what is topical is jointly experienced with the contemporary viewer/audience a resonance is created between viewers, painting, and artist. This offers a perspective taken from the paintings themselves—one that which also sees the contemporary Victorian viewer as more than a passive consumer of propaganda.

Abraham Solomon was one of the first British Realist painters of the nineteenth century. He was not alone; his contemporary William Frith produced a number of Realist paintings of note as did Augustus Egg and John Millais. Solomon's Realist art was painted from about 1854 until his death in 1862. During that time Realism in painting was more or less established in France through the art of Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet. Linda Nochlin offers this definition of Realism: 'Its aim was to give a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of

contemporary life.²³ Stendhal, speaking of the novel, had defined the Realist novel as record of reality unmediated by the intervention of an author:

Ah, Sir, a novel is a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment it reflects to your vision the azure skies, at another the mire of the puddles at your feet. And the man who carries this mirror in his pack will be accused by you of being immoral! His mirror shews the mire, and you blame the mirror! Rather blame that high road upon which the puddle lies, still more the inspector of roads who allows the water to gather and the puddle to form.”²⁴

Realism was important in number of ways—it led artists to use all aspects of life in their art. Subjects such as prostitution and the urban world of the poor became much more common. This was a key characteristic of Realism, and why it was so important. Realism encouraged, in its democratic way, the right for almost anyone to appear in an artwork. For Solomon the drowned prostitute was just as deserving of the artist’s attention as the ladies on the promenade at Brighton. But not just that, uniquely, Realism helped create a way by which most people could talk about art in a simple and straightforward way. Realism, with its emphasis on the accurate portrayal of the present, meant almost anyone could look at a painting and have something to say. Even though they might lack the more thoughtful critical language of metaphor or symbolism

²³ Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 13.

²⁴ Stendhal, trans. Margaret R B Shaw, *Scarlett and Black* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953), 365-66.

they were able to talk about accuracy. It may seem a minimal gain but in this way the pleasure of art was democratised a little. An example of the use of accuracy as a way of discussing the merits of a painting is this *Art-Journal* critic's dismissal of John Millais' Realist painting *The Rescue* (fig.2):

Again, the utmost accuracy in all the circumstances is proposed, but there never was a party rescued from fire under the conditions represented here; there is no smoke—it is impossible that the staircase could be otherwise than filled with smoke. As a mere effect, the picture is triumphant, but the truth of the conditions must not be canvassed.²⁵

The audience for art in mid-nineteenth century Britain was arguably the most sophisticated mass audience for the visual arts up until that time; not only were they were bombarded by prints, book illustrations, and journals devoted to the visual arts, but this was a period when exhibition culture was expanding. Solomon's paintings had a huge audience, paintings such as *Waiting for the Verdict* would be seen by a range of gallery visitors from the aristocracy, or the Queen and all ranks below. His work would also be viewed as engravings which were sold, at different price levels, in their thousands. The poor and lower income groups might see engravings torn from the *Illustrated London News*. *A Welcome Arrival*, 1855 by John Dalbiac Luard (fig. 3) shows illustrations from the *Illustrated London News* used as a decorative screen in this way. In the centre is a print of Solomon's *A Contrast* (fig. 4). Others might come across a realization of *Waiting for the Verdict* in the theatre or a theatrical performance

²⁵ "The Rescue, J E Millais", *The Art-Journal* (Vol 1, Jan. 1855), 175.

based on the painting. A part of an American playbill survives (fig. 5) Murray Marks made a claim that engravings of *Waiting for the Verdict* hung in public houses and cottage homes.²⁶ Marks's reference to public houses strengthens the claim to a wide audience among lower ranks of society for Solomon's art. I will concentrate on the British audience, but examples of his work were published in America (fig. 6), an oil sketch was found in California (fig. 7), and the playbill illustrated (fig. 5) is from an American production of *Waiting for the Verdict*. It may also be assumed that his work travelled across the Empire. The first version of *First Class: The Meeting* (fig.8) is in Canada, and engravings have appeared at auction in Australia.²⁷ This breadth of audience is important to understanding Solomon's work. He painted and exhibited during a period when a mass culture was developing, in a very broad sense British culture was becoming relatively homogenous. People accessed that culture in very different ways, but specific topical events were common, more or less, to the whole population.

This study of Abraham Solomon concentrates on a group of paintings mostly shown at the Royal Academy between 1851 and 1862, these twelve paintings include his well-known modern-subject paintings. His art can be broken into four broad categories. Firstly, his historical or literary narrative paintings, pictures based on anecdotes from literature or history. He painted these throughout his career. These were in vogue and found a ready market for most of the century. An example is *An Academy for Instruction in the Discipline*

²⁶ George Charles Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends* (London: J. Lane, 1919), 156.

²⁷ Lot 102, *The Return (First Class)*, Mossgreen Auctions, Armadale, Australia, 28 June, 2017.

of the Fan—1711 (fig.9) based on an article from *The Spectator*.²⁸ The second group is a transitional stage, here represented by *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* (fig.10). This is an experimental combination of portrait (or portraits) and social commentary. Thirdly his modern subject pictures which began with his three railway paintings of 1854. The fourth group are three paintings which he completed in the years before he died; in the early 1860s. These “crowd paintings” are named with reference to Charles Baudelaire who viewed the crowd as the defining symbol of modernity.²⁹ They were Solomon’s ultimate development of the British Realist style. In different ways they explore the urban phenomenon of public gatherings and sociability, anticipating developments in painting later in the century. This study is an attempt to make a Realist interpretation of Solomon’s Realist art—to view the paintings, first and foremost, in their own terms. To view them as multi-narratives, stimuli to the imagination, and associations conjured up by viewers own experiences.

²⁸ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *Spectator Papers: Satirical and Philosophical Extracts from the Journal of That Name Written 1711-15 by Addison and Steele and Others* (Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper, 1950), 102.

²⁹ Charles Baudelaire, trans. P E Charvet, *The Painter of Modern Life* (London: Penguin, 2010).

Chapter One. The Realist Art of Abraham Solomon.

Topicalities in the strict sense are references to people, events, or places that were present in the public consciousness, usually but not always as news items at the time a novel was published or within recent memory. The word as I use it also includes what might be called physical topicalities—objects and scenes that were new presences in the contemporary view, the visible results of change.¹

(Richard D. Altick, 1991)

The rhetoric of Realism is to assert ‘this is how it is’, speaking in a direct, contemporary manner, without pleasing displays of conventional graciousness. Realism is a stance, rather than a straightforward imitation of nature. An ‘allegory’ involves the contrived bringing together of meaningful components to convey a message. Courbet’s ‘allegory’ is ‘real’ in as much as its unprettified components are drawn from the life that Courbet lived in the country and in Paris.²

(Martin Kemp, 2014)

Martin Kemp is here referring to Courbet’s painting *The Artist’s Studio* (1855) which the artist presented as both Realist and allegorical. Within French art history Courbet’s oeuvre is understood as a reaction to Romanticism and a

¹ Richard Daniel Altick, *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1991), 2.

² Martin Kemp, *Art in History: 600 BC-2000 AD* (London: Profile Books, 2014), 135.

response to state sponsored history painting. Britain was different. I will begin with the question—does the standard art-historical model which seeks to explain the rise in popularity of everyday life paintings in mid-century Britain make sense? Scholars have proposed that during the mid-Victorian economic boom newly wealthy collectors provided a ready market for small scale pictures which told a morally uplifting story. These pictures satisfied the limited aesthetics of an uneducated but moneyed class—the middle class. Carolyn Hill writes:

Reflecting the taste of a newly established middle class created by industrialisation, globalisation, and the growth of the city, nineteenth-century narrative art parallels the developments of the popular novel and the illustrated magazine. With the invention of the high-speed press, these publications reached new and larger audiences. The increasing influences of the new middle-class taste and values were important to artists. Their reputations and livelihoods were better sustained by more easily understood subjects, which entertained and provoked emotional response.³

This account by Carolyn Hill repeats the standard view; a ‘whiggish’ interpretation couched as it is in terms of present-day concepts such as

³Caroline Hill in George Hardy, *Artist as Narrator: Nineteenth Century Narrative Art in England and France*: (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma City Museum of Art, 2005), 5.

industrialisation, globalisation, and middle-class “values”.⁴ In this formulation the middle classes had newly emerged, born from technological change, with their own tastes and values. There is no explanation why this class, if class it was, should want to buy paintings or require a new art style, or why these middle classes only appreciated simple narratives and emotional rather than intellectual or aesthetic responses.

The important sentence in Carolyn Hill’s statement is, “their [middle class] reputations and livelihoods were better sustained by more easily understood subjects.”⁵ One aim of this study is to challenge that statement and suggest the paintings are not easily understood and require entirely new approaches to interpretation. In effect, to attempt to interpret these paintings both aesthetically and topically rather than producing simple readings of narratives. One starting point is to examine the topicalities which run through Solomon’s paintings. By taking the idea of topicality, more often a subject of interest for Shakespearean literary critics and referencing Altick’s definition quoted at the head of this chapter as a model, Solomon’s paintings reveal the complex networks of meaning which were available to contemporary viewers and were part of a popular dialogue between viewer and art work. This is to throw out a snobbish and elitist view that the consumers of these paintings were unable to appreciate the finer points of this art and to suggest that they amounted to a subtle and quite clever alternative art style, in effect a spirited cultural transgression against received taste which was powered by Realism.

⁴ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (Harmondsworth, Middx., UK: Penguin Books, 1973), 3-9.

⁵ Hardy, *Artist as Narrator*, 2005, 5.

It cannot be said with any accuracy what any one viewer might have seen in any one of the paintings. The interpretations presented here may seem unlikely speculations. They are not that, they are closer to “speculations about speculations” which stem from proposing what two or more people, both men and women, might discuss when viewing the paintings together—using a topical approach assumes that the discussion will reflect the events of the day. Each painting offers a range of topical allusions and this composite of possibilities is enough to understand the works as more complex, although centred in their own time, than we have been led to expect. Altick points out that ephemerality which has been seen as a major problem of the Victorian novel, and also by extension everyday-life pictures which necessarily have ephemerality built in, is in fact a strength. He says this of topical ephemerality:

But when they introduced those topicalities, the possibility of diminished timeliness was furthest from the writers’ minds; uppermost was the usefulness of topical references in strengthening a sense of community between themselves and the readers of their own day, not a scarcely envisioned posterity. The very quality that leads some modern readers to reject Victorian novels as irretrievably dated can be turned into an asset when the texts are newly illuminated by an informed exercise of the historical imagination. It is not quite a paradox to say that, in fact, ephemerality is part of a Victorian novels permanent worth. An awareness of the topicalities that its first readers discovered and

responded to enables us to read, with greater understanding than is otherwise possible, the living book of Victorian fiction.⁶

Altick's important idea is that topicality in the novel strengthened a sense of community, and this is also true of the visual arts. Solomon had the problem of a wider national audience than the stratified audience for Victorian fiction. The novel was still an expensive purchase in the 1850s; the British Library suggests a book cost at least 3s 6d.⁷ Solomon's triumph, however brief, was to create images which his multifarious public saw as representations which may have been part of their own lives or with which they had a connection. This ability to identify with the people in the painting, a new experience for poorer viewers, was an important part of their success by allowing viewers to see their own lives as important when previously they had been marginalised. This gave relevance to his work and topical references helped make him popular in his own day. I wish to argue that his paintings were popular because they could be appreciated as complex and layered by a sophisticated audience, but they were also populist in the modern sense of uniting around feelings of anxiety and distrust of a governing elite. That distrusted elite in the 1850s was largely the aristocracy and its control of the army. Bram Spruyt gives a relevant definition of populism:

...a typical attitude of people who suffer from being overwhelmed and disoriented by societal changes, who have been placed in a weak and

⁶ Altick, *Presence of the Present*, 1991, 4.

⁷ https://www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/pu_intro.html. See the section on average book prices.

vulnerable economic position because of such changes, who feel their voice does not matter in politics, or who face difficulties in finding a positive social identity.⁸

Solomon was a London Jew who, through art, was forging a new identity for himself in a hostile world, as were many others, particularly those who had moved to cities and towns. Admittedly during this period legal restrictions on Jews were being abolished. He mobilised populist and popular imagery—it may be that the Jewish experience was in a way metaphorical of a general social phenomenon; that for so many the possibility of no longer being despised was common to the culture of the mid-century. He seemed perfectly placed to voice disaffection and contemporary alienation, but the specificity of popularity, populism, and contemporaneity of his pictures has trapped them in their own time to the extent that now they are only valued as social and historical documents having as Altick puts it: “Timeliness in the midst of timelessness, even at the possible cost of ephemerality.”⁹

Topicality is the proposed starting point of this study but it begs the question, how does this approach differ from an art historical method of contextualising a work of art within its social and cultural present? I have tried to answer that question by examining a number of key art historical works and suggesting that often art historians do not place art works in context, as they claim, but instead use the artwork as confirmation of existing theories. This is

⁸ Bram Spruyt, Gil Keppens, and Filip Van Droogenbroeck, "Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?" *Political Research Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (June 2016): 336.

⁹ Altick, *Presence of the Present*, 1991, 5.

Jean-Francois Lyotard's objection to the meta-narrative and within historiography Carlo Ginzburg's advocacy of the micro historical method.¹⁰ In this study I wish to emphasise the viewer's experience as a range of responses to the "nowness" of the paintings. The primary purpose of this is to understand Solomon's pictures as complex and patterned by topicality which the contemporary viewer could choose to experience at whatever level they wished.

Concomitant with this concern for the presence of the present in Solomon's paintings it is important to understand Solomon as a Realist painter of a particular type. Solomon's Realism, in a variation of the contemporary Realism of Gustave Courbet, can be thought of as the artist taking Alberti's idea of the painting as a window onto another world, discussed in detail by Joseph Mashek, and replacing it with a mirror by which the artist reflects back to his audience their own world.¹¹ Mario Praz makes the same claim for Dutch genre painting, he refers to Vermeer as holding up an "enchanted mirror," Solomon's mirror is not so much enchanted as camera-like in intention.¹² Like Courbet, Solomon wished to portray the "real" world of ordinary people, hence "Realism," but unlike Courbet, Solomon's imagined viewer and his subjects were reflections of each other. Courbet through his use of heroic scale more often seemed to be asking his viewers to look at "ordinary" people who are

¹⁰ Jean-François Lyotard and Geoff Bennington, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2010), Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013).

¹¹ Masheck, Joseph. "Alberti's "Window": Art-Historiographic Notes on an Antimodernist Misprision." *Art Journal* 50, no. 1 (1991): 35-41.

¹² Mario Praz, *The Hero in Eclipse: In Victorian Fiction*, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 3.

other than themselves and had been transformed through the intervention of the artist into figures in history paintings. Solomon did not wish to elevate his subjects to the heroic scale but instead by making relatively small pictures he emphasised the ordinariness of his actors. This attempt to hold up a mirror to the world, a distorted mirror it should be said, is the major mechanism by which topicalities are drawn into his paintings. A mirror always reflects the present; never the future or past and so is an accretion of topicalities. Realism of this sort involves the artist trying to convince the viewer that what they are looking at really does exist in the here and now. This can be most easily seen in the background to Solomon's innovative work *Second Class—The Parting* (fig.11). The background is composed of advertising posters pasted to the back wall of the carriage, these are all, as far as can be discovered, real posters of the time advertising real companies and services and this convinces the contemporary viewer of the actuality of the image.

Solomon's Realism had a purpose; that purpose was that viewers were prompted to take a fresh and contemplative look at their own lives through the medium of art. Solomon suggests this is his intention when he remarks, "I also send another sketch of 'How they teach the young idea,' not to shoot, but to walk."¹³ In that instance he is asking the viewer to look at a French phenomenon almost anthropologically. He emphasises looking as a form of learning, whether from real life or the painting—through Realism they have become the same thing. Another part of Solomon's Realism, one which he takes from his intention to persuade the viewer to look at the physical world in more detail is his use of the still life. Throughout his pictures there are little

¹³ "Abraham Solomon." *Athenaeum*, no. 1836 (3 Jan 1863): 20. Appendix Five,

piles of luggage, hats, and other everyday detritus. These objects, which Norman Bryson calls “the overlooked” form a Realist aesthetic, well within the tradition of Western art, by which objects which would have no or little aesthetic interest in real life are transformed, much like the people in the paintings, into aesthetically pleasing images by their incorporation into a work of art.¹⁴ Importantly Solomon’s main body of work is influenced by Pre-Raphaelitism, in particular that aspect of first period Pre-Raphaelitism which involved the use of deep depth of focus. Equal weight in early Pre-Raphaelite works by John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt was given to background and foreground, almost everything in a painting was meticulously detailed. Solomon uses this style a little more selectively but some passages in his modern-subject paintings give detailed representations of wood graining and rock formations. This continues his Realist purpose in transforming looking into a form of learning; by obliging or at least encouraging the viewer to pause and more carefully examine particular elements of the picture which stand as an analogue for the real environment.

In the last three pictures considered, the crowd paintings, there is a further variation in Solomon’s Realism in which he combines topography, topicality, and time to make images which form a “locus.” By locus I mean to suggest the painting had an identifiable geographical position, an existence in time which can be located, and a framework of topical references. These elements interact to envisage an idea of place, or locus, which is not simply a

¹⁴ Norman Bryson “Rhopography” in Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 60-95.

geographical place but also defined as a place in that moment, and a place as a collection of associations and topicalities. Through this the viewer can more completely step into the painting as potentially part of their own experience in their own present. So, for the viewer of *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig.12), of *Brighton Front* (fig.13), and of the *Departure of the Diligence* (fig.14), they are able to imagine themselves as passers-by of these scenes and experience not just a representation of the place but something indefinable suggested by the word “ambience”, or more simply “placeness”.

Even though Solomon’s paintings and engravings were hugely popular in his day they were not universally admired by critics. John Ruskin referred to his work as ‘rubbish’.¹⁵ Ruskin’s criticism was based on his belief that Solomon’s paintings would not stand the test of time because they were tied to a particular moment and therefore ephemeral. A true work of art, and Ruskin derives his view from David Hume, is identified by the joint verdict of true critics and this verdict must be held over a period of time.¹⁶ Central to Ruskin’s argument are ideas of bad taste, vulgarity and lack of education and ultimately that taste and class are linked. Later in the century Ruskin was to write contemptuously of English watercolours of the mid-century that: “they gave an unquestionable tone of liberal-mindedness to a suburban villa and were the cheerfulest possible decorations for a moderate sized-sized breakfast parlour opening on a nicely mown lawn”.¹⁷ In contrast to the aristocracy who acquired

¹⁵ Alfred Hunt, “Letters to the Editor”, *The Liverpool Albion*, Vol.30, No. 1,659, Jan 11,1858.

¹⁶ David Hume and John W. Lenz, *Of the Standard of Taste, and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965)

¹⁷ Quoted in: C. P. Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire: 1760-1860* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1976), 79.

taste from birth the parvenu middle class were unable to distinguish between good and bad art. As recently as 1999 Julian Treuherz wrote:

The middle-class collectors also had a taste for recognisable subject matter rather than obscure allegory and bought narrative paintings and scenes of everyday life in large numbers, especially in the first days of the reign. A good example is the Yorkshire wool manufacturer John Sheepshanks, whose collection is now in the Victoria and Albert museum. The taste for Realism and narrative lasted throughout the age, though alongside it there later grew up a more sophisticated and poetical art of suggestion and decorative effect, collected by a select group of aesthetes. These, however, were for the most part, like the early Victorian collectors, businessmen, drawn from the new late Victorian plutocracy of financiers, shipping magnates and entrepreneurs.¹⁸

Treuherz associates nineteenth century art of everyday life with the rise of the manufacturing middle class of the north; trade rather than gentlemen. For Treuherz more sophisticated collectors of the later century were a step up from trade, they have become a “plutocracy of financiers.” In this there is an element of a theory of “environment” which attached a natural good taste to the

¹⁸ Helen Valentine, ed., *Art in the Age of Queen Victoria: Treasures from the Royal Academy of Arts Permanent Collection* (London: Royal Academy of Arts in Association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999), 13.

aristocracy because of their familiarity with art from birth, here expressed in a *Spectator* article of 1863:

the question, we mean, whether the power of appreciating the higher elements of beauty which art presents to us is not in some measure a matter of hereditary habit and organisation, which it takes generations to bring to its highest perfection, and which demands a gradually elaborated action on the grain of the senses, that is only perfectly attained by a continuous tradition of sensuous refinement.¹⁹

Accounts of the popularity of paintings of everyday life, such as those of Treuherz and Hill are based on a view that middle-class taste dominated the conservative art market and the Royal Academy in the 1850s and this bourgeois taste reflected ignorance of high art. This lack of knowledge was exploited by art dealers and artists alike. Thackeray in 1844 compared the exploitations of patrons by artists and ‘dextrous speculators who know their market’ to the way in which ‘savages are supplied with glass beads’ and children... accommodated with toys and trash’.²⁰ It seems tempting to claim the increased production and popularity of paintings of everyday life originated from the purchasing power of a ‘new’ middle class in mid-Victorian Britain. Subjects, narratives, moralities, social distinction, snobberies and the enormous prices paid to artists in the

¹⁹ “Art and Aristocracy”, *The Spectator*, no. 1838 (London) 19 Sept 1863, 9.

²⁰ Mark Bills et al., *Art in the Age of Queen Victoria: A Wealth of Depictions* (Bournemouth: Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, 2001), 25.

1850s all seem to confirm the view that a cultural revolution had swept the art world. Much of this may be true, but another version has been proposed by E D H Johnson which places continuity rather than upheaval at the centre of the history of everyday life painting in British art.²¹ It is worth remembering, at this point. Butterfield's arguments against the historian's mistaken assumption that change is inevitably dramatic.²² Johnson explains the emergence of genre painting by shifting back a bourgeois class-based theory by a hundred years to the middling-class world of the 18th century. He links this development towards genre with an increased popularity for the engraved image; an argument suggested by Julia Thomas in her discussion of the meeting between narrative painting and illustration.²³ Historians of Victorian art have tended to explain everyday life painting as answering a demand from the middle classes, a demand exploited by artists and dealers alike. Johnson sees a demand created by printmakers which resulted in a hybrid art form of paintings created for the sole purpose of becoming prints among which were the paintings of everyday life produced by Solomon and others such as William Powell Frith.²⁴

The importance of Johnson's book *Paintings of the British Social Scene* is that he shows that the paintings of Abraham Solomon and other genre painters of the 1850s did not appear from nowhere but form part of a tradition

²¹ E. D. H. Johnson, *Paintings of the British Social Scene: From Hogarth to Sickert* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 14.

²² Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (Harmondsworth, Middx., UK: Penguin Books, 1973), 5.

²³ Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 1-20.

²⁴ Johnson, *Paintings of the British Social Scene*, 1986, 83.

of genre which dates from before William Hogarth. One example is Egbert Hemskirk (also Egbert van Heemskerck the Elder) who arrived in London from the Netherlands in about 1675 and “became very eminent for painting drolls after the manner of Brawer. His comical genius succeeded for a long time...in vogue amongst waggish collectors, and the lower rank of virtuosi”.²⁵ Heemskerck’s paintings in London make a physical link between Hogarth and Dutch genre paintings and in his painting, Boors *Carousing and Playing Cards* (fig.15) even mark a tenuous visual analogy with David Wilkie’s *Village Politicians*. (fig.16). From this point in the 17th century Johnson traces a line through William Hogarth, Joseph Highmore, Arthur Devis, Johann Zoffany, David Allan, George Stubbs, Francis Wheatley, Thomas Gainsborough, Joseph Wright, Philip Mercier, James Ward, George Morland, John Constable, David Wilkie, William Mulready and so on to Abraham Solomon and William Frith. There seems to be a thread of the domestic-as-subject in British art of the 18th century as much as the nineteenth. Johnson’s reading of British genre painting as continuous tradition seems more attractive than the sudden appearance of a self-made bourgeoisie wanting to decorate small rooms in homes in the modern metropolis. A good example of continuity are the pair of paintings by Edward Penny from 1774, *The Profligate punished by Neglect and Contempt*, and *The Virtuous comforted by Sympathy and Attention* (fig.17). Both these paintings (with a change of clothing) might pass for everyday life pictures by Abraham or his sister Rebecca Solomon.

²⁵ John Barrow, *Dictionarium Polygraphicum: Or, The Whole Body of Arts Regularly Digested* (London: Printed for C. Hitch and C. Davis..., and S. Austen ..., 1735).

Solomon's paintings, in their apparent simplicity were easy targets for the critics. As early as 1850 the Spectator critic had written about a genre painting by Solomon, "The subject of Mr Solomon's picture is of a kind unsuited to any but a trifle or a caricature; and the proposition which it involves is of a very questionable kind".²⁶ The status of some of his works, such as *Waiting for the Verdict* was called into question publicly, and one of the effects of this was to increase the distinction between high and low art. In some respects, the existence of Solomon's art may be said to be crucial to definitions of the avant-garde art which followed it. The idea of non-narrative painting, pictures without a subject, promoted by the "art for art's sake" movement should be seen as relying on a propensity to narrative attached to painters like Solomon. For Aestheticism, "subject," particularly narrative, interfered with art's ability to be art and so the modern-subject painters while providing a convenient "straw dog" helped in refining the definition of art through what it was not. These problems of definitions are discussed by Elizabeth Prettejohn in her introduction to *Art for Art's Sake*.²⁷ Linda Nochlin notes:

The idea that an elect—an anti-Philistine elect known as the avant-garde—self chosen and self-perpetuating—could respond to art on the basis of *art* qualities alone, is a *social* response not merely an aesthetic one, to the tremendous social and institutional pressures on the

²⁶"The Arts," *The Spectator* (25 May 1850), 1143, 18.

²⁷ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007), 2-9.

production and consumption of art that went along with the more general upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In other words, the creation of the avant-garde was the mirror image, the precise response *to* the emergence of the mass Philistine audience. Kitsch and formalism are mirror images of the same impulse of the same impulse to keep the ever culture-hungry bourgeoisie at bay.²⁸

One explanation for the popularity of Abraham Solomon's paintings, and there may be many possibilities, is that for the contemporary audience the viewing of his paintings was both a rich experience of a shared present and an aesthetic pleasure. Solomon's pictures were, as he says, meant to be picturesque and decorative.²⁹ The formal qualities of the work should not be ignored; his use of colour and light to enhance mood, and the decorative appeal of painted fabrics make his paintings instantly attractive. Solomon's use of colour, light, and brushstroke are in some cases reminiscent of the Düsseldorf School which so much influenced American, British, and European genre painting.³⁰ Other of his paintings are impressionistic, sometimes this is not obvious in reproduction. Much of his work remains hidden and existing paintings are badly reproduced. In many cases, the story or a narrative reading

²⁸ Nochlin, *Realism*, 241.

²⁹"Abraham Solomon." *Athenaeum*, no. 1836 (3 Jan 1863): 20. Full text Appendix Five.

³⁰ Bettina Baumgärtel and Beat Wismer, *The Dusseldorf School of Painting: And Its International Influence 1819-1918* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2012).

of the picture will be, of necessity, the primary response to his work given the difficulty inspecting finish, colour, or size.

Much of this study is confined to the 1850s, a decade which began with Pre-Raphaelitism and the Great Exhibition and arguably an acceleration of experimentation in art. Theodore Zeldin says of this time: “The painting of this period is, in popular belief, distinguished by the much publicised divorce that took place between public taste and artistic genius”³¹ These seemingly populist styles were crucial for later developments in British art from aestheticism to the classical revival of Leighton and the highly influential arts and crafts movement. After Solomon (and other modern subject painters of the 1850s) in Britain and elsewhere, much of western art becomes modern-subject painting, in the sense that the concerns of art (over and above the aesthetic) are most often to do with the human condition rather than religion, the past, or classical mythology. Once Solomon exhibited a painting of people sitting in a second-class carriage on a train then the present became the default subject for artists. A more nuanced appreciation of the art Abraham Solomon can only lead to a greater understanding of the relation between the popular art of the 1850s and the art which followed. Popular painting was to continue to occupy a place on the walls of the Royal Academy but was displaced in the more exclusive exhibition spaces and galleries and eventually museums. Modern-subject painting survives, some of its images have become embedded in present-day culture in photo journalism, advertising and film.

³¹ Theodore Zeldin, *A History of French Passions, 1848-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 443.

It is an appropriate time to look again at the work of the London Jewish artist Abraham Solomon (1824-62). His main body of work was completed in the 1850s and early 1860s which like the early 21st century was a period of technological change and new forms of social relations. Solomon and other artists along with photographers and illustrators helped develop a visual culture for an expanding literate audience. Although illustrated journals had been available to the wealthier reader, a mass audience did not come into existence till the repeal of the “taxes on knowledge” and the abolition of stamp duty on newspapers in 1855. This was accompanied by advances in wood engraving techniques in the 1850s.³² Particularly after the Great Exhibition in 1851, which prompted a flood of illustrations, greater numbers of people had access to visual representations of their world through newspaper and journal illustrations, advertising, textiles, wallpapers, furniture, ceramics, and other household goods. No longer were the mass of the population solely reliant on verbal descriptions to describe the world but words and images could be combined to communicate in a different way. Alongside this change, for those who read novels, there were also a greater range of written examples which might be used to describe needs, emotions, and feelings. An ordinary person could now say for example “I prefer that dress from Paris which was illustrated in *The Lady’s Magazine* last month.” and point to an illustration of a dress or refer to a shared experience of viewing a printed image of the dress. It became possible for ordinary conversation about feelings or desires to be expressed by visual references and supported by a huge library of images produced by illustrators, photographers, and painters. People

³² Antony Griffiths, *The Print before Photography: An Introduction to European Printmaking 1550-1820* (London: British Museum, 2016), 493.

were informed about the available postures which might signify agitation or fear, or whatever emotion they wanted to express, through widely distributed images such as Solomon's *Waiting for the Verdict*. The greater use of image combined with words as complimentary seems to have fascinated Solomon and other artists of the period. Artists were at the forefront of developing a synthesis of word and image whose purpose was to express emotions and mood by combining painting and poetry, they did this by attaching poetic quotations to their paintings and by illustration. Martin Meisel, when discussing Augustus Egg's *Past and Present* (fig.18) refers to this as the "narrative voice."³³ The idea of one art form enriching another was circulating at this time, Richard Wagner expressed this in his concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the idea of the total work of art, when he wrote in 1849:

The Arts of Dance, of Tone, of Poetry, are each confined within their several bounds; in contact with these bounds each feels herself unfree, be it not that, across their common boundary, she reaches out her hand to her neighbouring art in unrestrained acknowledgment of love. The very grasping of this hand lifts her above the barrier; her full embrace, her full absorption in her sister i.e. her own complete ascension beyond the set-up barrier casts down the fence itself. And when every barrier has thus fallen, then there are no more arts and no more boundaries, but only Art, the universal, undivided.³⁴

³³ Martin Meisel, *Realizations* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 26.

³⁴ Richard Wagner, *The Art-work of the Future, and Other Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993), 15.

Wagner came to London to conduct in 1855 so it is possible that his ideas were familiar to artists such as Solomon.³⁵

Despite, or perhaps because of, Abraham Solomon's contemporary fame and the world-wide popularity of engravings of his works he has only featured once in a major exhibition since his death and has been neglected by scholars since the 1980s. Lynda Nead in her book *Myths of Sexuality* (1988) discussed two of Solomon's pictures, *A Contrast* and *Drowned! Drowned!* Her analysis used Foucauldian discourse analysis and a feminist perspective which has some parallels with this study. Her task was to uncover how Victorian art, particularly paintings of modern life, was integral to the system which regulated women's role and gender relations and through which women defined and policed themselves. Solomon's paintings are clearly a reflection of gender and power relations, they can hardly be anything else, but a characteristic of paintings of everyday modern life is a constant shifting of meaning and freedom of interpretation by individual viewers. It may be argued that all art is overdetermined, but paintings of everyday life differ in that they, by their very nature, encourage interpretations which use the language of everyday life and thus promote the viewer to the role of critic. This is an important point, because although there are many reviews of Solomon's paintings in art press of the time, they should not be considered the definitive interpretation of the pictures. These are images which encouraged viewers to make their own interpretations which might be entirely unrelated to the critic's view. Paintings of everyday life *potentially* allow the viewer to make interpretations which diverge from

³⁵ Jonathan Brown, *Great Wagner Conductors: A Listener's Companion* (Oxford: Parrot Press, 2014), 9.

dominant cultural expectations in ways that other artworks which prioritise the exclusive role of the artist do not. The combination of the present-day, “every day”, and Realism’s demotic approach made critics of all. In some everyday life pictures women are apparently little more than clothes horses but sometimes in the same painting female independence is celebrated with images of autonomous women and heroines; *The Flight* (fig.19) is an example in which the viewer is left to decide which meaning to accept. Advances were made in women’s freedoms in the nineteenth century and artists such as Solomon who placed women at the centre of his work were part of that process. One aim of this study is to argue that Solomon and other painters of modern life produced art which, aside from an unavoidable regulatory function also promoted social change. Not to be ignored is that Solomon was a Jew and though he aimed to integrate he never assimilated. Inevitably some of his art, particularly his Realism, reflects his Jewish upbringing, encompassing as it does a desire for change and equality by arguing for a scientific clarity of vision.

Chapter Three. Ways of viewing a modern-subject painting.

A Fifteenth-Century painting is the deposit of a social relationship. ¹

(Michael Baxandall, 1972)

American genre painting, or scenes of everyday life, flourished during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when the young nation sought images and narratives to define and bolster its developing identity. As in seventeenth century Holland and early nineteenth century England, genre painting achieved its greatest popularity and critical acclaim during a period of rapid economic development and cultural change. ²

(Peter John Brownlee, 2014)

The ‘contextual’ approach to understanding a work of art has become a standard method in art history. Putting paintings in an historical, cultural, and social context involves seeing them as more than just the product of the artist but as specific outcomes of prevalent intellectual thought, technologies, economic changes, shifting gender relations, or class relations. In the twentieth century this became a powerful tool in understanding western art. An early

¹ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1.

² Peter John. Brownlee, *American Encounters: Genre Painting and Everyday Life* (Chicago, IL: Terra Foundation for American Art, 2012), 9.

advocate of this approach, Arnold Hauser theorised a systematic Marxist-historical link between art and social change. Marxist interpretations have been important in the idea that art, and I would claim that British modern-subject paintings of the 1850s have been particularly vulnerable to this view, is predominantly ideological in the narrow sense of representing the interests of the dominant class and gender.³ In a review of Hauser's book, Ernst Gombrich points to one problem, which might be applied more generally, that:

What he presents is not so much the social history of art or artists as a social history of the Western world, as he sees it reflected in the varying trends and modes of artistic expression...for his purpose, facts are only of interest insofar as they have a bearing on his interpretation."⁴

The nature and ramifications of this debate are not the central concern of this study; the problem here is the way in which modern-subject paintings are susceptible, or perhaps have become susceptible to, being used as examples within the two important theoretical framings of Victorian Art, feminism and Marxism. Modern-subject pictures more than any other art genres of the nineteenth century have been characterised as purely illustrative of the values of a putative middle class. This dominant attention of narrative subject over aesthetic concerns has made them prone to sociocritical interpretation to the

³ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

⁴ E. H. Gombrich, "Review: The Social History of Art by Arnold Hauser," *The Art Bulletin* 35, no. 1 (1953): 80.

exclusion of other responses. Perhaps it is inevitable, for example, that a painting of people sitting in a second-class carriage of a train in 1854 (fig.11) should, as a primary interpretation, be thought of in class terms, or as a representation of a particular type of female fortitude, or even in the portrayal of the determined little boy a “queerist” essay on the construction of masculinity. These paintings seem to be designed to be read as essays about class and gender. But, those interpretations ignore, perhaps as inconvenient, much of the rest of the painting. British modern-subject pictures seem to be defined by interpretations which emphasise either class or gender to the exclusion of the aesthetic, the playful, the whimsical, the sensual or other perspectives.

The pictures of the modern-subject painters, like the Realist novels of the period were unashamedly ephemeral, and although this is often thought of as a weakness it can also be their strength as Altick points out.⁵ For Altick the ephemerality of the Realist artwork illuminates the particular historical moment more than any other artwork. For him, ephemerality, the concern with the transient, is an important historical resource because it concentrates on the smaller details of everyday life which other artworks ignore. Modern-subject paintings can also inform the historian of the details of everyday life of the past, they certainly show how people looked in the past and the clothes they wore. These are interesting details, but it is their significance as artworks which live in a continuing present which is central to this study.

This idea of a continuing present is quite straightforward. Solomon’s Realist ambition is to hold up a mirror to the present. That attempt to show the present-day world involves including actual evidence, which contemporaries

⁵ Altick, *Presence of the Present*, 1991, 4.

understood easily, that the image belongs to the present. This involves the pulling in of topical references. In Solomon's *Second Class* (fig. 5) the people on the train wear the clothes expected of people in 1854, they sit beneath posters of the time, their luggage suggests 1854 rather than 1754. They are trapped in the present moment, frozen in time, and they will always exist in the present moment—1854. This makes these paintings quite different from history paintings, or paintings with religious or mythological subjects which are viewed from the same temporal perspective from the beginning. The latter always show the past, but everyday life paintings start off as explicitly from the present and then become images of the past. They continue to exist in their own present and it is this continuing present, which this study attempts to examine. These are paintings of the present in all its ephemerality and putting the paintings at the centre of interpretation, by taking them seriously in their own terms, is to abandon the notion of them as historical objects, or objects within history, and to recognise them for what they are intended to be—as objects which inhabit a continuing present-day. This argument is central to the justification of topicality over historical context as the preferred means of thinking about these paintings. By examining, even in a limited way some of the experiences that are shared between viewers and the artist it is possible to edge closer towards meaning in these artworks. This is not to abandon an historical approach altogether and with it to deny the importance of theory, it is only to suggest that there is an alternative view in which the topical experience of those who first saw and purchased these images in all their different forms tells a different story than their contribution to established theories and histories of the nineteenth century. This study uses a topical approach which has been borrowed from literary criticism and based, not on the more general method of social and historical context but on a more detailed process of relating events simultaneous with, or within a few years, of the picture's creation.

Topicalities have long been of interest to Shakespeare scholars, and they appear throughout his plays. One example is the references to the Midlands riots (1607) in *Coriolanus* (c.1608). Shannon Millar discusses this in *Topicality and Subversion in William Shakespeare's Coriolanus*.⁶ Literary critics are careful to emphasise the use of topicality as much more than a search for influences. Millar explores topicalities as interlocking to contribute to a different narrative from that which is initially apparent. Shakespearean examples should be seen in the context of a love of allegory, often a story within a story, of which Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queen* is an important example.⁷ While Elizabethan allegory encoded narratives which were only accessible to an educated elite, nineteenth century painters of everyday life democratised allegory by using topical, often nationally shared, events. This may be seen in a number of Solomon's paintings, *A Contrast* is a good example, where an allegorical narrative, of Prince Albert as a traitor, is seemingly hidden behind the immediate goings on in the painting. Miller summarises his understanding of the complex interaction of topicalities in *Coriolanus*:

I will also be drawing together a number of the play's topical allusions and references in order to see, not how these events shape the play, but how the topical issues are reformulated through their proximity to one another. The complex of meanings and associations created by one topical parallel can

⁶ Shannon Miller, "Topicality and Subversion in William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32, no. 2 (1992), 287-310.

⁷ Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 55-61.

bleed into and thus reshape the meaning of other topical references. By viewing topical references in conjunction with each other, then, the cultural significance of various events converges, creating a story of its own. In the course of exploring *Coriolanus*'s use of topicality, we also need to re-think the role that significant cultural issues and conflicts play in shaping an author's use of topical allusion.⁸

In *Coriolanus* Millar reads the interaction of topical references, the Midland riots, King James' proclamations in response to those civil disturbances, renaissance concepts of Kingship, Coriolanus's failure to be an effective leader and his subsequent assassination as combining, through the merging of these topicalities, to produce another narrative, a play within the play—of James I as 'traitor to his own crown'.⁹ Similarly, in Solomon's *A Contrast* there is a play within the play involving Prince Albert as a foreign consort, and his malign influence over the English Queen Victoria. The idea that topical references are not just individual fragments of real life which have crept into the play/artwork but can be seen as a type of allegorical scheme using shared experience rather than classically derived symbolism, an idea which seems apt to the interpretation of paintings of everyday life, is developed by Nicholas R. Moschovakis through blending theory.

⁸ Shannon Miller, "Topicality and Subversion in William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32, no. 2 (1992), 287-88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.

In his study, *Topicality and Conceptual Blending: Titus Andronicus and the Case of William Hacket* gives a useful definition of topicality:

Critics of literature and the other arts commonly understand “topicality” as kind of meaning that presumes an interpreter’s familiarity with particular, publicly reported events or controversies, to which an imaginative work alludes more or less implicitly.¹⁰

This is helpful in arguing that an artist’s use of topicality is common to all the arts and reaffirms the centrality of the interpreter or viewer in drawing out topical references. Topicalities can be found, not just in literature and the visual arts but are certainly present in nineteenth century music. Even in a seemingly un-programmatic composition, Gustav Mahler’s Symphony no.1 (1888), the composer uses Jewish folk songs and Klezmer music to encourage the audience to consider the rise of extreme anti-Semitism in contemporary Vienna: “I am three times homeless, as a native of Bohemia in Austria, as an Austrian among the Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world.”¹¹ A better known example comes from Mozart’s opera *Così fan tutte* (1790) with a scene parodying the magnetic theories of Mozart’s contemporary Franz Mesmer.¹² Even in

¹⁰ Nicholas R. Moschovakis, "Topicality and Conceptual Blending: "Titus Andronicus" and the Case of William Hacket," *College Literature* 33, no. 1 (2006),127.

¹¹ George E. Berkley, *Vienna and Its Jews: The Tragedy of Success* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1988), 55.

¹² Steptoe, Andrew. "Mozart, Mesmer and 'Così fan tutte'." *Music & Letters* 67, no. 3 (1986): 248-55. Andrew Steptoe, "Mozart, Mesmer and 'Così fan tutte'," *Music and Letters* 67, no. 3 (July 1986), 248-55.

seemingly abstract art forms, such as symphonic music, the concrete world of recent events is apparent through topicalities and can be used as an aid in interpreting the work of art as from the audience's viewpoint.

Moskovakis emphasises shared access to and understanding between artist and viewer-audience of alluded topical events; this is important to any discussion of viewer response to a painting of everyday life. But he also makes the crucial point that topicalities are implicit, they must be sought out and discovered by the viewer or the audience. In this version of topicality theory, the work of art and its appeal becomes, at least in part, poetical or aesthetic because we are using a fundamental tool of the mind—cognitive blending. Cognitive blending theory is modern variant on Associationism, a standard psychological theory of the mind in the nineteenth century.¹³

Cognitive blending theory goes further than simple association by proposing that the imagination acts more creatively and pulls together associations into other quite unconnected, or seemingly unconnected, narratives and meanings. Rather than the discrete associations proposed by Associationism the mind is said to combine associations to create “essentially novel imaginative achievements”.¹⁴ The mind, in this theory, is in a constant state of creative imagining, in which the development of metaphor and allusion are central. The painting of everyday life has a special place in this scheme because it puts up no impediments to the viewer's imagination. Unlike religious or history paintings, everyday life paintings are not based on a pre-existing story with a selection of ready-made associations and metaphors. The paintings actively stimulate the

¹³ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), 699.

¹⁴ Moschavakis, *Topicality and Conceptual Blending*, 2006, 129.

viewers' imagination by asking them to create their own narratives from the images and topical allusions they observe.

Moschovakis begins with the point that cognitive approaches such as his are not dependent on authorial intention to explain the topical content of an artwork but neither are they dependent on “the post-structuralist position that authorship is a mere fiction” and that “audiences can make informed hypotheses as to an author’s probable intentions”.¹⁵ Having established the audience’s importance in interpreting the art work he then goes on to make the point:

Second, conceptual blending theory draws our attention particularly to the metaphoricity of topical identities, and hence to their capacity for aesthetic novelty, which literary critics in general have neglected. The theory of blends emphasises the innovative aspect of all cognitive activity, in so far as it involves acts of metaphorical identification. It can, I believe, help us to reintegrate the study of topical allusion within a poetics that respects the values of creativity, novelty, and wonder as central to literary interest.¹⁶

Moskovakis suggests that topicalities should not only be considered as additional information which is “added on” to the interpretation of the text by the critic but are integral to the interpretation of the text as a whole. For example, in Solomon’s painting *Drowned! Drowned!* the poetry of the painting

¹⁵ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶ Ibid.

comes partly from the painting's aesthetic value but also in the topical allusions which direct the viewer to imagining the city, the night walk, and the river.

The uncovering of topicalities by the viewer-audience, either as stimulating blends or associations and whether their presence is unconscious or consciously intended by the artist, can be argued for in relation to Abraham Solomon's work after scrutiny of individual pictures. Importantly, for this research, literary critics, including Altick, make the point that topicalities within an artwork engage the mind and imagination of the viewer-audience and help create a relationship which is imaginative and poetic in ways that are not obvious to the present-day viewer. It is this element which explains, at least in part, the contemporary appeal of Solomon's paintings. At the same time the presence of topicalities which structure presentness in a modern-subject picture add to its ephemerality and make a contribution to the difficulty in understanding these paintings today.

“A Fifteenth-Century painting is the deposit of a social relationship.” Michael Baxandall's influential statement from the opening paragraph of his book *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* helped establish what has become a standard method for explaining, analysing, or understanding works of art. However, as Paul Hills has pointed out Baxandall's intention was initially misunderstood by scholars in the 1970s who largely ignored Baxandall's subtitle ‘a primer in the social history of style’.¹⁷ Baxandall's intention was not only to highlight historical context as a methodology but to

¹⁷ Paul Hills. “Art History Reviewed XIII: Michael Baxandall's ‘Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy’, 1972” *The Burlington Magazine*, 153, 1299 (June 2011), 404-408.

explain how styles emerge. He proposed contextualising the artwork, socially, culturally, and politically so that the work of art becomes explained not just in terms of art historical categories or styles such as Mannerist, Baroque, and so on, but also through the social processes within which styles develop. Those social processes can be influenced by everyday activities which may be found reflected in contemporary paintings, he gives examples of postures in fifteenth century art which mimic movements from the popular *bassa danza*. Baxandall shifted the emphasis from the artwork itself to external forces and influences. Baxandall does not suggest that the art-work was determined by historical forces alone or the artist and patron were not fully able to exercise free will in jointly creating a work of art. When Baxandall set out to relate social experience, relations, interactions, and phenomena to the style of fifteenth century paintings, he had an advantage of describing what appears to be a closed system. His field of study was an art product from a defined geographical area, a relatively stable political system, and unified by a common religion. These paintings were the product of patronage rather than consumer choice. The elements in the picture were limited by the contractual relationship with the patron which from the beginning defined the “look” of the painting. The existence of the patron meant that the artwork had to be described in words to start the process of making the painting rather than originating from a non-verbal imaginative source. That the paintings originated as verbal descriptions encouraged the patron to build up a language which described the artwork. Baxandall’s narrowing of the focus of his study helps make an argument for the usefulness of a social-cultural contextual approach to understanding the fifteenth century Italian (mainly northern Italian) art, but it is not clear how this method might be transferred to the nineteenth century when artists were free to make their own images without direct instruction from a patron.

By the nineteenth century Baxandall's human patron as a major influence on the form of the painting gives way to, with the possible exception of portraiture, a system of viewers, critics, institutions, class ideologies, fashions, or technologies to which the artist responds. T J Clark sets out in *Image of the People* to examine this system which acted as a 'patron of the imagination' that directed the artist as surely as a Medici.¹⁸ For Clark, the usefulness of an historical context is to investigate how the artist's imagining of this new patron, roughly speaking the 'market', politics, the public, culture might interact with the artist and his work. There is an underlying idea that artists imagined a hypothetical patron by speculating on the needs and wants of their expected audience. Artists, in this case Gustave Courbet, in mid-century Paris did not paint purely for profit but they painted pictures which they wanted to be seen, and Courbet went to great lengths to show his art to the public with his Pavilion of Realism in 1855.¹⁹ To be seen and considered by viewers the expectations of the "public" had to be predicted, their interests had to be considered and their limitations had to be measured. This fictive audience of viewers, critics, other artists, politicians, petit bourgeois, and cultural expectations becomes in Clark's version of social history of art Baxandall's 'deposit of a social relationship'.²⁰ His emphasis is very much on artists as creators choosing to represent elements from the world they inhabit rather than

¹⁸ T. J. Clark, *Image of the People; Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848-1851* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), 10-11.

¹⁹ Stephen F. Eisenman and Thomas E. Crow, *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 269-71.

²⁰ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1.

the artist determined exclusively by social forces. In this way the painting reflects those cultural elements and influences which are chosen, not given:

The point is this: the encounter with history and its specific determinations is made by the artist himself. The social history of art sets out to discover the general nature of the structures that he encounters willy-nilly; but it also wants to locate the specific conditions of one such meeting...A work of art may have ideology (in other words, those ideas, images, and values which are generally accepted dominant) as its material, but it works that material; it gives it a new form and at certain moments that new form is in itself a subversion of ideology.²¹

In Clark's schema, even if artists were to ignore or wanted to scandalise their audience they had first to imagine that audience. In order to *épater le bourgeois*, *il faut comprendre*. Clark's method makes use of Marxist ideas of class, ideology, spectacle, and modernism as fundamental categories in any understanding of historical change and with that an understanding of the art of mid-nineteenth century France.²² Clark makes a claim to a dynamic interpretation of Marxist views of class in his introduction but within the body of the work his Marxism is more traditional. His use of 'bourgeois', 'petit-bourgeois', 'proletariat', and '*calicots*' conjures up a straightforward Marxist interpretation of history, and art, which is dependent on a structural determinism

²¹ Clark, *Image of the People*, 1972, 13.

²² T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 5.

little different from his criticism of Schapiro.²³ He says himself in the conclusion to *The Painting of Modern Life*:

...particularly if one believes, as I do, that the sense of class just outlined is basic to bourgeois ideology, and a contrary imagery would have to be based on some form of identification with the interests of other classes in capitalist society. That Manet and his followers had no such identification is obvious. It is not enough to say they were bourgeois artists; it needs stressing, rather that their practice as painters—their claim to be modern—depended on their being bound more closely than ever before to the interests and economic habits of the bourgeoisie they belonged to.²⁴

The point here, and Clark's work is a good example of this, is that an historical-context method cannot be ideologically neutral but always has a 'point of view'. A critique of an artwork might attempt some independence from history if art and artistic development is seen as completely independent and self-referential, an idea inherent in "art for art's sake" or Aestheticism. One problem with the historical context approach to art is that history can be a bit of a bully. History, certainly in its grand narrative form, whether Marxist, Whig, Feminist, Hegelian, Christian, or Evolutionary, tends to close off the artwork from the full range of interpretations. Artworks become merely illustrative of social change so that, in Clark's case, a book about painting becomes in part a book about a

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.,260.

broad sweep of history. The difficulty for Clark is to create a balance between the painting as an object with an aesthetic appeal, the painting as ideological, and the painting as a product of a particular moment in history. His analysis of *Le Bar des Folies-Bergère* (fig.20) by Edouard Manet is a case in point.²⁵ Clark devotes almost the entire chapter to various descriptions of the cafés-concerts, their history, and their entertainers as a form of popular amusement in contemporary Paris. Clark's view was that; "Painting was mostly a complaisant spectator of this spectacle, perfecting the petit bourgeois view of things and leaving behind the best picture of what it amounted to."²⁶ Clark in this moment reduces the painting, which must be more than that, to a record in a library of historical images, in the way paintings of everyday life by British artists of the 1850s have come to be valued only as historical documents. This is partly true, the painting provides a record of what a bar-counter looked like in 1882, and the catalogue of the Salon of 1882 suggests that the accuracy of the image, in other words Realist, was an important consideration for viewers:

M. Manet, on demande où est la glace ? Nous sommes vis-à-vis d'un comptoir Folies-Bergère. Accorde. Face à face avec une jeune limonadière. Accordé. La glace nous la montre de dos. Parfait. Et ce client est comme moi en dehors du comptoir, et la vitre nous renvoie son visage.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., 205-258.

²⁶ Ibid. 205.

²⁷ Philippe Burty, *L'exposition Des Beaux-arts (Salon De 1882): Comprenant Quarante Planches... Cent Quatre-vingts Dessins ...* (Paris: Librairie D'art Ludovic Baschet, 1882), 125-126.

The painting has some features in common with British paintings of everyday life of the 1850s. Manet has used the device of the “defining moment” by which the narrative is halted, in order to heighten drama.²⁸ The limonadière is caught in contemplation, the presence of the male customer suggests another story going on. The young woman’s facial expression may suggest a placid realisation as she stands alone surrounded by her wares. James Collinson in his painting *The Empty Purse* sometimes called *For Sale* (fig.21) uses a similar idea, that the young woman is also for sale. The limonadière and her wares for sale seem to represent more than themselves. Clark suggests that she is symbolic of modernity and the bar is symbolic of the new suburban petit bourgeois class. Moving from an historical context to the topical events of 1882 suggests a more pessimistic interpretation was available to contemporary viewers. January 1882 saw the crash of the French stock market, (Paris Bourse), and was the worst financial crisis in France during the nineteenth Century.²⁹ By coincidence this financial crisis was said to have precipitated Paul Gauguin’s decision to become a full-time artist.³⁰ David Sweetman emphasises the serious effects of the crisis:

²⁸ Susan P. Casteras, *The Defining Moment: Victorian Narrative Paintings from the Forbes Magazine Collection* (Charlotte, NC: Mint Museum of Art, 1999).

²⁹ The Krach of 1882 and the Bourse de Paris. Eugene N. White. 2005. (Conference paper)
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.454.3088&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (accessed 21 Feb 2019)

³⁰ David Sweetman, *Gauguin* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), 101-104.

With delicious irony, the local trains were able to make a great deal of money laying on special carriages to bring in the countless suburban investors who were now desperate to offload what were rapidly becoming worthless shares in foreign railway companies... Convinced that the fall of Capitalism had come at last, left-wing groups organised protests which became riots and which led to bombings and other acts of violence around the country.³¹

Viewers of the Salon that summer would be well aware of this economic catastrophe and its consequences so this image of the chaos and confusion of conspicuous consumption and the young woman's apparent realisation of her situation would have had a very topical resonance. This is one example of how a topical approach, based on the contemporaneity of the image rather than a future outcome such as "modernity" results in an interpretation which is rooted in the viewer's experience.

Contextualising the artwork can 'frame' our interpretation or view of the art of an entire era. David Solkin begins his study of early nineteenth century painting of everyday life by stating that:

The imagery that we will be examining can tell us much about how everyday was colonised in early nineteenth-century Britain—how it was scrutinised, regularised and represented by the operations of an increasingly pervasive hegemonic power. But the same pictures also

³¹ Ibid.

reveal the quotidian as a site of resistance—to surveillance from above, to what I shall be describing as the distinctly modern vision of Wilkie and his followers: a vision of the world in a constant state of flux, shaped in the last instance by the radical economic transformations, revolutionary politics, and war.³²

The importance of Wilkie's paintings seem, in this account, to be reduced to a role as illustrative examples of a process of political change, one dominated by pervasive hegemonic power, radical economic transformations, surveillance and a modern vision. Wilkie's early painting, *The Village Politicians* (fig.16) is a painting of daily life of the very recent past, the 1790s, rather than the contemporary world of 1806. It therefore differs from Solomon's preoccupation with the identifiable present. Solkin mostly uses the painting to promote his argument about a representation of modernity based on the central image of a man reading a newspaper, perhaps informed by Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community'. For Anderson the spread of the newspaper and the novel in the nineteenth century was the basis for the development of nationalism expressed as an 'imagined community'.³³ Anderson argues that the newspaper, apart from creating a common language, means of expression, and rhetoric, creates the possibility of a national conversation. Solkin emphasise the "progress" towards the modern but fails to address the topical sources of Wilkie's image. The year

³² David H. Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 5.

³³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016).

is 1806, the French navy have been trounced by Horatio Nelson for whom the nation is still in mourning, but instead of grasping the advantage politicians are squabbling after the death of William Pitt in January. Wilkie borrows the Dutch genre theme of the 'disorderly house' to make the point that while politicians argue the nation is in disarray in this painting by Jan Steen (fig.22). Note the unwashed dishes, the dog drinking from a pot, another dog trying to steal a child's milk, drinking and smoking, the old bones on the floor all viewed by an inquisitive neighbour: 'God sees everything, but the neighbours miss nothing.' An argumentative government was caricatured by Gilray in 1807 (fig.23) and viewers at the Royal Academy in June 1806 would have drawn a parallel between *Village Politicians* and Lord Grenville's ministry.³⁴ Another topical reference comes from Robert Burns (1759-96). Burn's poem *Letter to a Gentleman* (1790) might be read as a literary source for Wilkie's painting. This is a poem about sharing a newspaper of which the first few lines are:

Kind Sir, I've read your paper through.
And faith, to me, 'twas really new!
How guessed ye, Sir. What maist I wanted?
This mony a day I've grained and gaunted,
To ken what French mischief was brewin:
Or what the drumlie Dutch were doin;³⁵

³⁴ Richard E. Willis, "Fox, Grenville, and the Recovery of Opposition, 1801-1804," *Journal of British Studies* 11, no. 2 (1972), 24-43.

³⁵ Robert Burns, *Letter to a Gentleman*, 1790,
<http://www.robertburns.org/works/299.shtml>

An analysis of *Village Politicians* benefits from an understanding of the lived experience of the contemporary viewer and their responses, deriving from their cultural environment even though such observations can only be speculative as interpretations.

Lynda Nead in her book *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* approaches the art of the nineteenth century via Foucauldian discourse theory.³⁶ The art that she describes is viewed primarily as documentary evidence in which power relations between men and women are encoded. The images she analyses are treated as historical documents, evidence which support a discourse theory which acknowledges that power relations can shift but are not progressive. History in this instance does not move in one direction, that is the Hegelian tradition:

The Foucauldian method's use of history is not a turn to teleology, that is, it does not involve assumptions of progress (or regress). This is why we say it involves histories that never stop: they cannot be said to stop because they cannot be said to be going anywhere.³⁷

Nead's account of mostly mid-nineteenth century art is reductive despite a Foucauldian ambition that is usually associated with complexity. This is

³⁶ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1988).

³⁷ Gavin Kendall and Gary Wickham, *Using Foucault's Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), 4.

unsurprising given the narrow focus on prostitution and representations of the fallen woman and her alter ego female respectability. Like Solkin and Clark who see the art they discuss through a Marxist view of transformation through class, Nead mainly considers the role of art as part of an apparatus of female disempowerment within discourses of femininity. Discourse theory, in its simplest sense, examines everyday relations, which are often taken for granted, and views them as relations of power with their own semi-autonomous languages and practices. Nead identifies and translates the discourse of nineteenth century figurative art, mostly everyday life painting, as an exchange between different representations of femininity. Much of the art she examines contrasts images of the virtuous wife and the fallen woman, the adulteress or the prostitute. From this perspective art is seen as instructional and an important part of the apparatus of self-discipline which helps explain why women of the period conformed. In this view women were warned that their respectability was constantly threatened by 'fallenness' and shown examples of the fate which awaited them if they transgressed. This is very much part of the Foucauldian project which asks questions about why people are constrained by forces which are both interior and hidden. This internalisation of control, Foucault has suggested, is a feature of modern western cultures and specifically arose in the modern era.

Nead takes these ideas and uses them to examine the practices of unconscious self-control and contradictory means by which Victorian women were policed and policed themselves. There can be no argument with that. Typically, the art of everyday life, seeks to open up the ordinary to scrutiny by making visual and, freeze framing, moments which are otherwise hidden. This is one intention of Rebecca Solomon's painting *A Friend in Need* (fig.24) which

is analysed by Nead in her final chapter *Woman's Mission to Women*.³⁸ Viewers of the painting occupy the position of passers-by of a familiar street scene in this sense Realist. The viewer as passer-by is also a feature of some of her brother Abraham's pictures, particularly his "crowd" paintings. A beadle, a Church of England official, is attempting to remove a beggar woman from the portico steps of a London church. He is being stopped by a well-off mother and we may be struck by the women's power to stop the beadle with a simple gesture. Viewers are alerted to the task of scrutinising the painting carefully. This is emphasised by the reflection of the scene in the polished metal sphere of the Beadle's staff of office. Only an etching of this painting exists, so it is difficult to interpret, but it seems reasonable to assume that this is a mirror-reflection of the scene on the steps in the manner of Van Eyck's, *The Arnolfini Marriage* or Valasquez's *Las Meninas*. Nead analyses this work in terms of notions of charity and women's role of the period alongside definitions of femininity and prostitution. Although Nead refers to events around the time of the painting a more thorough topical analysis opens up a number of other avenues for consideration.

The picture was painted shortly after the Crimean War and so war and perhaps Florence Nightingale, who was at the height of her fame as a symbol of female sanctity and authority, would be in the mind of a contemporary viewer. The focus of the painting, the Beadle, though his pomposity has been pricked by the well-to-do mother, is underlined by a quotation from *Measure for Measure* attached to the painting, 'Drest in a little brief authority he plays such fantastic

³⁸ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1988), 197.

tricks before heaven'.³⁹ This line is spoken by Isabella who is pleading for justice for her brother against an unjust enforcement of the law. But there is more than this. The contemporary viewer would firstly take note of the title, *A Friend in Need*, a motto by Benjamin Franklin, and see the woman on the steps as a friend of the wealthy woman. The beggar woman wears no wedding ring, so a viewer would suppose she has come to this situation because of her illegitimate baby. Solomon seems to be making a plea for a more charitable approach to the 'fallen' woman and the wealthier woman is using her authority to try to make that come about. However, the contemporary viewer would also take notice of the poster on one column of the portico which advertises a meeting of the Caffrarian (sic) Mission. This mission was a charity to help 'Kaffirs' in South Africa and its presence suggests two associations for a contemporary viewer. Firstly, that Solomon is referring to the motto 'charity begins at home' and may be obliquely asking the viewer to consider that charity within the community, ie. towards the woman on the steps, is more important than charity to strangers thousands of miles away in Africa. This contains within it a reflection on contemporary criticism of the extravagance of foreign wars. A popular response to the Crimean war was most famously made by John Bright in his 'the angel of death has been abroad' speech to the House of Commons.⁴⁰ Nead makes no mention that Rebecca is Jewish, a fact which should have a bearing on any interpretation of the picture. The image turns on the idea of kindness towards strangers, the woman on the steps may be intended to show a traveller. Most viewers would have been aware of Rebecca's

³⁹ William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*. Act 2 Scene 2.

⁴⁰ George Barnett Smith, *Life and Speeches of the Right Honourable John Bright, M.P* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1881), 403.

religion, if only by her name. Many would have known about the many Jewish charitable organisations in the 1850s, described by V D Lipman as a ‘plethora’.⁴¹ Given a contemporary viewers awareness of the importance of community charity and charitable giving as a fundamental practice of Judaism, something suggested by Lipman,⁴² there are reasons for viewers to detect a specifically Jewish element in the picture. The beggar woman is dressed in a possibly oriental or gypsy style. One contemporary view might be a plea for tolerance towards Jews and foreigners. A secondary association comes about because the Kaffrarian Mission was founded by the Scottish Presbyterian church and so a contrast is suggested between Non-Conformism and the Established church; both Jews and non-conformists were constrained by disabilities at this time. Church taxes for the maintenance of established churches were mandatory and not abolished until 1868 and much resisted by non-conformists.⁴³ In this way the very fabric, and even the classical architecture embodies a complicated linking of legal distinctions which would be understood by a contemporary viewer alongside another level of injustice between state church, Judaism and non-conformity metaphorised by the image of the beadle.

In common with *Village Politicians* a focus on the painting itself and its topicalities results in a quite different and less generalised interpretation of the picture, one which takes into account different viewer responses. Nead sums up

⁴¹ V. Lipman, *Social History of the Jews in England 1850-1950* (London: Watts, 1954), 50.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ J. P. Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism: The Church Rate Conflict in England and Wales, 1832-1868* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 223-262.

the picture, for her an artist's reflection of historical attitudes rather than a political statement on the part of a Jewish woman artist:

Nineteenth-century philanthropy brought together the feminine ideal and the fallen woman in a complex economic, social and moral relationship. It produced new definitions of femininity, of class and respectability and above all, it set the family at the centre of social organisation. In the 1850s, however, these positions were still in the process of being defined and Solomon's painting, exhibited at the moment when women's participation in the philanthropic enterprise had reached a particular peak, took this message of women's mission to women onto the walls of the Royal Academy.⁴⁴

The argument in favour of a topical approach to Abraham Solomon's paintings does not just rest on a rejection of the limitations of historical contextualisation. Elizabeth Prettejohn argues that a 'social history' approach while producing 'vast quantities of valuable information...information on its own is of merely antiquarian interest.'⁴⁵ Prettejohn's criticism is that the "extended meanings" in Pre-Raphaelite art are limited in scope by a reliance on the circumstances in which they were produced. The charge is that a great deal of current writing on Pre-Raphaelite art relies on anecdote; this may be the case. I would argue that much of the writings on the art of this period also sets out to

⁴⁴ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988, 208.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Prettejohn, *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), 233.

prove largely undisclosed theories about historical changes in the nineteenth century. A topical approach centres on viewers and attempts to propose the possible complex associations which viewers might make and turns on the explanation of a work's popularity with an audience from all strata of society and many countries outside Britain.

Peter John Brownlee who is quoted at the head of this chapter makes the usual argument about the emergence and popularity of genre and everyday life paintings in America. He identifies Dutch genre painting as an antecedent alongside sudden economic growth and the attempt to forge national unity through the visual arts, but he notes significant variations on the European and British model. The principle reason for genre paintings popularity in nineteenth century America, in Brownlee's account, is economic expansion. This argument relies on a market led theory of supply and demand in which the growth of a more comfortable lifestyle led to a particular style of art which reflected the power of the consumer. Brownlee's account differs from most British and European commentators by not claiming the art of everyday life as an art form specifically developed by and for the bourgeoisie. He sees the emergence of everyday life painting as a response to the major concerns of the time, with a public which was mainly immigrant, the continued existence of slavery, the encounter with the 'wild' west, and the 'threat' of native Americans. Brownlee suggests that everyday life paintings were a way of working out the problems of this confusing new world through visual culture. American everyday life paintings used recognisable types to codify the complexities of multi-cultural American society so that viewers could more easily manage their experience of what must have been, for many, a baffling situation. A world in which they had, and this is the white American immigrant experience, no cultural inheritance to fall back on. One fine example of Brownlee's thesis is Richard Caton Woodvilles's *War News from Mexico*

(fig.25), which shares a subject with Wilkie's *Village Politicians* and *Chelsea Pensioners reading the Waterloo Dispatch*. Woodville's painting incorporates a frontier setting, the rapid availability of news, slavery, and a series of recognisable types.⁴⁶ Brownlee's emphasis on typological classification shares Mary Cowling's view of British everyday life paintings that understanding the world through taxonomies of facial characteristics or postures is an important function of everyday life paintings.⁴⁷ By doing this the everyday life painting orders and simplifies a confusing world, toffs are toffs, fashionable young men are effeminate, middle-aged women are terrifying, Jews are thieves and swindlers, and all of them have their own physiognomic indicators.

Brownlee and Cowling share a view that everyday life painting in the nineteenth century was a response to anxieties due to rapid change, and that artists responded and possibly reinforced these anxieties. For a present-day viewer, this resort to stereotypes may make us uncomfortable but importantly this emphasis counters the received wisdom that everyday life and genre painting were a purely bourgeois art form. Certainly, it was only the better off who could buy the actual paintings but that does not in itself make this art bourgeois. The proliferation of visual media from the 1840s ensured that these images were consumed in reproductive forms by huge numbers of viewers from the very rich to the very poor. This alternative explanation points to a weakness in arguments about the emergence of everyday life paintings of artists such as Abraham Solomon. It seems unlikely that the stubborn refusal for this art to be

⁴⁶ In Woodville's painting the older man who signifies the quieter wisdom of age is a near-copy of the older gentleman in Wilkie's *Village Politicians*.

⁴⁷ Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

rehabilitated, whilst some Pre-Raphaelite art and other Victorian art seems to have gained a presence in the canon, can be explained in any simple way.

One explanation for the emergence of popular genre painting is that a new market of buyers demanded simple morally instructive storytelling pictures which could be hung in suburban villas. In European accounts, this was a middle-class demand but the American (Brownlee) metanarrative which combines the aesthetic appreciation of immigrants with the unfamiliarity and ‘otherness’ of slavery and ‘native’ cultures has little need for a specifically class-based account. In both America and Europe, from the 1860s, everyday life paintings began to disappear from galleries and exhibitions. This too is a puzzle. Did tastes change? Did the patrons of art in the later part of the century come to appreciate art in a very different way? Or did the everyday life painting, as practiced by Abraham Solomon, migrate from the walls of the gallery to the billboard?

It seems worth making an attempt to explain the sometimes very visceral reactions to mid-century everyday life paintings and the continued absence of these paintings from the art historical canon. ‘Twee, treacly and tearful... Were the Victorians really as apathetic and drippy as these paintings suggest?’ asked Laura Freeman in a review of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in Liverpool in 2016.⁴⁸ The aspect of Victorian art that seems to offend most is sentimentality; used to dismiss an artwork because of perceived false emotion or exaggerated sweetness. Early Victorian painting was expected to prompt an emotional response from the viewer. Though perhaps not such a strong reaction as was expected in the eighteenth-century. For example: “Looking at it, my whole

⁴⁸ Laura Freeman. “Twee, treacly and tearful: Pre-Raphaelites at the Walker Art Gallery reviewed.” *The Spectator* (27 Feb 2016).

frame contracted, my Blood Shivered and I felt a faintness at my Heart.”⁴⁹
Notes from a display at the Tate Gallery, *Victorian Sentimentality*, which took Solomon’s *Waiting for the Verdict* as its centrepiece, state that:

In recent years art historians and curators have brought about a sea change in the way Victorian art is perceived. The work of the Pre-Raphaelites and of the Aesthetic movement have been completely re-evaluated. Yet one aspect of Victorian art remains resistant to rehabilitation: it is sentimentality. This display brings Victorian sentimentality into the spotlight and considers a much maligned and misunderstood phenomenon. Why has sentimentality come to seem so unforgivable? It might simply be a result of snobbery directed at art which appeals to popular taste, or because the emotive themes that recur in sentimental art—childhood and especially child death, forsaken love, animals, sunsets, heart-rending stories and pathetic scenes—now seem hackneyed. Alternatively, it could be the way the way the pictures invite (or manipulate) the viewer into an emotional response, using narrative, colour, light and shade and recurring symbols such as scattered flowers.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Abigail Adams to her sister Elizabeth Smith Shaw, March 4 1786, in Adams Family Correspondence, vol.7 (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005),82. Quoted by Rebecca Bedell, "What Is Sentimental Art?" *American Art* 25, no. 3 (Fall 2011), 11.

⁵⁰ <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/display/focus-victorian-sentimentality> (accessed 30 July 2017)

The Tate Gallery curator argues that popular appeal has made this art “resistant to rehabilitation.” It’s not clear if these paintings continue to have a hold on popular appeal; a few rooms away in Tate Britain the impressionist galleries are always crowded, and no less sentimental. David Halle provides a summary of twentieth century commentaries on the divide between popular and ‘educated’ art which is useful reminder of an extreme elitism which was more or less acceptable. He is writing about the audience for abstract art, but the comments reflect general attitudes to art:

For example, Le Corbusier wrote that “the art of our period [above all cubism] is performing its proper function when it addresses itself to the chosen few. Art is not a popular thing, still less an expensive toy for rich people...but is in its essence arrogant.” Ortega y Gasset commented that, because abstract art had eliminated the “human element” that attracted the masses, it could be appreciated only by a minority who possessed “special gifts of artistic sensibility.” Ingarden [Roman Ingarden] argued that, the more abstract the work of art, the greater the intellectual effort required by the audience. Benjamin [Walter] explained the broad unpopularity of Picasso’s work as a result of the fact that “the masses seek distraction” whereas “art demands concentration from the spectator.” Clement Greenberg maintained that abstract art appealed only to the most “cultivated” segment of society— “the avant garde”— who engaged in the process of “reflection” necessary to appreciate abstract art; by contrast the “masses,” as well as most of the rich and the middle class, had been seduced by “kitsch,” which predigests art for the spectator and spares him effort.” And Bordieu wrote that the working

class requires art to be practical, an attitude incompatible with the “detachment and disinterestedness” needed to relate to abstract art.⁵¹

These writers on twentieth century painting suggest one possible reason why the art audience should be so anxious to conform to the conventions of modernism; an aesthetic by which art should be detached, cerebral, and disinterested rather than decorative and emotional. These writers have an almost religious fervour; Le Corbusier even mentions “the chosen few” and they offer the audience a stark choice between a confident image of the self, as a person of taste and an outer darkness of inferiority, perhaps even subservience to a cultivated elite. It is no wonder that a liking for (non-ironic) sentimental art is taken as a marker of vulgarity and bad taste and thus confronts core beliefs about the self. This may go some way to explaining current extreme reactions to sentimental Victorian art.

But reactions against sentimentality, in the form of accusations of vulgarity, and bad taste in painting are not restricted to the twentieth century and Abraham Solomon had a major part to play in one contemporary debate. In 1854 his exhibited picture *First Class: The Meeting* was criticised for vulgarity in reviews in the art press and he felt obliged to repaint it. In the relevant chapter on this picture I will argue that these criticisms were linked to his Jewishness and that there is a thread of anti-Semitism, and xenophobia which underwrites the idea of bad taste and vulgarity. More directly related to Victorian ideas of high and low art was the argument concerning the award of

⁵¹ Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier, *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 131.

first prize to Millais's painting *The Blind Girl* (1856) by the Liverpool Academy in 1857. The Liverpool public preferred Abraham Solomon's *Waiting for the Verdict* and there was even a proposal to raise, by public subscription, a sum equivalent to the prize money won by Millais, to be given to Solomon.⁵² This dispute was pivotal in creating, in Britain at least, a clear line between popular and elite art in ways which were repeated by the modernist writers quoted before. The details of the debate are covered in the section on *Waiting for the Verdict* but it is worth noting here comments by Michael Rossetti:

It may be very convenient and profitable to fall in with the public taste and register its verdicts; but it is not the part of a body whose knowledge exceeds the public's, nor of each honest man within the body...that the Pre-Raphaelite art is the vital and progressive art of the day—progressive both as rising above other contemporary art, (and even on that its beneficial influence is already notably apparent,) and as being in itself the sure basis for progress from studentship to mastership.⁵³

In the above quotation Rossetti claims that although it may be convenient to follow public taste an organisation such as the Liverpool Academy should not do so as it has superior knowledge about art; and this should also be true of individuals. In the second part, he claims that art develops and improves through time. This idea of art as progressive implies that art is inevitably in advance of public taste. Ruskin also contributed to the debate in a letter

⁵² W.G.Herdman, "Letter" *The Athenaeum*, 1573 (Dec 19 1857), 1592.

⁵³ William Michael Rossetti, "Fine Arts", *The Spectator* (Jan 2,1858), 30.

published in the *Liverpool Albion* in which he dismissed both popular taste in Liverpool and Solomon's painting as "rubbish".⁵⁴ The acceptance of the notion that some art was "higher" and as such was beyond the reach of the ordinary viewer was well established in the nineteenth century. It had become necessary to refer to the public and popular taste in art as more and more less educated viewers began to attend public exhibitions and galleries. In a letter from George Du Maurier (as early as 1861) to the artist and future director of the Victoria and Albert Museum Thomas Armstrong, he writes:

if it is well painted, and its beauty does not consist in a Solomonsy lie. I really believe that mere female beauty would actually make a well painted picture go down the swinish public throat, in spite of its artistic merit...⁵⁵

By the 1860s, at least, Solomon's art was associated with insincerity, lying, and duping a gullible public, at least by the anti-Semite George Du Maurier.⁵⁶ Ideas of art appreciation as exclusive to the educated ranks of society in contrast to mass taste may simply be a matter of concern for art and its histories, though this is unlikely. Taste and culture are much too important to the organisation of power and prestige to be left to the aesthetics of art. Taste, those who had taste, and those who wielded taste are also a part of the process of ranking which links

⁵⁴ John Ruskin "Letters" *The Liverpool Albion* (Jan 11, 1858).

⁵⁵ Daphne Du Maurier, ed., *The Young George Du Maurier; a Selection of His Letters, 1860-1867* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952), 94.

⁵⁶ Du Maurier's character Svengali in the novel *Trilby* is a memorable exercise in anti-Semitism.

culture to political power. Leora Auslander has written on taste as delineator of rank in her history of French furniture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She has this to say in summing up her arguments:

Thus, a study of how a family spent its money, how and what it consumed, was understood to act as a guide to its innermost essence. These texts and images disclose the bourgeoisie's fears and fantasies of the permeability of class boundaries and the social meaning of goods far more than they display the actual consumption habits of either the working class or the petite bourgeoisie. What they make abundantly clear is that the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie used furniture to represent to themselves how others in society lived. The fascination with observing the inner dynamics of families through looking over their budgets and their possessions did not stop at the lower classes. The bourgeoisie also turned anxious eyes on themselves.⁵⁷

This resonates with some of Solomon's paintings, particularly *The Lion in Love* which argues against inherited power. The 1850s saw protests against aristocratic power after the debacle of the Crimean War which centred around the purchase of commissions in the army by the nobility. This was expressed in a democratic-utilitarian form by the Spectator in 1858:

⁵⁷ Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 273.

...that in its character as a monopoly, it defrauds the nation of the services of some of her sons, and invidiously excludes those sons from a career which should be as open to England as any other; and that it excludes them by the lowest and most vulgar tests—that of gold.

Note the coupling of vulgarity on the part of the rich because of their purchase of commissions with a weakening of the nation. The nineteenth century is often presented as a period of triumph for the middle-class and middle-class values.⁵⁸ This may be the case but it was also a century in which aristocracy and landowners held onto power and dominated government. Liverpool, Grey, Peel, Russell, Palmerston, Gladstone, Disraeli, and Salisbury were all prime ministers and with the exception of Benjamin Disraeli came from aristocratic or landowning families. The process of continued aristocratic survival is described by Martin Weiner in his book *English Culture and The Decline of the Industrial Spirit*.⁵⁹ Weiner argues that it was a new concept of the gentleman which evolved from a synthesis of professionals, landowners, and aristocracy with the public-school system as the primary training ground. Being a gentleman became a necessary qualification to joining the new governing elite:

Through these mechanisms of social absorption, the zeal of work, inventiveness, material production, and money making gave way within

⁵⁸ Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl* (London: Phoenix, 2003).

⁵⁹ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* (London: Penguin Books, 1985).

the capitalist class to the more aristocratic interests of cultivated style, the pursuits of leisure, and political service.⁶⁰

This may seem a long way from Abraham Solomon and present-day reactions to Victorian sentimentality and its characterisation as bad taste, saccharide, and falsely emotional but it would seem to be associated with the rise of the English gentleman. The gentleman was first and foremost worldly, sophisticated and cultured in the wider sense of being familiar with the arts; theatre, orchestral music, opera, and the visual arts. And it was this new grouping of cultured gentlemen, aristocrats and professionals who were by the later nineteenth century seen as suitable to govern the country, just as the aristocracy alone had once had a ‘right to rule’ and kings had once had a ‘divine right’. So, it should be understood that new definitions of art, as either high or low, and the paintings of everyday life have remained decidedly vulgar, originate, in part, from political realignments in the 1850s.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

Chapter Three. History and Abraham Solomon.

Historical narrative is not a portrait of what happened but a story about what happened. The historian does not even select from the totality of what happened (*res gestae*), but from other accounts of what happened (*historia rerum gestarum*); in this respect, so-called primary sources come no closer to the reality of the past than derivative chronicles do.¹

(David Lowenthal, 1985)

-But how were they read by the public of the day? To what extent did the prevalently oral culture of those readers interject in the use of the text, modifying, reworking it, perhaps to the point of changing its very essence?²

(Carlo Ginzburg, 1992)

Lowenthal makes the point that historical writing, however much it may aspire to scientific objectivity, remains a narrative based on a selection of events from the past. This is a study of two sets of narratives; those narratives from the everyday life paintings of Abraham Solomon and those narratives which survive

¹ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 214.

² Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xxii.

from his life. This is a chapter about documents from the past which have survived and may help illuminate fragments of Abraham Solomon's life. Lowenthal's scepticism is infectious, these fragments do not provide a "life" of Solomon in the conventional sense, but they say something, however disjointedly, about the circumstances of his life and upbringing. Ginzburg makes a different point from Lowenthal, one which also underlies this project. He bases his microhistory (or microbiography) of Menocchio the Miller, the hero of *The Cheese and the Worms* on Menocchio's interpretation of the few books he had read. The problem in both cases, of Solomon and Menocchio, is the same; to infer a life and a belief system from a few fragments. Likewise, the contemporary viewer of a painting by Abraham Solomon understood his art and brought his paintings to life in ways which we can only guess at. The documents that are available only help in the understanding of his world and those who viewed his paintings. Both artist and his viewers had, in the very broadest sense, made similar journeys from Georgian England to Early Victorian Britain via railways, urbanisation, Empire, and affluence. A confusing world for which Solomon and other painters of everyday life provided a map, a process described by William Michael Rossetti thus:

The art which deals with its own day is especially that which the painter is qualified and called upon to execute. It is what he knows most about, can do best, and can make of the most interest and value both to the bulk of his contemporaries and to all the generations which come after him. It

is that record which he alone can write in living and indisputable characters.³

Abraham Solomon's exhibition pictures of the 1850s are, as William Michael Rossetti points out above, 'a record of what he knows most about and can make of the most interest and value to the bulk of his contemporaries and to all the generations which come after him.' But we, the 'generations which come after him', have difficulty in distinguishing the particular cultural and political features of the 1850s from the catch-all term "Victorian". The 1850s were distinct; three important historical events shaped the decade and were significant to the work of Abraham Solomon; the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Crimean War (1853-1856) and the Indian Mutiny (1857). But, the material for Solomon's paintings also came from the quotidian as much as from grand events; many other minor incidents and topicalities were sources for Solomon's pictures. Rossetti suggests that more than any other art form or style the painting of everyday life inevitably reflects the lived experience of the artist and his time, "it is what he knows most about".⁴ One part of Solomon's life and experience which was reflected in his paintings was the expansion of suffrage in the early century (1832) and, a little later, the abolition of Jewish disabilities. The first of these changes reinforced the idea of the free, independent, individual, mainly for men but increasingly for women. The second in combination with the first opened up a space for Jews to comment on British society. Abraham Solomon was probably the first British artist to take

³ William Michael Rossetti, *Fine Art: Chiefly Contemporary* (London: Macmillan, 1867), 9.

⁴ Rossetti, *Fine Art: Chiefly Contemporary*, 1867, 9.

advantage of this opportunity. Slightly earlier the British-Jewish artist and Royal Academician Solomon Alexander Hart (1806-1881) had limited himself to historical subjects and some paintings on Jewish themes. He never exhibited a painting of everyday life. He would make orientalist paintings of romanticised Jewish life but not of the British culture into which Jews were increasingly assimilated. The change by which a Jew might comment critically on British life began in the 1840s with Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Sybil or the Two Nations* (1845), a 'state of England' novel. Disraeli, like Solomon a son of straw-hat makers, had converted to Christianity but his contemporaries thought of him as "Asiatic" and his many biographers have thought his Jewishness an important link to his politics.⁵ Abraham Solomon claimed the right to comment on the state of Britain in 1854 with his railway paintings and their contrast of rich and impoverished travellers but as suggested earlier his Realism obliquely disguised this aspect of the work.

The years from 1831 to the passing of the Great Reform Act of 1832 saw intense civil unrest and agitation in England.⁶ There was a real fear of revolution and the violent overthrow of the government. This would have seemed likely given that Spain, Italy, Portugal and Brazil, had experienced revolutionary activity in the early 1820s and in the first years of the 1830s Belgium, France, and Switzerland had also experienced revolution. In France, the monarchy of Charles X was overthrown in the July revolution of 1831. In England, there were the "days of May", riots in the lead up to the Great Reform

⁵ Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9-30.

⁶ Eric John Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (London: Abacus, 1980), 154-5, E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 890.

Act of 1832 and a run on the banks.⁷ In the middle of all this uncertainty and social unrest Michael Solomon, Abraham's father, wrote a letter to 'the Right Honorable (sic) the Lord Mayor Aldermen and Commons of the City of London in Common Council Assembled.' (Appendix One). Michael Solomon was not to be blocked from claiming his new-found rights which granted the right to "persons of every religious persuasion" to obtain their freedom of the City of London. In this letter Michael Solomon makes a very simple point but one which marks a shift in relations between Jews and the state, a shift that was to influence the careers of his artist children Abraham, Simeon and his daughter Rebecca. He demands from the Common Council that they follow their own rules and admit him as a Freeman of the City of London. In this he is acting in his own self-interest because by becoming a freeman he would be able to trade within the City of London. The letter reveals a man who seized the opportunity of the times and, like the reform agitators, imagines a new world of rights for ordinary people. Privilege of birth and religion must now give way to freedom of opportunity. Rather bravely, he goes as far as to criticise the Court of Aldermen:

Your Petitioner is informed that his application was duly made on the 18th of January to the Court of Aldermen for their order to Mr Chamberlain to admit your Petitioner has been and informed and believes the said Court of Aldermen made the usual orders for others who applied for their freedom and at the same time rejected your

⁷ Carlos T. Flick, "Thomas Attwood, Francis Place, and the Agitation for British Parliamentary Reform." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1971): 355-66.

Petitioners application because he does not profess the Christian Religion...⁸

At this time Jews had neither equal social or legal status so his defiance and his lecturing tone is all the more surprising. This was after all the decade in which Charles Dickens created a defining image of the Jew, the evil criminal Fagin, which caricatured Jews as lipping thieves and child abusers.⁹ Michael makes no apologies for being a Jew; reform was in the air and he seems determined to take advantage of it.¹⁰ Michael Solomon's letter of June 1831 sets the scene for his son's paintings of the 1850s. Not only was the aristocracy identified as the impediment to reform by the Birmingham Political Union but the principle of achieving reform through extra-parliamentary pressure was established.

Michael Solomon's letter and the agitation for electoral reform indicated a new consciousness of rights and individual freedom, protected by law, which was blocked by the continued privileges of the landowning nobility and associated interest groups. Changes were to be brought about by bringing together, not just the Political Unions, later to develop as the Chartists, but forms of cultural resistance such as the paintings of everyday life by Abraham Solomon and others. An immediate response to the Reform Act agitation which brought together the power of art and public protest in a painting of contemporary life was Robert Haydon's *The meeting of the Birmingham Political Union on 16 May 1832, attended by 200,000* (fig.26). One reading of

⁸ Appendix One.

⁹ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1992).

¹⁰ E P Thompson, *The making of the English Working Class*, 1964, 896-897.

Abraham Solomon's paintings may be to interpret them as a visualisation of his father's demand for equality. Certainly, his social conscience is clear in a number of his paintings such as *Second Class: The Departure* (fig.5) and *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig.6).

The term "Exeter Hall Radical" is perhaps a good fit for Solomon. It refers to someone who joined any number of liberal causes, from feminist and anti-slavery agitation to reforms in the working conditions for children (fig.27). A radical in the 1850s was no revolutionary, as R W Harris suggests; the mixture of conservatism, scepticism and social critique found in Solomon's paintings under a heading of Realism suggests a parallel with this group.¹¹ At this time, for most of these radicals, there was little dissent about the benefits of industrialisation, capitalism, or individualism. The main demand by writers such as Tom Paine and the 'Exeter Hallites' was to curb the aristocracy and agitate for a minimal state.¹² Exeter Hall stood on the Strand in London overlooking the entrance to Waterloo Bridge not far from Solomon's studio and home in Gower Street. The Hall consisted of meeting rooms and a large central auditorium for concerts and meetings which was home, at different times, to the Anti-Slavery Society (fig.28) and the Administrative Reform Association and other groups. Percy Howard in his article *The Passing of Exeter Hall*, explaining its great influence, was to say 'Statesmen, weighing one policy against another, have had to ask "What will Exeter Hall say?"'¹³ Exeter Hall was a rallying point for

¹¹ R.W. Harris, *Romanticism and the Social Order: 1780-1830* (London: Blandford, 1969), 56-85. Harris describes the origins of radicalism in the early century in his Chapter Three.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Percy Howard. "The Passing of Exeter Hall" in *The Civil Service Observer* 13: no.5 (May 1907)

reform campaigns. At the time London was more zoned than now, a neighbourhood or a building could sometimes place an individual in a moral or political framework. Bloomsbury could be shorthand for a Bohemian, Waterloo Bridge for prostitution and Exeter Hall for an emotionally inspired radicalism. Some writers, such as Thomas Carlyle, saw the Exeter Hall radicals as blind sentimentalists, in particular he reviled the hypocrisy, as he saw it, of the Anti-Slave Society:

O Anti-Slavery Convention, loud-sounding long-eared Exeter Hall—but in thee too is a kind of instinct towards justice, and I will complain of nothing. Only black Quashee over the seas being once sufficiently attended to, wilt though not perhaps open thy dull sodden eyes to the “sixty-thousand valets in London itself who are yearly dismissed to the streets, to be what they can when the season ends”; or to the hunger stricken, pallid, *yellow*-coloured “Free Labourers” in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Buckinghamshire, and all other shires! These Yellow-coloured, for the present, absorb all my sympathies...¹⁴

Carlyle suggests demand for political change was linked to false sentiment and hypocrisy. Abraham himself used sentiment in his paintings to appeal for greater rights for women—*Waiting for the Verdict* (fig.1) is the best example. It is perhaps important to realise that sentimentality could be a political act for artists such as Abraham Solomon. Victorian social reform may be associated

¹⁴ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843) 278.

with empirical argument embodied by statistical projects such as the National Census and Charles Booth's (1840-1916) poverty maps of London but emotion and sentiment were also used as effective political levers. This is another example of the symbiotic relationship between the early Victorian novel and paintings of everyday life. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, one of the most popular novels of the whole of the nineteenth century, uses the format of the sentimental novel to argue against slavery. Gail Smith writes: [with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*] Stowe began what was to be a long career in the sentimental novel.¹⁵ And she then quotes Jane Tompkins' definition of the sentimental novel which may be appropriate to at least some of the paintings of Abraham Solomon:

A political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time.¹⁶

Markham Ellis, though concentrating of the later eighteenth century examines in greater detail the use of sentimentality in the novel as an argument for equality. Much of this involves support for political agitation against the slave trade but also reform of British society as a whole:

¹⁵ Gail K Smith, "The sentimental novel: the example of Harriet Beecher Stowe" in Dale M Bauer and Philip Gould: *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth Century Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001), 226.

¹⁶ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The cultural work of American fiction, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1985), 126.

The sentimental novel as a genre develops a discussion, albeit often *ad hoc*, incoherent and inconsistent, around a set of issues or themes concerned with reforming British society and manners.¹⁷

The early Victorian period was an important time for Jews such as Michael Solomon and his son Abraham. It was a rare moment in Jewish history when long held disabilities were being abolished in Britain and when optimism rather than resignation was possible. Within a generation pogroms in Russia began and the Holocaust of the twentieth century reaffirmed the cycle of anti-Semitism in Europe. Perhaps it may have been no coincidence that Solomon became a painter of everyday life with its celebration of the present with little regard for past or future. Among Abraham's pictures of everyday life one picture stands out as a celebration of the great pleasure of the moment. The central group in *The Acquittal* (fig.29) partakes in a joyous celebration. While it would be stretching a point to suggest that this picture is primarily a marking of Jewish optimism it seems possible that it touches on Abraham's sense, as a Jew, that the present was a good place to be. For contemporary viewers this spontaneous pleasure in the present may also have resonated as a powerful reflection of Britishness at a time when family life was celebrated as a national characteristic. In another painting in which time is a subject, *Doubtful Fortune* (fig.30), Solomon comments on the foolishness of trying to predict the future through fortune telling. This picture is most obviously a topical reference to the craze for spiritualism in the 1850s but in a more general sense warns against

¹⁷ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, gender and commerce in the sentimental novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996), 49.

living only for the future.¹⁸ An anxiety about time and its disturbances which are highlighted by David Solkin in his analysis of *Village Politicians* is less obvious in Solomon's work.¹⁹ Certainly, timetables are at the centre of many of Solomon's paintings through the inclusion of trains, boats, and stagecoaches. In the world of the 1850s, timetables, appointments, work, exhibitions, and theatre were all governed by new requirements of time and 'being on time'. The Great Exhibition of 1851 was a huge celebration of the present and it should be possible to make a correlation between the increasing popularity of everyday life painting and a pleasure in the present. Walter E Houghton in his study of *The Victorian Frame of Mind* writes:

It has been said that while the eighteenth century was satisfied with what it was, the nineteenth century was satisfied with what it was becoming. But with the exception of the working class, the Victorians were very well satisfied with what they had become...²⁰

Solomon's apparent pleasure in the present may simply have been drawn from the quietism of an outsider. Solomon's response to the new Jewish freedoms was to exercise them quietly and ironically by becoming a detached observer, a

¹⁸ Ruth Brandon. *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc. 1983).

¹⁹ David H. Solkin, *Painting out of the Ordinary: Modernity and the Art of Everyday Life in Early Nineteenth-century Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 7-35.

²⁰ Walter Edward Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830-70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 38.

Realist artist. William Michael Rossetti writes about painters such as Abraham: “It is that record which he alone can write in living and indisputable characters.”²¹

Michael Solomon’s petition was granted and so he gained his freedom of the City of London as a right. The Great Reform Act, 1832 did not greatly increase the franchise and aristocratic power was maintained but the Act represented an ideological shift which was capitalised on by modern-subject painters who used the political power of sentimentality to further arguments about individual freedom. The struggle against privilege, particularly the replacement of aristocratic control in the army to a more meritocratic system, was to continue through the 1850s and this is reflected in pictures by Abraham Solomon. In 1858 Abraham was to hang alongside the usual exhibition portraits of military heroes his image of an army general as an aging roué and buffoon, *The Lion in Love* (fig.31), while in his picture *The Flight* (fig.19), also from 1858, he comments on military adventurism and empire. London Jews such as Abraham and his father had every reason to resent the privileges of the aristocracy. Michael, who presumably had the vote after the Reform Act of 1832, would have been one of the many Jewish voters in the City of London who returned Baron Lionel de Rothschild as their MP. The House of Commons was prepared to accept a Jew as an MP—the House of Lords would not. During the 1850s Rothschild was elected six times and ten times he was refused.²² Frederick Morton writes in his history of the Rothschild family:

²¹ Rossetti, *Fine Art: Chiefly Contemporary*, 1867, 9.

²² Frederick Morton, *The Rothschilds* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd. 1962) 149.

...the Commons passed a Bill permitting the seating of a Jew. But the House of Lords rose in revolt. Many of the usually absent peers rushed to London. From the remotest demesnes of Cornwall and Wales, viscounts and earls hurried to vote down Hebrew insolence.²³

Abraham Solomon had trained as an artist at Sass's Drawing School in Bloomsbury during the early 1840s.²⁴ Sass's was an expensive training school for a boy from the Spitalfields market neighbourhood and so there is some mystery as to how Abraham could afford to go there. The *Jewish Chronicle* obituary describes Abraham's family as poor but respectable but the less reliable source George Williamson, describes the Solomon family as prosperous.²⁵ Thackeray in his novel *The Newcomes* gives a fictional account of Sass's school as the art school Gandish's: ²⁶ "There was a young Hebrew amongst the pupils, upon whom his brother students used playfully to press ham sandwiches, pork sausages and the like."²⁷ This student was called Moss, and would seem to be either based on Abraham Solomon or a composite of prejudices, stereotypes, and Solomon himself. Moss's father was said to have

²³ Morton, *The Rothschilds*, 147.

²⁴ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (London: R Bentley and Son, 1888). Powell refers to Abraham as a co-pupil.

²⁵ "Obituary" *The Jewish Chronicle* (16 January 1863), George Charles Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends* (London: J. Lane, 1919), 156-7.

²⁶ Young, *Early Victorian England*, 1934, 12.

²⁷ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Newcomes* (London: Smith Elder. 1906) 180.

had a mysterious hold over Gandish and Moss himself seemed to make an income by buying and selling theatre tickets and other small articles. It also seems likely that Abraham supplemented his income in some way, perhaps by painting portraits or copying other artist's pictures—common practice at the time.²⁸

In 1817 Henry Sass, Solomon's teacher, along with two friends travelled to Italy and France and Sass published an account of his journey.²⁹ The book would be of limited interest except for Sass's "Preliminary Remarks" which gives a detailed account of his views on the teaching of art. Sass believed that an artist's education was not simply technical training in drawing or painting, but the largest part should be a rounded education in history, mythology, costume, poetry, and "susceptibility of feeling". Assuming Henry Sass put his programme into practice and Abraham completed his studies we can be more certain that his art reflects this very broad-based education. Sass was quite traditional in his views and seems to have had a special reverence for Raphael; in his autobiography WP Frith recalled a trip with his pupils to Hampton Court to see the Raphael cartoons. There is a clear influence on *Waiting for the Verdict* of Raphael's pyramidal compositional style. Sass also mentions the recent government purchase of the Elgin marbles and that through their example England was to become a great artistic nation: "We are now sensible, that merely to be a warlike nation, is to possess a rank little above barbarians; and to

²⁸ Paul Oppé, "Art." In Young, *Early Victorian England*. 126.

²⁹ Henry Sass, *A Journey to Rome and Naples, Performed in 1817 Giving an Account of the Present State of Society in Italy, and Containing Observations on the Fine Arts* (London: Longman etc., 1818).

be truly great, we must cultivate the mind.” The two pillars of art and education were to make England truly great along the lines of the classical empires of Greece, Rome and Renaissance Italy. This approach to art education and Solomon’s experience at Sass’s school explains to some extent the erudition of a number of Solomon’s paintings in his use of quotations from Shakespeare. Sass had taught him more than how to draw and his teaching method perhaps explains why after what may have been a rudimentary childhood education Abraham was able to produce paintings which indicate a close reading of Shakespeare and other literary sources.

After leaving his parents’ home in Spitalfields sometime in the mid-forties Abraham lived and worked in Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia until his death in 1862.³⁰ He settled, probably in late 1856 at No. 18 Gower Street not far from the British Museum and just a few hundred yards from St. Giles Rookery.³¹ The conjunction of the British Museum, a haunt of artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the philosopher Karl Marx, Solomon’s studio and home in Gower St., the University of London with its reputation for radicalism and home to the Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, and St. Giles, an Irish slum, said to be the worst in Europe, are indicative of the Bohemian atmosphere of the area.³² Until about 1856 Rebecca, Abraham’s sister, and Abraham shared a studio in Upper

³⁰ Algernon Graves, *Royal Academy of Arts: A complete dictionary of Contributors and Their Work from Its Foundation in 1769 to 1904* (London: Henry Graves and Co. Ltd. 1906).

³¹ Thomas Beames, *The Rookeries of London: Past Present and Prospective* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1852), 19.

³² Henry Mayhew. “A Visit to the Rookery of St Giles.” In Henry Mayhew, *London's Underworld*, ed. Peter Quennell (London: Bracken Books, 1987)170-83.

Charlotte St. Fitzrovia, the closest neighbourhood to Bloomsbury on the west side.³³ When brother and sister moved to 18 Gower St. they were joined by their young brother, the painter Simeon Solomon.³⁴ This association with Bloomsbury may have been due to habit after the period spent at Sass's School, cheaper rents, closer contact with other artists, and proximity to a synagogue or a combination of all these factors. Whatever the reason, Abraham's time in Bloomsbury meant he lived in a neighbourhood with a greater tolerance for both Jews and artists where he would come into contact with leading progressives of his day. Abraham was unusual in remaining in the area after the success of his exhibition pictures of the 1850s. Giles Walkley points to Fitzrovia as the artist's Latin Quarter for younger artists who would then move on to Kensington as they became more established.³⁵

Bloomsbury in the 1850s was a melting pot of German émigrés—some of whom were communists or socialist escapees from the revolutions of 1848—early feminists, doctors, and lawyers:

It was men of this sort, particularly reform-minded lawyers, who were to be instrumental in the making of Bloomsbury into London's intellectual workshop. Forward looking women played their part from mid-century, from the founding of the Ladies College in Bedford Square in 1849 to

³³ Graves, *Royal Academy of Arts*.1906.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Giles Walkley, *Artists' Houses in London 1764-1914* (Aldershot, Hants., Scholar Press, 1994), 30.

the establishment in the later century for working women, and for female teachers, artists, and above all doctors.³⁶

Solomon would likely have some contact with these intellectual and artistic neighbours as he was known to be friendly, sociable, and a party host.³⁷ He was possibly familiar with women artists of the period through his sister Rebecca who lived and worked with him in Gower St and who moved in female artistic circles. Abraham, quite possibly, had helped to train his sister; she worked as a copyist for John Millais, a friend of Abraham's, who also lived with his parents in Gower Street.³⁸ Millais shared a studio with William Holman Hunt at No. 8. Gower Street in the early 1850s. Both Rebecca and Abraham exhibited at the Royal Academy from 1852 and unsurprisingly their work shares some characteristics, both in style and subject matter. They had as a neighbour, at 30 Gower Street, the artist Emily Mary Osborn who is best known for her painting *Nameless and Friendless* (fig.32). Emily Osborn was a leading light in the Langham Place group which promoted women's education and was led by the artist Barbara Bodichon.³⁹ The most significant connection between the Solomons and Emily Osborn was that Rebecca and Emily were both signatories

³⁶ Rosemary Ashton, *Victorian Bloomsbury* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 4.

³⁷ Edmund Yates, *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences* (London: R Bentley and Son, 1884), 296.

³⁸ Ibid. Yates mentions Solomon's friendship with Millais and they both attended Sass's School of Drawing. Rebecca painted a copy of Millais's picture *Christ in the House of his Parents*, now in the Royal Collection.

³⁹ Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, 1827-1891: Feminist, Artist, and Rebel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998).

to a letter to the *Athenaeum* which petitioned for women's full admission to the Royal Academy.⁴⁰ This connection between Abraham Solomon and the movement to acknowledge the professional status of women artists is important when considering Solomon's pictures of women artists. Of particular interest is the way in which Solomon's support for professional women artists affects the interpretation of his picture *A Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* (fig.13).

Solomon also had connections to the radical doctors of the University College Hospital through his bother-in-law Ernest Hart the editor of *The Lancet*. The local hospital was known for its liberal stance. Charles Dickens was to say of University College Hospital in 1864: 'It excludes no-one—patient, student, doctor, surgeon, nurse—because of religious creed'.⁴¹ Hart had a long career as a campaigning editor of both *The Lancet* and *The British Medical Journal* and as an agitator for preventative measures to combat the epidemics which plagued nineteenth-century Britain.⁴² Hart was also a collector of paintings by Fantin Latour and wrote on Japanese art.⁴³

Gower Street was the site, from 1826, of University College London, and it was the University which, along with the British Museum, attracted the

⁴⁰ "Letters," *The Athenaeum* (Apr. 30, 1859), 581. This was an important development in the campaign for women's rights of the period. Signatories included the artists Anna Blunt and Barbara Bodichon and the journalist and art critic Anna Jameson.

⁴¹ Ashton, *Victorian Bloomsbury*, 2012, 126.

⁴² George K Behlimer, "Ernest Hart and the Social Thrust of Victorian Medicine", *British Medical Journal* 301 (Oct 1990) 3,711.

⁴³ Nigel Thorp *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings of James McNeill Whistler* (Manchester: Carcanet Press,2004), 35-7. Ernest Abraham Hart, *Stencils of old Japan: from originals in the collection of Ernest Hart, D.C.L.:* with an introductory note - Pub. for the author by J.S. Virtue – 1895

radicals of the day. The British Museum was used by art students to make drawings of sculptures. Historical prints and drawings were also available for study as were the national collection of books housed in the British Library, then at the British Museum. The founding committee of University College London included the Jewish philanthropist Isaac Lionel Goldsmid, and James Mill, the disciple of the Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, and father of John Stuart Mill.⁴⁴ From the beginning the university was run on meritocratic principles and welcomed both non-conformists and Jews. This contrasts with the aristocratic and privileged bias of Cambridge and Oxford and again there is an echo of Michael Solomon's letter to the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London, in this antagonism to privilege. Abraham Solomon expresses this visually in his painting of London street life, *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig.6), which contrasts a foppish, indolent and shallow aristocracy, represented as partygoers dressed as aristocrats, with the more noble and honest group on the right of the painting who are on their way to work. Contrasts between rich and poor was something the Solomon siblings could not easily avoid as they lived cheek by jowl with the impoverished, mostly Irish, inhabitants of the rookery of St. Giles. This was not unlike the situation in Sandy Street where they had been brought up, which was on the edge of the sinks and stews associated with the Rag Market near Petticoat Lane.

After 1848 and the March Revolution in the German states many revolutionaries fled to London and they often settled in Bloomsbury which became known as Little Germany.⁴⁵ Karl Marx was most famously writing *Das*

⁴⁴ Ashton, *Victorian Bloomsbury*, 2012, 33.

⁴⁵ Rosemary Ashton. *Little Germany: Exile and Asylum in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Capital in the British Museum and had already published the *Communist Manifesto*, in German, in 1855, but it was Gottfried Kinkel who perhaps made a greater impression on London artists in the 1850s. Kinkel was appointed to the University in 1854 and began teaching Art History, a post for which Anna Jameson was rejected.⁴⁶ He linked the importance of art to social change and said ‘but socialism is the leading idea of the age; to wish to exclude art from it is a crime just as much against art as against mankind’⁴⁷ Solomon may or may not have been influenced directly by Kinkel’s ideas but those ideas were available to Solomon and probably discussed within his circle.

Solomon’s politics and sense of justice may have sprung from his father’s example or from the everyday proximity of poverty in London. His sense of justice may have derived from his experience of being a Jew and the various campaigns towards the lifting of the impediments to Jewish and non-conformist equality. But, firmer evidence of his radicalism, or Bohemianism, comes from a description of a party given at 18 Gower Street in the late 1850s. Abraham Solomon seems to have been a sociable man. George du Maurier wrote of a “conversazione” he gave.⁴⁸ He also had a reputation as a kind man, Henry Holliday wrote: “one of the kindest of men, an excellent brother to Solomon and very friendly to me.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ashton, *Victorian Bloomsbury*, 2012, 220-221.

⁴⁷ Alfred R. De. Jonge, *Gottfried Kinkel as Political and Social Thinker: Based in Part on Sources Gathered by Agnes B. Ferguson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 115.

⁴⁸ Daphne Du Maurier, *The Young George Du Maurier: A Selection of His Letters 1860-67* (London: Peter Davies, 1951), 33.

⁴⁹ Henry Holliday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: William Heinemann, 1914), 42.

The description of the dinner party comes from the autobiography of Edmund Yates and the guests were, in order of mention.⁵⁰ (See also Appendix Two of this study). John Everett Millais. Artist. Founding member of the Pre-Raphaelites; Alexander Munro. Sculptor.⁵¹; William Powell Frith. Artist and painter of scenes from everyday life.⁵²; Frank Stone. Narrative and Genre painter. Art critic for the *Athenaeum*.⁵³; Augustus Egg. Artist and painter of scenes from everyday life.⁵⁴; James or George Sant. (brothers) Probably the genre painter and portraitist James Sant.⁵⁵; Edward Dutton Cook. Playwright and journalist.⁵⁶; Ernest Hart. Social reformer, and editor of the British Medical

⁵⁰Edmund Hodgson Yates. *Edmund Yates: His Recollections and Experiences* (London: R Bentley and Son. 1884). 295.

⁵¹ Sidney Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography: Munro, Alexander* (London, Oxford University Press. 1953).

⁵² William Powell Frith. *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1888).

⁵³ Edward Irving Carlyle, *Dictionary of National Biography: Stone, Frank*. (London, Oxford University Press. 1953).

⁵⁴A discussion of Egg's most famous work can be found in: Mary Cowling. *Victorian figurative Painting* (London, Andreas Papadakis Publisher, 2001) 42-43.

⁵⁵ The guest at Solomon's party is more likely to be James Sant than his younger brother George. James was based in London and eventually became portrait painter to the Queen: Christopher Wood, *Dictionary of Victorian Painters*. (London: Antique Collectors Club.1971).

⁵⁶ George Clement Boase, *Dictionary of National Biography: Cook, Edward Dutton*. (London: Oxford University Press. 1953).

Journal.⁵⁷; William Wilthieu Fenn. Artist.⁵⁸; Frank Topham. Painter of genre scenes and narrative paintings.⁵⁹; Louis William Desanges. Artist. Painter of the Victoria Cross series.⁶⁰; Dillon Croker. (T.F. Dillon Croker) poet and author.⁶¹; Edmund Yates, journalist and “Sensation” novelist.⁶²

A further mention of the Solomon family weekly re-unions was made by George Price Boyce in his diary entry for February 19, 1858: “Solomon’s weekly reunion. Tea and fish, wine and cake. Much interested with a book of

⁵⁷ For a summary of Hart’s career, including his campaign against infanticide: George K Behlmer, “Ernest Hart and the social thrust of Victorian medicine.” *British Medical Journal Vol.301*, October 3, 1990. 711-713.

Ernest Hart was also a collector and author of a book on Japanese art: Ernest Abraham Hart, *Stencils of old Japan: from originals in the collection of Ernest Hart, D.C.L.*: with an introductory note - Pub. for the author by J.S. Virtue – 1895. Hart was also a collector of the drawings of Simeon Solomon.

⁵⁸ There is little information on Fenn and only one painting is known: *Tyrolean landscape with figures* (signed).

⁵⁹ Christopher Wood. *Dictionary of Victorian Painters: Topham, Francis William. 1808-1877* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Antique Collectors Club, 1971).

⁶⁰ Desanges’ series of paintings of winners of the Victoria Cross and its role in the battle against aristocratic control of the British army is explored in: Joany Hichberger, “Democratising Glory? The Victoria Cross Paintings of Louis Desanges” *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol 7, No. 2, 1984, 42-51.

⁶¹ Croker was a poet and playwright. He was well known for his impersonations of famous actors. See: Charles Roach Smith, *Retrospections, Social and Archaeological* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1883) 256-257.

⁶² Yates had a successful career as a journalist. He introduced a more personal style to London journalism and pioneered the interview. He was also a prolific playwright and good friend of Charles Dickens, see: Thomas Seccombe, *Dictionary of National Biography: Yates, Edmund* (London: Oxford University Press.1953).

sketches by young Simeon.”⁶³ Although Simeon Solomon is mentioned by Boyce no mention, in either account, is made of Rebecca. Edmund Yates refers to cold fried fish being served, and Boyce also mentions fish, this may refer to an adherence to Jewish Sabbath rules and perhaps for that reason Rebecca did not attend these all-male gatherings. Lady Judith Cohen Montefiore gives a recipe in 1846 for Jewish cold fish and Claudia Roden suggests the practice began amongst Sephardic Jews in order to avoid cooking on the Sabbath.⁶⁴

We need to be a little cautious of Yates’ memory in listing the guests at a party from thirty or more years before. Alexander Munro’s medallion dates from 1853 but *Waiting for the Verdict* (fig.1) dates from 1857 so this suggests some inaccuracy. But even if these people did not gather on the same night Yates gives a good account of the variety of guests who may have attended. They were mostly young and having a good time and all went on to become famous in their own right—which might be called a typical Bohemian career. Honoré De Balzac writing of Bohemian Paris thought of it as a stepping stone for youth on their way to become “diplomats...writers, administrators, soldiers, journalists, artists!”⁶⁵. Yates says of the party, ‘A quietly Bohemian evening’; “quietly” doesn’t sound particularly Bohemian, but they mostly had some progressive element to their careers. Millais attacked the moribundity of the

⁶³ Virginia Surtees, ed., *The Diaries of George Price Boyce* (Norwich: Real World. 1980).

⁶⁴ Lady Judith Cohen Montefiore. *The Jewish Manual Practical Information In Jewish And Modern Cookery, With a Collection of Valuable Recipes & Hints Relating to the Toilette* (London: Privately printed. 1846).

⁶⁵ Jerrold E. Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York, NY, U.S.A.: Viking, 1986), 4.

Royal Academy in the late 1840s in founding the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Hart had enormous influence on health reform, Desanges attacked aristocratic privilege in the army with his Victoria Cross paintings; the Victoria Cross was specifically designed to celebrate the common soldier. Yates played his part in modernising journalism. The combination of Abraham Solomon's family background, his immediate surroundings and influences, and this description of his friends does seem to confirm that a hidden political reading of his paintings is possible. But how exactly might we describe his politics? It seems that he may have been a feminist, or at least a supporter of the right of women to become professional artists. He was certainly an open supporter of greater rights for Jews, his father's letter and the influence of the University of London suggest that. His close connection, and long friendship with Ernest Hart suggest a commitment to welfare reform within the Utilitarian model. Hart supported the introduction of the Contagious Diseases Acts on purely utilitarian grounds, disregarding the needs of ordinary women:

...he obviously saw the earliest feminist opposition to the acts as regressive, for in his view, at least, the imperatives of public health were being sabotaged by "the disturbing vigilance of certain ladies who constitute themselves the advocates of liberty of the baser elements of their sex." ⁶⁶

Abraham Solomon's turn to the painting of everyday life and Realism was radical for its time and one can see his use of sentimentality as political

⁶⁶ Behlmer, "Ernest Hart and the social thrust of Victorian medicine," 1990.

persuasion in a number of his paintings. British painting of everyday life, certainly that practiced by Abraham Solomon, created a visual representation of the world as a Realist reflection for those who had experienced the dramatic changes, with the accompanying uncertainties, of a changing world. For them government should be minimal and had no business in regulating daily life and this is apparent in Solomon's picture *Waiting for the Verdict* (fig.1) in which the legal system is portrayed as interfering in the life of a virtuous family.

The idea that an artist's biography might lead to a better understanding of the artist's work is sometimes seen as a discredited approach, Michel Foucault pointed out in 1969: 'None of this is recent; criticism and philosophy took note of the disappearance – or death - of the author some time ago.'⁶⁷ However, this research suggests that, without taking into account some of Solomon's history, for instance his Jewishness and the ongoing campaign against legal impediments, his images lose a great deal of clarity.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault and James D. Faubion, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology* (New York: New Press, 1998), 207.

Chapter Four. A Young Woman Draws a Portrait, 1851.

Oh, to be in England now that April's there
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!⁶⁸
Robert Browning, 1845

Abraham Solomon began his series of exhibition paintings of everyday life in 1854 with a pair of railway paintings, *Second Class: The Departure* and *First Class: The Meeting*. These two paintings were the first in Solomon's modern-subject series for which he developed his own style of Realism. But first, as a way of introducing the art of Abraham Solomon, a painting from 1851, *A Sketch from Memory* also known as *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* (fig. 10). This is an interesting transitional example of Solomon's work which was not exhibited at the Royal Academy as it may have been a private portrait commission. Prior to 1851 Solomon had mainly produced works based on historical subjects such as *A Ballroom in the Year 1760* and *Academy for the use of the Fan* (fig. 12). Both pictures may at first seem to be intended merely as decorative paintings celebrating the *ancien régime* but this was the year that William Thackeray's very popular *Vanity Fair* was published so satires on the pretensions of the nouveau riches and aristocracy were in vogue. They were

⁶⁸ Robert Browning, *The Poems of Robert Browning*, ed. C. Day Lewis (New York: Heritage Press, 1971).

painted during and shortly after the year of revolutions of 1848. A contemporary viewer of the pictures in London would not only be aware of the possibility of a Chartist revolution, Chartist agitation had been ongoing throughout the 1840s, but also the revolutions in Prussia, France and Italy.⁶⁹ Apart from political agitation the 1840s were also known as the hungry forties with famines in Ireland and Scotland as well as a general economic depression.⁷⁰ In March 1848 the Great Chartist march to Clapham Common had been followed by John Millais and William Holman Hunt who were to found the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1849. The revolutionary times may have had some influence on Holman Hunt and Millais, who led the field in establishing the painting of everyday life as a style in British art.⁷¹ Holman Hunt was to exhibit one of the most influential works of modern-subject painting, *Awakening Conscience* in 1853. Within this context why would Solomon paint a ballroom in 1760 while all around people were dying of starvation and revolution was in the air? On some level, it seems likely, and for some viewers it would seem obvious, that the painting of a ballroom was political satire. A ball may have been chosen for two reasons. First because a ball was associated in the public mind with great battles in reference to the Duchess of Richmond's ball on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo—an event described by Lord Byron in Canto II of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

⁶⁹ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

⁷⁰ Jane Cobden Unwin, *The Hungry Forties: Country Life under the Bread Tax* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1904).

⁷¹ David Goodway, *London Chartism, 1838-1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 74.

There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium's capital had gather'd then
Her Beauty and her Chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again.
And all went merry as a marriage-bell;
But hush! Hark! A deep sound strikes like a rising knell!⁷²

This association with one of the most famous poems of the early century was a useful aid in making Solomon's image both respectable and memorable. Secondly the ball may refer obliquely to the motto "fiddling while Rome burns"; that historic charge that the rich never give up their pleasure for the sake of the nation. In this way, the viewer was primed to associate the ball with warfare and aristocratic indifference to the starving poor. In a doorway, in a painting which is as full of incident as later panoramas by William Frith, stands a black slave or servant who silently watches the scene—perhaps a reference to the artist himself as outsider and observer. The choice of the year 1760, a precise date which hints at a larger meaning, refers to the high point of the Seven Years War, the first ever global War involving conflict in Europe, America, and India. In this way, the international aspect of these revolutionary years of the late 1840s is invoked, through association with the earlier date, and

⁷² George Gordon Byron Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage and Other Romantic Poems*, ed. Samuel C. Chew (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1936), Canto ii.

a sense of a turning point in history is suggested. The year 1760 is also memorable as the year George III was crowned king and for American viewers the painting would resonate as a reference to the origins of the American War of Independence. The second painting *A Lesson in the use of the Fan* is more obviously satirical, based as it was on Joseph Addison's parody of the then fashion for the language of the fan.⁷³ Solomon includes a poster in the background advertising Addison's Academy of the Fan to underline the source of his satire. The topic of the humour was the traditional Hogarthian one of "frenchified" manners and ridiculous fashions of the rich and like the previous painting the indifference of the aristocracy during this time of hunger and revolution. In this case the women, at least some of them, are made to look snobbish and ridiculous but the main target of the humour is the French teacher of 'fanning' who is portrayed as a fop with his blue velvet coat, his gold earring, and pigtail tied with a bow. In a Hogarthian touch there is a, presumably English, gentleman overlooking the scene in horror. For the contemporary viewer, the exploitation by the aristocracy may have been suggested by the presence of the black slave boy in a doorway, a suggestion that the modern world had become more humane. Solomon uses a black servant in another painting *The Breakfast Table* and this may be connected to the agitation in Britain against the continuation of slavery in America in the 1840s. The use of black slaves was increasingly repugnant. This is suggested by the enormous success of the nineteen-month long visit (1845-46) to Britain by Frederick Douglass, the hugely popular former slave and anti-slavery campaigner.⁷⁴

⁷³ Joseph Addison. "An Essay on Fans", *Spectator* (June 27, 1711), 102.

⁷⁴ Charles Parlin Graves and Joel Snyder, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Putnam, 1970).

The traditional enmity towards the French and frenchified manners should be placed in the context of the return of Napoleon through his nephew Louis-Napoleon who was elected President of France in 1848. It may have been over 30 years since the first Napoleon's rule had ended but it was less than a decade since the publication of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* which blamed an indifferent aristocracy for the revolution.⁷⁵ The French Revolution had shocked the British by its barbarity and the years of war were not forgotten—Trafalgar Square was built triumphantly in the 1840s. These two examples of Solomon's work from the beginning of his career seem to include political and critical elements. Topical-historical references probably played a role in unlocking their meaning for contemporary viewers.

There is no exhibition record for Solomon's painting *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* also known as *A Sketch from Memory* (fig.10). It is signed and dated 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition. The painting itself is probably set in Italy but seen through a filter of historicism; the clothing, furniture and table rug all being vogueish Italian Renaissance revivalist—similar objects were on display at the Crystal Palace. The picture might be a direct reference to Robert Browning's poem *Home Thoughts from Abroad*: "Oh, to be in England." Browning did not become famous until the 1860s with the publication of *Dramatis Personae* (1864) but his poetry was available in published form in the 1840s. The painting and the poem share a sentiment; that of homesickness. Homesickness was an increasingly common condition for 1850s viewers, it was almost an invention of mass travel. The spread of travel as a leisure activity brought with it the concomitant emotion of absence and exile—homesickness.

⁷⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1837).

So, the exiled young woman would be viewed as suffering a modern malaise. Not only poetry and painting but opera was to make a contribution to the expression of homesickness through *Clari or The Maid of Milan* (1823) by Henry Bishop. One song from this opera was to provide the Victorian staple of nostalgia, the aria *Home Sweet Home*.⁷⁶

Beyond the simple expression of homesickness there are a number of other references and symbols which might be easily read by contemporary viewers. To the right of the painting are two trees. These are Lombardy cypresses and they indicate firstly that the young woman is in Italy, specifically northern Italy, and secondly symbolise death. The cypress is named after the Greek boy lover of Apollo, Cyparissus. The boy was so upset by the death of his pet deer that his grief transformed him into a Cypress tree which weeps sap in memory of the dead pet.⁷⁷ Via this myth the cypress became a symbol of mourning and would often be planted in graveyards. This symbol of death on one side of the picture is balanced by symbols of life on the other side. On the table beside the young woman are grapes and water, grapes to symbolise fertility and natural abundance, and may well in this case associate with the blood of Christ and rebirth through the Resurrection. Water is a symbol, as one of the primary elements of earth, air, fire and water, of life itself. The combination of grapes and water may also be read as a reference to the bible story of the marriage at Cana, the first miracle of Christ, and so suggest

⁷⁶ Home sweet Home : sung by Miss M. Tree in *Clari, or The maid of Milan* at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden by Bishop, Henry R. (Henry Rowley), Sir, 1786-1855; Tree, Ann Maria, 1801-1862; Graupner, Gottlieb, 1767-1836. Open library edition [OL25949241M](#)

⁷⁷ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, ed. Horace Gregory (New York: Signet Classic, 2001), Book 10.

marriage as an important element within the picture. This interpretation is reinforced by the twining branch of Stephanotis, the only flower in the picture, along the parapet of the balcony to the left of the woman; Stephanotis symbolises marital happiness in the language of flowers.⁷⁸

The young woman seems to be wearing a loose unstructured dress with no evidence of a corset; she is shown in a relaxed pose and it would be unlikely that a woman wearing a corset would be able to sit in that slightly slumped position. She seems to be wearing some sort of day dress with a high lace collar and around her neck a black medallion, possibly a jet cameo, is hanging from a black ribbon. This is suggestive of mourning jewellery, the viewer is directed towards death. There are also a number of references to renaissance Italy which may reinforce an idea of birth through a simple word association. Renaissance Italian references sit well with the Italian locale, but they may also be intended to indicate her modernity via a reference to the then current fashion for historicism in furniture, on show at the Crystal Palace that year. She is sitting in a seventeenth century Italian Renaissance revival chair, sometimes known as a Lombardy chair and the small table is covered in a table carpet often associated with Italian Renaissance paintings. The origins of this particular carpet are unknown, the motifs are not typical, but there is a very slight similarity with a table carpet portrayed by Caravaggio in *The Supper at Emmaus* (fig.33) in the National Gallery, London which was acquired in 1839 and so would have been familiar to Solomon.

A further reference to Renaissance Italy comes from the fashionable renaissance style snood worn by the young woman. An example of this

⁷⁸ Mandy Kirkby and Vanessa Diffenbaugh, *A Victorian Flower Dictionary: The Language of Flowers Companion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2011)

headwear style may be seen in Titian's painting *La Schiavona* (fig.34). A further feature of the painting which seems to be narratively significant to is the large damask pillow on which the young woman rests. This can suggest two things, the first that the young woman is convalescing from an illness in Italy, this perhaps explains the fur lined jacket, or second that she is pregnant and has chosen to give birth abroad. The repetition of the renaissance motif in the furniture and clothing, the symbolism of the grapes and water; death is suggested by the cypresses and marriage by the stephanotis which all contribute to a story of love and procreation. The male figure at the centre of the drawing is presumably the young woman's lover, for whom she is pining or mourning, and perhaps father to her child. The painting may have been a private commission, with the symbolism personal and possibly unrecoverable, and meant as a double portrait rather than a universal allegory of loss and absence—the drawing of the absent male is detailed enough to be a portrait within a portrait. This gives a sense that this is more likely a Realist portrait rather than a symbolic portrayal of loss and nostalgia.

This picture has been reviewed in contemporary academic literature on two occasions, by Elaine Shefer in an article in *The Art Bulletin*, and by Gail-Nina Anderson and Joanne Wright in their catalogue to the exhibition *The Pursuit of Leisure*.⁷⁹ This is rare for a painting by Abraham Solomon, so it makes this painting a good example of present-day art historical attitudes to him. Shefer, Anderson, and Wright's reviews illustrate the weakness of ignoring

⁷⁹ Elaine Shefer, "Deverell, Rossetti, Siddal, and "The Bird in the Cage,"" *The Art Bulletin* 67, no. 3 (September 1985): 437-48, Gail-Nina Anderson and Joanne Wright, *The Pursuit of Leisure Victorian Depictions of Pastimes* (London: Lund Humphries, 1997), 47.

an artist's biography, in this case Solomon's support for female artists, and of placing the artwork in a general context of Victorian painting rather than considering topical references. Both reviews owe their interpretation to a feminist analysis which slightly distorts the painting from that seen by a contemporary viewer. This is not to privilege the contemporary viewer but instead I wish to argue that interpretations should be more aware of actual material sources when addressing Realist art.

There is no exhibition record for this picture and so collectors or curators have been free to provide their own title. The title of a Solomon painting is an important element of the artwork and along with any accompanying text is crucial to an understanding of the artist's intention in the artwork and its meanings. Some artists of the time, Augustus Egg is one example, did not use titles and followed the poetic convention of allowing the poem to speak for itself. This was intended to heighten the poetic dimension of the painting. Egg's triptych of marital breakdown now called *Past and Present*, originally untitled, was reconfigured by its new title as a progressive narrative—moving from past to present. As it was first presented the three paintings expressed the rapidity of downfall through simultaneity. Two of the paintings represent the same moment in time but from different perspectives and so contravened the traditional temporal narrative conventions. The title of the painting used by Anderson and Wright for the Solomon painting is *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait*. This may seem innocuous enough and attempts a neutral description of the subject but despite this it directs the viewer's attention. The viewer is encouraged to think from the first she is a young woman who is not an artist. Had she been male the more likely title might have been "artist at work", or some such, which recognised her artistic activity. She is not allowed to be an artist and the phrase "drawing a portrait" has a mildly belittling sound to it. Portraits were more often grander oil paintings ranked

second after history painting in the hierarchy of genres, she is merely drawing. The title used by Shefer is *A Sketch from Memory* and this seems to place the picture within a Victorian framework of nostalgia, longing and implied female dependency and this is how Shefer presents the painting.

The phrase “a sketch from memory” would have rather different meanings for some contemporary viewers. Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran, a Professor of drawing at the Académie des Beaux-Arts, had published his book *Éducation de la mémoire pittoresque* in 1848 and this was to have a great influence on artistic practice and training on nineteenth century French and British art.⁸⁰ Two of Boisbaudran’s students who came to London (following James McNeil Whistler) were Alphonse Legros and Henri Fantin-Latour.⁸¹ Boisbaudran emphasised the importance of memory in learning to draw and wrote:

It should never be forgotten how essential this faculty is, not only in the higher walks of art, but also in the humblest. Any one must see this for himself who will take the trouble to analyse and consider what the complex act of drawing really is. It consists in looking at the object with the eyes, and retaining its image in the memory, whilst drawing it with the hand. So even if my method helped the memory only in this, the

⁸⁰ Horace Lecoq De Boisbaudran, *Éducation de la Mémoire Pittoresque: Application Aux Arts Du Dessin* (Paris: Bance, 1862).

⁸¹ Felix Regamey, *Horace Lecoq De Boisbaudran Et Ses Eleves: Notes Et Souvenirs Avec La Reproduction D'un Portrait* (Paris: H. Champion, 1903).

humblest of its functions, it would still be of real value to the artist of the highest rank and the merest beginner alike.⁸²

With Boisbaudran in mind, that title, *A Sketch from Memory*, if it was used, might suggest that the young woman is a serious artist who is practicing a modern form of training in drawing. The references to the Italian renaissance, the chair, snood, trees, and table rug underline the idea that this is a painting about art and its practices. This is somewhat emphasised by the little still life on the table. The glass of water in particular seems to show off the artist's technical skill by capturing the translucence of glass and water and the reflection of light. We are invited to admire that we can look through the glass and water to see the corner of the woman's sleeve. But more importantly this still life introduces the Realist practice of aestheticising everyday objects—objects on a table. In this case Solomon uses established still life subjects rather than the piles of luggage or other objects which he was to use later.

Anderson and Wright's account rests on the perception that the young woman in the picture is an amateur: "The lively sketch on her pad indicates that this well well-dressed and leisured young lady is suitably accomplished in the art of drawing, but it also permits a more sentimental reading."⁸³ There are clues to her status as a serious artist, though perhaps not as a professional artist. Solomon was certainly open to the idea of the female artist through his support for his sister Rebecca. Reinforcing the idea that the young woman was an artist,

⁸² Horace Lecoq De Boisbaudran, *The Training of the Memory in Art: And the Education of the Artist* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 6.

⁸³ Anderson, *The Pursuit of Leisure*, 1997, 47.

at least for a contemporary viewer, was the bohemian or artistic nature of her clothes, her loose un-corseted dress and relaxed pose and her renaissance style snood. The window to her left suggests the Albertian ideal of the painting as a window onto the world and so the young woman is associated with renaissance art.⁸⁴ Her presence at the window and her disregard of the landscape outside reflect her interiority. Christopher Masters argues that ‘the woman at the window’ in nineteenth century paintings have a universal meaning which is allegorical and typical of the *Sturm Und Drang* movement of the turn of the eighteenth century. In his discussion of Caspar David Friedrich’s painting, *Woman at the Window*, and others of this type he writes:

...images in which a female figure, often alone, stands in front of a window. The woman’s remoteness from both the viewer and the landscape gives these works a metaphysical quality, as if the window is intended to represent aspects of human experience, above all its solitude and subjectivity. More specifically, the works also reflect the condition of women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries...⁸⁵

Critics of *Distant Thoughts* have tended to obscure the range of meanings within the image by emphasising the amateur status of the young woman and her drawing. Anderson and Wright use the expression ‘suitably accomplished in the art of drawing’. Their view reflects that wealthy young women of the period were expected to acquire by education and training a series of accomplishments

⁸⁴ Christopher Masters, *Windows in Art* (London: Merrell, 2011), 81.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

that would help them in attracting suitable husbands. These accomplishments included singing, playing a musical instrument, embroidery and homecrafts, as well as painting and drawing. There are truths in this stereotype, but the effect of this idea has meant that the visual production of many women in the nineteenth century has been thought of as ‘accomplishment’, while ‘art’ was produced by men. A painting in which this problem is addressed from a woman’s viewpoint is *Nameless and Friendless* (fig.32) by Emily Mary Osborn. Osborn was Solomon’s neighbour in Gower Street and co-signatory with Rebecca Solomon to a petition demanding female entrance to the Royal Academy Schools but this happened later in the decade. *Nameless and Friendless* explores the problem for a woman who is an accomplished artist trying to sell her work, a necessity now she is widowed and must support her young son. Perhaps in a nod to the Pre-Raphaelite love of symbolism the different levels of poverty and wealth available to her are indicated by the flooring of the room, literally her support. From right to left is shown a simple pine floor, then a plain rug or drugget, and then what appear to be encaustic tiles. The fourth flooring is the woven Persian style rug on the staircase which literally represents going up in the world. The female artist stands on the drugget—on the way to destitution. Despite the shop being an art gallery neither she or her art seem to be taken seriously by any of the men in the room and this is registered by her downcast eyes which indicate shame. It is her shame which illustrates the pernicious problem for the female artist of the period. Unlike a male artist who could sell his art without inhibition Osborn sums up the degradation for the female artist through the woman’s downcast eyes in selling what is a part of herself. The image of the ballerina being inspected by two male customers links, and this would be seen by contemporary viewers as an association with prostitution, that other great shame of the age.

The Solomon painting also makes an association with illicit sexuality by the suggestion that the young woman is not only a bohemian artist and possibly pregnant but by her expression. She looks away from her viewers, this is interpreted by Anderson and Wright as a look of reverie: “Her male subject is clearly not present and her abstracted gaze suggests a reverie of imagination or memory.” This may be the case but her blushed cheeks suggest otherwise. The blush and averted eyes may be interpreted as embarrassment and this may be the appropriate response to her pregnancy. On the other hand, her flushed cheeks and steady gaze may be a defiance of conventional morals—an attribute of the bohemian artist, male or female.

But what of topical events that contemporary viewers might understand in the painting? It has been assumed the young woman is an English woman exiled in Pre-unification Italy. But, with her black hair, dark eyes, and the various allusions to Italy, particularly Lombardy, might she not be Italian? The contemporary viewer might well have seen her in some way as a personification of Italy. The association between the young woman and art could be an allegorical reference to Italy as the centre of European art, and this painting is therefore likely to be a response to the fascination with Italy expressed by the cultural elite such as John Ruskin. The early 1850s saw the collapse of the short-lived republic of Italy led by Giuseppe Mazinni, the struggle to reunify Italy and oust the French and the Austrians was close to the heart of British popular sentiment which reached a high point with Garibaldi’s visit and ecstatic welcome to London in 1872. So, for the contemporary viewer this painting may have been understood as a political allegory of Italy mourning for her exiled revolutionaries. Mazinni who might be a possible candidate for the portrait in the picture was to live in London in exile from 1850.

Even in this early work Solomon’s complexity, not apparent at first sight, shines through. This may not be an entirely Realist painting but it is fairly

clear that Solomon is grappling with the idea of Realism and how to make paintings of the present.

Chapter Five. Taking the Train, 1854

But no words of theirs or mine can convey an adequate notion of the magnificence (I cannot use a smaller word) of our progress. At first it was comparatively slow; but soon we felt that we were indeed GOING, and then it was that every person to whom the conveyance was new, must have been sensible that the adaptation of locomotive power was establishing a fresh era in the state of society; the final results of which it is impossible to contemplate. On looking over the side, the earth, with its iron stripes on which we shot along seemed like a vast ribbon unrolling itself rapidly as we went.¹

(A Railer, 1830)

O, rather listen to the boiler singing;
Listen to the railway bell, so loudly ringing;
Quit, quit with me this antiquated scene,
And fly on railroad wings to Gretna Green.²

(W Pickering, 1846)

The excitement on the opening day of the Liverpool and Manchester Railroad in 1830 is tangible in the above quotation; not only was railway travel “magnificent”, it was progressive in “establishing a fresh era” and predicted to change the world. Railway travel, for those who could afford it, was a “modern”

¹ A Railer, “Opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railroad,” *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 28 (Nov, 1830), 825.

² Basil Montague, *Railway Eclogues* (London: W Pickering, 1846), 22.

experience and as early as 1846 Pickering associates the railway with romance and escape from an antiquated present: “Over the first two decades of the railway expansion, perhaps as many as two thousand different lithographs were made of railway lines or scenes.”³ These lithographic images, and paintings such as J M W Turner’s *Rain, Steam, Speed* (1844) mostly show trains cutting through the countryside, imposing, as Michael Freeman points out, the linear sensibility of the machine onto the landscape.⁴ Solomon’s innovation was to portray the inside of the train and make the carriage the setting for his paintings. He painted three railway carriage paintings, two of which were shown as a pair at the Royal Academy in 1854. By 1854 he felt no need to describe the engine or celebrate the speed of the train cutting through the landscape—this was all taken for granted by this time. His curiosity was the train compartment as an enclosed social space with its own rules, expectations, and narratives. He initially exhibited two railway paintings “First Class” and “Second Class”. Class, as a classification of railway fares, was an important matter for travellers in the 1850s and acted as metaphor for society as a whole. In an article in the *Spectator* from 1851 the system is described:

In the last point is included faith with the passengers in the several classes of fares. A first-class passenger demands ease and comfort, and some like “exclusive” society. A second-class passenger expects

³ Michael J. Freeman, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1999), 215.

⁴ A survey of early railway art was shown at the York Railway Museum, *Fear and Fascination*, 2012. No catalogue.
http://www.nrm.org.uk/PlanaVisit/oldevents/artgallery_fearandfascination

convenience, and on the whole a sort of company free from the grosser indecorums of very rude life. And we hold that a third-class passenger has the right to demand that he shall not be imprisoned for hours with a filthy vagrant, a lunatic, or a felon. Yet we all know that in the drive for over-trading it often happens that second-class carriages are inundated with third-class passengers, and third-class carriages are not protected against improper intrusions. Railway companies make class distinctions of fares for their own profit: they are bound in good faith to observe their own condition, and supply what the passenger supposes himself to be purchasing.⁵

This is a vision of a culture in which the wealthy only want to share space with their “equals” and enforce this by the cost of a ticket. This is a new form of social ranking. Exclusion was no longer enforced, in the feudal style, through habits of deference but by the simple price mechanism of a ticket. So, the system can be defended as democratic while maintaining the old hierarchy. Where the first-class passenger demanded, the second-class passenger had only an expectation of convenience and could only hope to be free from the intrusion of “rude” life. In all, this is a society, as represented by the railway class system, based on money and privilege but underlying that is a deep-seated fear and repulsion of the poor and their power to discomfort respectable passengers. This is the context in which Solomon places his characters, but he ignores the possibility of a third-class carriage, perhaps to simplify a potentially complex narrative and to make a more straightforward moral point of contrast.

⁵ “Rationale of Railway fares”, *The Spectator*, 1210 (Sept 6, 1851),13

The 1840s saw railway mania (the investment in railway shares) sweep the country in scenes reminiscent of Tulipomania in the Dutch Republic and its financial breakdown of 1637.⁶ In Britain anyone who could manage to borrow money to buy shares in railway stock did so and the subsequent collapse in share prices and demand for loan repayments, nearly brought down the banking system.⁷ Railways had first been used to transport manufactured goods and raw materials from the industrial north to consumers in the South but by the 1850s passengers had become more important to the railway system. Passenger travel increased with the establishment of companies such as Thomas Cook who began organising outings by train to the seaside or the country from the northern towns. The Great Exhibition of 1851 consolidated the importance of the railway as a passenger service as hundreds of thousands travelled by train to London.⁸

Mrs Gaskell's novel *North and South* (1854-5), originally serialised in Charles Dickens' *Household Words* and therefore probably read on railway journeys, uses the railway to connect the gentlemanly world of the south of England and the manufacturing, and less cultured, as she saw it, world of the north.⁹ The railway made possible the bridging of these different worlds and reflects Margaret's struggle to reconcile them. It is the railway which facilitates

⁶ Mike Dash, *Tulipomania: The Story of the World's Most Coveted Flower and the Extraordinary Passions It Aroused* (London: Phoenix, 2010).

⁷ For a contemporary account of the fraudulent practices of George Hudson, the Railway King and others see: Arthur Smith, *The Bubble of the Age: Or, the Fallacies of Railway Investment, Railway Accounts, and Railway Dividends* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1848).

⁸ Mona Wilson "Travel and Holidays" in *Early Victorian England*. Vol 2, ed. G.M.Young (London: Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1934) 310.

⁹ Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell ed. Elisabeth Jay. *North and South* (1855). (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007)

the love between Margaret Hale and John Thornton. The railway itself is given two forms, rural and manufacturing—the North and the South. In Solomon’s paintings, views from the train windows help define the different classes of the carriage; the gentlemanly rural idyll of first class and the rougher working scene of the port, possibly Plymouth, are shown through the carriage windows. Margaret Hale daydreams while looking out of a carriage window on a journey to the North; Elizabeth Gaskell writes:

There were few people about at the stations: it almost seemed as if they were too lazily content to wish to travel; none of the bustle and stir that Margaret had noticed in her two journeys on the London and North-Western line. Later on in the year, this line of railway should be stirring and alive with rich pleasure seekers; but as to the constant going to and fro of busy tradespeople it would always be widely different from the northern lines. Here a spectator or two stood lounging at nearly every station, with his hands in his pockets, so absorbed in the simple act of watching that it made the travellers wonder what he could find to do when the train whirled away, and only the blank of a railway, some sheds and a distant field or two were left for him to gaze upon.¹⁰

Gaskell and Solomon were both fascinated by the new visualities opened up by the railway such as the view from the carriage window. For both the railway carriage is a metaphor for adventure and new forms of social relations. Gaskell uses the train to underline new possibilities of intermarriage between the North

¹⁰ Gaskell, *North and South*, 2007, 356.

and the South. The possibility of these marriages between the practical manufacturers of Lancashire and the romantic world of southern gentility hints at the healing of a divided society. Solomon sees the train differently, his train does not so much link different worlds together but keeps them segregated and instead becomes a vehicle for ambition and a route of opportunity. For the young boy in the second-class carriage his opportunity is to make a fortune in the gold fields of Australia, and for the young woman in the first-class carriage there is the possibility of an advantageous marriage. These are opportunities which have always been available to young men and women but the train changes everything. Not just the speed of travel but the acceleration of social opportunity. Both novel and paintings address their audience topically, *North and South*, according to Patsy Stoneman: “Because it was defined as a topical work, *North and South* quickly dropped from public attention.”¹¹ Solomon dates his painting precisely and he emphasises the topicality of his images through the detailed painting of advertising posters on the back wall of the second-class carriage and in first-class the old man sleeps with his newspaper in his lap by way of date-stamping. Above all the railway was modern and exciting and in retrospect rail travel seems an obvious setting for a painting of modern life. One problem for an artist in painting a railway carriage interior was where to put the viewer. There was no tradition of portraying passengers inside enclosed coaches or carriages, if any do exist they are very rare. Solomon had no model to draw on but one solution was to show the view through a window. This would involve the train being stationary which would leave out the important and excitingly modern element of speed. Solomon’s solution is original and modern. He uses the theatrical convention of the fourth wall, so the travellers

¹¹ Gaskell, *North and South*, 2007, vii.

are unaware of being observed. The viewer in this configuration is thrust into the claustrophobic world of these tiny carriages. This transformation of the railway carriage into a theatrical space was used again as a device by Solomon in his later painting *Waiting for the Verdict*. (fig.1)

The fabric of the railway carriages themselves are a crucial element in the interpretation of the paintings—the enclosed spaces are like little peep shows. For the majority of viewers this was an opportunity to wonder at the luxury of travel for the rich and for the rich the opposite was true. The deep buttoned interior of the first-class carriage suggests something of the “comfy” life and character of its occupants as much as the wooden benches of the second-class carriage suggest the hardness of life for the poorer family.

That Solomon contrasts the luxury of the first-class carriage with the more spartan second class carriage may seem a criticism of a class system which rewarded one group over another. Contemporary viewers may not have thought in terms of privilege when shown these scenes or thought about class as always conflictual, but instead might have considered the virtue of aspiration. This was after all the era of Samuel Smiles and self-help.¹² Solomon is perhaps making a quite different point; he is highlighting the virtue of the new capitalist system by which status was based on wealth rather than the privilege of birth. A contemporary viewer might see class on a train as modern and democratic because there is no barrier of birth or class to buying whichever ticket you could afford.

¹² Samuel Smiles, *Self-help with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859).

Solomon's three railway pictures of 1854 were his first modern-subject, and Realist pictures of everyday life. They were original and unique in the way that they, especially the scene in the second-class carriage, could be dated precisely from information shown in the picture. *Second Class* initiates Solomon's Realist approach with its emphasis on the present and shared experience. The original pair exhibited at the Royal Academy were a muted success, but the engravings made from the second version of the diptych were a huge popular success when published by W H Simmons in 1857 and formed the basis of Solomon's wealth in the late 1850s. The first two versions were shown at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1854, these were titled *First Class—the meeting*. “*And at first meeting loved.*” (fig 11) and *Second Class—the parting*. “*Thus, part we rich in sorrow. Parting poor*” (fig.5). The first version of *First Class*, in Solomon's Pre-Raphaelite style, was abandoned by Solomon after adverse criticism and a new and more morally acceptable version was subsequently painted. The exhibited pictures seem to suggest a narrative sequence, but on closer examination they clearly show two separate and unconnected events. At first viewing they narrate the story of a young boy's departure to Australia as he is accompanied on the train by his widowed mother and his tearful sister to board his ship. The companion picture seems to show his return as a young man having made his fortune in the gold fields. But this is not the case; *Second Class* and *First Class* are both pictures of everyday life in 1854 and so the time sequence is impossible. This may be a deliberate play on time by merging present and future into a continuing present. Solomon's shift to Realist modern-subject pictures came from a desire to present the immediacy of the present, so in this early attempt to picture a contemporary story he has to deal with the sequential and temporal aspects of narrative. This is not a problem for narrative pictures set in the past such as those Solomon had painted in the 1840s, but it is a problem for a modern-subject picture which must be always

set in the present but yet indicate the passage of time. Solomon works around the problem of showing two events happening simultaneously but linked together by using the device of setting. Change temporally and socially is indicated by the different class of carriage.

Viewers might speculate that it is the train itself, particularly the train carriage, which influences the behaviour of the passengers. There was a growing awareness at the time, influenced by Henry Mayhew and other reformers, that environment influenced behaviour and that a better environment was not simply a public health issue but also a response to the criminality of London rookeries and slums.¹³ For the contemporary viewer the luxury of the first-class train carriage and the sparseness of the second-class carriage were not neutral but signified environments which had the potential to produce virtue and vice. This is particularly true of the first-class carriage. In the first version of the painting, which depicted a scene of improper relations between the young woman and young man reflected the proverb: “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city. And like a high wall of his imagination”—the rich man’s wealth blinds him to virtue.¹⁴ In this way the contemporary viewer might not see in the painting the corruption of the rich but rather view these rich passengers as corrupted by the luxury of the carriage and the luxurious goods which threaten to overwhelm them. On the other hand, the second-class passengers occupy a

¹³ Henry Mayhew and William Tuckniss, *London Labour and the London Poor a Cyclopædia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work* (London: Griffin, Bohn, and, 1861).

¹⁴ Proverbs 18:11

virtuous space which is entirely devoid of any luxury and the objects which surround them are purely practical—bundles rather than luggage.

Solomon suggests time passing, with its suggestion of change and opportunity, by his use of light. He sets the first picture in the grey light before dawn and the second in the light of dawn itself, and so viewers are given a sense of a journey being made by this visual representation of the passage of time. The transition from pre-dawn to dawn suggests that a story is being told. These two groups of people may be unconnected directly by narrative, but they are connected by contrast. One contrast that connects the two pictures is a contrast of decorum—that good manners involve behaving in a way which matches circumstances. In the second-class carriage the widow and her family behave very properly in front of an audience of a sailor who stares at them, and his companion who politely averts her eyes from the sad scene. In the first-class carriage the young woman and the young man flirt while the old man sleeps, and despite the opulence of their surroundings they do not behave well. The lesson to be learnt perhaps is that money cannot buy good manners. For the contemporary viewer this may have been one of the attractions of the paintings. They invite the reflection that this is how the wealthy behave when unobserved, a trope used by contemporary journals and magazines. The first-class carriage is usually a private space while the second-class carriage is a public space, and this is emphasised by the posters on the back wall. These posters reinforce the allusion in the text attached to the painting, a quotation from *Timon of Athens*, that the boy is destined for the goldmines of Australia. These images within the painting also reference a Pre-Raphaelite practice of using an image within a painting to reinforce a message. In *Isabella*, John Millais includes a majolica plate showing a beheading, a reference to Isabella's decapitation of her lover (fig.35).

The posters, apart from informing the viewer of the presentness of the image are a reminder of the constant haranguing from advertising that the public of the 1850s had to deal with. This ubiquitous advertising was an eyesore for many. Charles Dickens writes in *Household Words* of the bill-sticker who plasters every available space with posters advertising anything from Madame Tussaud to Professor Holloway of Holloway's Pills. He, after spending time with a bill-sticker, is overwhelmed by fumes from arsenic in the bill-sticker's paste or the ink of the posters.¹⁵ This was a period when, following the work of Dr Hill Hassall and campaigns in the *Lancet*, food adulteration and poisons in the environment were of great concern to the public.¹⁶ So, the posters are not just a visual annoyance but also a reminder of the poisons and dangers which were being produced by industry. They function to remind the viewer of the dark side of progress. James Dawson Burn in his book *The Language of the Walls* is vociferous in condemning the blanket coverage of the streets with advertising and its reduction of city life to a cycle of mindless consumption:

There is nothing in heaven above, in the earth beneath, in the water, or in the air we breathe, but will be found in the universal Language of the Walls. If you are in the enjoyment of health and riches, the walls will inform you where to fly for pleasure, and the names of the persons who will minister to your enjoyments. If you are a lover of fun, the walls will

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, "Bill-Sticking," *Household Words*.2, 52 (22 Mar 1851), 601.

¹⁶ See: "Editorial" *The Times* (July 24, 1855), 9. "and it has been shown by evidence of the most convincing kind that of the articles of daily use and first necessity a very great portion is subjected to foul and systematic adulteration."

lead you to the temple of Momus, and if you wish to be delighted with the soft strains of music, the walls will direct you to the halls of Apollo.¹⁷

The viewer in 1854 at the Royal Academy at this painting's first outing may have been struck by the close hanging of the posters which seem to reflect the close hanging known as 'salon-style' hanging, of paintings at the Exhibition. This connection with art is emphasised by the spandrel form of the carriage roof which echoes the spandrel-framing favoured by Pre-Raphaelite artists.¹⁸ In this way the painting becomes a parody of the viewers' own experience at the Royal Academy Exhibition. The posters seem to suggest a satire on an art gallery, and perhaps a hint of the need for self-improvement for the second-class passengers contrasting with the books, flowers, newspaper and fishing rods for the first-class passengers.

The scene in the second-class carriage contrasts with the first-class carriage through the use of light; the former grey and the latter golden. This was also a Pre-Raphaelite technique and *First Class*, like Holman Hunt's painting *The Awakening Conscience* (fig.36) uses light to emphasise form, detail and clarity. Clarity in this usage can be said to illuminate moral certainty. Not only does light indicate the passing of time, and hence a narrative possibility, but Solomon also uses the grey light of pre-dawn in *Second-Class—The Departure*

¹⁷ James Dawson Burn, *The Language of the Walls: And a voice from the Shop Windows; Or, the Mirror of Commercial Roguery. By one who thinks aloud*, (Manchester: Abel Heywood, 1855), 13.

¹⁸ Joyce H. Townsend, Jacqueline Ridge, and Stephen Hackney, *Pre-Raphaelite Painting Techniques: 1848-56* (London: Tate Publ., 2004), 166.

to emphasise the sadness of farewell. In *First Class—The Meeting* the bright light of the dawn celebrates the pleasure of meeting, its potential, and optimism. He uses the light of pre-dawn for its emotional effect in a number of his paintings such as *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig.6) and *The Flight* (fig.19). This association between extreme sadness and time of day probably derives from the expression, made popular by the poet Samuel Lover in the 1850s: “There is a beautiful saying amongst the Irish peasantry to inspire hope under adverse circumstances: ‘Remember, they say, that the darkest hour of all is the hour before day.’¹⁹ One issue for the viewer was colour; in 1853 a Government Select Committee had reported on the cleaning of pictures at the National Gallery by a Mr H R Bolton. Years of varnish had been removed to reveal old master paintings as brightly coloured rather than the preferred toffee brown, causing public debate and a minor scandal.²⁰ Solomon’s use of bright colour not only reflected Pre-Raphaelite influence but nodded to contemporary debates about colour and art.

Second Class—the Parting: ‘Thus part we rich in sorrow, parting poor’ is one of a series of emigration pictures that appeared in the 1850s in response to the increase in emigration, particularly to America, in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Much of this increase was the outcome of the famine years in Ireland and the Highland clearances of the 1840s but also as a result of anticipated greater opportunities associated with the Californian and Australian gold rushes. Pamela Gerrish Nunn explores a number of these pictures in her

¹⁹ Samuel Lover, *Songs and Ballads. Including Those Sung in His "Irish Evenings" and Hitherto Unpublished* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier, 1853), pg. #.

²⁰ David Bomford and Mark Leonard, *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004), 59-63.

article on Marshall Claxton's painting, *An Emigrant's Thoughts of Home* (fig.37) and she writes:

Emigration, a social and political phenomenon for mid-nineteenth century Britain, and the essential lubricant of British imperialism, inspired a profusion of paintings, prints, novels, plays, poems, essays and letters that speak eloquently about the realities and myths of Victorian Britain and its role in the world, engaging concepts of the family, womanhood, the artist's role and function and, indeed, the meaning of life.²¹

Ford Madox Brown's *Last of England* is the nearest parallel to Solomon's painting. Brown indicates that the emigrants in his painting are also sailing to Australia in search of gold by naming the ship the *Eldorado*. Brown's painting is more nationalist than Solomon's in its emphasis on the loss of England and dwells on the extreme difficulty of the journey as a metaphor for that loss. In a typically Pre-Raphaelite touch of intense detail the foreground of the picture features cabbages tied to the ship's rails which reminds us of the ever-present threat of disease, particularly scurvy, on these long sea journeys. Solomon suggests the length of the journey by foregrounding the boy's folded hammock.²² Brown's cabbages recall the association between emigration and disease embodied in the New Passenger Act (12 & 13 Vict., c.33) which

²¹ Pamela Gerrish Nunn. "Look Homeward Angel: Marshall Claxton's emigrant" *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 32 (1992), 1.

enforced medical inspection of emigrants. For some writers, and therefore viewers, emigration was a mechanism for cleansing the body politic of disease, this was particularly the case with the enforced migration of young juvenile delinquents. This is noted by Thomas Jordan who quotes S Turner writing in 1851:

Crime had increased despite a growing prison population of convicted criminals, and children played no small part. Emigration after terms in local prisons was an obvious way to purge society of juvenile criminals. It would also segregate them from non-criminal children avoiding the imprudence, in one observer's words, evident in allowing to "mix together the infected and the healthy".²³

For the contemporary viewer Solomon's image might conjure up thoughts, not just of adventure and prospects, but also associations with crime, particularly juvenile crime and of disease.

Then there is the question of gold itself, the object of the young man's journey. For a reader of Adam Smith, the question of gold and empire would recall Smith's refutation of mercantilism in his book *The Wealth of Nations*.²⁴ Mercantilism aimed to create a national balance of trade which maximised

²³ Thomas E Jordan. "Stay and Starve or Go and Prosper!" Juvenile Emigration from Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century", *Social Science History* 9, no.2 (Spring,1985), 146. With quotation from: S Turner. "Juvenile delinquency." *The Edinburgh Review* 94 (1851) 207-220.

²⁴ Adam Smith, Edwin Cannan, and Max Lerner, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937).

capital to the treasury for use by the nation in time of war. Through tariffs and import duties the treasury would acquire wealth in the form of gold and silver. This might seem a good thing but as Smith pointed out neither gold nor silver have any intrinsic value and their value fluctuates like any other commodity, so on occasion creating inflation.

It was not just readers of Adam Smith who might reflect on the problem of gold. Great Britain had reintroduced the gold standard with the Bank Act of 1842, having revived the fixed exchange rate between paper money and gold abandoned since 1821. The resulting rural distress and poverty was described by William Cobbett in his book *Rural Rides* (1830).²⁵ Percy Shelley put it more dramatically, linking gold and the old enemy, the aristocracy, in his poem commemorating the Battle of Peterloo *The Mask of Anarchy*:

‘Tis to let the Ghost of Gold
Take from Toil a thousandfold
More than e’er its substance could
In the tyrannies of old.²⁶

²⁵ William Cobbett, *Rural Rides in the Counties of Surrey, Kent, Sussex, Hants, Berks, Oxford, Bucks, Wilts, Somerset, Gloucester, Hereford, Salop, Worcester, Stafford, Leicester, Hertford, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge, Huntingdon, Nottingham, Lincoln, York, Lancaster, Durham, and Northumberland, in the Years 1821, 1822, 1823, 1825, 1826, 1829, 1830, and 1832: With Economical and Political Observations Relative to Matters Applicable to and Illustrated by the State of Those Counties Respectively* (London: A. Cobbett, 1853).

²⁶ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Mask of Anarchy* (Five Leaves Publications, 2017).

The gold standard and the convertibility of paper money were important issues for debate in the early 1850s particularly with the start of the Crimean War in 1854, when the influential banker Lord Overstone argued in *The Times* the importance of the gold standard.²⁷

Solomon's association between the young boy emigrant, the Australian gold rush, and Timon of Athens, "Thus part we rich in sorrow, parting poor", would be a reminder for some viewers of the dangers of gold and the acquisition of precious metal. Solomon's choice of a quotation from *Timon of Athens* is particularly telling. Timon a wealthy man from Athens during the classical period, enjoys helping other people. He is visited by a poet, painter, and jeweller to whom he gives money and having used up his fortune giving away money he finds that his so-called friends will not help him. He leaves Athens in disgust and goes to live in a cave in a forest. There he discovers gold and the painter, and the poet pursue him to try to get hold of the gold. Timon refuses and by the end of the play Timon dies cursing false friendship, and the love of gold. This was, and still is, a rarely performed play, though a synopsis is provided in Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* which was popular at the time.²⁸ The obscurity of the quote suggests that Solomon is trying to make a very specific point to a knowledgeable audience. The contemporary viewer might recall the 1851 season at Sadler's Wells when three of London's most famous actors, Samuel Phelps, George Bennet, and Henry Marston performed the

²⁷ Kwasi Kwarteng, *War and Gold*: (London: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2014) 61-62.

²⁸ Charles Lamb and Mary Lamb, *Tales from Shakespear: Designed for the Use of Young Persons* (London: Printed for M.J. Godwin and, at the Juvenile Library, 1816).

play.²⁹ These performances were possibly the prompt for Solomon to ally himself with the fashionable revival of authentic Shakespeare texts at Sadlers Wells under Phelps. Solomon's point may simply be that gold corrupts in the end, and we see a hint of that in the companion picture *First Class—The Meeting* (fig.11) through the indecorous behaviour of the wealthier passengers. This association with the corruption of gold and wealth is noticeably enforced by the innocence of the young boy patiently waiting his fate in Australia. In the play *Timon*, in exile in the wilderness, discovers gold and then buries it because he had no use for it—what use is gold in a desert? By doing this Timon highlights gold's lack of utility and he, by the end of the play, still in exile, dies cursing humanity. Gold does not make Timon happy, "this yellow slave will knit and break religions, bless the accursed, make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves and give them title, knee and approbation."³⁰

L. C. Knights in his analysis of the play points both to the universality of Shakespeare's satire, and its topicality for a Renaissance audience familiar with Machiavelli in the presentation of Timon as an ineffectual leader. And he comments that the main theme of gold was taken up by Karl Marx:

Timon of Athens, in so far as it is a direct satire on the power of money, can be seen as Shakespeare's response to certain prominent features in the economic and social life of his own day. And the satire, as we have just seen, has the kind of bite that makes it relevant to *any* acquisitive

²⁹ Richard Foulkes, "Shakespeare in the Provinces," in *Shakespeare in the Nineteenth Century*, by Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 180.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*. Act 4, Scene 3, 26-38.

society, our own as much as Shakespeare's. (It was almost inevitable that Karl Marx should quote Timon's denunciation of 'gold...this yellow slave' in an early chapter of Capital.)³¹

With the second of the railway pictures *First class--the meeting* (fig.8), the title is supplemented by a quotation from *Cymbeline*: "And at first meeting loved".³² This practice of supplementing the titles of paintings with a literary allusion was fairly common in the 1850s, and some comment has been made on the practice. Martin Meisel in his discussion of Augustus Egg's *Past and Present* (fig.18) refers to this element of the picture as a 'narrative voice'.³³ An *Art-Journal* critic calls these little quotations mottoes. Referring to the quotation from Dr Faustus which accompanied *Chatterton* (fig.38) by Henry Wallis a contemporary critic writes: 'Such is the motto that is inscribed on the frame of the picture; the same accompanies the title in the catalogue.'³⁴

This use of a narrative voice or motto is intended to clarify the story being told. But, as we have seen in *Second Class—The Parting* (fig.11) the supplementary quotation associated with a picture also encourages the viewer to make topical associations as well as adding greater depth to the image. These

³¹ L.C. Knights, *Hamlet and other Shakespearean essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 108.

³² William Shakespeare. *Cymbeline*. Act 5, Scene 5, 380. Spoken by Guiderius.

³³ Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and, Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 26.

³⁴ "The Royal Academy: Exhibition the Eighty Eighth," *The Art-Journal* (June 1, 1856) 169.

quotations from Shakespeare also seem a continuation from earlier popular narrative paintings illustrating incidents from Shakespeare's plays, notably those featured in Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery.³⁵ In this way Solomon, and other artists, promoted their art of modern life as successors to Shakespeare and promoted their paintings as 'serious' art. The precise choice of each quotation by Solomon does seem to suggest an ambition to develop a literary and visual hybrid. Apart from the medieval practice of using words in paintings (fig.39) a probable source of this idea of combining written word with image comes from William Hogarth. Hogarth had been the artist which many of the modern subject painters of the 1850s had turned to for inspiration and his reputation was particularly high at this time. *The Art-Journal* in 1855 wrote of Hogarth's work:

His name requires no panegyric; it has been universally recognised as that of a great moralist; for if the pencil can claim equally with the pen, the privilege to convey instructive truths, then the works of this teacher will continue, so long as they endure, vivid and argumentative exponents of good and evil.³⁶

In his series *Industry and Idleness* Hogarth uses quotations from *Proverbs* to emphasise biblical parallels in his narrative of the industrious apprentice and the idle apprentice. A straightforward interpretation of Solomon's second railway

³⁵ Rosie Dias, *Exhibiting Englishness: John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery and the Formation of a National Aesthetic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

³⁶ "The Royal Pictures," *The Art-Journal*, 1 (1855), 42.

picture suggests a direct derivation from Hogarth's *Industry and Idleness* series. We are shown three extremely wealthy people, possibly aristocrats, whose life of idleness is quite clearly spelt out. The young man is shown with his fishing rods, a defining attribute of the gentleman; fly fishing was the pursuit of gentlemen since the time of Izaak Walton.³⁷ The young woman's idleness is indicated by her novel, unread on the seat in front of her. The old man is sleeping when he should be paying attention or chaperoning the other passengers and discouraging their flirtation. It is his responsibility, as the oldest, to maintain proper order but he turns a blind eye, and by discarding his newspaper he is revealed as indifferent to the important matters of the world. In this way the unproductive classes are contrasted with the productive classes of *Second Class* (fig.11)—the older sailor, the widow, the virtuous young sister, and the young boy off in search of work. One group represents industrial progress, the train, making the search for work more efficient and the other group shows the dangers of industrial progress introducing new forms of leisure and sexual license. For contemporary viewers, this attitude is summed up by Samuel Smiles later in the decade, who was to say about the search for work, "Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us." It is not wealth in itself that is to be condemned but idleness which is the source of all poverty.³⁸ This is referenced by Solomon's use of the sleeping man image. The idea that sleeping, especially when one should be working, allows the devil to enter the unguarded mind still partly survives in the

³⁷Izaak Walton, *The Compleat Angler*, 1653 (New York: Modern Library, 1939).

³⁸ Samuel Smiles, *Self-help with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859), 75.

proverb “the devil makes work for idle hands.” Erwin Panofsky discusses the popularity of the image of the sleeping man in his analysis of Albrecht Dürer’s *Dream of the Doctor* (fig.40):

An elderly man is asleep on a bench by an enormous, apparently well heated stove (with fruits drying on the tiles), his body comfortably resting on thick pillows. As in numerous other late mediaeval “moralities,” this man slumbers while he ought to work or pray personifies the vice of “Acedia,” or Sloth. So popular was this interpretation of what may be called the “sleep of the unjust” that a pillow alone sufficed to indicate the sin of laziness— “Idling is the pillow of the Devil,” as the proverb says.³⁹

In Dürer’s engraving of the sleeping doctor a naked Venus and a Cupid are conjured up by the doctor’s dreams and encouraged by the devil blowing in his ear. In this way we are shown that “laziness is the root of all sin” and leads to sexual immorality.⁴⁰ Like indolent dreamers the three rich or aristocratic passengers are hermetically sealed within the carriage and unconscious of the outside world (no-one looks out of the window) whose main concern is themselves and their little love affair.

The first two versions of the railway paintings were reviewed by a number of critics. The *Art Journal* wrote of *First Class*:

³⁹ Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 71-2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The subject is an adventure in a railway-carriage; there are three figures; one, an elderly gentleman in the right-hand corner, is asleep, while between the other two, a youth and a maiden, there seems to have arisen a *tendresse*. As a picture, it is executed with great knowledge and power, but it is, we think, to be regretted that so much facility should be lavished on so bald—or vulgar—a subject.⁴¹

The same critic wrote of *Second Class*:

This is a pendant to a picture by the same artist already called ‘The Meeting’; but it is superior to the latter in everything. A widow is accompanying her child, a sailor boy, to Portsmouth or Southampton, whither he is proceeding to join his ship, bound on a long voyage. The characters are well drawn, and the story is pointedly told.⁴²

The critic for *The Spectator* wrote a particularly scathing review which was short and to the point:

Hopeless is the depth of sentimentalism at which we find Mr. Solomon in “The First Class,” and “The Second Class,” –the sentimentalism of

⁴¹ “The Royal Academy, The Exhibition,” *The Art-Journal*, 314 (June 1, 1854): 164-5.

⁴² *Ibid.*

flirtation, and the sentimentalism of family affection; in both common to the degree which may be called vulgar.⁴³

The reviews in *The Art-Journal* and *The Spectator* are linked in their criticism of *First Class* by the word vulgar. There is a further review in *Punch* which refers to the young lady in *First Class* as “affected”. This may stress vulgarity or commonness by suggesting she does not know her place.⁴⁴ This use of the word vulgar is crucial to understanding Solomon’s reaction in painting a second ‘sanitised’ version of *First Class* (fig.41).

For Victorians the word vulgar had a set of meanings which mostly referred to those who were thought to have stepped above their position in society. The related identities of the ‘lady’ and the ‘gentleman’ were increasingly enforced throughout the nineteenth century in an attempt to differentiate between those who were born into a class position or acquired it through education, and those who merely aspired to a higher-class position through money. There seems to have been a tendency to exclude some, though not all, of the nouveaux riches from the category of ‘lady’ or ‘gentleman.’ But the use of the word vulgar was also used as a synonym for Jews in the anti-Semitic world of Victorian Britain. Meri-Jane Rochelson explores the vulgar Jew’s presence in nineteenth-century novels and she refers to George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and the family of a Jewish pawnbroker who is gaudily

⁴³ “Royal Academy Exhibition: Domestic Subjects” *The Spectator* (May 27, 1854):18.

⁴⁴ *Punch, or The London Charivari*, 26 (1854), 247.

dressed and whose mother appeared to have “slept in her large earrings, if not in her rings and necklace.”⁴⁵ Rochelson goes on:

Bernstein identifies the “relational” nature of any definition of vulgarity, demonstrating that vulgarity only exists in contrast to an admired and accepted social norm. Thus Jews, by definition outside the Victorian mainstream, invite accusations of vulgarity as they strive for an appearance of wealth that would then bestow legitimacy on bodies considered unclean, repulsive, or simply un-English. In novels by Trollope and others, such characters inevitably failed and excessive displays of wealth and ornament would quickly identify them to contemporary readers as both vulgar and Jewish.⁴⁶

Jewish vulgarity and the association with ostentatious clothing reflects the London-Jewish trade in second-hand clothing at the Rag Market in Spitalfields near to Abraham’s childhood home. In a print from 1807, *Solomon in all his Glory!!* (fig.42), a Jew is dressed in second hand finery, including a garish waistcoat, accompanied by two young women. The Jew is shown as “above his station” by dressing in his “betters” clothes. This stolen persona reveals his true nature that he wants to conceal with borrowed finery. Literally the ostentatious colour of his clothes conceals his true colours.

⁴⁵ Meri-Jane Rochelson. “A Religion of Pots and Pans”: Jewish Materialism and Spiritual Materiality in Israel Zangwill’s *Children of the Ghetto*,” in *Victorian Vulgarity: Taste in Verbal and Visual Culture*, ed. David Bernstein and Elsie B. Michie (Burlington, VT, and Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 120.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

The Spectator critic also reviewed William Frith's very successful picture of that year, *Ramsgate Sands (Life at the Seaside)* (fig.43) just a few lines before his comments on Solomon's painting. For a contemporary reader of these two reviews there would be clear parallel between the vulgar Jewish artist of *First Class* and a Jewish vendor in the Frith painting. The Frith painting shows the crowd on the beach at Ramsgate and is crowded with incident. Of these hundreds of incidents, the critic focuses on one to illustrate the Realism of Frith's observations; that of an old lady and a Jew:

That Mr. Frith has an eye for externals this work swarms with proof; the old lady indignantly nervous at the pertinacity of the Jew vendor of "tomboli," but still immovably deaf to his appeal.⁴⁷

There is a suggestion that the old woman embodies traditional British virtues of public behaviour while the alien Jew makes a fuss hoping for a profit. Subtle codes are being ignored which the "foreign" Jew can never hope to appreciate. The woman, a lady after all, and by virtue of her age clearly not an upstart immigrant, instinctively understands these conventions. This is a broad hint that Solomon's painting, through juxtaposition, vulgar because it was painted by a Jew who was alien to the subtleties of British decorum.

It seems likely that Abraham Solomon's decision to paint a second, less problematic, version of *First Class*, was prompted by these suggestions of Jewish vulgarity. A further blow to Solomon's judgement, and to his sense that

⁴⁷ "Royal Academy Exhibition: Domestic Subjects. *The Spectator* (May 27, 1854): 18.

he would have no defenders in the artistic establishment, was that John Ruskin had written to *The Times*, two days before *The Spectator* review, in praise and defence of Holman Hunt's picture *The Awakening Conscience* but not of the equally daring pictures by Solomon. Solomon was likely to get the message that his painting was not to be defended nor he himself given any support despite the resemblances between the two paintings. Solomon and Hunt's pictures have a number of similarities and because both were first exhibited publicly at the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1854 it was easy for contemporary viewers to compare them. They share the use of light and coloured shadow, note the reflection of red light on the top hat, intense detail, note the careful paintings of the silk ropes on the carriage seats, and the symbolic use of everyday objects, note the sexual allusion of the empty gloves; this is a Pre-Raphaelite painting in all but name. Ian Lowe makes a point that confirms Solomon had intended the painting to be in the manner of the Pre-Raphaelites, "The figures are painted on a prepared white ground, a practice which Holman Hunt had introduced to fellow members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood."⁴⁸ The Christian redemptive message of *The Awakening Conscience* has been replaced in *First Class* by a criticism of the idle rich, though Holman Hunt's picture can also be partly read as a critique of the leisured rich. Both Holman Hunt and Solomon place sexuality at the centre of their vision of the modern world, and both explore the issue of contemporary morality. The young woman in the Solomon picture seems sure of her powers as she toys with a piece of jewellery, hinting that she is toying with her suitor's heart, though she might well end up as the kept woman of the Holman Hunt picture. Solomon's painting is less crammed

⁴⁸Ian Lowe, "Two Paintings by Abraham Solomon," *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin* 1-2, no. 9-10 (1967), 1.

with symbolism, though fishing rods, gloves, flowers, travel rugs and so on have been given a role for those who wished to read the painting symbolically.

The still life at the bottom of the painting is a feature of several Solomon paintings and like Holman Hunt's picture reflects those Dutch genre and contemporary paintings of the Düsseldorf School which often included a still life. In this case the well-thumbed railway guide, the pile of shawls, walking stick and umbrella are intended to inform a contemporary viewer about the personality of the old sleeping gentleman. But, this is also likely to be a feature of Solomon's Realist aesthetisation of the everyday object. The assortment of discarded trifles is intended to be elevated to the status of beautiful by the act of painting. Ruskin, in his letter to *The Times*, writes of the 'fatal newness' of the furniture in the sitting room of *Awakening Conscience* (fig.36), which might equally have referred to the 'fatal newness' of the first-class carriage in Solomon's picture.⁴⁹ This Ruskin letter in defence of Hunt marks a dividing line between Solomon and the rest of the art establishment. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood may not yet have become established by the mid-fifties, but its members held secure positions as leading avant-garde artists—Solomon was not to join them.

Given this combination of anti-Semitism, accusations of vulgarity, and what might appear to be bias on the part of the critics, including Ruskin, whose support was a ticket to success for any aspiring artist of the 1850s, it is hardly surprising that Solomon produced a second version of *First Class* (fig.41) in the hope of ameliorating the accusations against his art. Ian Lowe, in his account of the three railway pictures, finds this surprising:

⁴⁹John Ruskin. Letter to the Editor. *The London Times* 21,733 (25 May 1854), 7.

...the artist, with a humility which now seems surprising, appears to have taken the hostile criticisms to heart, for he painted another version of *First Class*. In this he endeavoured to eliminate all traces of the “bald” and the “vulgar” from the subject.⁵⁰

Out went the sumptuous dawn light of the first version and, as Ian Lowe writes, this is replaced by a cooler tonality similar to *Second Class* (fig.5). The young woman is now sitting in the corner of the carriage, her dress is plainer and less ostentatious, and crucially she is crocheting, doing productive work rather than toying with a jewel. For her, at least, she no longer has idle hands making work for the devil. The old man’s newspaper has disappeared and he is now eagerly receiving the news directly from a young lieutenant, presumably just returned from naval duties in the Crimea where war had begun in 1853.⁵¹ This image of respectability has been achieved by expunging any possibility that the protagonists are idle rich; these people are wealthy but the implication is that they are industrious and have earned rather than inherited their money. This is further emphasised by the fact that the young man has been transformed into a naval officer rather than an army officer. It would have been more apt to make the young man an army officer since the Crimean War was fought mainly on land, though the navy played a part in the war by bombarding a number of

⁵⁰Ian Lowe, "Two Paintings by Abraham Solomon," *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin* 1-2, no. 9-10 (1967), 1.

⁵¹ Ibid. In a note (13) to his article Lowe confirms “that there is no doubt that the uniform is that of a lieutenant 1847-1856.

coastal towns.⁵² In using a naval officer Solomon is referencing topical debates about aristocratic control of the army which was maintained through the purchase of commissions.⁵³ The Navy, on the other hand, promoted officers on the basis of merit, or length of service, and so at least in theory was more meritocratic.⁵⁴ Virtue in the picture is not only associated with industry and lack of idleness in the old man and young woman but also by the young man's choice of navy over army. There may have been another more topical reason for the change from the young suitor's transformation from gentleman fisherman to naval officer. This lies in the continued opposition to the disabilities imposed on Jews in Britain. The contemporary viewer might connect this painting by a Jewish artist and topical questions of merit in public life. Aristocratic opposition to the lifting of the last disabilities of the Jews was much in the air at this time, Lionel de Rothschild had again been elected to parliament in 1853, presumably with votes from the Solomon family living in the City of London. Frederick Morton has this to say about the election of 1853:

At the next general election, in 1853, the City of London doggedly returned him (Rothschild) as its member. Again, the House, after violent controversy, passed a Bill to remove the oath difficulty, and again the Lords threw it out. The argument engulfed the nation. 'If you destroy the groundwork of Christianity upon which legislation is based,' inveighed

⁵² Bombardment of Sevastopol (Oct. 1854).

⁵³ John Fortescue, "The Army," in *Early Victorian England: 1830—1865, Vol.1*, ed. G.M. Young (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 348.

⁵⁴ Admiral G. A Ballard "The Navy" in *Early Victorian England: 1830—1865, Vol.1*, ed. G.M. Young (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 346-7.

the Bishop of London, 'in order to gratify for a time a handful of ambitious men, you will destroy Christian England'.⁵⁵

As Morton says, 'the argument engulfed the nation'

Richard Altick in his book *Paintings from Pictures* sees the second version of *First Class* as an allusion to Othello's relating his adventures of the soldier's life to Brabantio while Desdemona looks on.⁵⁶ He points to the similarities in composition with Charles West Cope's *Othello Relating his Adventures* (fig.44). The Cope picture is certainly a good candidate as a model for *First Class*, the subject is similar and the gestures, both of storyteller and listeners, seem to fit. The etching was published the year before the painting and was included in a popular book on Shakespeare by the leading art publishers, Virtue. Cope was a founder member of the Etching Club, which included Millais, so there is an overlap in friendship networks which helps Altick's argument. It is not unimaginable that Solomon, looking for a quick replacement for his original painting should have seized on the Cope etching as a model. The trope of the return of the soldier was a familiar one to contemporary viewers and a number of popular prints had been produced in response to the Napoleonic wars.⁵⁷ The artist George Morland had painted several 'soldier's

⁵⁵ Frederic Morton, *The Rothschilds: A Family Portrait* (New York: Diversion Books, 2014), 148.

⁵⁶ William Shakespeare, *Othello* (1.3)

⁵⁷ Philip Shaw, "The Tired Soldier: John Opie and the Image of Return," in *Suffering and Sentiment in Romantic Military Art* (London: Routledge, 2016), 128-134.

return' pictures which had been reproduced as popular prints (fig.45).⁵⁸ Morland's *The Soldier's Return* includes familiar elements of a young soldier recounting his adventures to an older man while a pretty girl admires him. This subject mostly benefited nationalist ideology, appealing to the heroism in defence of the national good. But on occasion this form could be subverted, and one well-known subversion of the idea was the most famous Jewish painting of the time, Morritz Daniel Oppenheim's *The Return of the Jewish Volunteer* (fig.46). A small detail from Lowe's article on the railway paintings prompts this interpretation. He says in a note that:

The widow of F. N. Salaman⁵⁹ wrote (1.12.1951) that this pair was purchased at Christie's and that her husband had told her "that his father sat to the artist as model for the young lieutenant."⁶⁰

Oppenheim subverts the 'soldier's-return' format by having a young Jewish soldier, a volunteer, return to his family on the sabbath, a contravention of the rule against travel on the sabbath. The breaking of the rule suggests a shift towards a modernising Judaism and that the young man is a volunteer makes the point that Jews are willing to fight for their country, in this case Germany. The

⁵⁸ Sir Walter Gilbey. *George Morland: His Life and Works* (Adam & Charles: London), 1908, P.76.

⁵⁹ A member of the Salaman family who became wealthy trading in ostrich plumes. See: Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2008).

⁶⁰ Lowe, *Two Paintings* (1967), Fn.16b.

lesson to be learned is that if Jews are prepared to die for their country they should have equal rights.

By using his relation, presumably his nephew, to pose for the figure of the young lieutenant Abraham created a painting which had a very particular significance for himself and those who were aware of the model's identity. In this Solomon followed a practice which was not uncommon amongst Pre-Raphaelites such as Millais and Rossetti. In Millais' *Isabella* (fig.35) he uses a number of his friends as models for the guests at the lunch party. Whether intentional or not the connection between the models, who mostly knew each other, adds to the feeling that the people in the painting are linked by family and friendship in some way. In a similar vein, Rossetti's repeated portraits of Elizabeth Siddall during their love affair have an erotic intensity which is clear to viewers whether or not they were aware of the connection between model and artist. Artists may have many different reasons for choosing a model; using a friend, lover, or family member may simply have been a convenient and cheap option. But the choice of model, in common with any choice an artist makes consciously or unconsciously, reflects some aspect of an artist's intention to metaphorise. Many Pre-Raphaelite models gained notoriety through association with Pre-Raphaelite artists and it seems quite likely that identifying real-life models was of interest to collectors and viewing public.⁶¹ Family or friends who knew the model as Abraham's nephew, and it is interesting that his identity should be so significant in Salaman family history and that the story was repeated a century later, might view the painting as an allegory of Jewish

⁶¹ Russell James, *The Pocket Guide to Victorian Artists and Their Models* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Remember When, 2011).

emancipation. An image of an emancipated Jew acquiring a new form of status through public service.

This allegorical interpretation mirrors the allegory in the Oppenheim painting. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, who was German, had become known both as the first Jewish artist in European art, as “painter to the Rothschilds” and “the Rothschild among the painters”.⁶² His fame throughout Europe, as a Jewish artist, did not only derive from his connection to the Rothschild family but from his painting *The Return of the Jewish Volunteer* (fig.46). The history of the reproduction of this painting is not fully clear but it is known to have been reproduced and well-known to Jews throughout Europe.⁶³ One feature of Jewish culture in the nineteenth century (and this is important for understanding the international character of Jewish commerce) was the close connection between different Jewish communities. The Solomon family business was based on imports from Livorno, a free Jewish city in Italy and the Salaman branch of the family had connections with South Africa and America.⁶⁴ So it seems likely that Abraham Solomon would be aware of this well-known German painter.

⁶² Alfred Werner, *Families & Feasts: Paintings by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim and Isidor Kaufmann* (New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 1977), 5.

⁶³ Lilianne Weissberg and Georg Heuberger refer to an untraced lithograph from 1836 ‘and the Allgemeine Zeitung de Judentums recommended it “urgently as a room decoration.” ’ see Liliane Weisberg and Georg Heuberger. “The Rothschild of Painters and the Prince of Poets” in Georg Heuberger and Anton Merk. Eds. *Moritz Daniel Oppenheim: Jewish Identity in 19th Century Art*. (Frankfurt am Main: Wienand Verlag, 1999) 146.

⁶⁴ Lionel Lambourne, "Abraham Solomon Painter of Fashion, and Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist," *The Jewish Historical Society of England XXI* (1968): 274-86.

The political message of the *Return of the Volunteer* would have been quite clear to Jewish viewers during the struggle for Jewish emancipation and this is clarified by the full title of the work *The Return of the Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living in Accordance with Old Customs*. The picture alludes to anxieties about integration and assimilation. The family stand for the old ways of separation but their son has chosen the more modern path of integration with its concomitant risk of risk of assimilation and loss of identity. Abraham Solomon is making similar points by his substitution and the Jewish lieutenant is a reminder of the continuing disabilities against Jews. The young woman in Solomon's painting is probably intended to be non-Jewish and so the idea of assimilation, through "marrying out," and its threat to Jewish identity, is suggested. There are few visual parallels between this second version of *First Class* (fig.41) and Oppenheim's *Return of the Jewish Volunteer* (fig.46) but the idea of the returning Jewish hero and his betrayal seems central to both paintings. As Heuberger and Merk point out we do not expect a Biedermeier painting such as *The Return of the Jewish Volunteer* to have any political message but prefer to see a reflection of bourgeois family values and this also applies to Solomon's modern-subject paintings:

The boldest gesture in *The Return of the Volunteer* was Oppenheim's willingness to confront political issues—however subtly—before other artists dared to do so. For this prescience, his *Return of the Volunteer*

must be credited as one of the most overt political statements in Biedermeier painting.⁶⁵

This might also be said of Solomon's second version of *First Class: The Meeting*. It is interesting that these two important early Realist paintings, after all Biedermeier painting was an early form of Realism, should both be by Jewish artists. Realism is sometimes thought of as an essentially bourgeois form, but we can see in these two paintings the beginnings of what was to be called "Social Realism". Whether the apparent release from some discrimination experienced by Jews at the beginning of the nineteenth century released a socio-critical tendency is not entirely certain, but it is not surprising to encounter artworks which avoid Christian symbolism among the works of Jewish Realists.

⁶⁵ Georg Heuberger and Anton Merk, *Moritz Daniel Oppenheim: Die Entdeckung des Jüdischen Selbstbewusstseins in Der Kunst = Jewish Identity in 19th Century Art* (Frankfurt Am Main: Wienand Verlag, 1999), 120.

Chapter Six. A Contrast between leisure and work, 1855

Taking my customary walk the other day, observant of men, women and things, I met three ladies. They were all three young, all three good-looking, and all three lame! At least, such was my impression, seeing as they all carried handsome sticks and limped; but, on looking back, as everyone else did, I could discover no reason why they should do so.¹

(The Dundee Courier, 1869)

Yet we are not without painters who will not accept another's description or interpretation of men and manners, but will tell their own story, and in their own way; they will study human nature for themselves and give us their own reading of it: such a one is Abraham Solomon, in some of his pictures at least.²

(James Dafforne, 1862)

The 'Alexandra Limp' was a short-lived fashion in the late 1860s when women affected a limp in homage to "fashion icon" Princess Alexandra's rheumatic lameness. The Dundee Courier reports this oddity in a humorous piece poking fun at the absurdity of female fashions. Although this fashion

¹ "The Ladies of Edinburg and the Alexandra Limp," *Dundee Courier* (9 December 1869), 4.

² James Dafforne. "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX—Abraham Solomon" *The Art-Journal* (March 1862), 73.

occurred sometime after Solomon's painting, *A Contrast*, it is a reminder that disability in a Victorian painting is not always what it seems and for commentators and artists the affectation of disability, as they saw it, could be a source of humour. I am going to suggest that Solomon's painting is a serious social commentary but there is also the unexplored possibility that contemporary viewers might have been amused by the image of the over-refined, well-chair bound young woman on the beach. After all, manoeuvring a wheel chair on a sandy beach would have been an odd sight which might emphasise the affectations and pretences of the upper classes; just like the Alexandra limp.

James Dafforne thought of Abraham Solomon as an original artist, though "only in some of his paintings". Solomon certainly broke new ground by expanding the range of subject matter available to British Artists; the inclusion of all aspects of the world was after all the ambition of Realist artists. Jeffrey Daniels failed to notice the novelty of the subject matter; for him the picture is dismissed as, 'This touching work was well received by the critics.'³ For most writers this picture, like the railway paintings, is a morality tale on the disparity of wealth and health in Victorian England. In *A Contrast* (fig.2) Abraham Solomon returns to the theme of ill health first seen in *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* (fig.13). Ill health in different forms appears in a number of his works. Apart from *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* and *A Contrast*, hypochondria is satirised in *Le Malade Imaginaire* (fig.47), grief reduces a mother to illness in *The Lost Found* (fig.48) and in *Brighton Front* (fig.3)

³ Jeffrey Daniels, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon, 1823-1862, Rebecca Solomon, 1832-1886, Simeon Solomon, 1840-1905* (London: Inner London Education Authority, 1985), 54.

invalidism appears again—a young woman appears to be helping an elderly woman, possibly her mother, in a wheel chair. Like the railway paintings of 1854, *A Contrast* is stylistically Pre-Raphaelite, the cliffs in the background are minutely observed and almost every grain of sand and pebble on the beach is painted. The inclusion of the newly built Boulogne cathedral serves the double purpose of showing that this is a real place, which it may be in part, and alludes to the power of the Catholic church in France. The portrayal of the cliffs in the background is reminiscent, in its detail, of Millais's *John Ruskin* and the beach itself is comparable to that other later Pre-Raphaelite masterpiece *Pegwell Bay* by William Dyce (fig.49).

Slightly unnervingly, this is a picture of glances indicating from the first that this is a picture of secrets and codes. A young woman stares at her novel, a little boy is absorbed in play with a crab, a footman in a top hat stares, either lasciviously or anxiously, at the pêcheuses with their bare legs. Even the woman in the wheelchair who is supposed to be drawing the fisher women looks away from them and gazes at the man beside her. Apart from the inquisitive footman, this seems to be an encounter on the Boulogne beach between a wealthy group of visitors, presumably English (a steamboat in the distance indicates that they are tourists or day trippers) and French peasant women and their children who are busily ignoring each other. For a present-day viewer this non-encounter might seem odd but, in a period, when the higher classes did not acknowledge their servants or inferiors this may be a surprisingly accurate representation of Victorian reality. The British approach to servants and the working-class poor

was to ignore their existence as much as possible and this seems to be the case here.⁴

Lynda Nead in an analysis of the picture concentrates on representations of middle-class women as invalids and illness as a signifier of decorous femininity and dependence; the young woman as invalid ‘signifies her femininity and respectability.’⁵ For Nead the ‘contrast’ of the title is between the wealthy young woman, and the two principal fisher women; their bodies, ‘could also suggest they lead a healthier lifestyle than the feeble invalid sketching in her wheelchair’. She points out that the painting is divided by the upright pole of a fishing net which separates the healthy working women on the left from the sickly young woman on the right and this physical division marks a division between health and sickness but also a separation of the two classes and presumably the two countries of France and England. This is more or less how the painting was seen by contemporary critics, the critic from *The Athenaeum* is a little lukewarm: ‘The merit of the picture, in spite of the touches of sentiment, is perhaps, after all, more in the mechanism than the thought.’⁶ However, the *Art-Journal* was more enthusiastic:

A poor lady, with all the World can give her except health,
affectionately tended by her relations, is drawn in a Bathchair along the

⁴ Judith Flanders, *The Victorian House: Domestic Life from Childbirth to Deathbed* (London: HarperCollins, 2004), 118-19.

⁵ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd. 1988) 30.

⁶ “Fine Arts: Royal Academy”, *The Athenaeum*, 1438 (May 19, 1855), 590.

seashore and contemplating a group of French fishergirls, ruddy and robust.

While the Art-Journal associates the bath chair with ill health this was not necessarily the case at the Victorian seaside. John Gloag in *Victorian Comfort* points out that “bath chairs were a feature of many seaside resorts” which suggests that renting bath chairs was as much a seaside treat or a leisure activity as a necessity.⁷ The picture was shown at the Academy with a supporting quotation from Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part 1*, ‘Will fortune never come with both hands full? Such are the poor in health; Such are the rich, that have abundance and enjoy it not.’⁸

All this should make an interpretation of the painting straightforward, as a painting extolling health over wealth but it seems to be hinting at something other than that simple parable. Yes, the young woman in the wheel chair is ‘poor in health’ but she seems to be enjoying herself at the beach, passing her time by drawing the local fisherwomen and making the most of her leisure time. She is the one with the apparently attentive husband, if he is her husband, while, in contrast, the ‘healthy’ fisherwomen can be seen in the background toiling up to their waists in the cold water of the bay. There is no evidence of their husbands and they must work to support their children. If this is meant to suggest the nobility of work, as we might expect of a Victorian painting, it seems a very odd example. The picture implies the opposite of what we expect

⁷ John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design, 1830-1900* (Newton Abbot, Devon: David and Charles, 1979), 64.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, Act 4, Scene 3.

from paintings of the period; the rich in wealth and poor in health are having a perfectly nice time on holiday while the rich in health and poor in wealth don't seem to be having a particularly good time at all. A respectable viewer such as the critic from the *Art Journal* might see the Bath Chair as an invalid carriage, but for others the bath chair had comic potential as can be seen from a cartoon of the 1880's (fig.50). A satire on the work ethic seems like a plausible explanation for the topsy turvy world of health and wealth in the picture, alternatively, viewers may be prompted to consider that no matter how lowly the work, fulfilment is impossible without good honest labour, a conventional attitude. On the other hand, given the nakedness of the fisherwomen, some might be inclined to see the painting in the "saucy seaside" tradition.⁹ The contemporary viewer could point out that the young woman is gazing lovingly at her bath chair attendant, a man who may or not be her husband. All this gazing and glancing, in particular the footman's interest in the semi clothed fisher women, parallels his employer's interest in the man pushing her chair. What is clear is that this painting is more than a moral tale and the Shakespearean quotation attached to the painting is the best clue as to how the contemporary viewer might see the picture.

The supporting quotation to the picture is spoken by King Henry and it is the nature of Henry's illness, a theme of the play, which is one indicator of an destabilised morality within the picture. It is perhaps worth noting that *Henry IV* itself has a strong topical reference. The play was written as Elizabeth was expected to die and so its theme of suitability to rule and who should take the throne (Hal or Hotspur) mirrors anxiety over the succession to the English

throne. Henry opens Shakespeare's play by consulting with his advisers on his plan to travel to the Holy Land to fight the infidel:

So shaken as we are, so wan with care,
Find we a time for frightened peace to pant,
And breathe short-winded accents of new broils
To be commenced in strands afar remote.
No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood¹⁰

Henry is ill, shaken, he has usurped the throne from Richard II and his illness comes from guilty feelings about stealing the throne. Henry's guilt is not just that he was a regicide, but he is plagued by the thought that he has no right to rule and hopes to expiate this by going on crusade. The concept of 'fitness to rule' is also examined within the play through the unkinglike behaviour of Henry's son Prince Hal. These associations mean that viewers of Solomon's picture would be signposted towards a different and unexpected interpretation of the painting. Shakespeare's plays were widely understood by Solomon's contemporaries especially the art loving public of the 1850s, who were inundated by narrative pictures based on scenes from Shakespeare and a familiarity with Shakespeare was considered an essential accomplishment. Richard Altick estimates that *Henry IV Part I* was the source of at least 115 pictures in the early nineteenth century and was Shakespeare's most popular

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*, Act 1, Scene 1.

history play.¹¹ He credits this play with undermining history painting by making Henry IV a popular rather than high-art subject, through the comic portrayal of Falstaff by illustrators such as George Cruikshank.¹² The quotation from *Henry IV* indicated for a viewer schooled in the subtle allegories of Shakespeare's plays that there is a subtext in the painting about kingship and ascending the throne.

Referencing *Henry IV* and the legitimacy of his reign, other aspects become more noticeable. Nead points out the odd proportion of the two fisherwomen relative to the English figures and how they loom over the young woman in the wheelchair.¹³ In the distance is a steamboat. The little boat and the wheelchair celebrate Britain's manufacturing ingenuity. For a contemporary viewer, for whom travel was still a novelty, the possibility of an incapacitated woman magically appearing on a French beach through the agency of cast iron and steam must have had an element of wonder. The English presence has a quality of invasion and hints that there are other contrasts in this picture such as the contrast between a still rural France with the more advanced industrial British. Beyond the cliffs to the right we can just make out Boulogne itself, dominated by its new Catholic cathedral, the Cathedral of Notre Dame. This is more apparent in a surviving preparatory drawing of the right side of the picture

¹¹ Altick, *Paintings from Books*, 1991, 284.

¹² George Cruikshank and Robert Barnabas Brough, *The Life of Sir John Falstaff. Illustrated by G. Cruikshank. With a Biography of the Knight from Authentic Sources by Robert B. Brough* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1858).

¹³ Nead. *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988, 31.

(fig.51). The symbolism of the town dominated by a Catholic church, and one where the dome had only been completed in 1854, would have emphasised, for the contemporary English viewer, the priest-ridden nature of French society. Anti-Catholic feeling was never far from the surface in Britain; the painting was exhibited only a few years after Henry Manning, later Cardinal Manning, in 1851, scandalised the country by becoming a Catholic priest.

On the left of the painting a little boy wears a liberty or Phrygian cap and plays with a crab. The liberty cap symbolises the French Revolution, a not so distant memory, and in the same group a fisherwoman is holding her fishing net pole in the attitude of a halberdier. The fisherwoman becomes symbolic of France through her visual similarity with images of Jeanne D'Arc. One painting of Jeanne D'Arc in her role as saviour of France is Jean Auguste Ingres's, *Joan of Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII* (fig.52) completed in 1854, just one year before Solomon's *A Contrast*. On the left of *A Contrast*, a little boy is playing with a crab possibly symbolising slowness and deliberation, a synonym for plotting in this instance. Waldemar Deonna has written that the crab embodied, because of its gait, the ancient proverb deriving from the latin, 'Festina Lente' (hasten slowly).¹⁴ In this sense the little boy, as a symbol of France, who has the crab on a string, might be interpreted as inviting mistrust for the French. The crab suggests biding one's time, and the French were suspected of looking for the right time to strike back at Britain in retaliation for

¹⁴ Waldemar Deonna, "The Crab and the Butterfly," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17, No. 1/2 (1954): 47.

the defeat of Napoleon.¹⁵ So, for the astute viewer the picture seems to comment, unflatteringly, on the French state, history, and religion.

The central figure of the English group is the young woman in the bath chair. She represents both Britannia and Queen Victoria. She wears a purple cloak trimmed with ermine which symbolises her majesty and her face bears a striking resemblance to a Franz Xaver Winterhalter portrait from 1843 (fig.53). Her knee blanket is lined in a tartan material which recalls the royal obsession with Scotland and Balmoral. An identification with Britannia derives from the wheelchair itself. The preparatory drawing for *A Contrast* shows more obviously how the back wheel of the chair mimics the shield at Britannia's side as shown on this British penny of 1831 (fig.54). The identification of the young woman in the wheelchair as Queen Victoria makes more sense of the footman in his uniform and top hat standing behind the queen, he looks more like a royal footman than a middle-class servant. If he is a footman, we can imagine the older woman as a lady in waiting. Bending over Victoria wearing a tartan cap and tweed suit is a figure of Prince Albert, paying her some husbandly attention. *The Athenaeum* comments, 'a pretty English lady is being waited on with much affectionate solicitude by her handsome young officer-like husband.'¹⁶ We can leave, for the moment, the mysterious figure of the young woman engrossed in her reading while sitting on a skull-like boulder.

¹⁵ Holman Hunt's painting of *Our English Coasts* (1852) was said, by F G Stephens, to satirise the unpreparedness of England for a French invasion. Ribner, Jonathan P. "Our English Coasts, 1852: William Holman Hunt and Invasion Fear at Mid-century." *Art Journal* 55, no. 2 (1996): 45-54

¹⁶ "Fine Arts: Royal Academy", *The Athenaeum*, 1438 (May 19, 1855), 590.

The war in the Crimea had begun in 1854 and one cause of that war, or the pretext for the war, stemmed from an anti-Jewish riot in Greece in 1847. A Jewish businessman called Don Pacifico, who was a British passport holder, wanted compensation for loss of property in Athens, because of the riot, and appealed to the British Government. The Prime Minister Lord Palmerston authorised a naval blockade in order to force the Greeks to compensate Don Pacifico. Palmerston famously argued ‘civis Romanus sum’; that like citizens of the Roman empire, all British citizens, wherever they were, would be assisted by London.¹⁷ As always with a Solomon painting the contemporary viewer could associate the Jewishness of the artist and the subject of the painting, but it was not the origins of the war to defend Jewish interests which were the most noticeable topicality of the painting but the reference to the Prince Albert affair.

Britain was to enter the Crimean War in alliance with Napoleon III, and it was this alliance between France and Britain which seems to be the main topicality referred to by Solomon in *A Contrast*. Britain and France had been enemies since the middle ages and the French Revolution in France had produced the ultimate bogey man for the English in the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte. So, it was a surprise to many British to find themselves in alliance with the French and in particular with Napoleon’s nephew Napoleon III. Henry Fielding had written of the French, and the title of his ballad was used by Hogarth. The French were seen as effete and untrustworthy in contrast to the manlier and direct roast-beef eating English, a simple dichotomy of masculine and feminine national characteristics:

¹⁷ David Cooper, “The Don Pacifico Debate,” in Michael Scott-Baumann, ed. *Years of Expansion Britain 1815-1914* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), 199.

But since we have learnt from all-vapouring France
To eat their ragouts as well as to dance,
We're fed up with nothing but vain complaisance
Oh! the Roast Beef of Old England,
And old English Roast Beef!¹⁸

In *A Contrast*, Britannia is personified by Queen Victoria, her war chariot has been transformed into a wheel chair. She has been handicapped by outside forces and she is overwhelmed by and literally “crippled” by the larger than life figures of the fisherwomen who symbolise the threat of French power. The figure of the little boy and his captive crab can be seen to represent the uncertainty of putting trust in the scheming French. But the pressing problem is the danger of disloyalty from within the royal household and what seems most likely to be the source of the queen’s weakness comes from the figure of Prince Albert. He leans over her and appears to be whispering (dripping poison) in her ear. The anxious lady in waiting has made a gesture of lowering her spectacles in intimation that she has dropped her guard.

Prince Albert’s position as royal husband had been difficult since the early days of his marriage. There had been few precedents of an English queen married to a foreign prince, particularly one who had fathered heirs to the throne. The cult of Elizabeth as the Virgin Queen was celebrated in nineteenth century England, through Walter Scott’s popular novel *Kenilworth* and Albert’s

¹⁸ Henry Fielding, *The Letter-writers: Or, a New Way to Keep a Wife at Home. A Farce, in Three Acts. As It Is Acted at the Theatre in the Hay-market* (London: Printed; and Sold by J. Roberts, 1731).

influence over the queen, was difficult to accommodate. As husband his role was to instruct and advise her, but as subject and a foreigner he must also obey his queen. This was not an easy balancing act and it was only after his death and her release from his influence in 1861 that the cult of Victoria as Mother-Empress and an unambiguous rule could be established.¹⁹ Both the public and the political-aristocratic class were aware of this inherent contradiction and were suspicious of Albert's motives as a "foreigner." Albert himself was fully aware of his position and when a rumour began in 1854 that he was conspiring to favour his German relations over the Crimean War he wrote to Christian Friedrich, Baron Stockmar:

All the gossip and idle talk of the last fourteen years', he wrote to Stockmar 'have been brought to light by what has occurred. Everyone who has been able to express or surmise any ill of me has conscientiously contributed his faggot to burn the heretic...It was anything but pleasant to me amidst it all, that so many people could look upon me "as a rogue and traitor", and I shall not be at ease until I see the debate in Parliament well over; they must be knocked on the head, and the disease radically cured.'²⁰

¹⁹ Roy Strong, *And when did you last see your father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (London:Thames and Hudson, 1978), 152-53.

²⁰ Stanley Weintraub, *The Uncrowned King: The Life of Prince Albert* (New York: Free Press,1997), 299.

The Prince Albert scandal of January 1854 came to a head on the day before the reopening of parliament when ‘gullible crowds gathered on Tower Hill to see Prince Albert and the Prime Minister committed to the Tower. Both were burned in effigy.’²¹ In Solomon’s picture a contemporary viewer might see a Prince Albert figure leaning over the queen using his connection as her husband to whisper in her ear and seeming to glance towards the paper in her hand and so reflecting one complaint—that it was suspected that he had access to the Royal correspondence and so might pass on state secrets. In this way the themes of sickness and suitability to rule in Henry IV are transferred to a French beach via the Prince Albert scandal. Visually this is also expressed by the threatening cliffs behind the English group.

Another topicality in this painting links it to the Crimean War and Prince Albert through the topographical setting of Boulogne. This is another of Solomon’s paintings where place and topicality must come together in any interpretation of the picture. In 1854 70,000 French troops had been stationed in Boulogne on manoeuvres in preparation for the fighting in the Crimea, to begin later that year. Emperor Napoleon III had been in Biarritz where he had been supervising the building of the Villa Eugénie and on August 27, 1854 came north to Boulogne to inspect his troops. This event was celebrated in an 1856 Royal Academy painting, *Ball at the Camp, Boulogne* by J H Thomas (fig.55), later engraved for the *Illustrated London News*. The critic at the *Art-Journal* noted the presence of the Boulognaise ‘alongshore’ fisherwomen in the Thomas painting; these are central to *A Contrast*.²² Napoleon was joined by

²¹ Weintraub, *The Uncrowned King*, 1997,301.

²² ‘The Royal Academy: Exhibition: The Eighty-Eighth’ *The Art-Journal* 18 (June 1, 1856) 171.

Prince Albert, who travelled from England, and represented the Queen.²³ For those viewers of *A Contrast* with a longer memory, they would recall that Boulogne had also been the site for the camp of the Grande Armée which had been stationed at Boulogne in preparation for an invasion of England at the beginning of the century. An enormous memorial column to celebrate this event still exists in Boulogne.²⁴ *Punch* magazine commented on this meeting between Albert, King Leopold of Belgium, and Napoleon III and published this little poem speculating on Albert's feelings:

I wonder what his thoughts were—that sad-eyed, silent man,
As alongside Boulogne's jetty England's royal steamer ran;
While with a king beside him, that adventurer was seen
Greeting, as Emperor of France, the Consort of our Queen?²⁵

Weintraub interprets this poem as evidence that Albert was seen to want to be King in name as well as fact and this was certainly what large sections of the public believed.

The topical references to Prince Albert and war in the Crimea were possible contemporary readings of the painting, with its incongruous collection of figures on a beach, and for contemporary observers some details would trigger quite specific associations between fitness to rule and the undue

²³ Weintraub, *The Uncrowned King*, 1997, 307.

²⁴ Kate Baillie and Tim Salmon, *France: The Rough Guide* (London: Rough Guides, 2001), 211.

²⁵ Weintraub, *The Uncrowned King*, 1997, 307.

influence of Prince Albert. All this was in the context of a popular war; the Crimean war had begun with public support; but the war was vehemently opposed by radical and liberal thinkers such as parliamentarians John Bright and Richard Cobden. Both Bright and Cobden spoke out against the war on the general principle that war was wasteful, pointless and bad for trade. It was this war which prompted one of John Bright's most famous speeches; the "Angel of Death Has Been Abroad" and by 1854 he was being proved right.²⁶

However, that still leaves the young woman sitting on a rock reading a book. Her position at the front of the picture suggest she is important to the painting and perhaps is a key to understanding exactly what is going on. She seems indifferent to the main action of the picture but her position facing the protagonists suggests she is, in some way, an audience to this little drama.

The repentant Mary Magdalene has been portrayed in European art as a young woman reading in the desert, she was said to have retired to a rocky and barren place to repent her earlier sins as a prostitute.²⁷ An example at the National Gallery in London is Antonio da Correggio's *The Magdalen* (not acquired until 1910) (fig.56). Her supposed earlier life as a prostitute gave rise to the nineteenth century use of the word 'Magdalen', Lynda Nead tells us, 'in religious and medical publications as a euphemism for the contemporary prostitute.'²⁸ Solomon's young lady is certainly reading in a rocky and barren place and perhaps the sandy beach can stand in for a desert. She does lack the Magdalen's traditional attribute of the box of ointment with which Mary was

²⁶ House of Commons, 23 February 1855.

²⁷ Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art, Vol. I* (London: Longmans Green and Co. 1906), 347.

²⁸ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988, 69.

said to have anointed the feet of Jesus. On the other hand, her symbolic association with repentance and transformation seem to suggest an element of change in this allegory of English and French relations. Anna Jameson tells the story of Mary Magdalene's particular devotion in France which strengthens the idea that this figure may suggest Mary Magdalene.

According to a Provençal legend, after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, Mary Magdalene along with Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and various other disciples were put on a boat and set adrift in a vessel without sails or oars. This story is recounted in Anna Jameson's popular book *Sacred and Legendary Art*.²⁹ And, as providence would have it, they were safely borne to the seaport of Marseille in France. Mary Magdalene preached to the pagan inhabitants of Marseilles and they were converted and she, her work done, went to live as a hermit in the desert near the city.³⁰

The cult of Mary Magdalene became widespread in France after this, and La Sainte Beume Convent built on the spot of the Magdalene's cave became a site of pilgrimage.³¹ But a more contemporary display of the cult of the Magdalene in France was the recent building of La Madeleine church or temple in Paris; Jameson says:

...La Madeleine stands an excelling monument, if not of modern piety, at least of modern Art...with a sort of pagan magnificence in the midst

²⁹ Anna Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, Third Edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1905).

³⁰ *Ibid.*,347.

³¹ *Ibid.*,350.

of a luxurious capital, and by a people more remarkable for scoffing than for praying. Even in the successive vicissitudes of this splendid edifice there is something strange. That which is now the temple of the lowly penitent, was a few years ago *Le Temple de la Gloire*.³²

Jameson alludes to the doctrine, presumably shared by other early Victorians, that the French were a confusing mix of both Christian piety and classical paganism. *La Gloire*, the ambition to dominate Europe associated with Louis XIV, was carried on by Napoleon, and was now revived by his nephew the present Emperor. Anna Jameson, who was widely read by artists and may have been known by Abraham through his sister Rebecca, may be a source for some of the ideas suggesting the Mary Magdalene figure as a symbol of reform in *A Contrast*. But she is also a composite symbol, not only suggesting reform/repentance through association with the Magdalene, but also of the contemporary concern for the influence of the novel on the minds of young women.

The young woman reading, in this setting a passive activity, is contrasted with the Queen Victoria figure who is writing or possibly drawing, and so the woman suffering from ill health overcomes her disability through industry while the young, and presumably healthy, woman wastes her health in idleness. Solomon returns to a theme from the railway painting *First Class* (first version) where the old man passes time asleep and the young people waste time flirting. Reading might be seen as idle pleasure, though this depends on the seriousness of the book; in this context viewers may assume that the book is an

³² Ibid.

all-engrossing sensational or worse a Realist novel. Kate Flint locates contemporary anxiety about the novel in relation to its effect on young women as does Julia Thomas.³³ Flint quotes from a medical journal which comments on the obsessive consumption of novels:

The author located the reasons for this mania as lying on the one hand within a wider ‘morbid craving for excitement’ which was liable to be found among ‘the idle members of prosperous communities’, and which was deliberately fed by those out to make profits from various forms of publishing;³⁴

Here the *Medical Critic and Psychological Journal* links novel reading, as does Solomon, with idleness and wealth, but we are in France and novel reading can have even more disastrous results for the young reader. An anxiety about the French Novel and, ‘the generic assumptions of its power to corrupt’ was ‘a topos familiar in Victorian reviews.’³⁵ This is pointedly illustrated by Augustus Egg who, in his triptych *Past and Present* (fig.18) paints a fallen woman, a wife and mother, collapsed on her own sitting room alongside a yellow-covered volume with “Balzac” written on the spine. We are left in no doubt that the wife’s downfall should be, at least partly, blamed on the malign influence of the French novel. Though Walter Kendrick suggests that is not so much Balzac’s

³³ Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

³⁴ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, 1993, 55.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

immorality as the fact of his immoral subject matter presented as Realism. He writes:

Balzac's unsavoury but convincing Realism put his early English critics in an unfamiliar dilemma. The goings-on in his novels were morally reprehensible, but the skill of their representation was undeniably masterful. One could condemn the former, but one had at least to acknowledge the latter... The most hostile critics... took Balzac's novels for unretouched pictures of France. They directed their outrage at the supposed contagion of French degeneracy.³⁶

Solomon's exploration of relations between Britain and France and allusions to the nature of sovereignty, the influence of the Prince Consort, to the dangers of the alliance with France, and the folly of the war in the Crimea is set out in an elaborate allegorical scheme, which would have been easily read by the contemporary viewer, particularly a viewer with a knowledge of Shakespeare. The quote from *Henry IV Part 1* tells viewers a lot of what they need to know about the picture. Through this reference they are primed from the beginning to consider monarchical legitimacy and the lottery of primogeniture. But in the next picture, *Waiting for the Verdict* (fig.1) there is no immediate lead-in quotation to the painting, and while *A Contrast* is striking through its mysterious grouping of disparate characters on an alien shore, *Waiting for the Verdict* seems much more direct in the use of sentimentality as a political tactic and plea for reform.

³⁶ Walter M Kendrick, "Balzac and British Realism: Mid-Victorian Theories of the Novel": *Victorian Studies* Vol 20, No.1 (Autumn, 1976),10.

Chapter Seven: Waiting ,1857

La Traviata, which is often seen today as one of the most sentimental of operas, when it was first performed was Verdi's most modern and most shocking work. At its British premiere in 1856 no translation of the libretto was available, no doubt in view of what *The Times* referred to vaguely as its 'foul and hideous horrors'; when a year later what became the Obscene Publications Act was introduced into Parliament, Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias* was flourished as exhibit number one for the prosecution.¹

(Anthony Arblaster,1992)

Mr. Solomon has produced a picture of real pathos, "Waiting for the Verdict:" and Barwell's "Adopting a Child" [(fig.57)] is another of a similar class. We may return to these pictures again: at present we only refer to them as illustrations of the effect produced by the recurrence to nature's teaching, in which the two great geniuses of the Pre-Raphaelite school, Millais and Hunt, have led the way.²

(William Michael Rossetti,1857)

The scandal of Dumas's novel *La Dame aux Camélias* which formed the basis of *La Traviata* ("the one who strayed" or "the fallen woman") was not just

¹ Anthony Arblaster, *Viva La Liberta!: Politics in Opera* (London: Verso, 1992), 229.

² "Royal Academy," *The Critic* (May 15,1857), 232.

the uncritical acceptance of her prostitution but the use, by the heroine Violetta, of a red or white camellia to indicate to her suitors whether or not she was menstruating. *La Traviata* premiered in London on May 24, 1856 at Her Majesty's Theatre to a storm of protest from the *Times* and other papers which did not mention menstruation but instead directed their criticism at the sympathetic portrayal of prostitution, and the public display of disease—Violetta suffered from consumption. Consumption itself was said, in an 1852 medical textbook, to have been caused by over indulgence in sex. “Of all vices, however, none are so apt to lead on to consumption as the unnatural or unrestrained indulgence of the sensual passions”.³ For the audience the whiff of decay and sexuality, Verdi's music, and the soprano voice was an irresistible combination. The notoriety of *La Traviata* fueled by press criticism led to huge audiences and by 1858 there were four productions of the opera in London.⁴ At least three burlesques were based on it including the amusingly titled *Lady of the Chameleon*. To add to the presence of opera in the minds of the first viewers of *Waiting for the Verdict* the opera house at Covent Garden had been burnt to the ground in 1856 accompanied by a great deal of press publicity.⁵ In its time *Traviata* was considered to be a Realist opera because of its preoccupation with more of less ordinary lives and the seedier elements of the modern world. But Realism was not universally admired. For example, critical responses to

³ Richard Payne Cotton, *The Nature, Symptoms and Treatment of Consumption* (John Churchill: London, 1852), 70

⁴ Robert Montemorra, "The Victorian Violetta: The Social Messages of Verdi's *La Traviata*," in Julian Rushton et al., *Art and Ideology in European Opera: Essays in Honour of Julian Rushton* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 233.

⁵ Henry Saxe Wyndham, *The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre*, vol. 2 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1906), 206-11.

Realism in the novels of Anthony Trollope are discussed by David Skilton.⁶ These took the view that Realism was merely reflective or reproductive, therefore not art in the fullest sense, and lacked the essential element of imagination and imaginative transformation.

The moment of high drama, which Susan Casteras has called the “defining moment”, when action was suspended in favour of a tableau portraying the narrative culmination reached its highest form in grand opera and melodrama.⁷ Arguably in *La Traviata*, the scene between Violetta and her lover’s father Germont is one such moment. It is this sort of suspended point in time we are shown in *Waiting for the Verdict*, a heightened emotional state inspired by theatrical performance. It is not only theatricality which links *La Traviata* and *Waiting for the Verdict*; both put women as victims and heroines at the centre of a dramatic predicament and both artists chose high emotion and death as a vehicle to explore conventional attitudes to women. This is romanticism transformed into Realism, in Linda Nochlin’s phrase, “unmediated observation,” by the heroism of everyday life.⁸

The female victim-heroine, an increasingly familiar figure by the 1850s, appears again in Solomon’s *The Flight* (fig. 19). *Mariana*, (fig.58) by John Millais is also an example of this type. The woman as victim has always been a feature of western painting, often virgin-martyrs or grieving mothers, but heroines had been less common. Possibly in response to theatre as the home of

⁶ David Skilton, *Anthony Trollope and His Contemporaries* (London: Longman, 1972),45-57.

⁷ Susan P. Casteras, *The Defining Moment: Victorian Narrative Paintings from the Forbes Magazine Collection* (Charlotte, NC: Mint Museum of Art, 1999).

⁸ Linda Nochlin, *Courbet* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2007),29.

the female hero Solomon's heroine, the mother, is enclosed in a theatrical space, using the then new device of the box-set. The family's gestures hark back to older theatre traditions, the mother expresses her pain through a stylised facial expression and wringing of hands which would be familiar to theatre goers. Two examples appear in fig.59 which show the possible derivation of the mother's hand wringing and the sister's gesture from the handbook *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Acting* (1822). The head-in-hand posture of the grandfather, a common theatrical pose, can be traced back to Albrecht Dürer's woodcut *Melancholia* (fig.60). Apart from the theatricality of gestures it is tempting to suggest that the disarray of the mother's hair and clothing refers to the Jewish ritual of *Keriah*, the rending of garments; the mother's blouse has been pulled open which hints at this.

Both Verdi and Solomon addressed a dilemma of many women's lives, Solomon's heroine and Verdi's Violetta have put their trust in men but have been betrayed, as much by circumstance as deliberately. Both artists focus on the complex paradoxes which arise from relations between men and women, in Solomon's case the mother's desire to protect her children increases her vulnerability and isolation, added to which Violetta's lover's respectability must be protected by her self-sacrifice alone.

The second quotation above, from an unsigned review, was almost certainly written by William Michael Rossetti, brother of Dante Gabriel. Rossetti claims Solomon's painting for Pre-Raphaelitism; as a picture "inspired by nature", in the manner of Hunt and Millais. This is ironic given Ruskin's insistence that *Waiting for the Verdict* was absolutely not a Pre-Raphaelite painting, and led him to dismiss it as rubbish. Had the painting been shown in the 1840s it might have been seen that the picture owed a great deal to the stagey moral tales of the eighteenth-century French painter Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805). However, the 1850s context meant that Solomon's most

successful painting was considered with reference to Pre-Raphaelitism. Largely uncommented upon was the new Realism of subject matter and the changing portrayal of women in the arts. In the year prior to *Waiting for the Verdict* Solomon was exploring other aspects of women's lives, he showed two pictures at the Royal Academy, *The Bride* (fig. 61) and *Doubtful Fortune* (fig.30). *The Bride* contrasts, among other things, the pleasure and self-absorption of a pretty bride with the servility and envy of a yet unmarried seamstress who, in the language of the time, is 'redundant'. The highly detailed observation of lace, flowers posies, and embroidery of the wedding dress reflects the bride's superficiality in contrast to the honest simplicity of the seamstress's plain grey dress. This is a variation on still-life vanitas paintings which uses the older woman to symbolise the transience of life. The passage of time is also indicated by mirrors, a cheval looking-glass and draped dressing table mirror in the background, a mirror indicates the unmediated presents—a fundamental of Realism. This picture refers to the 'spinster question', a contemporary social problem which arose as a response to a finding of the 1851 National Census that revealed a surplus of 400,000 'redundant' women in England and Wales.⁹ Although written in the 1860s William Greg's book sums up this ongoing problem:

...there is an enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation, a number quite disproportionate and quite abnormal; a number

⁹ Charles M. Willich and E. T. Scargill, "Tables Relating to The State of The Population of Great Britain at The Census of 1851, With a Comparative View, at the Different Ages, of The Population of France; Also a Comparative Return of Births and Deaths, 1838-1854," *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 21, no. 3 (September 1858).

which, positively and relatively is indicative of an unwholesome state...¹⁰

Doubtful Fortune (fig.30), while also alluding to the passage of time, more straightforwardly refers to the craze for mesmerism and spiritualism which swept Britain in the 1850's.¹¹ Telling fortunes, usually on the topic of love and marriage was associated with gypsy women and this picture may recall a scene in *Jane Eyre* (1847) when Mr Rochester dresses as a gypsy to tell Jane's fortune.¹² Both paintings highlight Solomon's use of topical events as picture subjects, and his preference at this time for the female hero. Men are absent from these domestic scenes and although clothes and fashion predominate there is an overwhelming sense of women in control of the home and as a powerful presence, something which continued with Solomon's major work of the following year.

In 1857, Solomon showed his most successful (and through reproduction) his most widely disseminated image, *Waiting for the Verdict* (fig.1). He reduced narrative to an absolute minimum, though there is enough information for the viewer to imagine something of the situation. It seems that the husband and father of the family has been sent to trial and in an ante chamber of the court the family waits for the verdict. We don't know what he is

¹⁰ G William R. Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London: N. Trübner, 1869),5.

¹¹ R. A. Gilbert, *The Rise of Victorian Spiritualism* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

accused of but the judge in red robes suggests a capital crime. The painting appeals to viewers' empathy for the waiting family, particularly the central figure of the mother, who are portrayed as poor but deserving. The novelty of *Waiting for the Verdict* is that the viewer is not asked to consider the fate of the man in the dock, the unseen father/husband, but all sympathy is directed to the wife and children. For a contemporary audience that fate would be quite clear. Following a guilty verdict, they would be separated and sent to the workhouse, the cold, hard interior of the ante-room refers to the harshness of workhouse incarceration. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, 1838, with its portrayal of the workhouse, was a popular novel throughout the nineteenth century. In 1850 Dickens published *A Walk in a Workhouse* which similarly portrayed the horrors of the workhouse. The Workhouse Visiting Society was founded in 1858 to try to ameliorate some of the injustices of the system so the threat of the workhouse was very topical.

Waiting for the Verdict was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1857, and is now usually associated with, what became a pendant, *Not Guilty/The Acquittal* (fig.29) — commissioned by the original purchaser. The second painting was exhibited on its own at the Royal Academy in 1859. *Waiting for the Verdict* was originally intended by Solomon as a stand-alone picture and was treated as such for its first few years and so, in this study, it will be discussed as a standalone work of art.

The scene is an outer room of a court house where a family are waiting for the verdict in a trial involving the husband of the central female figure. The viewer is brought close to the action as if occupying the same space. This closeness between viewer and scene is a device which Solomon used on a number of occasions to heighten empathy or inclusiveness; noticeably in *The Flight* (fig.19). The viewer is drawn into the painting and placed close, almost uncomfortably close, to the centre of the action by the figure of the grandfather

who represents despair—in counterbalance to the defiance of the mother. A contemporary viewer could easily decode the family situation through their clothing. The grandmother and younger woman with their simple shawls, the mother with her manufactured paisley shawl, all three women wear ordinary dresses in plain colours and slightly out of fashion—no crinolines or padded underskirts here. The mother’s half bonnet lies by her side, its entirely undecorated state begins to suggest a non-conformist or puritan influence—certainly respectability. The grandfather and grandson’s hobnail boots suggest practicality rather than fashion. These boots may have indicated the virtue of manual labour and religious non-conformity (through plainness of dress) to a contemporary viewer. This rural family have travelled to either London or some provincial assizes to attend this trial. The *Liverpool Mercury* writes ‘they are decently-attired folks and appear to have come to the assize town from some country village.’¹³ The large basket indicates a journey, the sleeping child certainly indicates exhaustion, but tellingly has picked wild flowers, field poppies and perhaps cornflowers, which suggest the family have travelled on foot across the fields to get to the court. The peasant family, in their highly charged emotional state, are contrasted with the courtroom scene in the background. The *Liverpool Mercury* noted in 1866 that:

¹³ “Waiting for the Verdict and the Acquittal” *The Liverpool Mercury* (Friday Aug. 17, 1866).

The grouping is very effective, and the anguish of those most interested in the trial is well contrasted with the stolidity of the usher at the door of the court and the air of busy absorption which reigns within.¹⁴

The court is absorbed in its business and the waiting family as the *Mercury* implies will make no impact on the wheels of justice, but Solomon seems to want us to consider what sort of justice is this which causes such suffering to the innocent family?

Waiting for the Verdict, with its closely observed detail made use of then current Pre-Raphaelite techniques and finish, noted by William Michael Rossetti above. The face of the mother which Solomon places at the centre of the painting is, as with Holman Hunt's fallen mistress the focus of the picture. Both women are 'real' rather than symbolic representations of "fortitude" or "innocence" and both women are simultaneously victims and heroines, like Verdi's Violetta. It is one of the achievements of mid-nineteenth century art to combine the heroic and the everyday and to use that insight in the portrayal of women.

Solomon's intense observation permeates the entire picture. In the depiction of the old man and the sleeping child it should be possible to count the individual hairs on their heads. The wild flowers abandoned on the pavement are a masterful still life in themselves. They are reminiscent of the bouquets presented to young female travellers which are seen in *First Class* (fig.8) and *The Diligence* (fig.14) and so comment on the simple honesty of this family. Solomon is perhaps making a classical allusion in referring to the 'unswept floor' mosaic by Heraclitus which had been discovered as recently as the

¹⁴ Ibid.

1830s.¹⁵ The depiction of detritus aesthetically transformed by the act of painting is an idea which runs through much of Solomon's art and is a key component of his Realism. The viewer is asked to look again at the normally disregarded. This aesthetic may not simply apply to the bunch of flowers on the pavement, the figures are all dressed in old clothes which may have looked to the contemporary eye as little more than a pile of rags. The abandoned bunch of flowers also acts in a traditional symbolic sense to highlight the innocence of the child with the paved floor symbolising the intractability of justice.

Solomon's painting centres on the depiction and aestheticisation of the everyday and the importance of a Realistic representation of the present as a means of prompting the viewer to really "see" the world. This intense observation also encourages the viewer to bring to mind the topical. Even such a simple depiction as the oak panelling of the room might have invoked for the contemporary viewer a topical reference; popular taste and preoccupations are never too far away and here they contribute to the accessibility of this work. The room in which the group are waiting is oak-panelled and the grain of the oak is painted, apparently intentionally, in Realist detail, a reference to wood-graining, an important craft in this period which made cheaper wood look more expensive. Subterfuge, concealment, and trompe l'oeil were all much admired in the nineteenth century in the same way that the representational skills of the artist were revered.¹⁶ The skill of wood-graining was much admired at the time;

¹⁵ The mosaic is now in the collection of the Vatican Museums. See also: Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 140.

¹⁶ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament: Illustrated by Examples From Various Styles of Ornament* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2004), 28. Jones, in

for example, the wood-grainer Thomas Kershaw became internationally famous after he exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851.¹⁷ For contemporary viewers the large area of panelling may have been a reminder of their own domestic “faux bois” panelling or simply appealed to a taste for *trompe-l'œil* in painting but it may also have recalled Kershaw and his mastery of the skill.¹⁸ Solomon’s depiction of oak with its association with a ‘hearts of oak’ Britishness has other nationalistic connotations associated with the state, but the overriding simplicity of the room mostly symbolises the starkness of the verdict and the situation and may be a direct appeal, for once, to an audience who favoured the plainness of the practical rather than the prettily decorative.

The *Art Journal* gave a positive review, and admired the conciseness of the picture:

Proposition 35 declares wood-graining to be “allowable only when the employment of the thing imitated would not have been inconsistent”.

¹⁷ The Thomas Kershaw Collection can be seen at The Bolton Museum and Art Gallery.

¹⁸ An interesting review of Moxon, *The Grainer’s Guide* was published by The Mechanics’ Magazine, Register, Journal, and Gazette. Jan 1st-June 25, 1842. Vol XXXVI, 245. See also. W. Towers, T. J. Towers, and Joseph Colwell, *Every Man His Own Painter: Or A Complete Guide to Painting and Graining: Containing General Instructions in the Art of Preparing, Compounding, and Applying All Kinds of Paints, and Making Various Varnishes for House, Chair, and Furniture Painting and Graining: Also a Treatise on the Art of Imitating Fancy Woods and Marbles, with the Most Approved Method of Preparing the Ground and Graining Colors ; Both for Oil and Distemper, as Practised by the Authors and the Most Celebrated Grainers in Europe: To Which Are Added Concise and Excellent Instructions and Receipts for Preparing and Applying the Varied Descriptions of Distemper Colors for Walls.* (Utica: Printed by J. Colwell., 1830).

The despair of the father, the bitter grief of the wife, the unspeakable distress of the mother, are set forth in terms the most touching. Every portion of the canvas teems with expression contributive to the theme.¹⁹

The *Art Journal* is presumably referring to the faithful dog, the innocence of both children, the expression of despair on the mother's face and even the steps, representing the difficulty going up to the court room, and the progression of justice, and onwards to the red-robed judge. An earlier part of the review of the 1857 Royal Academy Exhibition by the *Art Journal*, and this seems relevant to *Waiting for the Verdict*, concerns the use of photography. The reviewer states, in a general discussion of the then state of British Art:

Photography has done much for Art in the smaller works—it is recognisable everywhere in small landscapes, and small figure pictures; the finish of some of these is beyond all praise.²⁰

There is no evidence that Solomon used photographs to paint this picture, though there is a suggestion of the distorted perspective sometimes seen in photographs. The figure of the grandfather appears overlarge and is reminiscent of the unusual perspective that photographs produce. Overall the image seems composed from different perspectives, the viewer directly faces the mother, but the grandfather appears is seen from a different viewpoint. It is as if created

¹⁹ “The Exhibition of The Royal Academy,” *The Art Journal* (30, Jun. 1857), 174.

²⁰ “The Exhibition of The Royal Academy,” *The Art Journal* (30, Jun. 1857), 165.

from a collage of images such as Oscar Gustave Rejlander's *The Two Ways of Life* completed in the same year (fig.62). The arrested gesture of the sister as a frozen moment suggests what photography was to become later in the century. Although cameras were slow at this time, photographs of real-life action, had appeared in the war photography of the Crimean War (fig.63). Solomon did experiment with photographs, he copied a daguerreotype of the Duke of Wellington early in his career (fig...?) and the evidence of his own carte de visites suggests a familiarity with the medium. Two photographs from a single session survive (fig.64) and they show Solomon experimenting with different poses. The first to represent himself as a serious artist and the second in a more relaxed pose of a bohemian. This appears to be a self-consciously modern attempt to manipulate his image through the medium of photographic portraiture. Whether or not photography directly contributed to the painting, the images of individuals caught in time reflect an aesthetic where descriptive Realism, "unmediated observation", photography, and theatre meet.

Waiting for the Verdict was much admired by the critics though a slightly disapproving comment came from *The Critic* who thought it 'too painful to be often looked at.'²¹ This reveals the underlying assumption of critics at the time and perhaps a view shared by the art-public that a painting was expected to be a domestic wall decoration or an object of home furnishing which had to pass a test of habitability before it was acceptable. It is this "painfulness" which was one objection to the Realist novel.²² The same objection did not apply to monochrome engravings and thousands of engravings

²¹ "Art and Artists: Royal Academy." *The Critic*, June 1, 1857, 255.

²² David Skilton, *Anthony Trollope and His Contemporaries* (London: Longman, 1972). 58-69.

of *Waiting for the Verdict* were sold: "Copies of the print may often still be seen in cottage homes and in inns, although it was painted as long ago as 1857."²³ Prints were immensely popular, not just those transcribed from Solomon's paintings. Between 1847 and 1894 one hundred and twenty-six different print sellers had registered with the Printsellers Association, and the number of plates declared through that association during the same period totalled 4,823."²⁴

A contemporary viewer would probably have expected to see an image such as *Waiting for the Verdict* in a "penny dreadful" or the *Illustrated London News* rather than the walls of the Royal Academy. Illustrations such as those by George Stiff for *The Mysteries of London* or for his own paper *The London Journal* were often lurid and dramatic (fig.65). *The Mysteries of London* and its sequel *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (1844-1856) has been described as the longest and most successful novel of the nineteenth century though it was published in weekly self-contained parts and would have been experienced by its first readers as a series of independent but loosely connected stories.²⁵ Unlike Solomon's works, Stiff's illustrations rarely attempted to fully convey the extreme anguish sometimes expressed in the text of *The Mysteries of London*:

O dear! The wretched woman sate [sic] up in bed and rocked herself to and fro as she spoke. She was frightfully altered. Thin and emaciated,

²³ George Charles Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends* (London: J. Lane, 1919),156.

²⁴ Hilary Beck, *Victorian Engravings* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1973),10.

²⁵ Anne Humpherys, "The Geometry of the Modern City: G. W. M. Reynolds and "The Mysteries of London,"" *Browning Institute Studies* 11 (1983), 69-80.

she was worn almost to a skeleton—not by remorse for the crimes she had committed—but with horror at the incessant contemplation of the penalty she would soon have to pay for them. There was something fearful in the expression of her countenance: she seemed like a starved tiger-cat that could have sprung at anyone approaching...²⁶

This woman might almost be the mother in Solomon's painting though Reynolds asks the reader to sympathise with her because of her suffering and her situation despite her known guilt; something that may not have been acceptable to the Academy audience. In Solomon's painting the issue of the mother's innocence is implied but these penny stories were a little more cynical about crime, guilt and innocence than "conventional" morality. In one story prisoners discuss the prospects of a guilty verdict which they attach, not to justice, but to corruption and bribery:

"Ah! And what's worse still," added his informant," is that the Old Baily juries [sic] always, as a matter of course, convict those poor devils who have no counsel." "And this is the vaunted palladium of justice and liberty!"²⁷

²⁶ George W M Reynolds, *The Mysteries of the Court of London* (John Dick: London, 1850), Vol VIII, Vol II Fourth Series, 44.

²⁷ George William McArthur Reynolds, *The Mysteries of London* (London: G. Vickers, 1846), Vol 1 ,69.

Reynolds portrays London as a series of contrasts, “The most unbounded wealth is the neighbour of the most hideous poverty; the most gorgeous pomp is placed in strong relief by the most deplorable squalor; the most seducing luxury is only separated by a narrow wall from the most appalling misery.”²⁸ This is a device used by Solomon which is at its most marked in the later painting *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig.6). Unlike Solomon, Reynolds overtly targets the power and corruption of the aristocracy who directly oppress the poor while the middle classes as a group do not feature except as dupes and lackeys of the nobility.²⁹

General viewers of whatever class would certainly recognise penny novel or popular fiction elements in Solomon’s picture, even though these novels were supposedly only directed at a literate lower-class readership. Alongside the visual/verbal correspondences between the two art forms Solomon’s painting would be viewed as allied ideologically to the penny novel’s commitment to equality. The populist agenda is laid out very clearly, in suitably purple prose, in the epilogue to Volume I of *The Mysteries of London*:

For we have constituted ourselves the scourge of the oppressor, and the champion of the oppressed: we have taken virtue by the hand to raise it, and we have seized upon vice to expose it; we have no fear of those who sit in high places; but we dwell as emphatically upon the failings of the educated and rich, as on the immorality of the ignorant and the poor. We invite all those who have been deceived to come around us, and we will unmask the deceiver; —we seek the company of them that drags the

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Humpherys, *Geometry of the City*, 1983,73.

chains of tyranny along the rough thoroughfares of the world, that we put the tyrant to shame; —we gather round us all those who suffer from vicious institutions, that we may expose the rottenness of the social heart.³⁰

The association by viewers with penny novels such as *The Mysteries of London* suggests Solomon's painting would have been understood as a more radical demand for change than it might at first seem. This is a good example of the ways in which Solomon's art, and this is probably true of other art of the period, needs to be seen systemically. Images such as *Waiting for the Verdict* reinforced and were reinforced by ideologies presented in penny dreadfuls, opera, pantomimes, and other art forms such as the more conventional novels of Elizabeth Gaskell. It seems that at this particular moment in the mid-Victorian period demands for change were more accepted as the purpose of both art and popular entertainment, although their symbiotic coexistence, it might be argued, was not to outlast the century.

One topical event which would have been very much alive in the minds of contemporary viewers of *Waiting for the Verdict* in 1857 was the trial of William Palmer in 1856. The Palmer trial was possibly the most famous of the century and throughout the trial *The Times* reported daily from the courtroom.³¹ Charles Dickens wrote about Palmer, the poisoner, in *Household Words* as “the

³⁰ Reynolds, *Mysteries of London*, 1846, 415.

³¹ *Report of the Trial of William Palmer: For Poisoning John Parsons Cook, at Rugeley: From the Short-hand Notes Taken in the Central Criminal Court from Day to Day* (London: Ward and Lock, 1856).

greatest villain that ever stood in the Old Bailey”³² Palmer’s story was used as the basis for Robert Graves’ novel *They Hanged My Sainly Billy* in 1957, so his fame lasted well into the twentieth century.³³ It was not simply the notoriety and topicality of the Palmer trial or the lurid details revealed in court which may have prompted Solomon to produce his own trial picture but at the heart of the Palmer trial was the question of how the criminal justice system decided on guilt or innocence. Palmer’s trial became a metaphor and analogy for changes in the criminal justice system in two ways which pointed to an apparently less arbitrary, more scientific model of justice. This was one subject of Solomon’s painting which powerfully challenges the apparent randomness of judicial verdicts when in the picture viewers are prompted to see the verdict as equally likely to be guilt or innocence, like the toss of a coin.

The Palmer trial was moved to the Old Bailey to safeguard the defendant from local prejudice in Staffordshire as the result of the *Central Criminal Courts Act* (1856) which recognised the problem of local justice and local juries. After Palmer’s trial the central authority was recognised as superior to local jurisdiction, as had happened with the *Poor Law* in 1834. Moreover, Palmer’s trial and the state’s case for conviction was based on scientific evidence of the presence of strychnine and so establishing reason and science as evidence of guilt over earlier ideas of judgement through virtue. We can see in Solomon’s painting a popular response and echo of this in that we are prompted

³² Charles Dickens, “The Demeanour of Murderers” in Frederick George Kitton, ed. *Old Lamps for New Ones, and Other Sketches and Essays, Hitherto Uncollected* (New York: New Amsterdam Book, 1897), 269.

³³ Robert Graves, *They Hanged My Sainly Billy: The Life and Death of Dr. William Palmer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957).

to hope for a not-guilty verdict on the basis of the family's virtue and respectability rather than material evidence.

Another source of topical interest in the trial process as a dramatic metaphor of society was Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*. Such was the success of the novel that two editions were published in 1854.³⁴ Again its popularity was a reflection of public interest in the criminal justice system, an interest which arose from anxieties about the modern urban world perhaps, or a reflection of a popular appetite for scandal, or an unconscious search for a moral framework to reflect a decline in religious certainties. *Mary Barton*, a Realist novel, made authentic by its use of Lancashire dialect, was set in Liverpool and like *Waiting for the Verdict* featured the trial of an innocent man and included a scene with the eponymous heroine anxiously waiting for the verdict. *Mary Barton* was not simply a sensation novel demanding an emotional and sentimental response, though that was part of its popular appeal, but like *Waiting for the Verdict* had a broader political message about social justice. Lisa Surridge argues that: "Gaskell draws on Chartist discourse which represented working-class manhood as being under threat".³⁵ Chartists had argued that economic power was linked to manliness:

What does it mean to be a father and not be able to feed one's child?

What does it mean to be a man when one's child feeds the family?

³⁴ E.C Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (London:Chapman and Hall,1854) Fourth Edition, E C Gaskell, *Mary Barton, With Two Lectures on the Lancashire Accent by the Rev.W.Gaskell* (London: Chapman and Hall,1854), Fifth Edition..

³⁵ Lisa Surridge, "Working-Class Masculinities in "Mary Barton,"" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 28, no. 2 (2000), 332.

When one's wife feeds the family? In what does manliness consist when work is unavailable and/or control over work impossible? These, as Dorothy Thompson and Jutta Schwarzkopf observe, were key issues in the Chartist movement. And while numerous critics have noted that *Mary Barton* gives the six points of the Charter short shrift, it is equally noteworthy that the novel vividly represents these crucial Chartist issues surrounding home, work, and masculinity. The text is filled with working class voices speaking urgently about the nature of work and family life in the new industrial age.³⁶

This idea of emasculation by which the independent rural worker, here the grandfather, had his authority removed as he became a servant to the factory and a slave to time is alluded to by Solomon, if only by the word 'waiting' in the picture title. Waiting in itself is a form of disempowerment and this is reflected in the figure of the grandfather who sits in despair while the lawyers busy themselves. Solomon's picture echoes Surridge's view of *Mary Barton* in the portrayal of the only two male members of the family. The grandfather's slumped figure seems to sum up this defeated masculinity which Surridge identifies with Chartist concerns; he cannot take up the role of breadwinner, a source of his masculinity, because he is too old to replace his son as head of the family. The fact that his grandson seems to mimic his pose suggests that the two are joined in defeat, that this indeed is, not just a crisis of his own

³⁶ Ibid.

In this quotation Surridge refers to: Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1984), 114-15. Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 3,6,7,39-45.

masculinity but is a crisis of masculinity which affects the whole family. The absent figure of the father, and it is his absence which contributes an emotional focus to the picture, has his feelings transmitted through the figure of the grandfather and we can imagine that he is similarly demasculinised by this trial. In contrast the women of the family, despite their grief, present a strong united front—their defeat seems only temporary. The grandmother holds the baby in a way which seems to suggest her strength in contrast to her husband's despair. Her firm grip on the baby signifies her future capacity to uphold family life, whatever the verdict of the court. The mother in contrast to the grandfather is not isolated, she is surrounded and protected by the other two women while at the same time protecting her child. The pyramidal composition, derived from Michelangelo, of five ages of womanhood right in the centre of the painting further emphasises female strength and solidarity.

The William Palmer trial in May of 1856 ended in a guilty verdict and he was hanged on June 14, 1856.³⁷ The verdict was controversial because the evidence was mostly circumstantial, and medical scientific witnesses were unable to provide absolutely conclusive proof of death by strychnine poisoning.³⁸ The significance of the Palmer case for Solomon's *Waiting for the Verdict* was the popular appeal of the subject matter and viewers were primed by the Palmer trial to take an interest in Solomon's visual representation.

³⁷ *Report of the Trial of William Palmer: For the Poisoning of John Parsons Cook, at Rugeley, from the Short-hand Notes Taken in the Central Criminal Court from Day to Day* (London: Ward & Lock, 1856).

³⁸ Ian A. Burney, "A Poisoning of No Substance: The Trials of Medico-Legal Proof in Mid-Victorian England," *Journal of British Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 1999).

Especially attractive was a painting which expressed the uncertain outcome of a court case and the possibility of an unjust outcome and so the viewer's sympathy is engaged by parallels between art and real life. The father's innocence, though we do not know the verdict, is incontrovertible as far as the viewer is concerned, and is indicated by the sheer respectability of the family group. We are expected by Solomon to understand that innocence is a characteristic of the whole family not just of the father in the dock.

The trial of William Palmer was held at the Central Criminal Court due to the impossibility of finding a fair jury in Staffordshire because of the publicity given to the case by the local press. In order to do this an Act of Parliament, the *Central Criminal Court Act* (1856) was passed.³⁹ This change in the law which meant that trials, when the charges were considered particularly serious, would now be held in London and families would have to travel to London to attend the trial. This may explain the prominence of the journey to the court in *Waiting for the Verdict* expressed by a straw basket to carry provisions, and tossed aside bonnet, so there may be a suggestion here that the family have travelled to London for the trial as Palmer had done. The emotional disorder of the family is contrasted with the orderliness of the court officials and the natural folds of the women's dresses and shawls with the stone and unadorned woodwork of the room. Solomon uses the grid pattern of the floor, the wall panelling, and glazing bars of the window to situate the agitation of the family within a rigid and unfeeling framework thus emphasising their

³⁹ Ian A. Burney, "A Poisoning of No Substance: The Trials of Medico-Legal Proof in Mid-Victorian England," *Journal of British Studies* 38, no. 1 (January 1999).

isolation. This accentuates the sense that the family is out of place in a strange environment and forced to confront the unknown world of the state and the legal system.

The centralisation of state power and the interference by the state in family life were important questions for this time as the state encroached further into private life. The logic of individualism led to a distrust, if not hostility, to government interference into private life but at the same time this was a period when the state was expanding. Rebecca Solomon's picture *A Friend in Need* (fig.24) is one example of a reaction to government centralisation of welfare for the poor. Rebecca's picture, which also uses architecture to symbolise the monolithic state, suggests that private charity and outdoor relief is preferable to state provided relief and the workhouse. Even the Utilitarian John Stuart Mill who might have been thought to support a rational centralised British state was reluctant to support the present system because of the corrupt influence of the aristocracy, writing in his autobiography:

I thought the predominance of the aristocratic classes, the noble and the rich, in the English constitution, an evil worth any struggle to get rid of; not on account of taxes, or any other comparatively small inconvenience, but as the great demoralising agency in the country. Demoralising, first, because it made the conduct of the Government an example of gross public immorality, through the predominance of

private over public interests in the State, and the abuse of the powers of legislation for the advantage of classes.⁴⁰

There is something of this Utilitarian distrust of the British state in *Waiting for the Verdict*. Although the core of the family, the women, remains united, the husband has been removed physically by the trial process and the grandfather has been crushed by his inability to help. The state, as represented by the background figures of court officials is distant and indifferent, the most prominent court figure, a barrister, has his back turned. For contemporary viewers the workhouse that other great state institution of the time, loomed large.⁴¹ This would probably have been the ultimate destination for this family should the breadwinner be found guilty. The threat of the workhouse implied the complete disintegration of the family with men separated from women, and children separated from adults. At a time when notions of the family were being increasingly defined as a romantic union of man and woman and the family unit was defined by a mother and home maker with a husband as sole breadwinner, the spectre of the workhouse and its destruction of the family unit would have been particularly chilling. The poet George Fulcher writes of the agonising choice that a mother has to make about which of her children should be sent away, and Solomon's painting seems to echo this:

⁴⁰ John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, 7th ed. (London: Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1882.) 171.

⁴¹ "The Objects and Aims of the Workhouse Visiting Society", *Journal of the Workhouse Visiting Society: Workhouses and their Inmates* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, Jan. 1859), 3.

Her apron-folds close pressed upon her face,
Through which the oozing tears you still might trace,
And hear the stifled sobs, her frame that rent;
The Mother on her Husband's shoulder leant,
Till all her weak resolve again gave way,
'She would decide upon some future day
Which should be left, and which be sent away.⁴²

Though there is no direct reference to the workhouse, its presence is implied by the official indifference of the court and perhaps even by the plainness of the waiting room. This lack of decoration had strong resonances for contemporary viewers for whom a busy decorative aesthetic was important. Such was the importance of decoration, as inspiration and stimulation, that the Workhouse Visiting Society made one of their aims the introduction of artworks into the workhouse:

The gift of a few coloured pictures of sacred subjects has been permitted in some instances in the sick and infirm wards, and it has been cheering to hear the remarks of wonder and admiration bestowed upon them by

⁴² George Williams Fulcher, *The Village Paupers and Other Poems* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1845), 34-35.

those who probably not looked upon anything but bare white or brown walls for months or years;⁴³

It is not simply the spiritual subject of the artwork which the Society highlights but it suggests that the simple presence of a picture, or a decorative object to look at, has its own benefits. Solomon's picture is mainly a painting which comments on contemporary social problems, but it is also, in its moral message, a secular version of a religious painting, as the allusion to the Holy Family in the central composition suggests, and as such is a work of art which would have been valued as redemptive. *The Workhouse Visiting Society* writes that, 'we find encouragement for a hope that what was thus presented to the outward eye might lead to the healing and enlightenment of the inward soul.' This idea gives purpose to art as morally uplifting and Solomon's painting as a modern parable.

Solomon's articulation of popular concerns about the encroaching state and its assault on the family through the workhouse and the court is conveyed by choosing a seemingly blameless family which encompasses, not only the virtue of hard work, a devoted mother, even a faithful dog, but crucially a country family playing on viewers' nostalgia for a rural past. For those viewers there may have been a sense of parody of the paintings of rural innocence which populated the walls of the Academy. Here a rural family is transported to a more confusing urban world and prompted by this image of the potential downfall of this virtuous family, who are apparently innocent of any crime, the viewer must confront the fragility of what might have seemed solid and safe.

⁴³ "The Objects and Aims" *Journal of the Workhouse Visiting Society: Workhouses and their Inmates*, 7.

This turns on its head the usual portrayal of rural versus city life by implying the countryside may be more insecure than the transient life of the city. In this aspect Solomon's picture echoes, both a vanitas painting, and that eighteenth-century trope of the country innocent arriving in the city to be exploited by London pimps and whore masters. As can be seen in Hogarth's *Harlots Progress, Plate One*, 1732 (fig.66).

Waiting for the Verdict, such was its fame, as a painting, was imagined as a play which was first performed at the City of London Theatre on Jan 31, 1859, and was written, with the 'express permission' of Abraham Solomon, by Colin Henry Hazlewood.⁴⁴ The play subsequently toured America (fig.10). The pendant to *Waiting for the Verdict*, *The Acquittal*, was not exhibited until the Royal Academy Exhibition in June so Hazlewood may not have seen that picture. The play was subsequently reviewed at length in *The Critic*.⁴⁵ This combination of painting, theatrical interpretation, and review of the play, all supported by writing in the art press, gives an insight into how *Waiting for the Verdict*, a powerfully emotional, sociocritical, and unsentimental picture was transformed by its reception into a more sentimental, overwrought, and trite narrative picture.

The modern-subject picture when considered as a narrative picture was expected to give the viewer the task of filling in the detail of the story and in that way demanded a committed interpretative engagement through which the viewer had to complete the story. Although art critics have left a partial record

⁴⁴ Colin Henry Hazlewood, T.H. Lacy ed. "Waiting for the Verdict; or, Falsely Accused. A domestic drama, in three acts" in *Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays, etc.* Vol 99 (London: Lacy's Printing House, 1859).

⁴⁵ "The Drama", *The Critic*, 18, no. 448 (Feb. 5, 1859): 136.

of how they saw the pictures they rarely wrote more than a cursory few sentences about each painting. With *Waiting for the Verdict*, the narrative teeters on the edge of a clear resolution—guilt or innocence—but the viewer still has work to do. Narrative interpretations dominate and even paintings with an insignificant narrative element, such as *Waiting for the Verdict*, are taken over by an impulse to tell a story. In this way aesthetics, formal qualities, associations, topicalities, or allegorical interpretations are often excluded by modern scholars and Victorian writers:

Artists placed great faith in the Victorian spectator, and the increased interaction and collaboration between viewer and narrative often brought—and continues to bring—a painting to life. Instead of being contained within a frame, a narrative may reach out and vocalize to viewers and solicit their rewriting of an implicit script. The mimetic style and barrage of objects encourage a prolonged reading and a more careful look by the beholder at the things depicted. This process of looking is inherently active for the spectator, who ideally is the opposite of a passive recipient mechanically gazing at the surface of a painting. Victorian ways of looking were a combination of physical, intellectual, and social activity, all united in an intense encounter that utilized the powerful dynamics of the gaze to sustain a dialogue with a work of art.⁴⁶

Susan Casteras comes close to describing the process by which Hazelwood wrote his theatrical version of *Waiting for the Verdict*, but alongside a narrative

⁴⁶ Casteras, *The Defining Moment*, 1999, 14.

constructed from the visual clues in the painting the playwright needed to provide characterisation. Hazlewood did this by using stock characters from popular theatre in which the good are very good and the bad are very bad. In this narrative driven approach, the play is a complicated series of twists and turns designed to impress the audience with the ingenuity of the playwright's interpretation of the picture and elaboration of a story. A review of the painting in the *Liverpool Mercury* however suggests that art critics took a subtler approach than simply constructing a narrative:

In striking and most effective contrast to the attitude of the wife is that of the old man, who sits on a bench close by, completely bowed down with woe, and his frame betokening a languor which indicates that length of years and many have completely destroyed the elasticity which belongs to youth and rendered him unable vigorously to cope with a great trouble.⁴⁷

This version of the grandfather figure contrasts with Hazlewood's stereotypical portrayal of a farmer; there is perhaps a more sensitive characterisation, but there is only a small difference between the two in the desire to reduce the painting to a story.

The poster for the theatrical interpretation of *Waiting for the Verdict*, claims that it was written 'with the express permission of the artist.' Did Hazlewood consult Solomon about the play as the theatre bill suggests? Did

⁴⁷ "Waiting for the Verdict and The Acquittal," *The Liverpool Mercury* (Fri. Aug. 17, 1866).

Solomon's 'express permission' mean consultation over the writing of the drama? Probably yes. There is evidence in the writing of Henry Mayhew and others that theatre was a passion for Jews living in the City of London.⁴⁸ Thackeray claims that the Jewish young man at Sass's school, who is probably Abraham Solomon, made money from selling theatre tickets to his fellow pupils.⁴⁹ And Lionel Lambourne refers to a theatre bill for an amateur production in which the Solomon family acted.⁵⁰ The play was titled 'Time Tries All' and featured, Mr. A Braham, Mr. S.I. Meon, and Miss R. E. Bekah. So, it seems quite likely that Abraham, probably a theatre enthusiast, would have had some contact with Hazlewood about the interpretation of the picture and the writing of the play. So whatever changes in the perception of the painting brought about by the theatrical production might be just as much the responsibility of the painter as the playwright.

Martin Meisel has recorded the many nineteenth-century paintings that became 'realizations' or formed the basis of theatrical performances.⁵¹ These translations from two dimensional visual images to three dimensional theatricals can be understood, and Meisel tends to agree in part, as hybrid art forms by

⁴⁸ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968), II,127, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield, Herts.: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), fn 20.

⁴⁹ William Makepeace. Thackeray, *The Newcomes, Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family* (London: Smith, 1906), 180-81.

⁵⁰ Lionel Lambourne. 1962. "Abraham Solomon, Painter of Fashion, and Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist" *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 21. Jewish Historical Society of England: 274-86.

⁵¹ Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

which the painting stops being, at least temporarily, entirely a painting but becomes an amalgam of performance and image in the mind of the viewer. *Waiting for the Verdict* is a good example of this process; its initial reception was of a painting expressing a contemporary dilemma alluding to fear of the workhouse and it was seen as a painting expressing terror and fear. There are formal qualities of balance, composition, horizontality and verticality to be considered. And it is also a painting with an aesthetic appeal deriving from colour and pattern—and that elusive term “finish”. It is a painting full of references and topicalities, but the translation of the painting into a play began a process by which the narrative impulse of the theatre subsumed many of the qualities of the painting and resulted in a picture which became primarily something to be read. Via this hybridisation of the art forms of narrative theatre and Realist painting the picture became reduced to an illustration. This transformation was not simply a result of theatrical realisation by Hazlewood but also derived from the pendant *Not Guilty* (fig.29) which reconfigured the painting as part of a narrative sequence. I wish to argue at this point that *Waiting for the Verdict* became a narrative painting, that is a picture which was and is seen as fundamentally a narrative illustration and only incidentally a work of art. This reframing happened early on in its reception, and a similar process is probably true of many modern-subject paintings; Solomon may have wanted his painting to tell a story or he may not. This is to say that whatever the content of the picture he exhibited it would have been interpreted as narrative because that was the expectation of the time and in *Waiting for the Verdict* we have a clear example of this process of narrativisation. The question to ask is does it make any great difference that paintings were made into narratives almost as soon as they were painted? The process of narrativisation that can be seen in *Waiting for the Verdict* is a useful example of the extent to which meaning of a Realist painting becomes colonised by public expectation.

Hazelwood's imagining of the circumstances leading up to the trial combines tragedy, self-sacrifice, and love which are evident in the painting and betrayal, evil, and murder which are not part of the painting but were customary for a commercial play of the period. The family are Martha Roseblade, her husband Jasper Roseblade, her father in law Jonathon Roseblade, her mother Mrs Burnly, and two unnamed children of unknown gender. The younger woman from the painting is a friend rather than the sister of the painting, a chambermaid called Sarah Sawyer.

In the opening scene we are informed that Jonathan Roseblade had, in his time, been quite well off. He had unfortunately stood guarantor for a loan to the son of a friend, so he might purchase a sinecure as a collector of public rates. The borrower reneged on the loan, he was corrupted by the money but Jonathan became responsible for the debt. So, from the first, Jonathan's virtue is established, and we are told the source of his pervasive despair, the loss of his home. Not only did the loan corrupt the borrower but the money was intended to purchase a position as a tax collector, thus introducing the idea of corruption of the older world when sinecures were purchased. In this way the play is to a greater extent more morality driven than the painting. Despite the fall into poverty Martha maintains that this has brought the family together, in greater love. A steward to the Earl of Milford, Humphrey Higson, wishes to get hold of Jonathan Roseblade's remaining property, a small cottage and some land. Higson arranges for Jasper Roseblade to be accused of poaching; he is found guilty and fined. The only virtuous character, outside the family, Rev. Owen Hylton pays Jasper's fine. From this point all the wealthier characters are portrayed as corrupt, including Viscount Elmore who has caused the death of a naval lieutenant's sister. Viscount Elmore is murdered in the woods on the night of October 31st. The secondary title to the play is *Dark Deeds in the Woods* and it is set on Halloween night, which adds to the Gothic horror. Jasper is accused

of the murder, is tried at the assizes, found guilty, and sent to London to be hanged. Eventually he is reprieved but the men lose the relevant certificate and Jasper is finally rescued by Martha who has found the murder weapon in a hollow tree. The last words of the play are spoken by Jasper:

And may our sorrows teach others not to judge too rashly of the poor and friendless, but to look into our hearts and see what pity can be found for them, even as they themselves someday may stand in need of pity; therefore, with a trusting spirit that our trials have had your sympathy, and our joy will be shared by all, Jasper Roseblade and his friends with hopeful hearts are—Waiting for Your Verdict.⁵²

Within the melodramatic theatricality of Hazlewood's interpretation he has identified a reforming agenda in *Waiting for the Verdict*. Antagonism to the aristocracy is certainly there, but also, in the small detail of the loan, a general antagonism towards the purchase of sinecures. In the more modern psychology of character development the actions and behaviour of the main characters are related to previous experience, however tenuously, and not as the result of innate characteristics. The state, symbolised by the court, is unfair, uncaring, and inefficient and it is, in the end, the women who resolve the situation while the men are buffoons, not unlike *La Traviata*. This radical agenda is commented on by the reviewer at the *Critic*:

⁵² Colin Henry Hazlewood, T.H. Lacy ed. "Waiting for the Verdict; or, Falsely Accused. A domestic drama, in three acts" in *Lacy's Acting Edition of Plays, etc.* Vol 99 (London: Lacy's Printing House, 1859).

Nevertheless, the *morale* of the piece is perfectly sound: the sympathies are all with the honest but falsely accused lad, though the politics are decidedly democratic. The peer of the realm has a heart of adamant, the game laws are openly denounced, and the rich are warned that the poor suffer and are men.⁵³

The reviewer has no difficulty in recognising the democratic element in the play and by the extension the picture when he comments ‘Altogether we think Mr. Solomon may feel gratified he has given rise to so moving a drama.’⁵⁴ A reading of the play and the review in the *Critic* suggests that audience-viewers would have had no difficulty in understanding the political implications of the picture. This may explain the reaction to *Waiting for the Verdict* (the painting) when Solomon exhibited it in Liverpool in 1857.

In 1851 William Holman Hunt had won the Liverpool Academy prize, of £50, for his painting *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia From Proteus*⁵⁵(fig.67). Pre-Raphaelite pictures won the same prize on a number of occasions between 1852 and 1858 and Liverpool became ‘by far the biggest source of patrons and followers for the Pre-Raphaelites’.⁵⁶ This partiality for Pre-Raphaelite pictures by the Liverpool Academy had its part to play in the final closure of the

⁵³ “The Drama,” *The Critic*, 18, no.448 (Feb 5, 1859): 136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/preraphaelites/liverpool_academy.aspx

⁵⁶ Christopher Wood, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1981),77.

Academy despite its prominence in Liverpool from the 1820s.⁵⁷ “John Millais, Holman Hunt, and Ford Madox Brown each received the Liverpool prize on two occasions.”⁵⁸ By 1858 this resulted in a controversy in the public press involving Millais’s *The Blind Girl* (fig.68), Solomon’s *Waiting for the Verdict*, and a letter from John Ruskin and others. The prize for the best work by a non-Liverpool artist had been awarded to John Millais’ *The Blind Girl*. ‘The decision was only reached by a casting vote against another painting by Millais and Solomon’s *Waiting for the Verdict*.’⁵⁹ John Guille Millais in his biography of his father states that although *The Blind Girl* was awarded the prize ‘the public generally favoured Abraham Solomon’s *Waiting for the Verdict*.’⁶⁰ The full history of the dispute is covered by Christopher Newall in his essay *The Liverpool Art World*, which presents the disagreement as a dispute about the status of Pre-Raphaelitism, “battle-lines were drawn on the issue of Pre-Raphaelitism and its legitimacy as the acknowledged *avant-garde* art form of the day.”⁶¹ Newall is clear that, in his view, Solomon’s work was “conservative” in contrast to the ‘*avant garde*’ Millais’s *Blind Girl*.

Pre-Raphaelitism was presented, by the Liverpool press as more elitist and pretentious than Solomon’s art, and though William Michael Rossetti had mentioned *Waiting for the Verdict* as a Pre-Raphaelite influenced picture at the

⁵⁷ C.P.Darcy, *The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in Lancashire: 1760—1860* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1976), 57.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *The Tate Gallery 1982-84: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions* (London: Tate Publications, 1986).

⁶⁰ John Guille Millais, *The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais*, Vol.1 (London: Methuen, 1899), 240.

⁶¹ Christopher Newall. *Pre-Raphaelites*, 1981, 17.

Royal Academy, this was forgotten when it came to prize money in Liverpool. It was the popularity and accessibility of the Solomon painting versus the less popular and more obscure Millais which was at stake. The Liverpool art audience were demanding a democratic art in which the public had a role to play in definitions of “good” art, a right that had been exercised by the aristocracy for centuries, but this was not a battle to be won in the end. The idea of the *avant garde*, the power of critics, and the notion of the autonomy of art, all of which diluted the democratisation demanded by Liverpool, advanced in the 1860s. A letter from John Ruskin was sent to the *Liverpool Albion*, presumably with his agreement, by Alfred William Hunt a Liverpoolian Pre-Raphaelite artist and a protégé of Ruskin. In this letter (Appendix Three) Ruskin argues for two types of art, the good and the bad, and in doing so he does not dispute the validity of the Solomon painting as art. Bad art is the art that the public buys and has every right to buy: ‘let the Liverpool people buy whatever rubbish they have a mind to.’⁶² Good art, the most important to him, because it will survive into the future, is that art which is good and right, “there is such a thing as a real right or wrong, a real bad and good, in the question.”⁶³

Ruskin is quite certain in his elitist view of art, but he avoids the question of who should decide what good art or bad art is. He leaves that decision to the apparently more disinterested judgement of time. Ruskin’s problem is the representation in art of the present day. By arguing for the judgement of time he is able to bypass the general problem with Realism, that it is an unimaginative reflection of the present. Art of the present day is inevitably

⁶² Alfred Hunt, “Letters to the Editor”, *The Liverpool Albion*, Vol.30, No. 1,659, Jan 11,1858.

⁶³ Ibid.

transformed into the past; after a certain amount of time, an everyday life painting becomes a painting of the past. Once regarded as a painting of the past a present-day painting loses its relevance and meaning, so in effect by setting the terms of the argument he proves himself right. He had previously outlined his position in his defence of Holman Hunt's *Awakening Conscience*. "That furniture so carefully painted, even to the last vein of rosewood—is there nothing to be learned from the terrible lustre of it, from its fatal newness..."⁶⁴ Ruskin's objection is that paintings of modern life are ephemeral and will not after an initial topical interest survive the test of time. He fails to recognise that the oak panelling in *Waiting for the Verdict*, "so carefully painted", is just as symbolic as the rosewood he praises in the *Awakening Conscience*. Solomon's painting is humanist and political rather than Hunt's Christian allegory and this may be one underlying reason why Ruskin should ignore the obvious Pre-Raphaelitism of Solomon's picture. A more contentious explanation for Ruskin's attack on Solomon's painting was his antipathy towards the Jews. Ruskin had written in 1852 in a letter to his father opposing the reform of Jewish Disabilities and making fun of Benjamin Disraeli: "...we have achieved a parliament which is unoffended at a proposal formally to deny the Christian faith, and which can produce from its ranks no one fitter to manage our exchequer than a witty novelist."⁶⁵ (The witty novelist was Benjamin Disraeli) This is no convincing evidence that Ruskin was influenced by Solomon's Jewishness but there seems to be a pattern by which Solomon was knocking on the door of Pre-Raphaelitism, and indeed was painting in a secular Pre-

⁶⁴ John Ruskin, "To the Editor" *The Times*, 25 May 1854.

⁶⁵ The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. 12, 593, accessed December 06, 2017, <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/ruskinlib/Pages/Works.html>.

Raphaelite style, but he was rejected in large part because he was not a Christian. For Ruskin, no more an anti-Semite than the rest of his generation, the failure of Solomon is his inability, because he is a Jew, to adopt typological symbolism, to suggest that these depictions of the present day prefigure the future as predicted by the bible.⁶⁶ In Ruskin's view, had *Waiting for the Verdict* seemed to suggest the Last Judgement, or indeed the judgement of Solomon, then it might have been a greater work of art. Instead, like Solomon himself, it was too fully anchored in a non-Christian secular present.

In a letter not previously commented upon scholars, a Mrs Unwins, wrote to *The Albion* the following week in reply to Ruskin. The complete text of the letter can be read as Appendix Four.⁶⁷ Her views are just as forthright as Ruskin; for her Pre-Raphaelitism is arid, 'dry-stitch painting', and too literal, 'hair painting and hoof painting', a 'field in which every laborious idea may figure, in stipple and dullness.' There may also be a sideways reference to the female stitch painters (Miss Linwood, Miss Morritt, and Mrs Knowles) of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century who had great success with embroidered pictures.⁶⁸ She argues for an art 'in which large-minded and imaginative men can feel it is a pleasure to honour and labour.'⁶⁹ But perhaps the mysterious Mrs Unwins is not who she seems, the letter is almost certainly a

⁶⁶ George P. Landow, *William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

⁶⁷ Mrs Unwin, "Letters to the Editor", *The Liverpool Albion*, Vol.33, No.1660, Jan 18, 1858.

⁶⁸ Margaret Swain, *Embroidered Georgian Pictures* (Bloomsbury, USA: Swain Publications, 1994)

⁶⁹ Ibid.

“squib” and the author, Solomon or one of his supporters, has perhaps set out to lampoon Ruskin’s pomposity. One clue to her identity, supported by the encoding of names in an amateur playbill, reported by Lionel Lambourne, in which Abraham Solomon becomes “Mr A Braham” is that Mrs Unwins can be read as “Mr S Un-wins”, a typically tortured Victorian pun.⁷⁰ Mr S is Abraham Solomon and “un-wins” means, in the language of punning, to lose or didn’t win. This may seem farfetched but Victorian name puns could be very obscure. In Mark Lemon’s book of “choice anecdotes” this is listed:

On A Gentleman Named Heddy.
In reading his name it may truly be said,
You will make that man *dy* if you cut off his *Hed*.⁷¹

Victorian humour is notoriously difficult to translate and a piece like Mrs. Unwin’s may seem just another example of over-elaborate “literary” writing where an obscure word is preferred to simple English in order to inflate the social and intellectual position of the writer. Perhaps there was a real Mrs. Unwins whose speech was so garbled, but that seems unlikely. Mrs Unwin’s use of the word “irrefragable” may be simply a case of sesquipedalianism or a deliberately humorous way of making the connection between painting and poetry.

⁷⁰ Lionel Lambourne, "Abraham Solomon Painter of Fashion, and Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist," *The Jewish Historical Society of England XXI* (1968).

⁷¹ Mark Lemon, *The Jest Book; the Choicest Anecdotes and Sayings, Selected and Arranged by Mark Lemon* (London: Macmillan, 1888), 274.

Mrs Unwins parodies Ruskin's rather haughty language and, in this way, highlighted his arrogance—presumably she wants to emphasise the familiar presentation of Northerners and non-conformists as “plain speaking”. She does this by using a number of unusual words and phrases. First, she uses “contumely” meaning insolent and mostly associated with Hamlet's soliloquy “to be or not to be”, then she uses the even more obscure word “irrefragable” to mean an indisputable proof, a word associated with science and philosophy. With these two words she calls on Shakespeare and science as witnesses for the prosecution in a trial of Ruskin's arrogance. The phrase “ocular dictation” suggests the important method in Victorian schools of teaching by dictation and alludes to Ruskin's “schoolmaster” style. “Crow painting” refers, dismissively, to the birds in the background of *The Blind Girl* and “hair painting” to Millais's detailed representation of women's hair. “Dry stitch painting”, again dismissive, refers to the use of short brushstrokes by Millais as a way of capturing detail, a technique used more commonly by watercolourists. Solomon was also a stitch painter and he notably used the technique to paint the courtroom in the background of *Waiting for the Verdict*. ‘Stitch-painting’ may also associate Pre-Raphaelite painting with the craft of embroidery. Another telling phrase amongst this tirade against Pre-Raphaelitism is “laborious idler” to mean people who spend more energy avoiding work than the energy it would take to do the work. This is not a common phrase but was used at the time by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in their book of 1857 *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*.⁷² Mrs Unwins contrasts this more extravagant language with words which allude to straightforwardness such as “healthy”, “elevating”,

⁷² William Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens et al., *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* (London: Hesperus Press, 2011),3.

“honour”, “reputation”, “labour”, and “native”. Mrs Unwin, or whoever wrote this letter effectively challenges the notion that this is a dispute about art alone. The squib suggests that this is a debate about a world view in which the democratic popular is opposed by metropolitan elitism and does this by effectively making fun of Ruskin.

Unlike Ruskin, Mrs Unwin wants an immediate emotional connection to the work in front of her. She wants an art which has an instant appeal, it is not for her to wait for history to tell her what she likes, and what she likes is imagination, pleasure, honour and labour. These are what she sees, one assumes, in Abraham Solomon’s picture. There is the obvious labour in painting the picture, the story and setting are imaginative, there is an immediate gratification in viewing the picture (pleasure), and there is a clear moral message, (honour). Mrs Unwin sets up a definition and valuation of popular painting while Ruskin seems to argue, at least in part, that art, true art, can only be appreciated by specialists like himself or judged by history. Ruskin had already reviewed Solomon’s picture in his *Academy Notes*, briefly and to the point, ‘Very full of power; but rather a subject for an engraving than painting. It is too painful to be invested with the charm of colour.’⁷³ This dismissal of the painting, by relegating it to the lesser art of engraving, underlines Ruskin’s attitude to popular art, which should be found in book illustrations and pictures in journals such as the *Illustrated London News* and not in the academies.⁷⁴ Though, Millais, who Ruskin praises was experimenting with exactly these sorts

⁷³ John Ruskin, “Royal Academy Notes 1857, Vol 14.” in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903-1912), 114.

⁷⁴ This point is also made by Lionel Lambourne, *Victorian Painting* (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 139.

of newsworthy images in a series of drawings in 1853 and 1854 which culminated in his painting *The Rescue* (fig.4).⁷⁵

Millais' *The Blind Girl* (fig.68) shares the immediacy of *Waiting for the Verdict*. Both are centred on a precise moment, in Millais' painting a moment when the blind girl senses the beauty of the world and her sister sees the beauty of the double rainbow. In *Waiting for the Verdict*, the moment shown is the realisation by the mother of what will happen if her husband is found guilty. Both are meticulously mimetic, but they differ fundamentally in that the Millais picture seems a Christian or possibly pantheistic celebration of spiritual forces of nature whereas *Waiting for the Verdict* is entirely humanist-secular and with a political point to make. Mrs Unwin has no patience with this non-political and purposeless art of Millais, 'not a field in which every laborious idler may figure, in stipple and dullness, as an interpreter of creation's charms.' Mrs Unwin was to lose the immediate argument concerning the art which Solomon proposed—that art should have a political and humanist purpose; a major concern of Realism. Marx was to say that philosophers "...have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it".⁷⁶ One can see that, Solomon comes close to this ideal, but his art was to fall from favour—very quickly—and new styles of art which demanded a more aestheticized audience were to replace modern-subject painting.

A great deal was expected from viewers of Solomon's *Waiting for the Verdict*. They were challenged by ideas about female self-sufficiency, and were

⁷⁵Christine Riding, *John Everett Millais: British Artists* (London: Tate Pub., 2006), 30.

⁷⁶Friedrich Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (Union Books, 2009), Appendix, thesis 11.

expected to address references to popular literature, and debates about contemporary art. One final topical reference for 1850s viewers is suggested by Lynda Nead in her *Myths of Sexuality*. She highlights the influence of debates leading up to the passing of the *Matrimonial Causes Act* (1857) in her discussion of Augustus Egg's painting *Past and Present* (1858), a self-consciously Realist painting signified by the presence of a novel by Balzac, the arch Realist, played with by the children.⁷⁷ (fig.18) Although Solomon's painting does not refer directly to divorce, one theme of the picture is British state disruption of family life. State interference in the private sphere of the family by the usurpation of the traditional role of the church to control marriage both as a religious and civil union was one objection to the *Matrimonial Causes Act*, and a petition against the Bill was signed by 90,000 people.⁷⁸ The Bill was initiated by Caroline Norton who had campaigned for a number of years and published in 1855 *A Letter to the Queen*, a plea for justice for wives.⁷⁹ In the mid-1850s Daniel Maclise, the Irish painter, had chosen Caroline Norton to represent the spirit of justice (Justica) for a mural in the House of Lords (still in place). This seems to have been the model for the face of the mother in Solomon's painting. It seems likely that Solomon would have borrowed the

⁷⁷ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988,78.

⁷⁸ Gerald Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press in Association with the Open University, 1997), 93, Christopher Bethell, Lord Bishop of Bangor, *Remarks on a Petition To Her Majesty Praying her to Withhold An Order Of Council Bringing Matrimonial Causes Act Into Operation On The 1st Of January, 1858* (London: Ringtons,1858).

⁷⁹ Caroline Sheridan Norton, *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Maclise iconography in order to strengthen the image of the mother in this picture as a cry for justice. See for comparison (fig.68). Maclise has scattered on the floor beneath the feet of Justice a number of symbolic objects, legal documents, and a heart and acorns. This refers both to Norton's struggle and her poem *My Heart is Like a Withered Nut*.⁸⁰ In an echo of this Solomon has scattered at the mother's feet withered flowers and the child's hat to suggest both the absent father and a loss of innocence. The recognition of Caroline Norton as the woman in the painting by the contemporary viewer links both the topicality of the Matrimonial Causes Act and the political implications of *Waiting for the Verdict* and reinforces for the viewer that this is a painting which places injustice against women at its centre. It is this complex of references, from William Palmer to Caroline Norton, set within a Realist representation of an everyday present which seems to have attracted so completely the mid-Victorian public.

⁸⁰ Caroline Sheridan Norton, *The Undying One; Sorrows of Rosalie; and Other Poems* (New York: C.S. Francis &, 1854), 190.

Chapter Eight. Not Guilty: The Resolution ,1859

We have been informed and are gratified to pass on the information as we have it to our amateur readers, that the celebrated “Waiting for the Verdict,” exhibited in last year’s Academy Exhibition by Mr. A. Solomon, and which has deservedly attracted no small share of public attention, has at last found a purchaser. The very fidelity with which the painful nature of the subject was rendered by Mr. Solomon left the picture long upon his hands, but during the last few days it has changed owners. It has been purchased by Mr. Lucas, the eminent contractor, so well-known in connexion with the rebuilding of Covent Garden Theatre, who, *on dit*, has commissioned the talented artist to paint a companion picture illustrative of the light side, as “Waiting for the Verdict” is of the dark one, of a court of criminal justice.¹

(*The Leader*, 1858)

And so, the fate of *Waiting for the Verdict* was sealed, it no longer stood alone as a single powerful social critique of the British State, the Legal System, and the treatment of women but was to become its opposite, a validation of British justice and fairness. The companion picture, ‘*Not Guilty*’ (*The Acquittal*) (fig.29), was painted by Solomon and shown at the Royal Academy in 1859. Since that time the two paintings have usually been hung together, they were engraved as a pair in 1866 by W.H. Simmons and were hugely successful as

¹ “Close of the Exhibitions,” *The Leader* No. 435, July 24,1858.

prints. Graham Reynolds suggests that these engravings were some of the most popular of the mid-nineteenth century.² *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* in a review of *Not Guilty* highlights the importance of trial by jury to the English constitution and for British art, as part of “the pictorial resources of the British people”. The *Blackwoods* reviewer is dubious as to whether a sequel can live up to its original and emphasises the extent to which the paintings as a pair were now to be viewed as narrative plot and nothing else:

In English art the State naturally goes hand-in-hand with religion, and thus trial by jury has long been part and parcel of the constitutional faith and pictorial resources of the British people. Mr. Solomon’s well-known picture of a past year, “Waiting for the Verdict,” now finds its final issue in the companion work “Not Guilty.” This picture, sufficiently vigorous and telling, shares, however, the proverbial fate attendant on the continuation of a once-told story. The mind wrought into the threatening fear of a tragic doom, the plot once marshalled for effect, each repeated echo palls upon the ear, and what ought to end in climax necessarily falls into an expiring decadence.³

Other reviewers took the same view; *Not Guilty* was a disappointment and an anti-climax. The problem is that neither painting, as *Blackwoods* suggests,

² Graham Reynolds, *Victorian Painting*, revised edition (London: Herbert Press, 1987), 179

³ “London Exhibitions—Conflicts of the Schools,” *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 86 (Aug. 1859), 137.

contributes to the dramatic tension of the narrative. What was once a narrative that required the viewer's engagement and celebrated the role of the viewer became a story spoon-fed in a way which negated the active viewer. When viewed as two paintings which are linked thematically rather than narratively they are much more successful. This points to the difference between the literary version of narrative and the pictorial. The novel published in weekly instalments was free to move from one dramatic moment to another without the necessity of repeating a description of the setting and circumstances; that would be held in the mind of the reader. The picture pair in order to move forward, *Blackwoods* suggests, has to repeat basic elements of the story for the benefit of the viewer. So, for a story to progress pictorially the same people have to be described (pictured) twice, and in the case of *Not Guilty* the setting is also repeated. This seems to be a reasonable explanation why the purely pictorial drama can become repetitive and dull early on in a sequence of images.

The *Athenaeum* review of the Royal Academy was enthusiastic about the Solomon picture but the introductory remarks, again like *Blackwoods* indicate a general dislike of sequential storytelling in paintings:

Companion pictures are generally disappointing—second volumes do not always fulfil the promise of the first—the second glass is not like the one that quenched your thirst—a continuation has not the freshness of the original idea, and if it has, the spectator at least looks at it with a tired and critically anticipating eye.⁴

⁴ “Royal Academy,” *The Athenaeum*, 1644 (Apr 30 1859), 586.

One feature of this review is that the critic, possibly Frederick George Stephens, engages with the painting and invents a narrative, not wholly justified by the picture in front of him. In this way we get an insight into how a contemporary viewer might create a story around the image. The imagined version is several hundred words long, so I will only quote a fragment:

The man, awoke as from a horrid dream, is free and declared innocent. But five minutes ago, he waited, clutching the bar with clammy, quivering hands as the foreman rose in the jury-box, to listen to those awful words which the Angel of Death seems to whisper through the stillness of the hushed court.⁵

One significant sentence in this review includes the statement “the figures are a little over-fed, and the grandfather is a trifle like Daddy Hardacres.” This is a rare indication that a contemporary viewer might look for, and discover, topical references in a modern-subject painting. *Daddy Hardacre* was a successful play, written by J Palgrave Simpson, performed at the Olympic Theatre in March 1857 which featured Daddy Hardacre as an elderly miser.⁶ This was a conventional tale of love and romance which featured trusting country folk and scheming city dwellers, the reference to the play suggests that the picture was

⁵ Ibid

⁶ J. Palgrave Simpson, *Plays* (London: Samuel French, 1850).

being interpreted with reference to theatrical imagery and seen as a reflection of the topical.

Not Guilty, presumably in deference to Mr Lucas, the owner of *Waiting for the Verdict*, is not such an indictment of state interference in the family but instead celebrates the notion that “justice will out” and the family will stay together and be happy. The further centralisation of the legal system through the Central Criminal Act (1856) and the imposition of a national police system through the Police Act (1856) were possible topical influences on *Waiting for the Verdict* and these are hinted at in *Not Guilty*. This is mainly suggested through the little vignette in the doorway on the left of the painting. We see an open door and a little scene in which a man, presumably the false accuser, is pointed out as he leaves the court house. Jeffrey Daniels says of the depiction of this exit: “the open door leads to the freedom to which the acquitted man can now return.”⁷ The accuser is about to disappear into the safety of the city—portrayed in the background. One man, in a rural smock, points to him while another man tries to get the attention of an indifferent bailiff of the court. A woman clutches her baby protectively to her breast and glances anxiously at the departing informer while two barristers are walking away with their backs to the scene. Beside her is an elderly woman who seems to be clutching an umbrella which may indicate a hint of future woes—stormy weather. Above the group is an unlit lantern which may infer that the light of justice has been extinguished for now.⁸ This little group replicates, especially through the figures of the

⁷ Jeffrey Daniels, *Solomon: A Family of Painters* (London: Inner London Education Authority, 1985), 55.

⁸ The presence of the lantern may indicate the influence of Van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Marriage* on artists of the time. Alison Smith, *Reflections: Van Eyck and the Pre-Raphaelites* (Yale University Press, 2017).

anxious mother and the older woman, the emotional pull and physical poses of the first painting as if to maintain, for those who wished to make that implication, that nothing has changed. Justice will continue to be indifferent to the poor and rural lives will be exploited by the city.

In the central group the family is reassembled as a circle—literally “the family circle.” The top half of the circle is an arc of faces and the lower half is composed of the child’s comfort blanket and the mother’s “paisley” shawl. The mother’s shawl is likely to be a cheaper printed version of an expensive Kashmir shawl and would have been recognised as such. It is contrasted with the handwoven basket next to it. Both these normally disregarded objects are transformed, by Solomon’s aestheticisation of the everyday, seen before in his railway paintings; through the painter’s skill common objects become aesthetic pleasures.

Another subsidiary symbolic element is Solomon’s development of the footwear theme, begun in the previous painting. In *Not Guilty* the boots of the family are highlighted again in order to suggest honest work. In contrast the bailiff of the court is shown in patent slippers while the main figure of the barrister is shown with shiny black “town” shoes. This distinction implies a different type of labour and perhaps of an attempt by the barrister to escape the grateful grandfather, note the lawyer’s foot on the step; more indifference from the legal system. Here perhaps suggesting the expression “a step above”, the barrister seems eager to join his fellow lawyers gossiping in the background, and to retreat to the private rooms beyond. family. The law officers, who once seemed so helpful have moved on and are now uninterested, both to the trauma the family have experienced and to their joyful celebration. This seems to imply a legal system which operates in the interests of the lawyers rather than the victims of injustice. That topical idea had common currency ever since the

publication of *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens in 1853.⁹ The central story of *Bleak House* is a legal dispute over a will, the case of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* in which the lawyers profit entirely from the huge inheritance and the claimants gain nothing. Although it might appear at first that all is resolved we are given enough clues to realise that the family may not ever be released from the taint of the trial and false accusation. It is a false kind of freedom and only the father, who alone has experienced imprisonment, seems to understand this. He is anxious and thoughtful.

It is significant that Solomon uses looking and inspection to heighten the emotional effect of both paintings. In *Waiting for the Verdict* none of the family group look at each other and this is highlighted by the terrified inward gaze of the mother: ‘looking out straight before her with that vacant expression which shows she sees nothing but her husband in the criminal’s dock.’¹⁰ In *Not Guilty* the situation is reversed, everyone is gazing at each other, the people in the doorway are looking at the false accuser, a court official, now nonchalant, looks on at the man leaving. The family are all, with the exception of the sister, who is encouraging the baby, looking towards the father. Solomon uses circles of looking, groups of figures look at each other, in a number of his paintings. In *Not Guilty* the circle of looking within the family repeats a very similar circle of looking from *Second Class: The Parting* (fig.5), though, in this case, it is intended to achieve the opposite emotional effect, that of the heartfelt last look of goodbye. In *A Contrast* the figures in the painting mostly look intently at each other and in *A Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* (fig.13) the young

⁹ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1853).

¹⁰ “Waiting for the Verdict and The Acquittal” *The Liverpool Mercury* (Friday, August 17, 1866.)

woman has an absent look though we are reminded of the intense gaze of an artist. This may simply be the traditional absorption which figures often display in European painting as a means of denying the beholder. Michael Fried in his study of French eighteenth century painting suggests that absorption by actors in a picture excludes the beholder and adds a greater sense that the painting exists in a reality separate from our own.¹¹ However in Fried's study absorption by figures in the pictures he highlights—those of Greuze, Chardin, and Van Loo for example—is primarily connected with activities such as reading, praying, playing music, or blowing bubbles and so on. In Solomon's pictures the act of looking at each other becomes as a device to heighten emotion. With *Not Guilty* the mother and grandmother express their love, and relief in the verdict, by gazing adoringly at the son/father. Absorption is a necessarily element of the Realist approach in which viewers are intended "discover" these scenes rather than have them apparently arranged to be viewed.

In the doorway a mother clutches her baby protectively and turns to stare at the false accuser. This stare and the lesson to be learned from this identification of him can be linked to Benthamite theories of crime and its prevention. Bentham's theory of crime and crime control involved transparency and observation. This is best known from his idea of surveillance-architecture in his plans for the Panopticon, a prison system where the prisoner is always aware of being observed by a hidden prison guard. The question of prisons was topical in the 1850s and as recently as 1857 *The Penal Servitude Act* was enacted.¹² The

¹¹ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

¹² *Penal Servitude Act* 1857, Chapter 3, 20 and 21 Victoria. An Act to amend the Act of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Years of Her Majesty.

transportation of criminals to Australia was coming to an end and had almost ceased by 1859. This left the problem of what to do with a new class of prisoners to be housed in British prisons. This is referred to obliquely in *Not Guilty*. The power of surveillance, in Bentham's philosophy, was not to be left to the prison alone:

It were to be wished that every man's name were written on his forehead as well as engraved on his door. It were to be wished that no such thing as secrecy existed—that every man's house were made of glass. There would be less reason to desire windows to his breast. Actions are a tolerably adequate interpretation of sentiments, when observation has furnished us with a key.¹³

The pointing out of the accuser links Solomon's picture with Bentham's Utilitarianism. In his book *Deontology*, a study of the internalised knowledge that we have of right and wrong, Bentham gives five sanctions for not behaving morally, the physical sanction, the social or sympathetic sanction, and the moral or popular sanction, the judicial sanction and the religious sanction. Three of these sanctions appear most obviously in Solomon's court pictures. The physical sanction derives 'from the physical construction of man in general.'¹⁴

¹³ Jeremy Bentham and John Bowring, *Deontology; Or, The Science of Morality: In Which the Harmony and Co-idence of Duty and Self-interest, Virtue and Felicity, Prudence and Benevolence, Are Explained and Exemplified, Vol.1* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Browne, Green, and Longman, 1834),100.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

This sanction can be seen to apply to the fear of execution or imprisonment. Viewers see this particularly in the mother's fear for her husband in *Waiting for the Verdict*. The social or sympathetic sanction is concerned with the person's domestic and personal relations: '[I]f he is be a father, his children will, in the ratio of their respect for his opinions and practice, recognise his authority, and adopt his standard of right and wrong.'¹⁵ *Not Guilty* is an affirmation of this principle, the painting revolves around the restoration of family respect for the accused father and by the return of his moral authority the family is brought back together. The third principle, the moral or popular sanction, public opinion, is shown by the disapproval of the group in the doorway of the court house. Through the force of popular sanction, we can expect the false accuser to behave differently in the future, because he will always be observed. In Bentham's logic the false accuser came into being, in the first instance, because the world was governed by a public sanction with two different aspects, that of the democratic and that of the aristocratic. The aristocratic sanction had a different set of preoccupations from the democratic sanction. This aristocratic sanction, through its instrument the legal system, doles out justice in proportion to the defendant's status and so the poor, the lowest status group, are treated less fairly than the upper classes. Solomon's use of the virtuous but poor rural family creates the greatest social distance between the legal system and the accused father in order to illustrate the uneven application of the law. This system of sanctions laid out by Bentham are all dependant on transparency and observation which Bentham sees as motors of moral behaviour and self-control. His demand is for a society with a free press and without secrets, and his vision of a future society reads like a model for the modern-subject paintings of

¹⁵ Ibid., 90.

Abraham Solomon—everything is to be observed and recorded for the common good. *Not Guilty*, which displays an even greater attention to detail than its pendant, suggests the idea that a true depiction of the world, Realism in other words, can in itself alter viewers' perceptions and so effect social change:

A whole Kingdom, the whole globe itself, will become a gymnasium, in which every man exercises himself before the eyes of every other man. Every gesture, every turn of limb or feature, in whose motions have a visible impact on the general happiness, will be noticed and marked down.¹⁶

Charles Thomas Lucas, who commissioned *Not Guilty*, was the son of a builder and had been born in London from Quaker descent. The firm of Lucas Brothers, founded with his brother, was established in Norwich and the firm moved to Lambeth around 1855. He became a friend and advisor to Benjamin Disraeli on labour matters. He was created a baronet in 1887 and lived in London, Clapham, at Sister House and in Sussex at his country estate, Warnham Court. The firm of Lucas Brothers built, among many others, the Albert Hall, the Floral Hall, Covent Garden, the Royal Opera House, Charing Cross Hotel and Station, and York Railway Station and Hotel.¹⁷ Charles Thomas Lucas was very much a self-made man and fits the stereotyped image of the Victorian

¹⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁷ *Proceedings of the Institute of Engineers*, 1896, Obituaries. http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Charles_Thomas_Lucas (accessed May 12, 2016).

businessman, he was hardworking, and successful, and a man of influence. He acquired all the accoutrements and prestige of the landed gentry through his purchase of the estate of Warnham Court and became a man of fashion through ownership of *Waiting for the Verdict*.

Lucas' commission of a pendant to *Waiting for the Verdict* suggests a number of things—his motives cannot be certain, but it seems likely that, businessman that he was, he saw an opportunity to associate himself with the famous picture and promote himself both as a champion of the poor, perhaps even suggesting his own humble origins, and have the world see him as a family man. The paintings would have been hung in a prominent place in either of Lucas's residences as an alternative to the conventional rows of portraits of ancestors associated with aristocratic families. The presence of portraits in aristocratic homes had functioned to advertise dynasty and lineage for the aristocracy and emphasised continuity and rootedness.¹⁸ Portraits were still important to the new industrial aristocracy but some of their functions were being taken over by photographs; *cartes de visites*, for example, were more efficient at identifying the likeness of a subject to other people. For actors and politicians, the photograph rapidly became a useful form of self-promotion and the legitimation of photography was established, thirteen years after its invention by the foundation with royal support of the Photographic Society in 1852.¹⁹ Solomon was one artist who used photographs to produce portraits; this newly discovered watercolour, a portrait of the Duke of Wellington, attributed

¹⁸ Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in England, C. 1740-90* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ Noel Chanan, *William, Earl of Craven & the Art of Photography* (Halsgrove: Tiverton, 2006) 73

to him is a copy, of an 1845 photograph by the French photographer Antoine Claudet, photographer-in-ordinary to the Queen (fig.70). It is not clear how narrative and genre paintings were used to decorate the home, a painting by William Mulready, from 1832-3, shows the collector John Sheepshanks in his sitting room surrounded by paintings and portfolios, which may suggest their use (fig.71) but this is also an image by which Mulready aestheticizes the familiar domestic interior. Ruskin, rather snobbishly, has this to say in 1858; he is writing about two paintings by Ernest Meissonier:

They will be placed by their possessors on the walls of small private apartments, where they will probably, once or twice a week, form the subject of five minutes' conversation while people drink their coffee after dinner.²⁰

Ruskin's description implies that ownership of genre paintings was part of a range of signifiers such as furnishings, fashionable dress, and expensive food, which denoted taste and status. Unlike aristocratic households where pictures were probably displayed to underline lineage and permanence, paintings in these newer collections were expected to remind guests of the present social position of their owners. Often through a subject matter involving the less well-off they may have acted as a reminder of how far the owner had succeeded socially and financially. This was not always the case because in fact, major

²⁰ John Ruskin, *Complete Works* Vol 16, 213-214

collectors often came from privileged families.²¹ The content of everyday life pictures was more suitable for the message to be conveyed. The old aristocrats may have wanted to convey their historical continuity through classical and history paintings, but collectors of modern British paintings had an agenda based firmly in the present.

There is evidence that Lucas purchased *Waiting for the Verdict* in order to advertise his business and himself, both in England and worldwide. *Second Class: The Departure*, with its railway carriage plastered in posters, indicates the importance of advertising and bill posting to businessmen in the 1850's. Lucas gained publicity when he purchased such a famous painting and doubled the effect by commissioning a sequel. It was he who undoubtedly ensured that when William Henry Simmons published engravings of the pair that, in large letters, his name and address were featured with the words, 'Engraved from the original Picture in the Collection of Charles Lucas Esq. of Sister House, Clapham Common' (fig.72). This arrangement guaranteed that his name was known throughout the empire as the owner of these famous pictures and that he was a man of taste and discrimination.

Charles Lucas the builder perhaps fits one stereotype but a collector of Solomon's work of a different type is known and this was the accountant Robert Palmer Harding. Harding was given a knighthood in 1890 in 'recognition of his services as chief official receiver.'²² Harding owned *Le Malade Imaginaire*

²¹ *Pre-Raphaelite: Painters and Patrons in the North East* (Tyne and Wear Museums Service: Newcastle, 1990) suggests that patrons tended to come from relatively well-off backgrounds.

²² J.R.Edwards. *A History of Financial Accounting* (London: Routledge, 1989), 288.

(fig.73), a literary-narrative painting which was one of Solomon's last exhibited pictures at the Royal Academy (1861) and was engraved for the *Illustrated London News* for the June 22 edition. The subject was taken from the Molière play of the same title and pokes fun at 'the hypochondriac, M. Argan who is visited by his physician, Diafoirus.'²³ This painting must have seemed a little old fashioned at the time, the heyday of these sorts of pictures taken from literature had passed by the 1860s and the humour of poking fun at the hypochondriac, M. Argan, is a little laboured. However, from Dafforne's description the attraction of the painting seems to have been its colour and skilful use of paint:

Every part of this most humorous picture is painted with scrupulous care and attention to details: the costumes of the figures are rich in colour, and the arrangement of light and shade is very effective. This painter was much accustomed to rely on gorgeous draperies and splendid accessories of every kind to give value to his compositions.²⁴

Solomon has used every possible opportunity to display his skill in drapery painting and materials and embroideries of every kind. This aspect of the painting makes it an allegory of the virtue of labour; the artist's labour. Perhaps this was an attraction for the accountant owner. The labour of the painter becomes as much a subject of the picture as the indolent old man and his

²³ James Dafforne, "Selected Pictures: From the Picture in the Collection of R.P. Harding, Esq., Wood Hall, East Dulwich," *The Art-Journal* (May 1871), 136.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

valetudinarian poor health is contrasted with the painter's industry. However, one small topical detail may cast doubt on the meaning of the picture. This comes from the colour of the old man's bedroom walls; these are painted in a lurid arsenical green colour and the colour appears in every part of the room including his clothing. It was around this time in the early 1860s that a suspicion was voiced that arsenic based paints and wallpapers were dangerously poisonous. Are we to believe that the miser is a hypochondriac or that he is being poisoned by his own interior decorations? If we believe that the miser is being poisoned and he is genuinely ill, partly through his own greed, then the viewer might see the painting very differently.

While Charles Lucas was very much the self-made Victorian through labour and business, Palmer Harding was a representative of another aspirant group looking for status through gentility, culture, and education; art was a helpful tool in this. New professionals such as the very recently invented profession of accountants needed to establish themselves socially by disassociating from "trade," with its connotations of labour, by joining the sub-aristocratic group of the "gentleman". Social status could be displayed by these classes by buying country estates and art or showing a knowledge and appreciation of literature. For Palmer Harding the purchase of *Le Malade Imaginaire* was to fulfil a number of these ambitions. The picture had been exhibited at the Royal Academy and so was a known artwork, it had been engraved for the *Illustrated London News*, it was by a well-known artist. Its subject derived from respectable literature, and its origins lay in sophisticated French literature. Perhaps this fact alone would hint that Palmer Harding was

familiar with and probably spoke French, just like an aristocrat.²⁵ The scramble for status and respectability by new professionals in nineteenth century Britain are described in more detail by John Richard and Stephen Walker in their study of the rise of professional accountancy in nineteenth century Scotland and England.²⁶ They place men such as Palmer Harding at the centre of this rise of the professional classes. He was the first ever accountant to be given a knighthood, an indication of the success of these new groupings and their incorporation into the traditional aristocratic honours system.

Solomon, at least in these examples attracted different types of collectors. From Palmer Harding who aspired to become that semi-aristocratic English invention “the gentleman” to Charles Lucas who seems to have been unashamedly a builder and had no problem in telling his artist what to paint. We can see this in their choice of purchase. Lucas expresses his common touch, whether real or not, and his allegiance to a meritocratic social order, by buying *Waiting for the Verdict*. Palmer Harding, in the vanguard of the new professional classes, buys *Le Malade Imaginaire* which promotes an image of himself as sophisticated and perhaps aristocratic descent through the surface polish of its French association. Perhaps Palmer Harding may not have been aware of the extent Solomon’s satire in *Le Malade Imaginaire* and Solomon’s other comic painting *The Lion in Love* (discussed later) shows that the object of

²⁶ John Richard Edwards and Stephen Walker, “Lifestyle, status and occupational differentiation in Victorian accountancy,” *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Jan. 2010), 2-22.

his humour could often be those who found his work most amusing and were amused enough to buy the paintings.

Lucas was to have the bigger influence. By commissioning *Not Guilty* he transformed the meaning of both courtroom paintings. But Palmer had his own influence as a collector who formed and moulded the perception of Solomon as an artist who was “collected”.

Chapter Nine: The Lion and the Tigress 1858

I have ventured to hope that, in thus bringing into immediate juxtaposition the many forms of beauty which every style of ornament presents, I might aid in arresting that unfortunate tendency to be content with copying, whilst the fashion lasts, the forms peculiar to any bygone age, without attempting to ascertain, generally completely ignoring, the peculiar circumstances which rendered an ornament beautiful, because it was appropriate, and which, as expressive of other wants when thus transplanted, as entirely fails.¹

(Owen Jones, 1856)

You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls... This is fact. This is taste.²

(Charles Dickens, 1854)

The comic paintings of Abraham Solomon were never simple anecdotes, though for those who wish, they can be read as one-liners. Humour is the ultimate

¹ Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament: Illustrated by Examples from Various Styles of Ornament* (London: The Ivy Press, 2001), 17.

² Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Harper Press, 2012), 10

topicality; what is instantly hilarious in one moment becomes bizarrely meaningless in the next. Past humour can never be completely rehabilitated but some of its meaning can be unearthed. The *Lion in Love* (fig.31) like most jokes makes a serious point. Solomon's painting *Art Critics of Brittany* deals with the nature of art, the role of artist, and viewers through comedy, and *Le Malade Imaginaire* addresses the nature of reality and perception. *The Lion in Love* is no exception. Here, Solomon takes his cue from Charles Dickens and Henry Morley and their satires on Utilitarianism and design teaching.³ Solomon's target is the proselytising of Owen Jones, Henry Cole and William Pugin. Owen Jones writing in his book *The Grammar of Ornament* objected to historicism and eclecticism on grounds of inauthenticity. His idea was that a style is appropriate to its own period and cannot be carelessly transferred in time and place. Historicism and eclecticism, here treated as approximately the same thing, are inauthentic because they combine disparate styles out of context. Jones, together with Henry Cole of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Pre-Raphaelite Richard Burchett, headmaster of the Government School of Design set out to reform British design taste. With its undertones of government diktat and metropolitan superiority this campaign to encourage better taste in both the consuming public and manufacturers was not to go unsatirised. This was a time when many people were first encountering consumer choice in their daily lives. They were making costly decisions when purchasing manufactured goods to furnish their houses, so it is unsurprising that there should be some anxiety about those purchases. An echo of this consumer anxiety runs through *The Lion in Love*.

³ Henry Morley, "A House Full of Horrors", *Household Words* 6 (1852)

Henry Morley wrote a squib in the magazine *Household Words* on the movement for “correct” design and Abraham Solomon, not one to miss out a topical subject, may have painted *The Lion in Love* in response (fig.31).⁴ *The Lion in Love* was exhibited the same year as *The Flight* and similarly plays with decorative surfaces, from wallpaper to carpet, bullion fringe to cross-stitch embroidery. An immediate response to the painting might be to see this avalanche of pretty pattern as a means of emphasising the seductive armoury of the young lady who is trying to snare an older officer. Certainly, one aspect of the painting which adds to its aesthetic pleasure is the deliberate contrast between the skill of the artist and the maladroit army officer who is clumsily failing to thread a needle; with his frogging and sash he may be a general newly returned from the Crimea and therefore fair game for satire. The scrupulous detail and depth of field reflect Pre-Raphaelite style and it is possible to see this moral tale of a picture as a descendant of the *Awakening Conscience*.

The Lion in Love shows a military man, not so much a lion but more a pussy cat, who, in thrall to a much younger woman, a tigress perhaps, is attempting to thread a needle on her behalf. To the modern eye the painting has all the ponderous humour of a *Punch* cartoon of the period, and like so many historical cartoons it is difficult to understand precisely the joke. However, the signals are there for the contemporary viewer. The Victorian love of puns is evident from the posture of the general in his shiny boots. This is a pun on the expression, “Keeping him on his toes.” There is a looking glass/candle sconce from which a cupid fires his arrow of love at the officer. Vanity is suggested by the mirror and the transitory nature of love by the candles. The mirror reflects nothing, which may be intended to hint at the emptiness of this encounter. The

⁴ Ibid., 266.

officer's sword has fallen to the floor to indicate the officer's loss of control through his passion for the young woman. She has a toy dog whose features mimic those of the officer with bushy eyebrows and moustache which suggests the colonel is her "toy" also. The little dog, through a visual similarity, also makes a subtler allusion to another tête à tête, the *Tête à Tête* from Hogarth's *Marriage à la Mode*, perhaps a suggestion that the relationship, whatever it is, will end badly. The corkscrew uprights of the needlework frame suggest the twisted path of love. The young woman's hairstyle is *a l'imperatrice* which tells us she is mistress of the situation and gives us another punning allusion; she is ruler of his heart.⁵ The tangled skeins of wool imply as they do in Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (fig.36) the web in which the officer has been trapped.⁶ The officer is trying to thread a needle which may have a sexual connotation, and the fallen glove and hat suggest abandonment, which may also have sexual overtones by suggesting that the officer has abandoned himself to infatuation. When put together this painting becomes an ensemble of puns and little jokes that did not get much approval from the critics. James Dafforne wrote, 'We want art which will do something more than amuse...'⁷ And the

⁵ *The Athenaeum* (May 8, 1858). The name of the hairstyle which was a fashion of the French Empress Eugenie is mentioned in this review. James Dafforne. "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX—Abraham Solomon" *The Art-Journal* (March 1862), 73.

⁶ James Dafforne. "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX—Abraham Solomon" *The Art-Journal* (March 1862), 73.

critic at the *The Athenaeum* wrote, ‘...when a clever man and a humourist tries to be funnier than he is, he sinks into caricature, as Mr Solomon has done.’⁸

The Athenaeum noted that, ‘the fun is overstrained and bombastic, because no colonel, unless a fool, would ever have thrown himself into such clownish distortions.’⁹ This Realist criticism, emphasising the inaccuracy of the picture, misses the point surely. At the time Britain was in the middle of the imperial crisis of the Indian Mutiny. In response Solomon painted war’s tragedy for women and children in *The Flight* (fig.19) and with *The Lion in Love* an aristocratic British Army officer in a young woman’s boudoir attempting to thread a needle belittles the military. Placed side by side *The Flight* and *The Lion in Love* can be viewed as companion pieces. *The Lion in Love* as an image of a woman in control inhabiting her customary territory, the boudoir or drawing room. *The Flight* derives meaning as an image of women outside their natural habitat, adrift in the hostile jungle and endangered by a war created by men. Both comment on the situation in India with *The Lion in Love* obliquely satirising the leadership of the British army who had so stupidly provoked the rebellion. Received wisdom had it they had caused the war by using pig-fat to grease gun cartridges—the colonel even looks a little pig-faced. Criticisms of the aristocratic dominance of the army, as noted earlier, were rife at this time. John Millais, in *Peace Concluded* (fig.74) was said by Holman Hunt to have satirised the practice of army officers escaping the front during the Crimean War by pleading “urgent private affairs” also known as “carpet leave”.¹⁰ Millais

⁹ The Athenaeum (May 8, 1858).

¹⁰ Michael Hancher, “Urgent private affairs: Millais’s ‘Peace Concluded,’ 1856,” *The Burlington Magazine* 133, no.1061 (Aug.,1991),499-506.

wished to make the point that the ordinary soldier could not take advantage of this privilege. In the end, because the war ended as the picture was completed, the topicality was lost, and the picture was given a different meaning.¹¹ Hunt says of this decision to change the meaning of the picture:

When the painting was nearly finished the announcement of Peace arrived. What was to be done? The call for satire on carpet heroes was out of date; the painter adroitly adapted his work to the changing circumstances...

Hunt uses the phrase “carpet heroes” to describe the practice of some officers conducting the war from their own drawing rooms. The word carpet, as a verb, also means a “dressing down” or criticism, so that added to Millais’s satire. The carpet in Millais’s painting is a traditional Persian carpet as are most of the rugs and carpets in paintings of the time. The table carpet or Holbein rug from the earlier painting by Solomon, *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait* (fig.13) emphasised the artistic taste of the young woman. Even the most vulgar apartments such as the sitting room in Hunt’s *Awakening Conscience* have Persian rugs on the floor, but not the boudoir/drawing room in Abraham Solomon’s *Lion in Love*.

The young lady’s room is furnished in the jumble of styles isolated from their historical meaning; the eclecticism Jones warns against. The carpet was an example of highly fashionable contemporary design and seems to be close-

¹¹ Ibid.

fitted, “almost universal in England in 1856”.¹² It is patterned with naturalistic looking flowers, which would have horrified the Utilitarian Mr Gradgrind from Dickens’ *Hard Times* (introductory quote).¹³ It would almost certainly have been manufactured on the new steam powered carpet weaving machines recently installed at Kidderminster. These were capable of weaving large widths of repeating patterns suitable for fitted carpeting. The machines had been invented by the American inventor Erastus Brigham Bigelow and had been exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851. He subsequently sold versions of these new machines to the carpet factories in Kidderminster and so the carpet refers to this modernity.¹⁴ The young woman’s drawing room carpet may speak of modishness, but it is also the chief evidence of her vulgarity, very much in line with the tastelessness of the room in Holman Hunt’s *Awakening Conscience*. John Ruskin wrote:

There is not a single object in all that room—common, modern, vulgar (in the vulgar sense as it may be), but it becomes tragical, if rightly read. That furniture so carefully painted, even to the last vein of the rosewood—is there nothing to be learnt from the terrible lustre of it, from its fatal newness.¹⁵

¹² Stefan Muthesius, *The Poetic Home: Designing the 19th-century Domestic Interior* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), 83.

¹³ Dickens, *Hard Times*, 10.

¹⁴ K.K. Goswami, *Advances in Carpet Manufacture* (Cambridge, UK: Woodhead Publishing in Association with the Textile Institute, 2009), 142.

¹⁵ John Ruskin, “To the Editor of the “Times”, *The Times* (May 25, 1854).

Solomon wants his viewers to laugh, probably pityingly, at the army officer, he is the lion of the title after all. And the young woman? Were viewers meant to laugh at her? She wears a “Van dyke collar” and her ensemble seems to be inspired by Van Dyke portraits of royal women (fig.75) with its separate skirt and bodice and suggestion of a stomacher. Viewers might recognise her as a “type”, in the Becky Sharp mould from Thackeray’s 1848 novel *Vanity Fair*, of a young woman determined to snare a rich husband.¹⁶ Viewers were probably supposed to be amused by her but not necessarily by her revival clothing. Her dress, hairstyle and rouged cheeks may suggest to a young Becky Sharp, but they also reflected the clothing of much of the picture’s younger viewers. It is the furniture carpet, wallpaper, and the sofa which are the main laughing points. Henry Morley’s character Mr. Crumpet, after a visit to the “house of horrors” exhibition and now understanding the ghastliness of eclectic design tells his readers:

When I come home a dozen hideous forms glare at me in the hall. My snug parlour maddens me; the walls and floors are densely covered with the most frightful objects; a detestable thing lies spread out at full length before my fire; the persons of my wife are surrounded very often by these horrors.¹⁷

¹⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (London: Macmillan Collector's Library, 2017).

¹⁷ Henry Morley, “A House Full of Horrors”, *Household Words*, VI, No.141, Dec.4, 1852, 265.

Mr Crumpet is the narrator of Henry Morley's satire on the *House of Horrors* exhibition at the Department of Practical Art in Marlborough House: Museum of Ornamental Art. Mr Crumpet lives in Brixton and works in the City and is meant to represent the man in the street. Morley's story is partly a satirical attack on the design pedagogues of Marlborough House and partly an attack on Mr Crumpet's gullibility and lack of sophistication by being taken in by the design dictates of the exhibition. Satirising the lower income groups and their aspirations to gentility seems to have been popular at the time. Alongside Mr Crumpet were the ever-popular provincial Mr and Mrs Sandboys who visited the Great Exhibition to the amusement of all.¹⁸ A comic series by Douglas William Jerrold was *Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (first published in book form in 1851), in which Mrs Caudle wants to have a cottage in the country and her first choice is Brixton. Brixton in the 1850s seems to have been a byword for that much despised lower middle-class aspiration to genteel "cosiness".¹⁹ Mrs Caudle thinks Brixton is genteel and she tries to persuade Mr. Caudle to rent a cottage there:

T'would add thirty years to your life—and think what a blessing that would be to me; not that I shall live a tenth part of the time—thirty

¹⁸ Henry Mayhew and George Cruikshank, *1851, Or, The Adventures of Mr. and Mrs. Sandboys, Their Son and Daughter: Who Came up to London to "enjoy Themselves," and See the Great Exhibition* (London: David Bogue, 86 Fleet Street, 1851).

¹⁹ John Gloag, *Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830-1900* (Newton Abbot, Devon: A and C Black, 1961). Gloag relates the history of interior and furniture design of the nineteenth century as a search by the middle-classes for comfort and cosiness.

years, if you'd take a nice little house somewhere at Brixton. *You hate Brixton?* I must say it Caudle, that's so like you: any place that's really genteel, you can't abide. Now Brixton and Baalam Hill I think delightful. So select!²⁰

This is the satirised world which Solomon uses as a source for *The Lion in Love*. In common with Morley, Solomon makes fun of the tastemakers of Marlborough House who ordained that decoration must be flat and never three-dimensional. Mr Crumpet tells us that ornament must be geometrical because nature decorates with geometrical patterns and does not use objects from nature as decoration, 'when did you see a pheasant stamped over with race-horses or ballet dancers?' he says. And he quotes William Dyce (1806-1881), artist and educator, "The art of ornamenting consists in the application of natural modes of decorating, not in applying pictures of natural objects to our fabrics."²¹ In the young woman's drawing room the carpet and the wallpaper break this rule, in fact Proposition 13 of Owen Jones's *The Grammar of Ornament*:

Flowers or other natural objects should not be used as ornaments, but conventional representations founded upon them sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind, without destroying the unity

²⁰ Douglas William Jerrold, *Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (London: Houghton, 1865), 150.

²¹ Morley, "House Full of Horrors", 1852, 267.

of the object they are employed to decorate. *Universally obeyed in the best periods of Art, equally violated when Art declines.*²²

This rule is also broken by the sofa—the flowers on the silk damask covering are perhaps a little too naturalistic, but the most serious crime is that the sofa is not historically “appropriate”, and its placement in a suburban boudoir violates the rules. The original model for this sofa would have been an eighteenth-century rococo canapé; quite delicate and designed for display rather than comfort. This version has been coarsened and is made cosier by sprung upholstery and overlarge pillows. Nikolaus Pevsner, writing about design of the period, refers to this style as the “unmistakable bulginess of 1851.”²³

It is not quite clear, and this is something which Pevsner points out, who was responsible for the design of these carpets and sofas and fireplaces etc. which ended up at the Crystal Palace. He names Alfred Stevens, the sculptor, who was employed by Hooles of Sheffield, and another sculptor John Bell, but as F H W Shepherd writes: “that many manufacturers, in part from jealousy for their patents, preferred to give technical training to their artisans in their own workshops.”²⁴ A Government School of Design was set up in 1837 to encourage the idea of good design, in other words professional design, at first under the directorship of William Dyce, an artist inspired by the German Nazarenes and therefore more sympathetic to craft than machine manufacture. This idea of

²² Owen Jones and Francis Bedford, *The Grammar of Ornament* (London: Published by Day and Son, 1856), 25.

²³ Nikolaus Pevsner, *High Victorian Design: A Study of the Exhibits of 1851* (London: Architectural Press, 1951), 36.

²⁴ “South Kensington and the Science and Art Department”, *Survey of London: Vol 38, South Kensington Museums Area*, ed. F H W Shepherd (London, 1975) 74-96.

design specialisation for manufactured goods was part of a general movement in the nineteenth century to professionalise more and more occupations.²⁵ The supervision of taste, exemplified by Owen Jones, was one way in which manufacturers, particularly manufacturers from the north of England, came to be seen as the mere makers of things while an elite group of the aesthetically educated uncontaminated by manufacture, would control the appearance of objects and regulate visual culture. Mrs Gaskell's novel of 1855, *North and South*, explores this rift in geographical terms and within the context of the newly emerging notion of the gentleman.²⁶ In *North and South* the unfashionable John Thornton, a northern mill owner, is educated in good taste by the southern middle-class lady, Margaret Hale, they fall in love and then marry. Those who did not understand or follow the new regulations of taste were rapidly being excluded from polite society, if Morley is to be believed. Solomon satirises the officer and the young woman in her "house full of horrors" and she is condemned by her vulgarity, as Solomon himself was in 1854 for his painting of lovers in a railway carriage; probably because he was a vulgar Jew. The officer is merely a fool for offering his devotion to such an unworthy person. Superficially the picture invites us to see the officer humiliated because he has been trapped or distracted by these horrors of carpet, sofa, and wallpaper

²⁵ Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society since 1750* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 58. Forty gives an account of the importance of design for manufacture, 1840's.

²⁶ Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, and Elisabeth Jay, *North and South (1855)* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007).

The Government School of Design, while following a general historical movement to professionalise many areas of work that had not previously been regulated was also intended to promote British industry:

The Crystal Palace at the Kensington corner of Hyde Park the Great Exhibition had not only been a popular cultural triumph; it had, as we have seen, also yielded a handsome surplus. In hard cash this represented the moral proof of a generation's campaigning, latterly under the aegis of Prince Albert, by a group of businessmen and politicians, artists and civil servants, who ever since the setting up of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures in 1835 had been warning an often Philistine public that 'to us, a peculiarly manufacturing nation, the connexion between art and manufactures is most important'. In using their surplus to buy land on the southern side of Kensington Gore, the Commissioners for the Exhibition intended, as we have also seen, to provide a permanent home for institutions which would achieve their central aim of bringing science and art to bear on industry. The nature of 'South Kensington', physically as well as academically, is inseparable from the ideas and background of the Commissioners' first, dominating, President, realized through the practical energies of the men whom Winslow Ames calls 'the Prince's team'. It was crucial to the Prince's success in combating official inertia that, ever since the experiment of his visit to Birmingham in 1843, he had enjoyed mixing with the bourgeois and the self-made, and accordingly South Kensington was able to combine advanced

German theories of art and science with an agile British pragmatism in adaptation to the circumstances of administration and finance.²⁷

The idea that British industry required state intervention of this sort went against ideologies of libertarian individualism, expressed by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* and against Free Trade manufacturers' opposition to government interference. The invisible hand of the market dictated that goods produced would always tend towards an equilibrium with goods purchased. In other words, if manufacturers produced goods that consumers did not find attractive or were "badly" designed then they would not be purchased. This is a simple economic "fact", or so it was thought. As it was, the carpets and wallpapers of the 1850s seemed to have found a ready market, even if that market might be one of stigmatised uneducated consumers. The problem was exacerbated by the need to export goods and French taste (because it was "better" taste) was thought to be an obstacle to the exploitation of foreign markets. That this vignette was taking place on an anglicised version of a French sofa sums up for the contemporary viewer some of the economic arguments of the period. This is surely Solomon's point and one that viewers would have understood.

Importantly, by portraying a serious subject in a frivolous manner, as Hogarth might have done, Solomon was able to heighten the impact of his argument while amusing the viewer. This may imply that the painting is a direct descendant not just of Hogarth's work but of the regency caricatures of Thomas

²⁷ "South Kensington' and the Science and Art Department', in *Survey of London: Volume 38, South Kensington Museums Area*, ed. F H W Sheppard (London, 1975), pp. 74-96. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol38/pp74-96> [accessed 2 December 2017].

Rowlandson who satirised the aristocracy, royalty, and politicians. Solomon's Realism does something quite different by redefining the distance between the viewer and the image. Caricature tends to present a world which is beyond the viewer's experience—we are gazing in from outside and taking a delight in looking through the keyhole at aristocratic goings on. Solomon uses Realism and representation to hold up a mirror, however distorted, to the viewer's world so that whatever political or ideological point he is making includes the viewer. In this way viewers are encouraged to laugh at themselves.

Much of this debate on the need to educate the public and promote better design began with the 1851 Great Exhibition. Prince Albert and Henry Cole, both major forces in the promotion of design principles and the Design School, were organisers of the Exhibition. Nicolas Pevsner has theorised the historical significance of 1850s eclecticism in his book *High Victorian Design* (1951). He argues that the Great Exhibition of 1851 was a high point in commercial expansion and inventiveness and rather than seeing eighteenth century furniture and decoration as a high point in design and 1851 as the nadir—he suggests this is the conventional twentieth century view—he believes that the “buoyancy and showiness of so much at the Crystal Palace thus marks the final flourish of a century of greatest commercial expansion”.²⁸ A gentleman's dressing stand from *Sheraton's Cabinet Makers Book of Prices* of 1788 leads seamlessly to, and inspires, at least for Pevsner, Rogers and Dean's 'Ottoman Coal Sarcophagus' ; an object 'answering the purpose of an ottoman and a coal receptacle'.²⁹ The connection here is the love of metamorphic furniture which

²⁸ Nikolaus Pevsner, *High Victorian Design a Study of the Exhibits of 1851* (London: Architectural Press, 1951),45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*,43,

for Pevsner symbolises the drive, energy, and ingenuity of the hundred years leading up to 1851. This idea from Pevsner that our view of design in the 1850s is somewhat distorted points to something which is often disregarded—that important elements of furniture design of that decade were light-heartedness, amusement, and love of novelty. This is something which is seen in Solomon’s picture and Morley’s short story—that all this preoccupation with design can be just a little bit too serious. However, Pevsner does not dwell on this point, he views the design of the period in class terms and repeats a view of the period as a triumph of self-satisfaction:

A universal replacement of the straight line by the curve is one of the chief characteristics of mid-Victorian design. As against other styles favouring curves, the curve is generous, full or, as has been said more than once before, bulgy. It represents, and appealed to, a prospering, well-fed, self-confident class...Another hallmark of 1850 is equally telling. There must be decoration in the flat or in thick relief over all available surfaces. This obviously enhances the effects of wealth.³⁰

Pevsner reflects a twentieth-century view of mid-Victorian design as catering for a world characterised by self-satisfaction, complacency, and smugness, symbolised by his notion of “bulginess” and in John Cloag’s thesis as an age of

³⁰ Ibid., 49.

comfort; or in William Lawrence Burns's history as an age of equipoise.³¹ Decoration itself was not the problem for contemporary critics of design in the 1850s and neither was historicism. There seemed, for many, no other choice but to plunder the past and other cultures to make use of historical styles—the idea of designing new forms for the present was still in its infancy. By the time of the Great Exhibition historicism had achieved an extraordinary taxonomy:

By 1830 the Italian Renaissance and the Elizabethan and Jacobean styles reappeared, and occasionally even a Neo-Louis Quinze for specially festive occasions. At the time of the Great Exhibition the styles available had become unlimited. Ricard Brown's *Domestic Architecture* of 1841 lists and illustrates everything from Cottage Ornée and Swiss Cottage to Norman, Lancastrian, Tudor, Stuart, Anglo-Grecian, Grecian, Pompeiian, Florentine, Venetian Anglo-Italian, French, Persian, Moorish-Spanish and Chinese.³²

Ralph Nicholson Wornum in his essay *The Great Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste* pinpoints the problem in mixing historical styles; the danger, for him, is not historicism but eclecticism. All this muddle and “uniform mixture” means that “nothing will be beautiful”:

³¹ William Lawrence Burn, *The Age of Equipoise; a Study of the Mid-Victorian Generation* (New York: Norton, 1964). John Cloag, *English Furniture* (London, U.K., 1948).

³² Pevsner, *High Victorian Design*, 1951, 50.

... by using indiscriminately all materials, we should lose all expression, and the very essence of ornament, the conveying of a distinct aesthetic expression, be utterly destroyed. For if all objects in a room were of the same shape and details, however beautiful these details might be, the mind would soon be utterly disgusted. This is however, exactly what must happen on a large scale; if all our decoration is to degenerate into a uniform mixture of all elements, nothing will be beautiful, for nothing will present a new or varied image to the mind.³³

Wornum, includes a warning: “This is however, exactly what must happen on a large scale.” This is an advice to the manufacturers to make use of the example of the exhibits: “towards a cultivation of pure and rational individualities of design.”³⁴ Wornum felt that mass marketing or manufacture on a large scale will inevitably lead to eclecticism, and in this he follows John Ruskin who was to express similar views in his chapter, *The Nature of Gothic* from his 1853 book *The Stones of Venice*.³⁵ For Wornum, the tastemaker, the task of the newly educated consumer and the British manufacturer and designer is to learn and keep separate the elaborate taxonomy of historical styles. Taste for Wornum has become something to be learnt and the person of taste is one who can

³³ R.N.Wornum. “The Exhibition as a Lesson in Taste” *The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue: The Industry of all Nations, 1851* (London: The Art Journal, 1851), i-xxii.

A more detailed theory of ornament, as either Aesthetic or Symbolic is contained in, Ralph Wornum, *Analysis of Ornament. The Characteristics of Styles: An Introduction to the Study of the History of Ornamental Art* (London, 1856).

³⁴ Wornum, Lesson in Taste, 1851.

³⁵ John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice: The Foundations* (New York: John Wiley, 1851).

distinguish “Cottage Ornée” from “Swiss Cottage”. In this way something as simple as a domestic object becomes part of a general preoccupation with classification in the nineteenth century and Wornum proposes a way of thinking about furniture and architectural styles which mimics the geological classification of fossils. It is perhaps no accident that in William Dyce’s painting *Pegwell Bay* (fig.49) it is women, who increasingly needed to understand the domestic taxonomy of styles, who are the fossil collectors. This positivist epistemology which might suit Dickens’ Mr Gradgrind has no place in the young woman’s sitting room, hers is a celebration of variety. She combines a contemporary French hairstyle, a mediaeval type romantic costume, a Bertha collar, such as the one in the 1640 *Portrait of a Woman with a Fan* by Frans Hals (fig.76) while sitting at an embroidery frame loosely based on a Jacobean style. For the viewer these references, while alluding to contemporary debates about historicism, would have confirmed the young woman as perhaps a little devious but more or less an average young woman. Her deviousness in using all of her wiles in seducing the soldier, if noticed at all, is perhaps forgivable because she may be “surplus” or in danger of becoming a “redundant” woman.

The question of the surplus woman as a social problem was one of the topical debates of the decade. It had arisen from the census of 1851 which showed a “surplus of 126,000 marriageable women”.³⁶ Such was the unease surrounding this problem that proposals were put forward to encourage the

³⁶ Charles M. Willich and E. T. Scargill, "Tables Relating to The State of The Population of Great Britain at The Census of 1851, With a Comparative View, at the Different Ages, of The Population of France; Also a Comparative Return of Births and Deaths, 1838-1854," 21, no. 3 (1858), 300.

emigration of unmarried women to Canada and Australia.³⁷ In this context the young woman may have been viewed, not so much as scheming fortune hunter, but as a victim of the shortage of husband material. This introduces an element of the bitter-sweetness to the picture. She is working hard to seduce the old buffoon—the general, Cupid aiming his dart makes that very clear, but she has little choice given the lack of eligible men available to her.

We are meant to smile at this squib of a picture, as if Solomon is suggesting, very much like Morley, that really this concern for taste doesn't matter much. But at the same time, he is saying something about contemporary everyday culture. For a viewer this painting encouraged associations with aristocratic control of the army, government regulation of taste and the surplus woman "problem". While being intensely topical, humorous, and therefore ephemeral, the picture makes a claim to modernity in its demand that the viewer looks beyond the superficial prettiness of the image.

³⁷ Nan H. Dreher, "Redundancy and Emigration: The 'Woman Question' in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1993)

Chapter Ten: Fleeing from Disorder, 1858

The incalculable importance of the cotton trade in ministering to the comfort of millions of the human race is amply evidenced by the fact that its produce now forms an inseparable element in their wants.

Contributing alike to the comfort of both rich and poor the cotton cloth which covers emaciation of the poor is made from the same material as the gaudy draperies which adorn the luxurious saloons of fashion, or those superbly delicate fabrics which encircle as with gossamer folds the rounded forms of beauty. ¹

(James Mann, 1860)

All of the paintings by Solomon discussed so far have been Realistic in the broadest sense of the word, and Realist in a narrower sense. That is, Solomon made naturalistic paintings and tried to picture ordinary people in more or less ordinary situations; the sort of images which might be encountered casually by a passer-by. In many of his paintings the viewer becomes a passer-by and is encouraged to look, in Norman Bryson's phrase, "at the overlooked."² In this way viewers are able to see, as if for the first time, their own world through the lens of art. Their vision was enhanced because a moment is frozen on the canvas and they have time to contemplate what would usually be a fleeting moment in their daily lives. A facial expression or posture, the stock in

¹ James A. Mann, *The Cotton Trade of Great Britain; Its Rise, Progress, and Present Extent* (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1860), 56.

² Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

trade of the artist, is transitory in real life or on stage but becomes fixed and observable in a painting. Objects in Solomon's Realist paintings of the everyday are given equal weight and are transformed by the aesthetic power of art—a hat tossed aside is not necessarily attractive (in real life it may simply be untidy) but when painted it can be transformed into an aesthetically pleasing image. In this way the viewer was encouraged to notice beauty in ordinary things. This can also be true for a present-day viewer of these now historical objects. But, we are looking at a very different thing. The hat has become an historical hat not an everyday object to be overlooked. Solomon's paintings which originally expressed a familiar present to the 1850s viewer are now historical documents, for many embodying no more than "quaintness". Solomon gave the viewer the widowed mother saying farewell to her son, the mother terrified about the court's verdict, or the nobility of manual labour on a Normandy beach where the beach itself becomes a confrontation between notions of leisure and work. *The Flight* (fig.19) which was Solomon's topical response to the Indian Mutiny is of a different order from his previous paintings. In this painting the subject is the exotic, the foreign and the unknown, so that viewers are asked to make an imaginative leap from their own domestic world of Britain to mysterious India. This may seem to place the painting within the Romantic movement's fascination for the exotic and the prevailing fashion for orientalist art which is seen in the contemporary paintings of William Holman Hunt such as *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* (fig.77) which was begun in 1854 and the French orientalist Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (fig.78), but Solomon avoids a conventional orientalist attitude by moving his Realist interest in the portrayal of the everyday to the siege of Lucknow. Viewers are asked to imagine, as if it was their own predicament, the transposition of two ordinary British women to India. There, they have been able to acquire the trappings of imperial power, servants, and wealth, presumably through their husband's employment by the

East India Company. But they have been undone by the catastrophe of war. Solomon had already established India as a land of opportunity by placing a poster asking for young male recruits to the East India Company above the head of the young emigre in *Second Class: The Departure* and the young women in *The Flight* have reaped that reward. With *The Flight* he seems to be addressing a female audience directly and he builds on the idea of women united together can be heroic when faced with adversity, developed the previous year in *Waiting for the Verdict*. Contemporary viewers, male and female, would be able to understand the picture's narrative through the clothes worn by the two central female characters. This is a painting which uses fashion as metaphor echoing the use of footwear to partly tell the story of *Waiting for the Verdict*.

The Flight is a tour de force in painting woven and embroidered cloth, from the velvet suit of the young boy to the luxurious shawl and dresses of the lead women, and one response by viewers may have been to see a secondary topical narrative, suggested by the quotation at the beginning of this Chapter in which James Mann refers to the universality of cloth and clothing and the importance of cotton and the Indian cotton trade. Cloth and embroidery were emblematic of India in the way that the Renaissance is to Florence or flamenco is to Seville—this is possibly a reason for their prominence in *The Flight*. The topical setting is northern India and portrays an incident, seen from a British perspective, which occurred during the First War of Indian Independence—historically referred to as the Indian Mutiny. In 1858 the India portrayed in this painting had not yet become so intimately entangled with the mythologies of the Raj and the narratives of the British Empire. Queen Victoria had yet to be crowned Empress of India, she was not to receive the “Jewel in the Crown” from Disraeli until 1876. In 1858, the same year as the painting, India was transferred to the British Crown after the dissolution of the British East India

Company.³ India was oriental and exotic as she had always been, Victoria's uncle, the Prince Regent had after all built the eccentric Brighton Pavilion within living memory. But there had been a shift in the significance of India as a part of empire; from the Regent's phantasy to a more hard-headed view of India as a market and potential producer of cotton. The story of cotton, slavery, anti-imperialism, female independence and anti-war sentiment are bound up in Solomon's painting at a time when viewers were acutely aware of the mutiny in India. This "newsworthy" aspect of the painting makes it one of the most topical not just of Solomon's oeuvre but of the period.

India became crucial to British manufacturer's thinking after the collapse in the supply of raw cotton, due to crop failure, from the southern states of America in 1845. Cotton is a fussy plant which only grows in specific climatic conditions and requires a great deal of water for irrigation. American southern states could provide the perfect conditions for the variety of long stranded cotton which was most suitable for the mills of Lancashire.⁴ Three main problems arose from the dependence on American cotton which were to influence thinking about India throughout the 1850s. Two problems were issues of supply, the first was the possibility of agricultural disaster in America, such as that in 1846,⁵ which could knock out the complete Lancashire cotton industry, an industry which was the basis of British wealth: "in some years between 1815 and 1875 it was to provide as much as 45 per cent of Britain's

³ Government of India Act (1858) (21 & 22 Vict. c. 106).

⁴ Arthur Silver, *Manchester Men and Indian Cotton* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 12-22.

⁵ William J. Phalen, *The Consequences of Cotton in Antebellum America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 161.

exports.”⁶ The second, anticipated, problem of supply was the probability of political unrest in America. Though the American Civil War would not begin until 1861, as early as 1846 there had been conflict between the anti-slavery North and the southern states.⁷ And it was slavery which for the non-conformist and anti-slavery manufacturers of Manchester was the third problem associated with American cotton:

...unless it can be fed by the return of the execrable external trade, will eventually force on the planters the advantage of a free labouring class. All the world are daily yielding to a Christian repugnance of such an institution, and justly so, for allowing for all the wild exaggerations of the misery it entails, it is unquestionably an inhuman law...Is it not then an error, the maintenance of so barbarous and loathsome an institution, which must ere long explode, or crumble beneath the weight of its own superstructure.⁸

For the leaders of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, who had led the successful campaign against the Corn Laws, the association between cotton and slavery was particularly repugnant: “the term ‘reformers’ best describes the leaders of the Chamber of Commerce... Three were Quakers; four were

⁶ Silver, *Manchester Men*, 1966, 1.

⁷ Silver, *Manchester Men*, 13.

⁸ Mann, *The Cotton Trade*, 1860, 56.

radicals.”⁹ John Bright, one of the main leaders in Indian reform and founder member of the Indian Reform Society, “would not associate with any movement of this kind except in so far as its members would attempt to end slavery by the use of free-labour cotton from India.”¹⁰ It was the great hope of the Lancashire manufacturers, particularly John Bright, to disentangle British cotton trade from slavery and to guarantee a reliable supply of raw cotton from India. By reducing imports from America less slavery cotton might be produced. The development of trade between India and Britain would also have the benefit, it was assumed, by encouraging greater equality between the between the two countries. For some contemporary viewers there might be a resonance between the textiles in the picture and the predominant cultural image of India as a producer both of luxury goods and a consumer of British staples—India as the major market for Lancashire cotton.

In part the dispute about the cotton trade was an extension of the debate between Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill which had begun with Carlyle’s *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (1849) responded to by Mill with *The Negro Question* (1850) and further extended by Carlyle in 1853, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*.¹¹ Ideas about racial exploitation,

⁹ Silver, *Manchester Men*, 17. Quakers had been at the forefront of the campaign against the slave trade and had begun the movement through a petition to Parliament in 1783. See *London Yearly Meeting* minutes, volume 17, 298 – 307.

¹⁰ James L. Sturgis, *John Bright and the Empire* (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), 34.

¹¹ Thomas Carlyle, "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," *Frasers Magazine* XL (December 1849): 670-79, John Stuart Mill, "The Negro Question," *Frasers Magazine* XLI (January 1950): 25-31, Iva G. Jones,

economics, world trade and slavery were still very much alive in the 1850s even though slavery had been abolished in the British Empire by 1833. This had contributed to the partial collapse of the West Indian sugar trade. The competitive advantage of slave nations such as America was quite clear, and parallels could be drawn between the sugar trade and cotton.

Although *The Flight* is a history painting seemingly depicting an episode from a war, the military action is peripheral and is upstaged by an image of a shattered family, taking up a theme from *Waiting for the Verdict*. For a history painting this may be unusual, but it reflects Solomon's individual approach to the Realist desire to elevate the ordinary. Viewers are presented with an incident in ordinary women's lives, history itself is abandoned and is replaced by the accretion of individual experiences; there is no grand sweep of history in this version. Some of this is expressed through the highly detailed depiction of an embroidered shawl. It is a feature of Solomon's approach to modern-subject painting that intensely observed detail becomes metaphorical. In this case the political and cultural intricacies of India and the Mutiny are symbolised by the intricacy of embroidery and its detailed depiction. The highlight of the painting is a powerfully observed embroidered shawl, known in India as a "Dupatta." This shawl tells the viewer that the painting is not what it seems by placing it as the central motif of the painting; the burning city, the main event historically, is just a distant glow in the background. This dupatta appears to have been embroidered in a Punjabi style of embroidery known as "Phulkari." Phulkari derives from "Phul" meaning flower and "Kari" meaning

"Trollope, Carlyle, and Mill on the Negro: An Episode in the History of Ideas," *Journal of Negro History* 52, no. 3 (July 1967): 185-99.

work, and as the translation suggests is a type of millefleur embroidery.¹² The embroidered dupatta is a metaphor for the British occupation of India in that it is produced by Indian labour but worn by a British woman. A contemporary viewer would make the link with Thomas Hood's poem *The Song of the Shirt*, "oh! men with sisters dear, oh! men with mothers and wives, it is not linen you're wearing out, but human creatures' lives."¹³ The shawl also serves as a contrast, and reference to social distinction, between the young woman in the green dress and her servant (ayah). Both wear the traditional dupatta except one has been expensively embroidered and the other is plain red. The young English women convey their fashion sense through the aniline emerald green and pale lavender of their dresses and bows.¹⁴ Suzanne Daly in her essay on the English novel and the Indian cotton trade points to the importance of women's clothing as an indicator of taste and virtue in the Victorian novel:

England's complex and evolving relationship with India is often worked out in Victorian novels through the association of English people and Indian things, but the terms of this relationship shift depending upon novelistic genre. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* and

¹² Shailaja Naik, *Traditional Embroideries of India* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Pub., 1996), 103.

¹³ Thomas Hood and Gustave Doré, *Thomas Hood* (London: E. Moxon, 1872).

¹⁴ See Laver, *Taste and Fashion*, 1937, 67. For a discussion, though a little later in the century, of Aesthetic distaste for aniline dyes and those who mixed magenta and green.

Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* reveal how gendered dress codes in domestic novels position Indian textiles as markers of virtue and good taste...¹⁵

In another of Mrs Gaskell's novels *North and South* the virtue and natural grace of the heroine, Margaret Hale, is established in the first pages of the novel through some Indian shawls which were intended as wedding gifts to her vacuous but pretty cousin:

So, Margaret went down laden with her Indian shawls, and snuffing up their spicy Eastern smell. Her aunt asked her to stand as a sort of lay figure on which to display them, as Edith was still asleep. No one thought about it; but Margaret's tall, finely made figure, in the black silk dress which she was wearing as mourning for some distant relative of her father's, set off the long beautiful folds of the gorgeous shawls that would have half-smothered Edith.¹⁶

Solomon expresses some of this idea of a natural femininity through the wearing of the dupatta. The ayah is shown as more easily graceful in her plain shawl, and there is a hint of the Madonna in her cradling of the blonde child, while the dupatta on the blonde young English woman, while clearly more expensive and luxurious, falls in stiff and less graceful folds.

¹⁵ Suzanne Daly, "Spinning Cotton: Domestic and Industrial Novels," *Victorian Studies*, Vol 50, No.2. (Winter 2008), 272-277.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 9.

In contemporary painting, often following the Dutch example, there was nothing unusual in textile painting, for its own sake; the ability to paint cloth convincingly was much admired and Solomon had been praised for his skill in painting draperies. A reviewer in *The Art-Journal*, James Dafforne wrote that Abraham “was much accustomed to rely on gorgeous draperies and splendid accessories of every kind to give value to his compositions.”¹⁷ John Millais had paid homage to the painting of satin dresses by Gerard Ter Borch in his 1860 picture *The Black Brunswicker*. But it was Holman Hunt among Solomon’s contemporaries of the 1850s who most often made textile a central element in some of his paintings. Like Solomon, Holman Hunt was a Londoner who had grown up in the fashion industry and in 1841 he went to work for Richard Cobden, a calico trader at that time.¹⁸ Cobden began his career as member of parliament, his friendship with John Bright, and founded the Anti-Corn Law League in that year, 1841. Linda Parry, in discussing Hunt’s time working for Cobden, suggests that Hunt was uninfluenced by Cobden’s politics which favoured manufacture and free trade. Hunt’s painting *The Awakening Conscience* can be read as a critique of the cheapness and ugliness of contemporary manufacture.¹⁹ In Ruskin’s reading Hunt’s detailed representation of the young woman’s clothing becomes an analogy for his view of the modern world much in the way Solomon uses the embroidered shawl to make a point

¹⁷ James Dafforne, “Selected Pictures: From the Picture in the Collection of R.P. Harding, Esq., Wood Hall, East Dulwich,” *The Art-Journal* (May 1871), 136

¹⁸ Linda Parry, “Textile Background: Cloth and Costume” in Holman Hunt and the Pre-Raphaelite Vision, ed. Katherine Lochnan & Carol Jacobi (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008), 58-9.

¹⁹ John Ruskin, “Letters to the Editor,” *The Times* (25 May 1854.)

about India. The immorality of Hunt's young woman, leaping up from her lover's knee, is underlined by the wearing of her shawl around her waist. This positioning of the shawl emphasises her sexuality, the man's hand, her own hands and the knot of the shawl all centre on her crotch. Her casual attitude to her sexuality is suggested by her carelessness with such an expensive item in tying it around her waist. She disregards the decorum of the shawl which should be worn to enhance femininity through modestly covering a woman's body and emphasising her gracefulness through drapery—a model drawn from classical sculpture.

In Solomon's painting the white, or pale lavender dress of the leading female figure is a metaphor, through its dishevelment, for the woman's emotional state. The woman's hair is loose, the dress is covered with, what appears to be, a matching cloak and she wears three rows of pearls. The dress may be a nightdress, it is unstructured and a similar shape, though plainer, to the nightdress in *The Awakening Conscience* (fig.36). It may be intended to suggest that she has been woken from her bed by the conflagration though the pearls seem to contradict that scenario. For the contemporary viewer the string of pearls may have been understood as a reference to cannibalism based on the popular penny dreadful *The String of Pearls: A Romance* (1846-47) which introduced Sweeney Todd to the Victorian imagination.²⁰ This reference seems to make sense of the combination of pearls and nightdress; if it is a nightdress. The reference to cannibalism reflects a view of the "savage" mutineers and the nightdress hints at the sexual vulnerability of the young woman.

²⁰ Robert L. Mack, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), a reprint of the original stories.

That the dark-haired young woman's hair is uncovered increases the drama of the picture, she is the only adult in the painting with a bare head and this may be Solomon's Jewish traditional background showing through. For a Jewish woman to appear in public with uncovered hair was a breach of the code of modesty and something which would only happen in very dramatic circumstances. For British viewers as well as Jewish viewers the bare head alone indicates a breakdown of both family norms and society. Molly Meyerowitz quotes the Talmudic story of a mother named Kimhit, about whom it was said: 'even the beams of her house had never glimpsed her hair.'²¹ The prescription against the uncovering of the hair is particular to married women. The woman in the picture appears to be unmarried, unlike her companion she is not wearing a wedding ring.

In the background, behind the two young women, there are five figures who viewers could understand by the clothes they wear. The child in his green dress suggests an ideal of childhood. The red sash, little dance pumps, and velvet allude to innocence and fragility contrasting with the dangerous surroundings of the burning city and the prickly cacti. He holds the hand of a female figure, possibly his grandmother, whose dignity is emphasised by her straight posture, the plainness of her shawl, her high buttoned shirt, and her very practical solar topee. She is linked to another woman (not a servant as they are holding hands) whose clothes suggest respectability without ostentation and who is reminiscent of the grandmother in *Waiting for the Verdict*. At the very

²¹ Molly Meyerowitz, "The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair" in *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 105.

back of the painting, seen in profile, is the only adult male in the picture. He represents loyalty, the faithful Indian in his turban, who is apparently looking out for danger and in this way protecting the group of women.

Solomon uses cotton, fabrics, and fashion to reflect back the public image of India as a source of fashionable clothing and its importance to the British economy as a market and potential supplier of raw cotton to the mills of Lancashire. The picture also refers to current debates within parliament, initiated by Radical Liberals such as John Bright, about the future of British involvement in India in the light of the failings of the East India Company. Bright made use of the biblical “Angel of Death” in his parliamentary speech against the Crimean War in 1855 and viewers would not escape this allusion in Solomon’s painting. The government of India had been mostly in the hands of the East India Company under a dual system of power sharing with the British parliament, ended by the Government of India Act, 1858.²² The question of slavery and a general revulsion that Britain’s cotton wealth was largely dependent on slavery is implied by the title which recalls the flight of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt.

The Madonna-like figure of the ayah reminds us that that the picture alludes to the various flights which are narrated in the bible in particular the flight to Egypt after the birth of Jesus, and the flight from Egypt under Moses. The flight from Egypt gave rise to the great feast of Judaism, Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles and also Pesach, the feast of Passover, which also has its origins in the Egyptian enslavement and celebrates the ‘passing over’ of the Angel of Death. Much of the Jewish influence in Solomon’s work has gone

²² John Bright was particularly active through the India Reform Society, James Sturgis, *John Bright and the Empire* (London: Athlone Press, 1969),13-39.

unnoticed but the link between *The Flight* and Sukkot or Pesach seems quite clear. Abraham's influence on his younger brother Simeon has rarely been considered, even though Simeon shared a home and studio with Abraham and Rebecca until Abraham's death in 1862.²³ It seems likely that, as is the case with Rebecca and Abraham, the three artist siblings discussed each other's work and influenced each other, both positively and negatively. Unlike Simeon, Abraham has few obvious Jewish references in his work, but with *The Flight* one can see quite a strong visual parallel between Abraham's ayah and the child she carries and Simeon Solomon's slightly later images, *The Infant Moses* and *Naomi and the Child Obed* (fig.79).

The story of the flight from Egypt is told in the *Book of Exodus* and is one of the most important founding narratives of Judaism, one through which the idea of Jewish nationhood was formed. In *Exodus* the Pharaoh has declared that any male children of the enslaved Israelites should be killed at birth. In his efforts to persuade the Pharaoh to release the Israelites from bondage, Moses unleashes ten plagues on the land of Egypt. For the last of these plagues Moses brings death to every first-born male in the land of Egypt. In order to save their children, the Israelites dip branches of Hyssop in the blood of a sacrificial lamb and paint their doorposts. God's destroyer, the Angel of Death, then 'passes-over' the houses of the Israelites, with the blood-stained doorposts, and spares their children; importantly the Angel of Death is both destroyer of the Egyptians and liberator of the Israelites. The oratorio, *Israel in Egypt* (1739), based on

²³ Colin Cruise, "Pressing all religions into his service: Solomon's Ritual Paintings and Their Contexts", in *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* ed. Colin Cruise (London: Merrell, 2006). Cruise mentions other influences but not the probable influence, however slight, of Abraham and his sister Rebecca.

Exodus was one of a number of works by Handel which heroised the Jewish people. This was a first in Europe and was most apparent in *Judas Macabeus* (1746) which linked, topically, the Scottish rebellion of 1745, Jewish financial support for the defence of the country, and the *Jewish Nationalisation Act* (1753). This Oratorio remained popular during the huge growth of choral societies and was particularly associated with Exeter Hall in the 1850s.²⁴ Verdi also famously made a contribution with his opera of Jewish nationalist struggle with the enormously successful *Nabucco* (1848) and Italian nationalism in *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* (1855). Parallels between *The Flight* and *Exodus* are clear, probably enough to indicate that the painting was inspired by Jewish history as much as India. Solomon's theatrical treatment of the subject, similar to *Waiting for the Verdict*, would link in viewers' minds ideas about British nationalism, their musical expression and a contemporary fascination with Jewish struggle as evidenced by the huge success of the opera *Le Juif Errant* (1852) also titled *La Juive* by Jacques-François-Fromental-Élie Halévy.²⁵

This is a picture which highlights some of the public concerns about the Mutiny in India and imperial power and it did this alongside three other paintings shown that same year at the Royal Academy. As four paintings shown at the same time and on the same subject viewers were able to assess the different perspectives of four artists. Although the paintings were variations on a theme they were all Realist, modern-subject paintings and the Academy seems to have been their natural home. Thomas Jones Barker's more conventional, and

²⁴ Howard E. Smither, *History of the Oratorio*, vol. 4 (North Carolina: Univ Of North Carolina P, 2012), 281-82.

²⁵ Leslie Orrey and Rodney Milnes, *Opera: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), 120-121.

arguably more “academic” portrayal, *The Relief of Lucknow* (fig.80) was never shown at the Academy but is now, with its spectacular frame in the National Portrait Gallery. The three paintings which were exhibited that same year were *Nearing Home* by J.D. Luard (fig. 81), *Eastward Ho!* by Henry Nelson O’Neill (fig.82) and *In Memoriam* by Joseph Noel Paton (fig.83). *Nearing Home* is usually seen as a Crimean War picture, but here I will treat it as relevant to the Mutiny paintings with which it shares the same themes. All four images focus on women and children as victims and heroes, probably in response to press reports of the violation, and bravery, of English women assaulted by the mutineers.²⁶ These four pictures are linked to a particular moment in global communication and two of them feature distance and travel as their subject. The journey of the hero and his triumph against adversity is a potent narrative in mythology, an idea developed by Joseph Campbell who described the *Odyssey* as a master myth. Solomon turns Homer upside down by making women the hero travellers in what may prove to be an epic tale of transformation.²⁷

These four Academy pictures were painted during the short period when written communication was possible telegraphically, but images, both drawings and photographs, relied on traditional means of transfer. In this way they embody technological transformation in the 1850s. Two of the paintings, Solomon and Paton’s, were only possible because of improvements in communications between London and India during the 1850s, though the final

²⁶ Alison Blunt, “Embodying war: British women and domestic defilement in the Indian ‘Mutiny’, 1857-8”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26.3 (2000),403.

²⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

phase, a direct telegraph cable, was not laid until the 1860s.²⁸ Artists in London depended on newspaper reports, and rough sketches, as sources. By 1858 a P & O steamship service had been established from Suez to Calcutta and a railway built from Alexandria to Suez, thus travellers could avoid the slow and treacherous journey via the Cape of Good Hope.²⁹ All the paintings were completed within a few months of the events portrayed, this gave all four an air of novelty as well as topicality. The immediacy of these images anticipated the development of photo-journalism which some found a disturbing development in modern life. The reviewer at *The Times* seems unsettled by the usurpation of the proper terrain of history painting by the modern-subject painter. Commenting on Joseph Noel Paton's picture *In Memoriam* (fig.83), the writer makes the point that sometimes the present can be too real and raw and therefore artists should wait for history to smooth the edges:

While this proves that contemporary life most effectually awakens the curiosity of the mixed assemblage of exhibition visitors, it shows the artists may err in choosing even subjects of the day. Few love to pause on a representation, however powerful, of an incident at once so real, so ghastly, and so recent as the Indian massacres of women and children.³⁰

²⁸ Dwayne Roy Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 29.

²⁹ Marshall and Graham give a full history of travel between England and India in, Ian Marshall, and John Maxtone-Graham. *Passage East* (Charlottesville, VA: Howell Press, 1997).

³⁰ "Royal Academy Exhibition" *The Times*, May 22, 1858, P.9.

Nearing Home (fig.81) shows a wounded officer being brought back to England by his wife, while *Eastward Ho!* portrays the departure of a troop of soldiers from England to India, a departure which is viewed mostly through the eyes of the women left behind. *In Memoriam* shows a group of women and two children awaiting their fate as sepoys break into their refuge in Cawnpore; after public protest the sepoys were painted out and replaced by kilted highlanders.³¹ All these paintings used the Royal Academy as a platform to portray a female perspective on the war in India while traditional military pictures such as Thomas Jones Barker's *The Relief of Lucknow* (fig.80) with its spectacular armorial frame did not. Superficially this group seem to confirm discourses of control and definitions of femininity as fragile and dependent. Nead points to a link between the moral panic of white women being raped by non-white Indians and attempts to police women's behaviour.³² J.W.M. Hichberger also points to the artistic response to the hysteria "that white women and children were in the power of the rebels."³³ However this group should also be seen in the context of a decade which saw a change in portrayals of women from mostly victims or dependent on men to the hybrid figure of hero and victim, a change in perception which was reflected in the modern-subject paintings of Solomon and others.

³¹ Alison Blunt, "Embodying War: British Women and Domestic Defilement in the Indian «Mutiny», 1857–8," *Journal of Historical Geography* 3, no. 26 (July 2000). 416.

³² Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988, 82.

³³ J.W.M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 60.

The heroic qualities of womanhood are not always obvious, *Nearing Home* reminded viewers of women's duty, particularly as wives, to care for the wounded but the mother/wife/nurse reflected a topical interest in Florence Nightingale and the legend of the 'Lady with the Lamp'. While women's expected devotion and 'naturally' caring temperament was well established within the ideology of the time, the requirement for women to care for and nurse the wounded had become further enforced through the popular appeal of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's recently published poem *Santa Filomena* (1857). The middle-class woman was not always restricted by ties of sentiment alone, as was previously the case, and might be a volunteer or sometimes professional nurse:

A lady with a lamp shall stand
In the great history of the land,
A noble type of good, Heroic womanhood.³⁴

Longfellow uses the phrase "heroic womanhood" which suggests an understanding that the everyday can be heroic. Nightingale was also famous for her work as an administrator, statistician, and military reformer so Luard's image, in its topical reference to Nightingale, of the middle-class nurse/wife had a feminist appeal via her combination of "feminine" and "masculine" abilities. The picture's additional title is "some of our English land birds settling on the

³⁴ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Santa Filomena" *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Nov.1857). See also. Edward Tyas Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale, Vol. 1.* (London: Macmillan, 1913) ,237.

ship, told us we are nearly home” is a reference to the story of Noah and the Ark and hence survival of the nation.

Eastward Ho! by Henry O’Neil depicts the despair of women who must see off their men to war, though the title suggests a darker interpretation.

Eastward Ho! refers to the early seventeenth century play by George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston (1605) which involves a betrayal and theft by a criminal nobleman, Sir Petronel Flash, who tries to escape his young bride by ship. Viewers may have understood through this title, the predictability of women’s betrayal by men, and their habit of running away. This is a superb example of the way high focus observation in the Pre-Raphaelite and Realist manner contribute to the meaning and aesthetic of the painting. The bare flesh of the women is thrown into sharp relief by the detailed depiction of the rough wood of the ship’s hull which separates the women from their men in a stark evocation of the horror of war. The contrast of the two textures evokes the erotic which is highlighted by the young couple kissing and also the phallic decoration on the hull.

Paton was a great friend of John Millais and, had he not lived in Scotland, might have been a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.³⁵ He specialised in fairy paintings which were enhanced by the minute detail of the Pre-Raphaelite style. This detailed depiction of an imagined world attempts to convince viewers of this other “reality”. His paintings included erotically charged woodland scenes, nakedness, and sexual coupling, for example *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* (1849); almost an orgy, permissible for public display only as a fairy painting (fig.84). *In Memoriam*,

³⁵ Emma Hicks, Jeremy Maas, *Victorian Fairy Painting* (London: Merrell Holberton, 1997), 108.

one of his rare modern-subject pictures, encouraged a sexual fantasy of the rape of white women by dark-skinned Indians but his translation from fairyland to real life was disapproved of and he repainted the picture as a rescue by Highland soldiers. The press, who criticised Paton had themselves exploited the “horror” of miscegenation, or perhaps the *frisson* of inter-racial sex, as the ultimate betrayal and usurpation of the rights of the British male:

There are some acts of atrocity so abominable that they will not even bear narration...We cannot print these narratives—they are too foul for publication. We should have to speak of families murdered in cold blood—and murder was mercy!—of the violation of English ladies in the presence of their husbands, of their parents, of their children—and then, but not till then, of their assassination.³⁶

The viewer was expected to contemplate the grief of those left behind after death by the reference to Alfred Lord Tennyson’s recent poem *In Memoriam AHH* (1850). Tennyson refers to the importance of seeing the world as it is, a connection that viewers might make with Paton’s journalistic Realism: “We have but faith : we cannot know ; For knowledge is of things we see ;”³⁷

³⁶ *The Times*, Aug. 6, 1857. Quoted by: Alison Blunt, “Embodying War: British women and domestic defilement in the Indian ‘Mutiny’, 1857-8”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 26,3 (2000), 408. See also the discussion by, J.W.M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 60.

³⁷ W. J. Rolfe and Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam by Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Houghton, Mifflin, 1895), 2.

Viewers would also see in the painting, through familiarity with the Sunday School text, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, an allusion to early Christian and protestant martyrdom.³⁸ The central mother figure holds a prayer book in her left hand and looks towards heaven in a calm and Christian acceptance of her fate. A young woman is clutching on to her, eyes closed and mouth open, she references Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* 1849-50 (fig.85) prepared for her role as holy martyr-virgin. *The Art-Journal* was nervous about the painting but suggested that in time: "it will then more becomingly—though not even then regarded without a shudder—serve the purpose for which it appears to have been painted."³⁹ Like other modern-subject paintings the problem was its contemporaneity.

The London Illustrated News, perhaps writing for a more popular and less squeamish audience, was not fooled by Paton's prurient exploitation of the incident: 'there, in that miserable murder hole, crouch the helpless English women and children of Cawnpore. Terror, anguish, despair on every face...the subject is too revolting for further description...The picture is one which ought not to have been hung.'⁴⁰

Paton's second version became a popular success as an engraving and in Julia Thomas's account established a visual justification for the subsequent

³⁸ John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments of These Latter and Perillous Dayes, Touching Matters of the Church, Wherein Ar Comprehended and Described the Great Persecutions & Horrible Troubles That Have Been Wrought and Practised by the Romishe Prelates, Speciallye in This Realme of England and Scotlande, from the Yeare of Our Lorde a Thousande, Vnto the Tyme Nowe Present* (London: Iohn Day, 1563).

³⁹ "Royal Academy Exhibition", *The Art Journal*, vol. 4 (June 1, 1858), 169.

⁴⁰ "Royal Academy," *Illustrated London News* (15 May 1858), 416.

revenge on the sepoys after the Mutiny.⁴¹ The picture had been transformed into a straightforward homily of male rescue—the Highlanders arrive, and the women are saved. The men doing the rescuing are British men defending “their own”. That they were Highlanders reflects the fashion for all things Scottish, Balmoral Castle had just been rebuilt in 1856, and contrasts the continuing loyalty of the Scot with the Indian mutineers. But, more than that, Paton has transformed the event from a depiction of a contemporary moment, too “real” for public consumption into an image more closely aligned with history painting. The reception by critics of these four paintings highlights a general problem with paintings of everyday life in their relation to history. While everyday life paintings were confined to ordinary lives they were acceptable to critics, but any attempt to be more “serious” by straying into territory claimed by history paintings was problematic. History painters’ attachment to the idealised hero was still firmly rooted and everyday life painters attempts to capture history “, seemed contradictory, this seemed particularly true of attempts to place women as self-contained heroes.

The “jungle” setting of *The Flight* seems an odd choice by Solomon when paintings set in Lucknow, erroneously, had a dry or desert setting. (fig.86) This may be a purely symbolic choice on the part of Solomon, the jungle acting a metaphor for chaos and uncertainty and representing a vision of nature untamed. The jungle itself suggests the terror of the unknown, dark forests in stories such as Hansel and Gretel which evoke childhood nightmares. The jungle setting may also be a reference to images of the expulsion from the

⁴¹ Julia Thomas, *Pictorial Victorians: The Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004),125-144.

garden of Eden, with a contrast between the ordered flower embroidery of the shawl representing the cultivated garden against a wild uncultivated world.

The knowledgeable viewer might point out the incongruity of cacti and banana trees growing side by side in a supposedly natural setting. But this may not be intended to be an actual Indian jungle, it is much more likely to be based on a corner of a botanical collection such as the Palm House at Kew. This would have been Solomon's only source for a background model. The prickly pear cacti, unheard of in India are clearly painted from life. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the addition of a number of botanical collections open to the public including Kew. A fascination with plants, plant collecting, gardening, and the taxonomy of plants preoccupied both scientists and the general enthusiast. This was also evident in the interest in natural history and geological discoveries of fossils. It was to culminate in the national response to the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, 1859 in the following year. Solomon's use of the botanical collection as a source underlines the modernity, topicality, and immediacy of the picture. For the contemporary viewer this setting adds to a feeling that this is not a gratuitous pleasure-taking of other people's misery, but it is justified as an objective and scientific observation through an association with the study of nature. So, for many there was the possibility, not of enjoying the image of terrified women—that would be cruel, but by learning from, a “real” representation of the event.

Chapter Eleven: “Our Pleasant Vices,” 1860

No circumstance seems to have affected the friends of religion with greater disgust than the number of suicides committed during the French Revolution. The frequency of this act is supposed to have originated from unbelief. Whether this be the case or not we do not pretend to determine. In England these unhappy acts are generally construed into lunacy; and as we are said to have more religion than the French, it might not be inconsistent with it were we to attribute in charity the greater part of these acts of suicide to that sudden derangement of intellect which is supposed to be the cause of them in this Christian country.¹

(The Oeconomist or Englishman's Magazine, 1798)

1937 violent deaths happened in the year; 2 were public executions, 61 were homicides, 234 were suicides, and 1640 were returned as deaths by accident or negligence. The homicides were most numerous in summer. The suicides were least numerous in the first three months of the year; of the suicides, 8 were by gunshot wounds, 55 by other wounds, 34 by drowning, 75 by hanging, 46 by poison, and 16 in other ways.²

(Report of the Registrar General, 1858)

¹ “On the Frequency of Suicide,” *The Oeconomist or Englishman's Magazine* no.5 (June 1798), 161.

² “Health of London in 1858,” *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Registrar General* (1858), xli.

Solomon's painting *Drowned! Drowned!* (fig.6) shows a young female suicide, presumably dead, who has been fished from the river Thames by a boatman. An older woman, a policeman, a pointing man, and a Covent Garden Market flower-seller surround the body. The flower-seller may simply be a flower-seller but according to Nigel Esprey "flower-seller" was a moniker for prostitute.³ Nothing in this painting is what it seems. To the left are a group of revellers returning from a night at a masked ball. The painting has been interpreted as a moral tale of the seduction of a young woman, her subsequent downfall and suicide. The first of the two quotations above is intended to show how suicide was seen as "unenglish" and that self-murder was a form of madness. This quotation is from the eighteenth century and represents a traditional view which lingered on into the nineteenth century. By Solomon's day some narratives of suicide were in place by which the suicidal act is down played but possible causes for suicide are emphasised. An example of this can be seen by comparing Millais's painting *Ophelia* (fig.87) which makes no direct reference to the factors which pushed her to suicide and Solomon's picture which emphasised the supposed causes of the young woman's suicide. The Millais painting is an eroticised image of a beautiful young woman who shows no signs of her death by drowning; the viewer is not asked to engage with her inner turmoil but is left to contemplate her beauty. In Solomon's painting the drowned victim is marginalised and viewers are asked to focus on the central male figure and his turmoil. These represent two extremes of response to female suicide which waver between morbid fascination with the dead body to an idea that the woman is incapable of the heroic act of suicide and is not allowed to

³ Nigel T Esprey, *Covent Garden Memories*,
http://www.coventgardenmemories.org.uk/page_id__59.aspx

make a fully independent decision. Instead her independence is taken from her and it is assumed that that she has been pushed to her death by men. This was the conventional view of the time seemingly expressed in *Drowned!* and accepted by critics such as James Dafforne in the *Art Journal*.⁴ Solomon however introduces a complication into this apparently straightforward story, one which would have been noticed by contemporary viewers who were astute at deciphering narratives within paintings. This is the problem of the leading and positionally central figure of the male reveller. He was interpreted, by Dafforne, as possibly, the young woman's seducer: "Had he any share in bringing her to a suicide's death?"⁵ This seems to fit with the look of horror mingled with recognition on his face, but if this is the case does it then suggest that the young woman has deliberately killed herself as revenge. That she has somehow orchestrated this whole scenario so that her body is discovered by him on returning from the masked ball. It seems an unlikely plot line but novels at the time were full of unlikely plots. These were the years of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) all of which had extraordinarily elaborate and scarcely believable plots. These sensation novels are discussed by Winifred Hughes as metaphors for contemporary social anxieties which introduce a new type of heroine who is not consistently "good".⁶ This small detail may introduce the possibility that, in this painting at least, Solomon is using ideas inspired by the sensation novel just as he had previously used

⁴ James Dafforne, "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX Abraham Solomon" *The Art Journal*. New Series. Vol. 1 (March 1862).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton University Press, 1980) ix.

features of the penny dreadful. It is certainly an interesting idea that the drowned girl is not a passive victim but instead is using her own death, the only weapon she has, to exact revenge.

Suicide was treated very differently, and less ambiguously, in Henry Wallis's enormously popular painting *Chatterton* (fig.88). In this painting of male suicide, which includes an allusion to the dead Christ, the poet is portrayed as noble and romantic and his death is presented as a rebuke to society's treatment of artists.⁷ The meaning attached to male suicide, for example Jacques Louis David's *The Death of Socrates*, is much more a celebration of heroism in defiance of death. There are many possible explanations for the difference in attitudes to female suicide, the subject was fairly common in the theatre and opera, but paintings of female suicide were rare, it was perhaps not a subject which made a painting sellable. It says something of Solomon's seriousness as an artist that he produced this painting knowing that the market for it would be limited. *Drowned!* was one of a few paintings of female suicide though paintings of fallen women were exhibited such as Augustus Egg's *Past and Present*. Images of female inequality which became more common in the 1850s may be linked to anxieties brought about by the beginnings of a feminist movement, most visible as the Langham Place Group and publicly through a petition in support of the *Married Woman's Property Act* in 1856.⁸

⁷ Tate Britain, gallery label, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/wallis-chatterton-n01685>

⁸ Pam Hirsch, *Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, 1827-1891: Feminist, Artist and Rebel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998), 194.

In London suicide by drowning was not a common cause of death, only 34 drownings were recorded in 1858, the first year when statistics were compiled. This number may not be accurate (the figures for suicide rarely are) but it is the figure available to the London public at the time. So, it was not the ubiquity of this dramatic act which led to Solomon's painting. As well as the topicality of feminism through the presence of the Langham Place Group two other topicalities are worth considering when thinking about contemporary viewers' responses and associations, both of these, like Solomon's picture centre on the River Thames. One anxiety during the 1850s was the problem of pollution of the metropolis and the river by dead bodies. In Solomon's painting it is not just that the young woman has killed herself but that she also represents a danger to public health—another dead body infecting the river. From 1850 until 1860 eight Acts of Parliament were passed to regulate the problem of human burial in London:

The Metropolitan Internments Act, 1850, as affecting a concentrated population of upward of two millions of persons, is, in a social point of view, one of the most important statutes which has for many years received the sanction of the legislature. The injurious effects, moral and physical, produced by the practice of interring the bodies of the dead in burial grounds surrounded by the habitations of the living...⁹

⁹ William Glen Cunningham, *Metropolitan Interments Act; 1850, with Introduction, Notes, and Appendix* (Shaw, 1850), 2.

This fear of contagion by dead bodies from overflowing graveyards was to lead to the establishment of a number of cemeteries on the edges of London but the contamination of the river was also considered:

That, considering the river as a highway passing through the largest extent of densely-peopled districts, the facilities for establishing houses of reception on its banks...¹⁰

Special “Houses of Reception” were to be built to isolate dead bodies from the water system but also to use the river as a funeral thoroughfare, so that public highways would not be contaminated. The topicality of river pollution and contamination from dead bodies, with debates in Parliament and press coverage gives another dimension to the painting and strengthens the idea of the young woman as a social pollutant and disease carrier. By association with this theme, the revellers who are in some ways the cause of this tragedy also become sources of societal pollution, disease, and contamination. Solomon (and his viewers would probably note this) dresses up the revellers in the fine feathers and satins of the aristocratic past to make an ironic point whose source is the line spoken by Polonius in *Hamlet*, “For the apparel oft proclaims the man.”¹¹ The viewer can see the revellers as a contagion, an important idea because their love of pleasure can infect others, despite their expensive “apparel.”

The Thames as an image of death running through the city and Waterloo Bridge as a focus in a cult of suicide was nothing new. By 1853 Charles

¹⁰ *Ibid.*,5.

¹¹ *Hamlet*, Act 1, 3, 73.

Dickens was writing about this; here in an exchange with a Thames waterman called Pea, an almost obligatory comparison with Paris the capital city of wickedness is included:

“So awful,” I returned, “at night. The Seine at Paris is very gloomy too, at such a time, and is probably the scene of far more crime and wickedness; but this river looks so broad and vast, so murky and silent, seems such an image of death in the midst of the city’s great life, that—.... Grim they look, don’t they?” said Pea, seeing me glance over my shoulder at the lights upon the bridge, and downward at their long-crooked reflections in the river. “Very,” said I, “and make one think of suicides. What a night for a dreadful leap from the parapet!” “Aye. But Waterloo’s the favourite bridge for making holes in the water from,” returned Pea.¹²

Dickens thinks of suicides because he is prompted by the reflection of the lights on the parapet on the river, Solomon also uses the play of these lights and reflections, he highlights the girl’s face in the light of the police bulls-eye. And, together these add to the mysterious and deathly atmosphere. The river is largely unseen, but its presence is felt.

The association with disease is emphasised by a second and even more powerful topicality which comes into play, with “The Great Stink” of 1858. By 1858 the river had become overwhelmed by sewage and other rubbish which

¹² Charles Dickens, “Down with the Tide,” *Household Words*, 150 (Feb 5, 1853) 481.

was being dumped into the waters by the expanding population of London. The hot summer of 1858 caused a stinking miasma to settle over London, particularly around the newly opened Houses of Parliament. At the time many people still believed “in the ‘miasmatic’ explanation of disease propagation and would have been easily persuaded that the stench was potentially fatal.”¹³ London itself was to become identified by this image of stench and excrement. Tristram Hunt suggests that it is an image based on a very concrete reality:

This vision of London as a bog, as a swamp swarming with infection and sinking in its own (frequently excrementitious) mire would become a favourite motif for Victorian critics of the capital. But an altogether less literary turn were the Registrar General’s statistics. And out they tumbled: neglect of sanitary measures in England and Wales cost the lives of 137 persons per day; annual deaths from typhus fever amounted to 16,000 along with another 150,000 to 200,000 affected by this wholly preventable disease; between 1838 and 1844 over 100,000 were killed in London by causes peculiar to the environment.¹⁴

The crisis of the Great Stink focussed on parliament and the inability of a great empire to keep its own house in order. The solution led to the construction of the Embankment and Bazalgette’s great London sewer the building of which

¹³ Stephen Halliday, *The Great Stink of London: Sir Joseph Bazalgette and the Cleansing of the Victorian Metropolis* (Thrupp, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub., 1999), 73.

¹⁴ Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2005), 33-34.

was to dominate the visual landscape of London for the next twenty years. This had begun shortly before the painting of *Drowned!*

In various parts of the Metropolis, small wooden sheds, surrounded by taurpaulings (sic) may be seen...in these spots has been commenced, within the last week, one of the heaviest operations London has witnessed in recent times...For good or for evil, the metropolis has entered upon a work of no common magnitude.¹⁵

The sewer and the river would have been foremost in viewers' minds when confronted by Solomon's challenging image not least because of the imagery produced by artists for the illustrated press in the period of the Great Stink. One problem for illustrators was that the subject was smell and there was no direct way of showing this. The importance of smell in contemporary notions of diseases and status cannot be overemphasised. Alain Corbin explores this in *The Foul and the Fragrant*.¹⁶ The solution was personification, and so an iconography of diseased children, female victims, and death as a boatman was developed, as may be seen in *Father Thames introducing his Offspring to the City of London* (fig.89) a cartoon by Punch from 1858. Smell is suggested in this image by the putrefying children and dead animals and in the background the smoking chimneys represent the pollution of industry and the onward

¹⁵ *The Builder*, 30 April 1859, 292, quoted by Halliday, *The Great Stink*, 1999, 77.

¹⁶ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination* (London: Papermac, 1996).

assault from the modern world. The figures of masqueraders in the background of Solomon's picture function in a similar way to represent noisy drunkenness, sexual licence, and ribaldry, they too are caricatures taken both from the theatre and a stygian underworld. As in the Punch cartoon these are creatures who seem to have emerged from the river itself.

Solomon's Realism was in part topographical, his paintings presented viewers with a recognisable place and a scenario which was, at least potentially, within their own experience. Of course, not every viewer would have been to London and seen Waterloo Bridge, but most viewers would have some knowledge of the bridge's reputation for suicides, through the Hood poem or have seen other images of the area and they would recognise a London policeman or a Covent Garden flower girl. The point is the picture is no abstract or idealised scenario, it is meant and would have been perceived, however mistakenly, to be a real place and an everyday incident. In this painting, as with the other crowd paintings, viewers can imagine themselves to be at the scene as if they are passers-by and the painting is part of their world. This is the powerful effect of Solomon's Realism which derives from the combination of the topographical and the topical which makes the image familiar and alive for the viewer. In effect the contemporary viewer can identify with the place and the scene as if they were there, even though the familiarity they feel may only have been channelled through newspaper reports, the theatre, illustrations in magazines, or cartoons in Punch.

This effect might be thought of as photographic in its intention, particularly in this engraved version where all evidence of painting has been removed. And, it seems likely that photography, given its position in the 50s and 60s as a popular art form, should have influenced Solomon the popularist. Oscar Rejlander had exhibited his allegorical tableau vivant *The Two Ways of Life* (fig.62) purchased by Victoria as a present for Albert, at the Art Treasures

Exhibition, Manchester in 1857. This photograph with its contrast of virtue and vice may have been an influence on *Drowned!* Edgar Yoxall Jones believes that Rejlander was inspired by George Reynolds' *The Mysteries of London* which has already been mentioned as a source for *Waiting for the Verdict*, so there is a tentative connection via Reynolds.¹⁷ Unlike Rejlander the photographer, Solomon's Realism is only partly based on accurate depiction as a means of convincing the viewer. Solomon's aim is much more to give a sense of "locus" by which I mean the combination of a representation of place topographically with the idea of place as temporal. A place may be defined in terms of time because it can change through time, the bridge at night is effectively a different bridge in the daytime. But not only is the place, the entrance to Waterloo bridge in this case, identified topographically and by time, by also by the joint topical experiences of viewer and artist. In this way place or locus is not just what the viewer sees or the time frame within which it fits but is defined by the bringing together of viewers topical experiences such as newspaper articles, Dickens' description of the river, the poem, and other literature of the time.

Drowned! Drowned! is the first of Solomon's "crowd" paintings to be discussed in this study. The others, to follow, are *Brighton Front* (fig.3) and *The Departure of the Diligence* (fig.14) All three paintings depict groups of people in public places. They engage with what was a new and everyday aspect of urban life—the crowd. These crowd paintings are a development of Solomon's earlier Realism, such as the train paintings, which began by encouraging viewers to look more carefully at the everyday and to see aesthetic qualities in ordinary life. The last three paintings of this study, all crowd paintings, show

¹⁷ Edgar Yoxall. Jones, *Father of Art Photography, O.G. Rejlander, 1813-1875* (New York Graphic Society, 1973), 22.

everyday interactions between people in public and suggest that Solomon seemed to be moving towards a broader interest in what it was to be a social being. This is not an absolute division between early and late Solomon, almost all his paintings discussed in this study depict groups of different sizes, but they generally focus on one or two subjects. With the later paintings the focus is less and less on the individual.

Unfortunately, the original painting of *Drowned! Drowned!* has been lost and is only known from a print first published in *The Art Journal*.¹⁸ So, the analysis must be restricted to the engraving and its context. There are some, very tentative, clues to the look of the painting from a review in the *Royal Academy Review* (1860) which compared *Drowned! Drowned!* to a painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Duel After the Masquerade* (fig.90). The Gérôme picture relies on colour and light effects to create an emotionally charged atmosphere, and because Solomon's painting is set at the same time of day the suggestion is that light, colour, and atmospheric effect were important for both paintings. In contrast to the Gérôme painting which, in the French Academic manner, is glass smooth, polished, and free of brush strokes, the Solomon picture is described as 'coarse and slovenly'.¹⁹ One has to be careful of this negative review, the language used sounds like a stereotypical criticism of a Jew and there may be an element of anti-Jewishness here. It might be that *Drowned!* used a similar loose brushstroke technique as *Brighton Front* though it's not possible to tell from the engraving. In 1871 a second engraved version with updated clothing and other

¹⁸ James Dafforne, "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX Abraham Solomon" *The Art Journal*. New Series. Vol. 1 (March 1862).

¹⁹ *The Royal Academy Review*. Council of Four. 1860, 38.

minor alterations appeared in *The Days Doings* magazine ²⁰ (fig.91). The transformation of the reveller's costumes from masquerade to contemporary dress reinterprets the picture more obviously in terms of class conflict and the death of the young woman is more pointedly attributed to her exploitation within a class system. Solomon is not so dogmatic though he is saying something about differences of rank or money, the right side of the painting is filled with ordinary workers while the left side is made up of revellers who are clearly leisured. But, the revellers actual status is masked by their costumes, which adds to the chaos which they introduce. The central male and female revellers are pretending to be aristocrats which implies, dishonesty, subterfuge, and hypocrisy, and this is contrasted with the suggested honesty of the other uniforms; of the boatman; the policeman; and the flower girl. These uniforms tell the viewer not just the status of the individual but also their precise role and again Solomon, as in *Waiting for the Verdict*, is using clothes symbolically. The change in clothing between the two engravings (1860 and 1871) is a good indicator of how a seemingly minor detail can affect the interpretation of a Solomon painting. In this example the move to contemporary dress narrows viewers' options and hands over the job of interpretation to the artist. The 1871 version is a straightforward condemnation of the young woman's exploitation while in the Solomon painting the masquerade introduces ideas of subterfuge, disguise, masculinity and even shame. Lynda Nead links artifice to prostitution and this hints at an inversion of the normal world. The young suicide in her plain shroud and the revellers in what might be taken as prostitute's costume: "Surface decoration, showy patterns, elaborate textures, jewellery, cosmetics—

²⁰ *The Day's Doings*, vol. 2 (March 1871), 89.

all these elements connoted that the prostitute had transgressed the laws of god, nature and respectable society.”²¹

Drowned! is included in this study, despite surviving only as a print, because it is one of three crowd paintings which Solomon completed in the 1860s. Its importance rests on this portrayal of the crowd as a signifier for modernity. All three seem to ask the viewer to pause and look very carefully at their surroundings, this is part of Solomon's Realist objective. These three pictures “freeze” at a more or less random moment. This is noticeably the case with the *Diligence* and with *Brighton Front* in which there would be little difference if the image were painted five minutes later or earlier. In this sense these two later pictures are “eventless” and do not depend on narrative.

Drowned! of the three crowd paintings, makes the least obvious use of this non-narrative approach, but the germ of a painting without a story is there. This comes from a Realist idea that the picture is almost peripheral vision, or a glance, something which is happening in real life but no more significant than the other ordinary events a passer-by might come across on a nocturnal walk. One feature of this painting is that there is no obvious focus for the viewer's gaze. In this and the following two paintings the viewer is encouraged to move freely around the scene. The three paintings, though they are quite distinct, become gradually less dramatic until the last painting *The Diligence* is close to a simple observational picture of a daily activity without a subject other than itself.

²¹ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988, 175.

For contemporary critics the subject of *Drowned!* seemed to be quite obvious, a young woman has thrown herself from Waterloo Bridge. James Dafforne is quite clear about it and worth quoting at length:

...in all probability, had its origins in Hood's wonderfully thrilling and most pathetic poem of "The Bridge of Sighs." The composition shows two distinct groups: one a party of half intoxicated revellers returning from a masquerade, the other a young female, "one more unfortunate," whom a waterman has just brought to shore from the dark rolling river: in front of her is a policeman, the light of whose "bulls-eye" glares vividly on that pale death-stricken face. Another man points out to a woman coming from early market, the place where the body was found. Here again, as in other works by the same artist, we have a "contrast,"—misery, death, and sympathy with human suffering on one side: gaiety, licentiousness, and degradation on the other; while midway between these the foremost figure of the revellers seems, by his look of mingled horror and pity, to stand as a link between the two extremes.²²

Dafforne's account is plausible though he doesn't take into consideration that the title of the painting comes from a line spoken by Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother.²³ If anything the painting was probably intended to be a modern version of the death of Ophelia. And Ophelia, perhaps differently from present-day

²² James Dafforne, "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX Abraham Solomon" *The Art Journal*. New Series. Vol. 1 (March 1862),75.

²³ Hamlet,4,7.

views of her, was regarded as an entirely innocent young woman who loved Hamlet completely though was not loved in return.²⁴ A contemporary viewer would not fail to note the connection, not just with the play, but with Millais's painting of 1852, about which *The Times* said, "there must be something strangely perverse in an imagination which souses Ophelia in a weedy ditch, and robs the drowning struggle of that lovelorn maiden of all pathos and beauty."²⁵ This explains the flowers, an attribute of Ophelia based on Gertrude's description of the drowning girl, and gives additional meaning to the presence of the band of players, the group of masqueraders, who indicate there is connection to the theatre. The viewer might connect the masqueraders to the "play within the play" from Hamlet. Solomon had painted a number of pictures based on literary sources, *An Academy for the Instruction in the Discipline of the Fan—1711* was based on one of the *Spectator Papers* for example, so it would not have been surprising that he had taken this episode from Shakespeare and put it in modern dress.²⁶ Once the connection was made that the painting was a modern version of Ophelia's death then an association was likely between Millais's painting of eight years before and *Drowned!* Two topicalities may have enforced this, the John Ruskin and Effie Gray annulment scandal of 1854 and Effie's subsequent marriage to John Millais in 1855. The affair between Millais and Gray, the original model for Ophelia, would provide a rich source of

²⁴ Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines*. (New York: Dutton, 1832), 182.

²⁵ "Exhibition of the Royal Academy (Private View)" *The Times* (1 May 1852), Issue 21104,8.

²⁶ Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *Spectator Papers: Satirical and Philosophical Extracts from the Journal of That Name Written 1711-15 by Addison and Steele and Others* (Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper, 1950), no.102.

speculation about the Solomon painting. Might the drowned girl in the Solomon be a portrait of Effie herself? Speculations which would be compounded after Solomon won the Liverpool Academy prize in 1860 having been robbed, or so some thought, by Millais in 1857.

The other source for the painting, suggested by Dafforne, was Thomas Hood's popular poem *The Bridge of Sighs*, 1844.²⁷ This influential poem was sympathetic to the plight of the wronged woman who like Ophelia had fallen in love with the wrong man:

Where the lamps quiver
So far in the river,
With many a light
From window and casement,
From garret to basement,
She stood, with amazement,
Homeless by night.²⁸

That the painting derives from the Hood poem is made obvious by the massive presence of Waterloo Bridge, the site of Hood's poem, "I have all but done a poem on 'the Bridge of Sighs'—i.e. Waterloo, and its Suicides."²⁹ However the emotional landscape of the Solomon painting differs, or seems to, from the

²⁷ Arthur Thomas. Quiller-Couch, *The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), no.354.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Thomas Hood and Peter F. Morgan, *The Letters of Thomas Hood* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1973), 600.

paragon of innocence that was the Victorian version of Ophelia and the wronged heroine of the Hood poem who was assumed to have been a pregnant prostitute.³⁰

Solomon introduces the lines from *King Lear*, “The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices make whips to scourge us” (*King Lear*, 5,3,181-82). This line had been interpreted by Archbold Allison, a good judge of contemporary moral sentiment:

...he did but express the conviction of mankind, founded alike upon observation and experience, that how agreeable and enticing soever the paths of sin may be in the outset, they terminate alike to communities and individuals in disappointment and ruin.³¹

This sheds a different light on the Solomon painting by implying that pleasure must come first and then is followed by God’s retribution. Thomas Hood’s heroine was seduced and there is no suggestion that she took any pleasure in what happened to her—it seems unlikely then that Solomon is suggesting that it was the woman’s search for pleasure which led to her death. It is more likely that Solomon, by quoting from *King Lear*, was shifting the focus of the painting onto the central male figure of the reveller. This is supported by Dafforne’s interpretation that “while midway between these the foremost figure of the revellers seems, by his look of mingled horror and pity, to stand as a link

³⁰ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988, 169.

³¹ Archibald Alison, *History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in M.DCC.LXXXIX. to the Restoration of the Bourbons in M.DCCC.XV* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1843), Vol.4, 573.

between the two extremes.³² It seems that Solomon was using Shakespeare to inform his viewers that the painting should be seen firstly as an updating of the Ophelia story and secondly as a warning that the man, and particularly a man who lives his life for pleasure will be punished. In several other Solomon paintings, most obviously *The Lion in Love*, the behaviour of a man is a significant focus; the grandfather in *Waiting for the Verdict* competes for the viewer's attention. There certainly seems room for an interpretation of Solomon's paintings as treatises on the construction of masculinity and instructions of how to behave as a man. But, the most extensive interpretation of Solomon's work has been informed by feminism.

Lynda Nead devoted a case study to *Drowned!* in her book *Myths of Sexuality*.³³ For her, "Abraham Solomon's painting exemplifies the tension that was set up within visual representations of the prostitute through the competing expectations of Realism, propriety and aesthetic pleasure."³⁴ This is somewhat at odds with the portrayal of the young woman who is not pictured in any obvious way as a prostitute; her blonde hair and white shroud-like shift emphasise her innocence as does her identification with Ophelia. A telling comparison between Solomon's drowned young woman fished from the Thames and a Haymarket prostitute by William Powell Frith appears in *Night: Haymarket*, 1862 (fig.92). Frith uses a traditional iconography of the prostitute, painted face, dark hair, and overdressed, rather than Solomon's almost religious

³² James Dafforne, "British Artists: Their Style and Character. No. LIX Abraham Solomon" *The Art Journal*. New Series. Vol. 1 (March 1862),75.

³³ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell, 1988), 182-191.

³⁴ *Ibid.*,182.

image of angelic innocence. Who was a prostitute and who was a fallen woman are categories fraught with difficulties but in the broadest sense the main distinction was age. A young woman could be innocent of male predation in a way the older woman could never be. So, in Augustus Egg's triptych *Past and Present* (fig.18) the married woman's downfall is seen, more or less, as her own doing. The young girl, though it is difficult to tell, might be any age from ten years to eighteen years old so this depiction of her victimisation should perhaps be seen as part of the growing Victorian response to child prostitution and child exploitation. Lynda Nead, observes that the Victorian definition of the fallen woman as a social victim, rather than as highlighting an individual's moral lapse, as a strategy for neutralising the power of prostitution to infect society as a whole:

One way of negotiating these fears was by defining the fallen woman as a social victim rather than as a social threat. This is a fairly straightforward mechanism. If you feel sympathy rather than fear towards a group which challenges the dominant order its power may be diffused. Pity deflects the force of that group and re-distributes power in terms of a conventional relationship organized around notions of social conscience, compassion and philanthropy.³⁵

Nead's book concentrates on the ways in which Victorian paintings of everyday life contributed to definitions of femininity and womanhood. The book has been influential in promoting the view that paintings, such as Solomon's, are to be

³⁵ Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988.

interpreted as ideological narratives in the service of unequal gender relations.³⁶
In another paper she states her aim:

to relocate images of women in Victorian high art within a specific history, that is, the history of sexuality; and to demonstrate that these paintings actively constructed meanings, values and morals. The discussion will not be confined to Pre-Raphaelite painting but will examine a range of images produced during the middle decades of the nineteenth century.³⁷

This narrow focus was useful, particularly at the time when art's contribution to the construction of sexualities and genders was overlooked, but the analysis though not reductionist in itself has often been reduced to a formula. Artists come out badly in much investigation of Victorian genre paintings even when produced by artists such as Solomon who have connections, tenuous though they may be, to first wave feminism of the 1850s. In Nead's approach biography is not to be considered. Whether Solomon was a feminist is of no great interest because even, as quoted above, supporting women by humanising prostitutes and identifying the social oppression of women may be interpreted as a deflection by which women are always presented as eternal victims.³⁸

³⁶ One example of her influence would be: Linda Mahood, *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2013).

³⁷ Lynn Nead, "The Magdalen in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting", *Oxford Art Journal*, vol.7, No 1. (1984): 1984

³⁸ Ibid.

One way in which *Drowned!* may be understood is in terms of Solomon's Realism and his creation of locus. The topographical or geographical site of the painting would have been understood in a number of ways and prostitution was one point of connection between the topographical space and locus. The bridge linked the south to the north bank of the river and so was a conduit between the brothels and street prostitution of Granby Street near Waterloo Station, the theatres in Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and the notorious Adelaide Gallery, all explored and documented by Jerry White.³⁹ The site of the painting was almost within the shadow of Exeter Hall the centre for reforming groups and organisations:

During the present month, there have been held in this noble hall, the Anniversary Meetings of the British and Foreign Bible, the Colonial Church Society, the London City Mission, Prayer Book and Homily Society, Sunday School Union, the Jews' Society, Religious Tract Society, Church Pastoral Aid Society, Protestant Association, London Missionary Society. Female Servants' Home, Church of Scotland Mission, Home Missionary Society, Anti-Slavery Society, and Foreign Aid Society.⁴⁰

³⁹ "Granby Street: Private Pleasures" in Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Vintage Books, 2008), 295-322.

⁴⁰ "May Meetings in Exeter Hall," *The Illustrated London News* (18 May 1844), 317.

In this way the geographical place represented in the painting is at the centre of a map of prostitution in London and the geographical meeting point of those who were concerned to reform prostitutes and rescue children. In this instance, locus, that combination of time of day and topical allusions deriving from news or literature is bound up with night and nightwalking. The site of the painting has been transformed by night into a different, almost alien, place—from a decorous thoroughfare to the dangerous intersection shown in the painting. One appeal of the painting when shown at the Royal Academy would have been the knowledge that the scene revealed another world, a night world of vice, which existed just a few hundred metres from the gallery, then in Trafalgar Square. This is something Solomon has done before, the posters in the railway carriage of *Second Class* reproduce the hanging of paintings at the Royal Academy in ironic parody. The proximity of the underworld of the night so close to the headquarters of good taste likewise creates an ironic resonance.

The imagery of night and night walking would have many different sources for the viewer. Chosen here are William Hogarth's *The Four Times of the Day* (fig.92) the second, a set of three sketches, *Morning, Noon, and Night* by William Powell Frith (fig.93) thirdly, Augustus Sala's *Twice Round the Clock* and lastly Charles Dickens' *Down With The Tide* written for his own journal *Household Words*. Both Hogarth and Frith explore the notion that place is constantly transformed by time and in thereby acquires different meanings and associations. Hogarth shows London at four different times of day starting in the centre of the city and ending in the semi-rural district of Sadler's Wells. These paintings show moving through the city in time as moving through different levels of order and disorder, and that order is only fully possible by leaving the city. The message is clear, the urban world is constantly on the verge of descending into chaos despite attempts to control the urban space. It is suggested that nothing works, the spinster lady in *Morning* tries to encourage

order through her display of politeness.⁴¹ Politeness is after all a regulatory system which anticipates order. The Huguenot family in *Noon* suggest an attempt of social order through family and marriage but this is thwarted by the miscegenation of the black man kissing the young white woman.⁴² *Evening*, though the most ordered of all, implies the disorder of infidelity with an image of the horned, cuckolded, husband.⁴³ *Night*, analogous with Solomon's painting, is the most disordered. The street is overseen by Charles I, he is symbolic, having been executed by his subjects, of the world turned upside down. Corruption in high places is indicated by the drunken freemason and the elemental forces of nature are indicated by the burning carriage. The animality of humanity is shown by piss being thrown from the window and pain by teeth extraction.⁴⁴ Both the changing nature of the city and the constant possibility of a breakdown of order in Hogarth's images of London prepare viewers of Solomon's painting to accept the possibility that there is a reality of disorder beneath the surface of the city. Christine Riding sees Hogarth as an explorer of the city who is creating a guidebook or travelogue for those who live outside the city and for those too respectable to venture into the streets at night. This is also true of Solomon's painting:

⁴¹ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works*, vol. 1 (New Haven and London: Yale U.P., 1965), 178.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

In the 1730s Hogarth developed an identity as a roving satirist who explores the city, exposing the folly and vice of its inhabitants while at the same time revelling in the vitality of its streets...⁴⁵

Hogarth uses humour in his explorations of London streets and it is perhaps an indication of a new level of anxiety about civil disorder that Solomon does not. This is underlined by the difference in architectural topography between Solomon's painting and Hogarth's London. In the Hogarth series London is shown as an assemblage of buildings of different heights and styles, disarranged as much as the populace, while Solomon's London is dominated by the great mass of the bridge symbolising a bulwark against disorder as well as the eternal reality of death in alliance with the poisoned river.

Hogarth, in the 1850s was widely respected as a father of English painting, a point made by Ernest Chesneau.⁴⁶ *Drowned!* more than any other Solomon painting might claim an obvious descent from the eighteenth-century master. This did not save Solomon from criticism, and he did retouch the picture. Possibly Solomon hoped viewers might perceive him as a 'serious' artist through an association with Hogarth. Solomon and other modern-subject painters were, in effect, suggesting an alternative history of British art in which two branches ran in parallel. The 'Grand Style' associated with Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Royal Academy and aristocratic patronage and the 'Genre' style which had its origins in Dutch and Flemish painting and the popular art of

⁴⁵ Mark Hallett and Christine Riding, *Hogarth* (London: Tate, 2006), 119.

⁴⁶ Ernest Chesneau, *The English School of Painting*, trans. L. N. Etherington (London, NY: Cassell, 1885), xii.

Hogarth—Chesneau sees the Hogarthian tradition as “true” British art.⁴⁷ It is not only the subject matter and Realism of Solomon’s modern-subject paintings which distinguishes them from others of the period, such as mediaevalist Pre-Raphaelite paintings, but modern-subject pictures also made a claim to an alternative interpretation of British art history. This ambition to express continuity by association with Hogarth was taken up by W. P. Frith in 1862 in three sketches for a projected series to be called *The Streets of London*. The paintings were never completed but the sketches, *Morning*, *Noon* and *Night* (fig.93) survive in private collections. These are updated versions of Hogarth’s *Four Times of Day* and Frith, like Hogarth, illustrates various sorts of order and disorder in the city streets. In *Morning* which is set in Covent Garden, the police arrest two men, expressing governmental order. In *Noon*, which is set in Regent Street, a series of incidents illustrates co-operation, a variation on the theme of informal means of preventing social disorder implied in Hogarth’s *Noon*, for example, a little girl helping a blind man across the road. Of interest here is the third picture *Night* which shows the Haymarket as the Theatre Royal is closing. In the 1860s the Haymarket was a centre for night-time street prostitution and brothels which opened after theatres closed. The contemporary viewer is being offered, in much the same way as *Drowned!* an image of a notorious locale after dark which would normally be hidden from most viewers, especially “respectable” women. The Haymarket and Waterloo Bridge were unremarkable by day but by night they were transformed and these nocturnal versions of the familiar became secret places rarely encountered by the respectable visitors to the Royal Academy. Even if the viewer, say at the Liverpool Academy, had not walked these streets they might have known about the reputation of such areas

⁴⁷ Ibid.

through journals such as the eminently respectable *Household Words*, (“but at night it [the Haymarket] is absolutely hideous, with its sparring snobs, and flashing satins, and sporting gents, and painted cheeks, and brandy sparkling eyes.”)⁴⁸ Again, the intended audience for this painting may have been largely composed of, though not restricted to, women. They could view from the safety of the art gallery what their husbands had the opportunity to see in real life. Men were warned not to take respectable women to the Haymarket at night:

If you happen to be accompanied by wife, daughter, sister, any decent woman, and to be waiting for one of the omnibuses that must pass there—go anywhere, do anything, rather than attempt to elbow through the phalanx of rogues, and thieves, and nameless shames and horrors.⁴⁹

Victorian theatres and Opera Houses, with their separate entrances, tiers, boxes, and ticket prices, were often concrete representations of hierarchies of status or class. In this case Frith uses the theatre building to heighten both the class and the moral position of the prostitute. She, to the right of the picture, is leaving from the ‘Gallery’ (clearly marked) exit where her place is with the more disreputable audience in the cheaper seats. The respectable middle class including a young woman in white and her companions, are leaving from the main entrance and are heading for their hansom cab. The prostitute is alone and on foot, and ready to begin her night of streetwalking so she represents the

⁴⁸ Albert Smith, “Rogues Walk,” *Household Words* XVI (Sept 1857), 264.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

takeover of the streets by the night people. Frith, twenty-five years later, described the scene:

A party is about to enter a carriage, and a gentleman is placing a young woman's cloak closely about her shoulders, in tender lover-like fashion. This is being observed by an overdressed and berouged woman, whose general aspect plainly proclaims her unhappy position; and by the expression of a faded though still handsome face, she feels a bitter pang at having lost forever all claim to manly care or pure affection.⁵⁰

This and other images of the colonisation of the streets by night, by streetwalking prostitutes, thieves, and rogues informed viewers response to Solomon's painting. Viewers might think of the picture as a moral text and also an example of the idea that "this is what happens when we are not looking." This provides an opportunity for the Realist artist, by revealing the underside of London life, to claim to be an anthropologist rather than simply a titillater. Unfortunately, in the 1850s there were few images of the night streets of London to inform Solomon's viewers of what to expect of the night streets. The lack of street lighting made this difficult in the 1850s and this partially explains the use of Waterloo bridge which was illuminated by gas lamps. Viewers could bring together literary accounts, perhaps their own daytime experience, and Solomon's picture to create a locus of time and place to understand the image.

⁵⁰ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences, Vol. 1* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1887), 337.

Both George Sala and Charles Dickens gave graphic accounts of nightwalking during this period. Dickens in his article for *Household Words*, “Down With The Tide”, claims that suicides did not drown but were smashed against the stone piers. This gruesome image which would not have been permissible for a painting would add, for those who had read it, to the imaginative engagement between viewer and picture. It is explained to Dickens by Waterloo the toll-taker:

“If people jump off straight forwards from the middle of the parapet of the bays of the bridge, they are seldom killed by drowning, but are smashed, poor things; that’s what they are; they dash themselves upon the buttress of the bridge”⁵¹

Surprisingly, the toll-taker Waterloo makes no mention of suicides by prostitutes despite the association between the bridge and Thomas Hood’s poem.

George Sala in his book *Twice Round the Clock* circumnavigates but does not mention Waterloo Bridge and says nothing about suicides. He does however take us to the police cells of Bow Street, a few hundred metres from the bridge, where the revelers may end their night and the police officer is based. He visits the Cut, the rookery near Waterloo Station, and the theatres of the southern side of the river from where the revelers have probably come. He visits Covent Garden where the flower seller and porter are destined, and Exeter Hall across the Strand from the bridge where middle class reformers met to

⁵¹ Charles Dickens, “Down with The Tide”, *Household Words* IV, no.150 (Feb. 5, 1853), 160.

campaign for the rescue of young girls from prostitution.⁵² Sala in his “round the clock journey” around London crosses the river to the other end of Waterloo bridge to the Royal Victoria Theatre which had previously been the Coburg Theatre. He remembers the melodramas performed there which are reminiscent of Solomon’s dramatic picture. The dramatic, gothic element of the melodrama has survived in Solomon’s picture through the recognisably theatrical figures of the masquerade. The viewer is spared the blood thirsty Realism of the melodrama but at the same time reminded of the gory theatre of recent melodramas at the Coburg Theatre:

The Grand Melodramas the Coburg used to give us—real horses, real armour, real blood, almost real water! Those were the days of “Ginvera the Impaled One” and “Manfroni the One-handed Monk.” There are famous dramatists, actors, scene painters, who would look rather shame-faced (though I cannot see why they should be ashamed) were they reminded, now, of their achievements in the service of transpontine melodrama at the Coburg.⁵³

The melodrama *Manfroné; or, The One-Handed Monk* (1809) begins with an attempted rape by the monk Manfroné, who then, when caught in the act, has his hand cut off on stage. As with *Drowned! Drowned!* the victim was a young

⁵² “Protection of Young Girls, Great Mass Meeting of Women in Exeter Hall”, *War Cry* (July 29, 1885),1.

⁵³ George Augustus Sala, *Twice around the Clock: Or the Hours of the Day and Night in London, by George Augustus Sala... Illustrated... by William M'Connell* (London: Houlston and Wright, 1859), 269.

girl. Melodramas were by this time old-fashioned, as Sala informs us. But, evidenced by the popularity of *Drowned! Drowned!*, there still seemed to be a place for gothic melodrama in painting. Sala in his peregrination of London, by day and night, informs his readers of an unknown world and Dickens does the same. These accounts and others like them, not forgetting Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851, form a shadowy background to Solomon's painting and enabled those contemporary viewers who had no experience of the night to interpret the picture.⁵⁴ What is not quite clear is whether Sala's readers were the same audience as Solomon's viewers. The painting, like many of Solomon's, was available in print form to a wide public as well as those who may have seen the original painting at the Liverpool and Royal Academies. Solomon seems to make an appeal to a broad audience by his inclusion of a range of characters, flower-sellers, policeman, riverboat men, and the wealthy revellers. Perhaps, unlike Sala's audience, viewers were intended to see themselves in the picture. It is easy to assume that the picture was only meant to show the seamier side of life to well-off art lovers. Certainly, a viewer could take the role of a passer-by and there is an air of complicity in the young woman's drowning. Were viewers to see themselves in the flower-seller who may have been a part time prostitute herself; the chief reveller who realises the consequences of his seduction of the young girl; the chief reveller's companion who turns away from the tragic death? The policeman and his baleful bullseye lamp suggest an indifferent gaze devoid of concern. This is quite unlike Sala's

⁵⁴ Henry Mayhew and William Tuckniss, *London Labour and the London Poor a Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those That Will Work, Those That Cannot Work, and Those That Will Not Work* (London: Griffin, Bohn, and, 1861).

perspective, he clearly sees his readers as respectable and perhaps quite shockable and from outside this night world:

Come with me and sit on the coarse deal benches in the coarsely and tawdrily-decorated cheap theatre and listen to the sorrily-dressed actors and actresses—periwigged-pated fellows and slatternly wenches, if you like—tearing their passion to tatters, mouthing and ranting, and splitting the ears of the groundlings.⁵⁵

Solomon's democratic, humanist, and Realist vision, developed in the next painting which, more than any other, examined the modern phenomenon of the crowd.

⁵⁵ Sala, *Twice around the Clock*, 1859, 271.

Chapter Twelve: Promenading, 1860-62

He would see little or no merit in the glowing colours of Titian, the flowing draperies of Veronese, the broad handling of Velasquez, the careful detail of Van Eyck. But the cheapest form of sentiment embodied in a modern picture, so long as it seemed to realize scenes, incidents and action which he was accustomed to see about him, would at once appeal to his imagination and interest his eye. ¹

(Charles Eastlake, 1868)

You know dear you once promised to take me to France. *You don't recollect it?* Yes—that's like you; you don't recollect many things you've promised me; but I do. There's a boat goes on Wednesday to Boulogne and comes back the day afterwards. *What of it?* Why for that time we could leave the children with the girls and go nicely. *Nonsense?* Of course: if I want anything it's always nonsense. Other men can take their wives half over the world; but you think it quite enough to bring me down to this hole of a place, where I know every pebble on the beach like an old acquaintance—there's nothing to be seen but the same machines—the same jetty—the same donkeys—the same everything.²

(Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures, 1845)

¹ Charles L. Eastlake, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery and Other Details. Second Edition, Revised* (Longmans & Co.: London, 1868), 2

² Douglas Jerrold, *Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures* (London: Prion, 2000), 142.

Charles Eastlake, in the quotation above, sums up the conventional view of everyday life paintings. He imagines a viewer who was unfamiliar with art and who was attracted to the immediate familiarity of subject and emotional expression of everyday life paintings rather than the old masters and he highlights the aspect of Realist paintings which appealed to many people. For him, this is a damning criticism, and an obvious one at that, which needs no justification, the familiar is not art and emotion comes in two flavours—cheap or expensive. On the other hand, in Douglas Jerrold's satire on marriage, originally published in *Punch*, Mrs. Caudle has persuaded her husband to take the family to Margate rather than their usual holiday at Gravesend. Mrs. Caudle, who is always dissatisfied persuades her husband to take an excursion by packet steamer to Boulogne. She is representative of many people with extra money in their pockets, she wants novelty and is prepared to pay for it. These seemingly contradictory demands the first based on the attraction of familiarity and convention and the second a desire for novelty and fashion are brought together in Solomon's painting of a crowd of promenaders in *Brighton Front* (fig.3). With this painting Solomon shows the contemporary viewer the contradiction that lay at the centre of the new urban modernity of the early 1860s. People wanted to be part of, and could not avoid, the crowd they increasingly encountered in urban life, at the theatre, the exhibitions, or on the streets. At the same time, they did not want to lose their individuality, they wanted to be apart from the crowd—both in it and standing outside it. One way they could square that circle was through fashion and display. The crowd strolling in Brighton seem, particularly to us present day viewers, undifferentiated in their repetitions of this promenading ritual but at the same time many, if not all, are attempting to assert their uniqueness. Like the *Diligence* this is a painting which largely asks questions about the nature of the fairly new phenomenon of the urban crowd, but rather than taking the quizzical stance of a British observer of the

French Solomon holds up a mirror to his home audience and asks them look at themselves. This may all seem familiar territory to readers of Charles Baudelaire, but *The Artist of Everyday Life* was not published until 1863 and so was not available to Solomon, though he may have read *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) by Edgar Allen Poe which explores similar themes.³

To begin with there are a number of questions to be asked about this painting. The first is the date. From Solomon's last letter we know that he spent some time in Ilfracombe in 1862 and subsequently in Biarritz where he died that year. This suggests that the latest date for the painting would be early 1862. Jeffrey Daniels puts the painting after 1861 because two of the male figures are sporting "Dundreary" whiskers which were fashionable after 1861 and so "provides a convenient terminus ante quem" which gives an approximate date between 1861 and 1862.⁴ The painting was never exhibited and may be an oil sketch for an uncompleted work, though this is doubtful given that a smaller version is also recorded (it seems unlikely that two oil sketches would have been produced but not impossible). Lionel Lambourne chose to see this work as a turn towards Impressionism by Solomon and Daniels felt that the painting was influenced by Eugène Boudin (1824 – 1898), who was painting beach scenes in the early 1860s (fig.94). None of this would be immediately important except for the existence of a woodcut by William McConnell published in the journal

³ Charles Baudelaire and P. E. Charvet, *The Painter of Modern Life* (London: Penguin, 2010), Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe; Newly Collected and Ed. with a Memoir, Critical Introductions and Notes by Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry* (New York: Scribners, 1894).

⁴ Jeffrey Daniels, et al, *Solomon, a Family of Painters: Abraham Solomon, 1823-1862, Rebecca Solomon, 1832-1886, Simeon Solomon, 1840-1905* (London: Inner London Education Authority, 1985), 56.

London Society in 1862 (fig.95). The two works are strikingly similar, the same setting and with similar elements such as the “swells” with Dundreary whiskers and Brighton’s chain pier in the background. McConnell may have been inspired by Solomon or *vice versa* or conceivably the two are completely independent of each other. It is probably the case that Solomon made use of McConnell’s illustration, which would fit a pattern in his other pictures which were inspired by and also influenced popular imagery. His other seaside painting *A Contrast* appears almost identically in a French Journal (fig.96), *Waiting for the Verdict* became a theatrical flyer (fig.5) and *Drowned!* *Drowned!* was updated for the magazine *The Days Doings* in 1871 (fig.91). This cross-fertilisation was a feature of everyday life paintings and should not be seen as a lack of imagination but a response to the need to produce more and more images at a faster and faster speed. The promenade seems to have been of topical interest and the McConnell illustration is part of a series for *London Society* on fashionable promenades in Britain. One illustration from this series was by a young Walter Crane, Simon Cooke says of this in discussing *London Society Magazine*:

Public gatherings recur throughout the engravings as another sign of leisured activity, notably those by Crane and George Thomas, and within these images of gatherings there are numerous representations of material wealth and polite manners. These compositions are relatively dynamic,

stressing the bustle of urban life while (unconsciously) revealing the ornamental uselessness of their subject's lives.⁵

Cooke's analysis of the McConnell illustration is determined by the view that the middle class of the period were self-satisfied and smug and there is some justification for that, though there is a repeated use of the direct stare between individuals throughout the image which may suggest social anxiety. This is particularly the case of two young women at the centre of the illustration who seemingly wearing the same costume and hats, stare intently at each other, possibly in annoyance at this social faux pas.

Solomon has taken McConnell's idea and made something quite different from it. Firstly, and most obviously Solomon portrays a crowd, his figures are packed tightly together, and some parts of the painting are so filled up that individuality disappears completely. This is quite different from McConnell's work or even from Frith's *Railway Station* (fig.97) in which the separateness of each figure and anecdote is maintained. Returning to the *Diligence*, where the crowd dissolves around the edges, symbolically indicated by the two almost invisible figures disappearing up the hill. These two pictures by Solomon are linked by a thought of what stops a crowd from becoming a mob. For the contemporary viewer the veneer of civilisation which separated crowd from mob was a central concern as cities and urban spaces began to dominate the modern world. Almost contemporaneously this question was addressed in Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In that novel

⁵ <http://www.victorianweb.org/periodicals/londonsociety/cooke.html>, Simon Cooke, *Illustrated Periodicals of the 1860s: Context and Collaborations* (London: British Library, 2010).

the mob appears on a few occasions, most memorably in the attack by Madame Defarge and the other women on the Bastille and Hôtel de Ville.⁶ However the most relevant image of the mob is the account of the funeral of Roger Cly in which a crowd is transformed from a gathering of citizens to a rioting mob almost instantaneously:

...after several hours, when sundry summer-houses had been pulled down, and some area-railings had been torn up, to arm the more belligerent spirits...the crowd gradually melted away...and this was the usual progress of a mob.⁷

In Brighton the sheer volume of the crowd, on the surface so respectable, has a slight air of chaos, but the situation is well controlled, and this is indicated by a separation of groups reflecting the social order of the time. To the left are the institutions, the solid and expensive hotels of the seaside front. In front of the hotels are the rich, the aristocracy, and the gentry with their horses, carriages, and servants. They are protected by a metal railing, tellingly a nominal barrier which relies on social convention for its effectiveness. The promenade itself—railings indicate that walkers had to pay to use its facilities—is occupied by the middle ranks who are there to be seen, women in fashionable clothing and men in top hats. To the right is the public beach where we can see fishing boats to indicate this is a place of work and the sea bathers with hardly visible bathing

⁶ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), 244.

⁷ Dickens, *Tale of Two Cities*, 172-73

machines. Although this may not have been a complete picture of the social hierarchy of the time it indicates a separation of classes by symbolic barriers as a means of control.

Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures shows that early Victorian middle-income families would go on an annual holiday to the seaside and that they could travel easily to Europe, a possibility that rested on the relative cheapness of railway travel and the new steam packets which crossed the English Channel. This is a novel world of leisure and one for which there were few models on which to base the holiday for the newly better off. They went, from London, on day trips to Brighton or to the French ports but they had to invent new ways to occupy their time. The main model for travel available to the trippers of the 1850s and 1860s was that developed by the leisured classes in the eighteenth century. The aristocratic grand tour emphasised the benefits of travel for its enlightening encounters with other cultures and the educational benefit of viewing art, architecture, and landscape. One occupation that was transferred from the aristocratic tradition was a combination of the promenade and visiting a spa. The promenade was typically associated with the daily parades in carriages along Rotten Row in Hyde Park and the Spa was associated with the exclusivity of Bath. Whereas the aristocratic promenade was unashamedly a form of self-advertising display the seaside promenade was given a medical purpose. This derived from a theory of the health-giving properties of ozone, a gas thought to revive the health of city dwellers, and one which was peculiar to the sea air at the point where the sea met the land:

It was thought to transfer the curative properties of the ocean to the air in ‘ocean laden winds’ and was a central marketing point for sea air from at least the 1860s to the 1930s.⁸

Solomon highlights the dual aspect of the promenade by placing a hooded bath chair occupied by an elderly, presumably invalided woman, at the centre of the picture and placing on either side of her a couple flirting and a young man, in boater and blazer, chatting to two pretty young women. This young man is associated with the two Dundreary swells leaning against the railing and so his dress may imply frivolity. For a contemporary viewer, aware of the claim that seaside promenading was a form of healthy exercise, there is enough evidence to indicate a level of hypocrisy. This is not as claimed a health regime but merely an excuse for display and flirtation. But the idea of walking as a leisure activity is also an important association with aristocratic behaviour simply because it is an activity of choice. Joseph Amato makes the point that when servants or the poor had no choice but to walk everywhere the choice by the nobility to walk or promenade as a leisure activity was an important class distinction.⁹ Solomon shows the promenade’s own forms of walking and posture, one of which is the leisurely stroll demonstrated by the two young ladies to the right of the painting. Posture is also an important element in differentiating the promenade from mere utilitarian walking. This is shown by the languid leaning of the Dundreary swell on the left of the picture called, by

⁸ John K. Walton, *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict* (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2005), 58.

⁹ Joseph Anthony. Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

Cuthbert Bede, “lolling and lounging” and denotes an acquired aristocratism and disregard for propriety:

His handsome features had assumed a more manly, though perhaps a more rakish look. He was lolling on a sofa in the *négligée* attire of dressing - gown and slippers, with his pink striped shirt comfortably open at the neck. Lounging in an easy chair opposite him was gentleman clad in tartan plaid, whose face might only be partially discerned through the glass bottom of a pewter, out of which he was draining the last draught. Between them was a table covered with the ordinary appointments for a breakfast, and the extraordinary ones of beer-cup and soda water.¹⁰

Alongside a particular style of walking, promenading required a smooth walking surface, very different from the rough cobbled streets of Biarritz and Solomon indicates this by painting the esplanade as an almost polished surface. According to Amato the smooth surface was an essential requirement for promenading by the aristocracy from the sixteenth century onward:

The path of somebody of importance had to be open, dry, firm, clean, safe, perhaps elevated, and as free as possible of obstacles, stomping and

¹⁰ Cuthbert Bede, B.A. *Mr Verdant Green: Adventures of an Oxford Freshman* (Stroud: Nonsuch, 2006), 70.

awkward peasants, foul crowds, and other unsightly and intrusive things.¹¹

Solomon's Brighton promenade shows the newly well off aping the courtly styles of the past. It may be that, in much the same way as readers enjoyed being poked fun at in *Punch* magazine they were amused by Solomon's satirical portrayal of themselves. This is one possible interpretation, but it could be that the promenaders are being mocked for their uniformity and herd like behaviour. Perhaps the painting is addressed to another audience, also evident amongst *Punch* readers, who regarded any form of mass culture as "common". There is no clear answer to this but, as often with Solomon, clothing speaks loudly, in this case hats.

In *Brighton Front* two women on the right of the painting, apparently in mourning are wearing "pork-pie" hats with their faces fully exposed. Fig.97 is a contemporary print of women wearing pork-pie hats. The bonnet has disappeared from the women's heads and their faces are exposed to the sun and the wind. This would have been both odd and modern for a contemporary viewer and an observation that would have confirmed the particularity of the female promenaders. At a time when a pale complexion was prized it must have seemed outlandish to expose the face in this way. Admittedly one promenader carries a parasol but this seems to emphasise that the others do not. Many of the men wear top hats but the majority seem to favour the bowler and there is at least one boater. The bowler hat was designed as protection for gamekeepers in

¹¹ Joseph Anthony Amato, *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

1849 and in the 1850s became associated with cab men, so the men in Solomon's painting were "early adopters" in utilising work clothes as fashion. The hats in the painting told viewers that this was perhaps an outlandish subgroup of fashion victims and eccentrics. The hat was soon to usurp the bonnet as the usual head covering for women but hats with their exposure of the face to the elements and public view were still not completely acceptable.¹² The wearing of pork-pie hats in public was in bad taste according to the *English Woman's Domestic Magazine*:

The pretty turned-down hats are prettier than ever, and many dainty specimens of the "pork-pie", or turned up hat, have been produced. The latter forms a charming style of coiffure, if worn at suitable times, and in suitable places, but nothing can be in worse taste than to wear one of these conspicuous hats in a crowded street.¹³

The *English Woman's Domestic Magazine* is quite strict on the question of the pork pie hat worn in public and its view adds to the suspicion that a contemporary viewer would not have seen, in the central group, a decorous group of bourgeois promenaders but a crowd of mostly bohemian young people behaving a little improperly at the seaside. This view is strengthened by the young women at the front of the picture who not only wear pork pie hats but are clearly wearing crinolines. There was nothing objectionable about the crinoline itself, it had been fashionable since the middle 1850s, but the crinoline was

¹² "The Fashions", *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* 4. (London. Dec 1861), 92. A Discussion of different bonnet styles then in fashion.

¹³ *Ibid.*

particularly popular, despite its awkwardness, because it freed wearers from heavy petticoats and gave greater freedom of movement. Oddly the crinoline, in some instances, indicated female emancipation and added to an impression of youthful rebellion. By the 1860s the crinoline was starting to be supplanted by the polonaise fashion, with the fullness of the skirt moved to the back—a move towards a silhouette which eventually became the bustle. What may be a polonaise style is worn by the young woman talking to the boater-wearing swell. So, it is quite possible that the main figures of young women would be viewed as “liberated” or bohemian, and this is further underlined by their apparent independence, walking in public without male company or female chaperones.

The suggestion of modernity in the painting is also expressed by an oblique reference to photography. Brighton was one of the major centres for photography outside London. Having a photographic portrait taken was one of the leisure activities associated with going on holiday.¹⁴ Solomon makes a reference to this by seemingly reproducing, in the figure of one of the young women, a typical studio portrait. Fig. 98 shows a *carte de visite* taken in 1862 by the Brighton photographer Henry Betts. Both images show a young woman in a porkpie hat with a furled umbrella in a similar frozen pose.

Photography may have been in its infancy, but Pre-Raphaelite artists had begun to think of the mechanically produced image as more truthful, or Realistic. William Bell Scott, Pre-Raphaelite follower, saw photography as the defining source for Pre-Raphaelitism:

¹⁴ Philippe Garner, *A Seaside Album: Photographs and Memory* (London: Royal Pavilion, Libraries & Museums, Brighton & Hove in Association with Philip Wilson, 2003).

Every movement has its genesis, as every flower its seed; the seed of the flower of Pre-Raphaelism [sic] was photography. The seriousness and honesty of motive, the unerring fatalism of the sun's action, as well as the perfection of the impression on the eye, was what it aspired to. History, genre, mediævalism, or any poetry or literality, were allowable as subject, but the execution was to be like the binocular representations of leaves that the stereoscope was then beginning to show.¹⁵

This sounds very much like Solomon's approach to Realism and echoes his detailed painting of surfaces, fashion, and "the overlooked". Bell suggests that, "the perfection of the impression on the eye" was what drew the Pre-Raphaelites to photography, but it also seems to have made an impression on Solomon, particularly in this image. However, Solomon, while informed by photography, has introduced an element which was impossible in photographs of the time—movement. Alex Werner, discussing McConnell's very similar illustration of Brighton front (fig. 95) writes that:

These images have the feeling of almost frenzied movement, filled with hundreds of massed caricatured faces and postures. Rather than focussing on just one small scene or group of characters, McConnell

¹⁵ William Bell Scott and William Minto, *Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott: And Notices of His Artistic and Poetic Circle of Friends, 1830 to 1882* (London: Osgood, Mc Ilvaine, 1892), 251.

filled his drawings with a range of people often from different walks of life.¹⁶

For Werner, the look of illustrations in *London Society* magazine was adapted to the requirements of wood engraving, its method and speed of production in the use a "shorthand style".¹⁷ Solomon seems to be doing something similar by using elements of the illustrator's techniques but also, in this painting and his other "crowd" paintings *Drowned! Drowned!* and *The Diligence*, introducing what the camera could not do, to show movement.

Brighton Front would also appeal to contemporary viewers because of a subtle reference to two other artistic traditions. The first was the use of the painting as a souvenir associated with the grand tour and Canaletto's vedute paintings of Venice. The idea of preserving an object which keeps alive something, a person or event, from the past may have developed from the mediaeval tradition of the relic. The relic was important because of its assumed power, the object having absorbed a spiritual power from a close association with a saint or even as a part of the saint's body. The painting as souvenir such as Solomon's *Brighton Front* gets some of its power and desirability from association with the practice of purchasing vedute as part of the grand tour experience. So, by purchasing a view of Brighton the collector was emulating aristocratic practice and by association becoming an ersatz aristocratic patron,

¹⁶ Alex Werner, "The London Society magazine and the influence of William Powell Frith on modern life illustration of the early 1860s". In Mark Bills, Vivien Knight, and Mary Cowling, *Painting the Victorian Age* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 104.

¹⁷Ibid.

however slightly. But the painting may also act as a map by means of which the viewer may enter into a remembered or a desired space. In Flaubert's near contemporary Realist novel a map becomes an aid to Madame Bovary's desire to be in Paris. A painting such as this Realist representation of the daily promenade in Brighton can function in a similar way both to conjure up a memory and to transport the viewer:

She bought herself a street-map of Paris, and, with the tip of her finger, she went shopping in the capital. She walked up the boulevards, stopping at every turning, between the lines of streets, passing the white squares that stood for houses. Eventually she would close her tired eyes, and in the darkness, she would see the gas-jets writhing in the wind, the folding carriage steps that were let down with a great clatter outside the main door of the theatre.¹⁸

The work of art as a souvenir is not simply a record of a place in the way a primarily topographical painting might be, but in Solomon's Realist approach, because it attempts to express the actual experience of time and place, the painting becomes a record of the feeling of what it might be to be part of the crowd. This particularly true of *Brighton Front* in which the viewer is encouraged to emulate the "roaming eye" of the spectator: there is no central point in the composition and nowhere for the eye to rest. Although viewers have a standpoint outside the picture they are part of the scene to the extent that they identify with the *mise-en-scène*.

¹⁸ Gustave Flaubert and Geoffrey Wall, *Madame Bovary* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 45.

A second historical influence and one which would be topical to viewers is an association with the “Galante” pictures of Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721). Watteau was immensely popular at the time, Charles Leslie praises him in his *Lectures on Painting*, and his painting *Les Plaisirs du Bal* (fig.99) was on display at the Dulwich Art Gallery.¹⁹ Solomon’s earlier painting *A Ballroom in the Year 1760* (fig.101) shows the influence of Watteau more obviously, but *Brighton Front* takes the ‘fête galante’ idea of fashionable people at leisure in the countryside and transposes it to the seaside. The boy with a little dog, the guitar player and the seated lovers might all be copied directly from Watteau and the overall conceit of the painting fits well with the 1850s love of eighteenth-century French art. These associations with Canaletto and Watteau suggest that contemporary viewers might value the painting over and above its simple topographical record.

There is every reason to think that Brighton was not quite the genteel destination that, for the present-day viewer, Solomon seems to portray. The artist John Constable described the place in a letter to his friend Archdeacon John Fisher:

Brighton is the receptacle of the fashion and off-scouring of London. The magnificence of the sea, and its, to use your own beautiful expression, ‘everlasting voice’, is drowned in the din and tumult of stage coaches, flys, &c, and the beach is only Piccadilly or worse by the sea-side. Ladies dressed and undressed; gentlemen in morning-gowns and

¹⁹ Charles Leslie, "Professor Leslie's Lectures on Painting. Lecture II," *Bulletin of the American Art-Union*, no. 2 (May 1850): 26.

slippers, or without them or anything else, about knee deep in the breakers; footmen, children, nursery-maids, dogs, fishermen, and Preventive Service men with hangers and pistols; rotten fish, and those hideous amphibious animals, the old bathing-women, whose language, both in oaths and voice, resembles men, all mixed together in endless and indecent confusion. The genteeler part, or Marine Parade, is still more unnatural, with its trimmed and neat appearance, and the dandy jetty of Chain Pier, with its long and elegant strides into the sea a full quarter of a mile. In short, there is nothing here for a painter.²⁰

There is no reason to think that in the intervening thirty-eight years Brighton had become less crowded or more respectable. It is not surprising that Constable, the ruralist, found little to paint except the sea and the sky, unlike Solomon he had little interest in the urban crowd. But contemporary viewers, in common with Constable, may have looked at the Brighton shown in the painting through the lens of its reputation for vulgar display, dubious morals, and associations with Regency debauchery. Solomon seems to leave this as an open question and allows viewers to make up their own minds. This emphasises his Realism, or at least the part which claims that he is holding up a mirror to the world around him, the idea that he is simply recording a scene rather than making any judgement.

²⁰ Charles Robert Leslie and Robert C. Leslie, *Life and Letters of John Constable, R.A* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), 151.

Chapter Thirteen: Leaving Biarritz ,1862

All, indeed, I look for is the picturesque, as I trust a large picture I am painting here may in some way testify. It will take me sometime, as there are a great number of figures in it; and as we have only been settled here three weeks, it is not yet more than commenced. The weather is so lovely (bright and sunny as possible, almost summer) that I hope it is likely I make more way with my work than in London just now, in the midst of November fogs. ¹

(Abraham Solomon,1862)

A diligence is much more than a prefecture; it is a perfect representation of a nation with its constitution and government. The diligence, like the State, has three compartments. The aristocracy is in the coupé, the bourgeoisie in the inside, and the people in the rotunda. Outside, above all, are the dreamers, the artists, the nondescripts. The conductor is the Law, which people are prone to call a tyrant...when the coach is too heavily loaded with luggage, that is to say, when society places material interests above everything, it runs the risk of being overturned.²

(Victor Hugo,1839)

¹ "Abraham Solomon." *Athenaeum*, no. 1836 (3 Jan 1863): 20.

² Victor Hugo and John Manson, *The Alps and Pyrenees* (Amsterdam: Fredonia Books, 2001),104.

The first quotation above is from Abraham Solomon's final known letter. It was written to his dealer just a month before he died in December 1862. He makes his only statement about his straightforward approach to painting. He claims, and the evidence of much of his art bears him out, to be simply an observer who travels and looks at the world in order to come upon a painting. In a sense he is claiming that the paintings he produces already exist in reality and his artistry is to find these scenes (the picturesque) and transfer them to canvas. This is the conceit of Realism, that the artist is merely a conduit, a scene selector. Artists must only be able to recognise what is picturesque in the world and record it for their viewers, without alteration. In his customary way viewers are shown a scene as if they are passers-by casually observing an everyday incident or perhaps as if captured by a photograph. Solomon was possibly influenced by photography in his painting of the *Diligence* (fig.14). He was certainly aware of photography and its debates through his friendship with Edmund Yates who wrote a short play about a photographer, *Your Likeness—One Shilling*, first performed at the Strand Theatre, April 1858.³ For present day viewers the *Departure of the Diligence* may not seem like a “slice of life” image, it appears staged and packed with incidental anecdotes—we are accustomed to snapshots or photo journalism seemingly without these features which to our eyes seem more “natural”. However, for a contemporary viewer used to the elaborately composed paintings of Classicism or Romanticism this scene of bustling and departure was closer to a naturalistic representation than we might imagine. The little incidents which punctuate the crowd do not in themselves make it a narrative picture, instead it should be seen as a picture

³ N. H. Harrington and Edmund Yates, *Your Likeness-One Shilling a Comic Sketch in One Act* (London: T.H. Lacy, 1968)

which contains narratives and reflects human perception. Viewers of everyday life paintings expect to find narrative and when they don't find a straightforward story they try to rationalise chaotic images or events by creating some sort of order, in this case by organising the crowd into a series of anecdotes—a phenomenon called gestalt perception by Purvis and Lotto.⁴ But importantly, the crowd here does not appear as a self-contained organism such as Dickens describes in *Tale of Two Cities*; the “mob.” This crowd is an accumulation of separate individuals and incidents. Edgar Allen Poe put it in 1840:

At first my observations took an abstract and generalising turn. I looked at the passengers in masses and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance.⁵

Solomon approaches the problem of distinguishing between a crowd and a mob similarly to Frith, a great painter of crowds. Both artists tend to fragment the crowd into anecdotes. This was a crucial distinction to make at when cities were getting larger and crowds were more common. City dwellers on the streets need signals that a group was an innocent crowd rather than an unruly mob and likewise viewers of paintings expected some assurance of order. Frith's painting

⁴ Dale Purves and R. Beau. Lotto, *Why We See What We Do: A Wholly Empirical Theory of Vision* (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 2011), 12-15.

⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe; Newly Collected and Ed. with a Memoir, Critical Introductions and Notes by Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry* (New York: Scribners, 1894), 62.

The Railway Station is dotted with authority figures and symbols of social control in the form of officials, police detectives, the division of carriages by class, soldiers and dominating the picture. The ultimate authority of the timetable tells viewers that this is a painting about order and control. Any hint of the mob is suppressed, and the wonder of the apparently self-regulating crowd, a wonder of the modern age is held up for all to observe; crowd paintings reveal the hidden hand of social control and put up those mechanisms for inspection. Much of this applies to Solomon's painting which shows the viewer the bureaucrat, the post man, the timetable, the soldiers, and because this is France there is a reminder of that dominant source of social control, the Church, represented by the two nuns and a priest. Inevitably, because this painting is set in France and intended for a British audience, viewers are asked to make comparisons between the two countries.

Solomon in his letter of November 1862, quoted above, writes about painting *The Departure of the Diligence: Biarritz* (fig.14). *The Diligence*, his last major picture, was not exhibited during his lifetime, it was sold at the posthumous sale of his works and subsequently entered the Royal Holloway collection in the early 1880s, where it remains.⁶ At Solomon's studio sale the work was described as 'an important work left unfinished' though Mary Cowling disputes this in her catalogue entry of 2008.⁷ *The Departure of the Diligence* is perhaps considered a minor acquisition by Thomas Holloway but the fact that Holloway had it in his collection, to be left for the education of

⁶ "Catalogue", Messrs. Christie, Manson & Woods, March 14, 1863

⁷ Mary Cowling and T. J. Barringer. *Paintings from the Reign of Victoria: The Royal Holloway Collection, London* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2008) 158.

young women, does suggest the high regard in which Solomon was held even twenty years after his death. The Thomas Holloway collection was intended to, and mostly succeeded, in bringing together the best of British art of the mid-century and Solomon's picture was included in the company of seventy-seven paintings by such well-known artists as Frith, Millais, Fildes, Landseer, and Leighton.

W P Frith's painting *The Railway Station* (fig.97) is also in the Royal Holloway Collection. The feverish bustle of urban Britain, at its industrial height, of Paddington station can be seen alongside the picturesque and quaint (from a London perspective) French provincial scene. This is the France of *Madame Bovary* and it is almost possible to read the haughty young woman pointing her cane to instruct a porter as Emma Bovary herself. One question of *The Diligence* is the nationality of the little crowd: do they include English tourists? Solomon provides an answer to this, he says in his letter "The girls are very pretty, and most useful for my style of art—very Spanish, which in my large picture I have to avoid. It must be essentially French" So, these are all French people with the possible exception of the man in Dundreary whiskers who has not paid his hotel account and seems to be dressed *à l'anglaise* in a British tweed suit. For a knowledgeable contemporary viewer this might be seen as a Realist painting which captures an observation of French provincial life in the manner of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, the *succès de scandale* of its day. There is perhaps also a suggestion of Courbet in the deliberate mix of social groups including the beggar man figure and the gypsy flower seller. However, the inevitable topical reference would be to Frith's *Railway Station*.

Solomon would almost certainly have seen his old schoolfriends enormously popular painting which had been exhibited by the dealer Flatow before the Solomons set off to Biarritz. *The Railway Station* was the sensation of 1862 and was seen at Flatow between April and December 1862 by 83,000

people.⁸ The two paintings share themes of departure, travel, the crowd and farewell and Solomon was apparently influenced by Frith's choice of subject. At the centre of both paintings is a man holding out his hand, and this image provides a symbolic core for both. In Frith's version the man is a taxi driver holding out a coin, he is disputing his fare with a customer and so symbolises Thomas Carlyle's argument that the cash nexus is at the centre of modern life.⁹ In Solomon's picture an old man is begging by holding out his hand and this, in the context of the painting about contrasts, points to a morally balanced society in which interdependence replaces exploitation. This is reinforced by the presence of the nuns whose "cornette" wimples indicate they are probably members of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, an order which was devoted to the service of the very poor. The Frith painting has a scene of two detectives serving a writ and the Solomon has, in a very similar gesture, an hotel keeper presenting a bill. Another noticeable similarity is the tarpaulin which the porters are using to cover the luggage on the roofs of the train and the diligence. Both painters have responded to what would have been a heavy block of colour dominating that part of the picture by making the canvas, which it probably was, into a transparent gauze or netting. The ribs of the canopy can clearly be seen through the cloth in the Frith and in the Solomon, giving rise to the idea that the painting was unfinished, the luggage can be seen through the red cloth. It is an odd parallel which may have come about for purely technical reasons, but it reinforces the similarities between the two pictures when viewed side by side, something which is possible at the Royal Holloway Museum.

⁸ Christopher Wood, *William Powell Frith: A Painter and His World* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006), 81.

⁹ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845).

The characters in Solomon's French provincial scene is self-ordering and if anything is to be learnt by the contrast between the London railway and the Biarritz diligence it is the different approaches to social control, a viewer in the 1860s might not have considered this, in these terms, but it seems to be present in Solomon's painting. The Diligence is framed to the right by the observing figure of the chamber maid and to the left by a pair of indolent Imperial Guards. The chambermaid symbolises order, partly because of her job but also by that form of control which is based on the awareness of being observed, *surveillé* in French. At the time, this was a conventional idea about provincial life and was the basis of much of Elizabeth Gaskell's stories of small-town, *Cranford*.¹⁰ The two Imperial guards are shown embracing, perhaps as a reference to the French revolutionary principle of fraternité. In this setting Solomon is suggesting by their casualness that enforcing order is unnecessary. By contrast the urban world of Paddington railway station is much more controlled by the direct intervention of the state in the form of the two detectives and the more obvious presence of soldiers. The wedding party which forms a central anecdote in the Frith painting may not have been seen in terms of social control, but it does illustrate a ritualised form of behaviour by which order is maintained by tradition and convention. This difference lies at the heart of the two paintings and is one which would have been appreciated by contemporary viewers. Solomon's picture shows a picturesquely ordered society and suggests a nostalgia for a culture that seems to have passed. Here everyone knows their place and are living settled and supportive lives; very different from the chaotic world of Paddington.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, *Cranford. By the Author of "Mary Barton."*, *Second Edition* (London, 1853).

The group of passengers is preparing to board a French mail coach, the “Diligence” of the title; the destination is unknown. In addition to the passengers, there is a young woman, probably a chambermaid, who leans out of a window to observe the scene, a pair of soldiers on the left are dressed in the uniform of the Imperial Guard (fig.102). In the far distance walking up the hill are two small figures and in the office of the ‘Messageries Imperiales’ sits the solitary figure of a clerk. This is a painting of colour, from the blue of the sky, the greens of the shutters, the cream of the plastered walls to the nun’s flowers. Shadows suggest the bright sun of midday in the South, and the use of light, shadow and pastel colours suggest an optimistic harmony—all is charming and agreeable. The painting is governed by time, this is symbolised by the perhaps impatient priest who checks his watch; no-one else seems to care when the coach will leave. This relaxed attitude may have been an attraction for the contemporary viewer, the railway, unlike the diligence, imposed a harsher timetable on people’s lives. This is represented in Frith’s painting by a lower-class family rushing to catch the train, this sprint to keep up or catch up is an apt symbol of modernity.¹¹

The Diligence is one of Solomon’s most striking forays into the representation of surfaces, but unlike the cloth and embroidery of *The Flight* these are mostly stone, cobbles and plastered walls. There is the familiar paisley shawl which perhaps references British manufacturing superiority. These mellowed surfaces recall the passing of time and the agelessness of this simple scene and so reinforce the message of tradition and security. The passengers and their luggage are arranged in a semi-circle around the coach as if to represent

¹¹ Christopher Wood, *William Powell Frith: A Painter and His World* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006), 79-80.

their social interdependence. In contrast Frith's passengers form a line and are more noticeably separated into individual groups. They are gathered under the industrially manufactured iron work of Brunel's great engine shed while the French passengers wait under the clearest of blue skies. Implicit in this aspect of Solomon's picture is an assumed preference for the sun and air of the diligence-stop over the smoke and gloom of the train. One small but significant feature of the foreground is the contrast between the rough cobblestones of the road and the smooth stone paving of the passenger area. This would give the British viewer the opportunity to comment on the terrible state of French roads and would act as a reminder of the beginnings of modernisation in France.

The pile of luggage in the centre foreground is a reminder of the very similar pile of luggage in *Second Class: The Departure*. This again is an example of Solomon's aesthetisation of the overlooked by which the mundane is transformed aesthetically by visual representation in painting. In this case the range of luggage, from the servant's tin box and simple cloth wrapped bundle to the carpet bag and trunk, mirror the different strata of the passengers and represent the all-inclusiveness of the coach.

A viewer's understanding of *The Diligence* might not be restricted to the topicality of the Frith painting and the image of the crowd in contemporary society, by contrast and comparison viewers were directed towards their own experience of an urban crowd. But the location of the painting, Biarritz and the Pyrenees, would be reminders of other topicalities. Napoleon III is a background presence in *The Diligence*, to the left are two soldiers in the uniform of the Imperial Guard outside the gate of what is probably intended to represent the summer residence of the Imperial family. To the right is the list of destinations served by the diligence and above in large letters are the words *Messageries Imperiales*. The viewer is left in no doubt that this is "Imperial France" and Napoleon III is part of the overall picture. Napoleon built the Villa

Eugénie for his Spanish wife Eugénie de Montijo. It was situated in Biarritz on the border with Spain and symbolised the union of France and Spain then ruled by the Bourbon Isabella II (1830-1904). The connection with Eugénie invokes high fashion and high society so it is curious that the painting shows none of this. It is significant that none of the women waiting for the departure is fashionably dressed, at least not in any style which might reference the Empress. It may be that they are dressed in practical travelling costumes, perhaps. The palace gate conceals another world of extreme wealth and fashion and so might give the British viewer some satisfaction that the splendour and luxury of French high society was hidden behind closed doors and therefore undemocratic and the ordinary life of the French was quite plain.

A portrait of Eugénie de Montijo (fig.103) has been attributed to Abraham Solomon.¹² It predates Eugénie's marriage by seven years at a time when she was an unknown twenty-year-old, and a minor Spanish aristocrat. The attribution seems unlikely, the sitter is intended to be Spanish with her dark complexion and lace mantilla, but whether she is the young Eugénie is uncertain. Whatever the case, the presence of the imperial couple hangs over Solomon's painting and reinforces Victor Hugo's remark, at the head of this chapter in which he writes:

Since we are in the way of rejuvenating the ancient metaphors, I would counsel those worthy men of letters whose style so frequently buries in

¹² See the Simeon Solomon Research Archive.
<https://www.simeonsolomon.com/as-artwork.html>, accessed 1.03.2019.

the mud “the chariot of State,” to say henceforth “the diligence of State.” It will be less dignified, but more correct.¹³

Viewers might see this picture as an allegorical representation of the French state but would also be aware of the modernising changes that the emperor was making in France. One of these was the railway system which was fast replacing the old Diligences:

Fuelled by a powerful combination of State financing and private enterprise, French railways in the 1850s began to forge their way across the country... In 1851, there had been only 3,910 kilometres of operational track; in 1856, the number had risen to 6,500.¹⁴

The Railway had already arrived in Biarritz by the time of Solomon’s picture in the form of the Paris-Hendaye line and to add piquancy for the British viewer, at this time, French railways were dependent on British locomotives.¹⁵

Significantly, given the state of the artist’s health, Biarritz and the nearby Pyrenees region was associated with convalescence and illness. This would be significant for those who were aware of the circumstances of the painting and meant that the artist and his illness became a topicality in

¹³ Victor Hugo and John Manson, *The Alps and Pyrenees* (Amsterdam: Fredonia Books, 2001), 104.

¹⁴ Fenton S. Bresler, *Napoleon III: A Life* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 278.

¹⁵ <http://www.sncf.com/en/meet-sncf/sncf-history>

themselves. Henry Blackburn in his 1867 guide book to the Pyrenees quotes from the *Moniteur des Eaux*, a guide which although it was written in French was aimed at the English traveller:

In the Pyrenees, at Bagnières de Bigorre, for instance, the invalid, or the ennuyée, will find every comfort and convenience, thus: —

‘Eaux salines, ferrugineuses, arsenicales, en boisson bains et douches de toute forme. —Eau sulfureuse en boisson et bains a l’hydrofère.—*Vaporarium* complet et étuves, bains russes—Casino sous la direction de M. Max-Mayer. Musique au parc tous les jours.—Salon de conversation.—BALS et CONCERTS.—THÉÂTRE.—PROMENADES.—Bonnes voitures et chevaux de montagnes.

Le tout à des prix inférieurs à ceux des autres stations thermales des Pyrénées.¹⁶

The two clearly marked destinations on the office timetable are Pau and Tarbes, Pau in particular was known for its spa and so the viewer was reminded of the attraction of the Pyrenean spa towns for convalescents and also that Biarritz, while an attraction in itself, was a gateway to the Pyrenees. Napoleon III had built, for the benefit of his wife, the spectacular *Route Thermale* which opened up the Pyrenees and linked the existing spa towns to Biarritz. Solomon was aware of the seriousness of his illness in his letter the month before he died and

¹⁶ Henry Blackburn and Gustave Doré, *The Pyrenees: A Description of Summer Life at French Watering Places* (London: S. Low, Son, and Marston, 1867), 3.

so the picture may have been viewed with this in mind. He wrote just weeks before he died:

I am wonderfully better, but still not quite well. I was so unwell on my return from Ilfracombe, that even with the advice I have respecting diet, &c. (which, I believe, is the principal), I can hardly expect to be quite rid of what you heard me complain of, and which, from my usually robust exterior, I fancy hardly called, or, indeed, could call forth the sympathy I craved for.¹⁷

The story of Solomon's early death and the fact that he was aware of his illness, and perhaps his fate, possibly coloured viewers' responses to the painting. Obituaries had appeared in all the leading art journals and many of the major newspapers, His last letter was quoted widely so the details of Solomon's death were well known. Solomon death at thirty-nine occurred around the first anniversary of Prince Albert's death who also died young at forty-two. The country was still in mourning for the prince and although Solomon's death was not of the same order he was yet another public figure to die young. The subject of departure was apt for a dying man and the wide social spectrum of passengers suggests the idea of death as a great equaliser. The diligence itself may have been seen in this context as a "memento mori" in an oblique reference to the sun chariot of the Greek God Helios. The chariot traversed the sky to mark the trajectory of the sun and so was a reminder of time passing. This

¹⁷ *Athenaeum*, no.1836 (1863), 20.

symbolic meaning of the coach, even based on the lumbering diligence, would have been well known to those of Solomon's audience who had seen the East pediment Parthenon sculptures at the British museum. These show the passage of Helios's chariot across the sky. Associated with this possible interpretation the coach should be seen within the European tradition of coaches as important symbols associated with kingship, triumphs, and authority. This iconography derives from classical imagery such as the Helios and Apollo's chariot. In this interpretation, it is can be seen that Solomon's democratic vision turns the symbolism upside down. The tradition of the state coach inhabited by the monarch is subverted through its occupancy by the people. Mary Helms says of the coach in her study of wheeled vehicles and monarchical symbolism:

Though not a formal part of the literal actuality of kingship, elaborate wheeled vehicles still informed the imagery that helped to idealize and "externalize" the monarch.¹⁸

The omnibus—even its name suggests an aspiration to popular democracy—was increasingly visible on London streets after the Great Exhibition in 1851.¹⁹ Its greater presence may have informed responses to Solomon's diligence. Within a similar timeframe, William Maw Egley in his painting *Omnibus Life in London*, 1859 (fig.104) also subverts the idea of the royal coach by replacing

¹⁸ Mary W. Helms, "In Pomp Ride Forth: Selected Themes in the Persistence of the Wheeled Vehicle as High Political and Ideological Symbol in Western Europe," *Anthropus* 105, no.1 (2010): 106.

¹⁹ Charles Edward. Lee, *The Horse Bus as a Vehicle* (London: London Transport, 1974).

the monarch by a small and evidently pampered baby boy and his military drum.

The Diligence is a sympathetic portrait of French provincial life, and this may reflect an important political topicality of which the general viewer would be aware. This is the recent transformation of relations between France and England after the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860. The Cobden-Chevalier Treaty was a significant shift in European politics and was recognised as such at the time. The Treaty itself was simply an agreement with Napoleon III to reduce duties on the importation of French wine and brandy in return for a reduction of duties on British goods exported to France. This apparently minor change was a triumph for free-traders led by Richard Cobden. Cobden had been instrumental in the abolition of the Corn Laws and this further development in European free-trade contributed to European economic integration.²⁰ Karl Marx writing in the *New York Daily Tribune* dismissed the treaty, as did Disraeli, as mere window dressing, perhaps forgetting the importance of public perceptions of relations between the two countries.²¹ On the other hand, *The Spectator* reported on a dinner given by the Lord Mayor in honour of Bright, Cobden, and Michel Chevalier the architects of the treaty:

The subject of the night's conversation was the victory of Free-trade over the prejudices of mankind, illustrated more especially by the

²⁰ Bairoch, P., & Burke, S. European trade policy, 1815–1914. In P. Mathias & S. Pollard (Eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe from the Decline of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 1-160.

²¹ Karl Marx. "The New Treaty between France and England" *New York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 14, 1860.

successful execution of the recent French treaty...The absurd apprehensions which society once felt of the encroachments made year after year by the principles of a liberal economy, are now so entirely dissipated, that even Tories can smile at their past alarms. ²²

John Morley, Richard Cobden's biographer was equally enthusiastic about the importance of this treaty and Cobden's triumph in pushing the free-trade agenda as a source of both prosperity and peace. Morley quotes William Gladstone in support, both of the philosophy of free trade and the importance of this particular treaty:

This [a pan-European and colonial system of Free-trade] was the conception at the bottom of the Commercial Treaty of 1860. "A treaty with France," said Mr. Gladstone, "is even in itself a measure of no small consequence; but that which gives to a measure of that kind its highest value is its tendency to produce beneficial imitation in other quarters. It is the fact that, in concluding that treaty, we did not give to one privilege which we withheld from another, but our Treaty with France was, in fact, a treaty with the world, and wide are the consequences which engagements of that kind carry in their train."²³

²² "The Apostles of Free-Trade at Dinner". *The Spectator*. (30 July 1861), 13.

²³ Morley. *Life of Richard Cobden*. 1879. 809.

This thawing of Anglo-French relations saw the traditional economic rivalry with France replaced by economic co-operation and, as Gladstone wrote, a new world-wide project. This helped to usher in a series of economic booms which Eric Hobsbawm has called the “great boom” that dominated mid-century Europe.²⁴ These changes made possible a reconfigured vision of France in British art, one which Solomon provides in the *Diligence*. A new version of France was also being painted by French artists, a France of peasants, urbanites, workers, and provincials and from the late 1840s painters such as Gustav Courbet, Jean-François Millet, and Edouard Manet were exploring, in different ways, neglected subjects of everyday life in France. Solomon was doing something similar in his painting but with an element of cultural superiority. He showed a France which was picturesque, quaint and undeveloped, unlike the thrusting vision of the Brighton promenade. The most negative view of this painting is that France has become merely a tourist destination and the painting a souvenir. This was the unthreatening image that perhaps best suited his audience. His viewers would be aware of the shift in economic relations represented by the Cobden-Chevalier treaty and an increasing sense of triumph over the old enemy can be seen in the *Diligence* in which France itself has become little more than a curiosity. Solomon had been visiting France since at least 1846 and he was certainly a Francophile. As early as February 1847 he had exhibited at the British Institution three paintings of French subjects including *A Study from the Hotel Invalides, Paris*. With the *Diligence* he shifts a British sensibility about passengers as a metaphor for society derived from Frith’s *Railway Station* and transposes it almost in its entirety to French provincial life.

²⁴ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848 -1875* (London: Abacus, 2010), 45-6.

He does this in a way which both reflects and moulds his viewer's perception of the non-British world as a tourist opportunity.

Conclusion

I began this study by thinking about the question—Why was Abraham Solomon’s art so popular? The answer to that question, I believed, would suggest new understandings and ways of viewing this artist and mid-nineteenth century art of everyday life. I expected this would contribute to scholarly knowledge of British art of the early Victorian period and lead to a reassessment of Solomon’s surviving output. Inevitably questions turn out to be the wrong questions and answers are never easy to come by. The question needed to be more precise. Perhaps it would have been better to query what it was about particular paintings that appealed to viewers at one point in history but not at other times. That enquiry would have been much more difficult as it would involve a general theory of art and a comprehensive theory of aesthetic responses to paintings; not something I wished to engage in. I have attempted a partial answer by suggesting that Solomon’s paintings can be viewed as a network of topical references which emphasised the present, the place, and a shared recognition to which viewers might respond as they chose. I have argued that in approaching a Realist modern-subject painting the dichotomy between an aesthetic response and a narrative response should be reassessed. One response should not preclude the other. By introducing the idea of topicality as a mainstay of a Realist painting I am suggesting that people responded to an “aesthetic of familiarity. The paintings were not simply read narratively, in other words as if they had no aesthetic value, but they were engaged with through a shared familiarity; a locus of place and presentness. There is a special significance in images which engaged viewers in a shared perception that was specific to this Realist art. The sense of being a participant in the painting and feelings of familiarity do not displace traditional aesthetic responses, such as beauty and the sublime but instead combines to create a

hybrid aesthetic. Of course, this hybrid might simply be termed “cosy” or “smug” and there are elements, it must be admitted, of easy viewing in Solomon’s art, but these are balanced by his fierce humanism and political agenda. This was comfortable art with a hard edge if such a thing is possible.

This has been an attempt to develop a different way of seeing the work of Abraham Solomon and by implication the work of other British modern-subject painters and hopefully opens up new areas of knowledge and enquiry about this under researched area of British art. The study has also touched on the relationship between the development of modern-subject and everyday life painting in Paris and London. Although everyday life painting and Realism is thought to be a phenomenon associated with French painters principally Jean-François Millet, Gustave Courbet and Édouard Manet, beginning in the 1840s. Realism, in one version of art history, then led on to Impressionism, post-Impressionism, Cubism, and so on into the twentieth century. This study shows that Solomon and other British artists were developing similar ideas by the mid-1850s, sometimes in advance of French painters. This is not simply ‘little Englander-ism’ but, in a small way, is further evidence against a predominantly Paris-centred history of modern European painting.

This research has also explored some of the aspects of the history of the British-Jewish artist. This is a neglected and important area of study of which a history has yet to be written. Abraham Solomon was not alone, there were Jewish portrait painters in London in the early century who appear in postal directories, about whom little is known. The eighteenth-century artist Richard Samuel (see, *Portraits in the Characters of the Muses in the Temple of Apollo*, 1778, in the National Portrait Gallery). was possibly Jewish, if only because of his surname, as were a number of printmakers living near the Rag Market in Spitalfields. There are also the stories Abraham’s brother and sister; all these need to be investigated as part of Jewish history and the often-hidden

tradition of Jewish art. Within the Jewish history of art Abraham Solomon is important because of the special conditions of his life which was mostly lived in an apparently progressive period. Disabilities were being lifted and centuries of persecution seemed to be coming to an end—this was not to last however. But, it seems quite possible that the optimism and confidence of his art are in part a reflection of an overall hope for the future. It adds to the significance of Solomon's work that he was an artist of a brief "age of optimism" in Jewish history.

Like many revisions of this sort which bring new analytical tools to a subject, this is a study which asks more questions than it answers. Not least is the assertion that contemporary viewers had a more complex response to the paintings than is available in the present-day and this made them more appealing as contemporary artworks. I have assumed that there is a richer experience in viewing an art work which has a complex of interpretations and its appeal is a response to that complexity. It is necessary to say this about the work of Abraham Solomon because, in the past, his paintings have been seen as simple moral tales not the richly visual works of art they evidently are. In that sense this is a work of art-historical revisionism. A second element in the attraction, for a contemporary viewer, of Solomon's paintings stems from his Realism. I mean the part of his Realism which attempted an unmediated reflection of the artist's and viewer's shared world. The idea of transforming the prosaic into objects of aesthetic pleasure through the medium of art was not new to the time. This had been done in the past through the still life and in both Spanish and Dutch domestic paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Solomon increasingly used his version of Realism to include not just the overlooked objects of everyday life but also a wider range of overlooked aspects of the social world. In his painting *Brighton Front* he transformed the everyday activity of ordinary people going for a walk into a version of a

ballroom scene. In this he elevates the ordinary to a level typically reserved for the aristocracy. A group of people sitting in a train carriage or waiting to start a coach journey are all transformed into artworks in ways which were new, principally by the mere fact of becoming subjects and foci within a work of art. The significance of this explosion in the range of subject matters in artworks was not fully understood at the time. In his day Solomon was more often thought of as a minor artist who painted minor subjects, but he stood at the beginning of a long development in art as the narrower range of subjects was abandoned. To coin a phrase, the “aestheticisation of the familiar” has had a distinguished history since Solomon first transformed the ordinary into art through his everyday life paintings and we no longer find it surprising to be asked to look at the familiar world aesthetically—a transformation from prosaic to aesthetic.

Abraham Solomon’s career was cut short due to his early death and was mostly played out in a restricted arena—the walls of the Royal Academy. He was hugely successful in his time and is now almost forgotten; and sometimes reviled. In this way he makes a good subject to model the journey from success to failure in art. His decade, the 1850’s, was a turning point in British history when technological innovation and consolidation of Empire established Britain as the leading world power. Solomon was someone who was able to grasp the opportunities presented and transform himself from a Jew in the ghetto to a person of significance. However much he assimilated he almost certainly remained despised as a Jew and this is one of his strengths. He was able to use his status as an outsider to look wryly at the world in which he lived but despite his life experiences he still took great pleasure in what he saw. This was possibly a unique moment; he was partially admitted to the rank of artist-commentator but was kept at arm’s length and became through his popular success an “inside-outsider”. He was never admitted to the Royal Academy, not

even as an associate, and so his position was always ambiguous.¹ But, and this may reflect his Jewish intellectual heritage, he never faltered in his humanism. In this way he was ideally placed to become the leading Realist of his time. The Realist emphasis on the legitimacy of anyone and everything as proper subjects for art sits well with humanist philosophy.

Solomon turned to Realism at around the same time as Flaubert and Courbet. Courbet painted the ordinary person as heroic striding across giant canvasses; that was his Realism. Flaubert portrayed Emma Bovary trapped in an ordinary life seduced by the false paradise of consumerism; that was his Realism. Solomon's Realism was to make his own contribution, his Realism was based on the "aesthetics of familiarity," an approach which had antecedents in western art going back millennia. The idea of representing familiar objects as art so that the viewer might look again, more carefully, with more time, and with pleasure in the artist's skill, had been part of the western tradition of still lifes for some centuries. Dutch artists had memorably added people to this formula to create the beginnings of an everyday-life art. Solomon was to do the same; this was his Realism. We can now point to the many differences and similarities between Solomon's art of the everyday and Dutch genre paintings. That is, the historian is able to invest Solomon's art with a greater detail of meaning than is possible with Dutch art. It is possible, and because of the internet easier, to point out topical events in the lives of contemporary viewers of Solomon's paintings because the information is readily accessible. For example, journals and newspapers from the 1850s are easily available online. In

¹ <https://www.simeonsolomon.com/abraham-solomon-biography.html>. Accessed 10.3.2019

this way the understanding of Solomon's art in terms of shared topicalities becomes an opportunity derived from a change in technology.

By seeing the paintings of Abraham Solomon as a network of topicalities it is possible to understand contemporary viewers' connectedness to the paintings and to see that the pleasure of looking at the paintings was not simply a recognition of places and events, fashions and attitudes, but involved an engagement with the familiar world as an aesthetic pleasure. The paintings are often slightly puzzling and because of this they demand explanation and the making of associations. One can imagine two or more people standing in front of a Solomon painting, the *Flight* for example, and discussing the clothing the women are wearing, the embroidered shawl or possibly the odd Quaker-run slavery-free produce shop in the locality and so make a link between cotton and slavery.² Topical interpretation, although speculative, gives an insight into viewer's responses to the paintings as if those responses were not simply readings but closer to a conversation between artwork and viewer.

The familiar, people walking, or taking a train, was transformed, by Solomon, into an aesthetically pleasurable artwork by the act of painting. For the contemporary viewer to go to a gallery and recognise themselves or an allusion to familiar places and events or just a sense of "people like us" must have been a great pleasure. A pleasure which is recognisable in modern life to any of us when we see a friend or even the place where we live or some other familiarity on television or a newspaper. This pleasure of familiarity is based on

² Louis Billington, "British Humanitarians and American Cotton, 1840-1860," *Journal of American Studies* 11, no. 3 (December 1977): 313-334.

the flattery of being included in the public world, an acknowledgement of our existence and in a small way a form of celebrity.

This research is “a Realist interpretation of a Realist painter”. Like Solomon, who gave equal weight to everybody and everything as artistic subjects I have tried to interpret the objects, the actors, and the other elements of the paintings as having a more or less equal importance. For example, a hat in a Realist interpretation should be given equal importance as a physical gesture, both after all are representative of the present moment that is ultimately the shifting subject of the picture. This may seem to result in the “over-significance of the insignificant” but it is not the purpose of this study to provide definitive answers to the meaning of paintings which were always meant to celebrate interpretation as infinite.

This study, through a close examination of his principal paintings, makes a contribution to knowledge of the art of a singular painter of the 1850s. It is based on unpublished research and based firmly on previous art historical literature. It suggests a method of understanding his art which frees him from the restriction of being merely a narrative artist, entertainer, and opportunist entrepreneur. Hopefully he can be freed from the stereotype, commonly attached to Jewish people, that his main interest in popular art was commercial. Through a more thorough understanding of the art of Abraham Solomon it is possible to appreciate his art in his time and that of other everyday life painters.

Appendix One.

A Common Council holder in the Chamber of the Guildhall of the City of London on Thursday the 16th day of June 1831.

The humble Petition of Michael Solomon was this day presented unto this Court and read in these words.

To the Right Honorable the Lord Mayor Aldermen and Commons of the City of London in Common Council Assembled.

The humble Petition of Michael Solomon of Sandy Street Bishopsgate within the City of London Straw Hat Manufacturer.

Herwith, That your petitioner was born in the City of London and has for the last Thirty Two years lived at his present residence and has for many years carried on a wholesale business there in a very extensive line and being desirous of availing himself of the liberal provisions of an Act passed by the Common Council allowing persons of every religious persuasion to obtain their freedom in the Gold and Silver Drawers Company and on the seventh of January last has deposited the usual fine and fees at the Chamberlains Office for the purpose of obtaining his freedom of the City of London and is informed the same has been daily accounted for and paid into the Chamber of London.

Your Petitioner is informed that his application was duly made on the 18th of January to the Court of Aldermen for their order to Mr Chamberlain to admit your Petitioner has been informed and believes the said Court of Aldermen

made the usual orders for others who applied for their freedom and at the same time rejected your Petitioners application because he does not profess the Christian Religion and although he is ready and willing to take the same oath as proscribed by the Act of Common Council and to pay the usual fines and fees and to comply in all things within the rules and regulations which as freeman of the City of London he ought to observe.

Your Petitioner has made several applications at the Chamberlains Office to be admitted to his freedom but is for the reasons aforementioned refused the same.

Your Petitioner therefore humbly prays your Honorable Court to direct Mr Chamberlain to admit him to his freedom according to the provisions of the liberal and enlightened Act of Common Court recently passed for that purposes.

Michael Solomon.

And a Motion being made and question put that Mr Chamberlain do admit the said Michael Solomon into the Freedom of the City the same was resolved in the affirmative and ordered accordingly. Woodthrope.

Geo. Ashley
Clark and Co.

(London, England, Freedom of the City Admission Papers, 1681-1925)

Appendix Two.

On Friday nights there was always a gathering in Gower Street, at the house of Abraham Solomon, who had just made a big hit with his picture "Waiting for the Verdict," where would be Millia's with his "Huguenot" success upon him, young and handsome, as in the Medallion which Alexander Munro had just completed of him; and Frith, putting the finishing touches to his "Derby Day"; Frank Stone, Augustus Egg, and Sant; Dutton Cook, undecided whether to take to pen or pencil as his means of living; Ernest Hart, whose sister Solomon afterwards married; and William Fenn. A quietly Bohemian evening: a little dancing, a few games of "tonneau," a capital supper with a speciality of cold fish, then cigars, and singing by Frank Topham or Desanges, and imitations by Dillon Croker, "and so home."

Appendix Three.

To the editor of the Albion.

Sir, the following extract from a letter of Mr. Ruskin will perhaps be read with interest as bearing upon a question which lately occupied so much of the public attention. Yours, etc. Alfred W. Hunt. 31 Oxford St. Jan.9th 1858.

I believe the Liverpool Academy has, in its decisions of last years, given almost first instance on record of the entirely just and beneficial working of the academical system. Usually such systems have degenerated into the applications of formal rules, or the giving of partial votes, or the distribution of a partial patronage; but the Liverpool awards have indicated at once the keen perception of excellence, and the frank honesty by which alone such new forms can be confessed and accepted. I do not, however, wonder at the outcry. People who suppose the Pre-Raphaelite work to be only a condition of meritorious eccentricism naturally suppose, also, that the consistent preference of it can only be owing to clique. Most people looking upon paintings as they do of planets or minerals; and think they ought to have in their collections specimens of everybodys work, as they have specimens of all earth or flowers. They have no conception that there is such a thing as a real right or wrong, a real bad and good, in the question. However, you need not, I think much mind. Let the Academy be broken up on the quarrel; let the Liverpool people buy whatever rubbish they have a mind to; and when they see, which in time they will, that it is rubbish, and find, as find some will every Pre-Raphaelite picture gradually advance, in influence and in value, you will be acknowledged to have borne as

witness all the more noble and useful, because it seemed to end in discomfiture; though it will *not* end in discomfiture. I suppose I need hardly say anything of my own estimate of the two pictures the arbitrement has arisen. I have surely said often enough, in good black type already, what I thought of Pre-Raphaelite work, and of other modern ones. Since Turner's death, I consider that any average work from the hand of the four leaders of Pre-Raphaeltism (Rossetti, Millais, Hunt, John Lewis) is, singly, worth at least three of any other pictures whatever by living painters.

“John Ruskin”

Published Mon. Jan. 18, 1858

Appendix Four.

Jan.12,1858

To the editor, The *Liverpool Albion*,

Can the application of contemptuous terms, as “rubbish” destroy the reputation of such as ‘*Awaiting the Verdict*’, strangely and uncreditably denied their prize by the Society of Liverpool Artists? Can Mr. Ruskin contumely convert into “rubbish” those works of great living artists which give a name to our country’s art and bring lustre to the Metropolitan exhibition as they once did.

Let them assert the certain and irrefragable connection of art physical with art poetic, and then will, in spite of ocular dictation and misused eloquence, — in spite of ‘hair painting’ and ‘hoof painting’, of ‘crow painting’, and ‘dry stitch painting’—in spite of Ruskinism and Pre-Raphaelism succeed in preserving a healthy and elevating tone to our native art, and rendering it,—as it should be— not a field in which every laborious idler may figure, in stipple and dullness, as an interpreter of creation’s charms but one in which large-minded and imaginative men can feel it is a pleasure to honour and labour.

Mrs. Unwins.

Appendix Five.

"All, indeed, I look for is the picturesque, as I trust a large picture I am painting here may in some way testify. It will take me some time, as there are a great number of figures in it; and as we have only been settled here three weeks, it is not as yet more than commenced. The weather is so lovely (bright and sunny as possible, almost summer), that I hope it is likely I may make more way with my work than in London just now, in the midst of November fogs. I am wonderfully better, but still not quite well. I was so unwell on my return from Ilfracombe, that even with the advice I have respecting diet, &c. (which, I believe, is the principal), I can hardly expect to be quite rid of what you heard me complain of, and which, from my usually robust exterior, I fancy hardly called, or, indeed, could call forth the sympathy I craved for. I shall be only too glad to be quite well and say no more about it. We are capitally housed, right on the sea, which is splendid here always--earlier in the season, particularly, when one sees, as I hear, four to five hundred fair bathers inducted into the briny ocean something in the manner my sketches attempted to delineate. I also send another sketch of 'How they teach the young idea,' not to shoot, but to walk. The construction is simple, and certainly not dangerous. The last sketch is the recollection of the only swell left here; I think her rather fine, and the costume might be imitated with advantage. The news here is not, as you may believe, plentiful. All the houses are 'a louer,' which scarcely looks cheerful; but as our art is all-interesting, it hardly affects us. With some wonderful weather, it is astonishing that the season should be over so soon. My wife finds no want of employment looking after me, obstinate as I am; wanting to work ten hours a day, when she will only let me do so half as much. Although the costume here is not specially remarkable, there is a great deal most suggestive, from which I trust to glean some little. The girls are very pretty, and most useful for my style

of art—very Spanish, which in my large picture I have to avoid. It must be essentially French; but I hope to use that characteristic in some smaller work." A. Solomon

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Fig.1. Abraham Solomon, *Waiting for the Verdict*, 1857, oil on canvas, 102x127, Tate Britain.



Fig. 2. Abraham Solomon, *A Contrast*, 1855, oil on canvas, 105x 151, private collection.



Fig. 3. Abraham Solomon, *Brighton Front*, c.1860-1, oil on panel, 48 x 102, Tunbridge Wells Museum.



Fig.4. John Everett Millais, *The Rescue*, 1855, oil on canvas, 122 x 84, National Gallery of Australia.



Fig.5. Abraham Solomon, *Second Class—The Parting*, 1854, oil on canvas, 69 x 97, National Gallery of Australia.



Engraved by]

"DROWNED! DROWNED!"

[J. and G. P. Nicholls.

Fig.6. Abraham Solomon, *Drowned! Drowned!* 1860, engraving, 18 x 12, *Illustrated London News* (1862).



Fig.7. John Dalbiac Luard, *A Welcome Arrival*, 1857, oil on canvas, 76 x100, National Army Museum.



PAINTED BY A. SOLOMON

ENGRAVED BY E. SEEL

MORNING.

Printed by F.E. Jones, N.Y.

Engraved Expressly for the Ladies Repository.

Fig.8. Abraham Solomon, *Morning*, 1852, Engraving. *Ladies Repository*, Cincinnati.

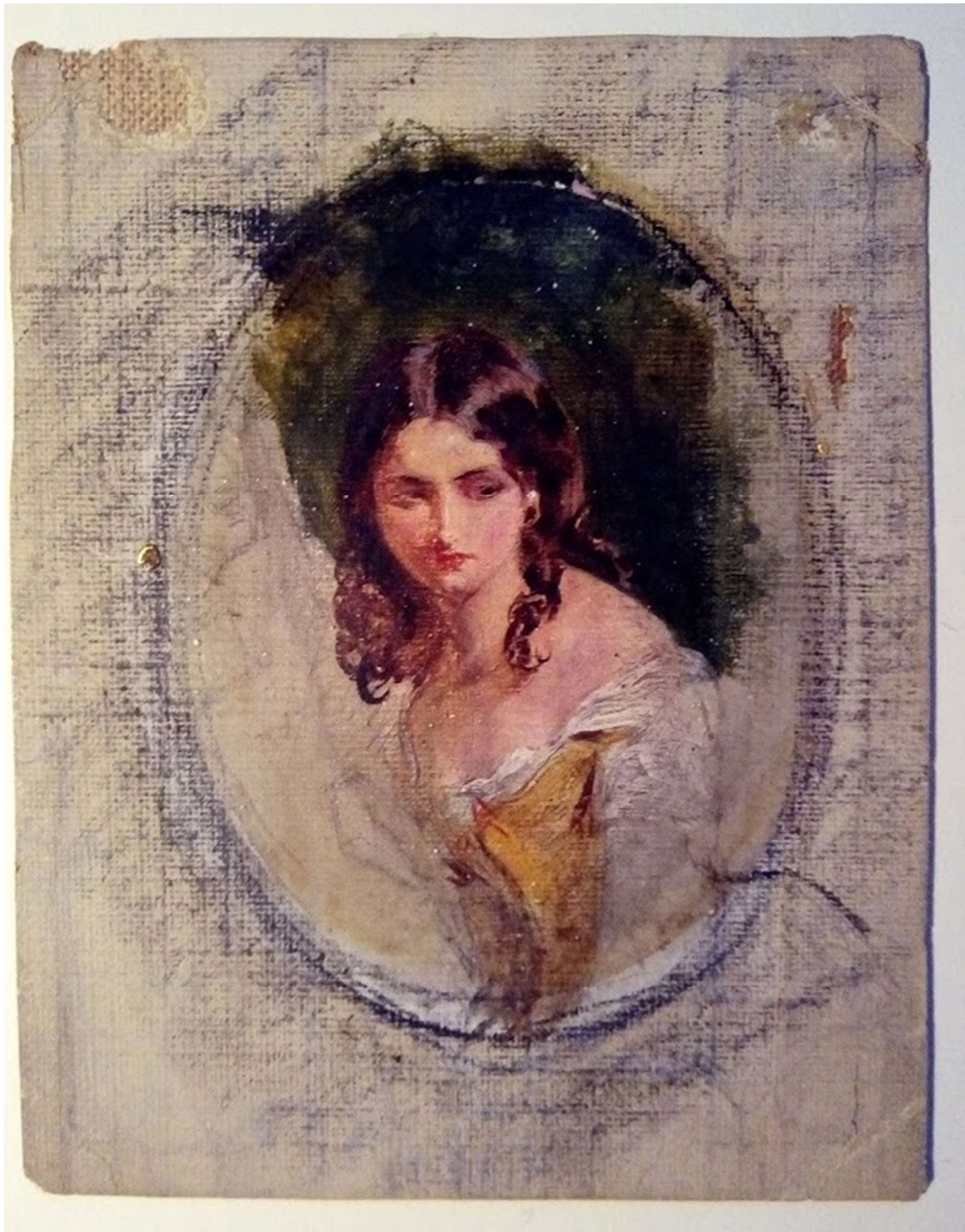


Fig.9. Abraham Solomon, Oil Sketch, a study for *The Valour of Love*, 1852, oil on canvas, 12 x 9, collection of the author.



Fig.10. Abraham Solomon: Playbill, detail of American poster for *Waiting for the Verdict* (play), 1864. (Seattle Mediation Services)

<http://seattlemediationservices.com/arbitration.html> accessed May 10,2019



Fig.11. Abraham Solomon, *First Class*, first version. *First Class—The Meeting*, 1854, oil on canvas, 69 x 97, National Gallery of Canada.



Fig.12. Abraham Solomon, *An Academy for Instruction in the Discipline of the Fan*—1711, oil on canvas, 51 x 71, Oldham Libraries, Galleries and Museums.



Fig.13. Abraham Solomon, *Young Woman Drawing a Portrait*, 1851, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 36, private collection.



Fig.14. Abraham Solomon, *Departure of the Diligence, Biarritz*, 1862, oil on canvas, 89 x 127, Royal Holloway Collection.



Fig.15. Egbert Van Heemskerck, *Boors Carousing*, late 17th century. oil on canvas, 37 x 42, Bowes Museum.



Fig.16. David Wilkie, *Village Politicians*, 1806, oil on canvas, 57 x 75, the Earl of Mansfield Collection.



Fig.17. Edward Penny, *The Virtuous Comforted by Sympathy and Attention*, 1774. oil on canvas, 123 x 99, Yale Center for British Art.



Fig.18. Augustus Egg, *Past and Present*, 1858, oil on canvas, 64 x 76, Tate Britain.



Fig.19. Abraham Solomon, *The Flight*, 1858, oil on canvas, 61 x 46, Leicester Museums and Art Galleries.



Fig.20. Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1882, oil on canvas, 96 x 130, Courtauld Gallery.



Fig.21. James Collinson, *For Sale (The Empty Purse)*, after 1854, oil on canvas, 61x49, Tate Britain.



Fig.22. Jan Steen, *The Dissolute Household*, 1660s, oil on Canvas, 80.5 x 89, Wallace Collection.



Fig.23. James Gillray, *Charon's Boat*, 1807, engraving, 24x 35.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1640418&partId=1&people=62186&peoA=62186-1-9&sortBy=objectTitleSort&page=1. Accessed Mar 10, 2019



Fig.24. Rebecca Solomon, *A Friend in Need*, 1856. Engraving as it appeared in the Illustrated London News (1859).



Fig.25. Richard Caton Woodville, *War News from Mexico*, 1848, oil on canvas, 68.6 × 63.5, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas.



Fig 26. Robert Haydon, *The Meeting of the Birmingham Political Union, 1832-3*, oil on canvas, 71x92, Birmingham Museums.

BRITISH GUIANA.

S P E E C H

DELIVERED AT THE

ANTI-SLAVERY MEETING,

IN

EXETER HALL,

ON

WEDNESDAY, THE 4th OF APRIL, 1838,

BY

JOHN SCOBLE, ESQ.

THE MARQUIS OF CLANRICARDE,

In the Chair.

L O N D O N :

PUBLISHED BY THE CENTRAL NEGRO EMANCIPATION COMMITTEE,
25, TOKENHOUSE YARD.

MDCCCXXXVIII.

Fig.27. Poster for an anti-slavery meeting, Exeter Hall. Negro Emancipation Committee.

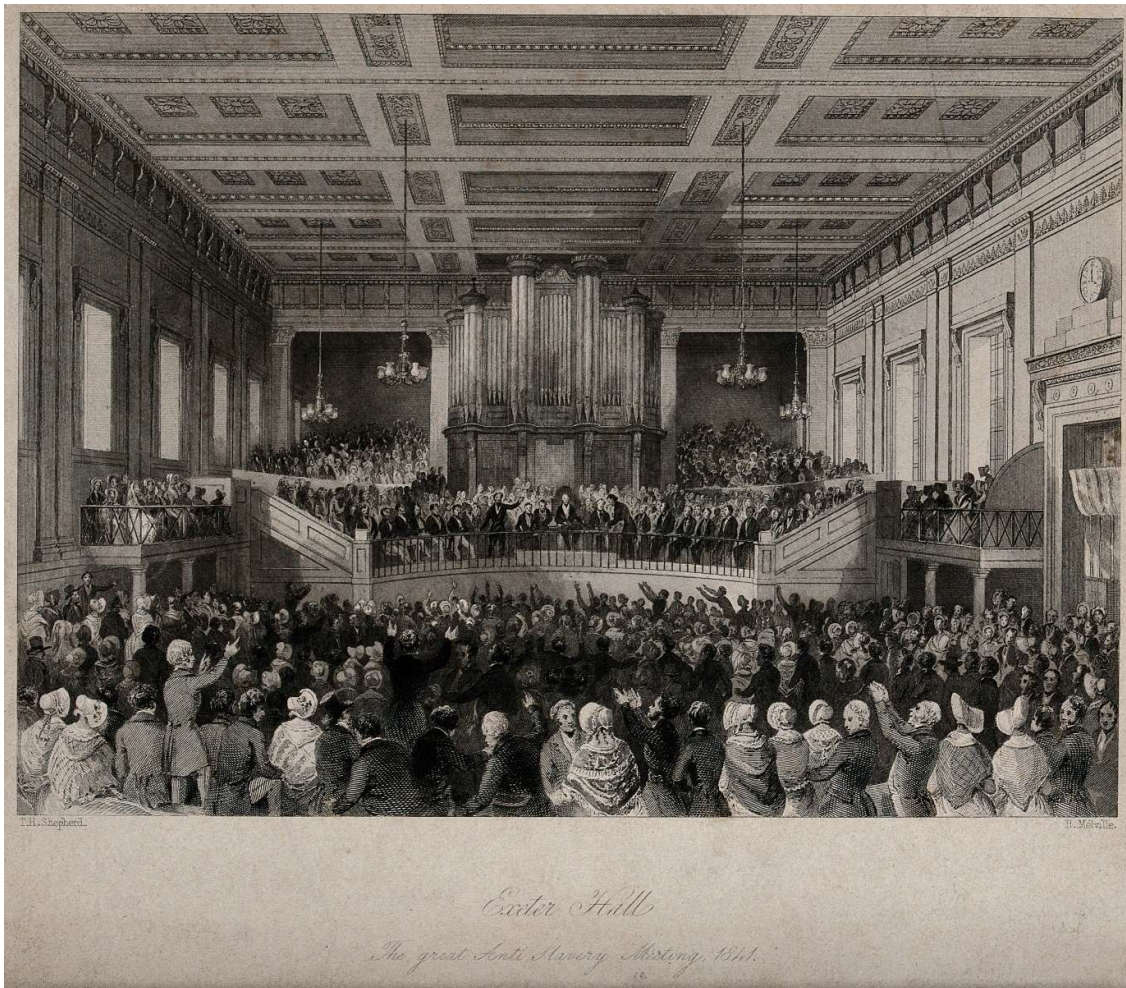


Fig.28. H. Melville, Engraving of the Great Anti-Slavery Meeting, Exeter Hall.

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/zqmuvs93>, 13 x 17.8. Welcome Collection. Accessed May 10, 2019



Fig.29. Abraham Solomon, *Not Guilty, The Acquittal*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 102x127, Tate Britain.



Fig.30. Abraham Solomon, *Doubtful Fortune*, 1856, oil on panel, 39 x 31, private collection.



Fig.31. Abraham Solomon, *The Lion in Love*, 1858, oil on canvas, 71 x 89, private collection.



Fig.32. Emily Mary Osborn: *Nameless and Friendless*. Emily Mary Osborn, *Nameless and Friendless*, 1857, oil on canvas, 83 x 104, Tate Britain.



Fig.33. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, oil on canvas, 141 x 196, National Gallery, London.



Fig.34. Titian, *La Schiavona*, 1510-12, oil on canvas, 119 x 97, National Gallery, London.



Fig. 35. John Everett Millais, *Isabella*, 1849, oil on canvas, 103 x 142, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

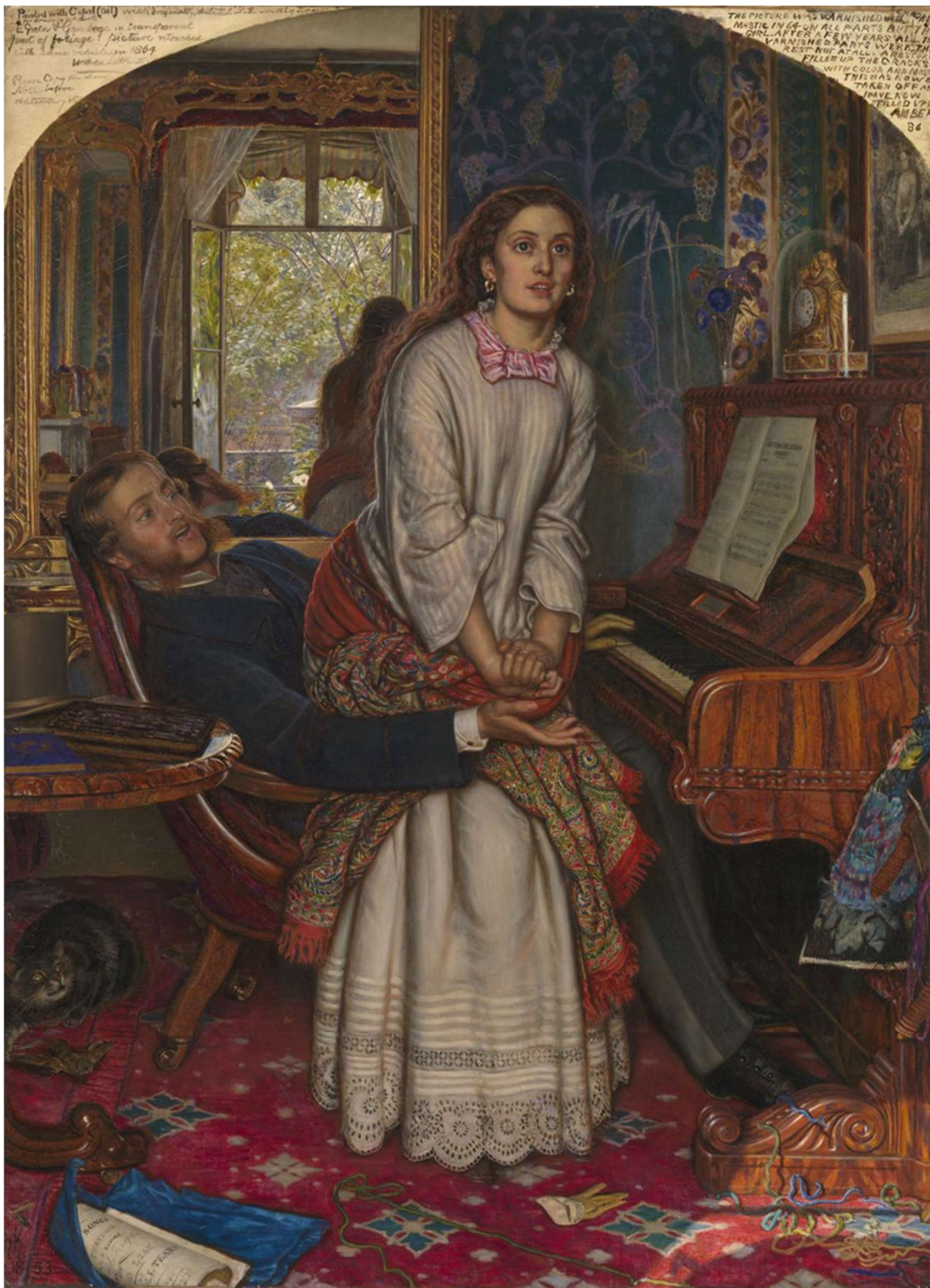


Fig. 36. William Holman Hunt, *The Awakening Conscience*, 1853, oil on canvas, 75 x 56. Tate Britain.



Fig.37. Marshall Claxton, *An Emigrant's Thoughts from Home*, 1859, oil on cardboard, 61 x 47, National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.



Fig.38. Henry Wallis, *Death of Chatterton*, 1856, oil on canvas. 62 x 93, Tate Britain.



Lomovska

Fig.39. Bernhard Strigel, *Pilate Washing His Hands of Guilt for Christ's Death*, circa 1495, oil on panel, 158 x 53, Walters Art Museum.

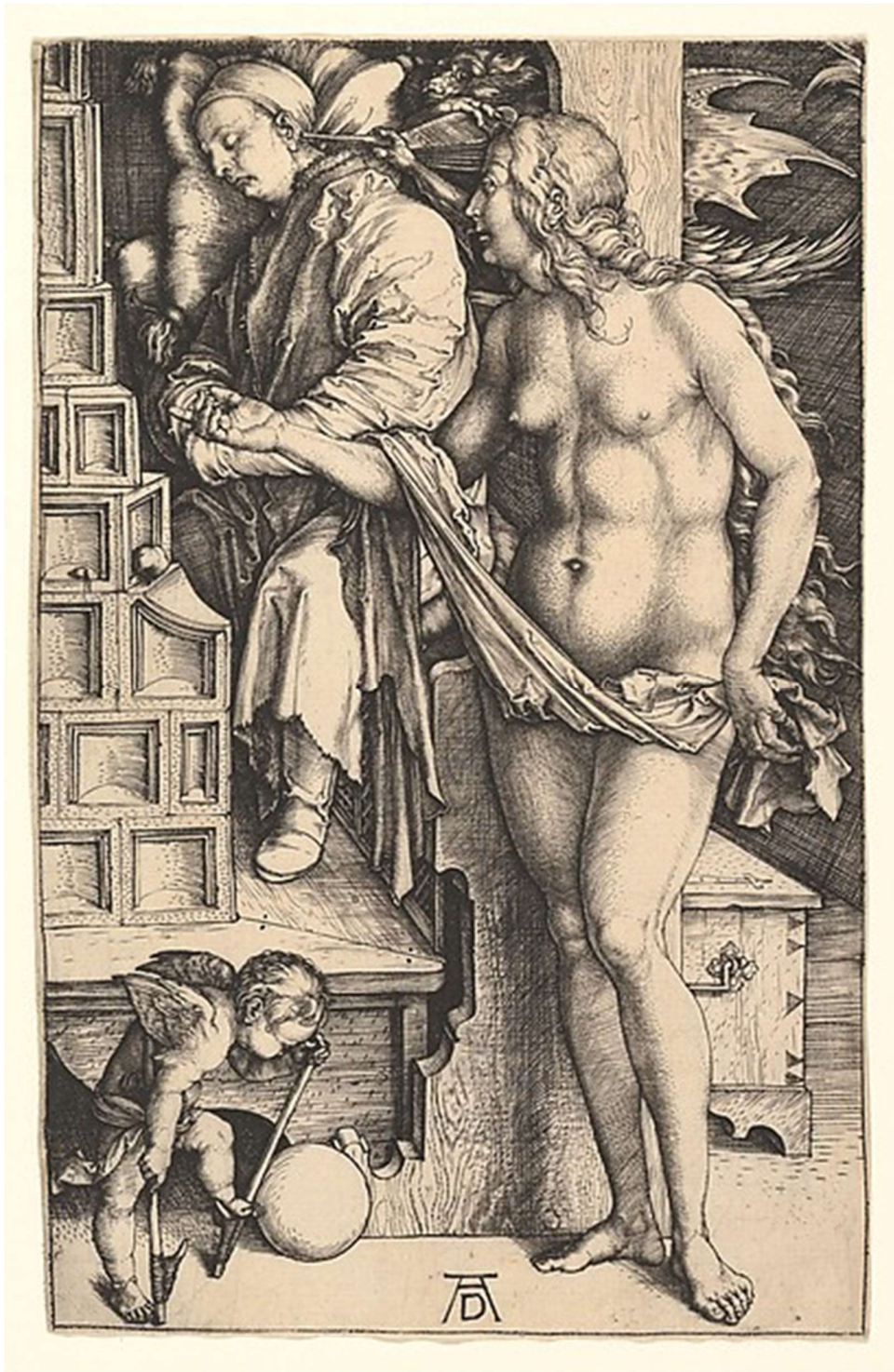


Fig.40. Albrecht Dürer, *The Dream of the Doctor*, 1495-99, engraving, 19 x 12.
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336221>. Accessed 10 May,2019.



Fig.41. Abraham.Solomon, *First Class*, second version,1855, oil on canvas, 20x 25, Yale Center for British Art.



Fig.42. Isaac Cruikshank, *Solomon in all his Glory*, 1807, coloured engraving, 24 x 34, Thomas Tegg Publisher.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1670181&partId=1&people=128037&peoA=128037-2-60&page=1. Accessed May 10, 2019



Fig. 43. William Powell Frith, *Ramsgate Sands*, 1851-4, oil on canvas, 77 x 155, Royal Collection.



Fig.44. Charles West Cope, *Othello Relating His Adventures*, 1853, engraving, 25 x 20. <https://www.abebooks.co.uk/Othello-Steel-engraving-Relating-Adventures-engraved/719068380/bd>, accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig.45. George Morland, *The Soldier's Return*, 1791, oil on canvas, 30.5 x 25.5, Lady Lever Art Gallery.



Fig.46. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, *Return of the Jewish Volunteer*, 1833-34, oil on canvas, 86 x 94, Jewish Museum of New York.



Fig.47.

Abraham Solomon. *Le Malade Imaginaire*, 1862, oil on canvas, private collection.

<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/solomona/paintings/3.html>, accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig.48. Abraham Solomon, *The Lost Found*, 1862, oil on canvas,103x129, whereabouts unknown.



Fig.49. William Dyce, *Pegwell Bay, Kent—a Recollection of October 5th, 1858*, 1858-60, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 89, Tate Britain.

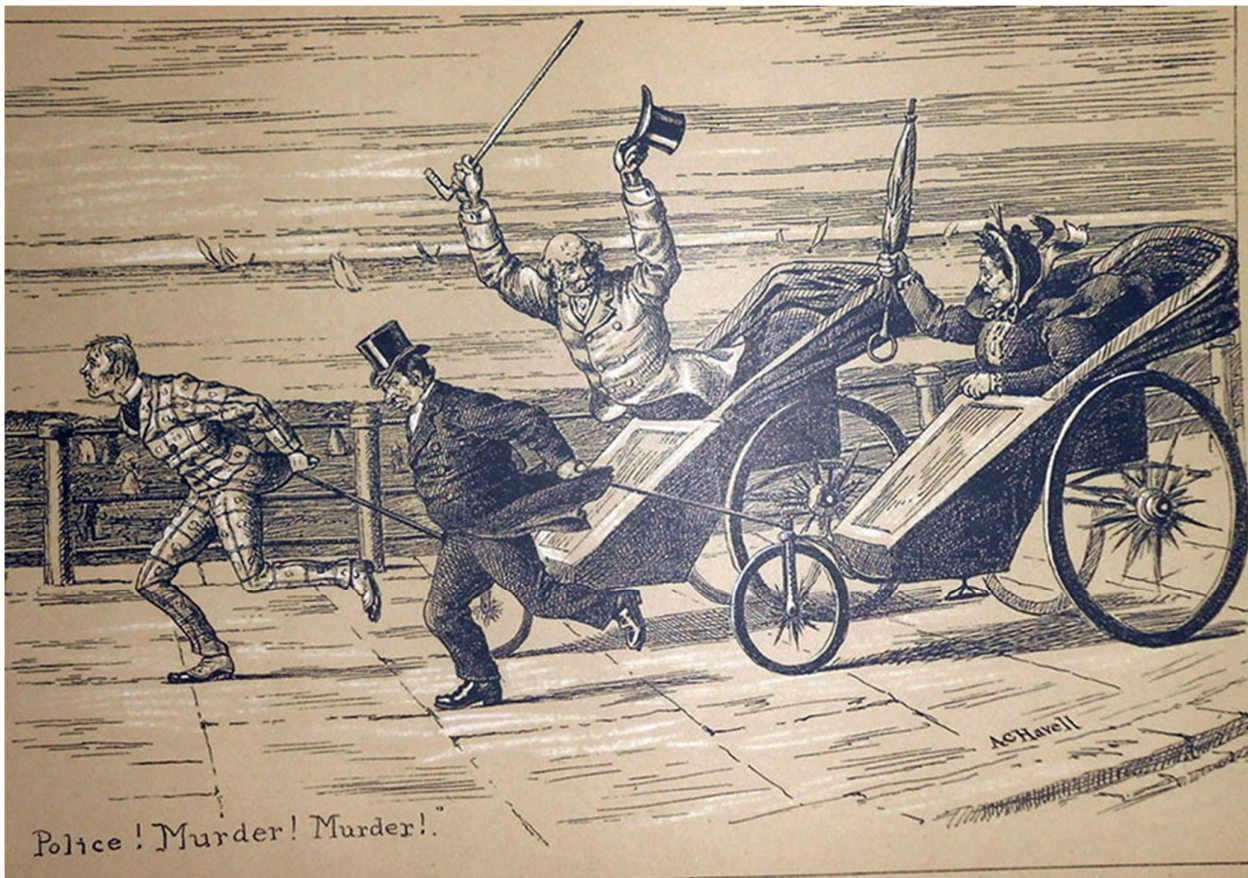


Fig.50. Fores's Sporting Notes and Sketches: Bath chair Racing. 1886.

<https://garageancien.wordpress.com/1900s-bath-chair-by-thos-hughes-co-birmingham/>,
accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig.51. Abraham Solomon, Preparatory drawing for *A Contrast*, 1855. charcoal and pastel on paper, 58 x 79, author's collection.



Fig.52. Jacques-Louis Ingres, *Jeanne D'Arc at the Coronation of Charles VII*, 1854, oil on canvas, 240 x 178, the Louvre.



Fig.53. Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Portrait of Queen Victoria*, 1843, oil on canvas, 65 x 53, Royal Collection.



Fig.54. British Penny: 1832

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BALL AT THE CAMP, BOULOGNE.—(COPYED BY G. H. THOMAS.)—FROM THE EXHIBITION OF THE BRITISH ARTISTS.

TESTIMONIAL PRESENTED TO LADY STERNS AT SMYRNA.
 A VERY interesting notice has lately been given by the humane services of the British nation of Smyrna, in the person of the illustrious Lady Sterns. The circumstances of the presentation are explained in the following manner:—

On the 15th of December, 1855, the General Hospital, Smyrna, and Mr. G. H. Thomas, of London, were invited to the residence of the British Consul, Sir G. B. Erskine, to witness the presentation of a testimonial to the memory of the late Lady Sterns, who had died on the 15th of December, 1855, at the age of 74. Her husband, the late Sir G. B. Erskine, was a member of the House of Commons, and had been a member of the House of Commons for many years. He was a distinguished statesman, and had been a member of the House of Commons for many years. He was a distinguished statesman, and had been a member of the House of Commons for many years. He was a distinguished statesman, and had been a member of the House of Commons for many years.



THE CHALICE PRESENTED TO LADY STERNS AT SMYRNA.

BALL AT THE CAMP, BOULOGNE.
 WHETHER we should do the compliment of the King of Bohemia, or the King of Prussia, is a question which has been long and warmly debated by the public mind. It is a question which has been long and warmly debated by the public mind. It is a question which has been long and warmly debated by the public mind. It is a question which has been long and warmly debated by the public mind. It is a question which has been long and warmly debated by the public mind. It is a question which has been long and warmly debated by the public mind.

Fig.55 J H Thomas: Ball at the Camp, Boulogne. G H Thomas, Ball at the Camp, Boulogne, 1856, engraved for the Illustrated London News. August 15, 1856.



Fig.56. Angelo Biasioli after Antonio Correggio, La Maddelena del Corregio. 1790-1830, etching, 18 x 22.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3046692&partId=1. Accessed Mar 10, 2019.



Fig.57. Frederick Bacon Barwell, *Adopting a Child*, 1857. Contemporary Engraving. Publisher unknown. <http://goldenagepaintings.blogspot.com/2011/06/frederick-bacon-barwell-flitting.html>. Accessed Mar 10, 2019.



Fig.58. John Everett Millais, *Mariana*,1851, oil on panel, 60 x 50, Tate Britain.

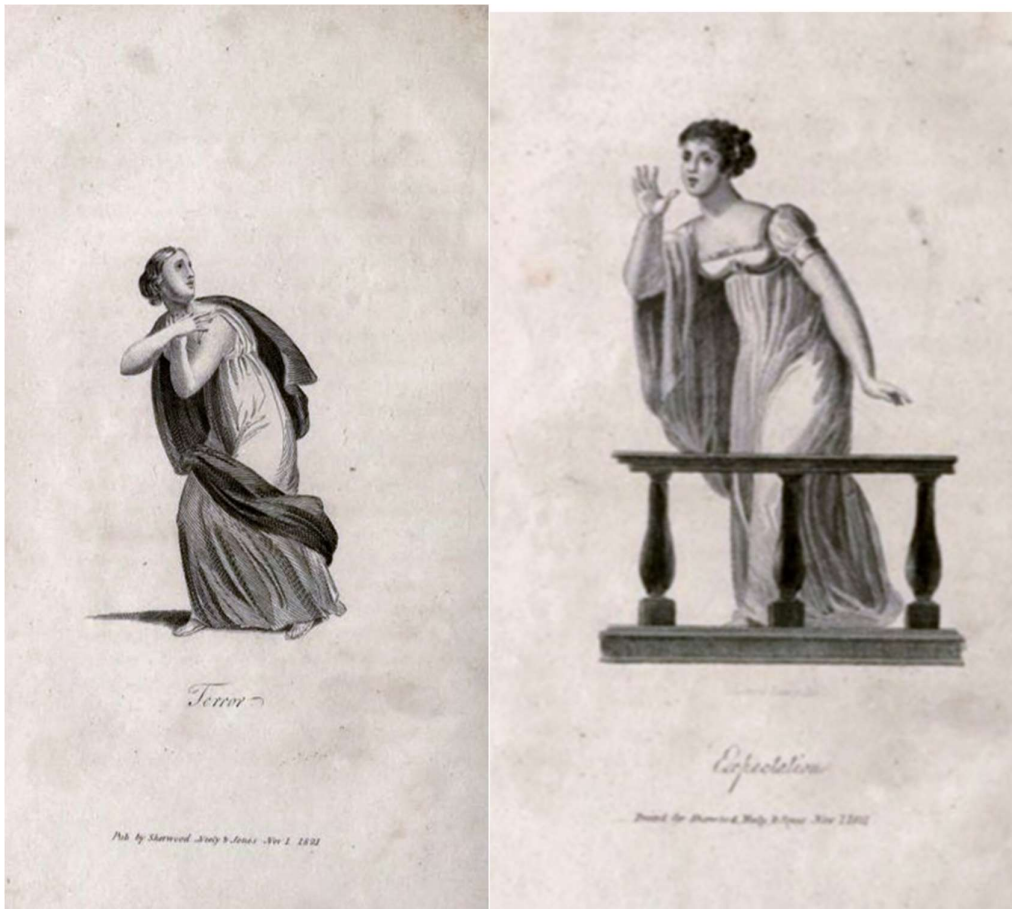


Fig. 59. Johann Engel and Henry Siddons, *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (1822)



Fig. 60. Albrecht Dürer, *Melancholia*, 1514, engraving, around 24 x 19, British Museum.



Fig. 61. Abraham Solomon, *The Bride*, 1856, oil on canvas, 125 x 98. Museum of Croydon.



Fig. 62. Oscar Gustav Rejlander, *Two Ways of Life*, printer, J. Dudley Johnston, 1857, printed 1920s Carbon print, 401 x 76.2. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

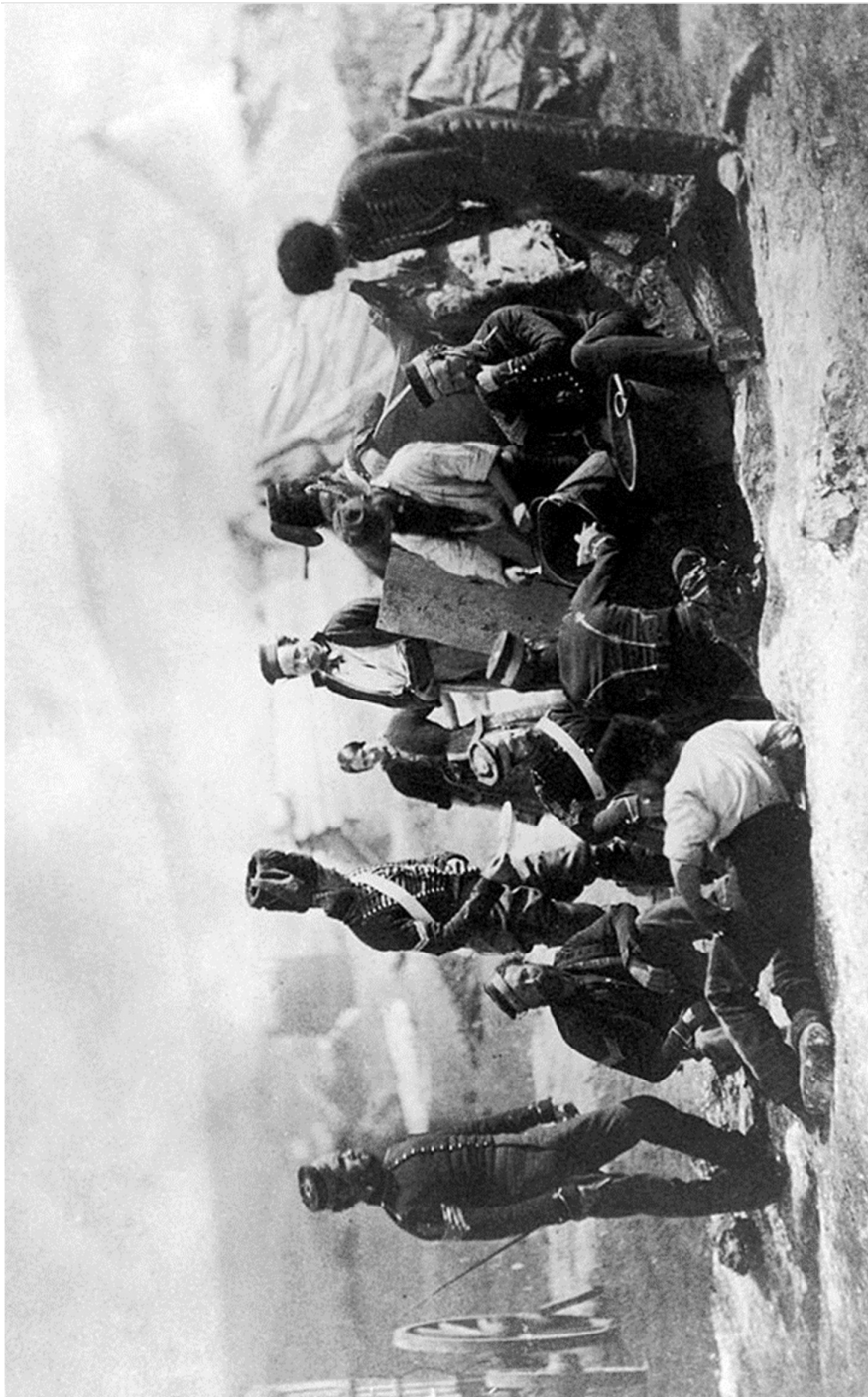


Fig.63 Roger Fenton, *8th Hussars soldiers preparing a meal at the Cookhouse in the field.*
Contemporary photograph.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10675182/In-pictures-Roger-Fentons-historic-Crimean-War-photographs.html?frame=2841379>. Accessed. March 10, 2019.

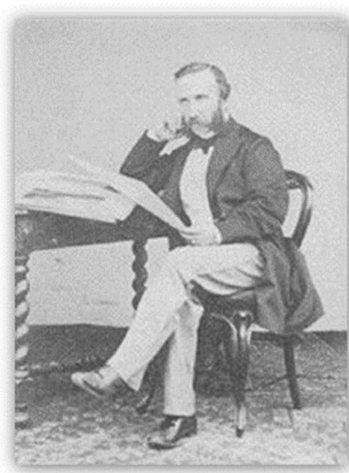


Fig. 64. Abraham Solomon, Cartes de visites. Abraham Solomon. Two studio photographs, presumably taken on the same day, photographer unknown. National Portrait Gallery.<https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw112142/Abraham-Solomon> . Accessed March 10, 2019.



Fig.65. George Stiff. Illustration from *Mysteries of London*.

<https://ainsworthandfriends.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/the-man-who-wasnt-dickens/>

Accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig 66. William Hogarth, *Harlot's Progress*, Plate I, 1732. Engraving.



Fig.67. William Holman Hunt, *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus*,1851, oil on canvas, 98.5 x 133, Birmingham Museums.



Fig.68. John Everett Millais, *The Blind Girl*, 1856., oil on canvas, 81 x 53, Birmingham Museums.

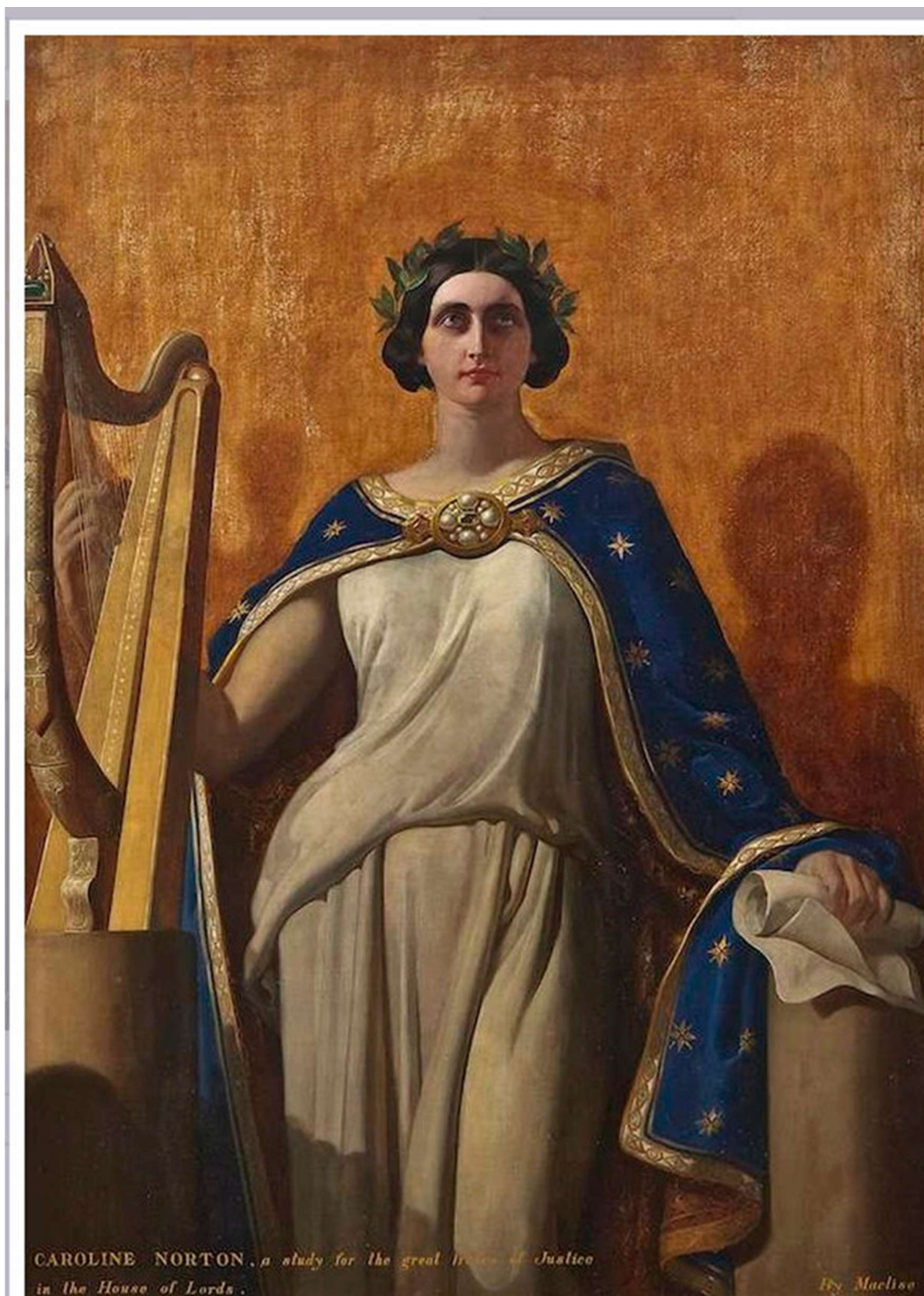


Fig 69. Daniel Maclise, *Justica*. (Caroline Norton). A figure of Erin (used on Irish bank notes). C.1840- 50, oil on canvas, 102 x 76. Private collection.



Fig.70. Abraham Solomon, *Portrait of the Duke of Wellington*. Portrait after a daguerreotype of the Duke of Wellington, 1850s, watercolour on card. Author's collection.



Fig.71. William Mulready, *Portrait of John Sheepshanks at his residence, New Bond Street*, 1832-1834, oil on panel. 33 x 42. Museum no. FA.142[O], Victoria and Albert Museum, London

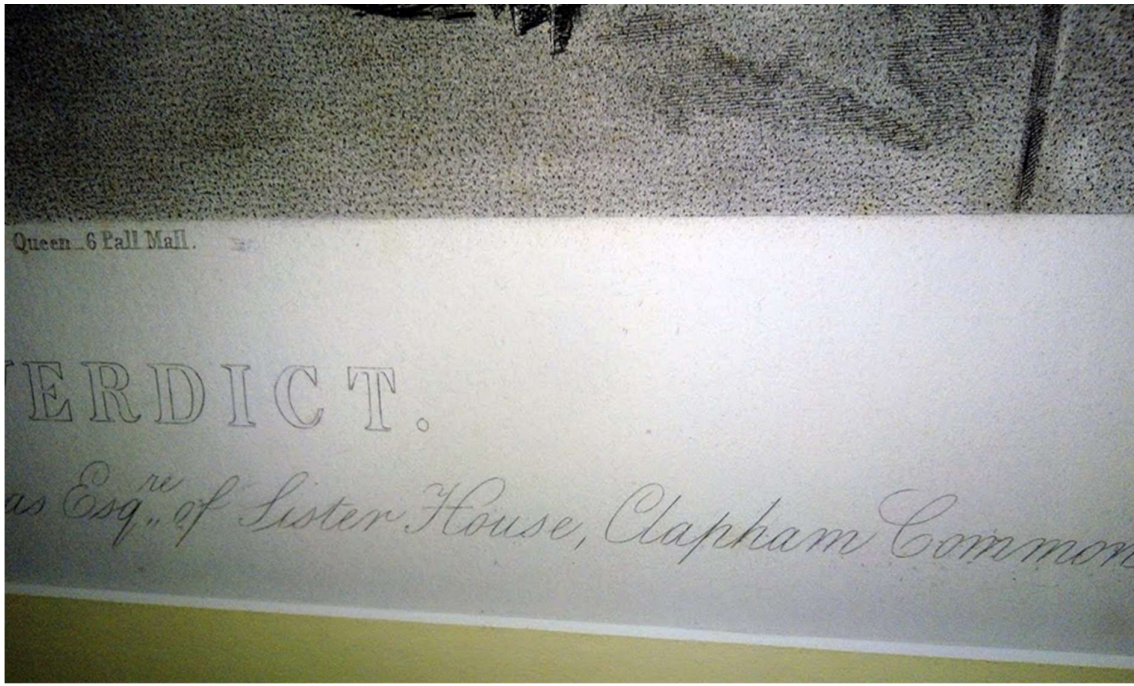


Fig.72. Abraham Solomon, *Waiting for the Verdict* (detail), 1866, mezzotint, showing the Lucas inscription. Author's Collection.



Fig.73. Abraham Solomon. *Le Malade Imaginaire*.1862, oil on canvas, private collection.



Fig.74. John Everett Millais, *Peace Concluded*, 1856, oil on canvas, 120 x 91, Minneapolis Institute of Arts.



Fig.75. Anthony Van Dyke (copy) *Beatriz Cusance*, secret second wife of Charles IV, Duke of Lorraine after Sir Anthony van Dyck. Whereabouts unknown.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beatriz_Cusance.jpg. Accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig.76. Frans Hals, *Portrait of a Woman with a Fan*, 1640, oil on canvas, 80 x 59, National Gallery London.



Fig.77. William Holman Hunt, *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*, 1854-55, oil on canvas, 86 x 141, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

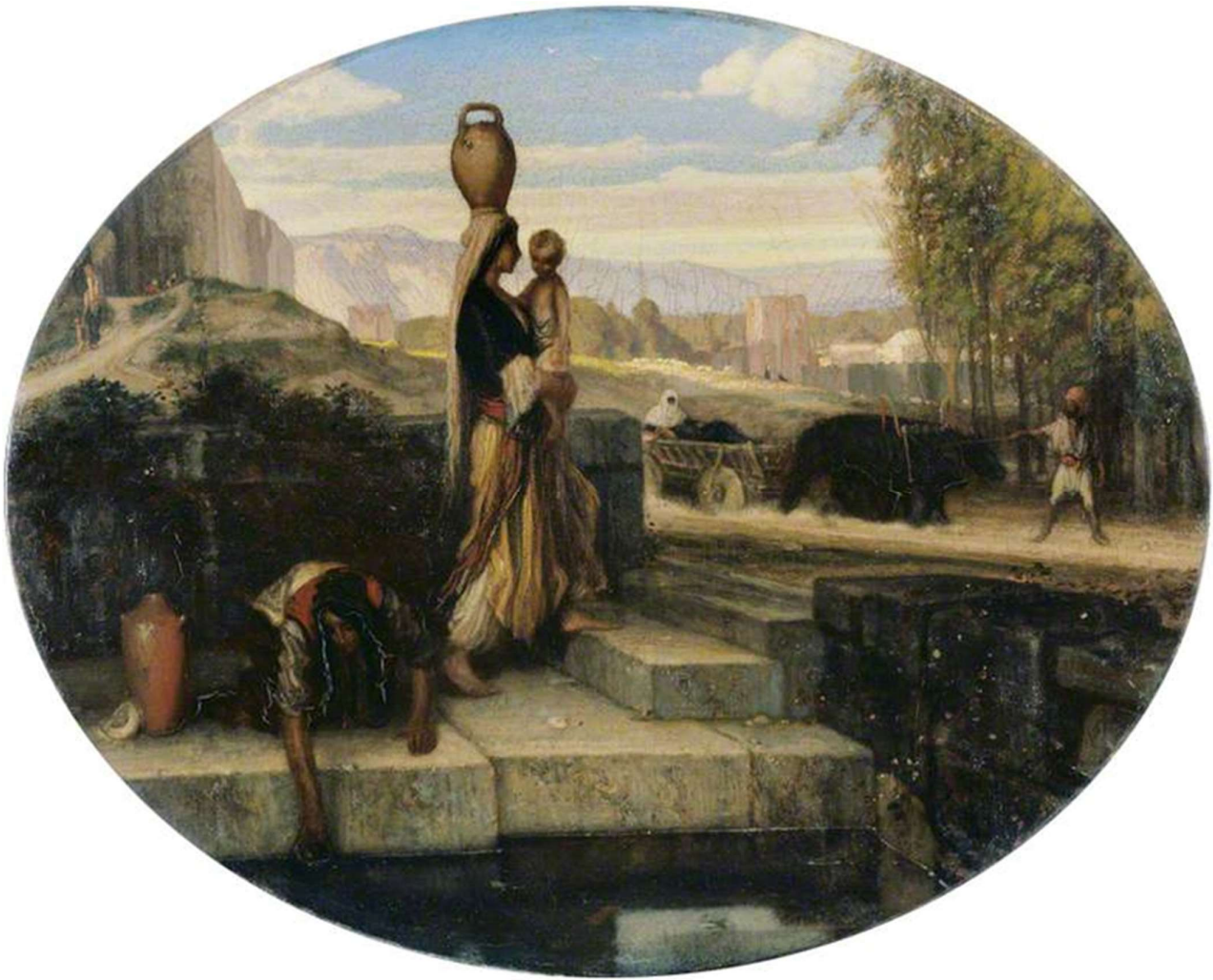


Fig.78. Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, *Eastern Women at a Well*, 1851, oil on canvas, 34 x 42, Wallace Collection.

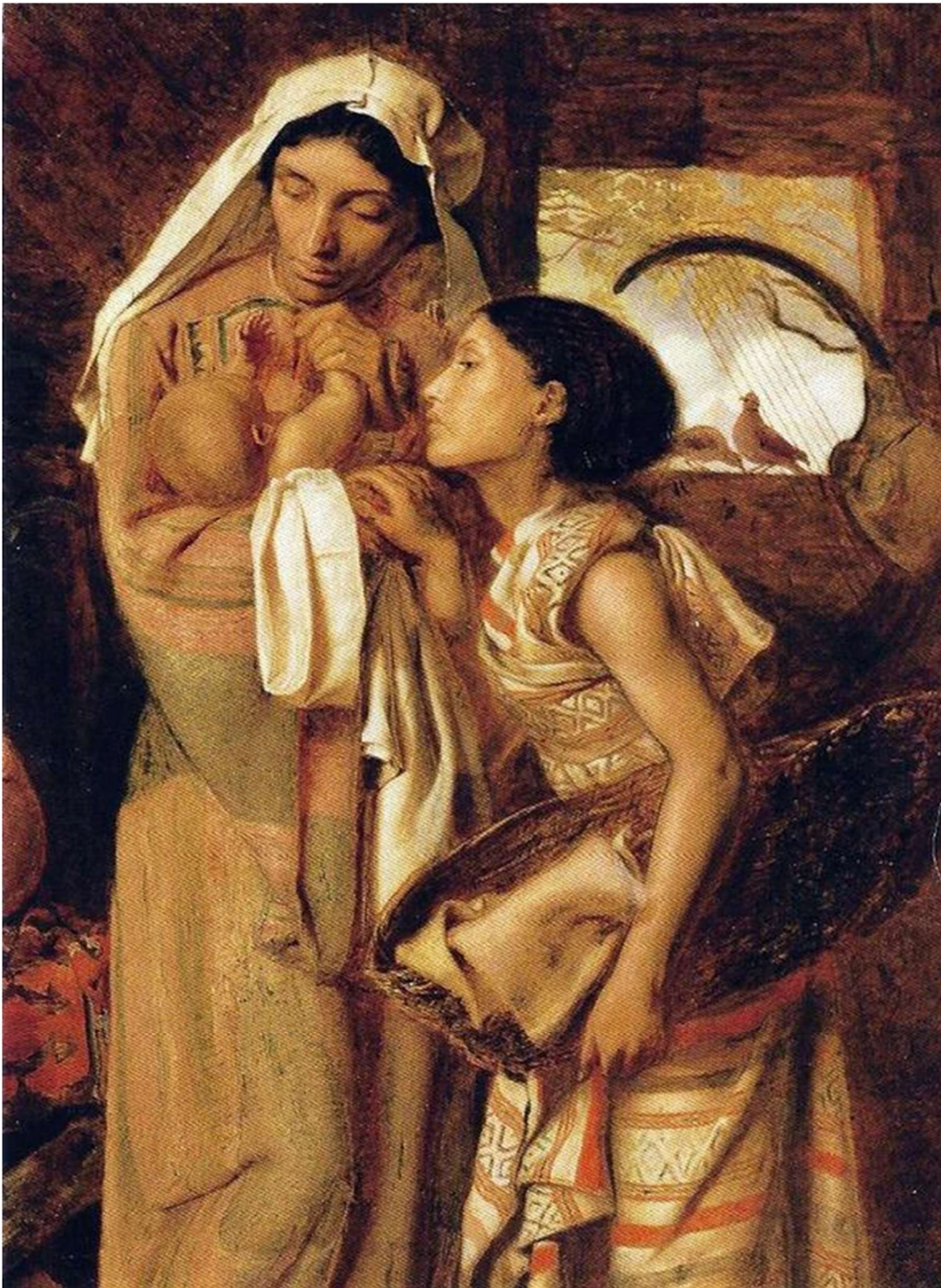
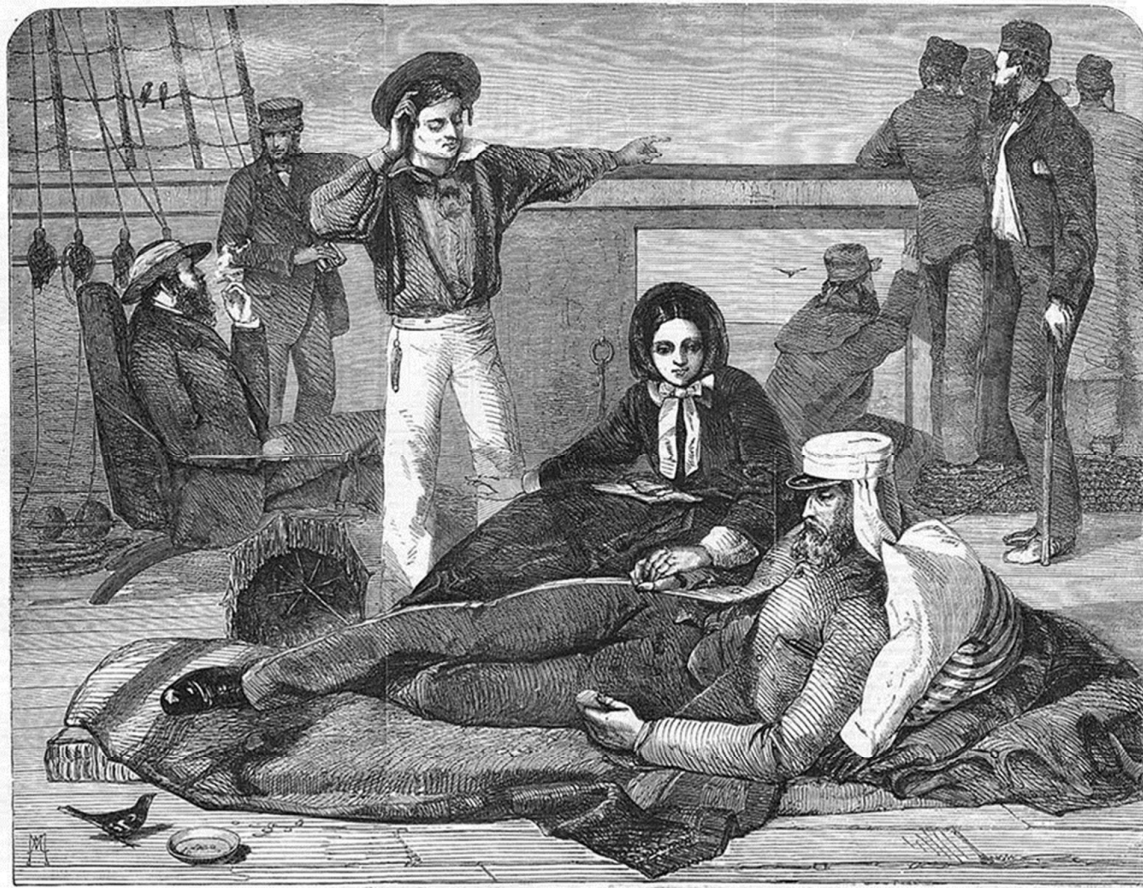


Fig.79. Simeon Solomon, *The Infant Moses (Mother of Moses)*, 1860, oil on canvas, 19 x 23, Delaware Art Museum.



Fig.80 Thomas Jones Barker, *The Relief of Lucknow* ,1857, 1859, oil on canvas, 105 x 181, National Portrait Gallery London.



"NEARING HOME."—PAINTED BY J. D. LUARD.—FROM THE EXHIBITION OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY.

Fig.81. John Dalbiac Luard, *Nearing Home* (1856). Wood engraving, *London Illustrated News*. June 18, 1856



Fig.82. Henry Nelson O'Neil. *Eastward Ho!* 1857. oil on canvas, 92 x 72, Museum of London.



Fig. 83. Joseph Noel Paton, *In Memoriam*, 1858, oil on panel, 123 x 96, private collection.



Fig.84. Joseph Noel Paton, *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania*, 1849, oil on canvas, 99 x 152, National Gallery of Scotland.



85. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* 1850, oil on canvas, 73 x 42, Tate Britain.



Fig.86. Felice Beato, *Bailee Guard Gate, taken from the Inside, and Showing the Clock Tower, Lucknow, 1858.* Albumen Print.

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/104605/felice-beato-henry-hering-bailee-guard-gate-taken-from-the-inside-showing-the-clock-tower-british-1858-1862/>. Accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig.87. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-2, oil on canvas, 76 x 112, Tate Britain.



Fig.88. Henry Wallis, *Death of Chatterton*, 1856, oil on canvas. 62 x 93, Tate Britain.



FATHER THAMES INTRODUCING HIS OFFSPRING TO THE FAIR CITY OF LONDON.

(A Design for a Fresco in the New Houses of Parliament.)

Fig.89. George Cruikshank, *Father Thames*, July 3,1858, (page 5) engraving, *Punch*.
<https://www.museumoflondonprints.com/image/134549/anonymous-father-thames-introducing-his-offspring-to-the-fair-city-of-london-1858>. Accessed May 10, 2019.



Fig.90. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Duel after the Masquerade*, 1857-59. Oil on canvas, 56 x 39, Walters Art Museum.



Fig.91. Anonymous, *Drowned!* Published in *The Days Doings*, 1871, engraving. Mary Ward Picture Library.



Fig.92. William Hogarth, *Four Times of Day*, 1738, prints, 47x 38.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1400924&partId=1&people=120911&peoA=120911-2-60&page=1. Accessed May 10. 2019.

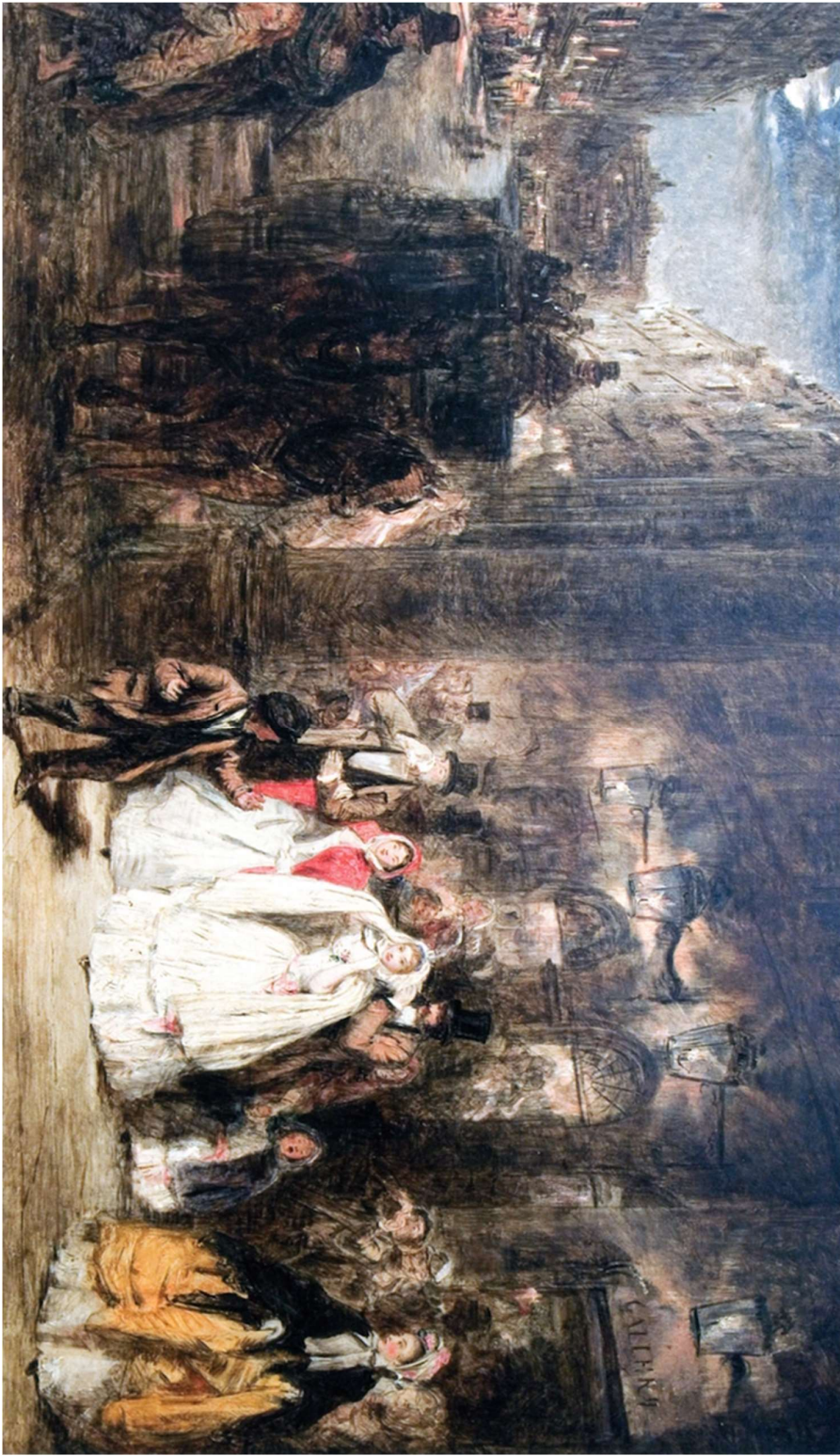


Fig. 93. W P Frith, *Haymarket (night)* Oil Sketch, 1862. private collection.



Fig.94. Eugène Boudin, *Beach at Trouville*, 1865, oil on cardboard, 26 x 40, Musée d'Orsay



Drawn by William McConnell.

See "Brighton In and Out of Season."

FASHIONABLE PROMENADES: BRIGHTON BEACH.

LONDON SOCIETY VOL II 1862

Fig. 95. William Mc Connell, *Fashionable Promenades: Brighton Beach*, engraving, *London Society*, Vol 2, 1862.



Fig.96. Anonymous, Les Bains de Mer: Boulogne-sur-mer-La Pêcheuse De Crevettes. *Le Journal Illustré*, July 29, 1866. Engraving.



The Railway Station by William Powell Frith (1862 - English). Oil on canvas. Royal Holloway College, University of London, Egham.

Fig.97. W P Frith, *The Railway Station*, 1862, Oil on Canvas, 117 x 256, Royal Holloway College.

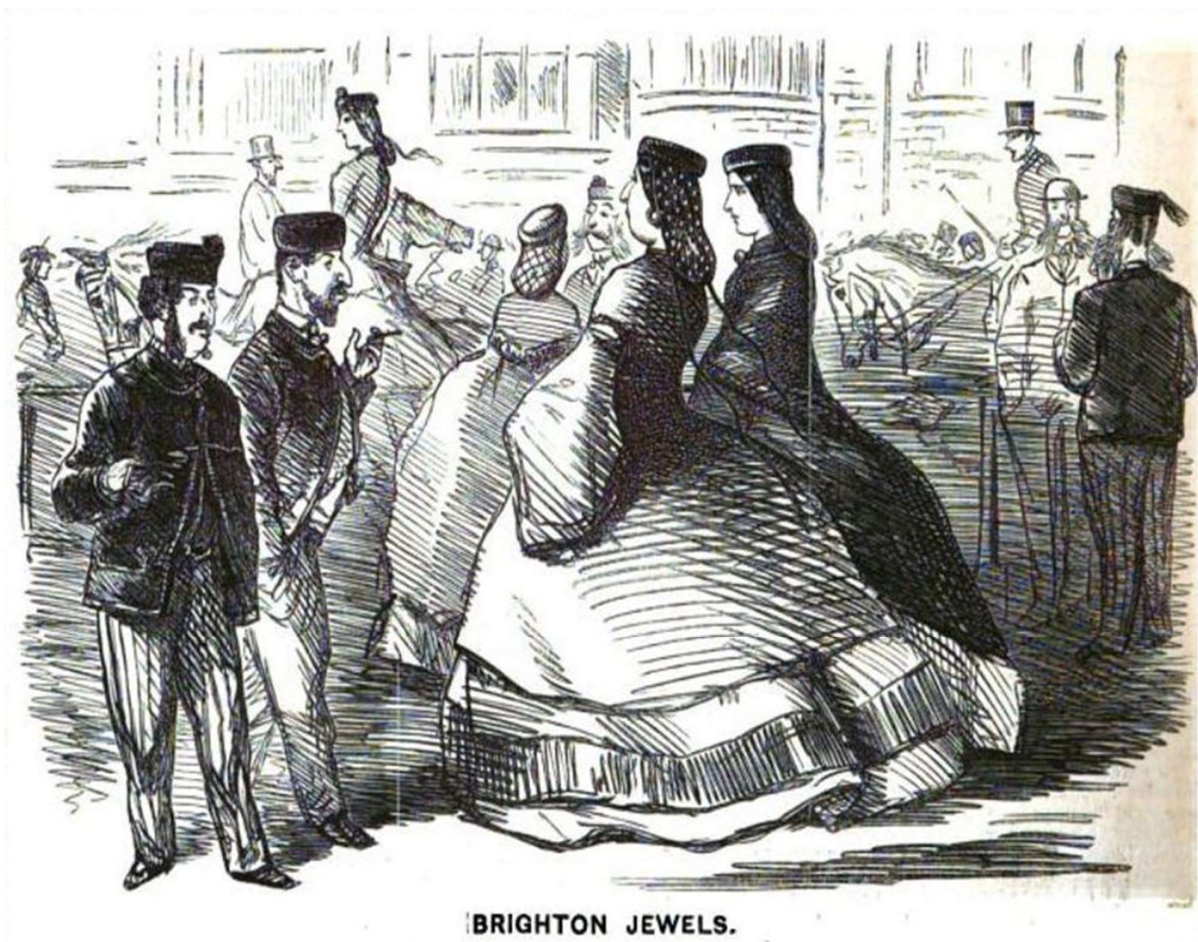


Fig.98. Punch Magazine, *Women in pork pie hats*, 1860

https://nn.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pork_pie-hatt#/media/File:Brighton_Jewels.jpg. Accessed March 10, 2019.



Fig.99. Henry Betts: *Brighton photograph*. A carte-de-visite portrait of an unknown woman wearing a hat and cape, photographed by H. Betts of Brighton (c1862)
<https://www.google.com/search?q=h+betts+photography+brighton+>. Accessed March 10, 2019.



Fig.100 Jean Antoine Watteau: *Les Plaisirs du Bal*, 1715-17, Oil on Canvas, 53 x 65, Dulwich Picture Gallery



Fig. 101. Abraham Solomon: *A Ballroom in the Year 1760*, print, 20 May, 1848, *Illustrated London News*, 327.



Fig.102. French Imperial Guards uniforms.

<http://www.twcenter.net/forums/showthread.php?306393-The-Offical-Napoleon-Total-War-Historic-Uniforms-Thread>



Fig.103.Attributed to Abraham Solomon, *Countess Eugénie de Montijo*, 1846, oil on canvas, Private Collection.



Fig. 104. William Maw Egley: *Omnibus Life*, oil on canvas, 45 x 42, Tate Britain.