REDRESSING WILLIAM ETTY
AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY (1820-1837)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to offer a re-evaluation of the celebrated yet controversial painter William Etty R.A. (1787-1849), whose diverse output has become virtually synonymous with his notorious and enduring artistic preoccupation with the nude. In his own time, Etty was periodically criticised for indulging in this perceived obsession, which troubled his contemporaries and which still dominates modern scholarship. While acknowledging the futility of attempting to preclude the nude in my reassessment of Etty’s pictorial practice, I argue that a different frame of reference might be similarly productive in seeking to redress his art-historical significance. Therefore, this study aims to advance an alternative hermeneutic approach: one that eschews special focus on the nude, and instead examines his works through the prism of contemporary exhibition culture.

To serve this purpose, I will provide close visual readings of a range of the artist’s most striking and intriguing contributions to a series of pivotal Royal Academy exhibitions, paying particular attention to the ways in which Etty exploited these summer shows as a forum for painterly performance and public display. By means of five detailed case studies – each of which expresses certain themes or perceptions of him as an artist – I intend to construct a more textured, nuanced narrative about his agenda, trajectory and presence at exhibition between the years 1820 and 1837. Consciously situating itself in the volatile climate of nineteenth-century art criticism, my project rests upon the most comprehensive survey of contemporary press coverage related to Etty that has ever been undertaken. Ultimately, my thesis seeks to recover, reconsider and resurrect Etty’s contemporary status as an ambitious and complex participant within the late-Georgian art world.
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Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Roger and Julia, and my four amazing siblings, for their constant love and support.

This dissertation is dedicated to Benjamin Hilliam.
DECLARATION

I, Beatrice Bertram, declare that this dissertation, and the ideas elucidated within it, are entirely my own and are underpinned by my own research.
INTRODUCTION

‘The sale of these studies is likely to be as pernicious to art as to morals’

On 20 April 1850 – five months after William Etty’s death – the Victorian genre painter, William Powell Frith (1819-1909), wrote to his patron and friend, Thomas Miller:

I arrived in York just in time to see a great many of Etty’s pictures – (that is hardly the right word for there is not a picture properly speaking amongst them) – his relatives are like all such people, they seem determined to turn every miserable scrap that bears the ‘impress of the great man’s hand’ into hard cash – there are above a thousand lots 7 or 800 are life studies – single figures, most of them indifferent not to say bad – they are selling everything even boards with a few unmeaning dabs of paint upon. These & the oil cloth on which he stood to paint – & all against his wish.¹

Frith had seen the remaining artistic possessions of “dear, kind Etty”,² which were soon to be sent to Christie and Manson in London and auctioned in 1,020 separate lots during 6-10 and 13-14 May.³ This event precipitated the sharp decline in Etty’s standing following his death and galvanised a downwards trajectory which has not since been challenged. Life class studies did indeed easily exceed 700, a figure which is placed into perspective by a comparison with Etty’s contemporary and colleague, William Hilton (1786-1839): his posthumous sale in 1841 had contained ninety-two lots, of which number there was a sole “male academy figure” amongst a range of historical works.⁴ It is noteworthy also that Hilton’s wife, and his brother-in-law, Peter DeWint, selectively sold off the painter’s works two years after his death, whereas Etty’s family had shifted the majority of his personal belongings within just six months of his passing, even down to a Burmese idol and a pear-wood crucifix.⁵

¹ RAA, 236-41-6. William Powell Frith, to Thomas Miller, in a letter dated 20 April 1850. Please note that all quotations referenced in this thesis are true to the original texts.
² Frith, 1888, 1: 73.
³ Although previous scholarship states that there were 1,034 separate lots at Etty’s posthumous sale (Farr, 1958: 108 and Robinson, 2007: 422), Christie and Manson’s catalogue in fact contains several numerical inaccuracies, including duplications and omissions.
⁴ Christie and Manson, 4 June 1841: 5. The male academy figure is listed as Lot 43 in the catalogue.
⁵ Christie and Manson, 6-14 May 1850: 46-47.
The dissemination of this surfeit of academic nude studies in a public sphere had a markedly detrimental effect upon Etty's already equivocal reputation. Such a view is confirmed by the *Athenæum* in its 'Fine Art Gossip' column for 11 May 1850:

> The seven days' sale which is nearly concluded at Messrs. Christie's ... has been one of the least fortunate circumstances connected with the career of the great colourist ... the determination to expose to the world a number of studies of the nude which the painter intended only as preparations for his pictures, is one which has not hesitated to postpone the artist's reputation to the desire of swelling the amount of his administrative estate. A mass of studies have thus been let loose upon the town little calculated to enhance the credit of the great painter, - putting into the possession of any casual person works whose purer aim and intention might be mistaken, and likely to have a mischievous influence on the younger artists of the day. - A sure consequence is, that many of these studies will be used, not for investigation, but for adoption; fostering that spirit of plagiarism which at this moment covers the walls of our exhibition rooms with pictures manufactured after the most approved modes and conventions which Mr. Etty adopted. The sale of these studies is likely to be as pernicious to art as to morals.6

Together, these two prescient contemporaneous accounts (one by a fellow painter, the other from a popular periodical) reinforce the sense that the characteristically reserved Etty would have been aghast at his private working studies having entered the art market. Given his awareness of the strident allegations directed against him – "I have been accused of being a shocking and immoral man! I have even heard my bodily infirmities ... turned against me" – it seems highly unlikely that he would have consented to a sale which inflamed these accusations.7 Indeed, according to Etty's earliest biographer, Alexander Gilchrist, the painter had once allowed a friend to select a few academic studies from his collection, on the condition that the purchaser kept them for life, declaring: "I don't want them ... in the possession of young men, merely to show about to one another ... They were painted in privacy for my information and improvement: not to *those* ends."8

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6 *Athenæum*, 11 May 1850: 511-12.
7 Etty, 1 February 1849: 39.
8 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 319.
The decisive role that the posthumous sale of Etty’s works played in hastening the distortion and decline of his reputation has been overlooked by previous scholarship, and will receive full attention here for the first time. As correctly prophesied by the correspondent for the *Athenæum*, the sudden deluge of nude sketches which flooded the market in 1850 proved to be “pernicious” both to art, and to the artist. Firstly, as Gilchrist had feared, many of Etty’s “Studies from Nature” were subsequently “doctored, – ‘finished’ by other hands, or worked up into set pictures”, rather than being preserved in their original state. Their conversion into palimpsests was likewise lamented by Richard and Samuel Redgrave in 1866, who remarked that the studies were “fitted with backgrounds and dressed up pictorially for the market, certainly not however by the hand of the master”. Secondly, they were “scattered at random, – into any but suitable hands”, promoting and perpetuating the perception that the painter’s output was inappropriate. I will now briefly outline the more long-term ramifications of this auction and consider alternative explanations for the painter’s adverse reception, before contextualising his career and output in relation to the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Having ascertained the need for an in-depth reappraisal of Etty, the second part of the introduction will locate my study within the existing scholarship, defend the merits of the methodology, survey the sources consulted and anticipate the content of subsequent chapters.

The lasting legacy of the widespread dispersal of Etty’s private studies has resulted in his name being persistently and arbitrarily attached to drawings of the nude in sales catalogues, often prefixed with the terms “attributed to” or “in the circle of”, thereby increasing their value. For example, out of a sample of ninety-three works by, or attributed to, William Etty sold at Christie’s since 2000, sixty-one (66%) constituted either academic studies or nude figures without any literary accompaniment or specified source. Similarly, a sample of thirty-nine Etty’s sold at

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9 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 308.
10 Redgrave and Redgrave, 1866, 1: 19.
11 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 308.
12 Data gathered from Christie's sold lot archive. I have made the following assumptions in my analysis: that nude studies constitute straightforward academic life studies, as well as those works exhibiting nude figures which do not appear to derive from any specific literary or historical source. Only works which have been accessioned as “by” or “attributed to” William Etty have been included in the survey. Those works which are listed as being “by a follower of”, “after”, “in the circle of”, or “in the studio of” William Etty have thus been excluded. Only works in oils have been considered, as opposed to pencil, ink, or chalk studies.
Sotheby's since September 2003 resulted in an equivalent figure of twenty-seven (69%). Interestingly, at the Royal Academy of Arts, fifteen oil, chalk and pencil studies on paper are accessioned as having been "formerly attributed to William Etty", illustrating the tendency to mistake or apportion any nude sketch as 'an Etty'. These revealing statistics point to the disproportionate amount of nude studies linked to the artist (rightly or wrongly) which continue to be circulated, and which, in my opinion, have played a significant part in precluding a more objective and rounded assessment of his pictorial portfolio.

As the painter's most recent biographer, Leonard Robinson, asserts: "The treatment of Etty's last works and studies has been a constant problem for researchers who cannot trust any attribution made on their behalf." This fact, together with the preponderance of unclothed figures within his corpus of exhibition imagery, has led to Etty's diverse output becoming virtually synonymous with his notorious and enduring artistic preoccupation with the nude form – particularly that of the female. In his own time, Etty was periodically criticised for indulging in this alleged obsession, which troubled his contemporaries and which still dominates modern scholarship, as I will elucidate. At the same time, however, it is precisely this inextricable association with the nude that has helped both to stimulate and maintain a degree of scholarly interest in the painter up to the present day, whether through tracing its evolution in British art, or investigating the relationship between artist and model. Herein lies the crux of the paradox: while Etty's focus on the nude has meant that his works continually appear in literature related to this controversial specialism – which has rescued him from complete obscurity – the artist is frequently side-lined, summarily dismissed, or excluded altogether from serious art-historical consideration. His past celebrity and acclaimed status have not met with comparable interest in the present.

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13 Data gathered from Sotheby's sold lot archive. Assumptions are as above, except for two works assigned inconclusive titles and listed without images, which have been excluded from the survey.
14 Data gathered from the Royal Academy of Arts Collections website.
'A peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere'

Amanda Schedler has argued that three main factors have collectively contributed towards Etty’s diminished standing: the fact that his work fails to “fit conveniently in any one category” (he cannot, for instance, accurately be classified as either a ‘Victorian’ or a ‘Romantic’ artist), “the natural accidents of his birth and death” (his retirement in 1848 coincided with the Pre-Raphaelite revolution) and, lastly, “the Reformation’s attempted banishment of religious images … especially sensual images of the nude”. I would add to this list the vagaries of fashion and picture currency brought about by a significant transformation in artistic practice during the first half of the nineteenth century, namely the eclipse of the historical genre by landscape painting. A concomitant reason for Etty’s marginalisation by modern scholarship can therefore be attributed to his having two great contemporaries working in the latter field – Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) and John Constable (1776-1837) – both of whom have benefitted enormously from the continuous deconstruction and reinterpretation of their careers. Analogous to the way that landscape was steadily eclipsing history painting in this era, the fame of its leading exponents has subsequently overshadowed that of those artists pursuing the grand manner, who were equally lauded in their own time, but who now languish in critical neglect.

Eclectic in his choice of aesthetic types, undeniably devoted to the study of the nude and hovering awkwardly between two distinct temporal and cultural eras, Etty presents an intriguing artistic figure. Nineteenth-century commentators and critics were conscious of this. In his 1870 essay entitled ‘A Fragment on Sandro Botticelli’, which was first published in Fortnightly Review, the literary and art critic, Walter Pater, describes Botticelli as being "before all things a poetical painter, blending the charm of story and sentiment ... with the charm of line and colour". Interestingly, Etty's pictorial practice likewise generated analogies with poetry, for example in 1825, the journalist and art critic William Carey labelled him as “that inspired LYRIC

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18 Pater, 1870: 156. This idea is inspired by Stephen Bann’s introduction to Paul Delaroche: History Painted, in which he argues: "if Pater credited Botticelli with bringing us close to 'the uncertain and diffident promise which belongs to the earlier Renaissance itself', undeniably Delaroche exudes the atmosphere of the French Restoration and July Monarchy" (Bann, 1997: 30).
PAINTER", remarking: “If ever painting merited the character of ‘mute poetry,’ the charming productions of this bewitching artist’s imagination are entitled to that distinction.” 19 Twenty-five years later, the auction house Christie and Manson announced the imminent sale of the works of “that celebrated English Poetical Painter, William Etty, Esq., R.A.” 20 Having characterised Botticelli as “poetical”, Pater then reflects upon the place he occupies in relation to other Renaissance masters and his conclusions find intriguing parallels with Etty’s ambiguous position in the artistic milieu of his time.

Pater constructs a useful conceptual hierarchy, where the “few great painters, like Michelangelo or Leonardo, whose work has become a force in general culture” are at the apex, and “smaller men”, worthy “only of technical or antiquarian treatment” are situated at its base. Botticelli himself – ranked as a “second-rate painter” – nevertheless is bracketed into a group of artists “who have a distinct faculty of their own by which they convey to us a peculiar quality of pleasure which we cannot get elsewhere”. 21 The phrase “peculiar quality of pleasure” is highly applicable to Etty, whose life and works repeatedly attracted the epithet “peculiar”. To give but a few examples, his contemporary, the Scottish genre painter David Wilkie (1785–1841), remarked that Etty’s character “recommended him so peculiarly to our Institution [the Royal Academy]”, 22 while Arnold’s Magazine referred to his style as one “of peculiar charm”. 23 This anomalous characteristic was also recognised by the artist’s early biographers, including Cosmo Monkhouse in 1874, who defined his style as having a “peculiar merit as distinguished from merely eccentric effect”. 24 More recently, in the last paragraph of his seminal 1958 monograph, Dennis Farr cautions against misunderstanding the painter’s “peculiar artistic personality”. 25

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19 Carey, 1825: 127.
21 Pater, 1870: 160.
22 Cunningham, 1843, 2: 135.
24 Monkhouse, 1874: 27.
'A Child of The Royal Academy'

Wilkie's above allusion to Etty's unusually intense and deep-seated relationship with the Royal Academy – to which he was so "peculiarly" attached – is revealing. It was widely recognised by contemporaries that the painter's untiring dedication and work ethic were exemplary, but the idiosyncratic element lay in his excessively tenacious efforts, whether sketching from the antique, or participating for prizes. In a sense, the artist remained an assiduous student of the Schools until his retirement to York in 1848, as expressed most famously through his indefatigable devotion to the life class, which he attended almost every single evening during the course of his career. It will be helpful at this point to briefly outline Etty's life prior to his entry into the Academy Schools, in order to better understand his academic overcompensation. Born in York on 10 March 1787, William Etty (Fig. 1) was the seventh child of the miller and confectioner Matthew Etty and his wife, Esther. Raised as a Methodist, and schooled in and around York, in 1798 Etty was unhappily apprenticed to the letter press printer, Robert Peck, in Hull. This period, as one commentator put it, divided the "happier times of childhood and manhood" like "night divides from day", so that when "he ought to be acquiring culture", he was "kept morning till night to the drudgery of putting types together for the 'Hull Packet'".\(^{26}\) On 23 October 1805, Etty completed his apprenticeship, an event he referred to as his "emancipation from slavery", and moved to London.\(^{27}\)

In the capital, a combination of innate artistic skill, ambition and good fortune (he was supported financially by his uncle, William) allowed Etty access to the metropolitan art world, and propelled him into contention for a student place at the Royal Academy. Up to this point, as Martin Myrone emphasises, he was completely "unacquainted with the world of art, geographically, and socially isolated from it".\(^{28}\) Myrone, who deploys Etty's career as an instructive case study in *Living with the Royal Academy*, argues that the painter's remarkably strong "adherence to the Academy served to externalize, objectify and give apparently stable form to his artistic aspirations, which emerged only in relation to the Academy".\(^{29}\) In his view,

\(^{26}\) Hamerton, 1889: 44.
\(^{27}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 30.
\(^{28}\) Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 178.
\(^{29}\) Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 178.
Etty's modest background and lack of formal training had a lasting effect upon his character and artistic development. Etty emerges from Myrone's study as "the outsider who refused to rebel, the conformist who caused outrage", whose atypical experience can illuminate much about contemporary artistic norms, modes and practices, as well as "the unease which might accompany professional achievement within the frameworks provided by the Royal Academy".30 From the day when he first drew the Laocoön in "dear Somerset-house", having been admitted as a Probationer to the Schools in 1807, Etty's life was destined to revolve around the Academy's annual activities, and he went on to become one of its most prominent, prolific and active members.31

For this reason, any reassessment of the painter's career and output would be perceptibly incomplete without considering the institution by which he was so fundamentally and irrefutably shaped. Founded in 1768, the royally sponsored Academy aspired to establish a specifically British School of art by means of education, competition and annual displays, with a view towards cultivating a native 'golden age' that would rival those of the Italian, French and Dutch Schools.32 Simultaneously, it sought to "spread the notion of the arts as a national resource", edifying and refining public taste and providing moral instruction.33 On a more localised level, for the majority of British artists living and working in the first half of the nineteenth century, the annual Academy summer exhibition – held at Somerset House on the Strand between 1780 and 1837, when it was relocated to the east wing of the newly built National Gallery in Trafalgar Square – acted as the fulcrum of the contemporary London art world. As David Solkin states: "during an era when a remarkable variety of visual spectacles proliferated in a seemingly endless array for the delectation of the capital's inhabitants and visitors, the display at the RA was known simply as 'The Exhibition', in implicit acknowledgement of its uniquely important status".34

30 Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 184.
31 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 34.
33 Hoock, 2005: 299.
34 Solkin, 2001: xi.
Displaying in the region of 900 to 1,200 works, the summer show was divided into a series of separate galleries, culminating in the famed Great Room, which was coated in a montage of canvases considered the best in class. The following contemporary quotation uses a banqueting analogy to describe the types of hierarchical rivalries that abounded around the trio of walled spaces at the top of the stone spiral staircase in Somerset House:

... one may compare these three attic apartments to a splendid banquet of three tables – the Great-room as the upper, the Anti-room, and the School of Painting, as the side tables, and the pictures of the Royal Academicians being hung in each of these, amongst the minor works, like some of the great dons ... Doubtless each young painter may feel desirous of attaining to the honors of the upper table, but they may wait their turn, and be content with the eclat attached to sitting right and left 'below the salt,' in such good good company.35

Gallery catalogues, with their linear sequence of entries, not only helped the spectator to make their way around the “multifarious and multidimensional crowd of pictures” jostling for attention on the walls, but also to systemise them.36 In the Great Room, the hang was organised according to a few strict conventions.37 However, those works fortunate enough to be selected for this space still ran the risk of being ‘floored’ close to the ground, or ‘skied’ in the dark recesses near the ceiling. The annual displays, as Sarah Monks explains, had “dynamic implications for artists”: for some, reputations were made and maintained, but for the majority, their efforts generated scorn, utter indifference, or were simply ignored. Her recent reading of the Academy as a living “organism, one whose most effective role was as a reference point towards, around and against which artists operated in their relationships with each other and with artistic practice itself” is highly pertinent to Etty.38

From the outset, the Royal Academy fostered and supported the provincial painter, who, in exchange, contributed towards its operations and acted as an ambassador for its promotion. Between 1811 (his inaugural show) and 1850 (posthumously),

35 Somerset House Gazette, 22 May 1824: 94.
37 Firstly, that the Hanging Committee were to respect a line running horizontally around the room, which paintings could be placed on or below, but not across. Secondly, that they attempt to provide lateral symmetry in the arrangement of the wall, with more central positions allocated to the larger frames (Solkin, 2001: 24).
38 Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 1.
Etty displayed a total of 138 works at this prestigious institution, ranging in genre from history to portraiture and still life. Appendix A features a comprehensive chronology of Etty's exhibition history, which represents the fullest and most accurate summary of his works. Supplemented by relevant biographical details and significant external events, it is designed to act as a visual accompaniment to this dissertation. Etty's artistic education was underpinned by two of the Academy's key characters: the Professor of Painting, Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), and President, Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830). Fuseli inspired an entire generation of artists with his unique brand of teaching; his lasting influence upon Etty will be examined throughout this study, whether in terms of practical guidance, or his published lecture series. In 1807, Etty spent a year as Lawrence's private pupil, and maintained a teacher-student relationship with the revered portraitist until the latter's death in 1830. Writing to Wilkie in 1824, Lawrence described Etty as: "a Child of The Royal Academy, educated in it – Its most illustrious Student – a former Pupil of its President, and a Man of the most blameless Life, modest, and natural manners".39 Conversely, the painter's peer, Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), rather less poetically punned: "Here lies Etty/The Academy's Petty".40 Given the Royal Academy's centrality to Etty's practice and output, it is crucial that this study situates itself within the context of its annual national showcase, where his developing artistic agenda can be most appropriately analysed.

‘An accomplished painter of the nude human form’

Etty's life and works have been the subject of analysis by scholarly literature since shortly after his death in November 1849. His pervasive reputation as “an extremely gifted minor master” and – in the same breath – “an accomplished painter of the nude human form” is a well-rehearsed narrative in the historiography.41 Following his demise, two former colleagues proffered first-hand accounts of his personality and painterly style: the first took the form of a lecture by the literary genre painter, Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859) – which was delivered to the Academy's students in 1850 – and the second an article published in the *Art-Journal* nine years later,

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39 Layard, 1906: 189.
40 Pope, 1963, 3: 646.
written by the portrait painter, Edward Villiers Rippingille (c.1790-1859). In an attempt to provide an assessment of Etty’s career, Leslie, who counts himself amongst the artist’s “greatest admirers”, compliments his untiring industry and skills as a colourist. However, as his address draws to a close, the text becomes punctuated by a flurry of damaging comments. Leslie criticises “inaccuracies of form, and want of attention to proportion”, discerns emerging “mannerism, in forms and attitudes” and questions the painter’s “peculiar treatment of, and choice of subjects”, before declaring that Etty’s “indiscriminate partiality for the nude is objectionable” and “cannot be passed silently by”. Cautioning his “younger brethren” not to be “blinded by high poetic authority and the fascinations”, Leslie singles out Etty’s 1828 diploma picture, *Sleeping Nymph and Satyrs* (Fig. 2), as an example of the depths to which his “exquisite pencil” had often fallen.42

In his 1859 article, Rippingille states that those who knew Etty best considered “the effusions of his pencil as sacred” and pays tribute to the “happy magic of the palette”, while stressing the artist’s “simplicity” in defence of his character. However, he concludes by declaring that Etty’s ingenuousness, conflated with his lack of intellectuality, resulted in works that “did not extend beyond the Academic in force and truth” and possessed “none of the vitality which distinguishes intelligence, life, and nature”.43 Between these two critical accounts by fellow artists emerged his earliest and most significant biography – Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of William Etty, R.A.*, released in 1855, which sought to secure his reputation. This comprehensive, two-volume, chronological account of Etty’s life and art, completed six years after his death and supplemented by the input of friends, family and colleagues, constitutes the canonical text to which subsequent scholarship has adhered. Comprising a large number of Etty’s personal letters and providing much in the way of empirical material, Gilchrist’s approach is descriptive and admiring to the point of hyperbole – championing rather than criticising the artist. A degree of guardedness towards Gilchrist’s work is advisable, due to the celebratory and defensive strands that run through it: indeed, the Scottish philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, described the book to its author as having been composed in a “vigorous, sympathetic veracious spirit”.44

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42 Leslie, 30 March 1850: 351-52.
43 Rippingille, 1 October 1859: 300.
Two further, considerably shorter, biographical studies in a similar vein – and both heavily indebted to Gilchrist – were published by Cosmo Monkhouse in 1874 and William Camidge in 1899. For Monkhouse, although “in brilliant and subtle play of light and colour, in ingenious harmony of line, or in skill in representing the hue and texture of flesh” Etty is unsurpassed, fundamentally he was “too devoted to his art to be a really great painter, in the sense of one who largely affects mankind”.\footnote{Monkhouse, 1874: 29.} Camidge is quick to defend the artist, declaring that he “never sought to pander to the passions, and if perchance any of his works have done this it is his misfortune rather than his design”.\footnote{Camidge, 1899: 22.} Previously, Richard and Samuel Redgrave, in \textit{A Century of British Painters} (published in 1866) had included him as part of their exclusive list of artists – along with Haydon, Hilton and Henry Howard (1769-1847) – who had “devoted themselves to naturalize the grand style in the English school, and to assert its power”.\footnote{Redgrave and Redgrave, 1866, 2: 164.} On the whole, the nineteenth-century accounts portray an artist of genuine talent, bordering upon genius, upheld as a model for future generations by virtue of his tireless dedication to his studies, art and exhibition pieces in the grand manner. His diligence, purity and simplicity are repeatedly brought to bear in a defensive riposte against the critics.

During the course of the twentieth century, scholarly focus shifted towards Etty’s relationship with the nude figure. Such a stance was adopted by William Gaunt and F. Gordon Roe in their 1943 book, \textit{Etty and the Nude}, which summarises aspects of Gilchrist’s work into themes, such as the painter’s concentration upon the nude, his technique, models and subjects. In their opinion, Etty’s chief achievement was painting “the human form, as it had not been done since Rubens”.\footnote{Gaunt and Roe, 1943: 81.} James Biggins’s \textit{Etty and York} of 1949 provides some supplementary material about Etty’s conservation efforts in his native city. However, the seminal twentieth-century text on the artist is undoubtedly Dennis Farr’s 1958 monograph and catalogue, which was originally prepared for his Master’s thesis at the Courtauld Institute of Art. The principal focus of this impressive study – as stated by the author in an interview – was to investigate the relationship between Etty and contemporary French art.\footnote{Schedler, 2001: 134. As related during an interview with Dennis Farr, conducted by Amanda Adams Schedler, on 3 June 1999.}
Although he concedes the artist had secured an “enviable niche in the history of British art”, Farr argues that Etty was essentially a “victim of his own ambition to become a history painter”: an aspiration that was beyond “his limited, but genuine talent”.50 For Brian Bailey in 1974, Etty’s “obsession” with the nude constituted “a substitute for sex, and his passion flowed out through his brushes”. Echoing Farr, Bailey views the painter as “a victim of his time” and ends by imploring galleries to dismiss Etty’s “concessions to early Victorian taste … and hang instead the splendid studies”.51

A comparative escalation in scholarly attention has occurred since the turn of the century, starting with Amanda Schedler’s aforementioned unpublished doctoral thesis, *The Nation, the Nude, and Desire: An Account of William Etty and his Work in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, which lucidly tracks the shifting perceptions surrounding the artist through existing literature. Schedler concludes with her own interpretation of Etty, which builds upon Joseph Kestner’s work on the construction of masculinity in Victorian art. She believes that Etty’s works emerge from the “complexity of his sexuality” in his response to both male and female nudes – producing works that are preoccupied with themes of “love, lust, and longing”.52 Joanna Soden’s 2006 study of the Royal Scottish Academy’s history detailed the institution’s relationship with Etty, and its choice to purchase several of his huge historical pictures. This fledgling academy effectively espoused the painter as a modern master, and his works as the cornerstone upon which its collection would be based.53 Leonard Robinson’s extensive 2007 biographical study builds upon the work of both Gilchrist and Farr to provide a highly detailed account of the artist’s life.

The most recent attempt to reconsider and rehabilitate Etty came with the major 2011-12 exhibition *William Etty: Art & Controversy* at York Art Gallery.54

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51 Bailey, 1974: 24, 33-34, 47.
54 For a useful summary of the exhibitions at which Etty’s works have been represented before this show, see Amanda Schedler’s Chapter 3, ‘Exhibition History of Etty’s Work’ (Schedler, 2001: 70-94).
accompanying scholarly catalogue, compiled by Sarah Burnage, states that the intention of the exhibition was to “ask new questions of his works, and to place our own preconceptions about the artist and his paintings under critical scrutiny”.55 A series of essays follow, which examine the artist from a variety of fresh, and at times provocative, perspectives. Thus, for example, Sarah Burnage argues that Etty utilised The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate (Fig. 3) to “resurrect his reputation and brush aside the damning suspicion that he had a ‘lascivious mind’”,56 while Sarah Victoria Turner interprets Etty’s 1840 The Wrestlers (Fig. 4) as an “ambiguous image in which numerous juxtapositions and contrasts (black/white, hard/soft, violence/intimacy) are dramatically spotlit for the viewer to contemplate”.57 In the final essay, Jason Edwards employs ‘queer theory’ to examine Etty’s private working study, Male Nude with Arms Upstretched (Fig. 5), declaring that Etty comes out “repeatedly and quite powerfully as a sodomite in his work”.58 My involvement in this show and the accompanying catalogue early in my doctoral studies allowed me to closely engage with the visual aspect and to immerse myself in thinking about how Etty’s pictures were produced, experienced, critically received and circulated.

‘Etty ... had in his full prime become the rage’

Having considered the various ways in which Etty has been investigated by previous art historians, focus now shifts towards outlining the original contribution that my study seeks to make to the corpus of scholarly literature, as well as the methodologies and source material that have informed it. Common to the rhetoric of the majority of the critical studies summarised above, is the artist’s preoccupation with the nude figure – for such an incendiary subject inevitably stimulates discussion and debate. It is within the context of his disputed reputation and undisputed partiality towards the nude that Etty has thus far been judged. While valid, this standpoint has become so embedded in the scholarly literature that it has not only occluded other possible interpretative contexts, but has also affected the formal analysis of his canvases and suppressed our understanding of how the painter

operated within the artistic milieu of the early nineteenth century. My thesis acknowledges the futility of attempting to elide or preclude the nude in its evaluation of Etty's artistic development – however, it argues that a different frame of reference might be equally productive in bringing new attention to the painter and seeking to redress his art-historical significance. Therefore, rather than recycling the types of standard narratives that have hitherto been constructed, this study hopes to advance an alternative hermeneutic approach: one that deliberately eschews special focus upon the near-ubiquitous nudity within Etty's enigmatic imagery, and instead examines his works through the critical lens of contemporary exhibition culture.

To serve this purpose, the following chapters will offer close visual readings of a range of the artist's most striking and intriguing entries to a series of pivotal Royal Academy exhibitions, paying particular notice to the ways in which Etty exploited these summer shows as a forum for painterly performance and public display. Traditionally, academics have assessed Etty's pictorial practice in its entirety, drawing retrospective conclusions largely based on the reputation he had acquired upon his death in 1849. Etty is often referred to as a 'Victorian artist', which is highly misleading – not least in view of the fact that over thirty years of his career took place within the Georgian era. By specifically selecting as my purview the three decades between Etty's entry as a student to the Royal Academy Schools in 1807, and the display of his enormous *Sirens and Ulysses* (Fig. 6) at the Academy's inaugural exhibition in the east wing of the newly built National Gallery in 1837, I hope to examine his character, motivation, agenda and artistic trajectory without being sidelined by the distortions of the Victorian perspective. These parameters, which, I propose, essentially mark the artist's 'epic period' – when his aspirations as a history painter rose and fell in a changing artistic climate – will frame the thesis.

A gradual but perceptible deterioration in the quality of Etty's work occurred from 1838 onwards: indeed, Farr pinpoints the productions of this particular year as revealing signs of "unevenness" and "a failing hand". Alongside Etty's deteriorating health, Farr ascribes the waning of his painterly faculties to the increasing demands placed on the artist by the art dealer Richard Colls, who established "something like

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59 During the preview for the *William Etty: Art & Controversy* exhibition on 23 June 2011, the Director of the Maas Gallery, Rupert Maas, highlighted the fact that Etty is often considered as a Victorian artist, when in fact the majority of his career took place in the late-Georgian period.
a monopoly of his output". Interestingly, there have been several suggestions of potential watersheds in Etty's career, with Haydon's biographer, Tom Taylor, suggesting that one occurred after the completion of his Judith triptych in 1831, while the Pre-Raphaelite, William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), observed that:

Etty, after twenty years of failure and irrepressible effort, had in his full prime become the rage. His 'Syrens,' 'Holofernes,' and the diploma picture will always justify his reputation; but in my youth he had lost the robustness he once had, and at last he composed classic subjects with the tawdry taste of a paper-hanger.

At the height of his powers, Etty had “become the rage”, and it is the vast Sirens and Ulysses of 1837 that Hunt singles out as the painter’s last great work. Yet for many modern scholars, Etty's private nude studies are more appealing – both in size and subject – than the highly ambitious, large-scale historical pictures that he displayed, and which were admired, during his lifetime. Indeed, these self-proclaimed masterpieces were intended to secure his legacy:

My aim in all my great pictures has been to paint some great moral on the heart: ‘The Combat,’ THE BEAUTY OF MERCY; the three ‘Judith’ pictures, PATRIOTISM, and self-devotion to her country, her people, and her God; 'Benaiah, David’s chief captain,' VALOUR; 'Ulysses and the Syrens,' the importance of resisting SENSUAL DELIGHTS, or an Homeric paraphrase on the ‘Wages of Sin in Death;’ the three pictures of ‘Joan of Arc’ RELIGION, VALOUR, LOYALTY and PATRIOTISM, like the modern Judith; these, in all, make nine colossal pictures, as it was my desire to paint three times three.

However, his studies have transpired to be much more future-proof than these nine “colossal” paintings, seven of which are now lost, spoiled, or in storage.

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60 Farr, 1958: 83.
61 Hunt, 1905, 1: 49.
62 See, for example Bailey, 1974: 44-47. This trend has been reflected in the exhibition history of Etty’s works, as Amanda Schedler notes: “Over the century and a half since the artist’s death, there has been a gradual shift in interest away from his history paintings and formal exhibition pieces to his loosely mythological paintings and informal nude studies...” (Schedler, 2001: 70).
63 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
64 Etty’s Judith triptych – which, along with his Benaiah and The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished, was purchased by the Royal Scottish Academy in 1831 – is irreversibly damaged and rolled up, while the current location of two works from his Joan of Arc triptych is unknown, and the third is in Orléans. Benaiah is now held in storage at the National Gallery of Scotland. The Sirens and Ulysses has recently been conserved, and is on display at Manchester Art Gallery, while the Combat hangs at Duff House.
This thesis is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the critical reception of all the painter’s major works – rather it seeks to investigate Etty in the exhibition space through a series of five detailed case studies, each of which delves into an area of particular interest that expresses certain concerns or perceptions of him as an artist. I will undertake close visual readings of several of Etty’s most important pictures, all of which he submitted to the annual displays of contemporary painting at the Royal Academy. By placing this imagery into a variety of new interpretative contexts, I aim to recover, re-evaluate and restore Etty’s contemporary reputation as an ambitious and complex participant within the late-Georgian art world. To do this, it will be necessary to unravel, both formally and thematically, the compositional syntax of his intricate paintings, and to analyse their preoccupations, gestures and contemporary reception. In order to trace their emergence and better appreciate the nature of their pictorial development, where possible I will examine the preliminary drawings and sketches that pre-date them, while key works that have not survived intact, or which are currently untraced, will be analysed through visual proxies.

In order to move away from the entrenched modern view of Etty as an avant-garde but fundamentally flawed painter of the nude – a paradigm that pervades the existing historiography – I will draw extensively upon late-Georgian art criticism. This will open up new avenues for research and pave the way for original reinterpretations of his exhibited canvases. By placing a particular premium upon the valuations of his contemporary critics – which, crucially, pre-date the received tradition – I intend to reframe Etty within a series of alternative contexts that help to construct a more textured, nuanced story about his presence at exhibition. Consciously situating itself in the volatile climate of nineteenth-century art criticism, my thesis rests upon the largest and most comprehensive survey of contemporary press coverage on the painter that has ever been undertaken, spanning his entire career. In the course of my research, I have unearthed references relating to Etty’s Academy exhibits that date back to 1811 (six years prior to those discussed in all extant scholarship), exposed a unique interview conducted with the artist himself and discovered a considerable number of new, previously unpublished manuscripts associated with his life and works. In addition, I have uncovered several intriguing international references to the painter, which aid our understanding of his wider reputation in France, Italy, Germany and the United States.
Collectively, this wide-ranging source material provides a more informed and objective assessment of Etty's public standing during the early part of the nineteenth century. These first-hand accounts have likewise enabled me to reconstruct – even if only partially – the make-up of the Great Room at Somerset House and later the rooms in the National Gallery, allowing for a more in-depth consideration of the impact and pictorial dialogue that his exhibited works engendered. Furthermore, my archive of primary data contains numerous letters written by Etty, primarily from York Art Gallery and York Archives, but also supplemented by a substantial amount of related correspondence held in private and public collections around the world – much of it as yet unpublished. In addition to this, the thesis is enriched by various autobiographical and biographical accounts drawn from a variety of Etty's colleagues and acquaintances. In my endeavour to examine Etty as fully as possible, I undertook research trips to numerous galleries and museums across the United Kingdom, as well as to Venice and Florence – where I retraced the painter's steps from his 1822-23 tour. An integral part of this project has been the opportunities afforded to me as part of the Collaborative Doctoral Award with the University of York and York Art Gallery, which has allowed me privileged access over three years to Etty's letters, diaries, sketchbooks, biographies, works on paper, preparatory studies and, of course, his paintings themselves.

*Redressing Etty*

Scholarship to date has tended to consider Etty's varied output in isolation, partly because it stubbornly refuses to fit neatly into the prevailing modern narratives of early nineteenth-century art. This interpretative trend is usefully exemplified by the monographic format of the most recent major exhibition on the painter – *William Etty: Art & Controversy* (2011-12) – which made no mention of influential, like-minded contemporaries such as William Hilton or Henry Howard, and painted a picture of the artist as an idiosyncratic individual operating within a vacuum. Etty's works were indeed incontrovertibly distinctive, and his nude specialism in particular “an adventure” for the national School.65 However, I would argue that this seems a rather impoverished approach towards an artistic figure who was clearly

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65 Gaunt and Roe, 1943: 18.
engaged in, and enriched by, so many practices and spaces that extended well beyond himself and his Buckingham Street studio.

Therefore, the first chapter of my thesis proposes an alternative scenario and investigates the little studied notion that Etty was part of a generation – or, to use Benjamin Robert Haydon’s contemporaneous term, a “set” – of artists which were nurtured by, developed within and enhanced the reputation of, the Royal Academy of Arts in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. The Academy Schools functioned as a site for collective learning and experimentation – a forum that fused diverse ideologies, personalities and stimuli – where Etty and his fellow practitioners were able to converge, converse and compete. With this formal framework in mind, the discussion centres upon a triad of progressive history painters, who constituted each other’s primary colleagues and rivals, and who were mutually concerned with promoting an abstract ‘poetical’ aesthetic in contemporary British art: William Etty, William Hilton and Henry Howard. In order to evaluate the nature of the imagery that emerged from this exclusive artistic community – and to consider more generally the kinds of ambitions, ideals, perversions and preoccupations that were being generated within the Academy’s walls in this period – I will utilise the 1820 exhibition at Somerset House as my first case study. This year has been chosen as it marked a turning-point in Etty’s critical fortunes: he succeeded in capturing the attention of the capital’s art scene with the display of his mythological The Coral Finder: Venus and her Youthful Satellites Arriving at the Isle of Paphos (Fig. 7), which garnered a series of accolades. The analysis of an array of canvases produced and exhibited by my trio of painters in 1820 reveals extensive thematic, stylistic and compositional similarities, and suggests that Etty’s work must be understood in relation to that of his contemporaries.

While Chapter I seeks to illuminate Etty’s location within a cultural grouping of artists linked by their academic training, Chapter II returns the painter himself to centre-stage. Revolving around the ways in which Etty’s extensive Continental tour of 1822-23 transformed his burgeoning pictorial practice, swelled his artistic network and significantly advanced his status, this chapter also introduces the painter’s zealous pursuit of the elusive ‘secret’ behind Venetian colouring.

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66 Taylor, 1853, 2: 276.
Specifically, a newly discovered manuscript, concerning a contemporary treatise on colouring, will be examined in order to demonstrate Etty's intense and complex engagement with Venetian painting. The trajectory of his travels will be traced by recovering and reviewing a selection of the material legacy associated with the artist, which indicates that he was far more socially active and technically experimental when abroad than has previously been allowed. Appendix E marshals internal evidence, using Etty's correspondence and journals, to map out his itinerary, and synthesises written references and length of time spent in each city to create a dynamic visualisation of his nineteen-month trip. The painter's aesthetic tour – during which he collated a wide-ranging assemblage of references to a series of classical, Old Master and contemporary works – inspired, informed and made an impact upon his future output. This is most evident in its immediate aftermath, when Etty executed and exhibited two diametrically opposed historical pieces, *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons* (Fig. 8) and *The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished* (Fig. 9), at the Academy in 1824 and 1825. I will argue that these canvases not only subtly assimilate certain facets gleaned from foreign Schools of art (particularly the Venetian), but also display and distillate this improved pictorial vocabulary and signify an increasingly self-aware strategy: one that suggests Etty's ever more mindful engagement with, and exploitation of, the exhibition space.

Chapter III readdresses a hitherto overlooked aspect of the painter's practice: his clear interest in, and treatment of, clothed, active, heroic female protagonists. It seeks to do this by offering a detailed, refined interpretation of Etty's *Judith* (Fig. 10) – the showstopper of the 1827 Royal Academy exhibition and the work that led to his election as Royal Academician – in order to rectify the scholarly neglect to which this important picture has been subjected. I will assert that the emblematic figure of Judith fascinated Etty and that in her, he found his ideal heroine: one with whose contradictions and ambiguities he sympathised, and whose remarkable exploits motivated him to compose an epic work in the grand manner. By examining how Etty intentionally sought to present his spectator with an original and creative reworking of a familiar subject, and by drawing extensively upon related contemporary critical commentary, I will unravel the painting's interconnected conceits. These include gender-specific role reversals, theatrical painterly effects, symbolism and the artist's manipulation of sexual tropes. Finally, while investigating the correspondences
between *Judith* and the exhibited output of his peers at the 1827 display, particularly Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Hilton, the chapter will shed further light on Etty's significance as a history painter in the conventional and academic sense of the term.

Chapter IV sets out to challenge another commonly held perception about the artist: that he was essentially apolitical, ingenuous and disinterested in contemporary events, rendering his works resistant to being interpreted as engaging with historical matters. On the contrary, my fourth chapter argues that Etty utilised two of his 1832 exhibits, *Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm* (Fig. 11) and *The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate* (Fig. 3), as pictorial vehicles through which to articulate his views surrounding the current political issues of reform and revolution. In iconographical terms, the powerful symbolic undertones conveyed by the striking Phrygian caps that blaze brightly at the centre of both paintings seem to stem from Etty’s recent upsetting entanglement in the July 1830 Revolution in Paris, as well as his anxieties about present-day political upheaval in Britain.67 A concomitant strand of research will present new evidence concerning Etty's opinions of, and attitudes towards, modern French painters, which makes an original contribution to the existing literature on this theme. Returning to the Great Room at Somerset House, a close visual reading of both key images will reveal the extent to which they not only directly engaged with contemporary constitutional transformations, but also operated alongside other pictures hanging on the walls at the 1832 Academy show to tell a cautionary tale about the dangers of reform. Yet despite the artist’s concerted efforts to communicate the relevant political narratives embedded within these works to the public, they were ultimately eclipsed by critics obsessed with the fleshiness, high key colouring and poetry that they saw in Etty's works.

Chapter V moves, with the Royal Academy, from Somerset House into its purpose-built premises in the east wing of the newly formed National Gallery, prior to the exhibition’s opening in May 1837. Etty showcased four paintings this year – *Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons* (untraced), *Mars, Venus and Cupid* (Fig. 12), *The

67 For Brian Bailey, this experience "apparently made scarcely more impression on him than the difficulty of getting a cup of tea" (Bailey, 1974: 20).
Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6) and Samson Betrayed by Delilah (untraced) – which collectively featured beautiful, yet sexually subversive, female figures. I will argue that the painter, in these interrelated works, deliberately deployed the nude female as an artistic corollary through which to convey a moral tale about the dangers of sensual delights. In addition, I will suggest, Etty sought to encourage his audience’s awareness of the importance of self-surveillance, or policing – particularly for the male viewer/voyeur – by means of diverse reactions displayed by the male figures pictured within his canvases. A particular premium will be placed upon The Sirens and Ulysses, which powerfully illustrates Etty’s intriguing tendency to disassemble, graft and refashion fragmented figural forms into his exhibited set-pieces. Showing as it does a trio of voluptuous, nude women kneeling amongst a pile of putrefying male corpses, the Sirens provoked particularly strident critical opprobrium. Etty’s enduring interest in drawing from the life, conflated with a little mentioned fascination with corporeal decomposition, had occasioned a new desire to study the mechanisms of human anatomy, and he was an assiduous visitor to charnel-houses. An in-depth investigation of the painter’s four pictures traces their linked identities within the context of the exhibition space, as his temptresses metamorphose from the naïve Eve into the flesh-eating Sirens.

“But, after all, it may be asked, is a painter like Botticelli, a second-rate painter, a proper subject for general criticism?” speculates Walter Pater, in the midst of his essay on the celebrated Italian artist.68 We might well similarly question the validity of reassessing Etty: a peculiar, unfashionable, marginalised painter of female nudes. Stylistically, however, he produced a diverse variety of imagery in a number of different modes, which often sought to point a moral and which lend themselves to a range of alternative, often ambiguous, readings. Indeed, during the most successful and prolific period of his career, Etty was widely considered to be one of Britain’s greatest contemporary history painters: so much so that he was honoured during his own lifetime with a retrospective exhibition of his finest works, one of the first of its kind, at the Royal Society of Arts in London.69 For Charles Robert Leslie, this one-man show, held in the summer of 1849, rivalled Sir Joshua Reynolds’s (1723-92)

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68 Pater, 1870: 156.
69 Further information on Etty’s retrospective can be found in Roger Bell’s ‘The Society’s William Etty exhibition of 1849,’ in RSA Journal, 138, 5408 (July 1990), 557-61.
1813 equivalent “in splendour, in truth, and in refinement”. In order to avoid becoming “stuck in this hermeneutic groove”, to use Stephen Bann’s apt phrase, it is necessary to transcend the modern estimates of Etty’s achievements and instead to redress his works through the prism of contemporary exhibition culture.

By analysing the intricate syntax of a selection of Etty’s annually exhibited paintings in an unprecedented degree of detail, my study seeks to restore his contemporary reputation and to portray him as the creator of informed, original and germane historical works. I will suggest that he was not alone in treating certain subjects and aesthetic types, but was instead part of a symbiotic, fluid grouping of contemporary artists, who exchanged ideas over the years and experimented with painterly techniques, materials and practices. Thus, the contemporary Etty becomes today’s ‘new’ Etty: a more rounded, serious individual who was unafraid to tackle history painting in an innovative, and at times contentious, manner. As I will elucidate, he is also able to illuminate much about the increasingly autonomous and self-critical world of British art, which was facilitated by the now established Royal Academy, and disseminated by the generation of artists within it. Each year, the results were played out on the very public stage of its annual summer showcase.

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70 Leslie, 30 March 1850: 349.
71 Bann, 1997: 27.
CHAPTER I
THE SYMBIOTIC ‘SET’: ETTY, HILTON AND HOWARD AT THE 1820 ROYAL ACADEMY EXHIBITION

It is curious what a set came in together under Fuseli: – Wilkie, Mulready, Collins, Pickersgill, Jackson, Etty, Hilton, and myself.¹

Under Fuseli’s wise neglect, Wilkie, Mulready, Etty, Landseer, and Haydon distinguished themselves, and were the better for not being made all alike by teaching, if indeed that could have been done.²

HOWARD, HILTON, HAYDON, AND ETTY ... four talented men, who devoted themselves to naturalize the grand style in the English school, and to assert its power.³

Introduction

In 1831, Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846), reflecting upon the recent death of a friend and fellow painter, John Jackson, reminisced about their student days at the Royal Academy, retrospectively bracketing several of his peers – including Etty and William Hilton (1786-1839) – together into a “set” of artists mentored by the Swiss Professor, Henry Fuseli (1741-1825). Likewise, Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1859), recollecting Fuseli’s drawing classes in 1812, included Etty as part of a similar group of students, before remarking that the former’s unconventional teaching practice of minimal interference (or “wise neglect”) allowed each individual the freedom to develop their own distinct painterly styles. By his own admission, Etty confessed that: “Living in daily contact with men like these, the heart must be cold that catches not an inspiration … the contact and collision elicited correspondence; electric sparks and fire are the offspring of such sparks”.⁴ Indeed, in the opening paragraph of his 1849 memoirs, he acknowledged the considerable sway that both Haydon and Hilton had exerted upon his fledgling artistic career, recalling: “poor Haydon, ardent ... glorious in his enthusiasm, drew at the same time; his zeal and that of Hilton in the

¹ Taylor, 1853, 2: 276.
² Taylor, 1860, 1: 37.
³ Redgrave and Redgrave, 1866, 2: 164.
⁴ Etty, 1 February 1849: 37.
cause of historic Art urged me to persevere, and, by their example and precept, I certainly benefited and was encouraged.\textsuperscript{5}

Haydon himself, when describing a day spent glazing at the British Institution in 1843, noted in his diary: “Chatted with Etty, who said my example and Hilton’s, in early life, had greatly influenced him.”\textsuperscript{6} Writing in the 1860s, Richard and Samuel Redgrave grouped these three fellow students – along with Henry Howard (1769-1847) – into another band of painters who were on a collective mission “to naturalize the grand style in the English school”.\textsuperscript{7} As can be seen, Etty was repeatedly placed into cogent, fluid sets of comparable artistic peers by his contemporaries, by exhibition critics and by later nineteenth-century commentators. However, scholarship from the twentieth century onwards has tended to discuss Etty’s diverse output in isolation: a rather reductive interpretative approach that has affected the analysis of his imagery, and one that has done little to rectify his pervasive reputation as idiosyncratic painter of the nude. Rather than concentrating upon those artists studying, living and working alongside Etty in London, several modern scholars have attempted to link his pictorial practice with that of contemporary French painters. These include Dennis Farr, in his 1952 article ‘Delacroix and Etty’, which mooted ideas that he was later to expand upon in his monograph on the English painter.\textsuperscript{8}

As I will show, Etty’s interaction with the circle of artists within his social world – whose works he variously emulated, was inspired by, or sought to surpass – played an important role in the evolution of his pictorial practice. Upon his entry into the Royal Academy Schools in January 1807, Etty encountered a remarkably heterogeneous group of students, many of whom would comprise his primary colleagues and rivals over the next two decades. The Schools themselves operated as a cultural milieu where advanced aesthetic ideas were generated and debated by the artistic communities inhabiting its spaces: a thriving educational environment that encouraged both collaboration and competition, conformity and individual creativity. In order to gain a broader, more nuanced understanding of Etty’s artistic growth and development, particularly during the formative early years of his career,

\textsuperscript{5} Etty, 1 February 1849: 37.
\textsuperscript{6} Taylor, 1853, 3: 222.
\textsuperscript{7} Redgrave and Redgrave, 1866, 2: 164.
\textsuperscript{8} Farr, March 1952: 80.
this chapter sets out to situate him within a group of painters which were brought together – and in many ways defined – by their shared academic training. As Martin Myrone explains:

... [Etty] was part of the first generation whose formation as artists was shaped entirely by the Academy. He was born into a world where the Academy’s authority had become well established, and was early recognised as part of a generation whose entry into and experience of the British art world was distinct because of that fact.9

It will do this by utilising the 1820 Royal Academy summer exhibition as a case study: the year that Etty, following a prolonged period of submitting canvases to the principal London galleries which had met with little in the way of critical acclaim, first succeeded in arresting the attention of the capital’s art scene with the public display of *The Coral Finder: Venus and her Youthful Satellites Arriving at the Isle of Paphos* (Fig. 7).10

Interestingly, he was not alone in producing and exhibiting imagery that fell into this category – a literary mode which is characterised as being ‘lyrical’ or ‘poetic’ (as opposed to the conventionally historical). Leigh Hunt, writing for the *Examiner*, commenced his review of the 1818 Academy exhibition with the following statement:

> PAINTING, with its many subdivisions, may be classed under three heads, Portraiture, History or Narrative, and Poetry. Portraiture gives the form and colour of objects; History the public and private transactions of mankind; Poetry a selection of the choicest subjects, with an intensity that delights the imagination by their beauty, their sublimity or their novelty.11

Hunt considers the latter class to be the “highest” of the three and points to Hilton, Turner, Howard, Fuseli and Thomas Stothard (1755-1834) as its advocates. This taxonomy of genre types is important as it illustrates the popularity of a specifically ‘poetic’ manner of painting during this period. I will argue that Etty too was dealing

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9 Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 175.
10 Etty's *Coral Finder* was purchased from the artist for £30 by Thomas Tomkison, pianoforte maker to the Prince Regent (Farr, 1958: 142).
in this pictorial currency, and that the extensive thematic, iconographic and compositional correspondences between a series of pictures displayed at the 1820 exhibition – especially those by Etty, Hilton and Howard – suggest that his work must be understood in relation to the output of his contemporaries. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to illuminate Etty’s location within, and relation to, a cultural grouping of artists linked to the Academy, who were mutually concerned with promoting an abstract ‘poetical’ aesthetic in contemporary British art.

One of ‘a small band of promising youthful adventurers’

It will be helpful at this point to briefly consider Etty’s previous exhibition imagery during the 1810s: a period which set the agenda for his most intense period of artistic development. Tellingly, Etty seems to have been aware of the need to possess a niche, or sense of place, as the portfolio of works he produced suggests a remarkable lack of direction. As can be seen in the Chronology (Appendix A), the artist showcased an eclectic range of pictorial styles at both the Royal Academy and British Institution during this decade, including portraiture, genre, fancy, classical and history. Intriguingly, from as early as 1811, the year in which his paintings were accepted and publically displayed for the first time,12 Etty’s work was recognised by the critics as aligning itself with the precepts of both Fuseli and Benjamin West (1738-1820), the venerated President of the Academy and royal history painter:

In history, this year, that able and indefatigable veteran Mr. West, as usual, takes the lead, and is supported by a small band of promising youthful adventurers, who, under his excellent guidance, will assuredly, with perseverance, attain a splendid rank in art. Mr. Fuseli is very great, but sober history is not the class in which to rank him, he is himself alone, and his poetical and metaphysical subjects, are particularly grand, and possess an elevation of thought, and airiness of fancy peculiarly his own … Messrs. Artaud, Etty, Hilton, Joseph, Woodforde, Halls, Sass, Singleton, and Trumbull, are the other supporters of the historical and poetic pencil.13

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12 At the 1811 Royal Academy show, Etty was represented by a classically themed canvas entitled Telemachus Rescues Princess Antiope from the Fury of the Wild Boar, while his Sappho was purchased for twenty-five guineas following its exhibition at the British Institution (Farr, 1958: 17). Unfortunately, both these paintings are currently untraced.

13 Monthly Magazine, 1 June 1811: 463.
Having unearthed this new excerpt, which I believe constitutes the earliest mention of Etty in the English press, thus contradicting the assertion by previous scholarship that his pictorial contributions went unnoticed until 1817, it becomes crucial to my argument for several reasons.\textsuperscript{14} Firstly, it reveals that from the very start of his career, Etty was singled out by reviewers as belonging to a category of artists who were advancing explicitly “historical and poetic” themes in their exhibition pieces. Secondly, that he was grouped with a set of contemporaries – including Hilton – who took their conventionally historical lead from West, but who looked to Fuseli for a more poetic, esoteric artistic model and, finally, that he was not alone in such lofty aesthetic pursuits, but instead part of a “small band of promising youthful adventurers”. In more general terms, the above correspondent’s terminology alludes to the highly hierarchical nature of the institution within which these emergent artists were being schooled – the words “rank” and “support” each appear twice, and the acolytes of the “indefatigable” President are urged to “persevere” in their chosen path, “under his excellent guidance”.

Doubtless keen to demonstrate his erudition and penchant for classical and historical themes, Etty derived the dramatic subject matter for his earliest Academy exhibit – \textit{Telemachus Rescues Princess Antiope from the Fury of the Wild Boar} – from Book XVII of \textit{The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses}, by François Fénelon. Translated into English from the French original in 1715, the narrative invents a series of exciting exploits for the son of Homer’s eponymous hero. In the 1811 gallery catalogue, Etty directed his viewer towards John Hawkesworth’s 1768 version of this textual source, encouraging an informed, discursive and interactive experience within the display space that he would later exploit to a greater degree.\textsuperscript{15} Another previously overlooked media reference, dating from 1816, sheds new light on Etty’s range of work in the 1810s, and shows him gaining a commission for his historical depictions. An article published in the \textit{New Monthly Magazine} describes the painter’s

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, Dennis Farr’s biography on the artist, where he states: “After six years’ obscurity Etty received a favourable criticism of his two paintings at the Academy of 1817 – criticism that was more valuable for the attention it drew to the painter than for any display of the critic’s sensibility” (Farr, 1958: 24).

\textsuperscript{15} The Academy Council had ruled in 1798 – presumably in response to the emergence of the Poet’s Gallery (founded by Thomas Macklin in 1788) and the Shakespeare Gallery (established in 1789 by Thomas Boydell) – that exhibitors would be allowed, if they wished, to include a literary quotation or passage within their catalogue entry. This was an opportunity Etty only started to take full advantage of in 1821 with \textit{Cleopatra’s Arrival in Cilicia}. 47
close involvement in the interior decoration of a “New English Opera-House”: a theatre that opened to the public on 15 June 1816. According to this report, the “first circle of boxes is decorated with classical subjects, illustrating the history of music, painted by Mr. William Etty”. Also employed on this project was Albinus Martin (1791-1871), who had trained as an architect at the Academy Schools. The two men remained friends, and were still corresponding over a decade later, when in October 1831, Martin wrote to Etty and enclosed an 1829 newspaper review concerning the artist’s Triumph of Venus.

Although only a minority of the subject paintings that Etty periodically exhibited at the Royal Academy and British Institution between 1811 and 1819 remain extant, by examining both their titles and the character of the contemporary responses they engendered, it is possible to identify two contrasting strands of imagery emerging. The first constitutes paintings with explicitly masculine, active and heroic themes, such as Priam Supplicating Achilles for the Body of his Dead Son Hector (RA 1814), Ajax Telamon (RA 1818) and Manlius Hurling from the Rock (Fig. 13, BI 1819), as opposed to those with more feminine, fanciful or sentimental preoccupations, including A Whisper of Love (RA 1813), Psyche (RA 1815), Cupid and Euphrosyne and Bacchanalians: A Sketch (both RA 1817, then BI 1818). These last two figurative works attracted positive critical notice for their “Titianesque tone of colouring”, and light, “playful” painterly touch, while William Carey – chief art critic for the Literary Gazette and one of Etty’s earliest supporters – declared that they showed “splendid promise”. Interestingly, Etty would continue to experiment with both modes of painting throughout his career and I would suggest that this dichotomy was one of the reasons why the artist found himself variously associated with those contemporaries who were inspired by specifically literary and poetic subjects, as well as with those whose output was more historical and narrative in nature. Moreover, the painter’s eclecticism during this period was influenced – even encouraged – by his early academic training.

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16 New Monthly Magazine, 1 July 1816: 542. This theatre (subsequently renamed the Lyceum) was purportedly owned by a Mr Arnold. In 1830, the Lyceum burnt to the ground and Etty’s decorative works were destroyed.
17 Repository of Arts, 1 March 1818: 169.
18 New Monthly Magazine, 1 July 1817: 543.
19 Literary Gazette, 17 May 1817: 264.
‘Under Fuseli’s wise neglect’

In her introduction to the recently published *Living with the Royal Academy*, Sarah Monks lucidly describes the Academy as a body whose potent “presence within the British art world affected the lives, experiences and ideals of its diverse artistic communities”.\(^{20}\) As an educational establishment, exhibiting forum and point of contact for both pupils and practising professionals, the Academy was destined to generate sets, or enclaves, of artists involved in collective projects and experimenting with similar themes and imagery. Its Schools, I would suggest, thus served as a site for inscribing shared ideologies and identities – a collegiate hothouse where Etty and his fellow practitioners were able to convene, collaborate and compete. Indeed, rivalry was rife, and became ever more so – for Martin Myrone, the Academy’s role as “an arena for competitive assertions of artistic authority, in the form of the annual exhibitions of contemporary British art” ensured that “the definition of the artist was a fraught and competitive affair”.\(^{21}\) Haydon’s rather arbitrary ‘set’ is often deployed by modern scholarship as a metric by which to highlight Etty’s lengthy struggle to achieve recognition as an artist of repute. It is true that when compared with the career trajectories of the other individuals who make up this eclectic group, his institutional progression was remarkably slow and most akin to that of the portrait painter Henry William Pickersgill (1782-1875).\(^{22}\)

Myrone suggests that Etty’s provincial upbringing played a part in hindering his development and that he was similarly hampered by not hailing from an artistic family. Fourteen out of the seventeen students with known fathers in the painter’s 1807 cohort, he elucidates, originated from backgrounds directly associated with the artistic realm.\(^{23}\) Taking this as a useful indicator of early success, it transpires that all seven other members in Haydon’s set had a distinct advantage over Etty in their preparation for entry into the Academy Schools. David Wilkie (1785-1841), for

\(^{20}\) Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 1.

\(^{21}\) Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 171-72.


\(^{23}\) Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 180. A total of thirty-four students, including Etty, enrolled in the Royal Academy Schools on 15 January 1807.
instance, had enjoyed five years of artistic training at the Trustees’ Academy in Edinburgh, William Collins’s (1788-1847) father was a picture dealer who had observed George Morland (a painter of rustic scenes), while Hilton was the son of a portraitist and theatre painter. The son of a York miller and confectioner, Etty’s formal ‘training’ had amounted to copying a small number of prints through shop windows and enduring a short spell within a cold plaster-cast studio in 1806. Once enrolled, however, all students followed the Schools’ collective educational regime and, by Etty’s own account, “drew ... side by side”, although several members of the group quickly formed cliques, such as the “inseparable” Haydon, Wilkie and Jackson. While Myrone makes a salient case for considering Etty in relation to his immediate peers, and for some of his works displaying the “visible signs of a complex social experience”, the painter once again emerges from his critical study as an awkward and paradoxical anomaly, whose “pictures perform a dislocation or disjuncture, a rupturing of the illusio which chimes with his relatively disruptive presence within the realm of art”.

Charles Robert Leslie’s set, quoted in the second epigraph, touches upon the incongruous character of the instruction that Etty and his contemporaries received at the Academy under the aegis of Henry Fuseli, its Keeper from 1804, and Professor of Painting between 1810 and 1825. As Martin Myrone states, while he was “much admired and liked”, there were several “reports of his unconventional teaching methods, which ranged from his ignoring the students outright to interfering very directly and rather unhelpfully by scratching out and reworking their drawings in front of them”. Leslie found Fuseli’s didactic methods bewildering yet effective:

I hoped for much advantage from studying under such a master, but he said little in the Academy. He generally came into the room once in the course of every evening, and rarely without a book in his hand. He would take any vacant place among the students, and sit reading nearly the whole time he stayed with us. I believe he was right.

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24 Etty, 1 February 1849: 37.
25 O’Keeffe, 2009: 273. In his memoirs, Etty mentions an early friendship with a fellow pupil named George Lukin, who won the silver medal for best drawing of an academy figure in 1808, but who appears to slide into obscurity thereafter (Etty, 1 February 1849: 37).
26 Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 183.
28 Taylor, 1860, 1: 37.
It is intriguing that Leslie is of the opinion that Fuseli’s very lack of discipline was the catalyst for this generation of students’ pictorial diversification. Wilkie’s phenomenal rise was an inspiration to every ambitious student in the Academy: within six years of entering the Schools in 1805, the Scottish painter had been awarded full Academician status and was lauded as the leader of his genre and generation. Crowds thronged towards his canvases, craning over one another to catch a glimpse, leaving even the most established Academicians in his wake.29

William Mulready (1786-1863) – another peer and proponent of genre painting – was elected to Associate Royal Academician in 1815, and then Academician in the following year. Despite his early aspirations in history painting, the promise of academic honours and critical acclaim led Etty to attempt genre during the 1810s: his efforts in this style, however, were met with a distinct lack of positive commentary.30 These included Drunken Barnaby (Fig. 14), exhibited at the Academy in 1820, which was inspired by Richard Brathwait’s Barnabea Itinerarium, or Barnabee’s Journal, published in 1638.31 This canvas drew some encouraging words – a “clever little thing”,32 and “the best picture of Etty’s for invention and expression that I ever saw”33 – but suffered as a result of its unfortunate positioning adjacent to George Jones’s The Assembly; Portraits: “the Hangers could not but know that the latter [Etty’s canvas] would have its feeble effect completely dulled by the gorgeous Assembly”.34

Another influential artistic figure for Etty was Sir Thomas Lawrence, the country’s leading society portraitist, with whom he trained for a year in 1807. The proliferation of portraits produced pre-1820 (at least eight of which were exhibited) may also be explained by a further, more personal pressure from his first benefactor and uncle, William Etty. It was he who had financed Lawrence’s tutorship and had even indicated in his will of 1809 that his nephew should continue to be funded

29 On 24 May 1813, Thomas Stothard wrote to Cumberland and stated that: ”Wilkie’s picture of Blindman buff has ever a crowd round it closely packed; and some of those in the rear, in vain struggling for a view, console themselves for the disappointment by looking at my Shakespeare subject, by which means I get admirers, as one theatre is filled by the overflow of the other” (Bennett, 1988: 52).
30 These works included A Domestic Scene (RA 1812) and The Fireside (RA 1813), which comprised a group sitting round a tea-table with muffins, pokers and tongs.
32 Literary Gazette, 24 June 1820: 411.
33 London Magazine, April 1821: 422.
specifically for instruction “in the art of portrait painting until he shall have acquired such a proficiency ... for his future progress in that art”. A letter from Lawrence to Etty's uncle, which dates from 1 July 1807, stipulates the conditions of the tuition arrangement:

In our short interview the other Morning it did not occur to me to mention that on many accounts it would not be right that any Copies of the Portraits I may have to paint (and which for his improvement Your Young Friend may make) should be taken from my House. It may sometimes happen that (Copies being often bespoke by my sitters) I may wish him to execute them for me if he makes sufficient progress in his Art in which case I shall pay him a sum agreed upon between us but it must be understood that except with my permission or that of the Person sitting to me no Copy is to be at your Relation's own disposal. He will have a Room in my House chiefly to himself and if at any time it should likewise be occupied by another that Person will be one employed in copying a Picture for me and from whom he may gain improvement. I have told you how my hours are employ'd but whenever he wants an opinion from me it shall readily be given him and with the sincerest view to his advantage. I shall intentionally withhold nothing from him that I think useful for him to know.

As only a short extract from this dictatorial epistle has appeared in previous scholarship, it has been quoted at some length here. An attached card notes that the fee of £105 was received on the following day, in advance of the student's arrival at Lawrence's studio in Greek Street. Although significant gains in painterly skill were fostered by the subordinate labour of copying canvases, Etty appears to have “received no specific instruction in painting” from Lawrence, and struggled to emulate his master's style. Having trained under two such highly respected but largely absent teachers, Etty's artistic multifariousness at this stage is unsurprising.

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35 TNA, PROB 11/1502/57. The artist's uncle harboured an ardent desire that his nephew should become more financially self-sufficient, and that this would be more easily facilitated if he were an accomplished portraitist.
36 GRI, 870357, Item 42. Sir Thomas Lawrence, to Etty's uncle, William Etty, in a letter dated 1 July 1807.
37 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 37-38.
38 GRI, 870357, Item 42.
‘It could never be too often repeated, that the Human Figure was the Painter’s alphabet’

On 10 December 1808, Etty joined his cohort in witnessing the General Assembly address by the Academy’s President, Benjamin West. Custom dictated that the President’s speech should take place at the distribution of gold medals, as opposed to the inferior silver premiums which were awarded first. This year, however, West delivered an unexpected exhortatory oration that expressed his gratification at the “degree of improvement” the students had demonstrated, particularly “in the delineation of the Human Figure”:

It could never be too often repeated, that the Human Figure was the Painter’s alphabet. The groups he proceeded to form from it resembled words; and those words, leading to sentences, finally enabled him to speak the universal language of his Art, understood alike by all nations. Without the perfect knowledge of that language, he could no more hope to excel in expressive composition, like the Greeks, in refined Art, than a man could hope to acquire the fame of an orator, if he were unskilled in the language in which he was to speak.40

Such words would undoubtedly have resonated with the impressionable Etty, who was steadily formulating his own pictorial vocabulary: one that sought to transform the genre of the academy study into the framework for an authentic history painting. In the early 1760s, West had also experimented with imaginative subject matter, drawn from the narratives of literature or myth. Although towards the end of this decade he began to produce history paintings in a more “radical Neo-Classical style”, upon which his reputation came to be based, Correggio and Titian as pictorial models represented “tastes and aspirations that West would never abandon”.41

West’s death, in March 1820, presented aspiring and professional artists alike with a unique opportunity to become the American’s successor in the most prestigious field of art, history painting. A void, or lacuna, opened up in the artistic milieu – albeit one that carried the tacit expectation of leading the national School towards a long-awaited golden age of historical painting.42 In the words of one contemporary

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40 Hoare, 1809: 25.
41 Von Erffa and Staley, 1986: 36.
42 West’s hugely successful retrospective of 1821 “attracted ninety-five thousand visitors during the first twelve months” (Whitley, 1973, 2: 9).
commentator: “numerous younger men are following his [West’s] footsteps, and keep alive the fire, ready to burst forth whenever the public shall fan it into flame”.43 As Etty’s earliest biographer notes, having decided that “all the great painters of Antiquity had become thus great through painting Great Actions, and the Human Form”, he “resolved to paint nothing else”.44 From 1820 onwards, he proceeded to experiment almost exclusively with painting historical and allegorical works. Etty’s wholehearted perseverance led the art critics Richard and Samuel Redgrave to retrospectively espouse him – along with Haydon, Hilton and Howard – as a flag-bearer for the national School of art. Following the death of the first and second generation of dedicated grand manner painters, the foursome were accredited with having advanced a historical, specifically British, aesthetic during their lifetimes.

Although history was endorsed as symbolising a touchstone of the highest value, and worth aspiring to, large-scale, grandiose, heroic works had become rather outdated, as revealed by a report in the Examiner from 1819: “The young historical Painters, who entered that high department, in 1805, have been compelled, by public apathy and neglect, gradually to abandon the public style”.45 This artistic community’s commitment to the cause of history painting – and by extension, to the Academy’s fundamental principles and to high art practices more generally – was becoming increasingly difficult to realise practically in terms of the marketplace. Such aspirations were in many ways rooted in the life class, where these students’ shared experience signalled allegiance to an ideal. Paradoxically, however, the pursuit of history painting became a sign of membership to a rather limited private circle. William Carey summed up the state of affairs in a hyperbolic remark of 1825: “the young escape in debt, reproach, humiliation, and danger, from historical painting as from a fatal snare or quicksand!”46 With the decline of grand manner history painting, most artists turned to more profitable genres, particularly portraiture and landscape.

43 London Literary Gazette, 3 July 1819: 430.
44 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 36.
45 Examiner, 25 April 1819: 257.
46 Carey, 1825: 59.
The ‘Poetical Set’ – Etty, Hilton and Howard

With this framework in mind, I would now venture to propose a refined cluster of artists concentrating upon the poetical strand of history painting, whose literary inspired exhibits shared a number of formal attributes, and who were devoted to the Academy and its tenets: namely Etty, Hilton and Howard. Haydon, who was included as the fourth member of the group put forward by the Redgraves, came to reject the authority of the Royal Academy and diverged in an attempt to commit himself chiefly to a more heroic and masculine thread of history painting, rooted in the classical tradition. His unwavering dedication towards the historical cause ultimately proved ruinous and having become a bankrupt, adversarial outcast, Haydon was imprisoned and eventually committed suicide. Meanwhile, Etty, Hilton and Howard all produced and exhibited works that were collectively categorised by the press as belonging to the ‘fanciful’ or ‘poetic’ class, and which tended to infuse traditional grand manner ideology with softer colour palettes and lighter, more feminine themes. As one contemporary critic declared conclusively:

...there are in the British School at least three artists of eminence, who have not only successfully but almost exclusively devoted their time and talents to the higher walks of their profession, history and poetry – we mean ETTY, HILTON and HOWARD.47

Henry Howard, the eldest of the three, had guided and overseen the artistic development of Hilton and Etty’s cohort from 1808, in his role as Visitor within the Life Academy – often alongside fellow Academicians Thomas Stothard and the York-born sculptor John Flaxman – and then, following its creation in 1815, in the School of Painting. In due course, the two pupils joined their former tutor in administering teaching duties, and all three were actively involved with the Council.48

48 During the Georgian period, Etty was assigned the following roles in the Academy on 10 December of each of the following years for the year ahead: Member of the Council (1828 and 1836), Visitor to the Life School (1828, 1831, 1834) and Visitor to the School of Painting (1828, 1831, 1834). This data has not appeared in previous scholarly literature and is derived from the following sources: Morning Post, 12 December 1828: 3, Morning Post, 13 December 1831: 3, Morning Chronicle, 12 December 1834: 2 and Morning Post, 12 December 1836: 3.
As the Academy’s Secretary from 1811 onwards, Howard was a mainstay of the institution, controlling the internal and external flows of information from the Schools, and then in 1834 was appointed Professor of Painting. A prolific exhibitor, Howard displayed works at the Academy’s annual shows for fifty-three consecutive years until his death in 1847, sometimes submitting up to ten pieces at a time. He showed early promise, winning both the gold medal for history painting, and the silver medal for an academic study, in the same year. His precocious reputation was further enhanced by a commendation from Sir Joshua Reynolds. However, in 1847, the Gentleman’s Magazine’s obituary noted: “Mr. Howard was always on the brink of doing something great – but, like others, never got beyond the line which separates imitation from original excellence.”

William Hilton, on the other hand, who became Keeper to the Academy in 1827, exhibited far fewer works at the summer spectacles, never exceeding two canvases per show. All three artists succeeded in claiming prizes at the British Institution’s annual distribution of premiums for outstanding history paintings.

From around 1819, this trio of painters were united in executing fanciful subject pictures for exhibition at the Academy, treating a wide spectrum of poetical, mythological and classical sources, from Milton to Shakespeare, and Homer to Ovid. The set’s shared interests and similar trajectories are best illustrated by Appendix B, where related works and common literary sources are placed side by side. Intriguingly, despite revolving around and deriving pictorial inspiration from the same textual narratives, each of these three artists developed a partiality for particular authors. Hilton, for instance, became associated with his renderings of scenes taken from Spenser’s Faerie Queene, utilising this narrative as a textual vehicle for five paintings, including The Red Cross Knight of 1809 and Una with the Satyrs (Fig. 15), which was exhibited at the Academy in 1818. In fact, Leigh Hunt

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49 Gentleman’s Magazine, December 1847: 647.
51 Hilton’s The Citizens of Calais Delivering their Keys to King Edward III won fifty guineas in 1810, he received £122.10s for The Entombing of Christ – He was Crucified, Dead, and Buried in 1811, while in 1814 and 1828 his Mary Anointing the Feet of Jesus and Christ Crowned with Thorns were purchased for 550 and 1,000 guineas respectively. In 1834, the British Institution awarded him 100 guineas for his painting entitled Editha Searching for the Body of Harold (Smith, 1860: 52, 60, 67, 87, 101). Howard was awarded 100 guineas for his Sunrise in 1815 (Smith, 1860: 70). Meanwhile, Etty was awarded 100 guineas for the general merit of his works in 1828 (Smith, 1860: 91).
noted that he had written about the idea of a new gallery dedicated to Spenser’s imagery, to which “Mr. Hilton (I do not know whether he saw it)” also “projected such a gallery, among his other meritorious endeavors”.52

Howard, on the other hand, as Marcia Pointon states, was “one of the most prolific Milton illustrators of the period”.53 Comus allowed him to portray passages involving deities or nymphs in aerial or aquatic environments. As well as producing several pictures depicting Iris and her Train, he showcased seven variations on the popular Sabrina theme between 1815 and 1830 – a topic that Etty also treated in 1831.54 Classical mythology provided Etty with an especially rich vein of inspiration and it is immediately obvious from my analysis that Venus is his heroine, given that at least fifteen of his exhibits feature her as either a central or subordinate character. He created a series of canvases illustrating scenes from Homer and Ovid’s narratives, such as the 1837 Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6) and his two versions of The Choice of Paris (1826 and 1846, Figs. 16 and 17). In the late 1820s, Etty referenced Ovid’s Heroïdes for his pendant pair of Hero and Leander paintings, a pictorial theme that Howard had previously attempted. Hilton and Howard freely drew upon Shakespeare – particularly popular were A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Tempest, plays replete with visions, tricks, spirits, fantastical scenes and fairies. Etty, however, only alludes to Shakespeare once, for his Cleopatra’s Arrival in Cilicia (Fig. 18) of 1821.

As well as creating poetic pictures, these three artists were further linked by their collective involvement in numerous literary projects. Howard was particularly prolific in this respect, and throughout his career produced accompanying illustrations for a wide variety of publications, along with fellow painters such as Thomas Stothard – whose output was synonymous with what Howard termed the “realms of Fancy” – and the history painter, Richard Westall (1765-1836).55 Indeed, Stothard and Westall formed part of a wider group of contemporaries who were also

52 Hunt, 1845: 74.
54 Marcia Pointon, in her book Milton and English Art, refers to all three artists when discussing Milton’s place in English art during the first half of the nineteenth century. She goes on to state that: “Between about 1820 and 1850 two English artists of talent and distinction were using subjects from Milton’s poetry in the painting of large-scale, highly finished canvases … B. R. Haydon and William Etty” (Pointon, 1970: 204). Benjamin Robert Haydon will be examined in more detail in Chapter III, as part of my proposed ‘historical set’, but it is noteworthy that he was also treating such subjects.
55 Howard, 1848: 48.
experiencing with similar pictorial subject matter, but whose output was often designed to fit publishers’ demands. Although he had trained as an apprentice under the well-known mezzotint engraver, John Raphael Smith (1752-1812), Hilton did not complete as many book designs as this background might suggest, especially given his documented financial struggles. During the years leading up to the 1820 Academy exhibition, he did however devise several frontispieces for the publishers John Taylor and Augustus Hessey, including the frontispiece for *Junius: Stat Nominis Umbra* (Fig. 19). As early as 1809, he had created designs for Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Citizen of the World*, including *The Rescue* (Fig. 20) and *A Monstrous Fish* (Fig. 21).56 Unlike Etty, Hilton benefited from friendships with those in publishing and literary circles, for example Taylor and Hessey, as well as with the poets John Keats, John Clare and Thomas Hood. Despite these associations, Hilton appears to have produced many fewer book illustrations after 1820.

The first mention of Etty contributing to a literary publication – which is reproduced here for the first time – is his 1829 *Guardian Angels* (Fig. 22), engraved by Edward Finden for *The Amulet, or Christian and Literary Remembrancer*, published by Samuel Carter Hall (1800-89).57 This illustration was to instigate a number of further designs for books. Etty’s connection with the publishers Hall, and Alaric Alexander Watts (1797-1864) – who he met by chance in Paris during the summer of 1830 – has not been commented upon by previous scholarship. It is raised here as it emphasises the fact that the artist was concerned with the same activities as his contemporaries, in an attempt to supplement his income. In the case of Hall, who was later to become Editor of the *Art-Journal*, in which Etty’s *Autobiography* was printed in 1849, the relationship lasted until the end of the painter’s career. Hall himself remarked, “I knew WILLIAM ETTY well ... when he was working hard for the fame that came and brought ‘commissions’ more than enough”, before going on to describe Etty’s “tender, almost womanly heart” and his ungainly appearance.58 In 1841, Hall even

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56 Hilton designed these two plates, amongst many others, for the publishers Taylor and Hessey, especially in the new editions of *The Citizen of the World: or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to his Friend in the East* by Oliver Goldsmith, and *The Mirror: A Periodical Paper Published at Edinburgh in the Years 1779 & 1780* by Henry MacKenzie.

57 This illustration featured in the 1829 annual to accompany the poem *The Angels’ Call* by Felicia Hemans (1793-1835). It must have been the work numbered 51 in the Birmingham Institution’s 1829 exhibition, rather than Etty’s 1828 Royal Academy work, *Guardian Cherubs*, as Dennis Farr suggests (Farr, 1958: 170).

58 Hall, 1871: 475.
included a short story penned by Etty in the literary annual *Friendship’s Offering, or the Annual Remembrancer*.\(^{59}\) The painter’s last contribution to Hall’s publications in the Georgian period was his *Cupid and Psyche* (Fig. 23) for *The Book of Gems* in 1836.\(^{60}\)

Alaric Alexander Watts had previously edited the *New Monthly Magazine* and had also contributed to both the *Literary Gazette* and the *Gentleman’s Magazine* during the early 1820s. Such was his industry that in the twenty years after 1827, he was said to have established “upwards of twenty Conservative newspapers”.\(^{61}\) Prior to meeting Etty, Watts had published images by both Howard and Hilton, for example the latter’s *Cupid Taught by the Graces* in 1829 (Fig. 24). Watts visited Paris in 1830 to meet artists for inclusion in his annuals: painters like Ary Scheffer, Alfred Johannot and Achille Devéria. The chance meeting between Etty and Watts is discussed at length in Chapter IV, but it should be noted here that after having spent a few days together visiting Parisian ateliers, Watts became interested in incorporating some of Etty’s images into his works. In a letter of 26 September 1830, he informed the painter that he had “a whim to publish a little volume of my own poems with some very exquisite illustrations” although he could not “afford to purchase pictures” for it. Offering to compose a poem to complement a picture, Watts nominates the *Psyche* owned by Sir Francis Freeling, should Etty “have no ulterior view with regard to it”.\(^{62}\) This “little volume” must have developed into Watts’s *Lyrics of the Heart*, which he was widely reported to be preparing for publication. In fact, the book did not go to print until 1851. The engraving was named as *Cupid and Psyche* (Fig. 25), otherwise known as the Royal Academy’s 1822 exhibit *Cupid Sheltering his Darling from the Approaching Storm* (Fig. 26), and it accompanied a poem by Watts called *Love and Friendship*.\(^{63}\) Several of Etty’s contemporaries were also represented by similarly themed mezzotints in this book, including Stothard’s *Cupids Blowing Bubbles* (Fig. 27) and Haydon’s *Cupid at Sea* (Fig. 28).

\(^{59}\) Entitled ‘A Sketch from Nature’, it tells of a servant looking over the body of a fifteen year old girl named Eleanor, who had recently passed away through illness, and going on to attend her funeral (Etty, 1841: 69-72).

\(^{60}\) Hall, 1836: 71.


\(^{63}\) Watts, 1851: 207.
‘To be sure the person of Venus is only a portrait of Mrs. O –, the Academy model’

Having considered several of the different sets into which Etty was placed in the nineteenth century, and having introduced an exclusive trio of contemporary history painters, I will now explore the 1820 Royal Academy exhibition at Somerset House, in order to highlight the kinds of formal and thematic correspondences shared by Etty, Hilton and Howard’s works. The summer exhibition, which admitted the public on 1 May and ended its run two months later, marked a turning-point in Etty’s critical fortunes and went some way towards raising his profile. In total, the summer spectacle attracted 68,936 visitors and, according to the London Literary Gazette, the collection was “upon the whole, showy and attractive”, with “a few admirable pictures. Portraits, as usual, predominate”. Indeed, as illustrated by the pie chart in Appendix C, portraits accounted for exactly half of the 240 exhibits in the Great Room, while only twenty-nine canvases (12% of the total) comprised history paintings. In this year, Etty displayed two works: the aforementioned Drunken Barnaby (Fig. 14) and a fancy piece entitled The Coral Finder: Venus and her Youthful Satellites Arriving at the Isle of Paphos (Fig. 7). Engaging with several stylistic and conceptual elements that feature in his later pictures of this type, Etty’s fictitious Coral Finder garnered the artist a series of accolades.

The contemporary press were generally positive about this work, with one commentator describing the canvas as: “Glowing with colour and imagination, and ... both classical and well grouped”. It was declared that the painter had “an exquisite eye for the Venetian tone of colouring, which gives such brilliancy to poetical subjects”, while his submission itself was deemed “equally poetical in its forms and colouring”, as well as “full of taste”. This type of terminology demonstrates that even before his Continental tour, Etty’s palette was already being aligned with that of the famous Venetian School of Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto. Indeed, Dennis Farr points to Titian’s The Rape of Europa (Fig. 29) as a suggestive precedent for Etty, particularly in terms of the foreshortened chubby putto, swathed

64 I am indebted to Mark Pomeroy at the Royal Academy of Arts for this data.
65 London Literary Gazette, 29 April 1820: 284.
66 Elmes, 1820, 5: 390.
67 Repository of Arts, June 1820: 360.
68 London Literary Gazette, 6 May 1820: 300.
in a scarlet drape, who hovers effortlessly in the air, scattering delicate pinkish rose petals throughout the centre of the composition (Fig. 7). He notes that Etty would also have been aware of Hilton’s version of the same theme (Fig. 30), painted in 1818 for Sir John Leicester, later Lord de Tabley (1762-1827). Etty still needed to study the science behind Venetian colouring in situ, at the same time as engaging with, and emulating, past masters. In order to ensure that his output would fulfil the criteria demanded of the highest genre of painting, he advanced and elevated literary and poetic traditions rather than more conventionally historic ones, and was not alone in promoting this alternative aesthetic.

A scribbled injunction in one of Etty’s notebooks dating from the late 1810s reads: “Do something out of your own head”. True to his word, the painter seems to have conceived an invented narrative for his imaginary Coral Finder by referencing and conflating several well-known myths associated with the classical goddess of love and beauty, Venus. I would suggest that the time-honoured Venus Anadyomene theme marks one point of departure for the composition. Devised in classical antiquity by the celebrated Greek painter Apelles – whose creation is now preserved only in literature – this iconic image of a nude female figure rising up from the sea was originally installed upon the island of Kos, before being shipped to Rome by Augustus. Pliny the Elder expounds upon the work’s hyperbolic legacy:

His Venus Rising from the Sea, known as the Venus Anadyomene ... has been celebrated in certain Greek lines, which, though they have out-lived it, have perpetuated its fame. The lower part of the picture having become damaged, no one could be found to repair it; and thus did the very injury which the picture had sustained, redound to the glory of the artist. Time, however, and damp at last effaced the painting, and Nero, in his reign, had it replaced by a copy, painted by the hand of Dorotheus.

Christine Mitchell Havelock, in her discussion of the female nude in the art of the classical world, interprets this excerpt as implying that “Greek literary exercises of the late Hellenistic period were being read by everyone and were causing a revival

69 Farr, 1958: 29. The original canvas by Titian transferred from the Orléans collection to the Earl of Darnley, and a copy by William Young Ottley had been sold at Christie’s in 1811.
70 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 90.
71 Bostock and Riley, 1857, 6: 260-61.
of interest in certain works of art that had until then been forgotten”.72 Once, she states, the painting had been rediscovered, it became subject to much interest and inspired a succession of both pictorial and sculptural groups. Amongst these is the *Aphrodite Anadyomene* situated in the Palazzo Colonna, Rome (Fig. 31), to which prototype Titian owed a significant debt for his own treatment of the theme in around 1520 (Fig. 32).73 The familiar trope of Venus emerging from the sea and wringing out her dripping locks is closely related to – indeed, even interchangeable with – the legend of the goddess’s birth, where she arose fully formed from the foaming shallows near Paphos, Cyprus, transforming the city into a cult centre of devotion to the deity. Botticelli, for instance, adopts the ubiquitous *Venus Medici pose* for the protagonist in his famed *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 33), and portrays her being blown towards the Paphian shore on a scallop shell, protecting her modesty with her long auburn hair.

In his *Coral Finder* (Fig. 7), Etty clearly alludes to the various mythologies and motifs surrounding the goddess’s inception and representation – he sets the scene in the sea just off the Isle of Paphos, and the ornate craft which bears his voluptuous Venus is barely larger or more sea-worthy than the traditional scallop shell – yet he avoids direct appropriations. Assigning his entry with a suitably ambiguous title in the gallery catalogue, the painter chooses to dispense with the conventional iconography of Venus with upraised arms, engaged in drying her hair and instead depicts her in a reclining pose: disproportionately large, with pale alabaster flesh, chestnut curls and gold jewellery. Two reduced female attendants embrace in the prow and are lent weight by the dark-haired nymph in the water, who reaches up towards them, clutching the red coral she has collected. Pale classical architecture punctuates the dark headland and is lit from the right by a warm evening glow. Bodies and clouds shine with a soft luminescence as the golden boat glides along in the dark crook of the shore. Although the scene does not seem to have a textual sanction, I would suggest a new source for the conceit of collecting coral, in the shape of the following well-known ‘epithalamium’, or wedding poem, by the Latin poet Claudian:

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72 Havelock, 1995: 86.
73 Havelock, 1995: 90.
Rich ornaments each eagerly conveyed,
Intended nuptial presents to be made.
Cimothoë the choicest girdles brought;
A necklace Galatea, highly wrought;
By Spatalé, a diadem o’erspread
With pearls superb, obtained from RED SEA bed;
And Dodo, plunging where the waters flow,
Plucked coral from the rocks that lie below:—
While under briny floods, a branching stem;—
But, hardened in the air, a precious gem.
Encircling Venus, all the naked band
At once expressed their joy with voice and hand.74

While I believe that these festive verses informed Etty’s image, the fact that his picture does not illustrate a fixed literary source opens it up to an array of possible readings. Fuseli had articulated that the highest class of art transcends specific historical and literary source matter, and seeks instead to embody an absolute quality or a sentiment. Etty, in this work, set out to produce a conspicuously inventive scene that would display his knowledge of ancient art and poetry, as well as the emergence of a distinctive painterly singularity.

Subtly fusing yet another familiar topos related to the goddess into the catalogue of correspondences within this canvas, Etty places his protagonist in a Venus Victrix pose.75 I would argue that the contemporaneous Italian sculptor Antonio Canova’s (1757-1822) elegantly rendered portrait sculpture of Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix in the Galleria Borghese (Fig. 34) may help to explain Venus’s majestic yet immobile appearance. Interestingly, Pauline herself had instructed Canova to carve her in the guise of Venus “rising from the bosom of the sea”.76 Although the statue was famously inaccessible to the public, the scandal resulting from the portrayal of the Princess Borghese in a semi-nude, life-size sculpture soon meant that copious prints after the work were produced and widely circulated. According to one contemporary English writer, James Wilson, the recumbent figure was “well known by an engraving which is inscribed ‘La Venere Vittrice de Canova’”.77 The supine

74 Hawkins, 1817, 1: 223.
75 Dennis Farr states that the goddess is “lying in the pose of a Venus Victrix” but does not elaborate any further (Farr, 1958: 29).
76 Defauconpret, 1818: 204.
77 James Wilson, who toured the Continent between the years 1816 and 1818, also remarked: “Canova, I have heard, esteems this statue as his best performance, and is not very well pleased, that it should be so completely shut up from public admiration” (Wilson, 1820, 2: 112).
posture of Etty’s Venus, as well as her sideways glance and even hairstyle, recall that of the marble likeness. Widely regarded at the time as Europe’s finest sculptor, and fittingly called the “Praxiteles of modern days”, Canova had been working in Rome since 1780 and represented a neoclassical ideal. His marble groups reveal a “fascination with voluptuous graceful forms” – a phrase that is equally applicable to Etty's imagery of female nudes.

In 1815, Canova had visited London and socialised with fellow artists and future patrons, including Lawrence (who had completed his portrait), Haydon, West, Smirke, Hamilton, Turner (when he had visited the painter's studio), Fuseli and Wilkie. It appears that Etty likewise held Canova in high esteem: speaking after his death in 1822 – having recently visited his workshop in Rome armed with a letter of introduction from Lawrence – he described the sculptor as “Rome’s brightest ornament”. Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix is not the only neoclassical model of a reclining female figure by Canova that may have provided a template for Etty’s pictures of this period. Indeed, the reclining nude was in regal favour: George IV’s Fountain Nymph (Fig. 35), commissioned from Canova, arrived at Carlton House for installation in June 1819 and the King went on to order a companion piece for the sculpture in 1820, Dirce (Fig. 36). These two delicately modelled marbles are portrayed with one gazing at a harp-playing putto and the other clasping a garland of flowers – iconographical symbols which Etty incorporated into both his Coral Finder (Fig. 7) and his Cleopatra (Fig. 18) of the following year. By associating his depiction with contemporary statuary, Etty was able to allude to a venerable pictorial tradition of representing reclining nude or semi-nude Venuses in marble. In

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78 Morgan, 1817, 2: 84.
79 Duby and Daval, 2010, 2: 855. Canova’s celebrated sculptural creations not only depicted, but also inspired, many poetical works, such as the verses published by his friend Melchiorre Missirini, who was secretary to the Accademia di San Luca and author of the poetical Sui Marmi di Antonio Canova, Versi (Venice, 1817). The romantic Italian poet, Ugo Foscolo, was so captivated by Canova’s Three Graces (1814-17) that he composed an unfinished piece – Le Grazie – in celebration of the marble group in c.1812.
80 Haydon noted in his diary that “the Academicians would at first pay no attention to him, and swore he came for work. At last, mere shame obliged them to invite him to a dinner” (Taylor, 1853, 1: 296). Canova said of Fuseli: “There are in art two things, fire and flame. Raphael has the fire, Fuseli the flame” (Tomory, 1972: 128).
81 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 129.
82 Canova had also been commissioned by Lord Lansdowne to produce a Sleeping Nymph in 1821, which is now at the Victoria and Albert Museum – a sketch of which he had sent to Sir Thomas Lawrence in 1820.
theory, these sculpted forerunners should have helped preclude accusations of moral laxness or opprobrium.

Despite such intriguing inter-medial associations – which have not been discussed by previous scholarship – Etty did not entirely escape charges of prurience from his critics. After all, his canvas, showcasing a prominent and strikingly pale female nude, would have stood out amongst the plethora of fully clothed aristocratic portraits sharing the gallery space. Indeed, veiled criticism of this kind took the form of an imagined dialogue between a pair of fabricated visitors to the 1820 Academy show. The fine arts correspondent for the *London Magazine*, Thomas Wainewright, described his experience as a spectator at the exhibition in character as the foppish connoisseur, Janus Weathercock. Addressing his companion, 'Jon', Janus asserts that Etty's Venus is "only a portrait of Mrs. O –, the academy model", but is pleased to find there is "no affectation of ideal grace about it [her], as in those namby-pamby wenches by Hilton. It's honest and downright." Jon agrees enthusiastically, declaring: "Yes! and the flesh is in a very beautiful tone of colour, --- and what a pulpy, marrowy touch he has!" The revealing allusion to "Mrs. O" suggests that the identity of the female model from which Etty had drawn had not been sufficiently disguised by the veil of mythology. Instead her facial features rendered her too realistic, and even recognisable to informed contemporaries. As regards my set of artists, this light-hearted exchange offers an interesting insight into Etty’s treatment of the nude by comparison with that of William Hilton.

‘All extremely interesting in the department of poetical painting’

As suggested by the comment above, Hilton’s *Venus in Search of Cupid Surprises Diana* (Fig. 37) – which, like Etty’s *Coral Finder*, was exhibited at the 1820 Royal Academy show – elicited a rather different type of critical response. "His Venus is a slight sketch from the antique, in proportions”, remarked the correspondent for the *New Monthly Magazine*, “which, however beautiful in marble deities, lose all their attractions when imbued with colour”. Another reviewer echoed this sentiment, calling the work: “An affectation of Titian, in which prettiness degenerates to

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84 *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 August 1820: 197.
insipidity”. On the whole, however, the piece was favourably received, with one critic considering it: “An excellent picture, adding to the reputation of this deserving artist. The arrangement is good and the colouring exquisite.” Hilton’s exhibit was linked to a specific textual tag in the gallery catalogue, derived from Book 3 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*:

– Soone her garments loose
  Upgathering, in her bosome she compriz’d
  Well as she might, and to the goddessse rose,
  Whiles all her nymphes did like a girlond her enclose.

Goodly she ‘gan faire Cytherea greet
And shortly asked her what cause her brought
Into that wildernesse for her unmeet
From her sweete bowres and beds with pleasure fraught,
That suddein chaunge she straunge adventure thought.
To whom halfe weeping she thus answered:
That she her dearest sonne Cupido sought,
Who in his frowardness from her was fled;
That she repented sore to have him angered.

Looking at the two paintings together, the literalness with which Etty has rendered his fleshy, full-bodied, humanised figure of Venus stands in stark contrast to Hilton’s idealised, insubstantial, glowing version of the same goddess (Figs. 7 and 37). In Hilton’s scene, the two unnaturally illuminated deities – Venus and Diana – face one another across a stream: the vividly translucent brightness of their skin juxtaposed against the solid greens and browns of the tenebrous wooded landscape. Indeed, Hilton’s accomplished deployment of chiaroscuro was singled out by the critics: “the excellent management of the light, so as that the luminous cloud on which Venus advances, and her own personal brightness, still leave sufficient attractiveness of light on the main group … recommend the coolness of the umbrageous bath, with its softness and profundity of shade”. As both Etty and Hilton’s mythical, Venus-themed canvases would have hung upon the walls of the Great Room, it is not surprising to find commentators comparing the works of these two former fellow students.

85 Elmes, 1820, 5: 394.
86 *European Magazine*, June 1820: 511.
87 Royal Academy of Arts, 1820: 12.
Having considered the ways in which Etty's *Coral Finder* might be suggestive of a range of both ancient works and modern sculptures, one contemporary image which we can be certain that Etty encountered – and which appears to have inspired elements of his own painting – is Henry Howard's *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 38).89 Howard's picture was very well‐received when displayed at the Academy show of 1819, and it was particularly admired by Etty's much‐respected former master, Lawrence, who was reported to have "purchased one of the sketches made for the picture as ultimately completed".90 In a panegyric passage which appeared in the *Repository of Arts*, the canvas was described as "exquisitely poetical and delicate" and its protagonists praised for "their buoyancy and transparency".91 Interestingly, the *Examiner*, in its discussion of Howard's painting, obliquely presented other moderns with a challenge, remarking that the subject matter is "of peculiar difficulty, and requires a master's hand to execute and a poet's fire to feel its requisite beauties, for it is nothing less than a display of the most lovely form of the lovely sex, the Queen of Beauty herself – Venus".92 Howard, like Hilton in the following year, chose to direct the spectator towards the literary source that had inspired his creation. He names the Homeric *Hymn to Venus* in the gallery catalogue, and his canvas foregrounds several traditional iconographic conceits surrounding the birth of Venus (the conch shell, the goddess lifting her locks, foaming spray and puffing zephyrs). Etty, on the other hand, alters and extends the allegory.

As well as sharing an atmospheric ambiance and mutual classification as poetical, Etty's *Coral Finder* (Fig. 7) and Howard's *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 38) both prominently feature a dark‐haired sea nymph in the forefront, looking up and reaching towards the occupants of the craft. The curving back of the bronzed, supplicating triton who kneels in the bottom left‐hand corner of Howard's painting is mirrored by the dark head of the rearing horse on the right‐hand side, encapsulating Venus who is crouched within the shallow oval of the shell: a contour that is reinforced by the interlinking arms of the nereids in the shallows. This

89 Howard's painting was commissioned in 1818 by Sir Matthew Ridley. The canvas was accompanied in the 1819 exhibition catalogue by the following quotation: "Venus, born of the foam of the sea, and wafted by the Nereids, Tritons, and Zephyrs to the island of Cythera, is received and decorated by the Hours, previous to her ascent to the Gods", derived from the Homeric *Hymn to Venus*.

90 Howard, 1848: lxxi.

91 *Repository of Arts*, 1 June 1819: 350.

92 *Examiner*, 30 May 1819: 348.
enclosed shape is taken and transformed by Etty into a curved, ornate and highly burnished craft, while his airborne putto, clutching a circlet of flowers, and the entwined pair of nymphs sitting in the prow, are also reminiscent of those in Howard’s image. Within these two evocative, loosely pyramidal compositions, arms reach upwards, creating height and momentum, while the sinuous twists and turns of figures direct one’s eye around the images. An unreal dreamy lightness and brightness bathes the central components of each painting, which are enhanced against a darkness of land and sea.

The acclaimed 1819 *Venus Anadyomene* (Fig. 38) was not the only time Henry Howard was to attempt this particular pictorial theme. In fact, in the following year he displayed another picture entitled *The Birth of Venus* (now untraced) at the Royal Academy, alongside two portraits, a landscape scene and a Shakespearian subject painting. Ten years later, Howard exhibited what appears to have been a different picture with the same title, this time at the British Institution, which is illustrated here through a print by Edward Portbury (Fig. 39). Though much less well-received, it would seem from the following review that the 1820 version was not dissimilar in conception and style to the previous year’s submission: “We do not find that Mr. Howard has here departed from his usual manner. Though a beautiful work, we have seen from his hand what has pleased us more.”93 As mentioned above, nineteenth-century moderns who treated the Venus Anadyomene topic or its variants automatically elicited comparison with the exceptional Apelles of antiquity, and this was certainly the case with Howard’s original attempt:

> When we look at the productions of this artist, we are prepared to see the finest poetical imagination giving a local habitation to the unreal creatures of superstition or fancy, and employing, in the sweetest manner, the magic of the pallet to embody, as it were, aerial forms, and express supernatural conceptions. In parts of this picture he has fulfilled these expectations; in others, he has fallen so far short of them, as to give him little chance of having his name mentioned hereafter with that of Apelles.94

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Interestingly, this correspondent’s choice of wording chimes closely with the following published evaluation of Thomas Stothard’s pictorial contribution to the 1820 Academy exhibition:

... they transport us entirely to the scenes which they represent, and give a local habitation to things which hitherto floated in indistinct visions upon our fancy. Assuredly, this painter is the painter to the imagination, and one of the greatest artists of his country and age.95

Although this quotation refers collectively to the eight exhibits that Stothard submitted this year, which comprised his *Amphitrite* (Fig. 40), *Sancho Panza and the Duchess* and six “excellent little compositions” inspired by Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, including *The Dance* (Fig. 41), *The Garden* (Fig. 42) and *The Supper by the Fountain* (Fig. 43), it is the first of this list that is most significant for my argument.96 As with both Etty and Howard, Stothard displayed a multi-figural, sea-themed, clustered canvas, replete with similarly embellished compositional syntax. However, instead of depicting a Venus figure, the artist portrays Amphitrite, sea goddess and consort of Poseidon, being borne across the waves in a chariot drawn by a pair of aquatic horses. Pairs of tritons and nude nymphs dance alongside, embracing affectionately, while numerous airborne *putti* control a fluttering red ribbon above the goddess’s head. A critic for the *Examiner* remarked that “the warm colours of the groups vivaciously seen on the blue sky and green waves, soothe our critical feelings with a pleasure earnest and classical”.97

The incontrovertible similarities between the nature and content of the critical commentary engendered by Howard, Etty, Hilton and Stothard’s imagery, as well as the correspondences and shared preoccupations their works exhibit, demonstrates the extent to which these artists were dealing in the same kinds of pictorial currency. Indeed, the *New Monthly Magazine* listed a series of paintings, all exhibited at the 1820 Royal Academy exhibition, that can be – and indeed were – linked together by affinities of style, iconography, genre and theme:

95 *London Literary Gazette*, 6 May 1820: 300.
96 Elmes, 1820, 5: 392.
Mr. Stothard’s ‘Amphitrite,’ Mr. Howard’s ‘Venus Marina,’ Mr. Etty’s ‘Coral Finders,’ ‘Cupid,’ by Mr. Owen; Mr. Hilton’s ‘Venus in search of Cupid,’ and Mr. Hayter’s ‘Venus complaining to Mars of the wound she received from Diomede,’ are all extremely interesting in the department of poetical painting.98

George Hayter’s Venus, Supported by Iris, Complaining to Mars (Fig. 44), which hung in the School of Painting, was labelled a “bold attempt at poetical composition” and as such “ought to have been in the great room, where there is certainly no composition equal to it”.99 Having exhibited predominantly portraiture at the Academy between the years 1809 and 1819, Venus, Supported by Iris marked a different direction for the miniaturist.100 It seems irrefutable, from the above analysis, that this group of artists were fully aware of each other’s works and were collectively producing imagery that was linked by compositional, stylistic and thematic similarities.

Another review likewise brackets these painters together, alongside others, creating a larger, flexible group:

HILTON, HAYTER, LESLIE, BONE, HOWARD, THOMPSON, FUSELI, ETTY, JONES, BRIGGS, COOPER (we do not observe any order in our enumeration), have furnished subjects of great merit for description and criticism, and now in our power.101

Having expanded my proposed set to include such peripheral artists as Hayter and Owen, whose real interests lay in portraiture rather than illustrating history or poetry, and excluding Stothard, whose work was so often produced with a view towards illustrating books, it becomes clear that the most interrelated are the original trio – comprising Howard, Hilton and Etty. Their 1820 Academy canvases effectively exemplify the archetypal attributes which appear to characterise the poetical mode of history painting with which they were experimenting. Featuring

98 New Monthly Magazine, 1 June 1820: 717. William Owen’s painting, which was hung in the School of Painting, is currently untraced. It generated rather muted critical notice, for example: “this is a funny-looking arch fellow … a cupid of a Flemish droll, and not of the Midsummer Night’s Dream” (London Literary Gazette, 20 May 1820: 333).
99 Elmes, 1820, 5: 396.
100 Hayter exhibited only portraits between the years 1809 and 1815, nothing for the next three years, and then two portraits and a landscape scene at the 1819 Royal Academy showcase.
101 Morning Post, 29 April 1820: 3.
predominantly female protagonists, depicted nude or semi-clad, within fictional or imaginative settings, their subject matter is drawn almost exclusively from the narratives of mythology or poetry. Collectively, these multi-figural, interconnected compositions display light colour schemes and explore soft realms of emotion, such as pleasure and sensuality. The tendency of critics to compare and contrast their works, placing a particular premium upon an individual's ability to realise their chosen subject in a specifically poetic and expressive manner, would only have encouraged and promoted this type of imagery. Although the 1820 exhibition was not the only show where such artists were grouped together and congratulated for their combined advancement of poetical history painting, it is instructive as a case study and usefully illustrates Etty's increasing involvement in the artistic milieu.

‘The Queen, in the dress and character of Venus’

Any doubts Etty may have harboured as to which genre of painting to concentrate upon prior to the 1820 Royal Academy exhibition were dispelled by the success of his Coral Finder, and this picture determined the direction he would take with his next exhibit.102 Indeed, during the following summer, through the agency of the 1821 Academy show, Etty completely redefined contemporary critics’ expectations of his output and artistic preferences with the submission of a large, striking and imaginative canvas, grounded in the classical tradition, entitled Cleopatra’s Arrival in Cilicia (Fig. 18). Dennis Farr considers the Cleopatra an “extraordinary painting [which] ... must have burst like a bombshell upon the Academy and the public alike”.103 Crucially, this canvas underpinned the artist’s future pictorial repertoire. In view of Cleopatra’s importance to Etty’s artistic development, I will now briefly analyse the painting’s compositional syntax, preoccupations and critical reception, before revealing how, once again, his work can be productively compared to the output of his peers.

Apparently under the advice of the journalist William Jerdan, the Cleopatra was commissioned from Etty by Sir Francis Freeling, Secretary to the Post Office, who left

102 In 1819, the Annals of the Fine Arts printed a list of London’s principal practising painters with their chief stylistic genres, classifying Etty’s as “History and Portrait”, consistent with his entry two years previously in the same publication (Elmes, 1819, 3: 597-98, and Elmes, 1817, 1: 426).
the choice of subject to the artist’s discretion. Freeling was delighted with his purchase for 200 guineas, exclaiming: “It has made a great sensation among the artists and the cognoscenti. Unfortunately it wants drapery!” The painter was thus directed to introduce further drapes to cover up some of the female figures in the forefront, which were subsequently disrobed again in 1829, all at his patron’s insistence. Etty’s canvas, depicting Cleopatra’s illusory world of fancy, fantasy and lyrical beauty, demonstrates the artist consciously developing his poetic approach to history painting. Cleopatra was accompanied by two quotations in the 1821 gallery catalogue – the first taken from Plutarch’s Parallel Lives, and the second derived from Shakespeare’s play Antony and Cleopatra:

She sailed along the river Cydnus in a magnificent galley; the stern was covered with gold, the sails were of purple, and the oars of silver; these, in their motion, kept time to the music of flutes and pipes and harps. The Queen, in the dress and character of Venus, lay under a canopy embroidered with gold, while boys, like painted Cupids, stood fanning her on each side of the sofa. Her maids, habited like Nereids and the Graces, assisted in the steerage and conduct of the vessel. The fragrance of incense, vast quantities of which were burnt on the deck, was diffused along the shores, which were covered with people.

Plutarch’s Life of Antony.

The sails were purple, and so perfumed, the Winds were love-sick with them. Shakspeare’s Antony and Cleopatra.

It is notable that Etty intentionally chose to refer his viewer to both Plutarch and Shakespeare, permitting him to conflate and embody prose and poetry pictorially. By purposely placing a higher premium upon the excerpt sourced from the Greek historian’s Life of Antony – it is cited first and is significantly longer – the artist alludes to the authority of antiquity, which would have helped elevate his painting to a higher academic realm. Etty was to assign quotations to many of his works from

107 Many of Etty’s most inventive compositions evolved out of ideas originating from the late 1810s, with the Cleopatra seemingly the first to reach fruition from his sketchbooks. Gilchrist confirms that the Cleopatra was a “subject whereof the conception lay floating in his mind” (Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 91).
108 Royal Academy of Arts, 1821: 16.
now on, a technique that enabled him not only “to point an allusion”, but also to “create an eye-catching break in the ordered lines of the catalogue”.  

Continuing in the same vein of imagery that he had displayed in 1820, Etty seems to have consciously utilised the Coral Finder (Fig. 7) as a template for his later composition. Cleopatra (Fig. 18), however, is much more ambitious in both conceptual and aesthetic terms, exhibiting a proliferation of figural forms, as well as intricate and ornate pictorial rhetoric. Etty depicts a diminutive golden boat, which carries a larger-than-life, reclining female nude “in the dress and character of Venus”, while a rather chaotic mass of largely female characters gather precariously on the deck around her. An elaborately garlanded canopy supports swathes of wild, billowing scarlet fabric, while deep plum-coloured sails are saturated with incense. They, in turn, are encircled by a scatter of colourful, winged putti, who, “love-sick” from the abundant perfume, candidly embrace and kiss one another as they sweep down in a tangled curve. Elongated serpentine lines lace the composition, while the swirling draperies work as a device to lead the spectator’s eye around the sinuous shapes of the many figures. Amongst all the exaggerated movement, Cleopatra lies motionless beneath a soft pink cover, wearing a glazed and abstracted expression.

Significantly, as well as referencing his own earlier work, Etty displayed his expanding knowledge by drawing upon imagery produced by his artistic predecessors, both ancient and modern. Edward Francis Burney’s Cleopatra, which is illustrated here through John Agar’s sketch after the original painting (Fig. 45), has not been alluded to by existing scholarship, yet presents a particularly suggestive precedent, showing as it does an undersized boat supporting the large, supine figure of Cleopatra raised up on a dais, along with a harp-playing boy in the prow and a kneeling Cupid engaged in fanning the monarch. Canova’s aforementioned range of recumbent female nudes, such as Pauline Bonaparte as Venus Victrix (Fig. 34), also appear to have provided a sculptural model for the central figure, as they had for the Coral Finder. Meanwhile, Dennis Farr associates several groups of nymphs in a selection of Etty’s works with Rubens’s grand Marie de Médicis cycle in the Louvre, but I would suggest that this famous series of paintings in fact had a far greater impact upon the painter’s conceptualisation of the Cleopatra than has previously

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109 Gaunt and Roe, 1943: 76.
been thought. Interestingly, Etty had demonstrated an interest in this Old Master as early as 1816, while in 1818 he made a copy after Rubens’s Lioness, as revealed by the following report, in which he is still referred to as a student, despite having enrolled eleven years earlier:

The number of Students this year were seventy-eight, among whom were seventeen ladies; nearly sixty artists were often seen pursuing their studies at the same time ... The number of copies made exceeded two hundred, and the names and the works of the students were as follows: ... Etty – Ruben’s Lioness.

The most directly relevant of Rubens’s set of twenty-one works, which were on display in Paris throughout Etty’s lifetime, were perhaps the Landing of Marie de Médicis at Marseilles, 3 November 1600 – Disembarkation at Marseilles (Fig. 46) and Majority of Louis XIII, 20 October 1614 – Louis XIII Comes of Age (Fig. 47).

All three canvases feature a strong, centrally placed mast, with upward diagonals created by either crossed masts, poles or gang planks. The stone architecture of Cilicia, to the right of Etty’s image, is reminiscent of that in the Disembarkation and works to anchor his poetical composition. This is signified formally by the sharp juxtaposition between the weight and solidity of the marble structures and the frothy clouds, flimsy drapery and ethereal feel of the tiny golden boat crammed with mythological forms. In an astonishing form of pictorial translation, Etty transforms the white awning held up by Rubens’s man-servants into the shape of his Doric temple, while his marble pillars in the forefront recall the imposing Corinthian columns (Figs. 46 and 18). Etty was fascinated by the Rubens series, and returned in 1823, when he completed a copy of the sturdy nereid who is pictured with her back turned towards the viewer in the bottom right of Rubens’s Disembarkation. In the

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110 Farr, 1958: 30, 66. The author firstly relates the series to Etty’s Coral Finder (RA 1820) and then Hylas and the Nymphs (RA 1833). Etty first visited the Louvre during an aborted trip abroad in 1816, then again during hisContinental tour of 1822-23, and, as Farr notes, “that Rubens’s Marie de Médicis series should have appeared yet more splendid is proof enough of Etty’s tacit admiration for Rubens in 1816” (Farr, 1958: 35).

111 Elmes, 1819, 3: 597-98.

112 Cleopatra’s vessel is reminiscent of the golden craft in Louis XIII Comes of Age, where equally intricate care has been taken with the gilding, but the figurehead has evolved from a dragon into an eagle.

Cleopatra, this female figure has been replaced by the equally muscular form of the sea-god Poseidon, whose arm is similarly intertwined with that of an arching nymph to his left, while both figures use their strong, outstretched right arms to moor the golden vessels with a rope (Figs. 48 and 49). Etty even seems to have reformulated the sumptuous navy blue and gold mantle worn by the personification of France, who bows to greet Marie de Médicis in the Disembarkation, by deploying it to drape his own vessel, with the splash of red material underlying France's cloak now reflected in the cloth's trim (Figs. 50 and 51). This internalisation of details from Rubens's allegorical works helps to endow Etty's depiction with a degree of majesty and monumentality, while the allusions lend his image gravitas.

When Cleopatra was displayed at the Academy in 1821, the Monthly Magazine, having classified Etty's canvas as belonging to the "fancy, or poetical class", deemed it "as gorgeous, as resplendent, as replete with magnificent and Eastern splendour as can be expressed by the pencil", in short, "first-rate", while another reviewer thought it "one of the best in the whole exhibition". Crucial to the sensational appeal of Etty's picture at Somerset House, I would argue, was the fact that Cleopatra's story would have been extremely familiar to the audience, thanks to its prevalence in popular culture and literature. In 1820, the year before Etty's painting went on display, 'Cleopatra's Needle' was brought to London from Alexandria, as a gift to King George IV from the Pasha of Egypt. Meanwhile, a successful contemporary theatrical production of Shakespeare's play opened in December 1821, during which the representation of Cleopatra sailing down the river Cydnus was considered to be the most "splendid and gorgeous of all the scenes". Reputedly, it comprised: "all the luxury of description that historians, poets, and painters have adorned it. It filled the whole frame of the stage, while thunders of admiring applause resounded".

114 Monthly Magazine, 1 June 1821: 465.
117 Literary Chronicle, 8 December 1821: 781. The Egyptian queen had even managed to influence headwear fashions in London at the start of the 1820s: "Married ladies wear turbans and caps of all sorts, with flowers, feathers, or other ornaments ... the Cleopatra turban, with very long ends, is still in very high estimation among the more mature belles of fashion" (La Belle Assemblée, October 1820: 183).
In a review of the painting penned after it was re-displayed at the British Institution in 1822, the picture was described as “a most poetical imagination”, although this particular correspondent could not help but speculate as to “where she [Cleopatra] could have picked up so many flying Cupids”. This criticism crops up elsewhere, with a different reviewer complaining that the Cupids “turn the thing into a mythological fable”, before adding: “there was no necessity on the score of ornament or colouring for these supernatural accompaniments, because the description is of itself sufficiently luxurious and splendid”. The reference here is to Plutarch’s florid prose, which specifically states that the boys surrounding the queen were merely “like painted Cupids”. Continuing with his diatribe, this same critic notes Etty’s preference for “mere abstract poetry … by Shakespeare and Dryden”. By this, he seems to be suggesting that the type of poetry from which the artist derived inspiration, and with which his output was most analogous, was considered to be too lyrical, or speculative, and not stern or moralistic enough to suit the art world’s shifting aesthetic tastes. As Charles Robert Leslie – who had included Etty in his group of artists trained under Fuseli – wrote to his sister in 1813:

... pictures from modern poets [that is, all English ones, among others] do not take, and even if they should, it is uncertain how long they may continue in vogue. To insure a picture currency, therefore, it is necessary that it should tell either some scriptural or classic story. Even Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton, are scarcely sufficiently canonised to be firm ground.

Such an opinion does not seem to have been shared by the members of my poetical set, and was certainly not adhered to, as their submissions to the 1821 Royal Academy show reveal. Exhibited alongside Etty’s Shakespearian Cleopatra, Hilton’s Nature Blowing Bubbles for her Children (Fig. 52) was accompanied in the gallery catalogue by a poem:

Blow sportive bladders in the beamy sun,  
And call them worlds! and bid the greatest show  
More radiant colours in their worlds below:

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118 Album, April-July 1822: 122.  
120 Langhorne and Langhorne, 1809: 283.  
121 Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, March 1822: 333.  
Then, as they break, the slaves of Care reprove,
And tell them, such are all the toys they love.¹²³

These verses were taken from *The Library*, published in 1781, by the English poet and clergyman, George Crabbe (1754-1832), whose works were currently experiencing a revival of interest.¹²⁴ In this canvas, Hilton sought to present his viewer with an ostensibly idyllic scene, which carried an unmistakeable didactic message: his intention, "like the poet's, has been to show the utter worthlessness of the object's which engage the attention of the greater part of mankind, and to moralize on the vanity and emptiness of all human pursuits".¹²⁵ Hilton's painting, which merged sentimentality with edification, was praised by the *Examiner*:

This noble picture unites the simplicity of Nature with Allegory, the seriousness of moral instruction and satire with the charms of females and infantine beauty ... It is at once a moral lesson on the follies that are more or less pursued by all in life, while it is a charming exhibition of a fine young woman, amusing children with the frivolous but to them delightful sport of infancy ... It will equally delight the mother, the artist, and the philosopher.¹²⁶

This seems to be an important dimension to the pictorial logic that governed the mode of poetical painting in which artists such as Hilton and Etty worked. It required that the imagery of pleasure, lightness and femininity be supplemented by an overt or underlying moral lesson, often a warning about the threat of danger or downfall. Curiously, one critic wondered, when examining Etty's canvas, whether "the beauty of Cleopatra is too much for the human eye to dwell upon, or the merits of this picture escape casual observation", as visitors seem to “turn from it with a slight glance”. Perhaps the sight of Cleopatra pretending to be Venus was too far-fetched and failed to fit in with the perception of her as a strong, cunning Egyptian Queen. However, the same correspondent went on to declare that the painter had “only to proceed in the noble career he has chosen to reach the summit of his art”.¹²⁷ With this painting, Etty had embarked on a sequence of challenges to his viewer's contemplative and interpretative skills.

¹²³ Royal Academy of Arts, 1821: 10.
¹²⁶ Examiner, 13 May 1821: 301.
¹²⁷ Literary Chronicle, 16 June 1821: 382.
Whereas Hilton, in his *Nature Blowing Bubbles for her Children*, had referenced the modern poet George Crabbe, Howard’s contributions to the 1821 Academy exhibition were inspired by two of his favourite authors, Milton and Spenser. The first, *Sabrina* (Fig. 53), was accompanied in the gallery catalogue by the following lines from Milton’s *Comus*: “‘That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream;’ And ‘– The Nymphs that nightly dance / Upon her streams with wily glance’”.128 The water nymph Sabrina sits upon a throne to left of the canvas, beside a riverbank, watching nymphs dance lightly across the water’s surface. Interestingly, this image shares several compositional correspondences with Hilton’s *Venus in Search of Cupid Surprises Diana* (Fig. 37), which had been displayed at the Academy in the previous year. Howard has replaced Venus with Sabrina, Diana’s symbolic hound has metamorphosed into a pair of swans and the nude maid-servants in the earlier picture have been reformulated as a cluster of clothed, twirling nymphs. Clearly, Howard had looked to the imagery of his younger colleague when depicting this Miltonic scene.

Intriguingly, I would suggest that certain elements of Howard’s second poetic scene, *The House of Morpheus* (Fig. 54), owed a debt not to a fellow Academician, but to a Continental artist. Deriving pictorial inspiration from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Howard included the following verses in the 1821 gallery catalogue:

> Amid the bowels of the earth full deep  
> And low, where dawning Day doth never peep,  
> His dwelling is: there Tethys his wet bed  
> Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steep  
> In silver dew his ever-drooping head,  
> While sad Night over him her mantle black doth spread.129

In this composition, Howard seems to have referenced Anne-Louis Girodet’s ethereal picture, *The Sleep of Endymion* (Fig. 55). Apart from the obvious compositional similarities, this connection is further enhanced by the fact that Cynthia is another name for the goddess Diana, and Girodet’s Endymion is lit by the goddess of Night’s moonbeam. Howard’s scene carries the same fanciful forewarnings that appear throughout many of the poetical set’s works, as his image represents the “great

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128 Royal Academy of Arts, 1821: 8.  
129 Royal Academy of Arts, 1821: 11.  

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passion of unwonted love” – a succession of visions whereby the Red Cross Knight is led to imagine that Una has been deceitful.\textsuperscript{130}

Etty’s recent unofficial graduation from the Academy Schools coincided with the success of his Cleopatra and a new-found determination to devote himself to poetical and historical scenes. As his academic confidence, artistic powers and technical mastery increased, so too did his position and visibility within the exhibition space. Both the critics and his peers acknowledged his talent and increasing distinctiveness, with Charles Robert Leslie writing in May 1821 to his friend, Roger Irving: “Etty’s ‘Cleopatra’ is a splendid triumph of colour. It has some defects of composition, but is full of passages of that exquisite kind of beauty, which he alone can give.”\textsuperscript{131} As well as comparing Etty with his contemporaries, it became increasingly common for the press to draw parallels between his works and those of the Old Masters. For instance, the Examiner enthused about the Cleopatra, stating in its encomium that even “the chiefs of the Venetian and Flemish Schools, TITIAN and RUBENS, sometimes failed to give such subjects due effect”. This reporter then went on to suggest that Etty should refer to paintings such as Veronese’s The Communion of St. Jerome,\textsuperscript{132} as well as Titian’s Bacchus and Ariadne and Peter Martyr to further refine his skills.\textsuperscript{133} Commentary of this kind was well-timed, and seems to have helped galvanize Etty into commencing his tour across mainland Europe in the summer of 1822 – an edifying experience which I will discuss in the next chapter.

\textit{Conclusion}

The late-Georgian poetical and historical painters William Hilton and Henry Howard rarely appear in existing literature concerning Etty, if at all. In fact, this list of little known artists could easily be expanded to include such names as Thomas Stothard and Richard Westall. Recent scholarship’s propensity to side-line these contemporaries when evaluating Etty’s artistic development has promoted the misleading perception of the painter as an idiosyncratic outsider, whose exhibited

\begin{footnotes}
\item[130] Altick, 1985: 350.
\item[132] This painting was exhibited at the British Institution in 1821.
\item[133] \textit{Examiner}, 3 June 1821: 346-47.
\end{footnotes}
works were somehow unique. Distancing the provincial painter from his colleagues – by repeated allusions to his humble social origins, lack of early formal training, or extreme dedication to learning – risks overlooking his place within influential, overlapping artistic communities. It has been little commented upon that Etty frequently lent objects, studies and money to friends and colleagues, as recorded in a series of hitherto unpublished diary entries. “LENT [William] Hilton day after Good Friday 2 swords”, he notes, as well as “Lent [Abraham] Cooper February chain armour”, and “Lent [George] Franklin a lute”. Interestingly, Etty also kept a note of the drawings which he allowed fellow artists to borrow from his own collection, including George Franklin, Bright, Barker, Dyce, and Charles Robert Leslie. Moreover, he went on to become an important and leading member of the Royal Academy community: hosting dinners, contributing works to conversaziones, requesting rule changes as part of the Academy Council, and guiding students as a Visitor at the Life School and School of Painting.

As suggested by the epigraphs that preface this chapter, and substantiated by the press coverage within it, I have shown that Etty was in fact an integral member of several ‘sets’, some of which were fluid in their affiliation. In order to reassess his location within these groupings, I proposed a specific ‘poetical set’ of painters, which comprised Etty, Hilton and Howard. Having utilised the 1820 Academy exhibition as a case study, and having briefly looked towards the 1821 show, it transpired that these three artists produced and presented works which were not only linked by

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134 Etty logged his lent and borrowed items in a private diary, which is now in the possession of his descendant, Tom Etty. One of the references is presumably to the painter William Dyce (1806-64), although Bright and Barker are unverified as they could relate to several students studying at the Royal Academy during this period.

135 Leslie, 30 March 1850: 351. “I [Leslie] remember years ago, borrowing from him [Etty] to copy, a head of a young girl, of such angelic purity of expression, that I returned it after having destroyed all the attempts I had made to repeat it”.

136 Examples include his lending a work to an Artists’ and Amateurs’ Conversazione Society in 1830 (London Literary Gazette, 13 November 1830: 739) and the City of London Artists’ and Amateurs’ Conversazione, to which he lent a “very beautiful Cupid and Psyche” (Arnold’s Magazine of the Fine Arts, December 1833: 191).

137 For example, on 22 July 1833, Etty “moved and was seconded by Mr. Reinagle that it be recommended to the Council to reconsider their late Regulation respecting the route of male and female models, and that in future the female model be allowed to sit one week in three and not oftener – which passed” (RAA, RAA-GA-1-4: 171-72). A further record in the Council’s minutes is on 16 January 1840, the year following William Hilton’s death, when Etty “moved and was seconded by Mr. Cockerell that it be referred to the Council to consider the propriety of omitting the name of the Keeper in the annual list of members eligible to serve as Visitor in the Life Academy – which passed” (RAA, RAA-GA-1-4: 337).
compositional, iconographic and thematic affinities, but which also drew upon shared literary sources and engendered similar critical commentary. Appendix B offered a succinct visual overview of the subjects that Etty, Hilton and Howard chose to exhibit during their working lives, and this detailed survey illuminated the extent of their symbiotic exchange. Rather than being a peculiar individualist, we find Etty instead occupying a rather central position – looking to, and being inspired by his peers, but also, in turn, self-styling. Hence it is imperative that his work be understood in relation to his contemporaries, and the pressures of the collaborative yet competitive group dynamic. The value of this innovative approach will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation – particularly by advancing a ‘historical set’ that materialises in Chapter III.
CHAPTER II

'THE KEY TO THE SECRET': ETTY'S AESTHETIC TOUR AND ITS AFTERMATH

Introduction

In June 1822, William Etty embarked upon a nineteen-month long Continental trip, where he travelled extensively throughout France, Switzerland and Italy before returning to England in January 1824. Etty's edifying aesthetic tour – the trajectory of which is illustrated by Appendix E – transformed his burgeoning pictorial practice, swelled his artistic network and significantly advanced his academic status in the competitive London art world. Intent upon absorbing the lessons of ancient sculpture and the Old Masters, the painter sought to cultivate and refine his skills by consciously collating a wide-ranging assemblage of references to a series of contemporary and classical works. This chapter seeks to examine Etty within a European context and argues that his extended aesthetic education inspired and informed his future output to a far greater degree than has previously been allowed.¹

Firstly, I will assemble and analyse an array of hitherto unknown documentary data – both visual and written – associated with the artist during the years 1822-23, paying particular attention to sources that shed new light on his social activities, working methods, presence at foreign academic institutions and painterly experimentation. Etty’s methodology when studying abroad drew comment from Cosmo Monkhouse in 1874, who claimed that the artist “devoted himself almost exclusively … to taking sketches and studies of the great pictures of the Venetians”.² Executing small-scale but precise copies of choice works – or, as Etty himself termed this pursuit, making “memorials” – was a highly effective way of learning from, and retaining a record of, foreign artworks for future reference, and will receive full attention here.³ As well as examining a selection of the painter’s memorials, a newly

¹ The scholarly catalogue which accompanied the 2011-12 William Etty: Art & Controversy exhibition at York Art Gallery went some way towards addressing the significance and end products of Etty’s 1822-23 tour. See, for example, Sarah Burnage’s highly informative catalogue entries 1, 35-45 and 50 (Burnage, Hallett and Turner, 2011: 61-70, 108-109, 164-74 and 180-83).
² Monkhouse, 1874: 28.
³ Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 163.
discovered account by a contemporary Grand Tourist, which describes Etty’s intense and complex engagement with Venetian painting in situ, will be investigated together with a practical treatise, in order to illuminate his pursuit of the elusive ‘secret’ behind Venetian colouring.

Secondly, the chapter will explore how the subtle assimilation of certain facets of Italian art Schools (especially the Venetian) into his own work shaped and coloured the canvases he produced for successive Academy shows upon his return. In 1824 and 1825, Etty executed and exhibited two diametrically opposed history paintings – *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons* (Fig. 8) and *The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished* (Fig. 9) – which distilled his improved pictorial vocabulary and signified the emergence of a distinctly self-aware strategy, one that exemplifies his increasingly mindful engagement with the exhibition space. Such an agenda allowed the artist to start carving out his own niche as a modern British master. Previous scholars – such as Dennis Farr in the 1950s and Leonard Robinson more recently – have favoured a chronological and biographical approach towards what they term Etty’s “Grand Tour”.4 However, Etty’s age, class and professional status, conflated with the date of his travels, place him outside the traditional definition of the Grand Tourist: usually a young British milord completing his education with a prolonged European stay.

The thirty-five year old Etty’s tour was funded by his brother Walter, and his chief motivation for travel was to further his artistic development. Brinsley Ford considered education – artistic or otherwise – as central to the Grand Tour because “true taste could only be acquired in Italy”, citing the eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson’s anxiety: “a man who has not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see. The grand object of travelling is to see the shores of the Mediterranean”.5 Yet the conventional view of the Grand Tour as an educational construct for young British aristocrats has been challenged. Jeremy Black, for instance, states that this image “had fragmented as a consequence of the increasing variety in British tourism, a variety in personnel,

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4 See Chapter 4, ‘The Grand Tour: 1821-1823’, in Dennis Farr’s biography (Farr, 1958: 35-44), and Leonard Robinson’s Chapter 5, the first section of which is called ‘The Grand Tour – A second attempt’ (Robinson, 2007: 95-112).
intentions, routes and activities”. He locates this expansion “in the closing years of the European ancient regime”, offering William Wordsworth visiting Paris during the French Revolution as an example. Frank Salmon demands an extension of the Grand Tour into the nineteenth century, and argues for a wider definition of the term to include people travelling later in life, women, middle-class professionals, artists and writers.

Etty’s travels of 1816 and 1822-24 were made possible by the return of peace following Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo in June 1815 and before developments in transportation – particularly the railway – ushered in the beginnings of mass tourism by the mid-nineteenth century. The post-Napoleonic tour was much less ‘grand’ in nature than its eighteenth-century predecessor, with Italy shattered, noble families bankrupted and art collections scattered. Etty’s travels throughout Europe will be referred to here as his ‘aesthetic tour’. He followed in a long tradition of professionals travelling abroad to experience first-hand the ancient architecture and great art of Europe. David Watkin suggests that no British architect was as deeply affected by his travels as Sir John Soane, whose “intensive 27 month stay in Italy, in 1778-80, was an experience which coloured his entire career, culturally and emotionally”. For Ilaria Bignamini, artists belonged to a strong strand within the Grand Tour which she describes as an “invisible academy” – one that facilitated study, enabled contact with patrons and led to a rise in social status; Sir Joshua Reynolds, she suggests, would never have become President of the Royal Academy if he had not visited Italy. Reynolds himself famously developed his ‘grand manner’ through two years studying the masterpieces of Rome, Venice and Florence. In his Seven Discourses (1778), he observed that: “Raffaelle, it is true, had not the advantage of studying in an Academy; but all Rome, and the works of Michael Angelo in particular, were to him an Academy”.

Etty chose a traditional route for his travels – Paris, south to Geneva, then crossing the Alps to the main goal, Italy. Rosemary Sweet considers that the Grand Tour

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6 Black, 1992: 312.  
10 Reynolds, 1824, 1: 8.
became the “romantic tour” in the 1820s-30s. Romanticism altered what was admired: the Alps, previously considered an ordeal to be endured, become a tourist destination in themselves, and the Rhine area – popularised by Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage – began to rival Italy in cultural appeal. When travelling off the beaten track, southern Italy, Greece and the East were admired.11 In contrast, Etty’s tour was focused on the best places for viewing art: Paris, Rome, Florence and Venice. His reactions to the cities of Italy were not typical of tourists in general. Rome was widely regarded as the highlight of Italy, indeed of the Grand Tour. The city’s sheer size and range of classical sites, museums and art collections rendered it daunting to the uninitiated. Etty was unable to cope with Rome in 1816, but fared better with a guide in 1822. Tourists typically spent months in the capital, where a vibrant social network was easily accessed, and artists congregated because Rome was the centre of the European art market. Florence was the city where British tourists reported feeling most at home since the city was small, the ducal galleries contained many of the most admired artworks and even the food was considered more suited to British tastes. Naples was admired for her salubrious climate and, from 1748, for the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompei.

Unusually, Etty adopted Venice. Tourists typically visited Venice briefly and only for the grand spectacles of Ascension Day and the carnival: “Most visitors were fascinated, but many felt ill at ease and were glad to leave after a stay of only a week or two.”12 Like most nineteenth-century tourists, Etty saw Venice as a city of past splendours, and did not engage in current debate over her absorption into Austria-Hungary, unlike earlier British tourists who initially lauded Venice’s political independence as a possible model for Britain and, as the eighteenth-century progressed, pointed to the commercial decline and corruption of Venice as a warning to British politicians. Venice was also widely criticised in tourist literature for moral laxity, prostitution and cicasbeism. Etty was unusual in staying for so long and for prizing the artistic legacy of Venice so highly. As Sweet maintains:

Venice’s place on the Grand Tour was, therefore, slightly equivocal: as an education in taste, it arguably offered little that could not be acquired elsewhere. It represented an object lesson in republican

government and the power of commerce, certainly, but this had to be set against its associations with luxury, libertinism and licence.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Etty and the ‘canvas gentry’}

In order to evaluate the impact of the painter’s 1822-23 travels upon his career, it is useful to begin with a brief synopsis of his first trip abroad, which had taken place six years previously. In early September 1816, Etty set off, alone, on a whistle-stop tour of the Continent – the itinerary of which can be traced on the map in Appendix D.\textsuperscript{14} Within a week, he had already warned friends at home that he might curtail his planned year-long trip if Italy proved no better than Paris. After forty days, a despondent Etty, writing from Florence to his benefactor brother, Walter, declared: “And I now feel unequal to the task of going to Rome and Naples. – It would only be an accession of expense, without any positive advantage.” Even “Florence the Fair” had “a character of gloom about it that I cannot bear”.\textsuperscript{15} His initial visit to Italy had lasted less than twenty days, a considerable amount of which was spent in transit. It is notable that on his route back, Etty attended the Parisian Académie and spent a week at the studio of the French painter, Jean-Baptiste Regnault (1754-1829). However, within just ninety days of leaving, the painter was safely back at home, having aborted his lonely, unhappy and unproductive trip. This abandoned tour yielded little more than one painting of a head in Milan, for while in Florence, he “began to draw, but could not proceed”.\textsuperscript{16}

By contrast, Etty’s second foreign tour transpired to be an entirely different experience for the man who claimed that he had been permanently cured of his “passion for roving”, and reveals a dramatic shift in attitude, artistic engagement and ambition.\textsuperscript{17} Compared with the relatively straightforward route pursued by many of his contemporaries, Etty’s path through France and Italy appears rather circuitous. His enthusiasm for knowledge is conveyed by the fact that he revisited several key sites, looped back on himself and impulsively explored new roads between

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sweet, 2012: 207.
\item Etty had originally hoped that his York friend, William Jay, would accompany him on his first visit abroad, but “business disappointed both of us” (Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 65).
\item Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 71-72. William Etty, to Walter Etty, in a letter dated 5 October 1816.
\item Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 73. William Etty, to Walter Etty, in a letter dated 26 October 1816.
\item Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 72. William Etty, to Walter Etty, in a letter dated 5 October 1816.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
important cities (see Appendix E). Between July and November 1822, Etty’s course was a conventional one: visiting Paris and Geneva before moving on to Italy – Milan in the north, Bologna and Florence in the centre, then Rome and Naples further south. Upon entering Venice via gondola in mid-November – a city he had not visited in 1816 – Etty exclaimed: “its lofty Towers, its swelling Domes – looked like an oriental city springing from the bosom of the ocean”.\footnote{Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 152. William Etty, to Walter Etty, in a letter dated 17 November 1822.} Having originally planned a short stopover of ten or so days, the painter found himself so enraptured by Venice that he ended up staying for over nine months, having swiftly acknowledged the opportunities that this city presented for an artist who was gradually gaining a domestic reputation as a colourist. The crucial difference between this later tour and his first was that Etty now had a travelling companion, the portraitist Richard Evans (1784-1871), who, having enjoyed a stimulating trip of his own in 1821, relished the prospect of a return visit to Italy and was able to act as an expert guide.\footnote{Evans’s return visit to Rome was on behalf of the architect John Nash. A contemporary \textit{Somerset Gazette} reader described his activities: “I saw with great pleasure an English artist, Mr. Evans, engaged in copying the series of pictures known as Raphael’s Bible, in the loggia of the Vatican. I learnt that they were executing for Mr. Nash, who has been adapting a place for their reception in his house in Regent-street ... The arabesques were copied by Italian artists, employed by Mr. Evans” (\textit{Somerset Gazette}, 6 March 1824: 346-47).}

It is clear from Etty’s correspondence that Evans led him on extended excursions around the sights of Rome, dealing efficiently with the detested customs officers, reputedly even taking hold of one man and giving him “what you sailors call a sleugh round”.\footnote{Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 202.} An increasingly self-confident and sociable Etty likewise benefitted hugely from becoming part of an expanding web of Englishmen – artists, patrons and antiquarians – living or studying in Europe, which meant a contact could be sought in almost any major city on the traditional trail.\footnote{Writing to the painter Charles Robert Leslie from Rome on 20 November 1821, Joseph Severn estimated that “there are here now 1000 English and another 1000 are expected – one place is inhabited entirely by English” (Scott, 2005: 180).} Interestingly, Cesare de Seta describes the tourist community as the largest wandering “academy” ever known.\footnote{Bignamini and Wilton, 1996: 13.} Nowhere was this more apparent than in Rome, where upon his arrival on 10 August 1822, Etty was welcomed into a close-knit artistic collective, who shared with him their ambitious plan to form an outpost of the Royal Academy of Arts in the Italian capital. At the head of this aesthetic milieu was Charles Eastlake (1793-1865), future
President of the Royal Academy and first Director of the National Gallery. Back in England, Etty nominated Eastlake to become an Associate of the Royal Academy, declaring it was with "men like you, of genius, and classic erudition that its first ranks ought to be filled".23 Other founding members included the aspiring history painter Joseph Severn (1793-1879), the antiquarian Seymour Stoker Kirkup (1788-1880), as well as the sculptors Joseph Gott (1785-1860), Richard Westmacott (1775-1856) and John Gibson (1790-1866). These men would have known of Etty’s talent and his association with the President – indeed Lawrence wrote to Eastlake in December 1822: “Do you see any thing of Mr. Etty? A young Artist of great worth and true relish for Colour?”24

Having stemmed from an initial contribution made by the artists to hire a model for an evening in December 1821, the makeshift Rome Academy had flourished into a fledgling institution, complete with a dedicated space for members to congregate, converse and collaborate.25 This space belonged to Joseph Severn – recipient of the Royal Academy’s prestigious gold medal in 1819 and a three-year travelling scholarship to Rome – who rented a large room next to his studio for £9 a year. The group went to great lengths to simulate the London Academy, with Severn purchasing a skeleton and even securing a cadaver “from which we are determined to be perfect in Anatomy”.26 In contrast to the London Schools, this emergent, informal Academy grew out of a youthful student base, where tourists – artistic or otherwise – had the freedom to come and go. Crucially, it also precluded the fierce rivalries generated by the exhibition environment and regimented hierarchical structure of the Royal Academy, which encouraged individuality with prescribed learning. In Rome, potential patrons were shared amongst the artists, while any competition was directed more towards other foreign academies within the city, such as the Italian St. Luke’s Academy, than amongst the brethren themselves. Although Etty’s level of involvement in this project is unclear, his timely presence in

24 RAA, LAW/4/103. Sir Thomas Lawrence, to Charles Eastlake, in a letter dated 31 December 1822.
25 Brown, 2009: 137. The first drawing session started with just under twelve painters and sculptors.
26 Scott, 2005: 193-94. Recorded in a letter from Joseph Severn to his father, James, on 24 March 1822.
Rome and his inherent proclivity towards such educational institutions, suggests that he would have been, at the very least, an interested and supportive party.

While it is only possible to speculate upon the depth of Etty’s participation in this embryonic establishment, his convergence with several members of this entrepreneurial artistic community is documented within his surviving manuscripts. In one letter to Lawrence, dated 12 October 1822, the painter appreciatively relates that Evans had acted as “an excellent cicerone” in Rome, allowing him to see “about twice as much as I should have done alone”. He also mentions that he had “rather wished Mr. Gott to accompany” him to Naples at the end of August, and concludes by passing on Seymour Kirkup’s “respects and kind remembrances” – a friend who, as with both Eastlake and Evans, Etty continued to correspond once he had taken up residency in Venice later that year. Despite initially failing to meet Severn and Westmacott in the capital, Etty seems to have come across them while visiting Naples during the autumn of 1822. During his three week stay in this city, the painter was occupied with sketching from “the fine Antiques dug from Pompeii and Herculaneum”. In a previously unpublished pencil sketch dating from this period, Severn depicts several figures huddled companionably around a table, playing cards (Fig. 56). Intriguingly, the central character in this intimate image bears a striking resemblance to a contemporaneous self-portrait by Etty (Fig. 57). Severn scholar Grant Scott supports this hypothesis by identifying the trio of friends as Etty, Westmacott and Dr. Frederic Hervey Foster Quin. Moreover, I also unearthed a charcoal drawing of an artist busily sketching objects from the antique by candlelight, which claims to portray Etty in Naples (Fig. 58).

Etty maintained these friendly connections throughout his tour, and responded in kind by encouraging his Rome-based colleagues to venture with him to Venice.

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27 RAA, LAW/4/65. William Etty, to Sir Thomas Lawrence, in a letter dated 12 October 1822. The English sculptor Joseph Gott – having been awarded the gold medal for Sculpture in 1819, as well as a small pension from Lawrence – had moved into Severn’s apartment in the summer of 1822.
28 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 121.
29 Scott, 2005: 265.
30 It should be noted that this image is inscribed with the date “Naples, June 1823”, which does not tally with Etty’s visit to the city during the August and September of 1822. However, as Severn scholars Sue Brown and Grant Scott have both advised, Severn was notorious for incorrectly recording dates.
year later, in September 1823, the writer Charles Armitage Brown entertained several of the group in the latter city, and recounted to a friend:

Severn is astonished at my right down English dinners. He, and Messrs Etty and Evans, dined yesterday with me on a boiled leg of mutton, caper sauce and carrots ... Talk indeed of my supper-appetite! Why, I nibble like a mouse in comparison with these canvas gentry, who ate as if they had not been blessed with dinner or supper since they began to brush in Italy.31

Etty’s enduring friendship with Severn is further confirmed by the contents of an extant letter dating from August 1838, in which the latter (who was making a brief return trip to England) politely declines an invitation to dinner, despite the temptation of “your good company and your roast beef”, before thanking the artist for his “kind recollection” of him.32 Chapter I attempted to locate Etty within a set of peers centred in London, and it is now possible to argue that he was far more actively involved with his British contemporaries abroad – the “canvas gentry” – than has previously been thought, thus widening his social world, perhaps by shedding the constraints of polite English society, with its rigid hierarchies.

‘I knelt down in thanks, I kissed my book’

“Dear Venice ... thy pictured glories haunt my fancy now! Venice, the birth-place and cradle of colour, the hope and idol of my professional life”, exclaimed Etty in his Autobiography,33 closely echoing the responses of his former master Henry Fuseli, who, in his ninth lecture, had described this city as “the birth-place and the theatre of Colour”.34 Arriving at the White Lion Hotel in Venice on 17 November 1822, Etty had originally planned upon returning to London by 9 December, but instead found himself “detained a willing prisoner”,35 after having seen “so many things capable of giving me lessons”.36 Of a total of fifteen months in Italy, nine were spent as a resident in Venice, where he acquainted himself first-hand with the colours of Venetian

31 Stillinger, 1966: 141.
33 Etty, 1 February 1849: 38.
34 Fuseli, 1830: 56.
painting and fortified his knowledge of the Old Masters. He even prioritised this experience above exhibiting new work at the Royal Academy's 1823 exhibition: the only year he missed throughout his entire career. Pithy diary entries jotted in one of the artist's illuminating Italian sketchbooks convey the excitement of his first two weeks, during which time he devoured the city's many picturesque sights, painted at its Academy, purchased prints, browsed colour shops and sketched from masterpieces. Adjectives such as “beautiful”, “glorious”, “splendid” and “masterly” punctuate the narrative, associated in particular with the canvases of “our favourite” Veronese, “grand and surprising” Tintoretto, and “clever” Titian (Figs. 59 and 60).37 Such sketchbooks were central to the development of Etty’s pictorial practice while he was overseas, providing the art historian with a privileged glimpse into the personal world of the painter, as well as a fascinating and valuable store of information about his technique, working processes, materials and compositional ideas. He utilised these compact ‘portable studios’ for a wide variety of purposes – artistic, reflective, financial, practical – and their contents range from hurriedly scribbled outline drafts, to carefully finished topographical studies. In one, there is a previously unidentified pencil sketch (Fig. 61) after Alessandro Allori's 1570-72 painting, Pearl Fishers (Fig. 62), which is in Florence’s Palazzo Vecchio. Having created a detailed pencil study of the Bridge of Sighs in Venice (Fig. 63), Etty afterwards converted it into a finished oil painting, exhibited at the Academy in 1835 (Fig. 64). Thus his sketchbooks acted as a repository of imagery to which he could refer at a later date. They also seem to have functioned as a private forum where the artist could experiment with, and elaborate upon, the conceptual preparation of future compositions, including the two works he was to concentrate upon after returning to London. An incident recounted in Etty’s memoirs highlights their importance to him: while en route from Rome to Florence, he discovered to his great dismay that one of his indispensable notepads, whose “blank leaves” were filled “with sketches from the figures of Michael Angelo, sketched from the originals in the Capella Sistina”, had been misplaced. Determined, he set out back along the road, and his relief at finally finding his "lost treasure" is manifest: “I knelt down in thanks, I kissed my book, and I know not what other extravagance I committed in my joy.”38

38 Etty, 1 February 1849: 39.
Once Etty had realised the extent of his predilection for – and artistic allegiance to – the Venetian School, he appears to have created a comprehensive ‘shopping list’ of Old Master paintings, comprising approximately forty-five individual works of art variously found in Rome, Florence and Venice (Fig. 65). Rome’s chief attraction for the artist had been the works of Michelangelo and Raphael, and despite having sketched a number for mnemonic purposes, he maintained that their “qualities may in great measure be got from prints”, while those of the Venetian masters could be gained “only from the pictures themselves”.\(^{39}\) Indeed, Etty’s posthumous sales catalogue of 1850 included prints of Picoli’s engraving after Michelangelo’s *The Last Judgement*, and an entire folio on *The Frescoes’s of M. Angelo in the Sistine Chapel*.\(^{40}\) By contrast, a remarkable profusion of Venetian pictures are enumerated, and ticked off, for his collection of memorials to be completed: even the ten works itemised for facsimiles to be made in Florence and Rome – with the exception of two Van Dycks and a Cigoli – were attributed to Venetian masters. Intriguingly, Etty had a tendency to select particular figures, parts of figures, or figural groups to include in future projects, such as the ‘digger’ (Fig. 66) and ‘puller’ (Fig. 67) which he carefully extracted from Tintoretto’s vast *Crucifixion* (Fig. 68) in the Scuola di San Rocco, Venice. Having identified another canvas that he wanted to copy, *Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife*, by the Florentine painter Joseph Cigoli, he identified just one feature of especial interest – the seductive “leg of Potiphous’s wife” (Fig. 69).

A final productive example of this extrapolation technique and the subsequent integration of details in Etty’s own exhibited output occurs in the fourth item on his list, Bonifacio Veronese’s *Dives and Lazarus* (Fig. 70). Etty had written to Lawrence from Venice in March 1823: “Don’t you admire … the beautiful Paris Bordone, – *Fishermen presenting the Ring to the Doge*? – the pretty subject of Bonifazio, – the *Ricco Epulone*, or bad rich man [Dives and Lazarus]? both in the Academy.”\(^{41}\) In this last image, the Italian painter reimagines Christ’s parable taking place in an aristocrat’s villa, complete with gamblers, courtesans, musicians and the beggar Lazarus, to the right of the composition. The story warns against moral turpitude, as the spectator witnesses the ignorance displayed by Dives (the "bad rich man") and his companions – for after his imminent death he will burn in the fires of hell, while

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\(^{39}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 187.
\(^{40}\) Christie and Manson, 6-14 May 1850: 43-45.
\(^{41}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 169.
Lazarus will be comforted in the lap of Abraham. Previous scholarship has overlooked the fact that in 1838, Etty reduced this panoramic work down to its central group of characters and refigured their pictorial arrangement for his Academy exhibit *Il Duetto* (Fig. 71). Both the stance of the woman playing the lute, and the presence of the black page holding the musical script, powerfully recall Bonifacio Veronese’s painting. Such intriguing appropriations reveal that even fifteen years after his trip, Etty was still returning to and referencing imagery that he had encountered in Italy.

‘Went to the Accademia and drew (applause)’

The *Dives and Lazarus* hung upon the walls of the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia, which Etty frequented on a daily basis during his stay in Venice, taking full advantage of its Schools and formidable art collection. Following its inauguration in 1750, the Accademia was forced to relocate, because of invading Napoleonic forces, in 1807. This move into a cluster of buildings which included the Santa Maria della Carità (designed by Palladio), the Chiesa della Carità and the Scuola della Carità – necessitated their restructuring and modification, resulting in five large rooms on the ground floor for the students’ use, and two exhibition rooms on the floor above (Fig. 72). This educational institution – which in 1822, during Etty’s visit, was situated where the Galleria dell’Accademia now stands and is pictured on the far side of the Grand Canal in Canaletto’s work, *The Stonemason’s Yard* (Fig. 73) – became something of a home from home for the painter. Etty thought it “grand and glorious”, “the best I have seen on the Continent”, containing “a school for Beginners, of the Elements of the Human Figure”, separate Schools for “designing Ornaments, architectural and other; for Perspective, for Engraving, &c.”, as well as his preferred “Life (del Nudo)”. Giuseppe Borsato’s contemporaneous painting, *The Commemoration of Antonio Canova* (Fig. 74), offers a fascinating snapshot of the sumptuous Assembly Room which Etty would have entered on 18 November 1822. It depicts the sculptor’s coffin being laid symbolically at the base of his artistic

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42 From now on, this institution will be referred to as the Accademia.
43 With the renovation completed by 1811, the Gallery and Schools were able to co-exist until 1872, when the latter was relocated to its present site in south-east Dorsoduro.
44 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 159.
predecessor Titian’s Assumption, an event that had taken place only a month before Etty’s arrival.

As well as paintings, there were also two sizeable plaster casts on display in the halls, which had been executed by Canova (a former student of the Accademia) and donated to the institution by his half-brother, the Abate Giovanni Battista Sartori Canova (1755-1858): the Hercules and Lichas (Fig. 75) and Theseus Slaying a Centaur, seen here in Lazzari Francesco’s cross-section (Fig. 76). Etty felt that these and the other casts were “arranged in a way so simple and judicious, as to call forth the high approbation of our Sir Thomas”, in a comment which most likely alludes to the Farsetti collection. Part of this rich collection – formerly housed in the Palazzo Farsetti – comprised copies of original sculptures held within Roman and Florentine museums. Etty quickly established a diurnal routine, not unlike his customary one at home, which involved studying and sketching “in the cold marble halls” during the day, “till my fingers were almost petrified”, before returning to the stove-heated, “comfortable” life classes in the evening, where he drew from nude male models. Whereas at the Royal Academy in London, Etty was acquiring a somewhat unfavourable reputation as a peculiar perpetual student due to his habitual nightly visits to the Life, in Venice he was rewarded for such dedication, and his triumphant performances are well-documented in his extant manuscripts. In his first month, he notes in his journal: “went to the Academia and drew (applause)” and “Academy – finish figure – Professors praised me”. Out of the sixteen diary entries on these two pages, dating from 17 November to 1 December, nine of them are devoted to detailing days spent at the Accademia (Figs. 59 and 60).

Etty expresses unabated delight when Martini, Professor of Painting, pointed a knife at his work and stated that “if he was to prick my painting of the Figure, it would bleed” – a comment which suggests a student seeking and revelling in approbation,

45 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 159.
46 Viola, Vallese and Graham, 2005: 42. The collection was held in a room that was specially designed by the architect Giannantonio Selva.
47 Etty, 1 February 1849: 38.
48 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 160.
49 YAG, YORAG: 2005.488.52.
rather than a self-assured practitioner.\footnote{Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 162. These excerpts are taken from a letter to his brother, Walter, in which he continues his indulgence by recounting the praise lavished upon him by a Professor San Dominichi, who calls the painter ‘Ercole’ (a Hercules)’ and ‘Un genio proprio’ (a true genius).} As was also the case in London, the regulated conformity of the academic environment bestowed upon Etty an element of predictability and a plethora of benefits which reinforced his unwavering devotion to it. Martin Myrone suggests that Etty’s unusually strong connection with the Academy Schools stemmed in part from a lingering sense of alienation on account of his provincial roots: “We may suspect something here of the characteristic over-investment in the relatively autonomous world of the academic by those (like Etty) who consider themselves – and are viewed as – ‘outsiders’.\footnote{Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 178.} I would argue that this notion can usefully be developed further by reviewing Etty’s involvement in academic forums other than those located in London. As well as suggesting links with the emergent Rome Academy, the painter’s diaries and letters inform us that he both visited and studied at numerous different academies across Europe, for example in Paris, Florence, Venice and the newly established School at Modena.\footnote{It should be noted that the institutions listed here are those referenced in Gilchrist, or those that appear in Etty’s extant intermittent correspondence. It is highly likely that the artist also visited others, such as the well-established academies of fine art in Naples and Bologna.} These educational hubs represented reassuring, risk-free environments which allowed a minority of cosmopolitan travellers to flow through their establishments.

Attendance at the life drawing classes provided by these institutions allowed Etty to engage in familiar activities whilst adopting his habitual role of student. Analogous to the way that the artist’s sketchbooks functioned as a type of conveniently transportable studio, the evening classes held at these foreign art Schools allowed Etty to recreate his customary London routine and to practise drawing from the nude male model in a warm, safe and socially acceptable arena. The Life School in the Accademia drew upon canonical classical sources for compositional inspiration, such as casts after antique marbles, as well as Old Master works, including Titian’s St. John the Baptist. A previously unknown study portraying a pair of pugilists, captured by a contemporary student and now held in the Accademia’s archives, exemplifies the types of groupings and attitudes adopted by models, from which Etty would have sketched during his time in Venice (Fig. 77). The drawing delineates two athletic, nude young men in a standard studio set pose, with the identities of the models.
minimally transformed by a few classical props – in this case a large shield – to recreate a range of heroic and capitulating roles. In this tight group, a bearded man is shown standing over his fallen comrade. The latter’s head hangs down heavily, casting a deep shade onto his sunken, twisted torso. His exhausted body is shown in vivid contrast to the lean physique and coiled strength of the upright soldier, who glances alertly around while placing a supportive hand on his friend’s shoulder.

While Etty was in Venice, the Accademia’s President, Leopoldo Cicognara, awarded both Lawrence and his former pupil the prestigious title of Honorary Academician. This event is recorded in the Council’s minutes for 10 May 1823 (Figs. 78 and 79):

To the distinguished Mr. William Etty, painter of history, and renowned for his culture and his works, having been declared by unanimous vote of the body of this Academy and enrolled among the honorary members, the President has the pleasure of issuing the present diploma as act of his investiture.

Venice 10 May 1823.53

This certifies that the distinguished Cavaliere Thomas Lawrence, President of the Royal Academy of London, distinguished for his enlightenment and worthy of singular esteem for his high merit in the fine arts, is acclaimed by this academic body, and elected to the ranks of its honorary members, in testimony of which the President is honoured to present in these letters patent, the solemn act of his investiture.

Venice 10 May 1823.54

These documents – which I discovered in the Accademia’s archives during a research trip to Venice – have not appeared in existing literature. Together with Severn’s sketches, they assist in painting a picture of the artist abroad: socialising, studying and making meticulous memorials for future use.

53 ABAV, 143.68. Council minutes from the Accademia dated 10 May 1823. I am indebted to Michael Barbour for this translation.
54 ABAV, 142.67. Council minutes from the Accademia dated 10 May 1823. I am indebted to Michael Barbour for this translation.
‘A method of his own’ – Etty, Miss Cleaver and Titian’s ‘Flower of the Florentine Gallery’

Etty’s protracted stay in Venice – where he accumulated a rich repository of material – indicates a belief on his part that the Venetian School possessed the secret of colour, which had imbued paintings since the sixteenth century. Indeed, previously unpublished source material in the form of a diary entry by a contemporaneous Grand Tourist named John Hincks, while travelling with his brother, contributes towards our knowledge of the types of methodologies which Etty investigated while attempting to emulate the works of esteemed past masters. Hincks’s enlightening journal reveals that the pair spent lengthy periods in Naples, Rome and Florence. While in this last city, the brothers paid a final visit to the Pitti Palace on 11 July 1823, where they deliberated over the relative merits of Canova’s neoclassical Venus and the antique Medici Venus. Hurrying across the river Arno to the Uffizi, where the latter sculpture was located, John recalls their desire to take one “last lingering look at the exquisite chefs d’œuvre”, before departing for Bologna. Despite their haste, one particular canvas caught the siblings’ attention, but it was not one of those hanging upon the walls of the gallery. Walking through the Tribuna room, they encountered an English painter – whose acquaintance they had first made five days beforehand – hard at work on his coveted replica of an Old Master work: “We remained some time looking over the Copy, which Mr. Etty was making of Titian’s Venus”.55

The “Flower of the Florentine Gallery”, as Etty affectionately termed Titian’s famous Venus of Urbino (Fig. 80), had never yet been “copied as it ought to be” according to Evans, who urged the artist to accomplish the feat. Etty himself was “burning with the desire of copying, large as life, the celebrated picture”, following his seven-month residency in Venice, Titian’s birthplace.56 The “Venus of Titian” is recorded, along with Cardinal Bentivoglio by Van Dyck (Fig. 81), in the aforementioned list of copies he wanted to make while in Florence.57 However, Etty, having decided that a small memorial of the Venus would not suffice, instead ventured to create a full-size facsimile: a canvas measuring 119 by 165 centimetres. This challenging enterprise set him in direct conflict with the Assistant Director of the Uffizi, Baron Montalvi. Viewed as a “Jack in Office”, Montalvi was reputed to have an “enmity to the English”,

55 BRBML, Osborn d408, 285.
56 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 174.
as well as being “pertinacious in creating obstacles” and was only beaten down by a
series of letters from influential contacts, including the ambassador of Florence, Lord
Burghersh. The Director’s procrastination had kept a frustrated Etty “waiting ten
days doing nothing”, although he was elated when his “perseverance and fortitude”
finally triumphed over “official obstructiveness”.58

The challenges which Etty overcame in order to complete his meticulous copy of this
celebrated masterpiece are inferred by the experience of another contemporary
artist. A newly discovered manuscript – which I illustrate here as it has not appeared
in previous scholarship (Figs. 82 and 83) – reveals that in April 1822, an American
painter called William E. West asked for permission from the Director of the Uffizi,
Pietro Benvenuti, to bring the canvas further down the wall, as “copying is rendered
most difficult by its position at a height of many feet and at a point in one of the
corners in front of the windows around the Tribuna”. This request, which had
apparently also been made by a “Carlo Schmidt of Saxony” in 1821, was rejected by
the Director, who felt that Titian’s painting would “be exposed to too harsh a light”.
Benvenuti added that moving one of the Gallery’s most important works had “never
yet been conceded by Your Imperial and Royal Highness if not to some national or
foreign professor in charge of some public institution, who could preserve the lustre
of the originals by means of the faithful copy that he produced”.59 Etty’s replica is
extremely accurate, as though he had benefited from viewing the original at close
proximity: however as this response indicates, it seems unlikely that this would have
been the case.

Etty’s experiences in Venice had equipped him with the confidence and tools to
emulate an artist he had long venerated: a supreme Renaissance Old Master, whose
imagery he had recently memorialised while at the Accademia, and to whose tomb
in the Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari he had made a pilgrimage only a couple of
months earlier (Fig. 84). I would suggest that by undertaking such a large-scale
reproduction of a painting that – for him at least – epitomised the Venetian School,
Etty believed the resulting canvas would not only confirm his knowledge and
understanding of the materials and techniques required for the task, but also go

58 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 181-82.
59 ACBSA, File 47, 1823, 30. I am indebted to Michael Barbour for this translation.
some way towards realising his aspiration to be perceived as a modern master. The quintessential element of the School was that of Venetian colouring – a concept so religiously pursued in Britain that it had become thought of as an elusive secret. The quest to learn this secret had years earlier rocked the Royal Academy, preoccupying the mind of its President, Benjamin West, while creating an air of mistrust amongst the Academicians. During the summer of 1823, the lure of discovering “the key to the secret” behind Venetian colouring took hold of Etty, as John Hincks, reflecting upon his first meeting with the painter on 5 July, observes:

An English Artist, of the name of Etty, was copying one of them [Titian’s Venus] and seemed to be painting in some manner different from the usual method, and to have made a good Copy. He had read Miss Cleaver’s book, and we thought he was trying a method of his own, in some degree connected with it.61

The daughter of William Cleaver – former Bishop of Bangor and St. Asaph – Miss Cleaver was an amateur artist residing in Brighton, who claimed to have accidentally stumbled across a process of painting which bore so close a “resemblance to the Venetian manner” that it was “impossible entirely to reject so many concurring analogies”.62 In 1807, this “ingenious inventress”63 had spilt “some wax on a crayon drawing ... [and] on attempting to scrape off the wax, a glaze was produced, which exhibited the colouring ... which so generally distinguishes works of the old masters”: a chance event which was to inspire her curiosity, and incite her to refine and record this process.64 Her technique relied on the effect of ‘dry colouring’ with wax crayons – one substantiated by the rationale that the weight of historical evidence showed the failure of ‘fluid painting’ in oils to reproduce the tints of the Venetian masters. Originating as a private publication in Brighton, her treatise was first printed in 1815 under the title Some Account of a New Process in Painting, by Means of Glazed Crayons; with Remarks on its General Correspondence with the Peculiarities of the Venetian School. By 1821, Miss Cleaver had gathered sufficient support and funding to produce an expanded edition of her treatise, which circulated widely in London, resulting in a far greater readership.

60 The Times, 5 February 1824: 3.
61 BRBML, Osborn d408, 280.
62 Cleaver, 1821: 4.
63 London Magazine, June 1822: 552.
64 Cleaver, 1821: 1.
Fired by a firm conviction in the veracity of her discovery, Constable recalls that Cleaver had “at length written to the Secretary of State to desire proper trials may be made of it [her process] by some eminent artists”. Paradoxically, despite alluding to her frustrations with the British Institution in the second edition, her pleas were eventually heard by its patron and Director, Sir George Beaumont, who subsequently approached Constable to trial it. Unfortunately, Miss Cleaver deemed Constable’s lone opinion to be inadequate, and insisted that “the Governors of the British Institution … send many artists, and … offer very high premiums for their success”.65 The confidence to demand a troop of painters from Beaumont may belie a false belief in the level of endorsement within the artistic community for her process. A year later, the history painter Richard Westall braved potential public and peer ridicule by exhibiting a *Cupid and Psyche* that was based upon Cleaver’s ‘recipe’ at the Royal Academy in 1822. “If we are rightly informed, this rich, and, we may say, voluptuous display of colouring, is upon the principles of Miss Cleaver’s mode of painting”, stated the arts correspondent for the *Literary Gazette*, before adding: “We do not think Mr. W. has done justice to the new method, or rather, that he has used it in his own way.”66

It is intriguing that Westall is criticised for not tailoring the method to suit his own painterly style – something that Etty was endeavouring to do, as Hincks’s journal suggests. Another review regarded Westall’s *Cupid and Psyche* as an “experiment in what might be termed the new Venetian school”, and thought it “too warm in its colouring … [though] not without some good poetical effect”. This same critic moved directly on to notice Etty in passing, whose own aforementioned *Cupid Sheltering his Darling* (Fig. 26) would have hung only a few frames away: “Etty, Stephanoff, Fradelle, and other colourists, are this year very successful”.67 The art historian John Gage highlights Westall’s example as a singular occurrence of the treatise’s popularity, before Constable’s contempt consigned Cleaver and her explanation of the ‘secret’ to trivial history.68 However, I have discovered that her theories can in fact be linked to a diverse range of artists working in this period, including the established marine and portrait painter Samuel Drummond, who was reported to be

65 Leslie, 1845: 137.
68 Gage, 1993: 213.
trialling Cleaver’s method with his copy after Titian’s Venus and Adonis at the British Institution. Moreover, within a lengthy book review of Cleaver’s 1821 edition, the Literary Gazette was quick to note “the subject has attracted much attention, and that one of our most eminent painters (Sir W. Beechey) is busily employed in ascertaining its merits”.70

It is rather surprising to find that Westall and Beechey number amongst this group, as both had suffered tremendous embarrassment over the Provis scandal, and been immortalised – along with Beaumont – within James Gillray’s 1797 satirical print, Titianus Redivivus; or the Seven Wise-Men Consulting the New Venetian Oracle, – A Scene in ye Academic Grove (Fig. 85). An enraptured Westall is portrayed in the front row of Provis’s hoodwinked students, while in the left-hand corner of the image an ape wearing a dunce’s cap is depicted urinating onto a portfolio belonging to Beechey, dowsing his scepticism. Beaumont’s name is inscribed upon a wing of one of the putti beneath the rainbow, who puff gas from their posteriors over the scene – a reference to his early acquisition of the ‘secret’.71 Yet where the Provises had purposely played upon the competitive rivalries between duped Academicians, Miss Cleaver appears to have harboured honest intentions towards the advancement of the native School of art. According to Hincks, Etty had not only read Cleaver’s treatise, but was critiquing it and developing an advanced methodology of his own to suit and improve his technique. This indicates a preceding period of experimentation – or trial and error – that can only be associated with his extended stay in Venice, where he had studied and sketched from the imagery of Titian, Veronese and Bassano, all of which Cleaver treats in her discourse.72

69 Examiner, 3 November 1822: 698.
70 London Literary Gazette, 1 December 1821: 758.
71 The ‘Venetian secret’ episode plays out across the diaries of the artist Joseph Farington, particularly in the entries dating from 25 November 1796 to August 1797 (Garlick and MacIntyre, 1978-84, 3). For an illuminating discussion on the ‘secret’, its impact and the methods used to investigate Venetian colouring by artists around c.1800, see Rosie Dias’s essay, ‘Venetian Secrets: Benjamin West and the Contexts of Colour at the Royal Academy’ (Monks, Barrell and Hallett, 2013: 111-30).
72 The Italian Schools and artists discussed by Cleaver include: the Italian School of Titian, Bassano, Paulo Veronese and Correggio, the School of Carracci, which includes Hannibal Carracci, Domenichino, Guido, Guercino, Albano, Carlo Cigniani, and the Bolognese School of Carlo Marratti. The level of exposure Miss Cleaver had to works by these artists remains uncertain. However, it seems safe to assume that her academic interest in the Old Masters, coupled with her privileged background, allowed her attendance at the Royal Academy and British Institution exhibitions. For instance, she notes examining a work by Titian belonging to the collection of Lord Grosvenor. Ironically, given her own secret, she even records a brief conversation with Benjamin West – the
Hincks’s diary entry dating from 11 July 1823 is informative and worth quoting in full:

We remained some time looking over the Copy … which was more particularly interesting to us, because though not precisely according to Miss Cleaver’s method, it was painted in a manner different from that usually followed, and it was allowed by everybody to be probably the best Copy that ever was made of the Picture, and one Gentleman, loud in praise of it, declared he had no doubt it would equal the Original. We mentioned to another English Artist who was there, that we thought the Flesh rather too pink. He said, that was a manner different from what the Italians pursued, that instead of painting in at once the colours it was intended to be, as they did, in opaque Colours, he [Etty] paints a Colour which he wishes to shine through the transparent colours he afterwards applies, softening it down to the Tint he wishes. This, we imagined, bore a strong resemblance to one part of Miss Cleaver’s plan.73

Although Hincks had yet to see the finished product when judging the flesh “rather too pink”,74 Etty’s friend and fellow student, William Hilton, privately noted that he too thought the former’s facsimile far too red in colour in comparison to the Titian, while viewing the original on his own Continental travels in 1825.75 Etty’s method – of scumbling through the upper layers of paint and softening them down towards the ground in order to achieve the desired tint – is in line with that expounded in Cleaver’s treatise. The author stresses the importance of avoiding “any shadowing but what the ground supplied”, regarding it as “one of the most important principles of the process; namely, to paint light upon shade and only light”.76 It should be noted at this juncture that Etty had already grasped the rudiments of this technique: “Paint with one colour at a time, in Flesh, or at the most with two”, he notes in around 1814, “‘twill give cleanness and clearness of tint. And let each layer of Colour be seen through. Or, in other words, manage it so, by scumbling, that the tints underneath appear. It will give depth, and a fleshiness of effect, impossible to get by solid

President at the centre of the Provis storm – in which they discussed the Venetian use of black gauze (Cleaver, 1821: 65-66).

73 BRBML, Osborn 408, 285-86.
74 Intriguingly, Drummond received a strikingly similar criticism: “Mr. DRUMMOND has adopted in his TITIAN’S Venus and Adonis, the presumed secret of the Venetian material and process of colour, discovered by a lady. The back of Venus does not belie the goddess of TITIAN, but the face of Adonis is a pinky deviation from him and nature” (Examiner, 3 November 1822: 698).
75 Pointon, 1972: 343.
76 Cleaver, 1821: 69-70.
colour.” The extent to which Etty conformed to the Cleaver blueprint is unclear, but Hincks’s commentary is instructive in illuminating the painter’s process of working: Etty entertained and conflated multiple points of reference – whether derived from an English amateur’s treatise or from the imagery of an illustrious Old Master.

Etty cherished his completed copy of the *Venus of Urbino* (Fig. 86), the production of which had reinforced the artist’s belief that he was capable of reproducing elusive age-old techniques. The canvas remained in his possession until his death in 1849, despite his repeatedly receiving “high offers” from interested parties. Having returned to London in early 1824, Etty ensured that the *Venus* was prominently displayed in his studio. He then invited the wealthy patron, Sir George Beaumont – who was so enamoured with the Venetian School and who had been embroiled in the search for the ‘secret’ at the turn of the century – to pay him a visit. An undated letter from Beaumont to Etty hints at the contents of the artist’s original invitation:

> I am well aware your sketches from the Venetian Masters must be highly interesting and when I come to London I shall with great pleasure call. But my views of gratification are by no means confined to these sketches; your own works will be the grand object I shall look forward to with the greatest pleasure.\(^{79}\)

Such a response must have delighted the artist, with its allusions to future sponsorship, and the two may have even have discussed the benefits and drawbacks of Cleaver’s methodology. Unfortunately, however, Beaumont was in the twilight of his years and focused his activities upon gifting his finest paintings to the nation, in support of establishing a National Gallery before his death in 1827, rather than on identifying and patronising modern British talent. Other contemporaries were similarly intrigued by the “goodly harvest” which Etty had reaped,\(^{80}\) as evidenced by the following excerpt from a previously unknown and unpublished letter by David Wilkie in the Getty Research Institute: “May I take the liberty of requesting that you will allow me to call upon you to see the copys you have been making in Italy.”\(^{81}\)

\(^{77}\) Gaunt and Roe, 1943: 55.

\(^{78}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 182. The Royal Scottish Academy purchased the work for ninety pounds in 1853 and retained the coveted canvas in its collection, despite transferring many other Etty paintings to the National Galleries of Scotland in 1910 (Soden, 2006, 1: 99).


\(^{80}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 173.

\(^{81}\) GRI, 870357, Item 50. David Wilkie, to William Etty, in a letter dated 11 April 1824.
'We anticipate works ... that will rival those of the admired old masters'

Keen to present a distillation of his improved pictorial vocabulary, Etty exhibited *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons* (Fig. 8) at the 1824 Royal Academy summer show. As the painter’s European travels had seen him absenting himself from the 1823 exhibition, the media eagerly anticipated the display of the latest output produced by this “rising celebrity” at Somerset House.\(^{82}\) Indeed, the *Literary Gazette* had reported upon his extended stay at the Accademia, renowned as a “School of Colour”, where he could absorb himself in a grand *salle* replete with paintings by such venerable past masters as Titian, Tintoretto and Paris Bordone. This same correspondent felt compelled to “blush to think that the School of so great a nation as our own should be crammed in such a corner, when I see how things are done here”.\(^{83}\) Etty himself was described as being equally excited at the prospect of revealing his newly acquired knowledge to the public: according to the *Somerset House Gazette*, such was “his ardour” to produce an “elegant composition” that he was “seen at his post in the Drawing Academy the evening after his arrival”. Further heightening readers’ expectations, the paper then exclaimed: “we anticipate works from his elegant pencil, that will rival those of the admired old masters, and add a distinguished name to the list of masters of our own school”.\(^{84}\)

Press commentary of this nature suggests that Etty was encouraged to craft, cultivate and carve out a public role as a ‘modern’ Old Master painter – one who could be seen as epitomising the native School and could be compared favourably with esteemed Continental past artists. This notion has not been fully analysed by existing literature on Etty. Although Britain was able to boast some internationally acclaimed artists – Lawrence for portraiture, Turner for landscape and Wilkie for genre – the Academy’s entrenched values decreed that the British School must compete with those of Italy, France and the Low Countries in history painting, the most elevated and prestigious form of art. As the portrait and subject painter Edward Daniel Leahy stated in a letter of 1824 to the *London Literary Gazette*: “the English name is undistinguished in the schools of painting; and, at least in the higher department, where invention dictates

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\(^{82}\) *Repository of Arts*, 1 March 1823: 178.
\(^{83}\) *Literary Gazette*, 22 March 1823: 188.
\(^{84}\) *Somerset House Gazette*, 28 February 1824: 331.
and imagination sways, our reputation is subordinate and eclipsed”.85 Etty and his contemporaries – in particular Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Hilton – all aspired to depict history and inevitably faced comparison with predecessors such as Titian, Poussin and Rubens, especially when the works of these renowned artists flooded the British art markets in the wake of the Napoleonic wars.

Moreover, the growing number and diversity of public exhibitions, along with the purchase of John Angerstein’s impressive private collection for the inauguration of the new National Gallery in 1824, resulted in increased public access to Continental art. Given these changing circumstances, it is hardly surprising to find that in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, British painters were remarkably cognisant of and sensitive to the onerous burden of their artistic inheritance. Within his discussion of Turner’s complex engagement with the Masters, David Solkin speaks of the artist’s “acute sense of his own belatedness” and states: “the legacy of past art now imposed itself as an altogether more weighty and daunting presence”.86 Painters, both individually and as a collective, were expected to simultaneously emulate, rival and even exceed the achievements of their eminent precursors. While debating Turner’s confrontations with, as well as contemplation and consumption of, Old Master paintings, Ian Warrell finds “a broadly similar pattern of interest and involvement … in the work of contemporary artists as diverse as David Wilkie, William Etty … [and] William Hilton”.87 In this sense at least, it is possible to align Turner and Etty’s productions, as both were part of a complicated contemporaneous project that involved recycling the imagery of revered artistic predecessors.

“Mr. Etty is one of the aspiring few of the English school”, declared the Somerset House Gazette, “who having ventured upon this unfrequented and perilous path to fame [history painting], has neither loitered on his way, nor turned him back”.88 The time-honoured mythical legend of Pandora’s birth had the potential to pull together a number of different artistic strands, which would act as a statement of Etty’s future intent: a concentration on the classical tradition, reverence of the female form, attention to Venetian colouring and even moral didacticism. Pandora had been the

85 London Literary Gazette, 11 September 1824: 587.
86 Solkin, 2009: 18.
87 Solkin, 2009: 55.
88 Somerset House Gazette, 28 February 1824: 330.
subject with which James Barry (1741-1806), history painter and former Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy, hoped to secure his reputation (Fig. 87). For him, as William Pressly explains, the theme had represented “a sublime vehicle for his views on the role of art and artists”, which would “reveal high-minded moral truths that will instruct and enlighten his audience”.

‘Such a picture not only attracts, but fixes the attention’

For his version of the theme, Etty produced a vivid canvas illustrating the creation and celebration of Pandora, who was fashioned by the god Vulcan on airy Olympus (Fig. 8). The numerous preparatory drawings and sketches devoted to this composition suggest that a significant investment of time and energy went into each stage of its production. These preliminary studies differ considerably in both scale and media – ranging from the small graphite drawings that are scattered throughout his Italian notebooks (Fig. 88), where he elaborated on its pictorial organisation, to the medium-sized oil and pen coloured draft version in the Tate (Fig. 89). There also exists a large, unfinished *modello* at the City Art Gallery, Birmingham (Fig. 90). Dennis Farr speculates that the existence of this unusually sizeable ‘sketch’ suggests Etty originally intended to paint the *Pandora* on a much grander scale, but that he “abandoned” this canvas in favour of a more “compact and balanced composition”. It also seems likely that, given the limited time period between his return to London in late January, and the opening of the Academy show in April – conflated with the fact that he was under some pressure to showcase new work – the painter decided to settle for a canvas with more manageable, and saleable, dimensions.

Reviewing this assortment of draft versions reveals the trajectory of the composition, which seems to have developed in a fluid and considered manner from the first hurried pencil outlines in his private sketchbooks to the finished exhibition piece. In his final rendering (Fig. 8), the painter purposefully modifies Pandora’s posture and adds the plinth on which she stands – both elements which enhance the statuesque, otherworldly feel of the painting, while rooting her in this world. Moreover, it is Pandora, and not Vulcan, who now turns to glance up towards the

89 Pressly, 1983: 22-23.
90 Farr, 1958: 45.
golden box in the top right-hand corner of the image. By his own admission, however, Etty seems to have completed the Academy canvas at considerable speed: he proudly claimed to have executed it from start to finish “in a few weeks”. The London Magazine noticed the rapidity of its realisation, remarking that “it was indiscreet in him to send out a picture so hastily got up; – it may prejudice his interest”. Intriguingly, although a cursory glance at the painting suggests it is highly polished, my close analysis of the painted surface revealed an unexpected element of incompleteness. In places, Etty appears to have failed to finish painting over his original pencil markings. Foremost amongst these unresolved areas is the pencil outline of a face which peers out from Vulcan’s left forearm (Fig. 91). Hands are also sketchily executed – especially Cupid’s clenched left hand, which grips his bow, his mother’s hands and the intertwined ones of the spring and summer seasons, above his head.

It is clear that Etty had assimilated many stylistic traits gleaned from his recent study of, and exposure to, Venetian painting into his repertoire. Excited by the richness of colour he had witnessed, his Pandora displays a visual exuberance: all the primary colours exist in their most vibrant state, producing a spectacular showpiece, which, for one reviewer, “sparkles in its voluptuous intensity”. His new-found painterly assurance can be detected in the impasto brushwork that shimmers across the surface, where rich red swirling drapery carries the action in a semi-circle around the top half of the central statue. The lushness of Etty’s colour scheme also confirms how much the artist had profited from his daily experience of the vernacular of Venetian art, where brightly painted ceilings – often depicting heavenly coronations – grace the lavish interiors of galleries and palaces throughout the city, for example Veronese’s Apotheosis of Venice (Fig. 92). One contemporary correspondent exclaimed: “the whole composition is rich and splendid, resembling the Venetian school ... Such a picture not only attracts, but fixes the attention.”

This sentiment is echoed in the words of a posthumous writer, for whom Etty’s Pandora was “in spirit, a reminiscence of the antique, and of the great Italians”, and

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91 Etty, 1 February 1849: 39.
93 European Magazine, June 1824: 553.
94 Circulator of Useful Knowledge, 12 February 1825: 100.
who found its colouring “deeper in tone” and “more resplendent” as a result of his year and a half’s “incessant study in Italy [which] had completed his education as a painter”.

I would suggest that Etty’s pictorial trajectory is articulated formally in the canvas through the female figures: the reclining Venus to the left, which powerfully recalls those of both the Venus in the *Coral Finder* (Fig. 7) and the Venus-like Cleopatra (Fig. 18), is no longer the focal point of the composition. She has now been replaced, in the form of a mortal Pandora, who is presented in all her blushing glory. Indeed, one critic, struggling to decide between “the transcendant charms of Venus and those of Pandora”, eventually settles on the latter, eulogising: “there are certain exquisite flesh tints about the bosom of Pandora of magic delicacy … which perhaps have never been surpassed in painting.”

As well its eye-catching colour scheme, the painting’s appeal would have been further enhanced by its performative aspects. As Leo Costello notes: “Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, paintings were often referred to as ‘performances’ and the exhibition rooms of the Academy and the British Institution were sometimes discussed as ‘theatres’.” In his 1958 catalogue, Dennis Farr draws attention to the “relief-like effect” of the picture, and employs a theatrical analogy to describe the depiction of the characters, which “seem to be projecting from the flat surface of a backdrop”. Intriguingly, other art forms in the early 1820s which were based on the well-known myth of Pandora’s birth included musical productions. In January 1822 – just a few months before Etty and Evans left London – the *Morning Post* advertised a “luminous” new ballet at The King’s Theatre, Drury Lane, produced by a “Mr. ANATOLE, the new Ballet-master, entitled *Pandora*”. The celebrated Madame Anatole, who was making her debut on the London stage, seems have made an attractive heroine, “elegant in her deportment”. In Etty’s painting, the smoky looking atmospheric cloudscape and billowing red drapery, reminiscent of theatrical curtains, create an exciting and actively dramatic scene. Viewers may well have

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95 *Dublin University Magazine*, May 1855: 511.
96 *European Magazine*, June 1824: 553.
98 Farr, 1958: 45.
99 *Morning Post*, 14 January 1822: 3. A correspondent for the *Examiner* offered an interesting insight into the special effects involved in the production, which included: “Prometheus stealing fire, and the opening of Pandora’s box, with a mighty rush of very ugly red and green devils, who flourish about with flaming brands, rather stifling to the spectators” (*Examiner*, 20 January 1822: 44).
associated the character of Pandora with the graceful Madame Anatole, aligning Etty's female protagonist with a contemporary celebrity.

After Etty's disappointment at discovering that the *Cupid Sheltering his Darling* (Fig. 26) “should be judged worthy of no better place than that of being placed by the floor” by the Hanging Committee at the 1822 Academy exhibition, he must have been relieved that his *Pandora* received a more favourable position in the wall hang only two years later. However, despite the excited media reports surrounding the artist's new material, the canvas – like the *Cleopatra* before it – was not actually placed within the Great Room itself, but in the adjacent, smaller School of Painting. This location was not without its benefits, as an excerpt from a newspaper review of the following year reveals: “The Inner Room, or School of Painting, is not inferior in light, and need not be so in sterling attraction, to the great room”. Thus we can surmise that the painting was well-lit – allowing for the artist's new skills to be seen to their best advantage.

‘*Pandora, the heathen Eve, having been formed by Vulcan as a statue*’

Etty makes reference to a range of classical and contemporary sculptural works in this image. One unmistakeable pictorial allusion is to the iconic *Venus de Milo* (Fig. 93), which I would argue provided the model for his statuesque Pandora. Etty had recently viewed the Hellenistic *Venus* in the Louvre, where it was on display at that institution's 1822 biennial exhibition, having been presented as a gift to the French National Gallery, following its discovery and excavation on Melos just two years previously. This sculpture served as a highly suitable replacement for the famed *Venus de Medici*, which had been successfully returned to Italy under Canova's direction in 1815. The contemporary British press went into rhapsodies about the marble:

... among all the fine statues of this kind ... there is perhaps none worthy to be compared to this, if not for the fineness, the purity, and the correctness of the forms, at least for the grandeur of the style, the

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100 RAA, LAW/4/8. William Etty, to Sir Thomas Lawrence, in a letter dated 26 March 1823.
fullness of the naked parts, and, above all, for the beauty of the execution.102

Moreover, a correspondent for the *New Monthly Magazine* pronounced admiringly: “Words cannot speak its beauties, much less overrate them. It is faultless in its class, and its class is the highest in art. It is a perfectly pure and natural representation … of female beauty”. Interestingly, this writer chose to refer to the *Venus* as the classical sculptor’s “Promethean creation” – in other words, his perfect Pandora.103 Echoing the phraseology of the commentator above, this passage highlights the ‘purity’, ‘naturalness’ and ‘beauty’ of the marble – terms highly apposite for the portrayal of a “heathen Eve”. The catalogue entry which accompanied Etty’s *Pandora* was supplemented both by a succinct summary of the scene depicted: “Pandora, the heathen Eve, having been formed by Vulcan as a statue, and animated by the Gods, is crowned by the Seasons with a garland of flowers”, and a rhyming couplet: “To deck her brows, the fair tressed Seasons bring / A garland breathing all the sweets of spring.” – Elton’s Hesiod”.104

Tall, elegant and statuesque, Pandora wears an otherworldly, dislocated look, which renders her timeless and ethereal. Compositional affinities between the antique marble and Etty’s central female figure include the *contrapposto* pose, lowered right shoulders, tilted heads, diaphanous drapery slipping down and similarly well-defined abdominal muscles (Figs. 94 and 95). Elizabeth Prettejohn, who takes a “reception-based approach” in her illuminating article on the *Venus de Milo*, notes that the Melian’s “armless silhouette was both immediately recognisable … and specially resonant, perhaps, for the sensibility of the Romantic period; thus its visual appearance was modern, in one way, as well as ancient in another”.105 Etty has added arms, but ensured they are kept to her sides, allowing her chest to be fully seen. Yet

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103 *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 November 1822: 466.
104 Royal Academy of Arts, 1824: 18. Incidentally, it should be noted that this appears to be a misattribution, as these verses are actually taken from the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Cooke’s translation of Hesiod, rather than Etty’s contemporary, Charles Abraham Elton’s: a fact that has apparently gone unnoted by modern scholarship. Cooke’s *The Works of Hesiod*, which was first published in 1728, became the principal popular English translation of the Greek historian, resulting in the author’s nickname, ‘Hesiod Cooke’. Elton’s translated version reads: “With chains of gold her shapely person hung; / Round her smooth brow the beauteous-tressed Hours, / A garland twined of spring’s purpureal flowers” (Elton, 1815: 13-14).
while the Venus is fully formed, Pandora is shown at a transformative moment mid-metamorphosis, as colour starts to seep into her pale, idealistic facial features, giving her a flushed appearance, and her sculpted contours yield and soften as she becomes animated. The tools of the blacksmith god, recently employed to mould, fashion and carve, can be seen lying in the rather murky, male right-hand corner of the scene (Fig. 96). One contemporary, observing Etty’s painting when it was re-displayed at the British Institution in 1825, found “a spice of” a “French statue-like appearance of design” within it, and “a classical spirit diffused throughout the movement and positions of the figures”.

The top of a fluted, circular pedestal lies semi-obscured beneath the rounded clouds, which emphasises Pandora’s immobility, while also confirming her origins in stone. The London Magazine commented upon these sculptural analogies, noting: “The cloud … is like white marble … and the finger of Pandora touching it, is turned back as if pressed upon a table”. Linking his conception to a universally celebrated antique statue anchors Etty’s composition, connecting his work with the venerated classical tradition and demonstrating lessons learnt from his studious aesthetic tour. The fact that the Venus de Milo had only been discovered in 1820 gives the work a modern, topical dimension.

Tellingly, Etty appears to have been thinking about his painting in sculptural terms since as early as 1820, when he produced a preparatory sketch of the same subject for display at the British Institution. He had put considerable thought into the creation of this earlier oil study: “‘Art’ is to be consulted for it,” he notes, “in the Mercury, the Torso, Flora, perhaps Niobe”. From this remark, it is possible to deduce that Etty intended to make reference to a series of famous classical statues – some of which he would later view in person while abroad. Meanwhile, it is likely that the Pandora theme itself was originally inspired by the imagery of the York-born sculptor John Flaxman, especially his Pandora Attired (Fig. 97), which had illustrated an edition of the Hesiod, published in 1817. Etty in fact possessed five volumes of Flaxman’s outline illustrations “in a small wooden cabinet specially devoted to them”, which he treasured. The Horae (or goddesses of the seasons) that can be

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106 Examiner, 20 February 1825: 115.
108 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 89.
seen flying in from the left of Flaxman's image, clasping sprigs of foliage, are re-deployed in Etty's painting engaged in the very act of crowning Pandora – encircling, emphasising and enhancing her modelled figure. Choosing to depict his heroine as the only standing adult character, Etty dispenses with Flaxman's three Graces, who surround her adjusting her drapery, thus highlighting the solitude and purity of the faultless statue before she becomes animated, and, eventually flawed.

As I elucidated in the previous chapter, Antonio Canova's interest in mythological subjects within a broadly classical tradition greatly appealed to both Etty and many of his peers. After the sculptor's death, he reflected that: “Numerous pensioners on his bounty, studying the Art, have to lament his loss”. Intriguingly, the standing character of Cupid to the left of Etty's *Pandora* bears a striking resemblance to Canova's much celebrated statue, entitled *Cupid* (Fig. 98). This work had been brought to England in 1817, and purchased by Lord Darnley, who was to commission Etty's 1826 *The Choice of Paris* (Fig. 16). The sculpture was publically exhibited at London's European Museum from 1817 and had remained on display following its acquisition thanks to the requests of "several distinguished Amateurs". Casts after Canova's marble were also produced, one of which stands in Venice's Correr Museum (Fig. 99). Both Cupids lean on their right leg grasping a tall bow in their left hand. An advantage which the painter had over sculptors was the ability to animate figures through colour, and his Cupid is pictured with a golden bow, and brightly painted wings (Fig. 100). Through this diverse assemblage, or amalgamation, of sculptural appropriations, Etty endows his mythological creation with a degree of gravitas, sanctioned not only by Europe's foremost modern sculptor, but also by the example of antiquity.

As well as showcasing his improved colouring skills and alluding to numerous classical and contemporary sculptural works, Etty's *Pandora* exhibits an intriguing gender divide. At the start of the year, depicted on the left-hand side of the canvas,

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111 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 129.
112 Etty had paid a second visit to Canova's workshop after his death, which likely contained this statue, or a copy after it.
113 *Morning Chronicle*, 26 May 1817: 1.
114 Although colouring Cupid's wings was a pictorial convention, the *Edinburgh Magazine* disparaged Etty's depiction of the god's wings in his 1822 work *Cupid Sheltering his Darling* as anachronistic: "stolen from Pidcock's menagerie of strange birds" (*Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1822: 21).
reside predominantly female characters, dressed in soft, light, pastel fabrics, while
to the right-hand side the tableau noticeably dims and takes on a more sombre tone,
as spring moves towards autumn. Here, the viewer is presented with largely male
figures, clad in darker, heavier drapes and anchored by the swarthy solidity of
Vulcan, whose huge foot presses powerfully down upon the frame. Pandora’s
chiselled form stands suspended in the pictorial centre – poised between the
carefree, affectionate scenes taking place to her right, and the subliminal threat
symbolised by the tantalising golden box borne towards her by the winged
messenger god, Mercury. Formally, this danger is signified by the way that Pandora
turns her face and lifts her eyes towards it, in a gesture which casts one side of her
complexion into shade, reflective of the catastrophic evils that she will inflict upon
the world.

I would argue that this trajectory of narratives can be read as allegorising the shift in
Etty’s own pictorial practice. Thus, the types of mythical, poetic and amorous themes
so characteristic of his pre-tour output are symbolised and sustained by the
embracing characters inhabiting the ephemeral ‘feminine’ half of the painting – in
particular the Venus and Cupid dyad – while weightier, more threatening narratives
start to emerge from the deep chiaroscuro in the ‘masculine’ half. The journalist
Charles Westmacott, discussing the Pandora, indicates that Etty was becoming
recognised as possessing a distinctive artistic signature:

There is a captivating style of Painting that is not natural, and yet
blends with it so much poetic inspiration and celestial beauty, that we
are irresistibly compelled to admire in despite of our more calm
judgement. Mr Etty has a style of his own. It is nothing earthy ...

The Academy’s swift response to the critical success garnered by this picture was to
bestow upon Etty the coveted title of Associate Royal Academician in November
1824 – just a few months after the exhibition closed its doors on 10 July.

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Royal Academy exhibition.
116 This was in fact the painter’s third and most desired accolade, as he had previously been
granted honorary diplomas by both the Venetian and Charleston Academies.
‘He has now come forward in a new character’

A year later, in 1825, Etty exhibited *The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished* (Fig. 9) at the Royal Academy’s summer exhibition. In this work, he has simplified the compositional architecture and his idealised divinities come crashing down from the ephemeral cloudscape onto the hard earth, as human warriors engaged in mortal acts of combat. Etty’s striking shift in tone, style, scale and theme was almost ubiquitously applauded: “Mr. Etty, an artist who has hitherto appeared before the public only in a few small easel-pictures ... He has now come forward in a new character – as a painter in the great style of epic composition”,¹¹⁷ declared the *Parthenon*, while the *Morning Chronicle* unreservedly pronounced the work “one of the finest specimens of historical talent that the English school has yet produced”.¹¹⁸

A comparative table can usefully and succinctly illuminate the trajectory of Etty’s artistic style, by collating a selection of the critical terms which his 1824 and 1825 Academy exhibits generated:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where the Pandora is:</th>
<th>The Combat is:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mythical</td>
<td>Historical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanciful</td>
<td>Judicious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluptuous</td>
<td>Monumental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannerist</td>
<td>Imaginative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celestial</td>
<td>Classical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captivating</td>
<td>Sedate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich</td>
<td>Pure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resplendent</td>
<td>Subdued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brilliant</td>
<td>Bold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delicate</td>
<td>Violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendent</td>
<td>Heroic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splendid</td>
<td>Sublime</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Combat* is a drama between three characters – two males and one female – in this pared down, more brutal picture. A pair of strong crossed diagonals traverse the canvas, formed by entangled bodies and interwoven limbs. At the epicentre, three elbows combine to form a central fulcrum, connecting and trapping the entwined trio of protagonists in a motionless moment between life and death. Symbolically,

¹¹⁷ Parthenon, 11 June 1825: 8.
¹¹⁸ Morning Chronicle, 3 May 1825: 3.
the old tree to the right of the scene has already lost a large branch – or limb – and a snapped sword lies on the dark ground. This passage of maximum intensity, rendered by a temporary stay of execution within a tense and fluid scene of violent movement, enhances the painting’s emotional and narrative effect. Etty’s increasing painterly assurance was summed up by a contemporary critic:

In his last year’s picture of Pandora Crowned, Mr. Etty’s various and rapidly improved pencil exhibited his taste to great advantage; but in his present picture, The Combat, he surprises with high principles and masculine powers of drawing, composition, colour and expression, and in a subject where they are difficult to accomplish, for the figures, which are larger than life, are nearly naked.119

Perhaps the most remarkable formal aspect of Etty’s 1825 Combat is its monumentality. Over twelve times larger than its predecessor, this major, life-sized and provocatively ambitious painting was unequivocally designed to make an impact – on a colossal scale (see Appendix F). Having recently received the accolade of Associate, Etty set out determinedly to produce a work that would not only consolidate his academic credentials, but also showcase his talents in a more traditional, weightier kind of history painting. Although students were not officially required to submit a diploma picture until they received full Academician status, the premium Etty placed upon this composition suggests he intended it to act as a type of quasi-diploma piece that would secure him a place in the Great Room at Somerset House. While maintaining a concentration upon colouring, spectacle and theatricality, Etty’s Combat invites a deeper reading than that required by Pandora, in which a carefully devised fusion of technical and compositional elements had worked in concert with colour to set the painter’s post-tour imagery apart from that produced before. The contemporary media once again generated anticipatory excitement around the picture pre-exhibition, and emphasised both its size and noble theme. “Mr. Etty has a heroic subject … on a grand scale, and one of the boldest attempts of our native school”, declared a correspondent for the London Literary Gazette in late April 1825, before adding: “It was not completed when we saw it, but promised to be a lasting monument of the artist’s powers and fame.”120

119 Examiner, 8 May 1825: 290.
120 London Literary Gazette, 30 April 1825: 283.
Once the exhibition opened to the public on 2 May 1825, the newly elected Associate found that he was no longer relegated to one of the “side tables” at Somerset House’s “banquet”, but had instead been invited to dine at the prestigious upper table alongside other similarly decorated painters.121 Indeed, his submission was allocated entry number one in the gallery catalogue and hence would have hung imposingly above the entrance door on the north wall of the Great Room. “No. 1 is The Combat ... by W. Etty, the newly created associate, who does so great credit to his electors”, noted one critic approvingly.122 Audiences were astounded to behold a very different type of picture to the previous year’s Pandora, which, as was widely reported in the papers, had received the prestigious patronage of the Academy’s President, Sir Thomas Lawrence.123 The majority of critics deployed a very similar vocabulary to one another in their commentary surrounding the canvas, with a commentator for the New Monthly Magazine stating that the painter’s skills were displayed “in a new and striking light”.124 Having grown in technical assurance and aptitude, Etty muted his palette to suit and enhance this sombre scene: “the colouring, though perhaps somewhat too glowing, is a good deal softened down”, remarked one reviewer.125 His sophisticated colour scheme was described as “pure” and “perfectly still and sedate,” and was lauded as paralleling the superiority of the Venetians. “In colour this picture strongly reminds us of the great heroes of the Venetian school”, declared the correspondent for the European Magazine.126 Especially admired was the carefully graduated variation in complexion from “the deep sunburnt tone of the conqueror’s figure” to the translucent “brilliant softness” of the pleading female.127 Indeed, the hard, brown bark of the tree and the dark-skinned trunk of the victor, positioned either side of the exposed victim, seem to reinforce his helpless plight by hemming him in, as he is forced to kneel in defeat.

What, then, was the catalyst that galvanised the painter into focusing his mind upon a vast historical and heroic subject: one that marked a significant departure from his usual output? I would suggest that Etty’s assiduous attendance at the evening life

121 Somerset House Gazette, 22 May 1824: 94.
122 London Magazine, 1 June 1825: 256.
123 Thomas Lawrence purchased Etty’s Pandora for approximately 300 guineas (Farr, 1958: 150).
124 New Monthly Magazine, 1 June 1825: 252.
125 Literary Chronicle, 7 May 1825: 301.
127 New Monthly Magazine, 1 June 1825: 252.
classes provided by the Accademia in Venice profoundly shaped the pictorial realisation of the *Combat* (Fig. 9). It appears that the emphasis placed upon conflict and combative poses in this foreign Academy formed the ideological background from which he drew inspiration for his evolving composition. Such a hypothesis is supported by my discovery of another contemporaneous pencil sketch held within the archives of the Accademia, created by a student in 1823 (Fig. 101). This study depicts a well-built nude male model wearing a helmet and clasping a shield in his left arm, leaning forwards as if preparing to strike his prone opponent, who is attempting to flee. Divested of props, the subjugated soldier looks back helplessly into the eyes of his fierce adversary, whose right hand is balled menacingly into a fist as if clutching an imaginary sword. Chiaroscuro is deployed to emphasise the pair’s muscular frames, while the shield casts an ominous shade across the back of the defeated soldier. Engaging in detailed studies such as this while on his tour, may well have been a significant reason behind Etty’s shifting his focus from the sprawl of mythical characters and embellished pictorial rhetoric of the *Pandora*, to the intense concentration of human emotional drama displayed in the *Combat*.

With this in mind, the demarcation of the muscles that protrude from beneath the skin of the victor’s robust torso in the *Combat* is particularly pronounced and this introduces a theme that became a recurring area of concern for the artist’s detractors. Etty had a propensity to focus pictorial attention upon the torsos of his figures, sometimes to the detriment of their extremities. In this particular case, however, it was the depiction of the muscles themselves that caused problems for one contemporary critic, Charles Knight, who elaborated upon the matter in a discourse entitled *Anatomical Artists*. Knight begins by allowing that “there is no picture in our exhibition of this year so much praised as Etty’s”, before directing his reader to “look at the figure of the man about to strike”, whose muscles, he states, are overtly exaggerated, producing an unrealistically “violent”, almost disfigured effect: “Mr. Etty must know that painting *figures* is different from painting *monstrosities*”. For Knight, then, Etty had overstepped the boundaries of propriety by revealing the internal mechanisms of the body, where decorum required him to “paint what we all can see, without our ever having been present in a dissecting-room, and keep his science merely as a corrector”.128

A related critical concern was the painter’s apparent failure, in this picture, to reconcile the observational skills required in the studio with the presentation of a nude in public. To this end, several detractors disparaged what they saw as a too transparent transportation from studio to story, such as the reviewer for the *Parthenon*, who commented: “His figures ... partake too much, in some particular parts, of the character of the hired model”. In his eyes, the fact that Etty was apt to portray the studio in his finished paintings – and to make its workings too visible – by extension rendered his nudes somehow too naked:

What interest can be felt in three academy figures, two men slaughtering each other, and a naked woman struggling between them? ... Mr. Etty is the painter of Loves and Graces, Psyches and Cleopatras; with those his delicacy of pencil and his delicacy of taste are congenial, and to those let him adhere.

Etty was certainly aware that in order to preclude this type of criticism, it was necessary to align his painting with a high art tradition focusing upon such heroic or epic themes as violence, battle and armed conflict, so that he might redefine himself and his output against this particular type of history painting. Thus he sought to give credence to his historical work by alluding to an array of relevant venerable precedents, drawn from antiquity and the Renaissance masters.

In Venice, for inspiration, Etty had completed a series of careful pencil sketches (Figs. 102 and 103) after Titian’s *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Fig. 104). The iron grip of the conqueror’s left hand upon the head of the vanquished man in Etty’s *Combat* powerfully recalls that of Abraham’s upon a kneeling Isaac, while both bearded central characters raise their strong, sword-wielding right arms in preparation to strike. Intriguingly, Etty also extends the iconography of the small sapling and hewn wood pictured in Titian’s work and transforms them into the trunk of his ancient, gnarled tree, with old wounds from severed branches. There is a colour reversal at play here – whereby the orangey brown hue of Abraham’s mantle in Titian’s image reappears in the cloth wound around the victim’s shoulder in Etty’s canvas. His victor is clad in a dusky pink that is reminiscent of the colour of the sacrificial Isaac’s clothing. Another point of departure for the artist lies in the depiction of the

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vanquished man. The excessive musculature exhibited by his torso provoked one contemporary critic to claim that the “upper part of the figure, perhaps, has too near a resemblance to that of the Centaur, as represented by GUIDO, when struck by the arrow of Hercules, in the act of carrying off Dejanira”. Indeed, the thrown back head and outstretched arms of the doomed warrior are reminiscent of Reni’s earlier composition (Fig. 105), which Etty was likely to have encountered while visiting the Louvre on his tour.

‘If Mr. Etty borrowed from the poets yesterday, he can lend to them today’

Naturally, the new pictorial direction that Etty was perceived to have taken with the Combat also elicited an alternative type of response from the viewer. In the case of the poet Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-38), we are offered a particularly pertinent example of a contemporary spectator being so inspired by Etty’s painting as to write a poem, thereby transforming the gallery environment into a “site of cultural production”. Thus poet, painter, spectator and author are all engaged in a mutual act of invention, interpretation and composition. Landon’s evocative extended poem, published in the Literary Gazette for 16 July 1825, opens with her visualisation of an imagined context for the dramatic scene portrayed by the artist:

They fled, – for there was for the brave Left only a dishonour’d grave. The day was lost, and his red hand Was now upon a broken brand; The foes were in his native town, The gates were forced, the walls were down, The burning city lit the sky; What had he then to do but fly, – Fly to the mountain-rock, where yet Revenge might strike, or peace forget?

They fled, – for she was by his side, Life’s last and loveliest link, his bride, – Friends, fame, hope, freedom, all were gone, Or linger’d only with that one. They hasten’d by the lonely way That through the winding forest lay, Hearth, home, tower, temple, blazed behind,

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131 *Morning Chronicle*, 3 May 1825: 3.
And shout and shriek came on the wind;
And twice the warrior turn’d again,
And cursed the arm that now in vain,
Wounded and faint, essay’d to grasp
The sword that trembled in its clasp.

At last they reach’d a secret shade
Which seem’d as for their safety made;
And there they paused, for the warm tide
Burst in red gushes from his side,
And hung the drops on brow and cheek,
And his gasp’d breath came thick and weak.
She took her long dark hair, and bound
The cool moss on each gaping wound,
And in her closed-up hands she brought
The water which his hot lip sought, –
And anxious gazed upon his eye,
As asking, shall we live or die?
Almost as if she thought his breath
Had power o’er his own life and death.

But hark! – ’tis not the wind deceives,
There is a step among the leaves:
Her blood runs cold, her heart beats high, –
It is their fiercest enemy;
He of the charm’d and deadly steel,
Whose stoke was never known to heal, –
He of the sword sworn not to spare, –
She flung her down in her despair!

The dying chief sprang to his knee,
And the staunch’d wounds well’d fearfully;
But his gash’d arm, what is it now?
Livid his lip, and black his brow,
While over him the slayer stood,
As if he almost scorn’d the blood
That cost so little to be won, –
He strikes, – the work of death is done!133

Landon concludes by inventing a narrative that goes beyond the charged moment
captured on the canvas. These emotive verses have been quoted in full here as they
have not appeared in previous scholarship surrounding the picture and their
existence reveals the power of Etty’s eclectic imagery to inspire a poetic response.

133 Literary Gazette, 16 July 1825: 449.
The colours on the canvas are conjured up by the lyrics: the reflected light of a fictional blazing town in the distance, the deep shade of the wooded glade, gushes of red blood, the wife’s long dark hair, glinting silver steel and the purpled, bruised lip of the vanquished man. Interestingly, the type of language employed by the author to evoke the fugitives’ fear and their mortal enemy’s violence, such as “wound”, “deadly”, “despair”, “slayer”, “blood”, “strikes” and so on, are juxtaposed with softer idioms and quieter, tender moments. These include the stanza which describes the bride who gently binds her husband’s wounds with cool moss and her own hair, stemming the flow of blood. The push and pull of these two opposing lingual registers are reflected in the composition of the picture itself. Coincidentally, Landon’s likeness was represented in a portrait by Henry William Pickersgill at the 1825 Academy exhibition. Despite having produced such a different mode of painting – one which partakes of the masculine, heroic and historical as opposed to the feminine, amorous and mythological – Etty’s work was still considered poetical. In the words of one critic, poet and painter are involved in a symbiotically beneficial relationship: “If Mr. Etty borrowed from the poets yesterday, he can lend to them today.”

Crucially, I would argue, the inclusion of the soft, fleshy female figure, fused into the midst of two fighting males, is more than simply an opportunity – or excuse – to display a nude: she changes the dynamics of the picture. Etty softens and rationalises the psychology of the scene without undue sensuality, as all three protagonists are undressed in the classical manner. The emotion of the moment, where only colour carries the eye, is palpable. Indeed, as in the Pandora, this painting displays two sides, or moods. On the left, the swarthy victor raises his sword for the kill, his red cape swirling like pulsing blood, exuding power and certainty. On the right, the paler victim is immobilised by a hand-hold and foot-hold as the taut white cloth across his thigh is pinned to the ground by the victor. As Pandora was caught between immobility and a new life, so this wife is caught between a soon-to-be dead husband and a living, merciless victor. Her only weapon is her voice as she pleads for the life of her vanquished husband. With the exhibition of his Pandora and Combat – and as a result of his study in Venice – Etty the colourist had matured, and elevated himself into the role that the contemporary press had crafted for him: as a distinctive,

modern Old Master, with an expressly British artistic identity, and a worthy painter of allegorical, mythological and historical subjects. Given his intense contemplation of Venetian art and his application of Venetian colour, the following excerpt from The Times – who had dismissed his Cleopatra just three years previously – must have been highly gratifying for the artist:

Mr. Etty has certainly found the key to the secret, if there be any secret, of Venetian colouring, and we are convinced that the dirt of years, and the discolourings of varnish, will at length draw from the connoisseurs that praise to which every person of taste and judgement must already feel his pictures to be entitled.135

135 The Times, 5 February 1824: 3.
CHAPTER III
JUDITH – ETTY’S HOLY HEROINE

Introduction

Widely regarded as the showstopper of the 1827 Royal Academy exhibition, Etty’s immense history painting, simply entitled Judith (Fig. 10) – which is illustrated here through William Yuill’s copy after the original – shows the apocryphal heroine standing resolutely next to a prone Holofernes, sword held aloft, absorbed in supplicating God and on the brink of meting out retributive justice. Crucially, Etty’s treatment of a clothed, dynamic female protagonist, one with a highly complex and seemingly “morally contradictory” character,1 marked a striking departure from the sequence of mythological, poetic works featuring supine, submissive nude women that he had periodically displayed during the first half of the 1820s, and for which he was becoming known. This chapter will examine how the painter sought to present his spectator with an innovative and subtle approach to a familiar subject – an aspiration that was acknowledged by contemporaries such as the poet and journalist, William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), who remarked in 1850: “The subject is an old one, but Etty has treated it in a new way, and given it a moral interest, which the old painters seem not to have thought of.”2 In the following discussion, I will argue that the emblematic figure of Judith fascinated Etty: in her, he seems to have found his ideal leading lady – one with whose intriguing ambiguities he felt an affinity, and whose remarkable exploits inspired him to produce a superlatively epic, academic and enigmatic picture.

The success of this monumental scriptural subject not only led to the artist being awarded the accolade of Royal Academician, but also to the work’s prestigious purchase by the fledgling Royal Scottish Academy in January 1829 and that institution’s subsequent commission for two pendant pieces.3 Over the next two years, Judith went on to become the central canvas in a triptych depicting the biblical

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2 Bryant, 1850: 404.
3 Soden, 2006, 1: 80-83.
heroine’s dramatic narrative (Fig. 106). However, despite its centrality to Etty’s practice, and its considerable contribution to British art in the period more generally, surprisingly little rigorous scholarly attention has been paid to Judith. This is largely due to the fact that the picture itself – along with its companions – is now irredeemably damaged thanks to the artist’s experimental use of bitumen, precluding close formal analysis of the actual paintings. In order to recover the appearance of the original canvas as far as possible, I will primarily refer to two hitherto unknown visual proxies: William Yuill’s aforementioned reproduction (Fig. 10) and the version by an unidentified artist that was sold by Burstow and Hewett in December 2013 (Fig. 107), together with a series of Etty’s pencil sketches and preparatory oil studies for the composition. Up to now, there has been virtually no attempt to trace the emergence of Etty’s Judith in terms of the studies that pre-dated the painting and the replicas that followed it. By offering a refined interpretation of Etty’s Judith, in a degree of detail that has not previously been attempted, this chapter seeks to rectify the scholarly neglect to which the painting has been subjected.

To this end, I will suggest that the artist, in his creative reworking of the theme, deliberately installs a dramatic disjuncture at the centre of the composition by having his two protagonists, along with their respective catalogues of contradictions, meet and merge. Such pictorial and figurative counterpoints – female/male, clothed/nude, virtue/vice, active/passive, godly/ungodly, armed/unarmed, sober/intoxicated – cleave the painting in two, generating gender-specific role reversals at both the formal and thematic levels. Having explored these

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4 This chapter is primarily concerned with the central panel of the eventual triptych. The two side panels were commissioned in the wake of the critical acclaim garnered by Etty’s 1827 Judith – the work which resulted in his election as Royal Academician. At the 1827 Academy exhibition, the canvas was displayed as a standalone work and at this point there was no indication of his intention to add pendants. In view of this, and for reasons of concentration, the wings will not receive the same level of attention as Etty’s primary painting. However, it is noteworthy that some members of the Royal Scottish Academy believed that Etty had created the central canvas with the “original design of a triplet” in mind (Harvey, 1870: 14).

5 Farr acknowledges the problematic physical state of the triptych, stating: “It is difficult to discuss any of the three Judith pictures in detail, for their condition is such as to preclude more than a general idea of the composition of each” (Farr, 1958: 50). The central canvas was deemed “bituminous beyond rescue” by 1986, with the last condition report stating that it had: “many tented paint blisters ... several associated areas of paint loss. Paint surface severely scarred by bituminous cracking ... Surface grimy” (SNG, NG1186).

6 Farr lists the various studies for the painting as part of his catalogue entry on Judith (Farr, 1958: 135-36) but only discusses the version that was mistaken for a Géricaul in any detail.
preoccupations, amongst others, a close reading of Judith will utilise the related contemporary critical commentary to consider theatrical painterly effects, Etty’s intriguing manipulation of sexual tropes and his interest in revealing a psychological dimension. The chapter will then investigate a set of wider issues that go beyond the concerns of the individual painting and the artistic agenda of its creator. Moving into the exhibition space, I will first elucidate the links between Etty’s Judith and the exhibited output of his peers at the 1827 Academy show – particularly Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Hilton. This allows for a consideration of the implications of Church patronage and the role of history and religious painting in this era, which is informed by my discovery of an interview with Etty himself, and enhanced by reference to Haydon’s impassioned petition from King’s Bench prison.

‘Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day!’

In order to understand the picture, it will be helpful at this point to briefly outline the events related in the Book of Judith. Set in the eighteenth year of the reign of Nabuchodonosor, deified King of the Assyrians, the Book of Judith opens with the monarch preparing to wage a war by which to “avenge himself on all the earth”, and “destroy all flesh, that did not obey the commandment of his mouth” during an earlier military campaign. As chief captain of the Assyrian army, Holofernes is granted 120,000 foot soldiers and 12,000 horsemen, with whom he is to “cover the whole face of the earth with the feet of mine army”, so that the “slain shall fill their valleys and brooks, and the river shall be filled with their dead, till it overflow”. Cities that dared to resist were crushed, while those who yielded to Nabuchodonosor’s might were spared: their peoples enslaved and forced to worship him as the one true god. Meanwhile, the Jews, terrified by the trail of destruction and fearing for the sacred city of Jerusalem, fortified their towns and villages. The high priest Joachim entreated the hill city of Bethulia (which had been identified as a key stronghold) to protect the path to the holy city. However, Holofernes strategically set up camp in the valley nearby, garrisoning the fountain which acted as the city’s water supply, so “they and their wives and their children shall be consumed with famine”. Following weeks of mounting panic, the city’s chief, Uzziah, finally succumbed to his people’s desperate request to surrender and declared that Bethulia would capitulate to the Assyrians unless God interceded and saved them within five days.
At this juncture, the beautiful and irreproachable Judith enters the tale, furious at Uzziah’s provocation of their Lord. Having mourned her late husband for over three years, she wears a “sackcloth on her loins” and “widow’s apparel”, shunning the possibility of a comfortable existence for one of unremitting piety. She berates Uzziah for tempting God’s hand – however the latter refuses to break his oath to the people, leaving Judith to take it upon herself to save the city by means of an act that will “go throughout all generations to the children of our nation”. Spreading ashes upon her head, Judith entreats God to bless the plan she has devised and to assist in the destruction of Holofernes’s waiting army, so that she might “break down their stateliness by the hand of a woman”. Then, having “braided the hair of her head”, dressed in “her garments of gladness” and adorned herself with jewellery – to “allure the eyes of all men that should see her” – Judith leaves Bethulia with her maid. The two soon encounter the Assyrians and declare that they have defected. Captivated by her beauty and beguiling talk, the soldiers lead Judith straight to Holofernes, who emerges from “under a canopy, which was woven with purple, and gold, and emeralds, and precious stones”. Lavishing praise upon the Assyrians and promising to deliver both Bethulia and Jerusalem to Holofernes, the courageous, duplicitous Judith pretends to pledge herself to Nabuchodonosor.

Three days pass before Holofernes announces a sumptuous feast, requesting that Judith be “honoured in his presence, and drink wine, and be merry with us”. Finding that his “heart was ravished with her”, the banquet is a transparent ruse for his planned seduction. It is at this point, when all the servants have exited the tent and Judith is left alone with Holofernes, who is “lying along upon his bed: for he was filled with wine”, that the story is told pictorially through Etty’s triptych.7 Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1831, The Maid of Judith Waiting Outside the Tent of Holofernes till her Mistress had Consummated the Deed that Delivered her Country from its Invaders (Fig. 108) was the last of the series to be painted, but illustrates the first scene in the narrative sequence. Judith’s maid-servant, clad in a green dress and long dark veil, glances over her shoulder towards the tent opening as she sits anxiously outside, surrounded by sleeping guards.8 The right-hand wing of the triptych – Judith Going

8 Etty recorded his thoughts about the events of this canvas: “I imagine it to be about the same point of time. The Maid, ordered to wait without, is sitting by the dying embers of one of the watch-fires: the guards overcome by sleep; – the time, past midnight. The darkness and silence
Forth (Fig. 109) – was the second canvas to be completed and was displayed at the Academy in 1830. It portrays the aftermath of the killing, with Judith – having “smote twice upon his neck with all her might” – handing Holofernes’s severed head to her maid, who “put it in her bag of meat” so that they might creep unnoticed past the soldiers and return, triumphant, to Bethulia. Upon being received by her people, Judith held up the head and cried: “Behold … the Lord has smitten him by the hand of a woman”.9

The principal painting – with which I am most concerned – was the first to be executed by Etty and represents Judith entreating God to strengthen her as she prepares to behead Holofernes (Fig. 10). Pointedly, Etty does not include the figure of the maid in this central canvas, although she features in both pendant pieces where the action takes place outside the private sphere of the tent. With Judith, as had also been the case with several of his earlier exhibits, Etty encouraged his audience to engage with the events pictured on canvas and to interpret them in conjunction with any written material provided, through the process of close observation, conscious deciphering and extended reflection that was expected of the educated viewer of history paintings.10 To accompany his centrepiece and help clarify its premise, the artist included a quotation derived from Chapter XIII of the Book of Judith in the gallery catalogue for the 1827 show at Somerset House:

Then she came to the pillar of the bed which was at Holofernes’ head, and took down his fualchion from thence, And approached to his bed, and took hold of the hair of his head, and said – Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day!11

‘A paragon of chastity, strength and courage to a dangerous and deceitful femme fatale’

Contained within the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Book of Judith has been a constant cause of religious contention, and the eponymous heroine herself subject

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10 For example, Etty referred the spectator to both Shakespeare and Plutarch for his Cleopatra’s Arrival in Cilicia (RA 1821) and to Hesiod for his Pandora Crowned by the Seasons (RA 1824).
11 Royal Academy of Arts, 1827: 6.
to a wide spectrum of representations, in a variety of media, ranging from devout maiden to wanton murderess. Before examining Etty's painting in detail, it will be helpful to briefly consider the artistic metamorphosis of the Judith theme over time. Manuscripts dating back to the ninth century present the text as an epic narrative, exploring the entire story in the form of an episodic sequence that focuses upon Judith's transformation from grieving widow into daring warrior, bolstered by God's might. During the early Renaissance, Judith's portrayal came to concentrate on a single condensed event: the moment of murder and its immediate aftermath. In the works of Botticelli and Michelangelo, for example, she is depicted as a desexualised, heroic icon, while Mantegna's image invites allusions to the Virgin Mary (Fig. 110). Judith received an allegorical treatment in Donatello's bronze statue of 1460 (Fig. 111), where she embodies the Medici family's protection of Florentine liberties – a work which Etty would certainly have encountered when he was in Florence.¹²

Increasingly, the brutal act empowered and individualised Judith, and subsequent reinterpretations advanced a darker, more seductive and sinister side to her character, further diluting her relationship with God, as demonstrated by Giorgione's version (Fig. 112). Showing as it does Judith's left leg – exposed from the thigh down by a suggestive slit in her pink dress – placed triumphantly on Holofernes's detached head, this painting offers a persuasive template for Etty's own Judith (Fig. 10). Intriguingly, although this particular version has been held in the Hermitage's collection since its purchase in 1772, the important London art collector and designer, Thomas Hope (1769-1831), also possessed a Judith, then attributed to Giorgione, which he had lent to the students of the Royal Academy in 1825. This fact – which has not been cited by previous scholarship on Etty's canvas – is evidenced by a letter in the Royal Academy Archives, in which Hope requests that his Judith with the Head of Holofernes be delivered to Mr. Bigg once the students of the Academy had finished studying from it.¹³

By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the once-cherished maiden had become shrouded in explicit scenes of blood and butchery, with multiple subsequent renderings deriving their inspiration from Caravaggio's visceral, violent and gory

¹² It is notable that Donatello – like Etty – portrays Judith in a moment before the beheading of Holofernes.
¹³ RAA, RAA/SEC/2/82/5. Thomas Hope, to Henry Howard, in a letter dated 17 March 1825.
Judith Beheading Holofernes (Fig. 113). Such images are characterised by being cloaked in darkness and for foregrounding the figures – enabling the observer to witness the hack, the voiceless scream and the spattering of blood at close proximity. As Mary Garrard states, Judith had transformed from “a paragon of chastity, strength, and courage to a dangerous and deceitful femme fatale”: a fearful and seductive woman, armed with a sword, who had slain a colossal general at his most vulnerable – in his bed, asleep and intoxicated. These brutalist depictions culminate in Cristofano Allori’s Judith with the Head of Holofernes, in the Pitti Palace (Fig. 114), where the artist imposes his own likeness onto Holofernes’s decapitated head and casts his ex-lover in the role of Judith, with her mother as the maid. Here, Judith’s gaze candidly transcends the canvas and engages the beholder, as she strides forwards purposefully, clutching her booty. Veiled in shadows, the general has been reduced to a disembodied head, and the scene encapsulates female supremacy over her traditionally dominant counterpart – far removed from her working for God and her people’s liberty. Etty would have witnessed several of these works during his 1823 tour of Italy, including the Florentine-based representations by Donatello, Allori and Artemisia Gentileschi (Fig. 115).

Indeed, intent upon continuing to paint in the grand manner programme galvanised by his Continental travels, Etty ensured that any noticeable improvement in his practice was credited to his recently acquired knowledge of the Old Masters. The Morning Chronicle appeared to hint at the artist’s attempts to naturalise aspects of the Venetian School into his native one when they pronounced: “highly gratifying must it be to the Academy to see how much this gentleman has availed himself of his visits to the Foreign Galleries; he has brought from distant hives a store of the richest honey”. Etty’s conscious agenda meant that the press increasingly tended to compare the painter’s output not only with his direct contemporaries, but also with works produced by the leading proponents of the golden age of Venetian painting. His sophisticated use of colour kept him firmly bracketed with such Venetian masters as Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese. Indeed, for the Literary Gazette, Judith’s

\[\text{14} \text{ Garrard, 1991: 301. See Mary Garrard's Chapter 5, 'Judith', in Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art, for a more comprehensive discussion of Judith's artistic representation throughout time.}\]

\[\text{15} \text{ Morning Chronicle, 12 April 1827: 3.}\]
“contour, attitude, and style altogether, remind us forcibly of Paul Veronese”,\textsuperscript{16} while the \textit{World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons} declared that Veronese himself “would not have been shamed to own it”.\textsuperscript{17} This kind of commentary suggests that the parallels being drawn between Etty and the Venetians had spread beyond the realm of colour and pervaded the spheres of composition and delineation. In his 1958 biography on the artist, Dennis Farr devalues his statement that Etty was “breaking fresh ground” with \textit{Judith} by relating the work to a possible Veronese held in the Methuen Collection in 1816 (Fig. 116), although he was unable to verify a link.\textsuperscript{18}

Given his extended residency in Venice, it is highly likely that Etty would have been aware of Giulia Lama’s \textit{Judith and Holofernes}, circa 1730 (Fig. 117), which was in the Accademia’s collection. The previous chapter revealed the extent to which the painter’s experiences at the Accademia influenced the conceptual development of the \textit{Combat}, both through the sketches he completed during the evening life classes and also his exposure to famed Old Master works in the galleries. Scholars have not previously identified Lama’s work as a possible point of reference for Etty’s composition, but it seems to provide a persuasive pictorial precedent. Like the female artist before him, Etty chooses to depict Judith engaged in reverential, vitalising prayer as she stands over the intoxicated, collapsed body of the commander, prior to the bloody act of decapitation. Both painters portray the supplicating heroine with her head tilted to the right, an absorbed facial expression and upraised eyes. Lama’s deployment of light is particularly striking: Holofernes’s exposed torso, with its protruding ribs, glows in an unnatural white light, while Judith’s face is half-obscured by shade, suggestive of her apprehensive state of mind.

Interestingly, despite the popularity of Judith and Holofernes as a theme in art and culture, it was not frequently depicted by artists during the first half of the nineteenth century, due to the violent, shocking elements in the narrative and Judith’s own troubling sensuality. Indeed, so distinctive was this subject choice that, since its inception in 1768, only a handful of artists in the Academy’s history had exhibited a canvas illustrating the scriptural source, including John Francis Rigaud,

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Literary Gazette}, 12 May 1827: 299.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons}, 1 June 1827: 123.
\textsuperscript{18} Farr, 1958: 51.
who submitted *The Prayer of Judith in the Tent of Holofernes: “Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, this day”* in 1798. Choosing such an uncommon theme not only allowed Etty to align his work with a venerable Old Master tradition of tackling the topic, as outlined above, but also to showcase his artistic individuality and inventiveness.

*‘My heart and mind I feel to be more Catholic than anything else’*

Deriving pictorial inspiration from a non-canonical book – indeed, one that had recently been excluded from the most popular bible in Britain, the King James Bible – indicates that Etty’s faith did not preclude the depiction and endorsement of the story of Judith. Hence it is productive to contextualise the painter’s treatment of the theme in relation to his religious predilections. Raised as a Wesleyan Methodist, Etty seems to have “gravitated towards Anglicanism” during his unhappy apprenticeship in Hull. Although his dedication to leading a devout Christian life is indisputable, the artist’s written legacy suggests a certain degree of indecisiveness concerning which particular path to follow:

> My heart and mind I feel to be more Catholic than anything else – but I do not turn Catholic at least at present for several reasons ... Being Shut out of those glorious Minsters that they have erected ... Friends’ objections – I wish – I wish – I wish ...

It seems that Etty’s religious identity, entrenched since childhood, increasingly became challenged during the course of his career, causing him a great deal of internal conflict and anxiety, as the above declaration reveals. The influence of the Catholic Church progressively seeped into many aspects of his life, whether when

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19 When reviewing this painting, one critic remarked: “The story of Judith exhibits such a breach of the laws of hospitality, that nothing but our persuasion that she acted by divine impulse can reconcile us to the treachery. A representation, then, of this subject, demands the chief powers of the art. It requires that to every charm of person should be added the majesty of an heroine, and the enthusiasm of a saint: but the present attempt is so feeble, that it excites scarcely any emotion either of admiration or abhorrence” (*Monthly Mirror*, July 1798: 28). Etty is unlikely to have been aware of this work – but it should be noted that both artists chose the exact same passage in the narrative to illustrate.

20 Robinson, 2007: 267. Further information on Etty’s religious beliefs, and how they evolved during the course of his career, can be found in Chapter 13 of Leonard Robinson’s biography (Robinson, 2007: 267-76).

working on grand manner paintings in the 1820s, or socialising with a growing number of Catholics in the 1830s and 40s, including William Mulready, Augustus Pugin (1812-52), Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867) and John Rogers Herbert (1810-90). In his 2011 article, Dominic Janes advances the debate surrounding the artist’s work and reception in an innovative manner. Although his concentration upon Etty’s Magdalens, or “race of fallen women” to use this scholar’s term, leads him to overlook the painter’s alternative and equally intriguing religious heroines (such as Judith), Janes’s hypothesis that these images were “produced as exercises in the delightful encounter with desire and of virtuous resistance to temptation by a man caught between Catholic devotions and Protestant prejudices and excitements” is revealing, especially in view of Etty’s shifting spiritual trajectory.

Moreover, having delighted in the abundance of decadent decorations adorning religious buildings on the Continent during his trip of 1822-23, Etty witnessed first-hand the assistance of the traditional Church in supporting a variety of elevated artistic projects, which appears to have further softened his attitude towards Catholicism. As discussed in Chapter II, the painter’s aesthetic tour across Italy became at times something close to a spiritual pilgrimage, with him worshipping at the tombs of artistic heroes such as Titian and Veronese. In comparison, the patronage of the Church of England at home was found to be seriously wanting, as Etty himself voiced during the course of a unique, newly discovered interview, which was conducted by a Parliamentary Committee in July 1844: “They [the Church] not only not encouraged it [high art], but very seriously discouraged it”. This fascinating dialogue has not been referenced by previous scholarship on the painter, and offers an intriguing insight into his personal views on contemporary issues surrounding the Art Unions and Church patronage. Although Etty eventually rejected a full conversion to Catholicism, his beliefs can be usefully traced on a trajectory from the Methodism of his youth, to the Church of England, to Catholicism – or some amalgamation of the latter two – in his later years. In 1826-27, it seems

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22 Janes, 2011: 301.
24 House of Commons, 1845: 137.
25 Art Unions were public lotteries, where people could pay a subscription for a draw that offered an original artwork as its prize. Etty, in his previously undiscovered interview, aired his opinions about Art Unions, viewing them “as I do all games of chance, like lotteries, as an unnatural excitement, as a fascinating and absorbing power over the human mind, which leads it from sober fulfilment of its duties” (House of Commons, 1845: 143).
appropriate to describe Etty as a Protestant, with Catholic leanings that had arisen from a combination of the cosmopolitan existence he led in London, his professional engagements and experiences, and observations made while abroad.

Interestingly, during the 1820s, the non-canonical books of the Old Testament – including the Book of Judith – were at the centre of a highly publicised doctrinal disagreement concerning an ecumenical society. The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) had been created in 1804 for the sole purpose of diffusing “the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, by circulating them in the different languages spoken throughout Great Britain and Ireland”, as well as internationally, funds permitting.26 It was a Society that Etty himself would certainly have been aware of through his close friendship with the Reverend William Jay of Bath, who was an advocate for the BFBS from its earliest days.27 The Society’s reach across the United Kingdom was considerable, as the Gentleman’s Magazine testified in August 1826: “the astonishing aggregate of 4,009,389 copies of the Scriptures issued in this country in 22 years”.28 Despite their wish to transcend the boundaries between different Christian branches, the Society became embroiled in an argument relating to the inclusion of the apocryphal books. In an attempt to accommodate the demands of its various national and international offshoots, the Society included or excluded the books as requested. For some members of the Society, this kind of flexibility was deemed unacceptable and risked tainting the truths contained within the canonical books with the words of false prophets. Under great pressure from such detractors, in 1826 the BFBS acquiesced and agreed that no future expenditure would be allocated for Bibles containing the Apocrypha, and that its own publications would be fully bound in order to prevent distributors from inserting the additional books.

However, these concessions proved to be insufficiently severe for some subsidiaries, particularly Scottish members, who felt contaminated by the continued association of the BFBS with those European societies that still supported the inclusion of the Apocrypha. The Edinburgh Bible Society had already highlighted Judith’s tale as paradigmatic of the corrupting influence of the apocryphal books, stating that the

27 William Jay would go on to become an honorary lifelong Vice President of the BFBS’s Bath auxiliary in 1841 (Redford and James, 1855, 1: 245-46).
28 Gentleman’s Magazine, August 1826: 152.
narrative had extolled the act of assassination. In 1826, the two largest subsidiary bodies of the Society – Edinburgh and Glasgow – as well as thirty-eight other Scottish auxiliaries, withdrew their membership of the BFBS. Just months before Etty's immense Judith was displayed in a prime position upon the walls of the Great Room at Somerset House, the Christian Pioneer declared that “a storm is at present raging between the Directors of the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Edinburgh Committee”. Yet the fierce polemics surrounding the BFBS did not deter Etty from continuing with this controversial theme: on the contrary, given that the canvas's subject matter was garnering so much media exposure, the story of Judith and Holofernes was a pertinent pictorial topic – one which would have struck a chord with the majority of visitors to the 1827 Academy exhibition. Incidentally, the Royal Scottish Academy's acquisition of the apocryphal painting, and its subsequent commission for two pendant pieces from the artist, was all the more remarkable, taking place as it did in the wake of the acrimonious split between the BFBS and its Edinburgh auxiliary.

Any unease that might have arisen from the public exhibition of an apocryphal story on such a gigantic scale appears to have been suppressed by Etty's burgeoning reputation as a modern master – a notion reinforced by the Royal Scottish Academy's purchase of the striking painting as the centrepiece of its emergent collection. According to Alexander Gilchrist, far from presenting Judith as disreputable, Etty claimed to have visualised his warrior-maiden as a symbol of “Patriotism and Self-Devotion ... to her country, her people, and her God”, thus presumably anticipating and refuting potential attacks on her character. The artist explained in an unidentified letter that he had first envisaged the conception for Judith while contemplating the vaulted ceilings of York Minster, “when the solemn tones of the Organ were rolling through the aisles”. As Leonard Robinson notes in his 2007 biography: “There is absolutely no doubt that the total effect that York Minster and the services there made on Etty all his adult life was the reason for the attraction of the Roman Church.” Bearing this in mind – and having considered the context

29 Edinburgh Bible Society, 1825: 10.
32 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 235.
within which the composition was produced – it seems safe to assume that Etty’s shifting spiritual beliefs and opinions allowed him the freedom to depict subjects, such as Judith, which had been shunned by the Protestant faith.

‘Judith’s allure tantalized ... with a divinely perfected sensuality’

As well as Etty’s leanings towards Catholicism, the propaganda engendered by the controversy of the BFBS – conflated with a renewed public awareness of the Apocrypha – is also likely to have contributed towards Etty’s decision to depict the topical tale of Judith and Holofernes. Their scriptural narrative was suitably sensational, yet sanctioned, as subject matter. Perhaps the most significant incentive for the painting, I would suggest, was the fact that Judith is female. Chapter I, while investigating Etty’s location within a specific ‘set’ of artistic contemporaries linked to the Royal Academy, illuminated the painter’s interest in portraying Venus, and noted the proliferation of pictures executed by him which featured this divinity in one guise or another – but invariably nude. However, although Venus had certainly been instrumental in attracting attention to Etty’s exhibited works in the early 1820s, she had not rewarded him with the formal academic credentials he so desired. An alternative type of powerful female figure was thus required – one who was less explicitly erotic, but who nevertheless possessed considerable charms of her own: “If the pagan goddess Venus and her human lovers offered a classical mythic fantasy about what intercourse with a goddess might be like, Judith’s allure tantalized ... with something similar, a divinely perfected sensuality”.34 Judith, a clothed, brave, beautiful, virtuous, spirited and ambiguous femme fatale, fascinated Etty – seduced him, even.

The intriguing notion that Etty, during the mid-1820s, was experimenting with the idea of a female warrior triumphing over a male foe seems to be confirmed by the existence of a double-sided pencil study on card in York Art Gallery’s collection (Figs. 118 and 119). Previous scholarship has neglected to notice that the graphite outline drawings on both the recto and verso of this card, and once on the same side of another (Fig. 120), reveal the parallel conceptual development of two distinct

compositions. Amongst a number of small studies depicting the Judith dyad, another future pictorial theme can be discerned: that of Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret, from Spenser’s Fairie Queene, to which Etty was to return in 1833 and subsequently work up into a completed canvas for exhibition (Fig. 121). The delineation of the female knight, Britomart, and the head of her terrified adversary – the evil sorcerer, Busirane – are particularly well-defined by thick, black pencil markings. By contrast, the arching figure of the naked and chained Amoret is little more than a faint, faded scrawl. The trio of protagonists – of which the figure of the armoured champion, with her billowing cloak and plumed helmet, is by far the most finished – are encased in a diamond shape formed by criss-crossing lines (Fig. 119). On the other piece of card, slight sketches of the two compositional groups appear adjacent to one another: from left to right, Judith is pictured with upraised right arm, reaching with her left towards the head of a prostrate Holofernes, while Britomart, likewise clutching a sword in her right hand, prepares to rescue the curved sweep which symbolises Amoret (Fig. 120).

Having chosen Judith as his chief heroine, it can be seen from the sequence of preliminary studies for this painting that Etty made substantial changes in gesture and pose during the course of the compositional process. In one of the oil on board sketches at the Royal Scottish Academy, Holofernes is shown with his torso twisted so that he is half-lying on his front, head and left arm hanging over the edge of the bed (Fig. 122). By turning the general onto his back and exposing his face and neck, Etty emphasises his vulnerability: he is unconscious, unsuspecting and unarmed. This seems to have been a relatively early modification, in view of the fact that in the majority of surviving studies Holofernes is pictured from a frontal perspective. At some point, a circular shield appears behind the bed in the centre of the scene, which is then strategically repositioned further to the left, firmly in Judith’s territory (Figs. 10 and 122). Other alterations include significantly increasing the angle of Judith’s right arm, and the addition of a coverlet to hide the lower half of Holofernes’s otherwise naked body. Etty’s penultimate conception of the painting seems to have been preserved in the brightly coloured oil sketch in York Art Gallery’s collection (Fig. 123), which is very close to the final version: all the key elements – right down to the leopard-skin rug beneath Judith’s foot – are present, as is the vibrant red and
gold colour scheme. According to The Times, “though it will scarcely be believed by those who see the picture ... it was painted in the short space of four months”. If this was indeed the case, it is likely that Etty’s comprehensive conceptual preparation enabled the artist to execute the completed canvas at speed.

The underwhelming reception to Etty’s The Choice of Paris (Fig. 16), his sole submission to the 1826 Academy exhibition, may have played a part in prompting the painter to revisit a more daring, masculine approach to his work, last seen in his critically acclaimed The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished of the previous year (Fig. 9). After all, it was the latter’s success which had secured the patronage of Lord Darnley for a history painting at an agreed sum of £500. Darnley transpired to be “dilettant-like ... continually urging this or that emendation”, much to Etty’s chagrin. Alex Kidson points to the “piecemeal” fashion in which the work seems to have progressed, as evidenced by the existence of “numerous pentimenti”. Although Etty had been careful to align The Choice of Paris with a catalogue of pictorial templates by illustrious predecessors such as Flaxman, Rubens and Raphael, the canvas generated a decidedly mixed response from reviewers when displayed at the Academy show. La Belle Assemblée felt that Venus should have been “more modestly, yet more voluptuously portrayed”, while a correspondent for the Age disparaged Etty’s depiction of the three divinities, declaring that he had made “Juno a shrew, and has given Minerva a beard”, while rendering Venus’s face “girlish and silly”. Venus had failed the artist once more, when he was on the brink of gaining further academic honours. Freed from the constraints of this commission,

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35 It is possible that the depiction of this rug was informed by the two panther skins that are recorded in his posthumous sales catalogue (Christie and Manson, 6-14 May, 1850: 46).
36 The Times, 5 May 1827: 6.
37 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 233-34. Following its exhibition, further difficulties arose when Etty’s patron refused to take delivery of the picture and underpaid the artist by £100, despite suggesting that he make further alterations before the work was publically displayed for a second time, at the British Institution in 1827.
38 Kidson, 1999: 60.
39 This is contrary to Robinson’s and Farr’s respective statements that The Choice of Paris’s exhibition in 1826 had “attracted considerable praise” (Robinson, 2007: 123) and that it was “deservedly admired” (Farr, 1958: 49). One periodical expressed its disappointment that the painting “falls short of our expectations in the talents of so good an artist as we consider Mr. Etty to be” (Literary Gazette, 13 May 1826: 298). Another found a want of “beau ideal” in the goddesses’ portrayal (Gentleman’s Magazine, May 1826: 443).
40 La Belle Assemblée, June 1826: 273.
41 Age, 7 May 1826: 414.
in 1827, Etty sought to create a conspicuously original work illustrating an emblematic female figure who had evidently been occupying his mind for some time.

'A colossal scriptural subject'

Etty's ambitious *Combat* of 1825 (Fig. 9) had represented his first formal attempt at realising a vast historical and heroic theme, and had resulted in his election to Associate of the Royal Academy. Two years later, the painter ventured to produce a second large-scale, epic canvas: this time, however, he chose to depict an event with a specific textual sanction. Indeed, upon encountering Etty's *Judith* (Fig. 10), prominently displayed in the Great Room, one critic declared it to be: "another very large picture; the figures almost colossal" and the female protagonist herself "most heroically tall", in fact, "almost sublime".42 Other contemporaries likewise confirmed the affinities between the two compositions and many felt that the painter had surpassed himself with the exhibition of his later canvas: "Mr. Etty blazed out with great effect in 'The Combat,' in 1825", exclaimed the *Morning Post*, "but we think that he has this year excelled all his former works, and if we do not deceive ourselves, the *Judith* is ... one of the finest productions of the British Historical School".43 A commentator for the *New Monthly Magazine* also praised the picture as belonging "to the very highest class of art", but concluded their encomium by noting *Judith* was unlikely to sell, given its size and scriptural subject matter – recollecting that Etty's "splendid 'Combat,' was purchased by a brother artist for three hundred pounds, scarcely a third of its intrinsic value".44 Unsurprisingly, a significant investment of time and money was required to produce pictures on such a monumental scale.

As well as being executed upon similarly outsized canvases, the *Combat* and *Judith* (Figs. 9 and 10) also share a number of compositional and thematic correspondences, suggesting that the former may have functioned as a male prototype. In the earlier painting, the three figures had shared centre-stage, surrounded by ominous symbols of darkness and destruction, such as the snapped sword and mutilated tree-trunk. Having decided to domesticate the scene for his

42 *La Belle Assemblée*, June 1827: 277.
43 *Morning Post*, 5 June 1827: 3.
44 *Literary Magnet*, January 1827: 333. John Martin had rashly vowed, upon seeing the *Combat* in Etty's studio pre-exhibition, that he would buy the picture if it did not sell (Robinson, 2007: 120).
*Judith*, Etty replaces rugged, untamed landscape with the oppressive, dark red interior of a general’s tent, replete with lavish décor, elaborately woven rugs and gleaming silver vessels. Once again, however, symbolism is deployed to allude to the plot: a wide-brimmed goblet in the bottom left-hand corner of the canvas contains undrunk wine, suggesting that Judith will survive unmarked – at least outwardly – with her honour intact. Conversely, in the centre-front a large, robust flagon has been knocked over, from which dark liquor seeps onto the floor, hinting at Holofernes’s recent intemperance and prefiguring his spilt blood. Furthermore, the soon-to-be victims in both paintings are situated on the right side of the frame, draped in dusky orange cloths and immobilised by hand-holds on their heads. This common pictorial organisation allows the two victors to reach out to their right, extending the length of the strong top-left to bottom-right diagonal axis, and exposing their superhuman (or God-given) strength, in a dramatic pause, before swinging down to despatch their opponents’ lives.

In an intriguing and important role reversal, the vulnerable semi-nude female who is stretched imploringly across the victor’s massive thigh in the *Combat* – with only the power of speech as a weapon – has been transformed into a formidable, fully clothed warrior-woman, holding aloft a mighty sword (Fig. 10). Judith must act like the man she embodies, and decapitate a “Herculean” adversary, who would however be unassailable should he awaken.45 Our eye is drawn downwards along the left to right diagonal, which is interrupted by a series of pointed pyramidal shapes: the sash from which the scabbard of the scimitar hangs, Judith’s golden cloak, held in place by a triangle of jewels at her throat, the bent left arm of the victim, the space within the crook of his other arm, and his raised left leg beneath the coverlet. All these sharp angles create visual obstacles, punctuating the smooth passage of the sword’s swing. At the epicentre of Etty’s *Combat* (Fig. 9), three elbows had fused to form a central fulcrum, connecting the entwined trio of characters in a motionless life or death moment. Similarly, in *Judith*, Holofernes’s heavy head and hair, caught up in her fingers and encircled by his raised arm – which is positioned in such a way that the hand behind his head must be almost touching hers – is situated right at the pictorial centre of the image.

45 *Literary Magnet*, January 1827: 333.
By placing Holofernes's dark-haired head against a white sheet in the centre of the composition, around which the pictured action orientates, Etty pointedly and suggestively alludes to the act that decorum prevented him from actually showing: the slaying itself. I would argue that the artist introduces a particularly effective moment of dramatic disruption here, where woman and man, victor and victim, virtue and vice, active and passive – and all the inevitable ambiguities conveyed by such binary oppositions – meet, in a passage of maximum intensity rendered by the temporary stay of execution. Seemingly fused into one continuous, gently curving outline, and silhouetted against the wine-coloured hues of the tent material, the figures of Judith and Holofernes, from her sword arm to his trailing foot, are brightly illuminated. His head thus marks the iconographical intersection between female and male – effectively contrasting the hyper-conscious, alert, clenched verticality of Judith on the left with the general’s unsuspecting, inert, sagging form along the right. This split within the image gives rise to an inherent instability and such tensions, I will suggest, reflect the ambivalence associated with interpreting the complex figure of Judith: a virtuous heroine who is perversely “cast as a biblical wanton”. With this framework in mind, the next section will utilise the intricate syntax of the painting to explore issues raised by gendered role reversals, which appear to transcend the bounds of the canvas and trespass into Etty’s own pictorial practice.

‘Judith looks the genuine heroine’

While the majority of critics were unanimous in their praise of Etty’s work as a whole, the painter’s figural arrangement divided contemporary opinion. For example, the *Morning Post* was unhappy with Holofernes being so “prominent”, and suggested that it might have been better were his figure “more withdrawn from the eye … half obscured in the inner recesses of the tent – a dim, portentous gloom – the veil of night, as it were – spread over the victim”. Conversely, the *Literary Magnet’s* arts correspondent congratulated Etty on his effective use of chiaroscuro in relation to the Assyrian general: “The Herculean figure of Holofernes is strewn, in all the listlessness of sleep, upon a couch … The light, which is wonderfully managed,
proceeds from a lamp upon a table." This second critic, rather than objecting to the way that Etty has drawn attention to Holofernes, instead indicates that a strong light was necessary to do justice to his muscular form. Equally as diverse were their views concerning Judith's figure. The former critic argued that by casting a “veil of night” over the slumbering male, the artist’s manipulation of light and shade “might have been managed so as to give greater interest to Judith, and a more solemn and affecting character to the whole scene”. By contrast, the latter conjectured: “Perhaps the figure of Judith is a little too colossal, inasmuch as it appears to detract from the grandeur of that [of] Holofernes; certain it is, that it is somewhat overcharged in the drawing.” In short, where one periodical thought Holofernes should be put in the shade, the other extolled his “Herculean” portrayal and would instead reduce Judith's “colossal” proportions.

Etty very deliberately allocates equal pictorial prominence to both protagonists by sharing the intensity of light that illuminates their bodies (Fig. 10). The positioning of the main light source (the lamp) on the left-hand side of the composition means that while it shines onto both characters, Judith is better lit, and her imposing stance casts an inauspicious strip of shade across Holofernes's left shoulder and neck. Handling the lighting in such an innovative manner helps to create an extraordinary and completely credible gender exchange. Etty is able to convince the viewer that Holofernes is not only manly and mighty, as befits his public persona – indeed, we see most of his well-built form in great detail, while his hirsute head is symbolic of potent virility – but also passive and vulnerable. Paradoxically, the general’s prostrate body is feminised by its open posture, while alcohol has rendered him as weak as a woman. Judith, on the other hand, gains power through her inhuman, yet sanctified, action. Physically, she exhibits a significantly sturdier, more solid frame than that of Etty's typically fleshy female models, as she calls silently for reinforcement from the Lord, who will condone and 'strengthen' her resolve. Holofernes's usual strength is thus transferred to and inhabits the body of Judith: they touch and a conduit is created. Like him, she is depicted with dark-coloured hair, in an iconographical invention that prompted The Times to remark: "Mr. Etty has departed from the practice of ... most of the masters, with respect to the colour of

48 Literary Magnet, January 1827: 333.
49 Morning Post, 5 June 1827: 3.
50 Literary Magnet, January 1827: 333.
Judith’s hair. He has given her black hair, but she has generally been represented with fair hair”.51

The painter reinforces these intriguing reversals of conventional male and female roles by his careful choice of costume and props. Holofernes’s naked and satiated body sinks into a soft, billowing mattress, his maleness barely concealed by a russet-coloured coverlet, while one foot rests upon a velvet stool. A sober Judith, on the other hand, is surrounded by the trappings of battle as she brandishes the warrior’s scimitar, leaving its empty scabbard hanging in front of a huge circular shield. To her right, a stone column supports the weight of this armoury and is mirrored in Judith’s upright posture. Margarita Stocker notes that later in the apocryphal narrative, Judith “tore down Holofernes’ canopy, symbol of his worldly pride, and his armour was presented to her, the customary donation of trophies to the victor, as if this had been a military overthrow”.52 I would suggest that by picturing the paraphernalia of war, as well as the thick red canopy in the tent, Etty dramatizes the fatal conflict and alludes to the imminent toppling of the male military leader, in all his glory, at the hands of a woman. That woman is arrestingingly clad in a bright scarlet dress, representative of pretended passion and foreshadowing spilt blood. Having adeptly deployed her own weapon – captivating sexuality – she now raises the general’s sword, imbued with his usual phallic power, further emasculating Holofernes. The inequality of sex (gender) has thus been equalised through alcohol, seduction and deceit.

As well as staging the struggle of the sexes, the painting’s configuration also sets up a troubled dichotomy between virtue and vice, once again in gendered terms. In her discourse concerning the problematic presence of the “armed maiden” in culture, Marina Warner reflects upon the gender-specific connotations associated with the “battle between feminine virtue and brute vice”, where the “predominance of the feminine gender in words for virtue seems to have given virtue a monopoly on the feminine category”.53 Judith, therefore, naturally epitomises virtue, while Holofernes personifies vice. Here, of course, it is the woman who is about to commit a cardinal

51 The Times, 5 May 1827: 6.
52 Stocker, 1998: 34. “... they gave unto Judith Holofernes’s tent, and all his plate, and beds, and vessels, and all his stuff” (Judith, 15:11).
sin. Such gender exchanges as those detailed above inevitably perplexed contemporaries, as confirmed by the content of the critical commentary surrounding the picture. The Examiner's reporter, reviewing the work on display at the 1827 Academy show, found Etty's female lead to be somewhat “wanting in refinement, particularly as it respects the drawing and forms of the limbs”.54 Two years later, another writer jokingly recalled that Judith's exposed right leg was “as flesh-like as my ain noo lyin' on the rim o' the bath, and amaist as muscular”, though fortunately “not so hairy”.55 Responding to this type of remark – and therefore to the underlying accusation levelled at the artist that his Judith was not “sufficiently feminine” – another critic countered: “She is as feminine as her character and her action allow her to be; she is a heroine”.56

A genuine heroine, this statement appears to be implying, was expected to assume a number of conventionally masculine attributes and characteristics due to the daunting nature of her situation. Judith needed to be tough, courageous and resilient in order to overcome a cruel and formidable adversary, at great risk to herself and in spite of her inherent physical weaknesses. Her femininity was powerful in and of itself: it was able to undermine God's ultimate patriarchy and was the tool by which Holofernes was laid low. Interestingly, Etty's pictorial practice itself seems to have generated a type of gendered language during this period. When Judith was re-exhibited at the British Institution in 1828, it was hung prominently upon the south wall of the gallery, giving critics a further opportunity to observe and appraise the canvas. Alongside his masterpiece, Etty also submitted two other, smaller pictures that had not previously been publically displayed: The Dawn of Love (Fig. 124) and Cupid Intercedes for Psyche. Having reviewed the painter’s contribution to the year’s show, the London Magazine declared:

We would recommend to our artist to leave these small unfinished vignettes, these little doughy Rubenses as ‘toys of desperation’ to others. His firm, broad, manly pencil, requires wider scope and a

54 Examiner, 20 May 1827: 311.
55 Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, March 1829: 380. Criticisms concerning Judith’s masculine appearance were also directed at the pendant pieces. Reviewing Etty’s painting of The Maid of Judith etc. on display at the Academy in 1831, the Examiner remarked: "Damsels of seven feet high, and bulky in proportion, are not to our taste: we feel, in fact, a little uncomfortable in the presence of ladies with a power of arm which, if it accidentally alighted upon our heads, would leave us prostrate on the earth" (Examiner, 8 May 1831: 292).
56 Morning Post, 5 June 1827: 3.
different subject. His large picture of \textit{Judith and Holofernes} ... is in our judgement a noble and masterly performance.\footnote{London Magazine, April 1828: 27.}

The accumulation of feminine and diminutive phrases in this excerpt – "small", "vignettes", "toys" – conveys the sketchy, soft quality of these sentimental works and the critic’s clear disappointment at the artist’s apparent reversion from "manly" and "masterly" subject paintings, such as \textit{Judith}, to mythical allegory, Venus. Similarly, a correspondent for the \textit{New Monthly Magazine}, referring to \textit{The Dawn of Love}, exclaimed: "Here the artist seems to forget all the severity of his genius, and to soften to his subject."\footnote{New Monthly Magazine, 1 April 1828: 157.} Etty’s feminised, poetical pieces did not accord him the eulogies that his masculine grand manner paintings engendered.

\textit{‘It seemed to me a more, a much more interesting moment’}

Etty, in \textit{Judith} (Fig. 10), purposefully chose to portray the endless moment of stillness and suspense just before the impending death stroke, as had also been the case with the \textit{Combat} of 1825 (Fig. 9). Margarita Stocker states that Etty’s "unusual" choice of moment "suggests a renewed sensitivity to its [the Book of Judith’s] narrative details", as opposed to "the received clichés encouraged by familiarity", fuelling an increased level of artistic creativity.\footnote{Stocker, 1998: 144.} Etty himself elaborated upon the rationale behind this decision:

\begin{quote}
I have preferred ... choosing the point of time immediately preceding the decollation, to that immediately \textit{after} ... which, (latter) has been generally chosen by the Old Masters. By which means, I not only avoided the offensive and revolting butchery, some have delighted and even revelled in: – but it seemed to me a more, a much more interesting moment.\footnote{Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 236-37.}
\end{quote}

In this respect, it seems likely that Etty had taken note of his mentor Henry Fuseli’s advice concerning the "\textit{limits of expression}" in the latter’s 'Fifth Lecture on Painting', where he had asserted unequivocally: "A decollated martyr represented with a head in his hand ... and a headless corpse with the head lying by it ... can only prove the..."
brutality, stupidity, or bigotry of the employer, and the callus or venality of the artist".61 Although Etty’s audience may well have condoned the desperate measures undertaken by the eponymous heroine in her reckless attempt to save her people from ruin, a literal rendering of the shocking scene would not have been considered suitable for contemporary sensibilities. The painter thus enlisted his viewer’s imaginative faculties to visualise the next act in his pictorial play.

I would suggest that in Etty’s phrase “a more, a much more interesting moment”, there lies a nineteenth-century suggestion of the workings of the mind, which runs alongside and complements his heroine’s mental plea for additional strength from God. Judith’s impassioned prayer ensured that she was seen not only to be justified and empowered, but even ennobled by her bloody quest. By displaying her religious devotion, and by showing only the hilt of the sword (most of its shaft is severed by the top edge of the canvas), Etty deliberately focuses the observer’s attention upon Judith’s interplay with God. Hence her body once again becomes a conduit: this time for divine justice, which flows down through the hidden blade, through her outstretched arms, and towards the Assyrian general’s head. Such a reading would mean that the symbolic evening star – seen in the upper right-hand corner of the canvas – confirms God’s invisible presence and his watchful gaze over the necessary act which is about to be committed. It is the only external element to encroach upon the indoor scene and appears to be an original insertion by the painter, who may have intended to use it in the final panel, had he received his commission for the two pendants from the outset. The star’s significance did not elude the critics, one of whom acknowledged its “almost supernatural interest, by the mode in which it suggests the all-seeing eye in whose sight the deed is about to be performed”.62

Judith’s unresolved psychological state at this tense time clearly intrigued the artist and his interest in showing her vacillating emotions seems to have manifested itself pictorially in both her posture and physiognomy. Pale-faced and wide-eyed, lips parted in prayer, she stretches her body upwards, seeking recourse and reassurance from above – one hand tightly clutching the sword of sacrifice and the other buried deep in Holofernes’s black curls. Etty later revealed that he had intended Judith to

61 Wornum, 1848, 471-72.
convey an acute awareness of the danger surrounding her, feeling “her own womanly and tender nature unequal to the deed” in the face of “peril, of immense peril, to her country and herself”.63 As she was seen to be acting on behalf of God, Judith’s horrifying actions were sanctioned, and by succeeding, she proved that God was on her side. The instinctive revulsion triggered by the sight of a weapon-wielding woman, intent upon murder, is thus bypassed – or at least tempered. Indeed, contemporaries generally approved of the painter's judicious scene selection, which allowed him not only to avoid “the disgusting appearance of the blood”, but also to convey “that assumption of moral courage, which he has so admirably depicted in the countenance and figure of Judith”, whose “whole frame seems to speak the greatness of the deed she meditates”.64 Only one critic objected to the violence of the subject matter: “We can read of the feats of Judith, or of Virginius, with admiration of their heroism, but who would not have shuddered to see the knife actually raised over the unsuspecting victim?”65

As Etty himself acknowledged, by choosing to illustrate the moment before the decollation he departed from a number of familiar artistic templates, such as those by Caravaggio and Gentileschi (Figs. 113 and 115), both of which show the sword actually cutting into Holofernes’s neck. Despite the fact that Etty eschewed any unpalatable bloodshed, the Examiner deemed his work to impact as “vigorously on the eye as any of CARAVAGGIO’S, while it is better and indeed beautifully balanced in its light and shade”.66 Capturing the highly charged moment before the murder meant that Etty maximised the dramatic and emotive force of his work. However, it also enables the spectator to appreciate Judith reflecting upon her motives and to observe her intense piety and relationship with God, thus reducing the violent aftermath for the viewer. Etty understood that showing the premeditated brutality would allow any sympathy to be replaced by revulsion and shock. In doing so, he had implemented another lesson learned from his past tutor, Fuseli. The Swiss teacher declared in his fifth lecture that he believed it impossible to “fully pity what we shudder at or loathe”, as mutilation was contagious, spreading “aversion from the slaughterman to the victim”. By displaying the ‘plot’ rather than the “extreme of the

63 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 237.
64 New Monthly Magazine, 1 April 1828: 157.
65 Morning Post, 5 June 1827: 3.
66 Examiner, 20 May 1827: 311.
catastrophe”, Etty had minimised the corruptive influence of his heroine upon the audience.67

‘Artistic melodrama’?

Martin Meisel utilises Etty’s Judith series to exemplify what he calls the painter’s “narrative strategy”, which, for him, “employed the categories of contemporary drama and the manipulation of pictorial means” in a calculated bid to produce “effect”. Deploying the technical term “effect” to describe the visual impact that an initial, cursory glance at a painting is capable of producing upon a spectator’s mind, prior to further scrutiny (in other words, the “dramatic” or “theatrical” qualities of a picture), Meisel makes an interesting case for reading Etty’s imagery as being intentionally performative. Focusing on the principal work of 1827, which, as he goes on to say, “succeeds well enough in representing the whole story to reduce the two later paintings to ancillary pendants”, he explains that the melodramatic qualities exhibited by the canvas are chiefly achieved by Etty’s choice of moment – intensifying the sense of imminent action – and his effective use of chiaroscuro.68 Meisel concludes his discussion by quoting Etty’s response to the criticism generated by his controversial decision to turn Judith’s face away from the viewer in the right-hand panel, a gesture that conveys her fear of being discovered with the head, surrounded as she is by guards, sleeping on their feet, fully armed (Fig. 109). “I am not anxious to imitate those second-rate Actors”, the artist countered, “who, when they are performing, are more desirous to play to boxes, pit, and galleries, than to absorb themselves in the passions and natural interests of the scene”.69 For Meisel, this justification constitutes evidence of Etty consciously precluding the “taint of the theatrical”.70

While this may be the case, Etty’s principal painting, at least, was not in fact deemed sensationalist by reviewers – unlike several other large historical canvases on display at the 1827 Academy exhibition. For instance, the figures of the Virgin and the Magdalene in William Hilton’s huge Crucifixion (Fig. 125) were thought to be

68 Meisel, 1983: 72-76.
69 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 287.
70 Meisel, 1983: 78.
rather “too theatrical” by one critic,\textsuperscript{71} while a different correspondent wrote of Haydon’s \textit{Alexander Returning with Bucephalus} (Fig. 126): “perhaps ... the mother who is kneeling, and holding up her child, is a little too theatrical”.\textsuperscript{72} As these three works were the most commented upon in their category of painting, it is notable that Etty’s was the only one to apparently evade the stigma of melodrama. Moreover, in a report dating from July 1827, an arts critic for the \textit{Inspector} describes his encounter with \textit{Judith} hanging in the Great Room of Somerset House, and his experience appears to contradict Meisel’s premise as to the “effect” the painting had upon the beholder. The commentator states: “… on the first glance at this picture, we are struck with its grandeur and sublimity; on the second, with its beauty and expression; we go on to admire its exquisite coloring, and we leave it wondering at the harmonious union of its innumerable excellencies”.\textsuperscript{73} It would seem that for this reviewer, it was the painting’s noble and elevated style that impressed first and foremost.

The scene, however, is undisputedly a dramatic one and Etty certainly employs a range of pictorial devices which enhance the painting’s theatricality – and, by extension, I would argue, its visual appeal within the exhibition space: an arena exploited by the painter that Meisel fails to consider. Particularly intriguing in this respect are the painter’s distinctive and disjunctive lighting effects. A bright spotlight binds Judith and Holofernes together, highlighting the arching sweep of limbs running unbroken through both their bodies. Judith’s long white neck is vividly lit, while a band of dark shade is etched across her pale face in another instance of striking and symbolic chiaroscuro (Fig. 10). This strip of shadow could be interpreted as reflecting her uncertainty, or, alternatively, as having been cast by the uplifted sword, hidden from view. The latter reading reinforces the sense of an invisible godly presence, thus prefiguring the sinister violence she – a fervent believer in God and his compassion – is about to commit in his name. Etty’s manipulation of bright light and deep shade, especially upon Judith and the couch beside her, resulted, for one contemporary critic, in a “degree of abruptness, in bringing out more cogently the noble power of her action”.\textsuperscript{74} This remark appears to

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Morning Post}, 5 June 1827: 3.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Literary Magnet}, January 1827: 335.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Inspector}, July 1827: 307.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Examiner}, 20 May 1827: 311.
refer to the thin strip of dark grey shadow that runs down Judith’s left arm and slips over the white bed-sheets onto the floor, where it meets the mirroring band of shade cast by Holofernes’s limp right arm. The use of the term “abruptness” suggests an awareness of the tangible disjuncture that has been installed at the centre of the composition by Etty.

Furthermore, I would extend the theatrical analogies outlined above to include the fabric walls that hang in huge, heavy folds above and behind the couple: these swathes of dark red drapery resemble stage curtains, in front of which the scene unfolds. The whole structure seems to be suspended from spears which rest upon a classical pillar, while the ‘stage’ is set, littered with props – rich rugs, gold and silver drinking vessels, jugs of still-lidded wine, the cushioned bed – extending into the wings (and metaphorically, it is possible to suggest, into the side panels of the future triptych). Yet surely the most intriguing theatrical aspect of the image, and the one most pertinent for my purposes, is the painter’s contradictory depiction of a devout widow, playing the role of a deceptive seductress in order to brutally murder a man for the sake of her people. Having worn nothing but widow’s weeds and having shunned all company for over three years, Judith, the heroine of the tale, is illustrated in character: dressed to tantalise, and sporting sparkling jewels. She is, however, far from being a nude.

‘Etty, Hilton, and Haydon present us with some splendid historical works’

By seeking to elevate his pictorial output in a variety of ways – tackling a familiar scriptural subject in an innovative manner, enlarging the size of his canvas and displaying emotional uncertainty – Etty was increasingly recognised as belonging to a fluid grouping of artists whose primary aim was to “naturalize the grand style in the English School”.75 This set emerged out of, and is conflated with, the ‘poetical’ one proposed in Chapter I, and comprised Etty, Benjamin Robert Haydon and William Hilton: painters who jointly endeavoured to ignite public interest in history painting, a genre of art at which every envied European School excelled. All three contemporaries had flourished under the aforementioned “wise neglect” of Henry

75 Redgrave and Redgrave, 1866, 2: 164. The quotation in the section heading derives from the Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction, 26 May 1827: 346.
Fuseli in the 1810s, during which time both Hilton and Haydon appear to have directly shaped Etty's nascent artistic career.\footnote{Taylor, 1860, 1: 37.} The exhibition of Etty's monumental \textit{Combat} (Fig. 9) in 1825 had propelled him into this 'historical set', while subsequent submissions such as \textit{The Choice of Paris} (Fig. 16), and more importantly, \textit{Judith} (Fig. 10), consolidated his membership. Although a number of other artists (including Henry Howard, Richard Westall and Henry Perronet Briggs) are aligned with the contemporary painters bracketed together under the historical banner, it was Etty, Haydon and Hilton who were most consistently referred to as a collective in the media. Indeed, reviewers of the 1827 Academy show repeatedly linked the latest productions of this artistic trio – for example, the \textit{Examiner} exulted appreciatively: “This Exhibition has been thronged during the past week, and it is expected will produce an unprecedentedly profitable season, from the attractions of the fine Historical works of ETTY, HAYDON, and HILTON”.\footnote{Examiner, 13 May 1827: 291. A week later, a report in the same paper commented upon "the four chief historical pictures here – Mr HAYDON’S \textit{Alexander returning with Bucephalus}, Mr ETTY’S \textit{Judith}, Mr HILTON’S \textit{Crucifixion}, and Mr EASTLAKE’S \textit{Spartan Isidas}" (Examiner, 20 May 1827: 311).}

Those who aspired to paint history at this time were not only actively encouraged to do so by both their peers and the press, but were also perceived to be advocating and advancing the Academy’s fundamental ideologies. However, this exemplary status was, paradoxically, undermined by the lack of patronage available for the production of large historical canvases. Debate surrounding the patronage system which supported high art in England raged during the early nineteenth century, with blame variously laid upon the State, the Church and private individuals. For Haydon, the provision of funds for an artistic genre that sought to edify, moralize and please the population fell under the State’s scope of responsibility. A petition, penned by Haydon, protesting against the unjust treatment of historical painters, was delivered to Parliament by Henry Peter Brougham MP in June 1827. Its rhetoric stressed that the Arts had "never eminently flourished except where National encouragement had been afforded them", and the artist suggested several projects that should be initiated by the Government. This appeal was sensationalized by Haydon’s place of residence at the time: incarcerated in the King’s Bench debtor’s prison. Within his statement, Haydon eulogised the productions of his two closest contemporaries in
the field, singling out Hilton’s *Crucifixion* and Etty’s *Judith* for particular praise: “ETTY’S *Holofernes*, now before the public ... [is] a work in point of splendour no School in Europe can at present equal, nor would it have looked inferior amongst the distinguished works of former times”.78

Etty, on the other hand, attributed the inadequate fiscal assistance to “the absence of encouragement from the Church mainly”, with an “exception in favour of the Roman-catholic portion of the community”. When asked in his enlightening Parliamentary interview whether artists had “shown their power to paint pictures” fit for a position in churches, Etty replied acutely: “I think artists have shown their power; Mr. Hilton, for instance.”79 This mention of his friend’s name is yet another example of the mutually beneficial affiliation between these three artists. Although Hilton’s reticent personality has left posterity with scant evidence of his thoughts concerning his fellow history painters, he appears to have held both Etty and Haydon in great esteem, even donating the debt-ridden Haydon £34 in 1814, which “endeared him to me for the rest of his life”.80 While all three painters presented the public with subject pieces in 1827, it was Etty and Hilton who received the majority of plaudits for their respective huge scriptural canvases, *Judith* (Fig. 10) and *The Crucifixion* (Fig. 125), while Haydon’s sole contribution, *Alexander Returning with Bucephalus* (Fig. 126) – which was “not hung, in the painter’s opinion, as it deserved” – generated a rather mixed response.81 Commentary devoted to this canvas ranged from the positive, such as it “is admirable for its classical purity and poetical beauty”,82 to the downright negative: “Like many of this gentleman’s, this is ... exceedingly bad. The face of the young hero is perfectly mean, and is rendered quite ludicrous, by being infinitely too small for the legs, which dangle down the horse’s sides like a giant’s”.83

*Etty’s *Judith* at the 1827 Royal Academy exhibition*

Of the thirty-seven summer shows held at Somerset House in the 1800s, the 1827 event was the sixth most populous, and was frequently compared with the most-

78 *Examiner*, 22 July 1827: 453.
80 Taylor, 1853, 1: 215-16.
81 Taylor, 1853, 2: 171.
82 *Morning Chronicle*, 12 April 1827: 3.
visited event of 1825, at which Etty had “blazed out with great effect” by displaying his *Combat* (see Appendix G).\(^{84}\) Importantly, the 1827 exhibition marked the first and only time in Etty’s career where his entry – *Judith* (Fig. 10) – was selected as critics’ choice and showstopper, an even more remarkable feat given that this show was characterised by its unusually high number of historical canvases. A review within the *New Monthly Magazine*, which is archetypical of several other papers, commented: “the present Exhibition at the Royal Academy is decidedly one of the very best that late years have presented”, before proclaiming: “Incomparably the best production in the collection is one by Mr. Etty, which places him at once in the first rank of his profession ... This is decidedly the best production of the year, and may be safely classed among the really high efforts of art.”\(^{85}\) The *Literary Magnet* agreed, declaring *Judith* to be “a work which belongs to the very highest class of the art; nay, we may go still further, and affirm, that it is the noblest picture in this unusually rich and gorgeous exhibition”.\(^{86}\)

The Hanging Committee, which in 1827 consisted of the literary painter Charles Robert Leslie, the portraitist Henry William Pickersgill and the architect William Watkins – all of whom had easily defeated Etty during the 1826 Royal Academician elections – gave his scriptural subject a favourable placement in the hang. *La Belle Assemblée* reported that this inexperienced group had, curiously, taken the step of moving the “post of honour” from the “south to the west side of the room: it is filled, with perfect propriety and justice, by Hilton’s Crucifixion”\(^{87}\). In its review of Hilton’s canonical work, the *Literary Magnet* noted: “The extremities of the Virgin, too, partake too much of the same disagreeable hue; the unpleasant effect of which is increased by the proximity of Mr. Etty’s gorgeously-coloured picture.”\(^{88}\) Bearing this in mind, as well as the positioning of the doorway on the south side of the west wall, we can confidently place Etty’s *Judith* in the north-west corner of the Great Room.

The *Literary Magnet*’s comment suggests that Etty’s striking red and gold colour scheme detracted rather from the more muted, solemn tones exhibited by Hilton’s painting (Fig. 125). Together, these two vast canvases would have measured just

\(^{84}\) *Morning Post*, 5 June 1827: 3.

\(^{85}\) *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 June 1827: 242-43.

\(^{86}\) *Literary Magnet*, January 1827: 332.

\(^{87}\) *La Belle Assemblée*, June 1827: 277.

\(^{88}\) *Literary Magnet*, January 1827: 333.
under eight and a half metres in width and five and a half metres in height, at the apex of The Crucifixion (see Appendix H). Taking into account the wall dimensions and not the actual exhibition area, they would have taken up a considerable amount of space, as the west wall of the Great Room was only sixteen metres wide and nine and a half metres high, “including the lantern”.89

Inevitably, the visual impact made by these two works would have dominated the exhibition space and commanded full attention, to which La Belle Assemblée testified: “there are some unusually large pictures, which, not more by their size than by their merit, force themselves upon the spectator’s notice”.90 History paintings constituted 11% of the works hanging in the Great Room (see Appendix I) – a slightly higher percentage than in the previous two years – which further contributed to the sheer surface area covered by works of this genre, especially Etty’s and Hilton’s. Given the sequential order of entries listed in the gallery catalogue, it follows that Judith was bordered on one side by Laurence Cosse’s Portrait of an Artist and on the other by Francis Danby’s Cleopatra Embarking on the Cydnus (Fig. 127). In the latter, which, according to the Morning Post should “be rather considered as a landscape than as history”, Danby illustrates another beautiful warrior-woman, Cleopatra – a theme Etty had also treated, in 1821 (Fig. 18) – prompting this same critic to remark: “we cannot but admit, much as we respect Mr. ETTY’s powers, that the present picture excels its predecessor in all the important parts of the subject”.91 Danby may have won the Cleopatra contest, but Judith’s bright, vibrant colouring and life-size figures would undoubtedly have overshadowed the adjacent, smaller picture.

Hilton’s Crucifixion was likewise surrounded by an assortment of secular subjects, including the highly apposite Portrait of the Canon del Reigo by R. M. Sully, and a landscape scene entitled View in Monsal Dale, Derbyshire. From a Sketch Painted on the Spot by James Paul André the Younger. In the absence of a contemporary image recording the layout of the 1827 display, it is instructive to turn to an earlier drawing by Edward Francis Burney, which details the wall plan of the 1784 Royal Academy exhibition (Fig. 128). Burney depicts a cross-section of the Great Room, showing the east wall dominated by Benjamin West’s monumental triptych of Moses Receiving the

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90 La Belle Assemblée, 1 June 1827: 277.
91 Morning Post, 11 June 1827: 3.
Laws on Mount Sinai (Fig. 129). It is not hard to imagine Hilton’s triptych occupying a similarly pivotal position in the hang on the opposite wall – which was identical apart from the presence of the door – forty-three years later. Interestingly, the arched central canvas in Hilton’s three-part Crucifixion was exactly the same height as that of West’s, and the proximity of these to the skylight must have meant that natural light glowed behind both Christ and the angel, while Etty’s Judith was over half as high and slightly wider. Utilising Burney as a template, it seems likely that any portraits placed around the two star paintings of the 1827 show would have been arranged in such a way as to have their sitters appear to be peering into the religious scenes themselves – as had been the case in 1784.

Whether the Hanging Committee staged any such pictorial play across the clustered walls is unclear, but the conflict between secular versus sacred subjects was irrefutable, and many critics struggled to reconcile the sanctity of the church with the urban spectacle of the exhibition space. The Literary Gazette summarises this perceived risk of contamination in their review of Hilton’s work:

> When we confess the imposing and sublime impression of this grand sacred composition, surrounded as it is by gauds, gilding, and ill-according associations, we are disposed to believe that when in its proper situation, the altar-piece of a solemn and magnificent church, it must produce the most powerful effect.92

In choosing to exhibit scriptural subjects at the Academy, artists risked accusations of idolatry and, if the painting was not commissioned, gambled on finding a purchaser. The history painter Richard Westall, who displayed two sizeable canvases based on biblical subjects in the Great Room – The Peaceable Kingdom of the Branch (Fig. 130) and Christ Praying on the Mount of Olives – was subjected to charges of impropriety: a risk Etty also ran with the submission of his Judith. Westall’s Mount of Olives was targeted by a critic for the Morning Post, who questioned whether the work’s “class suits the feeling of a Christian and Protestant country”, and concluded that they would rather not encounter such a subject beyond the “walls of an edifice appropriated either to study or devotion”.93 This same correspondent also harboured reservations about the figures of Judith and

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92 Literary Gazette, 12 May 1827: 298.
93 Morning Post, 9 June 1827: 3.
Holofernes as having been “selected as the objects of amusement and exhibition”.94 However, he fell short of challenging the subject matter’s continued relevance to a Protestant country whose leading Bible Society had banished the Apocrypha from its publications. As noted above, Etty, by choosing to show the moment before the extreme murderous action, had mitigated the violence of the narrative and handled it in a sensitive manner.

Featuring Etty’s Old Testament Judith and Hilton’s New Testament Crucifixion, alongside supporting canvases by artists such as Westall and Henry Pierce Bone (1779-1855) – who submitted a Holy Family – in 1827 the Great Room contained the highest number of pictures illustrating religious themes in the whole 1820s. While the scale and positioning of such works helped to enhance the spiritual nature of the display space – the audience would have looked up to observe these paintings, as in a place of worship – quality and suitability for a coveted place in the Great Room was judged to a certain extent on the degree of intimacy a subject conveyed. To this end, a contemporary visitor to the show, having witnessed the chain of events rapidly unfolding inside Holofernes’s claustrophobic tent, would also have found themselves invited to attend Christ’s crucifixion, metaphorically replacing the painted figures which can be seen exiting the sacred scene from the left and right panels, thus encouraging viewer engagement and visual interaction.95 Protestant objections to the suitability of the exhibition environment for the display of sacred subjects are highlighted by the reprobation that Westall’s Mount of Olives received. Hilton’s flesh tints were likewise singled out as inappropriate by the Inspector, for whom they had an “appearance as unnatural as disgusting”.96 At a time when Catholic emancipation was a current issue, in the run-up to the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, tensions between Protestant and Catholic artistic representations and interpretations were all the more volatile. Therefore, it would seem that acceptance to the Academy was dependent on two crucial considerations: firstly, whether the subject verged on the iconography associated with Catholic idolatry, and secondly, whether scriptural

94 Morning Post, 5 June 1827: 3.
95 Hilton’s depiction of the fleeing soldier was praised in no uncertain terms: “We know of nothing in modern art to be compared with the fore-shortening of the arm of this figure. It seems to protrude from the canvas” (London Star, 25 May 1827: 3). The trop d’oeil effect would have further increased the sense of the spectator’s involvement.
subjects should even be publically displayed in the competitive, critical and theatrical exhibition space.

However, with little in the way of demand for imagery to decorate Church of England buildings, patronage for grand religious paintings was severely limited. Although Hilton’s triptych was originally commissioned, it was subsequently purchased as a stained glass design for the east window of the classical St. George’s Church, Derby Square, in Liverpool, while the canvases themselves were hung in the city’s Town Hall.97 The lack of demand for works of this genre was a source of great frustration for British history painters, as revealed by Etty’s reflective responses in his 1844 Parliamentary Committee interview: “I have heard instances, one in particular, in which a very fine picture had been rejected by two or three different churches, which was offered as a gift.”98 The challenges faced by painters such as Etty, who determined to continue in the grand manner tradition, are usefully exemplified by Haydon’s career trajectory. At this point, the final member of my historical set had fallen back into the “orthodox bosom” of the Academy, in the wake of several unsuccessful individual projects.99 A correspondent for the New Monthly Magazine observed that: “Mr. Haydon has at length joined the ranks of his fellows, and seems disposed to take the ordinary means of achieving that patronage, without which even first-rate talent cannot now-a-days command success”.100 His one-man shows at the Suffolk Street Gallery drew attention as spectacles, but failed to secure the generous long-term patronage he so needed. Ultimately, despite his infamous resilience and unwillingness to accept the decline of history painting, Haydon even considered moving to the “darling size of England”, the cabinet piece, in a bid to improve his financial situation.101

In a pictorial display that was unique for its comparative abundance of historical and religious paintings, and one that included works by established Academicians including Richard Westall and Thomas Stothard, as well as by rising artists such as Charles Eastlake and Joseph Severn, Etty had succeeded in attracting praise from

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97 Atkinson, 2009, 1: 158.
98 House of Commons, 1845: 138.
99 Morning Post, 9 June 1827: 3.
100 New Monthly Magazine, 1 June 1827: 242.
101 Taylor, 1853, 2: 167.
artists, the public and the critics. Although he had been careful to protect the integrity of Judith’s story and thus to preclude the type of criticism levelled at Westall’s scriptural paintings, and in spite of the admiring reviews that Judith’s exhibition engendered, the painter ultimately found himself without a buyer – a predicament that the Standard had anticipated when commending his “self-denial” in creating the immense canvas. He may well have considered his biblical masterpiece to be a work worthy of recognition. However, even though it was subsequently re-exhibited at both the British Institution and the Birmingham Society of Artists, it was to be an academic institution, rather than the Church, who eventually purchased the picture.

**Conclusion**

The canvas portraying Judith (Fig. 10) unequivocally heralds and revolves around Etty's complex holy heroine. Departing temporarily from Venus, and other such submissive female nudes, the painter presents a clothed, courageous and convincing warrior-woman in a leading role. Paradoxically, although Judith is by nature a modest, grieving widow, having determined to defeat Holofernes, alone, she must look seductive in order to entrap and behead him. Etty wisely chooses her moment of need, when she begs God to grant her the strength to succeed in her very unfeminine task. By deliberately not showing a severed neck, and by replacing spattered blood with spilt wine, Etty creates a dramatic pause, a timeless hiatus before swift action. Hence, he evokes horror by association and the spectator experiences unending suspense. Having investigated the rationale behind this unusual choice of moment, as well as the theatrical aspects of the painting, and having explored the nuanced ways that the figures of Judith and Holofernes assimilate and exchange roles in specifically gendered terms, one theme has repeatedly emerged from the discussion: the image’s instability, which Etty created by pitting victor and victim, who are equally prominent in pictorial terms, directly against one another.

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102 *Standard*, 25 May 1827: 3.
Blurring the boundaries in this way, I would now go on to suggest, not only allowed Etty to exhibit an advanced level of artistic creativity, but also to ensure that a more modern, psychological take on an important and well-known biblical story, painted by artists such as Titian and Veronese, precluded the charges of mannerism that had periodically attached themselves to his output.\(^{103}\) Operating within and contributing to a venerable pictorial tradition, Etty sought to reignite Judith’s powerful and intense bond with her God – which had been side-lined by many of his predecessors – while shunning the graphic scenes of bloodshed featured in the canvases of Caravaggio and Gentileschi. The sword thrust towards the heavens energises Judith’s resolve, re-establishing the authority of God, who endorses, empowers and witnesses the forthcoming atrocious act, as suggested by the presence of the symbolic evening star. Picturing the weapon poised in prayer, rather than in mid-swing, detracts from the imminent moment of murder. The observer’s perspective is sufficiently distant to embrace the entire scene, while an escape to the outside world can be found in the corner of sky to the top-right corner of the canvas. Etty’s depiction continues the evolution of Judith as a complex figure through a variety of original compositional devices, and not only succeeds in alluding to previous versions of the theme, but also – crucially – calculates its production and presentation to suit an early nineteenth-century British audience.

However, rather than attempting to rid Judith of her ambivalence and offer his audience a tempered and vapid figuration, Etty appears to have enjoyed the copious ambiguities inherent in her story, and exploited them in order to showcase his pictorial ingenuity and distinctiveness. The striking strip of chiaroscuro that cuts across her face may indeed allude to the godly presence within the scene, as suggested above, or alternatively – and perhaps more persuasively – it may denote the fragmented persona of Judith herself: at once both sexual warrior and zealous maiden. Such a reading is supported by the notable absence of the maid-servant, who traditionally appears in the scene between Judith and Holofernes to emphasise and defend her mistress’s sexual purity. Other indicators towards a less straightforward and more sensual interpretation include the dishevelled bed-sheets, Holofernes’s

\(^{103}\) For example, in 1824, when discussing Etty’s *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons*, one critic remarked: "This artist is decidedly a mannerist in composition and execution; yet his mannerism is fraught with much beauty, and his ideal colouring accords well with the poetry of his subjects" (*Literary Chronicle for the Year 1824, 15 May 1824: 319*).
naked form and abandoned posture, and the bright scarlet colour of the heroine’s robe. Judith’s ambivalence is further highlighted by the delineation of her visible and suggestive right leg at the forefront of the painting, which forces itself upon the spectator’s notice. Intriguingly, in 1828, the artist’s friend Thomas Uwins, in a letter to Joseph Severn, remarked that the picture was “found guilty of having a lady’s thigh almost, if not quite, naked, which prevents the moral part of the visitors from turning their eyes towards it”.104

The Book of Judith was marginalised and removed from the canonical bible, analogous to the way that Etty has been marginalised by modern scholarship. As with the complex historical figure of Judith, the painter’s output stubbornly refused to fit into the changing cultural climate of his era, and his concentration on the nude form has meant that he continues to be perceived as both problematic and controversial. Etty, I would argue, saw Judith as an ideal heroine, exhibiting as she does a strong moral personality and a willingness to sacrifice herself for the common good – one who identified with the message that the artist consistently used to defend himself against the critics throughout his career. In his Autobiography – his published reflection on his life and works – Etty declared that his intention was always to “paint some great moral on the heart”, never wishing to “seduce others from that path and practice of virtue”.105 In many ways, both Judith and Etty have had their characters assassinated by historians, who insist on viewing them through a sexual framework, at the expense of their achievements. Ultimately, the exhibition of Judith in 1827 marked a watershed in the painter’s career:

Etty amassed a fortune after he abandoned such large canvases as his Judith and Holofernes series, and his other pictures of that size and time, for attractive nudities and rich scraps of colour, of cabinet size. If ever Art was lowered by the conditions of a time, surely Etty’s was. Haydon would not pine in neglect and silence like Hilton, nor condescend to small and sensual nudities or luscious bits of mere colour-painting like Etty.106

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104 Uwins, 1858, 2: 235.
105 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
106 Taylor, 1853, 3: 359.
CHAPTER IV
REVOLUTION, REVELLERS AND REFORM: ETTY AT THE 1832 ROYAL ACADEMY EXHIBITION

We hear, with concern, that the Exhibition of the Royal Academy is not so profitable this season, as it has been heretofore; the same may be said of all other Exhibitions: we believe, the agitation of the public mind is such, that few care for aught but the news of the hour.¹

Some imagine that they see in the inferiority of the present Royal Academy Exhibition the evil influence of public commotion and strife upon productions of genius and science. There is little doubt that artists are afraid of trying the strength of their wings in any work requiring imagination, because it is painful to bestow fine colours and long meditation upon a work which makes no return either in money or in fame.²

The judgement formed upon a hasty glance at the walls of the Academy on the day of the private view has since been confirmed by a more careful examination of the individual works of which the Exhibition is composed, although for such indulgence the turmoil of politics has given us but little mental leisure.³

Introduction

Set against a tumultuous social and political landscape, the sixty-fourth Royal Academy summer exhibition opened at a time of significant uncertainty and instability for the nation, known as the ‘Days of May’. On 9 May 1832, only two days after the Academy commenced its seventy-five day run, the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, tendered his resignation to William IV following the second failure by the House of Lords to pass his Reform Bill, and the lack of support he had received from the King on this issue. That moment – combined with the subsequent period of turbulence prior to the Reform Act’s eventual execution by royal assent on 7 June – marked the culmination of over a decade’s escalating pressure for change in Britain’s electoral system. The attendance figures for the 1832 exhibition clearly reflect the "agitation of the public mind": there were 3,847 fewer visitors to the show than in

¹ Athenæum, 2 June 1832: 355.
² Athenæum, 19 May 1832: 322.
³ Morning Post, 29 May 1832: 2.
the previous year, and a remarkable 24,613 fewer than had attended the 1829 display, which had been a week shorter in duration (see Appendix G). Tellingly, in a letter that has not been cited by previous scholarship, the portrait painter Thomas Phillips (1770-1845), declared: “the political bustle I am sorry to say falls hard upon our Exhibition. Men’s minds are so preoccupied that they do not, as they are wont, flock to us, & the product will I fear fall short of our usual receipt. Although the Town acknowledges that it is a very good show”. In response to the chaotic atmosphere at home, as well as to his recent alarming experiences on the Continent during the ‘Three Glorious Days’ of the July 1830 Revolution in Paris, William Etty completed and exhibited two masterpieces which cautioned against reform: Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm (Fig. 11), and The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate (Fig. 3).

Given that he was at the height of his career – having received the accolade of Royal Academician four years beforehand – and that he always sought to impress and challenge the exhibition crowd, his competitors and critics, it seems certain that Etty's decision to present these two visually arresting paintings together was not an arbitrary one. This chapter sets out to explore Youth on the Prow and the Destroying Angel as distinctive and individual artworks which also share similar preoccupations and exhibit intriguing iconographical affinities. It also argues that they can be usefully read as variations upon a theme: namely, that of reform. Comprising entangled, overlapping, multi-figural compositions, both these similarly sized set-pieces were hung on the south wall of the Great Room at Somerset House, on or near the line, and in close proximity to one another. Moreover, and perhaps most strikingly, both pictures are punctuated by vivid images, right at their pictorial centres, of crimson caps – an inviting motif to which, once observed, the eye is inexorably drawn. By reviewing Etty's disturbingly memorable experiences in Paris during the summer of 1830, and considering the wide spectrum of connotations that these symbolic Phrygian caps might have evoked for both the artist and his viewers,

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4 Thomas Phillips, to unknown, in a letter from 1832. This manuscript was sold by Bonhams as Lot 49 in London on 27 March 2012. Indeed, in August 1832, it was reported that: “The receipts for admission to the Exhibition, have been less by 300l. than those of last year; and the auditors’ accounts show an excess of expenditure beyond the income of the Academy” (Monthly Review, August 1832: 621).

5 From now on, these two paintings will be referred to as Youth on the Prow and the Destroying Angel.
I will assess the extent to which his two paintings engaged with contemporary political issues and transformations. I will also recover the ways in which the artist adapts, reimagines and manipulates the imagery of his artistic predecessors – both venerable and recent – in producing these politicised pieces.

This political interpretation is not one that has appeared in previous literature on Etty. Conversely, for Cosmo Monkhouse in 1874, he "might have lived alone in a star and not been less affected by the wants which interested and excited his fellow men", while Leonard Robinson states: "We have no evidence that he ever engaged in political discussion or troubled himself by thinking very much about politics. His opposition to Reform was based on his preference for traditional forms." Most scholars have adhered to Dennis Farr’s estimation of Etty during this period:

The July Revolution of 1830, into which Etty was to wander quite by accident, left him (an Englishman, it is true) unmoved, except to be mildly irritated that it should interfere with his painting at the Louvre. Yet Delacroix found it an inspiration, although in 1848 even he was to react against the trends of his day. To this extent Etty is at least consistent ... his views on political reform remain as unchanged in 1848 as in 1832. Indeed, his character hardly changes throughout his life, there are no quirks or unexpected late developments, and he seems impervious to the influence of foreign ideas on his own way of life, although his attitude towards them does mellow with continually renewed acquaintance.

Contrasting Etty with the French Romantic painter, Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863), has become a familiar trope in the scholarship surrounding the English painter. However, in the following discussion I will question the basis for such comparisons, in view of new and hitherto unpublished evidence concerning Etty’s opinions of, and interactions with, contemporary French artists. Returning to the 1832 Academy show, a detailed study of the canvases themselves will follow, placing particular emphasis upon their shifting ‘visionary’ qualities and the disjunctive elements visible within each picture. The two works’ contemporary reception, as well as their dialectic with a selection of other exhibits upon the gallery walls, will be analysed in order to evaluate the degree to which they were politically motivated in character:

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6 Monkhouse, 1874: 29.
7 Robinson, 2007: 171.
an especially pertinent line of enquiry considering the contextual circumstances that surrounded their development and display. Ultimately, I hope to illuminate how Etty intended to use the Youth on the Prow and Destroying Angel as pictorial vehicles through which to articulate his thoughts concerning the issues of reform and revolution.

The submission of two explicitly interrelated works to a single Academy exhibition seems to be a pictorial ploy new to Etty’s practice. Interestingly, the artist had been exploring preliminary compositional ideas relating to both canvases for a number of years before their eventual execution and exhibition, with the design for each having developed from a series of sketches dating from the early 1820s. The theme of Youth on the Prow had been of interest to Etty from as early as 1818-19, and he had previously displayed a comparable work entitled A Sketch from one of Gray’s Odes at the British Institution in 1822. This picture prompted The Times to reprove: “We take this opportunity of advising Mr. Etty ... not to be seduced into a style which can gratify only the most vicious tastes”. Yet despite such a disparaging response, Etty was not deterred from resurrecting the topic of his sketch and exhibiting a finished painting of the same subject a decade later, albeit this time at the Academy. Within this forum, the canvas attracted a considerable degree of critical attention, and was bought by the art collector Robert Vernon later that same year. The Destroying Angel, on the other hand, was originally commissioned in 1822 by Henry Payne of Leicester, who subsequently purchased the work from Etty for the sum of £130 following the 1832 Academy exhibition. Payne appears to have left the subject matter of the piece entirely to the artist’s discretion, and an “unfettered”

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9 Gilchrist notes: “The Sketch again, for a still more important work, the Temple of Vice, (of 1832), was among those thrown off before he quitted England. One, for the Youth on the Prow (also, of 1832), had, we have seen, been already exhibited” (Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 103).
10 Farr, 1958: 158.
11 The Times, 29 January 1822: 3.
12 An entry in the artist’s ‘Cash Book’ states “Paid to Walter a Draft for Two hundred and fifty Pounds from Mr. Vernon – in part payment for Pleasure at the Helm, etc.” (YAG, YORAG: 2005.498).
13 Dennis Farr and Alexander Gilchrist both state that the work was first commissioned as early as 1822 for 60 guineas (Farr, 1958: 132 and Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 345). A decade later, a series of letters were exchanged between Payne and Etty concerning the fee, delivery and positioning of the picture, which was intended for the patron’s drawing room (YCA, MS. Y927 S/R, Letters 36 and 46. Henry Payne, to William Etty, in letters dated 16 February and 4 August 1832 respectively).
14 Carey, 1833: 14. Carey explains that “he [Payne] gave a commission to Etty to paint him a picture, from his [Etty’s] original design of this subject, leaving him wholly free to use his own
Etty later declared that he had thrown his “whole soul” into the picture – its execution reputedly costing him “months of arduous study”.\(^{15}\)

In addition to his *Youth on the Prow* and *Destroying Angel*, Etty submitted one further work to the show – *Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake* (Fig. 131) – a poetically inspired picture derived from a scene in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, which was hung in the School of Painting, away from the main exhibition area itself. The composition of this third painting had also developed in his artistic imagination over an extended period of time: Alexander Gilchrist, Etty’s earliest biographer, informs us that a “pen-and-ink sketch dates as far back as 1815 to 1818”.\(^{16}\) Having experimented with the conception and configuration of these three pictures during the preceding decade, Etty sent the resulting trio of completed canvases to the 1832 Academy exhibition, where they were on general display between 7 May and 21 July. Upon looking at *Youth on the Prow* (Fig. 11), we are immediately struck by the brightness and vibrancy of the palette, the ethereal, nebulous atmosphere and the playful interaction between the half-naked protagonists, who cavort in and around the flimsy looking golden skiff. Their intertwined, twisting limbs enhance the theme of carefree pleasure. This image, rather than being simply an unadulterated celebration of sensuality and youth is, however, intended to evoke a fleeting moment of calm before a storm – the soft blue sky is filling from both sides with heavy, rain-bearing clouds and a shadowy figure can be seen lurking in the darkest clouds on the right-hand side (Fig. 132). The artist personifies ‘Youth’ as the bronzed, red-capped young man in the middle of the crowded craft, while the sinuous form of ‘Pleasure’ is shown reclining in an openly erotic, frontal pose at the helm. Youth and Pleasure, the picture seems to be suggesting, are vulnerable and transient: the small skiff that they share so harmoniously may soon be wrecked by a gathering storm.

Conversely, within the compact, curved composition of the *Destroying Angel* (Fig. 3), excessive sensuality and hedonistic, debauched behaviour has led to the infliction of divine punishment beneath an inky night sky. The omnipotent ‘agent of God’ leaves a smouldering trail of destruction across the canvas in the wake of his diagonal

\(^{15}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 345.
\(^{16}\) Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 345.
ascent, while brawny, claw-footed, orange-eyed demons revel in abducting and chaining up their wine-dazed and helpless victims. Terrified, men and women attempt to escape from the ensuing chaos of billowing smoke and crumbling columns, trampling grapes, dice and flowers underfoot. These savage and violent reprisals are played out under the blank eyes of three indestructible golden statues, which preside passively over the scene of devastation. On the one hand, in Youth on the Prow, the viewer is presented with a transitory moment in time – signified by the delicately blown bubble and the theme and mood of Youth – where carefree passengers, surrounded by pleasure, frivolity and temptation reach for that fragile ideal, unaware of being watched by an ominously dark, menacing presence. On the other, in the Destroying Angel, with the retribution that follows excess pleasure: a horrific scene of destruction in which the Temple of Vice falls, and the idolatrous are punished for their wanton acts of immorality. A trajectory between the two can start to be traced: the cherubic, red-cheeked little zephyr has vanished, only to be replaced by a major, muscular, ferocious force, embodied in the sweeping angel. No longer hidden amid the shadowy clouds to the right of the boating party, the demonic stormy whirlwind has come to life, intent upon wreaking havoc amongst the merry-makers. I will now elaborate upon a series of events that shaped the pictorial development of Etty's two works. The first takes the form of a seemingly innocuous trip to France, which affected the artist to such a degree that he was spurred to enhance his two already complex and multi-faceted paintings with a further interpretative layer.

*Etty's experiences in Paris: the 'Three Glorious Days' of the July 1830 Revolution*

"The thunder peals louder and louder: as if God spoke in anger to the gay and giddy multitude ... Pleasure and amusement are the idols." Etty's evocative words could easily relate to the events pictured within his Destroying Angel (Fig. 3) – however, they were actually penned by the artist upon his arrival in Paris in July 1830. His perception of the French capital – which he had visited on four previous occasions – changed rapidly over the ensuing month, as he became embroiled in the outbreak of the 'Three Glorious Days', which took place between 27 and 29 July. Prior to this

17 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 290-91.
excursion, Etty had experienced relatively little political intrusion upon his life, and certainly none that had instilled in him a desire to express his persuasions in pictorial form. The July Revolution resulted from years of cumulative discontent against the French monarchy under Charles X, following his accession to the throne in September 1824. His ill-repute seeped through French society as a series of unpopular absolutist measures unravelled the restoration of faith in the monarchy, following Louis XVIII’s creation of the liberal 1814 French Charter. It was the suspension of this constitution, and the issuing of four repressive ordinances, that ignited the rebellion. With plans to “paint in the Louvre till the last day of August”, a diffident Etty was unwittingly plunged into the fast-developing political uprising: one which imprinted horrifying scenes of bloodshed, terror and devastation upon his impressionable and sensitive mind.18

Vivid memories haunted Etty for the rest of his life, and a significant portion of his 1849 Autobiography is devoted to recording his frightening experiences in Paris. A letter to his close friend Thomas Bodley – composed once safely back in Buckingham Street – is plagued with alarming sights and dreadful sounds:

With fierce cries they carry on the work of destruction ... portentous and awful cries, that, ‘like an exhalation’ rose over Paris in the Darkness and broke the still Silence of Midnight! mingled with the sound of the tocsin – the deep toned bell and the shrill hasty smaller one – the rattle of musketry – the drums beating to arms – the crackling of fires – all formed a mixture, grand yet awful in the extreme ...19

On his daily journey across the city from his lodgings to the Louvre, Etty passed through streets containing houses with “shattered walls and broken windows”, fires, lifeless bodies and tracks of blood. Stories of insanity emerged from the anarchy, with one man who “frantic with grief – and despair – he threw himself on the ground – and wildly dashed his head on the pavement in the agony and bitterness of his feelings”. Reflecting on his overall experience, the artist declared it: “an alarming yet impressive scene – it can never be erased from my memory”.20 Although clearly unnerved at finding himself “involved in all the alarm and hubbub”, Etty was more

18 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 294.
19 YCA, eb 27, Letter 386. William Etty, to Thomas Bodley, in a letter dated 3 September 1830.
20 YCA, eb 27, Letter 386. William Etty, to Thomas Bodley, in a letter dated 3 September 1830.
preoccupied at the time with completing and preserving his copies at the Louvre, than in engaging artistically with the surrounding chaos. Significantly, French artists, witnessing the same horrors, did respond by producing pictures about the rebellion. Chief amongst this group was Etty’s contemporary, Eugène Delacroix, who informed his brother, Charles, on 12 October 1830: “I have started on a modern subject, *A barricade...* and if I haven’t conquered for my country, at least I’ll paint for her”.22

As mentioned in Chapter I, in mid-July 1830 – a couple of weeks prior to the ‘Three Glorious Days’ – Etty had unexpectedly happened upon the publisher and poet Alaric Alexander Watts (1797-1864), and the eclectic painter Thomas Uwins (1782-1857), who, according to Watts’s son and biographer, Alaric Alfred Watts (1825-1901), were all “chance visitors in Paris at the same time”.23 This instructive account, which has not appeared in previous scholarship on Etty or Anglo-French artistic relations, provides valuable new information pertaining to the painter’s thoughts about, and dealings with, contemporary French artists, as well as further intriguing details about his demeanour, technique and practice. Although Dennis Farr was left ultimately frustrated by his investigation into the Englishman’s links with his contemporaries across the Channel, scholars have remained tantalised by the prospect of a symbiotic relationship between Etty and the French moderns – particularly Delacroix.24 The temptation to connect the two has even led to suggestions that they were comfortable enough with one another to exchange ideas about subjects, and it is not uncommon for them to be referenced as friends, despite the obvious language barrier.25 These inferences appear to have primarily stemmed

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21 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
22 Wilson-Smith, 1992: 90.
23 Watts, 1884, 2: 56.
24 Although Etty had entertained Delacroix when the latter visited London in May 1825, Farr concludes that “no further contact was made after Delacroix had written a farewell letter to Etty on leaving England” in August of the same year – and that when Etty “visited France in later years he never availed himself of Delacroix’s invitation; he may even have forgotten all about him” (Farr, 1958: 49).
25 Leonard Robinson, for example, finds correspondences in subject between Etty’s *A Family of the Forest* (RA 1836) and Delacroix’s *The Natchez* (displayed at the Paris Salon in 1835), a work which the former artist “may have gained some information about ... from Delacroix in 1825” (Robinson, 2007: 219). This scholar also suggests that the two painters may have met earlier than is usually supposed, due to a study by Delacroix of the model Mademoiselle Rose being “so reminiscent of Etty” (Robinson, 2007: 95).
from the following passage within a letter from Delacroix to the art critic Théophile Silvestre:

L’époque de ma vie où j’ai vu l’Angleterre (-1826) et le souvenir de quelques amis d’alors est très-doux pour moi. Presque tous ont disparu. Parmi les artistes anglais qui m’ont fait l’honneur de m’accueillir tous avec la plus grande bonté, car j’étais alors à peu près inconnu, je crois qu’il n’en reste plus un seul. Wilkie, Lawrence, Fielding, grands artistes, un surtout, Copley, dans le paysage et l’aquarelle; Etty, mort, je crois, récemment, m’ont montré la plus grande complaisance.26

Delacroix’s favourable recollection of his 1825 trip to England, and the hospitality he was shown by Etty, has resulted in numerous conjectures being made about the extent of their association – some of which seem tenuous or unfounded.

In the catalogue that accompanied Patrick Noon’s milestone exhibition in 2003 on artistic relations between English and French painters during the Romantic period, the editor states that “Etty certainly visited Delacroix in Paris in the summer of 1830”. It would appear that Noon’s understandable desire to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between the pair has led to this misleading statement, as there is no actual evidence to substantiate it as fact. Moreover, when discussing Etty’s 1830 Academy entry, Candaules, King of Lydia, Shews his Wife by Stealth to Gyges, One of his Ministers, as she Goes to Bed (Fig. 133), Noon glosses over the fact that the painter expressly points to Herodotus’s Histories as his classical inspiration for the picture in the gallery catalogue, and instead highlights a “more immediate and probable literary source” in the shape of Seigneur de Brantôme’s Lives of Fair and Gallant Ladies. Discounting the possibility that Etty – if indeed he was even aware of this text – might have encountered the French version during one of his previous visits to Paris, or learnt of it from other contemporaries, Noon thinks it more likely “that Delacroix introduced him to it” in 1825.27 I believe this to be an improbable assumption, which only emphasises the lack of material surrounding their acquaintance – if it produced anything at all other than Delacroix’s “cherished memories” of his summer in London.28

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26 Silvestre, 1864: 76.
‘Fit only to decorate papier maché tea-boards, and ornament china’

Significantly, Alaric Alfred Watts – armed with first-hand information gleaned from his father’s autobiographical notes – depicts Etty as an artist with “no knowledge” of “Horace Vernet, De la Roche, Decamps, Delacroix, and Eugene Deveria”, who “seemed rather unwilling than otherwise to allow himself to be made acquainted with them”. While visiting the Louvre with Watts and Uwins in July 1830, the three men were standing in front of Le Concert Champêtre (Fig. 134) when Etty reportedly declared that the canvas was “one of the pictures I came to Paris to see, and I am not disappointed”, before resolving: “I shall copy that picture as well as I can, to show your French friends how we manage such matters in England.” This competitive attitude towards foreign artists had previously surfaced during his travels in Florence and Venice, as detailed in Chapter II. Furthermore, on the back of a preparatory sketch for his 1827 Judith, Etty had scribbled the words: “Honour and glory to the next Exhibition! – We must keep the foreigners from fooling us!” While Etty was busily engaged in making his facsimile of Le Concert Champêtre, Watts proposed to acquaint him with several of the French artists “at work around him” – an invitation which the English painter declined, preferring to “show them what manner of man he was, through his work”.

The younger Watts’s subsequent description of Etty’s activities and how his work was received by native artists is strikingly similar to that recounted by the Hincks brothers, who had come across him copying Titian’s Venus of Urbino in the Uffizi during July 1823. Although progress on his replica of the Giorgione was initially slow – “for the outline was to him the most difficult part of the work” – Etty was soon proceeding “with astonishing rapidity and success”, as his “fellow-workers ... gathered before his easel, and watched with curiosity, not unmingled with admiration, the approach of this performance towards completion”. It was Etty’s exuberant colouring that attracted particular notice from onlookers:

29 Watts, 1884, 2: 57-58. This painting was at the time thought to be by Giorgione, but has more recently been attributed to Titian.
31 Watts, 1884, 2: 59. Watts admits that he was secretly relieved Etty had refused to be introduced to his fellow workers in the Louvre, in view of his “peculiar ... exterior and deportment”.
On renewing our visit on the fifth and sixth day, it was evident that Etty had made a sensation, and I was saluted with more than one inquiry who he was? 'Qui est-ce monsieur, donc, Monsieur Vast?' (so it was frequently their pleasure to name me); 'mais c'est superbe! la couleur est vraiment extraordinaire!'32

Two-thirds the size of the original,33 Etty’s completed memorial of Le Concert Champêtre (known as the Music Party) was, according to Watts, a "great success", which was "talked of in the studios", and "several distinguished French painters came expressly to see it, and spoke with generous enthusiasm of its merits".34 Precisely who these appreciative artists were remains unknown, but one particular French painter was well aware of Etty’s celebrated performance in the Louvre – Paul Delaroche (1797-1856).

Alexander Gilchrist notes that on 13 July 1830, Etty had written to Thomas Bodley about having visited “some of the principal Artists in their Ateliers; and saw what they were doing”, but neither the painter nor his biographer elaborate further.35 However, Watts provides an extremely detailed and illuminating account of Delaroche’s atelier, and Etty’s unconcealed discomfort at interacting with his French contemporary (even indirectly through a translator):

Our first visit was to the studio of Paul De la Roche, situated in a narrow dingy street, the name of which I have forgotten, which, as Etty said, for inconvenience beat Buckingham Street hollow. We were shown into a large room, some seventy or eighty feet long, by thirty or forty wide, and of proportionate height, filled with well-dressed people promenading up and down as though in a public gallery. Pupils of M. De la Roche were occupied in different parts of the room in different studies, some copying pictures, others making drawings of animals. There were in the room a fine horse and a dead wolf serving as models, each surrounded by a group of admiring students. A large canvas was stretched on one side [of] the atelier, before which was a large and lofty platform on which stood the master. He appeared to be about forty years of age; a slender, graceful-looking man, with that amenity of manner which characterized the better-schooled Frenchman of that day. He received my card with Etty’s name upon it,

32 Watts, 1884, 2: 60.
33 Farr, 1958: 59-60. The biographer notes that Etty also made copies of Titian’s Supper at Emmaus and Jacob van Ruisdael’s Fresh Breeze: Sea Coast, as well as two other unrecorded studies.
34 Watts, 1884, 2: 61.
35 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 292. The elusive “acquaintance” mentioned by Gilchrist, “who accompanied him on these visits” to the ateliers can now for the first time be revealed as Alaric Alexander Watts.
and descended to welcome us. He expressed warmly his appreciation of Etty’s transcript of the ‘Giorgione,’ and professed himself thoroughly acquainted with Etty’s reputation as a colourist. I interpreted, I dare say but indifferently, between them, the more so as I had on one side to make my bricks pretty much without straw, as Etty, perhaps as much from shyness as any other cause, could not be prevailed upon to respond to these obliging overtures by any similar civilities.  

The impression of Etty that emerges from this passage – and Watts’s surrounding narrative – is of a British artist who venerated Old Master painters, particularly Italian ones, but continually dismissed or disparaged the talents of his international contemporaries. In November 1823, for example, he had written to Sir Thomas Lawrence expressing his annoyance at the popularity of François Gérard’s (1770-1837) “detestable” Entry of Henry IV into Paris, 22 March 1594 in comparison with a Veronese hanging nearby, to which he had been the sole devotee. By 1830, Watts deemed Etty to have become “prejudiced even to bigotry against all French art” – an entrenched valuation which had first manifested itself during his earlier Continental travels. His admiration is limited to single works rather than their creators: for instance, the “graceful and touching character” of Anne-Louis Girodet’s (1767-1824) The Entombment of Atala (Fig. 135) is immediately qualified by his observation that: “Pictures may please an untutored eye which possess few, if any, of the properties which belong to a real work of art, and this seems to me a picture of that class.” For Watts, this intransigence is palpable to the point of embarrassment in Delaroche’s studio – a place which was to become the “most effective atelier during the period of the July Monarchy ... numbering over one hundred pupils at any given time”.

Delaroche’s recognition of Etty’s recent endeavours at the Louvre and the mention of his cross-border reputation must have delighted the latter, especially given his propensity to revel in the praise of his peers. Etty seems either unable or unwilling to reciprocate Delaroche’s enthusiasm – an attitude which may have contributed towards his indifference about maintaining contact with Delacroix after the French

36 Watts, 1884, 2: 63-64. It is possible that Etty then travelled onwards with Watts and Uwins to visit the atelier of the Dutch artist “Ary Scheffer in the Rue Chaptal”, who was finishing his Margaret in the Chapel, although he is not directly mentioned in the narrative.
37 RAA, LAW/4/169. William Etty, to Sir Thomas Lawrence, in a letter dated 14 November 1823.
38 Watts, 1884, 2: 56-58.
39 Boime, 1971: 56.
painter’s 1825 letter. During the three day rebellion in July 1830, Delacroix found himself torn between his sympathies for the revolutionaries and their cause, loyalty towards his patrons, such as the Duchesse de Berry, and his own vacillating opinion. Yet his daily activities were strangely similar to Etty’s own: “A simple stroller like myself ran the same risk of stopping a bullet as the impromptu heroes who advanced on the enemy with pieces of iron fixed to broom handles”, he remarked in retrospect.40 In fact, both painters spent a substantial amount of time in and around the Louvre: Etty as a copyist, and Delacroix as a protector of the collection against insurgents. It remains a possibility that the two men did meet – whether in the precincts of the Louvre or during an unrecorded visit to Delacroix’s atelier on Quai Voltaire – although no surviving evidence exists of such an encounter. In any case, Etty's resistance towards artistic developments in contemporary France, as well as his inability to communicate, would no doubt have rendered the reunion unremarkable. By September 1830, an enthused Delacroix had set to work on his famous Liberty Leading the People (Fig. 136), in preparation for the next year's Salon, while a relieved Etty was safely back home, preoccupied with the restoration of his beloved York Minster in the wake of the fire which had ravaged it in 1829. Following his French ordeal, Etty, upon disembarking at Dover, looked back across the English Channel and sighed, “Happy England … if only thou art sensible of thy true happiness!”41

However, having exhibited a seemingly conservative apathy towards current affairs, Etty's political perspective became increasingly sharpened and more reactionary over the course of 1831: “sick of the hackneyed phrase REFORM; fear it will, like the Whigs, never do much for us”, he complained to Bodley that August.42 Anxieties of this kind pervade the correspondence between Etty and his friends, with Albinus Martin – a former architect at the Royal Academy – revealing the precariousness of the situation in a letter to Etty: “What eventful times we live in! Even now whilst I am writing in ignorance arising from our remoteness from the seat of Government you may be witnessing the first outbreak of a revolution – a few hours will inform us.”43 Meanwhile, the 1831 Academy exhibition had released Etty from the

40 Online entry for Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People on the Musée du Louvre website.
41 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
42 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 325. William Etty, to Thomas Bodley, in a letter dated 16 August 1831.
prestigious commission bestowed on him by the Royal Scottish Academy, following the completion of the final panel for his Judith triptych. Free to choose his own subject matter, Etty, undoubtedly inspired by his eventful experiences in the French capital, and responding to the growing anxieties concerning political change in Britain itself, found an artistic corollary to express his shifting views by presenting a dual cautionary vision for his own countrymen with his Youth on the Prow and Destroying Angel – just a year after Delacroix had famously displayed his pictorial account of the Revolution at the May 1831 Salon.

*Phrygian cap iconography*

Intriguingly, both artists’ works prominently feature the *bonnet rouge*, or red Phrygian cap: a highly symbolic scarlet cap representing freedom and the pursuit of liberty. In Delacroix’s image (Fig. 136), Liberty dominates the scene in her role as the personification of the new French nation – raising the Tricolour, brandishing a musket, and proudly sporting a Phrygian cap. Her rallying cry and determined strides across the bodies of the lifeless Swiss guards embodies the sentiment of a battle won, but a war still to fight. In contrast, Etty’s use of the symbol of the *bonnet rouge* – at the pictorial epicentre of both Youth on the Prow and the Destroying Angel – is part of a very different, more opaque kind of allegory in which Etty, drawing upon his shocking experiences in Paris, and the forms of violence he had witnessed there, dramatizes the dangers rather than the promises of reform and revolution. It is notable that surviving preliminary studies for these two pictures, dating from the 1820s, omit the Phrygian cap (see, for example, Fig. 137), suggesting that it materialised in the centre of Etty’s canvases at a later point in the compositional process, presumably post-1830. Moreover, a small pencil drawing in the Victoria and Albert Museum illustrates a seated man wearing a Phrygian cap (Fig. 138), and on the same sheet of paper, Etty has sketched the mother and son dyad for Love’s Angling, which was shown at the Academy in 1831 (Fig. 139).44

44 Prior to 1832, the painter’s only known depiction of this symbolic scarlet bonnet – or of something like it – appears in his 1826 exhibit, The Choice of Paris, where the Trojan prince wears a golden conical cap: his especial attribute in Neoclassical art. Twenty years later, the artist treated this theme once again and, interestingly, in his 1846 The Choice of Paris, the Trojan prince now sports a red Phrygian bonnet. Etty’s The Bridge of Sighs, Venice – which he submitted to the 1835 Royal Academy exhibition – is the only other example of the artist’s sporadic use of the
The cap of liberty had been adopted as a proud symbol of Revolution in France in the early 1790s. Significantly, the British public had been bombarded with anti-revolutionary rhetoric since the original outbreak of rebellion in 1789, led by commentators such as the politician Edmund Burke. Visual warnings also appeared in works of art, such as Johann Zoffany’s 1794 painting, *Plundering the King’s Cellar at Paris* (Fig. 140) in which the *bonnet rouge* takes centre-stage, pictured reigning over a scene of devastation and debauchery which offers a suggestive precedent for Etty’s *Destroying Angel* (Fig. 3). Zoffany’s juxtaposition of the two rotting heads and the red cap – all three are placed upon stakes, with the cap taking the higher, more colourful and most prominent position – is a clear caveat. Following the exhibition of Zoffany’s painting, the bloody, revolutionary connotations of the cap had been reinforced within the British public’s psyche through a succession of satirical engravings, including George Cruikshank’s *A View of the Grand Triumphant Pillar* in 1815 (Fig. 141), and *Death or Liberty! Or Britannia and the Virtues of the Constitution in Danger of Violation from the grt Political Libertine, Radical Reform!* in 1819 (Fig. 142).

Given the ubiquity of the cap as a symbol of dangerous reform, it is perhaps no surprise to find that, leading up to the summer of 1831, graphic satirists again began to exploit the red Phrygian cap as a pictorial metaphor. Thus, in the 1831 cartoon, *The Bad Hat*, by Robert Seymour (Fig. 143), William IV is portrayed as the unwitting victim of the scheming Earl Grey, who publically steals the crown off His Majesty’s head whilst proclaiming: “What a shocking bad hat”. Earl Grey himself sports a red Phrygian cap, which, together with the Tricolour and capitalised word [REF] “ORM”, figuratively stains the Reform Bill with potent symbols of the French revolution. A handkerchief bearing the “King’s Conscience” is swiped by the Lord Chancellor Henry Brougham – a firm supporter of the Bill – as he trips lightly past. Brougham features more prominently alongside the King in another print of the same year: *Sinbad the Sailor and the Man of the Mountain* (Fig. 144). In this image, the King, *bonnet rouge* in existence. This time, the wearer is loading a dead prisoner onto a black gondola in order to dispose of the body, and Etty places the cap at the centre of the grim deed.

45 Richard Wrigley offers an enlightening discussion on the emergence and revolutionary use of the liberty cap in French society in Chapter 4, ‘Liberty Caps, from Roman Emblem to Radical Headgear’ (Wrigley, 2002: 135-86).

weighed down by having the Chancellor perched upon his shoulders, is forced to wear the *bonnet rouge* with an attached Tricolour cockade. Brougham, who also dons a miniature red cap, discards the crown whilst carefully placing the King’s new hat on his head.

At this point, in thinking about the relationship between Etty’s two exhibition pieces, and about their use of the Phrygian cap, it is helpful to turn to a far older image: Thomas Rowlandson’s popular 1793 print *The Contrast 1793. British Liberty. French Liberty. Which is Best?* (Fig. 145). In this image, the personification of British Liberty sits peacefully in the shade of a leafy tree, holding the Phrygian cap, and surrounded by symbolic items such as the scales of justice, the Magna Carta and a sleeping lion. Her naval might is embodied in the distant ship, and Britain’s island status is confirmed by the tranquil sea upon which it sails. Here, intriguingly, the cap is coupled with a pacific and positive image of Britishness and liberty. In contrast, French Liberty is portrayed as an ugly, dishevelled and frenzied woman, striding across a decapitated naked male body, whose head she has set atop the central spike of her trident, flanked by two liberty caps. Her bulging muscles seem to emit wing-shaped smoking flames. In the background, a nobleman hangs forlornly from a street lamp. The distinction between British serenity and French anarchy advanced by Rowlandson is, I would suggest, also implied by the contrast set up by Etty, whose utopian blue seascape – in which even the skiff’s swan figurehead is redolent of innocence and poetry (Fig. 11) – is directly juxtaposed with fiery chaos in the *Destroying Angel* (Fig. 3). *Youth on the Prow’s* aquatic scene can indeed be read as being synonymous with his view of contemporary Britain: an idyllic island nation threatened by the dangerous external influences that, having recently been experienced in France, find expression in the shocking and violent imagery of its companion piece.

Etty, as well as evoking older pictorial models, would also have envisaged that his pointed inclusion of the liberty cap at the centre of his two pictures would strike a chord with viewers familiar with this symbol’s appearance during a series of current disturbances and debates caused by the raised political temperature. A recent riot in Bristol, following the rejection of the second Reform Bill in October 1831, generated satirical imagery and press coverage that chimed with the iconography of his
Destroying Angel: “insults of drunken maniacs, the howling of savages bursting into the haunts of peace, of demons into the habitations of domestic quiet, – the sacrilege, the plunder, the threats of fire, of torture, and death”.47 More to the point, at the riot’s height, “an individual mounted the statue of King William, and, fixing a tri-coloured cap on a long pole, pronounced aloud, ‘The Cap of Liberty!’”48 Meanwhile, when the Radicalist MP Henry Hunt addressed reformers in Leeds, he was ceremonially presented with a tri-coloured flag, “having the words ‘Radical Reform; Vive la Liberte 27, 28, and 29 Juillet, 1830,’ surmounted by a cap of liberty”.49 Additional rioting throughout industrialised towns, including Derby and Nottingham, further fuelled fears of a full-blown revolution. The symbolic power imparted by the crimson liberty cap seems to have seared itself into Etty’s consciousness as a result of his first-hand experience of a revolution in Paris, and was subsequently incorporated into his evolving works. Etty seems determined to articulate his perspective on the precarious British social landscape, and to present his own vision of the ramifications of taking the incorrect path towards reform. The Phrygian cap’s inclusion as a motif gave an important immediacy and universality to what might otherwise be perceived as inconsequential imaginative and mythological pictures.

Content and inspiration: ‘visionary’ allegory

Having summarised the context within which Etty’s paintings were realised and brought to completion, I will now return to the images themselves. These two elaborate, complex and over-crowded canvases, which are so characteristic of the artist’s style in the 1820s and early 30s, preclude precise classification. The spectator is presented with a bizarre amalgamation of poetical, literary, historical and allegorical elements. In part, it can be assumed that Etty’s former academic master Henry Fuseli, through his laissez-faire teaching, gave license to – or even encouraged – such a unique and uninhibited mode of painting, resulting in inexhaustible images that invite an array of possible interpretations. Even their titles are left deliberately vague and open-ended. Significantly, the painting we now know as Youth on the Prow

47 Eagles, 1832: 135.
48 Morning Post, 3 November 1831: 4.
49 Morning Post, 12 November 1831: 2. The purpose of the meeting was to promote the “formation of a Political Union of the Working Classes to obtain Universal Suffrage, Short Parliaments, and the Vote by Ballot”.

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was actually untitled when first exhibited at the Academy in 1832. Its popular title stemmed from the six lines of verse derived from *The Bard*, by the English poet Thomas Gray (1716-71), which accompanied the painting in the gallery catalogue:

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Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,
While proudly riding o’er the azure realm,
In gallant trim, the gilded vessel goes,
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm,
Unmindful of the sweeping whirlwind’s sway,
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening prey.50
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By releasing this passage from the constraints of its context, Etty lends the allegory a more universal truth, and by dispensing with any direct reference to the poem’s true subject – the rise and fall of the House of Plantagenet – he is able to repress the historical and emphasise the lyrical aspects of Gray’s ode. The legitimacy supplied by such a distinguished literary source – the narrative of which would work to control, or neutralise, the nudity pictured – is jeopardised by the artist’s intentional abstruseness. Yet paradoxically this ambiguity renders the piece relevant to modern history, as viewers are invited to imagine that the untroubled boating party is shortly to be overwhelmed by the “sweeping whirlwind” of contemporary political and social upheaval. Meanwhile, despite assigning a protracted title to his other exhibit – *The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate* (Fig. 3) – Etty, in the gallery catalogue, described the image in deliberately obscure terms as: “A finished sketch of that class of compositions called by the Romans ‘Visions,’ not having their origin in history or poetry”.51

Critics were quick to note the lack of formal titles attributed to the works, and several also observed and commented on their incomplete and unfinished nature – especially in relation to the *Destroying Angel*.52 In keeping with the transitory essence suggested by the term ‘vision’, the painting itself is not even ‘finished’ as an object, and has a sketch-like feel that is emphasised by its material make-up: unlike Etty’s other two exhibits, it takes the form of a painting on paper, mounted on canvas. Some of the contemporary responses to the painting appear to reveal an awareness

50 Royal Academy of Arts, 1832: 15. Gray’s *The Bard* was first published in 1757.
51 Royal Academy of Arts, 1832: 16.
52 See, for example, reviews in the *London Literary Gazette*, 12 May 1832: 298, and the *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 June 1832: 126.
of the shifting, layered aspects of his ‘visionary’ work. “The architectural portions of
the picture, sketchy as they are, and retaining the original chalk marks, are not the
least of its beauties”, remarked the Morning Post upon examining this canvas, and
in the following year, the same paper commented: “the powerful impression of a
finished picture is admirably combined with the dauntless spirit of a sketch”. The
Times, however, was less impressed: “It is only to be considered as a sketch, or we
should have to quarrel with the slovenly manner in which the distance is painted,
and which spoils the effect of that part of the picture, making the remote objects
appear almost as near as those which occupy the foreground”. By leaving one of his
chief paintings unnamed, and presenting the other as an invented ‘vision’, Etty allows
his pictorial narratives to be timeless – situated in the past or related to the present
– and allows for a great deal of personalised interpretation on the part of the
spectator. At the same time, through his imaginative and abstract conceptions, Etty
can be seen to conjure up imperceptible ideals or sentiments, which was considered
an especially elevated form of creativity.

I would suggest that Etty’s curious inclusion of the term ‘vision’ in the 1832 gallery
catalogue can be seen as a tribute to the teachings of his master, Fuseli. The Latin
word harks back to the classical rhetorician Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria: a subtle
allusion that has not hitherto been commented upon by previous scholarship on the
painting. Fuseli quoted from this orator’s works within his third lecture to the
Academy students, which was entitled ‘Invention’:

We give ... the name of visions to what the Greeks call phantasies; that
power by which the images of absent things are represented by the
mind with the energy of objects moving before our eyes. He who
conceives these rightly, will be a master of passions; his is that well-
tempered fancy which can imagine things, voices, acts, as they really
exist, a power perhaps in a great measure dependent on our will.

By aligning his work with this concept, Etty was clearly intent upon tackling the
“highest summit of invention”, and integrating the lessons of the Swiss teacher into

53 Morning Post, 9 June 1832: 3.
54 Morning Post, 20 April 1833: 6.
55 The Times, 24 May 1832: 3.
56 One critic summed up this notion in the following excerpt: “... by the verse which they seek to
embody, or, nobler still, by a visible feeling or fancy of their own” (Athenæum, 12 May 1832: 308).
57 Wornum, 1848: 412.
his own productions. Quintilian believed that an individual’s imagination was capable of producing a ‘vision’ (a kind of ‘mental picture’) by drawing upon a mnemonic bank of sensory or visual impressions and recollections, which merge to form an invented image in the mind’s eye. Truly intense visualisations of this type possessed the ability to evoke immediate, powerful and persuasive reactions in those listening to the rhetorician’s dialectic. Crucially, the ancient Roman emphasised that by effectively communicating this ‘vision’ with one’s audience, an orator could thus initiate an identical emotional reaction to his own – in short, turning his “auditors into spectators” through the deployment of language.

Therefore, Etty’s pictorial manifestation of an invented Roman ‘vision’ (Fig. 3), hanging in the exhibition space, perhaps sought to conjure up a sense of fear and horror in his spectator, through the work’s associations with reform and vice. The central positioning of the bright Phrygian cap, around which the unfurling chaos swirls, would inevitably elicit a wide range of revolutionary references in the viewer’s mind. The terminology also works to place the painting in a mythological, ethereal setting and imbues it with a sketchy but vivid quality – not of the present, but of an imagined, prospective future, after the fall. Formally, following the line formed by the architecture around the composition, through the curve created by the careful positioning of bodies and arms, we can trace an oval, like an eye, through which we observe the disastrous repercussions of temptation. Our visual address is confronted by a ‘vision’ of an awful apocalypse. Interestingly, later in the aforementioned lecture, Fuseli showcases Raphael as an exemplary Old Master from whom students of art might seek inspiration, selecting his “magnificent fresco … the Incendio del Borgo, in which he sacrificed the historic and mystic part of his subject to the effusion of the various passions roused by the sudden terrors of nocturnal conflagration”. The Room of the Fire in the Borgo constitutes one of Raphael’s frescoes in the Vatican Palace, close to the room which inspired many of the spatial and figural elements of Etty’s Destroying Angel – the Room of Heliodorus – the impact of which I will now expand upon.

58 Wornum, 1848: 386.
60 Wornum, 1848: 418.
**Etty’s artistic predecessors, ancient and modern**

In his dramatic depiction of divine retribution (Fig. 3), Etty can be seen to be deliberately defining himself in relation to a number of artistic predecessors, and critics variously discerned the influence of Michelangelo, Rubens and Breughel upon the painting.\(^6^1\) A particularly persuasive pictorial template for Etty’s work, however, is Raphael’s famous fresco, *The Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple* (Fig. 146), painted between 1511 and 1512. This is one of the *Stanze* frescoes in the Vatican, which Etty had seen and studied while visiting Rome in 1822.\(^6^2\) Heliodorus, a general and statesman, was sent by Seleucus, King of Syria, to steal the treasure held within the Temple of Jerusalem. In response to the pleading prayers of his priests, God sent a fierce, golden-armoured horseman, flanked by two beautiful angelic youths, to strike Heliodorus down.\(^6^3\) As previously noted, Etty was mindful of the forms of art that his mentor Fuseli selected as model examples in his Academy lectures, including the illustrious works of Raphael. In his Lecture VIII, on ‘Colour – Fresco Painting’, Fuseli singles out the “astonishing” *Heliodorus* as a work that demonstrates the “ultimate powers of Raphael”, and, despite stating his intention to concentrate solely upon its harmonious colouring, cannot help but commend the “loftiness of conception, the mighty style of design, the refined and appropriate choice of character, the terror, fears, hopes, palpitation of expression, and the far more than Corregiesque graces of female forms”. His discourse culminates in a description of the diverse range of character groupings within the piece – “angelic, devout, authoritative, violent, brutal, vigorous, helpless, delicate …” – all adjectives that can easily be applied to figures within Etty’s *Destroying Angel*.\(^6^4\)

Fuseli further compliments Raphael’s representation by admiring the "general tone that diffuses itself from the interior repose of the sanctuary, smoothenes the whirlwind that fluctuates on the foreground, and gives an air of temperance to the whole".\(^6^5\) Etty eliminates the perceptible “temperance” – or control over excess – that the *Heliodorus* exhibits and instead unleashes chaos across his canvas. However, one

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\(^6^1\) *London Literary Gazette*, 19 May 1832: 314, and the *Examiner*, 10 June 1832: 373.

\(^6^2\) Farr, 1958: 36.

\(^6^3\) 2 Maccabees, 3:1-40.


\(^6^5\) Wornum, 1848: 515.
is immediately struck by the compositional similarities between the two in terms of the architecture: firstly in the Corinthian columns and trio of archways in the backdrop, and especially the way that both artists choose to compress the action within a vaulted arch. Raphael’s fresco presents controlled commotion, where the activity moves from the group of women and orphans on the left, who gesture and point fearfully, to the prostrate figure of Heliodorus, with his spilt treasure, on the extreme right. His pose – supporting his weight on one arm as he is engulfed by the God-sent pursuers – is echoed by that of the chained male figure in the foreground of the Destroying Angel (Figs. 3 and 146). Unlike Etty, who fills the centre of his picture with violent action, and the reeling activity of struggling bodies, contracting the picture space, there is a marked void in the middle of Raphael’s work, which is empty of figures. This space stretches backwards past repeated roundels and patterned tiles to the small window of blue sky in the distance, creating a spacious and airy perspective. Etty’s characters are involved, entangled and jumbled, spilling helplessly down the steps and onto the frame, along with wine, crushed posies, dice, blood and grapes – the downwards pull created by the concave arch heightening the terror of retribution. In his discussion of Raphael’s fresco, Heinrich Wölfflin notes that the “impetuous rush” of the two youths to the right of the composition “is reflected in the horse so that it appears to be part of the same lightening movement. The rush of movement is admirably rendered so that their feet seem hardly to touch the ground”.66 Etty has cleverly combined the hovering figures of the two youthful angels and reformulated them into his own wingless, muscular destructive angel, who soars at speed above the scene.

Speaking about his admiration for the Renaissance masters Raphael and Michelangelo, Etty declared: “both are Kings, and must rule alternately”.67 Indeed, his indebtedness to Michelangelo’s pictorial forms in the Destroying Angel is unmistakeable. The rampaging demonic figures in the bottom-left corner of the Italian’s canonical fresco, The Last Judgement, correlate closely with the devilish beings pictured within Etty’s frenzied image. One of the artist’s sketchbooks, dating from 1822, is littered with sketchy pencil drawings created during his visit to the Sistine Chapel, including Michelangelo’s arrow-clutching St. Sebastian (Figs. 147 and

148) and Charon, the ferryman of the damned (Figs. 149 and 150). Some of Michelangelo’s distinctive, monstrous characters seem to have been reformulated and transplanted into Etty’s work, such as the open-mouthed ghoulish creature whose wide eyes convey mad fear (Figs. 151 and 152). One of Etty’s fiendish ‘daemons of evil’, shown seizing the waist of a terrified woman as she flees forwards, is reminiscent of the bestial, crouching demon sinking savage teeth into his victim’s leg within *The Last Judgement* (Figs. 153 and 154). In both works, the creatures share splayed, clawed feet, bulging muscles and a chilling stare directed straight at the viewer. By reworking elements of frescoes by two of the most celebrated Old Masters, Etty was able to allude to, and draw upon, a venerable pictorial tradition, which chimed with the artistic preferences of his tutor.

If, on the one hand, Etty’s *Destroying Angel* can be understood as referencing the imagery of renowned Renaissance artists, it can also be seen to have responded to the depictions of scenes of devastation by his contemporaries, for example those produced by John Martin (1789-1854). The vogue for Martin’s melodramatic works during this period seems to loosely reflect the ideological and political upheaval that gripped the country. Evangelical pre-millenarians firmly believed that in order for there to be a second coming, the “world must sink into wickedness and chaos”, and the 1789 French Revolution was deemed by many to presage the start of the Apocalypse. Similarly, the upheaval in Paris during July 1830, which had such a lasting effect upon Etty, was assumed by this group to represent a portent from God, or a “symbolic earthquake”. The epic scale and catastrophic subject matter of Martin’s biblical scenes, such as *Belshazzar’s Feast* (Fig. 155), which was first exhibited at the British Institution in 1821 and reproduced as a mezzotint in 1826, struck a chord with receptive spectators. The production of such ‘apocalyptic sublime’ imagery proliferated during the 1820s and 30s, as artists were inspired by their own entrenched Christian beliefs, as well as by contemporary events such as the 1830 Revolution and British riots. Samuel Colman, a millenarian artist from Bristol – a key site of the English riots in 1831 – was also motivated to depict the hellish destruction of a place of worship (*The Destruction of the Temple*, Fig. 156).

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70 For example, in 1821, 5000 spectators queued to view John Martin’s apocalyptic tableau *Belshazzar’s Feast*. 
This time, a Gothic cathedral crumbles beneath an onslaught of lightning and fire, with its cross – representing established religious practice – falling into the flames below, as worshippers cower beneath Christ’s true cross in the sky. In Etty’s picture (Fig. 3), architecture collapses and the falling masonry reinforces the downfall of the debauched revellers. With such sensationalist works proving so popular with the public, often being theatrically displayed as dioramas and panoramas, Etty could be seen to be adopting a fashionable mode of imagery for his own vision of the fall of a civilisation through divine intervention.

Despite his reservations, it would seem that Etty may not only have been responding to the imagery produced by his contemporaries in Britain, but also to the paintings of his peers across the Channel. One key work that provides interesting parallels is Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* (Fig. 157), which the French painter saw as his “celebration of the catalyst for reform”.71 This morbid canvas depicts a close up of the few remaining survivors of the tragic wreck of a French frigate off the coast of Senegal in July 1816. Of the 150 civilian passengers cut loose on a basic raft to fend for themselves, only fifteen remained when they were miraculously picked up by a passing British boat, having endured great hardship and stayed alive only by resorting to cannibalism. The topic was more suited to a small genre picture than a grand history painting. As Christine Riding suggests, the canvas’s size dictated that it "should have engaged with an elevated subject of profound moral or national significance for the edification of society".72 However, although the work portrayed a shameful and barbaric episode, its size and treatment of the heroic male nude, as well as the inclusion of classical and Old Master references, elevated its status into the highest art form: history painting. When it was sensationallly exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1819, the *Medusa’s* shocking subject matter divided the critics, but Géricault was awarded a medal by the French Academy.73 Gilchrist speculates that by the time it came to London in the following year, to be displayed at William Bullock’s Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly, Etty was already envisaging his *Youth on the Prow* and *Destroying Angel*.74

72 Noon, 2003: 68.
74 Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 103.
It was Etty's former master, Lawrence, who proposed Géricault's invitation to the 1821 Royal Academy dinner. At a private viewing of the picture, the *British Press* reported that "the Marquis of Stafford [Etty's patron], the Bishops of Ely and Carlisle, and a number of the most eminent patrons of the Fine Arts together with several members of the Royal Academy" had visited.\(^75\) To draw in the public, Bullock had advertised widely in the London newspapers, so that during its six month stay, the gruesome picture earned Géricault 18,000 francs and attracted approximately 40,000 visitors (including, presumably, Etty).\(^76\) A decade later, Etty re-examined Géricault's masterpiece in the Louvre, when he visited with Alaric Alexander Watts, who wrote in his memoirs:

> The picture which satisfied him best of the modern French school, was the well-known 'Wreck of the Medusa,' by Gericault, the great merit of which he frankly recognised, admitting that it had in it much of the quality of Michael Angelo.\(^77\)

As is also the case in Etty's *Destroying Angel* (Fig. 3), the energy of the Frenchman's piece flows upwards and from left to right, culminating in the action of the black youth waving his red flag in a vain attempt to attract the attention of the rescue boat in the distance. Here, the composition is carefully arranged around two principal pyramidal structures – formed on one side by the two ropes which stretch outwards and frame a fallen tarpaulin and a filling sail, and on the other by a jumbled, entangled heap of animated figures, with the African boy at its pinnacle. The cloud formations and cresting waves repeat and reinforce these triangular shapes, while the front corner of the wrecked raft points towards the viewer and seems to almost breach the boundary created by the picture frame. Our eye is drawn inexorably downwards, through death, distress and despair and into the foaming waves. Parts of lifeless, pallid bodies puncture the edge of the canvas.

The iconography and compositional dynamics of Etty's work can be suggestively related to Géricault's image. The English artist, as well as deploying a similar imagery of fallen, abject figures, also reworks the pyramidal arrangement that is so striking in Géricault's picture. Yet the unity of the *Destroying Angel's* pyramidal architecture

\(^75\) Johnson, 1954: 250.
\(^76\) Johnson, 1954: 253.
\(^77\) Watts, 1884, 2: 58.
is disrupted by the series of strong diagonal axes that cut their paths across the picture plane. The rightward, diagonal ascent of the fiery angel’s sweeping flight is mirrored by a line which runs up the glinting metal chain in the foreground – whose links are echoed in the bulging muscles of the fiend’s powerful arm – through the fainting female’s flimsy white drapery and the flame of the blazing firebrand, past the burnished heads of the statuary and out of the frame. A third diagonal is created by the brawny back of the devil in the bottom right-hand corner of the scene, its contours highlighted by the use of heavy chiaroscuro. This same pictorial device is used in the left-hand corner, passing through the chest of the swooning woman and the knee of the male clutching at his head in horror, setting up another series of axes that run in the opposite direction. These numerous criss-crossing lines intersect the picture and add drama to the scene as the eye is constantly kept on the move.

It is now clear that the political messages of Etty’s pictures, and their interest in embodying a ‘visionary’ form of artistic expression, were underpinned by a wide-ranging evocation of Old Master and contemporary painting. This strategy provided the painter with a range of benefits. Through alluding to the work of such artists as Raphael and Michelangelo, Etty was able to give his troubling and provocative imagery of political change an entirely respectable pedigree, thus distancing his work from any charge of being too closely aligned with the ephemeral, vulgar imagery of propaganda and satire. Meanwhile, the characteristics that his *Destroying Angel* shared with the spectacular, sublime paintings of Martin and Géricault suggest Etty’s attentiveness to the kinds of imagery that were making a powerful appeal within the exhibition spaces of his own day, and his desire to replicate their visual effects within the Academy’s Great Room. In view of the fact that the display was, notoriously, crowded with contemporary fashionable portraits, it seems likely that *Youth on the Prow* and, in particular, the *Destroying Angel*, would indeed have stood out from their companions on the walls.

*The aesthetics of disjunction*

Etty’s striking subject matter, and his allusion to such an extensive and varied range of artistic influences, were not the only formal aspects of his self-styled Roman ‘vision’ that ensured the canvas attracted attention in the exhibition space. The
work’s perceptibly disjunctive elements – a feature shared by Youth on the Prow – likewise rendered it conspicuously different from many of its neighbours. Dennis Farr describes the Destroying Angel as a “diffuse” and incoherent “assembly of Life studies, but studies at one remove, so to speak, from the Life academy”, and points to the way that Etty replicates poses from previous multi-figural pictures to back up this statement.\textsuperscript{78} For instance, the partially obscured female with both arms arched over her head towards the left of the composition seems to have been directly lifted from his 1828 The World Before the Flood (Figs. 158 and 159). In Youth on the Prow, Etty again presents the spectator with a densely packed group of figures on a series of levels – sitting, kneeling, standing, reclining or floating in water. The composition surges upwards like the translucent bubble which floats towards the sky. A particularly unusual and unique formal element within this image is the marked way that the female nude intersects with the water – a pictorial motif which features elsewhere in Etty’s body of work, appearing for example in his Cleopatra of 1821 (Fig. 18), and his 1846 Musidora (Fig. 160).\textsuperscript{79} The line of water which slices across the creamy flesh of the three nymphs is very crisply demarcated, and the plane of their pale, severed silhouettes seems to leave a distinct imprint upon the painting.

This process of grafting – or ‘collaging’ – isolated parts of the nude figure into his grand set-pieces inevitably leads to an unnatural sense of disjointedness – and a disparity between the figure and its setting. Martin Myrone considers this disjointedness to be one of the reasons why Etty’s art generated such vitriolic criticism, stating: “The fissures and junctures which are too visible in many of Etty’s nudes, often at the meeting of naked flesh with water ... are unwelcome reminders of the constructed nature of these images, their materiality, and the movement of such works from the Academy to the studio to the exhibition hall”.\textsuperscript{80} Alison Smith also remarks upon what she views as the artist’s inadvertent exposure of his groundwork, declaring that “when critics condemned Etty’s figures as overtly naked, they had the model and studio in mind”.\textsuperscript{81} Such issues prompted one contemporary critic to comment: “Affectation in attitude, too obvious nudity of form, and over-

\textsuperscript{78} Farr, 1958: 76, 63.
\textsuperscript{79} I am indebted to Martin Myrone for drawing my attention to this particular feature of the painting during the ‘Unpacking Etty’ symposium held at York Art Gallery in November 2011.
\textsuperscript{80} Burnage, Hallett and Turner, 2011: 57.
\textsuperscript{81} Smith, 1996: 86.
marked anatomy, detract from the merits” of Etty’s Youth on the Prow.\textsuperscript{82} Another accused the artist of having a “lascivious mind”, stating that the “naked female may, in the severity of the antique, be modest, but it is not so in the attitudes of Mr. Etty”.\textsuperscript{83}

Having already investigated how Etty intentionally presented his Destroying Angel as a ‘vision’, and what that entailed – namely the provocation of a series of mental images and associations – such disjunctive elements as those outlined above could only have increased and intensified the visual effect of his work. Moreover, I would suggest that by exposing the various diachronic stages that make up the production process, Etty finds a formal equivalent to the kinds of political and social disjunctures with which his canvases seem so concerned. The reality of flesh, of corporeality, of the model and of the discernible sutures that connect them, combined with the ambivalent, intangible imagery of a ‘visionary’ art, works to render his pieces fitting for the shifting realities that were taking place outside the exhibition hall – specifically the current changing shape of the state.

\textit{Etty at the 1832 Royal Academy exhibition}

Beyond the frame-filled walls of Somerset House, London was awash with speculation and intrigue concerning the eventual outcome of the ‘Days of May’. Even the city’s preeminent contemporary art establishment was unable to distance itself from the current political and social turbulence. On 7 May 1832, the Academy’s exhibition officially opened its doors to the public. On the same day, 200,000 people, affiliated with multiple reformist unions, marched to a grand meeting in Birmingham, organised by the Birmingham Political Union – an event that was captured in paint by Benjamin Robert Haydon (Fig. 161).\textsuperscript{84} Later that same day, the Tories won a vote to postpone the consideration of disfranchisement clauses – a central concept within the Bill – and a defeat that reformists considered to be a “mutilation”.\textsuperscript{85} Britain appeared to be in “a state of revolution, to be terminated only by the frank acceptance of the Bill”.\textsuperscript{86} Within two days, Earl Grey had handed in his

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Original}, 19 May 1832: 188.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Morning Chronicle}, 8 June 1832: 3.
\textsuperscript{84} Maccoby, 1935: 42. One newspaper reported that by its “lowest computation, we are justified in saying, that at least 200,000 persons were at the Meeting” (\textit{Morning Chronicle}, 8 May 1832: 3).
\textsuperscript{85} Pearce, 2003: 274.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{The Times}, 8 May 1832: 3.
resignation over the King’s refusal to create enough peers within the House of Lords – thereby outnumbering the Conservative votes – to ensure the safe passage of the Bill through Parliament.

At such a volatile time, the press acted as the conduit which represented and disseminated the entire spectrum of current British political affairs – and the newspapers’ opinions concerning the Reform Bill crisis seeped into areas of commentary that were ostensibly free of prejudice, such as art criticism. In the words of a writer for the *Athenæum*: “the press has a vast power at present in the land: it thinks, and speaks, and criticises for the multitude”.87 Aside from the expressly radical publications which were spawned as a direct result of the ferocious polemic about parliamentary reform that had raged on over the preceding fifteen-month period, the more mainstream papers also aligned themselves to various political parties – from the radical weekly paper the *Examiner* and the Whig-supporting *The Times*, to the conservative *Literary Gazette*. At this critical juncture, the press’ considerable sway was crucial to the outcome of the Reform Bill – as Aspinall states: “All the great reforms of the period, such as ... catholic emancipation, the Reform Bill of 1832 and the repeal of the corn-laws, were preceded by long periods of agitation, of which the Newspaper Press was an indispensable instrument”.88 In view of the palpable force of the printed media, there is undeniably an argument to be made that certain critics’ political proclivities may have shaped the reception of individual paintings at the exhibition. Visitors to the display may have already had their judgement influenced by their choice of circulated broadsheet and been informed of an appropriate response to specific works, impinging upon their objectivity. The extent to which the critical commentary influenced readers, however, remains a source of contention.

In this particular year, it is tempting to expand upon the subversive methods and critical frameworks used by art correspondents to review the exhibition. Indeed, it is possible to read the display as a politicised one that went beyond the usual glittering surface effects and offered its visitors a fascinating response to, and intervention in, the debates surrounding the Reform Act. Upon entering the Great

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88 Aspinall, 1946: 43.
Room through the main door in the west wall, contemporary spectators would have found themselves surrounded by 248 works of art, hung in a dense mass of frames extending from floor to ceiling.89 The display space’s centrepiece, and the year’s showstopper, David Wilkie’s *The Preaching of Knox Before the Lords of the Congregation, 10 June 1559* (Figs. 162 and 163), was positioned on the line in the middle of the east wall – a historical work that was only finalised, like Etty’s pair of paintings, a decade after its initial conception in 1822. This dynamic canvas dominated the press coverage and attracted huge crowds to Somerset House, so much so that exhibition-goers were warned they “must be early risers; otherwise, it is only by waiting patiently for at least an hour, they have the slightest chance of drawing near to this centre of attraction”.90 Commentators were unequivocal in their eulogies, declaring the picture to be “the lion of the Gallery”,91 “the polar star which attracts all eyes”,92 and “not only the most excellent in the exhibition, but ... the most perfect work of the English school”.93

Wilkie’s highly finished history painting, commissioned by the conservative parliamentarian Sir Robert Peel, was accompanied in the gallery catalogue by a lengthy and detailed description of the event depicted, in an excerpt from Dr. McCrie’s *Life of John Knox* (first published 1811), in order to make it more easily comprehensible for a London audience.94 The text relates how Knox – a Scottish clergyman and leader of the Protestant reformation movement in Scotland – delivered a powerfully compelling sermon to a congregation comprising both members of the nobility and clergy in the parish church of St. Andrew’s in Fifeshire, brazenly defying the Archbishop’s threat of assassination. Knox himself is pictured to the right of Wilkie’s canvas, springing up onto the balls of his feet, as he bends zealously forwards over the pulpit, unconsciously kicking open its door and sending a jug flying in his fervour. The preacher’s outstretched right arm reaches out entreatingly to the rapt assembly, while his left hand clutches at a Bible, and his face

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89 The Hanging Committee this year consisted of the animal painter Edwin Henry Landseer, as well as the landscapists Richard Cook and William Daniell (Whitley, 1973, 2: 233).
90 *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 June 1832: 255.
91 *The Times*, 8 May 1832: 3.
92 *Bury and Norwich Post*, 16 May 1832: 1.
93 *New Monthly Magazine*, 1 June 1832: 255.
94 The work had originally been commissioned by Lord Liverpool, who died in 1828. Peel, who paid £1,300 for the painting, was considered “one of the chief patrons of art in these dolorous days” (*Athenæum*, 19 May 1832: 324).
is contorted by the force of his impassioned oratory – eyes straining wide, mouth open, his pose and expression all “wrought to the highest pitch of pictorial energy”.95 The way that his black cape flutters out behind him adds animation, and the reformer “appears like a great black eagle about to swoop down upon the priestly band before him ... his eyes flashing fire ... in his fanatic rage”.96 Interestingly, the press largely ignored the picture’s religious controversy, and instead interpreted it as a fundamentally patriotic piece that “grapples with a national and spirit-stirring” subject matter.97 In part, it would seem that the show’s star painting gained such extensive plaudits for its pliability to all causes. For the radicals, Knox could be seen to represent a staunch and vehement reformer who succeeded in bringing about change in the face of overwhelming danger, while for the conservatives, the picture could just as easily be interpreted as being entrenched in British history and highlighting Protestant values. The pro-reform connotations evident within the work especially appealed to the Whigs, who considered it to be politically progressive.

A significant amount of media attention was also devoted to the metaphorical contest between the artists David Wilkie and William Beechey with their respective representations of King William IV (Figs. 164 and 165). The two pictures, according to one report, were “fine centre-pieces on each side of the large room”.98 It was noted that: “The position of these royal whole lengths necessarily induces a comparison between them”, and we can easily envisage these two imposing, full-length portraits facing one another and towering over the audience.99 The two flamboyant, larger-than-life painted likenesses of William IV must have made quite a visual impact, especially in view of the fact that Beechey’s canvas was the largest in the exhibition. On the one hand, their central, prominent and highly visible positioning within the display was inevitable – symbolically asserting the crown’s authority over its subjects and nodding to the King’s role as the Academy’s benefactor. At the same time, a spectator, looking from one to the other, would be confronted by two rather different representations of the same man. Wilkie – who had been appointed to

95 Morning Post, 5 May 1832: 3.
96 Spectator, 12 May 1832: 449-50.
97 Bury and Norwich Post, 16 May 1832: 1.
99 London Literary Gazette, 2 June 1832: 347.
succeed Lawrence as Painter in Ordinary to the King just two years beforehand – attempts to transcend the boundaries of portraiture by dressing his royal patron in the rich robes of state and placing a gleaming sword in his right hand. The sovereign’s pale silhouette stands out strikingly against the pseudo-classical shadowy backdrop, and he appears to be poised to stride purposefully out of his frame and into his realm, gazing squarely ahead – formidable, stern, powerful – “an angry tone to the cast of his countenance”.100 The cuirassier’s breast plate, which is pictured lying by his right foot, hints at his role not solely as a leader, but also as a warrior and protector, prepared to fight for his kingdom. Contrastingly, Beechey depicts the King lower down in the canvas, wearing a milder, more benign, pensive expression, and has him turn his head to the side in contemplation. His features, one critic wrote, conveyed “a look of care and anxiety, which, if it did not formerly belong to his Majesty, may well have been produced by the events that have occurred since his accession”.101

Indeed, the Academy’s previously popular royal patron found himself subjected to a barrage of humiliating public abuse in this period. William IV was garnering far more interest outside the Academy than within it, having allowed Earl Grey’s resignation and requested the Duke of Wellington to form an unlikely new government. His attempts to install Wellington as Prime Minister had ended in failure after only a few days, as the latter was unable to gain sufficient support to form a cogent government. The irony of entreat ing Wellington to take on the position – in the hope of passing through a revised Reform Bill, which the Duke had previously scorned – bordered on the absurd. Peel, as well as the Speaker Charles Manners-Sutton, had both already spurned the King’s invitation to form a Tory government. On 13 May, as he drove from Windsor, the King’s carriage was bombarded by “clods of dirt”, accompanied by fierce hissing voices,102 with one correspondent describing the surrounding crowd as “rude and insulting”.103 Traditionally, the monarch’s visit to the summer exhibition took place on the Friday before the formal public opening the following Monday. However, in 1832 William IV did not attend the institution until 27 May, three weeks’ into its run, with the *Morning Chronicle* stating that the “intended visit

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100 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, May 1832: 440.
102 Ziegler, 1971: 216.
... had been postponed for the present”. Public agitation and the perilous political scene, including the Birmingham unionist march mentioned above, had clearly disrupted the King’s conventional routine. When he did eventually visit the exhibition, despite the fact that the third Reform Bill was now guaranteed a future safe passage through Parliament, his reputation had been tarnished:

The streets were crowded – the demonstrations of affection & loyalty were but of a limited character – while the hearty hisses of some who could not restrain their feelings must have produced a deep sense of mortification in the breasts of those who could not but feel that such an expression had been justified by circumstances.

The monarch’s actions during the preceding month were, by some, deemed feeble at a moment when the state was in desperate need of a strong, bold and intelligent leader, that is, of the kingly ilk that Wilkie portrays. The ongoing complex political machinations, as well his own confused response to the situation, had a negative effect upon his public image. Although a conservative at heart, the King did not strongly oppose parliamentary reform per se – he did, however, object to the “creation of peers as something which diminished the weight and symmetry of the society at the top of which he stood”.

A contemporary visitor to the 1832 show, having encountered Wilkie’s morally elevating historical canvas directly ahead of them, would be drawn forwards into the middle of the domed space. Pausing here, and glancing to either side, they would find themselves surrounded by a trio of dominating pictures, in which a reformist image of Knox was bracketed by the two portraits of the King, alternately heroic and contemplative. Collectively, I would suggest, this trio of canvases offered an allegory of the British nation itself, or more particularly its ability to maintain the traditional institutions of State – typified by the figure of the King himself – whilst also allowing gradual changes to take place within its constitutional structure.

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104 Morning Chronicle, 7 May 1832: 3. In his absence, the Duchess of Kent and Princess Victoria attended the exhibition.
105 Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle, 3 June 1832: 2.
106 Pearce, 2003: 286.
Luminously set off against Wilkie’s *William IV* (Fig. 164) – which was considered by some to be “rather dark” – Turner’s expansive historical landscape, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage – Italy* (Fig. 166), formed part of another, subtler, contest that was playing out across the walls of the Great Room.\(^{107}\) While Beechey’s introspective portrayal of the King (Fig. 165) hung adjacent to Etty’s vibrant *Youth on the Prow* (Fig. 11) in the centre of the south wall, Wilkie’s commanding royal portrait was bordered on one side by Turner’s painting – suggesting a direct attempt by the members of the Hanging Committee to pit the nation’s two greatest contemporary colourists against one another. Despite measuring less in height than Etty’s *Youth on the Prow*, Turner’s canvas was twice as wide, and not so dissimilar in area to Wilkie’s depiction of the monarch. By comparison, Etty’s carefree pleasure-seekers were completely dwarfed by Beechey’s *William IV*, which was nearly four times larger (see Appendix J).\(^{108}\) Like *Youth on the Prow*, Turner’s picture was accompanied in the gallery catalogue by the verses that had inspired its production, namely the twenty-sixth stanza from Canto IV of Lord Byron’s 1818 poem, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*:

– and now, fair Italy!
Thou art the garden of the world.
Even in thy desert what is like to thee?
Thy very weeds are beautiful, thy waste
More rich than other climes’ fertility:
Thy wreck a glory, and thy ruin graced
With an immaculate charm which cannot be defaced.\(^{109}\)

The poem describes Childe Harold’s departure from England following his repentance of an indulgent and misspent youth. His subsequent pilgrimage leads him to admire, and lament, the glorious triumphs and disastrous downfalls of several European civilisations, including Italy. He is especially enthralled by this country’s beauty – both its picturesque natural scenery and the ruined vestiges that evoke the fallen empire of antiquity.

Turner’s visual manifestation of Byron’s work reflects an appreciation of the sentiment conveyed by the poet, an understanding he was keen to display after

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\(^{107}\) *Morning Post*, 5 May 1832: 3.

\(^{108}\) Please note that these measurements exclude the frame.

\(^{109}\) *Royal Academy of Arts*, 1832: 9.
completing his third visit to Italy at the end of 1828. He deploys a heightened colour scheme to communicate Childe Harold’s – and indeed the writer’s own – enchantment with the Italian landscape. With both images exuding a glowing colour palette, and illustrating groups of figures surrounded by a hazy sky and water, it is not hard to imagine that Etty’s and Turner’s paintings might present a challenge to one another. This seems confirmed by the critical commentary: one reviewer recommended that Turner “look... to ETTY for all that the eye can desire in brilliancy of colour, united with the most perfect harmony and sobriety”. Leo Costello considers “this cross-fire of colours” in the context of Turner’s deliberately competitive, “virtuoso” performances during Varnishing Days at the Academy, and likewise finds interesting parallels between aesthetics and Reform era socio-political issues. Some critics, Costello explains, aligned the artist’s “intense colors, painterly effects, and performative approach” with “the loss of traditional values”, brought about by the “falseness and vulgarity of rampant individualism”. He points to a comment by a reviewer for the Spectator, who engages in the very type of visual trajectory that I have been describing:

Let the reader first go close up ... and look at the way in which it is painted; and then, turning his back (as one does sometimes to the sun) till he reaches the middle of the room, look round at the streaky, scrambled, unintelligible chaos of colour, and see what a scene has been conjured before him as if by magic ... Then he will see that this is no meretricious trick of art ... but an imaginative vision of nature seen by the waking mind of genius ...

Perceived as a piece of Claudean historical landscape, Whig-supporting publications lauded the image as its invention lay in the lines of Byron – a social reformer and activist. However, Turner suffered a barrage of criticism at the hands of the more conservative papers. Such critics dismissed his idealistic creation as mere fancy – one that overstepped the boundary between realism and romanticism – calling it “a sin against Nature”, admonishing the artist that “there is but a step from the

110 As Costello points out, resonances to literary treatments of Venice’s decline “were familiar in Turner’s cultural milieu and they frequently also resonated powerfully with ideas of contemporary British history and empire” (Costello, 2012: 147).
111 Morning Post, 29 May 1832: 2.
114 Spectator, 12 May 1832: 450.
115 Morning Post, 29 May 1832: 2.
sublime to the ridiculous”,116 and attacking it as an “exceedingly artificial picture” which the spectator “cannot for a single instant believe in its reality”.117 Etty too seems to have infringed upon that same step with his illusory imagery, and was likewise accused of allowing his artistic “powers” to “run too far riot into the imagination” in his Youth on the Prow,118 while his Destroying Angel, in the words of one critic, hovered “so near the border land, which separates fancy from absurdity, that we must with reluctance exclude the splendid error from our list”.119

Etty’s canvases, thanks to their vivid colour schemes, voluptuous nude figures and highly visible positioning within the display, would have eclipsed most paintings hanging nearby, and offered themselves up as an alternative to Turner’s landscapes of nostalgia, and as an alternative form of visionary painting. They certainly managed to attract attention to themselves: “If the eye is caught by a sparkling and bold composition which seems to stand out from the wall”, exclaimed one critic, “it is sure to have the name of ‘W. ETTY, R.A,’ against it in the catalogue”.120 Thinking about the possibility of pictorial dialogue or engagement between paintings on the walls of the exhibition, the Hanging Committee seem to have created a fascinating sequence of works, or visual path, for spectators to follow. Tracing across the south wall from left to right, Etty’s persona of Youth appears to be moments away from bursting the translucent bubble that hovers above the party, grasping at temptation like Eve and the apple, while the intimidating ‘whirlwind’ lurking in the clouds to the right of the composition serves as a reminder of imminent danger. Directly next to this watery and whimsical scene hung Beechey’s immense canvas, and the intriguing juxtaposition of the British King and the French symbol of liberty could account in part for the unsettled feeling on this part of the wall – one that threatens to destabilise the “mildness and benignity” Beechey depicts in His Majesty’s countenance.121 The portrayal is understated, with the King pictured in modern dress, looking away from the viewer, and stripped of the powerful effects so prevalent in Wilkie’s canvas directly across the room. A perceptible sense of concern pervades the portrait, and this is realised upon following William IV’s lateral gaze

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116 La Belle Assemblée, June 1832: 285.
117 London Literary Gazette, 12 May 1832: 298.
118 Library of the Fine Arts, June 1832: 514.
119 Athenæum, 12 May 1832: 308-309.
120 Morning Post, 9 June 1832: 3.
along the wall, where the scene of Etty’s *Destroying Angel* unfolds in a post-reform/post-bubble society.

**Conclusion**

Firmly rooted in the spirit of poetry, Etty’s portrait-shaped *Youth on the Prow* glows with Venetian colouring and the spectator is presented with a serene, aquatic scene of carefree tranquillity. Disassociated from any specific historic or poetical source, the landscape-orientated ‘vision’ of the *Destroying Angel* displays the fiery interior of a temple, where smoke billows over a scene of total chaos and devastation. Yet the inescapable point of reference in both these images, around which the pictured action revolves, is the central red Phrygian cap – a pointed iconographical symbol rarely seen in Etty’s output. Moreover, their proximity to one another upon the wall, as well as their shared symbolism and overarching theme of the perils of unbridled pleasure, enhances each image. I would suggest that the subtle allusions and affinities within and between the canvases reveal a personal, fundamentally conservative, anti-reform political agenda on Etty’s part, and one that he saw as an appropriate artistic response to the reformist agitation and violence of the period. United, the paintings each played their part within a politicised pictorial narrative running across the walls of the 1832 exhibition – one that warns against the dangers of radical change, as well as political and moral temptation.

However, despite Etty’s aim to tell a pictorial story about the risks associated with reform through the joint exhibition of these two paintings, their dialectical relationship and shared political didacticism were overlooked by contemporary critics. Indeed, a correspondent for *The Times* found both Etty’s canvases completely incomprehensible. Speaking about *Youth on the Prow*, he declared “if it has any meaning, no man can tell”, while when reviewing his *Destroying Angel*, he accused the artist of wasting “upon the wild and unmeaning what might be made subservient to much more worthy purposes”. Another critic agreed, commenting that although the *Destroying Angel* “seems to point a moral”, it exhibits “somewhat ... too pantomimic an effect”. Seemingly, Etty’s ‘finished sketch’ was perceived as being

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122 *The Times*, 24 May 1832: 3.
123 *Library of the Fine Arts*, July 1832: 57.
simply too unfinished, obscure and fanciful to function as a proper history picture, leading one reviewer to remark that: "Such scenes are not, however, of this world, nor for the people who are in it; and where one will feel the poetry of the work, a thousand will reckon it ridiculous".\(^\text{124}\) Notwithstanding Etty’s best efforts to articulate a moral lesson through the picture’s topical, relevant subject matter, its revolutionary references and sharp, angular compositional breaks, his work did not reverberate with contemporary spectators in the way he had planned. Presumably, he envisaged that his ‘vision’ of a hellish future, teeming with broken bodies, would reflect an image of a fractured society, where past misdemeanours had disastrous repercussions. Yet lacking the anchor of historical fact, or the foundation of a literary source, the meaning of this scene – where a fictional ‘angel’ wreaks destruction in a make-believe temple of vice – was not fully comprehended by viewers.

Crucially, in Etty’s *Youth on the Prow*, all eyes, hands and arms seem to point towards the delicate bubble floating upwards – a symbol traditionally representative of temptation, and the frailty of happiness, but here, of course, resonant in terms of contemporary anxieties regarding the future of the British nation itself. The nymph perched on the prow attempts to stay Youth’s hand, whose actions will inevitably lead to the bubble bursting. Through such symbolism, Etty adds a degree of gravitas to his sensual, serpentine painting, and gestures towards current events. At the time, people were afraid that the ‘bubble bursting’ would lead to anarchy, chaos and confusion. Representing the precariously fragile present situation of the state, it reflects the unease of the nation and alludes to the volatile political climate. Once the bubble has burst, we are led to imagine, the stormy ‘whirlwind’ of revolution – personified by the menacing, reclining figure emerging from the darkest clouds on the right-hand side – will overcome the party. Etty himself later clarified his intention to present:

> … a general allegory of Human Life, *morally*, where what we see here portrayed in its fabulous sense, is often real … They snatch at the bubbles of pleasure … till the roar of the whirlwind of distress, and misery, and death, awakens them from their pleasant dreams and sweeps them down to the general doom”.\(^\text{125}\)

\(^{124}\) *Athenæum*, 2 June 1832: 355.

\(^{125}\) *Art-Journal*, 1 April 1850: 128.
Here, however, “the whirlwind of distress”, as with the Destroying Angel, seems also to represent a far more specific and topical warning about the perils of political change – a warning that forms part of the “general allegory” spoken of by Etty, and that flashes out of each picture from a single red Phrygian cap.

However, the paradox of the type of ‘poetical’ painting that Youth on the Prow epitomises is that it offers a form of high art that runs the risk of not being taken seriously, and of being perceived as fundamentally too frothy, or frivolous. In 1835, within an intriguing discussion concerning the delicate balance between the respective territories of the poet and the artist, Fraser’s Magazine strikingly singles Etty out as being “apt to poetise with his pencil much after the fashion that Darwin piqued himself upon painting with his pen, rather too flowerily and lusciously: they cloy us with sweets till we feel surfeited and out of conceit with them”.126 One reviewer noted the use of the bubble as alluding to William Hilton’s well-received 1821 picture, Nature Blowing Bubbles for her Children (Fig. 52), which left the London Literary Gazette feeling “a little disturbed at the title of the subject, and we imagine Mr. Crabbe has been forced into a meaning he never intended”.127 Etty’s Youth on the Prow was likewise disparaged by the Library of the Fine Arts, who remaked: “the poetic description conveyed in these lines of a young and reckless monarch seems strangely applied to a bevy of Naiads in and round a cockleshell of a fancy boat”.128 Ultimately, Etty was always in danger of being seen as having become altogether too ‘poetic’ in his work, and incapable of edification. Partly as a result of this, few contemporary reviewers took the time to breach the polarity created by the sensuality in the foreground and the political or moral narratives embedded in the backdrop.

Etty’s vibrant Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake (Fig. 131) was, as I have noted, his third submission to the 1832 Academy display. Depicting Cymochles being distracted from avenging his brother’s death by the beautiful Phaedria upon an enchanted lake, this image was considered to be the least controversial and objectionable of the painter’s trio of exhibits. Like Youth on the Prow, the work was accompanied in the gallery catalogue by several lines of verse, this time taken from

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126 Fraser’s Magazine, July 1835: 52.
128 Library of the Fine Arts, June 1832: 514.
Book 2, Canto VI of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* – one of the key poetic works of the English Renaissance.129 The artist selected a series of short quotations from several different stanzas and conflated them to produce his composition:

> Along the shore as swift as glance of eye,  
> A little gondelay, bedecked trim,  
> With boughs and arbours woven cunningly,  
> That like a little forest seemed outwardly.  
> And therein sate a layde fresh and fayre.130

This literary inspiration, coupled with their shared marine subject matter, bright colour palette and ethereality meant that reviewers instinctively grouped this painting together with that of *Youth on the Prow* as Etty's characteristically 'poetical' pieces – despite their being separated by some 150 frames and placed in different rooms within Somerset House.131 In fact, the cavorting couple portrayed in the former were often mistaken for a 'Mars and Venus' theme, and the canvas was exhibited at the York exhibition of 1911 with the title 'Youth and Pleasure'.132 While one contemporary publication, shocked by the extravagance of *Youth on the Prow*, advised Etty to: “pack up his palette and colours, and travel through the country, confining his labours to the signs of tavern-keepers, by whom such volupitous daubings may be endured”,133 most reviewers seemed to agree that his *Phaedria and Cymochles* was “much less exceptionable; it exhibits a rich luxuriance, with less of the meretricious”.134 I would conclude that such a picture, exhibited in a separate room to the artist’s two principal exhibition pieces, would have offered a reassuring alternative not only to the gratuitously voluptuous associations of *Youth on the Prow*, but also to the dangerous politics articulated by both his other submissions.

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129 Spenser's first three books were published in 1590, with the second edition introducing a further three books in 1596.

130 Royal Academy of Arts, 1832: 22.

131 For example, the *Examiner*, 10 June 1832: 373 notes: “Mr. Etty has contributed three pictures, – two of them poetical, the other neither historical nor poetical, but one of the compositions termed 'Visions’.”


133 *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 June 1832: 126.

134 *Original*, 19 May 1832: 188.
CHAPTER V
‘A MONSTER OF BEAUTIFUL LOATHSOMENESS’: ETTY’S SIRENS AND ULYSSES
AT THE 1837 ROYAL ACADEMY EXHIBITION

Introduction

At the 1837 summer exhibition, which was significant for being the first to be held at the Royal Academy's premises in the east wing of the newly built National Gallery, Etty chose to display four paintings featuring several of history's most familiar female figures: Eve, Delilah, Venus and the three Sirens.1 Drawn variously from the narratives of scripture, mythology and classical literature, these powerful women famously epitomise beauty and desirability, but are equally infamous for exploiting their sexuality for subversive, even transgressive, purposes. Unequivocally characterised by their collective pictorial concentration upon the actions of the female protagonist(s), Etty's exhibits will be seen to elicit an array of reactions – ranging from erotic to revolted – both on the part of the male figures pictured within the canvases themselves, and on the part of contemporary male viewers. By deliberately foregrounding his attractive, nude female leads with a view to articulating a moral lesson about self-surveillance and the dangers of sensual delights, Etty naturally opened himself up to accusations of prurience and licentiousness. This year, however, it was not so much Etty's deployment of the female nude, as his unprecedentedly realistic depiction of decomposing male corpses that provoked particularly strident critical opprobrium. Consequently, another strand of the following analysis will consider how the painter, quite literally, grafted fragmented figural forms – both living and dead – into his exhibition imagery and, by doing so, sought to advance a distinctive kind of aesthetic: one that fused dangerous femininity, nudity and naturalism.

In a letter penned on 3 April 1837 and sent to the Academy, Etty carefully itemised his contributions to the forthcoming exhibition, assigning titles to each canvas and detailing literary quotations to be printed in the gallery catalogue that accompanied

1 Atlas, 14 May 1837: 313.
the wall hang. Foremost on this list is the strikingly ambitious *Sirens and Ulysses* (Fig. 6), his first large-scale subject picture for a decade, which was fittingly completed in time for the inaugural show in the Academy's brand-new galleries. Set apart from its pictorial companions on account of its epic scope, content, complex cast of characters and conspicuously colossal size – at almost three metres high by just under four and a half metres wide, it constituted his largest canvas yet produced – Etty's *Sirens and Ulysses* distillates the shared thematic preoccupations displayed by his other three, substantially smaller submissions: *Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons* (untraced), *Mars, Venus and Cupid* (Fig. 12) and *Samson Betrayed by Delilah* (untraced). Etty, in these works, dramatizes tensions between temptation and resistance, redistributes conventional gender differences and deals with issues of morality and mortality. An in-depth investigation of the painter's four pictures – through the eyes of a nineteenth-century visitor to the exhibition – seeks to explore such interconnecting concerns within the framework of his artistic agenda, the works' contemporary critical reception and their linked identities within the context of the exhibition space.

It will be helpful at this point to briefly consider the circumstances leading up to the Academy exhibition's opening on 1 May 1837: a high-profile event which took place under the glare of media spotlights. Eight weeks later, on 22 July – and with Queen Victoria now on the throne – the final show of the Georgian era closed, having attracted a record total of 105,188 visitors (see Appendix G). Indeed, this year marked a time of significant transition for the Academy, which, together with the newly formed National Gallery, had recently been relocated from Somerset House on the Strand into a purpose-built suite of rooms in Trafalgar Square, where it occupied the eastern part of the building. Constructed on King's Mews, to the north side of

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2 YCA, ed 139, Letter 139. William Etty, to the Royal Academy, in a letter dated 3 April 1837. The contents of this letter reveal that at one point the painter had intended to send a sketch, of an unknown subject, to the 1837 Academy show as his fifth entry. Moreover, the picture listed fourth on his list – entitled “Venus, Mars and Cupid” – has been scribbled out, but this canvas was in fact exhibited alongside the first three enumerated works. Such alterations suggest that Etty put considerable thought into the selection and positioning of his paintings this year.

3 Etty's *The Sirens and Ulysses* is at Manchester Art Gallery, while his *Mars, Venus and Cupid* is in the Lord Fairhaven collection at Anglesey Abbey. Sadly, both the *Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons* and *Samson Betrayed by Delilah* are currently untraced and their provenance is unknown. In the absence of visual proxies for these compositions, pertinent primary sources will be examined, in conjunction with associated secondary literature, in order to recover as far as possible some notion of the appearance and impact of the original canvases.
Trafalgar Square, these apartments were specifically designed by the architect William Wilkins to accommodate both artistic institutions.\textsuperscript{4} The lay-out is usefully illustrated in his 1836 lithograph (Fig. 167), where the red sections denote the two floors of rooms allocated for the Academy’s use. Ascending the grand central staircase to the upper level, a contemporary visitor to the annual spectacle would have turned to the right in order to enter the first of five successive exhibition spaces, all glass roofed. As the Observer informed its readership on the first day of the display:

There are two chambers, one on each side of the staircase; that on the right devoted exclusively to miniatures and engravings, and that on the left to architectural subjects. There are three galleries running parallel from east to west, & opening from each other by doors in the centre – the last gallery having a small portion cut off from the east end, and an elliptical bow projecting beyond the others to the west.\textsuperscript{5}

Having proceeded eastwards through the Antique Academy, the exhibition-goer would next have passed into the School of Painting. Two of Etty’s four paintings were placed in this middle room: \textit{Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons} and \textit{Mars, Venus and Cupid}, both of which had been completed by the summer of 1836 ready for a loan exhibition held in York, where they were presented to the public for the first time.\textsuperscript{6} His two other exhibits, \textit{The Sirens and Ulysses} and \textit{Samson Betrayed by Delilah}, were hung in the final and largest gallery space, the East Room (Lecture Room in Wilkins’s lithograph), which replaced the Great Room at Somerset House and was reported to have contained “by far the greatest proportion of good pictures”.\textsuperscript{7} The \textit{Illustrated London News’s} depiction of the 1843 summer showcase offers an additional visual guide to the main room (Fig. 168), as does Edward Radclyffe’s print, after Frederick Sargent, of the Private View at the Royal Academy’s 1844 exhibition (Fig. 169). Crucially, in this year Etty had been selected to serve on the Hanging Committee – which now comprised five members instead of the usual three – alongside J.M.W.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{4}] Hutchison, 1986: 83-84.
\item[\textsuperscript{5}] Observer, 1 May 1837: 3. Although the Royal Academy opened as usual in May 1837, the National Gallery did not in fact admit the public until nearly a year later, in April 1838.
\item[\textsuperscript{6}] Farr, 1958: 75-76. This experimental loan exhibition in his native city – to which Etty also sent several other works, including \textit{The Parting of Hero and Leander} and \textit{Hylas and the Nymphs} – had been organised by his friend, the architect John Harper. According to Alexander Gilchrist, although the show managed to “pay its expenses”, it was not sufficiently successful “to encourage the projectors to repeat it” (Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 46-47).
\item[\textsuperscript{7}] The Times, 3 May 1837: 3.
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Turner, William Hilton, the sculptor Francis Chantrey (1781-1841) and the architect Charles Cockerell (1788-1863).  

*The removal to Trafalgar-square has roused to great efforts, ETTY*

This year was also remarkable for being one of recovery and retrenchment, given that the royally sponsored institution had just survived intense scrutiny at the hands of a House of Commons Select Committee. As Holger Hoock explains, the Committee, which investigated the Academy's constitution, achievements and responsibilities throughout the course of 1835 and 1836, "crystallized two main forms of anti-academic critique: on the one hand a dissatisfaction with the formal, iconographic, or pedagogical preoccupations of the academy, and, on the other hand, a politico-constitutional critique of Old Corruption".  

This comprehensive inquiry concluded that London's preeminent artistic establishment possessed "many of the privileges of a public body, without bearing the direct burthen of public responsibility". A substantial number of parliamentarians, as well as members of the artistic community – including Benjamin Robert Haydon and John Martin – expressed their concerns about the nature of the Academy's operations. Criticism revolved around the outmoded, elitist culture that had endured since the Academy's inception in 1768: one which restricted membership, advantaged Academicians and condoned flagrant favouritism during the hanging of the display, amongst other charges.

Leo Costello, in his aforementioned recent discussion of Turner's Varnishing Day performances during the 1830s, points out that the formation of this Select Committee highlights the "degree to which issues that had once been internal to the Academy became a part of a larger political debate".  

By the same token, broader shifts and transformations taking place in Reform-era Britain were reflected in microcosm at the Academy's annual showcase, as had also been the case at the 1832 exhibition. The "private and irresponsible nature of the proceedings of the Academy" was emphasised by the Committee, and such polemics would inevitably have

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10 House of Commons, 1836: viii.
intensified the propaganda surrounding the 1837 exhibition. Indeed, certain publications – especially the more radical ones – utilised the pretext of art criticism to continue the Committee’s lambasting of the beleaguered establishment. The Spectator, for instance, “expected that the Academy would attempt to redeem its credit, and the reputation of the British school, which, unhappily, is identified with this close corporation in the opinion of foreigners and the Government”. Judging the move from Somerset House to have been a “miserable failure”, this reporter added acerbically: “The mountain has brought forth a mouse.” The more conservative Observer, on the other hand, declared the 1837 display to be “one of the best, if not the best, that the Academy ever presented to the public”, believing that the “artists were inspired by an anxious desire to open the new national building with as much éclat as possible”.

Etty himself appears to have been aware of the historical import of this inaugural exhibition and hence had neglected to send any works to the British Institution that spring, prompting one commentator to remark that he – along with certain other Academicians – had “reserved [their] strength” for the summer’s Academy show. Another contemporary periodical observed the painter’s renewed fervour, exclaiming that the transferral from Somerset House had “roused to great efforts, ETTY: who, for a year or two, has been comparatively napping, and who, last year ...

we might almost say, slumbered”. Having been actively involved with the “new arrangements”, the painter excitedly relayed the events of the show’s opening day to friends in York: “The New Gallery opened at twelve to-day, to the public. Before two, 600 Catalogues were sold. I was there. The people poured in like a torrent. The day was fine; and the Exhibition looked glorious.” At a time when the Academy’s civic, national role was being brought into question – as highlighted by the Select Committee’s inquiry – and in view of continuing concerns over its capacity as a corruptive body, Etty’s self-proclaimed endeavour to paint “some great moral on the

12 House of Commons, 1836: viii.
13 Spectator, 6 May 1837: 426-27.
14 Observer, 5 June 1837: 1.
16 John Bull, 23 April 1837: 199.
17 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 60-61.
heart” and, through his Sirens and Ulysses, to illustrate “the importance of resisting SENSUAL DELIGHTS” seems highly pertinent.  

‘You left word you wanted a fine model – it is difficult’: Etty’s perfect, ‘pure’ Eve

The first of Etty’s four paintings was initially entitled Adam and Eve at their Morning Prayers, however when the picture was re-displayed in London, the artist replaced ‘Prayers’ with ‘Orisons’ and included a literary tag in the gallery catalogue from Milton’s Paradise Lost, Book V, line 140: “Lowly they bowed, adoring”.19 These subtle alterations were most likely made at the suggestion of the lawyer Thomas Myers Junior, an ardent and longstanding supporter of Etty’s works, who recommended the quotation within a letter to the painter dated 3 April 1836: “this, I think, comprises all that the Picture can contain; & no more: so, therefore, if you approve, it may do”.20 Having been particularly impressed by Etty's submissions to the 1832 Academy show, Myers had first contacted the artist in July of that year and maintained a steady stream of correspondence until May 1844.21 Referring to himself as “Ridolfi Minor”, Myers persistently exhorted Etty to paint grand manner pictures which drew upon elevated, classical themes: “Do practice the ‘grande aim,’ which you preach”, he counselled in mid-April 1836: “To say truth, none of your works this year, with the exception of Adam & Eve ... are sufficiently high for many whom, I know, are anxious to patronise you”.22 He was justified in singling out the Adam and Eve, as the canvas seems to have been generally well-received when exhibited in the capital: “a charming subject”, remarked the Morning Post in May 1837, “and the bending and delicate form of Eve happily conceived”.23 The Gentleman’s Magazine was similarly struck by the work, pronouncing both it, and the Mars, Venus and Cupid, to be “splendid little paintings, and would grace any gallery in Europe”.24

18 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
19 Farr, 1958: 76.
Within a newly discovered letter to the artist – which I illustrate here as it provides documentary material that has not been commented upon by previous scholarship (Fig. 170) – William Hilton, history painter and Keeper of the Royal Academy, expresses his deep regret that he is unable to meet his “old friend” due to an incapacitating illness, but declares he will call upon Etty at the “first opportunity and try to set you right in your wild notions about models”. The emphasis is Hilton’s own, and reflects the widespread intrigue and amusement expressed by contemporaries concerning Etty’s relationships with his models. It is tantalising to speculate about the nature of these “wild notions”, given the artist’s involvement with both male and female models in a variety of public and more private forums: at the Academy, in the life class, or at his Buckingham Street studio. In February 1837, John Constable jokingly referred to Etty as “our grand ‘curator’”, profiting from his network of models with a “little girl, aged 17”. The latter’s industry and his assiduous attendance at the Life School throughout his career – as student, Visitor and co-ordinator – naturally placed him at the interface between artist and model. Interestingly, in the spring of 1836, during the early stages of the compositional process for his Adam and Eve, Etty wrote a three-page letter to his friend and fellow history painter, George Patten (1801-65), in which he describes a selection of his current female models:

You left word you wanted a fine model – it is difficult – Mrs Smith whom I sent you has some very good points about her as a short figure – and a fine head[,] Miss Reeves, at a cap shop in Portland Street, Greek Street (private door) is a good color and proportion but rather thin – I have lately made sketches in outline of several (they are of course courtezans) in order to get a small figure ... and I have found two out of the number fine – one her name is Hamilton, of a fine form and bright color, I am endeavouring to persuade her to get money in a way more artistical – I want to persuade her to sit to Artists and academics – she would be an acquisition[,] she sat to me for an hour and a half to make sketches from – she lives at No 9 William Street – Waterloo Road – and I think she might soon be broke in – you might write a twopenny letter and try her[,] say I recommended her – Another with a fine figure her name is Jones, living at 14 Ann Street Waterloo Road, also a fine form of torso and nice color. If either of them could be induced to sit and be punctual to their engagements they would be acquisitions


So I am going to write to Hamilton, to try if she can be made useful to Art.\textsuperscript{27}

Etty’s intriguing epistle has been quoted at length here as its content was hitherto known only from Alexander Gilchrist’s 1855 biography – to which source all later scholars have adhered – but in fact the autograph letter itself was recently sold by Bonhams into a private collection.

The above excerpt differs slightly from the transcription printed in Gilchrist, who purposely excludes the models’ names and addresses, and omits the parenthesis in which the painter notes that the women from whom he has been sketching were courtesans, presumably to protect Etty’s reputation. This letter, written to one of his closest colleagues, offers a fascinating and personal insight into the painter’s attitude towards his female models. Tellingly, the type of terminology that Etty deploys to describe them – “good points”, “short figure”, “fine head”, “good colour”, “a fine form of torso” and so on – are objectifying terms which indicate that he regarded these women as things, or entities, composed of an assortment of physical parts, rather than as figures in their entirety. The difficulty in selecting a single “fine model” for Patten’s use resulted in this bodily segmentation, and Etty even goes so far as to relegate one particular potential “acquisition” – a Miss Hamilton – to the status of a horse, declaring that she “might soon be broke in”. Another letter from Etty to Patten, which is in York Art Gallery’s collection, provides further proof of the artist’s tendency to fragment and objectify models’ bodies: “The bearer tho’ short is a nice round Figure and good at keeping the posture – so I send her to you.”\textsuperscript{28} Especially pertinent for my analysis, however, is the above allusion to the “small figure” for which Etty recounts he has been busily making “sketches in outline” from a number of different female models: a time-consuming and expensive process. These preparatory drafts were produced specifically for the purpose of creating the Eve in his \textit{Adam and Eve}. 

\textsuperscript{27} William Etty, to George Patten, in a letter dated 7 April 1836. Transcription from the Bonhams online sold lot archive. This manuscript sold as Lot 281 of the ‘Papers & Portraits: The Roy Davids Collection Part II’ sale, conducted on 29 March 2011 in London. See Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 44 for his abridged version of this letter.

\textsuperscript{28} YAG, YORAG: 2012.8. William Etty, to George Patten, in an undated letter (c.1824-48). Etty notes the name and address of the female model on the verso of the paper. Transcribed by the author of this thesis.
Significantly, Gilchrist states that in this work, Etty not only “aimed at perfection of Form”, but also “at showing that he could paint a naked man and woman expressive of pure and devotional feeling”. When it came to the pictorial embodiment of Eve, it seems that the artist was not satisfied with his “ordinary custom” of fashioning nudes, which involved stitching together sedulously selected sections of different models, “painting a bit from one, a good point from another”, but instead went to great lengths to track down a model with a faultless figure. The chosen model did eventually undergo a small alteration in the final composition, as her waist was not thought to be “round enough”, but Etty otherwise adhered to her form. For Amanda Schedler, the painter’s “search to find one perfect model in order to avoid working from several imperfect ones may attest to a revulsion against the real bodies that sat for him”. While Schedler makes a salient point about the intersections and overlaps between realities and idealities in Etty’s imagery, in this case she fails to take into account the context in which his comments were made. I would argue that by avoiding his habitual fusion, or meshing, of truncated limbs and superlative body parts, Etty can be seen to have been protecting his Eve’s integrity – as the woman who had been created whole by God’s own hand. Ultimately, her flawless figure was not corrupted by another’s painted flesh.

*Adam and Eve* had been commissioned from the artist by the celebrated collector William Beckford (1760-1844), who purchased many fine Italian paintings and regretted, in July 1836, that he could not afford to buy Sir Thomas Lawrence’s incomparable collection of Old Master drawings – “one of the most important collections ... ever to have been assembled” – which were subsequently dispersed. Etty was also actively involved in the controversy over the Lawrence drawings, which he described as “the first thoughts of the first men of all ages since the Revival of the Art” – indeed, a preparatory meeting of the “Committee appointed ... to petition Parliament” was held at his studio. Interestingly, in 1838, Beckford acquired Etty’s *The Prodigal Son* (Fig. 171) from the Royal Academy and “so highly valued it, it is said, [that] he tied it up as an heirloom”.

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29 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 45.
31 Ostergard, 2001: 241. Beckford’s name appeared on a petition to urge that the drawings were so important that they should be bought by the nation.
32 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 38-39.
33 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 82.
article, ‘William Etty’s Magdalens: Sexual Desire and Spirituality in Early Victorian England’, compellingly elides Beckford with Etty “as bricoleurs who were working to articulate novel forms of sexuality through the manipulation of material culture”: the eccentric patron as an enthusiastic collector of appealing artworks, and the artist as an avid arranger of models, compositions and artefacts. Etty, I would add, was more of a collector (albeit an amateur one) than Janes suggests, given that his 1850 sales catalogue contained numerous studies, Old Master copies, engravings, books, plaster casts and miscellaneous objects, including a throne and two complete suits of armour. In this shared passion, the two men’s respective projects of “establishing novel means of expressing same-sex desire” and “flirting with the moral danger of effeminate subservience to the world of alluring objects (including bodies)”, found surprising resonance with one another.

This dialogue can be usefully extended to consider both men’s role in a broader narrative involving collecting, conserving and curating artworks that was materialising in the capital at this time. Whereas Beckford was playing his part in the development of an accessible Old Master tradition at the National Gallery – in 1839, he was to sell several important pictures to this institution, including The Trinity with the Madonna by Lodovico Mazzolino and Raphael’s Saint Catherine of Alexandria (Fig. 172) for £7,350 – Etty was contributing towards and endorsing current art practices at the Royal Academy. Past and present converged in a new, purpose-built gallery, located in central London, which significantly advanced the native project of high art.

To return to Etty’s Adam and Eve, I would suggest that for the artist, the subject was less about Adam epitomising the original male sinner (which seems to have been the main attraction for Beckford) and more about Eve. In his obsessive pursuit of the ‘perfect’ model to inspire his ideal, sublime Eve, whose figure he sought to realise in paint “at his very best”, with Pygmalion-like care and precision, the artist also appears to have been working to demonstrate her psychological complexities. By doing so, in this first image, which was created as part of an overarching project involving duplicitous women, Etty offered his spectator a template of a beautiful

35 Christie and Manson, 6-14 May 1850: 1-49.
37 Ostergard, 2001: 245.
38 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 45.
woman whose curiosity and innate moral weakness leads to the downfall of her trusting but easily led male counterpart: a statement that was to be powerfully reinforced by his other three submitted paintings.

‘Venus has evidently worn stays, and been tight-laced in at least one sense of the word’

Alongside his *Adam and Eve*, Etty sent a second cabinet-sized canvas to the 1837 Academy exhibition, which likewise portrayed a celebrated pair of lovers and which was also hung in the School of Painting: *Mars, Venus and Cupid* (Fig. 12). Purchased from the artist by Thomas Wright for 120 guineas following its display at York in the summer of 1836, this lively work foregrounds another figurative female subject renowned both for her beauty and powers of temptation – the goddess Venus.39 Although the painting is commonly known as *Mars, Venus and Cupid*, Etty, in his aforementioned letter to the Academy, referred to it as *Venus, Mars and Cupid*, deliberately emphasising Venus's name.40 As Sarah Burnage rightly points out in her 2011 catalogue entry, the amatory subject matter – a “favourite” of Etty's – allowed the artist to “contrast the strength and stoicism of Mars with the playful and distracted characters of Venus and Cupid”.41 Indeed, a vertical line runs down through the centre of the composition, marked by the stone column supporting the portico and reinforced by Venus’s tumbling hair and falling white drapery. Everything situated on the masculine, martial, left-hand side is solid and square, from the angular architecture behind Mars’s upright form, to the terracotta tiles beneath his feet. As befits the god of war, he is attired in a gleaming breastplate, lined and adorned with dark red fabric, a russet cloak, pinned in place by a large golden clasp, and a silver helmet, which boasts a resplendent scarlet plume. Conversely, the nude dyad on the feminine, familial, right-hand side of the image affectionately embrace one another, the sinuous curves created by their entwined limbs mirrored

39 Farr, 1958: 149. Farr notes in his catalogue entry that there is a label on the verso of the panel, which reads: “No. 4. Wm. Etty R.A. Exhibited at the first opening of the New National Gallery in the year 1837”.
40 YCA, ed 139, Letter 139. William Etty, to the Royal Academy, in a letter dated 3 April 1837. The painting’s title has been crossed out by the artist, but it is still possible to decipher the order of characters.
41 Burnage, Hallett and Turner, 2011: 141.
by the rounded arch overhead. Cupid’s vibrant wings provide a conspicuous splash of colour within this landscape of pale, tactile flesh.42

Significantly, *Mars, Venus and Cupid* was the only one of Etty’s four entries this year not to have been accompanied by a literary quotation in the gallery catalogue, rendering the precise narrative moment pictured ambiguous. In classical mythology, Mars and Venus enjoyed an illicit, passionate love affair. Upon finding out about his wife’s adultery, Vulcan forged an unbreakable web of invisible chains which he set around the lovers’ bed as a trap, and, once they had been ensnared, invited all the other deities to ridicule the humiliated couple. Sarah Burnage states that Etty’s canvas portrays the pair pre-affair – in view of Mars’s aloof appearance – and suggests the work thus functions as a pictorial prequel to his luxuriant *Venus and her Satellites* of 1835 (Fig. 173), where the god is shown naked, disarmed and asleep.43 This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the ‘masculine’ side of Mars, *Venus and Cupid*’s composition can be discerned, in miniature, to the far left of the earlier work, where an empty suit of steel armour (almost identical to the one that encases Mars in the later, pared down image) is depicted in front and to the left of a stone archway, in an iconographic echo that Burnage neglects to notice (Figs. 12 and 173). The ‘feminine’ side of *Venus and her Satellites* abounds with semi-draped handmaidens, whose representation generated particularly voracious criticism, as exemplified by the following review in the *Observer*:

A Brothel on fire, which had driven all the Paphian Nymphs out from their beds into the court-yard, would be a modest exhibition compared to this – for they would at least exhibit *en chemise*. Several ladies, we know, were deterred from going into this corner of the room to see Leslie’s, Webster’s, and other pictures of great merit there, to avoid the offence and disgrace Mr. E. has conferred on that quarter.44

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42 One critic commented on the work as being “of a minor class, a groupe of *Mars, Venus, and his MAJESTY’S present principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, HENRY JOHN, Viscount PALMERSTON*” (*John Bull*, 23 April 1837: 199). Amusingly, this reference is to Lord Palmerston – the Foreign Secretary in 1837 – who was popularly called ‘Cupid’ or ‘Lord Cupid’ by the press due to his youthful looks and flirtations with the opposite sex: “nicknamed Cupid ... he is notoriously distinguished by his attention to his good looks, and his devotion to the toilet. The man who has to manage the interests of England over all the world ought to be distinguished for something more than a knowledge of the best made breeches, or a dangling after the most perfumed petticoats” (*Fraser’s Magazine*, October 1836: 506).
44 *Observer*, 10 May 1835: 3.
If, on the one hand, Etty intended the spectator to recall his own earlier exhibit, I would suggest that in the wake of such negative responses, he sought to temper the explicitly erotic connotations displayed by that work through a further artistic allusion to Correggio’s *Venus with Mercury and Cupid* (‘The School of Love’) (Fig. 174). Purchased at great expense by the National Gallery in 1834, and likewise showcasing Venus and Cupid, it seems highly likely that the painter would have been mindful of this picture when producing his own, contemporary version of the mythological duo. In Correggio’s canvas, a nude, winged Venus demonstrates a more maternal, nurturing dimension to her character as she supervises the schooling of her child. Etty’s indebtedness to the Renaissance master can be seen formally in his borrowing of a tight trio of divinities – one sitting and two standing – as well as in his pictorial focus upon the tender relationship between mother and son. Cupid’s crimson wing-feathers reflect those in the flamboyant plumage on Mars’s helmet, and these, together with the deep red hue of the god’s scabbard, and the stripes across the end of Venus’s shawl, bind and contain the three in a scarlet oval. However, Etty’s threesome is a self-contained group, who are absorbed by and very aware of one another, whereas in Correggio’s composition, Venus directly addresses the viewer. By replacing the figure of Mercury with that of Mars, and by turning Venus around, Etty evokes an underlying narrative of the promise of sensual pleasure that is missing from Correggio’s image (Figs. 12 and 174).

Venus’s serpentine pose – seen from the back, with torso twisted so that the right-hand profile of her face is on show – is reminiscent of two earlier female nymphs, both pictured kneeling on the edge of boats: in *Cleopatra’s Arrival in Cilicia* (RA 1821, Fig. 18) and in *Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm* (RA 1832, Fig. 11). Etty, having created a sensuous shape, and turn of head, implanted it shamelessly into three very different pictures. This patent figural replication suggests that, for his Venus, the artist had reverted to his customary method of fashioning the nude form: by conflating and assembling choice areas of different models and melding them together in order to construct a whole woman. Once again, critics were quick to accuse Etty of making the workings of the studio too transparent and disparaged his selection of female models. The *Morning Chronicle*, for example, denounced Venus’s body as having been “artificially distorted by dress”. This same correspondent added
that “she has evidently worn stays, and been tight-laced in at least one sense of the word”, implying the goddess’s reputed sexual laxity.45

Etty exploits the gendered divide visible in Mars, Venus and Cupid (Fig. 12) – a compositional conceit which the painter had also used in both his Judith (RA 1827, Fig. 10) and Pandora Crowned by the Seasons (RA 1824, Fig. 8) – to highlight the pointed pictorial juxtaposition between the metal-clad Mars and the nude figure of Venus. More specifically, he does this by depicting the provocative goddess turning away from Mars, while at the same time allowing her cascading hair, bare legs and already loosened sandal to encroach upon the male side in a suggestive manner. Mars’s sword, symbolic of his virile potency, is still sheathed, and yet is placed on the floor behind Venus’s chair along with his shield, firmly within ‘her’ side of the painting. The war-god is clothed but not armed, and stares out of the canvas with a strangely distant, opaque expression. Venus is nude, but her gaze seems fixed intently upon Cupid, who, in turn, looks over at and reaches out to Mars. Such internal dynamics of contemplation, I would argue, serve to dramatize the dangers of sensuality. Reading the composition in this way, the male viewer (turned voyeur) is invited either to train his erotic gaze upon Venus’s unclothed body – encouraged by Cupid, who caresses her locks – or determinedly not to look at it, following Mars’s example. Such an interpretation also suggests that the affectionate mode of exchange between Venus and Cupid, and the overlapping of their bare limbs, prefigures an altogether more intimate relationship between the two adults that the viewer is led to imagine will soon occur.

‘The painting that first meets the eye ... is ETYY's Syrens and Ulysses’

Having moved out of the School of Painting and into the East Room, a contemporary visitor to the 1837 Academy exhibition would next have encountered Etty’s enormous and highly visible Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6) dominating one wall: “The painting that first meets the eye on entering the east-room is ETYY's Syrens and Ulysses, No. 122”, confirmed the Morning Chronicle.46 Retaining the two-sided gendered arrangement displayed in his Mars, Venus and Cupid and maintaining a

45 Morning Chronicle, 2 May 1837: 3.
46 Morning Chronicle, 2 May 1837: 3.
focus upon the perils of temptation, the events pictured in the artist’s third canvas play out on a strikingly magnified scale. One temptress has burgeoned into three, and instead of a single adult male, the viewer is presented with a whole ship full of hyper-masculine mariners, and a mass of corpses and body parts. Due to Etty’s repute, as well as the frame’s colossal size and unusually morbid cast, the Sirens was generally seen and discussed first by reviewers, who expressed a wide range of responses. The picture was commended by The Times for its “glow of colour and fervour of composition”, while the Gentleman’s Magazine pronounced it “the largest, and, in our estimation, by far the finest that Mr. Etty ever painted. It is an historical work of the first class”. Conversely, the Observer declared that however “cleverly treated”, the painting’s subject matter could not “fail of producing the most unpleasant feelings”, and “it is to be hoped that there are few who would nauseate their friends by placing it in their galleries”.

Etty’s picture illustrates a dramatic scene described in a series of different passages from Book XII of Alexander Pope’s translation of Homer’s Odyssey, in a form of textual editing that reflects his attitude towards models: taking the best bits and then creating a whole. The Sirens, sometime changeable, bird-like witches, are depicted as alluring female nudes kneeling upon a flowery shore, who, having caught sight of the ship full of sailors, start singing, swaying and exuding sensuality. Ulysses watches, completely bewitched, and although trussed tightly to the mast, struggles wildly to join them. His obedient and trustworthy oarsmen row hard to pull him away from deadly temptation. A total of twenty-six lines of verse were printed in the gallery catalogue, which began with the enchantress Circe’s graphic account of these sinister mythical creatures and their grisly habitation:

Next, where the Sirens dwell, you plough the seas;  
Their song is death, and makes destruction please.  
Unblest the man, whom music wins to stay  
Nigh the cursed shore and listen to the lay.  
No more that wretch shall view the joys of life  
His blooming offspring, or his beauteous wife!

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47 The Times, 3 May 1837: 3.  
49 Observer, 30 April 1837: 2.
In verdant meads they sport; and wide around
Lie human bones that whiten all the ground:
The ground polluted floats with human gore,
And human carnage taints the dreadful shore.

Following Circe’s counsel, Ulysses persuaded all his men to plug their ears with beeswax and ordered them to chain him to the mast, so he might hear but not be able to succumb to the Sirens’ haunting song – the following refrain from which closed the excerpt:

We know whate’er the kings of mighty name
Achieved at Ilion in the field of fame;
Whate’er beneath the sun’s bright journey lies.
Oh stay, and learn new wisdom from the wise!50

Etty, as his earliest biographer informs us, was “full of energy and eagerness” when he commenced work upon the *Sirens and Ulysses* “in oils” on 14 November 1836: “My reputation and interest”, the artist announced, “demand that I should not trifle”.51 Just five months later, the vast canvas had been completed and the speed of execution suggests, as so often with his work, that the conception had been formulating in his mind for quite some time.

A series of preliminary studies for the picture survive, which depict different phases in its design and development. Several of these reveal that at some point during the compositional process, Etty had considered situating the Sirens on the right-hand side of the canvas rather than the left.52 One sheet of paper in York Art Gallery – which has not previously received scholarly attention – is covered with sketches in black ink that neatly articulate the artist experimenting with alternative structural arrangements (Fig. 175). The middle left-hand drawing shows the Sirens and the ship in similar poses and positions to their final ones, although the central Siren’s torso has yet to been twisted round so that her back faces the viewer, leaving her right profile exposed (like Venus’s). By contrast, an adjacent draft delineates the

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50 Royal Academy of Arts, 1837: 10. Etty, in the gallery catalogue, refers the reader to both Alexander Pope and William Cowper’s translations of Homer’s *Odyssey*.
51 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 52.
52 Farr, 1958: 153-54. Examples of this reversed composition include one at York Art Gallery (YAG, R2521a) and another at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A, 7652.21).
three Sirens in the same figural format, but this time kneeling to the right of the ship. Beneath this, another drawing has the three located to the left of the boat once more, while thick pen strokes outline a skull and male torso lying to their right. The presence of a small figure study for Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake indicates that this set of compositional sketches can be dated to around 1834-35, when Etty was preparing his second painting on this theme for the 1835 Academy exhibition (Fig. 176). A further thin fragment of paper in the York collection is etched with pencil outlines for a muscular male figure – presumably Ulysses – with hands bound behind his back and bent right leg (Fig. 177). More bones and vestiges of sailors can be made out in a faint sketch on the verso of an address card belonging to a Nicholas Fitzgerald in Chelsea (Fig. 178). Significantly, it is the Siren group that recurs most regularly in the extant studies (see, for example, Figs. 179 and 180). For Etty, they were clearly the most important feature of his painting, and mentally fixed from early on, as reflected in the wording of its title.

When devising his Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6), Etty seems to have referenced and reconfigured certain formal aspects of one of his own previous multi-figural, boat-based creations, Youth on the Prow (Fig. 11). To this end, the carefully constructed pyramidal shape that had stabilised the earlier canvas – formed by the central positioning of the mast, which supported two gently filling sails, and accentuated by two protagonists reaching up towards the rising bubble – is reproduced in the later work. Here, however, the mast is truncated and off-kilter, straining under the weight of two coarse, billowing sails, and the restrained, thrashing form of Ulysses. As a result, the whole structure leans to the right, tipping the sailors dangerously close to the Sirens, and creating on one side a much larger pyramid that is balanced on the other side by the raised arms of two of the Sirens. Both pictures feature a brooding sky, with a particularly livid cloud looming out of the centre-right of each, threatening catastrophe. In the Sirens and Ulysses, the artist’s evocative treatment of the sky, with its diffused, bruised clouds, creates a type of pictorial barrier against which the sailors strain: pulling on ropes, tugging at oars and tightening the cord around Ulysses’s bulging thigh. Youth on the Prow’s verticality has been reduced and largely replaced by a horizontal format, whereby strong parallel lines demarcate sky,

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53 A study in the Victoria and Albert Museum displays four sketches for the Siren group on the back of a letter from the painter’s brother, Walter Etty, which is inscribed on the front with the date 20 March 1835 (V&A, 7652.32).
sea and sand. Etty seemingly intended his audience to recall the former canvas, together with the types of moral messages it sought to convey (particularly, as the previous chapter argued, when viewed in conjunction with the artist’s other key painting of the same year, the Destroying Angel). At the same time, however, the dissimilarities between the Sirens and Ulysses and his 1832 works – not least in terms of scale – allowed Etty to make a powerful statement about his classical knowledge, as well as his reputation as an experienced Academician and leading exponent of the native School: one whose imagery was continually evolving, and who was not afraid to be seen as contentious, by placing his Sirens on a bed of bodies and bones.

Conflating Classicism and Romanticism – Homer, Hilton and Howard

Prior to Etty’s conception of Homer’s epic account of delusion and destruction, there was not an established artistic tradition at the Academy for treating Ulysses’s close encounter with the Sirens. Joseph Kestner, in his 1995 book Masculinities in Victorian Painting, asserts that the appeal of this particular narrative episode – along with several others in Books IX-XII of the Odyssey – lay not only in “the rich anecdotes” they offered, but also in “the gendered modelling contained in these episodes, constructing male heroism and female venality”. Given Etty’s proven interest in “gendered modelling”, this Homeric myth, realised on a vast scale, allowed the artist to convey a story consistent with his own didactic about the importance of resisting sensual delights, especially in view of the recent lampooning of his exhibits by the press. Within their extravagant eulogy of the picture, the Gentleman’s Magazine endorsed the artist’s unusual choice of subject matter, thinking it “admirably adapted to Mr. Etty’s pencil”, before adding: “there are certainly few passages in Homer, or any other author, ancient or modern, to which the talents of the painter or sculptor could be more legitimately addressed”.

It seems highly likely that the theme had originally been suggested to the painter by the same Thomas Myers who was later to recommend a literary tag for his Adam and Eve. Myers, in a letter dated 14 January 1834, declared:

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54 Kestner, 1995: 60.
Mr. Jee, with whom I am staying is a Brother in Law of the late Ld. de Tabley ... and I learnt from my very hospitable host, that it was Ld. de Tabley’s intention to have given you a Commission at the very time that death deprived you and the British School of the most liberal and ardent Patron it has ever had. His Lordship was balancing between two subjects. I quote both; in the hope that the opinion of the most spirited Patron of the English School may have better luck with you than my own ‘hints’.56

The two possible topics being considered, Myers elucidates, were both of Homeric origin: *Thetis Ordering the Nereids to Descend into the Sea* (Book 18, line 177 of Pope’s translation of the *Iliad*) and *The Sirens* (Book 12, lines 194-220 of Pope’s translation of the *Odyssey*). Having next directed Etty towards Flaxman’s 1805 outline drawings illustrating these passages – “See them too. He has admirably overcome the difficulty of the lower parts of the figures of the Sirens being those of fish” – Myers concludes by entreat ing the artist to paint one of his own ideas, Lucretius’s *Phaethon*, the pictorial realisation of which, he feels certain, would prove a “historical triumph of the English School of Art”.57 Although Etty apparently disregarded Myers’s final “hint”, the second of de Tabley’s proposals obviously appealed to him. In fact, on the first page of this same letter, there is a hasty pencil sketch portraying what appears to be a tiny trio of kneeling women, with arms outstretched beseechingly – almost as if the rudimentary elements of the composition had sprung to mind straightaway (Fig. 181).

Whether or not this was indeed the case, Etty’s *Sirens and Ulysses* (Fig. 6) can be suggestively compared to Flaxman’s stylised engraving of the scene (Fig. 182).58 Unlike the sculptor, who keeps all the Sirens’ arms separate and beneath their shoulders, the painter has two of his stretch theirs up into the air, adding height and movement to the cluster of nudes. Having knitted the three figures together more tightly, so that pale limbs overlap and entwine – symbolising their unified power – Etty appropriates the aulos from the central Siren in the earlier image, and further amplifies the acoustic sense by inserting a lyre into the hands of the one to the left.

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This musical iconography is integral to the viewer’s understanding of the narrative, and when the painting was re-displayed at his 1849 retrospective, Etty had an English version of the Sirens’ song set to music and performed in the next door room.\(^{59}\) Lastly, Flaxman has chosen to depict a hollow skull amongst the flowers in the bottom left-hand corner of his work, and Etty replicates this symbolic motif, placing it prominently in the forefront of his picture. This skull – belonging to a sailor who had been drawn in by the music, succumbing to the sight of naked females – acted, I would suggest, not only as a pointed reminder of the dangers of sensual delights, but also as a type of poignant *memento mori* for both artist and viewer.\(^{60}\)

While Flaxman’s line engraving seems to have constituted Etty’s primary point of pictorial reference, scholarship surrounding *The Sirens and Ulysses* has neglected to notice two other similarly suggestive sources of inspiration for the painter. In 1819, Sir John Fleming Leicester – later the aforementioned 1st Lord de Tabley – impressed by *The Rape of Europa* (Fig. 30) that William Hilton had executed the year before for this munificent patron’s collection of modern British art, commissioned the artist to produce another composition. The resulting canvas, entitled *The Mermaid of Galloway* (Fig. 183) – was displayed in Leicester’s gallery at 24, Hill Street, Berkeley Square, and illustrates the culmination of a romantic Scottish ballad involving a captivating yet remorseless mermaid:

> One of her most celebrated exploits was the exercise of her bewitching influence on the young Maxwell of Cowehill, who, on the eve of his marriage, was attracted by the melodious voice of the siren, and becoming violently enamoured of the charms of this unearthly fair one, she cast her spells about him, and secured him for ever.\(^{61}\)

It is intriguing that this picture – painted at a time when Etty and Hilton were particularly conscious of, and influenced by, each other’s productions, as Chapter I proposed – depicts a female nude with upraised arms gazing down delightedly at the deathly pale, muscular victim lolling upon her lap. The “siren’s” milky white flesh is

\(^{59}\) Farr, 1958: 107. When it was first exhibited at the Academy in 1837, one critic disparaged the painting as “a strong illustration of the absurdity of submitting to the test of sight what was meant only be conveyed in sound” (*Morning Chronicle*, 2 May 1837: 3).

\(^{60}\) Etty had turned fifty in the March of this year – the same month that the final life class was held at Somerset House.

\(^{61}\) Hamilton, 1831-32, 2: 142.
silhouetted against a dark, stormy sky and tempestuous seascape. Female nudity and male death are strikingly juxtaposed here, and the viewer is invited to envisage the next stage of bodily decay. Etty may well have come across the work in Leicester’s London townhouse, which was often opened for public viewings, and it was also reproduced as a sketch in an 1831 publication by George Hamilton. When deliberating what subject matter to request for his commission from Etty, the future Lord de Tabley clearly felt that a sea-themed painting, featuring nude nymphs, would complement the other canvases contained within his gallery of native art – such as Hilton’s *Mermaid of Galloway*.

As noted in the previous chapter, both Hilton and Etty would have been mindful of associated imagery produced by their former Professor of Painting, Henry Fuseli. “As anyone who comes to Fuseli knows”, Marina Warner declares, “the crazed subjects of his chief curiosity are female … Maenads, gorgons, furies, harpies, sirens haunt his art … he invites us, through the mediums of his female characters, into states of heightened emotional tension”. This formulation chimes closely with Etty’s scheme of foregrounding his female protagonists in order to draw in males both from within, and at the front of, his canvases. Fuseli had been similarly fascinated by the theme of “woman’s dominance over man”, however in his work it often assumed “a frankly sado-masochistic character”, as in the case of the fantastical *Titania and Bottom* (c.1790, Fig. 184), which “displays to the full the peculiar power of his art”. Intriguingly, the arm gesture, tilted head and complacent facial expression of Hilton’s mermaid are reminiscent of those displayed by Fuseli’s Titania, and the left-hand sides of both women’s faces are cast into shade. Furthermore, in his highly stylised, haunting *The Weird Sisters or The Three Witches* (Fig. 185) of 1783, which illustrates a scene from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, but had likewise been inspired by a quotation from the classical tragedian Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*, and, visually, by Leonardo da Vinci’s drawings of grotesque heads, Fuseli conflated classical, Gothic and poetic elements. Etty, for his own witch-like trio of Sirens, chose to portray them in their guise as beautiful women.

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63 Anon., 1979: 27.
64 Myrone, 2006: 130.
If, on the one hand, Hilton’s picture offered a recent precedent for portraying a man’s downfall at the hands of a capricious, seductive, female sea-creature, Etty can also be seen to have drawn upon the work of another close contemporary – this time, one which depicted the Sirens themselves. Henry Howard’s tenebrous *Comus Listening to the Incantations of Circe* (Fig. 186) was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1831, and afterwards purchased by Sir John Soane for £300 together with Turner’s *Admiral Van Tromp’s Barge at the Entrance to the Texel, 1645* for 250 guineas.65 In this painting, Howard shows his three Sirens draped from the waist down – pictured left to right from a profile, back and frontal perspective – in dappled sunlight and crowding around the central figure of Circe. Etty can be seen to have adopted similar postures and gestures for his trio of nudes, along with the upstretched arms of the Sirens, and to have adapted their arrangement so as to contain and add coherence to the group. Moreover, Etty’s middle figure waves her aulos in the air, while the curved lyre motif appears in both paintings (Figs. 6 and 186). Etty was later to produce his own *Circe and the Sirens Three*, which constituted the first of his designs for the fresco in the Garden Pavilion, Buckingham Palace, and was exhibited at the Academy in 1846 (Fig. 187). Having responded to and reformulated the imagery being created by his contemporaries in this way, the artist once again demonstrates the incontrovertible correlations between his exhibited output and that of his peers. Interestingly, in May 1837, the *Spectator* observed that: “Of the four living painters who have successfully essayed the ‘grand style,’ – namely, BRIGGS, ETTY, HAYDON, and HILTON – ETTY alone contributes to the present exhibition.”66

‘Mr. Etty avails himself of the assistance of a model in all he undertakes’

Historical or allegorical painting in the “grand style” – to which elevated genre Etty’s *Sirens and Ulysses* aspired – demanded a certain level of idealisation, particularly when it came to the transportation of the nude form from studio to story, and from private to public sphere. In the *Sirens* (Fig. 6), all twenty or so protagonists are depicted nude or semi-nude and are divided by gender: while the left-hand side is inhabited by a trio of curvaceous female figures, whose entwined, luminescent limbs, silhouetted against the dark green sea and ominous grey clouds in the backdrop,

66 *Spectator*, 20 May 1837: 475.
seem to be modelled so as to project from the surface of the canvas, the right-hand side contains an abundance of entirely male characters, both living and dead. As had also been the case with the *Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons* and the *Mars, Venus and Cupid*, Etty was once again rebuked for his selection and deployment of female models in this work.

Indeed, the Sirens were declared “more voluptuous in character than perfect in form” by the *Spectator*, who then went on to assert: “in fact, they are Academy models, whose personal defects the painter has not corrected so completely as to attain the ideal of female beauty”. As Alison Smith states, given that Etty's primary focus in the life class was the area between a model's neck and knees, his females are often endowed with “bizarre proportions” – specifically “expansive hips and tiny extremities, barely capable of supporting the weight of the torso and thighs” – while the head can appear “dislocated from the body”. Etty's curious practice of sewing together preferred parts of different figures, and implanting them into a completed set-piece, meant that his productions were especially prone to exhibiting such disparities. Etty's editing technique is discernible in the raven-haired Siren to the left of the trio, who the painter has disfigured by attaching her appendages incorrectly: a left hand is bizarrely affixed to her right wrist, and there is a seemingly impossible contortion of a left foot sticking out from beneath her red cloth (Fig. 188).

Interestingly, Etty's transposition of male models into the *Sirens's* composition was similarly subject to critical scrutiny and generated accusations of stitching, bodybuilding and overcharged anatomy – especially in relation to the classical hero himself: “We greatly dislike the anatomical Ulysses”, remarked *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, “we see no necessity for his nudity; and his immodest display of it”. Between 1808 and 1825, anatomical lectures were delivered to the Academy students by the eminent surgeon Anthony Carlisle, who, according to the writer Charles Lamb, was “the best story-teller I ever heard”. Etty's fellow probationer, William Collins, recalled the interest that Carlisle's lecture series stimulated “by the exhibition of the Indian jugglers, or any other of the fashionable athletae of the day,

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67 *Spectator*, 20 May 1837: 475.
69 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1837: 335.
70 Talfourd, 1837, 2: 94.
whose muscular systems were well enough developed to claim the students’ eyes”.71 Male bodies were as capable of “claiming” eyes as female. The Professor of Anatomy utilised “prize-fighters … a troupe of Chinese jugglers … [and] a squad of Life Guardsmen” to demonstrate the use of different muscle sets in the body. The latter display took place in 1821, in Somerset House’s Great Room, and was very well-attended – so much so that the doors had to be closed and guarded by constables from further intruders.72 However, it was Carlisle’s firm belief that “anatomy is subservient to precision and truth in design; it may secretly give correctness to drawing, but, if urged further, it will create disgust”, with minute details of the human structure proving to be “useless in historical painting”.73 Although adequate male models were available at the Academy in the form of soldiers and pugilists, the sculpted and fastidiously well-defined appearance of Ulysses’s body indicates a reliance towards assessing the anatomical potential of each muscle and building up a whole figure, rather than sketching from a single model in a set pose.

For the French newspaper L’Artiste, this method of configuring characters was too transparent: “Mr. Etty uses six or seven muscles, with which he builds the limbs and torsos of all his subjects; the different body parts do not appear to hang together”.74 Leonard Robinson, in his 2007 biography of the artist, even goes so far as to say that Etty’s ‘grafting’ technique frequently meant “heads, hands and feet do not convincingly ‘join’ the torsos to which they are attached”, creating a distorted, even grotesque effect.75 Interestingly, this charge had also been levelled at the painter’s former tutor, Fuseli, whose supernatural males attracted negative attention for looking like “surgical preparations who had burst, skinned as they were, out of the bottles in Surgeons’ Hall”.76 In his Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6), the marked divide between male and female figures allowed Etty to replicate the “sharp gendered dichotomy of visual form” often found in Fuseli’s imagery, by contrasting the hyper-masculinity of the robust Ulysses with the fleshy fluidity of the Sirens’ “curvaceous … lifeless or soft femininity”.77

71 Collins, 1848, 1: 35.
73 Hoare, 1810, 1: 1-12. This is from an essay by Antony Carlisle entitled ‘On the Connection between Anatomy and the Arts of Design’, published 4 July 1807.
74 L’Artiste, May 1837: 244.
75 Robinson, 2007: 341.
Etty’s spectacularly muscular male bodies were referred to as being “overcharged” by the *Spectator*, who pronounced that the artist had outdone “GOLTZIUS in exaggeration and falseness”.78 This same hyperbolic term was reiterated by a correspondent for the *Morning Post*, who extended it beyond the men’s physicality and applied it to their colouring, remarking: “Ulysses and his companions look more like red Indians than Greek warriors”.79 Of course, such schematic differentiation could lead to stereotyping and associated accusations of “moral vacuity”.80 On the ship, the sailors’ bodies ripple with shadows, which throw their muscles into relief as they heave on ropes, row and steer their vessel as swiftly as they can past the Sirens, whose more simply and smoothly delineated female forms have flesh supple enough to stretch and fold. In this sense, the supernatural monstrosities could be seen to be those inside the vessel rather than the savage Sirens on the land: indeed, one newspaper even referred to the latter as “nymphs”.81 Whereas by having nature as “his handmaid” when fashioning live figural forms, Etty took the risk of exposing his painting’s compositional make-up, his recourse to realism for the representation of corpses jeopardised its didactic objective.82

*A disgusting combination of voluptuousness and loathsome putridity*

Beneath the lively drama of temptation, resistance and rejection which is being played out across the top two thirds of the painting, at the bottom of his vast canvas Etty depicts a shocking scene of death, decay and desolation. Interestingly, although this was the first time that the artist had included corroding flesh in an exhibition piece, and on such a grand scale, an incipient fascination with the fragility of life and the decomposition of the human body can be discerned as early as 1822–23. While he was in Florence, Etty had encountered, and been struck by, a series of macabre waxwork models, produced by the Sicilian monk Gaetano Giulio Zumbo (1656-1701).83 Zumbo’s highly realistic, polychromatic wax dioramas – such as *The

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78 *Spectator*, 20 May 1837: 475.
82 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, June 1837: 628.
83 Gilchrist relates how Etty, while sight-seeing in Florence, “relaxes his mind over the ‘celebrated Preparations in wax of the Human Body, – very beautiful, very curious, and interesting’ and the ‘three very extraordinary Historic or Poetic pictures, or sculptures, or both;’ for ‘they are modelled in wax, and coloured to Nature’ (Gilchrist, 1855, 1: 184-85).
Transience of Human Glory (Fig. 189), The Plague (Fig. 190) and The Triumph of Time (Fig. 191) – feature bleak scenes that are riddled with bodies, some living, but the majority dead and in varying degrees of decay, until rendered skeletal. The Italian sculptor's detailed anatomical studies and morbid tableaux of bodily deterioration seem to have captured Etty's vivid imagination, as evidenced by the contents of his largest extant travel sketchbook.

While primarily dedicated to drawings, this journal also contains some pages of writing – including letter drafts – his 'shopping list' of artworks to copy en route and several short diary entries. However, the quantity of descriptive text reserved for Zumbo's gruesome productions is unrivalled, and certain passages went on to form part of a letter to his friend Thomas Bodley. Upon viewing the waxworks in situ, Etty found himself forcibly reminded of a line from the biblical Book of Psalms: that man is "fearfully and wonderfully made". The ephemerality of human existence and the inevitability of death – as meticulously realised in wax by Zumbo's "gloomy, but poetical imagination" – is clearly of deep interest to the painter. He reflects solemnly upon great men of the age being reduced to the "last degree of loathsomeness and horror", and employs evocative and explicit terms to describe rats gnawing at a man's entrails in a "map of hideous and bloated corruption", and worms celebrating their "triumph over him".

What Gilchrist and later scholars have neglected to notice is that nature at its most decrepit had snared the attention of an artist who would revisit moments demonstrating human transience in several future works, and was inspired to present his own painted version of rotting bodies in The Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6). Indeed, fourteen years after having viewed Zumbo's waxworks, Etty ventured to reproduce the various stages of corporal disintegration within this monumental, multi-figural picture, which he displayed to a sensitive British public during the Academy's inaugural show in its smart new galleries. Such a graphic transcription of human decay had rarely been seen hanging upon the walls of this institution, if ever. It is certain, at least, that no exhibitor had submitted a canvas conveying the classical story of Ulysses and the Sirens to the Academy's summer show before Etty (see

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84 YCA, eb 01, Letter 360. William Etty, to Thomas Bodley, in a letter dated 23 September 1823.
85 Psalms, 139:14.
Appendix K). When developing his ambitious composition, the painter – not content with his recollection of wax simulacrums – visited public mortuaries in order to study and draw directly from cadavers, in a bid to improve his anatomical knowledge of the human body. While we cannot be sure whether Etty actually engaged in physical dissection himself, we do know from associated correspondence that he enlisted the help of Robert Liston, a surgeon based at University Hospital, when painting his *Entombment of Christ* in 1843. On 29 March 1843, Liston informed one of his colleagues that “Mr Etty the celebrated artist ... is anxious to see Dead Bodies”, and two days later apprised the artist:

There is a very good body for my Lectures at the College. Quite at your service. Figures for one of the Demonstrations or for the Dissecting room. Martin Freeman – he will let you have access to it and find it in any attitudes you wish.

Etty's concerted efforts to gain first-hand knowledge of dead bodies can be discerned in the pictorial realism displayed by his *Sirens and Ulysses* (Fig. 6). The physical remnants of six sailors – pictured in differing degrees of decay – lie strewn across the beach, surrounding the pristine, nude flesh of the Sirens. Those corpses in closest proximity to the three fabled creatures are the most corroded: sketchily finished, picked-clean skeletons are situated to the immediate right and left of the group, while a single skull is centrally placed beneath it. Detached from an absent body, this skull – which was likely to have been inspired by Flaxman's outline illustration – appears to have been transferred straight from one of the painter's careful preliminary drawings (see, for example, Fig. 192). Intriguingly, on the verso of a sketch in Manchester Art Gallery there are a series of small pencil and ink studies showing skulls and feet from various perspectives (Fig. 193). This palimpsest –

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87 Prior to Etty's canvas, the subject matter of ‘Sirens and Ulysses’ had been very infrequently treated, with frescoes by Annibale Carracci, Guercino and Giacinto Camassei being the only other pictorial examples listed before Etty in Jane Reid’s *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s* (Reid, 1993, 2: 740).
88 Gilchrist states that when the artist was preparing to paint the *Sirens*, he “paid assiduous visits to charnel-houses, carefully studying from dead bodies in all the stages of decay. It never entered Etty's head to shirk or gloss over the realities of any story he had to paint: once it had secured his choice as a grand and pregnant theme” (Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 54).
89 Farr, 1958: 78, and Robinson, 2007: 347. This painting is now untraced.
92 I am indebted to John Peel at Manchester Art Gallery for drawing my attention to this image during a research trip undertaken in May 2014.
which has not been unearthed or commented upon by previous scholars – is illuminating, and in the top right-hand corner of the page, several lines of a draft letter have been scrawled over the drawings:

Dear Dixon, I saw the skulls ... I am truly sorry I was out of the way when you called last night but if you will do me the favor to come and drink tea with me any evening I shall be particularly glad, and if you will take the trouble to drop me a line what evening, I will take care and be at home. I saw the skulls and shall consider either of them an acquisition.93

It seems likely that these sketches date from pre-1837 and that they were composed in preparation for the painting. Once again, Etty assumes his role as a collector – or bricoleur – by referring to the skulls as objects that he wishes to acquire. Tellingly, the artist's 1850 sales catalogue reveals that he did in fact own a skull (Lot 988), which may well have been one of those purchased from 'Dixon'.94 The painter's rendition of the skull, and his pictorial realisation of Homer's “verdant meads”, prompted one contemporary to comment wistfully: “The eye rests on this merely accessory episode with a pleasure that makes us regret that the artist did not put forth his extraordinary powers as a colourist upon a picture wholly conceived in this purer and more poetical fashion.”95

In this instance, Etty's usual method of transplanting sketches, or sections of sketches, into a composition had proved successful, and is discernible elsewhere in the canvas, particularly in his portrayal of the dead men. For example, the semi-decomposed body lying to the right of the Sirens – whose pallid head, with its open yet unseeing eyes, is thrown into stark relief against the deep blue hue of the drapery behind – has been lifted directly from a series of chalk and pencil drawings which the artist made of a cadaver in a charnel-house. Collectively, this set of studies – reproduced here for the first time – focuses pictorial attention upon the corpse's torso, but provides no detail of its forearms, or indeed anything beyond the chest area (Figs. 194 and 195). When subsequently incorporated into the painting, the narrative allows for the figure's forearms to have rotted away, while his abdomen

94 Christie and Manson, 6-14 May 1850: 47.
95 Athenæum, 6 May 1837: 330.
and legs are presumably buried beneath the bronzed body of another recently deceased sailor. The muscular upper back of this last figure has been carefully finished, but areas of difficulty are clearly apparent in the hair, where there are visible brushstrokes under a thin wash, as well in the clothed legs. Etty’s sketchy painterly technique here means that the boundary lines between one body and the next are obscured. In this way, the painter sought to show three specific stages of decomposition, which can be traced in a diagonal from solid, tanned, intact torso, through sunken, ashen, emaciated trunk to hollow white ribcage (Fig. 196). However, slips in draughtsmanship – usually in places where he has not extracted figural forms from preliminary studies – include glaring imprecisions, as in the ship, where metallic yet transparent shields reveal rowers’ forearms and oars (Fig. 197).

‘We are with Ulysses and his companions ... we comprehend their temptation’

Piles of huge, half-eaten sailors did not constitute a usual ingredient of English history paintings and contemporary commentators were – unsurprisingly – outraged. Indeed, the fundamental, seemingly insuperable, issue for the critics was the painter’s flagrant verisimilitude when it came to his representation of the desecrated corpses scattered liberally across the Sirens’ island: “True to the letter of his text”, remarked a reviewer for the New Sporting Magazine, “the artist has with repulsive fidelity painted several skeletons, and bodies of men in a state of incipient putrefaction, lying on the shore near to his naked ballad-singers”. As this excerpt implies, the problem appears to have been exacerbated by Etty’s intimate and incongruous juxtaposition of the Sirens’ fleshy, feminine corporeality with the ravaged remains of their lifeless male counterparts. This contrast, I would argue, is reflected in technical terms by the careful handling and even, polished treatment of flesh exhibited by the three female nudes – which are rendered using fully opaque pigment – as opposed to the sketchy, imprecise quality of the corpses, with their translucent glazing and visible underpainting. Such an unvarnished display of female supremacy and male subordination provoked an outcry from the correspondent for the Athenæum, who experienced a visceral reaction upon encountering the picture at the Academy on 6 May 1837:

Let any person experienced in the mind of Italian art, figure to himself in what manner one of its masters would have treated this loveliest of all the legends of classic mythology, in which beauty and death mingle, – and then look at Mr. Etty’s picture. He will turn away, with pain, from the three gigantic, voluptuous fiends in the foreground, with their massy white waving arms, and their moist, full-orbed eyes – so disarmingly contrasted against the corrupting bodies of their victims, which grovel at their feet, and are painted (as it were) with the very slime of the charnel-house.97

The Spectator echoed this sentiment in their description of the work: “a disgusting combination of voluptuousness and loathsome putridity – glowing in colour and wonderful in execution, but conceived in the worst possible taste”.98 Etty was denounced as a “sensual, not an intellectual” painter, one who sought only to gratify “his love of displaying the female figure”,99 while the canvas itself was labelled “fearfully, nay, disgustingly, true to nature”.100 Thanks to its iconography of bodily disintegration, Etty’s Sirens flaunted its singularity and technical authenticity in a manner that departed dramatically from the status quo for treating such narrative elements.

The stridency of the critical censure directed at Etty’s painting might also allude to the contemporary (male) spectator’s discomfort upon finding themselves confronted with the artist’s life-sized dramatization of mortality. In thinking about the dynamics of contemplation, Etty can be seen to have purposely cast the beholder as an onlooker: one who shares the Sirens’ perspective, and is thus involuntarily obliged to stand amongst the dead men in order to observe the reduced and bound Ulysses beyond, and to meet his gaze. The open palms, outstretched arms and submissive gesture of the engaging Siren on the right of the group (and centre of the image as a whole) invite the viewer to step not only into the pictorial narrative, but also into her, and her two predatory sisters’, province. Nearby lie the dead and decaying bodies – replete with their disturbingly morbid associations – which cannot be seen by Ulysses and his crew, rendering the unwitting spectator complicit in the seduction. This notion was articulated within a lengthy letter that was published in the Art-Union of June 1839. Utilising Etty’s picture – which he refers to as the Syrens

97 Athenæum, 6 May 1837: 330.
98 Spectator, 6 May 1837: 427.
99 Spectator, 20 May 1837: 475.
100 Observer, 5 June 1837: 1.
Tempting Ulysses – to exemplify “the imperfect success” of an otherwise technically sophisticated and aesthetically appealing work “which has been mistakingly conceived”, the author writes:

Mr Etty ... was tempted, by his power of painting female figures, to neglect what should have been the order of his composition, and, by placing the Syrens in the foreground, and Ulysses and his companions in the distance, he has done a violence to the imagination of the spectators, which causes a sudden feeling of disappointment. We can no more reconcile ourselves to this prosaic embodying and close proximity of the Syrens, (who are thus brought as it were to sit amongst us) than we could be satisfied with any combination of harmony in music which professed to render the Syren's song ... Our human sympathies are not with them: our human comprehension does not perfectly grasp the shadowy notion of their resistless charm, or the extent of their fearful power. We are with Ulysses and his companions; we sympathise in their danger, we comprehend their temptation, we desire their safety, we fix our minds in contemplation on that wise man’s moment of weakness; we are in the boat, not on the strand (where Mr Etty in vain endeavoured to place us) ... 101

By foregrounding the Sirens so unequivocally, Etty clearly intended the viewer of his history painting to linger, delighting in their beauty, nudity and sensuality, before moving to engage with the events pictured elsewhere in the canvas, and interpreting them in conjunction with the textual tag in the gallery catalogue. Having passed through this first interpretative phase, becoming aware of the shocking juxtaposition of soft female flesh with sharp male carcasses would encourage the observer to reflect more generally upon the meaning of mortality and the dangers of female sexuality.

However, the prevailing reaction to the work was that of bewilderment and revulsion, as was the case for the above critic, where “a violence to the imagination” detracted him from being able to mentally “reconcile” himself with the episode depicted and hence “grasp” the moral. Nineteenth-century cultural constructions of masculinity, as explored and elucidated by Kestner, involved the male viewer’s “empowerment through identification” with the “spectacle of the male on canvas”, in a process of narcissistic ego-reinforcement. 102 This critic’s patent desire to align

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101 Art-Union, 15 June 1839: 89.
himself with the “wise” classical hero – whose lustfulness is summarily dismissed as a “moment of weakness” – and his equally brave companions, explains his reluctance to “sit amongst” the Sirens on the sand. Ulysses, in his demonic state, is the only one to look directly at the women-creatures and risk their visual and musical temptation. His visual address sets him apart from the mass of men around him and the Homeric hero’s ultimate resistance (albeit entirely owing to being restrained) transforms him into “a paradigm of male repudiation of female allure”. Yet instead of sharing his gaze, the male viewer is confronted by it – only to find it wild and frenzied. Three years later, the contemporary writer, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63), exhibited a similarly averse reaction to Etty’s imagery:

"Look for a while at Mr. Etty’s pictures, and away you rush, your ‘eyes on fire,’ drunken with the luscious colours that are poured out for you on the liberal canvass, and warm with the sight of the beautiful syrens that appear on it."

‘Another modern Prometheus’

The unconventionality of Etty’s painting is highlighted by the art collector Thomas Wright’s insightful comments made in a letter to the artist dating from 25 October 1837, after the work had returned unsold to his studio. Having just viewed the National Gallery’s newly acquired picture of Ruben’s’s The Brazen Serpent (Fig. 198), Wright exclaimed:

“\textbf{\textit{How much did I wish that the Rubens had been exhibited before, or even at the same time, that your noble Picture of Ulysses & the Sirens was before the Public – we should not have heard so much ill-natured criticism about the dead, livid bodies etc.}}”

Rubens illustrates a parable from the Old Testament Book of Numbers (21:6-9), where God inflicted a plague of deadly serpents upon the people of Israel as punishment for their sinfulness, and only allowed those who were repentant to survive the lethal venom, through gazing at a bronze serpent held aloft by Moses.

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104 Fraser’s Magazine, June 1840: 732.
the centre and right forefront of the picture lie two large, muscular, nude male bodies, whose contorted postures, grey tinged skin and glazed eyes betray their agonising incapacitation. Out of the mass of figures depicted behind the dying pair, a semi-nude woman rears up – her pale arms entwined and bound by a snake’s suffocating coils – appealing to Moses for salvation. A pile of afflicted people in the middle distance desperately attempt to fight off the fiery serpents that fall in droves from the stormy sky.

Etty, in his *Sirens and Ulysses* (Fig. 6), had likewise portrayed dead, discoloured male bodies in order to make a moral point, namely: "the importance of resisting SENSUAL DELIGHTS, or an Homeric paraphrase on the ‘Wages of Sin is Death’". Supposedly, a "clerical friend" had even suggested to Etty that this well-known idiom, derived from the Book of Romans (6:23), “might advantageously have been inscribed under the Picture: so as to arrest attention to its real aim, and secure a fine hearing”. Wright was probably correct in his belief that had the contemporary exhibition-going public encountered Rubens’s work – that of a prestigious Old Master, purchased for the nation – on display in London before seeing Etty’s *Sirens* at the 1837 Academy show, the latter would have been much less severely censured. As it was, Etty’s convincing delineation of slain sailors’ decomposing bodies led one correspondent to remark: “the surgeons will be in raptures; indeed, the picture is only fit to adorn a dissecting-room”, while the *Literary Gazette* mused: “Who would like to have the representation of a charnel-house suspended in his apartment?”

This type of response can be partly explained by the fact that the canvas fanned the fires surrounding contemporary moral and ethical issues raised by the practice of artists studying from and dissecting cadavers. “Conceptual ‘slippage’ between surgeons, dissectors, artists, writers, murderers, creators, and destroyers” was, as Dominic Janes states, “deeply entrenched in early nineteenth-century culture”. Such concerns, he proposes, famously manifested themselves in literary form with the

107 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
108 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 63.
109 *Spectator*, 20 May 1837: 475.
publication of Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*.\(^{111}\)

Indeed, the influence of this iconic narrative was seeping into society during this period, with the first popular edition of the tale, in one volume, appearing in October 1831, published by Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley. Continuing in the same vein, Janes makes a fascinating case for reading Etty as “another modern Prometheus, attempting to breathe life into all-too-dead matter through his mass-production of nudes as commodities”, on account of his “grotesque” appearance and his tendency to refer to his pictorial creations as his children.\(^{112}\)

Intriguingly, one letter in York Art Gallery's extensive collection – which has not previously been referenced in scholarship on Etty – contains a spoof invitation to a dinner party sent by the artist to a couple of his close acquaintances in 1833. Having jokingly informed his friends that the night’s entertainment will include a viewing of “Martin’s Grand Diorama of the Destruction of Jerusalem, by the Jews! With Five Hundred and Fifty Thousand Figures!!!”, he declares that there will also be a production of “Frankinstein – The part of Frankinstein (for this night only), Mr Franklin”.\(^{113}\) Etty often called his assistant and long-term friend George Franklin “Frankynsteyn”, as can be seen from another letter in the collection.\(^{114}\)

*Samson and Delilah ‘the deluder’*

The fourth and final painting by Etty to be showcased at the 1837 Academy exhibition hung alongside his colossal *Sirens and Ulysses* upon the walls of the East Room, and presented the contemporary spectator with another cautionary tableau of male disempowerment and destruction at the hands of a desirable and, in this case, greedy and deceitful female. Entitled *Samson Betrayed by Delilah*, this untraced work illustrated the following verses derived from the Old Testament Book of Judges:

\[^{111}\text{Janes, 2011: 300.}\]
\[^{112}\text{Janes, 2011: 300-301. In a letter written by Etty to his friends the Bulmers in 1838, which is quoted in Gilchrist, the painter refers to “Seven children, alias Pictures, calling for attention” (Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 81).}\]
\[^{113}\text{YAG, YORAG: 2012.24. William Etty, to unknown recipients, in a letter dated 17 September 1833. Transcribed by the author of this thesis.}\]
And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him ...

Having been re-displayed at the Royal Manchester Institution during the autumn of 1837, *Samson Betrayed by Delilah* was purchased from the artist by the cotton merchant, Daniel Grant, in October of the same year (when he also acquired the *Sirens and Ulysses*), after which time its provenance is unknown. According to Gilchrist, the canvas contained nine figures and was: “Small in size but large in manner, a compressed epic, it is the very perfection of the Cabinet Historic.” The following contemporary commentary surrounding the painting’s exhibition – which has not appeared in previous scholarship – provides some description of Etty’s depiction. In its scathing review, the *Spectator* remarked: “an attempt is made to tell the story; but we get no idea beyond that of a bouncing courtezan and a strong man with his hands tied, held by a sort of black footboy in armour”, while the following review, published in the *Atlas* on 13 May, is similarly enlightening:

But all the offences against good taste which deform the picture are atoned for a thousand times by the magic of the colouring. The composition is fine; a helmed head with an uplifted axe forming the top of the pyramid; Samson bent beneath the knee of a Philistine, who binds him, occupies the centre, and his attitude affords the finest opportunity for muscular development. In the foreground, on the right, a negro soldier, and at the back on the left the lords of the Philistines in their rich dresses fill up the picture.

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116 Farr, 1958: 79. Etty was persuaded into parting with both *The Sirens and Ulysses* and *Samson Betrayed by Delilah* for just £250, as he was “always mindful of Haydon’s precarious financial position”.
117 Leonard Robinson, discussing Etty’s religious paintings, notes: “there is now uncertainty over the provenance of some, as many were later assigned to store-rooms or otherwise hidden away since such subjects became unfashionable” (Robinson, 2007: 269).
118 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 55.
119 *Spectator*, 20 May 1837: 475.
120 *Atlas*, 14 May 1837: 313.
The scriptural subject matter was aligned with a venerable Old Master pictorial tradition, disseminated widely through easily available prints after artists such as Van Dyck, Rubens and Rembrandt. For the *Literary Gazette*, Etty's picture was "one of the finest and most powerful pictures (of a cabinet size) ever painted in this country", capable of being compared favourably with eminent past masters: “Its energy of action and character, its depth and richness of colour, and its masterly execution, are all transcendent, uniting the highest qualities of Rubens and Tintoret".¹²¹ The story of Samson and Delilah had also been treated numerous times at previous Academy summer exhibitions.¹²²

By carefully choosing to portray yet another notorious temptress – and a second Old Testament character – Etty reinforced the statement made by his previous three paintings. Delilah, the "deluder", who “has a tearful eye to turn upon Samson, even while her open hand waits for the price of his ruin", is responsible for her lover’s emasculation and eventual downfall.¹²³ She thus constituted a fitting counterpart to her fellow female leads: Eve, Venus and the Sirens. Reminiscent of the *Judith* saga, the narrative of Delilah’s betrayal contains strands of sexual temptation, male arrogance and the metaphorical castration (shaving, binding and blinding) of a strong man by a treacherous woman. However, in this case, there were many witnesses to Samson’s unmanning, and Delilah did not wield the sword herself. In a role reversal, the dozing male is the blameless biblical hero unconsciously facing his utter destruction and physical mutilation, having (perhaps foolishly or naively) entrusted Delilah with his vows to God. As Margarita Stocker explains, the male viewer “found comfort in Eve, who misled her husband Adam and hence manifested the duplicitous character of womankind; and in such biblical sirens as Delilah, who betrayed Samson to slavery and blinding at the hands of his enemies”.¹²⁴

¹²² Interestingly, Venus and Cupid’s presence within this subject is not unknown, for instance in Rubens’s *Samson and Delilah*, where the pair feature as a background statue.
Conclusion

An educated nineteenth-century spectator, familiar with Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, would have known that Eve, in Etty's *Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons*, had just woken from a disturbing dream in which she was tempted into eating forbidden fruit, and that the moment depicted is thus pre-serpent/apple, prior to her fall and before 'knowledge' had come into the world. Of the four paintings that Etty submitted to the 1837 Academy display, this was undoubtedly the most innocent– both Adam and Eve would have been naked, in their natural state, symbolising the fact that they had nothing to hide. I elucidated above how the painter sought perfection when choosing a fitting model for his pure, naïve Eve. The second picture which hung in the School of Painting, *Mars, Venus and Cupid* (Fig. 12), was similarly small in size and maintained a focus upon the activities of a well-known pair of lovers, but invited a rather different reading. A tidy and conventional composition, it employed standard conceits and colouring to show sexual intent and temporary deliberate denial. Each participant plays their set role in this scene: Venus knows how best to present herself, Cupid is her willing helper and Mars is physically strong, yet psychologically confused. The exact moment in the seduction process is ambiguous, however there is a tangible sense of self-consciousness, and awareness of right and wrong, that is likely to have been missing from *Adam and Eve*.

The narratives of desire, sensuality and temptation insinuated by these two canvases were then extended and complicated by those hanging in the adjacent East Room. In his immense, explicit *Sirens and Ulysses* (Fig. 6), Etty launches a pictorial offensive, drawing his unsuspecting viewer into the heart of the dramatic action – a trio of music-making, man-eating creatures, in the guise of beautiful nude women, kneel amongst the rotting remains of their human prey, as they attempt to lure a new batch of muscular sailors to their deaths. Ulysses is the only man to consciously yield to these three murderous enchantresses, albeit with a safeguard in place. It is the loyalty and protection of his fellow men that ensures his safety. The painter's candid treatment of the gory theme outraged some sensitive critics, but the scandal only heightened the public interest surrounding the work. Finally, in his *Samson and Delilah* – akin in size to *Adam and Eve* and *Mars, Venus and Cupid* and depicting yet another ill-fated couple – the scene has now shifted to post-event: Samson has been
betrayed by his beloved Delilah, and his fall is catastrophic, as was Adam’s, who trusted Eve implicitly and rightly, before she was seduced by the serpent. Both had to leave the Garden of Eden together. Misguided love and blind trust characterise the two biblical portrayals, but Delilah was a knowing serpent.

In thinking about a trajectory between Etty’s portfolio of pictures at the 1837 exhibition, their most striking feature is the transformation of women: from Eve to the Sirens. Eve, who was herself tempted – and who then enjoined her lover to share in her misfortune – exhibited remorse and horror. Venus seduced Mars, but both suffered humiliation at the hands of her cuckolded husband Vulcan. Samson was charmed, betrayed and subsequently ruined: he sought death (albeit that of a hero). The three Sirens – haunting, voluptuous and ruthless – flaunted their sexuality to lure sailors who then died at their hands. Collectively, these images, I would suggest, do not show Etty indulging in the wonder of beautiful, naked women, but instead he utilises the female nude to demonstrate the frailty of man. By dramatizing the dangers of seduction, temptation (and perhaps even love) he sought to illustrate, as he himself asserted, “the importance of resisting SENSUAL DELIGHTS”. Etty had a life-long interest in the study and appearance of the female body, and also, I would argue, in the complex behaviour of women. He mastered the nude, but seemed – from his choice of subjects – less certain of the vagaries of the female psyche. The intentions of his temptresses vary, from Eve’s unintentional perfidy, through the adulterous Venus, to the greedy and malicious Delilah, and finally, to the Sirens, who symbolised innate and repulsive evil within seductive female bodies.

In Etty’s interpretation of Homer’s tale (Fig. 6), the Sirens are stripped of any allusion to their monstrous disposition (hinted at by the hooked claw in Flaxman’s print, see Fig. 182), and instead resemble London women, with flushed cheeks, pink lips and dimensions that betray classical proportions. With all physical deformities glazed over, it is the vestiges of men scattered around them that provide the shocking forewarning. As so often with Etty, gender struggles are dramatized in paint. However, a well-prepared, trusty crew can control and overcome sensuous temptation – a natural and understandable male weakness. They can fill a boat with one purpose: survival. The sailors show great strength of mind and use their might

125 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
and muscle to work as a team, moving Ulysses and the ship past the seductive trio onwards into the dark water ahead. Etty's original “Bumboat” (to use Constable's derogatory term), seen in *Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm* (Fig. 11) – full of largely female, carefree pleasure-seekers – has metamorphosed into an earnest, drilled crew of loyal seamen, working together to weather a moral storm, in this more masculine and serious picture. Unapologetically unconventional, innovative and progressive, Etty’s creations continued to court controversy and yet in many ways it was their very singularity that enabled him to maintain his status as a prominent participant in the art world of the period.

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CONCLUSION

On 29 May 1996, Sotheby’s auctioned a pen and watercolour caricature of William Etty, created by his former student, Charles Hutton Lear (1818-1903), which depicts the artist clad in stiff, black Victorian attire, with a book tucked under one arm and clutching a life class sketch of a voluptuous female nude (Fig. 199).¹ This amusing image of Etty is consonant with the eccentric and lascivious reputation that he acquired during the first twenty years of Victoria’s reign, if not a number of years earlier. He is pictured standing alone, eyes cast down contemplatively, and the whole work is left peculiarly, yet presumably purposefully, unfinished: his thin legs taper off into nothingness and the notion of a backdrop is indicated by a few faint lines. Conversely, an illuminating written account, composed by Alaric Alexander Watts in Paris during the summer of 1830, provides a rather different impression:

Etty’s appearance was rough, without being romantic. He wore a coarse blue frock-coat, the right sleeve of which bore evidences of frequent contact with his wet canvas, and cut so long in the skirts as to set off in no very prepossessing fashion a rather bulky person; blue trousers, of considerable amplitude as far as they went, displaying above a pair of thick ‘Blucher boots,’ coarse grey worsted stockings, a costume, it might be supposed, little adapted to one of the most sultry days of a Parisian summer … His fellow-workers in the Gallery gathered before his easel, and watched with curiosity, not unmingled with admiration, the approach of this performance towards completion … when completed [it] was a great success; and becoming talked of in the studios, several distinguished French painters came expressly to see it, and spoke with generous enthusiasm of its merits … Not content with the use of his brush and his palette-knife, his finger and thumb, and now and then his coat-sleeve, had been employed in modifying some bit of colour on his canvas, and having now and then to protect his nose and chin from the attacks of the flies of a hot Parisian summer day, his face presented a most grotesque appearance, from the dabs of colour with which it was liberally bespread.²

Far from portraying a prim Victorian recluse, this lively passage describes Etty putting on a “performance” for foreign fellow artists, in a highly public manner that

¹This caricature was sold at Sotheby’s in London on 29 May 1996 as Lot 306 for £1,200.
²Watts, 1884, 2: 59-61.
evokes Turner’s notorious painterly activities. Indeed, these two contemporaries share several familiar tropes, such as the shambolic appearance, the ability to entertain and astonish onlookers, and the erratic use of any available implement when in the frenzy of pictorial inspiration.

Compare, for example, the following well-known abridged extract, penned by the painter Edward Villiers Rippingille in 1860, where he recalls Turner’s conduct on Varnishing Days at the Royal Academy during the 1830s:

Turner who, as he boasted, could outwork and kill any painter alive, was there … Such a magician, performing his incantations in public, was an object of interest and attraction … A small box of colours, a few very small brushes, and a vial or two, were at his feet, very inconveniently placed; but his short figure, stooping, enabled him to reach what he wanted very readily. Leaning forwards and sideways over to the right, the left-hand metal button of his blue coat rose six inches higher than the right, and his head buried in his shoulders and held down, presented an aspect curious to all beholders … In one part of the mysterious proceedings Turner, who worked almost entirely with a palette knife, was observed to be rolling and spreading a lump of half-transparent stuff over his picture, the size of a finger in length and thickness.  

Turner was of course a natural showman, and it should be noted that such retrospective textual narratives were often deployed to construct an image of the artist as a bravura, imaginative genius and therefore cannot be read as transparent. What is of interest here, however, is that the passage about Etty as characterised by Watts – whose curious and colourful painterly performances resonate so closely with those of Turner – does not comply with the neat, contained, insular figure in Lear’s comical caricature. Instead, Watts presents a painter whose technical skills, particularly as a colourist, excited attention and admiration: one who, when at the height of his powers and deemed to have “become the rage”, was eager to publically demonstrate the strength of the British School when in the French capital.

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3 Rippingille, 1 April 1860: 100.
4 For an interesting discussion of Turner’s performances during Varnishing Days at the Royal Academy, see Leo Costello, *J.M.W. Turner and the Subject of History*, especially Chapter 3, “This cross-fire of colours”: Turner and the Varnishing Days (Costello, 2012: 111-42).
5 Hunt, 1905, 1: 49.
Although he was grounded in the Georgian period, during which time he produced his greatest works, Etty has become absorbed into the tastes and values of the early-Victorian era – an era which has been subject to considerable scholarly interest, and which still claims him. His controversial, somewhat salacious, modern reputation has increasingly become entrenched by this continuing, unchallenged association. Aside from his biographical accounts, the majority of previous critical studies on the painter have concentrated upon his treatment of the nude, and interpreted his life and works in terms of the equivocal repute that he obtained in the first few decades following his death in 1849. This is exemplified by his characterisation in two influential publications by Alison Smith. In this dissertation, for the first time, Etty has been examined through the prism of a purely late-Georgian perspective. Art-historical literature relating to this epoch has focused upon landscape painting to such a degree that it has marginalised alternative genres of art, particularly history. To this end, my primary aim in this study has been to rescue Etty from the repetitive, often reductive, representation of him as a Victorian painter of prolific nude figures.

It might be said that an analogous exercise to my own took place during the course of his 1849 retrospective exhibition, when a number of contemporary commentators recognised Etty’s dwindling reputation and sought, by evoking his early works, to restore him to his former status as a prominent and successful British master. This retrospective, held in June 1849 at the Society of Arts in London, was a highly significant event, given that it marked only the second show to be conducted by an institution for a living artist in Britain. In 1848, the Society had instituted a successful first retrospective for the genre painter, William Mulready (1786-1863), and this exhibition, as well as Etty’s ensuing one, was held in the hope of acquiring funds for the foundation of a National Gallery of British Art, as stated on the poster for Etty’s showcase (Fig. 200). Etty’s retrospective served as an “honorary device”, whereby his works could be “examined as an ensemble, revealing similarities and differences,

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7 Hudson and Luckhurst, 1954: 52. Interestingly, the Society of Arts had initially offered their second retrospective exhibition to Turner, however he turned it down due to a “peculiar inconvenience this year”.

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strengths and weaknesses and providing a model of emulation for other artists".\textsuperscript{8} Importantly, it departed from previous comparable expositions, which had either been organised entirely by the artists themselves, for example Nathaniel Hone's (1718-84) one-man show in 1775, or by institutions, following an artist's death, such as the British Institution's 1813 display in tribute to Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92).

Once again, Etty's canvases were marshalled towards the creation of an important national artistic establishment: his \textit{chefs-d'œuvre} having formed the cornerstone of the Royal Scottish Academy's incipient collection between 1829 and 1831. At the Society of Arts in 1849, 110 of Etty's finest works – including his nine "colossal paintings"\textsuperscript{9} – were displayed in the Great Room, while a further twenty-three studies hung in the Committee Room. Furthermore, five engravings after his works were on show in the Subscribers' Room. As the graph below usefully illustrates, the exhibition was heavily weighted towards those paintings produced during the Victorian part of Etty's career (1837-49):

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Number of works produced and first exhibited over time.}
\end{figure}

Indeed, as the \textit{Eclectic Review} remarked, his pictures from this period were "greater in proportion by far, than of those of the preceding twenty years".\textsuperscript{10} This fact was much lamented by a number of critics, who sensed the need for both clarification and rehabilitation. The \textit{Morning Chronicle}, for instance, declared that: "The later works of Etty, as seen at the Academy exhibitions, have tended, like those of Turner, in a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} Stefanis, 1 October 2010 (Tate website).
\item \textsuperscript{9} Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
\item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Eclectic Review}, September 1849: 326.
\end{itemize}
great degree to efface from the public mind the memory of his earlier productions."11 Having discerned a steady decline in the quality of his exhibits from ambitious historical and poetical compositions to “smudgy, dingy, smoke-coloured studies of the nude female figure”, this critic concluded that were a viewer only to consider Etty’s later pieces, they could “have no idea of the grandeur of conception and the breadth as well as finish of execution, or of the gorgeous wealth in colour, which characterize some of his earlier works”, particularly the “nine grand pictures”.12 Etty himself proudly singled out several of these immense canvases when surveying his life’s work: “I had completed the arrangement of them; and sat me down in a chair, in the midst of these my children: the noble Judith; the animated Sirens … I then felt it was something to be William Etty”.13 Poignantly, this retrospective show was to mark the last time that the artist’s nine colossal paintings – moralizing masterpieces intended to secure his legacy – were displayed together in one room.

As outlined above, a noticeable nostalgia pervades the contemporary critical commentary relating to what I have termed Etty’s ‘epic period’ (1820-37), before his output gradually became diluted by a plethora of fanciful, saleable, cabinet-sized canvases. In its review of the 1849 show, a contributor for the Athenæum attributed the artist’s tangible change of trajectory in the mid-1830s to the underwhelming market for grand manner paintings: “though every verbal acknowledgement was accorded, there was no encouraging hand held out to purchase his pictures or give him commissions”. Etty is then bracketed alongside two of his peers, William Hilton and Benjamin Robert Haydon (whose 1846 suicide in abject poverty would still have been fresh in the mind) as paradigms of those painters who had “paid the penalty of disappointment” for pursuing this fruitless genre in a bid “to produce works worthy of their country”.14 Seeing as these reviewers’ efforts to re-establish Etty’s contemporary status as a celebrated history painter reflect my own, it is apt to summarise the conclusions reached in the previous five chapters with reference to the critical response engendered by Etty’s retrospective.

11 Morning Chronicle, 11 June 1849: 5.
12 Morning Chronicle, 11 June 1849: 5.
13 Gilchrist, 1855, 2: 274.
14 Athenæum, 23 June 1849: 649.
One of Etty’s earliest Academy successes, *The Coral Finder: Venus and her Youthful Satellites Arriving at the Isle of Paphos* (Fig. 7) – which I singled out in my first chapter as the picture that initiated the painter’s ‘epic period’ – was not displayed at the Society of Arts’ retrospective. In September 1849, the Eclectic Review confirmed the canvas’s crucial place in Etty’s corpus of works by commenting that it was “undoubtedly towards the middle and close of the first period ... a period of some ten or eleven years, dating from the ‘Coral Finders,’ in 1820, that our artist put forth fullest strength”. As elucidated in Chapter I, although Etty had been recognised as a champion of historical and poetical painting from as early as 1811, it was this mythological exhibit that marked his full entry into a ‘poetic’ or ‘fancy’ aesthetic which would feature prominently in his output throughout the remainder of his career. My discussion highlighted the little-known fact that Etty was an integral member of several fluid ‘sets’ of like-minded peers, who were also dealing in the same pictorial currency. Despite the abundance of documentary source material which points to the importance of Etty’s interactions with his artistic contemporaries, this aspect of his practice has been substantially side-lined by scholars, persuaded as they were of his outsider status and eccentric solitariness.

I sought to rectify this misconception by relocating Etty within a cultural grouping of artists inextricably linked both by their shared academic training and a mutual concern with advancing a ‘poetical’ strand of history painting in the British School. Deploying my own specific ‘poetical set’ – which comprised Etty, William Hilton and Henry Howard – an in-depth analysis of the 1820 Royal Academy exhibition revealed extensive stylistic, thematic and compositional correspondences between Etty’s allegorical, ethereal *Coral Finder* and the imagery produced and displayed by his peers. Interestingly, the paintings of all three were often accompanied in gallery catalogues by quotations from common literary sources – a discernment which led to the discovery of new data relating to their involvement in publishing projects. It is unfortunate that art-historical literature from the twentieth century onwards has essentially glossed over the identities of those artists who were most commonly associated with Etty, due to their own reduced reputations, as well as the prevailing

scholarly tendency to construe the painter as an anomalous figure – further occcluding his significant role within a domestic sphere of influence.

Throughout his career, the encomiums that were most consistently accorded to Etty were in connection with his superlative skills as a colourist, and this proficiency became an inextricable part of his artistic identity. In Chapter II, I examined Etty’s efforts to emulate those Venetian masters that he most admired, especially Titian and Veronese, during his aesthetic tour of Italy during 1822-23. Years of close observation, meticulous study and painterly experimentation perfected his technique, as reflected by the press coverage surrounding the 1849 Society of Arts retrospective. The Observer, for instance, eulogised: “One feels dazzled and bewildered, on entering the room, by the extraordinary brilliancy reflected from the walls”,16 while the Examiner asserted:

That he had learned much from the old masters is certain; but he brought to the study a habit of seeing nature with his own eyes, and a considerable stock of acquired ideas; and he used what he had learned merely to extend and give a practical direction to the range of his observations and experiments.17

Intriguingly, the Athenæum counselled students visiting the show that they would be mistaken in thinking “Venetian Art owed its superiority to superior acquaintance with the material employed, – to some occult chemical knowledge now extinct”. In fact, the portfolio of Etty’s works presented to the public constituted, according to this correspondent, “some of the most complete examples of mastery over the chromatic agency of the painter’s art of our own or of any age”.18

Etty’s “mastery over the chromatic agency” of his art was considered in Chapter II, which shed new light on the painter’s open-minded philosophy towards his ongoing artistic education – whether through attending life classes at foreign academies, copying directly from the imagery of renowned classical and Renaissance masters, or by scrutinising a contemporary treatise on colouring. My detailed investigation, which drew upon a wide-ranging array of hitherto unknown written and visual

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16 Art-Journal, 1 July 1849: 223.
17 Examiner, 16 June 1849: 373-74.
source material, indicated that Etty was more socially active when abroad than has previously been appreciated, forming part of a convivial “canvas gentry”. Close readings of two striking and very different canvases, which Etty displayed at successive Academy shows upon his return to London – *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons* in 1824 (Fig. 8) and *The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished* in 1825 (Fig. 9) – demonstrated the extent of his improved pictorial vocabulary and increased singularity. The exhibition of these two works, I argued, allowed Etty to elevate himself into the role that the contemporary press had crafted for him: as a distinctive, modern master, and a skilled painter of both mythological and historical subjects.

Chapter III concentrated on *Judith* (Fig. 10) – Etty’s fully clothed, contradictory and complex holy heroine – which was unanimously lauded as the showstopper of the 1827 Royal Academy exhibition, and regarded by contemporaries as epitomising the pinnacle of his pictorial practice. Indeed, upon encountering *Judith* on display at the artist’s retrospective in June 1849, the *Spectator* deemed it representative of the “culminating point” in his career, enthusing: “He painted the ‘Holofernes’ twenty-two years ago, and has since painted nothing to equal it as a whole”. Indeed, the importance of the prestigious purchase and patronage of the Royal Scottish Academy, which effectively espoused Etty as the leading British painter in the grand manner at the time – a living, modern master – has been underplayed by previous scholarship. For his modern, British take on a stand-out scriptural subject, one that had frequently been treated by Continental artists, Etty carefully selected the dramatic moment of suspended animation, when Judith, sword upraised, seeks the blessing of God for the appalling deed she is about to undertake. The story was well-known, yet the psychological depiction of the warrior-woman and the agonising unawareness of the unconscious, unmanned victim, were innovative. In my re-evaluation of *Judith*, I unpacked and unravelled several of the work’s thematic preoccupations, including the intriguing gender-specific role reversals between Etty’s two equally prominent protagonists, compositional conceits such as its

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19 Stillinger, 1966: 141.
20 *Spectator*, 16 June 1849: 568.
21 This critical neglect was hastened by the physical condition of the *Judith* series, which has now virtually disintegrated, rendering the apogee of Etty’s colossal works unavailable for public viewing.
disconcerting disjunctive elements and melodramatic painterly effects. Judith, I suggested, symbolised an ideal heroine for Etty, given that she was a personality who could relate to the message he consistently used to defend himself against his detractors: that his intention was always “to paint some great moral on the heart”.22

Notably absent from the 1849 Society of Arts retrospective were the troubled pendants which Etty showed at the 1832 Royal Academy exhibition: *Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm* (Fig. 11) and *The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate* (Fig. 3). The former of these two works, which had formed part of the Vernon collection presented to the National Gallery in 1847, was sorely missed by a critic for the *Illustrated London News*, who thought it one of “Mr. Etty’s very best pictures”, while the latter presumably remained in the possession of its original purchaser, Henry Payne.23 Dennis Farr, in his 1958 monograph, disparages Etty’s *Destroying Angel*, finding it a “sobering thought” that this canvas constitutes the nearest English equivalent to Delacroix’s *The Death of Sardanapalus* (Fig. 201) given that, for him, it fails to “capture our attention for long, if at all”.24 Earlier in his seminal study, Farr had declared that the July 1830 Revolution in Paris had left Etty “(an Englishman, it is true), unmoved, except to be mildly irritated”.25 One wonders whether he would have dismissed the image so perfunctorily had he considered the implications of the red Phrygian caps that shine out from the pictorial centres of both paintings – a powerful symbol that closely resonated with contemporary events.

In Chapter IV, I argued that the pictorial realisation and joint exhibition of Etty’s *Youth on the Prow* and his *Destroying Angel* reflected not only the ideological backdrop of the 1832 English Reform Act, but also the painter’s recent, raw memories of the ‘Three Glorious Days’ in the French capital. In my opinion, as calls for constitutional reform gathered pace in Britain – a nation that was gripped by civic agitation, outbreaks of violence and widespread cholera – Etty executed two performative pictures which expressed his views surrounding the current political issues of reform and revolution. In one, the bearer of the *bonnet rouge* is on the brink

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22 Etty, 1 February 1849: 40.
24 Farr, 1958: 64.
of bursting a bubble that will result in the dissolution of the serene scene around him, and in the other, he can only watch, petrified, as terror rains down. Farr is correct in describing Etty as “no revolutionary” – indeed, his pictures collectively sought to caution against reform – yet he was not afraid to express his beliefs on a public stage at the highest point of tension in nineteenth-century British society.26

Finally, Chapter V explored Etty’s gigantic picture of The Sirens and Ulysses (Fig. 6), arguably his most provocative work, which was allocated a highly prominent placement in the wall hang at the 1837 Royal Academy exhibition – the first to be held at the newly built National Gallery.27 As had also been the case twelve years previously, at the Society of Arts retrospective in 1849 this painting generated “much discussion respecting the justness of taste in the introduction of certain details in the foreground of the picture”.28 These “details” were of course Etty’s graphic depiction of dead and decomposing male bodies heaped on top of one another in a mouldering mess. By transplanting body parts directly from the autopsy table, and unashamedly grafting them into his vast canvas, Etty sought to illustrate the dangers of succumbing to sensual delights. He evoked the transience of existence by juxtaposing supple female flesh with the dross of male cadavers. As he had also done with the Judith triptych, Etty tackled a subject shunned by generations of British artists, and produced an original interpretation of the gory theme to a mixed response, foregrounding the seductive Sirens and the mortal remains of men, while reducing Ulysses to a distant, half-crazed figure. Musing upon Etty’s “moral aim” in 1849, the Spectator declared that although initially “quite sincere”, it had “scarcely survived the ‘Holofernes’”, and by the time he had come to the Sirens “the moral had ceded the first place, and had become ancillary to the exhibition of the nude.”29

In spite of the savage criticism that the exhibition of Etty’s Sirens and Ulysses elicited, I would argue that this highly significant work spawned a pictorial tradition of a type in British art – a notion that has not appeared in previous scholarship on the artist. The evocative canvas certainly inspired the next generation of painters, many of

27 This painting has now become one of three colossal paintings by Etty to remain on permanent display, following a successful and extensive conservation effort by Manchester Art Gallery.
28 Athenaeum, 23 June 1849: 649.
29 Spectator, 16 June 1849: 568.
whom held Etty in high esteem, with both William Edward Frost (1810-77) and Frederick Richard Pickersgill (1820-1900) presenting closely associated variations on the theme at the 1849 Royal Academy summer exhibition.\textsuperscript{30} Strikingly, while Frost’s \textit{The Syrens} engendered allusions to its predecessor – the \textit{Spectator} commented upon “a group of certain ladies peculiar to the Royal Academy ... meretricious but not tempting”\textsuperscript{31} – in 1850 this same periodical went so far as to call Pickersgill’s \textit{Circe, with the Syrens Three} a “cartoon-study for Etty’s” (Figs. 202 and 203).\textsuperscript{32} Moreover, the subject flourished further during the ‘Victorian classical revival’ that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, with Edward Armitage (1817-96), Edward Burne-Jones (1833-98) and John William Waterhouse (1849-1917) all producing their own unique versions of the Homeric narrative (see Figs. 204, 205 and 206). Appendix K, which collates the exhibition history for the ‘Sirens’ subject at the Royal Academy between 1769 and 1900, effectively illuminates the theme’s proliferation following 1837 – the year that Etty first showcased his conception. He had thus set a pictorial precedent for the portrayal and public display of the Sirens in their pursuit of male prey: a contentious topic that had not been commonly treated until this point. This exciting legacy merits further exploration and research.

My dissertation is introduced in a year when the famed landscape painters, Constable and Turner, have once again been metaphorically pitted against one another in two exhibitions running in parallel – Tate Britain’s \textit{Late Turner: Painting Set Free} and the Victoria and Albert’s \textit{Constable: The Making of a Master}. These shows will undoubtedly prove invaluable in generating debate and opening up new, productive avenues for academic research. It is in this spirit that I have approached Etty and his eclectic output. While unquestionably a less accomplished artist than either of his two great contemporaries, I would argue that the study of Etty highlights a lacuna in nineteenth-century British art-historical scholarship – one that has been

\textsuperscript{30} It is notable that Etty’s only pupil, James Matthew Leigh (1808-60), went on to become the Principal of ‘Leigh’s Academy’ – a progressive and successful institution whose alumni included Burne-Jones, Rossetti and Millais. This institution now exists as the Heatherley School of Fine Art in London.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Spectator}, 12 May 1849: 19.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Spectator}, 21 December 1850: 18. Please note that Figs. 202 and 203 are representations of the ‘Sirens’ theme produced by Frost and Pickersgill, but it is unclear whether they are the actual 1849 Academy exhibition pieces themselves.
obscured by the scholarly focus on landscape painting – namely that there exists a swathe of subject painters who have been largely overlooked. In their own time, these artists were publically extolled as leading exponents of history painting, at a time when history remained at the apex of the genre hierarchy, with many viewing it as the only route to a golden age of British art. For instance, it is remarkable that the 1832 Royal Academy exhibition is known more for the anecdotal words uttered by Constable upon discovering Turner’s last-minute addition to his work *Helvoetsluys: – the City of Utrecht, 64, Going to Sea*, in the School of Painting, away from the main display space, than the political narratives reflected in microcosm across the walls of the Great Room.

Each of the above chapters, through turning away from the received tradition, and reframing and rehabilitating Etty within a series of new interpretative contexts, has allowed for an intriguing, inventive and multi-faceted figure to emerge: one who is able to illuminate much about the nineteenth-century British art world. Indeed, were Etty’s important and influential contribution properly recognised – simultaneous with Turner and Constable – the native School would no longer appear limited to landscape, but rather traversed by an alternative artistic community treating historical, poetical, allegorical and mythological themes. Subject and literary painting would then be seen to have a key role – different in character to the French versions, although no less important. To dismiss Etty simply as a painter of the nude not only does him a disservice, but also severs the crucial link he provides to this vibrant community. Ultimately, my study has offered an original perspective on Etty’s complex and challenging pictorial practice and on its dynamic, sometimes conflicted, relationship with the exhibition culture of late-Georgian Britain.
## Appendix A: William Etty Chronology (1787-1849)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Personal events</th>
<th>Exhibition history</th>
<th>Influential and notable events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>10 March: William Etty is born at 20 Feasegate, York, the son of Matthew and Esther Etty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1794</td>
<td>Attends school in Bedern, York, where he is seen &quot;sketching much in his copybooks, and running home from the uncongenial boy-world as soon as school was over&quot;.</td>
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<td>1796</td>
<td>Attends Mr Hall’s school in Pocklington as a weekly boarder.</td>
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<td>1798</td>
<td>Apprenticed as a Compositor to the letter-press printer Robert Peck in Scale Lane, Hull.</td>
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| 1805 | 23 October: finishes his apprenticeship with Peck, an occasion he retrospectively refers to as his "emancipation from Slavery".  
23 November: relocates to London and lives with his gold lace manufacturer uncle, William Etty, at 31 Lombard Street. | | British Institution founded by private subscribers at 52 Pall Mall, London. The gallery was formed to exhibit works by both living and past artists. |
<p>| 1806 | In a bid to develop his skills, Etty studies plaster copies of antique sculptures at Giovanni Battista Gianelli's plaster-cast shop in 33 Cock's Lane. | | |</p>
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<td><strong>1807</strong></td>
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<td>15 January: admitted as a Probationer to the Royal Academy Schools.</td>
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<td>J.M.W. Turner is elected Professor of Perspective at the Royal Academy - a post he held until 1837.</td>
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<td>1 July: Sir Thomas Lawrence accepts Etty as his pupil for one year.</td>
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<td>2 July: Uncle William pays Lawrence a fee of £105.</td>
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<td><strong>1808</strong></td>
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<td>January: enters the Royal Academy Schools as a student.</td>
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<td><strong>1809</strong></td>
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<td>Submits entries to the Royal Academy's annual summer exhibition for the first time, although all six are eventually rejected.</td>
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<td>Etty's fellow student, the Scottish painter David Wilkie, is elected Associate of the Royal Academy - the first instance of numerous peers moving up the ranks of Associate and Royal Academician before Etty.</td>
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<td>25 May: Etty's uncle dies and leaves the artist a &quot;handsome legacy&quot;.</td>
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<td>24 August: moves to &quot;Mr. Underdown's apartments&quot;.</td>
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<td>11 December: moves to &quot;Mr. James's apartments&quot;.</td>
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<td><strong>1810</strong></td>
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<td>Exhibits at the Royal Academy and the British Institution for the first time.</td>
<td>British Institution: <em>Sappho</em>. Royal Academy: <em>Telemachus Rescues Princess Antiope from the Fury of the Wild Boar</em>.</td>
<td>Henry Fuseli is elected Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy - a post he was to occupy until 1825.</td>
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<td>Lives in 15 Bridge Street, Blackfriars.</td>
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<td><strong>1811</strong></td>
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| 1812 Lives in 23 Pavement, Moorfields.               | British Institution: *Cupid Stealing the Ring* and *Mirth Presents a Picture of Venus and Cupid.*  
Royal Academy: *Domestic Scene* and *A Portrait.* | Abdication of Napoleon I and restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. William Collins, who entered the Academy in the same year as Etty, is elected Associate Royal Academician. George Stephenson builds the first steam locomotive. |
| 1813                                                 | British Institution: *Courtship.*  
Royal Academy: *Indian Warrior, The Fireside* and *The Whisper of Love.* |                                                                                                                                                               |
<p>| 1814 11 April: moves to Surrey Street, the Strand, where he resides for the next six years. | Royal Academy: <em>Priam Supplicating Achilles for the Dead Body of his Son Hector.</em> | France is defeated by Britain at the Battle of Waterloo and subsequently Napoleon is exiled to St. Helena. Dulwich Picture Gallery opens to the students of the Royal Academy. |
| 1815 January: makes a short trip to Paris.           |                                                                                                                                                       |</p>
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<td>1817</td>
<td>Autumn: Etty is disqualified from entering his copy of Titian's <em>Ganymede</em> for a medal in the Royal Academy’s recently established School of Painting competition, for unintentionally breaking the rules. Nonetheless, he receives the &quot;high approbation&quot; of the Royal Academy's Council for his efforts at the distribution of premiums. 24 December: Etty's father, Matthew, dies aged seventy-five.</td>
<td><strong>Royal Academy</strong>: <em>Cupid and Euphrosyne</em> and <em>Bacchanalians: a Sketch.</em></td>
<td>Dulwich Picture Gallery, Britain's first public art gallery, opens to the public.</td>
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<td>1818</td>
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<td><strong>British Institution</strong>: <em>Cupid and Euphrosyne, Head of a Warrior</em> and <em>Bacchanalians: a Sketch.</em>  <strong>Royal Academy</strong>: <em>The Blue Beetle: Portrait, Portrait of the Rev. William Jay of Bath, Ajax Telamon</em> and <em>A Study.</em></td>
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<td>1820</td>
<td>Lives in 92 Piccadilly.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>Sketch for Pandora Formed by Vulcan and Crowned by the Seasons, Hercules Killing the Man of Calydon with a Blow of his Fist and Magdalen: a Sketch.</em>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>The Coral Finder: Venus and her Youthful Satellites Arriving at the Isle of Paphos and Drunken Barnaby.</em></td>
<td>Benjamin West dies. Thomas Lawrence succeeds him as President of the Royal Academy. Gérault exhibits <em>The Raft of the Medusa</em> in Bullock’s Egyptian Hall, London. William Collins is elected Royal Academician.</td>
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<td>1821</td>
<td>Lives in 16 Bishop's Walk, Westminster Bridge, Lambeth. Etty’s sumptuous depiction of <em>Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia</em> secures significant praise for the artist, who was later to claim that the morning after the opening of the exhibition he &quot;awoke famous&quot;.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>Cupid and Psyche.</em>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Cleopatra's Arrival in Cilicia.</em></td>
<td>Gérault spends most of the year in London. Death of Napoleon on St. Helena.</td>
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<td>1822</td>
<td>Falls in love with his cousin, Mary, before setting off on his Continental travels. 24 June: leaves London for Italy with his artist friend Richard Evans, intending to be abroad for six months. They travel through Paris, Geneva, Milan, Parma, Bologna and Florence, towards Rome, where Evans contracts malaria. Etty continues alone towards Naples, where he scales the active volcano Vesuvius three weeks prior to its eruption, and describes how &quot;a scene of hell opened before my astonished eyes&quot;.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>Venus and Cupid Descending</em>, <em>Cupid and Psyche Descending</em>, <em>A Sketch from one of Gray’s Odes (Youth on the Prow)</em>, <em>The Young St. Catherine: a Study</em> and <em>Cleopatra, in the Character of Venus, Sailing Down the River Cydnus.</em>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Cupid Sheltering his Darling from the Approaching Storm and Maternal Affection.</em></td>
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<td><strong>1823</strong></td>
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| Studies at the Accademia in Venice and boasts in a letter home that the Professor of Painting, Martini, had declared him to be "more like an Italian than an Englishman".  
10 May: he is made an Honorary Academician of the Venetian Accademia.  
See Appendix E for a detailed timeline of this journey. | **British Institution:** *Cupid Sheltering his Darling from the Approaching Storm.* |  
| 24 January: Returns to London and moves into his new home in Buckingham Street, the Strand.  
Betsy, his niece, becomes his housekeeper.  
*Pandora Crowned by the Seasons* secures Etty's election as an Associate Royal Academician.  
Lawrence purchases the *Pandora* for 300 guineas.  
Etty also receives unexpected recognition from the Academy of Charleston in South Carolina, and is elected an Honorary Academician. The Charleston Academy was perhaps made aware of Etty's work through the architect William Jay, who had an office in the city until 1823. | **Royal Academy:** *Pandora Crowned by the Seasons.* | National Gallery founded. |
1825

Entertains the French painter Eugène Delacroix, who visits London between May and August. Visits York and starts his campaign to save Clifford’s Tower, the city’s walls and antiquities “from the barbarous project” set in motion to modernise York city centre. Etty is made an honorary member of the Royal Scottish Academy.

1826

Etty’s name is submitted for election to Royal Academician, but he fails to gain a majority of votes. The York-born sculptor John Flaxman, whose designs informed a number of Etty’s works, dies in December.

1827

Elected a Royal Academician, filling the vacancy created by Flaxman’s death. Secures this coveted position ahead of his friend and professional rival, John Constable. The Directors of the British Institution award Etty £100 in ‘Acknowledgement of his talents, industry and perseverance’.

1828


Influential and notable events

Exhibition history

Personal events
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| **1829**        | **British Institution:** *A Subject from Ovid’s Metamorphoses.*  
**Royal Academy:** *Benaiah and Hero, having Thrown herself from the Tower at the Sight of Leander Drowned, Dies on his Body.* | Constable elected Royal Academician.  
John Everett Millais is born.  
Catholic emancipation granted in Britain.  
Fire at York Minster started by the arsonist Jonathan ‘Mad’ Martin. |
| Etty’s mother, Esther, dies at the age of seventy-five. Royal Scottish Academy purchases *Judith* and commissions two pendant pieces for a triptych.  
Etty opposes alterations suggested by Sir Robert Smirke to the interior of York Minster, publicly voicing his objections in both regional and national newspapers. | **British Institution:** *Venus and Cupid* and *Benaiah, One of David’s Chief Captains.*  
**Royal Academy:** *The Storm, Judith Goes Forth, Candaules, King of Lydia, Shewing his Wife by Stealth to Gyges and The Dancer.* |  |
| July: Etty visits Paris to study the works of the Old Masters in the Louvre, and becomes entangled in the ‘Three Glorious Days’ of revolution. Visits several *ateliers* with Alaric Alexander Watts and Thomas Uwins.  
Becomes enamoured with an English girl over twenty years his junior, but is rejected on the basis of the age difference. | **British Institution:** *Sketch of a Subject for an Altarpiece: Martyrdom of some of the Early Christians* and *The Storm.*  
**Royal Academy:** *The Maid of Judith Waiting Outside the Tent of Holofernes, Nymph Angling, Window in Venice During a Fiesta* and *The Shipwrecked Mariner (Robinson Crusoe).* | Death of Sir Thomas Lawrence.  
Martin Arthur Shee is appointed President of the Royal Academy.  
July revolution in Paris. Louis Philippe, Duc d’Orleans, becomes King of France following the abdication of Charles X.  
Death of George IV. Accession of William IV.  
Wellington Ministry collapses - Earl Grey becomes Prime Minister. |
| Travels to Edinburgh to see his completed *Judith* series, which has been placed on display in the Octagon Room of the Royal Scottish Academy. | **British Institution:** | Whigs introduce Reform Bill into new Parliament, but it is defeated in the House of Lords.  
Paul Delaroche creates a sensation at the 1831 Paris Salon with the exhibition of his *Princes in the Tower* and *Cromwell Viewing the Body of Charles I.*  
Delacroix exhibits *Liberty Leading the People* at the Salon. |
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<td>1832</td>
<td>Helps to raise a subscription to save York's medieval gateway - Bootham Bar - from destruction. Etty also helps to save the Abbey Church of St. Alban's, and the Lady Chapel of St. Saviour's, Southwark. 'Ridolfi' (William Carey) writes a lively defence of Etty’s art in the <em>Yorkshire Gazette</em>.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>Sabrina</em>, from Milton’s <em>Masque of Comus</em> and <em>Robinson Crusoe</em>.  <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm</em>, <em>The Destroying Angel and Daemons of Evil Interrupting the Orgies of the Vicious and Intemperate</em> and <em>Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake</em>.</td>
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<td>1833</td>
<td>Summer: Etty begins painting Charlotte and Mary Williams-Wynn, labouring over the image which he hoped would be “one of my best”.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>The Dangerous Playmate</em>, <em>Venetian Window during the Carnival</em> and “Fair laughs the morn... (Youth on the Prow, and Pleasure at the Helm)”.  <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret</em>, <em>The Lute Player</em>, <em>Head of a Philosopher: A Sketch</em> and <em>Hylas and the Nymphs</em>.</td>
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<td>1834</td>
<td>Etty suffers months of illness. June: visits York and makes a tour of Yorkshire with John Brook.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>Hylas and the Nymphs</em>, <em>Gathering Flowers</em>, <em>A Sketch for the Sacred Annual (Christ Appearing to Mary)</em> and <em>The Persian</em>.  <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>The Cardinal</em> and <em>Portrait of Elizabeth Potts</em>.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1835</td>
<td>Close friend John Harper organises an exhibition in York to which Etty sends <em>Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons</em>, <em>Mars, Venus and Cupid</em>, <em>A Family of the Forest</em>, <em>The Parting of Hero and Leander</em>, <em>Sabrina, Hylas and the Nymphs</em> and <em>A Venetian Window</em>. Summer: Etty publishes two letters on 'The Arts in England', in which he strongly encourages the government to patronise fine art and preserve the late Sir Thomas Lawrence's invaluable collection of Old Master drawings for the nation.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>The Lute Player, Nymph and Young Faun Dancing</em> and <em>The Cardinal</em>. <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Venus and her Satellites</em>, <em>Study of the Head of a Youth</em>, <em>Warrior Arming (Godfrey de Bouillon)</em>, <em>Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake</em>, <em>The Bridge of Sighs</em>, <em>Preparing for a Fancy Dress Ball</em>, <em>Wood Nymphs Sleeping: Satyr Bringing Flowers</em> and <em>Study from a Young Lady: A York Beauty</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Exhibits for the first time at the Academy's premises in the east wing of the newly built National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. Etty's friend and fellow Royal Academician, John Constable, dies.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>The Bridge of Sighs</em> and <em>The Prodigal Son</em>. <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Venus and her Doves</em>, <em>A Family of the Forest</em> and <em>Psyche Lays the Casket at Venus's Feet: Cupid Pleads on her Behalf</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>John Constable dies. William IV dies. Accession of Queen Victoria to British throne.</td>
<td><strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>The Sirens and Ulysses</em>, <em>Samson Betrayed by Delilah</em>, <em>Adam and Eve at their Morning Orisons</em> and <em>Mars, Venus and Cupid</em>.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Personal events</td>
<td>Exhibition history</td>
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<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Etty presents a paper to the Yorkshire Philosophical Society on 'The Importance of the Arts of Design' to support the establishment of a School of Drawing and Design in York.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> The Good Samaritan.  <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> Prodigal Son (second version), Bivouac of Cupid and his Company, Miss Lewis in the Character of a Flower Girl, Bacchante and Boy Dancing, Somnolency, Il Duetto and the Converted Jew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>28 February: notifies St. Martin's Lane Model Academy that he will no longer have occasion for &quot;the Room I have taken there ... after Michaelmas Day next in the present year&quot;. Etty spends the summer in York and is &quot;disgusted and disheartened&quot; by the Corporation's decision to allow the railway to remove parts of the city's medieval walls.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> Waters of Elle.  <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> Pluto Carrying off Proserpine, Diana and Endymion and the Lady Mayoress of York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Etty records &quot;fatal Friday&quot; in his diary as York Minster suffers another fire. September: visits the Low Countries, &quot;the land of Rubens&quot;, to study this past master's works.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> Bright-eyed Fancy Hovering O'er, A Group of Children and The Little Mariner.  <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, Andromeda: Perseus Coming to her Rescue and Mars, Venus and her Attendant Disrobing her Mistress for the Bath.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Makes a second trip to Belgium, heading straight for Antwerp. Visits a Trappist convent before leaving for Mechlin to admire its Cathedral and numerous works by Rubens. Stays with John Harper during his annual trip to York, and visits Bolton Abbey.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> A Subject from the Parable of the Ten Virgins. &quot;Five of them were wise and five foolish, etc.&quot; and Head of a Mahomedan. <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> The Repentant Prodigal's Return to his Father and Home, To Arms, To Arms, Ye Brave, Female Bathers Surprised by a Swan, A Still Life, David (at his Harp) and Group: Morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Government School of Design opens in York with Etty's help.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> Bathers Surprised and The Little Brunette. <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> The Dance, The Innocent are Gay, Two of the Modern Time (Lady and Lapdog), One of the Olden Time (A Warrior) and A Magdalen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Selected to be one of the professional judges of the cartoons submitted for a competition to design new wall paintings - based on themes from British history - for the newly refurbished Houses of Parliament. One of several painters commissioned to complete frescoes for the summer pavilion at Buckingham Palace. Inexperience in this style of painting results in failure to impress Prince Albert, and his work is removed. William Dyce is appointed in his stead. Visits France to see &quot;authentic scenes&quot; to inspire and inform his history painting <em>Joan of Arc</em>. Charles Etty, William's younger brother, arrives back in Britain from Java following an absence of thirty-one years.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>On the Thames, Bather, Sketch for a Large Picture of Christ Blessing the Little Children, Dead Game, Head of Judas</em> and <em>Fruit</em>. <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>The Graces, The Bather, The Entombment of Christ, In the Greenwood Shade, A Still Life, Flemish Courtship</em> and <em>The Infant Moses and his Mother</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Visits Edinburgh with his brother Charles and niece Betsy. The Royal Scottish Academy hosts a dinner in the artist’s honour.</td>
<td><strong>British Institution:</strong> <em>Study of a Head</em> (afterwards entitled <em>The Saviour</em>), <em>Sleeping Nymphs and Satyrs</em> and <em>Warrior of the Olden Time</em>. <strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>The Backbiter, A Subject from Comus, The Cardinal, 'Tis but a Fancy Sketch, Live while you Live, the Epicure will Say</em> and <em>Eve at the Fountain</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>Exhibition history</td>
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</table>
| 1845 | Etty says a final farewell to his brother Charles, who returns to Java. | **British Institution:** Cupid Looking after the Goldfish, The Forsaken and Ablution.  
**Royal Academy:** Aurora and Zephyr, Cupid Intercedes for Psyche, Flower Girl, A Votive Offering, Indian Alarmed, Study of the Head of a Little Boy and "Or like a Nymph, with bright and flowing hair, Dance on the sands and yet no footing seen". | As a result of spiralling debt and depression, the history painter Benjamin Robert Haydon commits suicide. |
| 1846 | Buys a house in "Dear Old Ebor" in preparation for his retirement. | **British Institution:** A Pirate Carrying off a Captive, Children Reposing after Bathing and A Bather (Musidora).  
| 1847 | Sells his Joan of Arc triptych for 2,500 guineas. Resigns from his position on the Council Board of the Royal Academy. | **British Institution:** An Israelite Indeed, A Magdalen Reading and Reposing after Bathing.  
**Royal Academy:** Charites et Gratiae, Joan of Arc, on Finding the Sword she had Dreamt of, in the Church of St. Catherine de Fierbois, Devotes herself and it to the Service of God and her Country, Joan of Arc Makes a Sortie from the Gates of Orleans, and Scatters the Enemies of France, Joan of Arc, after Rendering the Most Signal Services to her Prince and People, is Suffered to Die a Martyr in their Cause. |  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Personal events</strong></th>
<th><strong>Exhibition history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Influential and notable events</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1848 16 September: retires to York. Pens his short <em>Autobiography</em>, which is to be published by the <em>Art-Journal.</em></td>
<td><strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Morning Prayers, Still Life, La Fleur de Lis, A Sketch of a Landscape: Givendale Yorkshire, A Group of Captives &quot;by the Waters of Babylon&quot;, Aaron the High Priest of Israel and John the Baptist.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1849 June: <em>Society of Arts</em> opens its retrospective exhibition of Etty’s art, including over 130 works by the artist. 13 November: William Etty dies, aged sixty-three years, and is buried in churchyard of St. Olave’s, Marygate, York.</td>
<td><strong>Royal Academy:</strong> <em>Amoret Chained, The Crochet Worker, &quot;Gather the Rose of Love while yet 'tis time&quot; and Portrait of a Lady (full face and in profile).</em></td>
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</tbody>
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**NOTES**

1796: It is in fact Mr Hall’s school in Pocklington, not Mr Shepherd’s, as printed in *William Etty: Art & Controversy.*

1 July 1807: A newly discovered letter from Thomas Lawrence to William Etty (the artist’s uncle) dates his acceptance as 1 July, not 2 July, as is usually cited (Item 42, ID:870357, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles).

28 February 1839: This is taken from a letter in a private collection from William Etty to William Benjamin Sarsfield Taylor and Charles Sibley (Richard Ford Manuscripts, checked 26.05.2014).

**SOURCES**

The first column of this Chronology is based upon the timeline created by Dr Sarah Burnage and myself for the *William Etty: Art & Controversy* exhibition catalogue. It has been supplemented and updated following further research.
### Appendix B: The 'Poetical Set' of William Etty, William Hilton and Henry Howard

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WILLIAM ETTY</th>
<th>HENRY HOWARD</th>
<th>WILLIAM HILTON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RA 1832 - Phaedria and Cymochles, or the Idle Lake. &quot;Along the shore as swift as glance of eye, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1821 - The House of Morpheus. &quot;Amid the bowels of the earth full deep, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>BI 1809 - The Red Cross Knight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA 1836 - Phaedria and Cymochles on the Idle Lake. &quot;And all the way the wanton damsel found, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1821 / BI 1819 - Una with the Satyrs. &quot;So from the ground she fearlesse doth arise, etc.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1833 - Britomart Redeems Faire Amoret. &quot;Ne living wight she saw in all that roome, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1820 - Venus in Search of Cupid Surprises Diana at her Bath. &quot;Soone her garments loose upgathering, etc.&quot;</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA 1831 / BI 1832 - Sir Calepine Rescuing Serena. &quot;Sir Calepine by chaunce more than by choyce, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1832 / BI 1835 - Una Seeking Shelter in the Cottage of Coreeca. &quot;By this arrived there Dame Una, etc.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1821 / BI 1822 - Cleopatra's Arrival in Clícia. &quot;The sails were purple, and so perfumed, the Winds were love-sick with them.&quot; (Antony and Cleopatra, Act II, Scene II)</td>
<td>BI 1810 - &quot;A mermaid on a dolphin's back / Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath, etc.&quot; (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act II, Scene I)</td>
<td>BI 1814 - King Lear and his Three Daughters. Lear. &quot;Nothing can come of nothing, etc.&quot; (King Lear, Act I, Scene I)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA 1810 / BI 1811 - Titania. &quot;I know a bank whereon the wild thyme grows, etc.&quot; (A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act II, Scene I)</td>
<td>RA 1814 - Miranda and Ferdinand Bearing a Log. &quot;If you'll sit down, etc.&quot; (The Tempest, Act III, Scene I)</td>
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<td>WILLIAM ETTY</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1820 - &quot;Howl, howl, howl, howl!&quot; <em>(King Lear, Act V, Scene III)</em></td>
<td>RA 1822 / BI 1823 - <em>Ariel Released by Prospero.</em> &quot;It was mine art, When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape; The Pine, and let thee out.&quot; <em>(The Tempest, Act I, Scene II)</em></td>
<td>RA 1822 / BI 1823 - <em>Caliban Teased by the Spirits of Prospero.</em> &quot;For every trifle are they set upon me, etc.&quot; <em>(The Tempest, Act II, Scene II)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI 1830 - <em>Shakespeare.</em> &quot;The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, etc.&quot; <em>(A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act V, Scene I)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1832 - <em>Contention of Oberon and Titania</em>. &quot;Give me that boy and I will go with thee, etc.&quot; (<em>A Midsummer Night's Dream</em>, Act II, Scene I)</td>
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<td>BI 1832 - <em>Dream of Queen Katharine</em>. &quot;Saw you not even now a blessed troop / Invite me to a banquet, etc.&quot; (<em>Henry VIII</em>, Act IV, Scene II)</td>
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<td>BI 1833 - <em>Ferdinand and Miranda</em>. &quot;I'll bear your logs the while, etc.&quot; (<em>The Tempest</em>, Act III, Scene I)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BI 1821 - <em>Cupid and Psyche</em>. &quot;Where far above in spangled sheen, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1811 / BI 1812 / BI 1824 - <em>Iris and her Train</em>. &quot;Gay creatures of the element, That in the colours of the rainbow live, And play I' th' plighted clouds.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1823 / BI 1824 - <em>Comus with the Lady in the Enchanted Chair</em>. &quot;One sip of this / Will bathe the drooping spirits in delight, Beyond the bliss of dreams. Be wise and taste.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BI 1828 - &quot;Venus now wakes and wakens Love.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1815 - <em>Sabrina</em>. &quot;She guiltless damsel, etc.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1831 / BI 1832 - <em>Sabrina</em>. &quot;Sabrina fair, listen where thou art sitting, etc.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1815 - <em>Sabrina Quitting the Nereids</em>. &quot;Made Goddess of the river.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BI 1816 - <em>Sabrina</em>. &quot;She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit / Of her enraged step-dame Guendolen ... The water nymphs that in the bottom play'd / Held up their pearled wrists and took her in.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>JOHN MILTON</td>
<td>WILLIAM ETTY</td>
<td>HENRY HOWARD</td>
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| **Comus**   | RA 1821 - *Sabrina*. "That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn stream, etc."
|             | **BI 1822 - Sabrina and Nymphs.** "That nightly dance / Upon her streams with wily glance."
|             | RA 1826 / BI 1827 - *Sabrina*. "She guiltless damsel, etc."
|             | RA 1830 - *Sabrina*. "The water nymphs that in the bottom played, etc."
|             | RA 1831 - *Circe*. "My mother Circe - with the Sirens three, etc."
|             | **BI 1834 - Sabrina.** "She, guiltless damsel, etc."
|             | RA 1834 - *The Gardens of Hesperus.* "There I drink the liquid air, etc."
|             | RA 1834 - *The Lady in Comus Benighted.* "This way the noise was, etc."
|             | **BI 1835 - The Hesperides.** "All amidst the gardens fair, etc."
| **Paradise Lost** | RA 1828 - A Composition taken from the following passages of the eleventh book of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. "When from the tents behold a bevy of fair women, richly gay, in gems and wanton dress, etc. etc."
|             | RA 1814 / BI 1815 - *Sunrise.** "First in the east, the glorious lamp was seen, etc."

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<tr>
<th>John Milton</th>
<th>Hesiod</th>
<th>Homer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paradise Lost</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theogony</strong></td>
<td><strong>Iliad</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>William Etty</strong></td>
<td><strong>Henry Howard</strong></td>
<td><strong>William Hilton</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1839 - <em>Pluto Carrying off Proserpine.</em> &quot;That fair field of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers, herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis was gathered.&quot;</td>
<td>RA 1815 - <em>Morning.</em> &quot;Wak’d by the circling hours, etc.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>RA 1823 - <em>The Solar System.</em> &quot;Hither as to their fountain other Stars, etc.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>RA 1814 - <em>Priam Supplicating Achilles for the Dead Body of his Son Hector, etc.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| RA 1829 - *Night.* "Now glowed the firmament with living sapphires, etc." | RA 1829 - *Night.* "Now glowed the firmament with living sapphires, etc." | RA 1804 - *Hector Re-inspired by Apollo; a sketch.* "The fainting hero, as the vision bright, etc."
<p>| RA 1835 - <em>Morning.</em> &quot;Till the morn, wak’d by the circling hours, etc.&quot; | RA 1835 - <em>Pandora.</em> &quot;Whom the gods endowed with all their gifts.&quot; | RA 1818 - <em>Ajax of Telamon.</em> |
| <strong>Bi 1820</strong> - &quot;Pandora Formed by Vulcan, and Crowned by the Seasons, a sketch from Hesiod.&quot; |  |  |
| RA 1824 / BI 1825 - <em>Pandora.</em> &quot;Pandora, the heathen Eve, having been formed by Vulcan as a statue, and animated by the Gods, is crowned by the seasons with a garland of flowers. &quot;To deck her brows, the fair tressed seasons bring: A garland breathing all the sweets of Spring.&quot; |  |  |</p>
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<td><strong>Homer</strong></td>
<td><strong>Odyssey</strong></td>
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</table>
| RA 1811 - *Telemachus Rescues the Princess Antiope from the Fury of the Wild Boar.* (Hawkesworth's *Telemachus*, Book 21) | RA 1838 / BI 1839 - *Leucothea and Ulysses.* "Swift as a sea-mew springing from the flood / All radiant, on the raft the goddess stood, etc."
| RA 1837 - *The Sirens and Ulysses.* "Next where the Sirens dwell you plough the seas, etc." | BI 1821 - *Penelope Recognising Ulysses.* "He ceased; Penelope with fluttering heart, etc." - Cowper's *Odyssey.* |
| **Ovid**    | **Metamorphoses** |                |
| BI 1829 - *A Subject from Ovid's Metamorphoses.* | RA 1836 / BI 1837 - *The Infant Bacchus Brought by Mercury to the Nymphs of Nysa.* |
| **Ovid**    | **Heroides / Musaeus** |                |
| RA 1826 / BI 1827 - *The Choice of Paris.* "The Goddess of Discord, incensed at not being invited to the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, threw into the assembly of the Gods who were at the entertainment, a golden apple, on which was inscribed 'To the fairest,' etc." | BI 1820 - *Hero and Leander.* "Till gain'd at last the Sestian shore he treads / Her door he found, and there in silence blest; Panting and faint, she strain'd him to her breast, etc." (Morritt) |
| RA 1827 - *The Parting of Hero and Leander.* "Hero was a beautiful woman of Sestos in Thrace, and priestess of Venus, whom Leander of Abydos loved so tenderly that he swam over the Hellespont every night to see her." | |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ovid</th>
<th>RA 1829 - Hero having Thrown herself from the Tower at the Sight of Leander Drowned, Dies on his Body.</th>
<th>HENRY HOWARD</th>
<th>RA 1807 - Venus Carrying Aeneas from the Field and Pursued by Diomed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virgil</td>
<td>BI 1822 - Ascanius Carried Away by Venus. &quot;Lulled in her lap amidst a train of loves, The goddess bears him, to her blissful groves.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeric Venus</td>
<td>RA 1819 - Venus Anadyomene. &quot;Venus, born of the foam of the sea, etc.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apollonius Argonautica</td>
<td>RA 1833 / BI 1834 - Hylas and the Nymphs. &quot;The nymphs of the river, enamoured of the beautiful Hylas, carried him away, and Hercules, disconsolate at the loss of his favourite youth, filled the woods and mountains with his complaints.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theocritus</td>
<td>RA 1826 / BI 1827 - Hylas Carried off by the Nymphs. (Idyll 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claudius Epithalamium on</td>
<td>RA 1820 - The Coral Finder: Venus and her Youthful Satellites Arriving at the Isle of Paphos.</td>
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<td>Honorius and Mary</td>
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<td><strong>BI 1812 - Cupid Stealing the Ring.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1810 - Venus and Cupids.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1835 - Nymph and Cupid Owns her Cherished Smart, etc. &quot;To laughing Cupid owns the cherished smart, And whispers where to aim a kindred dart.&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BI 1812 - Mirth Presents a Picture of Venus and Cupid.</strong></td>
<td><strong>BI 1810 - Pygmalion's Statue Animating.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RA 1815 / BI 1816 - Psyche.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1812 - Mars, Venus and Cupid.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RA 1817 / BI 1818 - Bacchanalians; a sketch.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1813 / BI 1815 - Hebe.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RA 1817 - Cupid and Euphrosyne.</strong></td>
<td><strong>BI 1813 - Love Disarming the Brave.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BI 1818 - Euphrosyne.</strong></td>
<td><strong>BI 1816 - Love and Hope. &quot;Hope told a flattering tale.&quot;</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RA 1819 - Genii of the Spring - Morning.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1820 - Venus Marina.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RA 1822 / BI 1823 - Cupid Sheltering his Darling from the Approaching Storm.</strong></td>
<td><strong>BI 1830 - Birth of Venus.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BI 1822 - Venus and Cupid Descending.</strong></td>
<td><strong>BI 1830 - Morning.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>BI 1822 - Cupid and Psyche Descending.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1837 - Aurora.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BI 1825 - Venus at the Bath, a sketch.</strong></td>
<td><strong>RA 1837 - Bellerophon Mounting Pegasus.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BI 1825 - Nymph and Cupid, a finished sketch.</strong></td>
<td><strong>BI 1838 - The Hours Awakening the Morning.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mythology</strong></td>
<td><strong>WILLIAM ETTY</strong></td>
<td><strong>HENRY HOWARD</strong></td>
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</table>
| **RA 1828** - *Venus, the Evening Star.* | **RA 1839 / BI 1840** - *Rising of the Pleiades.* "Now from the height of their paternal mount / The Atlantic sisters, in their wonted course, Prepare to join the starry Host of Heaven, etc."
| **BI 1828** - *Cupid Intercedes for Psyche.* | **BI 1830** - *Venus and Cupid.* |
| **BI 1830** - *Venus and Cupid.* |
| **RA 1835** - *Wood Nymphs Sleeping; Satyr Bringing Flowers - Morning.* |
| **BI 1835** - *Nymph and Young Fawn Dancing.* |
| **RA 1836** - *Psyche having, after Great Peril, Procured the Casket of Cosmetics from Proserpine in Hades, Lays it at the Feet of Venus, while Cupid Pleads in her Behalf.* |
| **RA 1835** - *Venus and her Satellites.* "Their beauty’s lovely goddess smiles, etc."
| **RA 1836** - *Venus and her Doves.* |
| **RA 1837** - *Mars, Venus and Cupid.* |
| Mythology | RA 1838 - *A Bivouac of Cupid and his Company.* |  |  |
| RA 1839 - *Diana and Endymion.* "The fable of Endymion's amours with Diana, or the moon, arose from his knowledge of astronomy, and as he passed the night on some high mountains to observe the heavenly bodies, it has been reported he was courted by the moon." |
|  |  |  |  |
| Miscellaneous English Literature | RA 1832 / BI 1833 - "Fair laughs the morn and soft the Zephyr blows ... Youth on the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm, etc." (Thomas Gray's *The Bard*) | RA 1838 - *Hope.* "Primæval Hope, Aonian Muses say, etc." (Thomas Campbell's *The Pleasures of Hope*) | RA 1824 - *Love Taught by the Graces.* "By whose clear voice sweet music was found, Before Amphion ever knew a sound." (Michael Drayton's *The Owl*) |
| BI 1822 - Sketch from one of Gray's Odes. "Fair laughs the morn and soft the Zephyr blows, While smoothly riding o'er the azure realm, In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes, Youth at the prow, and pleasure at the helm." (Thomas Gray's *The Bard*) | BI 1831 - "There is a shadow on the stream, There is an odour on the air, What shape of beauty fronts him there?" (Letitia Elizabeth Landon's *The Lost Pleiad*) | RA 1821 - *Nature Blowing Bubbles for her Children.* "Blow sportive bladders in the beamy sun, etc." (George Crabbe's *The Library*) |
|  |  |  | BI 1828 - *Amphitrite.* "Amphitrite, Queen of Pearls." (John Keats's *Endymion*) |
Note: Please note that this appendix covers works exhibited between 1804 and 1839 - the former being the year in which William Hilton first exhibited at the Royal Academy, and the latter being the year in which he died. Henry Howard was an established member of the Academy by 1804, and William Etty entered as a Probationer three years later. Both artists outlived Hilton, with Howard passing away in 1846, and Etty in 1849. It is not intended as a comprehensive list of every historical work displayed by these three artists throughout their careers, rather it is designed to highlight the numerous shared sources utilised by the trio. The titles have been taken directly from Algernon Graves’s publications listed below.

Source data
Appendix C: Breakdown of the 1820 Royal Academy Exhibition Great Room by Painting Type

- Portrait: 50%
- Landscape: 3%
- History: 3%
- Animal: 11%
- Unknown: 12%
- Genre: 4%
- Maritime: 3%
- Still life: 3%

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Appendix D

WILLIAM ETTY’S ABORTED CONTINENTAL TOUR (1816)

1816

September

BRIGHTON - Completes a little portrait of Martha Biddley (the wife of his friend, Thomas Biddley) in Brighton on 30th August, before setting off alone for a planned year-long trip abroad, which was funded by his brother Philip.

DIEPPE - Within a letter addressed to Martha dated 4th September, he complains about his travellers’ reception from the French customs, who had searched his luggage and confiscated his spare bottle. Stays at an English hotel, owned by a Mr. Taylor, who negotiates with customs to have the bottle returned to him.

BOURN - Arrives in a rainy London and makes an exception to a small village named EAUPLUT to deliver a letter for his landlord. Visits the Cathedral in Eauplut, but claims it is inferior to the beautiful York Minster. Moves on to the museum, where he spends an evening sketching. Departs on the same afternoon for PARIS, via ST-GERMAIN and MARLY.

PARIS - Stays at the Hotel Cour L. Excited from the journey, records his “law spirits”, which are exacerbated by the administration involved in processing his passport. Finds to his dismay that the Louvre and Luxembourg galleries are closed. On 8th September, he continues in a letter home that his original plan of travelling for a year may be “after all” impracticable and notes that “the circumstances under which I left home are so remote from the delights and pleasures of having fallen in low places”. While waiting for his passport, he paints a “pretty French child”. In another letter to Martha, dated 12th September, the artist airs his frustrations at the delayed departure from this city.

POLIGNY - Leaves on 18th September in the company of an “old French general, a lovely Austrian captain, and an Italian courier”. Crosses the Alps, passing through various hunting, such as the Savoy; Bria; Encounters one “wretched” and “miserable” inn after another, where he is disregarded by the customers. Views the “vast azure lake of Geneva” from a distance.

MILAN

LODIO

PADOVA

BRESCIA

MANTUA

BOLOGNA

FLORENCE - Arrives on 3rd October. Etty’s enthusiasm for his travels rapidly spirals downwards, from “generally below temperate” to having “sunk to the lowest point”. Wrote to Walter on 5th October, detailing the depression that he takes a toll on his health. He laments that Florence has “a character of gloom about it that I cannot bear”. Feels unable to journey onwards to Rome and Naples as previously planned. “It would only be an accession of expense, without any positive advantage”. Declares his intention to return, but emphasises that he does not regret the trip for these reasons: “It has cured me of my passion for seeing. It has cured me of another passion, and it has let me see there is no country comparable to my own.” Leaves Florence on 6th October.

PIEVE

LIVORNO

CERNO

TURIN

MOUNT CENIS - Uses the traditional mountainous pass between Italy and France.

CHAMBERY

LYON

PARIS - Arrives in the capital on 28th October, keen to enter a French studio. Spends a week studying at the Academy, before joining the studio of Jean-Baptiste Regnault (1774-1836). In his diary, he describes this studio as a “perfect bear garden”, with “anxiety during the session” and “miserable results”. He also records that Regnault “thinks the English system a bad one” and suggests that Etty should finish his studies “part by part”, putting “as few gums; the bones and muscles in their proper place”. Regnault is the studio for three days before taking his leave. Continues to sketch from the antique and paint from the life. Draws from Le Brun’s ‘Battles’. He also purchases a considerable number of prints, as well as some of Dagarou’s “celebrated” brushes.

November

CALAIS

Deal

LONDON - Arrives home, relieved, on 23rd November 1816. Resists to find himself and his work “safe in Surrey-street, – ay, and in my little old room too”, having managed less than three months in mainland Europe.

December

TIMELINE SOURCES
Royal Academy of Arts Archives - Collection of William Etty letters.
York City Archives - Collection of William Etty letters.
# WILLIAM ETTY’S ITALIAN TOUR (1822-23)

**July**
- **GENOA** - Etty and his travelling companion, the portraitist Richard Jourdain (1784-1873), stop for a day in Genoa.

**August**
- **NAPLES, POUPPET & MOUNT VESUVIUS** - Spends three weeks sketching "the fine antique sites from Pompeii and Herculaneum" in the Etruscan, as well as the Lateran Museum diocesan Corregeggs, St分子ur and St. Galiez’s Daril frescoes housed in Naples. Writes to Walker on 11th September after having accepted the assistant volonno Reception, which he leaves for England on 24th October. Etty departs for Pompeii on 25th October with a party of English tourists. "Hopkins & Walker" in the Palazzo Baroniss. Return to Rome in company of the English artist William Macready (1790-1877), who thought him "a very agreeable and accommodating travelling companion."

**October**
- **Rome** - Palace visit to Canova’s studio where lived 13th October with the Italian’s presence. White stones and chora with others who were interested in the creation of a full-sized statue. "Hopkins & Walker" in the Palazzo Baroniss. Rome’s most original works. Sketches: details of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes and his Last Judgment. Return to the close of the day’s visit to a male nude figure as in the "Sistine original sketches." Makes short trips to FRAGLIATTO & TIVOLI.
- **NAPLES** - Second visit to Canova’s studio: his latest works. Partly painted. Italian copies as well as copies of the Rennaissance & Mannerism. John the Baptist (Pantaleon and Korres) of Canova’s. "Hopkins & Walker" in the Palace Baroniss. Rome’s most original works. Sketches: details of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes and his Last Judgment. Return to the close of the day’s visit to a male nude figure as in the "Sistine original sketches." Makes short trips to FRAGLIATTO & TIVOLI.
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

**December**
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

**February**
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

**March**
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

**April**
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

**May**
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

**June**
- **VENICE** - A letter dated 4th January to his brother. Turkish reception for his "study after modern artists of the Venetian School."

## Timeline Sources

Royal Academy of Arts Archives - Collection of William Etty letters.
York City Archives - Collection of William Etty letters.
York Art Gallery - Itinerary of William Etty (1823).

## Legend

- **Stayed longer than 3 weeks**
- **Stayed less than 3 weeks**
Appendix F: William Etty’s Submissions to the Royal Academy Exhibitions (1824-26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Measurements (cms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>Pandora Crowned by the Seasons</td>
<td>87.6 x 111.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>The Combat: Woman Pleading for the Vanquished</td>
<td>304 x 399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>The Choice of Paris</td>
<td>183.5 x 277</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Attendance Figures at the Royal Academy Exhibitions (1820-37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Duration (days)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>68,93</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>84,78</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>91,82</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>86,24</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1824</td>
<td>70,03</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1825</td>
<td>102,2</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>74,73</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>84,61</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>83,07</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>87,26</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>1830</td>
<td>72,68</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>66,45</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>62,61</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>56,48</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>63,02</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>64,52</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>78,48</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>105,8</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: The ‘Historical Set’ at the 1827 Royal Academy Exhibition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Measurements (cms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Hilton</td>
<td>The Crucifixion (left hand panel)</td>
<td>338 x 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Hilton</td>
<td>The Crucifixion</td>
<td>549 x 259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Hilton</td>
<td>The Crucifixion (right hand panel)</td>
<td>338 x 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Etty</td>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>299 x 392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Robert Haydon</td>
<td>Alexander Returning with Bucephalus</td>
<td>153 x 193</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Breakdown of the 1827 Royal Academy Exhibition Great Room by Painting Type

- Portrait: 49%
- Landscape: 22%
- History: 11%
- Genre: 10%
- Animal: 6%
- Still life: 1%
- Marine: 1%
Appendix J: Comparison of Selected Works at the 1832 Royal Academy Exhibition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Measurements (in cm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Etty</td>
<td>Youth on the Frow</td>
<td>151.7 x 117.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Beechey</td>
<td>William IV</td>
<td>340 x 207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Etty</td>
<td>The Destroying Angel</td>
<td>101.9 x 127.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Wilkie</td>
<td>William IV</td>
<td>277.5 x 177.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.M.W. Turner</td>
<td>Child’s Harold’s Pilgrimage - Italy</td>
<td>141.2 x 248.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix K: Royal Academy Exhibition History for the ‘Sirens’ Subject (1769-1900)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Henry Howard</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Circe. &quot;My mother Circe - with the Sirens three, etc.&quot; - Comus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>William Etty</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>The Sirens and Ulysses. &quot;Next where the Sirens dwell you plough the seas, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>William Etty</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Composition from Milton's Comus. &quot;Circe with the Syrens three, amidst the flowery-kirtled Naïades.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>Frederick Richard Pickersgill</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>&quot;Circe, with the syrens three, Amidst the flowery kirtled naiades, Who, as they sung, would take the prisoned soul, And lap it in Elysium.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Victor Mottez</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>The Sirens. &quot;Wide around lie human bones, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>Felix Martin Miller</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Syrens - a sketch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>1249</td>
<td>Miss F. MacCarthy</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td>The Syren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>Frederic Lord Leighton</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>The Fisherman and the Syren. From a ballad by Goethe. &quot;Half drew she him, Half sunk he in, and never more was seen.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>Sir Edward James Poynter</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>The Siren. &quot;Whither away? fly no more, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>943</td>
<td>Mrs Cooper</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td>A Syren.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>George Jones</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>&quot;The Syrens were persuaded to contend in singing with the Muses, and the Muses being victorious plucked off feathers from the wings of the Syrens and made crowns of them.&quot; - Pausanias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>Joseph Durham</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td>The Siren and the Drowned Leander; model for a marble group. The legend is, the Siren became enamoured of Leander and evoked the storm that drowned him. &quot;Here he lies, his head across my knees, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>William Bright Morris</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>Sirens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>1493</td>
<td>Joseph Durham</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td>The Siren and the Drowned Leander; marble group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Artist</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>1336</td>
<td>Joseph Durham</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td><em>The Siren and the Dead Leander;</em> marble. &quot;His eyes were blinded with the sleety brine, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>Thomas Graham</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>&quot;Alas! what perils do environ, The man that meddles with a siren.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Edward Armitage</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>A Siren,</em> etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>David Carr</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Siren's Rock.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>John William Waterhouse</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>Ulysses and the Sirens.</em> The Sirens, who with their melodious voices lured all navigators to destruction on the dangerous coast of Sicily were, according to classical tradition, creatures having the body of a bird with the head of a beautiful woman. They received this form from Ceres, as a punishment, because they had not assisted her daughter Persephone when carried away by Pluto. They were informed by the oracle that as soon as any passed by without heeding their songs they should perish. Ulysses, warned by Circe, stopped the ears of his companions and ordered himself to be bound to the mast, and so successfully passed the fatal coast. After this the Sirens, in their disappointment, threw themselves into the sea and perished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1681</td>
<td>Arthur Wasse</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>A Siren.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>Arthur Wardle</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>A Siren.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>John Longstaff</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Sirens.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>Hugh G. Riviere</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Argonauts and the Sirens.</em> &quot;For fatal sweet those strains far heard / And straightway to their doom had drawn, etc.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>John Brett</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Isles of the Sirens.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>985</td>
<td>Miss Henriette L. Corkran</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>A Siren.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>John Macallan Swan</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Sirens.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>Hal Hurst</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Siren.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1204</td>
<td>Hector Caffiere</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>A Young Siren.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>Julius Olsson</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td><em>The Coasts of the Sirens.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Gilbert W. Bayes</td>
<td>Sculpture</td>
<td><em>The Sirens of the Ford;</em> group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABAV</td>
<td>Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia, Venice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACBSA</td>
<td>Archivio Catalogo Beni Storico Artistici, Florence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFBS</td>
<td>British and Foreign Bible Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRBML</td>
<td>Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University, New Haven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRI</td>
<td>Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLM</td>
<td>Morgan Library and Museum, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAA</td>
<td>Royal Academy of Arts Archives, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archives, London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V&amp;A</td>
<td>Victoria and Albert Museum, London</td>
</tr>
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<td>YAG</td>
<td>York Art Gallery, York</td>
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<td>YCA</td>
<td>York City Archives, York</td>
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<tr>
<td>YCBA</td>
<td>Yale Center for British Art, New Haven</td>
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</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Hincks, J. *Journal of a Tour on the Continent of Europe*, Osborn d408, James Marshall and Marie-Louise Osborn Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.


Unknown, *An Anonymous Woman’s Travel Journal* (Edward Hall Diary Collection, Wigan, 1833).

Newspaper and periodical primary sources

*Age* (1825, 1826, 1828, 1833).

*Albion* (1833).

*Album* (1822).

*Album Britannique, ou Choix de Morceaux Traduits des Recueils Annuels de la Grande-Bretagne* (1830).

*Analyst* (1834, 1835).

*L’Angleterre et les Anglais* (1833).

*Annual Register* (1836).

*Architectural Magazine* (1836, 1837).

*Arnold’s Magazine of the Fine Arts* (1831, 1832, 1833, 1834).

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