In 1806 Constable spent two months in the Lake District where the artist met Wordsworth and gradually fell under the influence of his poems.

3. Look at the painting on the following page (p. 388): it was one of Constable's favourites and showed that landscape painting is capable of monumental treatment.
1. Highlight the details of the composition.
   **The masses of trees are spread throughout the painting, but they are more consistent on the left.**
   **The cloudy sky takes almost half of the painting, mainly the right upper part.**
   **The village is set in the middle creating a horizontal line which links the sky and the water.**
   **The estuary of the river occupies the foreground.**
2. Point out the human activity depicted.
   **On the left some men are punting the barge across the water.**
3. What is the key-note of the sky? **The clouds.**
   Where is the light reflected? **Onto the surface of the water and on the white horse.**
4. The painting can be regarded as:
   a. the objective recreation of the eye's experience;
   b. the rendering of an ideal landscape;
   c. **the result of perception fed by a deep emotional involvement.**
5. Define the theme of the painting.
   **It deals with the routine and economy of rural life.**
   **It points out the simplicity of work and the serenity connected with it.**
   **It also highlights the link between man and nature.**
6. Does the painting follow Claude Lorrain's rules?
   **No, because the colours of the foreground and background are different, there are neither mythological figures nor ruins.**

http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/his/CoreArt/art/rom_con_white.html
...AND SUBLIME


see Lit & Lab p. 376 – 377

1. What is the word 'sublime' connected with nowadays?
   **It is connected with something causing deep feelings of wonder and joy.**

2. This painting is usually linked with the idea of the 'sublime' in nature. Trace its features.

   Joseph Wright of Derby
   *Vesuvius in Eruption, with a view over the Islands in the Bay of Naples* c. 1776 - 1780

   The alternation of light and darkness, Nature overwhelmed by an incredible force; it conveys the awesome mystery of the universe. It is sensational and frightening because of the idea of danger it implies.

   ![Vesuvius in Eruption, with a view over the Islands in the Bay of Naples](image)

Joseph Wright of Derby 1734–1797
*Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the Islands in the Bay of Naples* c.1776–80

The painting alludes to specific historical events but depicts it with reference to the awe-inspiring power of nature beyond measurement and comprehension.

It portrays the power of elemental natural forces filling the mind with a ‘delightful horror’.

Wright emphasises the drama of the erupting Vesuvius through contrasts: between the tranquillity of the sea and the violence of the volcano, the cool light reflected from the moon and clouds with the hellish spewing of fire and lava.

In comparison to the volatile power of the volcano, the tiny foreground figures stress man's insignificance before the **sublime** grandeur of nature. Scarcely visible in the sombre foreground, we see in fact two men, followed by a mourning figure, carry the lifeless body of one of the volcano's victims.

Equally pervasive are dramatic fluctuations of light contrasting with Burkean ‘obscurity’ in various sources and combinations, such as the complex play of moonlight across sky and water and the dramatic contrast of hot and cold light, of fire, lava and moonlight.

Joseph Wright toured Italy for the first and only time between 1773 and 1775 so he did not witness the eruption of Vesuvius in 1777, but it clearly spurred his imagination. He returned repeatedly to the subject, and produced over thirty views of the volcano.
Joseph Mallord William Turner was born the son of a barber in Covent Garden, London. After little formal education, he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools at the age of 14, and soon started to exhibit. He began his career as a topographical watercolour painter, making many sketching tours through Britain. On each tour he would fill a number of sketchbooks from which he would work up elaborate paintings when back in London. His work gave new scope to landscape painting, focusing on the elemental forces of weather, the immensities of space and the effects of light.

*The Passage of the St. Gothard*, 1804, William Turner p. 389
1. What kind of landscape is presented? Mountains with a ravine, the sky is obscured by clouds, there are human figures on the left. The nature in the foreground is raw and sharp.
2. What contrasting elements is the painting built upon? The tiny size of the men and the caravan is contrasted with the immensity of the ravine and the mountains.
3. What view of nature is conveyed in the painting? What role does man play in it? Nature is presented in an especially wild state. Turner suggests the edge of a precipice, thus furthering the intense spatiality and drama of the scene. The scene underlines the majesty of nature and the frailty of man which makes it an example of the concept of “sublime” as E. Burke theorized it.

Turner and the theory of light p. 389
Turner had a personal metaphysical theory of light: he rejected the optical theories of Newton based on physics, and instead suggested a subjective analysis of the spectrum divided into "positive" colours red, yellow and green - and "negative" ones - blues, blue-greens and purples. These corresponded to states of mind - positive ones such as happiness and warmth and negative ones such as anxiety. Turner's paintings of the last phase are regarded as forerunners of both impressionist and abstract art.

6. One subject to which Turner returned throughout his career was the great castle at Norham on the River Tweed on the English-Scottish borders.

From a highly formalised landscape (Claude Lorrain (*)) to the dissolution of the landscape itself: “Norham Castle, Sunrise”, 1841
1. Does the painting contain any realistic detail? No, the subject is dissolved into glowing colour.
   Identify the elements of the landscape. Sunlight, water, the castle, maybe a dog.
2. What is the real protagonist of the picture? Light.
   What effect does it have on the viewer? It has the effect of an almost mystical subversion of tangible experience.
This oil painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti is a picture of the Annunciation: "Ecce ancilla Domini" - 'here is God's maid servant' - are the words from the Latin gospel pronounced by the Angel announcing to Mary she will give birth to God's son.

The scene takes place in a bedroom: we see the Angel coming to the Virgin Mary, who is seated on her bed. She has just been woken up and looks a bit scared. The Angel is giving her a white lily, a symbol of innocence and purity. Another white lily is hanging from the red pedestal at the foot of the bed (red is a symbol of love).

The Angel can be recognized by the golden halo and the yellow flames under its feet; the Virgin Mary by the halo.

The picture has a tall narrow shape: it develops along a vertical division of space, especially visible in the section including the Virgin, her bed and the curtain. This sense of verticality is made by the left side of the blue hanging, the edge of the bed, the lamp and the embroidery stand on the right. The dove and the lily move across this division.

The Pre-Raphaelites adopted the practice of painting over a pure white ground. White, another symbol of the purity of the Virgin, is the dominant colour in the picture: the Virgin is wearing a white robe (an arrangement which may be justified in consideration of the hot climate) and her dress merges with the white bed sheets and whitewashed walls. Her physical presence, in fact, is revealed only by her head and bare right arm. The other colours appear to be restricted to the primaries, red (associated with Christ), blue (also associated with the Virgin) and golden yellow.

Besides colours, objects are also symbolical. The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit. Together with the lily it is the instrument of conception. The fire stands for the life coming from God.

If we compare Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* with Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation*, an example of traditional iconography, we can better explain why the Victorian public found it shocking.

Filippo Lippi, who died fourteen years before Raphael was born, painted his *Annunciation* about 1443.

In it the modern viewer finds a strange approach to perspective: the setting itself is unnatural and respect for perspective is only shown in architectural setting. But even though the architectural elements are realistic, the beams, the arches and the pillars seem to have a sole pictorial purpose. It seems that pictorial rules are subordinate to those of theology.

God the Father is present at the top left corner of the picture with several angels on rock like clouds.

Another uncommon feature of the painting is the angel looking in from an opening at the left side.

In this figure it is possible that Lippi wanted to show us an earlier moment of the story when Gabriel was just coming to Mary. This way the freshness of the lily in the hand of the standing angel could be explained as well.

All these strange elements are soothed by the simplicity of Mary and the lovely details of the picture: the flowers, the dove, the angel’s hair with the wreath. We also notice how the classicizing background pillars contrast Mary’s purity and give her a certain nobility.

It is also interesting how the pillars guide the eye upward strengthening the same feeling.

A completely different feeling is achieved by Rossetti: he shows us a simple, confused Mary who has just woken up. The iconography is unusual because the Virgin is normally shown reading a missal and wearing clothes, and the expression on her face is serene. Rossetti rejected the traditional image of the Virgin on which the idealized woman was based. He does not try to represent the annunciation, rather, like a poet, he tries to suggest the atmosphere of the event. It is a painting about female innocence and virginity rather than a devotional image. Her expression may be seen as the typical female reaction to the fundamental passage represented by maternity.

What in fact disquieted the Victorian public was that the picture was far too sensual - the Virgin's languid pose in bed, her naked arm - and that if the haloes surrounding the two figures' heads had been taken away the scene could be read as a secular love painting: a young man of robust good looks, so different from the sexless traditional angels, giving a flower to his lover. It was also objected that two young people - Rossetti's sister Christina and brother William - had been used as life models for the Virgin and the Angel, instead of resorting to traditional models in old paintings.

There are other elements inconsistent with the traditional approach of showing the annunciation, like the shape of the picture, Gabriel who has flames at his feet but he no wings, or the architectural elements (we cannot see where the wall ends and the floor starts).

Differences and similarities are the result of Rossetti’s mixing of traditional elements with innovations. He wanted to develop a new taste of beauty in a world dominated by materialism, compromise, ugliness and poor taste.

He turned against the neo-classical traditions of the Academy and looked for different inspiration in the simplicity, naturalness and spirituality of the medieval art. He reacted against the style Raphael had established, which was considered at the time as the crowning of all paintings. This style was based on dark colours, artificial settings and a triangle composition (see, e.g., Raphael’s *Transfiguration*, 1519 – 1520). Rossetti wanted to free himself from these restrictions and this is why he turned to a style preceding that of Raphael’s. The Middle Ages represented that somewhat vague period of the past where machinery and industrialization had not killed individual creativity yet.
O. Wilde’s “Salome” - Summary

It is night and the moon is shining. Towards the back of the set, there is a large cistern in which Jokanaan, the prophet is imprisoned. A Young Syrian repeatedly speaks to the Page of how beautiful Salome is, but the Page tells the Syrian that he should not look at Salome so much, that something terrible will happen.

The two also discuss the moon. To the Page, the moon seems like a dead woman. For the Syrian, the moon is a dancing princess. Suddenly the voice of Jokanaan is heard from the cistern, proclaiming the coming of the Messiah: “The eyes of the blind shall see the day, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened.”

Salome enters, saying she can no longer stay in the banqueting hall with Herod and Herodias. To Salome, the moon is a virgin—“She has never defiled herself.”

Salome is fascinated by the prophet and she tells him that his body is beautiful. He is a wasted "ivory statue," chaste like the moon. "Who is this woman who is looking at me?" protests Jokanaan. She is "amorous of his body." Jokanaan curses her.

Begging Salomé to stop, the Syrian kills himself and falls between the prophet and princess. Salome continues to ask Jokanaan to let her kiss him. He orders her to seek the Lord, refuses to look upon her, and descends into the cistern.

Suddenly the court enters, and Herod calls for Salome and Herodias reproaches him for always staring at her. Fatally attracted by Salome, Herod asks her to dance for him. She refuses. He swears to give her whatever she wishes. Salome dances. Herod invites Salome to ask for her reward, and she asks for the head of Jokanaan. Herodias applauds her. Aghast, Herod begs her to be reasonable. He offers her all his fantastic treasures but Salome is unmoved.

A huge black arm emerges from the cistern, bearing Jokanaan's head on a silver shield. Salome seizes it and tells the head that she will kiss its mouth now. Moments later, the voice of Salomé announces that she has kissed the prophet's mouth. It tastes bitter, perhaps of blood or love. A moonbeam falls on Salome, covering her with light. Herod turns and, upon seeing Salome, orders the soldiers to kill her. They rush forward and crush her beneath their shields.
Aubrey Vincent Beardsley (1872 – 1898) A short but glittering career. Recognizable influences include the pre-Raphaelite painters Dante G. Rossetti and Edward C. Burne-Jones, James A.M. Whistler, and the great Japanese printmakers. From this mixture of influences Beardsley soon evolved an original, imaginative style of black-and-white drawing which was both highly illustrative and possessed very strong formal and abstract qualities.


Beardsley's illustrations for Oscar Wilde's play *Salome* (1894) are a typical expression of decadent art in Britain. They made him famous all at once and a leading figure in the Aesthetic movement. Beardsley's drawings well express the movement's belief in art for art's sake with its apparent detachment from realistic and moral concerns. The world they depict is one of highly refined grace suffused with elements of morbid eroticism. They are also highly representative of the end-of-the-century taste for the thin lines of Japanese woodcuts and the elegant, curvilinear style of Art Nouveau.

https://archive.org/details/salomtragedyin00wildrich

Beardsley's drawing entitled “The Climax” is an illustration of the climactic moment in the play by Oscar Wilde of the same title, performed in 1894. It shows Salome kissing the severed head of John the Baptist. The scene is not realistically rendered but rather seen as in a stylized decadent dream. The author's decadent taste appears from the subject chosen: a sensual woman kissing a dead man's head. According to decadent aesthetics, however, the bloody and violent elements of the scene are turned into exquisite details: the blood dripping from the Baptist's head is milk white and looks like pure water languidly falling into the black pool in the lower part of the drawing. The morbid sensuality of the scene is conveyed through the protruding lips of both heads, ready to kiss. Other typically decadent features are the stylized flower and the lotus leaf floating on the pool- the latter is a clear sign of the influence of Japanese drawings on Beardsley.
Ex 1. Look at the illustration entitled “The Climax” (photocopy):

a) What frames the picture?

b) What background is Salome suspended in?

c) Like Whistler, Beardsley turned his signature into a pictorial device. It is …

d) What is John the Baptist's blood turned into?

e) What do her face, hair and body look like?

Ex. 2. Code

a) Consider Beardsley's use of lines. Does he mainly employ horizontal/vertical/curved lines? What effect do they create?

b) Does Beardsley use shading or chiaroscuro? How does this decision affect the composition?

c) Can you detect the use of conventional perspective and proportion?

d) How would you define Beardsley's style? Tick as appropriate:
   • realistic • impressionistic • classical • imaginative • hedonistic • surreal

Ex. 3. Expressive Function

a) Focus on Salome's gaze, How would you define it? What does it communicate?

b) The drawing contains symbolic images. Find them and explain their connotative meanings.

Ex. 4. Viewer’s Response

a) Gather some basic information about the biblical episode of Salome and John the Baptist and then comment on Wilde’s and Beardsley’s treatment of it.

b) Beardsley's drawing is not what we would call typically Victorian. Can you relate it to what you know about the decadent atmosphere of the 1890s and the end-of-the-century reaction to the Victorian compromise?

c) "The Times" described Beardsley's drawings for Oscar Wilde's play Salome "fantastic, grotesque, unintelligible for the most part and, so far as they are intelligible, repulsive". Do you agree with these words? Why/Why not?

KEYS:

Look at the illustration entitled “The Climax”:

a) A border frames the picture.

b) Salome is suspended in an imaginary, unreal space.

c) … the three-pronged device in the bottom right corner. It is thought to be based on three candles and their flames.

d) John the Baptist's blood is transformed into a ribbon.

e) Her face and body are unreal and exotic, while her hair has got tentacle shapes.

Code

a) Beardsley mainly employs curved lines. They create a decorative and abstract structure.

b) The lack of shading creates a two-dimensional image.

c) The use of conventional perspective and proportion ceases to exist in this composition; this picture reads as a flat pattern.

d) imaginative • hedonistic • surreal

Expressive Function

a) Salome's gaze is wicked and it communicates wickedness.

b) The symbolic images are:
   bubbles and flower: organic forms existing in nature
   Salome: perversity
   blood: crime

Viewer's Response (open)
PABLO PICASSO


- conceived in 1906 – left unfinished - Picasso was uneasy about it: he kept it in his studio until 1916 (the year of its first exhibition)
- title: Avignon Street was a notorious street of brothels in Barcelona
- traditional subject of female nudes painted in a revolutionary way
  - group of naked / partially draped / stylized female figures
  - contrast between the cold, neutral colours in the background and the warm colours of the naked bodies
  - their bodies have angular / fragmented / solid geometric shapes with sharp edges as if the painter had used a chisel more than a brush
  - combination of shading with bold strokes of colour: device used to represent a 3-d volume of the bodies
  - light, as well as form, is fragmented into multiple sources so that the observer’s point of view is constantly shifting
  - indeterminate and closed location: what gives meaning to space is the fragmentation of sharp splinters improperly fit among the figures
  - at their feet there’s a bowl of fruit (Still Life)
  - nudes and background have no proper spatial relationship: it paved the way for CUBISM

it is a challenge against the artistic criteria of beauty and truth established since Renaissance (▫ art imitated nature
▫ picture was a convincing representation of what was known to exist in the natural world ▫ key words: harmony / proportion / perspective)
P. was looking for a new way of painting NOT based on visual perception BUT on his MIND’S EYE
OPTICAL SYNTHESIS: the figures are shown from 2 / more sides at the same time → simultaneous view, which means that next to length / height / width, also a time dimension is introduced: the result that emerges from the composition is a MENTAL VISION of REALITY

- **2 central figures:**
  - seen full-face yet the nose is seen in profile || one eye slightly above another || the nose is no longer directly above the mouth
  - their postures are based on the traditional one of Venus
- **woman on the left:**
  - she’s seen in profile yet her eye is painted as if we saw it full-face (Egyptian convention)
  - it reminds of the ancient Egyptian Kings’ pose (position of the left leg is forward / right arm is extended straight down / fist is clenched
  - the “squaterr”:
    - most awkward / puzzling figure: direct / full view of her body from behind while her head is somehow twisted round
    - she stares the spectator as if woman’s pose were frontal / full-face
    - it’s a sort of jigsaw puzzle in which pieces don’t fit
- **faces of the 2 young ladies on the right:**
  - savagely distorted / primitive / reminiscent of tribal masks (contemporary widespread interest in African masks)
  - modern life could be interpreted following the patterns of ancient myths
  - wearing masks: inevitable process of women losing their identity to men’s desires (Picasso a sympathetic commentator on the plight of the prostitute and of women in general); the fact that the painting was set in a brothel might indicate that the prostitute was merely a commodity, a symptom of modern society and its alienation (a favourite motif of the era). In urban, commercial centres, humanity could be reduced to an impersonal status. Social relations grew cold, love was lost.
The many faces of Contemporary changes in thought and science were soon reflected in Cubist art, which subverted traditional hierarchies by transferring on the flat surface of the canvas the flux and relativity distinguishing modern life. By 1907 a fundamental step had been taken after The Demoiselles d’Avignon were painted by Picasso. The female figures are characterized by anatomical distortion while the geometrical details cannot be distinguished from the rest of the composition that appears to be made of fragments of broken glass. Side and frontal details were simultaneously perceivable and an enthusiastic penchant for primitive sculpture stood out in the demoiselles’ faces. A year later Picasso sided with Georges Braque and both developed what has been defined as “Analytic Cubism”. The series of landscapes executed in 1909-10 show the opening of outlines that causes planes at different depths to flow into one another; consequently, the sense of three-dimensionality collapses into a shallow, almost flat space. A new phase began when Braque inserted a nail as well as stencil letters and simulated wood grains in his Violin and Palette in 1910 and Picasso included a piece of oilcloth printed in imitation of actual caning in his first collage Still Life With Chair Caning dated 1912. So “Synthetic Cubism” was born. Besides exploring the possibilities of mixed media, the inclusion of transformed materials or materials chosen from everyday life, freed the art object from the misleading associations imposed by its fine arts status by relocating it in the ordinary environment.
FRANCIS BACON

Study after Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X (1953)

The general effect is one of melting, dissolution, accompanied by an awful and painful feeling: this is shown by the screaming open mouth and the desperate way in which the figure grips the arms of the chair; the gesture reminds us of a man in an electric chair being electrocuted. The vertical lines of red, orange and dark colours coming down on the entrapped figure convey the impression of an acid rain, the atomic fall-out which melts down and deforms people and things.

The picture in context

This picture belongs to a series of works known as “The Screaming Popes” (1949-mid 1950s), in which Bacon turned the stately and majestic Portrait of Pope Innocent X (1650), by the Spanish painter Diego Velazquez (1599-1660), into a nightmare of hysterical terror. The painting caused a great shock for its image of awful, repulsive desperation - which were not thought fit for a religious subject. Bacon said that his painting was concerned with his kind of psyche, with “exhilarated despair.” The definition reminds us of Samuel Beckett's Theatre of the Absurd. Bacon's and Beckett's characters are placed against an empty background and are devoid of any individualistic characteristics; they are also obliged to face life from within a void. Bacon's work is charged with the sense of absolute despair, hopelessness and collective guilt shared by most late Modernists, especially those of the so-called 'Age of Anxiety': Wystan Hugh Auden and George Orwell. Like James Joyce in Ulysses, Bacon too takes as his starting point a masterpiece of the past (Velazquez' portrait) and recreates it in terms which are typical of the Contemporary Age: despair and solitude.

When asked why he was compelled to revisit the subject so often, Bacon replied that he had nothing against the Popes, that he merely "wanted an excuse to use these colours, and you can't give ordinary clothes that purple colour without getting into a sort of false fauve manner." Conversely, in many discussions of the painting Bacon disparaged Christianity, calling it an "anodyne" or saying that "governments use religion to control the people".

PAINTING ANALYSIS

Velazquez
1) The Pope is sitting on a throne; his posture is relaxed, solemn and regal. He seems to control the world thanks to his domineering personality
2) He is wearing rich, ceremonial robes and a ring in his right hand.
3) He is carrying the state paper in his left hand.
4) The fluency of brushwork conveys the texture of the Pope's clothing, his weight and substance.
5) The colours used are white and crimson; they both point up his importance.

The throne, the robes, the ring and the state paper in Velazquez' portrait are symbols of authority and power. Velazquez's satisfied his client with a flattering, beautifully rendered portrait while at the same time passing on for the ages the unmistakable hint of corrupt character and deep-seated deceit behind that well-ordered and stern facade.

Bacon updates the seventeenth-century image by transforming the Spanish artist’s confident client and relaxed leader into a screaming victim.

The human figure is framed by geometric figures: the chair that contains it and the orange coloured bars that cut across it. Bacon observes his subjects in a symbolic, subjective, dream-like way.

One could hardly conceive of a more devastating depiction of post-war, existential angst or a more convincing denial of faith in the era that exemplified Nietzsche’s declaration that God is dead.

What makes the sitter "unattractive": a. his eyebrows are surrounded by shadows. b. his cheek bones are surrounded by livid shadows. c. his nose and moustache are deformed. d. his mouth is deformed and open. e. the man's gaze is devilish. f. his legs cannot be detected

1) How would you define the way Bacon observes his subjects? Choose among the following: exploratory - symbolic - detached - objective - subjective - sentimental - dream-like - intimate
2) "Fact leaves its ghost" is a favourite saying of Bacon's. What fact can you see beyond this painting?
Study After Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X, 1953, Courtesy Marlborough Gallery, London

2. In the 1950s Francis Bacon painted a series of canvases that reflected his obsession with the outstanding Spanish painter Diego Velazquez's (1599-1660) portrait of Pope Innocent X.

a. Identify where this man is and what is strange about his face. **He is in an isolated place and seems imprisoned in a chair. It is deformed and shadowy with a devilish look.**

b. Point out the details concerning the floor. **It is deformed by lines going in different directions which might represent light or speed.**

c. Find out what Bacon's painting is **deformed** by. **By a frame of vertical lines and irrational marks which have no representational relationship with those areas of the face they are intended to depict.**

d. Identify the **colours** used by Bacon and state their symbolic significance. **The dark colour of the background conveys death; yellow, connoting anguish, is the colour of the 'cage' imprisoning the Pope; violet is used for his robe; greyish white is the colour of his face, gown and hands.**

e. What does the image **communicate**? **The soundless, endless scream, the white clenched hands and the figure trapped in a dark, claustrophobic place communicate anguish, fear and desperation.**