Class 7: The Moral View

A. Reading a Picture

1. Class title 1 (*The Awakening Conscience,* detail)
2. Section title A (Millais pictures)

We'll mostly focus on artc this week, and the first of our featured artists, **John Everett Millais** (1829–96). Achieving notoriety as a member of the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** in 1848, he continued painting for most of the rest of the century, gaining a knighthood from Queen Victoria, and becoming so well-known that he was approached to license his 1886 painting *A Child's World* as an advertisment for **Pears Soap**.

3. Millais: *Bubbles*

This made him the most famous painter in Britain; he was already the richest. But what was perceived as the prostitution of his art, combined with a change in taste in the 20th century, soon led to his falling totally out of fashion. As an Art History undergraduate at Cambrige in the early 1960s, I picked up a book of Millais reproductions mainly to share a laugh with my friends. I now see how wrong I was; at his best, Millais is well worth a serious look.

4. Three Millais paintings (closing image of Title A)

Almost all Millais pictures, in common with most English art in the Victorian era, ask not to be merely *seen* but also *read.* The founder of the Pre-Raphalelite Brotherhood, **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** (1828–82) was a poet as well as a painter; his sister **Christina** was a poet too, and the group included almost as many writers as painters. Besides the stated goals of the group to go back to subjects of moral purity painted in the clear manner of Italian *quattrocento* painting before Raphael, they were also concerned to build stronger links between the sister arts of painting and literature. So most of their works either illustrated a known story, or (in later decades especially) invited the viewer to guess what the story might be. In short, they require *reading.* I have chosen these three works by Millais because they each illustrate a different aspect of this. I am going to show these, plus others by Millais and other artists, interactively, inviting *you* to discern whatever story you can find. The usual ground-rule: if you actually *know* what the picture represents, rather than merely guessing, please hold fire until other people have had a chance to chip in.

5. Millais: *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1850, London Tate)
6. — detail of the above

This is a very unusual treatment of a very well-known story, although we do not usually see this particular stage of it. Can anyone say what it is? The title is *Christ in the House of His Parents.* Of course, once you know it, it becomes fairly easy to read the story. But this was not the way people expected

their Bible stories to be told, and it created much notoriety. The positive aspect of this was that it put the Pre-Raphaelites firmly on the map. The negative result was that it made at least one member of the group leave, because his colleagues were bringing the Christian faith into disrepute; the group as a whole dissolved not long after. I had meant to explain all this myself, but I have found a video from SmartHistory that does it even better, so here goes.

7. Millais: *Christ in the House of His Parents* (SmartHistory video)
8. Millais: *The Woodman's Daughter* (1851, London Guildhall)

Everybody in Britain in those days would have been able to read at least the outlines of *Christ in the House of His Parents* the moment they saw the title. But the title of this painting from the next year, 1851, gives nothing away unless you happen to have read the poem by **Coventry Patmore** (1823–96) on which it is based. So I'll ask two questions. What do you think is going on now? And where do you think this relationship is headed?

9. — the same with Patmore, quotation 1

The poem is too long for me to give complete, but here are the relevant stanzas of the poem itself, which were actually posted beside the painting. It's the usual British preoccupation with social class. The Squire's son and Woodman's daughter can play together as children, but everything changes when they grow up. Here are three stanzas from later in the poem, and then the final three.

10. — the same with Patmore, quotation 2
11. — the same with Patmore, quotation 3

I am not sure that I can explain it definitively. The simplest explanation is that Maud is simply sorry for the loss of her friend—for the loss of childhood itself, even. Taking clues from other 19th-century things, I wonder if it is implied that she is going to drown herself. Or even if, like in *Tess of the Durbervilles,* the young squire has made her pregnant? Patmore leaves us to wonder. Millais doesn't even do that, but as with most of his depictions of children, their innocence also carries a note of vulnerability.

12. Millais: *Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind* (1892, Aukland)

The third picture has a Shakespeare quotation as its title, *Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind*, but tells us nothing beyond that. So any interpretation is up to you.

13. Three Millais paintings (repeat)

So we have three paintings to read, each with a different kind of concealed text: a Biblical story that everybody would know, a literary one whose source you would have to have read, and a story that you would have to guess. I'd like to take the first and last of these; the one in which the moral implication—specifically Christian—is explicit; the other a so-called "puzzle picture," in which the moral implication is social rather than religious, and is left to the beholder to figure out; more on that in a moment. But for now, let's stick to Biblical illustration, featuring the third co-founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with Rossetti and Millais, **William Holman Hunt** (1827–1910).

14. William Holman Hunt: *The Shadow of Death*, (1873, Manchester)

Two decades after Millais painted his carpenter's shop, Hunt came up with *The Shadow of Death* (1873), featuring a mature and very muscular Jesus, and some very obvious symbolism whereas that in the Millais had been quite subtle. Does it work for you? Not quite for me, because the concept requires such an unusual pose for Jesus, stretching or yawning. The Millais, by contrast, seems entirely natural.

15. Holman Hunt: *Christ and the Two Marys* (1847/97, Adelaide)

Hunt had actually come up with the pose in 1847, at the beginning of his career, when he painted the resurrected Christ appearing to the two Marys on Easter Morning. He set the picture aside, however, and did not finish it until fifty years later, in 1897. For me, the resurrection picture is a ludicrous failure, not least because those ribbons—burial bands, I suppose—seem so utterly arbitrary and artificial. The same with the landscape, although Hunt had a house in Jerusalem by then, and knew the Holy Land well. The key factor, though, is that Jesus in both pictures is shown as phsyically fit. This is in accordance with the ethos of **Muscular Christianity** that arose in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century in both Britain and America, giving rise to such offshoots as the Boy Scouts and YMCA.

16. Stills from *Chariots of Fire* (1981) and Rugby School

And private schools. The lower picture is my own school, **Rugby**, in a shot that perfectly captures the ethos: team sports and school chapel. The top pictures come from *Chariots of Fire* (1981), and show **Ian Charleson** as **Eric Liddell**, the Scottish missionary who won a gold medal at the Paris Olympics. These painters were not working in a vacuum, but were very much part of the religious currents of their time. Many of Hunt's pictures had a distinct **evangelical** function.

17. Hunt: *The Light of the World* (1854, Keble College, Oxford)

All through this course, we have been talking about Popularity as a quality associated with *artists*, but there is also another kind of Popularity that belongs to individual works. I doubt there is any picture from the Victorian era that sold so well in prints, postcards, and other reproductions, as Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (first version 1854), shown here. My parents bought one to hang in my bedroom. I am sure it put the idea into my head of *conversion* to Christianity as a sudden evangelical epiphany rather than the slow growth of faith. It was certainly so for Hunt. He could not finish *Christ and the Three Marys* in 1847 because he was an atheist at the time. But he said he painted *The Light of the World* "by divine command." It not only recorded a conversion experience; it *was* one.

B. Solving the Puzzle

18. Section title B (Solving the Puzzle)

The last few examples I showed were all explicitly religious. I now want to turn to a more interesting group, works whose moral is social rather than religious, and implied rather than explicit. Again, I'll do

this interactively, starting with a couple more by Holman Hunt, the first of which actually straddles the two categories. As always the question is: What's the story here?

19. Holman Hunt: *The Hireling Shepherd* (1851, Manchester)

I have not posted the title of this, because I want you to guess what is happening. Fairly clear, I think: a shepherd neglecting his flock while he flirts with some girl. If I give you the title, it might not change anything: *The Hireling Shepherd.* But if you know the Bible in the **King James Version**, you would recognize the word "hireling" as opposed to simply "hired."

20. — the above, with title and text

So what is this: a simple depiction of rural life, a Biblical illustration, or something else? According to Wikipedia, Hunt asserted that he intended the couple to symbolise the pointless theological debates which occupied Christian churchmen while their "flock" went astray due to a lack of proper moral guidance. I'm not sure that I buy that. Wikipedia also reports that initial comments were just as unfavorable to Hunt as they had been to Millais the year before. *The Illustrated London News* objected to the "fiery red skin" and "wiry hair" of Hunt's peasants. The Athenaeum was particularly offended by these "rustics of the coarsest breed... flushed and rubicund from too much cider."

21. Holman Hunt: *The Awakening Conscience* (1853, Tate Britain)

This is the one I used for the class title on the website. Hunt again, from 1853: *The Awakening Conscience.* Same question: What is going on? Same proviso: if you *know*, don't say. Once again, I'll let **Beth Harris** and **Steve Zucker** of SmartHistory do the explanations for me.

22. Hunt: *The Awakening Conscience* (SmartHistory video)
23. — Hunt: *The Awakening Conscience* (repeat)
24. Philip Hermogenes Calderon: *Broken Vows* (1856, Tate Britain)

Here is a painting from the wonderfully named **Philip Hermogenes Calderon** (1833–98), who was British despite the name. I have held back the title, though I am sure you can guess the general gist of it. My question here concerns how he has used the fence. What is the effect of putting the young woman full-length in front of it, and only glimpses of the two people behind?

25. William Frederick Yeames: *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* (1878, Liverpool)

The Nineteenth Century was also a great time for historical painting. This one, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* by **William Frederick Yeames** (1835–1918), which shows the young son of a Royalist family being questioned (quite gently) by Roundhead soldier in the English Civil War, is one of the most famous British paintings of the kind, reproduced on everything from prints to tea trays. But is is also a problem picture with a distinct moral; do you see what it is?

26. William Frederick Yeames: *Defendant and Counsel* (1895, Bristol)

Here is another Yeames. Without the title, it would simply be a wealthy woman consulting a bunch of lawyers—contesting a will, perhaps? So far from clarifying, the actual titile, *Defendant and Counsel,* only confuses the issue. If she is a defendant, what has she been accused of? There was so much debate about it, that a newspaper organized a competition for the best explanation. But when Yeames was asked to judge it, it became clear that he had no idea either!

27. John Collier: *The Sentence of Death* (1908, Wolverhampton)

The pose of the woman, staring straight out of the canvas is a virtual invitation to the beholder to guess what is going on in her mind. It is strikingly similar to one in a similarly-positioned figure in one of the last of these problem pictures, before the entire genre went out of fashion, this one painted by **John Collier** (1850–1934) in 1908. I won't tell you the title; can you guess it? In fact, it is called *The Sentence of Death*. There is no moral component to this that I can see—but a huge psychological one. But Collier did paint moral conundrums too; here is one to finish the hour. I wonder if you will get the title?

28. John Collier: [*title withheld*] (1907, Cyfarthfa Castle)
29. Class title 2

This is in fact called *Marriage of Convenience,* though that still leaves a lot to be explained. I assume that the girl's father has either died or left them, and the women are facing hard times. So the daughter has to marry wealth to save the situation. I am not so sure about the wedding dress on the bed: has the mother had it made to ensure quick action, or was the girl already about to marry somebody else, truly loved, though poorer?

C. Opening Young Minds

30. Section title C ("All things bright and beautiful")
31. Newton, Alexander, Moody, Sankey, McGuffey

Question: what do these five figures have in common? Answer: in their various ways, they were all evangelists, spreading the Christian faith and its moral lessons. **John Newton** (1725–1807) and **Cecil Frances Alexander** (1818–95) were British hymn-writers. **Ira Sankey** (1840–1908) was also a hymn writer, who teamed with preacher **Dwight Moody** (1837–99) to become the best-known American evangelical team of the 19th century. **William Holmes McGuffey** (1800–73) is remembered as the author of a series of *Readers* that were for a very long time the standard text books in American schools, and are still used by home-schoolers today. All five were household names at some point, but I imagine that none are well-known today outside evangelical circles. The fact that Alexander and McGuffey were writing explicitly for children gives me my title, **Opening Young Minds**—but in fact *any* kind of evangelism consists of putting religious or moral precepts into easily-understandable terms, so the phrase in this larger sense will be my theme for the hour. Let's start with **Newton**.

32. Newton: *Amazing Grace,* first verse

Newton was a slave-trader, a sea captain, and the owner of many slave ships other than his own. He was not originally a religious man, but once when caught in a storm off the coast of Ireland, he involuntarily began to pray. He was spared, and that moment was his epiphany of religious conversion, as I mentioned with the Holman Hunt painting. "Amazing Grace," the most famous of the many hymns he wrote with the poet **William Cowper** and published as *The Olney Hymnal*, is essentially his spiritual autobiography. He became a priest in the Church of England. Here is is, portrayed by **Albert Finney** in the 2006 movie *Amazing Grace,* when he is visited by **William Wilberforce** (**Joan Gruffudd**) prior to starting his Abolition campaign. **Slavery**, of course, was the biggest moral issue of the century in America and almost as much in England; I will be coming back to it more than once before the end of the class.

33. Michael Apted: *Amazing Grace* (2006), Wilberforce/Newton scene
34. Alexander: *Hymns for Little Children* (1848)

Here is a page opening from Alexander's *Hymns for Little Children,* first published in 1848 and reaching its 69th edition by the end of the century. Her idea was to make abstract theological ideas easy for children to understand. Hence "All things bright and beautiful" that you heard under my title video. But at times, the result could be quite naïve, as in "Do no sinful action," sung here by **Kenneth McKellar**.

35. Alexander: *Do no sinful action* (McKellar)

Alexander did not write the music herself. But the power and simplicity of her verses quickly inspired composers to write the melodies by which we know them today. I'm sure you recognize this:

36. Alexander: *Once in Royal David's city* (King's)
37. Moody and Sankey

Over now to America. In 1870, evangelist **Dwight L. Moody** attended a convention held by another preacher, **Ira L. Sankey**, who made much use of song in his testimony: hymns written by others, hymns that he had arranged, and hymns that he composed. Realizing that they would be stronger as a partnership, Moody asked Sankey to join him, and for the next 30 years, they crisscrossed the US and even sailed over to Britain. Sankey's hymns were best-sellers, and the partners ploughed the profits into charitable work.

38. Holman Hunt: *Our English Coasts* (1852, Tate Britain)

I will play just one of Sankey's hymns, *The Ninety-and-Nine.* It is one of the parables of Jesus, in which he compares himself once again to the Good Shepherd, who will go after one lost sheep, even though the other 99 in the flock are safe in the fold. Although he called the painting simply *Our English Coasts,* I am sure that this is the intended reference behind this 1852 painting by **Holman Hunt**. The video comes from a medley by actor/evangelist **Dave Willetts**, performing in costume and make-up. For the second verse, he seems to segue to another text with the same tune; I have done my best to catch the words. I wanted to include it, though, because of my emphasis on moral education for the *young.*

39. Sankey: *The Ninety-and-Nine* (Dave Willetts)
40. William McGuffey

William Holmes McGuffey, the creator of the *McGuffey Readers*, was a Presbyterian minister—but also an educator. He ended his life as a college president, but he began in his teens as an elementary school teacher on the Ohio frontier, where the only book he could expect his charges to bring to school was their Bible, so he taught them to read from that. In 1835, his friend Harriet Beecher Stowe recommended him to a Cincinnati publisher to write a series of readers for school use, and he wrote texts that conveyed the same kind of moral lessons. The *Eclectic Readers*, six in all, sold at rates second only to the Bible and Webster's Dictionary. **Henry Ford** was one of the children brought up on them; he later started a collection of all the different editions, and the Henry Ford Museum produced this video.

41. McGuffey Readers (Henry Ford Museum)
42. Page from the *First Reader*
43. Page from the *Second Reader*

Here is a page from the *First Reader*; let's compare it to a similar page from the *Second Reader*. You will immediately notice the difference in reading level. But you will also see that while both clearly have a moral purpose, the second story is explicitly Biblical. While never so explicitly evangelical as Cecil Alexander's hymns, McGuffey brought in Biblical teaching whenever the language level permitted it.

44. Wikipedia on the Revised Edition

In 1879, however, the publishers brought out a new edition, which is the one more generally seen today. Here is the Wikipedia paragraph about the changes. And here is something else I discovered: the *Readers* are still widely used today in the **Christian homeschooling community**. And while both are good, the preference is to use the earlier edition, because it is more scriptural. Here is a homeschool mother explaining the difference. But note: she gets confused, and says 1979 when she means 1879, and once the newer version when she means the older one. However, if you get it into your head that she intends the *first* version of 1836 whenever she is talking about Christian values, it will make sense.

45. McGuffey Readers, differences between editions

D. Facing Facts in Fiction

46. Section title D (book covers)

The music there was a spiritual, *Wade in the Water*; you will see its significance in a moment. Covering a similar topic for another course some years ago, I tried to find moralizing pictures from America to set beside the plethora of British ones, but couldn't find any. Two reasons, I thought: interest in works that depicted people straying outside societal norms required a more stable society than America possessed at the time against which to set them. And America already had one huge problem of public morality against which all others paled into insignificance: Slavery.

47. Harriet Beecher Stowe, with title page and painting of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

I can't say that **Harriet Beecher Stowe** (1811–96) was once famous and now forgotten. But ***Uncle Tom's Cabin***, published in 1852, was a huge success, even in Britain when it sold 200,000 copies in the year it appeared. Nowadays Stowe is probably remembered as the author of a rather simplistic moral tract, whose message is tarnished by its melodrama, sentimentalism, and recourse to stereotyoes. Yet we shall look on the positive, Hhere is a slide with the famous (but undocumented) remark by **President Lincoln** when introduced to Stowe, followed by three British views. I think I agree most with the last one, **George Orwell**. Much the same thing might also be said of **Dickens**.

48. Critiques of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
49. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* jigsaw, with Tom and Eva figurine

The popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* can be judged by the number of spin-off products, such as this figurine and jigsaw. I'll use the latter as background for a very rapid bullet-point summary of the plot. Immediately after, I'll show the same scenes in excerpts from the television movie of the book made in 1987; some of the clips are too short to be very meaningful, but I didn't put the video together myself.

50. Summary of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
51. Harriet Beecher Stowe: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, excerpts from the 1987 movie.
52. Charles Kingsley and *The Water Babies*

England did not have enslaved Africans on its own shores, but it had plenty in its colonies, and it was a major player in the slave trade, as you saw with John Newton before *Amazing Grace*. And there were plenty of other injustices for liberal campaigners to tackle. Besides being an author, **Charles Kingsley** (1819–75) was an Anglican vicar, a university professor, and an active social reformer. Though nominally a book for children, *The Water-Babies, A Fairy Tale for a Land Baby,* written in 1863 for his own son, contains a whole lot of moral and political polemic, rather awkwardly woven in to its central fable. Kingsley truly fits into our Popularity theme, being a huge best-seller in his day, but nowadays read by practically no one.

53. Chimney sweeps

Kingsley's particular target is child labor. In Victorian times, and even before, children were set to work at jobs where there small size would be an advantage: pulling wagons in a coal mine, or climbing down sooty chimneys to clean them. **Tom**, the young protagonist of *The Water Babies,* is one of these *climbing boys*. Falling down a chimney, he finds himself in the bedroom of an upper-class orphan girl called **Ellie**. They start talking, and become friends of a sort. Tom is suspected of stealing the household silver, and flees. But Ellie realizes that the true culprit is the adult sweep, **Grimes**, Tom's master. She runs after her foster father to tell him this, but too late; whether accidentally or on purpose, Tom falls into the water. But instead of drowning, he becomes a **Water Baby**, and it is there that his true moral education begins. Ellie later joins him under water, as does Grimes—and Tom finds himself working for his redemption. There was a 1978 film based on the book, which begins with live action and then turns into a cartoon, I'll give you two clips from the earlier section, then stop when the cartoon kicks in.

54. Film: The Water Babies (1978), excerpt 1
55. Film: The Water Babies (1978), excerpt 2

Wikipedia sums up the end of the book as follows: *By proving his willingness to do things he does not like, if they are the right things to do, Tom earns himself a return to human form, and becomes "a great man of science" who "can plan railways, and steam-engines, and electric telegraphs, and rifled guns, and so forth." He and Ellie are united, although the book states that they never marry, claiming that in fairy tales, no one beneath the rank of prince and princess ever marries.* But rather than leave you with a cartoon, I'd like to end with one of the rather fine poems from the novel, put together in a very fine video by the reader, **Oliver Peirce**. I added the text myself,

56. Kingsley: *The Water Babies*, "The Tide River"
57. Class title 3 ("Can real injustice be solved by fable?")