

Unità didattica CLIL – Classe 5[^]

*Arts in Great Britain
during the first half of
19th century*

Artistic movements and events

- *Romanticism*

Protagonists: William Turner, John Constable

- *The Great Exhibition (London, 1851)*

Protagonists: Joseph Paxton, William Morris

- *Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*

Protagonists: Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, Ford Madox Brown

English Romantic painting

- *The main subject is Nature*
- *Sublime: a mixed feeling of terror and weakness in front of the “unfinished” (and Nature) which become pleasure*
- *The artist is alone in his society, but he is aware of his role and doesn't need academic awards*

English Romantic painting

*In Great Britain, the most famous Romantic painters were **William Turner** and **John Constable**, who both painted nature and landscapes, but using two different styles.*

*The first preferred the representation of the **force of the nature**, that can be dangerous for men's lives.*

*The second represented a beautiful and **familiar nature**: it's the place where he grew up, the places of his life, which he wanted to thank and honour.*



William Turner, *The burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* (1835).

William Turner

The burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons (1835)

This painting is about the fire that broke out in October 1834, which Turner himself witnessed. Maybe, he made sketches “en plein air” first; then, he worked a lot on the painting. The canvas represents the fire and its smoke spreading in the sky and over the river Thames: Turner used a beautiful orange and red in contrast with blue water and sky. In the foreground, a crowd of spectators is watching the scene. In this painting, the force of the nature is evident: it can destroy anything but it can be a spectacular moment to attend.



William Turner, *The Slave Ship* (1840).

William Turner

The Slave Ship (1840)

In this painting, Turner depicted a ship sailing through a stormy sea, while slaves appear scattered around it. This scene actually happened in 1781, when a captain of a slave ship ordered 133 slaves to be thrown into the sea. It's clear that Turner was against slavery, which had been outlawed since 1833: he and the other abolitionists wanted slavery to be outlawed all over the world, not only in Great Britain. In this work, the focus is on the interaction between the different colours: a lot of figures are indistinct, without borders, defined by the only colours. Turner evokes the concept of "Sublime", concentrating on Nature rather than slaves. Curiosity: the first owner of this painting was the art critic John Ruskin.



William Turner, *Rain, steam and speed* (1840).

William Turner
Rain, steam and speed -
- The Great Western Railway (1840)

The painting represents a train on a modern bridge on the Thames. The Great Western Railway is one of the companies founded to develop the new means of transport in Great Britain. Along the track there is a little hare running in the same direction of the train: it could symbolize the speed in nature, and so the limits of technology, or maybe the fear of the new machinery. Let's analyze the title: "Rain and steam": the colour is the protagonist, without drawing and borders; "speed": the speed refers to the train, important innovation that had been introduced in 1803 and so a symbol of modernity.



John Constable, *Flatford Mill* (1816)

John Constable
Flatford Mill (1816)

This painting represents a place Constable knew very well: Flatford Mill, where his parents worked. In the foreground, there are two boys: one is disconnecting a rope by the River Stour, the other is sitting on a horse. This is probably a scene lived by Constable himself when he was a child. It's clear, in this work, the artist's affection for this place and for English countryside, where he grew up.



John Constable, *The Hay Wain* (1821).

John Constable

The Hay Wain (1821)

This is one of the most famous British paintings. It represents a cottage near Flatford Mill, on the River Stour: another place of the painter's childhood and life. Nowadays, the cottage is unaltered, but nature around it has changed. This artwork was exhibited in France where it was appreciated by French artists such as Delacroix and Géricault: Constable's art would influence also other movements, for example Barbizon school, which laid the foundations for the birth of the Impressionism.

The middle of the century

- *In 1848 John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Hunt founded the **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood** (they are known also as *The Pre-Raphaelites*)*
- *In 1851, in London, there was the universal exposition (World's fair) named the **Great Exhibition**: for this important event, the architect **Joseph Paxton** designed the **Crystal Palace***

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood

- *It was founded in London in 1848 by D.G. Rossetti, William Hunt and John Everett Millais*
- *Other members or supporting artists: Edward Burne-Jones, Howard Hughes, William Morris, John William Waterhouse*
- *It can be defined as a symbolist movement*
- *“**Before Raphael**”: they thought that the artists after Raphael painted with a mechanistic approach that corrupted the academic teaching of art (even though they were studying at the Royal Academy!)*



Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Venus Verticordia (1864).

D.G. Rossetti, *Venus Verticordia* (1864)

This painting represents Venus with a golden halo surrounded by a lot of beautiful flowers and butterflies.

“Verticordia” means “changer of the heart”, change towards virtue.

- These flowers, roses and honeysuckles (=caprifogli), refer to women's sexuality and to sexual passion.
- The arrow that Venus holds points to the heart and symbolizes the uncontrollable desire.
- The apple refers to the Judgement of Paris but suggests also the tempting of Eve.
- The butterflies could be symbols of Venus' soul.

All these symbols mean that in love both body and soul are involved.



John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-52.

J. E. Millais, *Ophelia* (1851-52)

The painting depicts Ophelia, a character from *Hamlet*, singing before she drowns in a river in Denmark. The episode is not usually seen onstage, because it's described in a character's speech.

The painting is known for its depiction of the **detailed flora** of the river and the riverbank. The episode would be set in Denmark, but the landscape is seen as **typically English**: *Ophelia* was painted along the banks of the Hogsmill River, in Surrey.

Ophelia's clothes, trapping air, make her temporarily stay afloat.

Ophelia was modelled by **Elizabeth Siddal**, a friend of the painter's and artist herself, who had to lie clothed in a bathtub full of water: as a result, she caught a severe cold.

When it was exhibited at the Royal Academy, in 1852, the work encountered a **mixed response**, but now it's admired as one of the most important works of the mid-nineteenth century for its beauty, its accurate depiction of a natural landscape, and its influence on a lot of artists such as other Pre-Raphaelites but also Salvador Dalì.



Ford Madox Brown, *Work* (1852-65).

F. M. Brown, *Work* (1852-65)

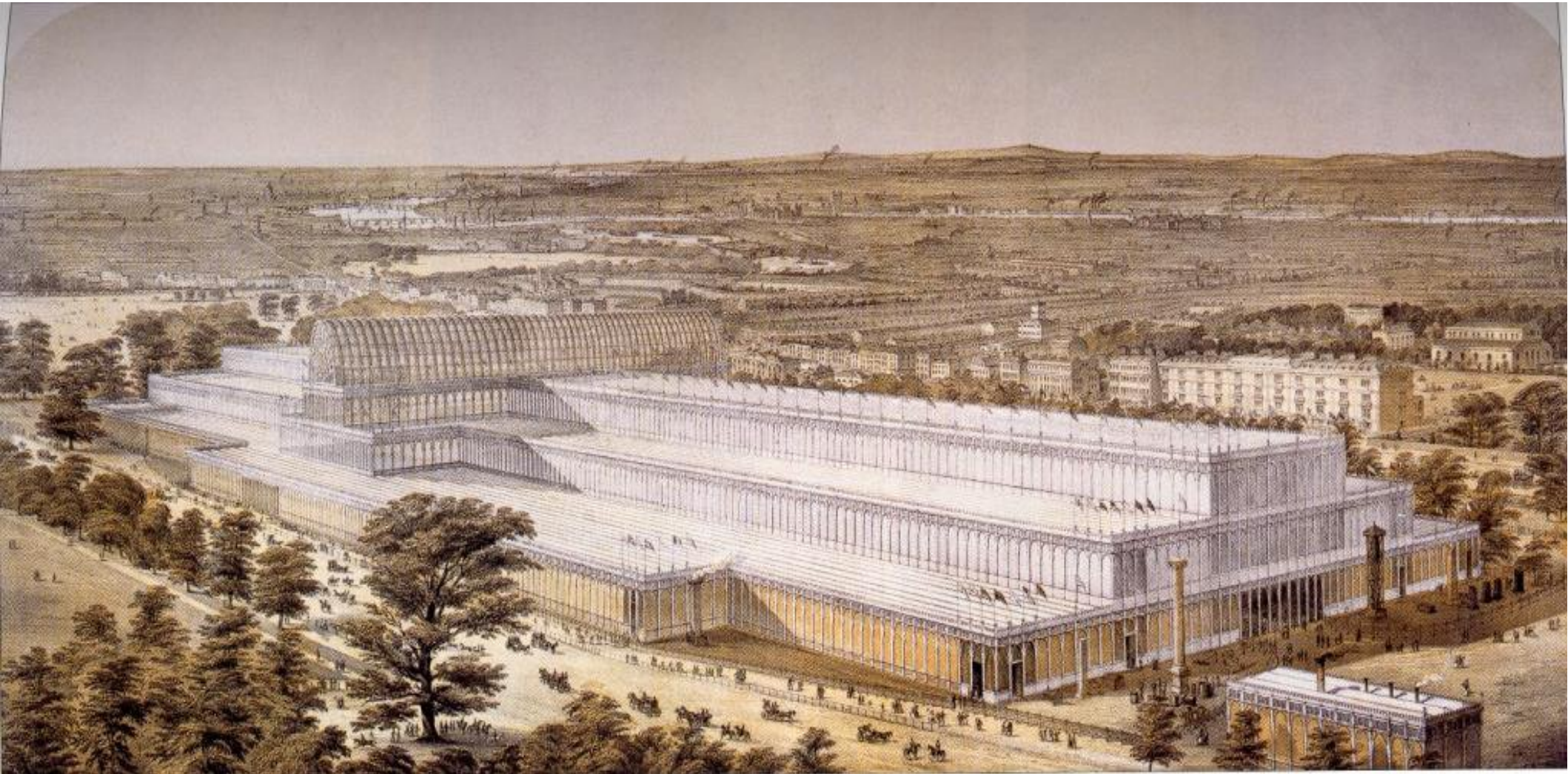
This painting (made in two versions) represents the **Victorian society**. A group of **workers** (navigators) is building a tunnel digging up the road (Brown painted a real street in Hampstead, London), probably to extend the sewerage system and deal with the threat of colhera and typhus.

Posters on the left and sandwich boards refer to an election campaign.

The two intellectuals on the right are **Frederick Maurice and Thomas Carlisle**: the first founded the Christian Socialism and established educational institutions for workers, the second wrote two books in which he described the political corruption and the importance of work as a form of worship.

There are a lot of animals in the painting, mainly **dogs**: they are owned by people of different classes and may have different purposes.

The Crystal Palace by Joseph Paxton and the Great Exhibition



The Crystal Palace by Joseph Paxton and the Great Exhibition

- 1st may 1851, London, Hyde Park: the first universal exposition, named *The Great Exhibition*, started
- The palace is one of the most modern architectures: it's made of plate-glass and cast-iron
- Inside, there were examples of foreign cultures and technologies (the largest foreign contributor was France) → the exhibits were grouped into four main categories: Raw Materials, Machinery, Manufacturers and Fine Arts.
- Moved after the exhibition, it was destroyed in a fire in 1936



The Crystal Palace by Joseph Paxton and the Great Exhibition

When William Morris (and other artists) visited the exhibition, he criticized what he saw: he thought everything was excessively ornate, artificial, and ignorant of the qualities of the materials used.

He inspired the “Arts and Crafts movement”, which wanted to reform design and decoration.

Which wallpaper was designed by Morris?

