

## REVIEWS

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*Hard Times: Social Realism In Victorian Art.*  
Yale Center for British Art, 6 April - 29 May 1988.

The exhibition *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* appeared at three venues during 1987-1988, originating at the Manchester City Art Gallery, then proceeding to the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam, and ending at the Yale Center for British Art. The exhibition was unusual, since the only comparable exhibition was *Victorian Social Conscience* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 1976.

An exhibition devoted to such a subject must be organized to indicate the stages of development of social realist art during the nineteenth century. It is easy to date the origin of such interest, Thomas Hood's famous "The Song of the Shirt," which appeared in the Christmas number of *Punch*, December 1843. The following year, in 1844, Richard Redgrave exhibited his canvas *The Sempstress*, explicitly derived from Hood and probably from the reports of the Children's Employment Commission, which had revealed the dreadful circumstances in which slopworkers had to toil.

The Yale installation by Susan Casteras achieved a most successful deployment of the one hundred exhibits to convey the early and later stages of social realist art. The major painters of the earliest phase, Richard Redgrave, G.F. Watts, and Thomas Faed, were all represented. In addition to *The Sempstress*, Redgrave's Diploma Picture, *The Outcast* (1851), was exhibited. This juxtaposition with *The Sempstress* created a subtextual narrative of its own, since starving seamstresses often resorted to prostitution, with the inevitable illegitimate child as the result, along with expulsion from the family and society itself. Anna Blunden's *For Only One Short Hour* (1854) indicates the interest female artists had in this subject. Unfor-

tunately, at the Yale venue only G.F. Watts' *The Irish Famine* (1849-50) was included; other venues had his *Found Drowned* of the same period, and no venue included his harrowing *The Sempstress*; its grim tableau exposes some of the falsity of Redgrave's pioneering effort. The works of Thomas Faed gave evidence of this artist's striking ability as a colorist, despite his ambiguous course between protest and mere genre. *Worn Out* (1868), with its father keeping a vigil at the garret sickbed of his son, reveals the process of immiseration: unemployed proletarian males experienced the status of women under Victorian patriarchy. In other canvases, however, such as the saccharine *Homeless* (1869), Faed is exposed as a sentimental exploiter of poverty.

One of the strengths of *Hard Times* was its inclusion of a number of works recording rural poverty, among them Wallis's *The Stonebreaker* (1858), Stone's *Silent Pleading* (1859), Shields's *One of Our Breadwatchers* (1866), and Wade's *Carting Turf from the Moss* (1868). Unfortunately, the Yale venue did not include Walker's *The Vagrants*, although the less significant *The Lost Path* (1863) was some compensation. In general, however, at all three venues Walker was under-represented considering his significance for the next generation of social realists, Frank Holl, Luke Fildes, and Hubert von Herkomer, each of whom was represented by some of his work for the *Graphic* as well as by canvases.

The Yale installation was particularly strong in presenting a virtual mini-exhibition of the canvases of Holl. With the exception of *The Village Funeral*, most of Holl's major paintings were included, beginning with the 1868 *The Lord Gave and the Lord Hath Taken Away* and *No Tidings from the Sea* (1870).

In many of Holl's canvases, women are