



'Cornfield by Moonlight,' c1830

SAMUEL PALMER

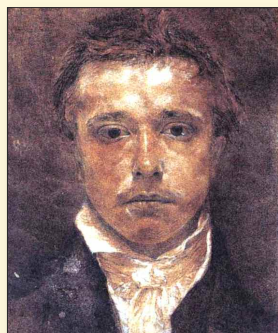
'The English Van Gogh's' Valley of Vision

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) was neglected and overlooked during his own lifetime, but has now become treasured as one of the most extraordinarily talented and quirkily eccentric figures of the English art world.

In his late-teens Palmer fell under the spell of the visionary artist and poet William Blake, and became the lynchpin of the first British art movement – the Brotherhood of Ancients – who, centering themselves upon Water House in Shoreham, set out to create a new rural idyll based upon God's abundance and Nature's fecundity.

It was in his 'Valley of Vision' (the Darent Valley) that Samuel Palmer created his finest paintings – of cornfields gleaned by moonlight, and moss-covered barns; of foaming springtide blossom, and bright sickle-shaped harvest moons. For many, these bejewelled canvasses, rich in colour and sentiment, seem to both predict and eclipse the work of the Impressionists half-a-century later.

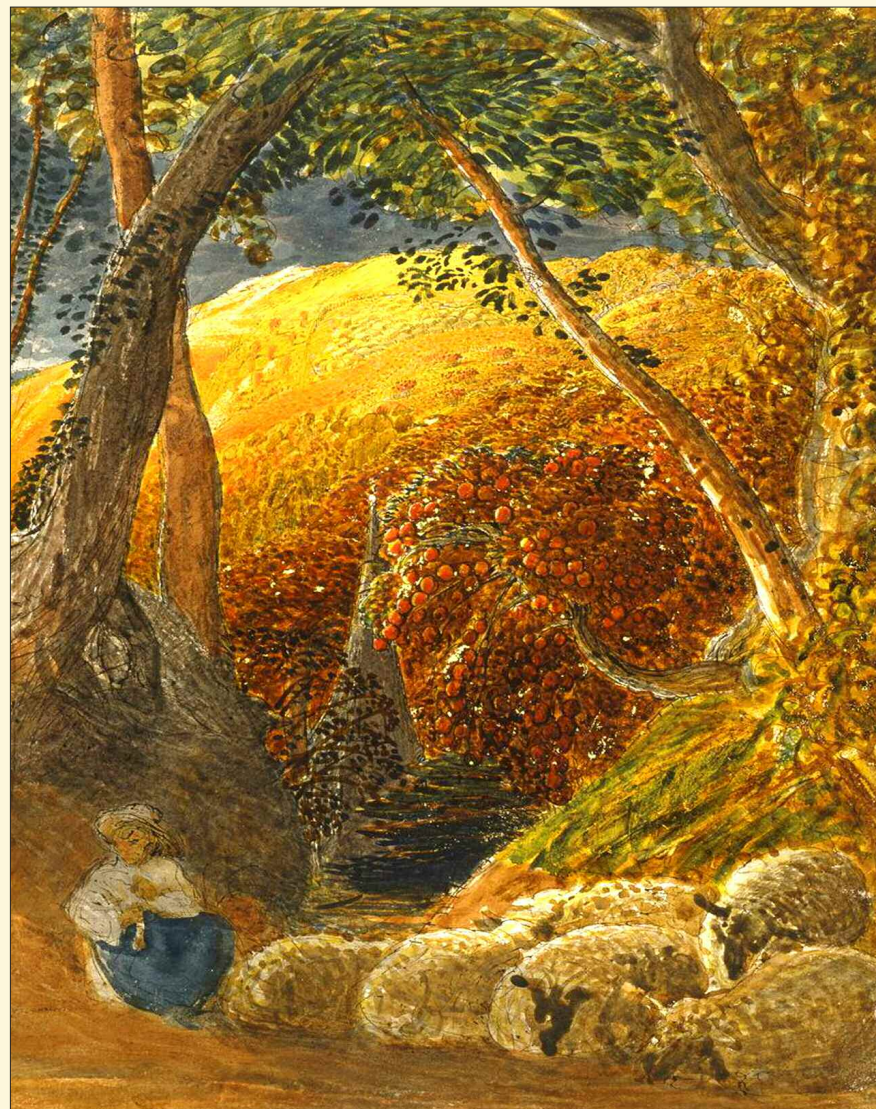
The splendour of Palmer's 'Shoreham Period' is exemplified by his work 'In a Shoreham



Garden' of 1829. It is a canvas dominated by a huge apple (or cherry) tree in full bloom growing by the edge of a garden path and framing a graceful female figure in profile gazing into the distance. She is anything you want her to be... Eve, the Virgin Mary, or the genius loci. Everywhere is a profusion of bud and unfolding blossom reaching forever upwards until they seem to explode into the Kentish sky like fireworks.

Palmer and the Ancients loved to ramble the valley at twilight, visiting villages such as Eynsford and Otford, where legends were recalled of 'snakes the bigness of a man's leg which bask sleepily on out-of-the-way banks where men never pass', and of a flying serpent that was wrestled to the ground, killed, and left draped on an Otford wall for all to marvel at. The Ancients also travelled at night to distant chalk pits and other such lonely places where they thrilled to recite passages from gothic novels – one particular favourite was Cut Throat Lane, the site of a half-forgotten murder.

Sadely, as with youth, Palmer's 'vision' faded with the responsibilities of married life and the need to produce 'conventional Victorian art'.



Right 'The Magic Apple Tree'. Such incredible profusion and fecundity is typical of Palmer's visionary landscapes.



Left 'In a Shoreham Garden' c1829 – created half a century before the advent of Impressionism.