

William Gerard Barry was born in Carrigtwohill in County Cork. His father was a local magistrate and he had seven siblings. He studied at the Crawford College and was known as a talented draughtsman. Encouraged by his tutor, Henry Jones Thaddeus, he continued his studies in Paris at the Academie Julian. Barry studied hard and apparently enjoyed living the bohemian life at Montmartre. In 1887, Barry lived for a year at an artists' colony in Fontainebleau. He sent a painting back to Ireland to the Royal Dublin Society for which he received the £30 Taylor Award. (This painting may have been *Time Flies*.) Barry returned to Ireland, but following a row with his father he left on board a ship travelling from Cobh to Canada. He worked as a deck hand to pay his passage and in Canada he worked his way around until he could again afford to paint. He travelled through the United States and received commissions, including, it is said, one to paint President Wilson. Barry continued his travels south and on to the South Seas. He eventually settled back in Europe and worked from a studio on the French Riviera. He retired in France and is said to have shared a studio with Augustus John later in life. He painted less as he got older, instead preferring to carry out portraits in charcoal. Other than this painting, *Time Flies*, very little remains of Barry's work.

Irish painters and artists of the eighteenth century generally left Ireland to make a living and to develop their skills, most artists went to London. This trend changed from about 1850 onwards when continental France and Belgium began to attract artists from Ireland, the US and Europe. In Ireland the notion that exile was required of an artists was a popular one; it was thought that the Irish landscape had to be physically abandoned for its true power to be appreciated. Some artists went abroad with the explicit purpose of improving their work so that they would return to paint in Ireland, others travelled to find a market for their work and in the hope of making an international name for themselves, something often necessary for recognition at home. The route to Paris was one taken by many Irish and international artists, it was considered a rite of passage to be part of that stimulating and innovative artistic community.

The shift to Realism in nineteenth century France encouraged the study of peasant life in its natural setting. Realism was a reaction to the romantic representations favoured up to then. In post revolutionary, industrial France, writers, poets, philosophers and artists found that the only true form of expression open to them was the reality of their individual situations. Courbet, the figurehead of Realism, claimed that painting should present real and existing things. While Daumier was painting the working-class in Parisian slums, Millet was painting the peasants in the fields. The *plein-air* painting of the Barbizon School was a major influence to Irish artists studying abroad, and was very different to studying in the gallery or painting in the studio. After studying in the French colleges for the winter, the artists would disperse to the various painting colonies around Fontainebleau, to Brittany or to Normandy. Here the camaraderie and competition, the sharing of ideas and development of techniques led to a honing of skills and a greater confidence amongst artists of all nationalities. Grez-sur-Loing was a pretty, but quiet and sleepy village in Fontainebleau, where Corot had painted in 1863. Frank O'Meara painted his 'reverie' paintings dealing with age and decay here, so the environment may well have brought out the melancholy in its viewers. William Gerard Barry, Walter Osborne, John Lavery and later Roderic O'Connor were all inspired by the surroundings.