

1

Joseph Mallord William Turner (23 April 1775 – 19 December 1851), *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, exhibited 1842, Tate

Turner was not a quiet, uncommunicative, uneducated loner who's only skill was that he could draw and paint. He was one of the most well connected, creative and far-sighted British artists who has ever lived. Many of the questions he raised are still pertinent today. Let me slowly paint a picture for you of the real Turner and the profound questions he raised.

This is *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*. Steam replaced sail in his lifetime so this is the latest technology battling the elements. There is a story, that some have doubted although I am inclined to think it is true, that he had himself tied to the mast of a ship during a storm so he could directly experience the forces of nature. If it is untrue it is still typical of Turner.

NOTES

Turner's Modern World (TB, Oct 2020)

Notes from a talk by Amy Concannon and James Finch (Tate)

See <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turners-modern-world/exhibition-guide>

See <https://youtu.be/snERLIaaaas>

- This was a time of great change, for half of his life we were at war with France. There was a never ending debate about voting reform, as divisive as Brexit is today and of course the raging argument about slavery.
- Industrialisation was changing working practices, cities grew and the way people travelled was changing. Over the century most people moved from the villages to the new cities where there was well-paid work but many ended up in a living hell of poverty and slums,
- There was a cholera epidemic a bit like Covid today but Turner survived.
- Air pollution by factories was ceaseless and blackened the air and like today it was actively debated and many campaigned for more control.
- **Room 1: Introduction** - highlights the main themes, new industries, different patrons and what he thought about these subjects.
- *The Opening of the Valhalla the first work you see*
- *The Hero of a Hundred Fights*, 1810, a monument to the Duke of Wellington.
- Why did he become interested, not the RA but because of other artists such as the French seascape artist. Also it was where the money was, patron wanted their businesses painted so he went to Coalbrookdale. The war was a major influence. Many industries were making war equipment, cannons and there was a patriotic element.
- **Room 3: War and Peace** (with red walls)
- He depicts a siege in India, he researched his pictures very carefully. He interviewed people, looked at the uniforms and the ships when they returned.
- *Battle of Trafalgar*
- *The Field of Waterloo*, 1817, Fitzwilliam Museum, watercolour, dead soldiers from both sides.
- The war of Greek independence, Italian independence. Napoleon is a key figure and waged war with everyone. He cut off supply chains. Turner called him "the scourge of Europe". He returns to him over a 40 year period. Napoleon is the dominant figure in Turner's mind.
- **Room 4: Modern Thought and His Literary**

Contemporaries

- Turner's understanding of himself as a poet. Often exhibited paintings with his own verses (see *Valhalla...*)
- *Samuel Rogers at his Breakfast table*, Turner, Wordsworth shows how Turner on far right fitted in with all the leading literary figures and scientists and a wide range of cultural events. Turner illustrated Byron's work and was drawn to the cause of greek independence. Another is Polish independence (Thomas Campbell's poem), Walter Scott's *Life of Napoleon* (see War and Peace room). *Ehrenbreitstein from Neuendorf*, a castle blown up and rebuilt, depicted by Turner thinking of the wars. Print of Overwesal, Blok crossing the Rhine. Walter Scott *Life of Napoleon. The Siege of Seringapatam*, the exact spot where Tippoo Sultan died, haunted by an absent presence.
- Five groups of work, Rogers, Byron, Campbell, Walter Scott and the Keepsake Magazine.
- **Room 5: Home Front.** Back to Britain, welcomed by *England: Richmond Hill ...* Turner seeking royal patronage, was unsuccessful at this, military illusions, the message is the war is over and Britain's victory brings security and peace. Goerge IV visit to Scotland was also documented in this room. *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough* labourers ploughing turnips despondently, royal splendour v. Hard labour. Long wall of watercolours and prints showing Turner documenting the British landscape before and after the Napoleonic wars, partly showing the fear of invasion. He shows a line of Martello towers. He also shows new infrastructure, such as canal. Chichester canal was part of a failed attempt to link Portsmouth to London, to avoid blockade.
- **Room 6: Causes and Campaigns.** Focuses on political reform and human rights as causes. See *Northampton Election*, 1830, a reformist campaign. See *Nottingham*, 1831, the owner of Nottingham castle was opposed to reform and opponents started a fire you can see and the rainbow hints at a positive future. There is also a Greek flag incongruously raised on one of the boats. *A Disaster at Sea*, ?c.1835. It was carrying convicts the captain allowed to die at sea. The opposite wall shows Turner's response to slavery. Both deal with human life and financial assets. It includes interpretive texts showing Britains role in the transatlantic slave trade and a few texts hinting at turner's views. He was not a great letter writer so we have to interpret through the pictures. He did make one investment in 1805 in a cattle plantation in Jamaca which was to be worked by slave labour, all of the investors lost money. He did have patrons that were connected with the slave trade such as William Beckford (*Fifth Plague of Egypt* was made from a picture owned by Beckford). He also had many progressive patrons such as Walter Forx? Who owned many of the pictures shown. Print of *The Deluge* in 1828, a rare object, owned by an advocate of abolition. Leads up to 1840, *The Slave Ship*, the same time as the first anti-slavery conference. There is a print and a medal of the conference. The work is too fragile to travel from the MFA, Boston, so it is a reproduction. It is not framed and set back, it is a high quality print on aluminium. Researched Turner's links to slavery, the cattle plantation and his patrons, and worked with the BAME network and Delia MacCauley and David Dabydeen a black poet who has written a poem called *Turner*.
- **Room 7: Steam and Speed.** One of the most fun rooms. *Rain, Steam and Speed* along a model made in Turner's time of the same type of train. Trains were not seen as subjects for arand oil paintings. The were

regarded as everyday and ugly but Turner stopped people in their tracks. Transformative inventions that changed the way people lived. It was described as an invention that would annihilate time and space. Shortly before it was exhibited there was an accident near the location and some people in third-class were killed. The room also has *The Fighting Temeraire* which shows Turner representing time and change. It is shown alongside a sketch of the painting. Also, unfinished *The Thames at Waterloo*.

- **Room 8: Modern Painter.** Hammers home the point Turner was making pictures with modern subject matter but they look like atmospheric landscapes. *The Whaling Industry* which boomed at this time, made for a patron who invested in the whaling industry. 1842 he went to the birthplace of Prince Albert but it was not picked up by the royals. A painter like no other before him, a unique modern painter. A mantle taken up by the PreRaphaelites and the Impressionists like Claude Monet. We end with *The Rock Limpet* and *Burial at Sea* as they encapsulate all the themes, Napoleon, a steamship, bold colour and the atmosphere. Their shape and size is also innovative, framed as hexagons, works in pairs and series, narratives over a series of canvases.

TURNER'S MODERN WORLD (TB, OCT 2020)

- *The Fighting Temeraire,*
- *Rain, Steam and Speed,*
- *The Slave Ship* throwing slaves overboard, ship foundering with prisoners on board off the French coast,
- *Calais Pier*, 1801,
- *The Field of Waterloo* (1817), *War.*
- *The Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842),
- *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons*, anti-war, anti-slavery.
- *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis* (1843).

BBC IPLAYER THE GENIUS OF TURNER: PAINTING THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

- Humphry Davy's (1778-1829) 1807 lectures were so popular that Albemarle Street became the first one-way street in London. Everyone knew it was the very forefront of knowledge. We were understanding the world for the first time and the success could be seen all around with new inventions and new sources of power. A short history of Humphry Davy as a rising star is here <https://www.sciencehistory.org/distillations/science-and-celebrity-humphry-davys-rising-star>
- He came from another era Georgian England born the same year as Jane Austen. His father was a barber. His father was very ambitious for him. Turner was very gifted from early on. Lots of people came in for a haircut or shave. Thomas Stottard an RA saw his work. Turner joined the RA School when he was 14. Turner referred Reynolds. Scholarship boy, upwardly mobile through his wits. It was purely a drawing school, painting was not taught. He taught himself to paint in oils he exhibited ***Fishermen at Sea***, a virtuoso work of art. Constable had to battle for years. Turner just burst onto the scene and stayed there.
- His ***Self-portrait*** is very flattering. He had a strong Cockney accent. He was very pushy and ambitious. Reynolds pointed Turner towards painters he thought he could learn from, Claude in particular, the master of light in landscape. Ironically Claude inspired Turner to

paint the industrial revolution. When he first saw him he burst into tears and said 'I will never paint like that' but he did. **Crossing the Brook** looks like a Claude but it is industrial Britain in Devon, there is an enormous water wheel, Gunnislake old mine (Tamar Valley, east Cornwall), the largest copper mine in the world. A 'Claude' but with modern industries.

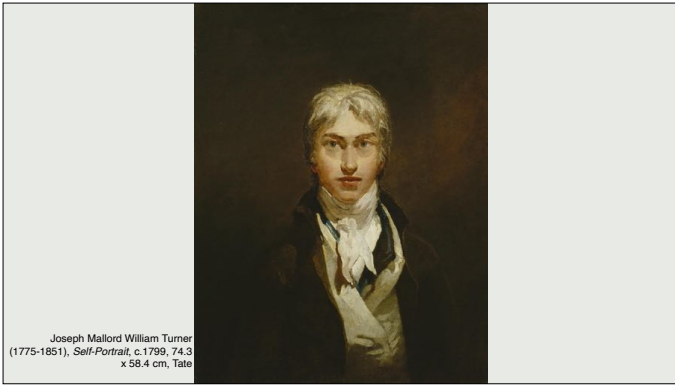
- **Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight** (1835). Claudian seaport transformed into the fires of modern Britain, coal being loaded in Northumberland by moonlight, industry never stops, industrial might. The reason Britain has become the leading nation. Turner was excited by this progress. *Keelmen* is a modern Claude. **Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba** (1648) is typical, it looks into the source of light. Parallel lines go to a vanishing point. Turner uses a Claudian structure (show both painting side by side). It could never have existed without science.
- There was no great divide between art and science, they shared the same building, went to the same parties, discussed ideas together, artists went to science lectures, scientist looked at art.
- April 1801 William Herschel gave a lecture on the sun the same day Turner was hanging for the exhibition the other side of the wall. Immediately he painted **The Festival Upon the Opening of the Vintage of Macon** (1803), it shows the latest scientific painting, another Claude except for one thing, the sun. New science triggered new ideas in Turner throughout his life. Look closely and the paint of the sun has ridges, exactly as Herschel described the surface of the sun. Unlike Claude he made the sun a physical object using impasto paint. For the first time in painting he sees the sun as a real object but one you cannot look at directly.
- In 1804 he sketched the stages of an eclipse.
- In 1802 Howard gave a lecture that was a landmark. The subject was clouds and the talk made him famous. He made the obvious observation that there are three types he called cirrus, cumulus, stratus. Before then people thought every cloud was unique because they did not look. By 1810s and 20s it was used in artist's manuals.
- The power of wind according to the following scale from 0 to 10. In 1806 Francis Beaufort measured the wind. He had a simple idea, measure the effect of the wind on the sails of a ship, a brilliant breakthrough, it is still with us.
- Turner was fascinated by the weather. Philosophers called it the sublime, an obsession with the powerful forces of nature. Nature at it most powerful showing the fragility of human life. **The Eruption of the Soufriere Mountains in the Island of St. Vincent** (1812). We are in awe of what the natural world can do. 1757 defined by Edwin Burke. Why do we love pictures of things we would be terrified of in real life. The sublime, the terrible is also beautiful. Turner took the idea and recast it for the industrial age, see **Bell Rock Lighthouse** (1819). It is sublime but for the lighthouse which challenges nature. Technology stands up against raw nature. It was built in 1807-11 by the Scottish engineer Robert Stevenson who commissioned Turner to paint it. It is 11 miles from Abrothe and St. Andrews and in 1799 70 ships were wrecked in the vicinity. It was almost an impossible situation to built a lighthouse. It had a unique curved base and it was on a rock only accessible at low tide. The waves grip the lighthouse like a hand to emphasize the danger. The ships in the picture are surviving not crashing. Human ingenuity can saves thousands of lives. From this point in he paints

the ways in which people can survive untamed nature.

- ***Life-boat and Mamby Apparatus Going off a stranded Vessel making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress*** (V&A, 1831). This painting shows an invention by George Mamby. It looks like a shipwreck but Turner shows a puff of air that has fired a rope out to a shipwreck. 1831 Mamby was elected to the Royal Society and was in the news. Turner like to reflect the latest technology and news. Mamby saw a shipwreck at Great Yarmouth. He could hear their cries and the next day 144 corpses were washed up. Mamby decided to solve the problem. Everyone was talking about Mamby. 'The entire coast will be guarded'. 'The seaman's best friend'. Many sailors were saved by his device.
- Turner discussed pigment receipts with Michael Faraday. Turner gave lectures on perspective but he was a disaster speaking in public despite his confidence. Was it a response to his Cockney accent. 'Mathematics' he called 'mithamatics'.
- His father was his guide and closest companion. His mother was a family secret. Early on his mother had 'an ungovernably temper'. Turner had to incarcerate her. She was admitted to Bedlam. We don't know if she was mad. They could have paid for private treatment but didn't. She died in 1804 in Bedlam. He was not keen for people to know as he was moving up in his profession. There is one sketch of a woman in an early sketchbook which might be her. With his mother gone his father came to live with him to mix the pigments. He never married and his father came to look after him. He was complex. His relationship with women was complex. He had two daughters with Sarah Danby but kept them at a distance. There are mixed reports on his personality. Delacroix met Turner in 1832 and described him as uncouth, cold hard like a country farmer. Constable admired his art but not the person.
- Factories were the dark side for most artists but for Turner they were an inspiration. ***Dudley*** (1832). Literary commentators, like Dickens, were appalled by the Black Country but Turner is not judgmental. There is no romantic nostalgia.
- ***Snow Storm – Steam-Boat Off a Harbour's Mouth*** (1842) is the modern world for Turner. His painting has become loose, more atmospheric, you cannot tell where the sea ends and the sky begins. There is no solid object except the little boat. There is an order in the chaos. It begins with Michael Faraday, he demonstrated the first electric motor in 1821 with a wire circling a magnet. The mathematician Mary Sommerville was introducing the same idea in a popular book and was a friend of both. Turner knew her very well indeed. She went to his studio often and was always welcomed. Is Turner showing the invisible magnetic forces in nature. The parallel with iron fillings around a magnetic. The vast power of the Earth's magnetic field. Magnetism was in the air there was a direct connection. The idea of a ship as focus of energy. He is not trying to explain but to express power, a visual metaphor. A visual language to express nature's hidden forces. An understanding of flux and dynamism. Although doubt has been cast on the story he tied himself to the mast it does seem likely, see the 'Catalogue Entry' here <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-n00530>.
- In 1840 when he was in his 60s he made regular visits to Margate. It has a strange atmosphere and light. He settled in with Mrs Booth see ***Margate from the Sea*** (1835-40). There may be a picture of her in a stash of erotic drawings. see ***A Sleeping Woman*** (Tate).

numbered CCCLXIV 364 and 269). He called himself Admiral Booth. He would get cabs to drop him several streets from his home. He loved to maintain an air of mystery. Few saw him paint but one was the artist Edward Ripplingill, Turner worked with a palette knife spreading a transparent stuff. He was a master magician, they could not understand what he was doing.

- ***Rain, Steam, Speed – The Great Western Railway*** (1844) one of his last great oil paintings. A train hurtling out of the canvas into the future. It is all there, the science, the upheavals, the new Britain. A wet misty day in the Thames valley. It is exciting. The world of old motion and the power of the new world. The firebox has almost eaten through the metal casing. The Great Western was the crown of the railway system. The bridge is Isambard Kingdom Brunel's. We are only a decade and a half into the history of the railways. Then 40mph soon 50 or 60 mph, unheard of speeds. The Great Western standardised time. Time was set by the sunrise so Exeter was 15-20 minutes different from London. Greenwich Mean Time was created thanks to Great Western. There is a hare running for its life. In Britain it is the fastest animal. It is not just a train but a reminder of how the world was changing. The railways destroyed many old homes. The old romantics like Ruskin and Wordsworth hated the railway as they were afraid great hordes of uncouth people would invade their beloved countryside. When Thackeray first saw it he knew he was looking at something completely new in painting. He saw great thick lumps of chrome yellow. "The world has never seen anything like this picture". Compare it with Wilkie (whom Turner loved), ***Sheepwashing*** (1817), laborious, literal, boring. Turner's maelstrom of paint, who else was doing it? No one. No one else had found a way to show fire turned into power and motion – the industrial sublime. Harnessing nature. The sublime conventionally saw technology as the enemy, not for Turner. For Turner industry becomes the sublime. Natural forces have been harnessed by mankind for the betterment of the human race. No one thought like that until the 1910s. He had his finger on the pulse. He is phenomenally important for Britain and the history of art. He revealed the wonders of science. He used paint to reveal a new world.
- ***Fighting Temeraire*** was painted when he was 64. He was born in an age of sail and died in an age of steam. The *Temeraire* was the best and the worst, in 1802 it was in disgrace a mutiny the sailors wanted to go home. At Trafalgar it sailed behind Nelson on the Victory and piled in when they saw Nelson had been shot, extremely heroic. Came to the end of its use. Tug boat owned by Beeston. Going to Rotherhithe. An epic ghost coming to its last moment pulled by the new age a tough little tug board. She had no masts but Turner paints her as she was in her glory days. It combines noise and silence, noisy tug and deathly silent ship. Was seen as an elegy on the passing of sail. Many were saying we will be damned if we submit to the machine age, Turner didn't feel that way, nor did the public. He called it my old darling, he knew it made people feel happy. The old glory is being pulled by the future. Steamships were a symbol of the modern world. There are many wrecked sailing ships in Turner but no wrecked steamships and there are everywhere. His sketchbooks are full of steamships. *Dover* (1825) a steamer puffs out to sea while rowers work hard in the foreground.



Joseph Mallord William Turner (23 April 1775 – 19 December 1851), *Self-Portrait*, c.1799, 74.3 x 58.4 cm, Tate

- Just a reminder of Turner, the man, which I am sure you have heard many times before.
- He came from another era—Georgian England; he was born the same year as Jane Austin. His father was a barber near Covent Garden who was very ambitious for his son. Turner was gifted from an early age and his father placed his drawings in his window where they were seen by passers-by including the Academician Thomas Stothard (1755-1834) who recognised his genius and helped him get started.
- Turner joined the Royal Academy School when he was 14 and while Constable had to battle for years to be accepted Turner just burst onto the art scene and stayed there.
- The Royal Academy School only taught drawing and so Turner taught himself to paint and the first oil painting he exhibited was...

NOTES

- Turner was born in 1775, according to his own account on t. George's Day, 23 April. He was the son of William Turner (1745–1829), barber and wig-maker, of 21 Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, and his wife, Mary Marshall (1739–1804).
- Thomas Stothard (1755-1834) was an English painter, illustrator and engraver and the foremost history painter of his day. He started as a student of the Royal Academy and was made an Associate in 1792, when Turner was 17
- “This self-portrait appears to date from around 1799 when Turner was about twenty-four years old. It was possibly intended to mark an important moment in his career, his election as an Associate of the Royal Academy. Despite his relative youth, Turner had already made a name for himself as an original, accomplished painter with the technical abilities of someone more mature. He had been described in the newspapers as an artist who ‘seems thoroughly to understand the mode of adjusting and applying his various materials’ and ‘their effect in oil or on paper is equally sublime’.” (Tate)
- Turner was an unusual character, very strong-willed (he retained his cockney accent and was a very poor presenter. To many he was cold and arrogant with a hard demeanour yet his undoubted genius attracted loyal friends and created enemies. There are stories of his meanness yet he left his money to a charity for poor artists. He would charge 250 guineas for a painting and then add 20 guineas for the frame. He was sly and secretive, sexually active but resolutely single. Many looked down on him as uncouth as he kept his Cockney accent and his clothes were often covered in paint. The well-off Walter Scott wrote, ‘He will do nothing without cash, and anything for it. He is the only man of genius I ever knew who is sordid in these matters.’ He worked fantastically hard and claimed his workload would have killed any other artist.

He could not stop drawing and painting. He took notebooks everywhere and continually sketched all day long.

- He loved to travel all over Europe and sketched everywhere he went.
- He was controversial. When young he wooed and wowed the establishment and later in life he upset them. His energetic brushwork, lack of detail and sweeps of

colour caused some to describe him as mad. Even his devoted patron John Ruskin was bemused by his late works.

- He never married and lived with Sarah Danby with whom he probably had two daughters, Evelina, born in 1800/01, and Georgiana, born some ten years later. He once said, 'I hate married men, they never make any sacrifice to the arts but are always thinking of their duty to their wives and their families, or some rubbish of that sort. Sarah Danby's relationship with Turner ended about 1813. In the early 1830s Margate became his second home and he settled there with his landlady Mrs Sophia Caroline Booth after her second husband died. He lived there under a false name and had carriages drop him a few streets away from his house. Later they moved to World's End near Cheyne Walk, Chelsea and he lived with her for about 18 years as Mr Booth as was known locally as Admiral Booth. He died in the house of cholera and his last words may have been 'The Sun is God'. He is buried alongside Sir Joshua Reynolds in St Pauls Cathedral. Chelsea was a poor area with bad drains and flooding that meant it had one of the highest rates of mortality from cholera of any area north of the Thames.
- He was close friends with his father and his death in 1829 had a profound effect on Turner including bouts of depression.
- He was a habitual user of snuff and was given a gold snuff box by the King of France.
- His lectures were described by Frith as 'stammerings, the long pauses, the bewildering mystery of it all'. His commentary on some prints was described as 'the most extraordinary composition I have ever read. It is impossible for me to correct it, for in some parts I do not understand it'. His friend George Jones explained that 'Turner's thoughts were deeper than ordinary men can penetrate and much deeper than he could at any time describe'.
- Unlike many artists he was very interested in all the latest scientific developments. Turner gave lectures on perspective but his lecturing style meant they were poorly attended. Although many writers, such as Dickens, were horrified by factories Turner was inspired by new developments and technology. In *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (exhibited 1842) the sea and sky merge. Turner found a new way to paint flux and vortices.
- Turner's mother was sectioned to Bedlam (Bethlem Royal Hospital) when he could have arranged private treatment and she died in Bedlam in 1804, the same year he moved to impressive new premises in Harley Street. He never once visited her.
- Turner knew Mary Sommerville well and she was an early populariser of science and explained Faraday's ideas.
- A series of articles by Edward Ripplingille (c. 1790-1859) entitled 'Personal reflections of artists' was published, mostly posthumously, in the *Art Journal*. Among them is the famous description of J. M. W. Turner on varnishing day at the Royal Academy. Ripplingille saw him painting but they could not understand how he did it.
- His will was contested by his cousins on the grounds that the money he left to found a charity for 'decayed English artists (Landscape painters only) and single men' had not been properly registered in the court of chancery and so the will was invalid. It took three years to reach a settlement which meant abandoning the charity, giving all his property and engravings to his relatives and leaving all his finished and unfinished

pictures, drawing and sketches to the National Gallery.

Notes

- Herschel's 1801 lecture on the imperfections of the sun's surface may have changed how Turner portrayed the sun (see <https://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2011/11/did-herschel-change-how-turner-painted-the-sun.html> and <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/13/turner-science-sun>). Luke Howard developed the nomenclature of clouds in 1802. Sir Francis Beaufort created the Beaufort scale of wind force in 1805. Bell Rock lighthouse was designed by Stephenson who requested Turner to paint it who shows it defying nature. Turner painting *Life-Boat and Manby Apparatus Going Off to a Stranded Vessel Making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress* in 1831. Captain George Manby invented the Manby mortar in 1808 to fire a rescue line to a sinking ship off shore. He also invented the portable fire extinguisher. Turner discussed pigments with Faraday who encouraged him to experiment but putting his pigments in the sun and covering half.

References

- <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-self-portrait-n00458>
- <http://turnerexperts.com/turner-bio.html>
- <https://www.newscientist.com/blogs/culturelab/2011/11/did-herschel-change-how-turner-painted-the-sun.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/13/turner-science-sun>



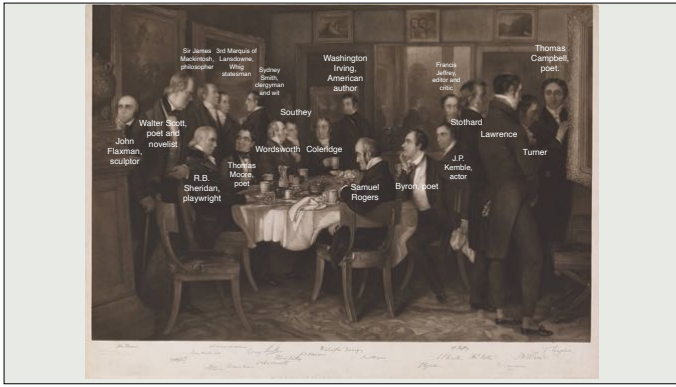
3

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Fishermen at Sea*, 1796, 91.44 × 122.24 cm, Tate

- ***Fishermen at Sea***, a virtuoso masterpiece. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy, in 1796 when he was 21.
- The painting depicts a moonlit view of fishermen on rough seas near the Needles, off the Isle of Wight. It contrasts the fragility of human life, represented by the small boat with its flickering lamp, with the power of nature, represented by the dark clouded sky, the wide sea, and the threatening rocks in the background. Turner was a great traveller round Britain and Europe and he had toured the Isle of Wight in the year before.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fishermen_at_Sea
- <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-fishermen-at-sea-t01585>



After John Doyle, engraver Charles Mottram, *Samuel Rogers at his Breakfast Table*, c.1823, 58 × 86.6 cm, Tate

TURNER AND THE INTELLIGENTSIA

THE LITERATI

- I would now like to go off in a different direction from a conventional talk about Turner's life.
- This is a breakfast meeting of a group of artists and thinkers at the house of Samuel Rogers who was a banker, poet, wit and celebrated host. He was a good friend of Byron and Turner and this shows a typical but imaginary social gathering in 1815.
- (CLICK) He we see Samuel Rogers with
- (CLICK) John Flaxman, a famous sculptor,
- (CLICK) Walter Scott, the poet and novelist,
- (CLICK) Sheridan, the playwright,
- (CLICK) a group of four noteworthy names,
- (CLICK) the lake poets Wordsworth, (CLICK) Southey (pronounced 'sow-thee') and (CLICK) Coleridge,
- (CLICK) Washington Irving the American author,
- (CLICK) the poet Lord Byron,
- (CLICK) a critic, an actor and a poet,
- and three artists (CLICK) Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), (CLICK) Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) and (CLICK) Joseph Mallord William Turner (23 April 1775 – 19 December 1851).
- It was Rogers who introduced Byron to the literary circles of London when he arrived in 1811 and Turner illustrated Rogers poem 'Italy' (1830), turning into into a best-seller. In other words, they all knew each other well and worked closely together.
- The point of this picture is to show that Turner regularly mixed with all the leading literary figures of the day.

NOTES

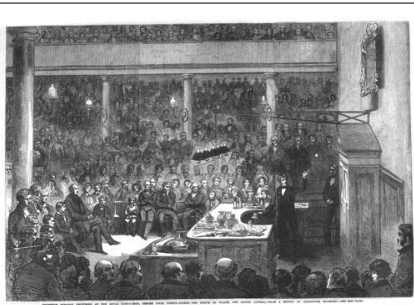
- Samuel Rogers at the table in profile. His guests are, from left to right:
 - John Flaxman, sculptor;
 - Walter Scott, poet and novelist;
 - Sir James Mackintosh, philosopher;
 - Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice,
 - 3rd Marquis of Lansdowne, Whig statesman;
 - R.B. Sheridan, playwright;
 - Thomas Moore, poet;
 - Sydney Smith, clergyman and wit;
 - the Lake poets Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge;
 - Washington Irving, American author;
 - Byron, poet;
 - J.P. Kemble, actor;
 - Francis Jeffrey, editor and critic;
 - the artists Stothard, Lawrence and Turner; and
 - Thomas Campbell, poet.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/doyle-mottram-samuel-rogers-at-his-breakfast-table-engraved-by-charles-mottram-t04907>



Thomas Phillips (1770-1845), *Sir Humphry Davy, Bt* (1778-1829), 1821, 91.4 x 71.1 cm, National Portrait Gallery



'Michael Faraday Lecturing at the Royal Institution before HRH Prince Albert, The Prince of Wales, and Prince Alfred from a Sketch by Alexander Blaikley', *The Illustrated London News*. v.28 1856 Jan-Jun. p.177

Thomas Phillips, *Mary Fairfax, Mrs William Somerville* (1780 - 1872). *Writer on science*, 1834, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, Scottish National Gallery

SCIENTISTS

- Turner also mixed regularly with the leading scientists and mathematicians.
- This is Humphry Davy's (1778-1829), a good friend of Turner. His 1807 lectures were so popular that Albemarle Street became the **first one-way street** in London. **Everyone knew it was the very forefront of knowledge**. Excitement was in the air. We were understanding the world for the first time and the success could be seen all around with new inventions and new sources of power.
- (CLICK) Davy was injured experimenting with an explosive and he hired Michael Faraday (1791-1867) to help. Turner became a friend of **Faraday** and this picture is from *The Illustrated London News* showing Faraday lecturing to HRH Prince Albert, The Prince of Wales and Prince Alfred.

NOTES

- The Royal Institution was founded in 1799 to achieve wider public understanding of science.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Somerville



Thomas Phillips, *Mary Fairfax, Mrs William Somerville* (1780 - 1872), *writer on science*, 1834, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, Scottish National Gallery

Thomas Phillips, *Mary Fairfax, Mrs William Somerville* (1780 - 1872), *writer on science*, 1834, 76.2 x 63.5 cm, Scottish National Gallery

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, exhibited 1842, 91.4 x 121.9 cm, Tate

- Turner was also a good friend of the **mathematician Mary Somerville**, and knew the anatomist and palaeontologist **Richard Owen** (1804-1892) who campaigned for the creation of the Natural History Museum and coined the word "Dinosauria".
- There was no unbridgeable gap between science and the arts, scientists and artists met and discussed the latest finds together. Turner was someone who helped bridged the gap between science and art. Somerville was an amateur painter that Turner coached and she wrote "**I frequently went to Turner's studio, and was always welcomed. No one can imagine that so much poetical feeling existed in so rough an exterior.**" [1]
- (CLICK) Somerville and Faraday discussed the idea of

the Earth as a vast magnet and the swirling forces we saw in *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* could be Somerville's magnetic lines of force which she speculated could run around a steel ship.

- This is a real effect and ships today have degaussing coils installed to cancel the field to make on board compasses point to magnetic north and for ships to be less easily detected by magnetic mines and enemy submarines.

NOTES

- "By the 1820s, Mrs Somerville was widely recognised in Britain and abroad as a leading authority on astronomy and mathematics. Her skill in explaining complex scientific ideas clearly and accessibly was particularly praised: she translated Pierre-Simon Laplace's great astronomical work *Mécanique Céleste* from French into English, at the same time rendering it "from algebra into common language". Mary's friend, the writer Maria Edgeworth, said that "While her head is among the stars, her feet are firm upon the earth". In 1826 her paper, *The Magnetic Properties of the Violet Rays of the Solar Spectrum*, was presented at the Royal Society - although since women were not allowed to attend meetings of the Society at that time it was actually read by her husband on her behalf." [2]

REFERENCES

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/nov/13/turner-science-sun>

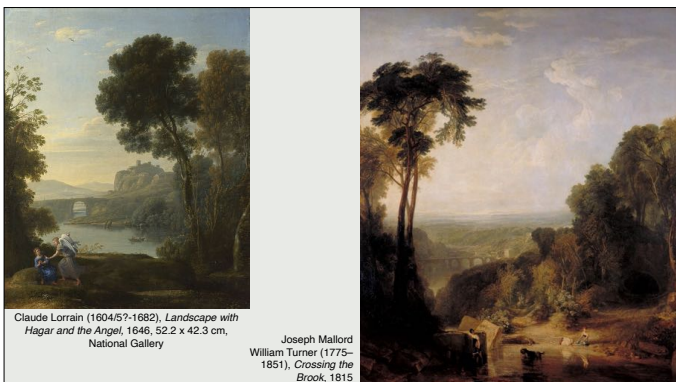
A short history of Humphry Davy as a rising star is here <https://www.sciencehistory.org/distillations/science-and-celebrity-humphry-davys-rising-star>

[1] <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/blog/curatorial/mr-turner-mrs-somerville>

[2] James Hamilton (Ed.), *Fields of Influence: Conjunctions of Artists and Scientists 1815-1860*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2001, pp. 23-24

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-n00530>

7



Claude Lorrain (1604/5?-1682), *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*, 1646, 52.2 x 42.3 cm, National Gallery

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Crossing the Brook*, 1815

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Crossing the Brook*, 1815

Claude Lorrain (1604/5?-1682), *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel*, 1646, 52.2 x 42.3 cm, National Gallery

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION: MINING AND FACTORIES

- This is a typical Claudian landscape as we can see if I show you a Claude (CLICK) In fact we know that Turner knew this particular Claude as it was owned by the art patron Sir George Beaumont and he gave it to the National Gallery in 1828.
- However, the Claude is a mythological scene. Turner lived at the start of the industrial revolution and we can find many references to the fast changing modern industrial world in his paintings.
- Joshua Reynolds pointed Turner towards painters he thought he could learn from, Claude in particular, the master of light in landscape. Ironically Claude inspired Turner to paint the industrial revolution. When Turner first saw Claude he burst into tears and said 'I will never paint like that' but he did. ***Crossing the Brook***

looks like a Claude but it is industrial Britain in Devon, we can see an enormous water wheel and Gunnislake old mine (Tamar Valley, east Cornwall), the **largest copper mine in the world**. A 'Claude' but with modern industries.(CLICK)

- Let us look more closely...

NOTES

- Claude Gelee (1600-1682) who is better known as Claude Lorrain or simply Claude became one of the most influential landscape artists by the end of the eighteenth century.
- Turner saw *Landscape with Hagar and the Angel* in 1804, see <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/jmw-turner/joseph-mallord-william-turner-five-sketches-from-paintings-by-claude-lorrain-r1174238>
- George Beaumont was a fierce critic of Turner as he thought Turner debased Old Master like Claude. Beaumont, an influential collector and amateur artist, claimed Turner "had done more harm in misleading the taste than any other artist."
- John Ruskin was Turner's great defender. One negative review of Turner so enraged him that he started writing a reply at four in the morning. He thought he would be finished by breakfast but eighteen years and 2,500 printed pages later, Ruskin's five-volume *Modern Painters* was a brilliant defence of Turner's art.



8

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Crossing the Brook* (detail), 1815

- Gunnislake old mine (Tamar Valley, east Cornwall), the largest copper mine in the world.
- "a very old copper mine worked since at least the Tudor period and located on the west bank of the Tamar around the town of Gunnislake, and largely responsible for the subsidence problems this town has had for many years with shafts and gunnises (from with the town gets its name) opening up without waning from the old workings." https://www.aditnow.co.uk/Mines/Old-Gunnislake-Copper-Mine_3188/
- Landscape was a lower genre of painting and was not regarded as important at the beginning of the nineteenth century so Turner has done two things. He has elevated a landscape to the status of a history painting by following the style of the respected Old Master Claude and he has elevated the modern world of mines and factories to the status of mythological elements by immersing them in what looks like an

Italianate landscape.

NOTES

A gunnies, gunnis, or gunniss is the space left in a mine after the extraction by stoping of a vertical or near vertical ore-bearing lode. The term is also used when this space breaks the surface of the ground, but it can then be known as a coffin or goffen.

REFERENCES

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/17/abandoned-tin-mine-drakewalls-tamar-valley-country-diary>



9

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 x 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

- We just saw water power and a copper mine but Britain had abundant iron ore and coal and those raw materials were the foundation of the industrial revolution.
- Here we see ***Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*** (1835).
- First let us look again at the Claudian reference...

REFERENCES

British Painting of the Sixteenth through Nineteenth Centuries, National Gallery of Art Washington, pp. 279-280 is founder here:

<https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/publications/pdfs/british-paintings-16th-19th-centuries.pdf>



Claude (1604/5?-1682), *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*, 1648, 149.1 x 196.7 cm, National Gallery



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 x 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

10

Claude (1604/5?-1682), *Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*, 1648, 149.1 x 196.7 cm, National Gallery, bought 1824

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 x 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

- Two hundred years before Turner Claude painted ***Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*** (1648). Like this painting it looks into the source of light. Turner uses a Claudian structure (show both painting side by side) but Claude does not show his world but the ancient world.
- In Turner's painting a brilliant moon illuminates the scene and on the left the square rigged ships wait for the morning tide to leave. On the right men are working through the night by torchlight transferring coal from the flat-bottomed boats that carried the coal from Northumberland and Durham down the River Tyne to the waiting ships. In the distance we can see the dim outlines of ships and factories.

- Turner has transformed the grime of the industrial revolution into a timeless scene of beauty, like the Claude. The seventeenth-century looked back to the classical period for inspiration but Turner is one of the first artists to represent the modern world and look forward to what the future might bring.
- If we look in more detail at the Turner...



11

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 × 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

- We see a Claudian seaport has been transformed into the industry of modern Britain, coal being loaded in Northumberland by moonlight. It shows that industry never stops creating the industrial might of Britain. Turner was excited by this progress but alongside this source of power he shows black clouds polluting the atmosphere. So Turner is not just blindly eulogising the modern world he is aware of the cost in terms of the pollution of the planet. The moon casts a beautiful glow over the scene but the red lanterns look like the fires of hell. Turner is pointing out that the modern world contains elements of both heaven and hell.



12

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Venice: The Dogana and San Giorgio Maggiore*, 1834, 91.5 × 122 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 × 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Venice: The Dogana and San Giorgio Maggiore*, 1834, 91.5 × 122 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*, 1835, 92.3 × 122.8 cm, National Gallery of Art

- There is another level of meaning that we know from his poetry was always at the forefront of Turner's mind.
- *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight* was commissioned by McConnel, a Manchester textile manufacturer, as a companion to this piece on the left *Venice: The Dogana and San Giorgio Maggiore* (1834). The Dogana is the customs house on the right and the San Giorgio Maggiore is an island with a Palladian church of the same name (begun in 1566).
- The pair of paintings show the fortunes of two great mercantile powers. The indolent and declining Venice is contrasted with the activity in a northern British port and the expanding British Empire. It was a subject that fascinated Turner—the rise and fall of civilisations.

Edward Gibbon published the six volumes of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1776. At this time the British Empire was still some 70 years from the height of its power but Turner was concerned that the British Empire should not go the same way as empires of the past but he saw that it would eventually decline.

NOTES

- The Manchester Guardian was enraptured the painting of Venice: "We stand transfixed, we ask no name nor open we the catalogue, and as we look on the waters of peerless Venice, we confess by our enraptured, breathless attitude, the power of the unrivalled and gorgeous TURNER. The fairy touch, the bright sunshine, the glowing colour, the transparency, the vividness, the poetry . . . surprise and delight us."
- The Manchester Courier considered that "no artist, perhaps, ever shewed such a mastery over his colours, availing himself of the most brilliant, we had almost said glaring, and yet harmonizing them so charmingly that the eye is never offended though frequently dazzled."
- Even the Morning Chronicle admitted that it was Turner's "best piece" at the Academy. In other words the critics completely missed the meaning behind these pictures.
- McConnel, acclaimed as "the pioneer of art collecting in Lancashire," subsequently commissioned a contrasting companion picture of an industrial scene at a seaport in the north of England, *Keelmen Heaving in Coals by Moonlight*.

13



J. M. W. Turner
(1775–1851), *Leeds*,
1816, 29.2 x 43.2 cm,
Yale Center for British
Art

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Leeds*, 1816, 29.2 x 43.2 cm, Yale Center for British Art

- Of all the British landscape artists of the Romantic period, Turner was the most fascinated by modernity, and many of his images chronicle technological advances
- Turner toured Yorkshire in 1816 to sketch the area in preparation for illustrating **Thomas Whitaker's** 'The History of Yorkshire'. Leeds was the centre of the **nations wool and flax** industries and Turner shows it spread out before us from **Beeston Hill**, now a crowded suburb. He places the **great flax mill** at the centre and we see men hanging cloth out to dry, masons mending a wall, milk carriers, and a millworker carrying a roll of cloth.
- The detail in this drawing suggests Turner intended to include it in the book but it was never included suggesting that the conservative author considered it **too industrial for inclusion**. Turner saw it **not as a dirty industrial scene** but the future opening up before

his eyes.

NOTES

Industrial Revolution - Factories

- “Of all the British landscape artists of the Romantic period, Turner was the most fascinated by modernity, and many of his images chronicle technological advances. While touring Yorkshire in 1816 to gather material for Thomas Dunham Whitaker’s ‘The History of Yorkshire’, Turner visited Leeds, the hub of the nation’s wool and flax industries, and made meticulous graphite sketches of the city, which he elaborated into this watercolour on his return to London. Turner’s remarkable drawing celebrates the economic success and resilience of Leeds—and by extension, that of Britain—in the immediate aftermath of the wars with Napoleon. As Stephen Daniels has noted in his penetrating analysis of the watercolour, to which this entry is indebted, Turner’s image is a complex and richly allusive portrayal of a rapidly developing industrial city, an amalgam of sources rather than a straightforward topographical record (Daniels, 1986, 1993).
- The watercolour, which depicts the city from Beeston Hill, about a mile and half south of the city, draws on the conventions of the prospect or panorama, a well-established genre for representing urban development and prosperity. Daniels has suggested convincingly that Turner used two eighteenth-century sources, Samuel Buck’s 1720 engraved prospect of Leeds and an allegorical poem by John Dyer, ‘The Fleece’, which details the processes of wool manufacture and offers a vision of Britain united through labour. With similar patriotic intention, though perhaps not without ambivalence, Turner mapped the smoky industrial landscape of Leeds, placing John Marshall’s flax mill at the centre of his composition and carefully differentiating its figures’ occupations—tentersmen hanging cloth to dry, masons, milk carriers, and a millworker carrying a roll of cloth. It is likely that Turner intended ‘Leeds’ to be engraved for Whitaker’s publication, but it was not included, perhaps because its industrial subject matter was considered unsuitable for this somewhat conservative publication. The watercolour was published in 1823, translated, appropriately, into the modern medium of lithography.”

REFERENCES

Yale Center for British Art website, Gillian Forrester, 2007
<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1225.html>
<https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/publications/pdfs/british-paintings-16th-19th-centuries.pdf>



Joseph Mallord
William Turner (1775–
1851), Dudley,
Worcestershire, ca.
1832

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Dudley, Worcestershire, ca. 1832*, from *Picturesque Views in England and Wales*, watercolour on paper, 29.3 x 43.2 cm, National Museums Liverpool, Lady Lever Art Gallery

- Factories were the dark side for most artists but for Turner they were an inspiration. Literary commentators, like Dickens, were appalled by the Black Country but Turner is never judgmental. There is no romantic nostalgia.
- “Located in the Midlands of central England — also known as the **Black Country due to the pollution** — **Dudley** in Turner’s time was undergoing rapid transformation into an industrial hub. The **aligned smokestack and church steeple** structure the image around the **contrast of past and present**. Turner subsumes the entire scene in a haze of smog by wetting the paper before applying watercolour, creating a view of industry that is **at once romantic and oppressive**.” (The Frick Collection website)
- Dudley was associated with the invention of the steam engine (it was first operated near Dudley Castle in 1712) and in 1821 the first iron steamship was built in the Dudley area at the Horseley Ironworks. If Turner wanted to capture the essence of English industrialisation, he could hardly have chosen a better subject than Dudley.

NOTES

- Throughout his career, Turner visited and sketched towns and cities which were centres of manufacturing industry, including London, Newcastle, Sheffield and Leeds. He visited Dudley, Worcestershire in the late summer and autumn of 1830. The town is situated half-way between Birmingham and Wolverhampton in the heart of England's Black Country, so called because of 'the dense clouds of smoke which belched continuously from thousands of coal-fired hearths and furnaces'.
- For the writer and painter John Ruskin (1819-1900), who owned the work at one stage, 'Dudley' represented Turner's own hatred of industrialisation. In 1878, he wrote that he found it a clear expression 'of what England was to become', with its 'ruined castle on the hill and the church spire scarcely discernible among the moon-lighted clouds, as emblems of the passing away of the baron and the monk'. In fact, Ruskin's interpretation is distorted by his own increasing antipathy towards industrialisation and probably had little to do with Turner's real intentions.
- By the 1830s Dudley had become the place to visit to observe the industrial revolution in action. Charles Dickens visited the Black Country in the 1830s and described it as a 'cheerless region' in which 'tall chimneys, crowding on each other and presenting that endless repetition of the same, dull, ugly form poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light, and made foul the melancholy air'. However, just as many other observers found the vision of modern industry surprisingly appealing.
- The Reverend Luke Booker, Vicar of Dudley (1812-1835) published in 1825 'A Descriptive Account of Dudley Castle' which celebrated Dudley's ancient past along with its present. Booker wrote that this land of forges, coal fires and the 'wonderful phenomenon' of steam engines, represented 'a region of almost exhaustless wealth' and was 'alive with worthy human activity'.
- Whilst we have no evidence to suggest that Turner ever read Booker, his watercolour can be seen to mirror these sentiments. The text that accompanied the

engraving of the work, written by Hannibal Evans Lloyd, wrote of the economic benefit of this industrialisation: 'The neighbourhood abounds in mines of coal, ironstone, and limestone, which furnishes employment for a great number of the inhabitants'. Indeed, in 'Dudley', the artist omits any suggestion of the social and economic problems associated with industrialisation which would preoccupy later critics like Ruskin.

REFERENCES

<https://www.frick.org/exhibitions/turner/36>

15



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Newcastle-on-Tyne*, c.1823, watercolour on white wove watercolour paper, 15.2 x 21.5 cm, Tate

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Newcastle-on-Tyne*, c.1823, watercolour on white wove watercolour paper, 15.2 x 21.5 cm, Tate

- Turner made his way to Scotland in 1818 sketching every day.
- Newcastle was a leading industrial city known for its prosperity and gentility as well as the **'the intellectual taste and the advanced civilisation of its inhabitants'**. One author wrote that Newcastle offered 'to the eye the most striking and pleasing objects' which 'characterise the wealth, science, and enterprising spirit of the place'. The city was 'well known as the great emporium of the coal-trade, and for its possession of almost illimitable collieries'.
- Turner depicts Newcastle and the adjoining town of Gateshead, looking west, with the River Tyne running between. The river is crowded with vessels. From the left to right are **the tower of St Mary's, Gateshead** and next to it, **the Tyne Bridge** of 1772. Above the bridge is **Elswick shot tower**, for the manufacturing of lead shot mined locally. To the right of the tower is the **keep of the eleventh-century castle**, and next to this is the **spire** of the late eighteenth-century elliptical **Church of All Saints** with the medieval **steeple of St Nicholas Church** in the background. So, we see the old and the new, an active seaport and people going about their day-to-day business.
- Turner shows us the people engaged in various activities. A marine, a sailor, and a pair of women waving at the boatmen on a barge laden with cargo are found in the immediate foreground

NOTES

- "This watercolour is worked up from a study in the Scotch Antiquities sketchbook, drawn when Turner made his way up to Scotland in 1818 to research the Provincial Antiquities and Picturesque Scenery of Scotland project initiated by the publisher Robert Cadell and novelist Walter Scott.
- One author wrote that Newcastle offered 'to the eye the most striking and pleasing objects' which 'characterise the wealth, science, and enterprising spirit of the place'. The city was 'well known as the great emporium of the coal-trade, and for its possession of almost illimitable collieries'. It had 'a fine Exchange, splendid assembly

rooms, numerous charitable institutions, and literary ones'. In essence, the city possessed all the signifiers of prosperity and gentility which spoke of 'the intellectual taste and the advanced civilisation of its inhabitants'.

- Turner depicts the city and the adjoining town of Gateshead, looking west, with the River Tyne running between. The river is 'crowded with shipping, keels, wherries, steam-boats, and other small craft'. From the left to right are the city's most conspicuous historic landmarks: first, the tower of St Mary's, Gateshead and next to it, the Tyne Bridge of 1772. Above the bridge is Elswick shot tower, for the manufacturing of lead 'sheets, pipes, shot, white-lead, red-lead, and litharge. The metal was mined in the nearby towns of Stella and Swalwell and then transported to the tower for processing. To the right of Elswick is the keep of the eleventh-century castle, and next to this is the spire of the late eighteenth-century elliptical Church of All Saints'. The last landmark to be featured is the medieval steeple of St Nicholas Church.
- Turner has peopled the staithes (a landing stage for loading and unloading boats) and steep hillsides of the river with a 'cross-section of the town's population'. A marine, a sailor, and a pair of women waving at the boatmen on a barge laden with cargo populate the immediate foreground. Beyond them labourers haul timbers next to an iron pulley towards a Union Jack at full mast and keelmen transport coal from the moored colliers. The masts of dozens of docked ships line the banks of the Tyne, the finely wrought lines of their cruciform frames layered and interspersed with the slack trapezoid shapes of white sails. The atmosphere is heavy with the effluvia of industry: smoke from Elswick tower and local lime kilns; fumes from the collieries and coal fires at the riverside; and dirtied vapour from the stationary steam engines pumping water from the mines. Indeed, as the art historian William Rodner writes, Turner here:

"gives greater play to the theme of an old city-district engulfed by the choking atmospheric effects of modern industrial development...the gray haze over the far and middle ranges of the watercolour [are] relieved only in the immediate foreground by elements of colour – brown on the sloping riverbank, the ships' white sails, red for the soldier's uniform."

- The colouring in Newcastle is complex: it is built up of minute stipples and hatching of multiple tones, creating a chromatic and textural richness." (Alice Rylance-Watson, Tate website, 2013)

REFERENCES

Alice Rylance-Watson, Tate website, 2013

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-newcastle-on-tyne-d18144>



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Festival of the Opening of the Vintage at Maçon, France*, c. 1803, 182.5 x 274.4 cm, Museums Sheffield

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Festival of the Opening of the Vintage at Maçon, France*, c. 1803, 182.5 x 274.4 cm, Museums Sheffield

SCIENCE: THE SUN

- Turner was interested in **all the latest scientific developments** and I have selected just a few.
- April 1801 William Herschel gave a lecture on the sun the same day Turner was hanging for the exhibition the other side of the wall. Immediately he painted ***The Festival Upon the Opening of the Vintage of Macon*** (1803), it shows the latest scientific painting, another Claude except for one thing, the sun. New science triggered new ideas in Turner throughout his life.
- (CLICK) It is hard to show in a reproduction but **look closely and the paint of the sun has ridges**, exactly as Herschel described the surface of the sun. Unlike Claude he made the sun a physical object using impasto paint. For the first time in painting he sees the sun as a real object but one you cannot look at directly.
- In 1804 Turner sketched the phases of an eclipse.

NOTES

- In 1801 Herschel described to the Royal Society how he had discovered that the surface of the Sun was not flat and featureless as previously thought, but was an object full of “openings, shallows, ridges, nodules, corrugations, indentations and pores”. This was an astonishing new insight and **created a sensation**.
- At that time the **Royal Society shared Somerset House, London, with the Royal Academy**, and as Herschel gave his lecture, members of the RA were in the same building arranging an exhibition that included Turner’s works. Even more enticing, Hamilton suggests that Turner himself may have been next door to the science lecture and could have heard through the thin walls.
- Two years after Herschel’s revelations, Turner appeared to have painted some of the newly discovered solar features in *The Festival of the Opening of the Vintage at Macon*.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/weather-eye-a-solar-obsession-pds96h8rqkj>



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*, 1843, National Gallery

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory) – The Morning after the Deluge – Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*, 1843, National Gallery

SCIENCE: COLOUR THEORY

- One scientific subject that was very relevant to Turner's work was colour theory.
- We normally think of colour being an attribute of form, in other words we think of the world as consisting of objects of different colours, but Turner realised that visually all the information we have is the coloured light entering our eye, objects are a secondary creation of our brain. So light and colour take the place of form, they are primary and form becomes secondary.
- "Turner found interest in Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's book, *Theory of Colours* (also known as *Zur Farbenlehre*), published in 1810. Turner absorbed Goethe's theory of light and darkness and depicted their relationship in a number of his paintings. According to this theory, the creation of colour is dependent on the distribution of dark and light reflecting through a

transparent object. Turner uses concepts from Goethe's theory, which is a rejection of Newton's Seven Colour Theory, and expresses the belief that every colour was an individualised combination of light and darkness."

- Some believe that Turner was criticising Goethe's theory that colour was the product equally of Light and Dark.
- We now know Newton was right and Goethe wrong but this does not detract from the main point I am making, that Turner was aware of all the latest scientific theories and incorporated the ideas in his art.
- The painting celebrates man's covenant with God after the Flood. The serpent in the centre represents the brazen serpent raised by Moses in the wilderness as a cure for plague. Here it symbolises Christ's redemption of Man, foreshadowing the Crucifixion in the New Covenant.

NOTES

- Exhibited in 1843 with the following lines:

'The ark stood firm on Ararat;
th'returning sun
Exhaled earth's humid bubbles, and
emulous of light,
Reflected her lost forms, each in
prismatic guise
Hope's harbinger, ephemeral as the
summer fly
Which rises, flits, expands, and dies.'

—Fallacies of
Hope, M.S.

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_and_Colour_\(Goethe%27s_Theory\)_-_The_Morning_after_the_Deluge_-_Moses_Writing_the_Book_of_Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Light_and_Colour_(Goethe%27s_Theory)_-_The_Morning_after_the_Deluge_-_Moses_Writing_the_Book_of_Genesis)

18



Joseph Mallord William Turner
(1775–1851), *The Eruption of
the Soufriere Mountains in the
Island of St. Vincent*, 1815, 79
× 105 cm, Victoria Gallery,
Liverpool

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Eruption of the Soufriere Mountains in the Island of St. Vincent*, 1815, 79 × 105 cm, Victoria Gallery, Liverpool

SCIENCE: GEOLOGY

- Another subject that interested everyone at the time was geology.
- James Hutton (1726–1797) is described as the father of geology and he published his controversial *Theory of the Earth* in 1785. He proposed that the Earth's remote history can be inferred from evidence in present-day rocks. He argued that, **contrary to conventional religious beliefs** of his day, the **Earth could not be young**. He explained that the Earth's crust was created by **continuing natural processes** over the long geologic time scale. There is the slow weathering by wind and rain and the sudden appearance of new rocks in a volcanic eruption.
- Turner was fascinated by natural events. La Soufrière volcano on St. Vincent has erupted recently and in 1902 it killed 1,500 people. This is Turner's

representation of the 1812 eruption called ***The Eruption of the Soufriere Mountains in the Island of St. Vincent*** (1812). He was not there and painted it in his studio in London using sketches done by Hugh Keane who was on the island. Turner exhibited it in 1815 with the title

- *The eruption of the Souffrier Mountains in the Island of St Vincent, at midnight, on the 30th of April 1812, from a sketch taken at the time by Hugh P. Keane, Esq. "There in stupendous horror grew etc"*

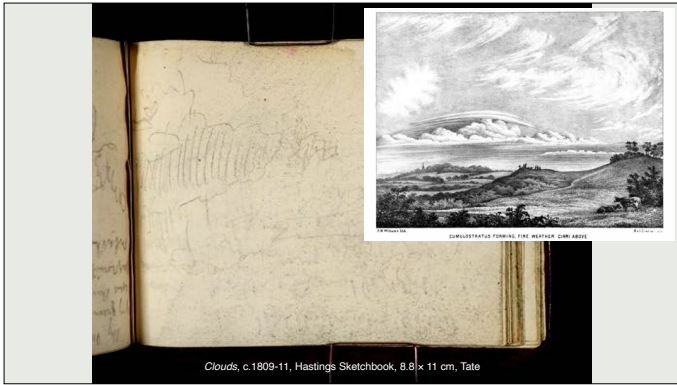
NOTES

- James Hutton (1726–1797) was a Scottish geologist, agriculturalist, chemical manufacturer, naturalist and physician. Often referred to as the 'father' of modern geology, he played a key role in establishing geology as a modern science. Hutton advanced the idea that the physical world's remote history can be inferred from evidence in present-day rocks. Through his study of features in the landscape and coastlines he developed the theory that geological features could not be static but underwent continuing transformation over indefinitely long periods of time. From this he argued, contrary to conventional religious beliefs of his day, that the Earth could not be young. He was one of the earliest proponents of what in the 1830s became known as uniformitarianism, the science which explains features of the Earth's crust as the outcome of continuing natural processes over the long geologic time scale.
- The other great geologist was Charles Lyle (1797-1875) who published *Principles of Geology* in 1830-33. It became his most famous, most influential, and most important work. It established his credentials as an important geological theorist. The reason it was so important was that up till then most people's ideas of the history of the Earth came from the Bible. They thought it was a few thousand years old and there had been a create flood. Like Hutton, Lyle's key concept was that what happened in the past was similar to what we see happening today. Tiny changes that accumulate over unimaginably long periods of time. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) took Lyle's book with him on the voyage of HMS Beagle and carried out observations that confirmed lyle's ideas. He also applied the idea of infinitesimal changes taking place over vast periods of time to theory of natural selection.

REFERENCES

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-eruption-of-the-soufriere-mountains-in-the-island-of-st-vincent-30-april-1812-67007>

https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/The_Encyclopedia_of_Volcanoes/pcucBAAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=The+Eruption+of+the+Soufriere+Mountains+in+the+Island+of+St.+Vincent&pg=PA1332&printsec=frontcover



Clouds, c.1809-11, Hastings Sketchbook, 8.8 x 11 cm, Tate

Clouds, c.1809-11, Hastings Sketchbook, 8.8 x 11 cm, Tate

SCIENCE: METEOROLOGY

- Like Constable and Turner were interested in clouds. In fact, it is possible both were inspired by the 2nd Edition of Thomas Forsters 'Researches about Atmospheric Phenomena' published in 1821 and based on Luke Howard's 1803 *Essay on the Modification of Clouds*.
- In 1802 Howard gave a lecture that was a landmark. The subject was clouds and the talk made him famous.
- (CLICK) He made the obvious observation that there are three types he called **cirrus, cumulus, stratus as well as interim forms**. Before then people thought every cloud was unique. By the 1810s and 20s his ideas were being included in artist's manuals.
- Also at this time, in 1806, Francis Beaufort had the simple idea of classifying the power of the wind on a fixed scale from 0 to 10. It was a boon to sailors as it removed the subjective view of a gale or a storm and replaced it with a precise number that anyone could measure.

NOTES

- "On one occasion [1840's] I had the audacity to ask him [Turner] if he painted his clouds from nature. The words had hardly passed my lips when I saw my gaucherie. I was afraid I had roused a thunderstorm; however, my lucky star predominated...after having eyed me for a few moments with a slight frown, he growled out 'How would you have me paint them?' Then seizing upon his fishing-rod, and turning upon his heel, he marched indignantly out of the house to the water's-edge." Turner's friend, Mr. Rose, in *The life of J.M.W. Turner*, Volume II, George Walter Thornbury; Hurst and Blackett Publishers, London, 1862, p. 95
- In 1802 Luke Howard gave a lecture that was a landmark. The subject was clouds and the talk made him famous. He made the obvious observation that there are three types he called cirrus, cumulus, stratus. Before then people thought every cloud was unique because they did not look. By 1810s and 20s it was used in artist's manuals.
- Luke Howard (1772-1864, aged 91) was a British manufacturing chemist and an amateur meteorologist with broad interests in science. His lasting contribution to science is a nomenclature system for clouds, which he proposed in an 1802 presentation to the Askesian Society. Because of this, Howard is referred to as "The Godfather of Clouds", the "namer of the clouds", and the "father of meteorology". His 1802 presentation *On The Modification of Clouds* (published 1803) established the still used terms "stratus," "cumulus," and "cirrus." Although he was a pharmacist, his contribution to the developing science of meteorology led to Howard being made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1821.
- His work also influenced the works of JMW Turner and John Constable. Both used Howard's work to depict clouds with greater accuracy. Turner learned of Howard's work when it was reprinted in the 2nd Edition of Thomas Forsters 'Researches about Atmospheric Pheomenae' published in 1821 and this led him to produce a series of cloud studies. The same source may also have been that by which Constable learned of Howard's work. Both artists became markedly more interested in making cloud and sky studies in the years around 1820.
- In 1806 Francis Beaufort (1774-1857) an Irish hydrographer and rear admiral in the Royal Navy. He

had a simple idea, measure the effect of the wind on the sails of a ship, a brilliant breakthrough, it is still with us. He used this to categorise the power of the wind on a scale of 0 to 10.

NOTES

- The Askesian Society often held theatres for "laughing gas evenings", where members would watch as fellows would sup nitrous oxide and stumble around the stage. The Society disbanded in 1807, with many of its members going on to join the Mineralogical Society, the Geological Society, the Linnean Society and the Royal Society of London.

REFERENCES

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-clouds-d07648>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luke_Howard

<https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co8032757/cumulostratus-as-produced-by-the-inosculation-of-cumulus-with-cirrostratus-drawing>

20



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), 'Calais Pier with French Poissards preparing for Sea, an English Packet arriving, 1803, 172 x 240 cm, National Gallery

- *Calais Pier* introduces a modern invention, the pier, which curbs the danger of the lee shore. A lee shore is one towards which the wind is blowing a vessel and it a dangerous situation for any ship, particularly a sailing ship. This painting is to do with man's relationship with nature. As the critic Guiseppe Gatt wrote, Turner '**strove to express a living, modern conception of history in which man is responsible for his own destiny**'.
• "A cross-channel ferry (a packet), fully laden with passengers and flying a British flag, is approaching the port of Calais. Around it, small French fishing boats ('poissards') head out to sea. The water is rough and dark storm clouds gather, although a shaft of sunlight breaks through to illuminate the white sail in the centre of the picture. In the lower right foreground, a small fishing boat is trying to get away to avoid being battered against the pier. The scene looks chaotic and there is a risk of collision.
- Turner's painting is based on an actual event he experienced, when he travelled from Dover to Calais in 1802 on his first trip abroad and was 'nearly swamped' in a storm at sea. Although it had a mixed response when first exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1803, the critic **John Ruskin declared it to be the first painting to show signs of 'Turner's colossal power'**." (NG website)
- This is an early Turner and it was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1803. It had a mixed reception and was the start of a criticism that continued throughout his life. Some critics disliked the thick, visible brushstrokes as they were used to the thin glazes used to paint the sea by earlier artists. Critics compared his use of paint to blots, batter, pea soup, smoke, a mix of soap and chalk, and the veins on a marble slab. The painting was unsold and remained in Turner's possession.

NOTES

- Turner refers to these fishing boats as 'French poissards,' which appears to be his own idiosyncratic adaptation of the French word poissarde ('fishwife').
- Towards the end of his trip abroad he saw (and sketched) Jacob van Ruisdael's *A Storm at Sea off the Dykes of Holland* (1670) in the Louvre. It may have

inspired this painting.

REFERENCES

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/joseph-mallord-william-turner-calais-pier>

21



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Calais Pier with French Poissards preparing for Sea, an English Packet arriving*, 1803, 172 x 240 cm, National Gallery

Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/1629–1682), *A Storm at Sea off the Dykes of Holland*, 1670-72, 110 x 160 cm, Louvre Museum

- Towards the end of his trip abroad he saw (and sketched) Jacob van Ruisdael's *A Storm at Sea off the Dykes of Holland* (1670) in the Louvre. It may have inspired *Calais Pier*. The difference is that Turner shows a more complex situation and involves us in the detail of a real event that many must have experienced. Crossing the channel in an overloaded ferry during a storm with the risk of capsizing and disaster. Turner is showing the British ferry on the point of arriving safely in harbour while the fishermen must go out in their boats to earn a living in the storm.

REFERENCES

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/joseph-mallord-william-turner-calais-pier>

22



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Bell Rock Lighthouse*, 1815, 30.6 x 45.5 cm, watercolour and gouache with scratching out on paper, National Gallery Scotland

SCIENCE AT SEA

- Nature is powerful but human ingenuity can save thousands of lives.
- In 1799 70 ships were wrecked in the vicinity of this area. Inchcape or the Bell Rock is 11 miles off the east coast of Angus, Scotland. The lighthouse was built in 1807-11 by the Scottish engineer Robert Stevenson who commissioned Turner to paint it.
- It was almost an impossible situation to build a lighthouse. It had a unique curved base and it was only accessible at low tide. The waves grip the lighthouse like a hand to emphasise the danger. The ships in the picture are surviving not capsizing.
- The masonry work on which the lighthouse rests was constructed to such a high standard that it has not been replaced or adapted in 200 years. Turner is showing

how human ingenuity can overcome the untamed power of nature.

NOTES

- In 1757 defined by Edwin Burke. Why do we love pictures of things we would be terrified of in real life. The sublime, the terrible is also beautiful. Turner took the idea and recast it for the industrial age, see **Bell Rock Lighthouse** (1819). It is sublime but for the lighthouse which challenges nature. Technology stands up against raw nature. It was built in 1807-11 by the Scottish engineer Robert Stevenson who commissioned Turner to paint it. It is 11 miles from Abrothe and St. Andrews and in 1799 70 ships were wrecked in the vicinity. It was almost an impossible situation to built a lighthouse. It had a unique curved base and it was on a rock only accessible at low tide. The waves grip the lighthouse like a hand to emphasize the danger. The ships in the picture are surviving not crashing. Human ingenuity can saves thousands of lives. From this point in he paints the ways in which people can survive untamed nature.
- The name Inchcape comes from the Scottish Gaelic *Innis Sgeap*, meaning "Beehive isle", probably comparing the shape of the reef to old-style skep beehives. According to legend, the alternative name Bell Rock derives from a 14th-century attempt by the Abbot of Arbroath to install a warning bell on the reef; the bell was removed by a Dutch pirate who perished a year later on the rocks.

REFERENCES

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/19251/bell-rock-lighthouse>



23

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Life-boat and Manby Apparatus Going off a stranded Vessel making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress*, 1831, V&A

- **Life-boat and Manby Apparatus Going off a stranded Vessel making Signal (Blue Lights) of Distress** (V&A, 1831). This painting shows an invention by George Manby. It looks like a shipwreck but Turner shows a puff of air that has fired a rope out to a shipwreck. 1831 Manby was elected to the Royal Society and was in the news. Turner liked to reflect the latest technology particularly anything that had been in the news.
- Manby saw a shipwreck at Great Yarmouth. He could hear their cries and the next day 144 corpses were washed up and Manby decided to solve the problem. His invention had everyone talking about Manby and the view was, 'The entire coast will be guarded' and that it was 'The seaman's best friend'. Although there were problems, particularly when it was used by those who were untrained many sailors were saved by his device.

- (CLICK) The Manby Mortar fires a thin, flexible line using a standard mortar, later replaced by a rocket. The line is spread on the shore to stop tangles and it hooks onto the vessel. This thin line is then used to pull a thick hawser out to the ship and this rope enables a rescue boat to reach the vessel or later to carry a Breeches buoy (like a zip wire).

NOTES

- "The inventor George William Manby (1765-1854) was a Norfolk man, and a school-fellow and friend of Nelson. His younger brother Thomas also joined the Navy and rose to rear-admiral but George was trained for the artillery at the Royal Academy, Woolwich, though he instead became a captain in the Cambridgeshire Militia. From 1803 he was barrack master at Great Yarmouth where in 1807 he saw a small naval vessel, the 'Snipe', wrecked within sixty yards of the shore with huge loss of life. It occurred to him that rescue in such a case required a rapid physical link with the shore, so he borrowed a small military mortar from the Board of Ordnance and devised a means of using it to fire a rescue-line from the shore. It was first attempted in earnest, and successfully, when the brig 'Elizabeth' was wrecked at Yarmouth on 12 February 1808, just as Manby was first promoting his invention's official approval: this was rapid, bringing him widespread fame and various awards." [1]

REFERENCES

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O79605/life-boat-and-manby-apparatus-oil-painting-turner-joseph-mallord/> see PDF file

[1] <https://www.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-112989>



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *The Chain Pier, Brighton*, c.1828, 71.1 x 136.5 cm

24

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *The Chain Pier, Brighton*, c.1828, 71.1 x 136.5 cm

- The chain pier was an enormous engineering feat that became a wonder of the world. It had a practical use as it enabled the cross-channel ferry to berth easily and Brighton became the most popular location for crossing the channel particularly after the railway opened in 1841.
- It was also a tourist attraction and people would pay 2d to walk along the pier to get the benefits of sea air without the need to hire a boat and in 1828 up to 4,000 people a day would walk along the pier. It is reported that during one storm thirty or forty people stood at the end and were covered by waves breaking over the tower.
- Turner shows us the pier on a calm day. He has painted the pier from the sea although he has shown the water as shallow when at this point it is deep. This was done to vary the form of the waves for the sake of the composition. In the distance we can see the shoreline of

Hove and the sun is setting in the west in a beautiful golden sky.

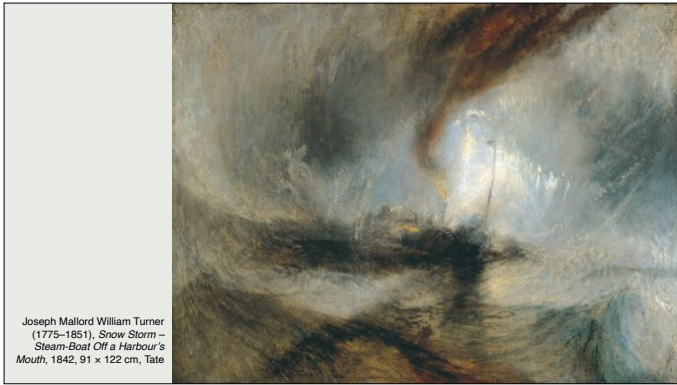
- It was also painted by John Constable about two years before Turner and Turner would have seen the painting when it was exhibited at the Royal Academy. Constable has painted the pier from the shore with an interesting collection of boats and people. However, like most of his paintings Constable's it was criticised for its bold colours and it never sold.

NOTES

- This is *The Chain Pier, Brighton*. Originally Brighton was a tiny fishing hamlet until the Prince Regent made it his summer residence. From then on it grew in prestige and popularity every year. The chain pier opened in 1823 and was one of the wonders of the age. It was built to enable the cross-channel ferry to berth easily and Brighton became the most popular location for crossing the channel particularly after the railway opened in 1841. People would pay 2d to walk along the pier to get the benefits of sea air without the need to hire a boat and in 1828 up to 4,000 people a day would walk along the pier. It is reported that during one storm thirty or forty people stood at the end and were covered by waves breaking over the tower.
- Tate display caption, 'The Chain Pier shown here had only recently been completed. Both Turner and John Constable painted pictures of this pier, which was the most visible sign of Brighton's status as a centre for modern trade and tourism. This is a version of one of the four compositions Turner painted for the Carved Room at Petworth in Sussex, the great house belonging to the Earl of Egremont. The unusually long format was used so that the pictures would fit under full-length portraits. The subjects of these pictures reflected Egremont's interests in local agriculture and commerce'
- This is one of what are known as the Petworth landscapes, c. 1828-30. This Tate version is more finished version painted in 1829. The owner of Petworth, Lord Egremont commissioned the landscapes and was also one of the sponsors of the pier.
- The Royal Suspension Chain Pier was the first major pier built in Brighton and was built in 1823, it was destroyed during a storm in 1896. It was 350 yards long and was used as a landing stage for packet boats from Dieppe but also had other attractions, such as a camera obscura. It was painted by John Constable in about 1826-27. Brighton became the busiest cross-channel port although in bad weather Newhaven's sheltered port was more attractive. The pier consisted of four enormous towers and two chains with ten-foot links were hung between them. One end of the chain was fixed in the cliff and the other embedded in the sea bed. In 1828 the pier was at the height of its popularity and up to 4,000 people a day paid 2d to walk along the pier. It was reported that during one storm thirty or forty people were covered by the sea breaking over the outer towers. It declined in popularity in the 1860s after the West Pier was opened in 1866 and the Palace Pier in 1891.

REFERENCES

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-the-chain-pier-brighton-n02064>



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *Snow Storm, or Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, (full title: *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth Making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the 'Ariel' left Harwich*), c. 1842, 91 x 122 cm, Tate Britain

- This is the painting we saw at the start of the talk. It was painted in 1842 and by then Turner's style has become looser and more atmospheric, you cannot tell where the sea ends and the sky begins. There is no solid object except the little boat.
- If we pour iron filings onto a sheet of paper near a magnet we see the invisible force lines. Michael Faraday discovered that a metal object passing through a magnetic field creates an electric current. Mary Sommerville speculated that a steel ship passing through the Earth's magnetic field will do the same thing. Everyone at the time was talking about the power of electricity and of magnetism and here Turner has combined all these ideas into a symbolic expression of nature's power.
- John Ruskin commented in *Modern Painters* (1843) that this painting was '**one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist and light, that has ever been put on canvas**'. Some other critics didn't like it and one described it as '**soapsuds and whitewash**'. This upset Turner who wondered if they knew what the sea was like in a storm. Ruskin commented, '**It is thus, too often, that ignorance sits in judgment on the works of genius**'. More recently, art historian Alexandra Wettlaufer wrote that the painting is one of Turner's '**most famous, and most obscure, sublime depictions**'.

NOTES

- ***Snow Storm – Steam-Boat Off a Harbour's Mouth*** (1842) is the modern world for Turner. His painting has become loose, more atmospheric, you cannot tell where the sea ends and the sky begins. There is no solid object except the little boat. There is an order in the chaos. It begins with Michael Faraday, he demonstrated the first electric motor in 1821 with a wire circling a magnet. The mathematician Mary Sommerville was introducing the same idea in a popular book and was a friend of both. Turner knew her very well indeed. She went to his studio often and was always welcomed. Is Turner showing the invisible magnetic forces in nature. The parallel with iron filings around a magnetic. The vast power of the Earth's magnetic field. Magnetism was in the air there was a direct connection. The idea of a ship as focus of energy. He is not trying to explain but to express power, a visual metaphor. A visual language to express nature's hidden forces. An understanding of flux and dynamism.
- Although criticised by contemporary critics, one described it as 'soapsuds and whitewash', John Ruskin commented in *Modern Painters* (1843) that it was 'one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist and light, that has ever been put on canvas'. Reportedly Turner was hurt by the criticism, repeating 'soapsuds and whitewash' over and over again, and saying, '**What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it**'. Ruskin commented, 'It is thus, too often, that ignorance sits in judgment on the works of genius'. More recently, art historian Alexandra Wettlaufer wrote that the painting is one of Turner's '**most famous, and most obscure, sublime depictions**'.

- There is a story that Turner asked to be tied to the mast of a steam-ship during a nocturnal storm at sea, to experience the feeling of it, and was there for four hours. He was 67 years then. Some later commentators doubt the literal truth of this account. Other critics accept Turner's account, and one wrote, 'He empathized completely with the dynamic form of sovereign nature.' This inscription allows us to better understand the scene represented and the confusion of elements.
- The paddle steamer 'Ariel' was formerly called the 'Arrow', being built in 1821-1822. In 1837 she was acquired by the Admiralty and renamed 'Ariel', and was used as the Dover packet up to 1846. This is a late Turner when he was at the peak of his ability to capture the terror and awe caused by the power of the sea during a violent storm. Turner uses different layers of paint which are brought to life by the intensity of his brushstrokes. The palette is limited to similar tones of greens, browns and greys and Turner draws us into the central action by using pale, silvery grey wrapped in the dark brown smoke from the steamship and its hull.

References

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-snow-storm-steam-boat-off-a-harbours-mouth-n00530>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_Storm:_Steam-Boat_off_a_Harbour%27s_Mouth

26



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1776-1851), *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough ('Windsor')*, exhibited at Turner's Gallery in 1809

THE AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION: FOUR-CROP ROTATION

- This is *Ploughing up Turnips near Slough*. For 170 years historians regarded it as a pastoral landscape with an early morning view of Windsor Castle. So, at first glance, an uncontroversial piece of work and it was praised at the time for its 'poetically heightened atmospheric effects' of the early sun reflecting off the morning mist.
- In 1980 an art historian pointed out that this was painted during the Napoleonic Wars at a time when **European ports had been blockaded by the French navy** and the **country was short of food**. In this light, we see the Royal Palace at Windsor, representing monarchy, part of Eton school representing education and the aristocracy and in the foreground the labourers working to produce the food needed by everyone during the war. It was the **beginning of the agricultural revolution**

which went hand-in-hand with the Industrial Revolution and English agriculture was amongst the most advanced in the world.

- However, more recently, **in 2004**, another art historian looked at the painting more closely and found a **number of puzzles**. The central part of the picture shows three men standing by a broken plough. If this represents agricultural productivity **why does Turner show a broken plough?** Secondly, **why turnips?** Turnips had become a **key crop supporting four-crop rotation** which dramatically increases the productivity of the land by using it all the time rather than letting it lie fallow for a year. Although **turnips were the latest scientific wonder crop** that had other associations. The king, George III was known as 'Farmer George' and as we see in this cartoon was associated with turnips. He was known for his miserliness and no one would eat turnips unless they were starving, they were **regarded as cattle fodder**. Turnips could not be grown well in the boggy soil shown here. We know the **soil is boggy as the plough needs four horses** to pull it and it has broken down. In the centre of the lit area is a **patch of weeds and a bottle**. At this time drunkenness was a major problem and it reduced productivity.
- The other part of the title of interest is '**Slough**'. Today, Slough is a **well-known commuter town but in 1809 it was not even a town**, it was a tiny hamlet of a few cottages. **No one referred to Slough** and this view of Windsor Castle was a very well-known and was **from Salt Hill on the road from London to Bristol**. It was so well-known that so well known that a few years later the **Prince Regent hosted a breakfast in the inn on Salt Hill** for the King of Prussia and his three sons. **So why Slough?** Perhaps, because in the **most popular book at the time John Bunyan's, *The Pilgrim's Progress*** [of 1678] the **Slough of Despond** is a boggy place made from the filth of sin.
- If we then consider the broken plough, the weeds, the bottle, and the Slough of Despond we get a different reading. Rather than patriotic it suggests the terrible conditions and the plight of the rural worker. It is about rural discontent. My view is that Turner has cleverly incorporate all three readings—it is an idyllic scene of early morning sun, it is a celebration of agricultural productivity and it is showing the problems of the rural poor.

NOTES

- The view is from Salt Hill near Slough. In modern terms, it is looking towards the M4 motorway towards the Thames, Eton College and Windsor Castle. Turner would have known the view and there was a famous inn, called Castle Inn, at Salt Hill a mile from Slough. It was named for its view of Windsor Castle and the Inn and its view were so well known that in 1814 the Prince Regent hosted a breakfast there for the King of Prussia and his three sons.
- **Interpretations.** Turner's painting supports many levels of analysis. It will limit this to three levels as I slowly unravel this intriguing painting.
- **Pastoral.** The painting was first exhibited April 1809 in Turner's gallery. For many years it was simply seen as an example of the pastoral or more specifically the Georgic. However, most descriptions of the painting were formal and stylistic, for example, focusing on Turner's success in representing sunlight seen through haze and the 'poetically heightened atmospheric effects'. It is known as Georgic based on Virgil's (70 BCE-19 BCE, an ancient Roman poet of the Augustan period) Georgics, a poem about agriculture and animal

husbandry which was very popular in the eighteenth century. The poem describes man's struggle against a hostile natural world and how hard work and animal husbandry can overcome setbacks (published 29BCE). It was related to the Greek Hesiod's Works and Days regarding man's relationship to the land and the importance of hard work.

- **Patriotic.** The art historian John Barrell in *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840* (1980) was the first to point out its celebration of progressive English agriculture. It was during the Napoleonic Wars and the French had blockaded our ports so we depended on farmers to produce our food. In this light, we see the Royal Palace at Windsor, representing monarchy, part of Eton school representing education and the aristocracy and in the foreground the labourers working to produce the food needed by everyone during the war. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a period of increased agricultural productivity resulting from new scientific agricultural practices. The academic John Barrell was the first to draw attention to the labourers and subsequently it was seen as supporting progressive English agriculture that was helping us win the war against France. This needs some explanation. The painting was first exhibited in 1809 at the height of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815, started when Napoleon seized power in 1799 apart from the one-year Peace of Amiens in 1802). In 1805 Nelson beat the French fleet at Trafalgar and in response the French blockaded European ports to stop food being imported into England. It therefore became critical for England to grow all its own food and agricultural productivity became critical for the war effort. The painting would therefore have been seen as patriotically supporting the war. The Tate says, 'As well as its distant view of Windsor Castle, this picture of a turnip harvest depicts current efforts to maximise yields and increase the food supply to serve the needs of a wartime economy'. There is a lot of history that was very significant at the time tied up in this sentence.
- **Political.** The third level of meaning was suggested by the art historian Michele Miller in 2004. She found anomalies in the work that suggested a different interpretation. Let us examine these anomalies one by one.
- **Enclosure.** First it is necessary to understand the importance of the turnip. The most significant agricultural advance made in the eighteenth century was crop rotation. This was first practiced 8,000 years ago in the Middle East but ancient practice involved letting a field lie fallow for part of the year. The big advance was four-field rotation which was first used in England in the 18th century and was promoted by Turnip Townsend, Viscount Charles Townshend. It consists of growing wheat, then turnips or swedes (winter fodder), then barley and then clover or ryegrass (gazed) each year. Using four fields each one could be at a different stage of the rotation. This enabled the land to be used all the time to grow a useful crop. Turnips leaves would feed the crops in the autumn and the turnip could be stored over winter to feed the livestock. This in turn meant that livestock did not need to be slaughtered in the autumn but could over winter. Turnips enabled four crop rotation but only if the land was enclosed so that livestock could be prevented from eating other farmer's turnips. In the Middle Ages, all land was owned by the lord but the tenants had certain rights over part of the land. One such right was the right to pasture cattle, horses and sheep (another was turbarry –

the right to take turfs for fuel and estovers – the right to take sufficient wood for the commoner's house). Over a period of hundreds of years common land had slowly been taken away by enclosing it. It was a major issue in the Tudor period and enclosures were constructed by the lord of the manor to create large fields to graze more sheep as our main export was wool. The final and most contentious wave of enclosures was later, between 1750 and 1850 and was justified by improving productivity. In this period one sixth of England was enclosed and this took the ability to grow food away from a large part of the population. The smallholders and commoners became dependent on poor relief and had to buy food. The main food of the poor was bread and in 1815 the Government passed Corn Laws that fixed a high price for wheat which increased the price of a bread. At the same time land was being enclosed in the name of improved agricultural productivity. Four crop rotation enabled fields to be productive all the time, they no longer needed to lie fallow. However, the poor needed the common land to eke out their existence. It enabled them to grow crops and even keep a cow for milk and cheese. The last wave of enclosures was mostly in the South East - Kent and Sussex and later Essex - and it led to what became known as the Swing Riots. That was still in the future when this was painted but unrest was growing because of bad harvests and the enclosure of common land. Despite the new agriculture wheat production fell during the war, mostly because of bad weather and in Buckinghamshire it fell after enclosure because enclosed fields were used to pasture livestock an inefficient way to use the land. Bread shortages for the poor were caused by using enclosed fields to produce grain-fed cattle for the monied classes.

- **Broken Plough.** In the distance we see Windsor Castle, a palace of George III, known as 'Farmer George'. During the late 1780s he had converted large parts of Windsor and Richmond into farms that used the latest agricultural techniques. The women are sitting on part of a harrow and a man is carrying a seedlip, both indicators of progressive agriculture and that the field will be replanted with another crop as soon as the turnips have been gathered. But the group of men directly below Windsor Castle are looking at a broken plough. The King promoted the new intensive agriculture which was particularly important as food supplies had been cut off by the French blockage. This was painted at the height of the Napoleonic Wars. By 1808 all foreign food had been cut off and for the previous nine years the harvest had been poor to terrible. For this reason, it has been interpreted as a patriotic painting showing a symbol of the King and the agriculture workers working hard to save the nation. But if this were true, why is the work so disorderly, why is the plough broken and the workers dispirited. The open fields of common land did not allow turnip growing as your neighbour's livestock would eat all your turnips. Turnips therefore called to mind enclosure. Lord Winchilsea had noted a few years previously that farmers pressed for enclosure to keep labourers dependent. Class differences are indicated by the lone figure in the white coat on the raised ground who has just dismounted from the white horse at the left. This juxtaposition of workers with a higher social class is unusual.
- **Slough.** Turner has made the castle more prominent than it would be from the site and for a while it was known as 'Windsor' but Turner explicitly named it as 'near Slough' even though the site is nearer Eton than Slough. Slough was a very small hamlet until the railway

came in 1836 when it was known as the station nearest to Windsor. The site was known at the time as offering a fine vantage point to view Windsor. The word 'slough' means a muddy or boggy place. The most famous slough is the Slough of Despond in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which was the most popular book after the Bible. In the book, the slough is a place that cannot be mended. Help explains to Christian that the King's labourers have been working on it for 16 hundred years but it remains the Slough of Despond. The area around Windsor was boggy and not fully drained. We can see a four horse Berkshire plough which in 1808 was considered old-fashioned and inefficient. Yet even this heavy plough has broken down. Like the Slough of Despond this turnip field resists the efforts of the King's labourers.

- **Boggy Soil.** Turnips were not a miracle crop and prefer light sandy soils and do not grow well in boggy soils. They also have low nutritional value. In the right soil they are an excellent preparation but in the wrong soil they 'will do more injury to the land than the turnips are worth' (1794, Board of Agriculture, Arthur Young).
- **Weeds.** The harvest we can see consists of a small wheelbarrow of turnips alongside a large area of weeds. Notice the weeds vertically align with the broken plough and the palace. Turner tends to link important connected details using vertical alignment.
- **Bottle.** At this time, the poor were often blamed for their circumstances and one thing that distinguished the deserving from the undeserving poor was idleness and drunkenness. It is significant that a bottle is located in the middle of the brightest patch of land.
- **Women Workers.** During the war, the shortage of men meant that women worked the fields, known as the 'petticoat harvests'. It has even been suggested that the development of farm machinery was a result of farmers' dissatisfaction with the productivity of the women compared with the men (*Women, Work, and Wages in England, 1600-1850*, Michael Roberts, ed. Penelope Lane). We see one of the women is nursing showing the farmer is desperate for labour and the women for work.
- **Turnips = Extreme Poverty.** Viewers at the time would have understood everything I have been telling you. They would also have known that turnips were associated with hunger. They were used to feed livestock and as human food they implied extreme desperation. Many writers at the time use turnips as the example of extreme poverty in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (Henry Fielding, 1749) Squire Western says, 'the Hanover rats have eat up all our corn, and left us nothing but turneps to feed upon'. There was not widespread starvation but the following year, 1809, the harvest was even worse driving up bread prices further and there were demonstrations in Cookham.
- The third level of meaning is therefore that Turner was surreptitiously suggesting all is not right with the farming world. I do not mean this was a revolutionary painting and that Turner was calling for riots. I mean that for those who look carefully there is a whole world of levels of meaning, of ambiguity and uncertainty. Like the real world there is no simple answer, no single interpretation, it is neither patriotic nor unpatriotic, it shows beauty and ugliness, power confronting poverty, agricultural advances and their negative impact, hard work and idleness, patriotism and the causes of revolution. I believe it is these levels of meaning and this ambiguity that makes it a masterpiece.



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16th October, 1834, 1834 or 1835*, 92.1 x 123.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament, c.1834–5*, watercolour and gouache on paper, 30.2 x 44.4 cm, Tate

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, 16th October, 1834, 1834 or 1835*, 92.1 x 123.2 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament, c.1834–5*, watercolour and gouache on paper, 30.2 x 44.4 cm, Tate

RECORDING THE MODERN WORLD

- **The Impressionists** are regarded as the first artists who went out and **recorded the modern world** in front of them. Turner did the same...
- Turner painted **two oil paintings of the fire that broke out in the Palace of Westminster on the evening of 16 October 1834**. Turner witnessed the fire from the south bank at Westminster and made sketches from different points, including possibly from a rented boat. The first painting was exhibited at the British Institution in February 1835 and shows the fire consuming the chamber of the House of Commons in St Stephens Hall. In the distance the **towers of Westminster Abbey** can be seen illuminated by the fire.
- Look at the size of the crowds that have come to watch. You may wonder what they are thinking. Benjamin Robert Haydon wrote, '**The feeling among the people was extraordinary—jokes and radicalism universal.**' (Radicalism—a belief in complete political or social reform)
- Among the spectators were Charles Barry (1795-1860) who realised a new building would be required and Augustus Pugin (1812-1852) who rejoiced at the opportunity to correct what he considered the terrible design mistakes that had been made in the recent renovation of the House of Lords combining Sir John Soane Neo-classical with James Wyatt's Neo-Gothic (in 1799).

NOTES

- The distorted perspective of Westminster Bridge intensify the drama. The next day *The Times* wrote 'Shortly before 7 o'clock last night the inhabitants of Westminster, and of the districts on the opposite bank of the river, were thrown into the utmost confusion and alarm by the sudden breaking out of one of the most terrific conflagrations that has been witnessed for many years past....The Houses of the Lords and Commons and the adjacent buildings were on fire.'
- Many saw this as divine retribution for the passing of the Reform Act of 1832 and the fortuitous destruction of the poor architecture of some extension buildings by others. The House of Lords had recently been rebuilt in a mixture of neo-Classical by Sir John Soane and neo-Gothic by James Wyatt (1746-1813) and some saw the burning as God's displeasure with the resulting aesthetic mess.
- Some thought the fire was an arson attempt but it was caused by the excessive burning of 'tallies'. These are square hazelwood sticks notched to show amounts of tax paid or deposited and then split in half to record the transaction. The system went back to William the Conqueror. Two cartloads of tallies had accumulated and the Board of Works decided to burn them in stoves. The two workers assigned were overly enthusiastic and despite warnings from the housekeeper who told them that two tourists could not see the tapestries for the thick smoke, they continued to pile on the wood. They left at five o'clock and by six some oak panels had ignited. Within nine hours all the buildings except the Westminster Hall had been destroyed. Some of the destroyed buildings dated back to Edward the



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Chichester Canal*, 1828, 65 × 134 cm, Tate

THE YEAR WITHOUT A SUMMER

- This is Chichester canal. The **canal system** was built during the eighteenth century before the railways as a means of transport. Britain was the first country to develop a nationwide canal system which at its peak was nearly 4,000 miles long. It dramatically **reduced the cost of moving goods** particularly heavy goods such as coal and iron. This enabled goods or raw materials from one area of the country to be transported relatively cheaply to be exported, consumed or used in another part. This tied the country together to create one large manufacturing unit.
- But I am showing this work for another reason—the brilliant sunsets Turner painted. **In 1815 the massive eruption of Mount Tambora** in what is now Indonesia sent 24 cubic miles of ash into the upper atmosphere. This reduced average global temperatures by between **0.4 and 0.7°C** and this **resulted in famine** across the world from China to the Americas. In Europe low temperatures combined with heavy rains and there was snow in June and frost in July and August. It became known as **'The Year Without a Summer'**. The crops were destroyed, there were riots in the streets and in Britain and Ireland typhus spread through the malnourished nation and 65,000 died.
- A study of landscapes painted before and after the eruption show that **artists recorded brighter red and yellow sunsets** because of the ash that remained in the atmosphere for years. So Turner's bright red sunsets and **yellow shrubbery** are an accurate scientific record of that period.

NOTES

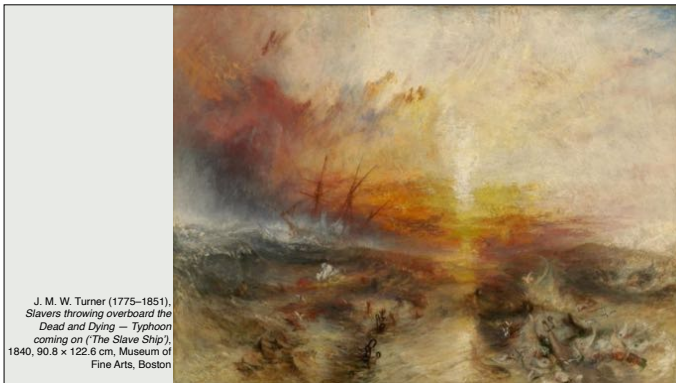
- "Chichester Canal is a painting by the English Romantic landscape painter, water-colourist and printmaker J. M. W. Turner. It was painted in 1828 and was commissioned by George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont. It is now in the Tate Collection.
- The work depicts the Chichester Canal in Sussex, southern England. The ship is probably a collier brig, as this serene scene had commercial purpose. Its brilliant

colours may have been influenced by atmospheric ash from the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia (see also **Year Without a Summer**)."

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Year_Without_a_Summer

29



J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851), *Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and Dying — Typhoon coming on* ('*The Slave Ship*'), 1840, 90.8 × 122.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

SLAVERY

- John Ruskin, the leading Victorian art critic, who was the first owner of *The Slave Ship*, wrote, '**If I were reduced to rest Turner's immortality upon any single work, I should choose this.**'
- In **1781** the captain, or some alternate, of a British ship called the **Zong** threw **130 slaves overboard** allegedly to preserve drinking water knowing the loss could be claimed on insurance. Some say Turner painted this to **remind us of the horror** of that event so nothing similar will ever be repeated.
- Turner painted it 59 years after the massacre and after Britain had made the slave trade illegal so a wider reading is required. Turner does not refer explicitly to the Zong but he attached a poem that included the lines,

*Hope, Hope,
fallacious Hope!
Where is thy
market now?"*

- I must add at this point that recent research has found that in 1804 Turner **invested £100** in a plantation that depended on **slave labour**.
- Turner may have been thinking of his own role or he may be referring to the **evils of capitalism** that drove the slave trade and the captains actions. If so the hope might be that the horrors of capitalism were now behind him. But his poem describes **that hope as false**. The evils of capitalism remain, **people continue to be exploited** and Turner's warns us that we must be **ever watchful** to take action whenever we see these abuses in the future. The **setting sun** perhaps represents the **potential of tomorrow**. Turner did not know what the future held and we do not know today but he may be **warning us to be ever watchful**. He also wrote,

*Yon angry setting
sun and fierce-
edged clouds
Declare the
Typhon's coming.*

- The setting sun may appear beautiful but it is 'angry' and 'fierce-edged' and there is a typhoon coming. In other words, **take care, be ever vigilant** there is still the equivalent of slaves being thrown overboard, for example, in 1840 the use of indentured labour in the former slave colonies and the fate of the former slaves. Even today people of colour are more likely to be shot in America, more likely to be poor and more likely to be abused.
- The painting was a warning to his contemporaries and is still a warning to us today about any form of exploitation.

NOTES

- "He based the painting on an 18th-century poem that described a slave ship caught in a typhoon and on the true story of the Zong, a British ship whose captain, in 1781, had thrown overboard sick and dying enslaved people so that he could collect insurance money only available for those "lost at sea." Turner captures the horror of the event and the terrifying grandeur of nature through hot, churning colour and light that merge sea and sky." (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)
- The British slave trade officially started in 1663 and over the next 150 years millions (estimated to be 3.4 million) of enslaved Africans were transported to the Americas. Towards the end of the 18th century an abolitionist movement took 20 years to bring about Wilberforce's **1807 Slave Trade Abolition Act**. A further abolitionist movement eventually led to the **1833 Slavery Abolition Act**. Many planters switched to indentured Indian and Chinese labourers, an exploitative system that was only abolished in 1920.
- This perhaps most famous seascape after *The Fighting Temeraire*, he was inspired to paint *The Slave Ship* in 1840 after reading *The History and Abolition of the Slave Trade* by Thomas Clarkson. In 1781, the captain of the slave ship Zong had ordered 133 slaves to be thrown overboard so that insurance payments could be collected. This event probably inspired Turner to create his landscape and to choose to coincide its exhibition with a meeting of the British Anti-Slavery Society. Although slavery had been outlawed in the British Empire since 1833, Turner and many other abolitionists believed that slavery should be outlawed around the world. Anti-slavery campaigner Granville Sharp, worked unsuccessfully to have the ship's crew prosecuted for murder. The painting was shown at an important time in the movement to abolish slavery worldwide, as the Royal Academy exhibition opened one month before the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. The painting was admired by its owner, John Ruskin. It has been described by the 20th-century critic Marcus Wood, as one of the few truly great depictions in Western art of the Atlantic slave trade.
- The sails are furled as it prepares for a typhoon. There are a number of chained bodies in the foreground indicating they are slaves thrown overboard. One can see fish and sea monsters swimming in the water. Objects are defined by their colour rather than by their outlines and the predominant colour is red of blood and death.
- The indistinct shapes, the emphasis on colour and emotion are typically Romantic and the focus is on nature as superior to man. The tiny figures and small shift further place the emphasis on the power of nature and the insignificance of man. This is enhanced by the quick, frenzied brushstrokes. The idea of the sublime is demonstrated by the utter powerlessness and terror of humanity in the face of nature.
- Some have seen the painting as an allegory of the

exploitation of human labour associated with capitalism and the storm is either the coming collapse of capitalism as it is overwhelmed by its own immorality or the storm demonstrates that all man's efforts are insignificant before the power of nature.

- When Turner exhibited this picture at the Royal Academy in 1840, he paired it with the following extract from his unfinished and unpublished poem "Fallacies of Hope" (1812):

*"Aloft all hands,
strike the top-
masts and belay;
Yon angry setting
sun and fierce-
edged clouds
Declare the
Typhon's coming.
Before it sweeps
your decks, throw
overboard
The dead and
dying - ne'er
heed their chains
Hope, Hope,
fallacious Hope!
Where is thy
market now?"*

REFERENCES

- <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/31102>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Slave_Ship
- <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-50-autumn-2020/winsome-pinnock-jmw-turner-slave-ship>



30

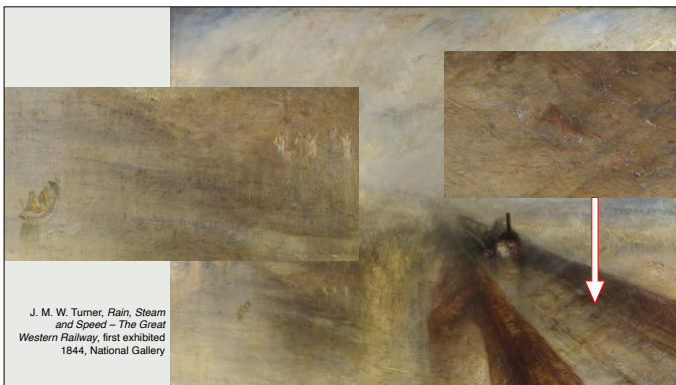
Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *The Field of Waterloo*, exhibited 1818, 147.3 × 238.8 cm, Tate

WAR

- For the first time we see a British artist painting an anti-war painting (Goya did the same a few years before).
- Turner emphasises war's tragic consequences for **the victims on both sides**. Before this painting artists would paint heroic scenes inspiring nationalistic fervour. Here Turner paints the consequences. In the catalogue he included this quote from the then controversial anti-war poem by Byron called 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage',
 - **'Rider and horse—friend, foe,— in one red burial blent!'**
- While Wordsworth, Robert Southey and Walter Scott all produced celebratory poems in the wake of Waterloo, Byron conceived his verses as way of reminding the public of the terrible toll of victory, 50,000 died.
- Byron was making a point in his poem, he thought Napoleon should have won but Turner is not so

simplistic. Turner raises the question and asks **us** to come up with the answer. Sometimes asking a question is more powerful than pushing an answer.

31



J. M. W. Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway*, first exhibited 1844, National Gallery

THE RAILWAY REVOLUTION

- This is a painting you have **seen a number of times** but I am showing it again to present it in a slightly different light. As a Romantic painting one would expect **nature to dominate and for progress and the industrial revolution to be criticised**. However, **the painting is ambiguous**. The painting could be seen to be celebrating progress and steam or it could be a rejection of the railways as a destroyer of nature, such as the hare, as old ways, such as the dancing figures on the shore.
- ***Rain, Steam, Speed – The Great Western Railway*** (1844) one of his last great oil paintings. A train hurtling out of the canvas into the future. **It is all there, the science, the upheavals, the new Britain**. A wet misty day in the Thames valley. It conveys the excitement of new technology and its transformative power. The world of old motion and the power of the new world. The firebox has almost eaten through the metal casing. The Great Western was chosen as it was seen as the crown of the railway system.
- (CLICK) The hare is always pointed out. It can be seen as a positive statement about the new world as the train is able to outrun the **fastest animal in Britain**. Others see the hare running in fear of the new machinery and Turner warning us of the danger of man's new technology destroying the beauty of nature. The other interesting element of the picture that is less often discussed is the boat on the river. It looks possible that this is an artist on the river with a parasol to keep off the sun and sketching a group of **wild, bacchanalian dancers** on the shore. Is this this Turner saying he prefers a bucolic scene of dancers to the new technology or are they **cheering and celebrating** the wonders of the new form transport that was changing the face of Britain? Again it is up to you to decide.

NOTES

- Turner redefined landscape painting by pushing the boundaries of how we appreciate colour and light. In this painting, a conventional interpretation is that it is a celebration of power and progress and the new scientific age. It shows Maidenhead Railway Bridge, across the

River Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead and the view is looking east towards London.

- The bridge was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel (1806-1859, died aged 53 of a stroke) and completed in 1838. The Great Western Railway was one of a number of private British railway companies created to develop the new means of transport.
- A tiny hare appears in the bottom right corner of the painting. Some have interpreted this as a positive statement about technology as the train is able to outrun what was the fastest animal before the steam train. Others see the hare running in fear of the new machinery and Turner warning us of the danger of man's new technology destroying the beauty of nature. My view is that this is a masterpiece precisely because it contains both contradictory interpretations.
- The other interesting element of the picture is the boat on the river. It looks possible that this is an artist on the river with a parasol to keep off the sun and sketching a group of wild, bacchanalian dancers on the shore. Is this this Turner saying he prefers a bucolic scene of dancers to the new technology or are they celebrating the wonders of the new form transport that was changing the face of Britain? Again it is up to you to decide.
- The bridge is Isambard Kingdom Brunel's. We are only a decade and a half into the history of the railways. Then 40mph soon 50 or 60 mph, unheard of speeds. The Great Western standardised time. Time was set by the sunrise so Exeter was 15-20 minutes different from London. Greenwich Mean Time was created thanks to Great Western.
- There is a hare running for its life. In Britain it is the fastest animal. It is not just a train but a reminder of how the world was changing. The railways destroyed many old homes. The old romantics like Ruskin and Wordsworth hated the railway as they were afraid great hordes of uncouth people would invade their beloved countryside. When Thackeray first saw it he knew he was looking at something completely new in painting.



David Wilkie, *Sheepwashing*, before 1817, 90 x 137 cm, National Gallery of Scotland



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Rain, Steam, Speed - The Great Western Railway*, 1844

David Wilkie, *Sheepwashing*, before 1817, 90 x 137 cm, National Gallery of Scotland

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), *Rain, Steam, Speed - The Great Western Railway*, 1844

- Compare *Rain, Steam, Speed* with David Wilkie. This is ***Sheepwashing*** (1817), laborious, literal; it could have been painted a hundred years before. Turner's conjures up a maelstrom of paint. There were no other artists painting in this way, they were painting like Wilkie. No one else had found a way to show the modern world—the industrial sublime.
- The conventions of the sublime saw technology as the enemy but not for Turner. For Turner industry becomes the sublime. Natural forces have been harnessed by mankind for the betterment of the human race. **No one thought like that until the 1910s. He had his finger on the pulse.** He is phenomenally important for Britain and the history of art. He revealed the wonders of science. He used paint to reveal a new world.
- It is all there in *Rain, Steam and Speed*, his vision of a

new Britain. Such freedom and excitement in paint was not repeated until the 1910s.

NOTES

- Not all critics at the time were complimentary, Thackeray wrote '**The rain, in the astounding picture called "Rain-Steam-Speed", is composed of dabs of dirty putty slapped on to the canvas with a trowel**'.

REFERENCES

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/5573/sheepwashing>

33



Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up*, 1839, National Gallery

THE END OF AN ERA

- Finally, his most famous painting. Often discussed but I will point out just one aspect—**change**.
- If you were born in the 1930s or 40s think how much the world has changed. This was Turner's view as he **was 64 in 1838** when he started to paint this. He was born in 1775, at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1830) and this **brought factories, steam power, gas lamps, affordable consumer goods, and a rapidly growing middle class**. In 1839 there was a real feeling that the world was changing fundamentally and changing forever. But there were many **terrible consequences, standards of living fell for most people, there was child labour and women had few rights**.
- Here Turner presents the two views clearly. Do you view this **nostalgically as the sad end** of a passing age of sail or are you **excited by the new steam powered tug** and the modern world. Is the **sun setting** on the old world **or rising** to bring a new dawn? Even the sky is ambiguous as we are looking east so it must be a sunrise but Turner has painted it as a sunset. Or is it both?
- Many thought the world was changing for the worst. Turner is asking us to decide if we are losing a wonderful, honest and simple world and descending into new world of pollution and misery **or** are we moving into an exciting world of better health, food for all, more freedom and everyone liberated from toil by new sources of power.
- We are still asking the same question? It is up to you to decide.
- Thank you.

NOTES

- ***Fighting Temeraire*** was painted when he was 64. He was born in an age of sail and died in an age of steam. The *Temeraire* was the best and the worst
- At Trafalgar it sailed behind Nelson on the Victory and piled in when they saw Nelson had been shot, extremely heroic. In 1802 it was in disgrace a mutiny

the sailors wanted to go home.

- Many were saying we will be damned if we submit to the machine age, Turner didn't feel that way, nor did the public. He called it my old darling, he knew it made people feel happy. The old glory is being pulled by the future. Steamships were a symbol of the modern world.
- It came to the end of its use. Tug boat owned by Beeston. Going to Rotherhithe. An epic ghost coming to its last moment pulled by the new age a tough little tug board. She had no masts but Turner paints her as she was in her glory days. It combines noise and silence, noisy tug and deathly silent ship. Was seen as an elegy on the passing of sail. There are many wrecked sailing ships in Turner but no wrecked steamships and there are everywhere. His sketchbooks are full of steamships. *Dover* (1825) a steamer puffs out to sea while rowers work hard in the foreground.
- The Temeraire was retired in 1812 and became a prison ship and storage depot and was decommissioned in 1838. She was towed 55 miles up river from Sheerness (Isle of Sheppey) to John Beatson's shipbreaking yard in Rotherhithe (near the Tower of London) to be broken into scrap.
- Regarded by Turner and critics as one of his greatest painting. In 2005 voted Britain's "greatest painting" (BBC poll). He never sold it and bequeathed it to the nation.
- The Temeraire came to the aid of the Victory in the battle of Trafalgar (1805).
- The scene is Romanticized. The masts had been removed, it was pulled by two tugs not one and Turner has added a sunset, or, from the direction, a sunrise.
- The great ship is painted in white, grey and brown and looks like a ghost ship that is pulled by a much smaller but stronger black tugboat. Tugboats were so new there was not even a word for them and Turner's use of the word 'tugged' is the first ever recorded use according to the Oxford English Dictionary.
- Sailing ships were being replaced by steam and steel so this represents the passing of an age.
- Turner used light and loose brushstrokes to invoke an elusive feeling of old age and nostalgia.
- Turner modified from a poem by Thomas Campbell's "Ye Mariners of England":
- This was literally true: Temeraire flies a white flag instead of the British flag, indicating it has been sold by the military to a private company.