

Anglais spé (1)

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Charlotte RIBEYROL

J. M. W. Turner (1775-1851)

Victorian Age : 1837-1901

Pictorial modernity in the wake of the **Romantic Movement**. Not a very happy childhood : mad mother, death of one of his sisters. Gloomy background. To escape from it, he spent a lot of time away from London (Margate).

John Ruskin was the Champion of Turner (*Modern Painters* 1843). Thanks to him, his talent is now known by all. Superiority on Poussin and Le Lorrain. Turner loved **water**. The “truth” of the sea. He also loved the River Thames. He used a little boat as a mobile painting studio like Monet.

He was a very precocious artist. He started in 1787, and he entered the Royal Academy School at 14. He exhibited his first **watercolours** and **topographical works** (accurate depictions) there. At 24, he was **elected associated member (then full member in 1802) at the Royal Academy**. He was a professor of perspective in 1801. At the time, belonging to the Royal Academy was extremely positive, and many were envious. One of his most famous rivals was **Constable**.

- **Constable**, *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* (1817) Tate Gallery
- **Turner**, *Helvoetsluys, the City of Utrecht, 64, Going to sea* (1832) Tokyo Fuji Art Museum

He added a patch of vermilion during the varnishing, and Constable said of him : “He has been here, and he had started firing”.

Turner loved **Jacob von Ruisdael**.

He gave one of his paintings, *Dido building Carthage...* to the National Gallery unconditioned next to Claude’s *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*. He was obsessed by the light of the sun. “The sun is God” would have been his last words.

He tried to develop an original approach of landscape, emphasizing the **luminosity of atmospheres** and **romantic/dramatic themes**. He chooses **long titles with poetic quotations from the great romantic poets (Byron, Shakespeare)**. He wrote the *Fallacies of Hope*. He believed in the powerful **link between text and image**. He wanted to **rival history paintings**. He was also extremely involved in the present tense and obsessed with modernity.

He was fascinated by the political and scientific changes. The **Industrial Revolution** affected England first at the beginning of the 19th c. France had still an agricultural economy. He was romantic and distrusted industrialization, but he was still in admiration of technical progress such as the **railways , the use of steam for boats and trains, thermodynamics**, etc...

- *Rain, steam and speed : the Great Western Railway* (1844), National Gallery

At the time, all this was considered vulgar, but Turner wanted it to enter the pictorial space. The whole painting is very blurred. We cannot see the form of the engines. The **composition and the lines** are also very ambiguous and based on **dichotomy**. On the one hand, **fire, energy and life** are associated to/concentrated on the engines with **warm colours** (red, brown, merging on black). On the other hand, the **diagonal** gives an impression of **threat** : the train is running to us like a **hellish creature**. The chimney emerges from this black mass. There is a **striking contrast in terms of speed and colours** : the composition is divided in two by the track. On the left, cold colours are used for the little boat. The railway is threatening the landscapes. Comments by English Lamartine **Wordsworth**.

- *The 'Fighting Temeraire' Tugged to Her Last Berth to be Broken Up* (1839), National Gallery

Mise en abyme in the late James Bond : the scene w/ young geek Q meeting James Bond in the National Gallery.

What is at stake here ? Despite her glory, this ship, which is associated to **great naval battles**, the glory of the English Navy (**Nelson**) and **Napoleonic wars** (ended in 1815), does no longer belong to the present, there is no need for this ship anymore. The **coming of peace in 1815** induces the **end of an area**. This is why the sun is rising, but it is decentralized. The painting is based on **contrasts**.

Steam and modernity :

- **Claude Monet**, *La Gare Saint Lazare* (1877), Musée d'Orsay

In 1819, Turner set out for his first journey in Italy (3 months). He also visited Naples, Florence and Venice. He was very much influenced by artists from the Renaissance.

- *The Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sibyl* (1532)

Prismatic colours. He altered his oil techniques to resemble the **transparency of watercolours**. At the time, chemical industries were creating **new colours**. Turner was especially fond of zinc yellow and patches of brown.

There are 2 phases in his works : one that is based on the **accuracy of architectural and natural details**, the other that **anticipates modernity** through its **dematerialized subjects** and is emancipated from the dictates of the Academy. **The precision is sacrificed to the general effects of colour and light**. Turner was isolated on the art scene.

- **Compare** *Norham Castle. Sunrise* (1845) to *Norham Castle on the Tweed* (1806), Tate Britain

Turner and Goethe

Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810)

"The Definite Nature of Colour" (in Charles Eastlake's translation)

- **Plus** = yellow, action, light, brightness, force, warmth, proximity, repulsion, acids
- **Minus** = Blue, negotiation, shadow, darkness, weakness, coldness, distance, attraction, alkalis

George Field : *Chromatics of the Analogy. Harmony and Philosophy of Colours* (1817)

From this **theory of polarities based on light and colour**, Turner painted :

- *Light and Colour, Goethe's Theory. Evening and Deluge* (1843), Tate Gallery
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Its depicts Moses and the Serpent but it's most of all **chromatic experimentations**.

Turner died in Chelsea, and was buried next to Joshua Reynolds in St Paul's Cathedral. In his will, he gave funds to found a **charity for artists** and **donated all finished paintings to the National Gallery**. A second gallery, the Tate, was founded to exhibit his works. They are exhibiter in the Claude Gallery since 1987.

Turner remained famous for his **pioneer rendering of colours and dematerialized pictorial subjects**. In many ways, he **made way to Impressionism** by breaking down with the past. Most subjects of his were **literary** or **biblical**, therefore mainly **narrative**, and, most of all, dedicated to the **Sublime**.

Anglais spé (2)

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Charlotte RIBEYROL

Joseph M. W. Turner (suite)

There were **two Turners**.

1 – He was an **HEIR of the GREAT MASTERS of the PAST**

- Northern schools (Ruisdael)
- Grand Style (Claude, Poussin) : In the National Gallery, he and Le Lorrain hang one next to one another : *Dido Building Carthage* (1815) and *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* (1648) * Note the long **historical/mythological title**.

He was keen on giving a historical significance to his paintings so as to reappraise landscape painting, which was not the best genre at the time.

- *Turner et ses peintres* (Paris)/*Turner and his Masters* (London)

He went to Paris for the first time in 1802, then in Italy in 1819 (*3 months in Rome, Naples, Venice*), and here he had to adapt his palette, lighten his tones and alter his oil technique to give it the transparency of watercolour, interesting transition as he started as a **watercolorist**. After this trip, he would never be the same. During the 20-30s, he tended to focus less on subjects and more on atmospheres.

- *The Bay of Baiae with Apollo and the Sibyl* (1823)

cf. DIE FARBE ETHIK (*of Colour and Light*), Goethe (1810): illustration of the negative polarity evoked here in the warm hues of the BRAZEN SERPENT.

The Victorian would then distrust the invisible subjects of his later paintings.

- *Norham Castle : Sunrise* (1846-50) and *Norham Castle on the Tweed* (1806-1807) : **Ruskin** defended the originality of his style, torn between search for modernity in painting and old masters. Also the modernity of his subjects.

We witness **two conceptions of landscape** (*The Railway engine*) and **seascape** (*The Fighting Téméraire*) with chromatic and spatial division.

Brought up on the academic tradition, he is known today thanks to his PIONEER rendering of light and DEMATERIALISATION. He certainly influenced the Impressionists by breaking down the academic rendering of landscape, and anticipated *Impression – Soleil Levant*.

2 – **He was also an HEIR of HIS TIME and belonged to the ROMANTIC MOVEMENT**

He believed that his works should express **narrative historical** subjects.

- *Snowstorm : Hannibal crossing the Alps* (1812), oil on canvas, Tate Britain

Hannibal was a Carthaginian general during the Punic Wars. His army was supposed to be invincible. Napoleon identified to him, so in a context of Napoleonic Wars, it was a way of commenting on the *hubris* (presumption) of Napoleon. The army is dwarfed and belittled by the power of nature in the lower section of the painting. There is a **tension** between the two depictions, one of men, and one a natural phenomenon/**natural phenomena** (= **wave, bird of prey about to submerge the army**). However invincible an army may be, nature is always more powerful. The idea of energy is not conveyed by the army.

The BEAUTIFUL and the SUBLIME (Burke's Enquiry)

- **FRIEDRICH**, *The Sea of fog*

→ It provokes fascination and fear because it's huge and powerful. On the contrary, the BEAUTIFUL is controlled, ordered by man, it is not a scary place.

SEA vs. MOUNTAINS

cf. **Ann Radcliffe**, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Turner wanted to renew the landscape tradition, which was very daring and provocative. He often was strongly criticized for his **dynamic compositions**, which clearly moved away from the trend in contemporary painting. Impressionism gave way to the new appreciation of his innovative and technically gifted painter of his time.

- **JWK Turner**, *Three Seascapes*, (1827) Tate

ROTHKO : "This man Turner, he learnt a lot from me." (1966) about **No.10** (1950), oil on canvas, MoMa, NY

- **JMW Turner**, *Slavers throwing overboard the Dead and the Dying – Typhoon coming on (The Slave Ship)*, (1840), oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Slavery was abolished in France in **1847** and in England in **1833**. Turner was very much interested in abolitionist movements. Britain was targeting the way other countries were still very involved in it, like the United States. Many American and French ships were chased and pursued by the Royal Navy and asked to release the slaves on international waters. Influenced by series of events (historical stories), Turner blended different sources here. To avoid arrest or various problems, illegitimate slavers threw overboard their slaves, like someone getting rid of the drugs before being caught. For instance, terrible events occurred involving the *Zong*, which had got rid of the "bad/damaged" goods, to get the insurance money.

We cannot actually see anything but a very visible **leg with a chain** on the right hand corner.

- **Pieter BRUEGHEL**, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1558), oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

It is all about presumption. In the foreground, there is only a secondary character who attracts the viewer first, so the title is misleading. The **mythological subject** is displaced here with an ironic comment.

In Turner's work again, the central subject (cruelty) is displaced/not centered. He comments on the invisibility of the fate of the slaves. A lot of people ignored things at the time, whereas the slaves' trade was still going on. So the leg is a **metonymy** for the slaves' trade. There is a combination here of violence conveyed through the use of contrast, colour and light, for instance the **central lighting of the setting sun** in the composition, the red light (= **bloodshed**). The rendering of the violence of nature (the movement of the waves, the foam, the monstrous fish and creatures (*directly taken from Borsch and Brueghel*) eating the slave) is therefore a means to comment upon the story. Something that cannot feel (nature), is feeling here (= HYPALLAGE) and is used to condemn this market.

cf. *The Fallacies of Hope*, quotation in connection with this work : "I wandered lonely as a cloud"
→ he projects his own feelings to nature.

A – Turner is clearly intermingling natural violence with daring contemporary issues. Viewing the painting makes us feel **uncomfortable**.

→ The **Fall of Man** is a Biblical theme which refers to men being expelled from the Garden of Eden. So there is a spiritual combination for the slavers and the guilty ship. Like many other intellectuals, Turner denounces the **ignominy of the slaves' trade**, he's targeting the US slaves' trade, which tended to get rid of slaves to play truce money.

→ It is meant appear as a general crime against human dignity

B – He is calling for the complete reappraisal of the academic genre of the seascape through this unconventional composition. The title may seem disconnected, and there is a MISE EN ABYME ship/slave.

→ The setting sun = The end of an area of the end of hope ?

EKPHRASIS BY RUSKIN

1843 : His father bought the painting for him, and it was hang for quite a time in Ruskin's dining room. Photographic reproduction was not easy at the time, so the *ekphrasis* became better known than the painting itself. Then Ruskin sold it in 1869 to a Boston abolitionist. The painting was exhibited to the public in 1862, but it was a great disappointment as Ruskin's description was so enthusiastic and ecstatic. Many people considered that the painting was not up to his description.