

## Turner and the Sublime

*Turner and the Sublime*. An exhibition initiated by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and co-sponsored by the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, and the British Museum, London. Held at the Art Gallery of Ontario, 1 November 1980 - 4 January 1981, at the Yale Center for British Art, 11 February - 19 April 1981, and at the British Museum, 15 May - 20 September, 1981

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## Turner and the Sublime

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Catalogue: Andrew Wilton, *Turner and the Sublime*, London, British Museum Publications, 1980. 192 pages, 123 illustrations, including 32 colour plates, bibliography and index, \$11.95 (paper).

In an Almanac of Fasts and Feasts like that figuring in the poet's attic in Turner's painting *The Garreteer's Petition*, the exhibition 'Turner and the Sublime' would merit distinction as a rich and sustaining visual repast for the years 1980-81. It was the 1975 bicentenary exhibition, *Turner in the British Museum*, comprising some 300 drawings and watercolours, that suggested another substantial show of Turner's works on paper, the first of such scope to be held on this side of the Atlantic.

Katharine Lochnan, Curator of the Art Gallery of Ontario's Department of Prints and Drawings, was responsible for this idea. Her institution undertook to act as sponsor, subsequently being joined by the Yale Center for British Art and the British Museum, so there is every reason for pride in the fact that this initiative was taken by a Canadian institution. Andrew Wilton, who had assembled the 1975 London show, organized the present exhibition; his interest in one of the most influential topics in 18th-century aesthetic speculation determined the theme that was eventually adopted. One hundred twenty-three items relating to Turner and the Sublime were thus brought together, two-thirds of them watercolours or drawings, and a third, prints.

Illness having prevented my attending the Toronto debut of the exhibition, I cannot offer first-hand impressions of its installation at the AGO or of the



FIGURE 1. *Turner and the Sublime.* The public opening at the Art Gallery of Ontario (Photo: Museum).

response of gallery visitors there. But 109,000 tickets to the show were sold during the two months it was on view (Fig. 1), surely a record in Canada for an exhibition of works on paper. Despite some initial skepticism about the value of a show that included no oil paintings, substantial numbers of spectators are reported to have said that they were deeply impressed. Moving from the mountain gloom of Turner's large Welsh studies of c. 1799 through a sequence that closed with radiant late watercolours of Swiss lakes, they were avowedly sublimed out of their commonsensical bearings and left 'walking on air.'

In New Haven, where I made several leisurely visits to the exhibition, my experience of the audience for 'Turner and the Sublime' was similar: the show was the most heavily attended of any that the Yale Center has presented since it opened in 1977. On weekdays as on weekends, the gallery was crowded by noon and one could not but overhear many comments. Some were trivial, even foolish: before studies and prints of the *Deluge*, one visitor announced a preference for works in which people were not drowning, while another solemnly informed her companions that 'next to Monet'

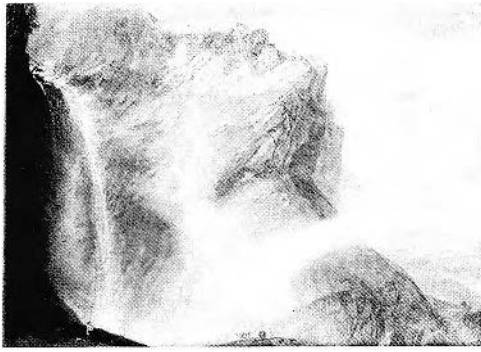


FIGURE 2. J.M.W. Turner, *The Upper Fall of the Reichenbach: Rainbow*, 1810 (?). Watercolour, 276 × 394 mm (cat. 27). Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (Photo: Museum).

Turner was the greatest landscape painter who ever lived. One also heard more thoughtful remarks suggesting that some visitors were changed in important ways by the experience. One spectator greeted an acquaintance just entering with a kind of congratulation on his good fortune in crossing the threshold of such a show. To encounter that quality of response to an exhibition is all too rare.

'Turner and the Sublime' occupied the third floor of the Yale Center, where it was very handsomely installed. An enlargement on the left side of *The Upper Fall of the Reichenbach* (Fig. 2) hung by the entrance made a handsome signboard for the show inside. One moved from it to the right, and thence in a counter-clockwise circuit. As an alternative to chronological ordering, arrangement by topics was intended to suggest the many ways in which, according to the catalogue (p. 106), 'theories of the sublime make themselves apparent in various types of works' by Turner. Such divisions were admitted to be rather arbitrary, and included categories concerned largely with modes of representation, such as the 'Historical Sublime.' Others had to do with effects both in nature and in art (the 'Picturesque Sublime' and the 'Terrific'), general conditions considered productive of sublimity ('Darkness'), and categories like 'Cities' which are manifestly topographical. As the works were displayed chronologically under each heading, one moved back and forth in time from one section to the next.

These disjunctions were somewhat balanced by a tendency to group early works in the first three or four sections ('Picturesque Sublime,' 'Architectural Sublime,' 'The Terrific' and 'Historical Sublime') and later works under the remaining rubrics ('The Sea,' 'Darkness,' 'Cities,' 'Mountains,' and 'Lakes'). The effect of this presentation seemed to me fresh and arresting in a way that justified the use of a topical theme. To what extent, or in what manner, these divisions reflect the impact of theories of the sublime on Turner's work is a somewhat different question.

The first two headings – 'Picturesque Sublime' and 'Architectural Sublime' – are categories proposed by Gerald Finley in an essay on Turner's relation to the Sublime (*Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, xlii (1979), pp. 141-165). In analyzing the Rev. William Gilpin's mediation between the sublime and the beautiful – which were distinct and incompatible qualities in the system of Edmund Burke – Prof. Finley pointed to Gilpin's insistence on the blending of beautiful and sublime effects in nature and on the picturesque as a picture-like species of beauty characterized by roughness and irregularity, both agents of the Burkean sublime. The argument runs that Turner found encouragement in principles of pictorial construction that Gilpin derived from earlier art and applied to subjects that combined beauty and sublimity. The watercolour *Llanthony Abbey* (1794; cat. 1), a spirited essay in the mode of Gaspard Dughet with debts to Edward Dayes and Thomas Girtin, illustrated this tendency in both essay and exhibition. In the show it was followed by studies with little, if any, relation to the formulae Gilpin advocated, one of these being the watercolour titled *Evening Landscape with Bridge* and dated 1798-99 (cat. 2). The work is in fact a view of Tummel Bridge; despite its breadth of handling and twilight aspect, it conforms quite closely to the design of Turner's oil of c. 1802-03, *Tummel Bridge, Perthshire* (Butlin & Joll, n° 44), a picture based on sketches made in Scotland in 1801 (cf. Figs. 3-4). Picturesque theory would not have endorsed the indefinite foreground in the watercolour, its concentration of effect in the middle distance, or its simplified masses and absence of linear intricacy. One cannot well apply the term 'Picturesque' to works that are remarkably independent of inherited formulae of picture-making. The carefully-defined classification of Turner's early work by Prof. Finley was invoked rather uncritically in the exhibition while, at the same time, no acknowledgment was made of this source.

One could only be grateful for the bringing together of early works including the large watercolours of Welsh mountains – powerful and sombrely coloured studies which were entirely unfamiliar to the vast majority of North American gallery visitors. How far Turner had realized his own notion of the Sublime by the later 1790s appeared in cat. 4, a *View in North Wales*, where a dramatic epiphany of light models the planes of a mountain summit and drops in a slanting shaft to the valley floor below. Looking very splendid in this company was the University of Toronto's large exhibition watercolour, *Pembroke Castle: Clearing up of a Thunder Storm* (cat. 8), a variant on the classical topos of the coming storm taken up earlier by Turner in *Pembroke Castle, South Wales, Thunder Storm Approaching* (1801). A rare opportunity was offered to compare treatment of light in the *North Wales* study with *Pembroke Castle's* pyramidal effulgence, which lends an almost sacramental aspect to the arrangement of baskets, mackerel and fisherfolk at its base.

No architectural subjects later than 1819 figured in the 'Architectural Sublime,' but the selection under this

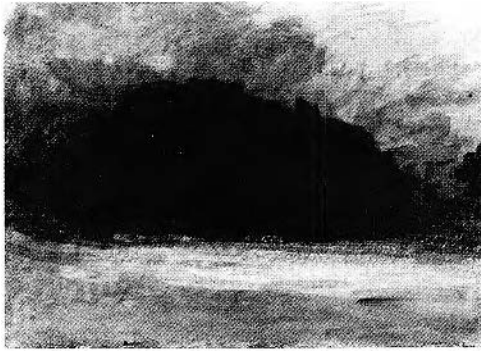


FIGURE 3. J.M.W. Turner, *Evening Landscape with Castle and Bridge*, 1801-03. Watercolour, 189 × 226 mm (cat. 2). Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (Photo: Museum).

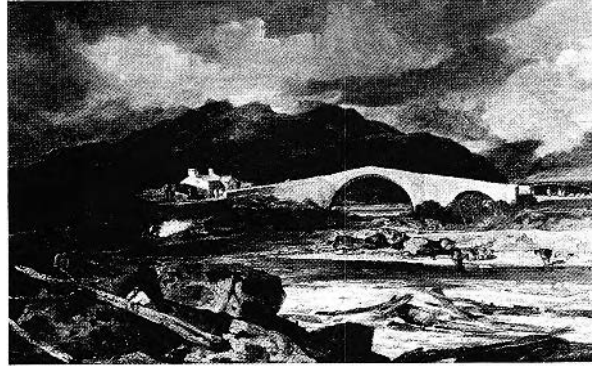


FIGURE 4. J.M.W. Turner, *Tummel Bridge, Perthshire*, c. 1802-03. Oil on panel, 11 × 18¼ inches. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

head from the first twenty-five years of Turner's career was fine and various. Rich and festive illumination of cyclopean masonry in an illustration to Turner's perspective lectures, the *Interior of a Prison* (cat. 15), suggested a design for an opera set, even if it is based, according to the catalogue entry, on a print from Piranesi's *Prima Parte di Architettura e Prospettive*. Far less close to 18th-century sources is the watercolour *Rome: The Portico of St. Peter's with the Entrance to the Via Sagrestia* (cat. 16) of 1819. In the catalogue, Wilton finds Piranesi's sense of scale in this design, but the minute figures and aerially looming architecture imply incommensurable divergences of scale; it is this quality that is perhaps most distinctively Turnerian. An 18th-century connection may exist instead in its arched opening onto a vista at right angles to the picture surface, a favoured convention of the Venetian Settecento. The heightened grandeur of the *Portico* drawing is absent in another drawing of the same period, the tender and fanciful *Rome: The Interior of the Colosseum: Moonlight* (cat. 17). This lovely drawing comes nearer to the mood of *Midsummer's Night's Dream* than to any idea in the tradition of the Sublime; one might imagine Longinus, the ancient authority on this matter, calling it a romance (as he did the *Odyssey*), rather than a work of true heroic sublimity. Andrew Wilton considers the associations of its subject to be entirely personal and unconnected with any conventional itinerary. This is surely mistaken. Visiting the Colosseum by moonlight was a fashion of the period that had been set by Mme de Staël's novel *Corinne* (1807). It sent many echoes through the work of Romantic and later writers such as Henry James, whose *Daisy Miller* Wilton cites in this connection without fully recognizing the tradition it reflects.

Under the heading of the 'Terrific,' the exhibition's most prodigious itinerary led from an austere but Wilson-like *Ben Arthur* of 1801 (cat. 18) through powerful works following on Turner's Swiss tour of

1802, to the brilliant *Gordale Scar* (c. 1816; cat. 30) and *Eruption of Vesuvius* (1817; cat. 33). The section closed with designs for Whitaker's *History of Richmondshire* (1823) and for Turner's *England and Wales* series (1825-38), both represented by engravings. There were some choice juxtapositions among works in this group – that of the chalk drawing of the St. Bernard Hospice (1822; cat. 22), for example, with a colour study, apparently the first stage of a watercolour that was not elaborated, of the same view (cat. 23). I could not follow Wilton in perceiving Burke's 'sad and fuscous' colours in this work, which seemed to be notable rather for warmth and delicacy of hue, the Hospice a sanguine flush at the centre of classically-disposed masses. *Malham Cove* and *Patterdale Old Church* (c. 1810; cat. 28-29) were, according to the catalogue, probably executed either as a pair of watercolours or as parts of a series of related views in the north of England. That they may be a pair seems likely: in each, a storm moves diagonally across the scene, leaving the space outside its path in sunlight. They recall the approaching and retiring tempest in the Pembroke Castle watercolours, though here the whole development occurs in each design with many formal and thematic analogies, as opposed to temporal sequence, between the two.

Classified as a 'mountainous' subject in Turner's *Liber Studiorum*, the drawing for the *Mill near the Grande Chartreuse, Dauphiny* (c. 1815; cat. 31) came for exhibition purposes under the umbrella of the 'Terrific.' The designation is supported in the catalogue by quotations from a 17th-century traveller and by Ruskin on the precipices and torrents of the site. While these observations are germane to the location, they say little that pertains to Turner's landscape. Missing is some critical recognition of its equipose of grandeur and intimacy; Marvell's 'delicious solitude' might well be a poetic parallel to the gaiety of moving light through foliage, water and rocks in a design that balances openness and containment. The drawing shows marked affinities in subject and treatment with Turner's (non-

mountainous) watercolour of c. 1818, *The Woodwalk, Farnley Park*, which figured in the 'Turner in Yorkshire' exhibition at York, England, in the summer of 1980.

Given the inescapable importance of oil paintings in these categories, prints – mezzotints and line engravings in about equal numbers – had to bear much of the burden of the 'Historical Sublime' and 'The Sea.' But they were quite successful in doing so, especially in the sequence of prints and drawings of the *Deluge*. My comments and criticisms are directed rather to questions of interpretation than to the effect of works in the gallery. In Turner's exploratory pen and ink study (cat. 46) for *The Deluge*, a picture he probably exhibited in 1805, Andrew Wilton finds traces of classical architecture like those in the *Tenth Plague* of 1804; these faint indications appear behind Michelangelesque figures struggling in the foreground. Might these outlines not resemble instead the rectilinear ark of the Sistine Chapel fresco? An ark of massive, compact shape appears in the distance of Turner's painting, as in the mezzotint of the work which was in the show (Fig. 5).

Another question connected with this work concerns the dedication of the print 'in grateful remembrance' to the abolitionist John James Proby, 1st Baron Carysfort, who may have commissioned the picture. The catalogue notes this circumstance without relating it to a salient feature of the work: the prominent figure of a black man who supports a female victim of the flood. This African is the only figure to be given prominence in a heroic aspect amidst the floundering representatives of humanity. To suggest that *The Deluge* could, on the one hand, be a 'liberal political statement' while, on the other, Turner often dedicated plates to patrons with whom he was friendly, falls short, I think, of confronting its probable significance. The painting was completed in the years just prior to abolition of the slave trade (1807) through a massive organization of public opinion in England, led by Wilberforce and others. Rather than looking exclusively at Turner's artistic rivalries to explain creation of the *Deluge* mezzotint in 1828, one might also consider its possible connection with the campaign that culminated in the freeing of all slaves in the British Empire in 1833. The subject of Turner's *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying* (1840) is an important further reason for such an enquiry. Surely there is some oblique interest, too, in the fact that another large painting of marine disaster in this period gives the most heroic role to a black – Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa* – and that this feature was demonstrably related to the painter's attitudes toward African slavery.

A different but no less vital iconographical issue is suggested by one of Turner's great *tours de force* in watercolour, the *Battle of Fort Rock, Val d'Aouste, Piedmont, 1796* of 1815 (cat. 51). Despite presentation of this work as an instance of the Historical Sublime and the precise reference of its title, *The Battle of Fort Rock* is discussed in the catalogue in terms of vague ruminations on Man and Nature. (Indeed, that windy abstrac-



FIGURE 5. J.P. Quilley after J.M.W. Turner, *The Deluge*, 1828. Mezzotint, 380 × 576 mm (cat. 49). Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (Photo: Museum).

tion 'Man' makes many appearances in these pages.) The fact that 'Turner compares human events with natural forces – the 'van progressive' is as 'the wild Reuss,' etc. in accompanying lines from his poem, *Fallacies of Hope* – should not exclude notice of allusion to a specific occasion. In question is an incident from the most decisive early chapter of Napoleon's career – his conquest of Piedmont after leading the Army of Italy across the Alps through the southerly Bocchetta Pass, reportedly announcing in triumph: 'Annibal a forcé les Alpes; nous nous les avons tournées!' (Scott, *Life of Napoleon*, in *Prose Works* 10, Edinburgh, 1835, p. 24). From the painter of *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* (1812), the very choice of such a subject and its exhibition during the Napoleonic Hundred Days (from 1 March 1815) surely invite reflection.

The theme of Carthage was treated explicitly in a painting of 1828 which is represented in the exhibition by an engraving, *Ancient Carthage – the Embarkation of Regulus* (cat. 54). Without indicating its source in John Gage's *Colour in Turner*, Wilton states that the brilliant effect of direct sunlight in this composition has been explained by reference to the punishment of Regulus, who was blinded by exposure to light when his eyelids were cut off by the Carthaginians. He then challenges this interpretation by arguing that this would have been a very unorthodox way of handling the relation of picture and beholder. It is confusing that he should take this position in view of his statement in the catalogue essay (deriving apparently from Finley's article) that 'the spectator is the protagonist' in an important phase of Turner's approach to the Sublime (p. 45). Wilton's suggestion that the title of the print (not that of the picture, which was simply *Regulus*) and Regulus' presence in the distance on the right would probably indicate 'a more traditional programme,' rather overlooks the tendency to allusive richness in Turner's imagery. More generally, a coherent view of how Turner's mind worked seems to be missing, and with it,

a firm basis for deciding what the appropriate grounds of interpretation may be.

A wealth of humorous allusion may be found in the drawing, here titled *The Amateur Artist* (cat. 50), which is self-reflectively about history painting: the artist who, according to the inscription, has sought to scale the heights with 'stolen hints from celebrated Pictures,' peers in fond absorption at the work on his easel while an apprentice kneels beside the fire in a Rembrandtesque interior. The title 'Amateur Artist' is not used in A.J. Finberg's *Inventory of the Turner Bequest*, nor in discussions by Jerrold Ziff and John Gage, who all call it 'The Artist's Studio' (in, respectively, 'J.M.W. Turner on Poetry and Painting,' *Studies in Romanticism* 3 and *Colour in Turner*, 1969). The 'amateur' designation confuses the reference to a 'Tyro' in accompanying verses with the artist, though the former surely alludes to the apprentice by the fire and not to the 'Master' at his easel. John Gage's very circumstantial argument for considering this a satire on Philip Jacques de Louthembourg is omitted: was this because the identification seemed inconsistent with credit given him in the catalogue essay for having considerably influenced Turner's interest in the Sublime (p. 37)? Whether Louthembourg was the target or not, the idea that the drawing was satirical should, I think, make allowance for the sly good humour of Turner's treatment. Despite the caricature of his procedures, Turner shows more than a little sympathy for the 'Master [who] loves his art.'

'The Sea' – non-historical but 'terrific' – leads from an early Dover shipping subject (cat. 55) through mezzotints of major sea pictures to coastal disasters from *England and Wales*, and to watercolour studies extending into the 1840s. The use of prints not only as substitutes for paintings, but to indicate something of their importance in Turner's thinking and relation to his audience, was a valuable educative aspect of the exhibition. Especially was it suggestive in this section, offering stimulating comparisons between the elaboration of such prints as *The Shipwreck* (published 1807; cat. 56), a work that, as Wilton observes, 'marked an epoch in Turner's career,' and watercolour studies which make their point by very different means. The study for *The Loss of a Man o'War* (cat. 59), showing a Leviathan half in shadow that appears to roll within a trough of darkness, is one of the most impressive of these. It belongs to that category of Turner's work which fundamentally extends the experience and idea of the Sublime by implications of physical immediacy that are scarcely capable of verbal articulation; by the membranous texture of the image recalls the most primary of physical boundaries, that which separates the body from all that is outside it.

Mainly exemplified by mezzotints, 'Darkness' overlaps with the Historical Sublime in, for example, *The Field of Waterloo* (cat. 71), with the Terrific in *Stone Henge* (cat. 79; from *England and Wales*), and, in the 'Little Liber' print *The Evening Gun* (cat. 78), with the Sea. An evocative watercolour study, *A Mountain Pass:*

*Night* (cat. 80), signals the penultimate category, 'Mountains.' Before that destination, however, there is a detour for 'Cities.' This section is not, nor could it be, justified by reference to 18th-century conceptions of the Sublime that otherwise inform the exhibition scheme, although the plate of *Dudley, Worcestershire* (c. 1830; cat. 86) does, as the catalogue notes, invoke 18th-century traditions of the industrial sublime. But Dudley, for all its smoke, was a town rather than a city, and even here the relationship between town and country that is conspicuous in all the other town or cityscapes shown, is strongly suggested. What seems to be at work is an impulse to see Turner's more urban subjects in terms of a characteristic mid-century view of city life as tragically demoralizing; that view is rejected in the catalogue entry although the corresponding framework is retained anyhow. The supernal majesty of *Luxembourg* (cat. 88) and other late watercolours of continental cities demonstrate how remote Turner's attitude was from typical Victorian judgments of the city.

So far as its realization in watercolour went in the exhibition, 'The Terrific' ended in 1817 with the *Eruption of Vesuvius*. Probably associated longest with the idea of awesomeness in landscape, mountains are the subjects of a dazzling group of watercolours from, principally, the 1830s and 40s. Among the most extraordinary of these are preliminary and finished versions of *The Pass of Faido* (cat. 103-104), in which forms in ebullition move towards a dramatically lit passage between cliffs in the middle distance. It seemed to me that the much slighter but brilliant study called *An Alpine Gorge* (cat. 100), might be connected with treatment of the climactic threshold in the *Faido* design. In any case, the selection of mountain subjects was superb.

The concluding section ('Lakes') similarly concentrated on the late watercolours, especially the ineffably beautiful views of Swiss lakes from the early 1840s. Ruskin, who by a long-standing convention is thought never too irrelevant or mistaken to be quoted on any subject, is laid under contribution in the catalogue with regard to his assumption that these works reflect pessimism on Turner's part. Disagreement with this idea is then expressed, but since the whole discussion is so gratuitous, why must the compulsion be perpetuated? One might more suitably invoke that great *transpectus* in which Lucretius apostrophizes the 'sole mistress of the nature of things ... [without whom] nothing rises up into the divine borders of light' (*On the Nature of Things*, 1). Nevertheless, one could only feel thankful for the choice of drawings. The *Bay of Uri from Brunnen* (cat. 114) seemed to me one of the most complete and sufficient works of art I might ever see, though for many, the series of *Lake Geneva with the Dent d'Oche* (cat. 117-121) may well have been the climactic experience of a memorable exhibition.

The substantial catalogue of the show has been well produced and very fully illustrated; every work is reproduced and there are thirty-two colour plates,

mostly quite good in quality. In addition to a bibliography and index, a concordance of catalogue numbers with those of the Turner Bequest, the Rawlinson and the Wilton catalogues, is provided. Inevitably, the catalogue proper has come under consideration in the foregoing account. It reflects Andrew Wilton's acquaintance with a vast body of material, the thousands of drawings in the Turner Bequest, as well as others. At the same time, I think that issues in the interpretation of Turner's art have not been approached in a very fresh or imaginative way. This seems to be connected with a lack of definite personal conviction about the nature of Turner's artistic personality.

There are, moreover, several difficulties with the catalogue essay, which attempts a comprehensive assessment of Turner's relation to the Sublime. Most fundamental is a failure to clarify the concept adequately and evaluate critically the manner in which this idea, or some version of it, may have been known by Turner and pertinent to his aims. The idea of the Sublime originated in Antiquity in the practice and theory of oratory (primary rhetoric), was secondarily applied to literature, and only in the Renaissance and later influenced the visual arts through systematic concepts of art theory which were derived from classical rhetoric. The idea of an elevated style was transferred to painting and sculpture from this source; a different and in large part contradictory tendency in the visual arts was generated by 18th-century popularizers of Edmund Burke's equation of the Sublime with terror. By the time Turner died in 1851, the lesser value ascribed to a plain style corresponding to commonplace subjects – the antithesis of the Sublime in the elevated sense – was being challenged by the Pre-Raphaelites and flouted by Courbet. The notion of the Sublime as related to fear had also undergone changes that modified its earlier force and urgency.

However, the catalogue essay treats the Sublime as homogeneous theory clarified or muddled, but not substantially altered, during its long history. Wilton says, for example (p. 29), that along with 'idealizing tendencies that the idea carries with it in its classic definition, it also contains an appeal to ... a "gut reaction".' But Burke's innovation in making the Sublime dependent upon implied threats to self-preservation was fundamental; it contains an essential negation of the disinterestedness implied in the notion of lofty, self-forgetful ideas. Also unsatisfactory is a failure to notice the scale and importance of popularization that was responsible for creating wide interest in the Sublime in the later 18th century. Had the theme not been taken up by a multitude of travel writers and popular novelists, the Sublime as an aesthetic category would not have had the impact it achieved. For this reason it is particularly inappropriate (p. 11) to say that by the time Turner took up the theory it 'was thickly overgrown with the learned argument and dry exegesis of scholars.'

Even the assumption concerning Turner's adoption of a theory is also problematic. Wilton does not exam-

ine evidence for Turner's interest in the matter at a theoretical level. There indeed seems to be no evidence that Turner read Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), the source regarded as most crucial for his attitude to the Sublime. He left one note on the definition of the Sublime in his 'Cockermouth' sketchbook of 1809, referring in it not to Burke, but to his political adversary Tom Paine on the relation of the Sublime and the Ridiculous. Yet Wilton suggests that Turner applied Burke's principles in his various procedures: in using enormous sheets of paper for some watercolours of c. 1800, Turner 'was perhaps obeying a "rule" of the sublime – that great size is conducive to grandeur. Several of the watercolours that he submitted to the Academy exhibitions in the late 1790s and early 1800s follow this rule' (p. 45). Or again: 'It may have been the influence of Burke's theory of the "terrific" sublime that initially encouraged Turner to distort the geographical details of what he saw to express more forcibly such ideas as height, depth and distance' (p. 79). If, rather than picking up notions in common currency that had been absorbed into picture-making by the late 18th century – or in addition to doing so – Turner could be shown to have studied theoretical writings on the Sublime, it would still have been out of character for him to construe them as a set of rules to be applied to his practice. To be sure, Wilton acknowledges that effects of splendour are more predominant in Turner's central period than themes evocative of fear, but he implies that Burke lies behind late disaster subjects, such as the *Slavers* (1840) and the watercolours of Goldau, cat. 105-106, in which 'Turner aims unambiguously at the sublime' (p. 98). And yet Turner is also seen (p. 102) in Ruskin's terms, as the discoverer of 'a new and broader realism.' Wilton does not see that these lines of attack diverge, nor does he ask what we can discover about Turner by echoing Ruskin's ideas of truth.

I have tried to suggest that Turner himself redefined the Sublime through his work and, in so doing, transcended not only 18th-century theories but the capacities of verbal utterance. A salient element in that redefinition was his relation to an aspect of the Sublime not recognized by Burke or mentioned in Wilton's essay – the Marvellous. But the Marvellous was often equated with the Sublime, as in Boileau's *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours* (1674), a work which was influential in England. Given Turner's feeling for spectacle, his impulse to dazzle, the often gay and celebratory mood of his work – all highly evident in this show – it seems arbitrary that such great emphasis should be given to his presumed dependence either on the aesthetic of Burke or Ruskinian notions of truth to nature. However, the exhibition served effectively to make better known many facets of Turner's protean gifts. It is likely to hold lasting significance for the perception of Turner's art by North American audiences.

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