

## J.M.W. Turner’s Pneumatic Form or Wind

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They are pictures of the elements, air, earth, and water. The artist delights to go back to the first chaos of the world, or to that state of things when the waters were separated from the dry land, and light from darkness, but as yet no living thing, nor tree bearing fruit was seen on earth. All is ‘without form and void.’ Someone said of his landscapes that they were pictures of nothing, and very like.<sup>1</sup>

William Hazlitt (1778–1830), *the Examiner*, 1816

### Turner and Pneuma

Art historian Kenneth Clark (1903–83) once wrote that “Leonardo da Vinci comes nearest to Turner in his desire to render elemental power”.<sup>2</sup> This point is rarely discussed at present. Indeed, it seems a bold attempt to bring these two painters from different periods and locations into proximity. However, if, as Professor Barbara Baert points out, Leonardo (1452–1519) regarded the wind as an essential object, this also applies to Turner (1775–1851).<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, it is worth noting that, like Leonardo, Turner also saw the wind as a pneuma. Turner started as a topographical landscape painter, depicting geography and buildings in detail, but in his later years, he deviated from the traditional genre of landscape painting and produced what could be termed an apocalyptic landscape.

This paper examines Turner’s contemplation of wind as a pneumatic form or phenomenon, even as an actual existence and natural phenomenon. As a result, I want to point out that he was not

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1 William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, P. P. Howe, century ed. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–34), 95.

2 Kenneth Clark, *Looking at Pictures* (London: John Murray, 1960), 143.

3 Barbara Baert, *Pneuma and the Visual Medium in the Middle Ages and early Modernity: Essays on Wind, Ruach, Incarnation, Odour Stains, Movement, Kairos, Web and Silence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 137–49 [Chap. 10. Leonardo’s Pneumatic Form].

only a mere observer of nature but also a witness of the apocalypse, and it is precisely there that the poetics of the wind is generated.

In Turner's masterpiece *Rain, Steam, and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844) [Fig.1], Professor Baert has keenly observed evidence of the early railway years in Britain and “an atmospheric obsession”<sup>4</sup> for the fluid, for steam and mist. Where is this Obsession? This paper does not seek to ascribe it to factors such as those conventionally pointed out, namely his unfortunate family circumstances with a mentally ill mother, or to the Romantic mindset (the beauty of the perishable, or the sublime to which Edmund Burke (1729–97) refers, of the small man against the powerful nature). Instead, I will consider it from the perspective of the irrational human figure that emerges from the darkness behind the Industrial Revolution. In this regard, the following thought-provoking reference by Professor Baert again provides the basis for the discussion in this paper.

What do we see? In the middle, there is a black locomotive that dominates the composition in a threatening manner. On the left, the viewer can discern a bridge shrouded in mist. This creates a contrast between the world of the industrial revolution, blackened by pollution, and the rainy, older world of the aqueduct, which delicately fades away in the steam of the train. The present and the past. Dynamic and stable. Speed and steadfastness. A dangerous black flash in the landscape enshrouded with a veil, of which we are not sure if it will ever lift, or if it is the ill tidings for a world that has now changed irrevocably. Here, the locomotive screeches and tears apart the present and the past.<sup>5</sup>

The dichotomous frameworks referred to here as ‘the present and the past’, ‘dynamic and stable’ and ‘speed and steadfastness’ are highly suggestive in this discussion. This is because Turner seems to have considered that the Industrial Revolution had divided the world from its previous history.

Probably nothing exemplifies the Industrial Revolution's changes to the British landscape better than this oil painting. Most of the contemporary reviews of the work were marvellous tributes, but only *the Spectator* (11 May 1844) criticised it, saying that “the laxity of form and licence of effect are greater than people will allow”.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the validity of the judgement, it is worth noting that the reference here to “the laxity of form and licence of effect” is noteworthy.

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4 Baert, “Canvassing Rain: Painting — Photography Cinema —,” *Predella: Journal of Visual Arts* 49 (2021), 148. I would like to express my profound gratitude to Professor Barbara Baert for sharing this paper with me.

5 Ibid.

6 Quoted in Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, Text, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 257.

Because these elements are the enigma in Turner's painting style, and by these, he represented the pneuma.

In this painting, Turner seems to represent the four elements. The flames burning at the front of the steam locomotive appear to look at the fire chamber within its mechanical structure. This discomfort may arise from the pretext for the appearance of fire, one of the four elements. The following words of the writer Théophile Gautier (1811–72/73) lead those four elements to the apocalypse.

Throbbing flashes of lightning, wings like great birds of fire, babels of clouds collapsing under the blasts of lightning, whirlwinds of rain sprayed by the wind: it could have been the setting for the end of the world. And through it all came the locomotive, twisted like the beast of the Apocalypse, opening its red glass eyes in the darkness and dragging the vertebrae of its carriages behind it in a huge tail. It was undoubtedly a pochade of raging fury, blurring the sky and the earth with a brushstroke, a true extravagance, but made by a madman of genius.<sup>7</sup>

'Steam', 'Pneuma', 'The Four Elements' and 'Revelation'. Using these clues, I want to approach Turner's vision of the 'Eye of the Wind'.

### Steamboats and Pneuma

From the end of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century, when the English landscape painter Turner lived, there was a significant change in British society as the Industrial Revolution progressed with the development of science and transport. Turner was a painter standing at the dawn of mechanical civilisation in the modern era, who witnessed the changes in the seascape as steamboats replaced sailing ships. Steamboats became a significant mode of sea transport in Europe in the 1820s, and Turner incorporated steamboats as a new motif in his seascapes. Given that smoke-breathing steamboats were not always an aesthetic subject for people at the time, it is remarkable that Turner was quick to adopt steamboats as a motif in seascape paintings.<sup>8</sup>

The following interesting statement is noted in *The Quarterly Review* (1836), an art review of Turner's steamboat images: "The tall chimney, the black hull, and the long wreath of smoke left

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7 Théophile Gautier, *Histoire du Romantisme*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1877), 371.

8 William S. Rodney, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution*, (California: University of California Press, 1977), 2, 40. The point that steamships were not an aesthetic object in Britain at the time is discussed in the following discourse by novelist William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63). "The little demon of a steamer is belching out" (*Fraser's Magazine* 19, June, 1839). Quoted in A.J. Finberg, *The Life of J.M.W. Turner, R.A.*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 373.

lying on the air, present, on his river, an image of life, and of majestic life.”<sup>9</sup> The reviewer read “an image of life” in the steamboats. This may be attributed to the fact that smoke emission was equated with breathing out by living organisms.

Furthermore, one work shows that Turner himself saw “an image of life” in steamboats. It is *Staffa, Fingal’s Cave* (1831–32) [Fig. 2]. The work was based on a bad weather scene from Turner’s 1831 tour to Scotland.<sup>10</sup> Fingal’s cave can be seen on the left, the sun setting into the sea on the right and, to the left, a steamboat emitting black smoke. Turner referred to this scene as follows. “The sun getting towards the horizon, burst through the rain-cloud, angry, and for wind”.<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Turner stated, “angry, and for wind”.

The painting shows that the black smoke emitted from the steamboat corresponds with the clouds. Furthermore, the wind appears to be blowing from right to left. The philosopher Michel Serres (1930–2019) made a thought-provoking point concerning this smoke stream. He indicated that the smoke emitted by the steamboat was directed towards the cave on the left.<sup>12</sup> This point by Serres is essential because it indicates that the work may have even deeper semantic content. Serres further pointed out that this work had two sources of light, namely the two suns:<sup>13</sup> the setting sun on the right and the light source pouring down into the cave from above in the centre.

The correctness of Serres’s point can be confirmed by dividing the painting on the left and right, with the steamboat on the axis. On the right, as the sun sets, it gets darker, including the clouds. On the left, the cave is depicted as melting into the sun’s rays. This illuminated cave is difficult to understand unless we assume another sun than the set one. Also, looking out to sea, a white bird flies to the left of the steamboat and a black bird to the right. This seems to suggest that the left and right spaces belong to different contrasting worlds, each with the steamboat as its axis.

What does this imply? The clue may lie in the fact that the cave is associated with the ancient Celtic legend of Ossian. The cave was formed over a long period by ancient volcanic activity. This cave, with its unique aspect of columnar basalt, was even compared to a cathedral by Turner’s

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9 *The Quarterly Review*, London, 57 (1836): 361; William S. Ronder, *J.M.W. Turner: Romantic Painter of the Industrial Revolution*, 40; William S. Rodner, “Humanity and Nature in the Steamboat Paintings of J.M.W. Turner,” *A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 18, no. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 455–74; Koki Okamoto, “A study of the imagery of steamboats in the works of J.M.W. Turner (written in Japanese),” *The Kajima Foundation for the Arts annual report: separate volume* (The Kajima Foundation, 2000): 676–87.

10 Finberg, *The Life of J.M.W. Turner, R.A.*, 333.

11 Turner to James Lennox, August 16, 1845, a letter quoted in John Gage ed., *Collected Correspondence of J. M. W. Turner* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 209–10.

12 Michel Serres, *La Traduction. Hermès III* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit), 238.

13 *Ibid.*

contemporary, the poet Walter Scott (1771–1832).<sup>14</sup> The legend of Fingal’s Cave and Ossian also influenced continental Europe at the time, inspiring not only painters but also musicians such as Mendelssohn (1809–47). Therefore, Turner must have known that this cave was associated with the Ossian legend.<sup>15</sup> Ossian was a legendary warrior and poet who was said to have been born around the third century; he was the son of the hero Fingal (or Finn) of the ancient Celts, who lived in the Scottish Highlands and Ireland. Later, in the eighteenth century, the Scottish poet James Macpherson (1736–96) translated Gaelic tales into English (actually, it is thought to be fiction) and published them at the end of 1761. Recent research has revealed Turner’s interest in Ossian from the beginning of his artistic career.<sup>16</sup>

From the above examination, two important meanings are hidden in the *Staffa, Fingal’s Cave*. The first is that the work includes the long period that the cave suggests, from the creation of the earth to the Industrial Revolution. The second is that the smoke of the secular steamboat unceremoniously pollutes the sacred cave. Hence, we will now explore Turner’s intention behind such implications.

#### Unpredictable Wind of Fate

One painting provides a clue to understanding Turner’s view of life and death. It is *The Fall of Anarchy (?)* (c. 1825–30) [Fig. 3]. This was once known as *Death on a Pale Horse (?)*. The title of the work and its contents are also unclear. The theme of this macabre work is thought to be taken from *The Book of Revelation*. This subject was popular among British Romantic artists at the time. It is known as ‘the apocalyptic sublime’, which contains biblical content in its works and poses threats.<sup>17</sup> It is thought that this painting may have been influenced by the large painting by Benjamin West (1738–1820) [Fig. 4], which was first shown in London in 1817, as well as the work of John Hamilton Mortimer (1740–79) [Fig. 5], who also inspired the poet Baudelaire (1821–67).<sup>18</sup> Comparing these three works on the same subject, a point is often made explicit. In two works by other artists that are not Turner’s, the dead skeletons control each of the horses, but in Turner’s

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14 Scott to Miss Joanna Baillie, a letter dated “Ulva House, July 19, 1810” in John Gibson Lockhart, *Memories of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Paris: Baudrey’s European Library, 1838), 405.

15 Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher, “Inspiration and Spectacle: The Case of Fingal’s Cave in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 22, Issue 4 (Autumn 2015): 778–800.

16 Murdo MacDonald, “Turner, Ossian and the Royal Academy,” *The Burlington Magazine* 164, no. 1432 (July 2022): 658–63.

17 Morton D. Paley, *The Apocalyptic Sublime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

18 *Ibid.*, 1; Butlin and Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, 158.

work, even the dead skeleton throws himself on his back onto the horse's back, leaving the horse uncontrollable. The skeleton appears to be trying to grasp the void. The view is surrounded by a swirling atmosphere, the horse's legs are not visible, and the direction of progress is undefined. In other words, even the death god is at the mercy of a chaotic fate.

In one painting, swirling chaos is linked to a steamboat motif. It is *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842) [Fig. 6]. In this painting, a steamboat can be seen in the centre, at the mercy of a blizzard and raging waves. The smoke emitted by the steamboat merges with the blizzard and swirls around. The painting actually has a longer title, which includes the sentence “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.”<sup>19</sup> However, no record has been found of a ship named ‘Ariel’ sailing from the port of Harwich.<sup>20</sup> It has been suggested that Turner's intention in naming the steamboat ‘Ariel’ may have been based on the spirit Ariel in Shakespeare's (1564–1616) play *The Tempest* (first performed in 1611).<sup>21</sup> Ariel, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, wrecked one particular ship. On-board the ship was the man who had banished the heroine Miranda's father, Prospero, through a wicked plot. In this context, it could be inferred that the steamboat in *Snow Storm* is also about to be swallowed by the sea, having suffered some retribution for its betrayal. There is an element of ‘violence’ inherent in Turner's works, expressed through natural phenomena such as water and wind. Next, I want to consider where the violence is located.

#### Light and Shadow of the British Empire

The British engineer James Watt (1736–1819) patented the steam engine in 1769. The Industrial Revolution emerged with steam as the primary source of mechanical power. In other words, the shift from sailing ships to steamboats implies the progress of the Industrial Revolution and the consequent prosperity of the British Empire. One painting shows the conversion from sailing ships to steamboats. It is a painting titled *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838* (1839) [Fig. 7]. The *Téméraire*, French for ‘daredevil’ or ‘reckless’, was the battleship that took part in the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) when Britain seized control of the European seas, and brought victory against Napoleon (1769–1821). The painting shows a steamboat being towed towards a demolition yard to dismantle an old ship. When Turner exhibited this work at the Royal Academy Exhibition, he accompanied it with the following text: “The flag which braved the Battle

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19 Ibid., 246.

20 Ibid., 247.

21 Charles Ninnis, ‘The Mystery of the Ariel,’ *Turner Society News* 20 (January 1981): 6–8.

and the Breeze / No longer own's her".<sup>22</sup> The work reveals that the steamboat, black in tow, is more present than its sailboat. The writer William Makepeace Thackeray, a contemporary of Turner, said the following:

The little demon of a steamer is belching out a volume (...) while behind it (a cold grey moon looking down on it), slow, sad, and majestic, follows the brave old ship, with death, as it were, written on her.<sup>23</sup>

The philosopher Serres made a similar point: "The old ship of the line did not die of its victory. It is murdered by its tugboat".<sup>24</sup> Based on the above, the steamboat seen in this work contains the possibility of its being deciphered as an executioner. Why did Turner interpret the steamboat, one of the symbols of the Industrial Revolution, as such? It is worth noting that the moon (top left) and the sun (bottom right) are visible simultaneously in this work. In other words, the work seems to contain an ambivalence towards the British Empire – which prospered during the Industrial Revolution – or a worldview on the history of repeated rising and falling.

*Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On* (1840) [Fig. 8] is a figurative painting of the sea and death. The work was inspired by an incident in which British sailors threw slaves overboard during a storm. Around 1840, when this work was painted, the movement to enforce the abolition of slavery was at its peak. With this painting, Turner exposed the dark side of Britain, which built its prosperity on the slave trade. Turner's patron, politician Walter Fawkes (1769–1825), was a member of the progressive Whig Party and one of those who opposed slavery. Through him, Turner had recognised the inhumane aspects of slavery.<sup>25</sup>

One work that is of interest in discussing Turner and slavery is *The Deluge* (1805). Its print based on this painting [Fig. 9] was dedicated to a man who was active in the abolitionist movement at the time.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that the image on the right of a black man rescues a white woman from the deluge [Fig. 10].

This image is thought to have been borrowed from the figures of Raphael (1483–1520) [Fig. 11], but Turner dared to alter the rescuer's appearance to that of a muscular black man.<sup>27</sup> Judging

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22 Butlin and Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, 229.

23 *Fraser's Magazine* 19 (June, 1839), quoted in Finberg, *The Life of J.M.W. Turner, R.A.*, 373.

24 Serres, *La Traduction. Hermès III*, 236.

25 James Hamilton, "FAWKES, Walter Ramsden (1769–1825)" in Evelyn Joll, Martin Butlin and Luke Herrmann eds., *The Oxford Companion to J.M.W. Turner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103–5.

26 Butlin and Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, 43–44.

27 Yasuhide Shimbata, "Turner's The Deluge: Its Portents and Its Aftermath (written in Japanese)," in *J.M.W.*

by the features of his clothing, with only the lower half of his body covered with cloth, the man is implied to be a slave. This contrasts with the behaviour seen in *Slave Ship* where the British threw the slaves overboard. Even more interesting is the image of a black snake coiling around a white bird [Fig. 12]. This may suggest a white person being strangled by chains. Based on this hypothesis, the positions of whites and blacks are reversed in *The Deluge*. This seems to foreshadow the retaliation that colonial rule would bring.<sup>28</sup>

Colonialism, promoted with the Industrial Revolution, not only expanded territory but also increased the superiority and selfishness of people through the dynamics of domination and subjugation. Turner may have seen in such an industrial revolution the irrational and inhumane nature of humans. Furthermore, this seems to have been one of the factors that led Turner to his catastrophic and apocalyptic vision in later years. It shows that, like Leonardo, the wind, as a natural phenomenon, was captured by Turner as the fundamental violence of cosmogenesis and termination. Moreover, in Turner's case, this emerges as a vortex-shaped composition.

#### The Wind of Apocalypse, or the Return to Chaos

Turner seems obsessed with the violence of the four elements that destroy machine civilisation.<sup>29</sup> Turner's preference for rugged landscapes may have happened because he saw the elemental fury in the raging atmosphere. It implies the dissolution of the rational human image believed in since the Age of Enlightenment. Perhaps it was Turner's desire for apocalyptic chaos that led him to see nature as an apocalyptic vision, despite his belief in thorough observation. In this sense, it is insightful that John Ruskin (1819–1900), Turner's greatest contemporary defender, described Turner as “sent as a prophet of God to reveal to men the mysteries of His universe, standing, like the great angel of the Apocalypse”.<sup>30</sup> His later painting, *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846) [Fig. 13], was painted on the theme of *The Book of Revelation*. In the swirling light, one

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*Turner 1775–1851: A Tate Gallery Collection* (The Tokyo Shimbun, 1997), 188–89, exhibition catalog; Mordechai Omer, “Turner and ‘The Building of the Ark’ from Raphael’s Third Vault of the Loggia,” *The Burlington Magazine* 117, no. 872 (1975): 694–702.

28 Shinichi Tomioka, “Joseph Mallord William Turner’s *Slave Ship*: an Allegory of Humanitarianism across Territories (written in Japanese),” in *Landscape and Modernity: British Art Series IV*, responsible ed. by Reiko Onodera (Tokyo: Arina Shobo, 2019), 57–92 and 194–98.

29 Inés Richter-Musso, Ortrud Westheider, with contributions by James Hamilton, et al., eds. *Turner and the Elements* (Munich: Hirmer, 2011), exhibition catalog; Midori Wakakuwa, *Iconology of Wind: Music and Poetry and Painting to Gather the Wind* (written in Japanese) (Tokyo: Shufunotomo, 1990), 65–70 [Chap. 5. William Turner, Shipwrecks: “Snow Storm, Steamboat Outside the Harbour”].

30 E. T. Cook and Wedderburn, eds., *The Works of John Ruskin*, Library Edition, (London: George Allen, 1903–12), III, 254.

angel holds out its arms, while above, birds that feed on the flesh of the dead fly eerily in the sky. A serpent in chains [Fig. 14] can be seen at the angel's feet. It might suggest slavery. Furthermore, on the ground are depictions of sinners taken from various biblical passages.

In the lower left [Fig. 15], from left to right, Cain flees after killing Abel, Adam and Eve mourn over Abel's corpse, and behind them, a skeleton symbolising death can be seen. What we see here is the scene of the first human murder.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in the lower right [Fig. 16] is Delilah cutting Samson's hair, and behind her is Judith and her maidservant holding up the head of Holofernes, behind which lies a headless corpse.<sup>32</sup> The common theme of these figures is 'deceit'. The sinners appear to be judged and swept away by the fiery light and swirling winds of the angel. After the sinners have been swept away, what remains is the swirling chaos of the four elements.

This work has a counterpart painting titled *Undine Giving the Ring to Massaniello, Fisherman of Naples* (1846) [Fig. 17]. The scene painted here is the fisherman Massaniello discovering the water nymph Undine in a net he hauled out. Undine was betrayed by a man she loved. On the other hand, Masaniello (1620–47), who existed in the 17th century, was a Neapolitan fisherman. He was a leader of the revolutionaries who rose up against the oppressive rule of the ruling Spanish but was killed by the treachery of his comrades.<sup>33</sup> To the right, a crowd of fish in the net and a mermaid holding a mirror in her right hand and looking at her own face can be seen [Fig. 18]. This is an image that leads to the allegorical image of "False Love" in Cesare Ripa's (1555/60–1622) *Iconologia* (first edition, 1593), which was translated into English at the time and widely known in England.<sup>34</sup> This means that the spotlight here is on the darker side of the treachery inherent in human beings. The ring held up by Undine appears to dissolve in the light [Fig. 19]. However, it has not yet disappeared. This could be interpreted as a humanitarian contract expiring, or it may imply that hope for it is not entirely lost.

"So I am to become a nonentity, am I?"<sup>35</sup>

The wind can be a pleasant breeze or a storm that brings disaster. Moreover, for Turner, the storm must also have been God's fury against selfish people. Concerning the painting *Staffa*,

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31 Gerald Finley, "Turner, The Apocalypse and History: 'The Angel' and 'Undine,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 121 (1979): 687–88.

32 Gerald Finley, *Angel in the Sun: Turner's Vision of History* (Ithaca: MacGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 183.

33 Sheila M. Smith, "Contemporary Politics and 'The Eternal World' in Turner's Undine and The Angel standing in the Sun," *Turner Studies* 6, no.1 (1986): 43–44.

34 Charles F. Stuckey, "Turner, Masaniello and the Angel," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 18 (1976): 161.

35 Quoted in James Hamilton, *Turner* (New York: Random House, 2003), 380.

*Fingal's Cave*, Turner's statement that "angry, and for wind" seems to indicate this point. Turner wrote an uncompleted long poem, *Fallacies of Hope*, after the poet Thomas Campbell's (1777–1844) poem *The Pleasures of Hope* (1799). Turner also worked on his poetry vignettes. As the title of Turner's poem suggests, it is permeated by his pessimistic view of life. However, was it not rather an objection to reason, rationality, and progress on which the European dream of the Enlightenment rested? Turner's vague landscapes may be seen as a resistance to modern science, which reduces phenomena with complex relationships to simple individuality.

Turner's vignette *The Death-Boat of Heligoland* (18379 [Fig. 20], which he worked on for that poem by Campbell, is set on a small island in the North Sea. It was a harsh land whose territorial rights had been disputed. In the picture, sailors face death in the stormy sea, some already thrown into the cold sea. One skeleton can be seen dancing happily with an hourglass at the back of the boat. And of interest are the spirits floating in the moonlit sky. This is because these spirits are not described in the poem by Campbell but are Turner's creations. There, new souls may be expected to be reborn.

I have made the following three points in this paper by examining the steamboat motifs in Turner's works.

1. The smokes emitted by the steamboats function as a pneuma of the Industrial Revolution and mechanical civilisation.
2. These smokes form cosmic chaos by responding to the atmosphere.
3. The chaos of the universe is vortex-shaped, forming apocalyptic space and oriented towards a return to the primordial.

It is no coincidence that Turner's creation process itself seems to trace a return to the primordial. Painter John Gilbert (1817–97/8) witnessed Turner's painting *Regulus* (1828, reworked 1837) [Fig. 21] and recorded the following.

He was absorbed in his work, did not look about him, but kept on scumbling a lot of white into his picture — nearly all over it. The subject was a Claude-like composition, a bay or harbour — classic buildings on the banks of either side and in the centre the sun. The picture was a mass of red and yellow of all varieties. Every object was in this fiery state. He had a large palette, nothing in it but a huge lump of flake-white; he had two or three biggish hog tools to work with, and with these he was driving the white into all the hollows, and every part of the surface. This was the only work he did, and it was the finishing stroke. The sun, as I have

said, was in the centre; from it were drawn — ruled — lines to mark the rays; these lines were rather strongly marked, I suppose to guide his eye. The picture gradually became wonderfully effective, just the effect of brilliant sunlight absorbing everything and throwing a misty haze over every object. Standing sideway of the canvas, I saw that the sun was a lump of white standing out like the boss on a shield.<sup>36</sup>

*The Literary Gazette* (4 February 1837) criticised the painting, saying that the “sun absolutely dazzles the eyes”.<sup>37</sup> Regulus (before 307BC–250BC) was a general captured by the Carthaginians during the First Punic War (264–241 BC). He was locked in a dark dungeon, and his eyelids were cut off. He was later dragged out of prison and blinded by sunlight. Researchers are divided on whether it is Regulus depicted here in the painting.<sup>38</sup> What is certain is that it is not easy to discern whether Regulus is depicted. This may mean that Regulus’ experience of blindness is shared as a viewer’s experience. Light radiate from the centre towards the viewer facing forward.

Turner used the wind to cover the world and the sun to dazzle the eyes of humans. By making our vision inadequate, Turner might have been plotting to evoke the violence, selfishness and absurdity inherent in human beings. Therefore, the following words, allegedly uttered by a 76-year-old Turner when he became ill and realised that he was close to death, approach us with weight.

“So I am to become a nonentity, am I?”<sup>39</sup>

[Fig. 1] J.M.W. Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed — The Great Western Railway*, 1844, Oil on canvas, 91.0 x 121.8 cm, National Gallery, London.

[Fig. 2] J.M.W. Turner, *Staffa, Fingal’s Cave*, 1831–32, Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 121.3 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, New Haven.

[Fig. 3] J.M.W. Turner, *The Fall of Anarchy (?)*, c. 1833–34, Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 75.6 cm, Tate, London.

[Fig. 4] Benjamin West, *Death on the Pale Horse*, 1817, Oil on canvas, 447.0 x 764.5 cm, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

[Fig. 5] Joseph Haynes after John Hamilton Mortimer, *Death on a Pale Horse*, 1784, Etching on paper, 68.5 x 47.3 cm, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, New Haven.

[Fig. 6] J.M.W. Turner, *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*, 1842, Oil on canvas, 91.4 x

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36 Lionel Cust, “The Portraits of Turner,” *The Magazine of Art* 18 (1895): 248–49.

37 Quoted in Butlin and Joll, *The Paintings of J. M. W. Turner*, 173.

38 John Gage states that Regulus has disappeared completely. John Gage, *Colour in Turner: Poetry and Truth* (London: Studio Vista, 1969), 143. Eric Shanes states that Regulus is depicted small on the dock at the far right of the picture. Eric Shanes, *Turner’s Human Landscape* (London: William Heinemann, 1990), 133–34.

39 Quoted in James Hamilton, *Turner* (New York: Random House, 2003), 380.

121.9 cm, Tate, London.

[Fig. 7] J.M.W. Turner, *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up*, 1838, 1839, Oil on canvas, 90.7 x 121.6 cm, National Gallery, London.

[Fig. 8] J.M.W. Turner, *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On*, 1840, Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 122.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Henry Lillie Pierce Fund, Boston.

[Fig. 9] J. P. Quilley after J.M.W. Turner, *The Deluge*, 1828, Mezzotint on paper, 45.7 x 63.0 cm, Koriyama City Museum of Art, Fukushima.

[Fig. 10] Detail of Fig. 9.

[Fig. 11] Sisto Badalocchio after Raffaello Santi, *The Deluge*, 1607, etching on paper, 13.3 x 17.9 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.

[Fig. 12] Detail of Fig. 9.

[Fig. 13] J.M.W. Turner, *The Angel Standing in the Sun*, 1846, oil on canvas, 78.7 x 78.7 cm, Tate, London.

[Fig. 14] Detail of Fig. 13.

[Fig. 15] Detail of Fig. 13.

[Fig. 16] Detail of Fig. 13.

[Fig. 17] J.M.W. Turner, *Undine Giving the Ring to Massaniello, Fisherman of Naples*, 1846, oil on canvas, 79.1 x 79.1 cm, Tate, London.

[Fig. 18] Detail of Fig. 17.

[Fig. 19] Detail of Fig. 17.

[Fig. 20] E. Goodall after J.M.W. Turner, *The Death-Boat of Heligoland*, 1837, Line-engraving on paper, 29.3 x 15.3 cm, Koriyama City Museum of Art, Fukushima.

[Fig. 21] J.M.W. Turner, *Regulus*, 1828, reworked 1837, oil on canvas, 89.5 x 123.8 cm, Tate, London.

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