

J.M.W. Turner

~~'The Fighting Temeraire' by J.M.W. Turner, 1839, oil on canvas, 151 x 214 cm, National Maritime Museum, London, UK.~~

Critical Analysis

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J.M.W. Turner was born on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1775 in London, and died on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1851. Although Turner was considered a controversial figure in his day, he is now seen as one of the best known artists of all time, one who elevated landscape painting to an entire new level. He discovered his love for painting at the early age of 14, and at 18 he had already established his own art studio. The chosen landscape being critically analysed is the

~~'Rain, Steam, and Great Smokes', 1844~~, by J.M.W.

Turner. The artwork was completed in 1838, using the media of oil on canvas sized at 91x122cm. In 2005, ~~'Rain, Steam, and Great Smokes'~~ was voted the greatest painting in a British art gallery. It currently hangs in the [National Gallery](#) in [London](#). Over the following paragraphs I will be discussing the


conceptual framework in relation to ~~'Rain, Steam, and Great Smokes'~~ whilst simultaneously concentrating on the relationship of J.M.W. Turner, his artwork (~~'Rain, Steam, and Great Smokes'~~), his audience, and also the world/influences that surrounds the painting.

J.M.W. Turner had devoted almost his entire life to painting, producing over 20,000 paintings. His one great desire in life was to be an artist, and drawing on different aspects of Impressionism, he could be said to have laid down the foundation for the genre. This style is highly elucidated in his artwork ~~'Rain, Steam, and Great Smokes'~~. Turner has incorporated both symbolism and colour to provide the artwork with a high level of meaning. By combining a soothing array of colours with symbolic subjects he has illuminated the artwork into a vibrant masterpiece. He has utilised both light and dark areas and included

both warm and cool colours to balance the work and provide it with a sense of unity.

The audience's eyes are first directed toward the colourful and intensifying sunset in the distance. Turners carefully selected array of peaches, gold's, yellows and whites entwined within the sunset invite the audience to come into the picture and delve inside. The left half of the painting consists predominately of cool colours, contrasting the warm and vibrant colours on the right hand side, whilst balancing out the warmness. Turner has used quick whirling brushstrokes to create the impression of the shimmering sun on the rippling sea, and the thick full marshmallow like clouds above. Whilst achieving all of this he has instilled a sense of reality which keeps the audience engrossed from the very first glance.

We can see that Turners relationship with his painting is quite intricate, and he has successfully endeavoured to evoke certain feelings and bring across a few messages to the viewer. One can see the inordinate power manifested in the little steam boat which is tugging the huge warship. The small tugboat seems to just ease its way through the calm and undisturbed water, mirroring the peacefulness of the entire landscape, and maybe even the peacefulness within Turner himself at the time of painting. It is inevitable that Turner had a sense of luminosity and vigour within him at this point in time, as he has conveyed this throughout his painting, especially through the powerfulness of the steam boat, and the intensity of the sunset.

In Turner's youth, he was moved to live with his Uncle on the river Thames due to a few family problems. It was here where he found his love for painting, and throughout his life, the river would have been an important part of his being. ~~'The Fighting Temeraire'~~  'The Fighting Temeraire' is actually set on the river Thames, so living there in his childhood would have had a huge impact on and would have been a primary source for the vivid colours that are pictured within his landscape. His fondness for the river is palpable in the painting, we can see the love that was poured into the picture and feel the happiness that was kindling inside of him at the time of painting.

Times were changing when Turner was painting this picture, the old versus new imagery in the picture reveal Turner's understanding of the transition of one generation to another. Whilst embracing the new era of steam power, Turner chose to also include the boats of the past. The Temeraire's significantly large sails, its size, and its stature suggest indirectly the glory of the past. Her noble posture seems to embrace the glory she once had, and contrasts beautifully with the steam engine tugging it along in front.

Additionally Turner's style of work began a change, where sometime after 1800 his paintings grew more dazzling and brilliant as time went on.

Eventually, a relatively new and upcoming style 'Impressionism' became his predominate form of expression, and became a prevalent style in his work.

Gradual, transparent, bright light became his trademark next to blurring, flurry objects, in which he was able to create unique masterpieces, pieces that, are still highly esteemed today. The combination of a new style

'Impressionism' and a new subject of 'steam' transportation clashed beautifully in his artwork 'The Temeraire', where audiences of that time were not accustomed completely with such form or content, but were pleasantly surprised with the blend.

This painting is my, and many others, favourite. The colours are just amazingly arranged into an incredible formation of strokes, creating an overall amazing painting. The sunset is by far my favourite bit of the landscape, it lures me in and I could stare at it for ever. Every time I examine the painting I find something new and different about his subjects, his use of colour or the way in which he has communicated his technique, which I didn't pick up on before. I love how it has a sort of solemn and soothing vibe on water, yet an effervescent and vibrant vibe existing within the sky. Turner's brushwork is amazing, using small whirling, and quick strokes to create the imitation of clouds and the sky, then a smooth glossy effect on the water. The more I look at it the more I appreciate the artwork and the artist, it truly is phenomenal.

Rachel Prince.

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