J.M.W. Turner: A Master of Light and Colour [B2]

Il più celebre pittore inglese, esponente del Romanticismo e precursore dell'Impressionismo, ha trasformato la pittura di paesaggio con un approccio innovativo, dominato dalla maestria nella rappresentazione della luce e del colore.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was one of the greatest and most influential British artists of all time. Renowned for his dramatic and atmospheric treatment of light and colour, the landscape and **seascape** painter was a key figure in Romanticism, and was a precursor of the Impressionist movement. His paintings broke the mould of accepted art of the time. He is often cited as the world's first modern artist.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Turner was born in Covent Garden, London, on 23 April 1775, the son of a barber and **wigmaker**. His artistic talent was soon apparent, and his father would sell his paintings from his shop. Aged just fourteen, Turner began to study at the Royal Academy Schools. He started to travel, **sketching** around the country, and then Europe, later selling his then traditional **watercolours** to rich **patrons**. Quickly called a prodigy, he was elected a member of the Royal Academy in 1802.

A FLOWERING GENIUS

In the second decade of the 1800s, Turner's paintings became increasingly luminous and atmospheric. His genius was beginning to appear. **Frosty** Morning (1813), a landscape painting of a Yorkshire scene, was based entirely on the effects of light. His paintings became more expressive, capturing the effects of rain and clouds, showing the majesty and beauty of nature in ways never seen before. His works in 1819 showing the Alps to the

public for the first time amazed the critics, who called Turner "an **astonishing** magician in **watercolours**."

TURNER'S MASTERPIECE

As the years passed, Turner became a national figure. In the 1830s and 1840s the artist was at at the peak of his powers. Turner had always been inspired by nature, but now he was also stimulated by the innovations of the modern world, especially the **steam** and smoke of the machines of the Industrial Revolution, which became **topics** for his art. In 1839, Turner produced the most famous painting of his life, The Fighting Temeraire — which was voted the greatest painting in Britain in a public vote in 2005. Turner called it "his **darling**." The ship, a hero of the Battle of Trafalgar, is on its final journey, being up the Thames to the **breaker's yard** by a small, **fiery**, **steam**-driven **tugboat**. Ethereal and **pale**, it **glides** to its **fate**. In one of Turner's many examples of artistic radicalism, effect dominated detail.

HIS ARTISTIC LEGACY

Other great works followed, **astonishing** the public and the critics. The Slave Ship (1840) showed the **crew** of an English ship throwing dead and dying slaves **overboard**. Turner's painting, based on a true story, shocks with its "**bloody** sky and **flesh-filled** sea." In Rain, Steam, and Speed – The Great Western Railway (1844), Turner's work most synonymous with the Age of Steam, a speeding train crosses a bridge over the Thames, moving so fast that it is just a **blur**.   Turner's genius **lay** in creating effects of light and colour, with little indication of mass. His use of light profoundly affected the Impressionists, especially Claude Monet. Turner died of cholera on 19 December 1851, and was buried in the crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral. Incredibly prolific, he left three hundred oil paintings and thirty thousand sketches and **watercolours** to the nation. The legend goes that his last words were: "The sun is God".

A TROUBLED CHARACTER

Throughout his life, Turner was a secretive, introspective, troubled character. As a young adult, he was admitted for mental health reasons to St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics in 1799, and Bethlem Hospital (like his mother) in 1800. He never lost his working-class, Cockney accent, which sometimes provoked **mockery** in **class-conscious** Georgian society. His accent was so **thick** and his **speech** so **hesitant** that it was hard to understand his lectures about art. Some critics also mocked his paintings — Snow Storm was criticised by one as "**soapsuds** and **whitewash**." At the Royal Academy, he was often considered **pushy** and rude. Yet he was also very generous, giving money to friends and poor artists. A self-made man, he had great entrepreneurial spirit, setting up his own gallery when he was very young and **courting** rich **patrons**. He loved to paint in the open air — he was one of the first artists to sketch directly from nature. He also liked to pay and sketch prostitutes having sex. His friend and art critic, John Rushkin, destroyed many of his 'rude' sketches. As he grew older, he became increasingly reclusive, eccentric and pessimistic, while his art grew wilder and more intense. His father's death in 1829 provoked periods of depression and poor health, and his gallery **fell into disrepair**. He was sustained, however, by intimate relationships with his **housekeeper**, Hannah Danby and her aunt, Sarah Danby. He had two daughters, Evelina and Georgiana, with either Hannah or Sarah, but kept this secret from the public. He finally recognised his parentage by leaving the two daughters money in his **will**. He had another lover called Mrs. Booth, the landlady of the seaside house where he often stayed in Margate.

Glossary

- **mockery** = derisione
- **soapsuds** = schiuma di sapone
- **pushy** = insistente
- **housekeeper** = governante
- **astonishing** = sorprendente
- **pale** = pallido
- **flesh-filled** = pieno di corpi
- **blur** = sfocatura
- **glides** = scivolare
- **wigmaker** = fabbricante di parrucche
- **steam** = vapore
- **darling** = prediletto
- **fiery** = infuocato
- **thick** = spesso
- **speech** = parlata
- **hesitant** = esitante, titubante
- **seascape** = paesaggio marino
- **topics** = temi
- **fate** = destino
- **crew** = equipaggio
- **class-conscious** = classista
- **fell into disrepair** = cadere in abbandono
- **sketching** = abbozzare
- **watercolours** = acquerelli
- **Frosty** = gelido
- **breaker's yard** = cantiere di demolizione
- **tugboat** = rimorchiatore
- **bloody** = sanguinoso
- **whitewash** = bianco di calce
- **courting** = sedurre
- **overboard** = gettare in mare
- **lay** = giacere
- **patrons** = mecenati

- **will** = testamento