

# CLIL - J.M.W. TURNER

## *and the* **SUBLIME**



Londra 23 Aprile 1775 - Chelsea 19 Dicembre 1851

# THE ROMANTIC AGE

*Romanticism was born in Germany and England at the end of the 18th century and then arrived in the rest of Europe*

*We are in the period of the restoration age where the uprisings of independence culminate in 1848:*

- **The Holy Alliance** and the **Quadruple Alliance** were born in 1815 to protect states from possible revolutions;



- This is how the first **secret societies**, protagonists of the uprisings of the 20's and 30's, began to be born (the Carboneria in Italy) ;

- **Napoleon** comes to power in France from 1799 until 1815 where thanks to the **congress of Vienna** the original borders of the European states are restored;
- The **bourgeoisie** no longer recognizes itself in monarchical absolutism and some young intellectuals want their own **national freedom**;

- The **first industrial revolution**, which took place in England at the end of the 1700s, arrived in Europe and made the economy take off, giving birth to capitalism;



# WHAT HAPPENED IN ENGLAND?

In England, at the beginning of the 19th century, English Romanticism saw the prevalence of poetry, which best suited the need to give expression to:

- *emotional experience,*
- *individual feelings;*
- *the truth beyond the power of reasons*

The great English Romantic poets are usually grouped into two generations:

- ★ **FIRST GENERATION:** *William Wordsworth* and *Taylor Coleridge*, characterized by the attempt to theorize about poetry;  
→ **1798** the *Lyrical Ballads* (manifesto of the movement) will be published;

-*Wordsworth* wrote about beauty of nature and ordinary things;

-*Coleridge* wrote about visionary topics, the supernatural and mystery;

- ★ **SECOND GENERATION:** *George Gordon Byron*, *Percy Bysshe Shelley* and *John Keats*, experienced the political disillusionment, which is reflected in their poetry, in the clash between the ideal and the real.

# ROMANTICISM

“Romanticism is an artistic and cultural movement whose purpose was to exalt feeling, fantasy and religion”

- It created a change in taste and sensibility and in the vision of the world and exalts individualism, patriotism, imagination and dream;
- Paintings were mainly based on the representation of landscapes and gave space to the imagination of the painter;
- The use of bright colors is dominant as is the use of light to highlight the colours;
- Painters wanted to give drama to the work and were very careful to add many details;
- Loose and decisive brushstrokes;
- As regards literature, it abandoned the classics while supported the spontaneous poetry that came from within;





# Romanticism in Turner

- William Turner is one of the most renowned artists of romanticism who will be a **forerunner of Impressionism**.
- As a romantic artist he used to put his focus on the **wild nature** which must reflect the human beings' feelings.

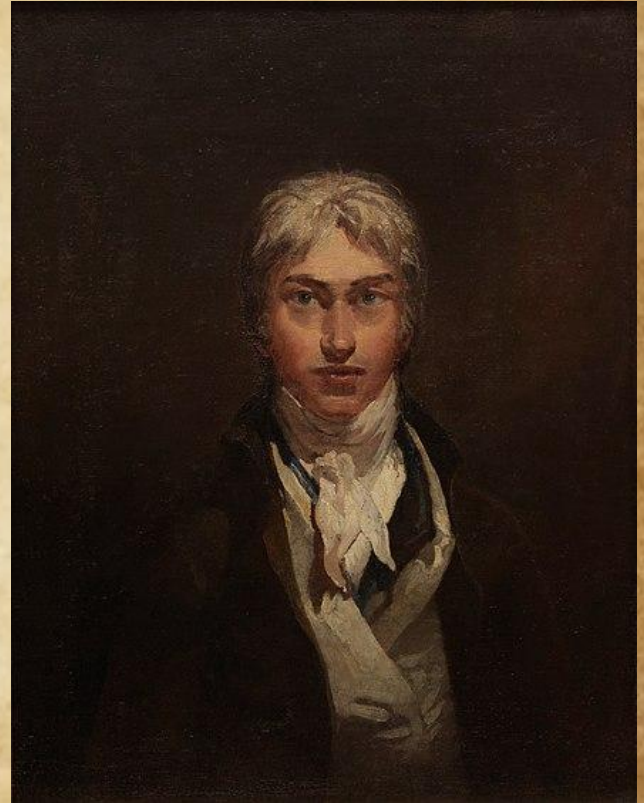
- His watercolor paintings provided a later influence on his technique with **oil paint**. He started to use oil paint in a translucent manner, which help him to produce his original style



- Over the years, the interest in **landscape** painting became the central point of his productions
- He was fascinated by the **unknown**, the **infinite** and the **sublime**. Man is attracted by the strength and **power of nature**, but at the same time he is aware of his inferiority and **fragility**

# J.M.W Turner

- He was born on **23 April 1775 in London** where he lived for all his life.
- He was a child prodigy, studied at the **Royal Academy of Arts** and he exhibited his first work there at 15.
- He earned a regular income from his commissions and sales, but for his **contrary nature** and since **he didn't have a very affable disposition** they were begrudgingly accepted.
- He opened **his own gallery in 1804** and he became a professor of perspective at the Academy in 1807.
- He travelled around Europe and typically he returned with **voluminous sketchbooks** where he painted lyrically beautiful landscapes that changed the face of British art





# Turner's temper

- Turner was a controversial figure, intensely **private, eccentric** and **reclusive**.
- He was awkward, **short-tempered** and he was difficult to deal with.
- He thought that the key of success was "**damned hard work**".
- It is said that he had himself tied to the mast of the ship during a snowstorm to capture the sublime personally.



Snowstorm; 1842; Tate, London, Great Britain

# Turner's purposes

- Throughout his career he struggled to elevate landscape painting and demonstrate that it could **equal history painting**.
- He wanted to explore the **use of color**, experiment with new ways to describe light and admire the masterpieces of **artists of the past**.
- He tried to investigate the **sublime radical nature** of color and the explosive energy of light.
- His aim, his "**pictorial mission**" was to block the light on the canvas, giving it a precise shape and color.



Light and color; 1843; Tate Britain, London



# Turner's last years

- Turner's ceaseless industriousness did not cease even in these years: in 1839 he painted one of his masterpieces "**The valiant Téméraire**" heroic and solemn work that aroused enthusiastic appreciation.
- In 1844 Turner planned a **trip to Venice**, but was forced to abandon it due to very precarious health conditions and his character also suffered becoming **shady and shamefaced**.
- He became **more pessimistic** as he got older, especially after the death of his father.
- After his father's death his outlook deteriorated and his gallery fell into disrepair and neglect and his art intensified.
- Turner began to drown his sorrows in alcohol, frequently drinking milk and rum and **rarely creating works worthy of his talent**.



The valiant Téméraire; 1838-1839;  
National Gallery, London



*Valorous soldiers against nature*

This picture is an oil on canvas painted by J.M.W. Turner, which was exposed in 1812. Initially this painting was owned by the National Gallery in London but was later acquired by the Tate Gallery. The painter's idea was to represent the crossing of the Alps by Hannibal and his soldiers, with a terrible snowstorm: Turner depicts soldiers who suffer for a decision taken against the forces of nature.

W. Turner,

Snow storm: Hannibal and his army crossing the Alps, 1812, oil on canvas, Tate Gallery, London





*The force of ocean and wind*

Snow storm is an oil on canvas which is placed in the Tate's collection of London. The painting has been exposed in Paris (Grand Palais) and in San Francisco (De Young Museum). The painting depicts the destructive force of ocean and wind, perceived from the mast of a ship.

W. Turner

Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth, 1842, oil on canvas, Tate Gallery, London





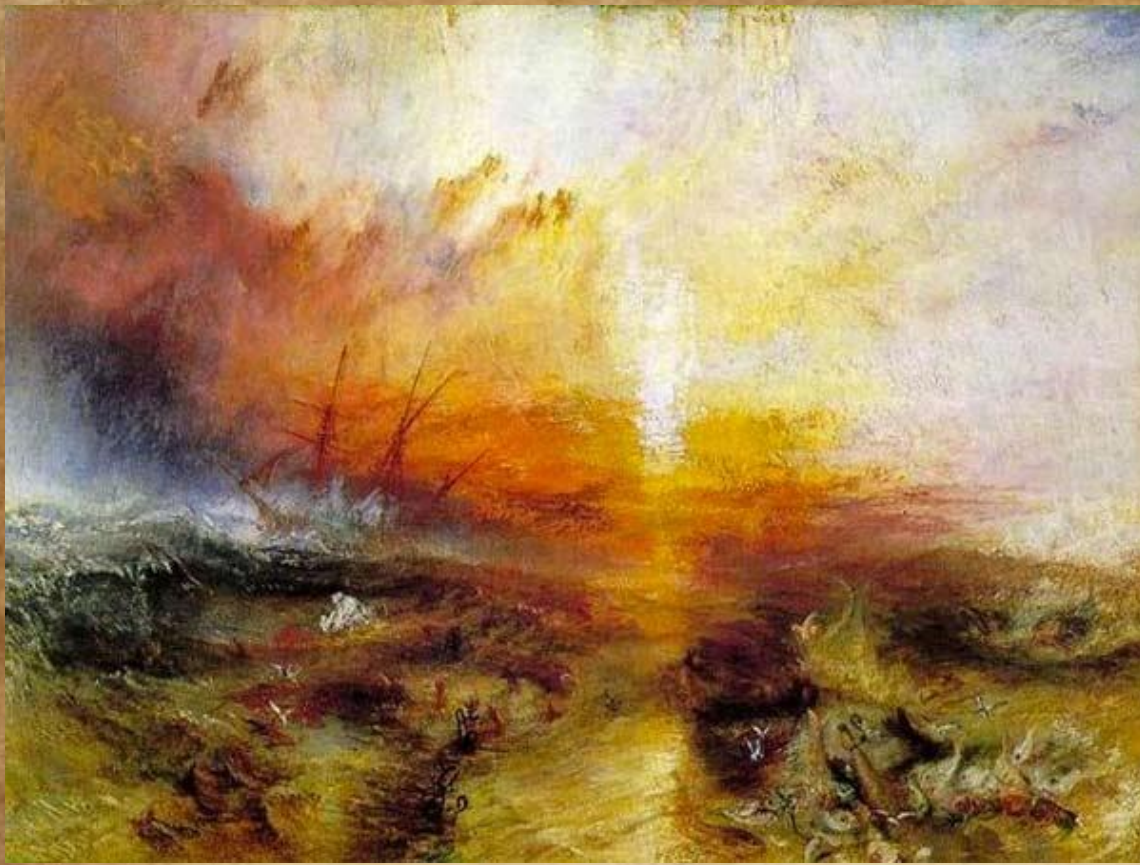
### *The evolution*

“The Fighting Temeraire, tugged to her last berth to be broken up” is an oil on canvas. It was painted by J.M.W. Turner in 1838 and it is preserved in the National Gallery. The painting pays tribute to the The Fighting Temeraire, which fought in the fleet of Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar (1805). It depicts the last voyage of this warship.

W. Turner

The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London





*The brutality of men and nature*

“The Slave Ship” is an oil on canvas painted by J. M. W. Turner in 1840. The painting is now on display at the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston. It depicts the tragedy of the slave trade: a ship is discarding human bodies in the ocean, leaving bloody water.

W. Turner  
The Slave Ship, 1840, oil on canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston





W. Turner  
Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway, 1844, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London

### *Nature and Men*

Rain, steam and Speed-The Great Western Railway is one of the most famous painting of J.M.W Turner, made it in 1844. The painting is situated at National Gallery of London. Turner painted it during the Industrial Revolution. The painting expresses the sense of speed of the train powering through the landscape. So Turner represents the power of technology and nature at the same time.



# Snow storm: steam-boat off a harbour's mouth

"He completely identified himself with the dynamic form of sovereign nature" (English art critic John Ruskin)

In a contest of natural and mechanical energies, a steamboat battles a blizzard.  
It is taking soundings 'by the lead line' to determine the depth of water.

The title specifies what is happening in precise nautical terms but Turner added some autobiographical narrative, claiming he experienced the storm.

The painting expresses the emotions felt by the author while watching nature in its terrible show, causing both fear and attraction in the viewer:  
this is what defines *the sublime*.

Turner got his inspiration from wild nature and the romantic movement clearly influenced his art, since the overwhelming and destructive force of nature is the heart of the picture.



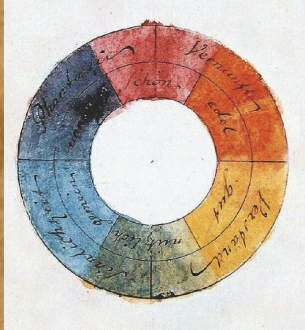
William Turner, *Snow storm: steam-boat off a harbour's mouth*, 1842, oil paint on canvas, 91x122 cm, Tate Britain, London.

## interpretation:

The steamboat represents the modernity and change brought by the industrial revolution and the beginning of a new relationship between man and nature:  
Turner is showing the scenery in a modern way, while subordinating technology to the great power of nature.

John Ruskin tells this anecdote about Turner

[ ] after dinner, sitting in his armchair by the fire I heard him muttering to himself at intervals: "soapsuds and whitewash! What would they have? I wonder what they think the seas's like? I wish they'd been in it."



Sea and wind are orientated towards the boat.



# Rain, Steam and Speed – The Great Western Railway

*"Meanwhile a train is coming at you, realistically moving at fifty miles an hour, and the reader would do well to go and see it before it leaps out of the picture."*

The picture represents a steam engine rushing towards us as it speeds along a bridge through the rain. The bridge is the Maidenhead Viaduct, which crosses the Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead on the newly laid Great Western line to Bristol and Exeter.



The whole painting is extremely dynamic. Turner represents the emotion he himself felt on this train: the transition from a rural England to an England that is opening up to progress and reflection between the past and the present of his country.

## Interpretation:

The train is modernity and Turner's painting is also modern. The train breaks into the canvas and into history. The bridge on the left for example is in the old brick style. The bridge and the train travel two different diagonals that move away from each other.

**Joseph Mallord William Turner, Rain, steam and speed - The Great Western Railway, 1844, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm. London, National Gallery.**



The picture is divided into two parts horizontally: the upper area has yellow tones and a bright white with blue-grey shades.

The lower part is not easy to decipher, but observing the small boat and the bridge on the left makes it possible to better understand the landscape shapes. In the lower part we notice the train, with darker colors and even clearer contours. The train has a *movement perspective*.

The white and red, applied with a spatula, remind the energy of the machine. The rain obscures the sunlight.



Colour is generally applied with dynamic and harsh brushstrokes to create sense of movement, while also using a *palette knife* in some places.



There is no border between the river and the sky, the shapes are undefined. The train is modernity and Turner's painting is also modern. The train breaks into the canvas and into history. The bridge on the left is in the old brick style. The bridge and the train travel two *different diagonals* that move away from each other, representing nature and modernity, respectively.



*England before the train*