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Turner and Shelley: The Sense of a Comparison

There is something arbitrary about the juxtaposition of any painting with any poem, even where one was originally intended as an illustration or an explanation of the other. There is an irreducible quantity of strangeness. Since there is no grammar or structure which necessarily shapes the juxtaposition, it inevitably expresses something of the non-inevitable, of mere subjective choice, whether that choice be artist's or critic's. This would be the same in the case of a piece of music and a poem, though not quite the same if the music actually set the words of the poem. With a sung text there is a structural connection (they both exist in the same time) lacking in almost all cases of visual and linguistic parallels, even in signs which have a linguistic gloss, though in some simple examples this might be arguable. In placing Turner's *Rome, from Mount Aventine* (1836) [figure 76] alongside Shelley's "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills" (1818) I shall try to investigate this strangeness in works which have *prima facie* only marginal connections, and yet which quite a few might agree have "in some sort of sense" a similarity of "Romantic" spirit. It is certainly not my intention to reduce the strangeness of such a comparison. On the contrary, I feel that attempts to present the inter-art comparison as if it were not contingent surreptitiously oblige the comparer to render one art in the grammar or structure of the other. Since the comparison, if it is genuinely public, is almost invariably in language, it is usually the pictorial which is rendered in the linguistic. The painterly in other words is reduced to the literary. This capturing of the world by language tends to turn the world into the monochrome – if I may risk this metaphor here – of the speaker's voice. But in saying that one is only describing how things are. To object to it would be tantamount to objecting to the functioning of language as the half-dialogue half-assimilation which is its communal existence. However it is interesting to allow – although to be honest one must really say not "allow" but "create" – the non-linguistic otherness of painting within the linguistic comparison. The last thing I am therefore trying to do is prove that these two works should stand together. It is an irony, as I shall also

speculate, that Shelley and Turner might not have accepted this relative mutual untransformability of their arts.[1]

The painting is by Turner and is on loan to the National Gallery of Scotland from Lord Rosebery.[2] It has been relatively recently restored, in the main successfully as far as it is possible to judge, and certainly more successfully than its companion piece in the Gallery from Lord Rosebery's collection *Modern Rome: Campo Vaccino*, whose colour shifts have been left looking improbably violent. *Aventine* is also quite rare in having escaped lining over the years, so that its surface texture is uncommonly well preserved.[3] In the case of our Shelley text, "preservation" is an issue, but perhaps less crucially so than in some Shelley poems, say "Mont Blanc". The question of preservation is however almost always acute in Turner's work. Technically eclectic, his paintings are often in consequence highly unstable. This was recognized from the outset, and Ruskin lamented that no "picture of Turner's is seen in perfection a month after it is painted".[4] This is something of an exaggeration,

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1 Works on Turner and poetry include John Gage: *Colour in Turner: Poetry and Truth* (London: Studio Vista, 1969); Mordechai Omer: *Turner and the Poets* (London: Greater London Council, 1975); Andrew Wilton: *Painting and Poetry: Turner's Verse Book and his Work of 1804-1812* (London: Tate Gallery, 1990). The last, in addition to transcriptions of the painter's verse, also contains transcriptions by Rosalind Mallord Turner of material crucial to Turner's theoretical conception of the relationship between the arts, some of which have already appeared in work by Jerrold Ziff (see below n. 34). Two more general studies of the subject are James A.W. Heffernan: *The Re-creation of Landscape: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Constable and Turner* (Hanover: UPof New England, 1985); Ann Bermingham: *Landscape and Ideology: The English Romantic Tradition 1740-1860* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987). Rendered somewhat less necessary by the new transcriptions of the verse, including "Fallacies of Hope", in Wilton (1990) is Jack Lindsay: *The Sunset Ship: An Anthology of Turner's Verse* (London: Scorpion P, 1966).

2 National Gallery of Scotland, The Earl of Rosebery Loan 1978. The painting had previously been at Mentmore. *Rome, from Mount Aventine*, 362 x 492, oil on canvas, is number 366, plate number 344, in: *The Paintings of J.M.W. Turner* 2 vols., Martin Butlin and Evelyn Joll (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1977). For bibliography and provenance see pp. 196ff. of the text volume. My thanks are due to Dr Lindsay Errington, Assistant Keeper at the National Gallery, for access to the Gallery's records. I am indebted to the Rosebery family for permission to reproduce the photograph [figure 76].

3 Information on the materials, techniques and state of the painting I owe to Mr. John Dick, the Restorer at the National Gallery of Scotland, who gave very generously of his time and expertise. Any misinformation or misuse of information is of course mine alone. I also owe an unrepayable debt to William Drummond Bone, ARSA, RSW, who first persuaded me that while all craft is not art, all art is craft.

4 John Ruskin: *Modern Painters* vol. 1 (1843). In: : *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: G. Allen, 1903-12), III, 249n. Butlin and Joll's presentation of part of this passage on p. 196 is misleading in its inversion of the sequence of extracts.

but rather less of one than one might think. Ruskin continues: "the vermilions frequently lose lustre [...] a year or two after the picture is painted, a painful deadness and opacity come over them, the whites especially becoming lifeless, and many of the warmer passages settling into a hard valueless brown [...] That which is greatest in him is entirely independent of means; much of what he now accomplishes illegitimately might without doubt be attained by securer modes." Ruskin suggests that if he feels it necessary Turner should paint one painting a year in his "immediate" and evanescent mode, but ensure the permanency of the majority of his output! Turner's apparent disregard for permanence, somewhat at odds one might feel with the impulse behind the Turner Bequest, might be interpreted in at least two ways – either as transient sensationalism or more philosophically as a lack of interest in time. The two are close to being moral opposites, though their effects might well be virtually identical. In the first the immediate impact is at the expense of permanence, and in the second immediacy is the messenger of permanence beyond the illusory continuity of time. It is this second kind of transience – immediacy – of which Shelley for example writes in the opening of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

> The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats though unseen amongst us, – visiting
> This various world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower. –
> Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,
> It visits with inconstant glance
> Each human heart and countenance,
> Like hues and harmonies of evening, –
> Like clouds in starlight widely spread, [...]

It is not altogether absurd therefore to see a connection between Turner's interest in the "immaterial vehicles of colour, steam, smoke, mist"[5] as subjects and his willingness to sacrifice permanency for the sake of a spectacular immediate effect. Far from being an admission of defeat in the face of time, they are attempts to catch at that which can only exist outside of the temporal dimension. His painting therefore takes on some of the qualities which the Romantics attributed to music. In this way of thinking the very permanence of printed words is a liability in their attempts to speak of the metaphysical.

The *ad hoc* nature of Turner's practice with his materials is well known and documented. All sorts of strange stuff can appear in a Turner oil, including water-colour, sand and glass (to give texture which catches light), and all

5 Graham Reynolds: *Turner* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969), 149.

kinds of media and varnish. There are many stories of Turner at Royal Academy varnishing days cooking and garnishing, as Samuel Palmer put it, of which Richard Redgrave's that he lifted colours from colleagues palettes and "at once" used them on a "picture he was at work upon with a mastic maglyph [= megilp]"[6] is typical. It is equally typical that using megilp as a medium for the kind of impasto effect implied by Redgrave is not a stable process in the longer term.[7] It is as if what is being created is not a *record* of beauty, but an "inconstant" beauty in its own right. Constable wrote of the 1836 Royal Academy paintings which include *Aventine*: "Turner has outdone himself, he seems to paint with tinted steam, so evanescent and airy."[8] This might be true in more senses than one.

Question-marks over Turner's material technique were a constant feature of reviews, and indeed it was to be a *Blackwoods* review of the three paintings exhibited in the summer of 1836, namely *Aventine*, *Mercury and Argus*, and *Juliet on her Balcony*, which led to the letter to Turner which Ruskin was later to call the first chapter of Modern Painters.[9] Again judgement often depended not so much on differing analysis as on interpretation of that analysis. Friendly critics interpreted the technical peculiarities of the paintings as part of the intended effect. But although not directly concerned with longevity, even they were concerned that those virtues which take time were being sacrificed for effects seemingly produced in an instant. Thus the *Spectator* of *Aventine*: "the Eternal City is spread out below the eye – an immense perspective of buildings relieved by a solitary pine-tree, steeped in a flood of golden sunlight", but of the other two paintings: "To expect Turner to define when he can indicate so marvellously is, we fear, out of the question."[10] The *Athenaeum*, while still positive, is more guarded still – of *Aventine*: "a gorgeous picture, full of air and sunshine, though sadly unfinished in its execution." Both reviewers are balancing the vague and possibly ephemeral against the precise and time-consuming – time-consuming in the sense that there is a proportion between time taken in execution and time bought from eternity. In both cases they are prepared to prefer the undefined and the almost

6 Reynolds, 144. The gloss is mine.

7 It is nevertheless a traditional process, though one cannot imagine that Turner's *ad hoc* employment of it helped it any. Megilp consists of one part boiled oil with lead and one part prepared mastic varnish. See Jonathan Stephenson: *The Materials and Techniques of Painting* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989), 49; 149; this also has a useful bibliography on painting materials.

8 Quoted by Reynolds, 150.

9 Ruskin, *Praeterita* I, ch. XII (1885). In: Ruskin, XXXV, 218.

10 Quoted by A.J. Finberg: *The Life of J.M.W. Turner* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 359.

immaterial air and sunlight. Clearly parallels could be drawn with a Romantic poetic of the organic, stressing the never-finished quality of being, and the moral necessity to escape the defining word as agent of repressive reason and repressive society. Here visual definition and painterly care are replaced by "indications" and what appears to be inspired improvisation. The parallel is indeed suggested by the *Athenaeum* itself, though in its own very nebulous terms: *Mercury and Argus* "is another of his rainbow-hued rhapsodies, a thing much like Shelley' s poetry, to be felt rather than to be understood".[11] Perhaps pressing this a little too hard for comfort, one might still suggest that "rainbow-hued" carries the hint not only of beauty but of transience, and that "rhapsodies" has the sense of a disordered outpouring. The dialectic of feeling and understanding could indeed be taken directly from Shelley himself. In these reviews then it is Turner's technique, let us notice, which brings up the parallel of a Romantic literary aesthetic every bit as much as the subject matter.

But of course the same "unfinished" eclectic inspiration could offend as well as seduce. If one's sense of eternity is static rather than dynamic, being rather than becoming, then Turner's method will seem merely an indulgence of the ephemeral, and destructive of values which have to be stable in order to be values. Of *Aventine* the Rev. John Eagles writes in *Blackwoods*: "A most unpleasant mixture, wherein white gamboge and raw sienna are, with childish execution, daubed together."[12] For all that, and this painting comes off distinctly less badly than the other two, Eagles keeps calling Turner a "genius". Perhaps that term is itself, with its high Romantic associations, not unambiguous praise. It suggests the immediacy of inspiration – Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and Byron's "lava of the imagination" – which though a caricature rather than an accurate account of Romantic poetics is certainly a caricature with currency.[13] And of course it suggests the abandonment of the objective virtues of care and craft.

Both praise and condemnation can then be seen as placing Turner, almost entirely from a technical point of view, within a tradition which from a

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11 *Athenaeum* No. 446 (May 14 1863): 347f.

12 *Blackwoods* XL (October 1836): 551. The Rev. John Eagles was the second generation of his family with an interest in the arts. He had himself aspirations towards being a landscape artist. He contributed to *Blackwoods* from 1831, and was also a poet of sorts, like Turner, which one might see as having a bearing on our theme. See *DNB* VI (1908), 312.

13 Compare J.D. Bone: "The Emptiness of Genius." In: *Genius: The History of an Idea*, ed. Penny Murray (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 173-94. Eagles is unlikely to have been read as using genius with a sense of its real conceptual ambivalence – rather there may have been a sarcastic edge.

philosophic point of view revalues the transient as the messenger of eternity, and the careless as the free. Thornbury's *Life of J.M.W. Turner* however seems to tackle *Aventine* from a different point of view. Apparently based on information supplied by Eastlake[14] that the eventual first owner of the finished painting (Munro of Navar) had commissioned a "copy", not an "ideal" painting, Thornbury comments:

> So faithful, indeed, has the painter been in this beautiful picture that he has, even at some peril to his success, introduced in the left-foreground a long monotonous row of modern houses; but these he has so cleverly varied with slant shadows that they become pleasing and conduct the eye to where it should go – the matchless distance.

There can clearly be no question of the oil having been done on site, despite what Munro's catalogue suggests. There is no hard evidence even of Munro's having commissioned an on-site sketch in 1828-29.[15] One has to say that at least Thornbury had seen the painting, whereas it is clear that not only was there confusion over the naming of the painting until Armstrong's catalogue of 1902, but that relatively recent critics have written without first-hand knowledge of it.[16] The National Gallery's documentation of the painting now includes a modern photograph of these "modern" buildings. They would no longer be thought monotonous, and it is interesting that Thornbury could conceive of them as such. But what is the aesthetic implication of his observation that this row conducts "the eye where it *should* go" (my italics), not to mention the "matchless distance"? If we are tempted to read these as general rather than particular comments, that is that Thornbury believes it to be the

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14 W. Thornbury: *The Life of J.M.W. Turner, R.A. Founded on 35 Letters and Papers Furnished by His Friends and Fellow-Academicians* (London, 1862; rev. ed., 1877). Thornbury's Life has a quotation from Shelley's *Alastor* as its motto: "Nature's most secret steps [...] to love and wonder" (ll. 81-98).

15 See Butlin and Joll, 197. Though it is plausible that a "realist" sketch was made, and even commissioned, there is no positive evidence for it – such as they are, the claims are not only second-hand, but *parti-pris*. Munro's own catalogue of 1865 supports the idea that the painting was done "on the spot". This is clearly not true in the literal sense. See Butlin and Joll, 197. See also J. Gage: "Turner's Academic Friendships: C.L. Eastlake." In: *The Burlington Magazine* CX (1968): 682, who believes that it was *Modern Rome: Campo Vaccino* that was sketched with Eastlake. Given his argument, there seems no reason why both paintings could not have been referred to, but whatever is the case it was clearly not this painting which was done *in situ*, and whether or not it was originally the subject of a "realist" commission is impossible to determine. The National Gallery's wall caption to the painting is reasonable but perhaps rather over-confident: "Turner made topographical studies for the picture in Rome, 1828-9, in the company of the artist Eastlake."

16 Butlin and Joll, 197. Gage is amongst them.

proper business of the aesthetic sense to ignore the material immediate for the less material beyond, then this commentary becomes another with a thoroughly Romantic perspective, in which defending the painting against a putative charge of literalism can only be read as tactical. He defends it, in short, against the very charges least likely to be brought against it. Nevertheless he reminds us that the painting functions at least in part through a tension between more articulate foreground and less articulate distance. This is worth remembering as we begin a more specific consideration of its construction.

It is not quite true, as the National Gallery itself might be thought to suggest in its wall captions, that *Aventine* contains none of the symbolic possibilities to be found in its companion piece on the walls *Modern Rome – Campo Vaccino*. Of the figures in the right foreground the youngest is kneeling facing the light which floods in from between the tree and the right-hand picture's edge, and has her hands raised in a gesture suggesting the acceptance of blessing. All of the figures are more realistic in manner than not, and this is typical of the figures in Turner's landscapes from his 1828-29 visit.[17] But the pose of the youngest suggests more or less obviously a benediction from the light onto her youth, and then it is partly a matter of the individual's susceptibility to the iconography of the just off-centre tree how far one extends the religious possibilities. However, to equate the possibilities of this with an interpretation of the whole painting would be indeed out of all proportion. The most immediate impression is, I would suggest, the contrast between the dark mass of the tree and the light, not only streaming under its crown but diffused across the whole of the rest of the scene. It is true that the

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17 Though the Rome paintings, unlike those at Venice, characteristically have the people dwarfed by the City. In general the 1828-29 visit concentrated more on the everyday than the earlier trip of 1819, which had a more mythological habit. The question of the importance of "subject" in Turner's painting is highly controversial. Wilton (1990, 110, n. 37) points out that it was Ruskin who inaugurated "the idea that Turner's paintings [...] were capable of being interpreted in terms of symbolism" and that this has produced a fair share of "garbled and implausible theories [...] of the meaning of the pictures". But Wilton himself (1990, 54) sees Turner at least up to 1812 as having "a strikingly consistent view of landscape as economic complex", which I in turn would find difficult to swallow. See below pp. 219. See too Martin Butlin: "J.M.W. Turner: Art and Content." In: *The Catalogue of the Bicentenary Exhibition* (London: Royal Academy, 1974). Turner's own expressed hierarchy may sometimes have placed landscape well below "history painting", but he often (though not always) seems surprisingly unaware of political activity going on around him. On the other hand, is "visionary landscape" the same genre as landscape? The fact that "the subject" and even a literary gloss were often added late in the day to Turner's paintings does not necessarily reduce their importance in the final overall effect. See Martin Butlin: *Turner: Later Works* (London: Tate Gallery, 1965; reprint 1981), 5; 11; Andrew Wilton: *Turner Abroad: France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland* (London: British Museum, 1982), 12f.; 37.

perspective of 10 buildings, as Thornbury suggests, leads us into the left-centre distance, and true also that the curvilinear lines of the Tiber lead us into the horizon.[18] But the depth is always resisted, or counterpointed, by the dark mass of the tree, which is also placed so that its height curves towards the centre-line of the painting but does not reach it, and its crown almost but not quite extends the line of the river as it vanishes into the haze. Its compositional function is antiphonal.

The off-centre tree of course is a Turner favourite, and reappears in various guises on various canvases – in the 1834 *Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sibyl* (Shelley also writes about Baiae by the way), or in the *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage – Italy* of 1832 (this time reversed on the left of centre) to name but two. It is however particularly striking in the fine surface texture of the *Aventine* painting as we now have it. Given the shortage of greens at his disposal, one can assume that Turner built up the crown of the tree from blacks and yellows, almost certainly working up from the earlier lay-in of the yellow sky behind it. It therefore comes out of but also obscures the sky behind it. The dark amorphous mass of its crown is underlit by the light, and here is painted in considerable detail, which again produces a contrast of expanse and articulation. The tree is the inverse of the scumbled light, which is laid over but which reveals that which lies beneath it. But both make us aware of the relationship of matter and light.

We know that a lot of his paintings were produced in a very dramatic way from lay-ins: "blue for sea or sky and yellow shading through orange into brown where there were to be trees or landscape,"[19] and then finished at a very late stage, sometimes indeed on varnishing days. Watercolour work without realistic forms, the so-called "colour beginnings", begins from the early 1820's. Boards "stained with oil", not to mention a roll of canvas from the 1828 Italian trip, also predate the picture of the burning of the Houses of Parliament in 1834 which is often taken as marking the start of his more "abstract" work. It is this process which leads to the dramatic "twentieth century" semi-abstracts of the later years, where he composed "in colour, dissolving, suggesting, and only half-defining, form; in his private exercises he composed in colour washes alone, virtually excluding any reference to the forms of nature, unless we regard them as veiled areas of sky, earth, and sea".[20]

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18 Compare Butlin (1981), p.5. The replacement of a Claudian arrangement of recessive planes by curvilinear lines leading into the distance in the later landscapes also forms "a flowing pattern on the surface of the picture". This is part of the shimmering movement between surface and depth, or medium and essence, which I am arguing is vital to *Rome, from Mount Aventine*.

19 Butlin (1981), 8.

20 Reynolds, 149.

The analogies between this more extreme practice and certain elements of Shelley's characteristic world-view are fairly obvious, and take us back to images of the permanence of the One and the transience of the many (in *Adonais* stanza 52 for example), in which the particularity of the material world can only approach the unity of the Idea as it dissolves in death. In the rather strange world of this rhetoric, to repeat, transience becomes the sign not of death but of eternity, and solidity (Blake's "solid obstruction" of the land separating from the waters at the creation in *The First Book of Urizen*) is the sign of true death. Like Shelley's Cloud, Turner "unbuilds"[21] his material forms as he goes, leaving only the reality of the colour-volume and dissolving the illusion of three-dimensional space dependent on matter. The inner space is liberated from the limiting and normally defining form. The "immaterial vehicles of colour, steam, smoke, mist"[22] become the realities of which normal reality is the illusory vehicle. Reynolds's use of the term "veiled" in the quotation above has also a peculiarly Shelleyean resonance. The "veil of being" is for Shelley the material clothing which banishes us from the being of being – it is the bodily existence which obstructs "the light for which all thirst".[23] In Turner's case an absence reveals the new vision. He does not solidify the lay-ins of these late "semi-abstracts". They are not veiled by being born into natural forms.

However, this later (or contemporary but private) technique is not the technique of *Aventine*. Not only is the tree representationally built up, thus both being part of and obscuring the sky behind it, but so, very obviously, is the foreground left and centre. Here a brown glaze is used on top of pigment,

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21 I change, but I cannot die
[...] the winds and sunbeams, with their convex gleams,
Build up the blue dome of Air
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again. – ("The Cloud" ll. 76-84).

22 Reynolds, 149.

23 *Adonais* st. 54:
That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

and as is typical of true glazing, the effect is to advance the surface treated. The same technique creates the "modern" building – and this is presumably the portion being referred to by Eagles as a mixture of "white gamboge and raw sienna". The miracle for us is that if gamboge was involved the painting still, or once again, looks as it does, for it is not light-fast. The textural effects of the white of the river are almost certainly obtained from the considerable body given by white lead. There is a tension involved here too, for the river acquires a greater solidity as it moves past the buildings. Its advance into the centre has greater surface articulation, greater presence, than the foregrounded but hazy buildings on its banks. The effect is complex: the tree and the river close in on the centre of the painting at different heights, but do not wholly occupy it. One is white, the other dark, and this *contrast* is underscored by the similar mass of their textures. One leads us into the dissolving distance, but the other either holds the eye, or rather obliges the eye consciously to move past it, and in this to become aware of movement and tension. There is as it were a complicity between river and tree to dissolve, by contrast as well as by movement, the foreground left and right into the background centre – though that suggests something altogether too static. The whole effect is interactive, not uni-directional. There is no resolution. The impasto effect of the white of the river where it catches the light matches the mass of the dark tree almost as if it were a reflection of it. We are affected too, I would argue, by a subsidiary but important organizational pull to the right of the painting, at the source, off-stage, of the glowing light. This is at the apex of a rough triangle whose base is formed by a very striking prussian-blue bag (which almost extends the line of the tree) in the right foreground amongst the figures, and a patch of equally striking blue (probably cobalt-based) in the top left-hand corner of the sky. The light emerges in a triangular spread, scumbled in turbid medium, possibly done with a cloth, or even perhaps with the palm of a hand. Here the effect of solid tree against hazy background is reversed – the surface appears transparent, transforming certainly but also revealing the solidity behind it. This cross-movement provides a sense of a definite source for the light, which in the main centralizing movement is the stuff of indefiniteness and all-pervasiveness. It is here, as indeed it appears on the head and shoulders of the girl, a revelation rather than a sublimation, a glow over creation, rather than the glow into which creation resolves itself. The blues are intensifications at opposite ends of a diagonal of the blues present in the river. Working in the opposite way, the thick white lead at the centre of the river is an intensification, or embodiment, of the whites in the modern building and suggested by the light, which lie at either end of a gentle curve linking the opposite banks of the river. The texture of

the painting thus contrasts various levels of focus or realization. This counterpoint of light and body, the contrasting movements of perspective and texture, of advancement of surface and desubstantialization, is perhaps at its subtlest in Turner's use of pen and ink. The detail of the buildings, most noticeably in the middle background to the right of the river, is a mixture of line allowed to show through a transparent colour, and of line cut into colour. Detail is both given and removed at the later stages of painting. Once again, of course, Turner is not at all abashed at the mixture of media. Solidity is dissolved by the veil of colour as light, and is revealed by the incision of the line. In literary terms the play of surface becomes the play of the resolution of the material into the Idea with the realization of the Idea in the material. In pictorial terms one could more simply and more sympathetically talk of natural representation, or "copying" in Thornbury's terms, being played off against idealizing pictorial form. Very little, if any, of this is available to anyone studying a reproduction, and much might be lost through time or unsympathetic restoration. In such circumstances one could see why the symbolic content in literary terms might be the most easily accessible matter for discussion.

Turner's interplay here of foreground and background, of solidity and light, of representation of the three-dimensional world and of presentation of surface (as light) as the "end" of representation, can be presented then as compatible with a Romantic, or more specifically Shelleyean, literary aesthetic. The important thing for me in this compatibility is that it is broadly independent of any "literary" content of the painting, and that it is nevertheless specific to this *painting*. A verbal analysis should remind one at every comma that it is at a remove from that which it analyses.

There is a sense in which this dislocation also occurs in the analysis of a poem. However here at least the medium of the analysis is the same. We have to remember that an analysis of a painting by a demonstration *in painting* is not at all impossible or even uncommon – simply that it rarely happens in the genuinely public domain of the book, as opposed to the quasi-private domain of the studio. Here I have tried to strait-jacket myself by discussing the painting first.

Despite the initial appearance of a somewhat *ad hoc* structure, an appearance perhaps given some legitimacy by the fact that we know it was not through composed,[24] on closer inspection we realize that Euganean Hills has

24 It was started in October 1818 at Este, and completed in Naples before 20 December 1818. Mary Shelley claims in her edition of 1839 that the poem was only finished after she had "with some difficulty urged him" to complete it. See D. Reiman and S.B. Powers: *Shelley's*

a symmetrical outline. Reiman[25] calls it "pyramidal", and sees the sections forming units of 89, 77, 39, 79, and 89 lines. The same structure could also be expressed by following the paragraph structure, in which case we find 3+3+1+3+3, represented by three paragraphs meditation on human unhappiness, three on Venice, one on the role of the poet and Byron specifically, three on Padua, and three on a return to the meditation on human life. Different editions have mildly differing views on where the paragraphs should break, and one editorial tradition even differs in the number of paragraphs.[26] No doubt this is settleable. The real reason for invoking another measure of symmetry is to suggest that the symmetry has another scale as well as that of Reiman's line measure. Not, notice, a less precise scale, for there is a sense in which 3+3+1+3+3 is actually in abstract tighter than Reiman's measure, but a larger scale.

The level at which the symmetry exists is based on a larger unit of organization than the line. Reiman's initial analysis in fact reads the poem as falling into three sections, corresponding to my first 3, then the next 7, then my last three. The middle section he then subdivides into three, my second 3, then my 17 central 1, then finally my third 3. This produces his suggestive but slightly skewed line symmetry. What I would like to suggest is that the actual experience of reading the poem is characteristically a mixture of the three scales of analysis (i.e. sections, paragraphs, and lines). But on Reiman's line scale I very much doubt if the symmetry is noticed, and at the opposite extreme I doubt if the seven central paragraphs cohere in a single section. In other words the reader notices a pull towards symmetry at a level which is neither architectural nor momentary, but rather floating somewhere between the thematic and the purely formal. The symmetry is distanced from the reader by the varying lengths of the verse paragraphs, and he or she may be constantly on the point of abandoning the symmetrical possibility or feeling.

Poetry and Prose (New York: Norton, 1977), 580. All quotations of Shelley's poetry are from this edition, unless otherwise noted, as it has some claims to be the best textual authority in advance of the Matthews and Everest edition.

25 Reiman and Powers, 581. I am indebted to Reiman's essay "Structure, Symbol, and Theme in Lines written among the Euganean Hills", which is reprinted here (579-96) for the starting point of my discussion. See also Matthew C. Brenan in *Explicator* II (1987): 23-6, for an interesting reading, not incompatible with mine here, of lines 285-319 ("Noon descends [...]").

26 K.N. Cameron, ed.: *Shelley: Selected Poetry and Prose* (NewYork: Rinehart, 1951; reprint 1965), and R. Ingpen and W.E.Peck, eds.: *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London and New York: The Julian Edition, 1927), III, 49-59; both break at the octosyllabic line and open the second paragraph at line 45 (163). Reiman opens his at line 27 (104). The Julian tradition does not break paragraph 11 into 11 and 12 at line 320, as does Reiman (111).

Unless the scale of reading is unnaturally brought into close-focus by analysis, the particular realization of the symmetry would not be part of the experience of reading.

Before I consider this further, I should like to look at a related element in the poem's prosody. This is the dominating use of the seven-syllable line, varied by the occasional appearance of the more normal octosyllabic. Reiman's theory is that the strongly accented shorter line invokes the inevitability of man's march towards the grave, and that the eight-syllable variations usually appear where the poet "describes or invokes a break in the inexorable march of Necessity", except in the concluding lines, where the seven-syllable line reverses its moral but not its rhetorical function, by invoking in "the healing powers of love and reason a strength and inevitability equal to that bondage portrayed earlier in the poem".[27] Some of this convinces. But at the opening of the poem, for example, the octosyllables carry the hope of the green isles, indeed the second line almost aspires in its nine syllables to the condition of the pentameter until the weak final syllable, and then the measure audibly collapses in the fourth line. The seven-syllable lines are then dominated by a movement which rather than sounding "strongly" stressed is a withdrawal of energy in limping trochaic stumbles.

> Many a green isle needs must be
> In the deep wide sea of misery,
> Or the mariner, worn and wan,
> Never thus could voyage on
> Day and night, and night and day,
> Drifting on his weary way, [...]

I would agree that the end of the poem uses the seven-syllable line in a different way, this time to emphasize within its restricted space the onward drive of the poet's positive vision – but there is also a crucial difference in its inner structure, for here the characteristic swing is upward – that is the emphasis, the stress, increases through a phrase, rather than decreasing. This is particularly noticeable in a comparison of the trochaic quality of the opening of the last three lines quoted above with the lines in the sequence below (twelve lines from the end of the poem) which almost seem to be suppressing an opening emphasis which gradually builds up through their anapaestic and iambic movement until it bursts forth finally in the climactic "Circling" (a key-word also to be found at a key moment in "Mont Blanc" – line 126):

> While each breathless interval
> In their whisperings musical

27 Reiman and Powers, 596.

> The inspired soul supplies
> With its own deep melodies,
> And the love which heals all strife
> Circling, like the breath of life [...] (ll. 362-7)

In other words there is considerable variation in the effects of the seven/eight-syllable contrast. It may be that what we are invited to notice in the seven-syllable lines at the close in relation to those at the opening is the transformation of tone from negative to positive through the transformed rhythm. But from time to time the seven-syllable line so dominates that I suspect its shortfall or restriction is forgotten. Neither does Reiman remark at all on the fact that at the beginning of the poem there is a strong tendency for all the paragraph openings to have eight syllables (usually for the first three lines) with only the exceptions of the second and the fifth paragraphs, in the latter of which it might be argued that the extra syllable is implied by the heavy pause after "Sun-girt City!"[28] Moreover there are only four other cases I believe when it appears – lines 45-7, 134-7 and 151 – within these six paragraphs – that is, until the hinge point of the poem. In fact it is presumably its appearance which encourages at least one editor to begin the second paragraph at lines 45-7 rather than at 27, as Reiman's text does, which would leave only one exception. But at the hinge point of the poem, this octosyllabic opening is dropped until the last paragraph, though octosyllables occur from time to time, twice made obvious at or very nearly at the *end* of paragraphs. One could speculate that the change in paragraph opening simply marked a break in the composition. Or perhaps the reprise of the longer line together with the image "Other flowering isles must be" in the last paragraph makes us aware that we are reaching the end (I read the first line of this paragraph with the "extra" syllable partly because of the definitely longer second line, but it is arguable), and as beginnings and ends are important triggers for perception of pattern this would remind us that the poem does have a shape.

Could we not then be tempted into saying that the prosodic variations, together with the oddities of the there-and-not-there overall symmetry (on the rationale of which Reiman does not speculate) call attention not only to the semantics of necessity in both its negative and positive guises, but also make us aware of a formal shadowiness which becomes a meaningful part of the experience of the poem? The couplet in itself tends to make us aware of a certain formal regularity, a certain obvious structural skeleton, but the

28 Reiman does not have the exclamation mark. Even so, the point might stand:
Sun-girt City, though hast been
Ocean's shild, and then his queen; (ll. 115f).

variations of line length, the variations as the poem progresses in the marking of paragraph openings, and the out-of-focus complexity of the poem's broad overall symmetry, blur the edges of our perception of form, while nevertheless keeping us aware of it. Our sense of a form comes and goes, as it were; we can believe we have captured it, only to lose it again. This is actually a technique not uncommon to Shelley. The rhyme scheme of "Mont Blanc" is a case in point – every line-ending has its rhyming home, though it is very hard to believe that the reader is more than hazily aware of it. "Ode to the West Wind" also famously slips between terza rima and sonnet. "Ode to Liberty" is (or is not) a sonnet sequence in which each unit has an "extra", overflowing, line.[29] This formal blurring has analogies with Shelley's concern for a sequence of creation (or epistemology) which moves from the indefinite to the finite (or perceived) and necessarily on once more into the resolution of difference in infinity (or universal harmony or non-differentiation or whatever). The moment of individuation, or clarity of form, has to be allowed to pass, so that the illusion of separate existence can give way to the reality of Oneness.[30] Again there is here a moral pressure. Clarity is the hubris of perceived time in the face of unperceivable eternity. And yet, of course, the poet has to speak. But perhaps, and perhaps like Turner's painting, he can only speak the truth if the words vanish on the air at the moment of speech.

To return to the overall structure, this time in thematic terms: it is informed by a sinuous subject movement, which takes us from a brief hint of individual solace through a dark vision of human pointlessness, back to a more specific case of that possible solace. The movement then proceeds through interwoven description and moral commentary on Venice, and emerges in the central section (the unit of 1) into the paean of praise for Byron, and through him the power of poetry, before retreating once more, as one might put it, into intermingled description and commentary on Padua. The content symmetry with the opening then returns us in the last group of three paragraphs to the specific case of solace that the narrator is experiencing, moves us briefly back to the negative vision, and then transforms the poem's opening tentativeness with a positive variation of that opening – "Other flowering isles must be" (l. 335) – which introduces the long conclud-

29 "Ode to Liberty" (in: Reiman and Powers, 229-36) has a fifteen-line stanza.

30 As in the famous lines of *Adonais*, st. 52:
The One remains, the many change and pass,
Heavens light forever shines, Earth's shadoes fly,
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments [...].

ing vision of the earth redeemed. The whole might be described as a kind of slipping and sliding process. We are asked to consider a positive possibility, we are led into a negative; we are introduced to a personal experience specific to a time and place, then we are asked to contemplate moral and political decay; we are encouraged to see not only a poet but poetry heroically; we repeat the picture of decadence; then we are taken to the core of a personal vision of peace, again specific to time and place ("Noon descends around me now.../the line/Of the olive-sandalled Appennine/In the south dimly islanded" ll. 285, 305-7) which nevertheless dissolves place and time, and then itself is dissolved by time ("Autumn's evening meets me soon" l. 321); and finally that personal vision is transformed into a vision which may eventually encompass all mankind and all the world. Positives and negatives interchange; the personal, the historic, and the Ideal interchange; the descriptive, the visionary, the temporal and the eternal interchange. Part of the quality of the poem lies in the experience of this changing focus, as well as in the more simple shift of its weight from negative to positive.

On the level of individual words and images it is perhaps to erect a castle too palpably of straw to point to the obvious Turneresque parallels, particularly in lines 285-319, and then to dismiss these as accidental. For one thing, it might very well be that they are not merely accidental, but part of the conditioning force of poetry on all cultural activity. Shelley's view of Padua and Venice (a view of the mind's eye, however, since from the Euganean Hills the chances of seeing Venice as he describes it are pretty implausible) is clearly of a kind that conditioned, or could have conditioned, the painter as well as the poet:

> Noon descends around me now;
> 'Tis the noon of autumn's glow,
> When a soft and purple mist
> Like a vaporous amethyst,
> Or an air-dissolved star
> Mingling light and fragrance, far
> From the curved horizon's bound
> To the point of heaven's profound,
> Fills the overflowing sky; [...] (ll. 285-93)

Misty views of Italian cities, the whole cult of an indefiniteness which bypasses the merely accurate senses to reveal the Unity beyond them, and with that the cult of a golden age behind the present (in both temporal and spiritual senses of "behind"), are indubitably part of the heritage of Romantic poetry. Shelley's rhetoric in this passage almost consists in an oxymoronic conjunction of focus and dissolution – ("soft ... mist ... vaporous"/ "amethyst"; "dissolved"/ "star"; – and one might add "noon"/ "autumn" none too fancifully

to the list). The purple light overflows the visible world just as it does in Rome from Mount Aventine. Earlier in the poem the "sunless vapour dim" (l. 63) of futile death is directly contrasted with the sun-filled dawn:

> Beneath is spread like a green sea,
> The waveless plain of Lombardy,
> Bounded by the vaporous air,
> Islanded by cities fair [...] (ll. 90-3)

The view is recognizably from the same mental standpoint as Turner's – the earth is desubstantialized into sea, but the whole is held in the visible medium of the air, so bringing the worlds of the visible and the invisible closer together. In the poem of course "Islanded" carries the resonance of the opening lines – these are benign "spots of time" on the sea of life. Returning to the passage beginning at line 285, we find that the verb of the following sequence from line 294 (it suggests something altogether too concrete to call it a sentence) is delayed until line 313. A whole series of natural phenomena are thus strung on one line, enacting the sense of the delayed verb:

> Interpenetrated lie
> By the glory of the sky: [...] (ll. 313f.)

This "glory", which may be read as "love", or "light", or "harmony", or a whole bible of other possibilities, can be related to the glory of Turner's sky, whether as unifying force, as simple beauty, or as benediction. All of this can seem to justify the *Athenaeum*'s invocation of Shelley's "rainbow hues" when reviewing Turner.

And yet in the end is it enough to point to general similarities of sensibility? Does this not quickly reduce itself to tautology? Certainly the benediction of autumn light which the narrator experiences is not unlike that depicted in *Aventine*. It is true that the wash of purple mist and golden light is also not dissimilar. It is perhaps even possible to say that some of Shelley's concern for the past glories and present decadence of Venice and Padua are parallelled in Turner's Rome. There is no Byron (or is there something Byronic in the dark figure with the skull-like face who might suggest time close to the light-faced girl in the foreground?) and there is no meditation on the abyss of personal futility. But perhaps this emptiness of tautologous comparison is produced by the tyranny of semantics? Surely "sensibility" is not only verbal, nor necessarily led chronologically by the verbal?

It is here that we have to face the fact that Turner critics seem now to assume that Turner, as Andrew Wilton puts it, judged "painting as a literary activity; his identification with the poets is almost complete".[31] We have to be clear what any argument might be about. I am certainly not saying that Turner

was not interested in the relationship between poetry and painting. Not only would that be absurd, but after all that very relationship is the subject of this chapter. However, I do argue that Turner did not see poetry as the essence of painting – not, that is, if by poetry one actually means poetry as distinguished from painting, for there is a usage of "poetic" which can apply to both writing and painting indiscriminately, and is pretty well so eviscerated of meaning (or perhaps returned to its origin) as to be a synonym for "good". He did not see painting as "a literary activity". It is difficult to see how Wilton comes to his radical identification. His evidence comes not only from Turner's own interest in writing poetry, but from his notes towards his Lectures on Perspective, and other contemporary sketchbooks. As he himself points out, frequently Turner is concerned "with the central differences between painting and poetry", and the "tone of the whole note" in the Perspective Sketchbook on the relationship "is one of complaint. Turner resents the immobility of the painted image" when compared to his conception of the word.[32] As Wilton says, Turner "always returned" to the fact that painting could not express purely abstract ideas.[33] Most of the examples used by Wilton and by Jerrold Ziff in his seminal article[34] show Turner carefully distinguishing the two arts. They are related, but they do not "translate" easily.[35] Frequently he seems to be arguing against the "natural" assumption that the literary has precedence over, and in some way "owns" the painterly. This is precisely the assumption of so much "literary" criticism of painting.

> Tho different the allurements but yet in the sentiment[s] produce[d] the Painter receives only the reward of having colored the Poet while the power of the Painter over other words the difficulty he has surmounted is lost to his merit [...] and seeking the acceptation of the utmost of his power [?having] to be if he succeeds as to be poetical, while he attends to the difficulties of his art and should omit, what in many instances when [it] is [from] testament to the beauty of the poet what in his language of Painting is ever distant and Paradoxical [...] he hears the censure with the power of redemption while he is confined to the local contrarieties of his art [...] he is considered only secondarily as endeavouring to give [...] what has been admitted to be beautiful in the Poet, *by very different means* [...] but as

31 Wilton (1990), 85. It is perhaps significant of his attitude to literary form, or perhaps just bad luck, that in *Turner Abroad* (see n. 17) Wilton prints Byron's *Childe Harold* without stanza divisions.

32 Wilton (1990), 85.

33 Wilton (1990), 86.

34 Jerrold Ziff: "J.M.W. Turner on Poetry and Painting." In: *Studies in Romanticism* III/4 (Summer 1964): 193-215.

35 Turner's word – see Wilton (1990), 86; Gage, especially 57: "the key concept of Turner's art is translation."

> his sentiments of [-or?] the Poets sentiments are his own and as he must embody them by known effects of nature he should be allowed to [be] consider'd equal [...]should be considered to have produced what is exclusively his *own*.[36]

If we penetrate what Ziff calls the "maze" of Turner's notes, the drift is fairly clear – the media of the two arts are different, and the painter should not be judged by reference to the poet. Nor, we might add, should he be elucidated only by the language of literary interpretation.

Turner's analysis of pastoral in Milton's "L'Allegro" also underlines not the identity of the two arts, but rather their difference:

> to commence with the Pastoral the lines in la Allegro are generally admitted [...] as beautiful in conception, admirably contrasted [...] but graphically considered upon the dismemberment of whole to parts [...] they contrast too forcibly [...] all offer jewels of poetic beauty but asking if it can collectively be considered a pastoral poetic picture, or a Poetic Pastoral – [...] here then if aerial Perspective from the known difficulty of natural phenomenon of hill, vales [...] meets with incongruity and feels a difficulty even to approximation of lines how far apart must it be from the sentiment whether of color or arrangements incidental of pastoral rusticity [.] Thus Poetic description[s] most full most incidental and display[ing] the greatest richness of verse, are often the least pictorial and hence *hasty* [practice] to use no harsher term is lead astray.[37]

Again the drift at least is clear – what is good for Poetry is not necessarily good for painting. The point is further driven home in interesting comparisons of complex and simple imagery in Thomson's *Seasons*, and in a comparison of Thomson and Milton describing Evening.[38] From our present point of view, perhaps the most telling distinction is one drawn from the presentation of sunrise:

> The Painter's thoughts are inseparable while the Poets are imaginary [...] [the poet] seeks for attributes or sentiments to illustrate what he sees in nature [...] – as like the sun just risen shines thro misty air shorn of his beams to elevate fal[l]n dignity [...] But the painter must adhere to the truth of nature and has to give that dignity with the means of dignity or must produce it by other means [...][39]

36 Perspective Sketchbook, c. 1809, transcribed in: Wilton (1990), 137, from f52v and 51v (the note is written from the back to the front). I have preferred the alternative reading of "testament" to "tantamount", but have otherwise attempted to follow R.M. Turner's rendering.

37 Draft for the fourth lecture of 1812, additions in his own hand to the fair copy made by W. Rolls (see Wilton (1990), 86), BM ADD. MS 46151N. Ziff adds that it is MS 14 in box 1. I have not been able to see it at first hand.

38 See the discussion by Ziff, 200-1.

39 Perspective Sketchbook, as transcribed in: Wilton (1990), 137. Ziff's and Turner's transcriptions of this passage differ radically, but their differences do not affect my argument here,

The painter's thoughts, that is, are inseparable from the image of nature, while the poet uses the image to personify the separate idea (in this case fallen dignity), or the separate idea to convey the image (Turner seems to say both).

Ziff, who is much less concerned with proving the centrality of the literary in Turner's art, argues convincingly that his major interest in the theory of the relationship of the two arts, and in his own writing of poetry, lies in the period of study for his Lectures on Perspective.[40] This gives us the clue to the interest, for here is Turner himself faced with having to verbalize painting. To reach for the literary is the same movement as to reach for language. But when he makes this reach, what he finds by way of illustration are as much the differences of the two media as any similarity. Of course they are both in a broad sense "poetic" – creative. But they are also intractably different – "their pursuits are different tho the[y] love and follow the same cause."[41]

Shelley, who *per contra* doodled in his margins from time to time, was as much beleaguered by the limitations of the word, as was Turner by the limitations of painting. Words are "weak" and cannot speak the truth directly; they "obscure" the very thing they are trying to describe.[42] It might in this sense then be true to say that both Shelley and Turner sought to transcend the limitations of their respective media. Perhaps this attempt is central to much Romantic art, but, if this statement is not to empty itself in generality, it itself has to be conditioned by the particular limitations and the particular attempts to transcend them, which will differ from art to art. It is simply not enough to say that "Turner" – or Shelley – "similarly [to Haydn, Beethoven, and Wordsworth] adopted and adapted the poet's grand vision as a thematic source for much of his art."[43]

What then are we saying? Perhaps only that if it is to avoid the empty tautology, and the reduction of all arts to the literary, inter-art criticism must negotiate carefully between media which can only communicate metaphorically. No criticism is dialogic which transforms one element of the comparison into the other. Perhaps it was a project of the Romantic Imagination as we find it in Turner and Shelley to dissolve the differences of medium in the air of immediate beauty. If so, it remains a project, in this world at least. Without medium there is nothing, and one medium is paint (and sand and glass and pencil!), while the other is print. Neither Shelley's sketches nor

though they might well affect other arguments based on this passage.

40 That is from 1808-1812. See Ziff, especially 194.

41 Cockermouth Sketchbook, 1809, from ff45v-43v (again written in reverse), as transcribed in: Wilton (1990), 86.

42 *Adonais*, st. 52, 8; *Epipsychidion*, l. 33.

43 Wilton (1990), 61.

Turner's poetry can bridge the gap. Not even Blake or Wagner can do that. Whatever magic happens in our minds, when we seek to replace that magic in the public domain, paint remains paint, and printer's ink printer's ink. Hovering above this inevitable gap, in a metaphoric miasma of some kind, we can warily venture that there seems in these two cases to be a certain similarity of technique. Both are working with delineations and structures which they propose and withdraw, remove and repropose. Perhaps the critic should take note. Both works indulge a sophisticated freedom to the point of naiveté. They are calculatingly improvised, and even their serenity is stretched taut.

The Romantic Imagination: Literature and Art in England and Germany.
Ed, Burwick, Frederick and Jurgen Klein.
Rodopi, Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA, 1996.
Pages: 202-222.
Figures: 76

Part III – The Sublime and the Picturesque