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The Clarity of the Mysterious and the Obscurity of the Familiar: Friedrich and Turner

When a history of mid-twentieth-century literary criticism is written that is not *by* René Wellek but about his role in comparative studies, one focal point will be the opening chapter of his *Confrontations*, "German and English Romanticism: A Confrontation", which was originally presented as a lecture in 1963. This is a startling essay. Wellek begins by rehearsing the gist of his celebrated refutation in 1949 of Arthur O. Lovejoy's argument that "the 'Romanticism' of one country may have little in common with that of another." Wellek goes on to observe that a survey of the studies of the subsequent fourteen years leads to the conclusion that "students of the issue agree with my general view or have arrived independently at the same or similar results."¹ Then, however, Wellek "radically" shifts his perspective:

I shall assume, however rashly, that the basic argument has been won, that there is a common core of Romantic thought and art throughout Europe. I shall [...] present a comparison between German and English Romanticism which will try to bring out the distinct and original features of the German movement.²

In effect, Wellek adopts Lovejoy's position, and with his customary clarity and thoroughness (although his omission of Jane Austen from among the distinguished authors of early nineteenth-century Britain reveals one of his spectacular biases) marshalls evidence demonstrating the striking *differences* between German and English Romanticism! He concludes that he cannot account for the dichotomy between the two Romantic literatures he has delineated:

I would be the first to admit that causal explanation and even historical antecedents do not accomplish much. We must leave something to chance, to genius, to a constellation of circumstances, possibly to that obscure force, national character.

1 René Wellek: *Confrontations* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965), 3.

2 Wellek, 4.

Why not agree that we are faced here with some ultimate data? It is variety that is the spice of life and of literature.³

In thus seeming totally to accept Lovejoy's point of view Wellek exposes not only the spuriousness of their debate between "Romanticism" and "romanticisms" but also the ineffectuality of Comparative Literature conceived of as a discipline of comparisons. For the past twenty years the Wellek-Lovejoy debate has been of little interest to leading scholars of Romanticism because its terms have seemed arbitrarily restrictive. If there is a unity to "Romanticism", which is used as a term devised by later critics as a shorthand reference to an earlier period and style, it is a unity encompassing what Coleridge called "multeity". More significant, it seems to me, is Wellek's inadvertent admission that *Comparative Literature* is, at the least, poorly named. If "variety" is the spice of life and literature, contrastive rather than comparative studies must be more enjoyable. And as Wellek's essay demonstrates even to him, the explanation by comparison leads to an intellectual dead end, breaking down into appeals to chance, to "national character", or "a constellation of circumstances" – whatever that may mean. If comparative studies lead us to this swamp of obscurantist banalities and clichés, we had better develop some new method.

During the past twenty years much attention has, in fact, been given to articulating new methods of criticism, but with surprisingly little attention paid to the specific methodology of what continues to be called Comparative Literature, even though many of our leading theorists are themselves comparatists. I should like to propose as a start that the name Comparative Literature be changed, along the line suggested by Wellek's essay and the book in which it appears, to Contrastive Literature, with its basic approach recognized to be confrontational. Especially when one extends one's literary interest beyond Western Europe and into so-called Third World literatures, *comparisons* are not merely odious but often impossible. Contrasts, however, can be illuminating in more than one direction. And whether or not variety is the spice of life, it is the essence of art; works of art are unique and are valued as unique (uniqueness is not, of course, to be confused with autonomy). Worthwhile criticism seeks understanding by definition of the individuality of unique works of art; of necessity, when one criticizes simultaneously more than one work of art, contrast will constitute a fundamental operation of the critique.

A contrastive approach, though not amenable to vast, easy, overarching, and untrue generalizations, is useful also for studies of more than a single art. "Comparisons" between works in diverse media, as I have observed in *British*

3 Wellek, 33.

Romantic Art,⁴ are most effective when they begin in recognition of the profound differences distinguishing the conceptions and practices going into their creation as well as their social functions and effects. Jean Laude seems to me exactly correct in observing:

Absolutely everything distinguishes a literary text from a painting or a drawing: its conception, its method of production, [...] its autonomous functioning. Nevertheless [...] a text and a painting cannot be disassociated from the synchronic series to which they are linked.⁵

An analogous inseparability of radically different artistries, we should recognize, may distinguish contemporaneous artistic expressions in the same medium, for example, German and English Romantic literature and German and English Romantic painting. What I hope to suggest sketchily in what follows is that a contrast of two leading Romantic painters, Caspar David Friedrich and Joseph Mallord William Turner, both of whom also composed poetry, provides us entry into that confrontation of German and English Romanticism that Wellek rightly, though in contradiction to his own theory, came to see as the appropriate mode of considering simultaneous aesthetic developments whose divergences are more impressive than their convergences.

My sketchiness of presentation is not only enforced by limitations of space but is also a deliberate attempt to suggest and provoke rather than to demonstrate and prove. What I wish most of all to accomplish by a contrast that must of necessity exclude the historical development in each artist's work as well as the changing circumstances of their works' reception, is to focus attention on differences so striking as to verge on the antithetical, differences between the work of contemporaneous artists each of whom is now regarded as the premier exemplar of Romantic painting in their country. My hope is to present so provocative a contrast that literary scholars concerned with British and German Romanticism will be attracted to more detailed investigation of the significance of *incommensurate* qualities of the two literary movements. Only such investigations can hope to articulate their deeply hidden parallelisms, the ground that makes meaningful juxtapositions feasible. For Wellek was on the right track: it is by *confronting* such phenomena, occurring simultaneously and equally within the influence of European post-Renaissance culture, but moving diversely to the point of antagonism, that our best opportunity lies for understanding the infinitely complicated, and therefore genuinely illuminating, dialectic between the work of individual

4 Karl Kroeber: *British Romantic Art* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1986).

5 Jean Laude, "On the analysis of Poems and Paintings." In: *New Literary History* III/4 (1972), 471-86; here 471.

genius and the evolution of a supra-individual style through which alone individual genius can manifest itself.

One might begin this contrast by observing that Friedrich is a deeply religious painter, even though he never painted a conventionally religious canvas. Even when a picture such as *Das Kreuz im Gebirge* (*The Cross in the Mountains*) [figure 53] – which portrays a crucifix, not The Crucifixion – boldly employs landscape as the key element in an altarpiece, there can be no doubt of Friedrich's spiritual fervor – as is evidenced by his later *Kreuz im Walde* (*Cross in the Fir Woods*), which was not, like the earlier painting, a devotional commission. Turner, often almost aggressively secular in his art, did create a few works portraying traditional Christian subjects, although the religiosity of some of these has been questioned. This complicated difference in relation of spiritual commitment to overt subject-matter is especially revealing because stylistically Friedrich so deliberately challenged the popular landscapist tradition of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, representative of whose manner is Koch's *Waterfall Near Subiaco* (*Wasserfall bei Subiaco*). Friedrich, though he roundly condemned medievalizing, refused to assist his friend Goethe's project scientifically to classify clouds, just as he refused to travel to Rome, for he wished to assert his landscapes' freedom from contamination by any kind of what may be called secular naturalism. Friedrich's spiritualized landscapes were intended to be *perceived* as aesthetically innovative, even revolutionary, though what they subverted were conventions of Enlightened "realism" in both art and philosophy: *The Cross in the Mountains* is, of course, a representation of a representation, and its spectacularly symbolic frame, besides precluding normal indicators of scale, emphasizes its innovative metaphoricness.

Turner's stylistic innovations were developed in a contrary fashion through themes and subjects that tended to give the impression (sometimes truly, sometimes falsely) that he had a deep respect for traditions and conventions in art and social thought. Unlike Friedrich, Turner painted many artistically conventional sublime scenes as well as topographical and mythological set pieces, for instance, *The Pass of St. Gothard* [figure 74], or *The Fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen*, or *The Garden of the Hesperides*. Such works, indeed, exposed him to attacks by true-blue conservatives like Sir George Beaumont, who detected an inappropriateness in Turner's manner of treating his subjects. Turner could be condemned for performing badly in recognized modes, because his innovativeness is to a degree concealed by a veneer of conventionality. Turner's originality depends less on ostentatious "revolutionariness" in subjects and themes than on his establishing a contrast between his and his predecessors' handling of analogous topics and genres, as in his famous *Dido*

Building Carthage, meant to be juxtaposed to Claude's *Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*. Beaumont's objection that Turner's sky was unlike Claude's proves that he had, indeed, perceived the difference to which Turner wished to draw attention.

This tendency toward subversion within apparent conventionality (differences in manner of course ultimately implying differences in meaning) appears also in Turner's trick of quietly parodying his contemporaries, as he does Wilkie in his *A Country Blacksmith Disputing Upon the Price of Iron*. Parody of this kind is uncongenial to Friedrich, not merely on temperamental grounds, but also because of the violence with which he re-imbues Neoclassical naturalism with spiritual significance, as when, for example, he portrays winter-blasted trees with a Van Gogh-like convulsive intensity dramatizing the need for resurrected life. This difference, furthermore, illuminates the incommensurateness between the German and British cultural traditions that shaped the relations of the two artists to their specifically artistic heritages. Turner's transforming of conventions from within links him to British poets and novelists of his time, who frequently presented the new as if they were only restoring continuity with a glorious past, recovering the "authentic" English way from some intrusive, aberrant tendency – usually identified as inspired by the French. And Turner is able, unlike Friedrich, consistently to associate his art with literary sources, since the British, unlike the Germans, possessed a continuous, centuries-old, internationally esteemed literary tradition. Although the most obvious sign of this associating (besides Turner's wordy titles) is his – and his contemporaries' – frequent appending of poetic quotations, his own compositions or those of others, to the listings in exhibition catalogs.

The catalogs suggest another significant contrast that I can here only touch on lightly. Friedrich depended more than Turner on the old system of patronage support: decisive to his success early in his career were purchases by the Prussian monarchy, and later by the Russian royal family. Difficulties in the latter part of his career were in part attributable to a decline in such royal patronage. In England during Turner's lifetime there was a more important and pervasive commercializing of the support for art, to which Turner himself contributed not a little. Not only did exhibitions attract a broader social range of buyers in England than in Germany, but Turner did not have to concern himself deeply with the opinion of royalty. Even the negative opinion of a major aristocratic collector such as Beaumont had little effect on his success – though to be sure Turner wisely cherished the support of his membership in the Royal Society, which in fact was a professional society. But even more important to the distinction between our two painters' eco-

nomic situations was the fact that in England earlier than in Germany a market for engraved reproductions of paintings flourished, and a successful artist like Turner could make substantial sums providing illustrations for books. In a variety of ways, then, the effective audience for Turner's art was radically different from Friedrich's, and most if not all of the differentiations I am depicting could be linked to differences in the practical, economic circumstances of the artists' relations with their audiences.

Friedrich's style, to return to the most obvious contrast between the work of the two painters, is linear, sharp, clear, whereas Turner's style is blurry, vague, literally shapeless. Yet substantively it is Friedrich who is the more enigmatic. There is normally little doubt as to what we see in Friedrich's paintings; but what is the meaning of what we perceive so unambiguously? Even so simple a painting as *The Solitary Tree* (better known as *Village Landscape in the Morning Light – Dorflandschaft bei Morgenbeleuchtung*) [figure 52] with its lightning-shattered oak putting forth new leaves creates a kind of metaphysical discomfort in the viewer (what Brentano spoke of as *Unbehagen*) through uncanny implications of the mystical or supernatural by a hyper-exact rendering of jagged surfaces. The disturbing suggestion of occult significancies not readily identifiable is enhanced by *The Solitary Tree's* function as a pair to *Moonrise over the Sea (Mondaufgang am Meer)* [figure 49]. With Turner, on the other hand, one is often unsure what one is seeing, yet his subjects usually are not in themselves enigmatic. Indeed, the subject-matter is likely to be mundane or familiar, or is plainly described by the lengthy explicitness of a title. Yet these reversals of style-to-subject relations in the two painters take yet another turn, for careful study reveals a consistently systematic allegorical significance in Friedrich's paintings, by which I mean a single *kind* of meaning beyond what is perceptible, whereas the explicit subjects of Turner's canvases often become more puzzling and ambiguous the more we study out the details of their blurriness.

The overarching implication of this contrast is its revelation that all Romantic art is founded on a new complexity of relation between style and subject-matter, that complexity in good part arising from a breakdown of the authority of rigid generic decorums. That "breakdown" in fact is a result of transformations *within* genres, as is suggested by Friedrich's determined spiritualizing of naturalistic landscapes. And these changes are inseparable from shifts in the relations artists sought to establish between their audiences and their works, shifts linked to socio-economic changes but also to conceptions of the intrinsic nature and social purposes of art.

The specific difference between Turner's and Friedrich's inverse subject-to-style relations may usefully be explored through the attention to their

figure painting, especially their *staffage*, topics so far inadequately analyzed by art historians. Friedrich characteristically uses a small number of significant, often even dominating figures, but these are ostentatiously presented from the back, as in the *Young Woman at the Window* (*Junge Frau am Fenster*), *Moonrise over the Sea* (*Mondaufgang über dem Meer*), *Woman at Sunset* (*Frau vor der Sonne*) [figures 49, 55, 56]. When the figures are so large and so command the compositional structure, the viewer is made intensely aware of *not* seeing the most distinctive and distinguishing portions of the figure, of being denied an encounter “face to face”. The human is thus rendered not only isolated but also inherently enigmatic. This view from the back contributes to the viewer’s awareness of being blocked from what lies before the figure in the picture, creating the sense, as Kleist put it, of being rejected by the picture.

One may be reminded by Friedrich’s mysterious figures of Watteau in such works as *Gersaint’s Studio*. But Friedrich represents little connectedness between characters, connections dramatized in Watteau even by the overtly self-reflective, inward-turning poses of his figures. The German’s figure-positioning and relating may be said to be characterized by stillness and isolation, not the ambiguity of relationship characteristic of Watteau. This contrast is worth notice because Turner once remarked that he had learned more from Watteau than any other painter, and though this hint has not been vigorously pursued by art historians, it seems to me revealing. As Turner’s *Homage to Watteau* demonstrates, it was not merely his predecessor’s use of color (the blurredness of brightness probably above all) that attracted Turner, but also Watteau’s flowingly ambiguous representation of the interrelationship of figures as well as strangely uncertain relations between people and artifacts. If nothing else, consideration of Turner’s debt to Watteau suggests how far more deeply and complexly than Friedrich the Englishman responded to a variety of earlier artists and a variety of traditions.

Friedrich is less engaged with his predecessors, seeming – and in fact being to a degree – an isolated, and a self-isolating, figure. Looking at his work one is most often struck by the separation between the people represented, their utter lack of communication, as in *Moonrise over the Sea*. That the figures are so set apart – they seldom even look at one another – however reflective of Friedrich’s position in the development of art in his time in Germany, also thematizes the painter’s severely linearized style so crucial to his evocation of spiritual dimensions within the natural world. That style is most innovatively impressive in representations of objects such as trees and rocks, in which elements of color and form are precisely segregated rather than being fused or overlapped.

So far as Turner’s contrastive blurring and superimposing of colors may be regarded as echoed by his subjects, one’s attention is drawn to the rarity with which he gives compositional dominance to a single figure, or even two or three. Friedrichian economy contrasts with Turnerian superabundance. Illustrative of this are paintings such as *Snowstorm: Hannibal Crossing the Alps* or *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* [figures 77, 80], in which one may have difficulty locating the titular figure. Those canvases are also characteristic in deploying a host of relatively small figures, the studying out of whose actions requires patient analysis. Yet even in these dramatic scenes, and almost unfailingly in his landscapes and quieter pictures, such as *Cologne, The Arrival of the Packet Boat*, or *The Harbour at Dieppe*, the *staffage* does not appear inherently enigmatic. The presence of many people normally seems appropriate to the situation, even if the vigor and variety of their activities produce an impression of confusion. More often than not the activities are commonplace, and even where they are out of the ordinary, one’s difficulty in perceiving exactly what is happening arises more from the complexity of interactions than anything mysterious in what is done. Crowding and diversity of behavior, like haze, mist, fog, too intense light, or the vagueness of distance, render Turner’s figures obscure, but neither these obstacles to clear vision, nor the doubtfulness generated by Turner’s multitudinous *staffage* and what his people are doing, is intrinsically problematic.

Exactly the opposite is true of Friedrich’s single, centrally placed figures or his unrelating, non-communicating, meticulously situated individuals. Who these people are, what they may be thinking is made to *appear* obscure. What they “mean” derives from the fashion in which they are so clearly yet so mysteriously located within the setting by which they are surrounded – which rather surprisingly is not true of Turner’s figures, even when his people struggle desperately *with* or *against* the elements.

Deeper implications of this contrast may be focused by a juxtaposition of pictures to which the two painters each applied the title of *Evening Star* [figure 45]. Friedrich added the stellar reference to his *Reminiscence of Dresden*, a painting in which, unusually, shows more people than the Turnerian parallel canvas. Even though in this instance Turner gives more prominence to a single figure than a crowd, he characteristically centers his picture on the light reflected from the water at the expense of the light directly emanating from the planetary source, a favorite device of his. Friedrich, too, likes reflections, especially of the moon, but only rarely uses this kind of evanescent illumination to center a composition, as Turner did even in his first major oil, *Fishermen by Moonlight*. The delicate intricacy of Turner’s *Evening Star* [figure 71], as in that of many of his better canvases, is founded on subtle visual

intra-actions, reflections, echoings, redundancies, refractive interplayings of light. Such interaffective nuances of hue and tone endow such canvases with a aura of indeterminacy. His *Evening Star*, for instance, evokes the transitoriness of twilight, without provoking either a sense of mysteriousness or any suggestion of the supernatural. Friedrich's *Evening Star*, even though seemingly a simple and mundane scene, in its portrayal of twilight – Friedrich's consistently favored time – has seemed to many critics to carry supernatural overtones, reinforced by its depicting of Dresden in the background entirely by spires of ecclesiastical edifices. The separateness of Friedrich's silhouetted figures (probably his wife and children) encourages a symbolic reading of the scene in terms of religious aspiration beyond the darkness of the natural world, rather than encouraging, in the way Turner's paintings do, exploration of the infinite nuances of inter-reflectivity of both the natural and the cultural worlds. There is, one might say, almost no room left for supernaturalism in the density of the social and phenomenal interactions Turner depicts. Contrarily, Friedrich's intense distinctiveness in representation enables him to endow even a picture so overtly political in its immediate reference as *Fir-Forest with French Chasseur and Raven (Chasseur im Walde)* with deeper and more spiritual resonances.

What I have referred to as indeterminacy in Turner's canvases depends on a kind of self-contestation of his coloring, which is characterized by perpetual shading, blending, contrasting, reflecting, refracting, and a diffusion of nuanced tones, so that one is seldom aware of any single colors, though one may be affected strongly by an overall tonality. Friedrich's linearism, as I have remarked, extends into his coloring, in which the distinctness of each hue tends to be rendered clearly. This vivid discriminating, which sometimes disadvantages Friedrich in his representation of clouds and sea where Turner is at his most effective (the clouds in *Monk by the Sea (Mönch am Meer)* [figure 50] are by Turnerian standards without depth and vital complexity), appears a result of his rigorous determination to make the natural yield up an ambiguous supernatural revelation. For Friedrich, the painting of a natural scene is, one might say, validated by the painting's rendering of a supernal (therefore inarticulable) truth through manifestations of natural phenomena, a truth that endows them with special meaning for man, natural creature with divine yearnings. Perhaps none of his canvases so perfectly captures this quality as *The Large Enclosure (Das große Gehege bei Dresden)* [figure 46], in which the seemingly random waterways of the barren mudflats reflect the last brilliance of the evening sky to surround the single representation of humanity, the dim boat before the dark line of trees, with so vivid yet so empty a setting that man's place in the cosmos is called into question.

Friedrich and Turner embody differing reactions to the impact of the Enlightenment. Turner challenges the clarity of rational intelligence by showing us how doubtful (because so ever-changingly complex) are the perceptions that provide the basis, according to British empirical thought, of rational intelligence. Friedrich with dramatic sharpness, that can be considered a turning of Enlightenment clarity against itself, reasserts the presence of religious emotion within the scientifically desacralized natural world of the *Aufklärung*. This specific difference in response suggests that "Romantic" might best be defined broadly in terms of counter-Enlightenment tendencies. Once more, however, most fascinating is the contrast between the German's turning of clear linearity against itself almost violently to re-affirm the existence of a spiritual reality, and the Englishman's more pragmatic display of the inherent complexity, what might be called the muddle, of our experience in the intricacies of the natural world.

In Friedrich's art, as has often been noted, the natural world seldom appears as active: the marvelousness of *The Large Enclosure* in some measure derives from the painting's reduction of a specific place and time to forms whose very transience embodies the eternity of the forces manifested in them. Friedrich's paintings have been compared to still-lives – and one often is struck in his landscapes by a frozen motionlessness, intensified when, as is often the case, no human figures are present. One always is aware, moreover, of a distance between oneself as viewer and what is represented on the canvas, a feeling of what I should call a negative tactility, frequently heightened by the presentation of figures from behind. This setting of a division between spectator and scene not merely spatially but psychically is intensified by Friedrich's preference for empty or very smooth foregrounds. Turner, to the contrary, often entirely does away with foreground in order to plunge the spectator into a turbulent action, rather than a situation, thereby destabilizing our relation to what is depicted. This is one reason Turner likes spectacular events as subjects, and more frequently than not the dominating aspect of his natural scenes are impressive meteorological phenomena. These characteristics assure that the viewer will be caught up *into* the violence Turner represents. Nature for Turner is energy, movement, change, rather than the fixed settings Friedrich prefers. So it is not surprising that in Turner's art the transient and evanescent and historical usually play a prominent if not dominating role. Even Turner's "blurry" or "fuzzy" manner of painting encourages the viewer to *persist* in looking, for only gradually do shapes and details reveal themselves in his canvases. Although trained as an architectural draughtsman, and capable of superbly precise linear effects, Turner in his most successful pictures avoids like the plague Friedrichian minuteness of definitional clarity

– a representational exactitude upon which depend the German's evocation of symbolic affects.

This contrast returns attention to Turner's interest in the place of his paintings in the ongoing history of art as a determinative feature in their composition. His concern for continuity, paradoxically, is expressed most strikingly in the way his paintings destroy surfaces, the paradox grimly realized by the deterioration of the paint on many of his canvases. Like Shelley attracted to the wind because it is at once so pervasive and so powerful a force, yet dimensionless and invisible (because lacking discernible "surface") except through its effects, Turner was drawn to every kind of manifestation of vast powers, being especially attracted to the invisible and incalculable power of history, including the history of his art. He persistently sought to depict forces that break down or break through simplified, one might say repressive, forms of ordering. The history of painting, Turner *shows* us with his canvases, is more dynamically dramatic than written histories of art might lead us believe. Again like Shelley, whose fascination with invisible forces accompanied keen appreciation for effects attainable through skilled manipulation of traditional metrical forms, Turner's representations of the powers of his art do not imply any desire to do away with basic geometrical structures – indeed, in his lectures on landscape painting he praised these as elements that *had* to be perceived by a good painter. What he resisted was reduction of the infinite multiplicity and evanescence of phenomenal activity to simplified explanations through static systems of ordering. Most obviously, of course, he enriches compositions with infinitely intricate color structurings, thus adding to and making more complex, doing justice to the superabundant possibilities for, manifestations of Euclidean ideals of form.

An epitomizing contrast to some of the foregoing observations is provided by Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice (Das Eismeer)* [figure 51] against Turner's *Snowstorm: Steamer off a Harbour's Mouth* [figure 78]. Turner gives us a struggle with natural forces in process, engaging the viewer in the event, as he claimed to have himself experienced what the picture represents. Such confronting of present violence precludes any final determination of either its outcome or significance. From within an event its future must be uncertain. In this respect the painting is properly termed indeterminate. Because it depicts what *is happening*, there is no place in it for the display of definitive meaning. Thus it demands attention as itself action. Friedrich, to the contrary, depicts the *results* of natural forces. He provides us an apparently decisive perspective from which to contemplate with agonizing exactness of visual detail the complete and final consequences of a past occurrence. Like his linear style, the meaning of his painting, however complex, is definitive,

forcing the viewer to imagine beyond the past event in itself toward its symbolic or allegoric significance.

Friedrich's creation for us of a contemplative vantage point away from what is represented is the basis on which the symbolic quality of his work rests. Probably the best illustration is his *Cross in the Mountains* [figure 53], which not only displays a replica of the Crucifixion rather than the event itself, but even emphasizes through the spectacular frame the artificiality of this representation of a representation.

Some of Turner's titles suggest symbolic import, though more often their mere length, occasionally to the point of absurdity, supports the sheerly narrational character of his presentations. His subject-matter, whether historical or mythological or traditional landscape, tends to play freely, not to say fast and loose, with his inherited systems of iconography, usually assuring that it will function in a subordinate if not parodic role. No one, not even Panofsky, would interpret *Snowstorm: Steamer off a Harbour's Mouth* [figure 78] primarily in terms of conventional iconographic symbols. Yet it is not inappropriate to read this kind of picture in contrast to earlier marine paintings Turner knew – and wishes us to recognize as being improved upon by his artistry – as is manifestly the case with a canvas such as his *Lee Shore*.

But Friedrich, especially in paintings with religious themes, consistently exploits *overtly* traditional iconographic elements, although usually with a powerfully original twist sustained by what have been called "hyperrealistic" representations. These may "remind" those more familiar with English art of the Pre-Raphaelites, because his style like theirs is founded on commitment to rendering sensory reality as symbolic. Both concentrate on hyper-visual distinctness of the subject rendered, rather than mitigating such perceptual absoluteness by making perceptible the process of rendering, as Turner does, most simply by not concealing his brush strokes. But Friedrich would have scorned Pre-Raphaelite archaizing as he scorned the Nazarenes. The Friedrichian characteristic style of definitional exactitude of subject (requiring obliteration of the mode of representation) enforces awareness upon a viewer that a "spirituality" has been introjected into the immediate, "contemporary" physical reality, as in *Winter Landscape with a Church*, wherein the ruined nature of the church is evidence of the present condition of Christianity, not a nostalgic reminder of the past.

In such pure and discriminatory representational clarity there is danger of loss of spiritual significance through particularities dominating so completely that the total effect becomes merely anecdotal, as in the work of Norman Rockwell. Such anecdotalism, which weakens much Nazarene and Pre-Raphaelite work, is avoided by Friedrich through his intense, almost patho-

logical, limiting of what he allows to be represented in his pictures: the effectiveness of *Winter Landscape with a Church* depends upon the isolation of the two crutches in the snow. Friedrich is not only severely selective in his subjects, but even restricts the range of colors he uses. His extraordinary economy, his pre-minimalism, if I may so describe it, accounts also for his tendency to repeat a small number of scenes and situations, boats in a harbor at evening, for example, and even to reiterate structures, as *Mount Watzmann (Der Watzmann)* repeats the pyramidal thrust of *The Sea of Ice (Das Eismeer)* [figure 51], whereas Turner's range of subject-matter is probably unequalled among major painters. And Turner sketched and painted so many sunrises and sunsets because each seems to have registered on him as a unique event. Friedrich's sunrises and sunsets, it is fair if a trifle inaccurate to say, are the same one, for the mere phenomenal uniqueness of these "risings" and "fallings" would detract from the spiritual meaning the event of twilight evokes in his canvases. Friedrich's intensity of representation, consisting of both uncomplicated, static, and superficially unnarrative compositions, and the extreme clarity with which he distinguishes tiny details of each object, compels viewers to seek out what may be implicit in such carefully concentrated attention to minutiae of a static and stylized if also "realistic" scene. Kersting's extraordinary portrait of *Caspar David Friedrich in His Studio*, painted in 1812, showing him in an austere, geometrically regular studio contemplating concentratedly a canvas illuminated by cold, clear northern light admitted to the studio by the single, rigidly rectangular window, a canvas whose back only is visible, thus beautifully memorializes by implication Friedrich's enigmatically symbolizing style.

In Turner's painting when what is implied does not contest what is explicitly discernable, the implicit tends to confuse or complicate what is manifest and apparent. Turner does, of course, use some natural symbols (the red sky in *Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying – Typhoon [sic] Coming On* is notorious), but on the whole his art does not strenuously entice us to examine his canvases for metaphoric significance. Or perhaps one should say that the metaphoric is embodied within the ostentatiously "historical", as in *Snowstorm: Hannibal and his Troops Crossing the Alps* [figure 77] which so absolutely contrasts with Friedrich's *French Chasseur*. There is reason for Turner's manner; he appeals to our capacity to "enter into" and imagine less what is there represented than what *might* be there. Not only does his style of self-advertising paintedness call attention to the work *as* a representation, but, more important, all portions of his paintings are so rendered as to assure that what we perceive will allow us richly to apperceive – quite a different process from reading out introjected allegorical signifi-

cance. Indeed, apperception is what the allegorist normally tries to limit severely, as Friedrich, like William Blake, strives to limit it by means of rigorous linearity.

But what does the phrase "enter into" mean, since we do not literally go into Turner's picture? Most simply that we are not encouraged by the mode of the painting simply to "stand back" from it, to contemplate and interpret it with detachment. Turner's pictures in fact encourage us *both* to move back from the canvases *and* to approach them very closely. We can find meaning in a Turner painting only by thus becoming actively – literally, by physically moving – and complexly involved in the artist's vision that gives rise to its intricate interplay of forces constituted by interreflecting and interrefracting elements. Of course our bodily movements are added to eye movements activated by the indistinctly delineated elements (that is, not easily distinguishable, one from the other), blurred because represented in process of change. Turner's compositions tend to be dense with confused narratives and evocative of conflicting emotions. In contrast to Friedrich's limitation and concentration (so that one can satisfyingly observe his canvases from a single physical position, since the separation of viewer from scene is so forcefully imposed), Turner's work presents us with a superabundance of details for which there is no one "right" position of perception. As opposed to what might be termed Friedrich's holistic symbolic appeal, Turner's paintings demand that the viewer construct a significance from a great diversity of narrativized stimuli that are as much self-interfering as reinforcing.

If the various contrasts I have so swiftly summarized and presented over-simply irritate because they do not converge toward some definitive conclusion, perhaps they may draw attention to a point of importance to all criticism today, not just Comparative Literature. Just as "Romantic" is a dubious term because it is employed with reference to a diversity of often antagonistically unique works, so are more general critical terms, not merely recognized problem-words such as "naturalism". What the contrasting of incommensurate Romantics such as Friedrich and Turner demonstrates is that *all* general critical descriptors necessarily refer to a variety of quite diverse phenomena. There are many kinds of symbolism, many kinds of narrative, many kinds of affective icons in art, no one inherently superior to others or more fundamental. And, finally, each to be appreciated fully must be recognized as different from others. Variety is not the spice of art, it is its essence. Does that mean that broad theoretical generalizations are impossible? No, just that they are relatively useless as final critical judgments. They are a beginning point, not the bottom line. Criticism is discrimination of distinctions, the perception and evaluation of different uses of different kinds

of symbols, different deployments of different kinds of narrativity, different responses to uniquely specific historical forces and events. As the essence of art is variety, because every worthy work of art is unique, so the goal of criticism is properly specificity of description, not generalization. As I have tried to show, if we wish to apply a term such as “Romantic” to both Turner and Friedrich, we must be aware that it can be meaningful only so far as it identifies impulses each of whose inevitably diverse manifestations develops in a peculiar fashion. Which is as much as to say that the term “Romantic” can only be meaningful when defined both as what it is and what it is not through modes of contrastive discrimination.

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JÖRG TRAEGER

“... As if one’s Eyelids had been Cut Away”: Imagination in Turner, Friedrich, and David¹

What connection is there between *La Mort de Marat* (*The Death of Marat*) [figure 39] and *The Deluge* [figure 73], or between David’s and Turner’s art at all? The question seems nearly absurd, for the viewer with a critical eye for style or iconography perceives only contrasts which could hardly be more radical: on the one hand colouristic painting which abolishes material limitations and conceives the world as an infinite change of colours, painting which places everything into mutual relationship and has found its myth in the biblical cosmogony; on the other hand plasticistic painting which clearly defines things in their finiteness and develops the visible world out of the pureness of its contours, painting which favours clear shapes and which has found its myth in republican moral austerity. There are hardly any biographical parallels, and the general historical relations, too, are at best of an antagonistic nature: on the one hand a painter who later glorified Napoleon’s triumph, on the other a painter who glorified his defeat. What then is it that connects the standard-bearer of French classicism with the principal painter of English Romanticism?

The answer lies hidden in the metaphor which a German poet coined for a picture by Caspar David Friedrich. The poet was Kleist, the picture was *Mönch am Meer* (*Monk by the Sea*) [figure 50]:

¹ The following is a translation (with corrections) of an article published in *Kleist-Jahrbuch* 1980, which in turn was a revised and expanded version of a paper read on 22 November 1980 at the annual meeting of the Heinrich-von-Kleist-Gesellschaft in Berlin. – Although the collaborative authorship of Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano as well as Heinrich von Kleist’s editorial tamperings have been well established, the essay, “Verschiedene Empfindungen”, which appeared in Kleist’s periodical *Berliner Abendblätter*, is often cited as if Kleist were the author. Jörg Traeger, relying on such erroneous attribution, has cited a metaphor which was not Kleist’s but Brentano’s. For a thorough commentary on the text, with attention to the original collaboration and Kleist’s alterations and intrusions, see: Roswitha Burwick, “Verschiedene Empfindungen vor Friedrichs Seelandschaft: Arnim, Brentano, Kleist,” *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* CVII (1988) Sonderheft: 33-44.