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WORRINGER'S THEORY OF ABSTRACTION AND SPATIAL FORM IN TURNER

I

It is indeed interesting to note how remarkably Turner succeeds in employing spatial form, as understood in its modern, post–Lessingian sense, in the composition of his later art. In order to bring home the significance of this statement, I propose to undertake here an analytic study of some of the select and maturer visions of Turner's last phase, such as *Shade and Darkness, Light and Colour* (both of 1843), and *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846), in the light of Wilhelm Worringer's theory of abstraction as propounded by him in his classic *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908).[1] This, I strongly feel, is necessary, for without it no account of the use of 'spatial' form in plastic art–especially of the type I am concerned with, in relation to Turner's abstract visions–would either be complete or adequate. The main line of argument, therefore, followed in this paper, is to point out, after expounding some of the salient features of Worringer's thesis about the principal art styles and the concepts working behind their evolution in the history of Occidental art, how far the visionary abstractions of Turner's later life fallt within or outside the framework of Worringer's theory of abstract art.

II

Now, for Worringer, if we look at the development of the history of art from the days of antiquity to our own times, we find that there are two different styles, one naturalistic and the

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other abstract, which have ruled the plastic arts of the various cultures of the world from time to time, depending upon the pre-dominance of the urge in man to empathy or abstraction. While the process of empathy is associated with the concept of naturalism or realism in its broadest sense, the process of abstraction that acts as an anti-pole to empathy, is invariably associated with the concept of non-organic style in art. The reason for this diversity in the reigning art style of different periods is, according to Worringer, not far to seek. When the people of a particular age, influenced by the cultural ethos of the time, have found themselves to be in harmony with the capricious, obscure and chaotic flux of the phenomena of the external world, their artistic impulse has always been to naturalism, to the portrayal of the world in all its detail and roundness which could best be represented in a three-dimensional work of art. Here there is no attempt to run away from the seeming arbitrariness or the senseless confusion of events and occurrences taking place in the outer world, precisely because of the establishment, to use Worringer's own words, of 'a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world'.[3] Such naturalistic art satisfied man's psychic need for the beauty of organic form by activating his self to participate freely and uninhibitedly in the mysterious power of such form, at once vital and felicitous. This is how naturalistic art becomes an objectification of one's own pleasure ('objectified self-enjoyment') in which, as Worringer would have it, 'one could enjoy more intensely one's own organism' (*A & E*, 28). In the history of Occidental art this sort of empathy is finally accomplished in such great epochs of naturalism as the period of Greek classical sculpture and architecture and the period beginning with the age of Italian Renaissance and ending with the close of the nineteenth century, when the artist attempted to portray not only the objective world of every-day experience,

but the processes of organic nature, man included, with al loving care and attention, in a three-dimensional manner.

This, for Worringer, is the materialist way of looking at things, a sort of 'artistic materialism,' according to which an object is represented not in its essential purity, but as vitiated by one's subjectivity and by relating it to or making it dependent upon other things. But this has not been, happily enough, the only measure for evaluating the stylistic greatness of a work of art, nor the urge to empathy been the only one leading to the florescence of a particular art style, for, according to Worringer, there have been other ages in the evolution of plastic arts when an altogether different and opposite impulse-the urge to abstraction-has led the artist to the creation of non-naturalistic or non-representational art. Ages, best representative of such non-naturalism in art, as Worringer proposes, have been those associated with the art of primitive peoples, the monumental art of ancient Egypt, Oriental and Byzantine art, sculptured masterpieces of Gothic art, and the abstract art movement of the twentieth century. The range is wide, txeending from the art of a people living at the lowest level of culture to that of the people subsisting at a very high level of cultural advancement.

Worringer, following Riegl the Austrian scholar to whom he is much indebted for the 'greatest incentives' to his own work, says how Riegl was the first to make a serious breach in the otherwise strongly established and traditionally accepted system of naturalim. It was Riegl who, by introducing the concept of 'absolute artistic volition' or 'will-to-form' during his investigative pursuit of various methods employed in all artistic creation, revolutionised not only one's way of approaching the history of the evolution of art, but also one's way of looking at and appreciating a work of art from a non-traditional angle.

Naturalistic art style had so deeply ingrained itself in the soil of Western art that it was regarded almost as an act of sacrilege to appreciate non-naturalistic piece of art since it constituted a distortion of naturalism owing to the artist's technical inability. Reigl, saying 'no' to this one-sided method of appreciating art, pitted the concept of 'will-to-form' against that of the ability to form. History of art was no more to be considered as representing a history of ability, but a history of volition. The stylistic features or peculiarities of any past epoch of art, whether naturalistic or non-naturalistic, were not to be accounted for any lack of ability, but to be explained by a differently directed intention or will-to-form. Non-naturalistic presentation in art therefore did not represent any inability on the part of the artist, but his unwillingness to make any effort towards naturalistic presentation. As Worringer would have it, "What seems to us to-day a strange and extreme distortion is not the fault of insnfficient ability, but the consequence of differently direction volition. Its creators could *do* no otherwise because they *willed* no otherwise" (*A & E*, 124). For Reigl too, the incentive to creation in art did not lie in acquiring mere technical skill or ability, but in the form-determining will, not in the impulse to mere imitation, but in one's absolute will-to-form. As Joseph Frank so very aptly puts it, "The impulse to creation in the plastic arts, Riegl believed was not primarily an urge towards the imitation of natural objects; for if it were true, esthetic value would be identical with skill in naturalistic reproduction, and the best works of art would be those which most skillfully duplicated the appearances of the natural world. Instead, Riegl postulated what he called an absolute will-to-art, or, better still, will-to-form." [3]

Mere imitation consists in creating an effect of verisimilitude, in presenting the replica or illusion of a given object without evoking one's feeling for the aesthetic value and significance of

the organic. As against this, the will–to–form acts in a different manner in so far as naturalism in art is concerned. It acts here by evoking the delight of man in the reproductions of art that are replete with the beauty and vitality of forms found in the outer, organic world of three–dimensionality. What is striven after is the joy of the organically alive and not the truth of mere presentation, thus accomplishing the fusion of man's inner feeling of vitality and the inward force of the organically dynamic in nature. Man's psychic need for happiness is finally achieved in naturalism through such active participation of his self in the inexpressible beauty of the organic form. A sensuous object begins to exist only when it comes to be permeated by the activity of one's inner life in that 'The form of an object is always its being–formed by me, by my inner activity' (*A & E*, 6). Imitation serves in such cases only as a substratum to absolute artistic volition that is driven to depict not the object as such, but the inner rhythm and power of its form.

In non–naturalistic art the will–to–form urges the artist to reproduce an object in its essential purity of form that is at once stable, orderly and irrefutable. This is made possible by depriving the object of all external trappings it has acquired in its relation to and entanglement with other objects of the outer world, by freeing it from all the flux and happenings associated with the temporal order of the world. This is what is known as rendering an object in its absolute value, or as Worringer would like to call it, in its 'closed material individuality.' This process also makes it necessary on the part of the artist to emancipate the object from all subjective considerations as well, in that they are bound to vitiate and cloud the objective presentation of the thing in its pure form. Abstracted forms of objects, liberated from the tutelage of the temporal, alone, according to Worringer, can act for the artist as points of repose from the passing caval-

cade of nature's exhibitions as they succeed one another in an unceasing continuum of time in three-dimensional world. Thus, for an object or a natural model to be transformed into the language of art, it became necessary to divest it of all extraneous relationships, to wriggle it out of all the finite occurrences of the outer world. Only through such process of reduction or deprivation that one could approximate a thing to its absolute material individuality; only this way one could eternalize it by giving it a permanent niche in the realm of art. "Tranquillity and felicitation could make their appearance only when the spectator was confronted by the absolute." (*A & E*, 35).

The psychic pre-suppositions for the urge to abstrartion, according to Worringer, are to be found in the various peoples' attitude to the universe around them. Just as the pre-requisite for naturalistic art can be traced to man's natural urge to empathy or harmony with the surrounding forces of the outer world, the basic pre-condition for the impulse to abstraction can be found in exactly the opposite direction, in man's disharmonious relation to his natural environment, in his unrestful state of feeling that is basically out of tune with it, a state that in turn is the result of his agrophobia or fear of vast, open spaces, found most prominently among the primitive peoples. This fear, while being instinctive in a primitive man on account of his feeling lost and helpless in a yet unexplored world before him, is a product of cognition among the people of more civilized culture, for, as Worringer says, "Their spiritual dread of open space, their instinct for the relativity of all that is, did not stand, as with primitive peoples, *before* cognition, but *above* cognition" (*A & E*, 16). This was so, because the Oriental man, with his richer cultural and philosophical heritage, unlike his Western counterpart with his rationalism and his intellectual mastery of the external world, came back to look upon the world of nature

as a veil of *Mayā*, something which was to be transcended in order to grasp the noumenal behind the phenomenal We find something of the same order in Turner who was interested in portraying not so much the surface appearance of things as the underlying elemental forces of nature such as wind, water, fire and mist that make for the abstract patterns of his late paintings. Dissolution of image is so complete in Turner as to leave no traces of corporeal existence in the near-abstract visions of his later life.

Western man's sense of intellectual mastery or his physical confidence in the presence of bewildering phenomena of the visible world, could not deprive the Oriental of his basic sense of the unfathomable and unreal nature of the phenomena of existence and hence his natural abhorrence–rather than fear—of the world of appearance, a satisfaction with appearances, according to T. E. Hulme, being limited to Europe.[4] The tendency to abstraction therefore is bound to be greater in the artistic creations of people with a natural mistrust of a world which they considered to be essentially transient and unsubstantial in nature. In the Occidental world, the flourishing of non-naturalistic art can similarly be found in such culturally developed periods as the Byzantine and the Gothic, dominated by a theology that rejected the world of nature as one instinct with evil and imperfection. All this obviously stands in contrast to the attitude of both, the man belonging to the age of classical Greece and the modern man extending from the period of Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth Century, the former considering himself to be part of the surrounding organic nature, and the latter certain of his domination over it. "In either case, the organic world of nature holds no terrors for them: they have what Worringer calls a *Vertraulichkeitsverhaltnis* — a relationship of confidence and intimacy — with the universe; and the

result, in art, is a naturalism which delights in reproducing the forms and appearance of the objective, three-dimensional organic world." [5]

The one major consequence of this urge to abstraction among the artists of non-naturalistic periods such as the primitive and the Oriental (Indian and Egyptian), was to find it necessary to render an object in the plane and not in space, in relief rather than in roundness, so that it could be presented in its pure, crystalline and geometric form, shorn of all details associated with space in depth. Rendering an object in its three-dimensionality is as good as snatching it out of eternity and putting it back into the corridors of time that deprive it of its essential materiality and individuality by relating it to the manifold diversity of material phenomena of this organic world. The succession of perceptual elements in a three-dimensional world makes nonsense of one's struggle to present a thing in its indisputable and necessary absoluteness, its individuality simply melting away in the presence of unwanted clutter of other related elements. Moreover, presentation of a thing in its depth dimension calls for such subjective factors as recession and foreshadowing which negate all efforts to render it in its abstraction is thus made well nigh impossible by space, its depth dimension being the one element responsible for thwarting all attempts in this direction. Aesthetic contemplation of an object in its pure materiality is denied by the dimension of depth as it comes to relate the object, of necessity, with the other distracting and agonizing facts of organic existence. Worringer therefore is right when he remarks, "Life as such is felt to be a disturbance of aesthetic enjoyment" (*A & E*, 24). Commenting on the corruptive effect of space in annihilating the individuality and abstract purity of things, Worringer further states, "It is precisely space which, filled with atmospheric air, linking things together and destroying their individual closedness, gives things their temporal value and draws them into the cosmic

interplay of phenomena; most important of all in this connection is the fact that space as such is not susceptible of individualisation" (A & E, 38).

Since space is thus a major stumbling block in attempting to arrive at the abstract form of an object, it was found necessary to do away with the presentation of depth dimension in art, because it is the one dimension that, according to Worringer, acts as *the* authentic dimension of space and, in doing so, connects the objects with the sense of time as they present themselves to the eye in a series of perceptual moments that follow one another in the unfolding drama of life. Restricting the representation of an object to the two dimensions of height and width thus became indispensable to achieve in art the much desired abstract materiality (Turner's materiality of the immaterial). "Depth relations had to be transformed, as far as possible, into plane (or surface) relations" (*A & E*, 40). Explaining the reason why non-naturalistic styles avoid the use of depth dimension in order to achieve a timeless unity by presenting objects in a unified spatial plane, Joseph Frank observes, "Presenting objects in depth gives them a time-value, or perhaps we should say accentuates their time-value, because it connects them with the real world in which events occur; and since time is the very condition of flux and change which... man wants to escape from when he is in a condition of disequilibrium with nature, non-naturalistic styles shun the dimension of depth and prefer the plane." [6]

All this offers us a new insight into our reading of the use of spatial form in plastic arts of all ages, twentieth century included, that have been primarily dominated by the artist's propensity to abstraction. And this understanding differs widely from the one offered by Lessing. For Lessing, the distinction between plastic arts and literature was clear, the one being spatial in form and

the other temporal, in that while a plastic art like painting concerned itself with the presentation of visual images in their simultaneity by juxtaposing them in an instant of time, literature, a verbal art, preoccupied itself with the unfolding of action or events in their consecutiveness, the very nature of its medium demanding a sequential arrangement of the narrative in words that must be apprehended in and through time. The picture is now changed. What we see instead is that the plastic arts, which were regarded, unlike literature, as absolutely spatial by Lessing, now came to be considered, in view of their stylistic evolution, more spatial in so far as they succeeded in avoiding the dimension of depth and less spatial if inclined to make room for its admission. This presents us with a paradoxical situation in that the plastic arts could be regarded as having been 'most spatial when they did not represent the depth dimension and least spatial when they did, since a greater degree of time–value always accompanies the presentation of three–dimensionality.' To put in a nutshell, one can safely assert that the greater the accent of the artist on abstraction, the better the opportunity to fully represent in a work of plastic art its inherent spatiality by doing away with the last possible 'traces of time–value.' (Joseph Frank's phrase.)

And this brings me to the consideration of the use of 'spatiality' in Turner in the light of Worringer's theory of abstraction and his concept of non–representational style in art.

III

Turner is indeed so Protean an artist, what with his range and command of themes, his apocalyptic imagination and abundant energy, that it is difficult to associate him with any particular kind of stylistic composition in his long life full of daring and innovative experiments with different styles. Beginning with his tutelage to the cult of the picturesque during the

formative years of his life or his interest in history painting, the ruling passion and High Art of the age, Turner ends by depicting those majestic, Vorticular formations of his last phase, that, besides revealing his complete liberation from the domination of the physical eye, point to his full conquest of the external world by means of an all-enveloping imagination. It is in his great compositions of the mid-thirties such as *Fire at Sea, Burning of the Houses of Parliament,* and *Snowstorm, Avalanche and Inundation,* where objects and persons alike are almost reduced to the level of nonentity behind the veil of the elemental process of nature such as wind, fire and water, that Turner is able to achieve the effect of abstraction in terms of pure patterns of light and colour. Even an early picture like *Evening Priory* of of 1797, shows Turner's progressive interest in light as the principal theme of his art in the painting of interiors, culminating in *The Interior at Petworth* where all forms are so dissolved as to transmute the scene into a symphony of light and colour.

This tendency to reduce all objects to the thiness of a water-mark or to absorb all forms in pools of liquescent colours and light, now serene, now lurid, reaches its farthest possible limit in his maturer visions of the forties such as *The Sun Setting Over the Sea* (1840), *Snowstrom* (1842), *Norham Castle-Sunrise, Sunrise with a Sea Monster, Seascape* (all c. 1840–5), *Shade and Darkness, Light and Colour,* and *The Angel Standing in the Sun.* It is little wonder that paintings like these, along with his innumerable Venetian poems in water-colour and oil-all aglow with the opalescent shimmer of Italian light, mist and colour, ranging from the bule of the lagoons to the liquid gold of the sky—have rightly earned for themselves such delightful epithets as 'sheer poems of light,' 'orchestratons of colour,' 'melting transparencies,' 'flooding luminosities,' 'spells of magic vagueness,' and 'riots of abstract splendour,' to cite but a few.

Since some of the paintings mentioned above are Vorticular in their formation, a word about vortex, the form in which Turner reaches the summit of his stylistic evolution as an artist, would be quite in order at this stage. Vortex, which he considered to be the most suitable vehicle for conveying his emotional response to a certain type of landscape had always fascinated him right from the beginning, one of the finest and earliest expressions of which we find in *Hannibal Crossing the Alps,* where in the sheaf of light streaming from the sun above, along with the arc of dark menacing storm clouds that encircle it, swallows up everything around in whirls of spiralling mist, snow and light. This indeed is a new and dynamic way of representing nature wherefrom all external connections and relationships, so very widely used in the traditional system of presenting the outer world in a naturalistic way, are done away with, in favour of vortex, 'a highly complicated field-of-force in action'[8] as Lindsay would have it.

It is after practising and breaking through such earlier styles as the pyramidal (*The Fifth Plague of Etypt, 1800)* the vertiginous (*The Passage of the St. Golhard, 1804),* the diagonal (*Fall of an Avalanche in the Grisons, 1810*), and the lozengeshaped (*Fisherman at Sea,* 1796; *Calais Pier,* 1803; *The Shipwreck,* 1805), that Turner finds in the vortex a form wherein he could embody his most sublime visions of nature with absolute freedom and without any care for convention–ridden schools or inhibiting traditions. The vortex in Turner, at once a supreme expression of his restless energy and overheated imagination, operates on two levels, one subjective and the other objective, the former representing the agitated state of the artist's mind and the latter the fusion of nature's various elemental forces in fury, thus projecting the imagery of vortex as an index both of his perturbed psyche and of a disturbed state of nature Turner. at once suc-

ceeds in elevating it to the status of a symbol signifying the fusion of the artists' creativity and nature's activity. This fusion of the subjective (mental) and the objective (elemental) forms of energy is so complete in Turner as to establish an easy and immediate communion between the artist's essential 'self' and the spirit of nature. Like any other persistent Romantic imagery or icon in the works of other major Romantics, the vortex in Turner tends to become a powerful analogue of the artist's mental state, a veritable 'figurative mediator between outer motion and inner emotion',[9] terms that Abrams uses elsewhere for the imagery of the windharp. In final analysis we can safely assert that the psychical and physical elements are so very completely merged together in Turner's vorticular formations – those whirling pools of light suffused with ripples of melting colours — that their latent meaning emerges only after one's deep understanding of them through repeated acquaintance. At first sight they tend to strike the eye as nothing more than revolving balls of ethereal beauty, half-fluid, half-fiery.

Aware as Turner was of the fragility of man's life and his puniness against the terrible and terrifying forces of nature in its sublimity, he committed himself to paint it in terms of colour and light befitting this tragic vision of his. As Gowing observes "His audacity was a genuine courage. He was deeply aware of the terror of nature and mortality. He painted it, and the paint committed him. It was brave to make light and colour real. The tense purity of colour itself possessed a quality of the terrible."[10] We shall see later on how light in Turner acts as a power that both creates and destroys.

It is Turner's insight into the basic structure of colour and his extraordinary technique of rendering light in such masterpieces of the last two decades of his life that promote him to make all

forms disappear, while retaining their barest possible structures that are, however, faintly visible through the enveloping veil of light, more as embodiments of colour rather than as coloured things. His passion for light and colour, the most elemental and visible qualities of an object is so deep-rooted in him that instinctively he is drawn to render not merely the beauty of visible objects as such, but 'the beauty of such objects as merely visible', as W. J. Hipple puts it in connection with Knight's definition of the picturesque.

All this leads to the predominance of abstract quality in the paintings of Turner, an abstraction that is at once lyrical and musical, the kind of which we find in the symphonies of Beethoven or in the works of impressionists where forms are sacrificed to effects of light and overlaid colour. The total effect is that of a surface shimmering with light upon which now depends the unity of an abstract or impressionistic picture, as against the unity that was earlier achieved through the logical partition of a picture into neatly apportioned areas of light and darkness. With the passing of time, we notice Turner's will-to-form being progressively diverted towards a non-representational style devoid of all relative jumble of the three-dimensional world. Age, instead of weakening his artistic abilities, leads him to create an art that is ageless. What happens is something like this: whereas the seventeenth century Dutch artists and the topographical illustrators of eighteenth century England revelled in portraying a three-dimensional world in all its corporeality as revealed by light, with Turner the whole process is reversed. Instead, Turner delights in representing it in the plane, and in doing so, makes it disappear, along with all its ambient details, behind a shimmer of unearthly light. Turner obviously seems to be interested here, not in painting a world-revealing light, but a light-revealing world devoid of all substantiality. It therefore,

comes as no surprise when Hazlitt refers to such pictures of his as 'portrayls of nothing and very like', and Constable as 'fumes of tinted steam'.

One can notice in Turner's evolution as an artist a systematic disengagement from and a growing disinterestedness in depicting the perceptual elements of the world in their concreteness, and a corresponding increase in his propensity to render them in their essentiality by relaxing their solidity. This is clearly a result of the ascendency of imagination in Turner, and when in full command of this faculty, he creates on the canvas a poetically enchanting world wherefrom the last possible vestiges of corporeal forms are made to vanish to give place to 'airy-nothings' that form the very stuff of his abstract art. In this connection it would be of interest to know how very relevant is the definition of imagination as given by Pottle, "You will know that you are dealing with imagination when the edges of things begin to waver and fade out." [11] Abstraction seems to be imperative in such an art that refuses to surrender itself to canons of naturalistic styles demanding a cubical representation of the perceptual world. The artist, by going beyond the perceptual world offered to the light of sense. presents us with different world imbued with the sense of light. Wordsworth regarded sight as the 'sad enemy of imagination,' and Turner, by liberating himself from the domination of the mere sight, as did the great poet himself, gives us a penetrating insight into the essences of things as represented in the flooding luminosities of his maturer years. Summing up these qualities as reflected in the paintings of Turner's old age, Rothenstein observes "We can trace throughout Turner's life the progressive relaxation of interest in the material objects of nature and a corresponding intensification of his preoccupation with light... In his old age Turner moved into a luminous enchanted solitude where his

main concern was the creation of works in which colour infiinitely transcended form. Of the pictures of his last phase, with a few exceptions, the most magical are the pure chromatic fantasies which he never exhibited. These are almost as abstract as music, yet their seemingly vague and tentative allusions to specific forms assume, beneath our wandering gaze, the character of flashes of piercing insight into the very essence of nature." [12]

Indistinctness, which Turner is reported to have regarded as his forte in painting, is at last accomplished by concealing the material forms and contours behind—to use his own words—'a matchless veil of colour'. Indeed Turner's concern for this process, with the passage of time, assumed such supreme importance in his colour structures of thirties and forties that he regarded it almost as a sacrilege on the part of the eye 'to pierce the mystic shell of colour in search of form'. [13] Gradually getting bolder, he began to get rid of his pictures of all the lineaments of a recognizable nature, sacrificing verisimilitude, volume and subject matter at the altar of his driving passion to winnow a thing from the surrounding husk of perceptual elements and represent it in such a manner as to form a whole for the imagination. Rendering of an object by means of mere perception would simply not do for an artist of Turner's stature and genius. This is what led him to transform his art into those chromatic patterns that came to be dominated by structures of pure colour, made radient by light and placed in juxtaposition to each other.

Turner's success as the supreme colourist among the landscape artists of his time, including Constable, can thus be traced to his mastery in subordinating narrative element or subject matter to landscape and material form to the demands of light and colour. This, however, does not mean that he deprives his paintings of all ideas, for, even in his most abstract visions, some or

the other kind of associational element, capable of engaging our imagination or intellect, is always to be found, though in a dimly discernible manner. Instead of relating the landscape to an actual event taking place in the dramatic world of three-dimensionality, what Turner does is to relate it to the impelling idea of his mind which does not rest till it finds expression in terms of colour tonalities and light, forces that he always regarded as superior to form. As Graham Reynolds observes, "While Turner had and retained a miraculous tact in the management of light throughout his pictures, the result of his reflections, his experience and his Italian journeys was to direct his interest towards the colour in the visible world, if need be at the expense of its form. His always present fascination for the immaterial vehicles of colour, steam, smoke, mist, helped him to make this choice. So in the later finished pictures he composes in colour, dissolving, suggesting, and only half-defining, form". [14]

If romanticism can be defined as the raid of the imagination on the materially visible and the finite, and imagination in turn as the faculty capable not so much of raising images, as of striking a chord of intellectual and emotional response, then Turner's later art should be considered as expressive of this new function assigned to imagination. In such an art, rich in its imaginative content and appeal, the artist, going beyond the thereshold of a mere 'time-space' bound consciousness, reaches for those ethereal heights of which the very air breathes the spirit of freedom, of infinity and eternity, instead of confining himself to the portrayal of a world that is painfully conditional, circumscribed and concrete. Devoid of all materiality and pictorial element, this sort of art, of necessity, reveals a world that is lyrical in its essense and symbolic in function, the artist being interested not in making manifest the truth of representation, but a poetic truth. This is what makes him realise, what Wor-

ringer and Reigl refer to as the absolute or 'closed material individuality' of a thing, in terms of pure space insulated from the enclosing pressures of a time-ridden world. Great art works of this sort thus acquire a sort of loneliness (Rothenstein's 'enchanted solitude') about them, cut off as they are from the surroundiug flux of time and the elements associated with it. They begin to exist as flames of pure colour, as music of silence, of pause that ensues when all sound has ceased to be.

IV

Evaluating Turner's abstractions in the light of Worringer's classification of art styles into naturalistic and non-naturalistic, with specific periods of history assigned to each of them, poses problems. Turner is a nineteenth century artist and his art the efflorescence of romanticism at its best. Worringer considers the nineteenth century as the pre-dominant period of naturalistic style unfit to promote the works of non-naturalistic style, the primary urge of the romantics being the urge to empathy and not to abstraction. The fact that the concept of empathy finds itself flourishing during the Romantic Era, is further confirmed by Worringer in the Notes to his *Abstraction and Empathy* : "The development of the problem of empathy extends back to Romanticism" (136, n. 2). The poser therefore is : why do we then find in the nature works of artists like Turner and Constable the manifestation of abstract and impressionistic way of representation ? If the art of an age is to be judged by the major works of its leading lights, then Turner's and Constable's works need to be assessed in terms of their technique which relevals a movement towards non-linear, near-abstract, and impressionistic modes of expression. And this despite their tendency to empathize with the various aspects of nature, ranging from the pastoral to the sublime. A clear outcome of all this is a sense

of unfinished perfection that invariably accompanies works of this nature.

To forestall all such objections, Joseph Frank, in a footnote to his article, says, "...it might be pointed out that neither Worringer nor the present writer regard these distinctions as absolute in any but a theoretical sense. These different styles are ideal constructions, to which the art of various periods has approximated in greater or lesser degree. Elements of both styles may be found in all periods; cultures are spoken of as creating one or the other on the basis of predominance, not of absolute exclusion."[15] This, however, seems to me to be an arrested defence, for Frank here talks primarily in terms of periods, and not in terms of individual artists in whom the elements of either style may be found in predominance, depending upon tne degree to which their art, at a given period of their life, may heavily lean towards. Perhaps the only solution, therefore, that can be offered to this problem is that while Worringer confines himself to the consideration of art styles in terms of historical periods in studying the evolution of the plastic arts, he should also have taken into account at least the cases of such individual geniuses (or shall we say, 'freaks of nature'?) as Turner and Constable, whose works progressively represent a variety of styles ranging from naturalistic to non-naturalistic, within the span of a single life-time. Had Worringer done so, he would have noticed how both styles, *in varying degrees,* could exist side by side not only in a given historical period, which indeed is a very broad generalization, but also in the life-time of a single artist, depending upon his *own* approach to nature and his *own* will-to- form in a particular style. This is all the more true of the Romantics, whose art, reflecting the spirit of the age, as does the art of any other age, goes beyond it all to add something more to itself and that is to reflect the spirit of

the artists themselves. Art, in the hands of the Romantics, becomes a highly personalised expression of their individual style. Art, to put it in words that Zola used in connection with Cezanne's painting, becomes here 'a corner of nature seen through a temperament' (1866).

This sort of art, as Wylie Sypher would have it, is not 'ready made,' but 'being made', not something given, but taken, permeated with meanings conferred upon it by the contemplative self of the artist, representing the artist's truth. The object is no more permitted to exist as something fixed and dead 'out there' in nature, but represented as a symbol of the artist's unique sensibility. This is subjectivity, and "Subjectivity, as Kirkegaard has stated, 'is truth.'. "The romantic painter," observes Sypher, "no longer wished to present images from the outside world only. Instead, his spirit imbued the world, changing its features and transcending its objects." [16] Nature, treated as a 'reflex of the self' (Sypher's phrase), is created anew with the artist's signature writ all across its face. Romantic painting thus becomes highly illustrative of Schopenhauer's philosophy of the world, according to which, it is no more to be treated as something existing independently of our consciousness, but as *our* idea of the world. Talking of Turner's mature art in this connection, Sypher avers, "Turner is among the romantic painters who represent the world as a form of consciousness—which is romanticism in a phrase. Turner's methods trace back to Claude's use of light and colour; but Turner's vision is more subjective than Claude's. Turner is the British counterpart of Delacroix, and what Baudelaire wrote of Delacroix he might have written of Turner. The painter, Baudelaire says, must create another world of his own, which Baudelaire calls the New: The true artist, the true poet, should only paint in accordance with what he sees and with what he feels'. Then he gains his harmony—the harmony of Turner's

evaporating vision, a 'rich, joyful, or melancholy impression upon the soul,' making the painter a hypnotist, as if he could project thought at a distance. Baudelaire said that Delacroix's colour 'thinks for itself' apart from the object it clothes. It is as abstract as thoughts can be, and reminds us again that the romantic painter represents the world as his consciousness of the world." [17]

What is true in case of Delacroix, is equally true of Turner whose colours speak their own language and whose art becomes an ideate correlative of the artist's self. This is what makes a Turnerian landscape inseparable from the history of the artist's mind. The objective world of nature acquires a significant form only through the play of the artist's consciousness which is brought to bear upon it for shaping it according to its own will. Individual history enters into landscape in the form of reflexive consciousness. Even the most sublime and abstractly painted scenes of nature, such as *Fire at Sea, Snowstrom, Avalanche* and *Inundation,* or *Snowstrom* (1942) would merely remain theatrical pieces of art, were they not used us means to make the painter aware of the rising power of his imagination.

The non-naturalistic mode of representation that Turner achieves in his later art is therefore not a result of his urge to abstraction, but of the transforming power of his imagination, of his all-assimilating consciousness that, all its intensity, goes out to incorporate the external world within its own orbit. Turner's art can be said to owe its excellence to this intensity, bearing out not the truth of Worringer's theory of abstraction, but Keats's statement about the true merit of a really genuine work of art : "The excellence of every art is its intensity capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship to Beauty and Truth (Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 Dec. 1817). The disagreeables driven out by Turner

from the masterpieces of his late art are sharp edges and sinuous contours of all material bodies, veracity, chiaroscuro, finish, etc. What is retained behind is simply a pattern of interpenetrating and dilating ripples of colour suffused with the radiance of light that is both enriching and annihilating. Such a radical treatment of light and colour and the daringly original and imaginative use they are put to is what makes the art of Turner turn towards a near abstract expression. Colour is no more used for any decorative purpose, nor light to divide the visual composition into well defined geometrical portions of brightness and shadow. The apperceptive world is instead represented to use Worringer's words, in its abstract 'capable of forming a whole for the imagination' (*A & E*, 41). As he states, "It is a question of imagination, not of perception. For only in the reproduction of this closed whole of the imagination could man find an approximate substitute for the absolute material individuality of the thing" (*A & E*, 40).

All higher types of landscape, rising above the presentation of the mere sensuous, tend to become symbolic of the artist's more imaginative and intellectual concerns which do away with anything perceptually offensive or ugly to the eye. As Knight so very perceptively observes... "in the higher class of landscape, whether in nature or in art, mere sensual gratification of the eye is comparatively small, as scarcely to be attended to; but yet, if there occur a single spot ... offensively harsh and glaring ... all magic instantly vanishes, and the *imagination avenges the injury offered to the sense*" [18]. The conquest of the realm of the objective and the visible by the imagination is so very complete that a romantic artist of the stature of Turner, instead of confining himself to presenting the world of perceived objects in terms of facts, reveals it in its pristine purity, that is, in its most reduced form, by freeing it from all relativity and cluster of unwanted

appendages that are irritating and unwelcome to the eye. Turner's abstractions, to repeat, are *not* therefore the result of any urge to abstraction on his part, but of an overwhelming and all-consuming imagination that cannot brook the despotic presence of either finish or of facts *qna* facts. Subjectivity here, contrary to Worringer's view, instead of acting as an element of adulteration vitiating the presentation of an object in its absolute materiality, enables the artist to represent it in its crystalline beauty from his own private angle. Every major work of romantic art therefore becomes the expression of an intense poetic experience presented from an unexpected angle that saves the work from becoming a product of shared experience or common knowledge.

Moreover, for Worringer, the presupposition for the urge to abstraction is the outcome of man s unhappy and restless condition is the face of nature's confused flux of phenomena, which state he describes as the result of one's immense psychophysical dread of space. The vaster the space, the greater the fear and hence the need to render objects in terms of abstract forms that act as points of repose wherein man can find tranquillity from the happenings of the phenomenal world. Turner's abstractions *don't* fit within the framework of Worringer's condition for the urge to abstraction, as they are not the outcome of any fear of space whatsoever on the part of the artist, for, who among the romantic artists of the nineteenth century exhibited a greater love for the immense and vast spaces of nature than Turner? His gay abunden to the boundless and colossal exhibitions of nature and his rapturous delight in its awe-inspiring spectacles, ranging from the dizzy heights of the Alps to the vast watery expanses of the Atlantic, act as a living testimony of his ardent love for and his tremendous urge to empathize with the landscape of sublimity. It is this need for empathy that establishes

'a happy, pantheistic relationship of confidence' between him and the world around him, whether it be the interior of Petworth House, the landscape around Norham Castle or the open splendour of the Alpine sublime. Thus, though Turner exhibits neither any fear nor any abhorrence of vastness in any form, whether horizontal, vertical or perspectival, his rendering of it, in one picture after another, such as *Hannibal Crossing the Alps, Snowstrom, Avalanche and Inundation. Fire at Sea, The Slaveship, Seascape* (C. 1840-5), *Val d' Aosta* (C. 1835-40), *Sun Setting over The Sea, Sunrise with a Sea Monster*, etc. in terms of near or total abstraction stands at variance with Worringer's view of non-naturalistic art which is essentially a product of man's basic fear of space. Turner's abstractions can finally be regarded as the outcome *not* of any tendeney to run away from, but to go all out to embrace and identify himself with the immense manifestations of space in nature, at once portentous, obscure and insecure. For Worringer it would be the other way round, the urge to abstraction being the result of man's primal fear of the three-dimensional space.

However, it is in these three vorticular formations of the mid-forties, such as *Light and Colour, Shade and Darkness*, and *The Angel Standing in the Sun* – the most representative examples of Turner's mythical imagination — that one can notice the absence of depth dimension, all the three traditional distances having been compressed into a flat circular surface containing only height and width. Turner completely succeeds here in presenting them at their most spatial, thus draining them of time-value associated with the depth dimension missing here. The transformation of depth relations into surface relations is here fully accomplished. What happens in the process is that his all-conquering imagination, by mediating between his self and his perception of the phenomena of the external world, trims them

of all unwanted elements related to the third dimension to such a degree as to make the phenomenal fit enough to be transformed into the language of art. The objects, to be made worthy enough to find fixation in art, are so deprived of their denseness and impurities, and of their dependence upon the external nexus of life, that they come to be represented in their most rarefied form, the artist having divested them 'of all but the minimum of their conditional mode of manifestation' (*A & E,* 133). Turner's art accords here with Worringer's postulate of avoiding the depth dimension which, as observed earlier, is for him the most authentic dimension of space. While all the three paintings do contain associative elements, they are presented in such a manner as to do away with any inerpretation based on actual experience or history. *Light and Colour* and *Shade and Darkness,* in as much as they deal with the primal theme of deluge, operate on a level of imagination that is mythic rather than historical.

Light and Colour is no more than a 'seething womb of light' (Lindsay's words), a huge bubble of variegated colours containing within itself a microcosmic world of smaller prismatic bubbles, each one of which symbolizes a unit of life and hope, as short-lived as the bubble itself. Other figures in the picture such as Moses representing the recording angel writing the Book of Genesis or the serpent-image symbolic of new life after the deluge, signify the myth of creation. The whole picture, rendered in terms of a circular rim of light, throbs with the vitality of Goethe's 'plus' colours, capable, in Goethe's own words, of exciting feelings that are 'quick, lively, and aspiring' The companion piece of *Shade and Darkness,* with its down-sweeping arch of the sky forming a curve around the deluge below, is another classic study in Turner's abstract vorticular formation, representing theme of chaos before the creation, unlike the theme of calm after the creation represented in *Light and Colour.* The figures of

animals struggling in the deluge in their effort to reach the dimly visible ark at the centre of the picture and the arc of dark birds hovering in the sky, add to the vitality and movement of the picture already made dynamic by the chaotic dance of nature's elemental forces. The painting, in contrast to its sister-piece, is sombre in mood, portray as it does the the theme of destruction in 'minus' colours productive according to Goethe, of 'restless, susceptible, anxious impressions.'

The Angel Standing in the Sun, another apocalyptic painting in vortiginious form, dealing with Biblical theme derived from the *Book of Revelation*, seems to be floating in an atmosphere that transcends all sense of recorded time or history. The Angel is not only an emanation of light, but stands for the forces of darkness and death as well, as it summons up the birds of prey flitting across the upper left-hand whirl of the vortex to feast upon :

> "...The flesh of mighty man, and the flesh of the horses, and of them that sit on them, both free and bound, both small and great." (*The Book of Revelation*, XIX, 17-18).

Apart from this passage, Turner also appended to the picture of quotation from Samuel Roger's *Voyage of Columbus* with a similar theme :

> 'The morning march that flashes to be sun;
> The feast of vultures when the day is done.'

It is interesting to note that Roger subtitled his poem as 'The Flight of an Angel of Darkness'. This seems to have given the idea to Turner to represent the light of the sun as a power at once beneficent (in its 'morning march') and devouring ('when the day is done') as it comes to identify itself with its counterpart, the 'Angel of Darkness'. Referring to this double sense in

which light is made to operate in the painting, Gowing observes, "Light is not only glorious and sacred, it is voracious, carnivorous, unsparing. It devours impartially, with distinction, the whole living world".[19] It is in this sense, as observed earlier, that light acts as a force that is at once creative and desctructive. In the all-absorbing glory of light, the figures in the painting seem to have bidden their final farewell to form. It is therefore little wonder that Turner came to look upon the sun the prime source of all light and most abstract of all heavenly deities, as his very god.[20]

It is paintings of such apocalyptic nature embodying Turner's transcendental vision that serve as effective 'types and symbols of eternity', torn as they are from the contingency and temporality of a world-order founded upon the framework of history of sensory experience. They strike the eye as the final apotheoses of Turner's life-long search for the essential nature of light bodying forth in terms of pure structures of colour, now tense, now lyrical, all resulting in a poetry of pigment *sans* form. Redeemed by the imagination that goes beyond the mere objective historical one, they seem to repose in a world that is timeless, liberated as it is from the tutelage of the 'cognate-organic' that dominates the corridors of the perceptive world as they extend into the third (depth) dimension of space.

For Turner's mastery of the depth dimension, one has only to turn to those golden visions of his, such as *Chichester Canal* (C, 1830-1), *Petworth Park* (1830), *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* (1829), and *The Fighting Temeraire'* (1838), where the eye is at once drawn to the horizon and where the sun, the symbol of cosmic vortex, shines in all its splendour fanning out its varicoloured light all across the sky. For his classic studies in abstraction, whether imaginative, derivative, or rooted in experience, one has only to glance at pictures like the *Interior at Pet-*

worth, Burning of the Houses of Parliament, Fire at Sea, Snowstrom, Avalanche and Inundation, Norham Castle : Sunrise, Rain, Steam and Speed, Snowstrom of 1842, Sun Setting over the Sea, Sunrise with a Sea Monster, Seascape, The Slaveship, etc., to convince oneself of Turner's command over the non-naturalistic way of representation with the depth-dimension altogether removed or only faintly presented. The eye perceives them as notning more than veiled areas of earth, sky and sea.

Summing up, one can safely assert that all such paintings of Turner accord well with Worringer's theory of abstraction and his concept of non-naturalistic style in so far as they succeed in avoiding the depth-dimension, and *don't* in so far as they are *not* the outcome—which they *never* are—of his disharmony with nature arising out of the dread of space, which he never had.

Department of English R. K. RAVAL
M. S. University
BARODA 390 002 (Gujarat)

NOTES

1. Originally published in the German in 1908. First translated into English by Michael Bullock and published by Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, in 1953.
2. William Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy : A Contribution to the Pyschology of Style,* trans. Michael Bullock (London, 1953), p. 15. To be referred to as *A & E* in all subsequent citations.
3. Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature", *Criticism : The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment,* ed. Mark Schorer et. al., (Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1948), p. 389.
4. See T. E. Hulme, *Speculations,* (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1949), p. 89.
5. Joseph Frank, *op. cit.,* p. 389.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 391.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Jack Lindsay, *Turner*, (Panther Books Ltd., Frogmone, St. Albans, Herts, 1975), p. 160.

9. M. H. Abrams, "The Correspondent Breeze", *English Romantic Poets*, ed. M. H. Abrams, (Oxford, 1975), p. 160.

10. Lawrence Gowing, *Turner : Imagination and Reality*, (M. O. M. A.,) New York, 1966), p. 53.

11. Frederick A. Pottle, "Eye and Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth", *Romanticism and Consciousness*, ed. Harold Bloom, (W. W. Norton Co., New York, 1970), p. 248.

12. John Rothenstein, *Turner*, (Faber and Faber, London, 1949) Introd., p. 24.

13. Quoted by William Vaughan, *Romantic Art*, (Thames and Hudson, London, 1978). p. 173.

14. Graham Reynolds, *Turner*, (Thames & Hudson, London, 1974), p. 149

15. Joseph Frank, *op. cit.*, p. 390, n. 5.

16. Wylie Sypher, *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art*, (A Vintage Book, New York, 1962), p. 56.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.

18. Quoted by W. J. Hipple (Jr.) *The Beautiful, The Sublime and The Picturesque*', (Carbondale. Illinois, 1957), p. 259. Italics mine.

19. Lawrence Gowing *op. cit.*, p. 53.

20. Turner's death-bed utterance, 'The Sun is God', rings with sincerity as it more than amply points to his faith in the sun, his life-long passion and object of devotion.

THE LATE MR. MARTIN SACHS MEMORIAL ESSAY COMPETITION

Essays are invited for the Late Mr. Martin Sachs Memorial Essay Competition **in English** from students below the age of 25 years studying in any Indian educational institution on the theme " Modern Society and Tragic Sense of Life " for the First and Second prizes to be awarded respectively of Rs 300/- and 200/– to the essays adjudicated to be so by a panel of referees appointed for the purpose. The prize–winning essays would be published, in course of time, in the Students' Supplement of the **Indian Philosophical Quarterly,** a quarterly journal of the Department. The conditions governing submission of essays for the competition are as follows :

1. The essay typed in double space on one side of the paper must be submitted in duplicate.
2. The essay must not be longer than 2500 words.
3. The essay must be accompanied by a certificate signed by the Head of the Institution / Department where the student is studying to the effect that
   (a the student is studying in that institution and is below the age of 25 years, and
   (b) the essay is written by him / her.
4. The essays should reach Dr. P. P. Gokhale, Philosophy Department, Poona University, Ganeshkhind, Pune 411 007 not later than 31–10–1988.
5. The decision of the panel of referees shall be binding on all the competitors and that no correspondence of any kind would be entertained on that count.

The Head,
Philosophy Department
University of Poona, Ganeshkhind,
Pune–411 007.