



## Experience as History: Shelley's Venice, Turner's Carthage

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*ELH*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 321-339.

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*ELH* is currently published by The Johns Hopkins University Press.

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## EXPERIENCE AS HISTORY: SHELLEY'S VENICE, TURNER'S CARTHAGE

BY KARL KROEBER

The thesis of the large study of which this essay is a part is that "Romantic" sensibility (dominating European art between 1770 and 1870) is alien to "modern" sensibility, because the Romantic identifies individual experience with historical process, whereas to the modern "experience" and history are antithetical. To understand the Romantic sensibility we have to turn from its artifices readily misinterpreted to suit our apocalyptic yearnings toward something for us distasteful, what the Romantics specially admired. We are repelled, for example, even by the title of the painting J. W. M. Turner considered his masterpiece, which he hoped to have permanently exhibited between two pictures by Claude Lorrain: *Dido Building Carthage; or the Rise of the Carthaginian Empire—1st Book of Virgil's Aeneid*.<sup>1</sup> Sympathetic to Turner's harbingers of abstractionism, we gag on his narrative illustrations of literary historical texts. Analogously, we are dismayed when Shelley "describes" Venice in stereotyped phrases evoking not so much what the poet sees as what he imagines the city to have been and what it may become.

Sun-girt City, thou hast been  
Ocean's child, and then his queen;  
Now is come a darker day,

<sup>1</sup> The two Claudes were *Sea Port* and *The Mill*: see Graham Reynolds, *Turner* (New York: Abrams, n.d.) p. 94. Reynolds provides the best general introduction to Turner's work, but a penetrating recent study is *Color in Turner* by John Gage (New York and Washington: Praeger, 1969). Although the standard biography is that of A. J. Finberg, *The Life of J. M. W. Turner* (London: Oxford, 2nd ed. 1961), Jack Lindsay, *J. M. W. Turner: A Critical Biography* (London: Cory, Adams, Mackay, 1966) is original and stimulating, as are the interpretations in Lawrence Gowing, *Turner: Imagination and Reality* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966). The best collection of reproductions of Turner's work will be found in John Rothenstein and Martin Butlin, *Turner* (London: Heineman, 1964), Martin Butlin, *Turner's Watercolors* (London: Radcliffe and Barrie, 1962), and Gerald Wilkinson, *Turner's Early Sketchbooks* (London: Radcliffe and Barrie, 1972). Ruskin's extensive writing on Turner is still valuable.

And thou soon must be his prey,  
 If the power that raised thee here  
 Hallow so thy watery bier.  
 A less drear ruin than than now,  
 With thy conquest-branded brow  
 Stooping to the slave of slaves  
 From thy throne, among the waves  
 Wilt thou be, when the sea-mew  
 Flies, as once before it flew,  
 O'er thine isles depopulate,  
 And all is in its ancient state,  
 Save where many a palace gate  
 With green sea-flowers overgrown  
 Like a rock of Ocean's own,  
 Topples o'er the abandoned sea  
 As the tides change sullenly.  
 The fisher on his watery way,  
 Wandering at the close of day,  
 Will spread his sail and seize his oar  
 Till he pass the gloomy shore,  
 Lest thy dead should, from their sleep  
 Bursting o'er the starlight deep,  
 Lead a rapid masque of death  
 O'er the waters of his path.<sup>2</sup>

Most modern readers explain their distress at such a passage by faulting Shelley's language as conventional and generalized: "gloomy shore," "drear ruin," "conquest-branded brow," "masque of death." But displaying interrelations between natural

<sup>2</sup>Ll. 115-41, "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills"; this citation, like all others in this essay, is from the text of *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry*, ed. Neville Rogers (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968), checked against G. M. Matthews' corrected edition of the *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford, 2nd. ed. 1970), and those passages reproduced by Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland and London: Case Western Reserve Press, 1972). Mrs. Chernaik's commentaries, pp. 61-74 and 168-75, and Donald H. Reiman, "Structure, Symbol, and Theme in 'Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills,'" *PMLA*, 76 (1962), 404-13, are invaluable. My criticism is indebted as well to Carl Woodring's commentary in *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 259-62, and to Earl Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), pp. 197-203. My greatest debt to Professor Wasserman, however, is several private conversations of cheerful disagreement with him shortly before his untimely death. On "non-referentiality" in Shelley's description, one may consult my essay discussing Wordsworth's fondness for "contrary-to-fact" constructions in the very face of the facts, "'Home at Grasmere': Ecological Holiness," *PMLA* 89 (1974), 132-141, esp. p. 139. My thinking on these matters of style has been influenced by my colleague, Professor Michael Riffaterre; see, for example, his "Interpretation and Descriptive Poetry: A Reading of Wordsworth's 'Yew Trees,'" *New Literary History*, 4 (1972-73), 229-56.

and historical time and compromising images of immediate perception by references to a remote past and envisagements of an uncertain future, Shelley escapes the concrete singularity of diction we think essential to poetry. He attains, instead, remarkable fluidity. In six lines Venice is not merely personified but had been child, was queen, is fallen, must become ocean's prey—if, oddly, her corpse should so be sanctified by the power that long before had raised her from nothingness. Different periods and conditions succeed one another to form not a picture but a process—how Venice has changed, is changing, may change, e.g., “A less drear ruin then than now.”

Shelley's language directs our attention less to objects than to systems—historical, artistic, linguistic. In the third line quoted above, “darker day” is a visual absurdity, effective so far as its physical inapplicability verifies its metaphoric appropriateness—its power to evoke a slavery-darkness-prison-death stereotype. By interplaying verbal and visual, Shelley establishes an “historical” structure, individualizing a *moment*. The present, for Venice and for the poet perceiving the city, is created not alone by immediate sensations, what *is*, but also by reference to what is not, to what may be, which recalls, even as it differs from, what had been. We're made aware of Venice less as a place than as an historical phenomenon, rising from unpeopled marshes to the glorious mercantilism of city-sea bridal only to decline, perhaps finally, into a superstition-haunted natural cenotaph.

The city as historical phenomenon is appropriately evoked by stereotyped language reminding us of conventions, especially the history of the art to which the poem contributes, the aesthetic *langue* of the poet's *parole*. Shelley draws upon two traditions, one of descriptive meditation, usually upon ruins, focused by the “ubi sunt” theme, and the other of “prospect” landscape description. The latter looks “forward” and the former “back,” and “The Euganean Hills” depicts a beautiful prospect Shelley sees and a beautiful past he remembers—and what he *foresees*. Imagining the triumphant past, he can envisage a desolate horror that may in time be realized within the beauty perceptible before him. The poet's foresight is the obverse of his historical imagination, a power to see what *is* in the perspective of what now *is not*, either “no longer” or “not yet.” If only at the end of the poem's second line do most readers discover that what had seemed an “actual”

description in line one is metaphoric, the surprise prepares for the poem's continual interchanging of literal-visual with metaphoric-verbal. The interchange depends on time shiftings. The possibility of an island "healing Paradise" in the poem's concluding lines then seems appropriate because we have been conditioned to the poet's vision as an interfusing of visible and visionary, perceptible *is*, reconstructed *was*, envisioned *might be*. From the perspective of what Venice is, the city's past glory has become unreal; from the perspective of that free, glorious past, the present Venice, the city the poet looks upon, is unreal. Likewise, from the point of view of the present, the city's future is only an uncertain dream, but from the vantage point of that time, the present city may appear only a superstition-haunted half-memory.

Analogously, interpolated lines 169-205 in praise of Byron exploit Shelley's friend for another kind of historical perspective. The poet's fellow-exile and European celebrity conjoins not only the history of England to that of Venice and the history of British literature to Mediterranean literatures, but also Shelley's sad private history to the sad history of post-Napoleonic Europe. That Shelley is not indulging a personal eccentricity by interconnecting personal experience with cultural history is indicated by *Dido Building Carthage*. Turner wants us to see his specific accomplishment as part of an historical development. He wished his picture to be hung between paintings by Claude so that we might see his work (as I believe Shelley desired us to read his poem) as commenting on current events through its role in its art's history. To these Romantics, the autonomy of art was not reduced but enhanced when thus doubly participating in history.

If Turner's painting, first exhibited in 1816, strikes us as academic, we forget how topical was the founding of a great maritime empire at the moment of Napoleon's overthrow and the emergence of seafaring Britain as Europe's chief power. Turner's picture engages us in a temporal dialectic. The absurd title tells us that Turner painted not "Carthage" but Carthage as depicted in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the principal literary continuity between classical antiquity and later Western civilization. In painting a scene from the *Aeneid* (which *he* doubtless read in Dryden's seventeenth-century translation), Turner reaffirmed the vitality of a major historical continuity, as is illustrated by at least one detail. Even if the figures on the frieze of the building to the right are not easy to

discriminate, the frieze recalls a compelling passage in Book One, that in which Aeneas sees a bas relief of scenes from the Trojan War, including episodes of his own heroism. Turner's picture adds another dimension to an historical self-consciousness introduced into the epic tradition by Virgil. Turner shows the founding of the Carthaginian Empire, obliterated two centuries before Virgil recreated it in his celebration of Imperial Rome, a Rome vanished for a millennium and a half when Turner reconstructed the ambitious Phoenician beginning. To overlook Turner's comment upon imperialism would be as narrow-minded as repudiating the cogency of his observation: the British Empire is no more. But Turner's prophecy, at the moment of the Empire's burgeoning, is not an abstract, metaphysical, apocalyptic one. He foresees the British Empire vanishing into a continuity of history. His visionariness is historical.

To understand it, we may look into the tradition in which it originated and which it transformed in emerging, because the late neo-classical aesthetic is in some respects congenial to the modern sensibility, especially in America. The display of Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe*, painted in 1771, initiated the first popular exhibition of the British Royal Academy. The painting confirmed the colonial West's position as a leading painter in England when the graphic arts flourished in a culture traditionally more hospitable to literary enterprise. Sir Joshua Reynolds' comment upon *The Death of Wolfe* was prophetic: "Mr. West has conquered! I foresee that this picture will not only become one of the most popular but will occasion a revolution in art."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The quotation, like others by or about West cited in my text, is from James Thomas Flexner, *America's Old Masters* (New York: Dover, Riverside edition, 1967), pp. 19-97. Reynolds' comment appears on p. 66. On West worth consultation (besides Rosenblum's studies, cited below) are Grose Evans, *Benjamin West and the Taste of his Times* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1959), and Charles Mitchell, "Benjamin West's 'Death of General Wolfe' and the Popular History Piece" in *England and the Mediterranean Tradition*, ed. Warburg and Courtauld Institutes (London: Oxford, 1945), pp. 179-92. Mitchell observes the possible unreliability of Galt's reporting of Reynolds' words, and credits West with an adapting of classical and religious aesthetics to new feelings of nationalistic patriotism. On the Royal Academy, see Sidney C. Hutchinson, *The History of the Royal Academy, 1768-1968* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968). The success of English painting is to a degree attributable to the Academy, established by a monarch shrewd enough unobtrusively to secure a "control over its private affairs that has descended in turn to each of his successors and has never been relaxed"; see William T. Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends in England 1700-1799* (New York and London: Blom, re-issue, 1968, orig. 1928), 2 vols, I, 251.

West was the man to give European neo-classicism a turn. The son of a Pennsylvania Quaker tavern-keeper, he had no formal instruction in drawing until he was an adult and already celebrated as a painter. His shrewdness is illustrated by his arrival in Rome. When the twenty-one-year-old "American Raphael" appeared there in 1759, he was mistaken by Cardinal Albani, the blind dictator of Roman connoisseurship, for an Indian. After the swarthy Cardinal had been persuaded that West was as "fair" as himself, the American was conducted by a curious crowd to see the Apollo Belvedere, then thought perfect classical art. "My God," cried West, "how like a Mohawk warrior!" After momentary consternation, the Italians acclaimed the comment, as was appropriate, with the star of Rousseau and the image of the Noble Savage ascendent among European intellectuals who wouldn't have known a Mohawk from a Mojave.<sup>4</sup>

To understand the revolutionary quality of West's *Death of Wolfe* a dozen years later, one must remember that the usual historical paintings of the time depicted all heroes in the dress of classical antiquity, in toga and sandals. West was historically specific for several reasons, one of which may have been that the subject recalled his place of origin, the new world. Unlike European painters (Zoffany, Hodges) who adapted figures and scenes of exotic places to neo-classic forms, West adapted the later neo-classic style to his natively "exotic" vision. Compositionally, *The Death of Wolfe* is late neo-classical in foregrounding a group of figures brought together by death. In the art of the 1750s and 1760s death is a preferred theme.<sup>5</sup> Living change, transition, process are not this style's delight. It aims for a conclusive statement, a finished period—a decline and final fall.

A premise underlying this art of variousness confined, what Paulson calls the circle of response, was belief in a common human

<sup>4</sup> I have drawn on the account by Flexner, pp. 19-22, his source probably being John Galt, *The Life and Studies of Benjamin West*, on whose reliability, see Mitchell. The story is retold by Robert Rosenblum, "The Dawn of British Romantic Painting" in *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Peter Hughes and David Williams (Toronto: A. M. Hackett, 1971), pp. 189-210.

<sup>5</sup> Consult the important article by Ronald Paulson, "The Pictorial Circuit and Related Structures in Eighteenth-Century England" in *The Varied Pattern*, pp. 165-87, especially pp. 186-87. Rosenblum, p. 199, points out that West repeated the compositional pattern of *Wolfe* in pictures of the death of Epaminondas and Chevalier Bayard. Mitchell discusses these adaptations of classic form at length, being especially helpful in defining shifts in taste for historical costuming (pp. 181-82).

nature: all men are alike.<sup>6</sup> The noblest expression of this faith in human uniformity is no work of art but the constitution of the United States of America. And it was this premise that was challenged by Romantic exoticism, local color, primitivism, and admiration for folk cultures. West, a frontiersman invading European salons, in himself embodies the Romantic "revolution," which in part evolved from later neo-classicism, claiming to "return to nature," but in fact introducing a new concept of nature. Notice West's defense of his picture's truth.

The event to be commemorated took place on the thirteenth of September 1759, in a region of the world unknown to the Greeks and Romans, and at a period of time when no such nations, nor heroes in their costumes, any longer existed. . . . The same truth that guides the pen of the historian should govern the pencil of the painter. . . . I want to mark the date, the place, and the parties engaged in the event.<sup>7</sup>

West is as far from the a-historicity of the medieval-early-Renaissance art which depicted, say, Greek heroes in fourteenth-century Italian dress, as from late-Renaissance idealizations of modern generals in the garb of Pericles. West, almost accidentally, introduced into art historical diacriticalness. Specifying time and place of his subject so contrastively, by implication he distinguished his subject from the time and place of the painter. He opened a field of possible discrimination between event depicted and event of depiction. Within forty years, Turner, wanting his *Carthage* displayed alongside Claude's paintings of a century and half earlier, was exploiting the distinction in a fashion that must have startled West.

But Turner developed a practice whose beginnings we see in West, some of whose predecessors had depicted historical figures in classical costume because they believed in the unchanging uni-

<sup>6</sup> Montesquieu, for example: "Since men have had the same passions at all time, the causes [of historical events] are always the same." Or Hume: "Would you know the sentiments, inclinations, course of life of the Greeks and Romans? Study well the temper and actions of the French and English: you cannot be much mistaken." An eloquent appeal for recognizing the progress of historical thinking during the eighteenth century is to be found in the fifth chapter of Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Koelln and Pettegrove (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

<sup>7</sup> Flexner, p. 65. Mitchell, p. 189, points out that by 1771 the subject of Wolfe's death was not, as it had been for Penny eight years earlier, "hot news," and that it was the historicity rather than the contemporaneity of West's picture which impressed the first viewers.



formity of human nature. If, as Hume and Montesquieu affirmed, there was no essential difference between modern French and English and ancient Greeks and Romans, representing historical contingencies of costume, furniture, and locale would have been to trivialize art. And it is these neo-classicists' disdain for historical contingency which makes them today perhaps more congenial than their Romantic successors. Admirers of Samuel Beckett or of Jackson Pollock find little of interest in historical art. Philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, and linguists seeking structures, timeless models of thought, language, mind, and culture, can have scant patience with historical individualization. Our faith in the validity of computable alternatives provided by electronic mechanisms accords with neo-classic faith in a mechanical rationalism. Our "structure" parallels their "consistency of human nature." Then and now history hardly matters.

For Romantics, history does matter, and one can perceive a Romantic tendency in West's art. Admittedly, the arrangement of the figures in *The Death of Wolfe* echoes a Pietà, and the Indian in the foreground is in a Poussinesque position.<sup>8</sup> Yet his alert but comfortable pose contrasts with the sagging body of the general and the uptight uprightness of his subordinates, whose distress is conveyed by conventionalized gestures and facial distortions. The Indian surely is inscrutable. And the "accurate" costuming of the soldiers is impressive because played off against the nakedness of this anonymous, enigmatic native, who appears to be observing not a hero but merely the leader of an alien and perhaps overdressed people. No wonder the celebrated actor David Garrick, like many Englishmen, felt West had portrayed Wolfe with insufficient patriotism. To the applause of a crowd in front of the painting, Garrick assumed a posture and expression which he felt was truer to what must have been Wolfe's actual behaviour, how he must have looked and acted at the moment of his heroic death.<sup>9</sup>

That Garrick's performance raises important issues can be illustrated by a contrast of West's picture with one no actor could have performed before. Turner's *Snowstorm: Hannibal and His*

<sup>8</sup> On these and other debts of West see Mitchell, Paulson, and Rosenblum, *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> Flexner, pp. 66-67. Jean Starobinski, *The Invention of Liberty 1700-1789* (Geneva: Skira, 1964), points out that "artists were free to ignore the particular kinds of passion drawn by Le Brun, but they could not escape from the general obligation of giving visual form to a typology of the passions" (p. 135). The typology, of course, reinforced the sense of "appropriateness."

*Army Crossing the Alps*.<sup>10</sup> Detailed contrast is difficult, because Turner's picture is so obscure. The snowstorm, recreating one Turner had walked through in Yorkshire in 1810, confuses our vision. Turner's titular figure—in contrast to West's Wolfe, who dominates the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec—is as elusive for the viewer as he was for the Romans. And so much is happening in Turner's picture that we scarcely know how to order our perceptions. Whereas West's figures only watch Wolfe die, Turner's die, kill, save themselves, march, fall, stagger on, encourage some comrades, abandon others. To Turner, as later to Tolstoy, "history" is a confused struggle of many people. History is a dubious process involving multiple and uncontrollable contingencies, of which not the least important is weather. The winter of 1812, the year Turner's *Hannibal* was exhibited, destroyed Napoleon, in fact, and in *War and Peace*: some of Tolstoy's scenes of the French retreat are much like Turner's painting. Thomas Carlyle's Romantic history of the French Revolution, published in 1837, is packed with meteorological descriptions. Edward Gibbon almost never mentions the weather in his pre-Revolutionary *Decline and Fall*. Meteorology is minor in *The Death of Wolfe* but dominant in *Hannibal*. Of course, art historians are correct to say that Turner seized on the snowstorm to emphasize parabolic, curving forms that revolutionized the simpler geometric patterns giving structure to neo-classic art. But Turner's revolution was conceptual as well as perceptual, metaphysical as well as technical. Gifted with Carlyle's linguistic flamboyance and knowledge of mathematics, he would have argued, as no neoclassicist could, with the sage of Craigenputtock that history's pattern is not circular but Hyperbolic-Asymptotic.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Besides Gage, see Lindsay, pp. 123-39. I am indebted to Donald H. Reiman for calling my attention to a striking illustration of the England-Carthage comparison: "England is the modern Carthage: the love of gold, 'the last corruption of man,' pervades the whole state from the centre to the extremities." Letter of Thomas L. Peacock to E. T. Hookham, November 28, 1808, in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, Halifax Edition, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones (rpt. New York, AMS, 1967), vol. VIII, 162. There is reason to think Turner's *Hannibal* to be indebted to a lost painting of Robert Cozens.

<sup>11</sup> Carlyle so defined history in "On History Again" in 1833. Turner's literary source, Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, emphasizes Hannibal's genius rather than the fortitude of his troops: "nothing was capable of subduing the courage of the Carthaginian general." When an avalanche blocked the army: "It was then that despair appeared in every face but Hannibal's."

Less mathematically, for the Romantic artist, history and nature are infinitely equivocal. Turner exploits ambiguities West barely introduced. Wolfe's death is heroic; but the Indian watching shadows his heroism by foreshadowing a different perspective. Turner seizes an event *intrinsically* doubtful, especially in 1812. Was Hannibal's invasion of Italy an heroic act, or the wilful recklessness of a power-hungry barbarian? Were the sufferings of the Carthaginian army deserved, or glorious sacrifices? Was Rome's ultimate victory affirmation of the value of its austere virtue? Or did Rome's witless strength destroy the inspiration of individualistic genius? By 1812 a Napoleon-Hannibal analogy was not original, but its meaning was still disputable.

*Hannibal Crossing the Alps* displays a passage, an event in process, and part of the larger process of a Punic war—the middle one of three. These Alpine sufferings led to Hannibal's most memorable triumphs. There is light ahead; the elephant's trunk points toward the bright warmth of Italy beyond the stormy pass. Yet even the brightness is ambiguous. Hannibal's successful battles in Italy did not lead to victory over Rome. The light at the end of these tunnel-like vortices embodies *The Fallacies of Hope*, the title of a long poem Turner worked at for years and which, beginning with this picture, provided epigraphs for many of his chief canvases.<sup>12</sup>

There can be fallacies of hope because Turner, unlike his predecessors in the sublime style, passes beyond the self-contained episode, perceiving experience as process. Hannibal's crossing of the Alps implies both a past and a future, and implies them with all the confusion of cause and consequence, motivation and result entering into any historical event understood as a complex of multiple sequences. The key unit for neo-classic historians is the epitomizing occurrence, the episode revealing with rationalized clarity the pattern in which historical meaning resides. For the Romantic

<sup>12</sup> Gage and Reynolds have pertinent comments on the relation of Turner's strange poetry to his painting, and there is a worthwhile study by Jerrold Ziff, "J. M. W. Turner on Poetry and Painting," *Studies in Romanticism*, 3 (1964), pp. 193-215. The verse is most readily available in the not quite satisfactory collection *The Sunset Ship*, ed. Jack Lindsay (London: Scorpion Press, 1966), which should be read in conjunction with T. S. R. Boase, "Shipwrecks in England Romantic Painting," *Journal of the Turner on Poetry and Painting*, *Studies in Romanticism*, 3 (1964), 193-215. The Window and the Storm-tossed Boat: Iconography of Romanticism," *Art Bulletin*, 37 (1955), 281-90.

artist like Turner, significance is not to be so confidently *measured*—it is evaluated by the more relativistic quality of intensity. Turner's technical development was toward increased blurriness and disintegration of outlines, because he more and more directly painted light. As Ruskin observed, shadow alone creates distinct outlines. If one compares the work of John Martin, a near-contemporary of Turner who carried on earlier conceptions of sublimity, one notices Martin's distinctness of line, concentration on shadows. Martin's "sublime effect" is principally a matter of scale. Tiny man stands against towering mountain, profound chasm, or grandiose edifice of antiquity. Even a vast crowd is composed of individually little people. Turner moved away from this measured grandeur into the perceptual haziness and conceptual equivocations of intense luminosity.<sup>13</sup>

The movement carries Turner beyond the historicity of practitioners of a simpler sublimity such as Martin. Ruins, for example, were used throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century as a dramatic measure of time. Byron still so used them in *Childe Harold*. But in Byron's poem the sombre ancientness of ruins is counterpointed by the intense personal immediacy of the poet's experience of their antiquity.<sup>14</sup> A parallel dialectic appears in

<sup>13</sup> The best study of sublime theorizing is still Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1935, rpt. 1960). Notable also is Geoffrey Grigson, "Painters of the Abyss," *Architectural Review*, 108 (1950), 215-20. On Turner and luminosity, see Gage *passim*, but especially his discussion of the later "Carthaginian" painting of *Regulus*, pp. 143-45, leading to his argument that Turner knew and imitated the passage from "The Euganean Hills" I have quoted, which had been published separately as "Venice" by S. C. Hall in his *Book of Gems* in 1838—see Gage, pp. 146-47 and notes 87-90, p. 260.

We need an aesthetic study of the "mob" or the "crowd" in Romantic art. In another essay I compare Carlyle's representation of mobs in *The French Revolution* with some of Turner's painting of "masses." By participating in a crowd, a human being becomes something other than an individual, and though this may entail a loss of humanness, it could be argued that a mob is uniquely human because created by the surrender of qualities of individuality no creature other than man possesses to give up. This line of thought enables one to pursue Paulson's suggestion that in painting of the late neo-classic period "history was interpreted as largely the variety of gestures and facial expressions of response to a central action" (p. 171). For Romantics like Turner, the dialectic which creates "history" out of interplay between individual and multitude is more intricate, but it derives from the "circuit" Paulson describes. See also Edgar Wind, "The Revolution in History Painting," *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 2 (1938-39), 116-37; and Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 34ff.

<sup>14</sup> It is Byron's experiential intensity which differentiates his "ruin" poetry (especially in *Childe Harold*) from that of most of his predecessors. For Byron ruins

Turner's art, which shows us, for instance, ancient Carthage instead of ruined, not yet built. Similarly, *Hannibal* involves us in a snowstorm, in which, nevertheless, we see an elephant among mountains, infallible signal of a unique ancient event. The Romantic artist of history feels acutely his separation from the experience in which he would have us participate, of the time dividing event depicted from depiction of event.

The resultant dialectic is obvious in Carlyle's *French Revolution*, where it is expressed by movements back and forth between past and present tenses, modes of the historical and experiential. The same interplay appears in a subtler and more significant form in *War and Peace's* oscillating between history and fiction. Tolstoy exploits a complexity introduced by Walter Scott, whose fiction we have been told, "made history come alive." Yet as early as *Waverley*, Scott defends introductory "historical" chapters as essential to his fictive story, incomprehensible, he insists, unless we understand its context of actual history.<sup>15</sup> For him, only history can make fiction live. Our difficulty in understanding the purpose of this Romantic dialectic is perhaps best defined by our bewilderment at the Romantics' tendency to combine "experience" with "omniscience." Percy Lubbock lamenting Tolstoy's failure to organize *War and Peace* around a restricted, Jamesian point of view illustrates the twentieth-century tendency to identify subjectivity and experientiality. A bothersome feature for us in "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills" is the poem's failure in consistent subjectivity. For our taste, too much impersonal history intrudes. But for Shelley, the immediate experience, what he sees from the hill, would not be complete (nor accurately represented) did not his imagination encompass within his sensory perceptions the history (past and future) invisibly *in* his perceiving. *What* he sees is valuable in part because it embodies powers of historical culture, powers determining *how* he sees. For

are *not* only monuments of "lost significance," as Starobinski correctly observes that they are for Neo-classic artists—see *The Invention of Liberty*, p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> *Waverley*, Chapter Five: "I beg pardon . . . for plaguing . . . so long with old-fashioned politics. . . . ; The truth is, I cannot promise . . . that this story should be intelligible, not to say probable, without it." For the modern view succinctly stated, contrast J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 4: "The development of fiction from Jane Austen to Conrad and James is a gradual exploration of the fact that for modern man nothing exists except as it is seen by someone viewing the world from his own perspective."

Shelley, "imagination" includes history of imagination. Most of his *Defence of Poetry* is devoted to that history. Because of that history, his poem expresses an equivocal "vision," referring both to sensory perception and to what cannot be sensorily perceived. The equivocation finds a graphic analogue in Turner's *Hannibal*, wherein it is difficult to see what is happening, because the painting accurately represents how in fact we see in a snowstorm—none too clearly.

The quality of *Hannibal* depends, as Ruskin observed, in part upon Turner's precision in depicting a snowstorm. And Shelley's accuracy about autumnal sunrise at the Venetian latitude contributes to his poem's success. Snowstorm and sunrise are available to many, not just the artist. But critics today tend to talk about experience without referring to such actual experiences, and this is why "experience" has become a jargon term. It was not some seventy years ago, when it was first used to define the innovativeness of Romantic artists by G. K. Chesterton. He argued that the juxtaposition in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* of Goldsmith's "When lovely woman stops to folly" and Burns's "Ye banks and braes of bonnie Doon" represented an enormous revolution, the overthrow of the idea of the poet's "absolute capacity," his right and duty, in my terms, to evaluate behavior.

. . . two poems on exactly the same subject . . . the whole difference . . . that Goldsmith's words are spoken *about* a certain situation, and Burns's words are spoken *in* that situation. . . there comes a bitter and confounding cry out of the very heart of the situation itself. . . no one . . . but a person who knew something of the inside of agony would have introduced that touch of the rage of the mourner against the chattering frivolity of nature . . . [the] poet in his absolute capacity is defied . . . by this new method of . . . the songs of experience.<sup>16</sup>

Notable is Chesterton's point about Burns's "rage . . . against the chattering frivolity of nature." Applying his personal experience, the critic observes a Romantic is not necessarily a lover of nature. The Romantics needed nature. Their predecessors, representing behavior rather than experience, had not. A forceful analysis of the distinction between behavior and experience is R. D. Laing's,<sup>17</sup> but if modern psychology is objectionable, one

<sup>16</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1957, orig. 1903), pp. 168-70.

<sup>17</sup> For example, R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), p. 18: "I see your behaviour. You see my behaviour. But I do not and never

can imagine Garrick trying to improve on Turner's *Hannibal* as he had on West's *Wolfe*. What, after all, could the actor do about the snowstorm? Turner's protagonist is so inseparable from his situation that we may even overlook him. Chesterton observes that by adopting the girl's point of view Burns enters into the *situation* Goldsmith had only spoken about. Burns is Romantic, I'd suggest, because for him experience is more a matter of "situation" than of subjective viewpoint. Turner's *Hannibal* may be called a "painting of experience" not so much because of its subjectivity, but because it is a view from inside a situation conceived of as a transient combination of contingent circumstances, in short, as an historical event.

Today we may miss the distinction between Burns's poem and Goldsmith's because we're accustomed to songs of experience expressing perspectives rather than historical situations. But the distinction is radical. Goldsmith, like Benjamin West, depicts visible behaviour. Garrick perhaps objected to West's representation of *Wolfe* because the artist departed from behavior, allowing the General's features to betray something of an experience of death not appropriate to his public martyrdom. And the perfection of Goldsmith's lyric springs from the poem's unfailing exclusion of experiential elements. Goldsmith articulates with total clarity a pattern of appropriate behavior.<sup>18</sup> Behavior is open to evaluations of appropriateness, concord or discord with publicly accepted standards. Experience, never as controllable, never can be so evaluated; in this respect it may be termed inherently equivocal, even indeterminate. Experience is only self-validating.

The Romantic sensibility, unlike the neo-classic or modern, is often satisfied by engagement with this intrinsic uncertainty of experience. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" ends with the characteristic Romantic mark of punctuation, a question mark: "Do I wake or sleep?" Modern critics worry the question, seldom considering that for Keats a question might be the best ending for

have and never will see your *experience* of me. Just as you cannot 'see' my experience of you. . . . Experience is man's invisibility to man."

<sup>18</sup> In an art focused on behavior, anything other than the human is irrelevant. It is Turner and Burns who provide us with mountain, storm, bird, and river, "nature," that is, the non-human. This proves not that Romantics disvalued the human, only that they sought the humanity of "invisible" experience. Paulson touches on the issue from a different angle, pointing out that West, though working in a tradition drawing on sources as remote as Alberti's *Della pittura*, represents something new in "the passions": "the mourners' very grief now expresses their alienation . . . the emphasis is on the responses of the periphery, which has lost touch with its center" (p. 187).

his experience, that the proper validation of what has happened to him is an equivocal. Were he not now uncertain, he would not fully have experienced (or not fully have reported) his situation in the darkening garden listening to the nightingale's song. Perhaps more difficult for us are Romantic poems (of which "The Euganean Hills" is one) ending not with a question but an hypothesis, a recognizedly provisional affirmation, a flight of fancy, a tone shift, some movement rounding off but not resolving the experience. Even a philosophic statement, such as closes Keats' "Grecian Urn," may not for a Romantic do away with the incertitude of experience but, instead, may mark it off to protect its equivocalness. Characteristic of the Romantic sensibility is desire *not* to transcend the experiential by a turn to some metaphysical certainty, some "deeper" structure, some archetypal pattern explaining, justifying, or giving supermundane sanction to its intrinsic indeterminacy.

To live in history is to live in uncertainty. *Our* determination to find apocalypse everywhere in Romantic art is misleading. The error, however, reveals a difference between ourselves and our Romantic predecessors. It is the modern sensibility that craves more than experience, the craving betraying an ontological insecurity. Ontological security may have come easier to Romantics because they identified history and experience, and regarded reality as a complex of temporal processes, necessarily constantly changing. If they engaged in such processes, they felt attuned to actuality, participating in essential being. Turner's readiness to move from a "literary-narrative" canvas to a "color beginning" and back, and, even more, his endeavor to fuse both modes in later canvases, graphically illustrates this kind of confidence, a confidence shared by Shelley, even though of all British Romantic artists he was probably the most idealistic, the most "Platonic" in the general sense of that term. He was certainly the most articulate necessitarian of the lot. And there can be no denying his later faith in an unchanging "One," something beyond the mutable world of appearances. Even so, Shelley can find experience intrinsically meaningful because historical, and he can believe that nothing exists except as it is perceived without becoming a modern fanatic of perspectivism.

His attitude is a source of his poetry's special uncongeniality to modern taste. By our standards, "The Euganean Hills" is too long. A minor lyric, it contains nearly as many lines as Eliot's



*Wasteland*. Shelley does not epitomize. He recounts the progress of an autumnal day from dawn to evenfall to portray sequentialities of human affairs as related to but distinct from—as visible in contrast against even though blending with—sequences of the physical cosmos. Nature and history are both temporal in essence, both are rhythmic, but the cyclic irreversibility of the former, for instance, is not an inescapable feature of the latter. If “Freedom should awake” in Venice,

Thou and all thy sister band  
Might adorn this sunny land,  
Twining memories of old time  
With new virtues more sublime. (156-59)

Cultural decay is not inevitable in the same sense in which sunset is the inevitable consequence of dawn. The metaphor of the natural cycle which dominates early twentieth-century visions of history (not only Spengler's but also Joyce's and Yeats's) Shelley distrusts. Yet awareness that all things human, from civilizations to private sensations, are of and in time, and, therefore, impermanent, is conveyed by both details and total movement of his lyric, particularly his use of the diurnal progress to structure its central portion. This ambiguity creates much of the poem's overt emotionality, tempting us to characterize it as either optimistic or pessimistic. It is both, but in the poem joy and misery, despair and hope, do not so much balance as interact: one becomes the other. The dramatic confrontations we would prefer Shelley melts into something like a narrative process. In the process is lost most of the irony we like, the irony which discovers the permanent beneath the transient, the timeless within phenomenal change, a certainty precluding the possible alternative futures Shelley envisions so equivocally.

In the “Euganean Hills” we are asked to adopt more than the poet's physical viewpoint, and are offered the perspective created by his still incomplete personal history, the course of life which momentarily makes the volcanic hilltop in the “waveless plain of Lombardy” an “island” for the poet, a temporary refuge from misery. This respite as a flowering isle in the voyage of Shelley's life across a sea of agony (perhaps leading to a paradisaic isle and perhaps to bones and skull bleaching on a desolate shore) is like, yet dissimilar to, what he sees. So perceiver and perceived can also function as metaphors of one another. Venice, literally an

island in the Adriatic and metaphorically one in the Lombard plain, embodies part of the agony, the agony of history, through which the poet voyages. Simultaneously, the city recalls past glory and suggests a possibly glorious future, and, therefore, may also be one of the flowering isles for which he yearns. We are presented not so much an ironic opposition of appearance to reality as an interpenetrative process by which (actually or potentially) one becomes the other. The gleaming towers of Venice are in fact

Sepulchres, where human forms,  
Like pollution-nourished worms,  
To the corpse of greatness cling.

But from this grim reality (and what could be worse than “pollution-nourished”?) new grace and virtue may come, just as Tyranny trampling out learning’s spark in Padua has fed the flame of “antique” liberty now springing to life in many lands. In this temporalized vision there is little place for the condensed dramatics of the epiphanic mode.<sup>19</sup> Even the climactic moment keeps us in the realm of time, with a thirty-four line sentence whose molten grammar reveals no transcendent reality but the fluid interpenetrativeness of all phenomena upon which

Noon descends . . .  
Mingling light and fragrance, far  
From the curved horizon’s bound  
To the point of Heaven’s profound,  
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.  
Pointing from this hoary tower  
In the windless air; . . .  
And the Alps, whose snows are spread  
High between the clouds and sun;  
And of living things each one;  
And my spirit which so long  
Darkened this swift stream of song,—  
Interpenetrated lie  
By the glory of the sky:  
Be it love, light, harmony,  
Odour, or the soul of all

<sup>19</sup> At this point I find Wasserman’s reading unpersuasive but exemplary of the modern point of view. “The poet’s moment of noon . . . is a timeless moment,” even though it is, Wasserman admits, “his historical revelation.” For modern critics it is inconceivable that a climactic experience should not transcend time: “the unifying noontime radiance endows the poet with his own personal experience of perfection, his eternal moment of absolute illumination, his insight into eternity and into the unity of which he is a part” (p. 200). I believe “eternal moment” is imported by the modern critic, and that Shelley strives to recreate a vision in and of time.

Which from Heaven like dew doth fall,  
Or the mind which feeds this verse  
Peopling the lone universe. (ll. 285-319)

All of Shelley's elegant prose testifies that the syntactic dissolutions of this passage are deliberate; the grammatical fluidity is a linguistic equivalent to the blurring interpenetrations of color by which Turner dissolved to recreate the geometrical structuring of neo-classic painting. Organization through conventionalized separations, the organization which *is* syntax, Shelley's language tries to overcome, so as to recreate the flowing simultaneity which is *now*, this particular ensemble of impressions emerging out of what has gone before and shaping itself into an unfolding future. Analogously, Turner renders the specificity of experiential process by freeing colors from the separateness created by conventionalized representational outlining. Interpenetration is essential for the Romantic, who individuates not by alienation and opposition, not by segregating one thing from another, but by depicting *how* they conjoin and interfuse.<sup>20</sup> For him, the experiential process can be realized only in an art made up itself of transformational activities—as is suggested by the last five lines of the preceding quotation.

Well, is it love or light or odor, we tend to ask of Shelley, who will not give us the discriminative answer we desire. He finds unifying significance in the sheer interactivity of diverse phenomena—including diffusion of his verse into an Italian landscape in which natural and cultural have blended, are blending, will blend, which we would perceive inadequately were we to see it as only one or the other.<sup>21</sup> Our anti-historical vision obscures for us the possibility of such temporalized interpenetration as an individualizing mode. Shelley's Euganean hill is *not* the still point of a turning world, but the opposite, a *now*, a complex ensemble of sensation which is meaningful only because involving past and future. To the contrary, *Four Quartets* is about time and can

<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Chernaik observes that "throughout the poem the relationship between scene and the thought it occasions is complex" (p. 62). To my mind the chief complexity is that to some degree the thought also "occasions" the scene. To Shelley, because the mind quite literally "feeds" verse, the poet can people the lone, companionless universe.

<sup>21</sup> Careful critics have noticed shiftings within metaphors: "the 'green isle' is not only a physical refuge but a moment of time, a metaphor for the poet's day . . . the moment is but an interlude; it passes with the day, and the poet resumes his original metaphor" (Chernaik, p. 65 and p. 71). See Woodring, p. 261, on the Lombard cities as dancing graces *and* chained slaves.

employ succinctly abstract language referring to time because Eliot's poem focuses on eternity. It does not render the temporal process of experience. It is not *in* time, as Shelley's poem is. Even Yeats, admirer of Shelley, presents us a golden bird singing "Of what is past, *or* passing, *or* to come," not their interactions, and in "Byzantium." The same city for Shelley, significantly, was Constantinople, in "the poem of *Hellas*, written at the suggestion of events of the moment . . . wrought upon the curtain of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene . . ." <sup>22</sup>

Archibald MacLeish speaks for modern sensibility when he claims a poem should only *be*, only exist statically. So does Auden observing that "poetry makes nothing happen." For Shelley, to the contrary, "all things exist as they are perceived," and the poet reorients the world by apprehending in it what does not yet exist in it, revealing "the gigantic shadows of futurity" within the luminous indeterminacy of present events. By perceiving the not-yet-perceptible the poet may determine what will be perceived. Turner could not philosophize as ingeniously as Shelley, but he seems to have acted on the same principle, enriching our visual powers and extending the potency of art by depicting what is difficult to see. For the Romantics, only through art can men make anything happen. It is imagination that enables us to participate creatively in the processes of life.

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<sup>22</sup> Preface to *Hellas*, Rogers, p. 274. The conception of open-ended art implied by Shelley has recently attracted much attention. "His poems," remarks Mrs. Chernaik, move "toward possibility, toward questions, rather than demonstrating or reaffirming doctrine" (p. 62). Her words are almost identical to those used by Larry J. Swingle, "On Reading Romantic Poetry," *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 974-81, to describe the fundamental philosophical direction of Romantic poetry, which "offers questions, exposes problems, uncovers data. It casts doubt upon supposed certainties, and it suggests possible new directions for thought. Romantic poetry stirs the mind—but then it leaves the mind in that uneasy condition. . . . In reading Romantic poetry, one is perhaps tempted to ask: What is the poetry telling us? But usually one's question should rather be: What is the poetry asking us?" (p. 980).

I suggest consideration of Turner's art helps us to understand how and why Romantic art functions in this fashion, though I realize as J. R. Watson has observed, that "large-scale comparisons between Turner and individual romantic poets cannot be made," and that with an artist so variously gifted we can note at best that "certain pictures connect with certain poets." Yet, Watson adds, Turner's art includes "many of the emotions and attitudes we associate with romanticism . . . however varied our discrimination of romanticisms may be, in England, they are united in the work of Turner"; see "Turner and the Romantic Poets," *Encounters*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 96-123, p. 121.

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