

Joseph Mallord William [Turner](#) (1775 – 1851)

The words in bold are defined below.

In the mid-1980s, the Grand Palais **hosted** a major exhibition bringing together the works of [Antoine Watteau](#) and Turner. And the early works of the Englishman indeed shared much of the romantic style of the dreamy, **bucolic** landscapes of the Frenchman. But while Watteau peopled his pictures with richly-dressed ladies and gentlemen of the *Ancien régime*, [strolling through idyllic vistas](#) in festive, carnival style, Turner's work evolved to bring out the sublime, **raw** power of nature and **the elements**... and later the brute force of steam, as engines **bellowed** black smoke into the lighter, brighter colours of the sea, the sky and the sun. Turner's direct observation and abstraction of nature anticipated the Impressionists, and he became England's greatest landscape painter, rivalled only by [Constable](#)'s feel for the [gentleness of the countryside](#), and the ageing Hockney's [celebration of nature](#) in simple, **vivid** colour.

Turner was born in 1775 into modest but **assured circumstances**: his father was a barber and wig-maker and played a significant role in encouraging his son. The 2014 biopic [Mr. Turner](#) shows their loving and **boisterous** relationship, as well as Turner's simple, rough manners.

The video "[Scratching and Fingerprinting: How Turner Revolutionised Watercolour Painting](#)" explains Turner's great innovativeness, with the example of *The Pass of Saint Gotthard near Faido* in the Swiss Alps. Jennifer Tonkovich¹ notes that Turner "executed this drawing in 1843 on commission from John Ruskin, who became his most ardent **patron**. The subject is the mountain pass at St. Gotthard, in the Swiss Alps between Lucerne and Lugano. Every spring, the ice melts at St. Gotthard's Pass near Faido and turns the Ticino River into a torrent that sweeps rocks **downstream**. Turner visited the region in August 1842 on one of his annual trips to Switzerland between 1841 and 1845. As was his practice at the time, he returned with quick pencil sketches made on the spot, working them into what he called sample studies to show to prospective clients for whom he would produce a finished watercolour".

To host: to welcome, to play host to; **bucolic**: relating to the countryside; **to stroll**: to walk slowly, to walk in a leisurely way; **raw**: natural, uncooked, unrefined; **the elements**: here, sun, wind, rain heat, etc.; **to bellow**: to shout, to blow into the air; **vivid**: strongly coloured; **assured circumstances**: his family did not live in poverty; **boisterous**: noisy and agitated like boys; **to scratch**: to use fingernails or an object to mark a surface; **patron**: a person who gives money to the arts; **downstream**: the lower part of a stream or river, where the water is flowing.

Watch the video and answer the following questions (see the answers in the footnotes).²

Dollops of water: large quantities of water (or a liquid) poured from a spoon or brush. **To venture** (somewhere): to go somewhere that may be dangerous, to dare to do something. **Scratching out**: to use a sharp knife or instrument to remove colour and reveal what is underneath. **Boulder(s)**: rocks. **To wend** (their way): to direct, to wind, to find one's way. **Whirl(s)**: quick rotation(s).

- 1/ During what period was Turner influential?
- 2/ What was one of his "most exceptional accomplishments"?
- 3/ How did he often work when producing watercolour landscapes?
- 4/ Where did Turner usually go? What was "his base" in Switzerland?
- 5/ What does the small carriage and horse in the picture represent?
- 6/ What colours did he use?
- 7/ What was Turner able to do with the picture?

¹ Eugene and Clare Thaw Curator of Drawings and Prints at [The Morgan Library & Museum](#).

² 1/ throughout the 19th century; 2/ the large body of watercolours he produced throughout his career; 3/ Turner would make sketches in the landscape itself, and then "work them up" into watercolour pictures inside; 4/ Lucerne; 5/ They indicate the scale of the sublime landscape and the long path needed to get to the pass; 6/ reddish brown and blue; 7/ He evokes the emotional response that nature can produce in us.