

A Memoir of J.M.W. Turner, R.A. by 'M.L.'

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MARY LLOYD

It was at the house of my kind old friend Miss Rogers, that I first had the pleasure of meeting the great genius J.M.W. Turner, but I was too young at the time to understand the extent of his fame. I distinctly remember his small bent figure, his Jewish cast of feature, and his kind, shy manner. His small "grey glittering eyes" were so like my idea of the "Ancient Mariner's" that I listened attentively to all he said. But he spoke little, as if *painting* were his only language. His voice was deep and husky, and full of feeling; his sentences broken, but letting out flashes of wit and humour, almost involuntarily.

He was seen to great advantage with the Poet Rogers, and his sister, also with Mr. Carrick Moore and his family, and at Sir Charles Eastlake's, late President of the Royal Academy, who always treated him with the greatest attention and respect.

I used to meet him at these houses three or four times a week, and he was always kind to me, and when I married he used to come and dine with us in Hertford Street. He was most kind in allowing me and my friends to go and see the wonderful gallery of his own pictures, in his old house in Queen Anne Street, so admirably described by Mr. Tom Taylor in his obituary notice of Turner in the *Times* of the 10th Nov. 1856, less than a year after the death of Rogers, whose works he had so beautifully illustrated!

I remember one day at Miss Rogers' somebody asked him how he liked the new rooms for the Royal Academy Exhibition in Trafalgar Square. He said, "I shall never like new rooms as well as Somerset House, where I heard my pictures praised when I was a lad." He then turned to me, and said "When I was a boy, I used to lie on my back for hours watching the skies, and then go home and paint them, and there was a stall in the Soho Bazaar where they sold drawing materials, and they used to *buy* my skies. They gave me 1s. 6d. for the small ones, and 3s. 6d. for the larger ones!" and he added, with shrug, "There's many a young lady has got *My sky* to her drawing." I said, I wish I had: He replied, "No, my dear, for then you would be as old as I am."

Turner was a real worshipper of Nature, in all its phases, - in storm and sunshine, in sunrise and sunset, and he would have been pleased at the sight we once saw in the Kensington Gardens. One cold day in February, when the snow was on the ground, we saw a little boy of six years old on his knees in the snow, with a tiny pencil, and a tiny note-book, trying to draw the first crocus which was peeping out of the ground. The boy longed for a sketch of the crocus, and I longed for a sketch of him!

Turner told me that, "People talk a great deal about *sunsets*, but when you are all fast asleep, I am watching effects of *sunrise* far more beautiful; and then, you see, the *light* does not fail, and you can paint them."

All who have tried painting *sunsets* will feel how often the fading light has altered all the effects and appearance of the colours they were using.

One day Turner took me down to dinner at Mr. Rogers, and he said "Have you read '*Ruskin on Me?*'" I said 'No.' He replied "but you will some day," and then added with his own peculiar shrug, "He sees *more* in my pictures than I ever painted!" but he seemed very much pleased. It is easy to understand this, for Turner's pictures appeal so much to the imagination, that much *must* depend on the imagination of the critic.

Another day, when I met Turner at Mr. Rogers' house, and there were several Artists present, the conversation turned on what they called "*Composition*." All agreed that *Raphael* was the greatest master; and Turner maintained that the great beauty of his "*composition*" was the *harmony* which was caused by keeping the rest of the picture in subjection to the principal part - whether it was the Holy Family or any other subject. Somebody took up an engraving (I think of Michael Angelo's) and pointing to a figure in the corner, said "Do you mean to say you would wish to do away with that fine figure?"

Turner paused a few moments, and then said "If I was so fond of that figure, I would paint a picture on purpose for him, and put him in the middle." We all laughed and so did he!

A friend of Turner's told me that his mode of painting was as original as himself, for he was constantly running away from his picture to see the effect across the room, and quickly returning to improve or alter, so that his occupation was anything but a sedentary one!

On one occasion when a brother Artist was examining his pictures rather closely, he said, "I painted my pictures to be looked at, not to be smelt."

When I was staying at Mr. Carrick Moore's, (Sir John Moore's brother) at their summer quarters at Thames Ditton, Turner was also their guest, and when the Ladies proposed to go over the river to Hampton Court Gardens, Turner said "and I will row you." This was an offer difficult to refuse, so we got into the boat and started. Turner was then about 80. There was some difficulty in landing by the sedgy bank, but we said it would do very well; however, Turner insisted on taking us further on to a more convenient place, because he said with his shrug "None but the brave deserve the fair."

One evening at one of Mr. Babbage's charming Saturday Evening parties, Mr. Rogers was eagerly expecting Turner, but he did not arrive until late. As soon as he made his appearance, Mr. Rogers said to me, as I was standing near the door "Here he comes! like a three year old," but this was quite too much for Turner, who thought they were going to make a "*Lion*" of him, and after shaking hands with Mr. Babbage he soon made his escape.

The Westall Brothers

RICHARD J. WESTALL

Though Turner was so old, he was still shy. His face was full of feeling, and tears readily came to his eyes when he heard a sad story. In short, he had great intensity as well as great refinement of feeling, with a crust of roughness, as if he wished to hide it, and only to express it in his most marvellous pictures. Probably no other Artist (without the aid of pupils) has left so large a number of pictures, large and small, in oil and watercolours, for the benefit of future ages.

The advice I gathered from him was in a few words,

"First of all, respect your paper!

"Keep your corners quiet

"Centre your interest.

"And always remember, that, as you can never reach the *brilliance* of Nature, you need never be afraid of putting your brightest light next to your deepest shadow, in the *centre*, but not in the *corners* of your picture."

I wish I had more notes of this wonderful genius; but he spoke so little, and painted so much, that it may seem presumptuous to add my small testimony to the impression he made.

(see IV, 2, p. 57.)
in sketchbook
I saw ed it
from memories

Turner Studies

IV, 1, 1

Summer 1984

The life of J.M.W. Turner RA (1775-1851) occurred almost within the span of the artists Richard Westall, RA (1765-1836) and his half-brother William Westall, ARA (1781-1850). The Westalls were from a Norfolk family. Their first known ancestor travelled from Great Yarmouth to see his sister in Amsterdam on 26 June, 1637.¹ He was 'Danill Westall: of Norwich Apotecarey aged 40 yeres' who was among the founders of Norwich Congregational Church and who had been transferred from the English Church of Rotterdam in 1644. His son, Daniel married Elizabeth Heyward, an heiress and daughter of the Mayor of Norwich. The Westalls became established at Reepham, near Norwich, where worsted weaving became the family trade for two generations, followed by beer brewing for another two generations. The artists' father, Benjamin Westall, was born in 1736 and was the second of the beer brewers.

The early 1770s were a difficult time for the family. Benjamin's wife died in 1770, leaving four young children, the youngest a blind infant. In 1772 Benjamin's brewing firm went bankrupt on account of the terms of his father's will. Richard, the eldest of these young children, wrote of this time in his poem *A Day in Spring*,² when a relation of his late mother, William Ayton,³ provided assistance:

Thou, the parent of my fame,

Thou, whose warmth preserved the flame,

Which was dying in my breast,

By cold penury opprest.

Richard's father moved with his second wife to become manager of a brewery in Hertford, probably in the late 1770s. It was there that William was born on 12 October, 1781. Richard was born at Reepham on 2 January, 1765 and was baptised at All Saints, Norwich on 13 January.⁴ *The Dictionary of National Biography* mistakenly maintains that Richard was born in Hertford;⁵ this error has meant that his influence on the Norwich school has been overlooked. However, John Pye notes two pictures by Westall as being purchased by (John?) Crome on 17/18 May, 1805⁶ and Iolo Williams mentions⁷ that John Thirle (1777-1839) painted somewhat in the style of Richard Westall. Thirle, indeed, provides the most concrete evidence of Westall's influence with his composition *Venus & Cupid (after Westall)* exhibited at a Norwich Society exhibition in 1805.⁸ Incidentally, *Venus & Cupid* is the title of a painting whose creator was unidentified at Turner's sale in 1874 and although this is a common subject it seems feasible to suggest Westall might have been the artist, particularly since his *Descent from the Cross* was the only identified English picture in Turner's collection other than portrait sketches.⁹

It is likely that Richard moved to London at about the time his father went to Hertford, for in 1779 the youth became apprenticed to John Thompson, an heraldic engraver on silver of 44, Gutter Lane, Cheapside. The *Annual Register*¹⁰ notes that like Hogarth Richard Westall was 'emancipated from, to his genius a painful thralldom' as an engraver, and 'immediately commenced his splendid career.' In fact, Westall had been studying for some time at an evening school of art run by