

## Replenishing the Void: Turner's *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets*.

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### Abstract

*In the Prints and Drawings room of Manchester's Whitworth Gallery sits a little known watercolour by Joseph Mallard William Turner (1775-1851) called *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* (1836-40). The watercolour depicts living fish, peering out of the gentle waves and basking in the afternoon light. *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* is something of a curiosity within Turner's artistic collection. Exhibited rarely, it spends most of its time placed firmly away from the light. The piece stands in dramatic opposition to other Turner marine animals, and to English portrayals of marine animals more broadly in the Romantic period (1770-1840). The Romantic marine animal is almost universally depicted as sublimely monstrous, or as the raw materials for industry, study, sport or supper. Turner's artistic life is marked by innovation but in most of his marine animals we see these common representations faithfully rendered. Nonetheless, Turner's portrayal of the fish in *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* evinces a small but fascinating perceptual shift during this period – a shift away from conceptions of marine animals as sublime alien entities towards the recognition of their fragile beauty and inherent connection with humanity.*

In the Prints and Drawings room of Manchester's Whitworth Gallery sits a little known watercolour by Joseph Mallard William Turner (1775-1851) called *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* (1836-40). The watercolour depicts living fish, peering out of the gentle waves and basking in the afternoon light. *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* is something of a curiosity within Turner's artistic collection. Exhibited rarely, it spends most of its time placed firmly away from the light. The piece stands in dramatic opposition to other Turner marine animals, and to English portrayals of marine animals more broadly in the Romantic period (1770-1840). The Romantic marine animal is almost universally depicted as sublimely monstrous, or as the raw materials for industry, study, sport or supper. Turner's artistic life is marked by innovation but in most of his marine animals we see these common representations faithfully rendered. Nonetheless, Turner's portrayal of the fish in *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* evinces a small but fascinating perceptual shift during this period – a shift away from conceptions of marine animals as sublime alien entities towards the recognition of their fragile beauty and inherent connection with humanity. *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* also

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offers a perspective on the sea and its inhabitants visible in several of Turner's other watercolours and sketches—that excessive plunder of the sea destroys the natural balance between death and rebirth: between what is taken and what is replenished. As one of the most famous and critically acknowledged Romantic landscape artists, Turner's work offers an insight into the consciousness of the first half of the nineteenth century and into aesthetic categories whose assumptions are retained in our depictions of the sea and marine animals today. At a time when we need to understand, take responsibility for, and act to change our devastating impacts on the ocean and marine animals, there is a pressing need to analyse the assumptions and ideologies infusing the aesthetics of the sea, particularly in art, whose potent influence on human perceptions is often unconscious but whose manifestations are everywhere.

[Figure 1 *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* c. 1836-40.]



Edmund Burke's (1729-1797) division between the sublime and the beautiful 'dominated thinking on aesthetics' well into the nineteenth century (Trott 72). This is a commonplace. Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) is routinely cited in analyses of Romanticism, and Andrew Wilton has already established the aesthetics of the sublime as crucial to understandings of Turner's work. But critics, including Wilton, do not analyse Turner's representation of marine animals. Rather, the critical focus has been, for instance, on issues of accession, biography, technique, the relationships between Turner's finished work and his sketches or the relationships between

his work and philosophy, industry or artistic contemporaries. Robert Wallace, whose Turner criticism I discuss later, is an exception; however, his main focus is on Turner's stylistic influence on Herman Melville.

Before turning to *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets*, Burke's categories warrant revisiting. For Burke, the sublime object arouses the 'delightful' terror evoked by the observation of 'pain' and 'danger' (40). Within Burke's divisions darkness and uncertainty are 'sublime to the last degree' (59). Burke observes 'power' (64) and 'obscurity' are 'necessary' (58) to produce the sublime affect. Dramatically uneven surfaces are sublime, as are 'sad and fuscous colours' such as 'black, or brown, or deep purple' (82), or lurid colours whose effect is 'darkness' (80). Extreme 'bitters' as well as 'stenches' (85) can produce the sublime affect, as can 'enormous strength' (65). Sublimity is evident in boundless natural and man-made spatial extremes, 'absolute and entire *solitude*,' (43) and of course 'Infinity' (73). Nature is most sublime when it is seen as evidence of God. For Burke, 'infinity has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror' and this delightful horror is the 'truest test of the sublime' (73). The 'sounds' of 'men, or any animals in pain or danger, are capable of conveying great ideas' and the 'great and awful sensation' of the sublime – especially 'the angry tones of wild beasts', but not 'the well known voice of some creature on which we are used to look with contempt' (84).

Beautiful qualities, by comparison, 'inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection' (43), and beauty 'causes love' (91) of humanity or living things. The beautiful object, or the object suggestive of beautiful ideas, is 'comparatively small', 'smooth' (114) and 'has an appearance of delicacy and even of fragility' (116). It is associated with 'transparent substances' (118), 'clean, even smooth and weak' musical 'notes' (122), and colours such as 'light greens', 'soft blues' or 'weak whites' and 'pinks' (117). If the colours are 'strong' they need to be 'variegated' (117) in order to be beautiful. The beautiful object will have 'clear' eyes, eyes that fit no exact geometrical shape nor 'deviate from the line of its neighbouring parts', and any motion of the eye should be 'slow' or 'languid' (118). Burke acknowledges that 'the qualities of the sublime and beautiful' can be 'found united' (124) but the most powerful sublime affect is produced by the most uniformly sublime object with purely sublime qualities (within his definition of the sublime). If the object has qualities that are beautiful and sublime, its sublime affect is lessened.

Nineteenth century marine animals were also routinely depicted and conceived in terms of their usefulness to human digestive, industrial, sporting, and scientific appetite—portrayals well outside Burke's aesthetics. The serviceability and functionality defining utilitarian portrayals of marine animals are aspects neither of the sublime, nor the beautiful. But as I discuss later in the paper, Turner does depict the utility of marine animals in technical studies, in fishing settings, and as part of the whaling industry.

The categories of the sublime and the beautiful magnify feelings of fear and repulsion in relation to the sea and marine animals because the portrayal of the sea and marine animals is almost always sublime and rarely beautiful. This is as true today as it was for the Romantics and even before the term existed or its characteristics and affective registers were codified. Besides God, the sea is the most sublime object for Burke. Within the aesthetics of the sublime, terror and mystery define the sea and the appeal of the sea is

predicated upon delight through terror, allure through repulsion, and awe through incomprehension. The aesthetic and ideological framework of the sublime sanctions the human domination and exploitation of the sea. As sublime, the sea is the infinite, inexhaustible ocean, and marine animals are depicted as dangerous and sinister. Marine creatures are feared: seemingly too alien to receive our empathy and too dangerous not to receive our violence.

Turner's *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* is generally thought to be one of several sheets taken from a sketchbook bought by his long-time supporter and admirer, John Ruskin from Turner's housekeeper after his death. The watercolour is dated between 1836–40 in *Turner's Watercolours from Manchester* (Charles Nugent and Melva Croal, 1996, 61). Turner's original has been ill served by its many inferior and misleading catalogue or online reproductions. Even in this essay, it has been necessary to include a reproduction of the watercolour that does not do it justice; it may simply be impossible to reproduce the subtle colouration of Turner's original.

I viewed the original watercolour at the Whitworth Gallery on 18 July 2006. The title *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* is not Turner's—the watercolour has no known original title. *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* is one of many titles the watercolour has accrued since it was separated from the sketchbook. In a Council report of 1912, from 'The Manchester Whitworth Institute Council Meeting Records' in *Whitworth Art Gallery: Annual Report 1870-1923*, the watercolour is referred to as 'Rough Sea and Gurnets.' The Manchester Gallery accession records reveal that the watercolour was presented to *The Whitworth Gallery* by the nephews of a well known Manchester collector, J.E. Taylor, it was then described as 'a sea-piece – with gurnets and sunset effect; two large fish in the foreground to the left on brown paper'. When sold to J.E. Taylor it was described as 'Sunset with Fish in Foreground'.

Mistaken interpretations can easily result when these titles or reproductions of *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* are consulted without reference to the original. Inaccurate reproductions make the sea appear rugged and ultimately produce a stormy, morose looking seascape fitted well to Burke's category of the sublime, and titles like 'Rough Sea and Gurnets' predispose a viewer to perceive a sublime aesthetic. The darkened horizon in reproductions of *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets*, make the role of the fish in the foreground appear limited and sinister. In the original, the effect produced is more appropriately suited to Burke's category of the beautiful; the fish are in the foreground but they are comparatively small, they have a luminous blue applied to them and the area around the sun is not dark or stormy, it is light blue and grey; melon and white. In this piece, the light colours to signify the sun's radiance. The fish are drawn in to the space of natural illumination, allowing them to partake of the beauty its lightness signifies. For Turner, the sun was the foundation of all life and energy. Elemental interdependence is created by the subtle repetition of the same colours in the sun, sea, sky and fish—it evokes the delicate beauty of the scene, prompting the idea of fragile interconnectedness, and the love and tenderness aroused by the beautiful object, rather than sublime terror.

The colours and lines on and around the fish are all soft and light, in accord with Burke's categorisation; there is no suggestion of angularity. Smoothness characterises the form of these fish, parts and colours are, as Burke would wish, 'melted . . . into one another' (117).

There are light pink speckles on the fins of the gurnets matching the light-pink sunset, and this same colour is visible in the higher sky above. There are weak white lines around the mouths of the gurnets and these are also in the sky and the water. The main bodies of the fish are coloured with glowing, soft blues, whites and Vandyke browns (a pigment significantly emphasising organic natural cycles). These transparent light-brown tints are applied to the head and body of the fish, and are repeated a little in the water, though the tints in water are comparatively less luminous. While they are obvious in the original, all of these subtle details of colour are generally lost in reproductions such that this notion of a natural fusion and delicate beauty is also lost. A close-up of Turner's gurnets is visible in figure 2.

The watercolour's foregrounded marine fish are anthropomorphized in a variety of ways. One gurnet, whose mouth is open, has its gaze directed towards the sunset, whose light floods the water. This directed gaze and open mouth evokes the idea that the fish is exclaiming in wonder at the sunset. Further, the fin of this gurnet appears to be deliberately propping it up in the water to get a better view. The other gurnet's gaze is directed at the viewer of the watercolour—thus bringing humanity into the picture. This direct gaze implies sentience—that communication and community between fish and viewer is possible, and this implied communication and community is vastly different to most products of the nineteenth century imagination wherein animals are, as John Berger remarks, 'meat or leather or horn' (2). By meeting the gaze of one gurnet and observing the look of wonderment on the other, the viewer is invited to empathise with rather than demonise the marine realm: to recognise likenesses between themselves and marine animals, not disparities. Mark Arkenstone, Turner's favourite philosopher-poet, made the connection between humanity and marine life one of veneration when he argued that the shellfish were the genesis of all life (Sidlauskas 1993). If this watercolour is read with that veneration—born of the love and wonder for our ancestry—in mind, the eyes of the gurnet meet the viewer with more than familiarity, they meet with intimacy.

[Figure 2 Close up of the gurnets in *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets.*]



The eyes of the gurnets further install them into Burke's category of the beautiful. According to Burke, eyes have a particularly 'great a share in the beauty of the animal creation.' The eyes of both fish (particularly the one looking at the viewer) are clear and blue, like the flecks in the water and the sky around the setting sun. The gurnets' eyes fit smoothly into their surrounding bodies and they are not strictly geometrical, nor is there any sense of brisk motion which Burke would view as ill-fitting to the beautiful. If there is any indication of motion, either in terms of the water directly around the fish, their bodies or their eyes, it is a suggestion of languid movement.

This watercolour has been related to other naturalistic fish studies such as *Study of a Gurnard* and its overall naturalism suggests that it is a real scene Turner witnessed (Nugent and Croal 61). The terms gurnet, gurnard and gurnournd refer to the same broad species of fish. Gurnard is the more frequently used term today. A gurnet is one of several marine fishes of the family Triglidae characterised by large and spiny heads. Flying gurnets of the family Dactylopteridae can flit with their multi-coloured butterfly-like pectoral fins over the surface of the sea, though they feed on the ocean floor and are now usually caught by trawl. Combining anthropomorphism with an essentially naturalistic portrayal makes the consciousness ascribed to the fish part of the nature, not fantastical and sinister. In this original, the fish are represented as peaceably enjoying the water and the setting sun. There is no grand sense of fear or pain, solitude, darkness or obscurity; the interconnected colours are clearly defined, not lost in heady swirls as would befit the aesthetics of the sublime. While there are debates about the relative merits of anthropomorphism, Turner's anthropomorphic treatment of the gurnets in this watercolour marks an important step towards the removal of cues that construct marine animals as sublimely terrifying and repulsive. His treatment also marks a step away from utilitarian portrayals of marine animals. While anthropomorphic approaches problematically assume the characteristics of the human animal to exist in the non-human animal, they avoid the fallacious assumption that the human animal is entirely unlike non-human animals, and that sentience is reserved for humanity alone.

Turner's depiction of marine animals in *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* indicates a move away from portrayals of sublime marine animals; it is one of those fractional but undeniable examples that point to an ideological change. This is why Turner's watercolour is so interesting. If Burke's definitions are applied, Turner's fish are beautiful—not sublime. They are portrayed as thinking, vulnerable participants in a tranquil seascape. Within Burke's category of the beautiful, the gurnets invite affection, not the fear of the sublime: as beautiful, their depiction implies community and communication with humanity, not sublime insensibility and inscrutability.

In addition to its departure from cultural norms, the watercolour also departs from most of Turner's other depictions of marine animals. The styles and subjects of Turner's later works are familiar and appealing, even sometimes considered conventional today, yet many were so different from the artistic norm during his life as to appear to breach acceptable standards and tastes. Nevertheless, looking at most of Turner's marine animals we see that regularly, in style and subject, they reproduce the image of the grotesque, sublimely terrifying or simply utilitarian creature that was so common in nineteenth century England.

Out of the thirty or so representations of marine animals Turner produced, only six display them alive and in water. The remainder focus on studies of dead fish or killing sea life. While an enormous number of Turner works are devoted to representations of the sea, it is not until his middle age that Turner generates a significant quantity of representations of marine animals. Indeed, in the context of his entire artistic collection, the thirty or so pieces (largely watercolours and/or sketches) that depict marine animals are to be seen as perhaps a minor aspect of his artistry. Held at Tate Britain, the Turner Bequest contains approximately 300 oil paintings and around 30,000 sketches and watercolours (including 300 sketchbooks). However quantitatively insignificant the works featuring marine animals may be when related to Turner's other works, they are significant lenses through which the ambiguity that inhabits nineteenth century attitudes towards marine animals can be viewed, not least because there are so few pieces that feature marine subjects in Turner's multitude of seascape oils, watercolours and sketches. Turner is famous for his seascapes and his ardour for fishing is well established, but marine animals are at the periphery of Turner's vision of the sea. But for a few depictions of marine creatures, Turner's exquisite light and motion filled seas are predominantly fallow voids.

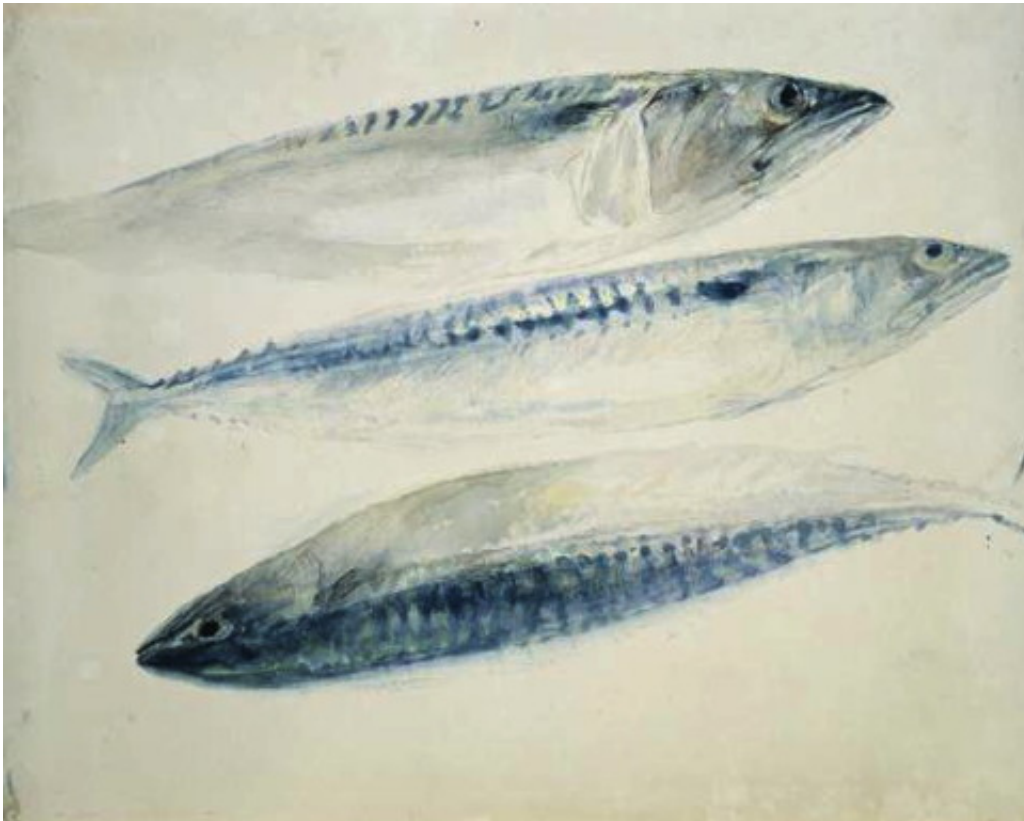
**[Figure 3 *A Harpooned Whale*, 1845.]**



Turner's artistic collection reveals that his sketches, watercolours and paintings of marine creatures were largely done in the middle to later part of his life. Almost all of the pieces featuring marine animals were completed from about the age of 43-71, arguably suggesting

an increased awareness of marine life. There is one early artwork, 'Study of Clouds; two lobster pots with fish, 1796-7, done when Turner was a young man of twenty-one, which features marine animals. With this exception, the remainder date from 'Neptune's Trident' (c. 1818-26), at its earliest estimation when Turner was forty-three, to his last two whaling oils: 'Hurrah! for the Whaler Erebus! Another Fish' and 'Whaler's (Boiling Blubber), entangled in flaw-ice, endeavouring to extricate themselves', both exhibited in 1846 when Turner was seventy-one.

[Figure 4 Sketch of Three Mackerel, c. 1835-40.]



The fish in *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* are alive, part of the aesthetics of the beautiful, and apparently enjoying a moment on the gentle light-filled water, as opposed to being in the throes of death, bloody and sublimely obscure like Turner's *A Harpooned Whale* (c. 1845), figure 3, or as a very dead specimen for detached study as in *Mackerel* (c. 1840).

Turner adopts a naturalistic style in his portrayal of land animals. His interest in animals is evident through the many detailed drawings in his early sketchbooks. With a similar attention to intricate detail (though without a similar attention to animation or natural habitat) several of Turner's marine animal pieces are specimen studies; works such as *Sketch of Three Mackerel* (1835-40) visible in figure 4, *Mackerel* (1840) and *Mackerel and Prawns* (1840).

In various watercolours such as *Cod on the Beach* (1835), figure 5, and *Lobsters on the Beach* (1826-36), Turner portrays marine animals as the objects of sport and appetite, laid out on



the beach amid fishing paraphernalia such as netting and oars. The different natural colour compositions of various inanimate subjects are brought to the fore in works like *Study of a Dead Tench* (c. 1822) or *Study of Fish: Two Tench, a Trout and a Perch* (c. 1822-24); whereas *Study of Fish and Three Prawns* (c. 1835-40) and *Study of Fish* (c. 1844-5), figure 6, highlight the fantastical and perhaps repulsive shapes of the marine animals as they lean together, corpses merging into one fleshy mass. As studies highlighting the utility of marine animals or technical geometrics, these works are neither beautiful nor sublime. As noted, Burke declaims the notions of function and use as features of either of his aesthetic categories.

[Figure 5 *Cod on the Beach*, 1835.]



Turner's four whaling oils—*Whalers* 1845, *Whalers (The Whale Ship)* 1845, figure 7, *'Hurrah! for the Whaler Erebus! Another Fish!'* 1846, and *Whalers (Boiling Blubber)* *Entangled in Flaw Ice, Endeavouring to Extricate themselves* 1846—depict various aspects of the whaling industry in which English entrepreneurs took an enthusiastic and active part. Barry Venning notes that one of these, Ethanau Bicknell, commissioned Turner's whaling

oils, although he only purchased one of them. In fact, only one of the four sold during Turner's lifetime. Turner's whaling oils were unlike standard artistic depictions of whaling, though they do fit Burke's aesthetics of the sublime. With their swirls of colour, they show whales bleeding into the water, hunted, harpooned and laid out in pieces on the ice, their bodies hacked apart and boiled. Turner portrays the struggle of the whalers, in dangerous icy waters, to capture and kill such large mammals but he also depicts the struggles of the whales themselves and the pathos and gore of their death. As Robert Wallace has suggested, the composition of these oils and several sketches, with their manipulation of what he calls 'Turner's powerful aesthetic of the indistinct' actually blurs the agony of the whale with the agony of the whalers (Wallace 1). In his chalk and watercolour sketch, *Whalers at Sea at Sunset* (1845), figure 8, the jumble of black and red renders the sunset as blood. Perhaps, as has been suggested by Berger, nature did in fact enter Turner's imagination as violence, in the form of images of blood and water mixing in his father's barber shop (150). But the whaling industry provided Turner with oceans of blood and in paintings and sketches such as the whaling oils and several whale sketches, Turner's never painted work on the apocalypse, which he had intended to call 'The Water Turned to Blood,' is achieved.

[Figure 6 *Study of Fish, c. 1844-5.*]



[Figure 7 *Whalers (The Whale Ship)*, 1845.]



On the one hand, in their depiction of apocalyptic struggles to destroy marine life, Turner's whaling oils fit in well with nineteenth century England's preoccupation with hunting whales for industrial use, as well as fitting in well with its notions of the sublime with the whales situated into realms of terror and monstrosity. On the other, these oils have been critically viewed, albeit by only a few critics, as obliquely emblematising the horrific character of the whaling project, and in this view, the aesthetics of the sublime garner empathy for marine animals.

Rather than an expression of an ageing intellect tossing out images of nothing, in *Spheres of Love and Fright: Melville and Turner*, Robert Wallace suggests that Turner's later paintings and his 'indistinct aesthetic' actually revealed an acute perception of 'the inevitable subjectivity of our perception of nature' (Wallace 13). For Wallace, Turner's work indicates an awareness of his own personal involvement in the production of the sea and its creatures—an awareness of how his emotions, opinions, bias and cultural inheritance play their part in the images that emerge to flood his canvasses and notebooks (17). Most critics, for instance John McCoubrey, focus on Turner's depiction of the peril faced by the whalers during their expeditions. Similarly Barry Venning interprets these oils as essentially illustrating the 'perils of Arctic exploration and those of the whaling trade.' Unlike Wallace's assessment, neither of these appraisals account for the way the indistinctness visible in Turner's whaling oils evinces marine agony and merges it with human struggle, balancing them both in the one composition and often within the same swirls of colour.

[Figure 8 *Whalers at Sea, at Sunset, 1845.*]



The notion of Turner's fixation with natural balances is repeatedly commented on by Turner critics but the historical accounts of threats to those processes are rarely discussed. Richard Hoffmann has shown that over-fishing was a reality in Europe from the Middle Ages onwards (30-32) and industrial development during the eighteenth century meant that the waste previously dumped with equanimity into the sea became increasingly perceived as excessive and dangerous (Alain Corbin 200). As an avid fisherman and observer of the ferocity of the whaling industry, it is likely that Turner was aware of these threats. Turner was certainly aware of the concept of extinction, having portrayed it in an unexhibited version of *The Evening of the Deluge* (1843). Turner suggests extinction by separating a reptile in the right foreground that witnesses the coming flood but is separated from the other queuing animals and is mate-less (Finley, 57-8)

Turner enthusiastically read Beale's *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale* and had several whaling acquaintances including Elhanan Bicknell (Hamilton, 96-99). Beale's account greatly influenced Turner's Whaling oils. Both *Whalers* and *The Whale Ship* refer to incidents recounted in Beale's narrative where Beale graphically explores the death of several whales and speaks of the ferocity of the whaling industry against its 'unoffending victim[s]' (160). Of the death of one particular whale, Beale declares that it dies 'a victim to the tyranny and selfishness, as well as a wonderful proof of the great power of the mind of man' (167).

As observed in a *Dictionary of Natural History* published in 1815, whales were known to be gentle, nurturing and harmless mammals and this is acknowledged in Beale's third story (the inspiration for Turner's *Whalers (The Whale Ship)*), as he describes the harpooning of a sperm whale. According to Beale, the whale is sighted and chased by three boats, it is attacked and re-emerges bleeding from its blow hole, one of the boats is turned over but the whale does not attack the men in the water, it however is struck again with the lance, and so it dies, sinking into the water

Recalling his early ambition to paint the bloody seas of the apocalypse, the whaling industry provided Turner with real seas of blood to represent via oil, watercolour and chalk. Turner's whaling oils, while they might draw attention to marine suffering, harness the power of the sublime, its suggestions of the infinite unknown, obscurity, fear and pain, and in doing so they participate in broader nineteenth century England's images of the sea as an incomprehensible place beset by the monstrous and the alien. But, as we have seen, other watercolours like *Sunset at Sea with Gurnets* feature unthreatened marine animals, and can be considered as imaginative attempts to balance what is taken and what is replenished.

[Figure 9 *Storm Clouds, Looking out to Sea (whale rising)*, 1845.]



In *Spheres of Love and Fright*, Wallace argues that several Turner watercolours and paintings emphasise the fragility of the earth's natural cycles and have an affinity with nostalgic nineteenth century depictions of land animals hiding in diminished wildernesses. I argue that Turner's *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* can be similarly viewed and actually offers more

support to this argument that the pieces Wallace chooses as evidence. Of the six paintings and watercolours that depict marine animals as alive and relatively unthreatened, *Sunset at sea, with Gurnets* is the most vivid in its clarity and expression. In his analysis, Wallace points to the first *Storm Clouds: Looking out to Sea* and the second *Storm Clouds: Looking out to Sea* (he refers to this as 'whale rising') which sit on adjacent pages in the *Ambleteuse and Wimereux* sketchbook.

In *Looking out to Sea*, low clouds sit over flat creature-less water. For Wallace, they curve as the skeleton of a gigantic whale. However, its companion piece, *Whale Rising*, depicts a living whale whose body can be seen on the top of the water. For Wallace, *Storm Clouds: Looking out to Sea* ('whale rising'), figure 9, is a depiction of these mammals that stands against portrayals of them being chased and captured. It is an embodiment of what he calls: 'Turner's imaginative need to replenish the sea with replacements for those creatures destroyed by man's industrial enterprise' (540).

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Similarly, Wallace identifies this imaginative need in *Stormy Sea with Dolphins* and *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*. He declares 'In each of these indistinct seascapes, the liquid spheres are populated with imagined creatures as if to replenish the life that man has torn from them (540).'

In this view, those Turner whales mercilessly pursued and killed emerge as signals of the artists awareness and potential compassion for their plight. Commenting on Ishmael's belief that the whale species will be protected by polar ice, Wallace observes that Turner may have been less hopeful:

Turner may have been less sanguine, especially after drawing vignettes of precisely those Antarctic whales that have, in the words of Captain Ross's 1847 *Voyage of Discovery*, 'hitherto enjoyed a life of tranquillity and security; but will now, no doubt, be made to contribute to the wealth of our country, in exact proportion to the energy and perseverance of our merchants; and these, we well know, are by no means inconsiderable.' (Wallace 539; Ross 191-2).

Captain Ross' observations during this voyage indicate his awareness of the formidable level of marine fishing that this period engaged in, but Ross, true to his age, was an avid supporter of the whaling industry. The utility of marine animals is always uppermost in his mind and his crew themselves killed and collected a morass of marine life for scientific examination and food certainly, but also for fun. His remark highlights the ambiguity of the nineteenth century awareness of excessive plunder, with the nineteenth century inaction or willingness

to continue its plunder of the sea regardless of compassion. Earlier Ross had described with a national pride and 'much pleasure' that the Auckland Islands was to become the site of an English Whaling Station. He congratulates Messrs Enderby 'by whose vessels they were discovered' on their 'exclusive possession' of the Islands (128-9). He goes on to say how this fishery could be successfully pursued from the Cape of Good Hope but laments that American vessels occupy that space. Indeed, the English whaling industry is only one industry, Ross regularly remarks on the presence of French or American whalers regularly during the two volumes of *Voyage of Discovery*. After Ross observed, with an apparent compassion and a touch of regret, that Antarctic whales had 'hitherto enjoyed a life of tranquillity and security; but will now, no doubt, be made to contribute to the wealth of our country,' he remarks,

A fresh source of national and individual wealth is thus opened to commercial enterprise, and if pursued with boldness and perseverance, it cannot fail to be abundantly productive. (192)

[Figure 10 *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*, c. 1845.]



*Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* proves Wallace's point more than the pieces he focuses on because Turner's portrayal situates them within Burke's aesthetics of the beautiful. Situated in a light infused ocean of soft melons, pinks, whites and blues, the gurnets are prominent, portrayed naturalistically and are also anthropomorphised. Charles Nugent compares *Sunset*

*at Sea, with Gurnets with Sunset on the Sea* which features a similar seascape without the fish. *Storm Clouds: Looking out to Sea* ('whale rising') shows a very small and unforegrounded black whale's back, thereby lessening the intensity of its impact on a viewer. The sea scene of 'whale rising' features Burke's sublime 'fuscous colours': heavy grey clouds are dotted with black and purple tints which the weaker whites and pinks, and the bruising of orange-yellow and blue, cannot relieve. An interconnection is suggested through the dark colours on the whale and sky, but the whale's oblique appearance as jagged brush strokes amid further rough strokes for the sea and sky further indicate the obfuscation and that fits the framework of the sublime. *Stormy Sea with Dolphins* and *Sunrise with Sea Monsters*, figure 10, run the risk of being too fantastical and obscure in their representations of marine animals, the sea creatures in these works appear too monstrously alien to elicit sympathy as they seethe in the dark or stormy water. The aesthetics of the sublime manifests with too much intensity in these works: fears and threats seem to lurk in the indistinct whorls of colour and the vague suggestions of bizarre life within. Another marine animal watercolour, *Sea Monsters and Vessels at Sunset* (c. 1845), unfolds a sun bleeding into sublimely dark water, where sinister marine shapes peer through the black and thus maintain classical and biblical iconography of the dark demonic sea with splashes of blood-light.

[Figure 11 *Sea Monsters and Vessels at Sunset*, c. 1845.]





*Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets* represents Turner's best effort to replenish the void; not only by giving back the life, as Wallace argues, 'that man has torn from them,' but by drawing attention to the beauty and familiarity of life in the sea through an aesthetics of bondedness. An analysis of aesthetic representations of marine environments underscores what consciously and unconsciously sits between humanity and the sea. It allows an acknowledgement of the human gaze directed at the ocean and the ways in which that gaze constructs what is seen. But the ocean exists outside our perceptions. We need to examine the assumptions and the often subtle and unacknowledged associations we have gleaned from a rich aesthetic heritage in order to apprehend interactions with the sea that reflect our dependence upon it and our intimacy with marine animals as living beings. Within the aesthetics of the sublime, terror, incomprehension, and the suspension of reason define the marine realm. Other aesthetics are possible and Turner's *Sunset at Sea, with Gurnets*, with its cues for beauty, empathy and interconnection, represents one alternative.

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