

Embodied vulnerability in the art of J. M. W. Turner: representations of ageing in Romantic painting

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ABSTRACT

Narratives of ageing are an important theme in both medical sociology and the sociology of the body. Research on representations of the ageing body typically draws upon such subjects as the paintings of Rembrandt or Victorian literature. In this paper, however, the aim is to demonstrate that some of J. M. W. Turner's pictures contain insightful narratives on ageing, the vulnerability of the body and the nature of our shared humanity. Turner (1775–1851) is widely regarded as Britain's greatest painter and one of the world's great artists. I contend that the central principle of Turner's Romantic art is the arousal of sensation. Although Turner is generally revered as a painter of landscape rather than 'the body', the paper maintains that many of Turner's paintings can be read as studies in the vulnerability of the body. It will be shown, for example, that many of Turner's pictures are wonderfully evocative 'visual poems' on the universal human experiences of loss, decline, 'the fallacies of hope', grief, ageing and death. This paper is, therefore, a cultural case study of 'the decline narrative' of ageing.

KEY WORDS – narratives, humanities, ageing body, art, emotion, painting.

Introduction

Downie (1994) has provided a useful overview of the interconnections between the arts, medicine and society. He noted that [although] the arts as well as being [can be] entertaining [they] are also rich in emotional insight. In other words, the arts move us – as they can be disturbing, consoling, and life enhancing (Alexander 2003). Moreover, the arts link 'personal troubles' and 'public issues' – to borrow Mills's (1959) classic formulation of 'the sociological imagination'. In addition, the arts enrich our perceptions of both the familiar world around us and of worlds that we have not encountered. In short, the arts deepen our empathy and expand our imagination. Furthermore, concepts like pain, suffering, health, illness,

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hope, transformation, transcendence, redemption, ageing, loss, death and even love are common to writings across the diverse fields of medicine, society and the arts (Eagleton 2003). In summary, the arts help us to understand ourselves as they illuminate our common humanity. One example of this concern is the plethora of recent writings on discourses of death, for example, in literature (Brofen 1992; Dollimore 1998; Morra *et al.* 2000), opera (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 1996, 1999; Žižek and Dolar 2002), and art generally (Drury 1999; Kemp and Wallace 2000; Brown 2001*c*; Elkins 2001; Spivey 2001). These writings all say something about the field of health and illness, which has recently seen an efflorescence of writings in the field of the humanities and medicine (Arnott *et al.* 2001). This paper on Turner and the ageing body is, therefore, a contribution to this growing literature on the reciprocal interconnections between the humanities, society and medicine.

John Mallord William Turner is universally regarded as Britain's greatest artist (Joll *et al.* 2001). There are many interesting academic books on aspects of his art, *e.g.* on the oil paintings (Butlin and Joll 1984), prints (Herrmann 1990), watercolours (Shanes 2000), his travels (Herold 1997), and on the influence of the industrial revolution on his paintings (Rodner 1997). Furthermore, there are beautifully illustrated popular books on his work, *e.g.* (Gaunt 1981; Bockemühl 2000; Smiles 2000; and Brown 2001*a*), and a plethora of 'popular scholarly' books that record Turner's life and career (Lindsey 1966; Reynolds 1969; Gage 1987; Tate Gallery 1987; Wilton 1987; Bailey 1997; Hamilton 1997; Venner 2003). None, however, explore his paintings as narratives of ageing, as this paper seeks to do.

The aim is to examine the claim that some of Turner's pictures are marvellously suggestive narratives on the universal human experiences of loss, decline, ageing and death. It is contended that the existential and emotional effect that his landscape paintings can have on the viewer underscores the link between his art and the embodiment of vulnerability. Artists in general, and Romantic artists in particular, paint because they want to *move* us (Clarke 1969). As John Constable said, 'Painting is another word for *feeling*' (Reynolds 1969). When we look at Turner's Romantic paintings, it is important to try and see the world in the way that Turner did, in other words with the eyes and sensibilities of a Romantic painter (Vaughan 1994; Brown 2001*b*). From this point of view, paintings should be more than 'spots of beauty on the wall' or 'index cards for intellectual debates' (Elkins 2001: ix). We have probably all dashed around an art gallery in a bid to tick off as many masterpieces as possible in the shortest time. In contrast, the aim of James Elkins's book, *Pictures and Tears*, is to counter this tendency, because 'the more you look, the more you feel' (Elkins 2001: x. Author's italics).

Ageing, growth, decline and loss

Sir Joshua Reynolds urged his students to view the great masters as 'models which you are to imitate, and at the same time as rivals with which you contend' (Gaunt 1981: 52). Turner was a 'star student' of Reynolds and he followed this advice, for Turner was an artist driven by the urge to surpass. *Dido Building Carthage, or The Rise of the Carthaginian Empire* (1815: BJ 131, National Gallery, London)¹ is Turner's response to the landscapes of Claude Lorraine.² In fact, Turner wept when he saw his first Claudian landscape. How could he ever hope to equal such great art? It is undeniable that he did, as, under the terms of Turner's will, *Dido* now hangs in the National Gallery of London in the same room as Claude's *The Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*. Indeed, Turner loved his painting of *Dido* so much that he once wanted to be buried in it (Joll *et al.* 2001).

Dido Building Carthage is literally the beginning of an era. It is paired with *The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire* (see below), and it seems reasonable to suggest that the painting reflects a contemporary interest in the rise and fall of empires (and so has parallels with both the Napoleonic age of Turner's own times, and with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*). As in many of Turner's paintings, 'yellow predominated to an excessive degree' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 95). The painting is justly famous for the sublime achievement of the warm glow of the sun on the sea. *Dido* is a wonderfully transcendent vision of shimmering morning light. Turner transforms nature into the stuff of great art. We can see here that Turner is the creator of a visual poetry of sumptuous iridescence. However, Turner is also the creator of tremendous images of *fatality*. 'His subjects usually encapsulate pivotal movements, a rise or a fall, a victory or a defeat, a sunrise or a sunset. ... [They] emphasise man's insignificance in the face of the powers of nature' (Strong 1999: 498). These Romantic motifs are vividly illustrated in many of Turner's classical and biblical pictures.

The Decline of the Carthaginian Empire (1817: BJ 135, Tate Britain, London) represents the end, or perhaps the death, of an era. 'Mr Turner has here embodied the whole spirit of Virgil's poetical description of the event, its awful grandeur' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 101). The setting sun is symbolic of the decline of the day and of an age. Moreover, as Ruskin noted, 'the scarlet of the clouds was his symbol of destruction' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 100). I think '*Rise*' and '*Decline*' can be seen as an allegory of our own birth, life and inevitable death. In other words, this pair of pictures is a story of ageing. In the transforming artistic vision of Turner, the history of an empire becomes a metaphor for the transience of our lives. Furthermore, the pair of paintings is not only about the long-gone empire

of Carthage, but also a narrative of ageing empires and of the ageing bodies that inhabit and produce them. Great art, of whatever genre, transcends time and place through its use of archetypes (Eagleton 2003) and so, through myth and symbol, the particular can be read as the universal. This is one reason why Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring's* is such a hugely popular book and (now) film trilogy, and why Wagner's *Ring Cycle* holds such sway over those who become familiar with it (Magee 2000).

Another of Turner's paintings of Carthage is of the epic tale of Hannibal crossing the Alps to attack the heart of the Roman Empire. In *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812: BJ 126: Tate Britain, London), Turner's experiences of 'extreme weather' are transmuted into his art. In this case, the inspiration came during a snowstorm in Yorkshire. Turner told his patron's son who was watching him sketch, 'in two years' time you will see this again and call it Hannibal crossing the Alps' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 89). This 'terrible splendour' was well received by critics. One review noted the, 'terrible magnificence ... seen in the widely circular sweep of snow in the air ... the moral and physical elements are here in powerful unison blended by a most masterly hand, awakening emotions of awe and splendour'. This is a Romantic masterpiece, where the diminutive figures are engulfed in a vortex of atmospheric light and darkness. The viewer feels a frisson of terror as they too become engulfed in the great vortex of the storm. It is in such devastating storms that Turner sought to expose, 'the pathetic inadequacy of human beings in an ineffably beautiful and terrible universe' (Clarke 1973: 234). The painting is symbolic of the disappointed ambitions of life and history. No matter how successful and enriching we find our lives, ageing almost invariably brings with it regret at the things that we have not achieved and of the things we could have done so much better.

Critics often describe *The Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sibyl* (1823: BJ 230: Tate Britain, London) as 'gorgeous'. In contrast, John Northcote was scathing, in describing it as 'an outrageous landscape with all the colours of the rainbow in it' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 140). For others, however, this marvellous painting was 'like the vision of a poet, rapidly and slightly embodied by a painter' (1984: 139). The light of the Mediterranean had a profound effect on Turner (Gombrich 1995). Kenneth Clarke (1976: 186) put it admirably when he wrote, 'the memories of Italy were like fumes of wine in his mind, and the landscape seemed to swim before his eyes in a sea of light. Shadows became scarlet and yellow, distances mother-of-pearl, trees lapis lazuli blue, and figures floated in the heat engendered haze, like diaphanous tropical fish'. Ruskin described it as an illustration 'of the vanity of human life' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 139). It is based on the story of the unrequited love of Apollo for the Cumean Sibyl, Deiphobe. The white

hare is a symbol of Apollo's lust. The god promised her anything she would ask. She asked to live for as many years as the grains of sand in her hand. Apollo also offered her perpetual youth in return for her love, but she denied him, and so her body aged and wasted away until she became a disembodied voice. When she was shrivelled by age her wish and utterance became the aching moving lament of 'I want to die' (Lodwick 2002: 107).

What is striking about this painting is the contrast between the youthful and beautiful sibyl set against a middle ground of ageing and ruinous buildings. Moreover, the decaying houses intimate the finite nature of our existence. Her beauty is as transient as the Roman Republic itself. Apollo and the Sibyl is, therefore, both a painting about the ruined beauty of Italy; and also a warning of the inevitable deterioration and death of our ageing human bodies. Like Byron, Turner saw Italy (and especially Venice) as a poetic lesson in the transience of human achievements (Tate 2003). Many of Turner's other paintings depict suffering and death.

Ageing, suffering and death

For Ruskin, *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus: Homer's Odyssey* (1829: BJ 330: National Gallery, London) was 'the central picture in Turner's career' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 184). It is a gorgeously coloured Turner-esque fantasy. Polyphemus, the King of the Cyclops, feasted on two men morning and evening until Ulysses blinded the giant with a firebrand – and escaped with his crew by clinging to the sides of a flock of sheep. The nebulous figure of Polyphemus is shown looming menacingly over the ship, whilst Ulysses taunts the monster from the deck of his vessel. *The Literary Gazette* protested: 'Although the Grecian hero has just put out the eye of the furious Cyclops, that is really no reason why Mr Turner should put out both the eyes of us, harmless critics'. ... Its skies are 'the colour of blood [rising over a] scene of death' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 185). In other words, Turner's strident colouring is designed to convey the pain of the subject. Like many of Turner's paintings, this is not simply an exercise in the depiction of climatic conditions, but rather an emotional paean on human suffering. Many of Turner's seascapes and landscapes also illustrate this theme of anguish.

Other instances are Turner's sea storms, such as *The Shipwreck* (1805: BJ 17), which evoke in the viewer their own vividly-felt personal experience of human vulnerability. The sublime landscapes of Romanticism called for violent and spectacular effects to invoke the wild awesomeness and

mysteriousness of nature (Wu 2000; Wilton 2001). Edmund Burke (1968: 39. Original italics) had defined the elements of sublimity as ‘whatever is in any sort terrible ... is a source of the *sublime*, that is, productive of the strongest emotion’. From this point of view, the precariousness of man is overwhelmed by a natural world of irrepressible forces: of mountains, fires, floods, storms, and raging seas. ‘In search of the sublime, Turner travelled widely, sketching grandiose scenery and extreme weather conditions, which he translated into canvases exhibited with poetic quotations’ (Langmuir 1997: 325). The graphic realism of the boats lurching in a churning sea reflects Turner’s Romantic view of man’s frailty in his relationship to the terrible power of nature. We will never know whether the trembling individuals in the centre of the picture will be saved. ‘They remain for ever in danger’ (Vaughan 1999: 228). Moreover, their peril, and the threat to the viewer too, are heightened by the painting’s deliberate lack of a refuge of safety (Appleton 1975). This is a painting that exploits the embodied vulnerability of the viewer. The overwhelming forces of nature can terminate the ageing bodies of our friends, family and ourselves. The painting reminds us that life is a litany of losses.

Gage (1987) suggested that Turner saw similarities in the struggles between Rome and Carthage and between Britain and Napoleonic France. The Napoleonic wars had direct and overt influences on Turner’s art. For example, *The Field of Waterloo* (1818, BJ 138: Tate Britain, London), presents the horrors of war in a composition of great theatrical power – the burning ruin of the fortified farm of Hougoumont at night. ‘It seems he painted it to express his horror at the wasted human life and to counter the misrepresentation of warfare as glorious and noble’ (Venner 2003: 148). The painting vividly illustrates the carnage after the battle ‘when the wives and brothers and sons of the slain come, with anxious eyes and agonised hearts’ (*The Examiner*, 25 May 1818).³ In contrast, *War: The Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842: BJ 400: Tate Britain, London), is a poignant painting of searing pain. It is, in essence, a picture of the loss of a man who once had virtually everything. The press was universal in its condemnation of this picture of Napoleon on St Helena. The painting was exhibited with these suggestive lines (from Turner’s own unpublished epic poem, *The Fallacies of Hope*):

Ah! Thy tent-formed shell is like
A soldier’s nightly bivouac, alone
Midst a sea of blood
But you can join your comrades

Ruskin observed that ‘the lines that Turner gave the picture are very important, being the only verbal expression of that association in his

mind of sunset colour with blood ... the conceit of Napoleon's seeing a resemblance in the limpet's shell to a tent was thought trivial by most people at the time; it may be so (though not to my mind); the second thought, that even this poor wave-washed disk had power and liberty, denied to *him*, will hardly, I think, be mocked at' (Butlin and Joll 1984: 249). *The Exile and the Rock Limpet* is a moving narrative of loneliness and loss. For me, this is a wonderful evocation of the utter blackness that we are all engulfed by in our moments of despair and despondency. Being human means that there are times when we are completely devastated – when we all feel, to coin a somewhat paradoxical phrase, 'full of emptiness'. Although both sociological (Seale 1998) and historical (Minois 1999) accounts of dying and loss often touch upon narratives of despair, I think this remarkably imaginative painting has a capacity to move us that is beyond words. Turner's technique recalls Renaissance religious art that was designed to induce overwhelming emotion (Murray and Murray 1998; Drury 1999). Medieval paintings and prayer books are full of 'devotional images ... enjoining worshippers to do more than sympathise with Jesus or Mary: the aim of prayer was to identify with them bodily, to try and think of yourself *as* Jesus' (Elkins 2001: 155. Original italics). The trick, therefore, is to imagine that you *are* Napoleon standing and staring at a rock limpet.

Ageing in a runaway world

It has become widely accepted that we live in a world dominated by the inexorable process of globalisation (Held *et al.* 1999). In Giddens's (1999) phrase, we inhabit a *Runaway World*. Turner could have applied this phrase to his own time, to the world of the Napoleonic wars and the industrial revolution. Two of Turner's most famous paintings, *Rain, Steam and Speed* and *The Fighting 'Temeraire'*, are pictorial paeans to the dawning of the new industrial age, and to the consequent loss of a languorous rural age (Rodner 1997). These two pictures reflect the huge changes that occurred within Turner's lifetime, and in this sense they can be read as narratives of ageing.

Turner's paintings should not just be looked at: rather, they are pictures that the observer can *live*. Turner's pictures should be witnessed, not just viewed. *Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway* (1844: BJ 409: National Gallery, London) is a wonderful example of Turner's ability to transform his own fervent experiences into his art, and for his art to then produce a passionate emotional response in the viewer. It is an allegory of the forces of nature and skilfully used up-to-date imagery (Gage 1987). The

hare (a symbol of speed) is running for its life in front of a speeding train which is crossing a bridge over the languid River Thames – the highway of the past. The composition can be seen as a nostalgic comment on the accelerated pace of modern life (Schama 1995). This painting is a story of the transformation of ageing. We all change as we age, but the world around us seems to change at a faster rate. The press was amazed and admiring. For the *Morning Chronicle* (8 May 1844), ‘*Speed, Steam and Rain (sic)* is perhaps the most insane and the most magnificent of all these prodigious productions’. *Fraser’s Magazine* (June 1844) commented that Turner ‘has out-prodigied almost all former prodigies. He has made a picture with real rain, behind which is real sunshine, and you expect a rainbow every minute. Meanwhile, there comes a train down upon you, really moving at a rate of 50 miles an hour, and which the reader had best make haste to see, lest it should dash out of the picture, and be away up to Charing Cross through the wall opposite. ... The world has never seen anything like this picture’. Indeed – the first exhibition of the Impressionists, held in Paris in 1874, included an etching of the painting, which had become something of an icon for both Monet and Pissarro (Butlin and Joll 1984: 257). This picture is an extraordinary elemental image in which the 70-year-old Turner draws together his concerns for art, light and atmosphere. The painting is another vivid translation of a personal experience: Turner reputedly stuck his head out of the window of a speeding train in a snow-storm. Such ‘lived experience’ becomes transfigured by the white heat of Turner’s artistic imagination and sensibility.

Turner referred to his painting, *The Fighting ‘Temeraire’ Tugged to her Last Berth to be Broken Up* (1839, BJ 377: National Gallery, London) as ‘my darling’. William Makepeace Thackeray, the art critic and novelist, praised this picture and described it ‘as grand a painting as ever figured on the walls of any academy, or came from the easel of any painter’ (Butlin and Joll 1984: 230). *Téméraire* played a distinguished part in the Battle of Trafalgar (1805). Its painting is yet another on the decline of Empire. The painting recognised the indisputable pre-eminence of steam power. *The Spectator* (11 May 1839) contrasted the lumbering hulk of the sailing ship against the tiny steam tug with a telling simile, ‘like a superannuated veteran led by a sprightly boy’. Past heroism had become obsolescence. The *Fighting Temeraire* ‘suggests the silent stately progress of a funeral cortège’ (Venner 2003: 240). In other words, *Temeraire* is a symbol of our own ageing and mortality. The dying sun signals the end of one age, the pale moon the beginning of another. It is an allegory of loss. ‘It is a glorious sunset, and we are to suppose that by the time the glowing disk shall rest upon the horizon, the *Temeraire* shall have been towed to her last resting place’ (*Art Union*, September 1844). For Ruskin, as we have seen, Turner’s

'crimsoned sunset skies' symbolised death (Butlin and Joll 1984: 231). As the *Morning Chronicle* (7 May 1839) put it, 'There is something in the contemplation of such a scene which affects us almost as deeply as the decay of an old human being'. Time, ageing and death overtake ship and man alike. Here, 'Turner seems to lament not only the passing of the old order of sailing ships that he had so loved to paint, but also his own decline into old age. The picture is a ... noble elegy for a long and fruitful life drawing to its predestined close' (Tate Gallery 1987: 86). So *The Fighting 'Temeraire'* is not only a wonderful sunset, but also a lament to ageing where several elements combine to suggest the passage of time. Moreover, the narrative of the painting 'tells a story of [Turner's] life-over-time' (Gullette 1997: 86): it is a meditation on impermanence. As Turner 'grew older he became more conscious of the brevity of life and the frailty of human ambitions. ... In the last two decades of his life Turner became increasingly distressed whenever a friend or colleague died. In addition, the robust good health he had generally enjoyed until the 1830s was interrupted by periods of illness, which led him to reflect more often on his demise' (Venner 2003: 4 and 205). It seems reasonable to suggest that he reflected on ageing and the lifecourse too.

Conclusions

Narratives of ageing are a burgeoning area of research on the connections between ageing and society (Bytheway 1993; Featherstone and Wernick 1995; Conway and Hockey 1998; Featherstone and Hepworth 1998; Gearing 1999). A part of this literature examines the ways in which the humanities offer evocative ways in which to understand stories of ageing, for instance, in photography (Blaikie 1999), literature (Cole and Winkler 1994), the novel (Hepworth 2000) and in art (Hepworth and Blaikie 1997). At least one brochure for a British postgraduate course in gerontology reproduces Rembrandt's self-portraits to illustrate the ageing body (White 1984).

This paper has attempted to bring out the allegorical and metaphorical imagery of Turner's Romantic paintings as an example of the relentless and ineluctable natural forces that overwhelm man's attempts to build civilisations that challenge those forces – as exemplified in *Rise and Fall of the Carthaginian Empire* and *The Bay of Baiae*. A cultural resonance with ageing is established through the intent of the Romantic artist to inspire feelings of awe in the presence of nature. Puny figures are dwarfed within immense and volatile landscapes. The futility of this battle is exemplified in Thomas Hardy's poem, *Convergence of the Twain: Lines on the Loss of the Titanic*,

in which the fateful collision between a celebrated product of human engineering and the iceberg is an ironic comment on human endeavour. Turner's paintings are often an ironic commentary on the folly of human endeavour or, to use Turner's phrase 'the fallacies of hope'. This notion is captured in the verdicts of the contemporary critics on *The Fighting Temeraire* who read Turner's painting as a narrative of change and decay. In a similar vein, *Rain, Wind and Speed* reflects the contradictions in Victorian attitudes to science and technology as 'progress', which has repercussions for beliefs about the nature and meaning of human life and the lifecourse. Similar reactions to technological and scientific progress are echoed today in attitudes to, say, genetics and society (see Turney 1998). For Turner and his contemporaries, and for us too, it is not only the 'past that is a foreign country' but the future and often the present too (Lowenthal 1986).

The 'look of age' is most obviously the body weathered by decrepitude. But 'the look of age' also reflects the similarities between changes of human appearance with changes in the appearance of places and material objects that have acquired a patina of age. Hence, 'ageing is a worn chair, a wrinkled face, a corroded tin, an ivy-covered or mildewed wall; it is a house with sagging eaves, flaking paint, furnishings faded by time and use. Whatever their historical connections, objects that are weathered, decayed or bear the marks of long-continued use *look* aged and thus seem to stem from the past' (Lowenthal 1986: 125). Turner's paintings too have suffered the ravages of time. Many Victorian morality paintings are, of course, paintings that are literally about 'the ageing body'. My purpose in this paper, however, has been to examine non-literal evidence of the subtle ways in which cultures encode attitudes to ageing and old age, and so to illustrate the implicit Romantic sensibility of Lowenthal's position (1986). My argument is that in many of Turner's paintings the expression of anxieties about ageing is more subtly expressed in an artistic convention that is not, on the face of it, explicitly concerned with the process of growing older. I hope, therefore, that my paper is a thought-provoking analysis of what Gullette (1997) has described as the dominant western ideology of 'the decline narrative' of ageing, and so proves to be a fruitful contribution to understandings of the deeply embedded origins of social attitudes towards ageing and old age.

In this paper I have challenged the familiar view of Turner as 'merely a landscape painter', and illustrated the thesis that Turner's pictures can be read as poignant paintings of our embodied vulnerability and as deeply moving testaments to the universal human experiences of ageing, loss and death. I have argued that the central tenet of Turner's art is the arousal of sensation, and I have claimed that it is the existential and emotional effect

that his paintings can have on the viewer that enables the link to be made between his art and 'the body'. In summary, Turner's paintings remind us that the body is fragile, and that it is our consciousness of this precariousness that forms such an essential part of our humanity.

The concept of vulnerability is derived from the Latin *vulnus* or 'wound'. In its modern usage it has come to denote the human ability to be open to wounds. Vulnerability, therefore, refers to the human ability to be open to physical, psychological, social and moral damage. To be vulnerable as a human being is to possess a structure of sentiments, feelings and emotions by which we can reflect upon and steer a passage through the social world. Moreover, our vulnerability is also part of our capacity to draw a mixture of pleasure and pain from our openness to experiences. Embodiment is an ensemble of corporeal practices that produces and gives 'a body' its place in everyday life. Embodiment places particular bodies within a social *habitus*, and so embodiment is a collective project because it takes place in a life world that is already social (Bourdieu 1984). The representations of ageing in the Romantic paintings of Turner speak to our innate human embodied vulnerability. 'Romantics ... probe the inner psyche ... [and so exemplify] the Romantic principle that artists must be judged by sensibility rather than style' (Brown 2001*b*: 12 and 64). Romantic art delivers unprecedented freedom of imagination and expression, and appeals directly to the emotions of the audience. Turner's paintings, which are essentially visions of feelings, are profoundly poignant. 'They are fundamental to our concept, not only of art, but also of ourselves' (Brown 2001*b*: 16).

We can all increase our artistic sensibilities through adopting the 'ways of seeing' art that both John Drury (1999) and James Elkins (2001) recommend. In other words, Turner's paintings are pictures that the participant observer can *live and feel*. After all, Romantic art is intended to evoke an embodied emotional response (Vaughan 1994). In conclusion, this paper is a contribution to the literature on the vulnerable body in society and culture, a theme which brings together the humanities, society and medicine (Turner and Rojek 2001; Wainwright and Turner 2003).

NOTES

- 1 Turner's oil paintings have been catalogued by Butlin and Joll (1984) and in this paper the unique BJ number and attributed date is used to reference the cited paintings.
- 2 For outstanding colour images of Turner's paintings see the websites of Tate Britain (London): <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain> and of The National Gallery (London): <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk>
- 3 All quotes of newspaper reports are cited from Butlin and Joll (1984).

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