

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

Books of enduring scholarly value

Art and Architecture

From the middle of the eighteenth century, with the growth of travel at home and abroad and the increase in leisure for the wealthier classes, the arts became the subject of more widespread appreciation and discussion. The rapid expansion of book and periodical publishing in this area both reflected and encouraged interest in art and art history among the wider reading public. This series throws light on the development of visual culture and aesthetics. It covers topics from the Grand Tour to the great exhibitions of the nineteenth century, and includes art criticism and biography.

The Life of J.M.W. Turner

This pioneering two-volume biography, first published in 1862, explores the genius of the groundbreaking Romantic landscape and historical painter J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851). As both journalist and historian, author Walter Thornbury (1828–76) has a light touch, yet he draws on a wide range of correspondence, sketchbooks, watercolours and etchings to give a detailed picture of Turner's artistic development and connections, and his increasingly eccentric character. Volume 1 traces the artist's progress from humble cockney beginnings, through youthful friendship and rivalry with Thomas Girtin and a stint as a drawing-master, to his establishment as a Royal Academician at the heart of the nineteenth-century art world. Thornbury sees Turner from all angles, covering his travels at home and abroad, his watercolour and printmaking techniques, his love of sea and sky and colour gradations, and even his fraught monetary dealings. The author also fully contextualises great works like *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* and *The Fighting Temeraire*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library and other partner libraries, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection brings back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Life of J.M.W. Turner

*Founded on Letters and Papers
Furnished by his Friends
and Fellow Academicians*

VOLUME 1

WALTER THORNBURY



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers
Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1
Walter Thornbury
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108059428

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2013

This edition first published 1862

This digitally printed version 2013

ISBN 978-1-108-05942-8 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with, or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE LIFE
OF
J. M. W. TURNER, R.A.

VOL. I.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

“THIS Turner, whom you have known so little while he was living, will one day take his place beside Shakspeare and Verulam. By Shakspeare humanity was unveiled, by Verulam the principles of nature, and by Turner its aspects. Of all the three, though not the greatest, Turner was the most unprecedented. Bacon did what Aristotle had attempted; Shakspeare did perfectly what Æschylus did partially; but none before Turner had lifted the veil from the face of Nature; the majesty of the hills and forests had received no interpretation; and the clouds passed unrecorded from the face of the Heaven which they adorned, and the Earth to which they ministered.”

RUSKIN'S *Edinburgh Lectures*.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)



London: Hurst

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers
Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1
Walter Thornbury
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

T H E L I F E

OF

J. M. W. TURNER, R.A.

FOUNDED ON LETTERS AND PAPERS

FURNISHED BY

HIS FRIENDS AND FELLOW ACADEMICIANS.

BY

WALTER THORNBURY.

“Nature’s most secret steps
He, like her shadow, has pursued.”—SHELLEY’S *ALASTOR*.

I N T W O V O L U M E S .

VOL. I.

LONDON :
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1862.

The right of Translation is reserved.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LONDON:
SAVILL AND EDWARDS, PRINTERS, CHANDOS STREET,
COVENT GARDEN.

P R E F A C E.

SOME four years ago, when the desire to write a life of Turner first entered my mind, I determined to take no steps in such a scheme till I had ascertained whether Mr. Ruskin might not himself have some intention of one day becoming the biographer of that great painter whose genius he had done so much to illustrate.

In answer to my letter of inquiry, Mr. Ruskin replied that he had no intention of writing a life of Turner, but that he should much rejoice in my doing so, and would give me all the help he could. His words were:—

“ MY DEAR SIR, * * *

“ Fix at the beginning the following main characteristics of Turner in your mind, as the keys to the secret of all he said and did:—

Uprightness.

Generosity.

Tenderness of heart (extreme).

Sensuality.

Obstinacy (extreme).

Irritability.

Infidelity.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi

PREFACE.

And be sure that he knew his own power, and felt himself utterly alone in the world from its not being understood. Don't try to mask the dark side. * * *

“Yours most truly,

“J. RUSKIN.”

Encouraged by this certainty that I was neither trespassing nor interfering with any one, I at once set to work steadily and quietly, letting no day pass by without some search for materials, some noting down of traditions, some visit to Turner's old friends, determining not to complete my book, however long it took me, till I had collected for it all that patience and enthusiasm could glean, cull, or heap together.

Through Mr. Ruskin's kind aid I became acquainted one by one with all Turner's executors, and my letters of inquiry made me also known to most of the English collectors of Turner pictures, water-colour drawings, etchings, engravings, and proofs. The two or three noblemen who alone of their wealthy order patronized the painter when living, instantly gave me courteously what information they could. From Turner's friends (all of whom truly loved his memory) I met with kindness and consideration. They kept nothing from me—they ransacked their memories—they searched for old letters—they established old dates—they read over to me old diaries and old note-books. Bound to me by the same sympathy, they aided me without one selfish or envious thought. Mr. Ruskin gave me a chart to steer by—all he could do—for of Turner's personal history I found he knew little.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

vii

First and foremost, I have to thank that greatest of all dead or living writers on art, for his memoranda, more especially for his kind permission to let me examine and take notes at my leisure of the many hundred sketch-books left by Turner to the nation, and for a quiet inspection of the best of the *twenty thousand sketches* found in the trunks, chests, and portfolios of their great hoarder.

The Rev. Mr. Trimmer (eldest son of the artist's oldest executor, of Marston on Bere, Staffordshire), I have to also warmly and especially thank for a MS. volume of recollections of Turner, whom he had known for forty years. I am deeply indebted to G. Jones, Esq., R.A., another executor, for his MS. volume of Turner reminiscences (especially as connected with his friendship for Chantrey). I also have to express my gratitude to David Roberts, Esq., R.A., for several sheets of valuable anecdotes of his old friend Turner; to J. Griffiths, Esq., of Norwood, an executor, for allowing me to study his large collection of touched proofs by Turner, and for furnishing me with a unique and most valuable index to all Turner's engraved works, an index that cost Mr. Stokes off and on some twenty years' labour.

I also beg to acknowledge the kindness shown me by H. C. Munro, Esq., of Novars, a great Turner collector, and one of the artist's few *compagnons de voyage*, in furnishing me with all he knew, and giving me full access to his matchless collection of Turner's water-colour drawings; to F. Dillon, Esq., for allowing me to see his beautiful collections of Turner etchings; and last, not least, I may mention the great help fur-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

nished me by that celebrated engraver, Mr. John Pye, the possessor of the best extant collection of the “*Liber Studiorum*,” in nearly all states, and a collector for the last thirty years of all matters relating to that *chef-d’œuvre* of Turner’s genius; nor must I forget to also warmly thank Sir Charles Eastlake, President of the Royal Academy, E. M. Ward, R.A., Messrs. Bale and Smith, Mr. Mayall, the eminent photographer, Wilkie Collins, Esq., and the two executors, Messrs. Hardwicke and Cockerell.

Nor can I close my preface without expressing my obligations to all Turner’s engravers—Messrs. Goodall, Cousen, Le Keux, Rawle, Wilmore, Armitage, &c., and not forgetting Mr. S. Lupton, who has from the beginning taken a special interest in the work.

When Mr. Ruskin first wrote to me, encouraging me in my plan of “*A Life of Turner*,” he said, “there is no time to be lost, for those who knew him when young are dying daily.”

I do not think, however, that as yet much information has been lost in that way—Sir John Swinburne is dead, it is true; Mr. Stokes, Turner’s oldest friend and enthusiastic admirer, is also gone, but the laborious catalogues and most of the stories of the latter have been handed to me by survivors.

The Stokes and Hawkins collections of the “*Liber Studiorum*,” it is true, have gone to pieces; but Mr. Pye’s, even a richer and fuller one, still remains intact; Mr. Trimmer, Turner’s preceptor in Greek and pupil in painting, too, is dead, but most of his traditions have been preserved for me by his sons. Mr. Wells also is dead, but some of his reminiscences have been

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

ix

written down for me by his daughter. Mr. Charles Heath and Mr. Charles Turner, both dead, were well acquainted with the artist, but their recollections survive in the memories of others. And thus I trust that a kind Providence has allowed nothing of this great man to perish which might be useful to a future generation, either for incitement or for warning. It is only a Shakspeare who can afford to leave his works behind him as his only monument.

And now a word in conclusion about my predecessors in Turner biography. They are few, indeed, whom I have to thank or to quote from. Mr. Peter Cunningham once wrote a short memoir full of prejudice, and still more full of errors. But for Mr. Burnett's most valuable remarks on Turner's art that accompanied it, it would be worse than valueless. Little else has been printed, if I except a short memoir of Turner in an old "Fraser's Magazine," by Mr. Cyrus Redding, another by Mr. A. Watts, and a still shorter one in some other paper, for which Mr. Windus, of Tottenham, furnished many facts. Mr. Timbs, with little of that courtesy that should distinguish literary men, plying his scissors with his usual industry, has lately cut out a dozen or two of trite or erroneous Turner stories, and published them in a catchpenny form—for which, as partly fulfilling Job's wish, I thank him. To Mr. Wornum, an official of the National Gallery, I am indebted for two or three dates.

In Mr. Ruskin's fifth volume of "Modern Painters" he alludes kindly to my "Life of Turner." I trust that my views of Turner may agree with those of the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

PREFACE.

great exponent of his genius. I have spared none of Turner's faults—I have tried to forget none of his excellences—I have not tried to caricature him as a miser, because I knew that one great work of charity had been the fixed object of his whole life: I could not ridicule him as an anchorite and a misanthrope, because I knew how tenderly he was beloved by his more intimate friends, how sensitive he was to their sufferings, and how deeply he felt their loss.

Yet I have not written this book in the base gladiator spirit of a mere special pleader, but with, I hope, a stern and undeviating regard for truth. I had no motive whatever to warp me. I did not wish to write a eulogy, a fulsome funeral oration, a poem, a riddle, a rhapsody, or a mere saleable time-serving apology. I have tried to paint the man as I really believe he was—an image of gold with clay feet—a creature over whom the sun now shone, now darkened—a great disappointed man, whose ambition was never satisfied, and who in despair of all other pleasure sought out nature, and in her presence felt his only real happiness.

I have not sought to put him on a higher or lower throne than the genius of his great exponent has already placed him, but rather to gather fresh proof of his genius from the records of his personal history. In many respects I certainly do not think his mind was so vast or so harmoniously developed as that of Michael Angelo, Raphael, or Titian. I do not think that his oil pictures were always equal to his water-colour drawings. But I do firmly believe that though often utterly defective in a sense of form, Turner was,

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PREFACE.

xi

taking altogether his quantity, imagination, variety, quality, and originality, the *greatest landscape painter not only England, but the world, ever has and perhaps ever will produce.*

WALTER THORNBURY.

P.S. In a postscript I must also thank Turner's old friend, F. H. Fawkes, Esq., of Farnley Hall, in Yorkshire, for the kind readiness with which he sent me a catalogue of his unique collection of Turner's drawings (chiefly unpublished); and to Mr. Trimmer for his original reminiscences of Lawrence, Gainsborough, &c. I have been much indebted to Mr. Pye also for his admirable and well verified volume on the history of English Art, which, as a treasury of dates, facts, &c., especially as relating to English engraving, cannot be equalled; nor can I help expressing my gratitude to Mr. Ruskin for many passages in the last wonderful volumes of his on "Modern Painters," volumes which, although I often differ from them, seem to me monuments of a genius as versatile and profound as Turner's, and infinitely more logical, clear, and far-seeing.

I only trust that the following pages will at least show the injustice of Mr. Fairholt's assertion, "that all reminiscences of Turner are unpleasant, and only tend to lower the man."

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE CURTAIN RISES	1
CHAPTER II.	
THE LONDON OF TURNER'S BOYHOOD	26
CHAPTER III.	
THE SKY PAINTER	
CHAPTER IV.	
LOVE AND AMBITION	70
CHAPTER V.	
TURNER'S CONTEMPORARIES IN WATER AND OIL	78
CHAPTER VI.	
TURNER AND GIRTIN AT DR. MUNRO'S	91
CHAPTER VII.	
TURNER'S FRIENDLY RIVAL, GIRTIN	101
CHAPTER VIII.	
TURNER, THE DRAWING-MASTER	128
CHAPTER IX.	
RISE AND PROGRESS OF WATER-COLOUR PAINTING IN ENGLAND .	142
CHAPTER X.	
TURNER IN YORKSHIRE	150

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv	CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.	
	CHAPTER XI.	PAGE
TURNER IN SCOTLAND		181
	CHAPTER XII.	
TURNER'S HOME AND FOREIGN TOURS		197
	CHAPTER XIII.	
TURNER'S WORK FOR THE ENGRAVERS		243
	CHAPTER XIV.	
TURNER'S ART LIFE. (PART I.)		257
	CHAPTER XV.	
THE "LIBER STUDIORUM"		269
	CHAPTER XVI.	
TURNER'S ART LIFE. (PART II.)		289
	CHAPTER XVII.	
TURNER'S ART LIFE.—SECOND PERIOD. 1820 TO 1835		302
	CHAPTER XVIII.	
THE POLYPHEMUS.—1829		308
	CHAPTER XIX.	
TURNER'S ART LIFE—CONTINUED		319
	CHAPTER XX.	
THE OLD TÊMÉRAIRE		333
	CHAPTER XXI.	
TURNER'S ART LIFE—CONCLUDED		346
	CHAPTER XXII.	
TURNER'S NOTE-BOOKS AND SKETCHES		350
	CHAPTER XXIII.	
TURNER'S PRICES		386

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05942-8 - The Life of J.M.W. Turner: Founded on Letters and Papers

Furnished by his Friends and Fellow Academicians: Volume 1

Walter Thornbury

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOL. I.

TURNER, FROM THE STATUE PREPARING FOR ST. PAUL'S CATHE- DRAL, BY P. MACDOWELL, R.A.	<i>Frontispiece</i>
TURNER'S BIRTHPLACE, MAIDEN-LANE	p. 2
TURNER'S HOUSE, QUEEN ANNE STREET	166

VOL. II.

TURNER'S HOUSE, CHELSEA	274
TURNER, FROM DANCE'S PORTRAIT	314
TURNER, FROM BAILY'S STATUE	324
THE TURNER GOLD MEDAL, FROM DRAWING BY MACLISE	350