


<p>J.M.W. Turner, <i>Snowstorm:</i> <i>Hannibal and his</i> <i>Army Crossing the</i> <i>Alps,</i></p> <p>1812, oil on canvas, 146 x 238 cm (57 x 94")</p>	<p>initial analysis</p> <p>Turner's engagement with two major debates in the period come to the fore in this painting. The first is the contrast between sublime and tragic landscapes and calm picturesque counterparts. The second is the subject of invasion by powerful armies on smaller groups. The latter for Turner exemplified by the battles between Rome and Carthage, between Edward I and the Welsh and continued in the exploits of Napoleon, and particular to this painting, the invasion of Switzerland. Turner, Joseph Farington and Henri Fuseli visited Jacques-Louis David in 1802 and saw <i>Napoleon Crossing the Alps</i> at his studio in Paris.</p>	<p>The painting combines at least two separate processes of facture. Firstly the landscape and the weather conditions which would probably derive from direct report by Turner in sketches, secondly the depiction of human figures factured in his studio from a variety of drawings of models and sculpture.</p>
	<p>A small orange disc representing the Sun in the upper left section of the painting.</p>	
<p>A large vortex or hollowing area lit by the Sun, cropped by the lefthand edge of the canvas, with the storm clouds dynamically around the top and righthand and the land marking the lower limit and horizon.</p> <p>An overall dynamic effect of the cloud forms providing a sublime expression. It is as if the blue black clouds are in the process of descending upon the group of climbing and partly falling figures below. They are Salassian tribesmen fighting Hannibal's rearguard. (Note 1)</p>	<p>The hollowing and vortex effect in Turner's work is a recurring visual form, copied by many subsequent painters, such as John Martin and Albert Bierstadt.</p>  <p>In the valley of the storm on the distant horizon is the form of an elephant, presumably carrying Hannibal. There is also a fallen elephant seen from behind in the centre foreground</p>	<p>A number of figures on a rocky terrain both under the storm clouds and to the right at a lower level.</p> <p>The figures represent Hannibal's army overwhelmed by the forces of natural phenomena and human conflict. Hannibal led his army over the Maritime Alps in 218 BCE to bring about a surprise attack on the enemy in Italy. A white avalanche descends upon them from the righthand side.</p>
	<p>There are two visual diagonals provided by Turner, one by the rock forms on the right and the other by the light brown ascending slope on the left which leaves the lefthand edge one third above the baseline.</p>	<p>The painting is in the Tate collection, London.</p>
<p>Note 1. The subject derives from Polybius <i>The Histories</i> iii 50-56, Livy <i>The Rise of Rome</i> xxi. 32-37 and explicitly in Turner's own <i>Fallacies of Hope</i> part of which was appended to the painting at its first exhibition.* Both Gray and Turner had been reading Roman literature and Edward Gibbon, <i>The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</i> in six volumes 1776-1788.</p>	<p>* Turner's poem reads: Craft, treachery, and fraud - Salassian force, Hung on the fainting rear! then Plunder seiz'd The victor and the captive, - Seguntum's spoil, Alike became their prey; still the chief advanced. Look'd on the sun with hope; - low, broad, and wan; While the fierce archer of the downward year Stains Italy's blanch'd barrier with storms. In vain each pass, ensanguin'd deep with dead, Or rocky fragments, wide destruction roll'd. Still on Campania's fertile plains - he thought, But the loud breeze sob'd. "Capua's joys beware!"</p>	<p>There is a considerable literature in poetry and fiction showing attention to aspects of the sublime and the Alps, for example Thomas Gray's 1739 tour, Ann Radcliff, <i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i>, 1794, Wordsworth, <i>The Prelude VI</i>, 1806-07, Byron <i>Manfred: A Dramatic Poem</i>, 1816-1817 and Mary Shelley, <i>The Last Man</i>, 1826.</p>