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### Last night's TV



How did Turner make such fine sunsets? With science, finds **Sam Wollaston**

Think of Turner and you think of ... Anthea? No! You think of sunsets right? Plus dramatic skies, daunting crags, wild seas. Well, maybe you need to think again - about machines, technology and industry, too. So says **The Genius of Turner: Painting the Industrial Revolution** (BBC2).

Obviously, Turner embraced steam. There's *Rain, Steam and Speed*, of course. And *The Fighting Temeraire*, the tugboat towing the ghostly sailing ship of war to her grave, the future pulling the past, noise versus silence. Jenny Uglow thinks it's not a sad painting, though. And it's not just about faded glory, says Simon Schama. "The faded glory is being pulled on by an equally tough, glorious, solid, black, energised future," he says. And the nation agrees. *The Fighting Temeraire* is Britain's favourite painting: it makes us happy.

I'm not sure I agree with this man, his biographer, suggesting that the fact none of Turner's numerous shipwrecks is of a steamship might have something to do with his preference for steam over sail. Isn't that just because steamships were less likely to end up on the rocks because they had engines? So there were fewer steamship wrecks and Turner was painting what was there ... but what do I know?

It's not just steam that Turner embraced, but factories, mills, all sorts of industry. He was a chronicler of his time and his time was the industrial revolution. It was the time of science, too, so those sunsets took into account what the astronomer William Herschel was finding out about gases and sunspots back then.

It is hardly surprising that Turner was interested in all that was going on around him in an era when so much was. But it's still fascinating to have it pointed out by all these clever people. A great documentary, that even the unnecessary reconstructions didn't spoil. I didn't know about his cockney accent, though. I can't imagine Turner saying to himself: "Ere, I fink I'll paint misself a John Wayne, innit?"



Turner

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