"The fighting Temeraire,
Built of a thousand trees." [1]

2. GHOSTS OF THE TEMERAIRE

2.1. Phantoms on the Quarterdeck

In order to frame each of the individual stories of the respective transports that I focus on, I first want to found my discourse on one wonderfully evocative, and indeed provocative, vision. Sadly, this vision is not my own. Rather, it derives from the inspiration of a nineteenth century artist who created an image that has become one of the most emblematic of a nation. The artist was Joseph Turner; his vision was the '*Temeraire,*' Figure 2-1.



Figure 2-1. *My Darling – Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851). (Photograph of the image by the Author). The formal name of the picture is: "The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up, 1838."*

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I have to say that from my perspective, Turner's "*The Fighting Temeraire*" is arguably one of the more inspiring, if not the most evocative, images ever created [2]. It normally hangs in Britain's '*National Gallery'* which is situated on one side of London's famous Trafalgar Square. Here, within the Square, and significantly as it turns out, proudly stands Nelson's Column. The painting is clearly one of the gallery's most popular and prized exhibits and has been voted by one poll as Britain's greatest ever painting [3]. Its notoriety is, of course, linked to its unforgettable imagery but as the great American satirist, Damon Runyon would say; "*a story goes with it*," and what a story it is. It is the various levels of this overall narrative that makes the "*Fighting Temeraire*" an iconic representation for my whole book and why I am starting with it.

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2.2. A Personal Perusal

For some time then the *Temeraire* [4] had been one of my very favorite images. I intended that, if I was ever presented with the chance, I would see it in situ. When that opportunity came, I was intrigued to see that upon closer inspection there were what appeared to be shadowy and barely distinguishable images of what might perhaps be people standing on the quarterdeck of the *Temeraire.* Were those figures actually there, or was it just my imagination that suggested that Turner had put in such images perhaps as ghosts of those individuals who had fought on board this legendary vessel? I asked about this possibility at the gallery's inquiry desk and was both surprised and gratified to learn that a whole text had been written about this one painting [5]. In this latter book, I learned that Turner had taken several liberties with

reality (but then what artists do not?). The presence of the sunset was Turner's imposition and the *Temeraire's* masts would not have been present during her last journey. The ship was actually known by her own crew as the 'saucy' *Temeraire*. Thus Turner's reference to the '*fighting Temeraire*' is, to a degree, his own and adds to the poignancy of his vision. Despite the many years that still remained in Turner's career after creating this painting, the critic John Ruskin called this image "*Turner's last great painting*." Turner himself was so attached to it that he refused to sell it and even referred to the painting as "*my darling*." Upon his death, Turner left the painting to the nation. Even today I have still yet to ascertain for certain whether there are indeed figures on the ship itself. However, I very much like to believe that there are. Perhaps this part of my story was even whispered to me by one of these "*phantoms of the quarterdeck*." Whether there truly are people there or not, the painting itself is a wonderful achievement, and that unique success is not confined to one dimension alone.

There are at least three clear and manifest levels of analysis with respect to Turner's image. Let me lay them out. First, there is Turner's immediate image. In this, we can see the mighty ship of the line, one of the last remnants of the great age of sail, as she is ignominiously hauled up to her destruction by some little, small, blackened 'kettle pot' of a tug redolent of the 'new age' of steam [6]. It is the ascendency here of new technology over old that we are asked to witness. Like Turner, we surely remain unconvinced that this new version of technology is necessarily better than that which has preceded it. Turner forces us to ask if this degenerative superposition; that is the nominal 'bad' driving out the 'good' of technology, is always true. For instance, ask

yourself here how much you like speaking with automated phone technologies versus a personal human contact?

It is the final indignity for the *Temeraire* a '*mighty heart of oak*' to find herself helpless under the control of, and subjugated to, the unwanted ministrations of this squat, inelegant and utilitarian little upstart. This is true especially because in her history *Temeraire* had battled successfully against the mightiest enemy warships on the high seas. It is this juxtaposition and our knowledge that this mighty warship is now being dragged to her doom by some little 'kettle-pot' up to some anonymous ship's 'knackers-yard' [7] that rightly stirs our emotion. Like the demise of anything beautiful and courageous there is an inherent tragedy, and Turner has captured and pictured it here.

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2.3. The *Temeraire* at Trafalgar

But there are further levels of insight, indeed many more. It is not only the elegant age of sail which is dying. Most probably however, this is why Turner introduces the factually incorrect but artistically justified appearance of the setting sun as a visual recapitulation of the end of an age; thus dies the remorseful day [8]. However, the *Temeraire* had a personal history well beyond being the icon for the era of wind-based sail technology that she here epitomizes [9]. To understand this fully we need to know the context of her greatest triumph and, in reality, *Temeraire's* only major fleet engagement. This is best viewed, metaphorically speaking, from the decks of another ship we can still see and still physically stand upon ourselves. For today, if we want to, we can

go down to the Naval dockyards in Portsmouth, England and walk upon the decks of H.M.S. *Victory*. The *Victory* was the renowned flagship of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson and led one of the two English lines (*Victory* led the *Weather* column, as opposed to the *Lee* column which was led by Admiral Collingwood on board the *Royal Sovereign*) at the fateful *Battle of Trafalgar* on October 21st, 1805 [10].

The English victory at *Trafalgar* blunted the imminent threat of Napoleon Bonaparte in his aspiration to invade and conquer England, one of the last remaining countries in Europe beyond his grasp. It was the defeat of the French and Spanish navies in the cold waters of the Atlantic that denied the brilliant French militarist his opportunity to put all of Europe under his control. The death of Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson, shot on the decks of the *Victory* during the battle, had been a heavy price to pay. However, this successful naval action ensured Albion's safety for a decade at least and in reality for much longer [11]. Today, the *Victory* is the physical embodiment of this pride as much as is Nelson's Column outside the National Gallery (where the *Temeraire* painting is hung), or even Nelson's tomb in St. Paul's Cathedral each of which commemorates Nelson personally. In one of the typically strange concatenations of history, the *Temeraire's* artist, Turner, is himself also interred in St. Paul's mere yards from Nelson's own burial place.

Therefore, the second level at which we have to look into Turner's painted image concerns the story of how the *Temeraire* 'saved' the *Victory*. When the English flagship *Victory* had broken through the combined French and Spanish line across the bows of Villeneuve's *Bucentaur*, she was subsequently locked up with the

French flagship *Redoubtable*. The issue between these two ships, and indeed the balance of the whole battle, now lay in doubt. With the rate of injury and fatalities experienced on *Victory's* decks, there was the very real and distinct possibility that she would be boarded and taken by the French. The English flagship was *in extremis* and desperate for relief. However, second in line behind the *Victory* came the 'saucy' *Temeraire* in this her one and only fleet action. The French had not reckoned on the bravery of Captain Eliab Harvey [12], his crew, and the 98-Gun vessel under them [13]. Although damaged in a skirmish with the 130-gun, four deck *La Santisima Trinidad*, the *Temeraire's* subsequent and very timely broadside disabled the French flagship and Nelson and the crew of the *Victory* were rescued. The French Captain of the *Redoubtable*, Jean-Jacques Etienne Lucas was in the prime position to record *Temeraire's* timely action. His eye-witness account reported that: "*the three decker (Temeraire), who had doubtless perceived that the Victory had ceased fire and would inevitably be taken, ran foul of the Redoubtable to starboard and overwhelmed us with the point blank fire of all her guns. It would be impossible to describe the horrible carnage produced by the murderous broadside of this ship. More than` two-hundred of our brave lads were killed or wounded by it*" [14]. No wonder the *Temeraire* was later referred to as: "*Pride of England and Terror of France*."

It is no exaggeration to say that it was by the *Temeraire* that the *Victory* was rescued and, indeed, that through the *Temeraire* that victory was won. Following this pivotal moment of the battle, the English subsequently swept the French and Spanish navies from the seas. Although badly damaged by a series of encounters, *Temeraire* still went on to capture two French ships which further enhanced her public reputation and renown. However, this

reputation was perhaps most helped by the fact that Captain Harvey was able to communicate directly with Admiral Collingwood just before the latter sent his earliest news dispatches of the battle back to England. As a result, *Temeraire* stood high in the consciousness of the nation and her name became inextricably linked with glory and victory. Alongside the *Battle of Waterloo*, for which the *Battle of Trafalgar* was the sea-born prelude, *Temeraire*'s action represents one of the very highest water-marks of British military achievement and a peak moment of the birth of the later dominant British Empire [15].

For one hundred years Britain remained unchallenged on the seas and unconcerned on land [16]. This was the dominion that the 'saucy' *Temeraire* had bought with her bravery. She was truly one of Albion's heroes. But like all military heroes, when the guns go silent and the flags are struck, they can become something of an embarrassment. It is more than ironic then, that when the Admiralty decided to retire *Temeraire*, she was formally under the command of Captain Thomas Fortescue Kennedy. By coincidence, it had been Kennedy himself who was *Temeraire's* first lieutenant at *Trafalgar* and who had led the boarding party on to the French ship *Fougeux* to secure *Temeraire's* ultimate victory. He must have been saddened indeed to have had to condemn his old ship to its tragic fate [17].



Figure 2-2: *An illustration of Captain Harvey of the Temeraire fighting off the enemy. The illustrated narrative is derived from Collingwood's distorted early dispatches on the course of the Battle.*

2.4. Transports of Delight

So, the story behind the *Temeraire's* image is not simply the demise of the age of sail. No! The backstory here is the sad and shameful way in which this grand old lady of the fleet, and to whom the very existence of the nation was perhaps owed, is being smuggled up in a surreptitious, 'hole and corner' manner, to Rotherhithe to meet her ignominious end. Turner here is implicitly asking us; is this any way for a nation to treat its heroes [18]? This is, in its essence, one of the main foci of my narrative. For here, I will look at the heroic side of technology. It is about such technologies that we can ask so many questions. Can indeed a technology be heroic? How and when do such technologies, grow, blossom, burgeon, and then almost as suddenly collapse dissolve, and disappear from

the 'stage' of life? Are we humans wedded, self-symbiotically, with our technologies? Or are we actually becoming, as Henry David Thoreau suggested, simply the "*tools of our tools*?" It is these questions that form the foundation and framework for my exposition.

The third and final level of Turner's image, as discussed here, is represented by the sad and lonely demise of each and every one of us, animate and inanimate alike. Unlike the manner of the *Temeraire's* silent and essentially anonymous departure, I look here particularly at technologies that have literally gone out with a bang rather than a whimper [19]. Although I discuss the genesis, evolution, and demise of these specific technologies, there hovers a larger story behind even these general propositions. For each technology sub-serves human needs, wishes, desires, and dreams. And so, my final aim is to elucidate the ways in which such technologies serve to fulfill these human goals. To examine how such 'vessels' take us to the places that we wish to go to, and in the manner we wish to get there; each by providing "*Transports of Delight*." To begin these stories; I start with the story which is closest to us in the present. Subsequently, I work my way back in time to successively older examples. Eventually I will look here to reverse this temporal trend in order to extrapolate from the principles I establish, to provide an understanding of the technological future for us all.



Reference Notes: Ghosts of the Temeraire

[1] From: The Temeraire by Herman Melville.

[2] The official name of the painting is actually: "*The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up, 1838.*"

[3] The poll was conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Channel 4 in association with the National Gallery. See: "Turner's Fighting Temeraire sinks the opposition." Nigel Reynolds, Arts Correspondent, 12:01AM BST 06 Sep 2005. In fact, the poll included any and all paintings in the National Gallery which holds such classics as Van Gogh's "Sunflowers." Thus, technically, the approval of the populous went beyond English paintings alone.
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1497703/Turners-Fighting-Temeraire-sinks-the-opposition.html

[4] A word of French origin, *Temeraire* is often translated as *reckless* or *rash*, but it can also mean *bold* and *brave* or even *audacious* or *fearless*.

[5] see Egerton, J. (1995). *Turner: The fighting Temeraire.* National Gallery: London. And see also: Humphries, P. (1995). *On the trail of Turner.* Cadw: Cardiff; as well as: Bockemuhl, M. (2010) *Turner.* Taschen: Hong Kong. See also: Willis, S. (2009). *The fighting Temeraire: Legend of Trafalgar*. Quercus: London.

[6] Beatson who won the contract to break up the Temeraire for 5,530 Pounds hired two tugs from the *Thames Steam Towing Co*. for this purpose.

[7] Of course this was not an anonymous location. The historical record tells us that John Beatson, who bought the *Temeraire* for scrap, had her towed up from Sheerness to his own Wharf at Rotherhithe, in the Limehouse area of the Thames. In Willis's (2009) wonderful text, he observes that the antithesis of the places of destruction, that is the places of creation, resemble nothing so much as the buidling sites of Gothic cathedrals when he notes: "*The Royal Dockyards were also the focus of the largest skilled communities in the country. Nowhere else could one find such a variety of trades as that which united to build these warships. They were then some of the most sophisticated single structures created by man,*

representing an achievement which has been compared by some historians with the construction of the medieval cathedral." Willis, S. (2009). *The fighting Temeraire.* (p. 99), Quercus: London.

[8] One cannot help but be reminded of Houseman's evocative "May" See: www.chiark.greenend.org.uk/~martinh/poems/housman.html. It ends:

"Ensanguining the skies
How heavily it dies
Into the west away;
Past touch and sight and sound
Not further to be found,
How hopeless under ground
Falls the remorseful day."

[9] *Temeraire* was laid down in 1793 and launched in 1798, being commissioned in March, 1799. She was the second ship of this name in the British Navy. The first had been a French ship captured at the Battle of Lagos in 1759. Like *Titanic*, *Temeraire* was one of three sisters of the *Neptune* Class. The others were HMS *Dreadnought* and HMS *Neptune*. She was a 98-gun second-rate ship of the line. As the setting sun is emblematic of the demise of sail, so the rising moon is representative of the coming age of steam. What Turner means by the waxing moon and dying sun as technical metaphors is very much open to debate.

[10] see Adkin, M. (2005). *The Trafalgar companion.* Aurum Press: London. And also: Pocock, T. (2005). *Trafalgar: An eyewitness to history.* London. The original plan had the *Temeraire* leading the Weather column but this plan was superseded by events and the task of leading belonged that day to *Victory*. Even this was subject to some further dynamics during the actual attack itself, as was reported in the log of the *Conqueror.*

[11] Wooten, G. (1992). *Waterloo 1815*. Osprey: Oxford.

[12] Most interestingly, Harvey was periodically absent from his ship in order to fulfill another role as Member of Parliament (MP) for Essex.

[13] *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Victory*.

[14] This was by no means the end of the conflict. *Temeraire* rammed the *Redoubtable* unseating many of her guns and, now lashed to the Frenchman engaged another enemy ship, the *Fougeux* upon her open, starboard side. Eventually, *Temeraire* was lashed to both the French ships and hand-to-hand and ship-to-ship fighting continued for more than three hours. Sandwiched between *Victory* and *Temeraire*, the French ships eventually surrendered, but only after most of their officers had been killed. *Temeraire* was extracted by the *Sirius* whilst still fighting a newly engaged enemy.

[15] While one can argue that the glory of empire was enjoyed by those who followed, see: Morris, J. (1968). *Pax Britannica: The climax of Empire*. Harvest: San Diego, this was the high point in military terms.

[16] And see: Bonney, G. (2006) *The battle of Jutland 1916*. Sutton: Stroud, England.

[17] For more information, especially about Lt. Kennedy, see: Willis, S. (2009). *The fighting Temeraire: Legend of Trafalgar*. Quercus: London.

[18] http://rense.com/general44/dead.htm (Pentagon Keeps US Dead Out Of Sight).

[19] The quote of course is from T.S Eliot's "*The Hollow Men*" which concludes:

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.



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