



Turner

James Hamilton

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J.M.W. Turner was a painter whose treatment of light put him squarely in the pantheon of the world's preeminent artists, but his character was a tangle of fascinating contradictions. While he could be coarse and rude, manipulative, ill-mannered, and inarticulate, he was also generous, questioning, and humane, and he displayed through his work a hitherto unrecognized optimism about the course of human progress. With two illegitimate daughters and several mistresses whom Turner made a career of not including in his public life, the painter was also known for his entrepreneurial cunning, demanding and receiving the highest prices for his work.

Over the course of sixty years, Turner traveled thousands of miles to seek out the landscapes of England and Europe. He was drawn overwhelmingly to coasts, to the electrifying rub of the land with the sea, and he regularly observed their union from the cliff, the beach, the pier, or from a small boat. Fueled by his prodigious talent, Turner revealed to himself and others the personality of the British and European landscapes and the moods of the surrounding seas. He kept no diary, but his many sketchbooks are intensely autobiographical, giving clues to his techniques, his itineraries, his income and expenditures, and his struggle to master the theories of perspective.

In *Turner*, James Hamilton takes advantage of new material discovered since the 1975 bicentennial celebration of the artist's birth, paying particular attention to the diary of sketches with which Turner narrated his life. Hamilton's textured portrait is fully complemented by a sixteen-page illustrations insert, including many color reproductions of Turner's most famous landscape paintings. Seamlessly blending vibrant biography with astute art criticism, Hamilton writes with energy, style, and erudition to address the contradictions of this great artist.

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