

*'Critics compared his use of paint to blots, batter, pea soup, smoke, a mix of soap and chalk, and the veins on a marble slab. The painting was unsold and remained in Turner's possession.' The National Gallery*

In the eggshell blue above Venice, in the ice cream cloud on a park in France, the storm abates. Even in an English meadow, where the gentry and a hound stand puffed and proud, the weather has held – see the sugar baron posed with a pheasant and a gun. But on through the gilded rooms, the centuries styled in shadow and light, the gold in the straw at Lady Jane's death, and how the upturned axe, whetted to an edge near diamond sharp, pierces the gloom. Before the Turner with a storm now trapped in a frame, the turbulent world at war with the sea. Note: the poor souls doomed on a Calais pier, piling into boats that bump and jostle, the white wave flare and the rolled up sail, the wooden hull swamped and the oarlock rattle. And how the artist works in thick grey paint, cutting up the Channel in a squall. What colour would you mix for a dinghy made of rubber? The life raft ditched on a beach in Kent? It's only a brush stroke, you tell yourself, the faces lit by panic and fear.