The extent to which the sea painters trained in Holland in the seventeenth century influenced British practice hardly needs emphasising. Of these two great maritime nations competing for control of the North Sea both had men and ships, but Holland had the artistic tradition; then, as the balance of power swung to the West, the later development of marine painting became centred in England. From the time when Willem Van de Velde, father and son, changed sides, in 1673, they received Royal patronage. Their British born successors span the eighteenth century and include Peter Monamy, Samuel Scott, John Cleveley (the elder and the younger), Dominic Serres, Charles Brooking and Nicholas Pocock. While there is a discernible progression in the work of these painters they share with their Dutch forebears an understanding of the sea’s changing moods, based on practical experience, and exact attention to the details of the ships’ form and rigging.

A new note of drama, heralding the Romanticism of the nineteenth century, is discernible in the sea paintings of Philip de Loutherbourg. His experience of the theatre encouraged him to emphasise the terrors of shipwreck and war at sea. These crowded and agitated sea scenes were one of the contemporary sources which Turner had in view when he commenced as a sea painter. Another source, and one more relevant to the present essay, was his return to, and direct emulation of, the 17th century Dutch masters. The most famous early instance of this is the so-called Bridgewater Seapiece (The Earl of Ellesmere). The Duke of Bridgewater, a latecomer to collecting, had recently acquired the large painting A Rising Gale by the younger Willem Van de Velde. Becoming aware of Turner’s rising reputation as a painter of seapieces he commissioned him in 1800 to paint him a companion piece. Having carefully studied the

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original Turner set to work to adapt the composition to his own requirements. This he did in a series of at least five studies in a sketch-book which was of special importance to him, and to which he frequently returned for subject-matter. The final result, reflecting Van de Velde’s composition in reverse, was shown at the Royal Academy in 1801 with the title *Dutch Boats in a Gale: fishermen endeavouring to put their fish on board*, and was immediately recognised as a success. Although it was not labelled as a pastiche, its resemblance to its original was so close that Constable remarked that he knew the picture by Van de Velde on which it was formed.

Shortly after this Turner had the opportunity of studying the vast collection of Old Masters assembled in the Louvre. This visit, made in 1802, was one of the most formative in his career, and confirmed his ambitions to be an epic, historical painter. Most of the notes he made concern Poussin, Titian, and the Italian painters. With Rembrandt he was disenchanted – “miserably drawn and poor in expression” – and it took him many years to form a more favourable opinion of him. The only other Dutch painter he mentioned in his notes was