

Romanticism

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1780-1850



Major Precepts of Romanticism

- Imagination
- Nature
- Symbolism & Myth
- Emotions & the Self
- The Romantic Hero
- Paradoxical Combinations
- Criticism of Bourgeoisie and the Philistine
- Self-Consciousness & The Individual
- Relativism



Romantic Period: Overview

- Challenged Neo-Classicism
- It focused on Music, Literature and Painting
- The Social Background was:
 - French Revolution (1789-1799)
 - Napoleon made Emperor (1803)
- Christianity was Replaced by a Love of Nature

In France specifically we see the emergence of political instability with various Governments and various forms of government rising and succeeding another between the absolute monarchy that ends with Louis the XVI in 1789 and Napoleons expansionist empire building which begins in 1851 with a coup d'état and comes to a close in 1870. Amongst these turbulent years we see political outcomes that range from "reign of terror", constitutional monarchy, a republic, a royal restoration and a socialist commune as well as the Napoleonic empire.

A time of change

The Industrial Revolution brought even more division to French Society. The Revolution created a new middle class called the Bourgeoisie. The revolution also created a social class that lived and worked in horrible conditions.

Labourers had gained the right to vote which made the bourgeoisie suspect of them

France experienced a slow change to commercialized agriculture, power driven machinery and mass production. Even by the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of workers were employed outside of industry. Factories were located mainly in a few cities in the northern part of France.

Still, industrialization played a big part in the lives of those living in the nineteenth century. Railways were built, connecting areas of the country and creating the beginnings of nation and regional economies.

The shift to industrialization created uncertain economic prospects for skilled artisans during the nineteenth century. Factories also put pressure on the prices of goods they produced, driving down wages. Because of the high proportion of income consumed by food, a decrease in wages could often push workers to the brink of starvation.

Romanticism

- Romanticism developed as a reaction to the cold, restrained Neo-Classical style of art, but the movement had no one definite style of subject.

Romantic Period: Overview



Painters were concerned with:

- The Power of Nature
- The Nostalgic and Emotion of Man
- Looking Inward
- Looking at Nature as it Really is

Romanticism encouraged

- Imagination and a direct appeal to the emotions
- The exploration of complex concepts such as liberty, survival, hope, heroism and despair.



Théodore Géricault (1791-1824)

- French Painter
- Studied Classical Figure Painting
- Influenced by Rubens, Titian and Michelangelo
- Depicted Epic Historic Events
- Studied Portraiture in London
- Died Age 33

Theodore Géricault

Frail, brooding and sensitive, Géricault was as romantic as a Romantic painter could be. While he began his career with grand military statements for the Emperor Napoleon, it was his later works, with their emotional brutality and raw empathy that captured the hearts of audiences for generations.

His masterpiece, *The Raft of the Medusa* was iconic in the era in which he lived, forging a new emphasis on raw emotion and sharply veering away from the refined compositional studies of Neoclassicism.

Romanticism is sometimes viewed as a reaction to its more serious predecessor, the Neoclassical movement. As Neoclassical artists focused on properly accounting history through close attention to detail, Romantic artists flirted with themes of man's self glorification, man's part in nature, divinity found in nature, and emotion. They were part of a complex multimedia philosophical movement, involving the literary, visual, and intellectual arts.

Théodore Géricault

Title: **The Raft of the Medusa (1819)**



frigate | 'frɪgət | noun

a warship with a mixed armament, generally lighter than a destroyer (in the US navy, heavier) and of a kind originally introduced for convoy escort work.

- *historical* a sailing warship of a size and armament just below that of a ship of the line.

- The story of the wreck of the frigate *Medusa* scandalised the public and acutely embarrassed the new government, but Gericault's strikingly original painting created a sensation. It won a gold medal at the Salon of 1819.

- The Medusa was a French naval vessel that was on course off the coast of Africa before running aground on a sandbar near Mauritania on July 2, 1816. After three days of trying to free the ship from where it was stuck, the crew and passengers took to the ship's six small lifeboats.

The problem was that there were 400 people on board, while the boats only had the capacity to carry approximately 250. As a result, 146 men and one woman were loaded onto a wooden raft that was both shoddily and hastily constructed.

The captain had no experience of commanding a ship at sea, and his incompetence and cowardice led to disaster. With only one bag of biscuits, two casks of water, and several casks of wine, the people adrift experienced a hellish 13 days at sea. There was a great deal of infighting, with many people being thrown overboard, throwing themselves overboard, or cannibalised.

By the time they were finally rescued, only 15 men had survived. This caused a huge scandal at home due to the slow response of the French government in the rescue.

• Composition

The action is arranged in two distinct pyramidal shapes. The diagonal lines lead the eye to two key peaks: the wave that may or may not engulf the survivors on the raft, and the flag in the top right corner that is raised in a last gesture of hope to the ship that may or may not rescue them.

Color palette:

Géricault utilized a somber, dramatic color palette that was characteristic of Romantic painters. As the focus of the painting is the mass of corpses, flesh tones are present in abundance.

Warm shades such as ochre, burnt sienna, umber and deep brown were used in contrast to the deep blue of the stormy sea.

Lighting and tone:

The tone of the painting is as dark as the subject matter. Géricault draws from the Baroque with his lighting scheme, heavy on chiaroscuro and tenebrism, the stark contrast between light and dark.

The light of the sky contrasts sharply with the darkness of the sea and the overall tone of impending doom.



Figure studies:

For the amazingly life-like and eerie quality to the bodies, Géricault worked figure by figure, completing the sketching and painting of each body before moving on to the next one. He had closely studied cadavers in the local morgue, bringing home severed limbs and heads.

Géricault employed live models, mainly friends and assistants, to pose for him in the cadaverous poses. He painted directly from these live models instead of from preparatory sketches.



Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863)



- French Painter
- Influenced by Raphael, Rubens, Géricault and Constable
- Painted in Neoclassical Style
- Painted Historic Events
- Bold Brush Strokes with Vivid Colours
- Avoided Black and Studied Colour Theory

Eugène Delacroix often took his subjects from literature, but he aimed at transcending literary or moral significance by using colour to create an effect of pure energy and emotion that he compared to music.

His *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), inspired by the 1821 play *Sardanapalus* by English Romantic writer Lord Byron, is precisely detailed, but the action is so violent and the composition so dynamic that the effect is of chaos engulfing the immobile and indifferent figure of the dying king.



Eugene Delacroix - The Death of Sardanapal

According to the story, Sardanapalus was the last king of Nineveh, a city in between the Mediterranean Sea and the Caspian Sea (present day Iraq).

He decided to take matters into his own hands after learning that his city was under attack by a rebellious enemy group. Instead of facing a humiliating defeat, Sardanapalus decided he himself would destroy his prized possessions.

His concubines - including his favourite Myrrha, his horses, his slaves would all be burned and destroyed.



Delacroix created the focus of the image in the centre of the canvas, painting the light and most bright colours in the same spot. His brushstroke ensures that the painting is very detailed. Aside from the completely Oriental subject matter, Delacroix continued to rebel against the more typical European style of painting typically seen during his day.

As it was common for paintings to display balance and order, Delacroix decided to paint in the vignette style which called for a strong focus in the centre as the image becomes less defined at the edges.



The focus of *The Death of Sardanapalus* exists at the foot of the bed, where the dead concubine lays across the soft fabric while another is being stabbed by the king's servant. The details around this part of the scene are less detailed and darker.

Tone elicited:

What attracted Delacroix to the story of Sardanapalus was the tragedy it possessed. He created chaos by adding more dead bodies and murders than the original texts suggests. He intended to evoke confusion. The disarray of this oriental scene was a direct contrast to the orderly world of the Europeans.



Brushstrokes:

Classically trained, Delacroix was accustomed to paying close attention to the detail of the line. As his style evolved his brushstrokes got thicker and quicker, but in *Sardanapalus* they remain for the most part tight and precise.

Color palette:

The reds and yellows in this image jump off the canvas, only making the scene all the more chaotic. These bright colours are delicately placed in the centre of the canvas, where all the action is taking place.

Eugène Delacroix

Title: **Liberty Leading the people** (1830)



Through July 28: Liberty Leading the People, Delacroix tells the story of Trois Glorieuses - Three Glorious Days - the Parisian uprising on July 27, 28, and 29 of 1830.

In this artwork Liberty is personified in the form of a vibrant, rebellious, bare breasted woman who leads the people to victory. She carries the flag proudly. Thrilled to have a modern subject to paint, Delacroix took to the canvas with great pride and patriotism. Though he had not taken an active part in the fighting of the revolution he had done his share for his country.

Instead of guns and cannons he used an easel and a paintbrush - he felt it was his duty as a painter to record this event as the revolutionists felt it was their duty to fight.





Composition:

Delacroix main compositional device is the pyramid shape; the figure of Liberty is the peak and the dead fighters below her form the base. This pyramid technique balances out the hectic and crowded canvas.

Color palette:

Delacroix's use of colour is never surface level. He repeats the colour of the French flag to emphasise the power of France and the power of her people.

To connect the heroine Liberty with the fighting people, Delacroix uses the same colour of her dress on the neck tie of a revolutionist and his colors are repeated used throughout the canvas to create unity, representing that of the revolutionists.



Use of light:

Delacroix uses light to illuminate Liberty and to highlight a dead fighter beneath her.

Tone elicited:

This piece conjures up feelings of power, of freedom and of victory while paying tribute to those who died fighting for their cause and country.

Brushstroke:

The emotional rhythm of Delacroix's brushstroke seemed to be a vital part of his originality. In its diversity one can see long and large, continuous strokes as well as small, divided, independent ones.

Homework

Q1

Describe and discuss '*the Raft of Medusa*' with reference to **subject matter, style, composition and treatment of the figure.**

Illustrate your answer

Q2

Discuss Delacroix's painting '*Liberty Leading the People*' with reference to **subject matter, style, composition and treatment of the figure.**

Illustrate your answer