

The Romantic Age

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As I went through the book I found that the art works produced during the Romantic Age were expressive and communicated a great idea of struggle and conflict. The works I chose are "The Raft of the "Medusa", "The Slave Ship," and "The 28th July: Liberty Leading the People." The Romantic Age began in 1800 with Napoleon Bonaparte and ended around 1900 with the Vatican Council.

The first work shows the feeling behind the wreck of the frigate "Medusa" that took place in 1816. Painter and lithographer, Theodore Gericault, was the leader of the French Romantic movement; The Raft of the Medusa was his most ambitious work. In this film we see how he consciously sought for headline public events to provide a subject for a major work that would launch his career. The Medusa, a government vessel, had sunk off the West African coast, and 150 people tried to escape on a raft. After thirteen days, only fifteen were rescued alive. They had had nothing but a few drops of wine - and human meat - to sustain them. The tragedy was blamed on official negligence and created a political scandal. Gericault depicted the instant when the survivors first saw the rescue ship, and he went to extraordinary lengths to achieve authenticity. He interviewed survivors and drew their portraits, he had a model of the raft built, and he even studied corpses in the morgue. Such a choice of subject matter, and the presentation of a dramatic moment, are typical of Romantic painting, and forcefully illustrates the extent of Gericault's break from the balance, chill, and calm of the prevailing Neo-classical school. The great artist Theodore Gericault impressed by the catastrophe created his famous picture "The Raft of the

Medusa": in it he gave his own view of the atmosphere of the disaster. The painting is enormous, sixteen feet high, twenty-three feet, six inches wide.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was an outstanding British landscapist, a great influence on his contemporaries and later on the Impressionist painters of France. Born in London, the son of a barber, Turner showed a precocious talent for drawing. In his teens he earned considerable money by coloring prints for an engraver. He took drawing lessons, made copies in Reynolds' studio and was admitted to the Academy schools. From the age of fifteen on he exhibited at the Royal Academy; by eighteen he had his own studio. He toured the country with Thomas Girtin, sketching picturesque views, ruins and scenes of shipping. Before Turner was twenty printsellers were buying his drawings for reproduction, Artistically he advanced rapidly. His 1799 drawing of Norham Castle, which he considered the beginning of his artistic career, made him an Associate of the Royal Academy, He worked in both watercolors and oils and his reputation began to rival that of the Dutch Sea painters. He also gained a reputation for picturesque classical landscapes with figures. In 1802 he became a full member of the Royal Academy and made his first foreign tour, visiting France and Switzerland. In 1807 he was appointed Professor of Perspective at the Academy. He took a house with studiogallery to exhibit his own pictures, of which he now sold many, especially marines. Turner did much traveling, making many sketches and studying all the while the effects of sea and sky in every kind of weather. He also studied the way the Old Masters had worked with nature and he reached a deep appreciation of their methods, especially those of Claude and Watteau. He

rivalled the former and derived great benefit from the fuzzy delicate manner of the latter.

Turner became increasingly successful, with profitable agreements between himself and various publishers for the reproduction of his works. Some collectors, Ruskin's father, even specialized in his watercolors. Not only did he ask high prices for the oils, but he now refused to sell the more important ones, saving them for his own collection. From about 1834 on he entered his splendid final phase in which he projected a completely personal and original expression of his experience; but the Academicians and recognized critics were unable to appreciate this development, Ruskin being his only articulate champion. The new development reached its climax around 1840 with such works as *The Slave Ship* (Boston), in which he moves further along the path of abstracting the forces of nature into a powerful moving symbol. Rather than the literary and more specifically Romantic symbols of earlier works, such as *The Falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen* or *The Fighting Temeraire*, the painter now transforms his canvas into a dynamically moving symbol of a force without form, a force such as the power of the sea, the movement of rain, the dynamism of a train, the enveloping character of a fog. It is to the "inner meaning of a -given idea" that works such as *Rain, Steam and Speed*, *Slave Ship*, *Whale Ship*, *SnowStorm*, etc., are dedicated, very prolific as well as successful during his lifetime. Turner left a large estate. His greatest contribution was the symbolic landscape, but he had also performed magnificently in the field of classical and Romantic landscapes and seascapes. His sense of movement and atmosphere mark a full step forward

in the development of open-air painting and consequently toward the Impressionism of the 1860's and '70's.

Delacroix, Eugene, 1798–1863, French painter. Delacroix is considered the foremost painter of the Romantic Movement in France; his influence as a colorist is inestimably great.

He studied in Guerin's studio with Gericault, who became a major influence on his work. Delacroix enriched his neoclassical training with acute attention to the works of Rubens, Michelangelo, Veronese, and the Venetian school, and later Constable, Bonington, and the English watercolorists. When his first major work, *The Bark of Dante*, had been exhibited in the Salon in 1822 and purchased by the government, he was, to his own surprise, recognized as the leader of the opposition to the neoclassical school of David. In temperament and choice of subjects he was a romantic, as revealed by his dramatic interpretation of scenes from mythology, literature, and political, religious, and literary history.

In 1824 Delacroix painted much of his *Massacre at Chios*. The violence of the subject matter and ravishing color of this work and of *The Death of Sardanapalus* were heavily condemned by some critics. In England in 1825 he spent several months-absorbing English painting and making numerous studies of horses. As a tribute to Byron and the Greek War of Independence he painted *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi*.

The four months Delacroix spent in Morocco in 1832 provided him with visual material that he drew upon for the rest of his life. There he filled seven fat notebooks with brilliant watercolor sketches and notes. *Women of Algiers* and

The Jewish Wedding revealed his continuing fascination with the exotic. His powerful Entrance of the Crusaders into Constantinople is a compelling, epic work of history painting.

Delacroix's other major sources were the works and lives of major literary figures. In 1820 he made 17 bizarre and exciting lithographs for Goethe's Faust. He used Shakespeare often in several. Turbulent scenes from the plays and poems of Byron, from the novels of Scott and from a number of other literary works also inspired him. He also created many strong paintings on religious themes.

Delacroix's self-portrait reveals a thin, dynamic, yet reserved countenance. He also portrayed many notable contemporaries, including Paganini and, in 1838, his close friends Chopin and George Sand. Of his animals in motion, the watercolor Tiger Attacking a Horse and The Lion Hunt are characteristic. During the last three decades of his life he secured numerous public commissions. His decorations in the Palais Bourbon, the Palais de Luxembourg, and the Church of Saint-Sulpice are examples of his genius as a muralist. His work is best represented in the Louvre.

To depict the theme of man's strive toward survival Theodore Gericault utilizes artistic elements such as the overall feeling of the painting, arrangement, symmetry, and color and light comparisons. The unsettling mood is clearly visible through the contorted figures, as they struggle with the harsh conditions. In the painting there is implied motion in the figures by strong dissimilarities in their positions. The composition appears to reach up because of the seated and

standing people that seem to be grasping for something up above. The topmost figure waving the cloth acts as the height of emotion and the hope of rescue. The view of the raft is separated into two parts each forming triangles. To avoid an unbalanced composition Gericault overlapped the triangles. The left most triangle contains those dying or near death and represents despair and despondency. In contrast the right triangle encloses the hopeful people reaching toward rescue. Many of the figures are gazing or motioning towards the figures holding the cloth, which brings your attention to the focus of the painting. One of the most effective ways Gericault portrays the stormy emotional atmosphere of the painting is through contrasting the lighted horizon near the rescue boat with the dark clouds in the sky.

The reasons that “The Raft of the “Medusa”” fits into the romantic age is by Gericault’s use of dramatic anatomic images, dramatic light dark color illustrations. The inequities in French society, used man's fight for survival as a recurring theme, he shows great emphasis on emotion, and he concentrates on reality rather than idealism. Romanticism for example, is characterized by freedom of form and spirit. It places a strong emphasis on feeling and originality.

These three works have been influential and emotional throughout the years. These paintings have made a great impression on my life and I enjoyed learning about the Romantic Age. The realism and emotion that went into every artist’s plan, the sheer time it took for the artist to plan their work is utterly amazing.

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