Art in Literature, Literature in Art in 19th Century France

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations vii

Preface xi

Introduction 1
The Quill and the Brush

Part I: From Revolution to Revolution (1789–1848)

Chapter One 8
David and the Classical Tradition

Chapter Two 30
Illustration-Revolution

Chapter Three 57
Birth of the Art Novel and Development of the Literary Myth of the Artist

Chapter Four 84
Romanticism and the Sister Arts

Part II: The Road to Independence (1850–1880)

Chapter One 108
Realism: Literature, Art and Society

Chapter Two 135
Manet and his Writers

Chapter Three 161
Impressionism and Literature

Chapter Four 182
Literature and Impressionism

Part III: Fin-de-siècle (1880–1900)

Chapter One 202
Post-Impressionism and Literature

Chapter Two 220
Symbolism and a New Set of Literary Standards

Chapter Three 240
Huysmans's *A Rebours*: From Art Novel to Artist Novel

Chapter Four 261
Art Nouveau and the Relationship Between Text and Image

Conclusion 277

Bibliography 279

Index 295

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Part I

Fig. 1-1. Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of Horatii,* 1784. Oil on canvas, 330 x 425 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. INV3692. (C) RMN / Gérard Blot / Christian Jean.

Fig. 1-2. Jacques-Louis David, *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons,* 1789. Oil on canvas, 323 x 422 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. INV3693.(C) RMN / Gérard Blot / Christian Jean.

Fig. 2-1. Eugène Delacroix, *The Barque of Dante,* 1822. Oil on canvas, 189 x 246 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. INV3820. (C) RMN / Droits reserves.

Fig. 2-2. Eugène Delacroix, *Hamlet and the Ghost,* 1843. Lithograph, second state, 25.7 x 19 cm, Musée National Eugène Delacroix, Paris, France. MD2008-12. (C) RMN / Gérard Blot.

Fig. 2-3. Eugène Delacroix, *Hamlet and Horatio in the Graveyard,* 1839. Oil on canvas, 29.5 x 36 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France. RF1942. (C) RMN / Thierry Le Mage.

Fig. 4-1. *Frontispiece* in *L'Artiste,* 1831. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Littérature et Art-Z-5434-UC1.

Fig. 4-2. Victor Hugo, *Le Pendu "Ecce"*, 1854. Brown ink wash, white gouache highlights, 52.4 x 33.8 cm, Musée du Louvre, D.A.G., Paris, France. RF23314. (C) RMN / Michèle Bellot.

Fig. 4-3. Victor Hugo, *Frontispiece*, 1866, in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. Pen, brush, brown ink, wash, white and red gouache and green watercolour, 19.2 x 25.4 cm, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Manuscrits occidentaux-NAF 24454-FOL. 2.

Fig. 4-4. Victor Hugo, *La Durande*, 1866, in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. Pen, brush, brown ink, wash, and white gouache highlights, 19.2 x 25.1 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Manuscrits occidentaux-NAF 24545-FOL. 85.

Fig. 4-5. Victor Hugo, *The Octopus*, 1866, in *Les Travailleurs de la mer*. Pen, brush, brown ink and wash, 37.5 x 25.9 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Manuscrits occidentaux-NAF 24545-FOL. 382.

Part II

Fig. 1-1. Gustave Courbet, *After dinner at Ornans*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 314 x 663 cm. Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille, France. Inv.P.522. (C) RMN / Philipp Bernar.
Fig. 1-2. Jean-François Millet, *The Gleaners*, 1857. Oil on canvas, 83.5 x 110 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. RF592. (C) RMN (Musée d'Orsay) / Jean Schormans.
Fig. 2-1. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 130.5 x 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. RF644.(C) Musée d'Orsay, Dist. RMN / Patrice Schmidt.
Fig. 2-2. Edouard Manet, Illustration of Stephane Mallarmé's translation of Edgar Poe's *The Raven* (Paris: Richard Lesclide, 1875). Lithograph, 54 x 35.5 cm. Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-48033816
Fig. 2-3. Edouard Manet, Illustrations of Stephane Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun* (Paris: A. Derenne, 1876). Frontispiece / 2nd engraving. Wood-engraving, 31cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Réserve des livres rares-RES 4-Z DON-211 (5).
Fig. 2-4. Edouard Manet, *Portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 27.5 x 36 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. RF2661. (C) RMN (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.
Fig. 3-1. Claude Monet, *Au bord de l'eau à Bennecourt*, 1868. Oil on canvas, 81.5 x 100.7 cm. Potter Palmer Collection, 1922.427, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, United States. Photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.
Fig. 3-2. Berthe Morisot, *Reading*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 71.7cm. Gift of the Hannah Fund, 1950.89. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, United States.
Fig. 3-3 Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Frontispiece* for Stephane Mallarmé's *Pages*, 1891, (Brussels: E. Deman, 1891). Etching, 19.7 x 10.5 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France. Réserve des livres rares-RES-4-Z DON-211.
Fig. 3-4. Edgar Degas, *Interior*, c.1868–69. Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 114.3 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, United States. The Henry P. McIlhenny Collection in memory of Frances P. McIlhenny, 1986.
Fig. 3-5. Edgar Degas, *Illustration for Halevy's La Famille Cardinal, Conversation*, 1880–83. Monotype, 18.4 x 14.2 cm. Gift of the Print Club of Cleveland in honour of Henry Sayles Francis, 1967.167. Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, United States.
Fig. 4-1. Stanislas Lepine, *Paris, The Pont des Arts*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 39.37 x 60.01 cm, Musée du Petit-Palais Paris, France. INV84. (C) RMN / Agence Bulloz.
Fig. 4-2. Claude Monet, *La promenade, La femme à l'ombrelle,* 1875. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Collection of Mr. And Mrs. Paul Mellon, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., United States. Image courtesy of National Gallery of Art. Washington.

Part III

Fig. 1-1. Vincent Van Gogh, *Still life with open Bible,* 1885. Oil on canvas, 65 x 78 cm.Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands. (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)
Fig. 1-2. Vincent Van Gogh, *Oleanders*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 60.3 x 73.7 cm. Gift of Mr. And Mrs. John L. Loeb, (62.24) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.
Fig. 1-3. Vincent Van Gogh, *Still life with a statuette*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm. Collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.
Fig. 1-4. Vincent Van Gogh, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet Seated at a Table. Auvers-sur-Oise*, 1890. Oil on canvas. Private Collection. Photo © Christie's Images/ The Bridgeman Art Library.
Fig. 2-1. Gustave Moreau, *Oedipus and the Sphinx*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 206.4 x 104.8 cm. Bequest of William H. Herriman, (21.134.1) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, United States. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.
Fig. 2-2. Gustave Moreau, *Orpheus,* 1865. Oil on canvas, 155 x 99.5 cm. (C) RMN (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.
Fig. 2-3. Odilon Redon, *Frontispice* for Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, 1890, (Brussels: E. Deman, 1891). Photogravure, 44,2 x 30,5 cm (page). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, France. Reproduction-RESERVE DC-354 (11)-BOITE FOL.
Fig. 3-1. Gustave Moreau, *Salomé Dancing before Herod*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 144 x 103.5 cm. The Armand Hammer Collection. Gift of the Armand Hammer Foundation. Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, United States.
Fig. 3-2. Rodolphe Bresdin, *Le Bon Samaritain*, (The Good Samaritan) 1861. Lithograph on chine colle; primary paper and thick, slightly textured plate paper, 75.6 x 60.3 cm, Brooklyn Museum, United States. Gift of Clara De Saldern, 33.58. Brooklyn Museum photograph, 2004.
Fig. 3-3. Odilon Redon, *Head of spider in a body of spider.* Lithograph, 23,8 x 31,3 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. (C) RMN (Musée d'Orsay) / Jean-Gilles Berizzi.
Fig. 3-4. Odilon Redon, *Landscape at daybreak*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 38.4 x 55.3 cm. MOMA, New York, United States. Gift of the Ian Woodner Family Collection. Acc. n.:230.2000. © 2011. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York / Scala, Florence.
Fig. 4-1. Jules Chéret, *Folies-Bergères, La Loïe Fuller*, 1893. Colour lithograph, 123.2 x 87.6 cm. Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library.
Fig. 4-2. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Moulin Rouge, La Goulue* 1891. Lithograph printed in four colors; three sheets of wove paper, 189.99 x 116.51 cm. Musée Toulouse-Lautrec, Albi, France.
Fig. 4-3. Alphonse Mucha, *Gismonda at the Theatre de la Renaissance*, 1894. Colour lithograph, 216 x 74.2 cm, Mucha Trust/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

Fig. 4-4. Théophile Steinlen, *Le Chat Noir*, 1896. Colour lithograph, 135.9 x 95.9 cm, Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France / Archives Charmet/ The Bridgeman Art Library.

PREFACE

"Life gets in the way"; that's what I always tell my students when life does get in the way of their academic achievement. But this time life got in my way. This must have been one of the most challenging years of my life. After more that 9,000 earthquakes and aftershocks this book is finally finished. Our little world in the Canterbury region has been turned upside down and the very fabric of the city we used to live in is now full of holes. People all around me are doing their best to recover, activate vacant sites, and to "keep calm and carry on".

Because of these circumstances, people's support has been even more crucial to this project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the individuals who helped this book make its way to the printers. First and foremost I would like to thank Mikael and Maxime for their unwavering support, enthusiasm, and extreme patience. I would also like to thank Melinda Johnston for her incredible copy-editing skills and her perseverance, Douglas Horrell for his invaluable help with all things image-related, Aaron Beehre for his creative vision, and Carol Koulikourdi and Amanda Millar for their patience and support. I would like to thank my friends for glasses of wine and a listening ear and my colleagues for being so understanding and supportive. I would also like to thank Ségolène Le Men and Philippe Bordes for being such inspiring professors and Virginia Spate for her support and a memorable dinner in Paris. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Canterbury College of Arts Research Fund for their financial support for this research and the illustrations accompanying this book.

INTRODUCTION

THE QUILL AND THE BRUSH

> C'est, du reste, un des diagnostics de l'état spirituel de notre siècle que les arts aspirent, sinon à se suppléer l'un l'autre, du moins à se prêter réciproquement des forces nouvelles.[1]
>
> However, it is one of the diagnostics on the spiritual state of our century that arts aspire, not to substitute each other, but to, at least, lend each other new strength.[2]
>
> —Charles Baudelaire (1863)

The traditional relationship between painting and literature underwent a profound change in nineteenth-century France. Painting progressively asserted its independence from literature as it liberated itself from narrative obligations whilst interrogating the concept of subject matter itself. Simultaneously the influence of art on the writing styles of authors increased and the character of the artist established itself as a recurring motif in French literature. The history of the relationship between painting and literature converged toward this breaking point.

In eighteenth-century France there was a complete assimilation of painting and poetry as "ouvrage de l'esprit". As the Abbott Charles Batteux (1713–1780) noted:

> Les deux arts (peinture et poésie) ont entre eux une si grande uniformité qu'il ne s'agit, pour les avoir traités tous deux à la fois, que de changer les

---

[1] Charles Baudelaire, "L'œuvre et la vie d'Eugène Delacroix" in *Curiosités esthétiques, L'Art romantique et autres œuvres critiques* (Paris: Bordas, 1990), 424.
[2] Unless otherwise stated, all the translations in this volume are the author's own.

> noms et de mettre peinture, dessin, coloris, à la place de poésie, de fable et de versification.[3]

Art writers and critics commonly misinterpreted "Ut pictura poesis" – the formula that, since the time of Horace, had been the basis for a parallel view of the arts – as the affirmation of the supremacy of literature over the visual arts. This brought an attendant subordination of painting to literature. To be a good painter, one needed to be a poet. Therefore, during the Enlightenment period, in the evaluation of an artwork, supremacy was given to the subject matter. Painting gradually fought against this subordination, to reach its independence in the nineteenth century, when the rivalry of the arts was marked by a pull between iconophobia and iconophilia.[4] On the other hand, occurrences of the incursion of painting in the literary field were already found in eighteenth-century literature as art criticism developed into a legitimate literary activity.[5]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the French cultural landscape was ready for the progressive independence of the literary and artistic field from institutional and bourgeois dogmas. For Jean-Paul Sartre the process of autonomisation of literature from bourgeois ideology was completed about halfway through the nineteenth century: "Après 1850 il n'y a plus moyen de dissimuler la contradiction profonde qui oppose l'idéologie bourgeoise aux exigences de la littérature."[6] According to Pierre Bourdieu, in nineteenth-century France there was a progressive political, religious and institutional liberation of all cultural products.[7] The process of autonomisation of the visual arts was slower but soon followed. The independence of cultural products from bourgeois ideology and state

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[3] "Both arts (painting and poetry) have such a great uniformity that to speak of both at once, one only needs to change the names and replace poetry, fable and verse by painting, drawing and colours." Abbot Charles Batteux quoted in Louis Hautecoeur, *Littérature et peinture en France du XVIIIe au XXe siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), 20.

[4] This was particularly true of the Romantic generation. See James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 91–94.

[5] See for example the study of Elisabeth Lavezzi, *Diderot et la Littérature d'Art: aspects de l'intertexte des premiers Salons* (Orleans: Paradigme, 2007).

[6] "After 1850 there were no more ways of hiding the deep contradiction opposing bourgeois ideology and the requirements of literature." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 153.

[7] Pierre Bourdieu, "Le marché des biens symboliques" in *L'Année sociologique*, no. 22 (1971): 52. Bourdieu was the first to offer a systematic theory of the artistic field (even though it was mostly literary) and explained the social and cultural context that allowed the process of autonomisation of literature.

domination brought with it the beginnings of the competition between the visual and literary arts as they fought for the domination of the artistic field, thereby contributing to the separation of the fields of art and literature.

Contemporary approaches and the current practice of interdisciplinary studies in French art and literature tend to take a theoretical approach. Instead, this book proposes to look at the relationship between art and literature, by focusing on specific artworks and books. By means of a series of case studies, chosen from key moments throughout the nineteenth century, our aim is to provide a focused analysis of specific examples of this relationship, revealing both its multifaceted nature as well as offering a panorama of the development of this ongoing and increasingly complex cultural relationship.[8]

As Jean Seznec noted:

> The main question is always to establish and elucidate a connection between a text and a work of art. The connection, however, is more or less remote, more or less meaningful; therefore according to the circumstances it will have to be considered from a different angle, and at a different level.[9]

Therefore a single interdisciplinary methodology couldn't suit the diversity of intermedial relationships presented in this book. This is why we have decided to vary our methodological approach in response to each case study's specificity. The exploration of parallel subject matter, while necessary, has proven to be inadequate at producing convincing results and needs to be completed with other tools of analysis. From socio-historical contextual studies to Roman Jakobson's intersemiotic translation, from Lilianne Louvel's tones, rhythm and speed studies to Barthes's circularity of codes, from theories surrounding the study of *ekphrasis* and pictorial writing to Gérard Genette's transtextual studies applied to intermediality, this variety of approaches allows us to unlock the different

[8] We have decided to focus the literary aspect of this book on novels and short stories rather than poetry because the nineteenth century was the century of the expansion and popularisation of the novel but also because there is already an excellent publication covering poetry. See David Scott, *Pictorialist Poetics: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[9] Jean Seznec quoted in Helen Osterman Borowitz, *The Impact of Art on French Literature: from de Scudéry to Proust* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 32.

levels of relationship existing between art and literature in nineteenth-century France.

The first part of this book focuses on the period between the 1789 and the 1848 revolutions and looks at how the traditional hierarchy between literature and art was being challenged even before the autonomisation of the artistic field. The first chapter is focused on Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) and his ambiguous relationship with the Classical tradition. Analysing a number of his most renowned paintings and the level of connection with their literary sources, we look at the ways in which David used literary texts and how he subverted the illustrative and inflexible tradition of history painting imposed by the *Académie Royale* in France. In Chapter Two we consider how the practice of Romantic illustration revolutionised the way texts were being read, what texts were being illustrated and painted, and how this contributed to the establishment of alternative literary sources; the new Classics. We make an in depth study of the relationship that Eugène Delacroix's (1798–1863) paintings and prints had with William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) play *Hamlet* (1599–1601). In Chapter Three we explore the birth of the art novel and look at the establishment and popularisation of the myth of the artist through the close study of Mme Germaine de Staël's (1766–1817) *Corinne* (1807) and Honoré de Balzac's (1799–1850) *Unknown Masterpiece* (1831). Chapter Four is focused on the essential Romantic concept of the "sister arts" and looks closely at Victor Hugo's (1802–1885) pictorial practice, in particular his illustrations for *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866).

The second part of the book explores how the visual arts gradually acquired their independence from the text during the 1850–80 period, while at the same time literature increasingly looked to the visual arts for inspiration. In the first chapter we study different strands of realism in art and literature and explore how artists working with different media responded to their changing social environments and to each other. From Jean-François Millet's (1814–1875) and George Sand's (1804–1876) sentimental take on rural life representing an ideal truth, to Gustave Courbet's (1819–1877) and Balzac's positive realism, art and literature looked in the same direction. Chapter Two is dedicated to the close study of a key figure in the evolution of relationship between art and literature; Edouard Manet (1832–1883). Looking at his illustrative practice as well as his portraits of writers, we look at the new authority given to the image and reestablish Manet as a literary artist. In Chapter Three we investigate the difficult relationship between the Impressionist painters and literature. From a failed illustrative project to the quasi-absence of literary subject matter within their practice, the Impressionists had changed focus. The

traditional narrative was deserted and supplanted by a deep concern for modernity and modernism. Chapter Four includes an exploration of the other side of that relationship, looking at how literature fed on Impressionism, and we consider the influence of painting on Emile Zola's (1840–1902) *The Masterpiece* (1886).

The final part of the book is focused on the Fin-de-siècle (1880–1900) and the final separation of the literary and visual fields. In Chapter One we look closely at Vincent Van Gogh's (1853–1890) relationship with books and in particular his representation of novels in still lives and portraiture. We explore how novels became part of the construction of the overall meaning of the pictorial composition and how Van Gogh's paintings offered an interpretation of the literary texts. In Chapter Two we look at how Symbolism established a freer approach to a new set of literary standards, looking in particular at Gustave Moreau's (1826–1898) new approach to myth and classical subject matter and Odilon Redon's (1840–1916) adaptations of Charles Baudelaire's (1821–1867) *Fleurs du mal* (1857). Chapter Three is a study of Joris-Karl Huysmans's (1848–1907) *A Rebours* (1884) and the shift from art novel to artist novel. His use of reference to visual material marked the final separation of the fields of art and literature. Finally, Chapter Four explores Art Nouveau posters and the move from the problem of the relationship between visual arts and literary narrative to the issues of the relationship between word and image. Looking at posters by Jules Chéret (1836–1932), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), Alphonse Mucha (1860–1939), Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947) and Théophile Steinlen (1859–1923), we analyse the way in which the dialogue between word and image influenced the final impact of the poster.

From Victor Hugo using both ends of the quill to write, draw, and paint, to the fin-de-siècle duel between the quill and the brush for the domination of the artistic field, the relationship between art and literature was forever altered in nineteenth-century France.

PART I:

FROM REVOLUTION TO REVOLUTION (1789–1848)

CHAPTER ONE

DAVID AND THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

The 1789 Revolution deeply altered the French social and artistic environment. A great mental divide was created between the *ancient régime* then perceived as corrupt and immoral and the new France promoting ethical principles based on Enlightenment philosophy.

During the pre-revolutionary period, there was a generally increased interest in all things Classical. The Enlightenment philosophers promoted the study of Greek and Roman cultures as an essential part of the education of the younger generation; the 'Grand Tour' was never as popular among the European elites as when Pompeii and Herculaneum were rediscovered.[1] Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717–1768) *History of Ancient Art* (1764) was one the most influential books of the period.[2] The first generation of Neo-classicists focused on aesthetic aspects of artworks rather than on their moral content. This "purely mercantile" art, concerned mostly with fashion and responding to a blossoming art market, developed into a sober and morally driven form of Neo-classicism that reflected the changes brought about by the French Revolution.[3] The Revolution didn't bring an attendant drastic change of aesthetic references; the Classical references, artistic and literary, stayed more or less the same. However, the perceived function of art was radically altered; art was no longer created for the pleasure of the wealthy but to educate the public. The moral message became paramount and the lightness of the first generation of Neo-classicists was replaced by a dark austerity, what art

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[1] Albert Boime, *Art in the Age of Revolution 1750-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 61.

[2] There was however a great variety of interpretations of Winckelmann's theories. Alex Potts in his article "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution" noted the disjunction between Winckelmann's theories and David's practice and understanding of them. See Alex Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution," *History Workshop*, no. 30 (Autumn 1990): 1–21.

[3] Boime, *Age of Revolution*, 137.

historian Robert Rosenblum called the "Neoclassic Stoic" style.[4] Looking to the Classical past became an exercise in self-improvement. Following in the footsteps of Denis Diderot (1713–1784), Jacques-Louis David made this aim clear:

> Antiquity has never ceased to be the great school for modern painters, the source of the beauties of their art. We seek to imitate the ancients in the genius of their conceptions […] can we not take this one step further, and imitate them also in their morals and the institutions established by them in order to bring the arts to a state of perfection?[5]

Classical ideas, stories and aesthetics became tools to morally and politically improve the new France as well as to create a new visual identity for the country. Classical art was used as a symbol of political regeneration.

The *Académie Royale* had dominated the art world since its establishment in 1648 with its strict structure and its long established teaching regimen delivered through the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts.*[6] This rigid system had already been criticised by artists and philosophers alike. Antoine Quatremère de Quincy (1755–1849) went so far as to declare that at the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts*, "there is very little true teaching at all."[7] The French Revolution hastened the fall of the *Académie* as it was closely associated with the monarchy. By 1793 the *Académie* was shut down and rebranded as the *Institut*.[8] This new identification reinforced the idea that art was here to serve the State and therefore the newly instated political regime. The Republic introduced the *concours*, a competition encouraging artists to depict significant events from the foundations and victories of the Republic. Interior Minister Pierre Benezech (1749–1802) described the intended programme as such:

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[4] Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 50. Rosenblum also placed the start of the French moralising current in 1761 with the works of Jean-François Marmontel (1723–1799) and Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725–1805). Ibid., 51.

[5] Jacques Louis David, "The Painting of The Sabines," in *Art in Theory 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 1120–21.

[6] Philip Conisbee, *Painting in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1981), 11.

[7] Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, "On the System of Teaching," in Harrison et al., *Art in Theory*, 712.

[8] It later returned to being called the *Académie de peinture et de sculpture*.

> Liberty invites you to depict her triumphs. Transmit to posterity the actions that must honour your country. The subjects you draw from ancient history have multiplied themselves around you. Be proud and nationalistic; paint our heroism, and the generations that follow cannot reproach you for not appearing French during the most remarkable epoch in our history.[9]

There was, as a consequence, a renewed interest in the formal education offered by the *Institut*.[10] After the Revolution, artists independent of the *Académie* demanded that the French government establish an open annual Salon to replace the academic Salon. Their wish was granted against the will of the *Académie*. As a result the academic painters had to compete for public attention with a wide range of newcomers. But as a gesture of conciliation, the control over the Salon and its jury system was given to the *Académie*.[11] So even though the *Académie* was adapted to the new regime, it maintained a firm control over the art world well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

David had a tumultuous early relationship with the *Académie Royale* and this may explain in part his attitude towards Classical texts.[12] Early in his career, while under the teaching of Joseph-Marie Vien (1716–1809), David couldn't see what the Classical tradition had to offer. He notably

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[9] David O'Brien, *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting and Propaganda Under Napoleon* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), 79.

[10] In the period between 1795 and 1804 the number of artists training at the *Institut* doubled compared with the period between 1785 and 1794. See Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Changes in the French Painting World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 43.

[11] The *Académie* maintained control over the salon jury system until 1881. Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Phaidon, 1971), 12–17.

[12] In 1774, after failing in 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773, David won the *Prix de Rome*. He developed suspicions of a plot to deny him the prize that made him extremely hostile to the *Académie Royale*. Philippe Bordes noted: "His dissatisfaction with the French academy had been steadily increasing since his return from Rome in 1781, when the St Roch was refused as his morceau d'agréement because it had not been painted in France; this had been followed by the tense exchanges over the dimensions of the Horatii, the harsh treatment of his pupils at the 1786 Grand Prix de Rome contest, the limited freedom in the choice of subject matter for the crown commissions, and any number of 'despotic' decisions made by the officers administering the academy." Philippe Bordes, "Jacques-Louis David's Anglophilia on the Eve of the French Revolution," *The Burlington Magazine* 134, no. 1073 (August 1992): 485.
David also led the dissident art students in 1789–90 and his influence was essential in the closure of the *Académie* three years later.

said: “L’antique ne me séduira pas, il manque d’action et ne remue pas.”[13] Paradoxically, by the 1780s he had created a series of history paintings that came to embody Neo-classicism. Classical literature became essential to his work. His education had been centred on Classical literature, history and philosophy as he read and studied authors such as Sallust, Livy, Horace, Cicero and Plutarch. David was also an avid theatre-goer and had seen plays such as Voltaire’s (1694–1778) *Brutus* (first performed in 1730), Pierre Corneille’s (1606–1684) *Horace* (first performed in March 1640) and Jean Racine’s (1639–1699) *Andromache* (first performed in 1667) that brought Classical ideas back into the modern era.[14] David had a particular keenness for tragedy and as Mark Ledbury noted:

> At the same time Ducis and other tragic writers were reinvigorating tragedy via the resources of painting, David seemed to enthusiastically embrace the resources of tragedy as a support for his vision of history painting and to adopt tragedy as a strategy of differentiation. He clearly became convinced that a tragic mode, one which would privilege peripety, recognition, and a gestural choreography attuned to the rhetoric of the tragic stage would enable him to move beyond the prevailing modes of pictorial engagement with mythology and find an alternative to the epic mode that so gripped him in his Roman years.[15]

But David’s strategy to find an alternative take on Classical themes went further than the adoption of a tragic mode. In his work he often showed a subtly dissident way of using texts that set him apart from the descriptive and prescriptive tradition of history painting imposed by the *Académie Royale* in France. David moved away from the traditional narratives and the prescribed scenes and chose to represent the untold moments: the instants just before or just after the key heroic moment or simply the scenes deemed negligible by previous generations of painters. He also sometimes compressed the texts and complicated the web of references adding multilayered textual and visual references.

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[13] “Antiquity will not seduce me, it lacks action and movement.” David quoted in Walter Friedlaender, *David to Delacroix* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 13.

[14] See Hamilton Hazlehurst, “The Artistic Evolution of David’s Oath,” *The Art Bulletin* 42, no. 1 (1960): 59–63.

[15] Mark Ledbury, “Visions of Tragedy: Jean-François Ducis and Jacques-Louis David,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 37, no. 4, ‘Artistic Interactions’ (Summer 2004): 558.

Deviation from Literary Sources: The Untold Moment

One of the ways in which David used Classical sources was by deviating from the original text and treating it as a starting point rather than a definite version of the story. David rejected the traditional approach to those texts and instead of representing the conventional key moment, he chose to represent the untold moment. In a quest for the Winckelmannian “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur”, and following Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s (1729–1781) belief that the climactic moment of a story is often best represented using the moment just before (leaving the imagination free), David often rejected the main glorious and often bloody grand action to privilege the moments just before or just after that event.[16] This wasn’t an unusual way of using Classical texts in literature. The eighteenth century saw many literary adaptations of Classical texts, but this was a highly unusual way of using text in painting, as the words were seen as being the solid ground on which to build a visual story. In its teaching, the *Académie* promoted an in depth knowledge of Classical texts; the closer the artist stayed to the texts the more successful a painter he or she was seen to be.

By choosing to focus on the untold moment David used the culture of his viewers to reconstruct the story. The Classical text became a background reference rather than the centre of attention. This allowed the painter to focus on the psychological depth of the characters and the moral dilemmas rather than the active resolution of those dilemmas. Because of this shift of interest from the heroic action toward human introspection, a greater focus was placed on the moral content of the story. This way of approaching texts offered a new interpretation of the stories and placed the images as complementary to the texts rather than visual repetitions. This changed the relationship between text and image as it asserted that painting had a role to play in relating the Classical stories and conveying the morals within them. It acknowledged that an image touches a viewer in a different way than a text. The instantaneity of the image offered a more sensual and emotional reception while the text was received in a more intellectual way. This original take on Classical subjects also established David as a new master and his belief that the “arts need to be regenerated along with morality” prevailed in the art world.[17]

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[16] Lessing explained this in *Laookon* (1766). This text also draws interesting parallels between art and literature.
[17] Jacques Louis David, “The Jury of Art,” in Harrison et al., *Art in Theory*, 721.

The Oath of the Horatii (1784)

The story of the Horatii was sourced from Roman historian Livy's *History of Rome*. Rome was at war with its neighbouring city Alba:

> In each army there were three brothers – triplets – all equally young and active, belonging to the families of the Horatii and Curatii. To these young men the two rival commanders made their proposal, that they should fight three against three, as the champions of their countries, the victorious to have dominion over the vanquished.[18]

How did David come to this unusual composition for the topic? Rather than Livy, it seems that David was influenced by Corneille's version of the story.[19]

Fig. 1-1 Jacques-Louis David, *The Oath of Horatii,* 1784, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

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[18] Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. A de Selincourt (London: Penguin books, 1960), 33.

[19] David stated "Si c'est à Corneille que je dois mon sujet, c'est à Poussin que je dois mon tableau." (If I owe my topic to Corneille, I owe my painting to Poussin) David quoted in Hazlehurst, "Artistic Evolution," 60.

Corneille's *Les Horaces*, written around 1640, focused mainly on the time before and after the fight and the moral dilemmas between the conflicting demands brought about by country, love, friendship and family. David saw this play in 1782 and submitted the subject for approval. But the choice of scene was then very different. In a letter from the Comte d'Angivillier (1730–1810), the General Director of Fine Arts,[20] to David approving the subject, it was described as:

> Horace, vainqueur des trois Curiaces, condamné a mort pour le meurtre de Camille, sa sœur, défendu par son père au moment ou les licteurs l'entrainent au supplice et absous par le peuple touché de ce spectacle et du grand service qu'il vient de rendre à sa patrie.[21]

At that early stage David had already modified his sources using Charles Rollin's (1661–1741) *Histoire Romaine* (1738–1748) rather than purely relying on Corneille's text.[22] David soon chose to abandon this scene of action and melodrama. He didn't focus on either the glorious battle or the dramatic bloodshed but chose instead the moment of the oath. There was no oath scene in Corneille's play. In Livy's *History of Rome* there was an oath scene but it was an oath between the cities to honour whatever the result of the triplet's battle might be. It was briefly mentioned and no details were given as Livy noted that it "is not worth the trouble of quoting here."[23] It seems then, that David's main influences in choosing this untold scene were visual ones. Rosenblum discussed celebrated oath-taking scenes, such as Gavin Hamilton's (1723–1798) *Oath of Brutus* (1763–64), Henry Fuseli's (1741–1825) *Oath of the Rütli* (1778–79), Jacques-Antoine Beaufort's (1721–1784) *Brutus* (1771) and Benjamin West's (1738–1820) *Hannibal Taking the Oath* (1770–71) as possible artistic sources for David's

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[20] D'Angivillier was the director and ordonnateur-général des Bâtiments and as such affected every area of the Fine Arts. For more on d'Angivillier and his role in the art world see Boime, *Age of Revolution*, 172–73.

[21] "Horace, victor of the three Curatii, condemned to death for the murder of his sister Camilla, defended by his father at the moment when the lictors take him to his death and forgiven by the people touched by this scene and his great service to the nation.", (Archives Nationales 011932). David quoted in Hazlehurst, "Artistic Evolution," footnote 4, 60.

[22] Edgar Wind, "The Sources of David's Horaces," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4: nos. 3–4 (April 1941–July 1942): 125. Boime also noted the influence of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* which abounds in references to Sparta and Rome. See Boime, *Age of Revolution*, 393.

[23] Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 33.

conception of the scene.[24] Hamilton Hazlehurst focused on the possible influence of Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) on the figures.[25] Edgar Wind looked for David's inspiration in Jean Georges Noverre's (1727–1810) pantomime and ballet tragique *Les Horaces*.[26]

What did David take from Livy and Corneille's texts then? David mostly used Corneille for the generally austere tone and moral message as well as for some strong visual motifs such as the three swords. But David used the three swords in a different context. Corneille's stage direction for Act VI scene V, after the battle took place, stated that: "Procule porte en sa main les trois épées des Curiaces."[27] David displaced that motif to give it a more symbolic impact. Both Livy and Corneille's texts also gave context and depth to David's characters. Everyone knew the story, therefore the painting sent a clear emotion and a clear moral message, the didactic effect was at its most efficient.[28]

David, by choosing the moment before the action, the psychological scene rather than the action scene, displaced the literary referent. He freed the painting from its purely reproductive and narrative obligations. He engaged the viewer in a reconstruction and an interpretation of the historical moment rather than a comparison with the text. He asserted the right of the painter to creativity and freedom of interpretation.[29] Of course this attitude toward texts was problematic for the art criticism of the time. The deviation from the text was already noticed by contemporary critics

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[24] See Robert Rosenblum, "A Source for David's Horatii," *Burlington Magazine* CXII, (1970): 269–73 and Rosenblum, *Transformations*, 69.

[25] See Hazlehurst, "Artistic Evolution," 59–63.

[26] See Wind, "Sources of David's Horaces," 128–131. Dorothy Johnson emphasised the importance of gesture and theatrical reference, writing that "In *The Oath* is crystallized the language of gesture that Diderot posited as the most essential element in the theatre and the visual arts." She also insisted on the impact this painting had on David's contemporaries. See Dorothy Johnson, "Corporality and Communication: The Gestural Revolution of Diderot, David, and The Oath of the Horatii," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (March 1989): 108.

[27] "Procule is carrying in his hand the Curatii's three swords" Corneille quoted in Wind, "Sources of David's Horaces," 128.

[28] The contrast between the two groups helps the interpretation and is the logical extreme of the theory of David's teacher, Dandré-Bardon, in his *Traité de Peinture* (1765) where he stated that groups of figures should be contrasted and contrast reinforced by expressions. See Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 36.

[29] For more on this see Stephan Germer and Hubertus Kohle, "From the Theatrical to the Aesthetic Hero: On the Privatisation of the Idea of Virtue in David's Brutus and Sabines," *Art History* IX (1986): 168–84.

such as Charles Paul Landon (1760–1826): "Le trait que M. David a représenté n'est pas rapporté par les Historiens."[30] The art critics were forced to look at the painting for itself rather than in relation to its source texts and literary referents.

Andromache Mourning Hector (1783)

Around the same time he was working on the *Horatii*, David produced his reception piece *Andromache Mourning Hector* (1783).[31] Hector's departure from Andromache was the theme traditionally taken from Andromache and Hector's story. Dora Wiebenson noted many variations of that theme by artists as diverse as Jean Bernard Restout (1732–1797), Antoine Coypel (1661–1722), Hamilton, Vien, Angelica Kauffmann (1741–1807), John Flaxman (1755–1826), Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein (1751–1828), Christoffer Wilhelm Eckersberg (1783–1853) and Peter von Cornelius (1784–1867).[32]

In this painting Andromache is sitting by Hector's body on his deathbed carved with battle scenes. She is being comforted by her young son Astynax. She gestures toward the stiff dead body of Hector, her wet eyes raised to the heavens.[33] Hector's body cuts the painting in half horizontally: in the foreground by the bed lie Hector's weapons and feathery helmet, in the background behind Andromache stands a candelabra with inscriptions in Greek. The dominant colours, red and black, convey the intense emotions of despair brought by the death of the hero. Once again, David deviated from the original text choosing the untold moment. This scene was not in the *Iliad* as the final scene was the return of Hector's body and the funeral rites; there were no private mourning scenes. David didn't represent the death of the hero, nor the funeral but chose to focus on a more private and intimate scene of heroic death.[34]

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[30] "The story represented by Mr David hasn't been reported upon by the historians." C. P. Landon in *Annales* VII (1803) quoted in Rosenblum, *Transformations*, note 68, 69.

[31] The full original title is *La Douleur et les regrets d'Andromache sur le corps d'Hector son mari*.

[32] On this topic see Dora Wiebenson, "Subjects from Homer's Iliad in Neoclassical Art," *The Art Bulletin* 46, no. 1 (March 1964): 28.

[33] Note that this is a Christian motif particularly referring to representations of Mary Magdalene. Rosenblum, *Transformations*, 83.

[34] "The subject and the design for this type seem to have been the invention of Gavin Hamilton, who derived his composition from Poussin. Hamilton may have

Once again David used the characters from the Classical source creating an instant understanding in the viewer of the main dramatic tensions. The text was used here again as a contextual element. David also used the text to set the tone of the painting. In Book XXII of the *Iliad*, after Hector's death, Andromache explained:

> What unhappiness is mine. For you are on your way to Hades […] leaving me behind in hateful misery […] your son is no more than a baby even if he survives this war with all its tears, nothing remains for him but hardship and distress.[35]

The inscriptions in Greek on the candelabra were referencing this extract of the text and by doing so David reinforced the tone of the painting. Literature was used as a tool rather than in a prescriptive way.

Paintings of death and commemoration, as *exemplum virtutis* (examples of virtue), were more and more common from the 1760s onwards.[36] This representation of the untold moment, the moment after, forces the viewer to contemplate and reflect upon the consequences of heroism. This is an intense emotional moment sending a clear message of self-sacrifice and courage, of loss and grievance. David also chose the moment when the heroism is displaced from Hector to Andromache, as she is becoming the new hero. In contrast to the paintings of the first generation of Neo-classicists, David's Andromache is turned toward the viewer and engages the viewer directly with her grief. This focuses the viewer's attention on Andromache, placing her as the main character, the heroine of the story. The painting offered a moment never written about: the transition between Homer's *Iliad* and Racine's *Andromache*. The image here deviated from the texts to complete them and offers a transitional scene in the story of Andromache.

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been following a pre-existing French tradition, for there is at least one French painting of a mourning scene in the manner of Poussin contemporaneous with Hamilton's illustration. Hamilton's model was closely followed by Dannecker, Kauffmann, and David." Wiebenson, "Subjects from Homer's Iliad," 30.

[35] Homer, *Iliad*, (London: Penguin classics, revised edition 2003), 393.

[36] See Rosenblum, *Transformations*, 56.

The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons (1789)

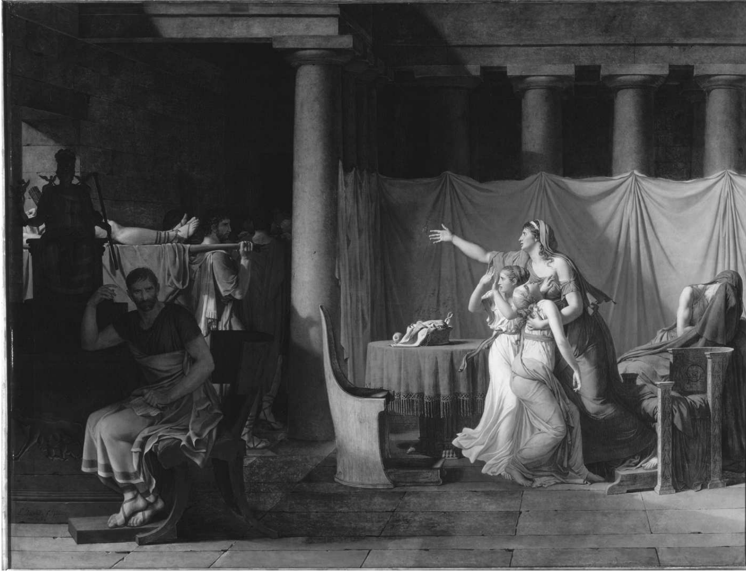

Fig. 1-2 Jacques-Louis David, *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons,* 1789, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.

With *The Lictors Returning to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (1789) David once again chose an untold moment, a scene outside the text. Paintings taking Brutus as their subject usually focused on the drama of Lucretia and the oath of Brutus such as in Hamilton (1763–64) or Beaufort's versions (1771) or the scene of the judgement and execution of his sons. Possible sources for the general story of Brutus are Livy, Valerius Maximus and Plutarch.[37] But for his painting David based himself once again on a more recent version, the one presented in Voltaire's play.[38] Voltaire's *Brutus* had been shown two years out of every three since David's birth.[39] David

[37] Ibid., note 92, 76.
[38] Alfieri's tragedy *Bruto Primo* is also a contender as a possible source, it was written in 1785 and it leaves Brutus at about the same moment as Voltaire's play. See Honour, *Neo-Classicism*, 72. Boime noted that "While in France he [Alfieri] versified the first one (*Bruto Primo*) […] in preparation for the publication of his collected tragedies in late 1788 and early 1789." Boime, *Age of Revolution*, 423.
[39] Robert L. Herbert, *David, Voltaire, Brutus and the French Revolution: an essay in art and politics* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1972), note 72, 141.