

on end under the same influence, copying the same models, and following in some fashion the same path? How can one hope after this that they might conserve some spark of originality? Will they not, despite themselves, have exchanged the particular qualities that they might have had, and fused together into a confused unity those unique means by which, more properly, each of us perceives the beauty of nature?

Any nuance which might survive this group experience becomes imperceptible, and it is with genuine distaste that one sees every year ten or twelve compositions, of almost identical execution, whose every stroke is painstakingly perfect, offering no germ of originality whatsoever. Having abandoned long since their own sensations, none of the competitors have managed to retain any of their individuality. The same drawing style, the same palette, minor variations in an identical system, even the same gestures and facial expressions, everything that we see in these, the sad products of our schools, seems to come from one source, inspired by one single soul – if indeed one can conceive of a soul here, lost in the midst of such anonymity, struggling to conserve its faculties and preside over these lamentable works.

I would add to this that although obstacles and difficulties frighten mediocre men, they are the necessary food of genius. They cause it to mature, and raise it up; if the way is easy it withers and dies. All that obstructs the path of genius irritates it and inspires a state of feverish agitation, upsetting and overturning those obstacles, and producing masterpieces. These are the men that a nation must strive to produce – men who allow nothing, not poverty nor persecution, to stand in their way. They simmer like volcanoes, bound to erupt, for such is their nature, burning to light up the way and astonish the world. Would we create men thus? The Academy, alas, does too much: it extinguishes the sparks of this sacred fire, it smothers it, not granting nature the time to allow it to catch. A fire must be nurtured, yet the Academy throws on too much fuel.

3 Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) on Romanticism

The quintessential artist of French Romanticism, Delacroix grew up during the rise and fall of Napoleon. He studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts under Guérin from 1816, and there encountered Géricault, who allowed him to see the *Raft of the Medusa* while it was still in progress. His own first success was achieved at the Salon of 1822 with *The Barque of Dante*, based on passages from *The Inferno*. This was followed two years later by *The Massacre at Chios*. These two works mark out the typical preoccupations of the French Romantics: stirring literary subject matter drawn from contemporaries such as Byron and Scott, or from earlier writers such as Dante and Shakespeare; and contemporary history, in this case the Greek war of independence. The artistic resources Delacroix brought to bear on such subjects were principally derived from Michelangelo and Rubens, influences which were leavened by his encounter with the technical radicalism of Constable's landscape painting. During the period from September 1822 to October 1824, Delacroix kept a journal in which he discussed the search for literary subjects, and explored characteristic Romantic themes of passion, genius and imagination. It was originally published in three volumes as the *Journal de Eugène Delacroix* in Paris in 1883–5. A second edition was published there, edited by André Joubra, in 1932. The present extracts are drawn from the English translation of that edition by Walter Pach, published as *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1938, pp. 41–2, 54, 64, 73–4, 82, 84–6, 94.

6 October 1822

It must not be thought that just because I rejected a thing once, I must ignore it when it shows itself today. A book in which I had never found anything worthwhile may have a moral, read with the eyes of a more mature experience.

I am borne, or, rather, my energy is borne, in another direction. I will be the trumpeter of those who do great things.

There is in me something that is often stronger than my body, which is often enlivened by it. In some people the inner spark scarcely exists. I find it dominant in me. Without it, I should die, but it will consume me (doubtless I speak of imagination, which masters and leads me).

When you have found a weakness in yourself, instead of dissembling it, cut short your acting and idle circumlocutions – correct yourself. If the spirit had merely to fight the body! But it also has malign penchants, and a portion of it – the most subtle, most divine – should battle the other unceasingly. The body's passions are all loathsome. Those of the soul which are vile are the true cancers: envy, etc. Cowardice is so loathsome it must needs be the child of body and soul together.

When I have painted a fine picture, I haven't expressed a thought. Or so they say. What fools people are! They deprive painting of all its advantages. The writer says nearly everything to be understood. In painting a mysterious bond is established between the souls of the sitters and those of the spectator. He sees the faces, external nature; but he thinks inwardly the true thought that is common to all people, to which some give body in writing, yet altering its fragile essence. Thus grosser spirits are more moved by writers than by musicians and painters. The painter's art is all the more intimate to the heart of man because it seems more material; for in it, as in external nature, justice is done frankly to that which is finite and to that which is infinite – that is, to whatever the soul finds to move it inwardly in the objects which affect the senses alone.

At midnight, 22 or 23 December 1823

[. . .] Let us do everything calmly, let us react emotionally only to fine works of art or noble deeds. Let us work tranquilly and without haste. As soon as I begin to sweat and my blood to boil, beware. Cowardly painting is the painting of a coward. [. . .]

Friday, 27 February 1824

. . . What pleases me is that I am acquiring reason without losing the emotions evoked by beauty. I certainly do not want to deceive myself, but it seems to me that I am working more calmly than ever before, and I have the same love for my work. One thing distresses me, and I do not know its cause; I need distractions, such as gatherings of friends, etc. As to the enticements that disturb most people, I have never been disquieted by them, and today less than ever. Who would believe it? What are most real to me, are the illusions that I create with my painting. The rest is shifting sand.[. . .]

Sunday, 1 April 1824

[. . .] Excellent ideas come to me every moment, and instead of executing them at the very moment they are clothed with the charm imagination lends to them in the form they assume at that moment, one promises oneself to do them later, but when? One forgets, or what is worse, one no longer finds any interest in what seemed inspiring. This is what happens in so wandering and impressionable a mind – one fancy drives another out more quickly than the wind changes and turns the sail the other way. Assuming that I have plenty of subjects, what shall I do with them? Keep them in storage, waiting in the cold for their turn, and never will the inspiration of the moment quicken them with the breath of Prometheus: I will have to take them from a drawer when I need to make a picture. It is the death of genius. What is happening this evening? For a whole hour I have been wavering between *Mazeppa*, *Don Juan*, *Tasso*, and a hundred others.

I think that what would be best to do when one needs a subject, is not to have recourse to the ancients and to choose of them. For what is more stupid? Among the subjects that I have kept, because they seemed lovely to me one day, what determines my choice of one over another, now that I have the same feeling for all? The mere fact that I can hesitate between two of them implies lack of inspiration. Really, if I took up my palette at this moment, and I am dying to do so, the beautiful Velasquez would be on my mind. I should want to spread out some good thick, fat paint on a brown or red canvas. What I would need, then, in finding a subject is to open a book that can inspire me and let its mood guide me. There are those that are never ineffective. Just the same with engravings. Dante, Lamartine, Byron, Michelangelo.[. . .]

Tuesday, 27 April 1824

At Leblond's. Interesting discussion about genius and unusual men. Dimier thought that great passions were the source of genius. I think that it is imagination alone, or better still, what amounts to the same thing, that delicacy of the organs that makes one see what others do not see, and which makes one see in a different way. I was saying that even great passions joined to imagination lead most often to disorder in the mind, etc. Dufresne said a very true thing: what made a man unusual was, fundamentally, a way utterly peculiar to himself of seeing things. He applied it to the great captains, etc., and finally to the great minds of all sorts. So, there are no rules for great souls: rules are only for people who have merely the talent that can be acquired. The proof is that they do not transmit this faculty. He was saying: 'How much reflection is needed to create a beautiful, expressive head, a hundred times more than for a problem, and yet at bottom, the matter is merely one of instinct, for it cannot explain what brings it about.' I note now that my mind is never more excited to create than when it sees a mediocre version of a subject that is suitable to me.

Friday, 7 May 1824

[. . .] On my way home this evening, I heard the nightingale. I hear him still, though very far away. This warbling is really unique, rather on account of the emotions it

evokes than for itself. Buffon goes into a naturalist's ecstasies over the flexibility of the throat and the varied notes of the melancholy springtime songster. As for myself, I find in him that monotony, the inexhaustible source of all that makes a lively impression. It is like a view of the vast sea. One waits always for still another wave before breaking away from the sight; one cannot leave it. How I hate all these rhymers with their rhymes, their glories, their victories, their nightingales, their meadows! How many of them really describe what a nightingale makes one feel? But if Dante speaks of it, it is as fresh as nature, and we have heard only that. Yet all is artificial and dressed up, a product of the mind. How many of them have described love? Dante is really the first of poets. One thrills with him, as if before the thing itself. Superior in this to Michelangelo, or rather, different, for in another fashion, he also is sublime, though not through his truth. *Come columbe adunate alle pasture* [Like doves gathering in the meadows], etc. *Come si sta a gradicar la rana* [As the frog sits up to croak], etc. *Come il villanello* [Like the peasant boy], etc. Therein lies what I have always dreamed, without being able to define it. Be just that in painting. It is a unique course to follow.

But when a thing bores you, do not do it. Do not pursue a fruitless perfection. There are certain faults (faults, that is, to the vulgar) which often impart life.

My picture [*Massacre at Chios*] is acquiring a twist, an energetic movement that I must absolutely complete in it. I need that good black, that blessed dirt, and those limbs that I know how to paint and few even try to get. The mulatto model will serve my purpose. I must get fullness. If my work loses in naturalness, it will be more beautiful and more fruitful. If it only holds together! O smile of the dying! The look of the mother's eye! Embraces of despair, precious domain of painting! Silent power that at first speaks only to the eyes, and which wins and makes its own all the faculties of the soul! There is the spirit, the real beauty that is proper to you, beautiful painting, so insulted, so misunderstood, delivered up to the blockheads who exploit you. But there are hearts who will still receive you devoutly; souls who will not be satisfied with phrases, any more than with fictions and ingenuities. You have only to appear with your manly and simple vigour, and you will please with a pleasure that is pure and absolute. Admit that I have worked with reason. I do not care for reasonable painting at all. I can see that my turbulent mind needs agitation, needs to free itself, to try a hundred different things before reaching the goal whose tyrannous call everywhere torments me. There is an old leaven, a black depth that demands satisfaction. If I am not quivering like a snake in the hands of Pythoness, I am cold; I must recognize it and submit to it, and to do so is happiness. Everything I have done that is worth while, was done this way. No more *Don Quixotes* and things unworthy of you! Concentrate intensely before your painting and think only of Dante. Therein lies what I have always felt in myself.

Sunday, 6 June 1824

[...] As soon as a man is intelligent, his first duty is to be honest and strong. It is no use to try to forget, there is something virtuous in him that demands to be obeyed and satisfied. What do you think has been the life of men who have raised themselves above the common herd? Constant strife. Struggle against the idleness that is common to them and to the average man, when it is a question of writing, if he is a writer:

because his genius clamours to be manifested; and it is not merely through some vain lust to be famed that he obeys it – it is through conscience. Let those who work lukewarmly be silent: what do they know of work dictated by inspiration? This fear, this dread of awakening the slumbering lion, whose rearings stir your very being. To sum up: be strong, simple, and true; there is your problem for all times, and it is always useful.

4 Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle) (1783–1842) from ‘Salon of 1824’

‘Stendhal’ was a literary pseudonym of Marie-Henri Beyle, first used in 1817. Born in Grenoble, Beyle left for Paris at the age of sixteen and subsequently worked for the Napoleonic regime in Italy and in Paris. One of the pivotal experiences of his life was his involvement in the burning of Moscow, in 1812, and the subsequent French retreat. After Napoleon’s defeat, he took up his literary career in Milan. In 1817 he published a *History of Painting in Italy* in which he questioned the prevailing assumption that classical criteria were universally applicable, contrasting ‘le beau idéal antique’ with ‘le beau idéal moderne’. Stendhal spent the 1820s in Paris working as a writer and critic. His *Racine and Shakespeare* of 1823 was one of the first statements of literary Romanticism in France. In it Stendhal argues that Romanticism is not just a modern movement, but represents a recurring phenomenon in the art of every period, namely that kind of art which reflects on its own time rather than on unchanging, eternal factors. That is, he identifies Romanticism with ‘the spirit of the age’ (or *zeitgeist*, itself a German Romantic concept). Stendhal produced two Salon commentaries, in 1824 and 1827. The 1824 Salon marked the triumph of Romanticism in French art. In addition to works by Vernet, Sigalon and Delacroix, Delacroix exhibited the *Massacre at Chios* (which Stendhal found journalistic in the light of his Russian experience); and the English landscape school was represented by Constable. Stendhal’s Salon was published in sixteen parts between August and December 1824. The following extracts are taken from Stendhal’s *Oeuvres Complètes, Mélanges III. Peinture*, Nouvelle édition, Geneva: Edito-Service, 1972, pp. 8 (29 Aug.), 11–14 (31 Aug.), 16–17 (2 Sept.), 25–8 (12 Sept.), 35–6 (7 Oct.), 39–41 (9 Oct.), 46–7 (16 Oct.), 51–4 (27 Oct.), 66–7 (23 Nov.), 73–4 (11 Dec.), 78–81 (22 Dec.). They were translated by Jonathan Murphy for the present volume.

At the Louvre 27 August 1824

Today, my intention is only to give a brief overview of the exhibition, sparing the reader more general considerations, in order to speak briefly about a few of the more remarkable pictures which doubtless have already attracted his attention. This first visit will by no means get to the heart of the matter: it is the simple, artless expression of a first impression.

It would appear that this year, opinions are quite violently opposed, and people fall into one of two camps. The battle lines have already been drawn. The *Journal des Débats* are going to be Classical, and swear only by David, crying out that *any painted figure must be the copy of a statue*, and that the spectators should admire this, even if it bores them rigid. *Le Constitutionnel*, by contrast, has come out with some beautiful, slightly vague phrases, no doubt a sign of the times: but at least it has decided to