

conviction through its abandonment of all compromise with the public values of the Davidian past or the Royalist present: the social compact implodes, and Delacroix comes into his own as a history painter.

In an essay published shortly afterwards, Delacroix wrote of a time in Michelangelo's early career when, so it was believed, neglect by patrons brought him close to giving up. Later in life, he would paint the sculptor in a state of idleness, surrounded by his past creations but with his chisel thrown to the studio floor, and he gave to his painted Michelangelo the traits and the pose he had earlier given to his Sardanapalus, making plain an understanding of the ruler's destructive despair as metaphor for the artist's condition.

His extravagant projection of futility in the *Sardanapalus* was played out most centrally through imaginary violence against women conceived entirely as objects of erotic possession. The regrettably automatic sexism of the time, which made such extreme fantasies acceptable, cannot be set aside. But as complete a statement as this painting was, it represented only a temporary swing in its maker's sense of possibility. Like David in his movement from *Horatii* to *Brutus*, Delacroix was capable of better, even within the masculinist assumptions he would never have questioned. In the same year (1827), he returned to the theme of the Greek struggle, but chose to condense his renewed expression of solidarity into one, monumental figure—an allegorical personification of Greece standing at the site of Missolonghi (where Byron had died), mutely appealing for the help of the West. In 1826 the city had again been the object of a Turkish assault, one so overwhelming that its defenders blew up the walls, destroying it and themselves rather than surrender. This prompted a new wave of Western agitation for the Greek cause, and Delacroix completed the large canvas in only three months.

The terrible collective suicide which ended the siege of Missolonghi made lurid fantasies about ancient despots seem paltry by comparison. With *Greece*, he conceded that representation of such total carnage in the real world was beyond both his ken and the capacities of his art, so he sought another solution within the neglected resources of Western tradition. The turn to explicit allegory allowed him to reintegrate the body of the oriental woman as heroic emblem.

As in Girodet's *Revolt at Cairo*, an anecdotal ascription of nakedness to an exotic victim—while retaining a potentially erotic appeal to some viewers, both male and female—cannot help conveying the connotations of moral superiority indelibly linked to the ideal nude. The disordered clothing, a conventional sign of distress, discloses the breast of an inviolable goddess; the male victim by contrast appears only as a stain of blood and a severed limb.

For any French observer, such a figure would also have

brought directly to mind "Marianne," the female symbol of the Republic adopted by the Jacobins in the immediate wake of Louis XVI's overthrow in 1792. This cast a partisan Republican light on the aspirations of the Greeks. The Ottoman forces appear only in a curiously flattened Egyptian soldier at some illegible distance to the rear. Haste may explain this lapse of convincing illusion, but it may well be a case of Delacroix experimenting with an overtly artificial, allegorical approach at the level of form, a way of building cognitive complexity into a painting that ran with rather than against the uncertainty of his draftsmanship. The two figures together, for all of their incongruity, forecast directly his response when upheaval at home in France ended the Restoration regime.

On July 28, 1830 discontent across the entire social spectrum with the reign of Charles X brought on violent insurrection in the streets of Paris. That moment of revolt, which so vividly recalled the great "days" of the 1789 Revolution, was quickly left behind when the deposed King's cousin, Louis-Philippe, was installed at the head of what came to be called the July Monarchy. Delacroix did not finish his painting in honor of the revolt until 1831. He was no radical and would personally have had no argument with moderate constitutional monarchy. But the demands of his artistic allegiances and skills caused him to produce a painting, *The 28th of July: Liberty Leading the People*, quite at odds with the comfortable status quo.

The first of these allegiances is of course the unrealized public potential of the *Raft of the Medusa*. *Liberty's* barricade, heaving up in the foreground, is the raft itself turned ninety degrees to the right so that the bodies tumble off its leading rather than its trailing edge. Géricault's sprawling barelegged corpse is shifted more or less intact from the lower right corner to the lower left, precisely marking the way he transposed his model. The straining pyramid of figures now pushes toward the viewer rather than toward a distant horizon.

The most pressing question would have been what to place at the peak of the rising. Géricault had selected a black man, bare to the waist, who could serve simultaneously as an emblem of the African locale and as a condensed personification of all oppression and every desire for emancipation from intolerable conditions. The anonymity of the figure, turned away from the viewer's regard, the magnificent description of the nude torso, along with its ethnic exoticism, made it a key device in universalizing the import of the subject. Delacroix turned to his immediately previous personification of the same urgent demands: a change in headgear to the Phrygian cap of the great Revolution (the mark of a freed slave in antiquity) and *Greece* becomes Marianne, emerged from the long darkness of royal tyranny to fight for France. In that she is a woman, she completes the



71 EUGÈNE DELACROIX *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* 1827.
83 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 56 (213 × 142)

whole of humanity; in that she can be nude, she represents a natural condition of humankind, suffocated by oppression but revealed again in revolt.

To some at the time, *Liberty* seemed to be merely a robust plebeian—sun-browned, barefoot, and careless of all modesty—who would naturally have leapt into the fray. She is indeed this character to a sufficient degree that she belongs with the surrounding sociological enumeration of male types engaged in the struggle, all ages and classes represented

among the living and dead. She calls up certain colorful contemporary accounts of working-class women who rallied their compatriots on the barricades. If she were the least bit more idealized, more evidently a part of the order of symbol, the painting would revert to a curious juxtaposition of reportage with arbitrary allegorical accompaniment.

But the body of *Liberty* hovers between actual physicality and a different kind of pictorial order altogether. Her leading arm is a dark silhouette deprived of persuasive foreshortening, defined by its difference from the white expanse of the tricolor flag behind; it exists as an interruption of the continuity of that abstract sign. Her head turns unnaturally to present a similarly flattened outline to the viewer. In a way that is directly reminiscent of inner transformation from mortal body to goddess in Canova's allegorical portrait of Pauline Borghese, the figure stands simultaneously as a sculptural presence and as a mental abstraction. Delacroix makes Woman the link between matter and understanding, the medium of passage from fact to meaning and back again. The discreet departures from a naturalistic norm are sufficient to impose a governing conceptual order on the disparate collection of bodies and actions surrounding her, that order carrying with it the ethic of purposeful civic virtue embedded in the legacy of Revolutionary Classicism. The imprint of that legacy may have been reduced to a trace, but that it could work so effectively is a sign of its continuing power. That the conceptual artifice of Classicism could function only when treated with such extreme discretion was just as clear a sign that it was at the point of being lost as a resource for art.

In fact, a crisis in Classicism was evident in other national cultures as well during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In Spain and England (states in which the grip of antiquity had never been as powerful as in France), Francisco Goya and William Blake among others set different unifying myths against the legacy of Greece and Rome. In the case of Goya the chief rhetoric employed was *Majism*, a subcultural style and tradition derived from the Spanish *pueblo*; in the case of Blake it was chiliasm, borrowed from English radical and millennial sects. These two artists' contributions to what appears to have been a widespread Western movement of cultural nonconformism and political insurgency—Romanticism—must now be considered in detail.