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THE MASSACRES OF CHIOS BY EUGÈNE DELACROIX –
 PROCESS, MEANING AND EFFECT

INTRODUCTION

What makes a great work of art? Why do we have works of art? Why do we need works of art? I decided to explore these questions by deconstructing the ideological workings and conflicting narratives contained in a painting that has attracted and puzzled me for many years.

The Massacres of Chios was first exhibited at the famous Paris Salon of August 1824. It is based on the massacre of thousands of civilians on the island of Chios in 1822.¹ It measures 4.17m x 3.54m, a scale usual for history painting². It signalled Delacroix's ambition to become a great artist,³ and its full title, *Scenes from the Massacres of Chios; Greek Families Awaiting Death or Slavery*, etc. (see the various reports and newspaper accounts), draws attention to the painting's simultaneous depiction of several narratives over time. The lack of a single focus, the brilliant colour and the "roughness" of the drawing and brushwork, caused a "storm or controversy" (Fraser: 2004), and earned Delacroix the epithets of Revolutionary, Romantic and Liberal. It continues to attract controversy to this day⁴ but is now regarded as one of the greatest works of Romanticism, and counted amongst other great anti-war paintings such as Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814-15).

THE ARTIST – FERDINAND VICTOR EUGÈNE DELACROIX
 (1798-1863)

Eugène Delacroix was born into wealth and bourgeois privilege, and received an excellent classical education, but lost everything by the time he was sixteen. His father died when he was seven years old, followed two years later by his beloved



Eugène Delacroix: *Scène des massacres de Scio*, 1824. Oil on canvas. Louvre, Paris.

brother Henri. His mother died when he was sixteen, leaving him and his remaining siblings penniless.⁵ He was elegant, brilliant, witty and charming, and he loved literature, poetry, theatre and music. He had close friendships with Chopin, George Sand, Paganini and Dumas. His health was poor, with debilitating, recurring fevers and chronic tubercular laryngitis, which depressed and fatigued him but his artistic production never flagged, and on his death he left a huge repertoire of paintings and public commissions, and thousands of hitherto rarely

seen drawings.⁶ His journal, published posthumously, remains an invaluable document for artists and historians. ... “one of the most important works in the literature of art history: the record of a life at once public and private, ... [and] one of the richest and most fascinating aesthetic documents of the nineteenth century...” (Hannoosh 1995).

ROMANTIC OR CLASSICIST? – ART THEORY, GENDER AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

In 1854, Delacroix admitted to Théophile Silvestre that he had been a Romantic since the age of fifteen, provided it meant the “free manifestation” of his “personal impressions” and was free of “academic recipes” (Johnson 1963: 5). But when the title of Romantic was thrust upon him in 1824, he rejected it, because his ambition centred on achieving mainstream success in the “true style”⁷ but always believing there were many paths to beauty, especially through the works of his favourite artists; Michelangelo the father of baroque, Rubens, Tintoretto, Veronese, Titian, Velázquez and Zurbarán.

In the eighteenth century, French art practice and theory veered between irrationality and rationality. Rococo, with its emphasis on feelings, refinement, amorality, elegance and grace, flourished in the first half⁸. Portraiture, landscape and still life on an intimate human scale dominated, displacing grand history painting.

By 1745 the appointment of Lenormant de Tournehem as Directeur Générale des Bâtiments du Roi, ensured that history painting regained supremacy by awarding it the highest commissions and establishing a new royal art school, providing art students with a broader education emphasising ancient history (Honour 1984: 22-23). Classicism, the style representing reason, order and eternal values returned, pushing aside the “irrational” Rococo. Art and artists had a new moral responsibility, expected to produce works that educated and edified with themes that emphasised virtue and self-sacrifice drawn from antiquity. Classical heroes in austere settings imbued with “universal truths” replaced landscapes and contemporary figures. Jacques Louis David productions just prior to the outbreak of the French Revolution, epitomised the best of Neoclassicism.⁹

By 1814, utopian idealism and revolutionary certainties had been corroded by Napoleon’s empire. Romanticism’s emerging vibrancy, emphasising the primacy

of imagination, individual perception and emotional expressiveness, contrasted starkly with Neoclassicism's static compositions and threadbare morality, no longer able to fulfil its promise of moral clarity, or arrest the encroachment of cultural ambiguity.

Neoclassicism as government arts policy was adopted by the king for the same reason he took on the title of Louis XVIII – to create a sense of legitimacy and continuity with the pre-revolutionary past and to establish a sense of stability, order and universality, and implemented by Antoine C. Quatremère de Quincy¹⁰. But the tide of innovation could not be stemmed. Winckelmann discovered “naturalness” in Greek depictions of the human figure and the idea quickly spread. Quatremère de Quincy visited London to view the Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles and lectured on the “Venus of Melos”¹¹ in 1821. These original Greek masterpieces changed traditional conceptions of classical art and freed it ... “from the concept of a single ideal type and thereby stimulated naturalism in the nude in the first half of the nineteenth century” (Holt 1966:15). The desire for natural looking figures rather than the static postures and lifeless, sternly moralistic figures of the Academy grew steadily, augmented by the startling discovery of antiquity's bright colours in the monuments at Herculaneum and Pompeii.

Old conflicts concerning art theory re-emerged, particularly the seventeenth century battle between the Rubenistes and Poussinistes¹² which was re-ignited in the rivalry between Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix.

Ingres followed Raphael and Poussin and the supremacy of line, symbolising the masculine and the Apollonian, embodying truth, purity, rationality, certainty, universality and order. Line was virtuous, heroic and pure – perfect harmony and beauty could only be achieved through line.

Delacroix was a colourist, associated with Michelangelo and Rubens. Colour (the feminine) was regarded as a heresy, it symbolised impurity, transience, variability, irrationality, corruption, appealing to the senses and by definition to the masses, embodying sensuality and chaos – the Dionysian.

Ingres' hostility to Delacroix and all he represented was so strong that he was heard to say that he could smell the odour of sulphur in the air whenever he saw Delacroix enter.

In the 1824 Salon the entries by Delacroix and Ingres were the most outstanding of the entire exhibition and critics were not happy with either entry.

The bruising critical reception of *The Massacres of Chios*, and the label of Romantic was a terrible blow for Delacroix. He wrote, “I imagine that it was with the *Massacre de Scio* that I began to be an object of antipathy and a sort of monster of the school ... Most of those who took my side and made me into a kind of rallying point were really only trying to defend themselves and their own ideas, insofar as they had any. For better or worse they enlisted me on the side of the romantics” (Rosenblum 1974-1975: 377).

His reaction to an admirer’s description of him as the Victor Hugo of painting constituted a firm rejection of Romanticism. He asserted his purely classical credentials, “je suis pur classique” (Mras 1966: 5), accepting no radical allegiances. He wanted the kind of success and fame enjoyed by the great artists of the past, such as Michelangelo, whose works he contemplated assiduously. “Neglect nothing that can make you great,” he advised himself in his journal, but his fascination for Géricault, Orientalism and the Greek War of Independence, inevitably steered him towards Romanticism and liberalism.

THÉODORE GÉRICAUT

Théodore Géricault, Delacroix’s senior by seven years, studied at the studio of Pierre-Narcisse Guérin, where they met. He was “the first great Romantic” (Crow 1994: 60). Highly talented and charismatic, his life revolved around horses and pleasure and he was too volatile to submit to the stern disciplined drawing practice required by the Academy. He failed to win the Prix de Rome,¹³ but undeterred he submitted work to the Salon. His entries in 1812 and 1814 were poor by academic standards but were nevertheless discomfiting intimations of things to come. He portrayed anonymous soldiers, one a wounded, and the other a lone cavalrymen,¹⁴ using vigorous, or what would then have been regarded as rough and unrefined brushstrokes, with the dramatic tonality of Caravaggio. They were antithetical to the official style epitomised in heroic portraits of the emperor Napoleon. Eventually, sustained criticism of his technical skills drove him to study in Rome¹⁵ at his own expense,¹⁶ where he found that... “the Michelangelo of the Sistine Chapel and particularly of the ‘Last Judgement’ was the great experience for him that overshadowed even the antique ... in the execution of his most important work, the *Raft of the Medusa*” (Friedlaender 1972:97). When he

showed it in the Salon 1819,¹⁷ it was “proclaimed” a “challenge to authority” and the offended government refused to buy it despite great critical acclaim.

The effect of the painting on the young Delacroix, who saw it during its creation, was profound. Piron¹⁸ records his comments on the effect that his first sight the “*Medusa*” had on him. ...“He [Géricault] allowed me to come to see the *Medusa* while he was working on it in a bizarre studio he had near Ternes. I was so overwhelmed by it that I ran like a crazy man all the way home to the Rue de la Planché” (Trapp 1971: 15). Delacroix continued to refer to this painting throughout his life.¹⁹

FRENCH ART AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN GREECE

The Greek War of Independence that erupted in 1821 was the first revolution of the nineteenth century in Europe. In 1822, the Massacres of Chios took place, receiving extensive coverage in the European newspapers and it became ...“the first major war crime to be reported in the press...” (Athanasoglou-Souyoujoglou 1981). The war, containing all the elements necessary to fire the imagination and excite the passions received saturation coverage throughout its six-year duration, and bewitched the French public. Enlightenment values, Winckelmann’s work, the rise of nationalism, the legacy of the French Revolution the insistent propaganda of Diaspora Greeks dreaming of independence and the rebirth (anagenesis) of classical Greece. The war became a metaphor for the struggle between civilisation and barbarity, good and evil, Christianity and Islam and Eastern exoticism²⁰, and kept French readers captivated. Chateaubriand and Byron who had visited Greece before the outbreak of the war wrote their memoirs, and among the poetry Byron wrote was one condemning Lord Elgin’s plunder of the Parthenon. The ‘Marbles’ had a profound effect in England and Germany. ...“the great series of marbles acquired for London and Munich convinced people that the centre of European civilisation had to be shifted decisively east from Rome to Athens” (Haskell 1984: 339).

Spurred by the bloody events in Greece and the refusal of the Great Powers to intervene on behalf of the insurgents, people became philhellenes in increasing numbers and went to Greece to fight.²¹ In France there was an outpouring of artistic production inspired by the bloody events of the war. Orientalism, Philhellenism and Romanticism dovetailed in French art of the 1820s.

THE EFFECT OF THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE ON THE ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

The Greek War of Independence coincided with the flowering of Romanticism in art and literature, the revival of classicism in art and architecture, and the radically transformative effects of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Political revolutions broke out around the world inspired by the goals and aspirations of the French Revolution and the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution. These interdependent, interrelated and contradictory events and movements unleashed powerful artistic, social and political changes that continue unabated today. Emotionality and expressiveness became a central feature of Romanticism, perhaps an artistic response to the political axiom of the rights of the individual that was brought to prominence by the French Revolution.

Events during the bloody six years of the Greek Revolution resonated with the heightened sensibilities and thirst for extremes of horror and glory that the Romantic psyche demanded²². The war provided the heated imagination of the Romantics with ample fuel, ranging from actions that plumbed the depths of depravity and unsurpassed cruelty such as the wholesale slaughter, rape torture and enslavement of whole populations to great acts of heroism such as those of the besieged citizens of Missolonghi and the wholesale suicide of the Suliot women. The extremes of defeat, despair, annihilation and victory were played out before an avidly newspaper devouring European public. The Romantic interest in medieval history that led the Romantics to explore hitherto neglected mythologies and narratives, in an effort to generate a sense of ethnic and national identity that had its roots in the distant past, also led to the revival of interest in Gothic architecture the renewed exploration of religious mysticism²³, the Crusades and the identification of the struggle of the Greeks against the Turks with the earlier extended wars between Christianity and Islam. The Greek revolution was identified with the survival of western values, western civilisation and western spirituality. Rebellious young Romantics who turned to dramatic contemporary events for their inspiration found much to inspire them in the war, which in its Anatolian theatre of combat fuelled the fascination for the exotic and the oriental, the clothes, the ornamentation, the music and the harems that dominated the imagination of the fashionable world and preoccupied Romantic

writers and painters, including those of the calibre of Lord Byron and Eugène Delacroix.

In the year of the famous Salon of 1824, when Delacroix showed his *Massacres of Chios*, the tide of popular opinion definitely turned in favour of the insurgents.²⁴ By sacking Chateaubriand, the ultra conservative French government of Charles X created a rod for its own back because he then united with the liberal opposition and threw his immense charisma, influence and power behind the Greek cause, setting up committees of influential citizens to raise funds in support of the insurgents. The pressure on the government became intolerable, its unpopularity increased until it was overturned in the July revolution of 1830.

THE PAINTING

Composition, Subject Matter and Style

Delacroix's preparation for painting the Chios massacre was thorough. He read everything he could find, and talked to anyone who could provide eyewitness accounts, striving for authenticity.

When they first saw it, critics described the painting as a chaotic assemblage of figures, without a hero or a single heroic moment to elevate the viewer to a higher moral plane. In the centre of the canvas are distant, turbaned figures shooting civilians. The harbour is burning.²⁵ Distant actions are partly obscured by the large, highly developed figures dominating the entire stage-like foreground. On the right, horse and rider drag a struggling naked woman, while a man clutches at the bridle to save her. On the left a man sits with unfocused eyes, ignoring the woman reaching up to him with her hand on his chest. Nearby a woman clings to a young man and in the foreground lies a naked, reclining man, a pieta, with diseased, yellow skin.

They are arranged as though they are in a randomly cropped snapshot, or a still from a film; perhaps one that may have panned across numerous similar scenes of groups endlessly waiting, suffering and dying, in stark contrast to the energy and force of the victorious Ottomans, epitomised by the horse and rider dominating the right side of the canvas.

Delacroix and the Gendering of Artistic Style

The painting contains a large number of women, from the struggling captive attached to the horse to the dead mother and hungry infant, the shocked old woman, whose splendid garments indicate a past life of wealth and ease, the supplicating woman disregarded by the dazed, seated man, and the despairing companion of the dying man in the foreground.

Delacroix's relationship with women was ambivalent. Women of his own class were essentially out of reach because he could not afford to marry, but he had many liaisons with servant girls and models. On June 14th 1824 he records: ... "I need a mistress to keep my flesh in proper subjection. I'm terribly worried about it, and struggle with my better self when I am in the studio. Sometimes I long for any woman to come along. ... And then, when a girl does come my way, I'm almost annoyed, I'd give a great deal not to have to do anything; ... Every time I have to wait for a model, even when I'm in a great hurry, I feel delighted when she's late and tremble to hear her hand at the door" (Wellington 1995: 41).

He writes of the "shallowness" and "materialism" of his cousin Madame de Forget, with whom he enjoyed a decade long relationship, and his longing for a soul mate. With George Sand he had a close, confiding correspondence for many years, until she and Chopin separated.

The depiction of women in his works up to 1831 are allegories either of defeat or triumph²⁶. *The Massacres of Chios* was his first salon painting to include many women.²⁷ They outnumber men, but both men and women are equally helpless and despairing, except in the case of the motif dominating the right side of the canvas, where the victorious, richly garbed Turkish horseman, drags a naked struggling woman behind him to a certain death while attacking the man struggling to free her.

The woman's pearly white skin, and sinuous²⁸ Rubenesque form are simultaneously seductive and enslaved. Both horse and woman are objects of desire and status, represent nature in the weighted binary paradigm – culture versus nature; where hierarchical superiority is allocated to culture, the masculine; and inferiority to nature, the feminine.

The Massacres of Chios or "*the Massacre of Art*"

Critics appalled by the Romantic excesses of the painting condemned it. Baron Gros called it "the massacre of painting", Étienne Delécluze, called Delacroix a "fool hawking his wares from the housetops", and Auguste Chauvin dismissed him as "the delirious author [that] meaninglessly gathers together scenes of atrocity, spills blood, tears out entrails, paints agony and despair. *Posterity will never accept such works*, and contemporaries of good faith will tire of them. They are tired of them already" (Trapp 1971:40).

Others said the composition was confused, with "horrifying and disgusting sights" of "naked or rag-covered, wounded, bloody victims with coarse ugly features". It was a "flagrant destruction of every pictorial rule," with "incorrect and trivial" drawing, and no "liaison and harmony" and a "chaos of raw and discordant tones", "a confused collage of figures", obstructed space in the middle ground, "breaking apart of the visual instant"; and so on (Wright 1997:150).

Others praised it fulsomely. An anonymous critic²⁹ in *Le Globe* wrote: ... "M. Delacroix has not chosen the moment of the massacre, he has set himself a greater challenge. He has chosen to describe their exhaustion after they have been wandering for several days, when they are still uncertain of their fate, not knowing whether they will be massacred or sold into slavery. In his view, this subject was much more piteous, and he thought he would be able to render it more forcefully and more heartrendingly. He has not wished to compose a scene, not at all, because he despises all arrangement, and so he has scattered the figures of his painting here and there, in a sort of systematic disorder ... Here is the result of all his planning: everyone without exception has confused the massacre for a scene of the plague. M. Delacroix has repelled, he has horrified, and yet, for all those people who judge painting according to a linear schema, he has only succeeded in distracting the spectator's eye, without even escaping the reproach of being too symmetrical, for there is no lack of order in his painting, there is a systematic disorder" (Wright 1997:152). The anonymous critic went on to praise Delacroix's impressive colour, skill and talent.

Flocon and Aycard praised Delacroix because he broke aesthetic rules by linking aesthetics and politics. They argued that those who were disgusted were failing to face the truth. ... Delacroix an artist with an ardent and sensitive soul

who, by ...“forgetting the pedantic, hollow precepts of his teachers, ... heeds his own heart and his imagination, ... transported in his thoughts into the middle of this place of horrors; ... See[ing] every agony: bloodstained corpses, the murderer’s crude and insolent figure, slavery, death, and abandonment and despair; ... and his brush will faithfully render them so that the spectator can see them as well. ... It is impossible to remain impassive in the middle of the host of emotions aroused by this painting. Everything here is so natural, ... that you forget art and the artist and feel as though you are really there at the site of this terrible event. ... you find yourself tormented by your thoughts. A barbarous war, dishonouring all humanity, ... taking place in the heart of Europe, near civilised nations, and they remain neutral. What sort of neutrality is this, which allows thousands to be massacred, annihilating entire populations? His painting is both a beautiful work of art and a beautiful polemic.” ...Wright comments ... “the French spectators were beset by reflections of their own culpability, their dishonourable neutrality. This historical painting was no longer a static object” (Wright 1997:153).

But the suffering of the Greeks was not the only thing that interested Delacroix. His fascination with Orientalism endows the conquering Turk with all the trappings of success and glory, glittering jewels, sumptuous clothing, a spirited horse, classically heroic,³⁰ galloping into centre of the island conquering all. It is the dominant motif in the painting. The triumph of barbarity and evil, dragging behind defeated Greece, violated and helpless, symbolising the destruction of civilisation, the end of order and the triumph of chaos.

Delacroix fits the romantic stereotype of the passionately driven artistic genius, eternally seeking the sublime the ineffable and the erotic. He writes on May 7th. “My picture is beginning to develop a rhythm, a powerful spiral momentum. I must make the most of it. I must keep that good black, that happy, rather dirty quality; and those limbs which I know how to paint and few others even attempt. The mulatto will do very well. I must get fullness. Even though it loses in naturalness, it will gain in richness and beauty. If it only hangs together! Oh, the smile of the dying man! The look in the mother’s eyes! Embraces of despair! Precious realm of painting! That silent power that speaks at first only to the eyes and then seizes and captivates every faculty of the soul! Here is your real spirit; here is your own true beauty, beautiful painting ... There is an old leaven working in me, some black depth that must be appeased. Unless I am writhing like a serpent in the coils

of a pythoness I am cold. ... Everything good that I have ever done has come about this way” (Wellington 1995: pp 33-34).

CONCLUSION

The colour of the painting, now unfortunately damaged and faded, was greatly condemned for its brilliance when first shown. Its brushwork was considered too rough because the pigments were laid side by side to intensify the colour and create an optical effect in the eye to achieve the desired tone.³¹ The painted surface remained textured instead of blended to make the smooth “licked” surface, mandatory in academic painting. Delacroix’s great paintings of that period, *Scenes from the Massacres of Chios: Greek Families Awaiting Slavery and Death* (1824), *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1826), *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), and *Liberty Leading the People to the Barricades, the 28th July* (1831), were stylistically eclectic, combining elements of styles and techniques of the great masters of the past and contemporary trends in French and British painting. They provide continuity between the past and modernism. His belief in the importance of direct observation of nature for inspiration, the primacy of individual perception and “imagination as the point of departure for artistic creation” (Holt 1966:151) made him the leading Romantic.

The battle between good and evil has been won by evil. Civilisation has fallen to barbarity and been corrupted. Degradation confronting the threadbare morality and sterile conformity of classicist patriotism and heroism in battle. Gros’ derisive comment, “the massacre of painting” may in reality be a howl of anger at Delacroix’s “massacre” of classicism.³²

There is a tension in the painting between the abjectness of the victims, their vulnerability in defeat, their humiliation and loss of dignity, and the glamour in their portrayal,³³ but Delacroix managed to avoid the worst excesses of nineteenth century painting. Sentimentality, coyness and salaciousness are absent, and dignity and respectability maintained. Delacroix’s classicism founded on the platonic striving for truth embodied in beauty, perfection and the sublime.

Like Picasso’s *Guernica*, *The Massacres of Chios* memorialises a horrifying act of war, “a brutal and pointless sacrifice” and becomes a symbol for peace. Despite its flaws it remains one of the greatest paintings of the 19th century.

A member of the “Cynical Realist” group in China in the 1980s, Yue Minjun made a copy of the work, which sold for over four million pounds at Sotheby’s, Hong Kong in 2007. In his “copy”, he reproduces the arrangement of the figures, each one a semi-naked, laughing caricature of himself. A flock of cranes flies overhead and the wall in the background is like Tiananmen Square, a reference to modern Chinese politics denied by the artist. Nevertheless this is one of several great European paintings he has chosen to imitate, another being Goya’s *The Third of May 1808*.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 This painting is the most famous visual document of the massacres that took place on the island of Chios in 1822. ... “the first large-scale Turkish war crime to be extensively published in the French daily press. It remained in the news for several months, from May 17, 1822, until late August.” (Athanasoglou-Souyoujoglou, N. 1984: 39)

On 11th April 1822, the Turkish fleet arrived on the island of Chios with *carte blanche* from the Sublime Porte to do whatever they liked to the innocent inhabitants of Chios, who paid a terrible price for the attacks on Turks in Chios by insurgents from the island of Samos. Two months of murder, rape, plunder and conflagration ensued. A population of around ninety thousand was reduced to about nine hundred. The neighbouring islands of Psara suffered the same fate. The Great Powers were deaf to all entreaties; determined to suppress all uprisings, protect the existing balance of power and maintain regional stability. They regarded the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire as the legitimate ruler of the Greeks, entitled to discipline his “unruly” subjects.

- 2 History painting or narrative historical painting was regarded as the highest genre of painting. Subject matter based on mythological and historical subjects from Greek and Roman antiquity, gained greater currency under the Neo-Classical revival inspired by the discoveries at the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii and the work of Joachim Winckelmann.
- 3 Delacroix's desire for greatness is recorded in his Journal on Thursday 29th April 1824: "Glory is no empty word for me. The sound of praise gives me real happiness. Nature has put this feeling into every heart. Those who renounce glory, or who cannot achieve it, are wise to show what they call a philosophical contempt for this illusion, the nectar of the greatest minds." (Wellington 1995: p. 31)
- 4 In 2009 the Museum of Chios displayed a large reproduction of the painting. After protests from the Turkish government, the reproduction was taken down, despite the outcry in the Greek press.
- 5 His mother had made unwise investments. Years of unsuccessful legal battles finally bankrupted Eugène, his sister and his brother in 1823.
- 6 Art historians regard the splendid public commissions that Delacroix carried out in his maturity as his greatest works, but because they are rarely reproduced, due to their enormous scale, they are not widely known. His most well known works are the ones he produced in his twenties and early thirties. After his death, thousands of his drawings became available, revealing the extent of his talent and industry as never before.
- 7 The official (but undeclared) arts policy was Neoclassicism, a term created by art historians in the mid 19th century. In the 1820s such terms such as Classicism and Neoclassicism were not used to describe the official style of the period. It was simply called the "true style" by critics, theorists and artists. Nevertheless his version of adherence to "true style" had a strongly individualistic bent.
- 8 Epitomised by the works of Jean-Antoine Watteau, whose paintings – *fêtes galantes* – often depicted pleasure loving people set in Arcadian landscapes and intimate gardens.
- 9 Paintings such as *Belisarius Receiving Alms* (1780-81), *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784-5) and *Brutus* (1789).
- 10 Originally a sculptor, then influential writer and critic. His study tour in Rome coincided with David's. They visited Herculaneum and Pompeii together in 1779 and were both influenced by Winckelmann's principles on art. He became permanent secretary of the fine arts and social functions section, in the Institut de Beaux Arts in 1816.
- 11 In the first decades of the 19th century numerous excavations were carried out on Greek islands and on the mainland, digging up artworks and transporting them back to France, England Germany etc.
- 12 The 17th century conflict flared between the classicists as personified by Raphael and the Baroque personified by Michelangelo. Poussin, whose Arcadian landscapes were based on classical principles of stillness and linear style, had a powerful influence on the French academy. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel inspired Rubens and other artists of the baroque to use colour, dynamic movement and gesture.
- 13 This prestigious prize was virtually an obligatory rite of passage for ambitious artists. Time spent studying and working in the French Academy de Beaux Arts in Rome was

invaluable training for artists, particularly Neo-classicists because the Academy's theoretical and technical frameworks were based on Poussin's principles. David tried three times before he succeeded, but Delacroix never really considered it. By then its significance had started to decline.

- 14 *The Charging Light Cavalryman (Chasseur)* 1812 and *The Wounded Heavy Cavalryman* 1814.
- 15 Initially in pursuit of a married woman he was besotted with but then he stayed on to study and learn, making up for all the weaknesses in his drawing skills.
- 16 His initial impulse to visit Rome was to follow a married woman with whom he was infatuated. But once there he stayed on to study and learn.
- 17 The *Medusa*, a painting on a controversial contemporary topic had been preceded by David's unfinished work, *The Oath of the Tennis Court* as the first ever history painting on a contemporary theme. Géricault's painting described a real event. The ship the "Medusa", sank due to poor maintenance. Dozens of survivors were placed on a raft and cast adrift. Many died of exposure and thirst. The remainder resorted to murder and cannibalism. Two survivors wrote about the events. The French public were horrified and the Government, who owned the ship, was embarrassed. The government refused to buy the painting, despite the critical acclaim it received.
- 18 Piron was Delacroix's lifelong friend from childhood and the executor of his will. His biography of Delacroix is considered to be thoroughly accurate.
- 19 In Antwerp on August 10th 1850, on seeing a Ruben's masterpiece, he writes: ... "Finally saw the famous *The Raising of the Cross*: extreme emotion! A great deal of relationship with the *Medusa* ... when I see this art, Géricault grows greater in my eyes: he divined this force and his work is in no respect inferior to what it is here".
- 20 (Holt 1966: pp. 160-161). In October 1853 he writes: [the] "way I have felt ... before the *Medusa*, especially when I saw it half finished. ...the essential thing about [it] ... is [its] reaching of the sublime, which comes in part from the size of the figures" (Holt 1966: 165).
- 21 Orientalism, a significant art style in the 19th century – was born from Napoleon's campaign in North Africa.
- 22 Many Greek intellectuals also visited Paris, including Adamantios Korais, and other Diaspora Greeks assiduously promoting the Greek cause in Europe with pamphlets, speeches, and fundraising events. By 1824, inspired by the Greek revolution there were numerous paintings, poetry, prints, lithographs etc created by French artists. The Greek Romantic poets Andreas Kalvos and Dionysios Solomos published seminal works in Paris, also translated into French and other languages. The support for the insurrectionists gathered such momentum that the government's resistance was finally overcome. France joined Britain and Germany at the battle of Navarino in October 1827, defeating the Ottoman and Egyptian fleets. A new nation was established in 1932.
- 23 Vaughan (1978, 33) quotes Shelley: ... "sorrow, terror, anguish, despair itself, are often the chosen expression of an approximation to the higher good".

- 24 Hatt and Klonk associate the rise in secularism in current contemporary art with the abandonment of artistic concerns for the ... “articulation of the highest ideals”... (2006, 36), a concern that was central to Romantic artists.
- 25 This does not imply that the painting on its own had a significant effect on public opinion. It is more likely that Delacroix did the painting when the French opinion was already swinging towards the Greeks.
- 26 This refers to the one bright moment in the destruction of Chios. The insurgents sent a fireship that destroyed the harbour.
- 27 *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1826) is a beautiful, oriental woman but she is also a defeated supplicant. On the other hand, she is the acknowledged precursor for his most widely recognised painting, *The 28th July, Liberty Leading the People* (1830) and the universal symbol for freedom and democracy, making it his first major painting to represent woman triumphant. Until then, his depictions of women such as those in the *Massacres of Chios*, *Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi* and *The Death of Sardanapulus* represent them as abject, powerless, enslaved and violated.
- 28 *The Massacres of Chios* was Delacroix’s second entry to the Salon. His first entry, in the 1822 salon was the highly acclaimed *The Barque of Dante* depicting Dante and Virgil sailing in a boat on the river Styx. It is a painting almost exclusively of men. Only one of the figures, one of the damned in the water, clinging to the barque in despair, is a woman. Perhaps this painting is a tribute to his dead father. The two main figures possibly symbolising his allegiance to Classicism (Virgil) and Romanticism (Dante).
- 29 The sinuous “s” curve was considered to be the ideal depiction of beauty and grace in the human form.
- 30 Historians agree that this anonymous critic was none other than Adolphe Thiers, who, mentored by Talleyrand (rumoured to be Delacroix’s real father), later became the President of the Republic.
- 31 Reminiscent of David’s painting *Napoleon at the Saint Bernard Pass* (1801).
- 32 Some of his colouristic effects, are borrowed from the English landscape painter John Constable, but they are mainly derived from his intense admiration for Rubens. Delacroix’s colour dismayed his contemporaries but later generations of French artists particularly Manet and the Impressionists, and the Post Impressionists, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, Gauguin, and later Picasso, acknowledge a debt of gratitude to him.
- 33 Even the philhellenes who flocked to Greece to fight for the Greek cause looking for glory and fortune, found the reverse. They despised the Greeks because they did not measure up to the ideal. Many could not cope with the primitive conditions they had fight under and did not survive.
- 34 However, what is perceived as glamorous now was not necessarily seen that way at the time. The outcry against the work, and its many perceived flaws, would not rate a mention today.

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INTRODUCTION TO PIERO BIGONGIARI'S GREEK WRITINGS

To be Italian in modern times has meant being haunted by disillusionment. Since the Enlightenment, writers and philosophers, Italian and not, have never stopped reminding Italy of the greatness of the early civilizations that flourished on its soil. There is nothing wrong with this, except that Italians themselves know it all too well. Their own marvelling is tinged with a feeling that by comparison those earlier civilizations put the modern Italian self to shame. This inadequacy in relating to history has been one of Italy's self-criticisms ever since Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837) sublimated his own sense of failure into a national principle: the ancients were the youth of the world, whereas moderns, coming so late, are its old age, too degraded in spirit to live up to the ancient legacy. Italy's antiquity is also its tragedy, in that the country holds in its own hands the proof of what it once was but seems incapable of becoming once more. Moderns have slipped too far from the graceful Classical template, and have no equivalent systems to raise their spirits or words anywhere near their precedents. So much of modern Italian mental life has been about making do.

Foreign travellers to Italy have sensed this inadequacy too. Henry James, describing a visit to Capri, found that what uplifted him most, the knowledge that the place had figured in the minds of classical writers, could not in fact be described. The awareness of Capri's relevance was overpowering, but not even this most perceptive of writers felt equal to it. He sensed that he was too remote from the classical figures he had in mind, and that the only solution was to settle for second best, whatever that might be:

The grand air of it all was in one's very nostrils and seemed to come from sources too numerous and too complex to name. It was antiquity in solution, with every brown, mild figure, every note of the old speech, every tilt of the