SIX

RESTORATION HISTORIOGRAPHY'S LEGACY IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Beth S. Wright

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Charles X's reign was doomed on July 25, 1810, when he signed the four decrees that broke with the constitutional Charter of 1814. They suppressed freedom of the press, dissolved the newly elected Assembly, scheduled new elections, and reorganized the electoral system to favor those with landed estates over urban voters. The decrees were published in the Moniteur universel on July 26. Fighting broke out on July 27 and reached its height on July 28; by the next day royalist troops were forced to leave Paris. On July 31, the king's cousin, Louis-Philippe, duc d'Orléans, was acclaimed by the people of Paris when he appeared on the balcony of the Hôtel des-Ville side by side with the hero of earlier Revolutions, Lafayette. Two days later Charles X abdicated. On August 7 Louis-Philippe was formally invited by the Chambers of Peers and Deputies to accept the crown as king, not of France, but of the French. Now the time was ripe for the sense of history that had been sought in 1824 by the Thierry brothers and Mignet, both in historical literature and historical art: "the immediate representation of the past that has produced us, we ourselves." The time was ripe for historical resurrection, for psychic fusion of the past with present-day experience.

Delacroix's The Twenty-eighth of July: Liberty Leading the People (Fig. 60) was the visual corollary of Thierry's sense of history, a resurrection liberated from the direct reproduction of one site and moment. Thierry had insisted that collectivities should be endowed with a force and a soul, so that every citizen would realize that the political evolution of their nation had the same urgency and fascination as their own life. Once they recognized this, the imagination of present-day citizens would revivify those of the past and transcend the barriers of time.

In his Liberty, Delacroix combined, without coalescing, allegorical ideality and genre mimesis, in a composition that was both monumentally ordered as a pyramid and episodically diversified. We see the tri-

color float from the towers of Notre-Dame in the background, the dead bodies of a worker and a soldier of the royal guard lying in the foreground, but these indications of time and place are overwhelmed by the beautiful personification of Liberty. She is both rooted in the people and their inspiring genius, and she visually lifts those contemporaries who fight by her side from their ordinarily subordinate position in the middle ground, making them larger than life. Delacroix's intention was not to represent a heroic action from the July days, but to imply both its motivation and its enduring importance. He based his figure of Liberty on the Nike of Samothrace and described the suffering, coarsened, alienated human beings who had been excluded from participation in their nation, and so conveyed the full historical meaning of the July Revolution.

Although his rationale was understood, Delacroix's decision to retain the truth of popular insurrection was perceived as both pictorially misguided and politically dangerous, even at this moment of Liberal triumph. Ambroise Tardieu, completely sympathetic to the "patriotic" conception of the work, which he described as "liberty helping the nation to win its rights, after that nation had been humiliated for sixteen years by being crushed by stupidity, bigotry, and fanatical hypocrisy," still thought that it had been a mistake to depict brutes in rags, "the populace and not the
people." This criticism was made several times by others, in even more vehement terms.

But Delacroix's historical conception mandated this aesthetic amalgam of truth and poetry. It was necessary to root allegorical ideality in genre specificity, just as it was necessary to balance Liberty's appearance between a recognizable classical Victory and an agonized, contemporary woman, so that both immediate events and their eternal significance would be revealed. By acknowledging the harsh experiences that led to insurrection, that insurrection would become comprehensible, even justifiable. Similarly, it was necessary to break apart a unified figure canon, to refuse to give a coherent retreat into space, in order for the viewer to see shards of reality, each true, instead of an enactment of reality, which would have to be false. This was the "desordre intelligent" that Casimir Delavigne lauded in his poetic celebration of the July Revolution, which voiced popular resentment, determination, and triumph in irregular, colloquial stanzas. 

Poem and painting held up a lens to reality, so that the concentrated rays of the July sun would set it aflame.

Many critics realized that Delacroix had taken this approach to achieve historical resurrection, and praised him for doing so. Victor Schoelcher, a republican and Delacroix's friend, thought that the painting was the most remarkable of all the works that commemorated the July Revolution, precisely because it was not a mere representation of an actual event. The personification of Liberty herself would inspire the people and their descendants. Lenormant affirmed the artist's evocation of site and people without tying them to "topographical exactitude" and was thrilled by the vitality, the reality, of this allegory of "Liberty of the people," which was so true to its subject and summarized it so poetically. Yet critics admitted that they were disconcerted by Delacroix's compositional strategies. Planche, for example, was disturbed by the indecisive spatial location, finding that the background "danced" forward and backward. And the moment was not precisely indicated: Was the battle over, beginning, or still being fought? But Planche admitted, despite these concerns and despite his rejection in principle of the mixing of allegory and reality, that once he had seen Delacroix's work all his preconceived ideas faded away, and that allegorical personification added history's majesty to yesterday's memories.

Planche also believed, however, that the full significance of Delacroix's work was not being recognized. In his conclusion to his review of the Salon as a whole, he warned that as long as the general public sought "first-class mediocrity" in Delacroix's Cromwell. Delacroix's Liberty, the Salon's most beautiful work and one that would endure, would have the success it deserved. In 1831, two schools of historical painting faced each other: one that sought historical resurrection, and another that succeeded in historical representation.

Heine, a Romantic and a liberal who considered Delaroche the "ring-leader" of the school of artists who preferred representation to "the past itself," wrote the most insightful of all the reviews of Delacroix's Liberty. He couched his praise of Delacroix in a commentary that in itself was a homage to the work: it exploded linear time, making the work come alive in an interactive review of the art work's impact on his soul. His language, like Delacroix's figurative vocabulary, was compiled of metaphor, prose, and slang. He described Delacroix's color as muted, lacking varnish and brilliance, dry, sun-dried qualities that gave his picture the real physiognomy of the July days. Delacroix's Liberty, her features expressing "insolent pain," was "Phryne, fishwife, and goddess." And if she appeared to be a common prostitute, if the urchin at her side was filthy, if the hero charging forward holding a gun looked like a criminal: "that is just the point, a great idea has enabled these common people, these blackguards, sanctified them and awakened the slumbering dignity within their souls." Heine realized, however, that Delacroix's resurrection of popular power would be welcomed only briefly:

Sacred July days of Paris!... Whoever experienced you no longer whines at the old graves but believes instead, joyfully, in the resurrection of the people. Sacred July days! how beautiful was the sun and how great were the people of Paris. The gods in heaven who watched the great struggle... gladly would they have come down to earth to become citizens of Paris! But envious, anxious as they are, they feared that in the end people might blossom up too high and too splendidly, and through their priests they sought to "blacken what shine and drag what was lofty through the dust," and they started the Belgian rebellion, de Potter's beastly ouevre. Precautions have been taken that the tree of liberty not grow up into the sky.

Heine and Planche were prescient. Such a passionate resurrection of struggle would not be welcome, once the government that had come to power because of that struggle was firmly in place. Then historical representation would be required: a clear description of the meaning of the recent events, a representation of their actions. Delacroix's Liberty, which the government acquired from the Salon and exhibited in the Musée de Luxembourg in 1832, was soon put into storage, and his competition entries for the Salle des Sénates in the Chamber of Deputies at the Palais-Bourbon were not selected.

There were conceptual as well as aesthetic reasons for their rejection. Guizot had announced the subjects for these paintings to be Mirabeau's refusal to dismiss the Constitutional Assembly and Boissy d'Anglas's calm salute to Féraud's head on a pike, thrust towards him by rioters who had burst into the chamber. These events symbolized the legislature's resistance to both despotism and sedition during the French Revolution. The third subject, Louis-Philippe's oath to the legislature on August 9, "closed in a fitting fashion the series of events to which we owe our political security." The Revolution had reached its culmination; its
functioned empathetically, instead of mimetically, could mystify an audience that wished to receive a message from the work instead of entering into its experience, and could undermine the stability of the government's presentation of historical meaning. Naturally, the contemporary political implications of medieval communal revolts were not lost on Salon juries, as Barbier noted after the rejection of Clément Boulanger's *Episode of the Enfranchisement of the Communes* (1835, Bourges), inspired by Thierry's *Lettres sur l'histoire de France*. Thus, although we may not find exhibitions or museums crowded with paintings directly inspired by texts written by Thierry, Monteil, Michelet, or Carlyle, both because of their style, which resisted visual representation, and their view of history as communal and experiential, nevertheless we should recognize that these historians had a profound influence on the visual arts, not only through their conceptual viewpoint and their themes, but also through art reviews written by their disciples.

The creation of modern historiographic texts, whose readers would proceed actively, even interactively, and so constitute themselves truly informed members of the nation, aroused increasingly onerous expectations for historical paintings. As we have seen, Delaroche's dramatic paintings of events were frequently condemned by Salon critics (particularly by Saint-Simonians, such as Louis Piel) as both pictorially flawed and historically naive. How were artists to communicate the new definition of historical meaning as "the spirit of an age" to all of the nation's citizens without merely representing appearances and events? Did this mean the end of historical art? In 1835, in his dissertation on contemporary French historiographic studies, Sarrazin (who frequently cited Thierry), insisted both on the invisible aspects of history and on the necessity of visualizing history. History was a series of distinctly different, complex, and interactive social ecologies; they would be deformed and falsified if they were examined by a unique and rigid analytical methodology. This swiftly changing, dynamic existence demanded a picturesque and animated narrative, and it needed to be conveyed in paintings and images, which Sarrazin thought were the best means of making history come alive for ordinary people: "Give people history in visual forms, for this is the only place where history comes alive for them, where it impresses and moves them."

This sense of history as the "spirit of an age," which created a crisis in representational canvases, was ideally suited to textual vignettes. To understand the development of historical painting during the Restoration and thereafter, we must take into account the complementary and competitive role of illustration in histories. As early as 1826, Michelet noted that illustrations could contribute to the intellectual value of a history of sixteenth-century France's political and literary events by providing insight into the age's way of life and aesthetic preferences as well as the appearance of its major figures or monuments.
Illustrated histories were published constantly during the July Monarchy, and their popularity had a powerful impact on Salon viewers' expectations for unique and monumental historical paintings. Like historical paintings, these illustrated histories were visually informative and expressively effective, documenting site and costume and presenting dramatic anecdotes. Furthermore, illustrators could avoid the pitfalls that awaited painters: they could break apart the visual instant into multiple images, and they had the support of textual commentary, which could explain action. The painter's rupture of a unified pictorial field had been criticized, but this rupture was acceptable, even praiseworthy, in sumptuously illustrated texts, where an encyclopedic visual range of typographic and graphic approaches was considered both intellectually appropriate and visually attractive.

In 1833, in his prospectus to his Histoire Pittoresque de la Révolution Française, Béraud supported Sarrazin's views when he argued that illustrative documentation was a primary instructive method for conveying the modern sense of history. No longer was it a question of teaching princes or ministers what had happened in the past, while excluding the rest of the nation from such an education. Now all of the citizens of the nation would be able to learn for themselves from his animated and vivid narrative, in which illustrations would not simply accompany the text but supplement its didactic ability. The prospectus for this Histoire Pittoresque (several livraisons were published) promised images of battles, festivals, parliamentary sessions, caricatures, and fashions. Béraud wrote that he wished to see the Federalist's green jacket with steel buttons, the Montagnard's unpowdered hair, the Jacobin's red bonnet, for “in times of popular upheaval, a hairdo is a profound thought, the cut of a coat a treasured symbol.” Given this promise of a direct reentry into the past, through the reproduction not only of details of local color but even of period documents, we can understand the cool reception that greeted modern depictions of dramatized scenes from lives of the celebrated.

Finally, vignettes could act associatively as well as representationally. In 1828, Ludovic Vitet, the Romantic supporter of Delacroix's historical painting and the author of the League's trilogy of reading-dramas, urged artists to avoid the “false, literal vignette,” the mere resting of actions, and to utilize the free play of purely visual elements to address the reader's and viewer's imagination. Barthes called this associative manner of reading a text pleasurable “abrasion,” in contrast to a linear pursuit of its content. We have seen this sort of “abrasive” approach taken in the antichronological placement of Janet-Lange's vignettes in Chateaubriand's Les Quatre Stuarts, where Henriette's covering in a hut and Charles I's preparation for execution framed the history of that doomed dynasty. Readers of this edition of Chateaubriand's work relished this subjective and interactive manner of learning history, the “reading” of text and image through their orientation to each other as well as their independent representation of an action. Text and image were not only parallel or supplementary representations; they were contrapuntal commentaries on the meaning of the event. This, I propose, is what Sarrazin had in mind when he stated that visual images could render the dynamism of historical existence, where conventionally ordered and analytical narratives could not.

The development of historical literature from a corpus of moral precepts to an evocation of an age's spirit made it possible for the French to arrive at increasingly rich and subtle judgments of what comprised historical meaning, and how that meaning could be conveyed in visual form. It was inevitable that the revolution in historiography would create a crisis in pictorial representation. We have seen how artists struggled heroically to create works that could express meaning without its being flattened into representations of physical events or exploded into scintillating compositional fragments. But the crisis in historical representation did not mean the death of historical painting, as we saw in Delacroix's Liberty. Artists could rise to the challenge of conceiving and composing works that were both pictorially sublime and historically insightful, according to the rigorous standards of modern historiography. When Courbet described his Burial at Ornans (1850, Musée du Louvre), his “declaration of principles,” in the Salon entry list as “painting with human figures, the history of a burial at Ornans,” he stressed that his work presented a subject that was conceived historically, in contrast to a traditional “history painting,” conceived according to pictorial criteria based on tragic or poetic literature. Masterpieces such as Courbet's Burial at Ornans, or Delacroix's Abduction of Rebecca (1846, Metropolitan Museum of Art) from Scott's Ivanhoe, a whirlpool of action and passion rooted in racial conflict, or Manet's versions of The Execution of Maximilian (1866–9), were true historical paintings in both senses of the term. The crisis in historical representation was a productive one for painting in general, for it demanded and justified such pictorial innovations as incrementally rather than hierarchically constructed compositions, multiple viewpoints, and diversified quotations from past pictorial works, because they could activate associative responses from the viewer. The readers of Thierry and Michelet were prepared to see history, past or present, as conceived by Delacroix, Courbet, Manet.

In 1833, Henri Martin, introducing his illustrated history of France, insisted that history was not a painting, organized according to a unique perspectival system, nor a text written according to one myopic author's point of view, but a faceted mirror in which not only all the people of the past but every present-day reader's point of view would be reflected, and which every reader could break and reconstitute according to his own convictions. This radical refusal to consign authority to another proved that the French nation was no longer “abandoned by the past, without memory or hope,” as Benjamin Constant had lamented only a
few years before. Then they had been lost in a traumatic present, their past wrenched away from them and rendered meaningless, their future impossible to predict. They could save themselves only by recovering their nation's memory, to be found in the facts, protagonists, passions that had existed, and that demanded commemoration, comprehension, and integration. Now they could move into the future, wholly themselves, because they had arrived at an understanding, however partial or evanescent, of that which had occurred before them, and so resulted in them: "the immediate representation of the past that has produced us, we ourselves."

NOTES

I have retained the original spelling in French quotations; translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. All dimensions of paintings are given with height preceding width.

CHAPTER ONE. IMAGINING THE PAST IN 1827


3. "It is impossible, in fact, not to place him on art's summit, on that throne of gold with ivory steps on which are seated, crowned with laurel, the artists who have accomplished their glory and are ready for immortality," Théophile Gautier, Les Beaux-Arts en Europe, 2 vols. (Paris, 1855), 1:142. In gratitude, Ingres gave
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2. Marrinan commented on Delacroix’s expressive distortions of scale, particularly his enlargement of the standing figures so that they dominate those in the foreground, his accelerated spatial recession, and his placement of the spectator’s perspective viewpoint near Liberty’s foot. Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe, 70–2.

3. See Delacroix’s drawings of Greek history, his preparatory studies for Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi (1826). Musée du Louvre, RF 9145, folio 19 verso; RF 9145, folio 12 verso.

4. In effect, c’est une belle idée et une composition tout romantique que la Liberté menant la conquête de ses droits une nation jadis l’exemple et la maîtresse de l’Europe, et maintenant humiliée par seize ans d’asservissement au jugement de la sorte, des préjugés et d’un fantasmagorie hypocrisies que l’exécution vient mal ici au secours de la pensée … M. Delacroix a été accusé d’avoir calomnié le peuple de Paris; moi, je ne l’accuserai que d’avoir pris ses modèles dans la populace, et non dans le peuple: on ne fait partie d’un peuple que quand on l’est utile, et non quand on l’est un fléau.


5. Qu’ils aient l’ordre pour eux, le désordre est pour nous!

Désordre intelligent, qui s’entend l’auteur,
Qui commande, obéit, marque à chacun sa place,
Comme un seul nous fait agir tous,
Et qui prouve à la tyranie,

6. Avouons d’abord que loin de partager l’avis général nous admirons beaucoup cette alliance de l’allégorie au réel que nous y trouvons. Il ne faut pas oublier que l’allégorie, comme la musique et les lettres, est faite pour aller sur les masses, et les perfectionner en transmettant à la société l’image de ce qui est grand et beau … M. Delacroix … ne voulait pas … traduire un épisode de trois journées; prenant son vol de plus haut, songeant à nos fils, il voulait personnaliser la révolution de juillet. Qu’avait-il donc de mieux à faire de montrer le peuple suivant la Liberté sur les barricades? Les bons tableaux sont ceux qui s’expliquent sans livret.


8. Faut-il blâmer, faut-il louer l’alliance de l’allégorie et de la réalité qui preside à cette composition? Nous blâmerions le principe en lui-même, mais nous louerions l’exécution: le succès absolu. Evidemment, dans la pensee de l’auteur, l’allégorie donne à la scène qu’il veut représenter une grandeur nouvelle et plus imposante; elle ajoute à la réalité le caractére idéal qui lui manque; en l’élevant elle l’élargit; elle ajoute à nos souvenirs d’hier, la majesté que l’histoire seule et la plus lointaine possède, et semble se reculer comme un privilège exclusif.

Gustave Blanche, “MM. E. Delacroix et Signol,” Salon de 1831, 107–12, 109. On the background and action: “Le fond est à une distance indécise, et danse … nous voyons bien dans ce tableau tous les éléments d’une action, mais que l’action en elle-même nous semble absente. On ne voit pas précisément ce qui est en train, s’il finit ou s’il commence” (111). He compared Delacroix and Delarue in his conclusion to the Salon review (298); see the discussion of his response to Delarue’s Cromwell in Chapter 4 of the present volume.

9. Cet artiste n’a pas de prédestination pour le passé en lui-même, mais pour la représentation de ces temps, pour la reproduction de leur esprit, pour leur histoire écrite avec des couleurs. C’est le goût actuel de la plupart des peintres français; le salon était rempli de scènes empruntées à l’histoire, et les noms de Deveria, Steuben et Johanns méritent un mention des plus distingués.


tional animal painter, and Louis de Potter (1786–1849), who had successfully fomented the Belgian rebellion against Dutch rule. De Potter was head of the Catholic–Liberal Party. The rebellion began with a riot in Brussels on August 25, 1830; Belgium became a separate kingdom in 1831.

11. On dit dans les vieilles chroniques de France que vers la fin du XIe siècle, le roi, croisant les bons habitants de la ville de Ronan, mal satisfaits de l'oppression des brigandages de leur seigneur égoïste, s'emportent en sédition pour affranchir leur commune... M. Augustin Thierry, qui est aussi un grand peintre à sa manière, nous a donné ses belles lettres sur l'histoire de France un admirable récit de cet événement, et c'est là sans doute que M. Clement Boulanger a été chercher pour en faire le sujet d'un grand tableau qui vient d'être rejeté par le jury... M. C. Boulanger a eu le tort d'intituler son tableau Afnachissement des Communes; et l'on assure que le jury, torturant la conscience du peintre, a cru y voir une apologie du meurtre au profit de la liberté; il a pris parti pour l'événement contre la bourgeoisie; il a déclaré cette peinture factice, immoral, corruptrice, attente et convaincante de brouillage, et il a lancé son verdict d'expulsion.


12. On the term "the spirit of the age" and its use by Mill, Carlyle, and French Saint-Simonians during the 1820s and early 1830s, see Culler, The Victorian Mirror of History, 50-65.

13. L'ordre de l'historique doit être conforme à celui de la vie réelle; tout se mêle, tout se confond dans la vie des peuples, comme dans celle de l'homme: il faut de même que l'histoire enchaîne et enfile tout dans un immense tissu, où les acteurs, les événements, les faits, se montrent à la place qu'ils ont occupée sur la scène du monde... La vérité de l'ordre historique ne peut pas seulement que l'on conserve sa forme naturelle à la société en général, elle demande encore que l'écrivain représente chaque société avec son caractère propre d'ordre ou de confusion, et qu'il évite avec soin de transporter sur des temps antérieurs la charité et la régularité de son époque. Il n'y a rien qui fausse l'histoire comme ces efforts de presque tous les historiens pour coordonner et arranger méthodiquement et distinctement un état social, où tout était pêle-mêle.

J. Sarrazin, Du Progrès des Études Historiques en France au dix-neuvième siècle; Dissertation présentée à la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg... le 1er Août 1835 (Strasbourg: E.G. Levrault, 1835), 53, 49-49.


16. Il ne s'agit plus seulement d'apprendre à quelques fils de rois, de grands, de ministres, ce qu'elles étaient leurs pères, ou d'exercer en eux le désir de mêmes éloges, ou la crainte du même blâme: ici c'est une nation tout entière s'étendant par ses propres exemples... Chaque acte de ce drame extraordinaire à sa physionomie qui lui est propre, son escorte de modes, de coutumes, de langage, d'habitudes, expression de la pensée publique, couleur des partis où se reflète leur politique, effets de grandes causes qui amènent eux-mêmes des causes nouvelles. Chacun de ses actes à sa grande...