Delacroix’s *organisme*, so described by Musset, reveals a sensitive use of the word, for Delacroix is essentially an organic painter, one who dissolves the planimetric picture surface of the Neo-classicists, and disinclines the logical arrangement of the subject in favor of an exploitation of his chosen pictorial elements. These may range over the whole height and breadth of his canvas, exploding from a barely discernible central viewpoint with a fissile energy which may cause the image to tilt in a precarious diagonal.

The extreme logic of David is subverted in favor of a greater expressionism, yet it is the energy of the painter that is in command. A drawing by Delacroix for even so legible yet intemperate a picture as the *Death of Sardanapalus* (Fig. 1) will be a frenzied explosion of lines that never converge (Fig. 17). This indicates a world outside thought, an overwrought subjectivity no longer dominated by appearance. That Delacroix was able to control such demonic intensity and to compress it into the sort of eligibility that the nineteenth-century eye was entitled to expect is evidence of both a furious temperament and the stoical discipline needed to bring it under control.

As a Romantic, Delacroix was, as he haughtily claimed, a pure classicist. Creative momentum, the pure expression of the *moi*, had to be harnessed, made acceptable. But in that process none of the struggle to achieve it need be effaced: the picture would be an event, a manifestation of the artist’s engagement with his art. At the same time the artist would seek the protective power of history to justify the tragedies he was intent on illustrating, as if he possessed some otherworldly stance to justify his performance as demiurge.

The duality was noted quite early on in Delacroix’s career. A society hostess, with designs on his company, opined how sad it was that such a charming man should paint such terrible pictures. What distressed her may have been evidence, as early as 1824, in his watercolours of tigers attacking horses (Fig. 18), of a violent irrational urge quite at odds with the polite patrician façade presented to the world. The critic Théophile Silvestre memorably described him as ardent and cold-blooded. It is in the energy of the brushwork, an energy directed from the wrist, that one is entitled to discern Romantic despair, a realization and acceptance that logic will never triumph in human affairs, that the spirit craves release, and that the more it is constrained by outside forces the more violently it will require expression.

Delacroix’s desire was to transmit through the medium of his paint images suggested by the id but controlled by the superego. In this way texts become altered to suit the painter’s requirements. Sardanapalus emerges from Byron’s play to decree an orgy of Delacroix’s own devising, in which naked women writhe helplessly under the disinterested eye of an inert tyrant. This willed destruction is voluptuous, but the excitement is in the paint rather than in the subject.
Studies for this picture show the violence being dominated and mastered, until the finished work, though excessively disturbing, is at least decipherable. Only the assault on the spectator remains undiminished, and indeed unexplained. All of this functions at the level of the subconscious. In a Journal entry of 1822 Delacroix stated that a mysterious bridge connects the soul of a painting with that of the spectator. It is true to say that the spectator remains entirely convinced by the sadism of this particular work. It is an element the spectator will have to deal with on his own terms, not quite sure that Delacroix intended to interpret so remote an event as an orgy.

What has this to do with Romanticism, apart from the fact that the appearance of Delacroix’s picture is so blatantly and unequivocally Romantic? Quite simply that Delacroix accomplishes that dissolution of the established order that was still accepted as the norm. After 1827, the date of the Sardanapalus, the unities are nowhere in sight. By spreading his composition all over the canvas, from top to bottom and from left to right, Delacroix subverts expectations of how the picture space should be organized. He would do this until the later part of his career, which was absorbed by government commissions imposing a degree of traditional restraint. In 1827 he took a risk which was to be widely deplored, forswearing political correctness in order to paint from his own uninhibited fantasies. Sardanapalus, in Byron’s play of 1821, merely gives an order that destruction is to take place, whereas Delacroix chooses to enact it. In 1827, the date of the picture, Victor Hugo published his Preface to Cromwell, with its famous defence of the fusion of the sublime and the grotesque. A well-meaning stranger, per-

ceiving not incorrectly that Delacroix had attempted precisely this fusion, congratulated the artist on being the Victor Hugo of painting, whereupon Delacroix replied, with the utmost firmness, ‘Vous vous trompez, Monsieur, je suis un pur classique.’ The rest of his career was devoted to justifying this pronouncement.

Delacroix achieves another form of political correctness by disguising his own conflicts behind the conflicts of his chosen subjects, so that the violence he depicts may seem little more than the violence of history. Certain historical episodes serve to explain the shock of the images, their tilting viewpoint, their absence of definition. Shakespeare, Dante, Byron are responsible, as are Rubens, Rembrandt, but also Constable, Lawrence, Bonington. By incorporating influences such as these Delacroix shelters behind the example of others. In the same way he proclaims his independence from classical standards and from the purity of the classical ideal. His resolute modernity is manifested in every picture painted before 1848, when, as he wrote in his Journal, he buried his former self, with his hopes and dreams for the future. Immolation as a form of contrition is Delacroix’s outstanding characteristic. Yet it was only after 1848 that he achieved epic stature, although his early works are better known. Without the shock reaction to his Sardanapalus, which was widely deplored, Delacroix might never have made the transition to maturity that is so evident in his later work.

As a young man he was easily influenced. The Journals for 1822 and 1824 describe the excitement he felt when he visited Gros and Géricault. He began his career within recognizable limits: Dante and Virgil Crossing the Styx of
1822 is strongly influenced by Géricault’s *Raft of the Medusa* of 1819, while *Scenes from the Massacre at Chios* (Fig. 30) is an orthodox composition of interlocking triangles, with a nod to David’s Camilla in the *Oath of the Horatii* (Fig. 15) in the slumped body of the girl in the foreground. Stendhal, reviewing the Salon of 1824, reported a certain lack of authenticity, which he explained by the fact that Delacroix had not witnessed the massacre himself but had merely read newspaper reports. Stendhal plainly saw Delacroix as a feeble civilian, or as one who did not have the benefit of a military background. But a military background is not necessary if one is mainly concerned with victims. When the victim takes precedence over the hero it may be a positive advantage to be a thoughtful bystander. All this rigorously built composition lacks is the requisite lesson of stoicism, a stoicism which Delacroix, in time, was to make peculiarly his own.

The genesis of the picture is interesting. There is something slightly unusual about its subject, which is a fictionalized account of an episode in the Greek Wars of Independence. The Greek revolt against the Sultan of Turkey began in 1820, and Delacroix’s picture commemorates an incident in 1822 when 20,000 Greeks were massacred on the island of Chios as a reprisal for recent Turkish losses. It is an orthodox and politically correct statement of pity and sympathy, and its good intentions are not in any doubt. But it is more than this: it is a work of discovery which inaugurates many enthusiasms beyond the range of David, or Géricault, or even Gros. Delacroix’s picture is on the scale of a Rubens; more specifically it is modelled on certain Rubensian examples. But it is in handling that the picture is so resolutely modern, for it has a richness of colour and a softness of glazes that Delacroix learned from the English painters Bonington, with whom he briefly shared a studio, and Constable, whose *Hay Wain* he saw in Arrowsmith’s gallery and again in the Salon of 1824, after which he is said to have made adjustments to the sky of his own picture. The luminosity of the sky in *Chios*, the horse’s mane, the turban of the Turk, and the nude torso of the girl are of a lightness of key that bears witness to the lessons he learned from the English painters, Bonington in particular. He was thus the first to glimpse the potentialities of the *plein’air* technique that was to gain momentum until it became a matter of serious study later in the century.

Delacroix’s youth was, like many a lesser person’s youth, suffused with enthusiasm and anxiety. His mother was a Riesener, a member of the illustrious family of eighteenth-century cabinet-makers; his father, according to a rumour reported by Edmond de Goncourt in his *Journal*, was Talleyrand. A comparison between Prud’hon’s portrait of Talleyrand in the Musée Carnavalet and Nadar’s photograph of Delacroix in middle age would seem to bear this out; the resemblance is too striking to be ignored. Family prudence would undoubtedly have prevailed in this matter, which was never elucidated. As a young man Delacroix seems to have gone out of his way to establish other credentials. A determined modernist, he was also something of a natural dramatist, drawn to Shakespeare, to Byron, to Walter Scott, all of whom were newly discovered to be superior to the rule-ridden French. Too young to be acted upon by the legacy of Napoleon, Delacroix was open to sympathies of a world order. The forms of distress he chose to chronicle are
in fact universal; they absorb Delacroix’s own anxieties without quite managing to defuse them. Thus the artist becomes prime mover in an orgy of feeling, without quite needing to show his hand; he is very clearly on the side of the angels. The distress of Gros, of Géricault, was undisguised. Delacroix rarely departs from a form of universality which is more worldly, but more distant.

This tone is also noticeable in the Journals. After the disorders of youth, when he worries whether or not to pursue his models, Delacroix gives evidence of increasing gravitas, so that the entries of the 1850s might have been written by a man in serene old age: Mozart, country walks, and solitude are praised; Berlioz, Courbet and Millet deplored. This is maturity; it may also be compromise. The disastrous reception of the Sardanapalus, its even more disastrous self-exposure, were to have a profound effect. Wholehearted sensuality was, in the opinion of the critics, an uneasy accompaniment to pity for the innocent victim. The Sardanapalus, they claimed, was a great and terrible bonfire, a poem of destruction. But the picture, as Baudelaire, Delacroix’s champion, almost revealed, is not about destruction but about ennui, about the inability to respond no matter how extreme the stimulus. Sardanapalus remains unmoved by the beautiful nude women imploring him for mercy. He is impotent. Delacroix’s future career was to be built on a refutation of all possible indictments: impotence, sadism, diabolism... ‘Vous vous trompez, Monsieur, je suis un pur classique.’

This later, more mature form of Romanticism reaches its singular climax in Liberty Leading the People of 1831 (Fig. 33), Delacroix’s only other excursion into the battlefield of
modern life, and his only major work on a contemporary Western theme. It takes the Baroque step of combining real and allegorical figures, much as Rubens did—in itself a bid for two kinds of approval. Yet the picture represents an curious compromise. It is a picture with a message, one which relies far less on beauty of pigment or charm of detail than the Chios. Instead of a serene blue sky there is a smoky haze, broken only by the red, white and blue of the tricolour. The foreground figures are very obviously modelled on Géricault’s studies of the dead and dying, which Delacroix had been able to see, while the figure of Liberty, with her quasi-Greek profile, is a compendium of Michelangelesque attitudes. The elegant yet nervous figure with the musket is, or may be, Delacroix himself, striking a blow for freedom, or, to use a Romantic word, liberty. His stance, however, is irresolute. Liberty exhorts him directly, but he is remote, wrapped up in some personal conjecture. In fact, while upholding the theory of Liberty, Delacroix is not sure whether he can face the strains of translating this theory into concrete terms, a painful, laborious, and disillusioning process known to all revolutionaries. Even David, for all his Jacobin fervour, knew the same moment of doubt during his imprisonment for having shown a mistaken zeal in his support of Robespierre. Delacroix goes further. In addition to his own moral complexity he appears to wonder whether the struggle is in fact desirable, for the figure in the centre of the picture, and overshadowed, seems to be pleading with Liberty, an action completely out of line with the forward surge of the revolutionary force, which he attempts to delay.

In one sense Delacroix’s life is devoid of incident. The
The torments and satisfactions of the artist have replaced attention to outside forces. He never married, and apart from his housekeeper, Jenny, no woman appears to have featured in his life. Nor did he undertake the painter's almost obligatory journey to Italy. He went instead to England, as Géricault had done before him, to Algeria and Morocco, and to the Low Countries. Much time elapsed between these excursions, of which the most significant was the journey to Morocco in 1832, when he joined the delegation of the Comte de Mornay to pay a six-month diplomatic visit to the Sultan. This semi-official appointment, to be followed by others of far greater weight and significance, might reinforce the rumours about Delacroix's paternity, for he was, in a way which might otherwise seem mysterious, to accede to various government commissions which may have been unexpected in view of the Sardanapalus scandal. The journey to Morocco facilitated both renewal and greater emancipation from the standards still prevalent in the studios and in the Salon. The spectacle of the Arab and Jewish worlds had the effect of freeing him from the last lingering memories of Davidian classicism. As he said, rather defiantly, 'Antiquity is at my door; I've had a good laugh at David's Greeks and Romans.' In Delacroix's vocabulary antique meant unspoilt, and in his hosts he found something not only unspoilt but colourful, dignified, melancholy, and with the kind of impassivity that he himself was beginning to prize.

These are the characteristics so brilliantly captured in Les Femmes d'Alger (Fig. 31), or women of Algiers in their quarters, which Delacroix obtained special permission to visit. Baudelaire found this picture heavy with a weight of moral sadness, as if the women, admittedly reflective, were expiating the original sin of sex. Baudelaire's interpretation may be justified in one sense, but sex and sin were his bitter preoccupation, as opposed to Delacroix's, which were light and colour. He was to reject Baudelaire's accolade with some hauteur, as he was to reject all attempts to make clear his intentions. These were to remain his alone, and were fiercely guarded.

The most obvious influence of the Moroccan visit was the supply of Moroccan themes which lasted Delacroix until his death. Seven volumes of drawings were compiled, of the Sultan reviewing his troops, of a Jewish wedding, of dervishes, of Arab horses. One picture of the Sultan, Abd-el-Rahman, was painted thirteen years later, in 1845; another dates from 1862, thirty years after the visit and a year before Delacroix's death. The brilliant sunlight of the landscape, and the dim but highly coloured gloom of the interiors, affected his colour scale. On the one hand the outdoor scenes have a silvery-yellow, almost Veronese light, while the interiors have a suffused reddish-gold tonality deepened by blues and greens. Within the scope of this visit, Delacroix developed a full Baroque colour range, and all his figures in his later works have dark features and a pronounced Moroccan physiognomy.

The search for happiness, which Stendhal decided was entirely possible, has been rejected, has been replaced by the consolations of art. In the first and heroic phase of Romanticism it was possible to believe in personal fulfilment, if only in reduced circumstances. In the second and disillusioned phase the world is regarded as a vale of tears; as Baudelaire declared in the crucial Salon of 1846, 'Nous
célebrons tous quelque enterrement.' ('We are each of us attending some funeral or other.' ) Baudelaire's pessimism was not to Delacroix's taste; when applied to his pictures he saw it as dangerous misrepresentation. His temperament, which was notably aristocratic, deplored plebeian expansiveness. For this reason he fails, or omits, to explain himself in his Journal, and, by an irony which he himself did not appreciate, became known through the rapturous excesses of Baudelaire's criticism. On these, apart from one deprecatory letter, Delacroix declined to comment.

This refusal to descend to the level of the crowd, this fastidiousness and reticence, were necessary to contain, almost to imprison, the limitlessness of the pictorial imagination. While retreating into a polite version of himself, Delacroix permits his colours to become warmer, harsher, with a typical tonal contrast of reddish-yellow with a deep blue-green. Visitors to his studio found the heat almost tropical, the painter himself unaffected by it. In his middle and later years, Delacroix escapes from the strains and challenges of contemporary life into a past nearer to his own refined taste, nearer in fact to Shakespearian tragedy than the fantasies by which he had earlier been captivated. Scenes of myth and legend come to predominate, and while the technique becomes warmer and more broken, the handling more unconventional, the subject becomes more respectable, taken either from literature or from history. And if these subjects are in a sense more predictable, less personal, there is a far greater and deeper pathos, as if to compensate for the painter's withdrawal behind a screen of reticence, almost of unavailability. The pathos is now in the paint, remote from outside contingencies. The artist has become his own world, and in a sense his own monument. From this standpoint, interpretation - let alone the excited interpretation of Baudelaire - is indeed an irrelevance.

The Capture of Constantinople (Fig. 34), exhibited in the Salon of 1841, depicts a crusading knight dispensing Christian mercy, much as Napoleon was to exhibit in the fever hospital at Jaffa. The picture illustrates the taking of Constantinople by Baudouin, Count of Flanders, in 1204: that is to say in the fourth crusade. Various citizens come forward to beg for the Conqueror's compassion. A Romantic subject, therefore, with the double attraction of an exotic setting and medieval armour and costumes. Yet there is not a trace of Romantic fustian about this picture, for Delacroix has based his style on the example of the great Venetians, notably Titian and Veronese. In addition he had paid a visit to Flanders in 1838, and in the group of women he has included direct quotations from the pictures by Rubens he could have seen in the Brussels gallery. Compared with the Massacre at Chios of 1824, a picture on an identical theme of conquest and subjugation, significant changes have taken place. The first, a greater mastery in the handling of a large composition, is fairly obvious. The Chios was built on an orthodox classical system of interlocking triangles, whereas the Constantinople is as audacious as any Venetian altarpiece. A great Baroque artist has emerged. Delacroix has kept faith with the past, but not the past of David. He looks now to the past which produced the major European masters, a category in which he hopes to be counted.

The second difference is one of colour. Most of Delacroix's easel pictures have either faded or darkened and no longer give a true idea of their original impact. The Chios,