for example, now has a kind of Brescian coolness, a coolness which must have increased over the years. But the Constantinople shows a deepening of the colour scale which has worn rather better, with saturated blues and greens and deep golden flesh tones. There is another difference, one of morality. The Turkish horseman of Chios is represented as a conqueror; in spite of Delacroix’s slightly divided sympathies it is clear that one side has won and the other lost. But the conquerors of Constantinople are seen contre-jour, their faces are in darkness. Compared with the physical presence of their victims they have a ghostly funereal quality. When the features of the leading horseman, the Count of Flanders, can be distinguished, they are seen to be those of Sardanapalus. Sardanapalus destroyed to satisfy his vanity and to confound his ennui. The Count of Flanders’s spectral impassivity implies that he anticipates no such release. This represents the Silver Age of Romanticism, an age of disengagement, of a disillusionment no less profound than that experienced by those earlier enfants du siècle, but with the compensations of a protective colouring, almost an identity, which confers a different status, the confidence that comes with the authority of a greater, more European, indeed more universal, tradition.

By the 1840s Delacroix’s style was out of date. The new direction in art was to be pointed by the realism of Courbet and Millet, a realism with which Delacroix could not come to terms. According to Baudelaire, whose article on Delacroix in the Salon of 1846 added immeasurably to the painter’s reputation, and who repeated many of his conversations with Delacroix, which he noted like an ardent reporter, a picture should reproduce the artist’s world, not copy that mundane world which is common to us all. Nature is merely a dictionary: the artist’s task is to synthesize the elements into a whole not available to those who merely follow the words. The slightly pompous style and tone of these remarks indicates that Delacroix could have been as prestigious a teacher as Ingres, had he so desired. He had neither the taste nor the time for such a calling, for the rest of his career was monopolized by a number of official government commissions for which he was obliged to work in a traditional decorative style. These commissions — surprising for one who had earlier been reprimanded for faults against good taste — began in 1833 and were to occupy thirty years of Delacroix’s working life. They were on a vast scale: the Salon du Roi and the Library of the Palais Bourbon, the Library of the Senate, the Galerie d’Apollon in the Louvre, and the Salon de la Paix in the Hôtel de Ville. With the exception of the Hôtel de Ville, which burned down in 1870, all still exist, and are little known. They represent the highest point of Delacroix’s career, and demonstrate the ease and brilliance with which he worked in a classical setting, superimposing his free translation of the Baroque style on to the awkward shapes and spaces with which he had to contend.

Having started to paint on such a scale Delacroix realized that such public exercises, should he be successful with them, would be his greatest claim to immortality. The iconography in all cases is classical, and comfortably so, for the former Romantic has become something of a reactionary; raising his voice against the concept of progress, he is at pains to demonstrate that true science is in fact philosophy, and not the race for material advancement, and that
philosophy itself may be a lesser goal than art. In his decoration of the Library of the Senate Delacroix envisages an apotheosis of great men, but his great men are predominantly poets, who rank side by side with Greek and Roman rulers. Homer is there, and so is Hesiod. Suffused with an extraordinary intensity, in common with his other official commissions, Delacroix has created his own Elysium, without the benefit of dogma (always a dubious advantage) and with only the consecrated figures of secular legend in sight.

In comparison with the early works, with the Chios, the Sardanapalus, the Liberty, the artist of the 1850s is more sober and more traditional. Lingering errors of taste have disappeared, the implications of defeat and humiliation have been swept out of sight. Delacroix's decorative work, with its wide classical and philosophical background, seems to have been produced by a man of profound maturity, of great learning, of fastidious taste far removed from the exorbitant and revealing fantasies of Sardanapalus. It would be pleasant to picture Delacroix as serenely above the struggles of his youth, struggles which were those of Romanticism itself, and it is true that he had to a considerable extent overcome the excesses of those years. His Journal at this time contains long descriptions of solitary country walks, of evenings listening to Mozart, whom he considered superior to Beethoven, of discourses on style which would not disgrace Boileau. He had become a recluse, and in a discreet way a fanatic, using the same literary sources and researching more carefully into the compositional patterns of the earlier masters, Rubens, Veronese, and Titian, even Tintoretto, who are the inspiration behind his last and greatest official commission, the decoration of the Chapelle des Saints-Anges in Saint-Sulpice, now blackened and barely visible. These pictures of angelic intervention are far too big for their constrained setting; the angels appear as demi-gods, their free and untrammeled movement representing superhuman as well as otherworldly force. Yet there are signs of intimacy. In the scene of Jacob wrestling with the angel, there is a still life in the foreground of Jacob's water-bottle that just avoids pathos. That other detail, of the caravan of animals and servants being sent off to Esau, represents Delacroix's last Moorish fantasy.

Painted between 1857 and 1861, these images strike an almost surreal note in the sophisticated setting of Paris's sixth arrondissement. They represent an epic of creativity in a man already weakened by a tubercular infection of the throat, justifying in more ways than one the adoration that Baudelaire had expressed, notably in the Salons of 1846 and 1855 and in the obituary, which Baudelaire himself was almost too sick to expand. Terminally exhausted, he quotes himself at length, yet terminal exhaustion is appropriate, for this is an obituary not only of Delacroix but of Romanticism as well. That was how Baudelaire saw it, although his account was partial; in a sense he was writing his own obituary as well.

Delacroix died in 1863, after a long illness during which he prepared his palette every day. He had no followers or pupils to speak of. His art died with him, and of his tremendous œuvre only Baudelaire professed to understand the salient characteristics, Baudelaire who underlined Delacroix's aristocracy of intellect and feeling, his universal competence, his self-absorption, his melancholy, and, above all, the peculiar quality of his Romanticism. Baudelaire, like so
many others, makes an honourable attempt to define this elusive entity, and his pronouncement has a certain finality: 'Le Romantisme ne consistera pas dans une exécution parfaite mais dans une conception analogue à la morale du siècle.' ('Romanticism will not consist in a careful execution, but in a conception analogous to the moral climate of the times.')

But definitions of Romanticism proliferate in Baudelaire's Salons. More apposite is his definition of beauty: '. . . quelque chose d'ardent et de triste, laissant carrière à la conjecture' ('. . . something ardent and sad, leaving the field free for conjecture'). This is certainly applicable to Delacroix, whose brooding images bequeath a disturbed impression of disharmony and disquiet. Delacroix, again according to Baudelaire, expresses much of modern man's dilemma, notably the melancholy of an exile in an imperfect world. Dispossessed of easy certainties, Delacroix lived a stoical life, which was to impress the slightly younger man as ideal in itself, apparent calm disguising irrepressible impulses, those impulses sublimated into images which retain something of the remoteness of the psychological journey they have been obliged to make.

Delacroix regarded Baudelaire as a man haggard with illness and doubt, certainly a nuisance; this was the opinion of many. He further dismissed his interpretations as dangerous intrusions. He did not return Baudelaire's unstinting compliments. There is no sign of his having read and appreciated Les Fleurs du Mal, although a letter of 17 February 1858 acknowledges the copy which Baudelaire sent him. Yet the two men are linked by the exceptional quality of their imagination, and the high value they placed on such an endowment. For that reason Baudelaire was and is allowed his excesses, and his moral and emotional subtleties. The conjunction is also a tragic one, the sick Baudelaire merely tolerated by a man who had been protected by various important and discreet government agencies almost from the beginning of his career, before he had had time to give a full account of himself. But '. . . quelque chose d'ardent et de triste . . .' is certainly the most memorable description of Delacroix's style. Despite their differences in background and outlook it is as two great pessimists of the age of progress that they resemble each other, and in so doing attain an heroic status which their successors will be unable to emulate.

True Romanticism consists in deploying all the resources of the moi, and setting them down before a public not always willing to admire or even understand them. In this sense Baudelaire is an obvious Romantic. But Delacroix, in his paradoxical wish to retreat from the public gaze and to let his pictures seek out that gaze with undeniable insistence, is also a Romantic, one who may have seen the dangers of self-exposure but who embraced those dangers with a solipsism entirely in keeping with the exalted self, 'puissant et solitaire', like Vigny's Moses. This ultimately tragic destiny, of which Delacroix's pictures are a true mirror, exhausts the resources of a period without true heroes. The resultant life is sterile, without progeny. The work of the imagination is more powerful than it would otherwise have been for that very reason. By 1863, the date of Delacroix's death, such beliefs were no longer admissible. The future, in order to become a future, would have to embrace other modes. But Romanticism exerted a hold on the century that was not to be entirely forgotten. Traces remained, survived, persisted.
If disciples were few, followers can be clearly detected. The phenomenon of Romanticism continued both to fascinate and to remain unresolved.

It was perhaps fortunate that Delacroix was not concerned with the future. He had accomplished his task, and even his mission, which was to take his place in the pantheon of great artists who had established the European tradition, giants of universality whose lineage can be easily described. Baudelaire paid Delacroix the compliment which the painter may have welcomed: Delacroix, he said, was an essential link in this chain, which had to be understood as the painter's birthright. Without him there would be a fatal gap. It was as a spectacle of greatness that Delacroix primarily existed for Baudelaire; how Delacroix viewed himself it is difficult to imagine. It seems that he accepted his gifts as part of his métier, and his confidence was not misplaced. There is no evidence of creative exhaustion in his last work; very much the opposite. He accepted too the need for a correct non-committal persona as a necessary component of an oceanic imagination, and acceded instinctively to a way of life that made work his outstanding priority. One of Baudelaire's observations may have pleased him: his classical dependence on a text, to which he gave an essentially pictorial interpretation. From being the boldest, the most instinctive of the Romantics Delacroix had evolved into the most solitary, the most unapproachable, and in a curious way the most hierarchical artist of the nineteenth century. He was at all stages of his career rather too much to take. Even his admirers found it difficult to agree on the terms on which he should be assessed.

The exception was Baudelaire. Baudelaire, like Delacroix, was not concerned with the future of art. Both men had a vested interest in prophesying its decline, but they did so from a truly genuine position of native greatness. Both speak contemptuously of younger painters, with their conspicuous lack of literary and philosophical background. To Baudelaire, Delacroix was the civilization that was threatened by the champions of realism. In comparison with those men, Delacroix represented the values of the ancien régime. Revolutions, if revolutions there had to be, should take place out of sight, should be expressed through colour, through brush-strokes, through an exalted if mournful understanding of the past.

Baudelaire, in his obituary, does not return to a premiss that had incurred the earlier displeasure of Delacroix: namely that Delacroix was the painter of moral sadness. Possibly this was a dangerous line to pursue, yet looking back on the gallery of disasters that Delacroix chose to paint, looking back to so relatively uncomplicated a date as 1838, when Delacroix, setting out to paint a double portrait of his friends Chopin and George Sand, produced the image of desolation that is the lesser-known half of the canvas, now divided, one may be tempted to share Baudelaire's view, or at least to accept it as valid.

In 1863 such pessimism was no longer attractive, for in that year a new chapter opened in the history of French painting. The Salon des Refusés was inaugurated; Manet became the man to watch. Yet of the two events of that year, the opening of the Salon des Refusés and the death of Delacroix, it was perhaps the death of Delacroix that ensured the most decisive break with tradition and the inevitability of complete and drastic change.