modernity. The Salons of the last years 1799 to 1809 were filled with pictures of Napoleon and his exploits; it seemed possible to share his glory. On 11 February 1824 Delacroix wrote in his Journal, ‘La vie de Napoléon est l’épopée de notre siècle pour les arts’ (‘The life of Napoleon is the epic of our century for the arts’). Napoleon is the presiding genius of mature Romanticism. Even the later phase, represented by Musset and Vigny in literature, by Delacroix in painting, will be steeped in nostalgia for an heroic way of life.

In this historical framework the emotional tide that had been slowly rising throughout the eighteenth century received its apotheosis. Napoleon bequeathed a legacy of aspiration and regret that continued to resonate until two generations managed to outlive the past and to usher in a new era, one free of nostalgia, with eyes turned towards the future. But old psychological habits die hard; regret, even denial, persisted in some cases until the end of the century. And perhaps the traces are still perceptible today, even though the context has been lost. That context, the Romantic Movement, has left its own legacy. Heroes are no longer taken on trust, and the inevitable outcome is a disappointment that is both different and strangely familiar.

The Romantic Movement in France has been described as a revolt against two people, against Voltaire in literature and against David in painting. However much this statement over-simplifies the problem it helps to establish an important fact. It suggests that Romanticism is essentially about dissonance, about rejection, about protest, about breaking the old rules but only incidentally establishing new ones. This breaking of the rules, not always a joyous procedure, led in many cases to a feeling of isolation and rootlessness, and from this point of view the famous Romantic melancholy can be seen to have a serious ideological cause, over and above the loss of certainty experienced in a more general sense.

Gros’s disobedience, seen literally as original sin, led him to beg for readmission to the Davidian fold, while at the same time aware that his own originality could not be denied. It could not be denied because it had already been made manifest in pictures which fragmented David’s tight control and introduced an element of self-questioning which established new standards in what an image could reveal, not only in the representation of an event but in an attitude more probing than that usually handed down with an official state commission.
David, who loved this brilliant and devoted pupil, could not understand Gros’s tormented complexity, and from his exile in Brussels inquired, no doubt sincerely, when Gros was going to produce a picture which conformed to the norm then observed by all who aspired to the title of history painter, the highest category in the academic hierarchy. ‘Vite, vite, mon ami, feuillez lez votre Plutarche.’ (‘Quick, quick, my friend, leaf through your Plutarch!’) He saw nothing incongruous in giving this unsolicited advice to a man of fifty. David’s lack of comprehension, together with Gros’s endemic anxiety, had a fatal outcome. Gros killed himself, an act that led some to interpret his death as in itself a Romantic masterpiece.

For the astonishing fact is that, psychic anguish apart, Gros died for purely professional reasons, because his originality, which was of the highest quality, seemed to him to constitute a direct disloyalty to the principles he had learned from his master, David. The story of Gros’s life and fame can be read as a struggle between an inherited set of rules, which he quite consciously accepted, and an unformulated protest against those rules which was expressed every time Gros painted a picture in which his imagination led him to discard what David had taught him. Finally his confusion became intolerable and his life unbearable. His death was unnecessary but significant. He had given rise to a certain dilemma. He had, almost unknowingly, introduced personal comment into accepted versions of the truth. At the same time in his career came a growing conviction that a great adventure had finished. ‘Tout n’est-il pas terminé avec Napoléon?’ questioned Chateaubriand, in his Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe of 1848. Gros, who had been Napoleon’s painter, no less than David had been, was witness to that other exile, and was thus indebted to the two great taskmasters who had given his professional life its motivation.

To make matters worse he was entrusted with the task of keeping an eye on David’s studio and practice during his master’s exile in Brussels. Yet he still considered himself an unworthy pupil. There is evidence that he would not recover from what he considered to be a monstrous disloyalty. In 1824, at the funeral of his friend Girodet, he pronounced an extraordinary eulogy which soon developed into a paroxysm of self-accusation. David’s biographer, Delécluze, reports his words.

Je dois m’accuser encore d’avoir été l’un des premiers à donner le mauvais exemple que l’on a suivi, en ne mettant pas dans le choix des sujets que j’ai traités et dans leur exécution cette sévérité que recommandait notre maître, et qu’il n’a jamais cessé de montrer dans ses ouvrages. [I accuse myself of having been one of the first to give a bad example, in not infusing the subjects I painted and their execution with that rigour which our master recommended, and which he never ceased to demonstrate in his own works.]

He then collapsed at the graveside in a dead faint. This loss of control was symbolic as well as very real. He was not to survive it, though he was obliged to experience it for another eleven years.

In June 1835, Gros, or as he was then, Baron Gros, member of the Institut de France, professor at the École des Beaux-Arts, officer of the Legion of Honour, and highly respected member of the artistic establishment, was called for jury duty at the Assizes of the Seine department, sitting at the Palais de Justice. From 16 June on he fulfilled this
obligation, but on the morning of the 25th he left his house in the rue des Saints-Pères and never returned. On the afternoon of the same day he was seen walking through the arcades of the Palais-Royal with an expression of terror on his face. He walked all night, until he reached the forest of Meudon. At midday the following day he was found drowned in a small tributary of the Seine. He was fully clothed except for his hat, which was on the river bank, and it was the mark in this hat which enabled the mayor of Issy to identify him. The stream in which he drowned was two and a half feet deep, and despite the efforts of his wife and his friends the only possible verdict was one of suicide.

This account is taken from the biography of the artist by J. Tripiere le Franc, of 1880, one of those reverent and monumental works that are characteristic of nineteenth-century scholarship. Tripiere le Franc had access to Gros’s letters, which he quotes extensively. Curiously, Gros has attracted few modern scholars, despite the fact that he was the outstanding painter of his generation. This is all the more surprising in view of the spectacular nature of his career and its tragic outcome. Indeed his fault, if fault it was, consisted simply in the fact that he was unable to take the responsibility for having introduced into the painting of contemporary history a full range of imaginative effects at variance with those established by David. Like David, Gros was committed to history as it unfolded, committed also to the spin put on history by professional propagandists. This essential component of the life and activities of Napoleon was entrusted to Gros as one who would follow faithfully the example already set by David. However, unlike David, he operated outside the intellectual framework still thought necessary to make these events acceptable within the context of history. Gros’s response to the legend was that of a man of feeling, untempered by reflection. He accepted the facts, but doubted them. His imagination was both his strength as a painter and a source of dismay to him as an obedient pupil. Delacroix, the first to perceive and to fully sympathize with the nature of his dilemma, wrote of it in a magnificent article in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1848. He describes Gros at work, looking at his watch to see if it were time to ‘quitter le travail, et de déposer, avec sa palette, le fardou de l’inspiration’ (‘... to stop work, and to lay down, with his palette, the burden of inspiration’). Delacroix also speaks of the intolerable strain which Gros’s imagination placed upon a temperament which was fundamentally that of a docile and passive follower. Finally his overburdened professional conscience led him to disclaim all that he had done to modernize the paintings of his time. His finest achievements seemed to him illusory, because David disapproved of them.

If the name of David is constantly cited in connection with Gros it is because he is one of those teachers on whom it seemed impossible to improve, and also because until about 1810 his epic visualization of the events of his own times was unchallenged, and indeed still is. Gros became David’s pupil in 1785, at the age of fourteen, but he was in fact only twelve when his father took him to the Salon. There he saw David’s Andromaque, a singularly unrepresentative work which shows an expansive Andromache mourning over the body of her husband, Hector. The overt emotionalism of the picture determined Gros to paint like David, a misappropriation which was to have lasting
consequences. He entered David's studio on the last day of 1785 and was a student for two years. Although the actual tuition lasted only two years the influence lasted until David's death in 1825, and in a sense lived on until his own death ten years later.

He seems to have had bad nerves even when very young. One day the painter Gérard made a disparaging remark in his presence, and Gros was convinced that it was not safe for him to remain in France. Through the good offices of David he was able to obtain a passport and to leave for Italy. This was in January 1793; he thus escaped the worst of the Terror, with which his peculiar susceptibility was completely at odds. If it is possible to imagine an apolitical hero-worshipper, as he was to become, there are few signs of it in his early behaviour. Owing simply to the fact that he was befriended by a Genoese banker on the journey, he made his headquarters in Genoa, after brief periods in Rome and Florence. Chance served him well, for instead of putting in months of study of Raphael and Michelangelo he was allowed to proceed directly to those Baroque models in which Genoa was so rich, Rubens, Van Dyck, and the sculptor Puget. Gros stands in relation to Rubens much as Prud' hon stands in relation to Leonardo: the similarities are a matter of sympathy rather than of copying. The lesson he absorbed from Rubens was that painting was a compound of energies rather than of static forms. The portraits of Van Dyck reinforced his natural elegance, as they had fashioned that of David before him.

With difficulty Gros was obliged to survive as an exile. The notoriously uncertain years made life dangerous even outside France. But for the second time Genoa was to prove of strategic importance to Gros. In June 1796 Napoleon made his triumphal entry into Milan. A few days later Josephine left Paris to join him. She broke her journey at Genoa, where Gros was presented to her; she then took him to Milan and introduced him to Napoleon. Gros had found a future hero, who for a time was to supplant David. His timidity was eclipsed under Napoleon's influence. His rapid sketch of Napoleon crossing the bridge at Arcola at the head of his troops was painted on the spot. In this sketch Napoleon is simply a soldier, unburdened by the political ideals of David, who instinctively grafted on to him a public persona. To Gros, Napoleon was a general who led his troops to victory at Arcole, and he painted the incident with no thought of the didactic capital to be made from it. This was Gros's moment of innocence. Formally weak, the sketch is alive with nervous movement, incomplete, immature, but furiously painterly, worlds removed from the classical past and clearly indicating that feeling for the epic quality of contemporary events, which Baudelaire later characterized as the high-water mark of mature Romanticism.

Napoleon rewarded Gros with an official position, the first of many. He was made a member of the commission set up to choose, or rather, commandeer, works of Italian art for France, and in this capacity went to Perugia, Bologna, and Rome. In the following year, 1798, he was given the title of Inspecteur aux Revues and automatically became an officer, with a uniform and a horse. He followed the army to Novara, Turin, and back to Genoa. He wrote home to his mother describing that most fashionable state of melancholy, _le mal du siècle_, or, as he puts it, 'le dégoût de soi-même'.
Va, vivre seul peut perdre un individu, surtout lorsque, comme moi, mon âme a besoin d’attachement. Le dégoût de soi-même arrive, et c’est fini. Combien de fois je vais disant: si ma mère était avec moi, elle réglerait mon existence, que je suis incapable de faire moi-même. Oui, je le sens au fond de mon cœur, mon malheur est d’être seul. [Living alone can kill a man, all the more so if, like me, he craves involvement. Self-hatred ensues, and that’s an end of it. How many times have I said: if my mother were with me she would organize my life, something I am incapable of doing for myself. Yes, I feel in the depths of my heart that my misfortune is to be alone.] (Letter of 23 November 1798, quoted by Tripler le Franc)

He expressed regret, and it is indeed a cause for regret, that he was not allowed to accompany Napoleon to Egypt. Finally he was evacuated from the besieged city of Genoa, and after six months in Marseilles, where he painted several fine portraits, he returned to Paris in October 1800.

The circumstances of his return were very different from those of his precipitate departure seven years earlier. He was now an army officer who still wore his uniform. He was given a studio in the Couvent des Capucines which became a kind of permanent salon for visiting fellow officers. At one end of the corridor Ingres and Bartolini were studying Greek vases behind closed doors. At the other end Gros was painting in full view of whoever cared to watch. The ambience was fervid, optimistic, militaristic. Yet Gros was still the tenderest of painters, as can be judged from another official commission, the posthumous portrait of Christine Boyer, the first wife of Lucien Bonaparte, done in 1800 (Fig. 10). This dreamily Romantic evocation, with its fantastically made-up landscape of grottoes and cascades, should be compared with a David of the same date, the tough, delicate, and impersonal portrait of Mme Récamier (Fig. 5), in which the painter’s sympathy for his virginal subject is never allowed to become overt. In contrast the Gros seems to carry a world of feeling, to foreshadow many an abandoned Romantic heroine. Significantly Gros was also a sensitive painter of children. His alert nervous apparatus responded quickly to vulnerability, to innocence, above all to blamelessness. Yet at the same time his admiration for Napoleon was undimmed. It was only when he began to sympathize with the conqueror’s victims, whom, it should be emphasized, he never witnessed at first hand, that doubt began to make inroads into his consciousness.

At the Salon of 1801 Gros exhibited his portrait of Napoleon at Arcole with great success, and in the same year he won an open competition for a commission to paint the Battle of Nazareth, his first essay in this particular genre of contemporary history painting. The Battle of Nazareth took place in 1799; it was won by General Junot, who with 500 horse and foot soldiers defeated 6,000 Turks and Arabs (the numbers are given by Delacroix). The picture was to have been immense, over forty-five feet long, and thus stood fair to immortalize the hero of the event. It was never painted and is now known only by a sketch in Nantes. It has been suggested that Napoleon was jealous of Junot’s success and had the commission stopped. It is in fact more likely that Napoleon wished to leave a very different image of the Egyptian campaign, and that image he sought and found in an episode celebrating himself: the scene in the fever hospital at Jaffa. In a letter to his mother Gros laments the fact that
he was not to be allowed to accompany the army to Egypt, where he would have had an opportunity to paint the Alexander of the New World, just as Charles Le Brun had painted the Alexander of the Old. The Alexander of the New World, conditioned to tributes such as this, found Gros’s fervour greatly to his liking.

An equally related point throws light on the artistic situation under Napoleon’s direct rule. Napoleon’s criterion for the fine arts was that everything should be not only realistic but recognizable. As far as painting was concerned he was a judge of effect, but not necessarily of quality: he knew what a picture should contain but had neither the time nor the inclination to communicate his wishes to artists considered capable of executing his commissions. He therefore needed an intermediary to translate his projects into artistic terms. At first he entrusted this office to his brother Lucien, the Minister of the Interior. This proved unsatisfactory. In 1800 Napoleon invited David to be ‘peintre du gouvernement’. David, although a sincere admirer of Napoleon, valued his artistic status and refused to become a virtual civil servant. Napoleon then offered the position to the sculptor Canova. This was manifestly inappropriate and Canova declined. Napoleon was thereby forced back on to his third choice, the existing director of the Musée Napoléon, Vivant Denon, and Vivant Denon, who accepted, did his job so thoroughly that he ended up with enormous power, and was responsible for various Imperial improvements to Paris. He also commissioned battle-pieces and portraits for the Imperial palaces and museums.

In Gros he found the ideal Imperial painter, and between them they created the image of Napoleon as posterity knows him. Gros never went to the Middle East, nor did he go to the Russian front. It was solely through the agency of Vivant Denon that he was able to produce such highly documented pictures as Jaffa, Aboukir, and Eylau. It was Vivant Denon who informed Gros and anyone else awarded a government commission what their pictures were to contain. Vivant Denon had a team of draughtsmen standing by on every campaign, virtually on every battlefield, noting down details of costume and terrain which would then be dispatched to the painters in their studios. Vivant Denon had the advantage of having been on the Egyptian campaign. His book Voyage dans la haute et basse Égypte was published in Paris in 1802. It is precisely this text which marks the difference between the rather generalized Baroque character of the Nazareth sketch, and the breadth and detail of Gros’s masterpiece, the infinitely superior and indeed unprecedented Pestiférés de Jaffa (The Plague Hospital at Jaffa) (Figs. 28, 29).

To compensate Gros for the loss of the Nazareth commission he was given one that was to prove more important. The Jaffa picture was finished in just under six months. It was painted on half of the enormous canvas set aside for the Nazareth, and it was exhibited in the Salon of 1804 where it was crowned with palms and laurels. A banquet was offered to the artist, and David presided over it. It was the most glorious moment of Gros’s career, and, to judge from the picture he painted, it was the most glorious moment of Napoleon’s, consecrating him as hero, knight, and saviour. This was not in fact the case, and it is precisely the difference between cold fact and brilliant propaganda that makes the picture so memorable, turning it from an icon into a reflection on the ethos of conquest.
The scene is taken from an incident in the Egyptian campaign of 1799, at a moment when an outbreak of the plague was destroying the morale of the French troops. As Napoleon’s one-time secretary, Bourrienne, writes in his Memoirs (1829–31), Napoleon visited the fever hospital at Jaffa on 11 March 1799 and embraced a dying soldier. This was to spread the message that the illness was less contagious than was feared. The action is well authenticated. What is not recorded on any canvas is Napoleon’s second visit, when he made a quick tour of the hospital and gave orders that the very sick were to be poisoned so as not to hamper the French retreat. This order was in fact carried out, but Gros, acting on the instructions of Vivant Denon, has immortalized the high heroism of Napoleon’s earlier visit.

The picture constitutes a heresy: it uses Christian symbols in a profane context. Thus Marshal Berthier, the man directly behind Napoleon, holds a handkerchief to his nose against the stench, as if present at the raising of Lazarus. The spectator is thus directed to read the picture as a quasi-religious allegory: Napoleon as thaumaturge, or miraculous healer. Bubonic sores erupt in the groin and the armpits, and Napoleon stretches out his hand to the soldier’s infected flesh as if he were in fact able to restore it to its former health, much as the monarchs of both England and France used to touch for the scrofula, or King’s Evil. This image of the royal and semi-divine Napoleon was the one to show the French, who received few reports of Napoleon’s campaigns, unless they were victorious. So that the picture, which perfectly conveys such inferences, and at the same time unites them in misleadingly straightforward imagery, is an imaginative exercise of the highest order. The pyramidal structure of the composition enables it to be easily deciphered; there is no apparent intention to mislead. Yet ambiguity is built into its legibility, and one may wonder how much of this was deliberate, or whether Gros was impelled by some inner doubt which his conscious mind was too well schooled to admit. Whatever the motivation behind it, the huge picture still carries weight as an image of the heroic army and its heroic leader, his arm fearlessly outstretched, in strong contrast to puny Marshal Berthier, his handkerchief fastidiously pressed to his nose and mouth.

Some of the credit must go to Vivant Denon who is responsible for the accuracy of the details: the soldier blinded by trachoma, another of the illnesses that plagued the Egyptian campaign; Napoleon’s natural repugnance indicated by the right hand clenched on the glove. There is even a touch of Napoleonic sentimentality in the detail of the crazed trooper trying to doff his cap, which is Vivant Denon rather than Gros. But it is Gros who animates the scene through the sheer weight of his painterly sensibility, enlarging the walls of the cloister to give a setting of unusual depth, contrasting the greenish sheen of sweat on the bodies with the powdery golden heat of the far distance. All this is undeniable. But there is, as it were, an additional message. If the sick man in the centre of the picture were to stand up he would be twice the height of Napoleon. This image of victimhood dominates the canvas, as an oblique comment on Napoleon’s heroism, which is thereby diminished. This was not foreseen by Vivant Denon and indeed could be read by the orthodox as the painter’s failure of proportion, or misuse of scale. But it is in fact a highly personal protest, the intrusion of Gros’s own sensibility, his moi, into what
has always been regarded as an epic of contemporary life.
In 1805 Gros was commissioned to commemorate Murat’s victory at Aboukir (Fig. 14). The picture is altogether less impressive, the execution more glacial, and it seems probable that Gros, as if to atone for the excesses of Jaffa, has reverted to the method of David, who was engaged at this time on his huge dark canvas of Leonidas at Thermopylae. What makes Gros's picture memorable, and as far from David as it was possible to get, is the passage in the far distance, in which blue smoke is set off against pink and gold and grey tents and a silvery view of the harbour, and in which the man surrendering his sword to Murat wears a plum-coloured turban. This passage contains the entire palette of Delacroix's Scenes from the Massacre at Chios.

As Jaffa followed Nazareth, of which Junot was the hero, so the painting of Murat's victory at Aboukir was followed by a picture of an even more resounding victory for Napoleon. In 1806 a competition was held for the honour of celebrating Napoleon's victory at Eylau in eastern Prussia. Twenty-six painters entered, most of them forgotten today, and Gros was the victor. The programme was again laid down by Vivant Denon, and the minute exactitude of his instructions can be deduced from the fact that the two surviving works, that by Gros in the Louvre and that by Meynier at Versailles, are almost identical in arrangement. Apart from Vivant Denon, all Gros had to go on was Napoleon's hat and coat, which he borrowed from Josephine. The picture was exhibited in the Salon of 1808.

Of less obvious beauty than Jaffa, Eylau is perhaps more impressive. The leaden colouring - green, black, white, grey - had a profound effect on Géricault, on Boissard de Boisdenier, on Charlet, on Raffet. It excited Delacroix, who noted with enthusiasm the kind of detail that literature could never convey, in this case the frozen drops of blood on the bayonet in the middle foreground (Fig. 11). It is a more deliberate picture, for its moral is more ambiguous. Napoleon was the prime instigator of this carnage, in which the numbers of the dead are respectable even by contemporary standards: 12,000 on the French side, 18,000 for the allies (Delacroix’s figures). So that the picture is rightly and overwhelmingly about death: frozen corpses in the foreground, a whole battalion cut down in the background, and ominous fires sending up black smoke on the horizon. Again the dead and dying take over from Napoleon; their disproportionate bodies edge towards the limits of the canvas, obtruding into the spectator’s space. Nevertheless an heroic slant is given the incident by the combined efforts of Vivant Denon and Gros. The Lithuanian troops are overwhelmed by Napoleon’s mercy. One, whose blood-filled boot is being cut away by a French surgeon, hails Napoleon as his hero, indeed as his saviour. Again Gros has borrowed a gesture from traditional religious imagery to stamp this representation as a cathartic moment. Only the after-image of the foreground figures, which the eye encounters first and last, leaves the spectator with a wholly different impression.

If Jaffa was crowned with palm and laurel, Eylau had a no less glorious reward. The year 1808 was an important Salon: David, Prud’hon, Gérard and Girodet all exhibited major works. David showed The Intervention of the Sabine Women and the very different Coronation of Josephine, Girodet the Atala, Gérard a large battle-piece, and Prud’hon his
impressive allegory of Justice and Truth Pursuing Crime. Napoleon visited the Salon in October. After looking at the pictures he presented David with the rosette of a Commander of the Legion of Honour, and made Prud'hon, Girodet and Carle Vernet chevaliers of the Order. He ignored Gros and walked past him to the door. Then, with one of those gestures which could ensure him the devotion of armies, he unpinned his own cross of the Order and offered it to the painter of Eylau.

In a sense it would be better to end at this point, on a note of achievement, the achievement being the creation of the image of an heroic generation. But in fact that moment had passed, and even the hero-worship faltered a little. In 1809 Napoleon divorced Josephine and in the following year married Marie-Louise of Austria in order to consolidate the Austrian alliance after the battle of Wagram. This divided Gros’s loyalties; Josephine had been his first patron and had remained a friend. The battle-piece of 1810, The Battle of the Pyramids, is a cold and rhetorical work, in which all spontaneity seems frozen. Gros was prematurely in decline. Incapable of working without a sense of high exaltation, his sensitivity to historical change ensured that the grand style deserted him when the lustre deserted Napoleon, when the now portly and complacent Emperor was officially encouraging comparisons between himself and illustrious Imperial prototypes. Obediently Gros set to work on the dome of the Panthéon, newly rededicated to St Geneviève, patron saint of Paris. A sketch in the Musée Carnavalet shows four groups of Imperial Christians, Clothilde and Clovis, Charlemagne and Hildegarde, St Louis and Queen Marguérie, and Napoleon and Marie-

Louise. There is a great profusion of orbs and sceptres and also of attributes: Napoleon has brought along the Code Napoléon in order to facilitate his entry into the Kingdom of Heaven. The whole scheme was dogged by disaster, owing to the disappearance and reappearance of Napoleon during the Hundred Days. Thus in 1814 Gros had to change the Napoleon group to one of Louis XVIII and his niece, the Duchess of Angoulême. Then, during the Hundred Days, they had to be rubbed out and Napoleon and Marie-Louise reinstated. Finally, in 1815, Louis XVIII was there for good. Napoleon was not even a ghostly presence. He was not even an historical reminder. Napoleon was no longer in charge of France’s destiny.

The year 1815 was a crucial one for Gros. The restoration of the Bourbon monarchy meant not only that Napoleon was exiled but that David, who had signed the document pledging fidelity to Napoleon during the Hundred Days, was exiled as well. Gros therefore found himself in a curious position. He was taken on by the new government, which realized how vital an instrument of propaganda his work had been under the previous regime. He was, however, made to take back his battle-pieces from the Imperial palaces and museums and to hide them in his studio, where they remained for the rest of his days. At the same time he was charged by the departing David to assume the directorship of his studio and to keep alive those principles which David had always taught. Here was an additional dilemma. David’s style was out of date. Even the style of Gros’s battle-pieces, a style intricately mixed up with specified content, was out of date. Gros, waiting for new instructions, discovered that there was no one to give them, only David, in Brussels,
becoming increasingly acrimonious and dogging him with no doubt well-meant but completely unjustified reproaches. "Vite, vite, mon ami, feuillezez votre Plutarque..." It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the only successful pictures painted by Gros after 1815 are portraits, in which this kind of conflict can be avoided. Works such as the Mme Dufresne in Besançon, or the Jeune Fille au collier de jais in Dijon, are the only pictures of this later period which maintain any kind of continuity with the early years.

Apart from isolated pictures such as these the story of Gros's later career is inglorious. He made a half-hearted attempt to apply his Napoleonic style to the new regime by changing sides and showing the tribulations of Louis XVIII and the Duchess of Angoulême during the Hundred Days. As if to emphasize the old-fashioned nature of this work, the Salon of 1822 saw the outstanding début of Delacroix, with Dante and Virgil Crossing the Styx. How much more disastrous for Gros was the picture he sent to the same Salon, the extraordinarily retardataire Saul and David, now known only from an engraving. Worse still, the exiled David was clearly disturbed that the Ministère des Beaux-Arts had not obtained his indemnification and invited him to return to France. He saw himself dying in Brussels, his former greatness officially overlooked. His one link with the past was Gros, his most spectacular and influential pupil, whom he had charged to continue his teaching. The pedagogic impulse dies hard; by the same token, Gros had been taking orders all his life. In exile David became rancorous, hence the letter of April 1821, "Vite, vite, mon ami, feuillezez votre Plutarque..." A further letter reproaches Gros for an obsession with uniforms, and charges him with the obligation —

it is almost an order — to paint history as David understood it. Or rather as David had formerly understood it, for Delacroix was now demonstrating that one could plunge into history, or rather histories, as diverse as those exemplified by Dante and Shakespeare.

Discouraged by a failure in the Salon of 1822, Gros, in bitterness, closed the doors of his studio. Delacroix, after persistent application, managed to gain admittance, and the sight of the Jaffa and the Aboukir inspired him to paint his own contemporary epic, Scenes from the Massacre at Chios (Fig. 30). Gros hurried off to Brussels to see David and was heaped with more reproaches. Two years later, in 1824, when Charles X visited the completed Panthéon and conferred on him the title of Baron, Gros begged the king to allow David back to Paris. The king refused. At the end of the same year Gros's friend Girodet died, and Gros made his extraordinary self-inculpating declaration at the funeral. He was by now convinced that his divergence from David's style of painting was a punishable fault, a disloyalty which he could not expunge. When David died the following year, 1825, Gros suffered a final, perhaps a fatal blow. After the failure of his last picture, Hercules and Diomedes, he seems to have relapsed into paranoia. 'Gros est-il mort?' he would ask, when friends tried to intervene. 'Vous venez donc visiter un mort?' ('Is Gros dead? Have you come to visit a dead man?')

His contempt for his successors was genuine. He was sufficiently a pupil of David to know that a certain technical discipline was essential, and that a certain likelihood or vraisemblance should be observed. Thus he criticized Delaroche's Execution of Lady Jane Grey, now in the National
Gallery in London, because the frightened girl had red lips, whereas her whole face should be white with fear. There speaks the painter of Eylau. *Grande âme en détresse*, as Delacroix describes him, he received a final accolade from that same Delacroix whose star was in the ascendant. It was Delacroix who underlined his achievement, in his article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and related how Gros had transformed at one stroke, almost in one picture, the type of history painting adumbrated in David’s *Oath of the Jeu de Paume* into an epic of contemporary life capable of carrying a whole range of complex emotions. The undertone of pathos, evident in all his works, was to receive full acknowledgement in the tragic harmonies of Delacroix, while the heroism of modern life, soon to be celebrated by Baudelaire, was first demonstrated by Gros. Both hero and victim, his story also illustrates the fact that these two conditions may be interchangeable.