

French Connections



7. Romance & Reality

TWO STYLES DOMINATED FRENCH ART in the earlier and middle parts of the 1800s: **Romanticism** in the earlier years and **Realism** in mid-century. France was a world leader in both. The terms are often thought to be opposites—indeed, I proposed the class on that assumption—but now see the situation is more complicated.

Paris was more or less the epicenter of Romanticism in the earlier 19th century, but much of this was in response to influences from other countries. French artists did, however, develop a special kind of high-octane Romanticism, in contrast to the more natural forms found for instance in Germany. Realism, when it occurred, was often a means to achieve a similarly dramatic result, rather than the more pervasive reality found in French novels later in the century—but those are beyond our scope. *rb.*

A. Terms and Faces

We look at portraits of the principal artists in the class, plus some others by Géricault and Courbet, as an approach to defining the terms Romanticism and Realism.

Géricault: four heads

Géricault: *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819, Louvre)

Courbet: five portraits

Leighton: *Cimabue's Celebrated Madonna* (c.1853, London NG)

Courbet: *Burial at Ornans* (c.1850, Paris Orsay)

B. Species of Separation

Romantic artists found themselves in the grip of their emotions while simultaneously separated from the world around them. In the rest of this hour, we consider two possible strategies for addressing this: by a reversion to basic moral principles or a return to nature. A third (and

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particularly French) strategy—plunging into theatricality and excess—will be the subject of the second hour.

Chateaubriand: *René*, excerpt

Delacroix: *The Natchez* (1834, NY Met)

♪ **Chateaubriand:** The Funeral of Atala, reading by William Jones

♪ **Lamartine:** *Isolement*, read by Lambert Wilson

♪ **Lamartine's** defense of the tricolor flag

C. Gautier, 1841

Further pursuing the gentle melancholy of nature-based Romanticism of the second kind above, we sample two musical pieces from 1841, both based on works by Théophile Gautier.

Gautier: *At the Cemetery*

Friedrich: *Entrance to a Cemetery*

♪ **Berlioz:** *Les nuits d'été*, "Absence" (Véronique Gens)

♪ **Adam:** *Giselle*, Act I excerpt (Alina Cojocaru, Johan Kobbold)

D. Romantic Excess

"Mad, bad, and dangerous to know"—Lord Byron as described by one of his many lovers—qualities that appealed to many French Romantics, most notably Delacroix and Berlioz.

Delacroix: *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827, Louvre)

♪ **Berlioz:** *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*, exc (Berlin SO, Rattle)

Byron: stanzas from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*

Delacroix: *Self Portrait as Hamlet* (1821, Paris, Mus. Delacroix)

♪ **Berlioz:** *Symphonie fantastique*, #4 (Andrés Orozco-Estrada)

Phillips: *Byron in Albanian Dress* (1813, London NPG)

♪ **Byron:** "The Isles of Greece" (from *Don Juan*, Canto III)

Delacroix: *Massacre at Chios* (1824, Louvre)

Delacroix: *Greece Expiring at Missolonghi* (1826, Bordeaux)

Delacroix: *Liberty Leading the People* (1830, Louvre)

E. A Violent Reality

The revolutions of 1830 and 1832 feature in important works by Eugène Delacroix and Victor Hugo, both featuring depictions of ordinary people. How does their particular balance of romance and realism compare with that found in the paintings of Courbet, the poems of Baudelaire, or—in what may be the oddest *French Connection* of all—the stories of Edgar Allan Poe?

♪ **Hugo:** *Les Misérables* (1998 movie), June uprising

Courbet: *The Stone Breakers* (1849, destroyed)

Courbet: *The Painter's Studio* (1855, Paris Orsay)

Courbet: *Charles Baudelaire* (1848, Montpellier)

Baudelaire: *Les fleurs du mal*, "To the Reader"

♪ **Poe:** *The Raven*, opening (Christopher Lee, Manet, Doré)

♪ **Poe:** *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, 2012 trailer

Adolphe **Adam** (1803–56, *French composer*), Charles **Baudelaire** (1821–67, *French poet*), Hector **Berlioz** (1803–69, *French composer*), George Gordon, Lord **Byron** (1788–1824, *English poet*), François-René de **Chateaubriand** (1768–1848, *French novelist*), Gustave **Courbet** (1819–77, *French painter*), Eugène **Delacroix** (1798–1863, *French painter*), Gustave **Doré** (1832–83, *French engraver*), Caspar David **Friedrich** (1774–1840, *German painter*), Théophile **Gautier** (1811–72, *French writer*), Théodore **Géricault** (1791–1824, *French painter*), Anne-Louis **Girodet** de Trioson (1767–1824, *French painter*), Victor **Hugo** (1802–85, *French novelist*), Alphonse de **Lamartine** (1790–1869, *French poet*), Frederic, Lord **Leighton** (1830–96, *French painter*), Édouard **Manet** (1832–83, *French painter*), Henri **Philippoteaux** (1815–84, *French painter*), Thomas **Phillips** (1770–1845, *English portraitist*), Edgar Allan **Poe** (1809–49, *American writer*), Sir Walter **Scott** (1771–1832, *Scottish novelist*)

The course website is www.brunyate.com/FrenchConnections
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