

Romanticism

Romanticism (also known as the Romantic era) was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century, and in most areas was at its peak in the approximate period from 1800 to 1850. Romanticism was characterised by its emphasis on emotion and individualism. It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature, but also had a significant and complex effect on politics, with romantic thinkers influencing liberalism, radicalism, conservatism and nationalism.

The movement emphasised intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing emphasis on such emotions as apprehension, horror, terror, and awe—especially when confronting the sublimity and beauty of nature.



Théodore Géricault (1791 – 1824) was an influential French painter and lithographer. Although he died young, he was one of the pioneers of the Romantic movement.

A Sith of the Imperial Force Guards Charging of about 1812 portrays a mounted Napoleonic cavalry officer who is ready to attack.

The painting was Géricault's first exhibited work and it is an example of Géricault's attempt to condense both movement and structure in its art.

The Charging Chasseur, 1812

The Raft of the Medusa, 1819

Géricault's best-known and most significant painting, and certainly most ambitious work, is *The Raft of the Medusa*, which depicted the aftermath of a contemporary French shipwreck, *Meduse*, in which the captain had left the crew and passengers to die.

The incident became a national scandal. The painting's notoriety stemmed from its indictment of a corrupt establishment, and reports of cannibalism, but it also dramatised a more eternal theme, that of man's struggle with nature.

It surely excited the imagination of the young Eugène Delacroix, who posed for one of the dying figures. The painting ignited political controversy when first exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1819; it then traveled to England in 1820, accompanied by Géricault himself, where it received much praise.



Research

Before starting on the work Géricault undertook extensive research, meeting with survivors including the carpenter, with whom he constructed an accurately detailed scale model of the raft.

In order to represent the stiffness and the authentic rendering of the flesh tones of corpses he made sketches of bodies in the morgue and studied the faces of dying hospital patients. He brought severed limbs back to his studio to study their decay, and for a fortnight drew a severed head, borrowed from a lunatic asylum and stored on his studio roof.

He travelled to the coast on a number of occasions to witness storms breaking on the shore.

The day of the rescue was reported to be sunny with calm water but Géricault chose to depict a gathering storm and dark, heaving sea to reinforce the emotional gloom.

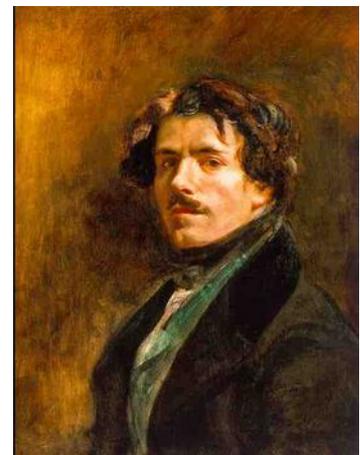


In contrast to representations of the nude, and particularly of lovers, by classical artists Géricault's sketch is more 'real' and has an emotion and directly erotic charge missing from the *Cupid and Psyche* (1817), a late work of the elderly David.

Géricault, *The Kiss* c1822 David, *Cupid and Psyche* 1817 In David's work the composition is highly 'staged' and artificial; the treatment is smooth and refined, and the flesh represented without a blemish, polished like fine china. *The Kiss* is a rapid sketch of a young man not afraid to express his emotions through the depiction of a real couple caught in an intimate and natural act, and is perhaps more honest, in this respect, than David's painting, where his erotic fantasy is masked by a subject cloaked in a Classical guise to give it respectability.

Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) was the supreme artist of the French romantic movement. According to popular rumour, he was the illegitimate son of the famous statesman Talleyrand, a friend of the family and one of the most brilliant statesmen the time.

As a young painter he received help from the state – almost as if someone powerful was secretly pulling strings. He moved in fashionable circles where he was in great demand, despite the fiery nature which smouldered beneath his charm. For most of his distinguished career, Delacroix painted vast canvases for exhibition at the annual salon. Their uncompromising subject matter often shocked the critics, but several of his paintings were purchased by the government.



Self-portrait 1837

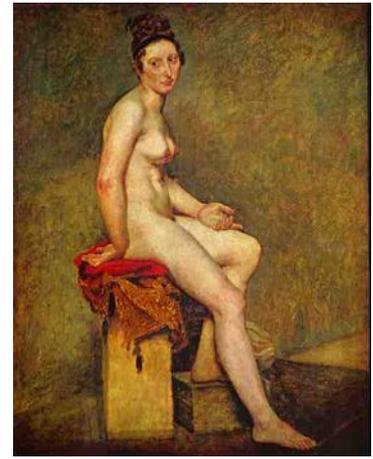
His father was a member of the revolutionary Government, who had voted for the execution of Louis 16th in 1793.

Eugène's childhood was not uneventful. "By the age of three", according to his friend the novelist Alexander Dumas, "he had been hanged, burned, drowned, poisoned and choked." Hanged when he caught his head in a horse's forage bag, burned when the mosquito net over his bed caught fire, drowned when the servant accidentally dropped him in the harbour of Bordeaux, poisoned when he ate some verdigris and choked when he swallowed a grape.

In 1816 he entered the Ecole des Beaux-Arts where he met Géricault, who was working on his painting *The Raft of the Medusa*. He was so excited, he later recalled, that when he left he started running like a mad man, not stopping until he reached his room.

Mademoiselle Rose 1817–24

In contrast to the sanitised Classical studies of the nude Delacroix's portrait is of a real woman of flesh and blood.



The Barque of Dante 1822

His first major painting which he offered to the 1822 salon, signals a shift in the character of narrative painting from Neo-Classicism towards the Romantic movement.

The unconventional subject was the barque of Dante. It caused a sensation, Barron Gros, one of Napoleon's favourite painters, had it framed at his own expense and the picture was bought by the state.

The painting is loosely based on events taken from canto eight of Dante's *Inferno*. A leaden, smoky mist and the blazing City of the Dead form the backdrop against which the poet Dante endures a fearful crossing of the River Styx. He is steadied by the learned poet of antiquity Virgil as they plough through waters heaving with tormented souls.

Orphan Girl at the Cemetery 1823

Believed to be a preparatory work in oil for the artist's later *Massacre at Chios*. An air of sorrow and fearfulness emanates from the picture of an *Orphan Girl at the Cemetery* and tears well from the eyes of the grief-stricken girl as she looks apprehensively upward. A sense of loss, of unreachable hope, her isolation, and the absence of any means of help, is emphasised as she looks out of the picture toward an unseen and unknown spectacle or spectre.



Horse Frightened by a Storm 1824 Watercolour

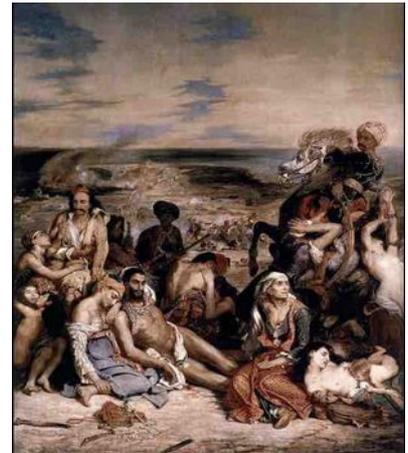
The horse played a special role in the art of Delacroix in the 1820s. While preparing the monumental oil painting, *Massacre at Chios* (1824), he realised he needed a thorough knowledge of the anatomy of the horse if he was to paint historical scenes.

This dramatic watercolour may be a recollection of something he had seen, but relies more on imagination than scientific knowledge to vividly communicate through violent expression emotional sympathy with the terrified animal.

Massacre at Chios 1824

His second major Salon painting depicts a tragic incident which had recently occurred in the Greek War of Independence. It is reported that he repainted the sky and landscape background after seeing Constable's *Hay Wain* at the 1824 Paris salon.

The Chios massacre was the killing of tens of thousands of Greeks on the island of Chios by Ottoman troops during the Greek War of Independence in 1824. Greeks from neighbouring islands had arrived on Chios and encouraged the Chians to join their revolt. In response, Ottoman troops landed on the island and killed thousands. The massacre of Christians provoked international outrage, and led to increasing support for the Greek cause worldwide.



Delacroix's painting of the massacre shows sick and dying Greek civilians about to be slaughtered by the Turks. This painting of the contemporary event, expressed the official policy for the Greek cause in their war of independence against the Turks; a war supported by English, Russian and French governments.

Gros, now turning against his protégé, called the work "the massacre of a painting"; but his reputation and importance among the younger generation of painters was now inescapable.



Thomas Phillips, Portrait of Lord Byron 1813

Often described as the most flamboyant and notorious of the major Romantics, Byron was both celebrated and castigated in his life for his aristocratic excesses, which included huge debts, numerous love affairs with both men and women, as well as rumours of a scandalous liaison with his half-sister.

Byron was living in Genoa when, in 1823, while growing bored with his life there, he accepted overtures for his support from representatives of the movement for Greek independence from the Ottoman Empire.

Byron went initially to the island of Kephallonia, where he spent £4,000 of his own money to refit the Greek fleet. He sailed to Missolonghi by a roundabout route in order to avoid the Ottoman Navy, arriving on 5 January 1824.

Delacroix

illustration of
Byron's 1813 poem

The Bride of Abydos 1857



Byron and Mavrokordatos (a Greek politician) planned to attack the Turkish-held fortress of Lepanto, at the mouth of the Gulf of Corinth; however, before the expedition could sail he fell ill, and bloodletting weakened him further. He made a partial recovery, but the therapeutic bleeding, insisted on by his doctors, aggravated his condition. It is suspected this treatment, carried out with unsterilised medical instruments, may have caused him to develop sepsis. He contracted a violent fever, and died in Missolonghi on 19 April aged 36.

Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi 1826

This painting was inspired by the Third Siege of Missolonghi by the Ottoman forces in 1826, during which many people of the city after a long siege of almost a year decided to attempt a mass breakout to escape famine and epidemics. The attempt resulted in a disaster, with the larger part of the Greeks slain.

Greece is depicted as a kneeling woman who occupies the major part of the painting. She is wearing a traditional Greek costume, her chest being widely bare, and she spreads her arms as a sign of sadness. The hand of a dead victim can be seen protruding from the rubble, beneath her feet. In the background, a dark-complexioned man wearing a yellow turban, who symbolises the enemy, is planting a flag in the ground.

The painting borrows elements from Christianity. Indeed, "Greece adopts the attitude of praying in the early centuries of Christianity. The blue coat and white robe, traditionally attributed to the Immaculate Conception, reinforces this analogy to a secular figure of Mary. The strength of the image is the sharp contrast between the traditional allegory which induces an idealisation of the model, and processing of the scene without any concession to the ideal."

A trip to England in 1825 included visits to Thomas Lawrence and Richard Parkes Bonington, and the colour and handling of English painting provided impetus for his only full-length portrait, the elegant *Portrait of Louis-Auguste Schwiter* (1826–30)



Woman with a Parrot, 1827

Delacroix painted the *Woman with a Parrot*, also known as *Recumbent Odalisque*, on his return from England. Representing one of Delacroix's favourite models, Laure, it forms one of a series of nudes, which includes the *Female Nude Reclining on a Divan* in the Louvre and the *Odalisque* of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. In their tonal refinement they emphasise the connections between Delacroix and the English artist Bonington.

The Death of Sardanapalus 1827

In 1827 he exhibited his third most important salon picture, *The Death of Sardanapalus*. The idea came from one of Byron's poems, and depicts the destruction of the legendary last king of Nineveh's prized possessions in 876 BC, including his concubines, his horses and his slaves before his own death on a funeral pyre; rather than submit to defeat by an enemy. The critics were horrified and urged the young painter to take a grip on his talent and not squander it on such excesses.



Even Delacroix was shocked by what the painting revealed of his own suppressed sensuality. He had always been appalled by any lack of restraint or control. One critic of the work called the painting "the fanaticism of ugliness" when it appeared in the Salon in 1828.

The main focus of *Death of Sardanapalus* is a large bed draped in rich red fabric. On it lies a man overseeing a scene of chaos with a disinterested eye. He is dressed in flowing white fabrics and sumptuous gold around his neck and head. A woman lies dead at his feet, prone across the lower half of the large bed. She is one of five or six in the scene, all in various shades of undress, and all in assorted throes of death by the hands of the half dozen men in the scene.

Delacroix used a painterly brushstroke in this painting, which allows for a strong sense of movement in the work. This scene is chaotic and violent, as shown by the movement, weapons, and the colours used. One woman reclined by an elephant head on the end of the bed is the only figure to engage with the viewer. Everyone else in the painting is focused on the task at hand: death.

Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus* was controversial and polarising at its exhibition at the Paris Salon of 1828 for one significant reason: it was not a Neoclassical painting. Delacroix's main subject was a king willing to destroy all of his possessions, including people and luxurious goods, in a funerary pyre of gore and excess. He was not a hero, like the Horatii sons, willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good in Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Oath of the Horatii*. It is the antithesis of neoclassical traditions, which favoured subdued colours, rigid space, and an overall moral subject matter. He also used foreshortening to tilt the death scene directly into the space of the audience, in complete contrast with the subdued order of traditional academic paintings.



Liberty Leading the People 1830

Exhibited at the 1831 *Liberty Leading the People*, is his best-known picture. It was painted to glorify and commemorate the revolution of the previous year, which toppled King Charles X and swept the Citizen King Louis Philippe to power, and proved a huge success.

A woman personifying the Goddess of Liberty leads the people forward over a barricade and the bodies of the fallen, holding the flag of the French

Revolution, the tricolour - which became France's national flag after these events - in one hand and brandishing a bayoneted musket with the other. The figure of Liberty is also viewed as a symbol of France and the French Republic known as Marianne.

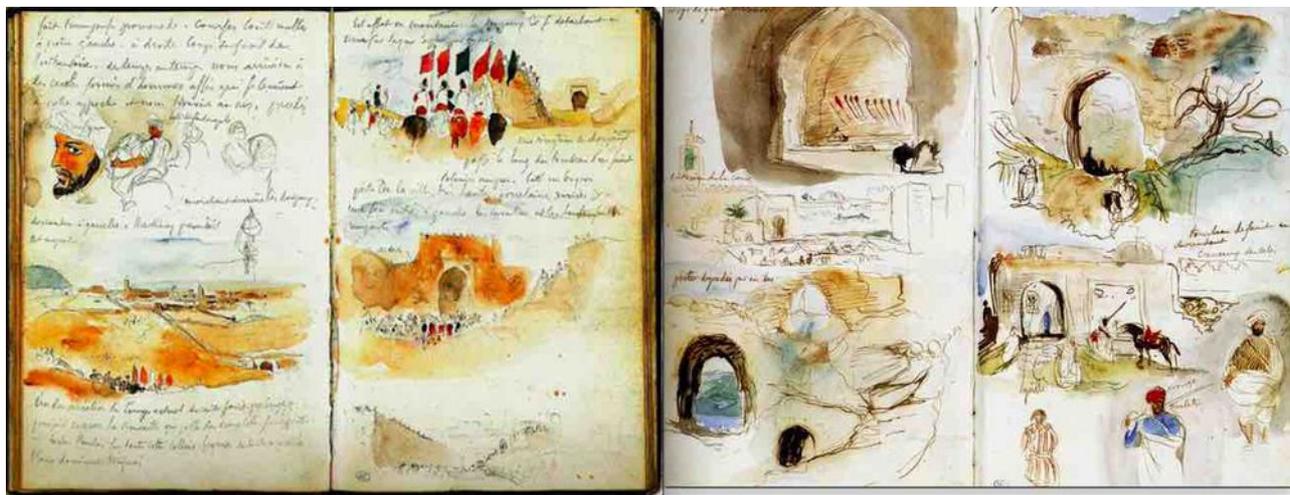
Delacroix depicted Liberty as both an allegorical goddess-figure and a robust woman of the people. The mound of corpses acts as a kind of pedestal from which Liberty strides, barefoot and bare-breasted, out of the canvas and into the space of the viewer. The Phrygian cap she wears had come to symbolise liberty during the first French Revolution, of 1789.

Young Tiger Playing with its Mother 1830

Painted early in his career, it shows how the artist was attracted to animal subjects in this period and shows the 'delight in wilderness' that preoccupied Romantic artists. Some authors have written that Delacroix's animals paintings were made using his pet cat as a model.



This painting, along with his tiger Hunts can be interpreted as a form of the artist displaying human emotions and passions personified as tame and fierce animals. He wrote in his Journal of the time: "Men are tigers and wolves driven to destroy one another". His friend Théophile Gautier saw a resemblance between him and his manner and those of the great cats that he painted, writing: "His tawny eyes, with their feline expression, his slender lips stretched tight over magnificent teeth, his firm jaw line emphasised by strong cheekbones... gave his features an untamed, a strange, exotic, almost alarming beauty."



Sketchbook

His sketches were put down on paper very quickly—late in life, he wrote: "if you are not skilful enough to sketch a man falling out of the window during the time that it takes him to get from the fifth story to the ground, then you will never be able to produce monumental work."

In 1832 he set out on an official government mission to the Sultan of Morocco, visiting Spain Tangier and Algiers, where he was swept away by the brilliant light and the rich colours of North Africa. He witnessed in person scenes that the Romantics had been conjuring up from their imaginations – fighting horses, fierce and noble warriors from the desert, women secluded in the harem, dervishes whirling in the streets. "In this short time" he wrote, "I have lived through 20 times as much as in months spent in Paris." His vivid memories and his hundreds of notes and sketches were to provide inspiration for the rest of his career.



The Women of Algiers 1834

Delacroix's first of two versions of *Women of Algiers* was painted in Paris in 1834.

On his return from Algiers the government began to shower him with monumental commissions for major decorative schemes which took up the greater part of his time and energies for the rest of his life.

Delacroix's *Women of Algiers* does not depict an overtly eroticised version of the Oriental female, as did other artists, such as Ingres' somewhat salacious depiction in his 1814 painting *Grande Odalisque*.

Delacroix fills the voids in his knowledge with his own European interpretation, resulting in a subtler version of the fantasy female. With the exposed décolletage, loose unbounded clothing and languid poses, Delacroix's Algerian females are still situated in the European oriental dream. The

addition of stereotypical Orientalist motifs, such as the narghile pipe, charcoal burner, and the odalisques pose. Together they create a fictional image that parallels the European fantasy of the harem more than reality.

Paul Cezanne described Delacroix's intoxicating colour plays as "All this luminous colour... It seems to me that it enters the eye like a glass of wine running into your gullet and it makes you drunk straight away."

Women of Algiers, along with Delacroix's other Orientalist paintings, has inspired many artists of later generations. In 1888 both Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin travelled to Montpellier to view his 1849 version of *Women of Algiers*.



Picasso, *The Women of Algiers* 1955

The painting served as a source of inspiration to the later impressionists, and a series of 15 paintings and numerous drawings by Pablo Picasso in 1954.



Renoir, *Parisiennes in Algerian Costume* 1872

***The Battle of Taillebourg* (draft) 1834-35**

In this dramatic sketch the participants of the battle are caught up and engulfed in swirling, turbulent swathes of colour.



***The Natchez* 1835**

This represents a scene from Chateaubriand's widely read Romantic novel *Atala*, which narrates the fate of the Natchez tribe in the wake of the French and Indian War (1754–63). Begun in 1823 he put the canvas aside for about a decade, and finally completed the picture for the Paris Salon of 1835.

In the catalogue, Delacroix provided this explanatory note: "Fleeing the massacre of their tribe, two young savages traveled up the Mississippi River. During the voyage, the woman was taken by pain of labour. The moment is that when the father holds the newborn in his hands, and both regard him tenderly."



Frédéric Chopin 1838 George Sand 1838

Although normally a solitary man, in his mid 40s he developed a close friendship with one of the most illustrious couples in France, the composer Frédéric Chopin and his mistress the novelist George Sand. He had a piano installed in the studio so that whenever Chopin dropped in he could play it. When Chopin died in 1849, he was devastated.

The double portrait was unfinished and was later cut in two and sold off as separate pieces. It showed Chopin playing the piano while George Sand sits to his right, listening and sewing (a favourite activity of hers).

Delacroix drew inspiration from many sources over his career, such as the literary works of William Shakespeare and Lord Byron, or the artistry of Michelangelo; but from the beginning to the end of his life, he had a constant need for music, saying in 1855, "nothing can be compared with the emotion caused by music; that it expresses incomparable shades of feeling."

Christ on the Sea of Galilee 1841

Delacroix, a great colourist, emphasises the contrast between the icy lavenders of Christ's mantle and the luminous reds and yellows of the disciples' robes. Delacroix describes the scene as though the viewer were close to the action in order to heighten the emotion.

Although not a practicing Christian he imparts a profoundly religious character on this work in which the serene attitude of the sleeping Christ, bathed in a supernatural light, is opposed to the fury of the unleashed elements and the agitation of the other characters.



Christ on the Sea of Galilee 1854

This scene is based on an incident recounted in three Gospels of the New Testament: a furious storm breaks out while Jesus and his disciples sail across the Sea of Galilee to spread Christ's message. To the disciples' amazement, Jesus calms the wind and the storm, dramatising the power of Christian belief.

Delacroix treated this subject several times. In an article of 1881 *Le Moniteur Universel* remarked: "One can say that Jesus during the Storm is the finest seascape of the French school."

Rubens, Hippopotamus Hunt 1616

Delacroix admired Rubens for his colour and dramatic rendering of his subjects. The complexity of the figure grouping, representation of turbulent motion and violent action, high drama, and brilliant palette are hallmarks of Rubens' style. In the notice of January 25, 1847, Eugène Delacroix admired the crocodile as a "masterpiece of execution", remarking, however, that "its action could have been more interesting."



Lion Hunt 1855

Following the example of Rubens he painted several pictures of Lion hunts. In these, he transformed studies of caged animals made in the zoo into fantastic compositions of wild lions engaged in combat. "I have no love of reasonable painting" he once wrote. "There is in me some black depth which must be appeased."

As has been pointed out, "This is less a matter of a 'hunt,' a word which too clearly evokes the superior power of man, than of a struggle, a violent grappling of

man and beast, with the horsemen thrown from their mounts, the steeds dying, and the whole tragedy of a struggle to the death, in all of its ferocity and tumultuous dynamism."

Moroccan Saddles His Horse 1855

He was a prolific diarist and his writings show him to have been deeply thoughtful about the theories of art, searching for intellectual solutions that would reveal his vision on canvas. His approach is best summed up by a personal dictum: "one must be bold to extremity; without daring, and even in extreme daring, there is no beauty."



Rider Attacked by a Jaguar 1855

This dramatic painting anticipates Expressionism in its vigorous distortions and heightened colour.

Power of colour

Colour was Delacroix's single greatest obsession. For him it held far greater possibilities than the accurate draughtsmanship taught by the academies, and was a means through which he expressed the full magnificence of his vision. There is an anecdote that one day getting into a cab he saw a shaft of sunlight lighting up the gravel

underfoot, casting violet shadows. Certainly the yellow cab glowed with greater intensity. And once he realised that by juxtaposing complementary colours, their richness would be intensified.

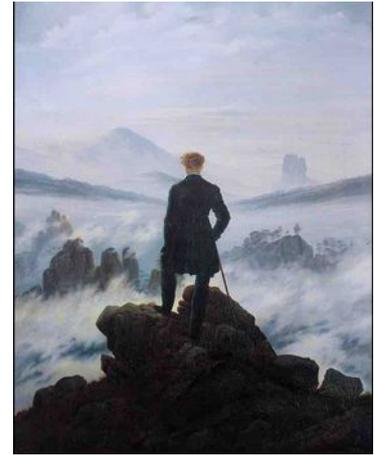
As he reached middle age he was seen less in society. His work demanded too much time. His trusted housekeeper, a Breton present woman call Jenny le Guillou, guarded him jealously in increasing seclusion.

For the last three decades of his life, he devoted his energies to painting giant murals for ceremonial and religious buildings. He died at the age of 65, in self imposed isolation.

Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* 1818

This work is considered one of the masterpieces of Romanticism and one of its most representative works.

In the foreground, a young man stands upon a rocky precipice with his back to the viewer. He is wrapped in a dark green overcoat, and grips a walking stick in his right hand. His hair caught in a wind, the wanderer gazes out on a landscape covered in a thick sea of fog. In the middle ground, several other ridges, perhaps not unlike the ones the wanderer himself stands upon, jut out from the mass. Through the wreaths of fog, forests of trees can be perceived atop these escarpments. In the far distance, faded mountains rise in the left, gently levelling off into lowland plains in the east. Beyond here, the pervading fog stretches out indefinitely, eventually mingling with the horizon and becoming indistinguishable from the cloud-filled sky.



Michael Gorra's (American professor of English and travel writer) 2004 analysis was that the message conveyed by the painting is one of Kantian self-reflection, expressed through the wanderer's gazings into the murkiness of the sea of fog. Dembo (2001) sympathised, asserting that *Wanderer* presents a metaphor for the unknown future. Gaddis (2004, American historian) felt that the impression left by the wanderer's position atop the precipice and before the twisted outlook "is contradictory, suggesting at once mastery over a landscape and the insignificance of the individual within it."

Robert Macfarlane (British writer) discusses the painting in terms of its significant influence on how mountain climbing has been viewed in the Western world since the Romantic era, calling it the "archetypical image of the mountain-climbing visionary", and describing its power in representing the concept that standing on mountain tops is something to be admired, an idea which barely existed in earlier centuries.



Henry Wallis, *The Death of Chatterton* 1856,

The subject of this painting was the 17-year-old English early Romantic poet Thomas Chatterton, shown dead after he poisoned himself with arsenic in 1770. Chatterton was considered a Romantic hero for many young and struggling artists in Wallis's day. It was shown at the Royal Academy summer exhibition in 1856, with a quotation from the Tragedy of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe inscribed on the frame: "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, And burned is Apollo's laurel bough."

Waterhouse, *The Lady of Shalott* 1888

"*The Lady of Shalott*" is a lyrical ballad by the English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892). It tells the story of a young noble woman imprisoned in a tower on an island near Camelot. She can only watch the outside world through a mirror and must weave what she sees. She has heard that if she looks at Camelot directly, she will be cursed. One of the poet's best-known works, its vivid medieval romanticism and enigmatic symbolism inspired many painters, especially the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers.



Bacon, *Head IV* 1949

In his series of Heads and Popes, based on Velázquez's *Portrait of Innocent X*, Francis Bacon portrayed the ultimate despairing expression of Romantic angst, giving utterance to feelings of deep unfocused anxiety and dread about the human condition. His Popes are trapped in cages, suffocating and screaming as they are hurled, like the damned in Medieval *Judgements*, backwards into an airless void.

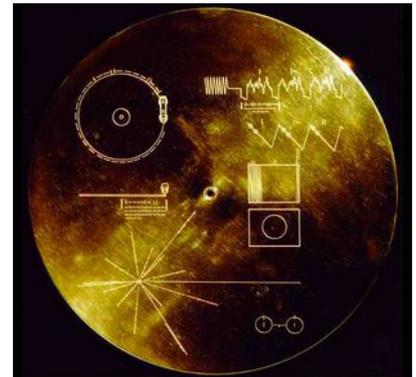


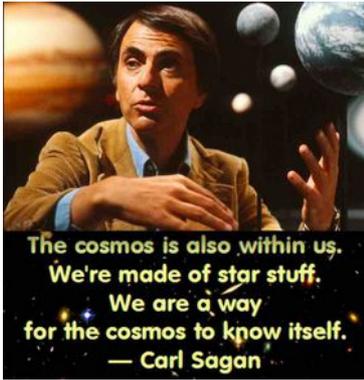
Karl Stieler, *Portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven* 1820

Beethoven is acknowledged to be one of the giants of classical music and was a pivotal figure in the transition from the classicism of 18th century music to the romanticism of the 19th century, which had a profound influence on the subsequent generation of composers.

His music features twice on the Voyager Golden Record, a phonograph record containing a broad sample of the images, common sounds, languages, and

music of Earth, sent into outer space with the two Voyager probes. To reach out across the universe in the hope that, maybe in the infinite distance of time, it will be intercepted by another advanced civilisation - and they will know that we were here: this must surely be the most 'romantic' of acts performed by men of science.





Carl Sagan noted that "The spacecraft will be encountered and the record played only if there are advanced space-faring civilisations in interstellar space, but the launching of this 'bottle' into the cosmic 'ocean' says something very hopeful about life on this planet."