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Abstract

Jacques-Louis David is remembered today for his contributions to the world of Neoclassical art before the French Revolution, during the Revolution, and during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte. His body of work represents an impressive journey from his Rococo roots to his Neoclassical political works to his many different portraits of Napoleon. In comparing his pieces, an observer can track the development of a variety of themes. Specifically, it is possible to see the different ways David portrayed the event of death in his history paintings. From there, a researcher can clearly tie the different views of death to the changing political climate of his time.

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Death and the Transformation of Women's Roles Surrounding Death: An Analysis of Jacques-Louis David's History Paintings

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by

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Introduction

Jacques-Louis David is remembered today for his contributions to the world of Neoclassical art before the French Revolution, during the Revolution, and during the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte. The paintings he produced for his wealth of commissioners influenced many other artists directly, whether from his teaching or example, or indirectly from his reformation of the French Academy and spreading of Neoclassical ideals. His body of work represents an impressive journey from his Rococo roots to his Neoclassical political works to his many different portraits of Napoleon. In comparing his pieces, an observer can track the development of a variety of themes. Specifically, throughout Jacques-Louis David's career, it is possible to see the different ways he portrayed the event of death in his history paintings. From there, a researcher can clearly tie the different views of death to the changing political climate of his time. Further, a viewer can see how David's portrayal of women evolved over his career, from passive mourners as he followed the examples he saw in his schooling, to powerful actors shaping the conflict around them in the midst of his involvement in the French Revolution, and finally an awkward blend of both passive and active that showed the artist's separation from the life he knew.

First, however, there are a few key terms whose historic context must be established. History painting includes the painting of any narrative scene. This is actually not limited to history as it would be defined today; rather, the term can apply to a variety of topics, including mythology, even if they may not be entirely factual.[1] David's history paintings span both myth and written history; often the importance of the scene as a history painting depends not on its origin, but on its narrative impact over time.

[1] Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2012), 56.

It is also important to remember that many different parties are involved in the creation of each painting. When analyzing each piece, the viewer must remember that in most cases, the artist did not simply decide to paint the chosen scene on a whim. Rather, there can be four or more parties involved. First, the commissioner would approach the artist with their desired scene or theme. Then, if that scene or theme involved a specific person being portrayed, that individual would influence the piece as they modelled, as seen in many portraits. The painter would influence the work as they created the actual piece. Finally, and in many cases most importantly, the piece would be seen by many different audiences. The artist would design their work to appeal to or challenge the intended audience, so this party shapes the final piece definitively. It is especially important to note the audience's impact on the production of history paintings. Though portraits, for example, would need to be received well by an audience for the sake of both the subject and the artist, the reception of a history painting has more personal ties to the artist's pride. Though an artist could make a living as a portrait painter, a history painter was assumed to enter the field looking for recognition.[2] Noting each of these influences on a painting is vital to understand the design and intention of each work.[3]

When it comes to portraying women in history paintings, there are two categories of female portrayal. Women in portraiture at the time would be portrayed with the typical feminine attributes of flowers, books, or their own children.[4] However, in history paintings, the women portrayed could be more symbolic. Therefore, this genre of painting produces a wider variety of women portrayed differently than the typical woman in portraiture would have been. However,

[2] Simon Lee, *David*, (London: Phaedon Press, 1999), 79.

[3] Amy Freund, *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary France*, (University Park: University of Pennsylvania, 2014), 8.

[4] Ibid., 144.

the ways where the women shown align with or differ from typical standards can reflect many different facets of opinion, whether on behalf of the commissioner, model, artist, or audience.

Early Education and the Academy

Jacques-Louis David was born in 1748, the son of an iron merchant-turned-administrator. After his father died in a duel when David was only nine, David was sent to live with his mother's brothers, both of whom were architects. His family hoped that David would follow in their example or perhaps branch out into medicine or law, so they were disappointed to learn that David planned to become a painter instead because painting was viewed as barely more than a trade, something which did not suit a young member of the bourgeoisie.[5]

A distant cousin, famed Rococo painter François Boucher, recommended that David go to study under Joseph-Marie Vien, a professor at the Academy. There, David would study drawing extensively, since it was an art underlying both painting and sculpture. Under the guidance of Vien, the Academy underwent an enormous transformation which David would actually complete as an instructor himself. Between the years of 1747-89, the Academy slowly moved from teaching how to paint in the Rococo style to the Neoclassical.[6]

[5] Lee, *David*, 17.

[6] David Karel, "Towards Neo-Classicism in France: Decadence and Reform in the Teaching of Art 1747-1789," *RACAR: Revue D'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* 2, 1 (1975): 5-13. Accessed November 6, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42630059, 8.

The Cupid Seller. Painting by Joseph-Marie Vien, 1763. Musée national du Château de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau, https://www.chateaudefontainebleau.fr/en/fontainebleau-resources/collection/.

Under the teachings of Rococo, in which Vien had been trained, the artistic style was decorative and often had playful or sexual undertones. The Academy had taught this style even in the beginning of the eighteenth century, when other great artists like Antoine Watteau had studied, and under such artists the genre had flourished.[7] However, by 1765, the tide was turning in favor of Neoclassicism, where artists returned to the study of Renaissance and, therefore, to the classical sources which drove that rebirth. This transition can be seen in pieces such as Vien's *The Cupid Seller*, which shows a woman in a chiton selling another woman a cupid which she holds by the wings.[8] That piece was modelled after an ancient wall painting, which would theoretically place it in the Neoclassical movement. However, the action of receiving a cupid held by the wings represents sexual fulfillment. This thinly veiled sexuality places the piece

[7] Donald Posner, *Antoine Watteau*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 66.

[8] Joseph-Marie Vien, *The Cupid Seller*, 1763, Musée national du Château de Fontainebleau, Fontainebleau, https://www.chateaudefontainebleau.fr/en/fontainebleau-resources/collection/.

more solidly in the school of Rococo. Taken together, this piece shows the transition between the two different schools of thought that were shaping the artistic world of the time.[9] Though David arrived at the school only two years after the completion of that piece, the teachers were beginning to focus more exclusively on Neoclassical ideals.

The Death of Seneca. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1773. Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000741346;prevRouteTS=1604780097169.

The first history painting on display as an example of David's work while he was still studying in the Academy and under the tutelage of Vien is his vision of the death of Seneca. Painted as his entry for the Prix de Rome, the subject matter was chosen by the judges and painted by a variety of young artists. David had entered and lost for two years before painting this piece for 1773's competition. He never actually won first prize, though this oversight was less because of the quality of his work and more because of the pervasive favoritism in the academy at the time.[10]

[9] Lee, *David*, 20.
[10] Lee, David, 24.

The events of the death of Seneca have been portrayed in many different ways over the years. In short, Seneca was ordered to commit suicide by Nero. Hearing of Seneca's death, his wife Paulina attempted suicide as well. However, when he heard of her plans, Nero stopped Paulina from joining her husband in death.[11] In the Enlightenment, Seneca was a somewhat controversial ideal figure, with some philosophers idealizing only his death because he "knew how to die when he had to."[12] Diderot, however, argued that Seneca was a figure to identify with, in some ways a mirror to use to analyze one's own life and contemplate the effects of their own death.[13]

Like his teacher's *The Cupid Seller*, David's *The Death of Seneca* bridges between Rococo colors and flair and Neoclassical drama. The piece itself is turbulent and theatrical in its posing, with Seneca and his wife Paulina frantically reaching for each other amid a crowd. David portrays each stage of Seneca's death, including the vein cutting, and the bandaging of Paulina's wound to save her life against her will. A soldier holds Seneca's death decree, and a scribe records his dying words.[14] Seneca's sprawling pose reflects his status between life and death. The addition of Paulina gives the scene more emotional drama as she is tearfully ushered away from her husband's side. This along with the soft color palette clearly ties this work more closely with the Rococo movement as opposed to the restraint expected of a Neoclassical treatment.[15]

This piece gives an early view of David's portrayal of death as a transition, with the moment of death enlarged for emotional impact. David portrays life and death as two states of

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[11] James Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 20.

[12] Julien Offray de la Mettrie, "Anti-Sénèque, ou Discours sur le bonheur," In *Oeuvres Philisophiques*. (Paris, 1796), 229.

[13] Denis Diderot. Essai sur lea vie de Séneque le philosophe, sur ses écrits, et sur les regnes de Claude et de Néron. (Paris, 1782), 3.

[14] Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Seneca*, 1773, Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000741346;prevRouteTS=1604780097169.

[15] Heidi E. Kraus, "Architecture and Memory in Jacques-Louis David's Sabine Women." *Art Inquiries* 17, 2 (2017): 138–54, 142.

being between which Seneca struggles, his right side slackened and corpselike while his left reaches toward the light of life.[16] The presence of Paulina transforms this vision of death into something entirely more personal by showing how Seneca struggles toward her specifically. Just as he strives to reach her, she also has to be dragged away, a reference to her love for her husband and her forceful separation from him after her life was saved against her will. David shows the event of death as something dramatic, but that drama is limited largely to the husband-wife relationship, not the world at large.

Andromache Mourning Hector. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1781. Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/LESSING_ART_1039789184;prevRouteTS=1604781696125.

Even after entering the Grand Prix three times, losing three times, and growing more exhausted of the favoritism plaguing the Academy, David still recognized the importance of

[16] Didier Maleuvre, "David Painting Death." *Diacritics*. 30, 3 (2000): 13-27. Accessed November 6, 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1566340, 17.

becoming a full Academician. In order to attain this status, David needed to paint a reception piece worthy of a holder of such a title. Freshly returned from studying in Rome, David decided to paint *Andromache Mourning Hector*, also known as *The Sorrow of Andromache*.

This piece shows a scene taken from Homer's *Iliad.* Though the epic poem ends with Hector's corpse being taken back to Troy to receive deserved honors, this scene imagines Andromache's reception of her husband's body. In this painting, Hector lies on a deathbed with his weapons and shield lying on the floor under his head. In front of Hector, Andromache turns tearful eyes to the sky as she holds the hand of her son, Astyanax, who stands in front of her, reaching toward her as if to console her.[17]

Upon first seeing this piece, few of the stylistic choices align with the Rococo sensibilities of *The Death of Seneca*. All references to Rococo are gone; there is no playful or dramatic undertone to the piece, and the colors match the somber mood. Rather, this piece shows the beginning of a new era of David's work. Learning from his travels in Rome and study of Artists like Poussin, David portrays the scene with a clear and effective composition, and the grief of Andromache does not read as overdramatically as Seneca's or Paulina's. Rather, her reaction is limited to the pyramidal composition.[18] The piece is static, with emphasis on the lines of the static poses, not the motion or color of earlier works.[19] With this piece, David takes his first step into Neoclassicism.

Hector lies on a deathbed in a clear classical reference to the Roman deathbed, though his pose is also reminiscent of Jesus Christ in some ways.[20] Of course, it would be a mistake to label

[17] Jacques-Louis David, *The Sorrow of Andromache*, 1781, Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/LESSING_ART_1039789184;prevRouteTS=1604781696125.

[18] Lee, *David*, 75.

[19] David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution*, (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 22.

[20] Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 83.

David a Christian, especially considering he later aided in attempting to erase the Church in France. However, he still knew how to implement and execute Christian symbolism in extremely effective ways. Here, David has chosen to portray death long after the actual moment; Hector is dead, and the piece shows the reactions of those left behind. The body of the deceased is more of an object than a person. The viewer instead focuses on the expressions of Andromache and Astyanax. Additionally, some theorize that the depiction of Astyanax as a child rather than the toddler of the epic poem shows David's own emotional investment in this scene because of the death of his own father when he was nine, though it is possible that this depiction is based off of other pieces which feature an older Astyanax.[21]

David's portrayal of death here is at once personal and patriotic. Whether the tie to David's own childhood loss is true or not, the picture of a wife mourning her husband shows loss on a personal level. Written on the candelabra in the back of the scene are the opening lines from Andromache's lament upon hearing of the death of Hector, and on Hector's deathbed are engraved scenes from Hector's last farewell.[22] These aspects of the piece show how death affects a family personally. However, many aspects of the piece reflect Hector's sacrifice for his city. His pose calls to mind a traditional portrayal of Jesus, whose role of sacrifice would be evident to an audience heavily influenced by the church. Additionally, David modelled his Hector after a Roman funerary scene, calling to mind the Roman ideals of service and sacrifice to the state.[23]

[21] Lee, *David*, 75.
[22] Ibid., 76.
[23] Ibid., 75.

The Oath of the Horatii. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1784. Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/ARMNIG_10313257933;prevRouteTS=1604781867276.

In 1784, David was commissioned to paint a piece for the *Direction des Bâtiments du Roi*. Though this piece is sometimes viewed as a rallying call for the French Revolution, that is improbable. At the time this piece was painted, David had no strong political ties, and it is more likely he was just trying to cement his reputation as a history painter.[24] He decided to paint a relatively obscure scene depicting the three Horatii brothers. In the seventh century BC, the brothers had represented Rome as champions against three brothers from Alba, the other side of a conflict. To complicate things, one of the Horatii was married to the sister of Alba's champions, and the Horatii's sister was betrothed to one of the enemy fighters. Regardless of the outcome of the combat, their family would be torn apart.[25]

In this piece, the three brothers Horatii stand to the left of their father. He holds their swords aloft as they swear their loyalty to the state, arms held stiffly out in front of them. Behind the father, his daughters lie slumped on the ground, despairing at the danger their brothers are

[24] Lee, *David*, 94.
[25] Ibid., 79.

about to enter. The background of the piece is separated by three archways, with the brothers framed by the left arch, the father in the middle, and the women by the right.

There are many possible themes to interpret from this piece. For example, the loyalty of the brothers to their father directly ties to a citizen's loyalty to their fatherland, or *la patrie.*[26] Most evident, though, is the level of the stakes of the coming combat in terms of the theme of death. The story of the Horatii ends with only the eldest brother surviving of the six combatants. Therefore, the reactions of all of the different figures in the piece show their reactions to the coming death of their close family or even themselves. Again, David shows the coming deaths of the brothers as the expectation for a citizen to act as sacrifice for their state. However, this piece differs drastically from *Andromache Mourning Hector* in that the brothers are not yet dead. Unlike the portrayal of Hector's corpse, this piece emphasizes men choosing to pledge their lives for the cause; in some ways, this is almost a thematic prelude to *Andromache Mourning Hector*.

The piece is notable for its sharp division between the men and women. Despite the division, though, both parties are demonstrating how best to serve their country. For the men, their duty is on the front lines, actively fighting the enemy. For the women, though, their duty is more subtle. One of the sisters is engaged to a man on the other side of the conflict, so her duty is to remain loyal to the family of her birth, even though she will suffer as a result.

Throughout the early years of David's career, he includes women in almost all of his pieces. In each of these pieces, though, the women play one united role of mourners reacting to the deaths of men close to them. It is intriguing to speculate on David's intent here, but it is also possible that in this early stage of his career he was attempting to produce what commissioners

[26] H. Spencer Beaumont, "Art as Revolutionary Propaganda in David's The Death of Marat," *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 30 (2018): 22–28. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a2h&AN=131832413&site=ehost-live&scope=site, 23.

would request, portraying women as beautiful yet weak to correspond to and compliment the accompanying male figures, whose stronger poses reflected their greater impact on the narrative of each piece. This relationship is especially evident in *The Oath of the Horatii*, where the women "appear more unconscious than overcome by grief; their poses are slack, and they seem though correct in scale, strangely diminished creatures."[27] Whether this portrayal agrees with David's own views regarding gender roles, it is important to establish this standard of David's work before he officially entered the political world as a key player.

The Revolution

Jacques-Louis David's entry into politics was gradual, starting with a general support of revolutionary activity and growing over time as he became more of an active participant in politics. David's experience of favoritism in the Academy led to his growing resentment of the old system.[28] Therefore, in 1790, David joined the Jacobin group. As the Jacobins came into power, he served in several government positions, including as Deputy to the Convention, where he voted for the deaths of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. As part of this role, he replaced the corrupt and dated Academy with the French Institute.[29]

[27] Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 235-6.

[28] Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 104.

[29] Ibid., 105.

The Lictors Bring Brutus the Bodies of his Sons. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1789. Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/LESSING_ART_1039789204;prevRouteTS=1604782205173.

Originally, the Crown had commissioned David to paint something for the 1787 Salon. When David was injured and unable to fulfill this commission, he instead funneled the money towards paintings to be shown at the salon of 1789. The subject of the piece was at first meant to be Coriolanus. After David was almost prevented from using the money given to him to paint later than requested, however, he decided to change his subject to Brutus. It is unknown whether this subject change was approved by the commissioners.[30]

Lucius Junius Brutus was one of the figures from Roman history credited with driving out the last tyrant of Rome and helping to establish the Republic. When he heard that his own sons were involved in a plot to return a king to power, he ordered for their deaths. This piece captures the moment where their bodies are returned to his house. The story of Brutus shows

[30] Lee, *David*, 119.

sacrificial dedication to one's own country much like the Horatii, but this piece was viewed as much more controversial than the earlier.

The painting is set in Brutus' home. Brutus himself sits in shadow, face contemplative as the corpses of his sons are borne into the house behind him, illuminated by light streaming in from the open door. Dominating the right half of the painting are Brutus' wife and daughters, who grieve over the young men being carried in. The daughters cling to their mother, and one throws up her arms as if to block the awful sight. The background is dark, with columns and a curtain visible only behind the women.[31]

Though this topic covers the subject of the death of kings, any interpretation of the piece has to be considered only in the context of the time before the revolution when David was actually painting the piece. It is almost impossible for David to already be calling for the death of the King at the time of this piece's creation. This piece was still controversial at the time of its showing, though. In fact, the *Direction des Bâtiments du Roi* had attempted to prevent the display of this piece after seeing a preliminary sketch of the scene where David included the heads of the sons on stakes, a creative choice painfully evoking recent events in Paris.[32] Though the final piece did not include that imagery, the figure of Brutus contemplating does invite the viewer to consider his actions for the sake of the state. Unlike *The Oath of the Horatii*, where the brothers present a united front, the entire piece shows the chaos resulting from Brutus' actions.[33] Unlike the Horatii, who volunteered their own lives, Brutus sits in the knowledge that he volunteered his own sons' lives; the audience sees not his death, but that of his sons'. In this painting, David expresses the first step of his journey into the realm of politics, whether because

[31] Jacques-Louis David, *The Lictors Bring Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*, 1789, Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/LESSING_ART_1039789204;prevRouteTS=1604782205173.

[32] Lee, *David*, 124.

[33] Ibid., 126.

he felt strong enough in his convictions or confident enough in his career where he knew he could withstand some controversy.

Additionally, it is important to note the connections between the revolution and Neoclassicism. Though scholars have been divided over the cause and effect relationship of Neoclassical ideals and the ideals of the revolution, their parallel growth aligns well with David's entrance into the world of communicating pro-revolutionary messages through his pieces, utilizing the ideals of order, law, and logic to support a new movement intended to bring them to fruition.[34] This piece shows how comfortable David has become in using the power associated with scenes of death from antiquity, using the antique to discuss the modern.[35] Death is heavy, shown in the shadows surrounding Brutus, but also controversial, forcing viewers to contemplate their own duty to their country when faced with death. However, the death shown here is past, the sons carried in long gone; though death is a powerful topic, it is not personal.

[34] Dowd, *Pageant Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution*, 23.
[35] Dominique Jarrassé, *18th-Century French Painting*, (Paris: Terrail, 1998), 173.

The Death of Marat. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1793. Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31701642;prevRouteTS=1604782411823.

On July 13, 1793, Charlotte Corday tricked her way into the house of Jean-Paul Marat, where she stabbed the famed newspaper writer with a concealed knife. This murder shocked the nation, but it also shocked David personally because Marat had been a close friend. This relationship shaped the way he chose to depict the man as he died; death was suddenly much more personal.

Jean-Paul Marat is portrayed in his bathtub where he often worked because of a skin condition, vulnerable in his nakedness. However, his face is dignified. It is evident he died while in the middle of writing, a quill in his hand which has dropped to the floor, and a note abandoned on his wooden side desk. The overall composition of the piece is vertical, with empty space behind the subject.[36]

[36] Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Marat*, 1793, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31701642;prevRouteTS=1604782411823.

When considering the way Jacques-Louis David portrayed death, it would be an enormous oversight to not address David's masterwork, *The Death of Marat*. David's treatment of Marat's death calls back in some ways to his portrayal of Seneca's. The transition between life and death is as tenuous and delicate as the touch of Marat's quill on the floor.[37] Wherever he is between life and death, though, there is a marked difference from the private drama of Seneca's death. Rather, David weaponizes this death, making it a cultural monument and a call to action.

The way David portrays his subject as a man also highlights his distress at the murder. By portraying Marat limply lying in his bath, David's work screams with injustice. Instead of his traditional portrayal of firm masculinity, his subject is wilted, a remnant of what he ought to be. Additionally, rather than harking back to only classical references, David invokes Michelangelo's Pietà in the position of the head and arm, showing Marat as a Jesus figure.[38]

Of course, noticeably absent from this painting is Charlotte Corday, the assassin herself. David was careful to represent Corday in no way other than her abandoned weapon and letter. Though this choice is not consistent with reality since she remained on the scene, David chose to instead leave no room for Corday to be seen in any positive light.[39] Corday is not a martyr or heroine; her actions have left the world in the painting lacking and empty in multiple ways.

[37] Maleuvre, "David Painting Death," 22.
[38] Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 107.
[39] Beaumont, "Art as Revolutionary Propaganda in David's The Death of Marat," 23.

The Intervention of the Sabine Women. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1799. Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039931969;prevRouteTS=1604782672860.

A more familiar subject to most art historians would be the rape of the Sabine women, an oft-depicted scene from Roman myth when the men of Rome kidnapped the Sabine women to be their wives. David approaches the scene differently, however, showing the aftermath, where the Sabine women take their children to the battlefield to stop their brothers and fathers from fighting their new husbands.

In David's painting, he consciously chose to make the scene feel more Greek even if the source material was Roman by depicting the men as heroic nudes. The women interrupt the battle, forcefully wielding symbols of their roles as mothers in the form of their exposed breasts and their own children.[40] In the background of the piece, the walls of the city dominated the left of the painting; many have noted the similarities between the towers included and the images of the fall of the Bastille, placing the scene closer to home for many viewers.[41] However, David

[40] Ed Lilley, "Jacques-Louis David, the Greek Ideal and an Alternative," in *Making Sense of Greek Art*, ed. Viccy Coltman, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2012), 109.

[41] Kraus, "Architecture and Memory," 138.

does not show the image of death that would be typically associated with a scene invoking the Bastille, with rioting crowds of people hurting each other and their perceived enemies. Rather, he shows the avoidance of death and bloodshed, notable in its absence.

Comparison between this piece and *The Oath of the Horatii* is inevitable. The stories place women in between the families of their birth and the new families they married into. However, here the women are not collapsed weeping in the corner of the piece. Rather, they run through the middle of the fight, brandishing their children like weapons. Their poses are not concave or delicate, but rather almost masculine in their stiffness; in many ways the central women would call to mind the Horatii brothers more than the women from that scene.

In fact, it is during this period of David's life when his portrayal of women in general changes. Having lived in the city through the years prior to and during revolution, David would probably have seen firsthand the physical might of women, whether during their protests or the repeated brawls between groups of women over price controls.[42] Further, David was familiar with and respected the female artist Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun until politics drove them apart.[43] Both in his public and personal life, then, David was surrounded by powerful women. So why did he only start portraying them as such after the revolution? David's portrayal of the women aligns in different ways with both the ideal woman of the republic and its nightmare. In turns, these women are "noble mothers caring for their children," but also "castrative" in the amount of power they wield.[44] In *Brutus* and *the Intervention*, the women included show their dedication as mothers by holding their children close, actively calming them or speaking out on their behalf.

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[42] Katie L. Jarvis, "The Cost of Female Citizenship: How Price Controls Gendered Democracy in Revolutionary France," *French Historical Studies* 41, 4 (October 2018): 648.

[43] Mary Sheriff, "Jacques-Louis David and the Ladies," in *Jacques-Louis David: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy Johnson, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 93.

[44] Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

However, In *the Intervention* and *Death of Marat*, the women assert themselves over the men in the scene. Taken together, it is possible David is expressing consciously or unconsciously the contradictions inherent in the new role of women in this age of revolution. If so, he was not alone in his anxieties surrounding the topic; though legislation immediately after the revolution allowed women to administer property equally with their spouses and to divorce their husbands if they desired, these legislations were short-lived.[45] The women seen in David's work of the time reflect the odd status of women of the time having received new power and the male perspective at times threatened by the power women were suddenly able to wield.

In *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*, David seems to call for peace and reconciliation amid the chaos directly after the Revolution.[46] It is important to note that he was imprisoned during the painting of this piece, so the piece was not actually completed until 1799. This piece probably shows a shared hope of David and the rest of the French populace for some intervening party to stop the chaos. As the timing would have it, this piece was first shown barely six weeks after the coup d'état of 18 Brumaire.[47] Change was imminent.

Napoleon to Exile

In many ways, it is ironic that such a devoted Jacobin would eventually become one of Napoleon's favorite artists. Though it is a mystery how exactly David and Napoleon first met, together, they would become excellent partners in propaganda. Even in the early years of Napoleon's rise to power, it was clear that he respected the importance of propaganda when out on the battlefield, including in the medium of art. Even during his Egyptian campaign he brought a painter to capture his successes on the battlefield. In many ways, this choice foreshadowed his

[45] Freund, *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary France*, 207.
[46] Kraus, "Architecture and Memory," 138.
[47] Dorothy Johnson. "David and Napoleonic Painting." In *Jacques-Louis David: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy Johnson. Newark, University of Delaware Press, 2006, 131.

aspirations as he followed the example of kings like Louis XIV, who also would use painters to sent images of his success back to the population at home.[48] This knowledge also unfortunately resulted in a decrease of David's history paintings since he was focused on serving Napoleon. However, there is still a surviving sketch of a historical scene from this period.

The Departure of Hector. Drawing by Jacques-Louis David, 1812. Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/ARMNIG_10313259059;prevRouteTS=1604782942916.

This is a scene popular among artists of the time because of both the rational and emotional impact of Hector's departure. Aligned with Neoclassical sensibilities, the scene shows a soldier separating himself from his family to fight for his people, placing his nation over his personal desires. However, the new emphasis on the family role after the revolution meant that the more emotional side of Hector saying his last goodbyes to his wife and son would also be celebrated by the public. Interestingly, David had included this image in one of his earlier works, *Andromache Mourning Hector*, where he had included a small scene of their farewell.

Though this piece was never completed as a painting, the sketch shows a piece typical of David in that it follows much of the traditional iconography of the time while also twisting the

[48] Johnson, "David and Napoleonic Painting," 133.

scene in a unique way. As in David's *Oath of the Horatii* and *The Lictors Bring Brutus the Bodies of his Sons,* there is a distinct division of the men and women in the scene, but in this piece, David has resisted expectation by emphasizing the distance between the subjects of the piece. The treatment of death is reminiscent of *The Oath of the Horatii* in that the figure of Hector is choosing to leave and face his death but softened by the fact that Hector looks over his shoulder back at Andromache, undermining his dedication. It would be intriguing to see how this choice of a hero reluctantly walking to his death would have changed or remained the same when painted as a full-fledged history painting.

This drawing, however, could reflect on David's role as court painter under Napoleon. It is no secret that much of his work during this time was propaganda for the nation, but in this case, it may show a different, softer side of Napoleon's image projected for the world. After the birth of his son, the King of Rome, in 1811, Napoleon seemed hard-pressed to leave his side to go and fight wars. David reflected this softer statesman in his portrait of Napoleon in his study in 1812.[49] As Napoleon sensed the political situation began to turn against him, though, he recognized the parallels to the story of Hector and Astyanax himself, stating in 1814 that "The tale of Astyanax, captive of the Greeks, has always struck me as the saddest page of history."[50] Though this sketch has not received as much attention from scholars as the many finished paintings of David's career, there are many avenues of research to pursue regarding the subject chosen.

[49] Albert Boime, *Art in an Age of Bonapartism 1800-1815,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 54.
[50] Napoleon Bonaparte to Joseph Bonaparte, March 16,1814, *The Letters of Napoleon to Marie-Louise*, ed. Charles de la Roncière. (Paris, 1935), 241.

Cupid and Psyche. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1817. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, https://library.artstor.org/#/asset/AMICO_CL_103800969;prevRouteTS=1604783239044.

Some scholars when viewing the plain delight on Cupid's face and the casual pose so different from David's typical masculine strength would argue that this piece represents the freedom felt in the early years of his exile.[51] To some extent, they may be right; though David had begun to design the scene in 1813, he did not actually find the time to paint it until his exile.[52]

According to the myth, Psyche was a beautiful mortal whose looks caused Venus to grow jealous and order her son Cupid to punish her. Instead of following his orders, he fell in love. Therefore, when Psyche was abandoned by her family because of the Oracle's prophecy that she would marry a monster, Cupid orders that the winds bring her instead to his palace. To avoid being seen, Cupid would only join her in the night and leave before dawn. However, Psyche's curiosity and suspicions about the unknown monster she had married grew, and finally one night

[51] Satish Padiyar, "Last Words: David's *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* (1824). Subjectivity, Death, and Postrevolutionary Late Style," *Journal of the International Association of Research Institutes in the History of Art* 23 (2011), http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2011/2011-apr-jun/padiyar-last-words.

[52] Issa Lampe, "Repainting *Love Leaving Psyche*: David's Memorial to an Empire Past." In *David After David: Essays on the Later Work*, ed. Mark Ledbury. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007, 111.

she hid a lantern by her bed to surprise Cupid, seeing his face at last. However, because he interpreted her actions as a betrayal, she was condemned to wander the world and try to earn her way back to her husband's side by doing good deeds. After her short odyssey, Cupid is moved by his love for her again and has her made immortal to join him for all eternity.[53] The myth of Cupid and Psyche was a popular subject for many different artists over the years, and the myth had grown in popularity during the years immediately following the revolution. Though some authors and artists attempted to cast Psyche as the model for hardworking feminine citizenship, the myth also grew in popularity among women as a way to express their sexuality.[54]

In David's painting, he does not show the pivotal moment when Psyche first saw Cupid's features or the traditional scene of the two figures embracing. Rather, he chose to paint a scene of Cupid leaving Psyche's side before she wakes. Critics of the time pointed out the adolescent, tanned, grinning Cupid hardly resembled traditional depictions of gods. In this way, David took the story which normally focused on the suffering endured by Psyche and instead turned the viewer's attention to Cupid's escape after satisfying his lust, portraying Psyche as his personal victim.[55]

It may seem odd to include this painting in the discussion of David's use of death in his paintings, but it is here where David subtly would defy the expectation of such a scene. Though the surface of the piece shows a cheeky version of Cupid grinning at the viewer, the decorations of the room point back to Empire France. Drawing on his years as Napoleon's interior designer, David included several key details recognizable on the furniture, such as the decoration used on Napoleon's armchair in the Tuileries Palace, which resembles details included on the base of the

[53] Mary Vidal, "`With a Pretty Whisper': Deception and Transformation in David's *Cupid and Psyche* and Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*," *Art History* 22, 2 (June 1999): 214-243, 218.
[54] Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror*, 285.
[55] Lilley, "Jacques-Louis David, the Greek Ideal and an Alternative," 115.

bed.[56] The inclusion of mortuary symbolism further amplifies the symbolism of Napoleon's France, further highlighting David's portrayal of a scene sounding the funeral march for Imperial France.[57]

Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Three Graces. Painting by Jacques-Louis David, 1824. Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, https://www.fine-arts-museum.be/en/exhibitions.

The theme of death may not be evident in this piece, but in many ways this final history painting of David's shows his own view of his approaching death. To many in the art world, this piece was David's final statement from exile.[58]

This painting features a traditional scene of Mars being disarmed by Venus. Mars lies reclined on a couch as Venus leans over him, moving to crown him with a wreath of flowers. Behind the couch, the three graces steal away various pieces of Mars' armor. In front of the

[56] Lampe, "Repainting *Love Leaving Psyche*: David's Memorial to an Empire Past," 112.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Satish Padiyar, "Dispossessed: On Late David." in *David After David: Essays on the Later Work*, ed. Mark Ledbury. Williamstown, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007, 311.

couch, a small Cupid unties Mars' sandals. The entire scene floats in the clouds, anchored only by the set of arches rising in the back.

The image of Mars being disarmed symbolizes peace, a theme appropriate for a man approaching his death to portray, especially after a lifetime so full of conflict. However, this vision of the disarming plays with the male and female roles in unique and almost unsettling aspects. It is interesting to compare the finished product with David's first sketches of the scene, where Venus turns her body to the viewer, disarming Mars both literally and figuratively with her seductive attributes.[59] However, by the finished product, David has emphasized the distance between the two main characters of the tale, creating an empty space in the center of the piece rather than a powerful or sexualized woman. There is no relationship between the two deeper than their proximity on the couch; this could represent the alienation and emptiness felt by David during his exile.[60] The goal of peace is laudable, but in David's eyes, it has come at an immense personal cost.

Over the years David served under Napoleon and his time in exile, his portrayal of women is astoundingly different than it had been in his earlier years. A truth that had rung true during the years where Rococo had been the prevailing style and remained so under Neoclassicism was that "men on beds were stoic heroes (usually dying); women on beds were figures of desire."[61] This rings true over the body of David's work, spanning his portrayal of dying or dead heroes like Hector and Marat, whose pose hearkens back to the tradition even if he is technically in a bath. Women on beds as objects of desire, however, emerges only over the last years of his career, as can be seen in both Psyche and Venus. However, these two women are

[59] Jacques-Louis David, *Première idée for Mars Disarmed by Venus*, 1817, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[60] Padiyar, "Last Words: David's Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces."

[61] Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror*, 268.

treated very differently. Though Psyche is shown looking pleased with herself as she rests, she is also shown in the act of being abandoned. Though Venus is shown draped on the couch next to Mars, she is turned from both the audience and Mars himself. Even Andromache, who is seated rather than lying on a bed, is far distanced from Hector. The women in this last stage of David's painting are defined by their distance from the men in their lives. Further, Andromache and Venus represent distraction and downright hindrance to Hector and Mars respectively. By the final years of his life, David sketches and paints his discomfort and distance from the world, resulting in female figures who are neither fully passive nor active in their posing.

Conclusion

By the end of his life, David expressed his freedom from political ties and his sad separation from the world of strife in turns. But this represents only a small fraction of David's career as an artist. Early in his career, David represented his experience learning both Rococo and Neoclassical ideals while in the Academy. Later in life, he became the face of the Neoclassical movement with his impactful pieces of art. Through his history paintings, David captured the changing role of death, addressing by turns the emotional drama, propaganda power, and grief of the topic. He also explored portraying women as both passive and active, emphasizing the contradictions in the female situation throughout the revolution, Napoleonic era, and beyond. It is impossible to group all of the women painted by David into any one category, though tracking the evolution of his portrayal of the figures is intriguing.

In the end, David ought to be remembered not just for his contributions to the painting world, but also for the many different hats he wore as an important member of the Jacobins and under the rule of Napoleon, and the ways he used his influence to change the French Academy and society as a whole. Truly, David was deserving of being called a talented artist, shrewd

businessman, lucky prisoner, and many other titles, and his work demands more research in the future.

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