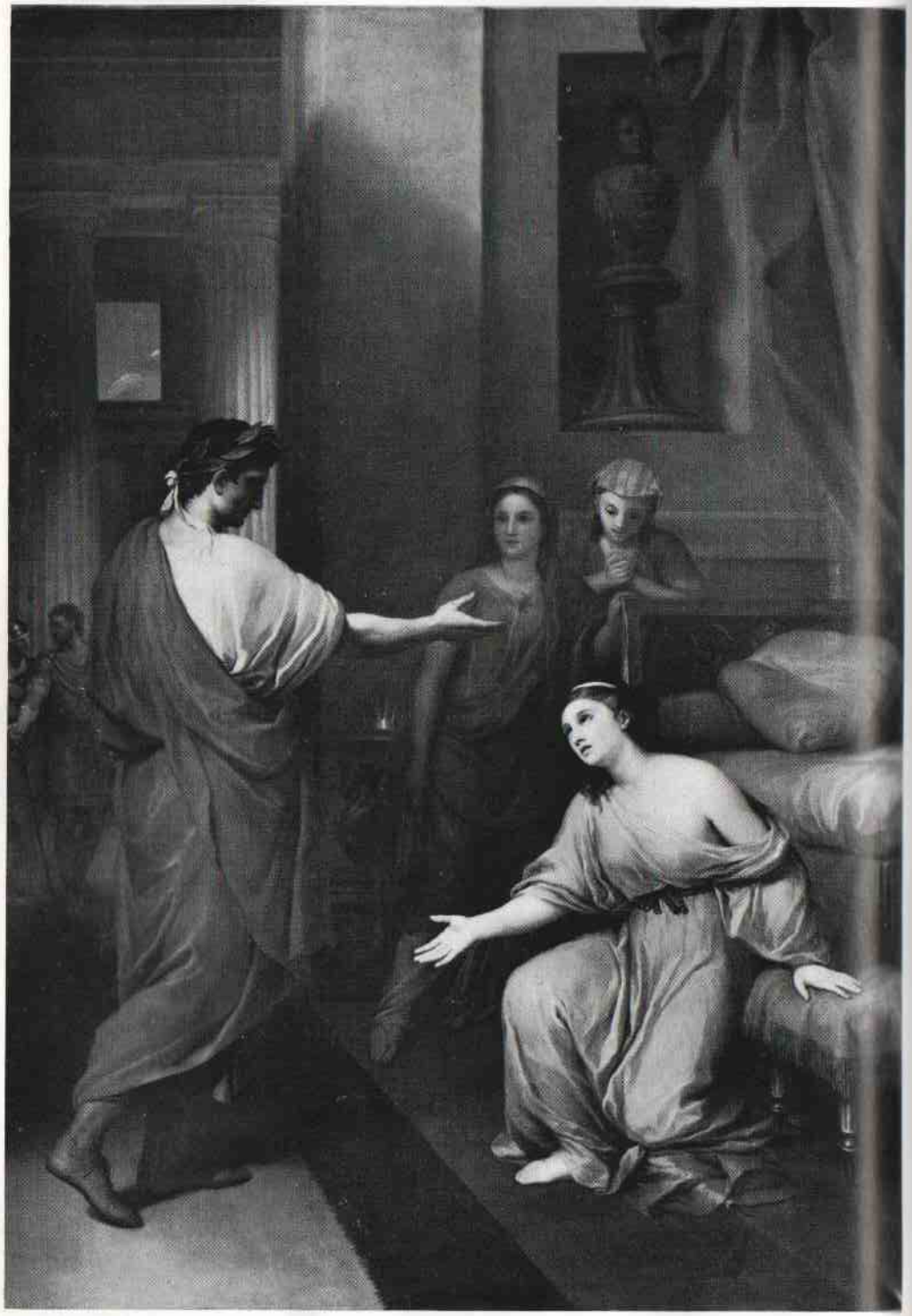


Nature and the Antique

It might be thought that the painters discussed in the previous chapter had, in their different ways, all obeyed the century's dictum and followed nature. The truths so patently lacking in rococo art were present in their work: they spoke to the heart or to the mind, mirrored society and made some comment on it. But their truth was soon seen to be not true enough. It was local rather than universal: it was what Shaftesbury had called '*the merely natural*'; it led back to the shallows of Dutch art. Thus it became necessary to ask what is the 'true imitation of nature'? The answer was given most publicly in 1755 when there appeared Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*. It does not matter that the views expressed there were not altogether novel; and much of what Winckelmann said had been practised by artists long before. But he codified in effect the aspirations of the century to produce great art, and encouraged its lingering tendency to rely on tradition. It is in the Greeks that we find great art, and by imitating them the 'true imitation of nature' will be reached. The quarrel of *Rubénistes* and *Poussinistes* seemed to be fought again, and lost by the *Rubénistes*, when Winckelmann remarked simply that Rubens never approached Greek proportions; it was sufficient condemnation.

Although Winckelmann's book was published at Dresden, its spiritual place of publication was – not Athens, but Rome. Throughout the century travellers had been hurrying there, bringing nature with them and then modifying it in the environment of the greatest surviving city of the past. The most dramatic of all conversions is also the one most relevant here. More fascinating than Napoleon's crossing of the Alps is that by the young Jacques-Louis David, brought in the baggage of the painter Vien, coming down to what might almost be called his birthright. The century had been waiting a long time for a truly moral artist,

104 Anton Raphael Mengs *Cleopatra before Octavius*

a regenerator, a patriot, a great painter who was also an admirer of the antique. That David's revolutionary qualities should not be only artistic but also political is part of the price that the century had to pay; it was the opposite extreme from the uncommitted yet *serviable* nature of the rococo. So much eighteenth-century art lacked a cutting edge? David answered with the guillotine.

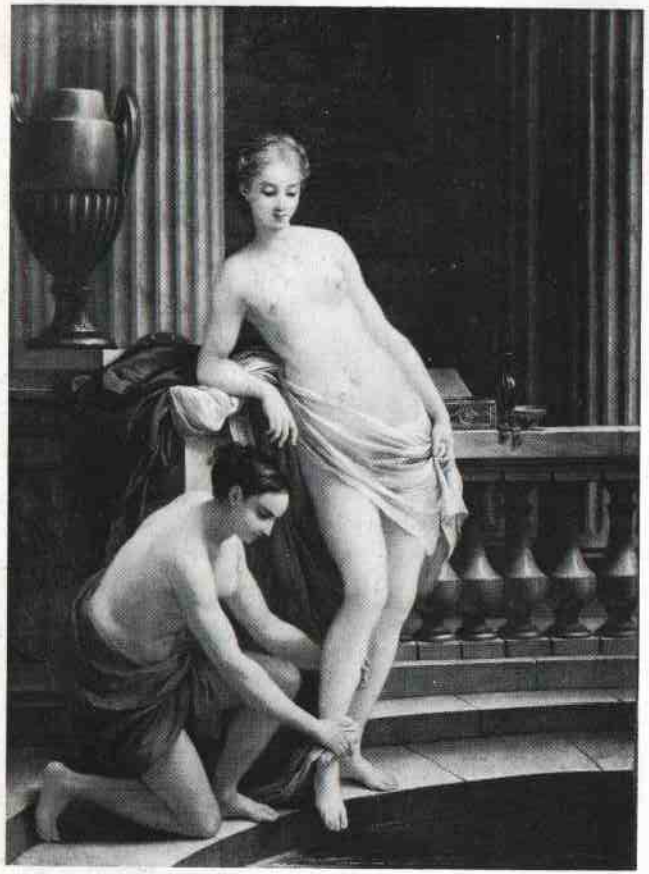
David had set out for Rome determined not to be seduced by the antique. It was in a very different spirit that most people went there, and the synthesis which was so much desired is conveniently expressed in the portrait, carefully devised by Tischbein, of *Goethe in the Campagna* (*Ill. 105*). This key picture enshrines the optimistic late-eighteenth-century world where nature and antiquity harmonize into a new creed, fused from the teachings of Rousseau and Winckelmann. Goethe is seen relaxed, almost negligently posed, at the centre of an open-air, natural world which also belongs to antiquity. The mood is more profound than that in Batoni's portraits, where Grand Tour sitters jostle an antique urn or gaze at a bronze bust – very much tourists sightseeing. Tischbein takes Goethe out of the city, and tinges his portrait with romantic response to the lapsed and grass-grown monuments of the Campagna, suggesting informality and communication at the same time. It expresses the successful outcome of a long hoped-for pilgrimage. Goethe becomes almost a natural growth, rooted to the stone he reclines on, absorbing atmosphere. The calm of the ancients becomes his calm, while he yet remains a modern man, whose interests are symbolized by the accurately delineated plants as much as by the bas-relief. He seems a new-style hero, priest almost of a new cult, with the wisdom of Sarastro and the experience of Tamino. Tischbein finished the picture in 1787; two years later came the French Revolution.

The Revolution was the drastic moral regeneration in real life represented in art by the neo-classical movement. What distinguishes the neo-classic from other eighteenth-century artistic currents is the earnestness of its adherents. An ethic rather than a religion, it tacitly or openly challenged Christianity and replaced its sluggish observances with a fiery inspiration which swept like a last Crusade through Europe. And underneath its most ridiculous manifestations and claims, there was the solid structure of fact: the fact of Rome and the exciting facts newly unearthed at Herculaneum and Pompeii, the marbles and terracottas, temples and houses, which all had the primary value of existing, of being true, and the secondary one of being beautiful. That wonderful world had set up its own standards, without the aid of Christ or the Virgin, and there was sufficient harshness in them to appeal to an age consciously anxious to reform. Where the

105 JOHANN HEINRICH WILHELM TISCHBEIN *Goethe in the Campagna*

rococo had implied a life of leisure, the neo-classic promised hard work, discipline, and sacrifices at which even human blood might excitingly flow. The neo-classic represents the triumph of the corpse in art; and what begins as past history culminates in the actuality of *Marat assassinated* (*Ill. 125*).

It is a sign of the basic reformist principle of the neo-classic that even Vien should claim – in an extraordinary letter-*cum*-petition written during the Revolution – to have been the great regenerator of the French School. When he returned to Paris from Rome in 1750, so he claimed, he set out to stem the tide of '*mauvais goût qui menaçait l'industrie nationale*'. To his pupils he offered the proper guide of nature, and this saved French art. It is of course true that both David and Vincent studied under him; and it is probably also true that he may have had some effect on the minor decorative arts – more significantly perhaps than on painting. What Vien really shows is how fashionable the neo-classic was



106 JOSEPH VIEN
Greek Girl at the Bath

becoming by 1750. In artistic stature less a forerunner than a footman, Vien made a successful career by stripping off the rococo apparatus and substituting the gauzy decencies of neo-classicism, while all the time preserving an erotic element beneath. He might claim to be a revolution in himself; for it, however, he was equipped not with a gun but a scent-spray.

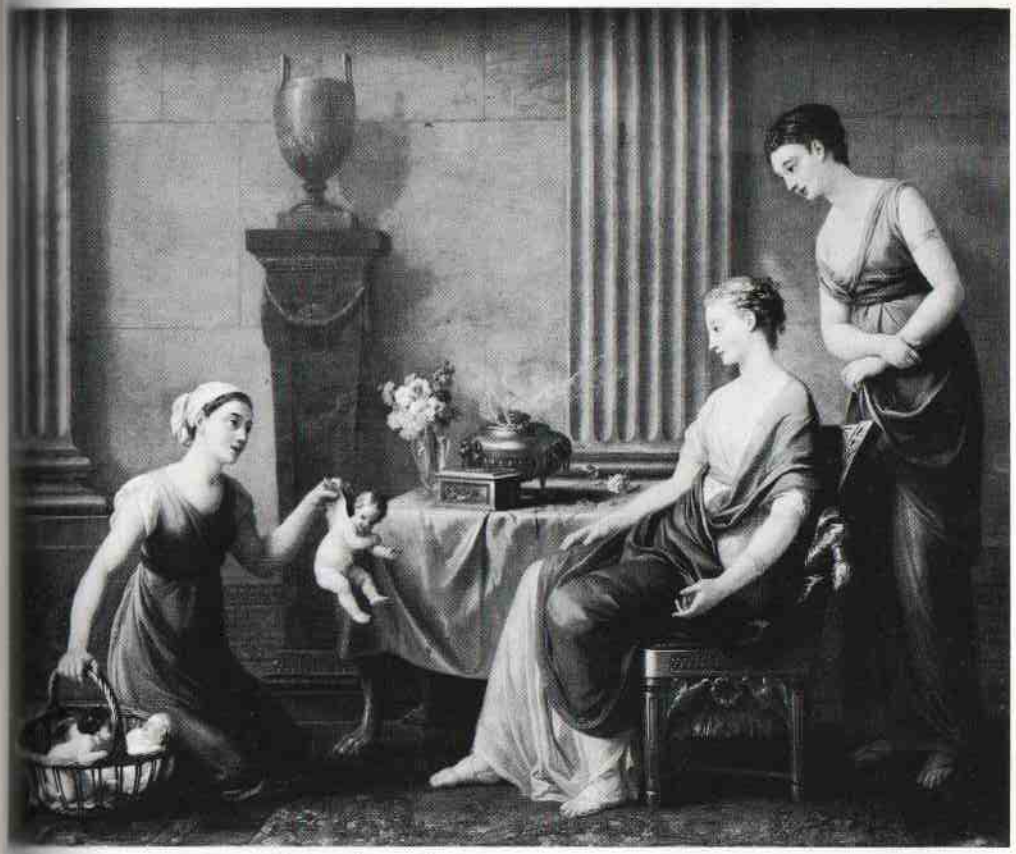
Not in fact by him but by his younger contemporary, Jean-Simon Berthélemy, is the *Apollo with the body of Sarpedon* (*Ill. 107*), a semi-baroque, neo-classic picture more typical and more vigorous than the work by Vien. Advised by the Comte de Caylus and praised by Diderot (two men with no love for each other), Vien was hardly more antique or severe than had been François Le Moyne. The latter's *Baigneuse* (*Ill. 24*) is a unlearned anticipation of what Vien was to conceive but spice with fashionable classical accessories: Vien's *Greek Girl at the Bath* (*Ill. 106*) is in fact a good deal more insipid than Le Moyne's girl, and yet it was a famous picture in late-eighteenth-century

107 JEAN-SIMON BERTHÉLEMY *Apollo with the body of Sarpedon*

Paris. The cruel truth is that it is neither natural nor antique; it is *chic* and pretty and no more robust than most of Vien's over-refined art. Simplified compositions suited him and kept him within the limits of his talent. He could hardly excite the patriotic virtues or preach elevated moral lessons, but that did not make his work less welcome. Besides, he said that he constantly talked of nature and antiquity, electrifying his pupils. The electricity which passed to David had certainly deserted Vien, who kept going on a watery diet of sentimentalized love: love in the hearts of young girls, or love for sale in the Pompeiian pastiche – both in subject and style – of *The Merchant of Loves* (*Ill. 108*). This is closer to Josephine at Malmaison than to anything Greek; it is a suitably muted, genteelly decorous appeal to what Vien probably called the softer passions, and thus keeps alive the French tradition which runs from Le Moyne to Prud'hon.

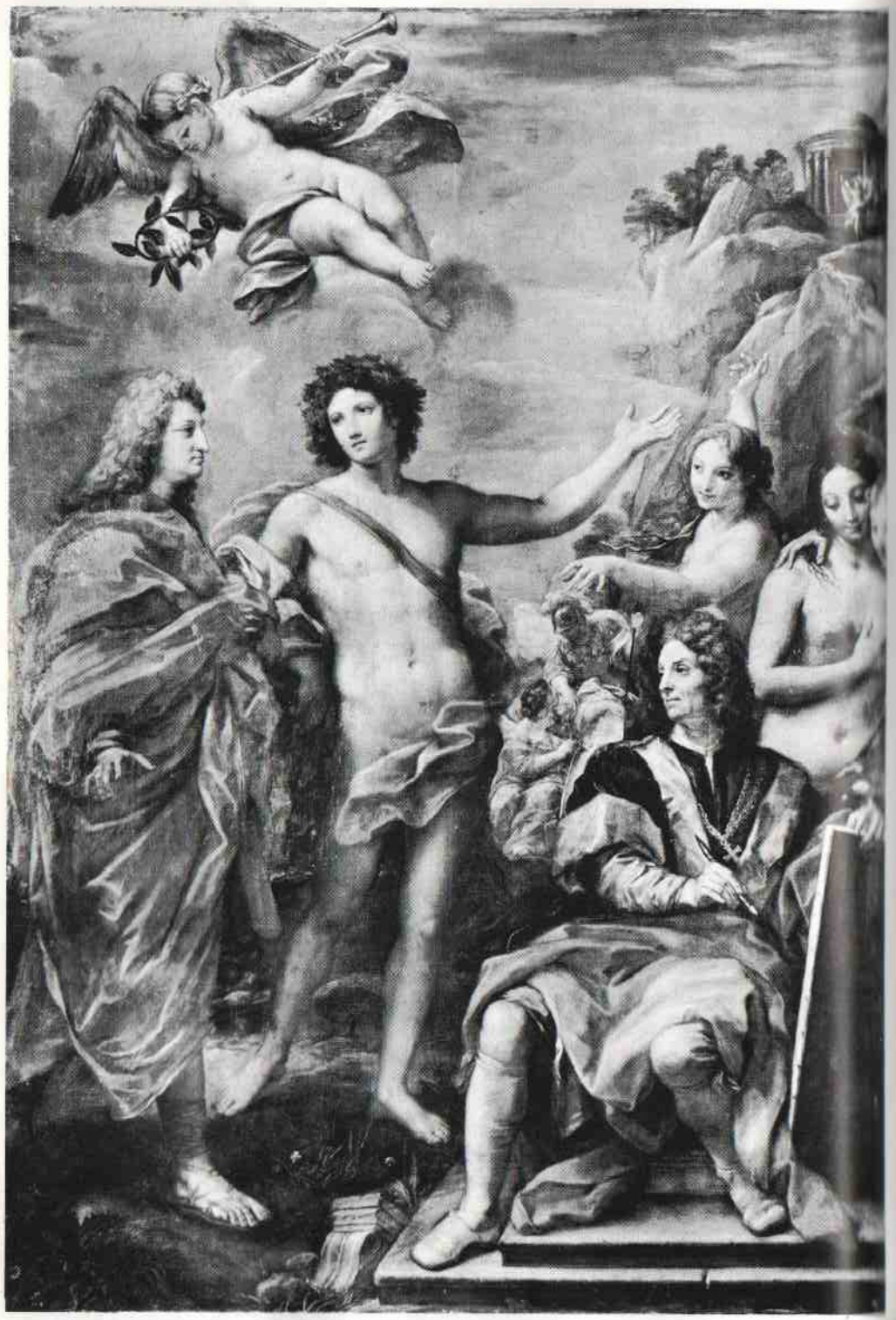
Nevertheless, Vien had changed his style drastically to achieve the emasculated charm and too simple bas-relief composition of this picture. His early pictures show him as thoroughly baroque (a tendency apparent again in the *Apotheosis*). The influence of Caylus was even stronger than had been his Roman experiences in revealing to him the new direction art was taking. Yet it is to Rome that one must constantly return, for it had largely remained aloof from the rococo and continued its eternal function of forming, but seldom producing, painters. It did not in itself make an artist neo-classical (and the contemporary careers of the sculptors Bouchardon and Adam neatly reveal its two facets); it had successfully housed Bernini as well as Poussin. But once the standard of truth is set up – truth related to antiquity – then Rome belongs to Poussin; and before him to Raphael. Severity, chastity of draughtsmanship (preference for line over colour), elevated sentiment, Rome stands for all such reforming discipline: literally a school where the artist will be educated and improved, a public school of manly attitudes, with hints of the cold bath and the cane.

It is possible to show that stylistically there is no single initiator of the eighteenth-century antique movement in painting because at Rome the tradition of classicism had never died out. A style of somewhat insipid classicism was carried on by Carlo Maratti who lived until 1713. His fame and popularity extended far beyond Rome. He is rather typically neo-classic in being more gifted as a portrait painter than as painter of subject pictures. His late work is virtually neo-classic in everything except subject. Winckelmann, who rarely mentioned any painter other than Mengs, could praise Maratti's draperies; and Maratti's *Apollo and Marchese Pallavicini* (*Ill. 109*) was to be hung with a pendant painted most suitably by Mengs himself – the *Cleopatra before Octavius* (*Ill. 104*).



108 Joseph Vien *The Merchant of Loves*

The sources of Maratti's style lie in Raphael, who was so often to serve instead of any direct use of antique monuments, or antique painting, as part of the general return to classicism. Many so-called neo-classic pictures betray borrowings from several non-antique sources and even utilize the odd baroque motif in composition. The general effect of Roman painting at the mid-century is certainly tending towards a diluted classicism, well represented by Sebastiano Conca's *Vestal Virgin Tuccia* (*Ill. 110*), painted in 1751. In some ways, this picture is a complete anthology, a blend of France and Italy, of the baroque and classicism, which ends by having hardly any individual flavour. Probably most travellers to Rome would yet have felt it was satisfactorily Roman and classical – and not just in its subject-matter. It is dignified and serious: a clear composition



110 Sebastiano Conca *The Vestal Virgin Tuccia*

with an absence of violent movement and hence with decorous, carefully-painted, draperies. A satisfactory suspicion of learning can be detected throughout, and if it is not truly antique at least it is neither novel nor *outré*. It calms rather than excites the imagination, and ends by being rather dull.

Conca's style prompts a doubt as to whether any Italian painter could be fully neo-classical. At least it is remarkable that what became the style was most rigorously practised by German and English painters (forerunners of the Nazarenes and the Pre-Raphaelites) until the dramatic revelation of David's *Oath of the Horatii*. It is usual to make Pompeo Batoni the Italian representative of this international movement. He has his place, if only because of his recognition when an old man of the young David, but it may be wondered if he was ever truly a neo-classical painter. He seems to have had little serious interest in depicting antiquity, and was really more at ease in a graceful allegorical climate, sweeter than Maratti's and with much more attractive – indeed brilliant – tonality. Not only

109 Carlo Maratti *Apollo and Marchese Pallavicini*

111 Pompeo Batoni *Innocence*

112 Pompeo Batoni *Benedict XIV presenting the Encyclical Ex Omnibus to the Duc de Choiseul*

was he a gifted portrait painter, though never a very profound one, but he had the ability to make a decorative composition out of almost any English sitter. He could not help being decorative, though in a Roman way that is in permanent opposition to Venetian bravura. The simple personification of *Innocence* (*Ill. 111*), anticipatory of Greuze but less sentimental, is a *tour de force* of clarity, beautifully drawn, with so many tones and textures of white set against a plain red curtain. Calm without being chilly, accomplished in its paint handling and yet not dull in surface, the picture represents Batoni's style at its finest; almost nothing is said, but the means of expression are exquisitely competent.

Faced with the problem of a modern historical subject, Batoni could only continue to offer competence, and to marry – not very happily – actuality with allegory. The painting of the *Concordat* (*Ill. 112*), where the Duc de Choiseul kneels before Pope Benedict XIV, shows that they ordered this sort of thing much better under the rococo. Batoni's grasp of reality is unremitting to the

point of making the composition absurd; his lack of bravura effects becomes timidity, and even his decorative gifts desert him here. The sort of antique subject which suited him best was not stern or stirring, but closer in mood to Vien. Batoni's *Allegory of Love* (*Ill. 113*), painted only four years after *Innocence*, is a perfectly charming, perfumed vision. Essentially decorative and unlearned, it is really Roman rococo in style rather than neo-classic – how rococo would be apparent if it were juxtaposed to a Poussin, for example.

Such reserves about Batoni seem justified. Although his pupils called him the 'regenerator of the school' that was not the view taken by Winckelmann and other neo-classic theorists. Admittedly, the *Dizionario delle Belle Arti* of Milizia, published in 1797, is violent in its prejudices, but it is interesting to find Milizia almost as bitter in his criticisms of Batoni as he was of Boucher and Tiepolo. He wrote of Batoni that 'he always lived in Rome, ignorant of the lovely things of Rome and Greece, and the ignorant lauded him to the stars, enchanted by the falseness of his colouring'. Thus, by the twin standards of the antique and the natural, Batoni had erred. It might be said that the most truly neo-classic thing about him was his first name.

If Vien and Batoni are to some extent false prophets, shaped more by fashion than conviction, one may reasonably ask where was the true preacher of the gospel. For Winckelmann, and a lot of other people, the answer lay in Anton Raphael Mengs. Attempts have been made to show that he was not originally orientated to neo-classicism, that he owes his place to Winckelmann's influence, and that in sheer priority some British (viz. Scottish) artists led the whole movement. Yet many people paid willing tribute to Mengs at the period. And his revolution consisted not so much in what he produced as in his attitude to art. Dismissed, explained away, disliked, he yet remains central to the whole movement. Inevitably perhaps with his first name, he set his art on a study of Raphael, and laid emphasis with his pupils on design rather than colour. Those who came into contact with him sensed his seriousness of purpose. Already in 1753, without any propaganda from the still unknown Winckelmann, the reactions to Mengs at Rome are reported by a Scotsman there: 'He is thought superior to any of the Romans. His works are, indeed, surprising...' His drawings appeared 'most beautiful'. And Mengs himself, who had visited Rome once before as a child, intended to execute all his work there: 'Sensible that Rome is the best place for a painter to improve his taste...'

This figure, with these ambitions, was bound to crystallize currents of taste around him. He was set on a path patently anti-rococo even if not yet fully neo-

113 Pompeo Batoni *Allegory of Love*

classical. Raphael stood not just for nature, but nature elevated as the ancients had elevated it to produce ideal beauty. Mengs was never to achieve greatness as a painter, but he must command some respect. His health had been ruined by the excessive work forced on him when a boy by his horrible father (an artist *manqué*). Isolated, reserved, literate, sensitive in his response to not always the expected old masters (Correggio he brilliantly analysed, and he pioneered reappreciation of Velazquez), fanatical in his painstaking application of paint, Mengs produced works which have every merit except that of being art. There the bird-brained Batoni had the advantage of him. Their rivalry was to be expected; their natures were quite dissimilar, as different as were their origins.

Mengs was twenty years younger than Batoni, a slow and uncertain worker, attacked by self-doubt as well as illness. He did not, and could not, undertake the wide series of portrait commissions that Batoni successfully did. But his best work was probably in portraiture; and, significantly, he comes nearest to creat-

ing a work of art when the sitter is himself. It was inevitable that he should become a friend of Winckelmann's: they are merely the first of serious German students living in Rome, never able to relax and take for granted the monuments with which they were surrounded. Winckelmann forced into the open the stylistic opposition of Mengs to Tiepolo. It was right that where Tiepolo had thought up so much high fantasy around the reckless lavishness of Cleopatra's banquet, Mengs should paint instead Cleopatra's humiliation at the feet of Octavius (*Ill. 104*). This was executed about 1760 for Henry Hoare, the creator of Stourhead and owner of Maratti's late allegory (*Ill. 109*), for which it strangely served as pendant. Not only is Cleopatra stripped of glory, shrivelled to a tiny supplicating figure before the tall, unbending man, but the whole composition is stripped of fantasy in the concern for historical truth and simplicity. The appeal is less to the eye than to the emotions. East confronts West with no panoply, but in a plain Egyptian room: restricted as deliberately as are the gestures. All is firmly delineated, plainly coloured, as un-exotic as possible – but as accurate as Mengs can make it.

It is very much more successful than Mengs' treatment of a Christian version of almost the same theme, where another woman kneels in intercession: the *Noli me tangere* (*Ill. 114*). This altarpiece at All Souls', Oxford, executed in 1771, is no less carefully painted. There is the same suppression of personality in handling the brush, so that the final effect is of glossy, glassy, enamel smoothness: sheets of translucent paint that preserve the bodies in waxen perfection, making a *tableau vivant* rather than a painting. But despite all his care, the truth of nature has eluded Mengs. The problem of the religious picture in an age of reason is presented more vividly than anything else; nor can it be felt that, even historically, Mengs has done more than perfunctorily project himself into the situation. Like a true neo-classical artist, he is much more at home in Cleopatra's palace at Alexandria than in the garden at Jerusalem.

It was obvious that in choosing his subject from history the painter had already achieved part of a moral aim: he was illustrating what was true. The incidents which were chosen tended to serve, like the whole neo-classical movement, the cause of a new secular religion; emotional and instructive scenes from lives of the saints were replaced by comparable antique examples, where virtue was tested more sharply than in, say, the *Continence of Scipio*. There are hints of the motif of public good, sometimes illustrated by abstruse examples, sometimes by stories like that of Regulus. The death of Socrates is especially the martyrdom that touches this religion; but deaths of all heroes have their part – rather like

114 Anton Raphael Mengs *Noli me tangere*

the school war memorial – in vaguely stirring associations of glory, pity, and patriotism. Women must be heroic too, or else weep. Their role as enchantresses is over; adultresses face artistic ostracism.

In a quite remarkable way, unparalleled before, art thus prepared for political events. Even the relative subjugation of women was to be part of Napoleon's code; 'the angel told Eve to obey her husband', he is recorded to have remarked. If republics, senates, consuls, were to become political actualities inspired by ancient Rome, it is hardly surprising that artists working in the city should feel the urgent need to capture something of the classical spirit. The effects ranged from capriciously assembled views of ancient Rome by Panini, and the more romantically charged response of Piranesi, to the history pictures of Gavin Hamilton, with subject-matter more often Greek than Roman.

Hamilton's *Achilles mourning over Patroclus* (*Ill. 115*), finished in 1763, is only one of several pictures in which the Iliad was his literary inspiration and Poussin his artistic prototype. Hamilton was painting pictures like this in Rome by 1758, and he is perhaps the earliest strictly neo-classic painter there. Through the medium of Cunego's engravings his compositions were widely disseminated and the novelty of his achievement was certainly remarked at the time. There is a combination of learned subject and pathetic anecdote, not new in itself but developing a new emphasis which will culminate in David. The choice of subjects from the Iliad is novel enough; yet symptomatic of a turning back to the epic, martial, world of legendary heroes. Soon the painter will not have to conjure up battles of the distant past but will have subject-matter enough in a Europe at war. Meanwhile, Hamilton's art seemed not only novel but important. Indeed, it would be hard to overlook the sheer size of the *Achilles mourning*; and then, for all the rather Rosa-style figures at the right, the central group suggests direct study of classical sarcophagi. It contrasts the violent access of Achilles' grief with the terrible calmness of Patroclus dead, a beautiful, lifeless corpse. Of a comparable Iliad picture by Hamilton, information was to be sent from Rome to the *Gazette de France*, testifying to the effect of this art which '*excite également de mouvements d'horreur et de compassion*'.

Hamilton himself did not feel restricted to antiquity for his subject-matter. As a Scotsman, working usually for Scottish patrons, he not surprisingly considered the possibility of painting *Mary resigning the Crown* – and though one must not force the pattern, it is noteworthy that the subject once more enshrines woman's yielding: as it were, a modern Cleopatra shown stripped of power. Already, the ancient and modern history picture were linked; and the neo-

115 GAVIN HAMILTON *Achilles mourning over Patroclus*

classic brought with it renewed interest in national history. That was to merge into romantic art, when neo-classicism fell away, and several pictures actually painted fully in the eighteenth century have an overblown, even Victorian, melodramatic appearance (*Ill. 119*).

Rome and Mengs still represented the ideal location and master. The young Benjamin West was drawn there and into that circle in the key years of the early 1760s, to produce much more tranquil, and insipid, pictures than Hamilton's. A natural lack of artistic energy helped him early to achieve the ideally neo-classic manner: Poussin-style exercises, often on a vast scale, which may be tolerably faultless but are terribly null. More clearly than anything painted by Mengs, West's *Departure of Regulus* (*Ill. 116*) obeys the canons established by Winckelmann. It is, too, far removed from any romantic absurdity or excess; its merits are largely such negative ones. Perhaps West was most successful when least pretentious; his illustrations of English historical events are simply illustrations, simply composed, unaffectedly direct. Neo-classicism had trained West to give full value to the facts of the scene depicted, removing anything merely decorative or liable to spoil the sense of witnessing an actual event. The utter

sobriety of *Charles II greeted by General Monk* (*Ill. 117*) disarms criticism; it hardly aims at being a work of art but rests its claim on documentary grounds. Except to a limited royal circle, the anecdote is not particularly stirring. Wisely, West does not make it a moment of high drama; but he does manage to convey a suggestion of history happening before our eyes, exerting himself to achieve something very like the truth.

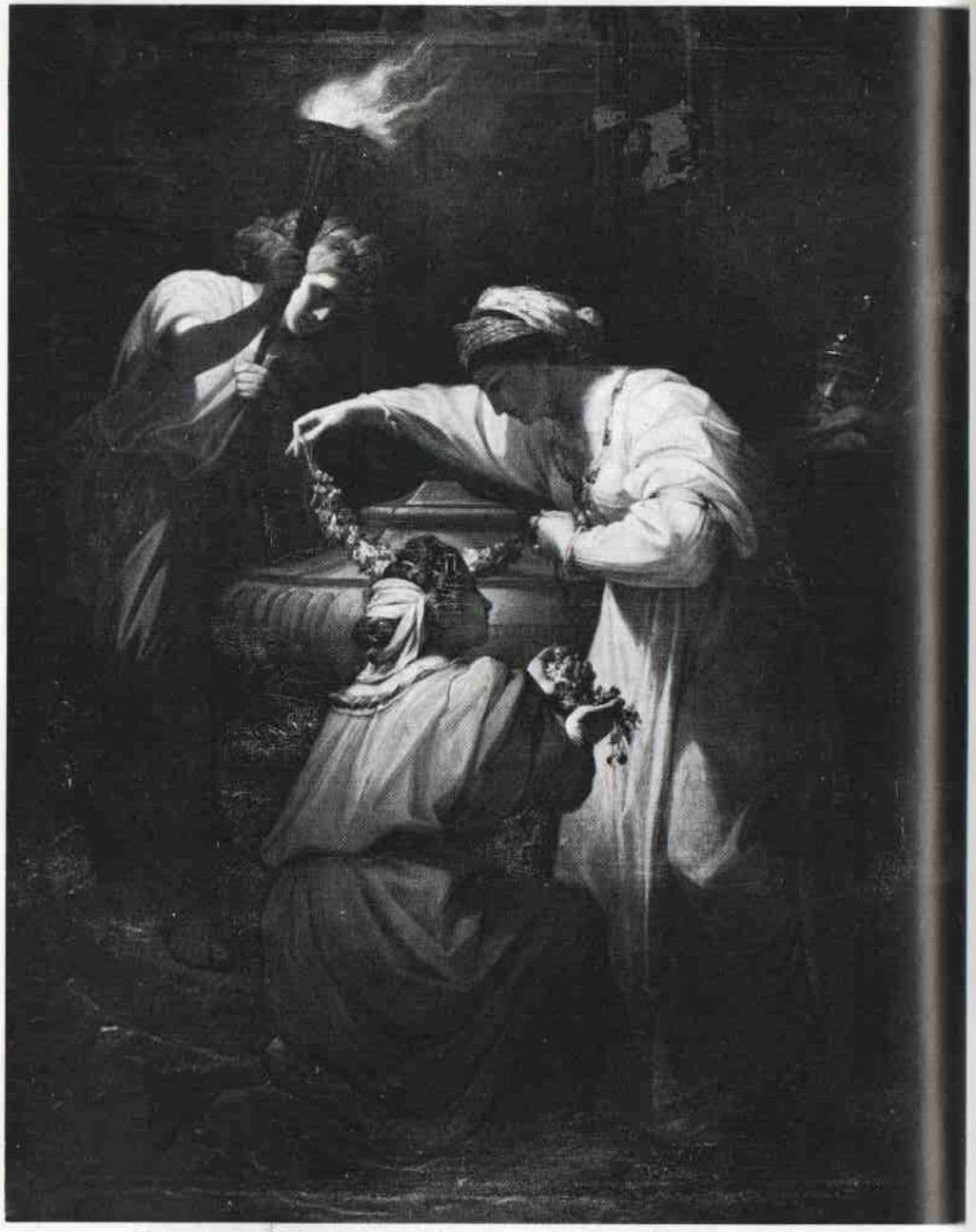
The more ambitious *Regulus* contains the much more typical neo-classic recipe of affecting and inspiring the present by depicting the past. Some artists had to choose which they would attempt. A painter like Angelica Kauffmann, though working in Rome, could not achieve much Roman gravity. A tendency to prettify pervaded even her portraiture (Goethe found her portrait of him charming but quite unlike) and she was perhaps more successful in touching the heart. History is seen as a series of sentimental anecdotes, unurged by any very definite intention, located in a vaguely classical past and acted out by quite sexless people with straight profiles, wearing sandals and plain tunics. When she tackles the

116 Benjamin West *The Departure of Regulus*

117 Benjamin West *Charles II greeted by General Monk*

story of Antony and Cleopatra, it is suitably muted into an elegiac mood. Cleopatra mourns the hero (*Ill. 118*) who is conveniently out of the way, and already in the tomb. This blameless, passionless, type of picture represents the danger inherent in neo-classicism: that it would fall into a formula just as shallow as the extremes of rococo but without any saving vitality of brushwork or colour. Even in the hands of David the convention could not be saved; his *Rape of the Sabines* marks the style's ultimate sterility.

While the quite illogical idea developed that a classical subject must be painted as a bas relief, with movement frozen and the paint applied in chilly smoothness, the artist remained – as West showed – less constricted by modern history subjects. No formula for these existed; they naturally carried none of the tremendous prestige of antiquity, and the painter could oscillate back from the pole of Poussin to snatch some vibrations from Rubens. Indeed, David's failure ever to establish an equilibrium is perhaps due to such oscillation – fatally destructive to any decisive, committed style – which was part of his inner lack of certainty.



118 Angelica Kauffmann *Cleopatra mourning at Mark Antony's tomb*

119 François-André Vincent *President Molé halted by rebels*

Whatever the failings of the *President Molé halted by rebels* (*Ill. 119*), by David's co-pupil under Vien, Vincent, it is at least a bid for striking effects. Compared with Angelica Kauffmann's picture, painted ten years earlier in 1769, it is full-blooded. It returns to the world of action and heroism – significantly, taking a dramatic, literally arresting, moment from the history of the Fronde, and setting up associations of patriotism, heroism and humanity. Far from lifting the scene into a tranquil sphere where even death comes with dignity, it involves

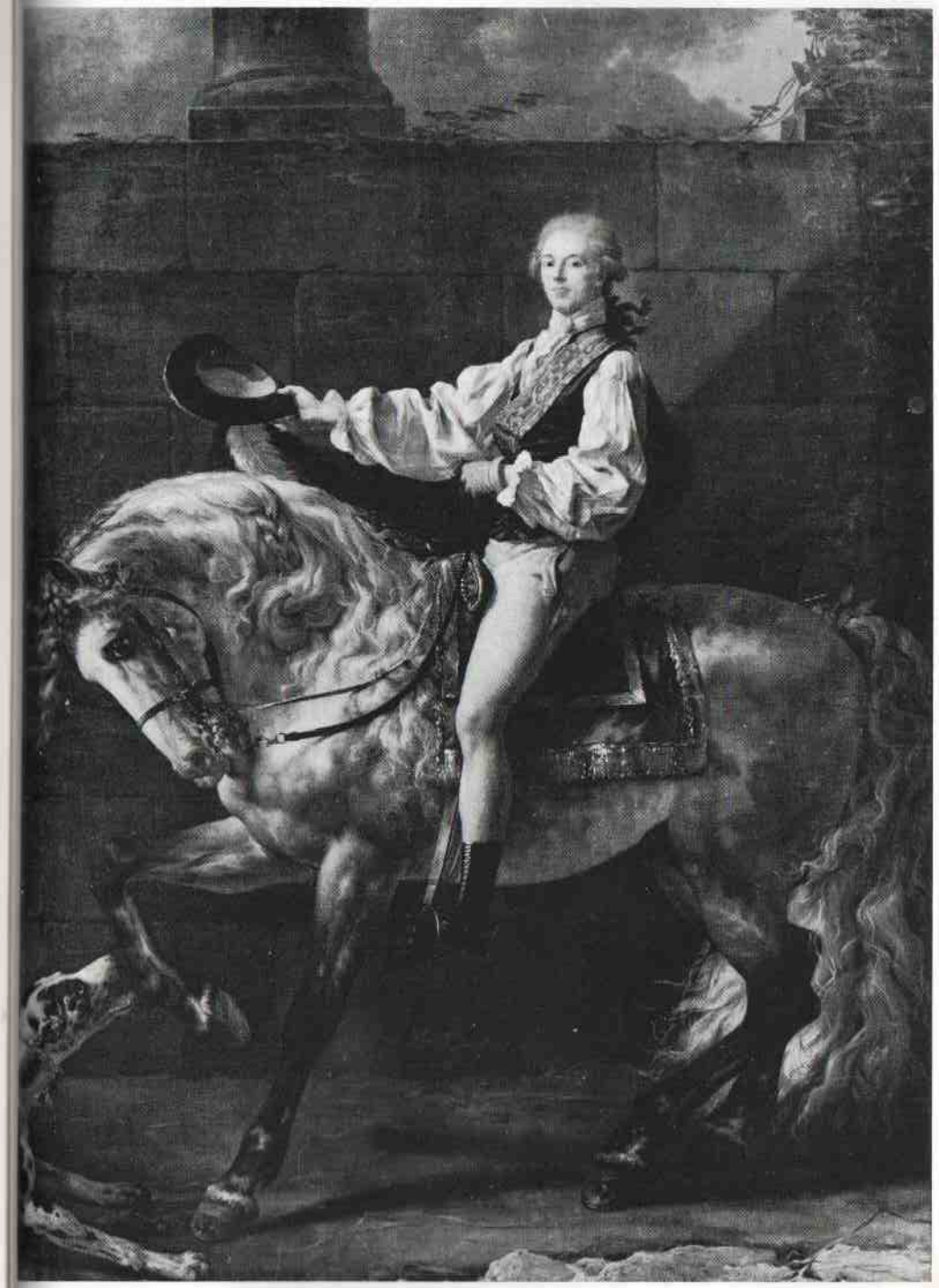
the spectator in the President's shock, creating a seventeenth-century Parisian street which may smell of the theatre but which seems preferable to the insipid surroundings chosen for most neo-classic pictures. It represents the new attitude of historical realism which is to overtake the neo-classic movement, out of which it came, and it prepares the way for Delacroix.

But the specific eighteenth-century recipe was to fuse nature and antiquity to produce a type of art which should compel attention by its moral force. To achieve anything of value, it was necessary that artistic force should also be present: taking us beyond the mere prose statement such as West uttered to the poetic achievement of something created. There is something profoundly unpsychological – and unurgent – about most neo-classical pictures. They remain illustrations, dependent on a Greek or Roman text, doubtless more accurate than the Renaissance vision of the classical past – but lacking that imaginative energy which so often animates a quite minor Renaissance painter's picture of antiquity.

It was perhaps inevitable that a sophisticated and rational age, *au fond* sceptical of art's power, should rely on the painter instructing where he could not inspire. At least, he should not corrupt by telling lies. But behind the pictures of Vien, Mengs, Hamilton, and more obviously behind those of the Wests and Kauffmanns, there was really no moral-*cum*-artistic force. The whole neo-classic movement in painting might seem merely a curiosity of taste, were it not that the recipe suddenly produced results in the work of Jacques-Louis David.

All along there had existed the possibility of a painter coming with a fervent belief not so much in antique virtue as in the need for modern virtue: for reform and for revolution. Then, this painter's Brutus, Regulus, Hector, would do more than stir vague associations of glory; his heroes would point not back but forward. David was the torch that fired a pyre of long-assembled aspirations. He seemed the painter so long promised. Thus when he exhibited the *Oath of the Horatii* (*Ill. 122*) in Rome, it was an immediate success; everyone appreciated it and believed he understood it. But in fact, of course, David fired more than an artistic bonfire. To return it was necessary also to destroy. We find Reynolds, who had applauded David, apparently withdrawing his praise when he grasped the real revolutionary principles of the art. In Rome the aged Batoni might, with unpardonable vanity, see David as his artistic heir, but others early paid the *Horatii* its real tribute; the picture was said to have 'inflamed more souls for liberty than the best books'.

In David, almost as much as in Goya, the whole century seems represented. He was not a neo-classical painter by temperament, nor because of fashion. His



120 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Count Potocki*

early portraits show him competent in a vein of straightforward naturalism, and his first subject-pictures are still rococo, betraying an artistic relationship with Boucher which reinforces their family one. His pictures are full at that period of confused hints of clashing tendencies: ludicrous pink and blue pseudo-balletic mythological persons with fiery horses that prelude Gros and seem ready to gallop into Delacroix's *Massacre of Chios*. David himself as a young man was constantly in need of being calmed; he was already threatening the romantic act of suicide which Gros eventually had to commit.

Despair did not immediately cease with his arrival at Rome. He did not seek out the city with the yearning of Goethe or Gibbon (who actually recorded that he passed his first night there sleepless) but had arrived after expressly stating that the antique would not seduce him. The achievements of neo-classicism did not facilitate his conversion; he was to fight his own battle, welding nature and antiquity under the direct stimulus of seeing Herculaneum and Pompeii, encouraged by the enthusiasm of Vivant Denon and Quatremère de Quincy – beside both of whom Winckelmann was an amateur. Yet Naples was also the modern world, to which David was never blind. It had its own graceful heroism, impetuous, private, undidactic. While one aspect of David's nature pondered on, and produced, an antique subject-picture with modern application – the *Belisarius* – another produced the *Rubénisme* and realistic panache of *Count Potocki* (*Ill. 120*): a portrait in which the sitter is treated naturally and yet heroically. It may be merely legend that David had witnessed at Naples Potocki's mastery over a supposedly untamable horse; yet the picture rings with triumph and with a witness's vivacity, still electric and charged by the painter's response to human endeavour and animal spirits. Reason may guide David to the example of Poussin, but the passion in him finds kinship with Rubens, from whom the horse in *Potocki* is borrowed. David's dilemma is not in fusing nature and antiquity as such, but in fusing reason and passion, spontaneity and thought. Perhaps in no single picture did he achieve complete integration; his career is made up of splendid and disconcerting fragments, as erratic artistically as it was politically, and leaving him with a strong sense of double failure.

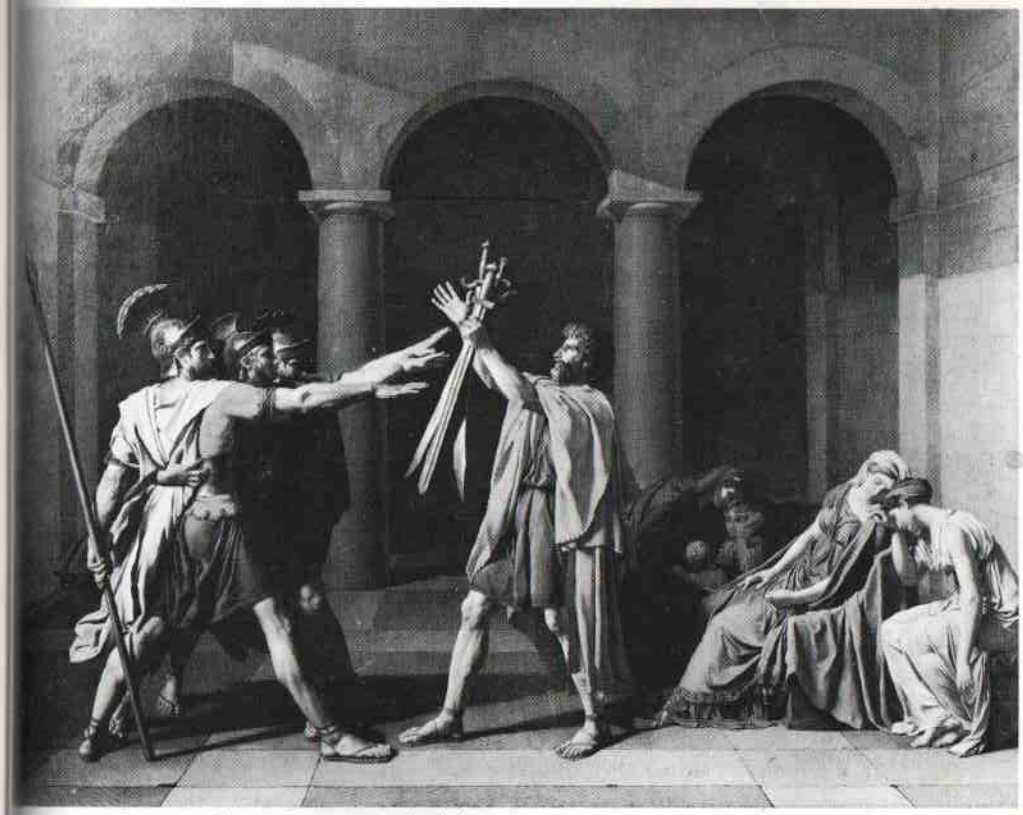
Had he continued along the path indicated by *Potocki*, he might well have had Delacroix as his pupil. But David could not rest as just painter; he shared the century's uncertainty about art. His must be allied to the age, must not only reflect it but positively guide it. To some extent, antiquity remained for him the wrappings inside which his message could be conveyed. Napoleon sensed it very quickly, and saw the possible propaganda dangers when he told David, then

121 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *Napoleon crossing the Alps*

engaged on *Léonidas*, that he was wrong to paint conquered men. Indeed, it may be said that Napoleon cruelly but perceptively seized the root of David: he wanted a hero and should have one from the present; modern history would replace antique subjects. And in place of the trivial domestic issue of a Polish count mastering a restive horse, there should be Bonaparte himself in the saddle, '*calme sur un cheval fougueux*' (*Ill. 121*).

The success of *Potocki* and *Belisarius* led to a royal commission which resulted in David's republican-seeming *Oath of the Horatii* (*Ill. 122*): the quintessential, neo-classic picture, whose impact was immediate when it was exhibited in Rome in 1785. It united the generations and the nations, and was admired by those whom by implication it attacked. During the long period of brooding on the subject, David was brooding too on the influence a painting can exercise on the public. It was not an accident that he showed it at Rome before it appeared at the Paris Salon. It is not only a public picture, but is closely linked to the public interest, the *res publica*. Far from the stoicism and increasingly allusive, abstruse, philosophizing of Poussin, David tells a simple story in a simple way, illuminated with hallucinatory clarity, and shot through with frightening, dramatic intensity. The picture shrieks of the sword; nowhere does the light glitter more threateningly than on the cluster of blades – unless on those sword-like arms thrust out so greedily towards them. Though there is poignancy in the group of grieving women, it is subordinated to stern patriotism. Men toe the line at the moment of exultation and self-sacrifice. In this proto-republican world there is no place for anything else: nothing to break the unrelenting claustrophobic courtyard of bare brick which completely fills the background.

Although nobody appears to have said so at the time, the picture perhaps partly owed its tremendous success to the fright it gave the spectators. For so long the century had asked to be affected, had half pretended to be touched by appeals to domesticity, dropped a tear for Greuze's girls in trouble, felt morally better for seeing Scipio exercising continence. David clears all that away. Even depictions of Homer's epic world are reduced in emotional importance beside the new issue of the state. The *Iliad* tells of obscure wranglings by petty chieftains, with justice administered by petty gods. But the Horatii, presented with powerful realism, are fighting for Rome, putting the state before all personal considerations; they are men in a world without gods, trusting in their swords to preserve the city from tyranny. It is an exciting prospect, a call to arms in a just cause by ordinary citizens: themselves brothers, amid their family, equals



122 Jacques-Louis David *Oath of the Horatii*

and about to die for liberty. Only four years later, the National Assembly at Versailles was to list the rights of man: 'Liberty, Property, Security, and Resistance of Oppression'. Soon it would not be in mere painted rhetoric that men swore oaths and seized their swords.

Painting is about to affect people, with a vengeance. David himself was the most affected of all. Perhaps the deepest conviction behind his picture is that violence will provide a solution; and tension comes from violence suppressed in the actual paint-surface, as if there was an almost hysterical determination to appear calm. The whole Horatii story is one of exaggerated *pietas*, involving a series of deaths through duty which culminate in the high Roman virtue of a brother killing his sister for loving the Republic's enemy. And originally David had thought his composition might be of the moment when Horatius is absolved from murder because of his services to the Republic; a hero must be judged by special standards.

123 JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID *The Lictors bringing Brutus the Bodies of his Sons*

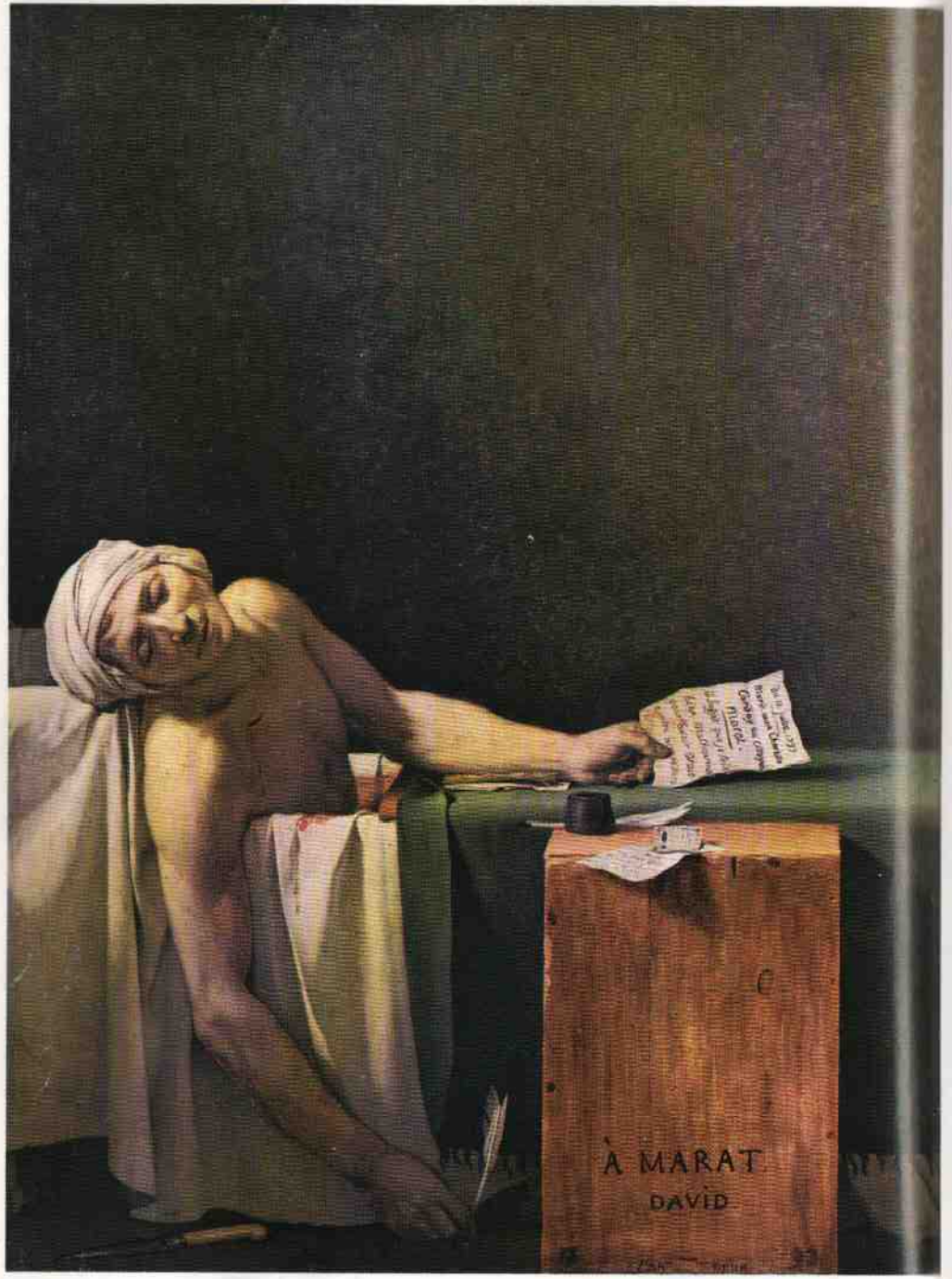
David never again achieved the intense impact of the *Oath of the Horatii* in its unity of antique *exemplum* and modern application, its combination of moral and artistic force. It succeeded in being an international picture, whereas his later work inevitably addressed itself morally to France and seldom recovered the intensity. He was to become aware, too, of increasing revolution – revulsion – against the neo-classic and this affected his own art. But in 1785 the *Oath of the Horatii* summed up three-quarters of a century's striving: tragic, classical, as resolute in draughtsmanship and design as in sentiment, it was really a culminating rather than a seminal work of art. So perfectly did it express what had been required that it was hard to see what development there could be beyond it – except by revolting against its standards. Even David could not eclipse it.

Its mood is reproduced in harsher terms, but without the full impact, in *The Lictors bringing Brutus the Bodies of his Sons* (*Ill. 123*), a clear attempt to re-do the *Horatii* but which could be said to show less classicism and definite hints of

romanticism. The pitiless illumination of the courtyard has been exchanged for a chiaroscuro interior, patterned with deep shadow and shrilly-glittering patches of dramatic light. What in the Horatii was only an irrelevance – emotion dividing a family, with women the sufferers – is here the theme. The Roman code had demanded that Brutus condemn his own sons for fighting against the Republic, and their bodies now enter the house: greeted by the hysterical, writhing, group of mother and daughters – and ignored by the immobile figure of the father. The picture has gone to extremes avoided in the *Horatii*. The fainting girl, an emotional zigzag of dissolving limbs, is Gothic in the sense that Ingres is Gothic. (David spoke of something Florentine in the pose of Brutus.) Equally extreme is the device of the corpse, as it were for ever on the point of entering the room, ironically blotted out by the dark statue of Rome, seen by the women but not by us – and made the more effectively frightening by the dreadfully dead, sticking-up feet that recall Caravaggio and seem to anticipate Géricault.

The picture is more disturbing, as well as more disturbed, than the *Horatii*. Roman virtue's stern requirement has brought nothing but death and grief to a household; even a deathbed is no edifying moral spectacle *à la* Greuze but a shocking sight. Finished in 1789, the *Brutus* reveals the almost feverish state of David's mind in the year of the Revolution. The Académie sensed some disturbing element in it, and not wholly artistic reasons prompted the attempt to exclude it from the Salon that year; when it was finally admitted it was guarded by students in the uniform of the newly-constituted National Guard. Artistic and political revolution are merged in the incident. Modern republicans parade in front of this depiction of ancient republicanism. All that remained was for life to present David with events comparable to the dramas of antiquity. Four years after the *Brutus* was painted, and in the full tide of Revolution, Marat was assassinated by Charlotte Corday (*Ill. 124*).

Well before that, David's search for a hero had led him to demand, and make, memorials to the dead heroes of the Revolution; but the greatest consecration of this aim is in the *Marat assassinated* – enshrining the most famous person to die a martyr to the cause. David's type of devotion usually led to emotional identification with his hero (he was to cry at the crisis of Robespierre's downfall: 'If you drink hemlock, I shall drink it with you') and he was already an ardent defender of Marat. He was the Revolution's servant, thinking of himself perhaps less as politician and more as the people's painter. It could be said that the *Marat assassinated* was commissioned work. The Convention looked to David when news of the murder broke; and David responded with a painting that combines



124 Jacques-Louis David *Marat assassinated*

the emotional and the factual. It shows a modern martyrdom: bringing violent death out of the past and thrusting it ruthlessly before us, with brutal effect. It does not merely stir the spectator, it accuses him. For our sake Marat suffered. He trusted humanity – and it stabbed him.

The detailed realism is almost too forceful to be faced. There is a sense of shocking actuality not only in the blood-stained bath water but in the roughened wood of the packingcase-like table and the patched sheet. All exercises an atrocious fascination, so that one hardly likes – and yet cannot avoid – examining the whole composition to discover what other unpleasant details lurk in it. Standing where Charlotte Corday stood, we are close to the waxen, lolling head that slumps towards us; and the knife is dropped virtually at our feet.

The shock of *Marat assassinated* is the century's shock. The Revolution stood for liberty and the release of all mankind's finest feelings; it was meant to end, not inaugurate, bloodshed. Yet liberty has led to this. It was a pointed rebuttal made by a friend of Madame de Staël's when he said that he could not admit 'any necessary connexion between abstract ideas and murder'. For David's picture tells us that you cannot trust mankind. Instead of confident enlightenment brought about by reason, we have a reign of terror and the apparent anarchy of Marat's assassination. The sense of betrayal is increased by David's careful recording of Charlotte Corday's deceitful message: '*Il suffit que je sois bien malheureuse pour avoir droit à votre bienveillance*.' Yet, in fact, Charlotte Corday, the descendant of Corneille, had seen herself as a patriot, ridding her country of an evil man; David had no monopoly of high ideals. In the subsequent confusion he clung to the rock abruptly arisen from the waves, pledging his faith once again, and this time never faltering, in devotion to Napoleon.

But that inevitably meant leaving the harbour of antiquity. Events had precipitated David into a modern world which he did not perhaps completely understand; as chronicler, he could paint the events of Napoleon's reign, but he never produced the thrilling actuality of Gros's interpretations. And what had happened to the recipe which as late as the Salon of 1799 was publicly proclaimed by the Minister of the Interior: the artistic advance of the French School being credited to its return '*à l'étude de la nature et de l'antique*'? The ideal was collapsing and being replaced by Napoleonic realism. In 1808 David prophesied that 'in ten years the study of the antique will be forgotten'. In England only Haydon continued to mix nature and Raphael and the essence of the Elgin marbles – producing huge pictures which nobody wanted. Among all his pathetic questions Haydon never asked England one more revelatory than when

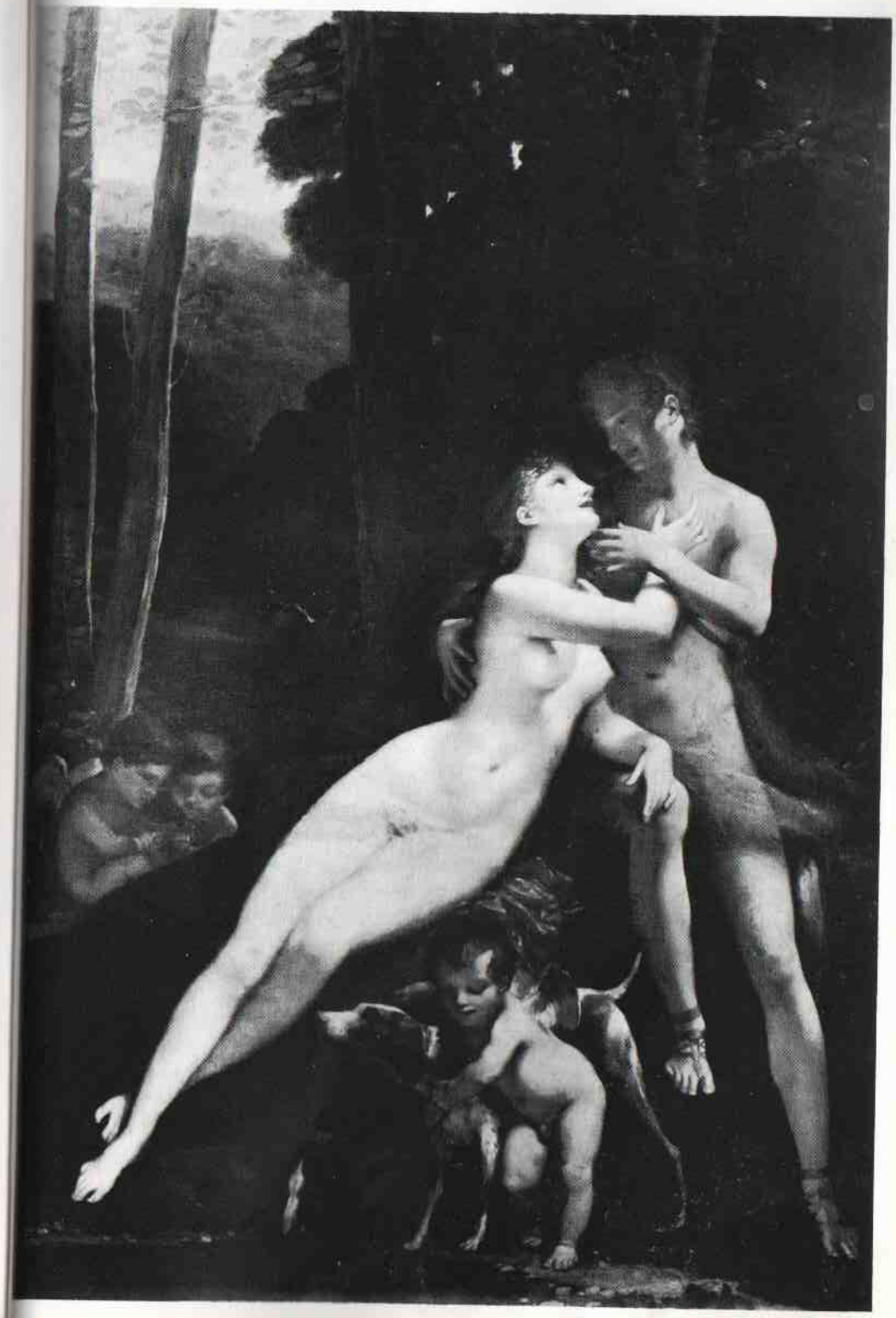
he enquired: 'Do you really expect to raise Art by encouraging pictures two feet long and three feet wide?' That size was adequate enough, one is forced to reply, for the genius of Turner and Constable.

The Royal Academy exhibition of 1799 contained 681 pictures, apart from miniatures; the vast majority were portraits and landscapes, but there was a sprinkling of fancy and religious pictures (the latter chiefly for Fonthill). Amid the whole range there was only a single picture based on a classical-historical source. The last eighteenth-century Salon was not such a frank victory for nature over antiquity, but the doom of neo-classicism was apparent in the work of David's own pupils. The moral content – which had seemed so essential to the eighteenth century – was not to be found in the chaste nullity of Ingres any more than in the reckless vigour of Gros. If we wonder which proved the more vital stock, both sprung from the divided plant that was David, the answer is the natural one. There was to be a solitary convoluted flower of classicism in the hot-house bloom of Ingres, a waxen camelia about whom it is hard to decide whether it is real or artificial. But from Gros there came a dazzling profusion – Géricault, Delacroix, and through them the Impressionists, then Van Gogh and Cézanne.

P.P PRUDHON

Almost a return to rococo standards is apparent in the charming, carefree, classical world of Prud'hon. In a twilit glade that Corot too will evoke, Venus and Adonis playfully flirt with each other (*Ill. 125*), bodies built out of warm light and tender shade, caressed by paint as by the last rays of sun. Modern lovers in the gardens of Malmaison, they have never been touched by the chill of a bas-relief, nor could ever be mistaken for antique statuary. Hotter still, and much more vigorous, is the modern world of Gros where Napoleon becomes a miracle-worker in the *Plague at Jaffa* (*Ill. 126*): the more effective for the pungent realism of the plague-stricken around him. Marat was only a dead hero, but Napoleon has come among his men, the youthful saviour, whose small stature merely adds to his poignancy. At last, the century has found its hero, not in antiquity but in real life. And it was to Gros that David finally confessed, writing from exile in Belgium under the re-awakened influence of Flemish art: 'It's too late...' He might have been the champion of neo-*Rubénisme*, but he had bent to the century's wish and lived to see his style outdated.

Yet if nature and the antique would not properly fuse to provide the answer to the century's demand for its own great painter, and nature by itself seemed not profound enough, the century had failed to produce a truly modern painter who would express its deepest fears as well as its aspirations. England, Italy,



125 Pierre-Paul Prud'hon *Venus and Adonis*

126 Antoine-Jean Gros *The Plague at Jaffa*

France and Germany had made their bids, perhaps too consciously. It was in Spain – a country not associated with reason, enlightenment, liberalism, or equality – that such a painter was unexpectedly to be found: in Goya. He is the one figure the century had not foreseen – in that as in so much he is the reverse of his close contemporary, David. He is only half an eighteenth-century man, but it is an important half. He stands like Goethe, and Stendhal, facing both ways. He dragged the old century with him as deaf, aged, banished, lonely, he battered his way into the nineteenth century with tremendous courage. That he should die in France is an accident symbolically correct: laying down his life in the country that would do most to foster modern art.

In the chain of painters named by Baudelaire in *Les Phares* – those beacons across the centuries – Goya is perfectly placed: between Watteau and Delacroix. And Baudelaire apostrophizes him with beautiful suggestions of the nightmare surprise-packet he is: '*Goya, cauchemar plein de choses incommues*'. It is the unknown quality in Goya that makes him at once artist, jack-in-the-box, and bomb.

127 David *The Lictors bringing Brutus the Bodies of his Sons (detail)*

128 Francisco de Goya *The Harvest*

Goya

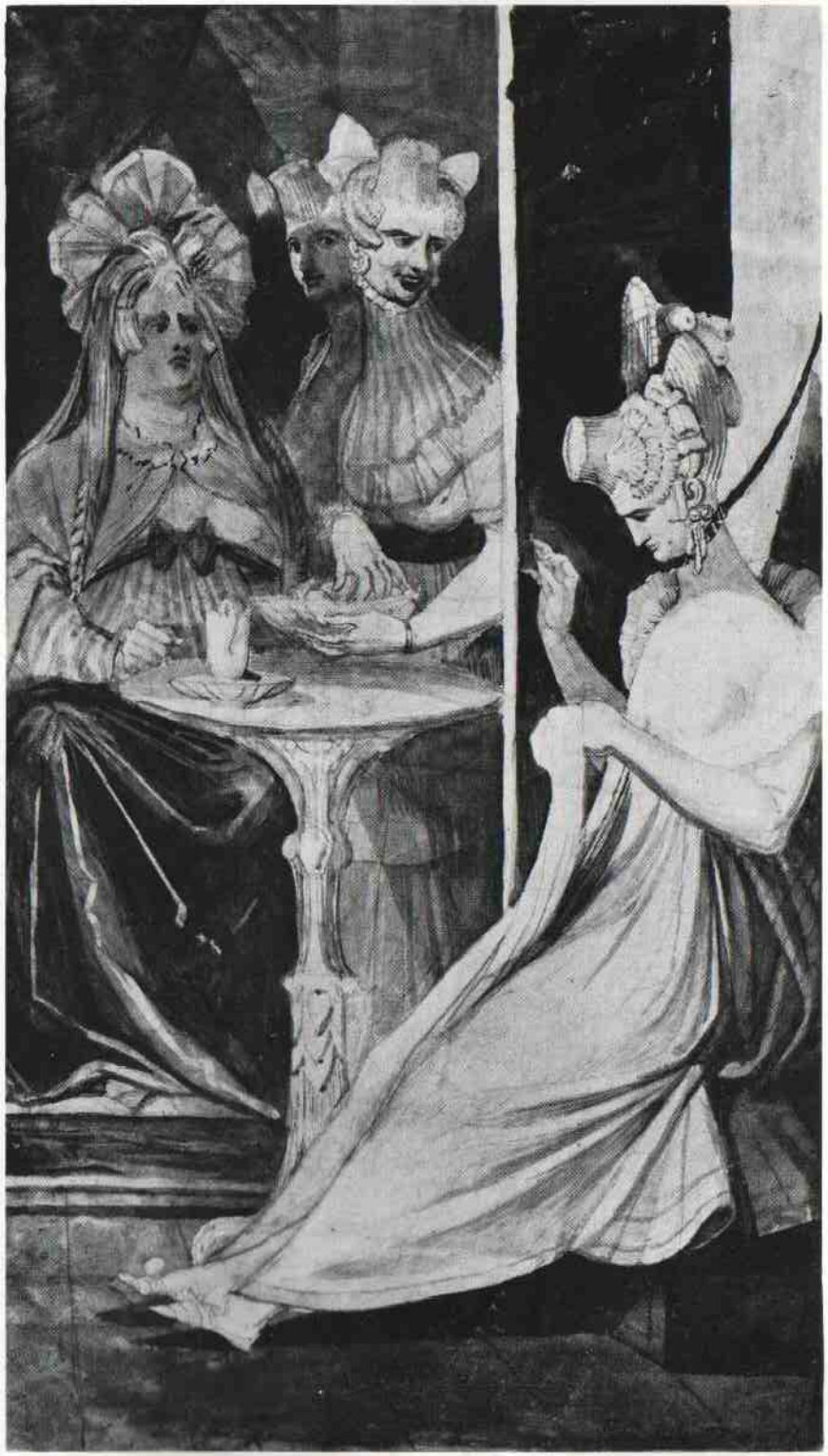
At the beginning of this book a verse of Pope's posed a question which is central to the preoccupations of the eighteenth century: 'With Terrors round, can Reason hold her throne?' The question was to be asked with increasing urgency as the century advanced; and the answer seemed increasingly in doubt. Though it might be said that the tremors of forthcoming earthquake were felt chiefly in France, what followed involved all Europe; it was not to remain solely the 'French' Revolution. To a remarkable extent, eighteenth-century art had gone a long way with reason – ignoring the 'Terrors round' and also those 'witches, devils, dreams and fire' which Pope singled out as threats to the dominance of reason. All the talk of man and nature – those major concerns of eighteenth-century society – had resulted in generalizations which concealed the harsh truths beneath. A more probing enlightenment would have told the century that it is not enough to *want* to follow reason, *want* to be good and social. Nature really includes the witches and devils and dreams; and the system that builds without allowing for them is bound to be toppled by them.

Most of the art so far illustrated in this book ignores psychology – with the outstanding exception of Watteau. It is ignored in the interests of pleasing or instructing, and the effect is to give much of it a faintly filleted quality. The extremes of rococo and neo-classicism are equally lifeless. Even when art tried to link itself to daily life, perhaps because it wished to borrow some vitality, it was easily reduced to depicting it as a spectacle or satirizing – as Hogarth did – its more obvious social abuses. Against this aridity had arisen the damp cult of sensibility: the 'religion of the heart' which had Greuze as its high priest. But none of these approaches touched on the region of the mind or attempted to suggest the true complexity of human nature. The vices of society cannot be explained as due just to gin and poverty; nor can we all be as sure as Greuze

pretended to be that a father's deathbed will fill the spectators with straightforward grief and remorse.

To dig deeper requires courage, and the eighteenth-century painter risked losing his supposed social role if he produced too personal a vision. Since the century was suspicious and utilitarian in its whole attitude to art, the pressure remained strong on the painter to serve society – even if in so doing he might be tempted to be false to art and his own nature. Inevitably, to Blake Reynolds seemed a leading example of such villainy: a man 'Hired to Depress Art'. Conversely, to Horace Walpole Fuseli seemed mad: his highly personal fantasies refused to be related to the ordinary known world. He suggested there were more things in heaven and earth than Walpole wanted to dream of. And to the Davidian ideal of the artist consecrating his talents to the service of the nation, Fuseli returns an almost obscene answer. Fuseli is certainly interested in man's nature, but it is the private nature of man that attracts him: dreams, above all, and the devil (who had, he claimed, sat for him). Although the *Nightmare* (*Ill. 2*) may now seem ludicrously conscious, still it pays tribute, fascinated tribute, to the derangement of reason, emphasizing the strength of horrid fantasy and the weakness of mankind. In that world it is irrationality that reigns, with licence to distort reality in the interests of obsession (*Ill. 129*), reminding us of Sade.

The individual's sensations are what matter; and in opting out of the social framework, Fuseli is already romantic. He provides no answer to Pope's question because he is on the opposite side. As a young man he had defended Rousseau and attacked Voltaire; he was naturally attracted to confusion – of which his writings are an admirable example – and perhaps there is some truth in Walpole's diagnosis of insanity in him. Fuseli can serve as a prologue to Goya, partly to show the interest in fantasy and mental states which they share and also to show clearly how different was Goya's attitude to irrationality. Though younger than Fuseli, he was much more deeply part of the eighteenth century; the social basis of his art is very real. His attitude to reason is significantly different too: '*Et Voltaire est immortel*', he wrote. The power of Goya comes from the double awareness: of man's duty to be rational, and of the irrational elements in his nature which make this task so hard. The purpose of the *Caprichos* is didactic and Goya wrote quite plainly that the work was intended 'to banish harmful vulgar beliefs, and to perpetuate... the solid testimony of truth'. Thus Goya sees the fantasy world as false; he believes that there is such a thing as truth and that the artist can play his part in leading us towards it. Far from supposing that reason



129 Henry Fuseli *The Débutante*

131 GOYA *Queen Maria Luisa*. Detail of *The Family of Charles IV*

132 FRANCISCO DE GOYA *The Parasol*

art. The people are always real, amusingly so, and already by 1777 Goya had achieved the perfect blend of reality and decoration that is the *Parasol* (*Ill. 132*). Perhaps it is less ironic than is usually supposed that it should be Mengs who turned the Spanish royal tapestry factory to the task of producing compositions of ordinary country life. For that shift was part of the century's whole movement towards the truth of things, and its delight in our equals, or our inferiors. Goya's lady and parasol-holder give a sense of being dressed-up, posed with a faint tinge of irony in an airy setting of graceful arc of feathery tree against sunny sky which is no less solid than they. There is some affinity with Piazzetta's *Idyll* (*Ill. 86*). Both pictures make one smile, not in condescension but in amused enjoyment just of people: in both cases the male attitude is hinted at as itself amused by the ladies, a sort of 'we're their servants but we know their pretensions' sentiment which Goya was to develop. Observation makes the *Parasol* more than just a brilliantly-coloured, ravishingly painted, piece of rainbow decoration. There is nothing sentimental, nor anything particularly Wordsworthian or worthy, about being in the open air in the countryside. It is rather as a piece of innocent fun that Goya shows upper-class people amusing themselves

cramps the imagination (a fallacy invented by romanticism and still with us today in most people's attitude to the eighteenth century), Goya felt that without reason imagination was sick. One of the *Caprichos* showing rat-like creatures with padlocked ears being spoonfed was given the draft caption 'The illness of Reason'.

Goya's art is seriously concerned with the fate of mankind. And he is typically eighteenth century in seeing mankind within the social framework – for Goya it is always *modern* man. The artist wants to comment on not only what he sees but what he knows. Reality is there not merely to be reproduced but to be pondered on and mocked if necessary. How much the individual matters is revealed by Goya's portraits, but they are only one aspect of his ubiquitous pictorial suggestion that 'the proper study of mankind is man'. Art is directed to man, and with Goya words often sharpen his graphic message. Both have a witty brevity which stings by its aptness after the moment of amusement.

Almost as much as David, Goya was involved in the political storms which brought in the nineteenth century. Unlike David, he remained committed not to a national cause but to the cause of humanity. Where David glorifies war when waged by Napoleon, Goya indicts the folly of all war, the senselessness of battle between human beings. In the dark night of stupidity and bloodshed he managed to keep alight a candleflame of sanity – by an act of willpower the more moving for the sense he gives of reason threatened. Even if the so-called 'black paintings' represent the temporary collapse of his optimism, it remains a courageous act to have depicted that collapse so vividly – and a creative one to have made art out of it. Such acts are typical of Goya; among his last pictures is one of himself being tended by his doctor in a portrayal direct, unsentimental, and moving. At Bordeaux in 1824 a friend found him 'deaf, old, awkward, and feeble… and so happy and eager to see the world'.

Goya had marvellously preserved the mood in which all his early work was executed: beginning with a delight in people and their antics which is as innocently gay as Domenico Tiepolo's, but deepening into greater awareness as the sky of optimism clouded over. And all the time he was following nature – following it, indeed, down darker tunnels and past more dreadful sights than the average eighteenth-century person ever conceived of. That lay in the future when Goya began painting his tapestry cartoons which represent an enchanted, only half-real rustic world, brightly-coloured, cheerful: very much peasant life seen from a palace window.

At first these cartoons are rococo in their decorative landscape settings but with a piquancy – a positive pinch of earthy actuality – lacking in most rococo

130 Francisco de Goya *The Swing*

in the *Swing* (*Ill. 130*) – so far removed in feeling from the erotic excitement engendered by Fragonard's famous treatment of the theme.

Yet, as Goya worked on at tapestry cartoons (producing finally a total of sixty-three over a period of nearly sixteen years) he must have become aware of harsher realities in the lives of the peasants usually depicted. Autumn might seem a season of charming idleness when families sit about, playfully grabbing at a bunch of grapes (*Ill. 128*), though behind them people toil among the vines. The mood, however, remains rose-coloured: the sky a sunset glow and the foreground figures softly bright in tones of peach and grape-green and purple. A deliberate shock is administered by the scene of *Winter* (*Ill. 133*): ease and plenty replaced by this snow-covered terrain with a few huddled men in drab-coloured clothes, their dog with its tail between its legs. Nor is this change to be explained as merely seasonal. Goya's early enchanted world, which held reality at some removes, is breaking up and being replaced by harsher facts. Other cartoons show poor children at a fountain, while perhaps the most serious of all depicts a wounded mason fallen from some scaffolding (*Ill. 135*). There is no longer any emphasis on the decorative. The two helpers seem well aware of a tragic situation, while the utter abandonment of the injured man – conveyed particularly in the slackly-hanging arm – suggests that he is fatally hurt. It is curious that Goya should have executed the preliminary sketch with a hint of the mason being drunk, and the helpers amused, for the whole incident brings to mind the moment in *L'Assommoir* where the drunken workman falls from the roof. Zola's social-moral point is not made by Goya; but it is probably right to see in these later cartoons an increasing concern with the human condition. The rococo balloon is abruptly filled with poignant emotion. Life has ceased to be a series of enchanted moments acted out by puppet figures. Goya's own life in these years underwent its first drastic changes and he was suddenly conscious of age. 'I have become old', he wrote in a letter to a friend in 1787, when in fact he was no more than forty-one.

What is so effective in Goya's tapestry cartoons, culminating in the *Wounded Mason*, is the power of observation which retains its power by an apparent *naïveté*. Goya goes on gazing when everyone else has lowered their eyes, seeing everything as if for the first time. It is a candour of vision that was to prove more devastating than any amount of emotional fervour. And it is the same candour that we meet in Goya's portraits – not satire, but a quality that is akin to the grave scrutiny to which Velazquez subjected his sitters. It is not they in particular who seem ridiculous to Goya, but to some extent the spectacle of all

133 Francisco de Goya *Winter*

human life. They are people plucked, as it were, out of the *Caprichos*' social framework and placed vividly before us with their foibles, their rather sad attempts at grandeur, and also with a moving sense of loneliness.

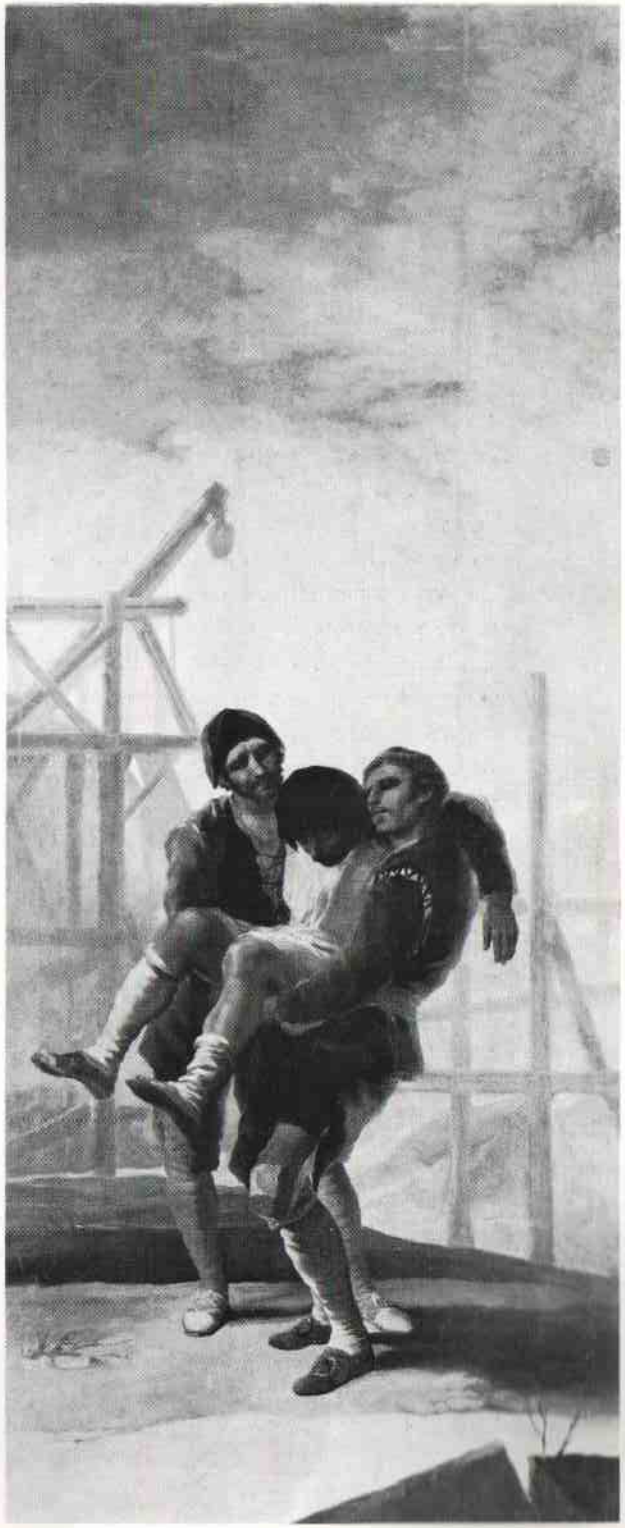
Queen Maria Luisa, so obtusely supposed by some critics to be caricatured by Goya, is treated with almost tender gravity. She inspired a whole row of masterpieces: it would be easy to persuade the uninitiated that it was she, rather than the Duchess of Alba, whom Goya loved. A false use of history has suggested that Goya is savagely indicting where in fact he is recording – with ravishing delicacy – a woman with attractive arms and tiny feet, a cloudy dream of crocus-yellow muslin (*Ill. 138*). It is not a crime in art to be ugly; and at least Maria

134 Francisco de Goya
The Family of Charles IV

Luisa has welcome vivacity in comparison with some of the doll-like women Goya had to paint. What is remarkable is the direct honesty of vision which makes Maria Luisa no more regal than she is – and no less. While Madame Vigée-Lebrun is softening the pride of Marie-Antoinette, applying the principles of the heart to the old French image of the sovereign, Goya attempts no such propaganda. His heart speaks his mind, but it is one never indifferent to the graces of costume, never negligent of the decorative possibilities of a cordon or an order – or a pair of curved Turkish slippers. Compared with the portraits of Spanish queens by Velazquez, Goya's suggests a much more relaxed relationship to the sitter, symbolized by the exchange of stiff, distance-making farthingale for the straight, graceful, tunics usually worn by Maria Luisa (whose concern with fashionable clothes is shared by the painter).

Even in reactionary, monarchist Spain the century has brought kings and queens to earth. It is part of Goya's achievement to make his sitters human and accessible, regardless of their rank. The large-scale official commission of the group portrait of the whole royal family (*Ill. 134*), assembled to face a new century in 1800, is a masterpiece of intimacy, casual despite the jewels and uniforms, lacking in any sense of etiquette and touched with hints of affections and dissensions – no accident, probably, that the future Ferdinand VII is in the shadows, well removed from his parents. All the average person's preconceptions of Spanish court decorum must give way before what is really the most sheerly familiar depiction of royalty produced by the eighteenth century: children, aunts and uncles, and the king and queen at the centre holding hands with their youngest child, the Infante Francisco, himself depicted tenderly and yet without sentimentality as nervously conscious of the ordeal of being painted. A European tendency to dispense with ermine-draped portraiture had already produced the bourgeois intimacy of Zoffany's portrayal of George III's children with their mother, and some rather self-conscious depictions of Marie-Antoinette and her children – all pictures from which the father was banished. Goya manages to combine the monarch and the father in the unpretending Charles IV, a dull man whose sole glitter is provided by his scintillating stars.

There is hardly any need for the painter to have included himself in the composition, for it bears throughout a witness-quality equivalent to '*Goya fuit hic*'. The eye that watched these people knew them in a way that virtually revolutionizes the art of portraiture: paying every tribute to face values, decorative qualities, yet penetrating beneath these to show us – should we need the reminder, and Goya knows we do – the pathetic fragility of all human beings. In

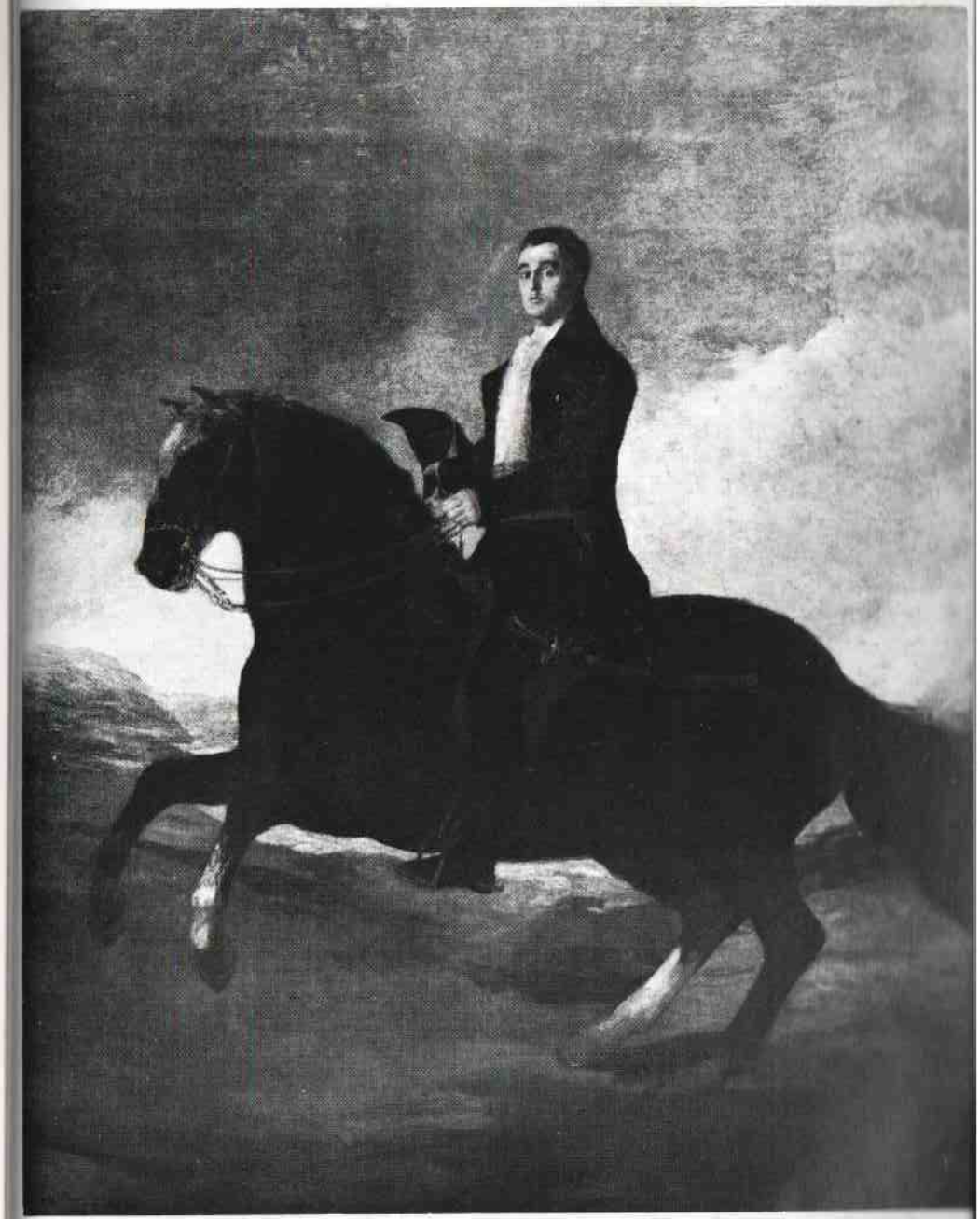


135 FRANCISCO DE GOYA
The Wounded Mason

136 Francisco de Goya *Third of May 1808 at Madrid*

some sense, this family might be assembled to face not an artist but a firing squad; and thus, far from accusing them, Goya may be said to be pleading for them. We are on the point of condemning the whole family as royal boobies and cretins, when Goya hints that we, without being royal, may share their other characteristics. To such questions as whether Maria Luisa was a cruel ambitious woman and faithless wife, or whether she was merely someone passionate and intelligent who had the bad luck of being sent to Spain and married to Charles IV, Goya returns no answer at all. He paints history, and historical persons, without any final conclusions. Their point for him is simply that they live – and must be kept alive by his art. And so they are, we may exclaim, looking at the almost rapturous freedom of the brushwork that makes this large canvas an airy sketch, with runs and trills of liquid paint, now shimmering in evocation of sequined muslin, now building up faces and hair of muslin delicacy with eyes that gleam like sequins.

137 Francisco de Goya *Conde de Fernán-Nuñez*



139 Francisco de Goya *Equestrian Portrait of the Duke of Wellington*

138 Francisco de Goya *Queen Maria Luisa*

Against this nature most eighteenth-century naturalism is too trivial or too stiff, while the century's other extreme was towards the inflated heroism finally enshrined in David's *Napoleon crossing the Alps* (*Ill. 121*). To that Goya might be said to reply with his equestrian *Wellington* (*Ill. 139*), a casual conqueror, an eccentric private gentleman rather than a victorious general. For Goya there are no heroes and no villains. Even the utterly detestable Ferdinand VII was to be served by the artist who had served Joseph Bonaparte – and it is impossible to think that Goya produced several large-scale official portraits of the king (*Ill. 141*) in a spirit of undetected mockery. Life and the painter were a good deal more subtle. Ferdinand was Spain's ruler – at the date of this portrait just returned triumphantly from exile – and he may at this moment have seemed to offer some possibility of stability after chaos. If Goya had any hopes left, they were to prove illusory. All that can be said is that Ferdinand VII's appearance was no deceptive mask of his real nature, and that Goya mitigated nothing of its grotesqueness.

The artist becomes the receptive wax on which the sitter may imprint himself. It is the sitter who takes the risk that Goya will serve him only too well, transmitting an image which has in it almost over-awareness, affectionate, ironic, or both, of his real nature. All Goya's sitters are like the royal family group in being defenceless. It is no cliché to speak of them being captured in paint; simply, they do not realize that it is happening, and it is their unawareness that is touching. It is hard to find any of Goya's mature portraits unsympathetic: either as works of art or for the sitters' personalities which now exist only in art. The mood changes in other ways, but this empathy remains. The *Condesa de Chinchon* (*Ill. 140*) sits like a shy grey mouse, the ghostly figure of Godoy's neglected wife, no match for the gipsy-bold Maria Luisa, and seeming content with a shadowy half-life, withdrawn, uncertain, peaky through pregnancy. She is perhaps the most elusive of the women portrayed by Goya, a nocturne beside the brash open air daylight of the *Conde de Fernán-Nuñez* (*Ill. 137*) where the painter revels in the sitter's self-contented air and consciousness of his own glamorous elegance. This portrait, rather than those of Maria Luisa or Ferdinand VII, is subtly satirical. Fernán-Nuñez assumes a proto-Byronic pose and faces the world as if it was his to dispose of; history should have picked him out to be a great figure, yet he had to be content with an embassy to London and a reputation as a fop rather than a hero. But in one dimension, of course, he remains a hero – the memorable one of Goya's portrayal, with its sweep of cloak, cocked hat, buff tights and pointed black boots, all somehow so personal that the clothes *are* the man: making a portrait that could afford to dispense with the actual face.

140 Francisco de Goya *Condesa de Chinchon*

141 Francisco de Goya *Ferdinand VII*

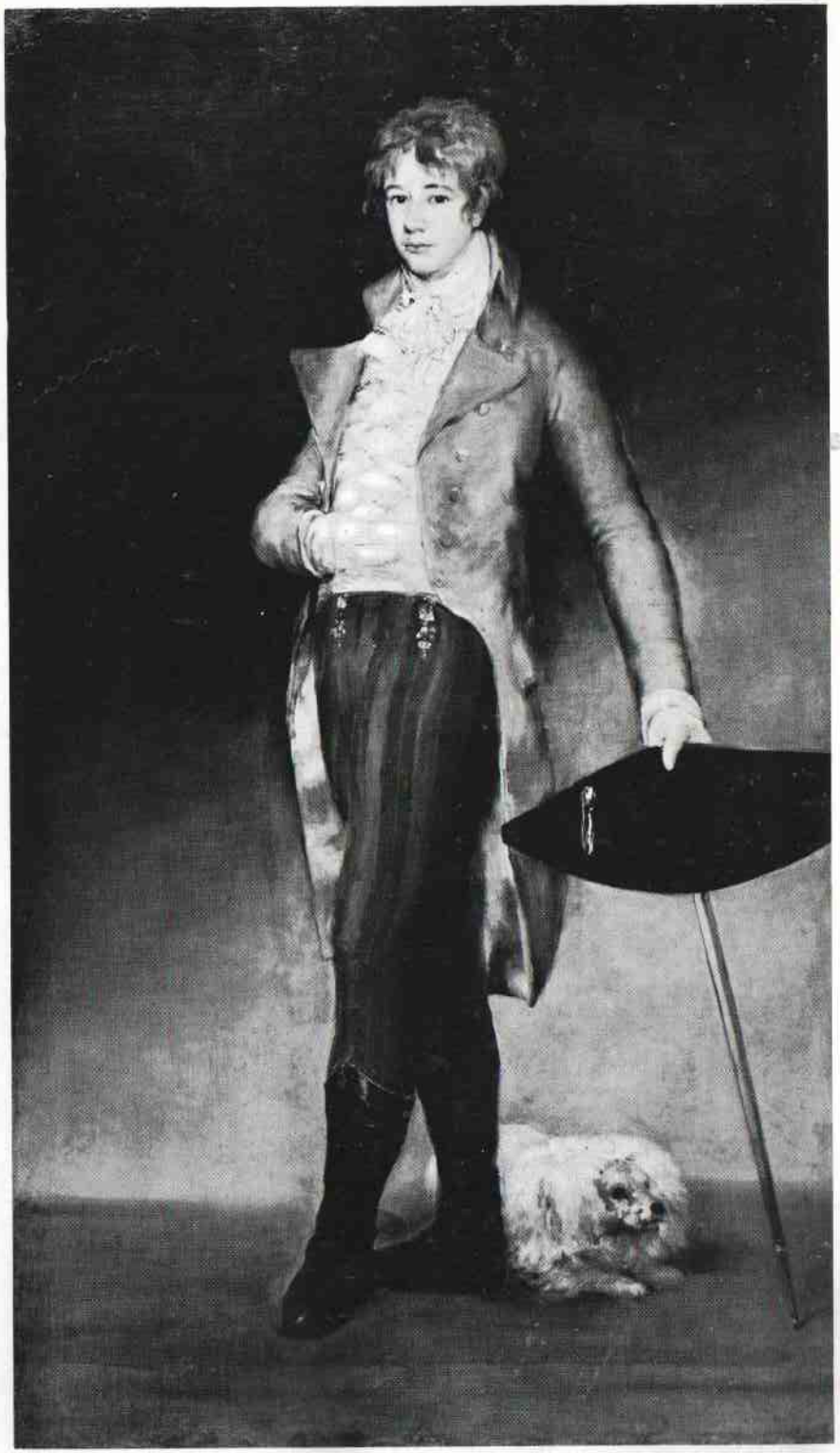
Goya's consciousness of his sitters is almost animal-like in its intensity and its absence of shame – as marked as is the absence of respect. He is always responsive to their sex, which the clothes of around 1800 seemed to emphasize: the men all faintly martial and swaggering, the women tending to be bundles of gauzy lace and yet capable of flashing glances and gipsy coquetry. It is personality that counts in this world rather than social position. Maria Luisa or the Duchess of Alba were not painted with the attributes of their rank but with the more effective apparatus of being feminine: rulers of hearts rather than lands. And Goya's attitude has something in common with Stendhal's, not merely in the more obvious ways of penetrating, affectionate irony, and exploration of the human heart, but perhaps in a certain envy of the health and passions of the people portrayed. In Goya's paintings it would probably be easy to find equivalents for the splendid Sanseverina, for Julien Sorel, Mosca, or Mathilde de la Mole. This is not just an accident of period, for David's *Madame Récamier* is quite foreign to the mood; she is completely posed, stiffened further by the rigid lack of any hint of humour. Goya's sitters are dolls that have been given a good shaking, the stuffing and the nonsense fallen out of them, so that they are left touchingly absurd, charmingly defenceless – naked, for all their elegant clothes. How well Goya seems to know his own son (*Ill. 142*), nonchalant, fashionable, with a man of the world air and with yet somehow a boyish uncertainty.

It is tempting to see Goya's technique, ever increasing in fluidity and impressionistic power, as mirroring his increasing sense that nothing is certain: '*todo es fingido*'. Each of us is an irrational creature; society is only an agglomeration of such creatures, perhaps the more irrational for the sinking of their individuality in the mass. We have Goya's own testimony to the restraint he felt in commissioned work 'where caprice and invention do not have free rein'; and it was probably inevitable that he should break away from such confinement to record his own unfettered reactions to society and the world. Well before the collapse of the Spanish monarchy and the irruption of Napoleon, Goya had opted out of one aspect of the system. Even while he remained court painter, he was tacitly claiming the freedom of a Blake to pursue his own imaginative interests. He chose a mass medium in which to disseminate his ideas, much more profoundly occupied than David had been with the problem of addressing a wide public. What he had to offer it was in effect an illustrated commentary (where words significantly played their part) which would censure common human errors and vices chiefly through ridicule: a formula worthy of Pope which resulted first in the *Caprichos* series of etchings, published in Madrid in 1799.

In a certain sense the *Caprichos* continue the tendency of the tapestry cartoons, but with the new element of fantasy in place of fun, and with a revolutionary examination of the springs of behaviour rather than merely country manners. The shift to what one feels is a predominantly urban setting (implied, however, rather than depicted) widens the range of society and sharpens Goya's vision. Typically for the eighteenth-century person that he basically was, Goya throughout contrasts enlightenment with darkness, literally and metaphorically. The world is a murky place inhabited by masked figures groping and huddled (*Ill. 143*), distorted into strange tall shapes which have authentic nightmare proportions. The animating factors of this dark dream universe are not those social ills that Hogarth had indicted so cheerfully. There is no comforting assurance that it is drink or poverty which shaped these sinister figures, with their suggestions of skulls and metamorphoses of sex. This is the masquerade of life, where even between man and woman rational dialogue is difficult. The light of sanity has been reduced to this greyish mist which is almost a symbol for the groping obscurity of the human mind.

The humour is as black as the sky in the intensely frightening *Tooth hunting* (*Ill. 144*), where a silly woman is led by her belief in sorcery into pulling a tooth from the mouth of a hanged man. Here we plunge into a night of irrationality much darker than anything encountered before in the century: the power of superstition shown is strong enough to overcome all feelings of horror and humanity. The woman has braved darkness, the precipitous wall, the suspended corpse, to take the tooth for a witch's brew – and yet cannot bear to look at her own action, holding up a handkerchief in a ridiculous gesture to shield her face. Against that active folly of the living is contrasted the ghastly quiescence of the dead, with broken neck, and bound hands and bare, dangling feet – a premonition of the *Horrors of War*. The incident combines the ridiculous with pathos; Goya moves us not only to laugh and cry, but to feel the sting of application to ourselves. It is from out of this shadowy irrationality – where death indeed lies – that he means to lead us into rational daylight. It is the same seriousness of purpose, and the same journey, that shape *Die Zauberflöte* and *Fidelio*; but Goya never managed to achieve the optimistic paean of '*Heil sei dem Tag!*'.

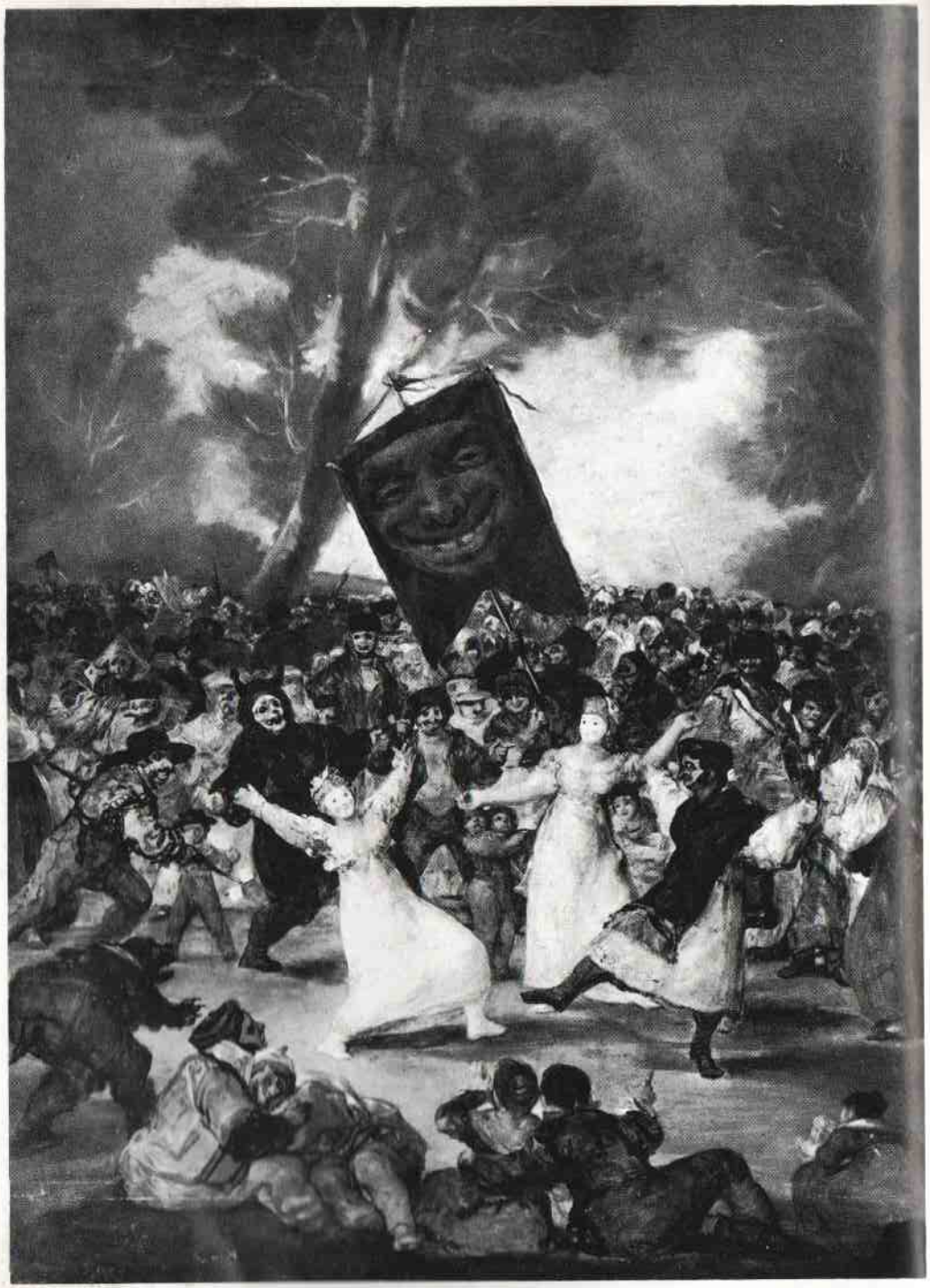
The *Caprichos* are no isolated tendency, either in Goya or in the artistic products of his period. They are part of a whole movement towards a new feeling of and for humanity which, when it finally rushed forward, was bound to do so violently. Goya lived to be the witness of what crimes liberty could commit, but he was witness also to the *douceur de vivre* of society just enjoying itself in the



143 Francisco de Goya *Nobody knows anybody*

144 Francisco de Goya
Tooth hunting

open air: whether rioting in carnival gaiety (*Ill. 145*) or calmly seated on the banks of the Manzanares, with parasols and refreshments (*Ill. 146*), picnicking in the utter unconsciousness of anything wrong with the world. This marvellous *plein-air* piece of work is an enchanted view of society, where Madrid lies along the skyline, as undistinguished then as now, brushed on to the canvas with the economical felicity of early Corot. Yet Goya's view could not remain so tranquil. The *Burial of the Sardine*, when looked at again, has an almost sinister quality, something frenetic in its excitement. We are not far from that tragic animation of the *Madhouse* (*Ill. 148*) which presents the cruel, more usually concealed, aspect of society. Goya, and perhaps Goya alone among painters, was to bridge the gap between the naked wretches of that scene and the sunlit, well-dressed figures of the *Pradera de San Isidro*.

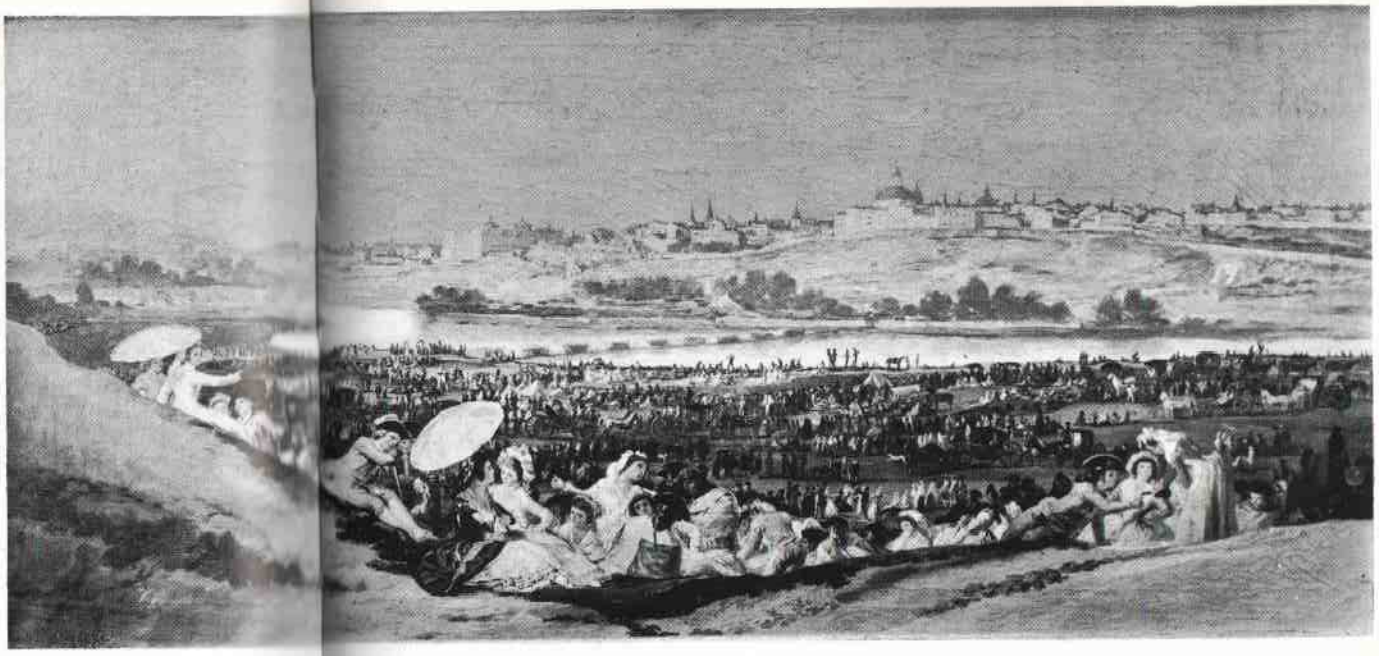


145 Francisco de Goya *Burial of the Sardine*

Events were to prove Goya no unjustified pessimist. If he had set himself to be the eighteenth century's modern moralist – hoping to cure by ridicule – he was to see human behaviour exceed even his horrific visions of its irrational impulses. One among many extraordinary things about him is that his art was able to include this experience within it – to digest it and build art, not propaganda, from it. His concern had always been with humanity; the *Caprichos* may necessarily use Spanish customs and costumes, but their application is universal. What threatened in those compositions was anarchy; and the black anarchy of actual war between Spain and France inspired Goya to the series of the *Horrors of War* which are not a patriot's view of war, but the view simply of a human being. Too prophetically perhaps does he conceive of a world where humanity has nearly blasted itself out of existence (*Ill. 147*). It is not the French, nor Fate, nor events, that are blamed. In fact, Goya goes beyond blame. With what must have been a tremendous effort to achieve dispassionate depiction, he shows the factual result of man's cruelty to man. David, clinging to the concept of the hero, had shown Marat martyred in his bath. Goya can find no single hero, any more than villain. Human nature is too complex for such a simple solution. When reason sleeps, monsters invade the mind. And the next step is shown by the two pictures of the events of the 2nd and 3rd May 1808 (*Ills 136, 149*).

Goya painted them a few years later. He was then in his sixties, having survived illness and suffered permanent deafness. From his earliest pictures, even the apparently light-hearted tapestry cartoons, there had been hints of some awareness of the ambiguity in human nature. In these pictures there is perhaps even more irony than tragedy. Like other Spanish liberals, he had looked to France as a place of modern civilization. Himself intelligent, articulate, well-read (the possessor of a considerable library), he might have expected the arrival of Voltaire's countrymen to bring to Spain a solution rather than further problems. These two pictures together express the stalemate of the human condition: killing or being killed. There are no longer those fantasy elements which served to make the *Caprichos* palatable; these scenes are not figments of the sick imagination but actual events – both barbarous.

War is not seen as a matter of bounding horses, splendid uniforms, and victorious generals – still less a rococo parade of operatic heroes with padded cuirasses and plumed helmets. Its carnage is democratic, and its victims anonymous. On 2nd May 1808 Napoleon's mamelukes were attacked in the streets of Madrid: their surprise and their slaughter provide a theme which Goya treats with no chauvinistic pride. Death is undignified and terrible; it is to be dragged



146 Francisco de Goya
La Pradera de San Isidro

backwards, like the central corpse, over the slit-open body of a horse, with blood raining down on to ground already littered with the dead. There is no place here for reason or enlightenment. What is commemorated is a moment – the instantaneous effect of the picture is part of its shock – which shows that man's worst enemy remains himself.

The sequel is historical and psychological. Spanish slaughter of the French troops is countered by French slaughter of Spanish hostages. It is in a real night that the inevitable revenge is carried out, by men as ordinary as those they shoot but transformed by darkness and uniforms into a long, inexorable, grey line of executioners whose level rifles are not deflected by the central, wildly gesticulating, too well-lit victim. The *Caprichos* had shown Goya's interest in the physiognomy as mirror of the emotions; the *Second of May* shows a whole range of eager, half-crazed faces of attackers and attacked. But in the *Third of May* the soldiers are faceless; it is the victims who alone are allowed expression, culminating in this face of angry despair – like a last screech for life at the moment death strikes. He dies for the mameluke's murder of the day before. And nothing is solved.

Artistically, the two pictures answer the eighteenth century's requirements of the history picture, but pitched now by events out of calm contemplation of the

147 Francisco de Goya *Horrors of War: Bury them and be silent*

148 Francisco de Goya *The Madhouse*

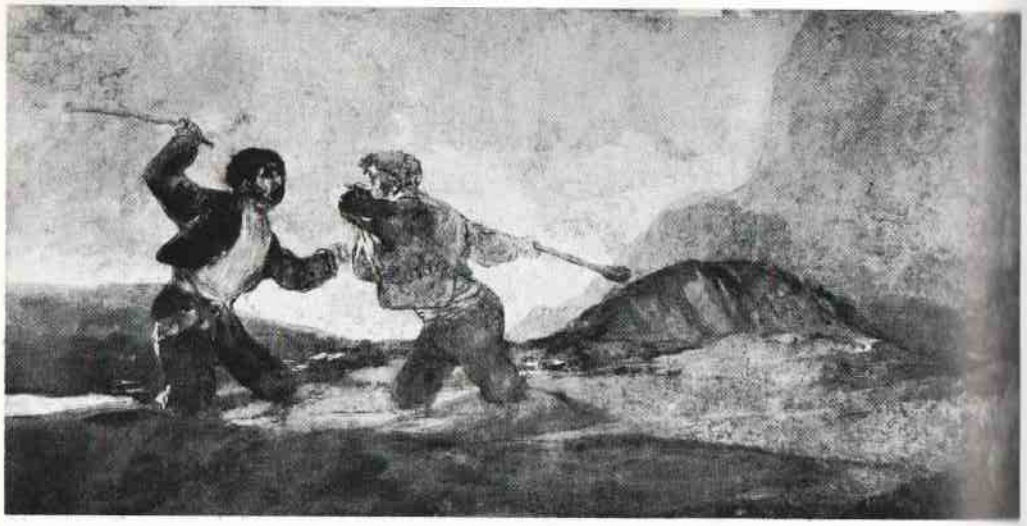
past into the bloodiest possible actuality. It is truth-telling art of a quite revolutionary kind: 'engaged' in the cause of humanity as the century had thought art should be, though it had hardly foreseen the result. Not only rococo nature but even the domestic dignity of Chardin is upset by this depiction of natural man; how faint and far away are both those climates when compared to a Madrid street scene where the pavement is slippery with blood. And, one might add, how hopeless seem the aspirations of enlightenment ('*Alle Menschen werden Brüder*') amid such a noise of murder.

Goya himself perhaps retained some glimmer of hope, sufficient to keep him alive but hardly to illuminate any ideals. His final artistic step was into the obscurity of the nightmare visions painted for the 'Quinta del Sordo' – pictures intended for the painter's own surroundings, as personal as Blake's prophetic writings. They reject the public and social utility of art which had been the eighteenth century's chief defence of artistic activity. That, rather than life itself, is what Goya turns his back on. Almost aggressively, the results refuse to please, decorate, or instruct. The artist who had filled so many rooms of Spanish royal residences with topical vivid depictions of country manners chose for his own

house timeless scenes in the ugly countryside of the mind, where pleasing colour has been sucked away, to be replaced by greys and muddy browns, which infect the vast figures struggling in a miasma. The *Caprichos* had assumed mankind was capable of improvement. The 'Quinta del Sordo' paintings suppose nothing; they do not even bother to record the facts of mankind's brutality as had the *Second* and *Third of May*. The artist who had been such a sensitive observer of all the outward aspects of existence deliberately shuts his eyes – and paints what he then sees. His autonomy is complete. He has cut himself off from the social framework, patronage, all concepts of art as communication. Instead, these paintings are expression; they verge indeed on Expressionism. They express perhaps the only truths Goya could any longer recognize.

His earlier fantasies had played with the stock images of witchcraft and goblins, making witty and frightening use of supernatural machinery. There are still supernatural subjects, like the floating Fates (*Ill. 151*), sinister hags that seem to blast the vegetation they pass over. Yet they have ceased to have any comforting

149 Francisco de Goya *Second of May 1808 at Madrid*



150 Francisco de Goya *Fight with Clubs*

sense of being allegory; they are not even removed into the fictional region of the supernatural but are palpably real, horrifyingly natural, authentic creatures of the unconscious. They have come out of the painter's own mind where they had all along been waiting while he painted cheerful man, public man, even possibly rational man. And they bring a message of the deepest pessimism. For there is something that is not false in nature. The onion-layers of clothes and habit and environment, when stripped away, do not leave a vacuum but the seed of a blind, raging, clawing, vitality that lives only by trying to destroy. The cosmos is under one vast brooding shadow (*Ill. 152*) which Goya expressed in a powerful etching, close to the mood of these paintings. But that is not literal enough. The full horror lies in that scene which seems to vibrate with echoes of Cain and Abel, and also with the hopeless tone of Hesiod's Iron Age – always the present age – when might shall be right. Like the last survivors of a doomed world two men, already struggling knee-deep in apparent quicksands, spend their time in exchanging blows (*Ill. 150*). One head, one final memorable mask, is a mere black fuzz, with blackened eye-sockets, blood-stained, agonized, yet still intent on reducing the other head to the same condition.

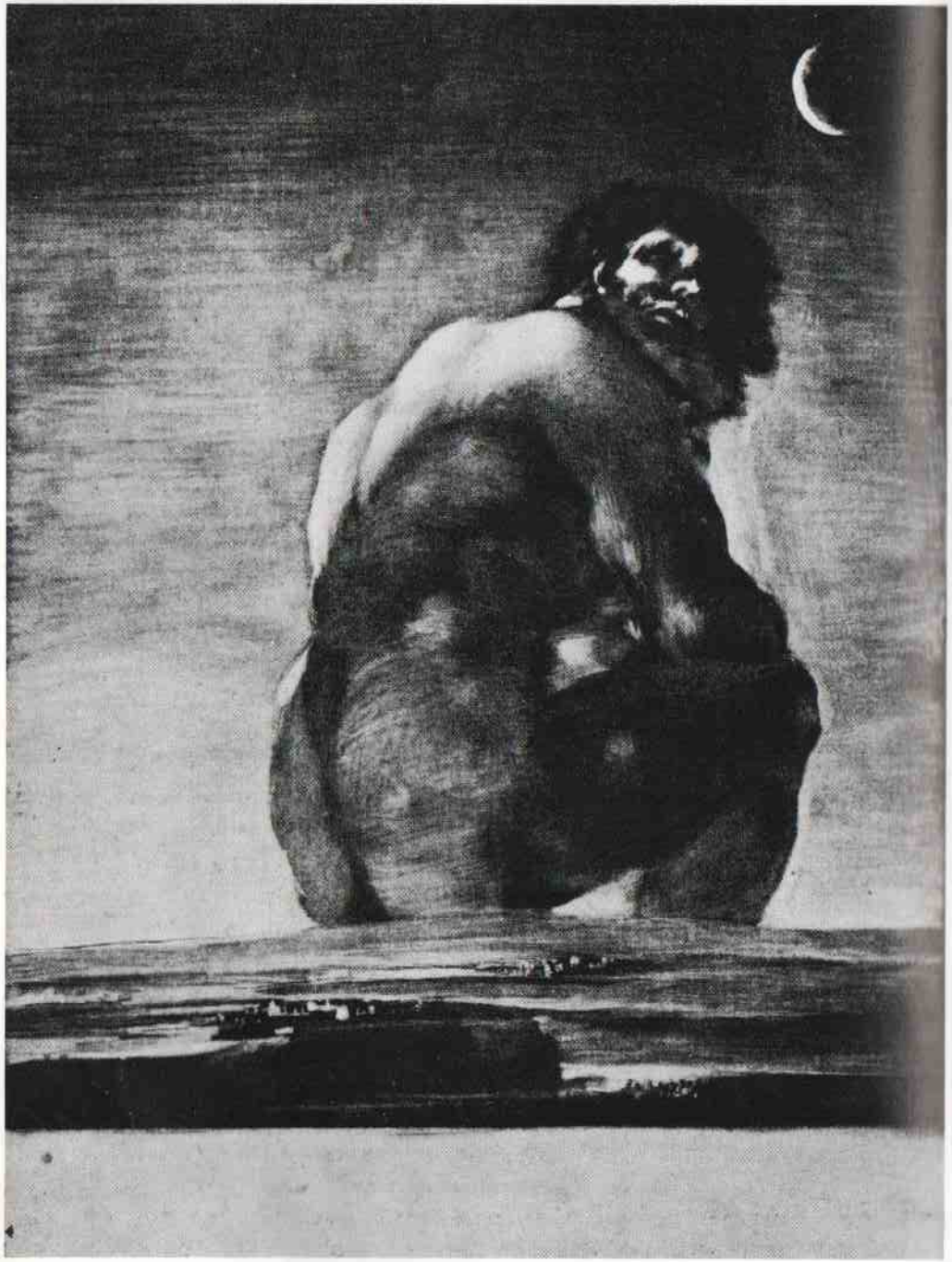
Just as Goya imposed on himself withdrawal from the whole politico-social apparatus of art – retreating while in fact advancing into the freedom of modern art – so he imposed exile on himself, withdrawing from the insane autocracy of Ferdinand VII's Spain to Bordeaux. To his deafness was added failing sight and stiffening hands. He had nothing, as he himself wrote in these last years, but

151 Francisco de Goya *The Fates*

the will to write – and paint, we may add. He had brought art out of the wonderful rococo past of his youth, not in reaction but through positive evolution. Born the heir of those Italian rococo figures who had all worked in Spain – Giordano, Amigoni, Giaquinto, Tiepolo – Goya had also been indebted indirectly to their antagonist, Mengs. He had been influenced by the enlightenment which was crystallized in France, perhaps instinctively preferring the witty rationality of Voltaire to the disturbed emotionalism of Rousseau; and before Voltaire's death he had produced his first tapestry cartoons.

When he died at Bordeaux in 1828 he had outlived Napoleon whose ambitions had affected his art as well as his life. David was dead; and Géricault. Europe had seen the dramatic career, and the poignant death, of Byron. Ingres was nearly fifty; Delacroix had already exhibited several times at the Salon. Goya takes his place in that 'modern' world. His ideas, his technique, his constantly deepening art, all entitle him to the double place of last of the *ancien régime* painters and first of the moderns. If his art must be examined for a message, it can perhaps be found in some further lines of Pope which certainly help to explain the eighteenth century and point also towards Goya's goal:

> *That reason, passion, answer one great aim;*
> *That true self-love and social are the same;*
> *That virtue only makes our bliss below;*
> *And all our knowledge is, – ourselves to know.*



152 Francisco de Goya *Colossus*

Epilogue

Perhaps the residue of all revolutions is disappointment. Certainly the dawn in which Wordsworth claimed it was bliss to be alive lightened into a prosaic and reactionary day – adjectives which also suit the poet himself in old age. Though the Bastille had fallen, nineteenth-century Europe seemed largely concerned with propping it up again, and adding its own yet grimmer buildings, more subtle prisons of factories and slums whose environment gradually sapped the energy not only to rebel but even to live; and there was no hopeful *deus ex machina* to arrive like Don Fernando at the end of *Fidelio* with his startling egalitarian message and authoritarian humanism: '*Es sucht der Bruder seine Brüder, und kann er helfen, hilft er gern.*'

That optimistic and humanitarian concern had largely disappeared too from art. The sleep of reason has merged into a deep artistic indifference on the part of most great nineteenth-century painters – with the honourable exception of Daumier and the more complicated case of Courbet – to the social conditions of their own period. Not only had Goya kept humanity as his central concern, as much as had Voltaire, but his work speaks eloquently of the events he lived through. The tumultuous history of nineteenth-century France has been carefully excluded from the work of a Monet, or Cézanne, with its thinnest of suggestions that anyone else exists except the painter and the natural world. It is usual to suppose that society in the nineteenth century turned its back on the painter; but it might be asked who took the initiative in this snubbing match. There is more than one aspect of escapism and deliberate isolation in the preoccupation with natural appearances and a '*petite sensation*' before a mountain. Candide may have recommended cultivation of one's garden but hardly the continued depiction of the pond at the bottom of it. The social conditions of daily life in nineteenth-century Europe could certainly inspire Tolstoy or George Eliot, Flaubert or

153 Eugène Delacroix *Liberty leading the People*

Dickens, to produce art from it. There were no longer painters of comparable stature comparably concerned with mankind. The tragedy of *Work* is that Ford Madox Brown could not fuse his programme into art. Others did not try. And it may be wondered who made landscape such a comfortingly right subject for art in an increasingly urban civilization?

The usual supposition is that Goya leads on to Géricault and Delacroix; but the truth is that they are resolutely anti-social artists, convinced that their duty is to fly from reason; and, in Delacroix's case, flying into the savage irrationalities of a largely fictitious past, all blood-flecked horses and expiring women, which is really the mirror of his own wild mental state. David may have been wrong, but it is difficult not to honour his political commitment and his efforts to produce a social art which should affect people. Delacroix has withdrawn politically as well as artistically. The slick juxtaposition of *Liberty leading the*

People (*Ill. 153*) to some picture of Goya's proves nothing except the differences between the two painters and the haunting myth of *gloire* which keeps stirring Delacroix at the prospect of battle. His ideal is always combat: man against man, man against animal, and here a bare-breasted allegorical woman heading a revolt – against what is hardly clear and hardly matters. If he had conceived *Fidelio* it would doubtless have ended in carnage, initiated by some Neronic personage.

In Géricault the obsession with the monstrous, the un-natural, is even more patent. He seizes on the insane face, the severed head, without pathos; and perhaps the most scandalous thing about the *Raft of the Medusa* (*Ill. 154*) is not its *donnée* but Géricault's delight that the ordinary prosaic fabric of life can be torn apart by catastrophe. The normal world is not stimulating enough until it provides such an event of horrific dimensions, not merely of one man alone on a raft but a whole group of desperate, alienated people, crazed father and dead son, overturned naked corpses and hysterical women. There is really no purpose to the picture beyond its intention of shocking. It betrays its provenance from a newspaper article and points the way towards Manet's strange desire to depict the far-away execution of the Emperor Maximilian. These paintings do not grow in a normal way out of their period or the painter's preoccupations, but suggest

154 Théodore Géricault *The Raft of the Medusa*

a certain amount of searching for a bizarre theme, for an event which is true and which is yet as frighteningly beyond nature as possible.

And, it might be said, they suggest considerable doubt about the power of art. They are stories with borrowed plots which have the built-in defence, when attacked, of replying that they are true. Géricault interviewed survivors, like a modern reporter. Yet a painter like Boucher – no doubt indifferent to the exact lights observable on snow – at least trusted in *art*: making seas of blue velvet and bodies of pearl with coral nipples that become true through their beauty.

Along with all its high achievement in decorative art, the eighteenth century had not ignored humanity. It had been following nature ever since Watteau carried his theatrically-costumed people out of doors, to achieve a new sort of relaxation and honesty. Hogarth and Chardin, even Greuze and Pietro Longhi, had captured something of the nature of their own age – sometimes with a good pinch of satire. Their art had never stopped having some sort of social base. Effortlessly, they believed that art was needed, and society agreed with them. Indeed, it is noticeable how, through all the variations of artistic style the eighteenth century produced, no really great painter was neglected by the century. For each revolution art performed, there seemed a public ready to applaud.

Even when the whole optimistic-rationalist structure collapsed, there was Goya still standing. If his own belief in reason faltered, at least there was no faltering in his attachment to the life of the period and – necessarily absent from the nineteenth century's attachment to exterior appearances – his pursuit of the internal nature that is psychology. Nor was it only human penetration that was lacking particularly in nineteenth-century romantic art; it was largely deficient in humour, so close to a feeling for humanity, and incapable of wit.

Nowadays, the vilification about the previous century that was elaborately built up by the nineteenth century (with lavish use of words like artificial, heartless, rational), is gradually being seen to be unjustified. In fact, the eighteenth century is the last period when painting was free to be exactly what it wished to be – serious or light-hearted, decorative, topical, allegorical, or actual – and yet remain consistently great art. By being committed to the widest possible concept of nature it had found, more perhaps than it realized, freedom. Not only was it the last period when painting could enjoy this; reflecting on the previous centuries makes one realise that it was also the first period.

Short Bibliography

List of Illustrations

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Short Bibliography

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