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the Literary Influence of Lord Byron's tragedy "Sardanapalus" in Eugène Delacroix's painting "The Death of Sardanapalus"

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Dedication

First and foremost, I thank Allah for giving the strength and patience to complete this work despite all complications. I would like to dedicate this work to my beloved mother, whose unwavering love has been my compass, whose sacrifices built the path im taking, to my brothers, each of you a pillar holding me steady through every storm.

To my supervisor who found me in the middle of no where looking for something worthy to work on , my academic life saver. And to my dearest friends, whose courage became mine when I had none left. Your belief in me lit the fire I needed to keep going.

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I am also sincerely thankful to all my teachers of first- and second-year master, And thank all my teachers who paved the way for me to reach this level.

Abstract

This dissertation explores the complex literary and artistic conversation that occurs between Lord Byron's poetic tragedy Sardanapalus (1821) and Eugène Delacroix's legendary painting The Death of Sardanapalus (1827). It considers Delacroix's inspiration from Byron's depiction of the ancient Assyrian king, and puts both works in the context of broader currents of Orientalism. The study opens with a general introduction that outlines the motivation, aims and scope of the research, foregrounding its key questions about the interrelations of literature and visual art in the construction of images of the East.In this respect and with the briefest of biographies — a mere prelude to artistic identity and its trajectory — the first chapter introduces Delacroix to the historical and cultural tides in which he found himself. Tracking his interest in Orientalism and drawing on Edward Said's fundamental critique, it pondered how Western artists and writers cast their dreams and fears onto Eastern subjects. It then explores how the sublime poetics of Byron impacted Delacroix, particularly his representations of violence and the human condition, and how the latter's transformative travels in North Africa introduced into his pictorial lexicon new experiences of light, color and cultural context. Chapter two conducts a comparative examination into themes featured in Delacroix's painting, such as the tension between the sexes, the use and impotence of power, decadence, and destruction. This interplay between written visual analysis including the composition, color, and emotional impact of "The Death of Sardanapalus," and ultimately argues that Delacroix transcends a narrative of Sardanapalus to capture a scene that conveys both this complexity and its unity in one frame. the chapter discusses the painting's critical reception, from contemporary feminist and political lenses. It ends with a discussion of Delacroix's interaction with Orientalist traditions, and the wider political and social dimensions of his art. The paper finally reflects on the fluid relationship between art and literature in constructing cultural narratives, showing

how Delacroix transforms and engages with a particular Western image of the East as developed in Byron's "Sardanapalus." In the end, this dissertation offers broader implications for the continued discussions about representation, identity, and cultural difference, as well as the ethical responsibilities of the artist in rendering cultural difference, as the legacy of these works still shapes the Western imagination.

Key words: representation, orientalism, Sardanapalus,

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General Introduction

It was the late nineteenth century that something unfamiliar came into European art, something poised to change completely the path of art history. Power shifted to Underground Romanticism, whose experiences, personal expressions and patterns and just as unusual interest in foreign land differed mainly from the classical way of painting. Eugene Delacroix (1798-1863) was an important representative of French Romanticism, but the need to escape neo-classicism constraints was not the only factor motivating this trend in art.

The influence of Theodore Géricault's emotional realism (primarily evident in The Raft of the Medusa) had a significant impact on Delacroix' compositional and emotional tone, as a result, he became Romantic artist. If the simple artist connection was merely an influence, the relationship between Delacroix and Géricault would have led to a significant change in the narrative of Romantic art. A painting never been executed simply; when Delacroix stood in the front of The Raft of the Medusa, he saw cutting-edge art in the front of his mind (in opposition to the common perception that it was an Avant-guard painting). By portraying modern events in a totally accurate manner, Géricault's paintings demonstrated that drama could compete or replace mythological stories in classical literature (Britannica, "Eugène Delacroix").

The Death of Sardanapalus (1827) is one of Delacroix's crucial controversial, and at the same time most celebrated works, portraying Romantic sensibilities, and the contradictory attitude towards the east. The painting took its core narrative from Lord Byron's 1821 poem about the drama Sardanapalus, but what was on the painting's canvas was more than just a simple depiction of the protagonist. The complex re-visioning of the Assyrian's king as a Byronic hero—which triggered the early stages of desire that were tempered with pride—was an opportunity for Delacroix to investigate the exotic "Orient" that so fascinated Romantic literature. However, the painting distance traveled far exceeds the original literary depiction, Byron's psychological tragedy is now visualized as a chaos, over-stuffed, and violent

representation of the terrors that Europeans project onto the othered East (Fraser 65; Nochlin 33).

The interaction between literature and painting in this process continues to be a larger concern in the 19th century about the "Orient," which is considered the location where European concerns and fantasies can be released. Said has hypothesized that the East functioned as a form of barrier that prevented the Western mind from directly encountering the most frightening parts of the European culture, while at the same time revealing much of the European spirit. This led to the identification of the European psyche as easily distinguishable from the East.

Studies of the scholarly nature of Delacroix's Sardanapalus have produced a complex and dense literature that focuses on the multiple relations to both Romanticism and orientalism. Based on earlier studies, Fraser's skeptical reading centers around the "sensory pandemonium" of the painting, which she claims constitutes an audacious critique of the neoclassical conventions of order, consistency, and morality (Fraser 322). Delacroix's goal was to show his creation in a way that would offend the viewer and force them to address the more brutal aspects of life that are typically concealed by the aesthetic façade of realism.

The analysis discusses how, despite being saturated in the typical stereotypes of Oriental despotism and sensuality, the overall portrayal of the work shows the dissent of this context which exposes the relations of power and the nature behind such depictions, particularly in regard to prevailing discourses of gender in that timeframe ((Nochlin 36). Her argument demonstrates that, in some respects, Orientalist paintings were simply a cultural tool that reinforced the European images of the "Other," yet also undermined them.

The theoretical background that underpins Delacroix's representation of Assyria here is Edward Said's celebrated Orientalism (1978), in which Said claims that in the West there has long been a tendency of depicting the East as attractive but inferior. Yet such themes of art

did not simply offer aesthetic exercises, but were the very cultural scaffolding to which European hegemony over Eastern peoples and lands once clung in its attempts to justify the expansion of its missions, as Said's theoretical frame reveals (Said 5) and it is this structure that is especially appropriate here, for the body of Oriental other that Delacroix's art both participates in the production of, yet ultimately so subversively, as well.

Studies of the scholarly nature of Delacroix's Sardanapalus have produced a complex and dense literature that focuses on the multiple relations to both Romanticism and orientalism. Based on earlier studies, Fraser's skeptical reading centers around the "sensory pandemonium" of the painting, which she claims constitutes an audacious critique of the neoclassical doctrine of order, consistency, and morality (Fraser 322). Delacroix's goal, Fraser believes, was to show his creation in a way that would offend the viewer and force them to address the more brutal aspects of life that are typically concealed by the aesthetic façade of realism.

More complex readings of the aesthetic's violent nature are derived from recent feminist studies, such as the recent and extensive analyses by Stacey Schmiesing. In Schmiesing's opinion, the women in the artwork are representational of the simultaneously desired and wasteful feminine objects in the patriarchy, this extends the political importance of the piece beyond the scope of orientalism (67). This feminist criticism has led to new, interesting interpretations, which demonstrate how the gender issues in the painting's deictic address intersect with the other aspects of the representation of 'otherness' in the East.

But not much has been written on how Delacroix's adaptation alters the frames of reference and themes of Byron's original. While a good deal of scholarship has treated the Orientalist elements of the painting, or its more general importance as a Romantic-age artwork, few have provided a systematic comparison tracing the specific modalities of literary transfer employed, and how these get altered and repurposed in a pictorial form. To fill these

scholarly gaps I zero in on one research question — What does Delacroix's reading of Byron's Sardanapalus look like (viewing Sardanapalus in painting), and what does Sardanapalus reading do to our understanding of the historically complicated and geographically diverse connections between 19th-century French political culture, romantic literature, and Orientalist ideology?

To answer the above question, this study has a series of interconnected aims. It starts off with a detailed, analysis of Delacroix's painting, in particular concerning the representation of central themes The annotated text reveals not only the pilfered lines from Byron but, more importantly, the ways in which Delacroix recast, amplified, or, indeed, took the wind out of, much of the material. Second, this study examines the relationship between the painting and Said's notion of Orientalism, determining how, if at all, the work serves either as an instrument of Western hegemony or a resistance to dominant representations of the East. Lastly, it considers the methodological challenges of turning a literary question into an aesthetic one and the complexities of relating meaning-making across media. In addition to examining the painting's reception from diffrent angles, considering evolving interpretations through contemporary feminist and postcolonial critiques.

This thesis contain pivotal details that enhance the existing literature on Delacroix and the Romantic movement in general. However, it provides a unique combination of literature and art history, the disciplines are often considered separately. Despite the acknowledgement of the orientalism in the painting, the painting not only serves to replicate and expand the subject of rebellion and excess in order to provide a criticism of the Restoration period of French politics (Fraser 325). This feminist perspective, questions more political interpretations of the work and shows its greater involvement of gender, violence and power structures (Schmiesing 99).

The research is still very relevant today, especially with the ongoing debates about cultural appropriation and representation issues, and the colonial influence in the indirect communication of nations. Similar to allusions made in modern Western media to "backward" Middle Eastern peoples, the imagined decadence in Delacroix's Assyria poses important queries about how artistic renderings of this kind can deepen post-colonial relations of power between West and non-West (Benjamin 92). This paper sets these discussions in dialogue with histories, in a way that engages with the contemporary concern for accountability and responsibility for/representation of cultural difference by artists and scholars alike.

The analysis focuses on Byron's poem about Sardanapalus and Delacroix's painting, despite acknowledging that larger cultural components had an effect on both. The discussion also involves a secondary focus on historically accurate accounts (including Diodorus Siculus' narrative of the real Sardanapalus) as well as on the contemporary political and cultural affairs of France that may have contributed to the appreciation of Delacroix. Artists like Jean-Léon Gérôme have produced works that are significant because of their comparison to the East, these works are actually outside of the determining the primary context of this study.

Among the significant projects are Delacroix's Journal, which elucidates his procedure and appreciation of Byron's sublime concept (Baker; Delacroix), as well as Nochlin's feminist criticism of the way gender violence is depicted in the painting (Nochlin 43). While the current study is primarily based on Said's theoretical framework, it still takes an active interest in postcolonial theory and criticism because of Said.

This dissertation is composed of two chapters that debate the textual relationship between Byron's poem and Delacroix's painting. first Chapter handles Delacroix and the orientalism of the Romantic" provides essential background information regarding both Delacroix's evolvement as a painter and the impact of this had on him, noting that Byron's literary style influenced the artist as he wrote. The Culture and Politics of the context in this chapter,

focusing on the cultural and political significance of the production of The Death of Sardanapalus, with an emphasis on the way aspects of French colonial expansion and post-Napoleonic political conservatism affected the representation of the East.

The middle-aged discussion, which is the core portion of the thesis that concerns the comparison, takes place in the second chapter, In both continuity and contrast to Byron, it explores how Delacroix accomplished the topics of power, destruction, heroism, and gender in his canva. Intermedial analysis has a methodological challenge; discussing the most significant aspects and provide a general description of how meaning is achieved in different artistic media.

This thesis also illuminates the intricate operations of Romantic imagination, which re-shaped history to correspond with their aesthetic and ideological concerns, through the lens of a sustained investigation of Byron's poem and Delacroix's painting. Instead of taking a simple cultural leadership role in the conception of orientalism, the research demonstrates the complex simultaneous foreignization as well as critical analyses of the stereotypical representation of the "Orient" by European artists (Said 5). This analysis demonstrates that texts like The Death of Sardanapalus are not simply their own creation, but have an important impact on ongoing debates about the culture of representation, artistic responsibility, and the colonial burden to the present.

It takes part in larger academic and public conversations about representation, identity, and the complex relationship between art and politics (Nochlin 122). This thesis claims that it's crucial to recognize these historical precedents in order to address the present issues of cultural difference, artistic representation, and the ethical consequences of creative expression in a world that is more connected than ever before.

This paper also seeks to cross disciplines, and applies techniques from the field of literary analysis to provide critical readings of art and examine the intersection of cultural theory with Lord Byron's Sardanapalus and Eugène Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus. This is because these methods offer a better framework for understanding how text was shifted into picture. However, it should be noted that there are limitations too. The first is: although the main emphasis is to be placed on analysis of literature and art, rather than a comprehensive historical study of Orientalism Secondly, the interpretation of the visual elements in painting is always somewhat subjective, every eye have a different sight. Besides, primary sources like Delacroix’s Journals and Byron's issue offer some insight to the process of their creation, yet it does not entirely take into account external socio-political conditions that may have had a word on their works. By admitting to these limitations, the study aims to remain critical and clear in its analytical modes.

CHAPTER ONE: Historical context and literary influence

Introduction

The 19th century was distinguished by a monumental shift of art in Europe, this period was noticeable by the emergence of Romanticism, a movement that encouraged emotions expression, individuality, and curiosity toward the overseas. In France, Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) became one of the most romantic movement celebrated painters, his career was characterized by the desire for claiming the success ladder and to leave a significant mark on the cultural landscape. From his formative years in the French aristocracy, Delacroix was molded by the values of fame, heroism, and civic virtue, these values are reflected in his earliest creative efforts as well as in the larger scope of his mature projects (Delacroix; Allard et al.4).

By the year 1820, the art world of France began to accept new artists. Delacroix took advantage of this opportunity to exhibit his work at the Salon, the most important venue for artists in France today. His first painting, The Barque of Dante (1822), received significant recognition at the institutional level and was considered the prominent artist of his time (Mauclair 5).

Not only his own ambition but also the inspiration of many contemporaries, like Théodore Géricault, played a crucial role in forming the artistic identity of Delacroix. No painting of the early part of the 19th century could compete with the sheer charge of raw emotion infused throughout the canvas of The Raft of the Medusa by Théodore Géricault, which conveyed in all its aspect dramatic realism calculating each stroke to address contemporary happenings with as much relevance and proximity as possible to the mind of the viewer. Delacroix, however, wanted to go beyond this reproducing, and instead create a style that combined poetic vision with technical modernity.

The Death of Sardanapalus (1827) belongs to this context, making it a milestone. From Lord Byron's verse drama Sardanapalus (1821), Delacroix's painting reinterprets the story of the last king of Assyria, who, about to be vanquished, prefers to die in a conflagration of wreck and rubble together with his treasure and his concubines. In contrast, Byron's play depicts Sardanapalus as a tragic and self-reflective figure —a proto-Byronic hero, torn between pleasure and duty— while Delacroix's canvas turns the narrative into a riot of sensual and savage violence. Moreover, the composition, shadows, color, and emotion of the painting challenge conventional norms and force the viewer to melt into the details underlying power dynamics, gender relations, and cultural position (Fraser 322).

To track the development of Delacroix s artistic identity and his relationship to Orientalist subject matter; to compare Byron s literary Sardanapalus and Delacroix s visual one; to take up the challenge of adapting literary themes into a visual medium; and finally, to consider what Delacroix s artistically adept handling of romantic Sardanapalus suggests for the politics of cultural representation, and for our understanding of Romanticism and Orientalism.

By placing *The Death of Sardanapalus* within its historical, artistic, and ideological contexts, this study seeks to shed the light on the complex interaction between art and literature, self and other, tradition and innovation. The research aims not only to deepen our understanding of Delacroix's achievement but also to contribute to ongoing debates about the role of art in shaping cultural narratives and identities.

I.Introduction to Eugene Delacroix and orientalism

I.1.brief biorgraphy of Eugene Delacroix

Since his prior years, Delacroix was a painter motivated by his deep desire to be a legend, his appetite took on a severe and almost ritual tone. bred in the French empire secondary

schools, where educational base emphasized on the values of fame, heroism and civic virtue, Eugene embodied the belief that greatness was an individual burden. In the post-revolutionary and Napoleonic context, fame was noted as moral and cultural accomplishments, more than bare celebrity. Delacroix's aspiration was fascinated even in his school notebooks, he repleted margines with creative depictions of signature, as if his name is something to be evoked, he wrote it in gothic a Roman style, at times with colors, mysterious puzzles or enigmatic. He was not crafting a career, but an identity.

Delacroix was a son of an influential family. an equally impressive parents, that only intensified his inner strength to achieve something notable. his father, Charles-François Delacroix, was a minister of foreign affairs, served during the revolutionary directory while his mother, Victoire Oeben, was daughter of well-known cabinet maker, Jean Francois Oeben who was favored by Louis XV. The eldest brother Charles- Henri obtained the rank of baron and general of the empire, another brother Henri died in the battle of Friedland in 1807. In the other hand, his uncle Henri Francois Reisner and his son Leon Riesner were both painters. certainly, with such imposing background, he evolved under artistic and military achievements. The then seventeen years old, in November 1815, he wrote to his friend Achill Piron: "pray to heaven that I may be a great man", a brief expression with a strong will to leave a mark. (Delacroix. Allard et al. page 4).

By 1820, the world of French art start shifting, thanks to Comte de Corbin influence, the Director of the Royal Museums of France including the louvre, between 1816 and 1841. The salon was accessible for new arrivals, providing them with a real opportunity to achieve success, then was the first try of Delacroix, he understood the importance of that chance.

in 1821 he wrote to his friend Charles Soulier: "I would really like to do a painting to the next salon, especially if it could get people to know me somewhat ". Starting from this opening, Delacroix took further step, instead of attempting again in The Prix de Rome, which

had been the conventional way to success, he preferred to give a Strick to his luck at the salon, otherwise he did't given up completely on the idea of entering the prix de Rome, as a student of Antonie Jean Gros, a honorable teacher, known for making artists ready for competitions. Delacroix made a confident move not exactly for principals but to gain recognition, commission and sell his work, a hurry move turned to be the perfect one.

THE BARQUE OF DANTE was his first major painting, affirmed by the salon 1822 and chased by the state impressively, it was advertised in the Musee of Luxembourg, meant that the painting would be among the collection of the museum of living artists established in 1818. Consequently, he reserves a chair in the salon as life career, an act not every artist of his generation could do, his ambitious preparation of the painting was apparently influenced by observing Theodor Gericault's earlier celebration as well as failure in his earlier exhibitions both met while studying in the Pierre-Narcisse Guérin studio, and the two developed a friendship. Géricault's bold composition and raw emotional energy, especially the ones depicted in *The Raft of the Medusa*, had a significant impacted Delacroix. Géricault taught Delacroix that painting could enhance both political and emotional angels (5).

Delacroix was mainly self-taught. He created sketches, studies, portraits, and caricatures, often alongside his friend Géricault. But it was his painting "Dante and Virgil" that truly marked his breakthrough. At a time when fame could come suddenly and dramatically, his work created a sensation similar to what Géricault had achieved with "The Raft of the Medusa." However, while "Medusa" captured the public's imagination with its intense realism and drama, Delacroix's painting was a poetic and intellectual exploration that made just as powerful an impact (Mauclair5).

Delacroix's "Dante and Virgil" stood out for its intense realism and drama, capturing all the horror and compassion that still lingered in the public's mind after the tragic shipwreck. Unlike Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa," which evoked raw emotion through its depiction of

disaster, "Dante and Virgil" was an interpretation of a poem, appealing more to the intellect of its viewers.

Yet, Delacroix's use of vibrant color and energetic movement gave the painting an emotional power that could be felt physically. It is truly one of the most impressive debut works ever created by a genius. With this painting, Delacroix raised important questions about art: he used painting to express poetic and mystical ideas that were quite different from classical traditions, and he challenged technical norms by shaping forms with color instead of relying on outlines. He placed every element in a dynamic atmosphere, letting colors interact, and prioritized expressive character over conventional beauty. Such boldness had not been seen since the days of Rubens and Rembrandt. To the followers of David and Ingres, this was almost heretical; only artists like Gros and Géricault had been allowed to break the rules because their subjects were considered outside the bounds of traditional "great art."

By depicting figures like Dante and Virgil in a lively and direct, Delacroix shocked the academic establishment, who saw him as a barbarian and a troublemaker. At the same time, young Romantics hailed him as an innovator and a true master. In fact, this painting encapsulated everything about Delacroix-his weaknesses and his flashes of brilliance. Even after seeing all his later works, "Dante and Virgil" remains a defining reflection of his artistic and poetic spirit.

This time, the very theme of Delacroix's painting led him to use muted tones and silvery, somber highlights-qualities that would become hallmarks of his style. He achieved a sense of concentrated tragedy and a melancholy richness, a kind of twilight splendor that made his work unique and set him apart even from Rubens. This ability to evoke such emotion made Delacroix, though a follower of Veronese and Rubens, a truly modern artist-a painter who captured the inner life and the spirit of his own era.

After that, Delacroix regularly submitted works to the Salons. In 1827 alone, he sent a remarkable group of paintings, including "The Death of Sardanapalus," "The Death of Marino Faliero," "Faust in his Study," "Milton and his daughters," "The Combat of the Giaour and the Pasha," "A Young Turk Caressing his Horse," "A Wounded Roman Shepherd," and "Horses," as well as a still life. The public could also see his "Justinian Composing the Institutes," a state commission, at the Council of State in the Louvre. By the age of twenty-nine, Delacroix had fully developed his artistic vision and confidently expressed his preferences. He drew inspiration from grand poetic themes from around the world-Assyrian history, Venetian culture, German and English literature-everything interested him. He was especially drawn to the exotic.

In short, Delacroix rejected the entire aesthetic system of David, which he saw as a barrier to French artistic progress. He was even more dismissive of Le Brun's approach, which, under Roman influence, had interrupted the natural evolution of French Renaissance art. Instead, Delacroix looked to Rubens and the great Italian masters like Titian and Veronese, believing that color was the most important tool for expressing emotion. He chose his subjects from the worlds of foreign romanticism and history, which was a clear rejection of both academic tradition and the style of Ingres. Interestingly, Ingres himself was not fully embraced by the academics because of his realism and devotion to Raphael, nor by the Romantics, whom he distrusted and who found his quest for harmony at odds with their own ideals.(7)

I.2. North African Journey

Delacroix's journey to North Africa, came as part of a French diplomatic mission to Morocco with short visit to Algeria, was a reframing experience sustained his Orientalist and romantic art. January 1832 he joined Morocco diplomatic mission with Charles-Edgar de

Mornay's, pushed by the desire to escape European modernity and discover primitivity, similar to ancient Greece. The six months trip, included Tangier, Meknes, and Fez in Morocco, with brief visits to Oran and Algiers in Algeria, and a return via Spain's Andalusia.

In his journal Delacroix said:

"I only began to do something passable on my journey through Africa when I had forgotten enough of the small details to remember only the striking and poetic side of my paintings; until then, I was pursued by the love of accuracy, which most people take for truth." (Plat, et al. 246)

This passage underline the shift of Delacroix's perspective from perfectionist realism to orientalist and romantic approach, at first he was recording details obsessively ,such as customs and architecture , but north Africa taught him to prioritize what leaves a deep impression , confusing the mind with both beauty and fear , For instance, a poem with vivid, unexpected imagery , or a photograph that captures a moving moment with a fascinating composition, moreover he reveals his fear of losing the vitality of notes outside Morocco's, a concern tied to his Romantic preference for imagination over realism. This aligns with Orientalism's tendency to idealize the Orient as a emotional and sensory spectacle, as notable in paintings like Women of Algiers, where lush colors and mood trump precise ethnography. Gasse-Houle notes this as a transfiguration of memory by imagination.

Delacroix created seven sketchbooks, several watercolors besides notes that was the source for the inspiration of over 80 paintings, including Women of Algiers in Their Apartment (1834), Fanatics of Tangier (1838), and Sultan of Morocco (1845). His writings—notebooks, letters, and later articles—reveal an Orientalist lens, romanticizing the region's colors, customs, and vitality., depicting transient impressions of Morocco's "picturesque" culture—its people, costumes, and countryside. it reflects an Orientalist gaze, cataloging the exotic for later artistic use. Gasse-Houle emphasizes that these journals were the mean to start another

version of painting, a basic material for works like Jewish Wedding in Morocco 1839, (Houle 33, 34)

I.3. Moving to distinctive artistic identity (formation of the hero)

Between 1822 and 1831 is known to be the period that Delacroix fleshed out most of his important themes, motifs he shall return to during the course of his career. But little has been said about how these earlier pieces relate to one another. The paintings from this period by Delacroix are diverse, addressing literature, history, and the Bible. And very few have one well-defined protagonist—The Bark of Dante has its two main characters, considered it's the "protagonist" is well-defined, likewise The Massacre at Scio lacks a clearly defined protagonist.

This variety makes it impossible to provide a concise, thematic summary of Delacroix's work in the early period. There is connective tissue, sure, but it isn't through thematic duplication; it is through the vision, the evolution of vision, and a narratively marked evolutionary journey through searching and spreading. Even Baudelaire had argued that Delacroix's art really deals with "passion." Baudelaire famously wrote in his posthumous homage on Delacroix that his "morality" was about devastation and disaster, with everything "his canvas against the black monster of humanity in the midst of its brute sensations." Given such dark imagery, there is scant opportunity for optimism or a silver lining – just the survival of suffering. Baudelaire went so far as to liken Delacroix himself to Emerson's hero, someone who stands firm in the face of all pandemonium.

The figures of Tasso, and other Delacroix heroes, suggest a solitary and stony immobility in the face of disruption. But if we search for patterns among these earlier works, we see evolution, not just repetition. Each successive painting shows the hero both at odds with his maker, and at least gaining some artistic clarity from the experience. His sense of continuity

is apparent in the composition of his paintings, and can be traced in his preliminary sketches and journal notes.

Consider The Bark of Dante (1822); the central figures are in an absolute, obtrusive orbit held there by the radiance of light and shadow and the inter-relation of the forms. The two damned in the lower right are free as well, and act as an "anchor" for the main group. Taking the middle group as a closed figure, it is separated from the more vague, drifting background. The idea of drifting is further reinforced through the boat floating through a dark and threatening scape, as we lose our sense of people and sense of positive space; the very relationship between figure and ground. Because this orbit appears both triangulated and ovoid, yet is predicated on two overlapping diagonals, Dante and Virgil seem even more adrift on closer inspection. The arrangement itself appears to mirror Saturn's rings — circling, enclosing, and dividing the characters.

Now, one finds it useful to compare the way Delacroix worked to his forefathers, so to speak: David, Gros, Géricault. Delacroix, however, broke with David from the very beginning by not just himself but also simply making this clear and directly imitative choices, decisions made by Gros and Géricault, who had been strongly heir to his work - their paintings generally included one or very few figures. In the example of David's Brutus (1789) the isolating of the hero in the foreground is a new and shocking compositional device (brown 66).

II.The Allure of the East

II.1. Understanding Orientalism

In order to imagine the environment in which Delacroix delivers us images of orientals some grounding in the notion of Orientalism will be required. Which is more than a mere term for an audience attracted to things eastern; it is a paradigm through which the West has traditionally been perceiving, interpreting and in effect constructing its image of eastern cultures (MacKenzie 34). In his seminal Orientalism (1979), Edward Said has recorded this experience of Western power (3). emphasizing that this is not an innocent or objective construction, but a construction of Western power, imagination and ideology. Overlaying Surveying the apparently neutral and benevolent Orient across the Old World, one of the foundational texts of postcolonial study that cultural hegemony and colonial power were still embedded within scholarly discourse and looking through Said's lens also in reference to visual art, Linda Nochlin argues for the importance of orientalist paintings beyond style or genre. but from an angle almost entirely congruent with the temporal arc of the expansion of European political and cultural hegemony. (Nochlin 36).

Oriental imagery also served as pretext to European colonialism, These ideologies often operate in insidious manner, which is why the Orient is simultaneously held as knowable and unfathomable, in that Eastern societies are portrayed as exotic and inscrutable, dogged by an image that they are frozen outside of time and development, constantly suggesting through depictions that their inhabitants are invariably ruled by tyrants, thus reinforcing the idea of European guardianship what this meant is that Eastern societies were viewed in negative light dwelling upon their brutishness and licentiousness and keeping intact the ideas of Eastern irrationality and Western rationality, a pyramid of dominance lay somewhere beneath the conscious interpretative level, thereby paving way for the justification of colonial rule and European intervention. (Kabbani 24). Instead of enabling the categorization of Orientalist painting as an accurate/inaccurate, respectful/disrespectful representation, Said's framework acts as a strong organizing structure for negotiating reductive understandings of art and

culture from that period; it compels the scholar to react to the intersection of both faux objectivity and fantasy, aesthetic tradition overwhelming relationships, that formed Western visions of the East. (Nochlin 33).

Orientalism, as Said indicates, is not just a way of thinking but a manner of intellectual system which is produced and maintained through the policy of the occident, this framework includes not only articulated colonial rule and science, like Oriental studies but also literary and artistic writing contributed to a larger public image of life in the East (Said5). paintings like Delacroix's Women of Algiers worked within a much more extensive visual economy of Orientalist representation that encompassed everything your mind could ever crave from travel photography to world expos, This visual economy played a role in shaping and forming a specific image of The Orient that if not intentionally in someone else's interest, benefitted Western identity by allowing it (even if indirectly) to outweigh the image of the Other. (67).

Building on Said's idea, cultural theorist Homi Bhabha notes that the structures of Orientalist discourse "do not operate to construct fixed stereotypes, but in between sites of colonial fantasy and desire" (Bhabha 1994:163). The conflicting attitudes held towards the East can be glimpsed throughout the period's painters, whose work often years towards a tension between fear and fascination, revulsion and desire. Delacroix's paintings, for instance, represent both appreciation for the "nobility" and "dignity" of the Moroccan people, as well as a circumscribed kind of exoticism in appearance and practice. Elaborating on this concept in much like The Fanatics of Tangier (Bhabha 71) The 19th century saw momentum build behind a collective, western fascination with the Orient due to colonial expansion, new bricks of travel, and a growing appetite for the exotic and sensational As outlined in most histories of Orientalism, so many French colonies blossomed with the conquest of Algeria in 1830 both opening access to North Africa and providing the political rationale to do so that imperialist undertakings needed (MacKenzie 47).

the journey of to Morocco coincided with and provides political context for his art: Although, perhaps, Delacroix originally supported French colonial policy he did write a strongly worded travel log where he made it clear he recognized the merits of French individualism; nor can one expect the French Government to approve actions of once previous regime where there was no denying he was partaking in the cultural field associated with the European expansion. (Grigsby 87). It was a pivotal moment, in which Orientalist images such as all the paintings, prints, images and films started to be reproduced on a large scale. In these popular depictions, the East was simultaneously seen as mysterious, sultry, barbaric and Other. These images disseminated within popular culture through consumer goods and brought with them public opinion and a sense of knowledge and sovereignty (and by extension control/power) over the East (Benjamin 92).

As such The Orient becomes something of a blank slate on which Western desires, fears, and fantasy are written upon with little regards for what the realities of life in the eastern cultures may have been. It is the product of a cluster of symptomatic modalities, like hyperrealism, and blood and thunder. an image of an eternal moment of time and forward progression; and portraits of authoritarian political skeletons and fundamentalist zeal. These strategies were designed to depict the Orient as the 'other' in contrast to the West and to guarantee western self-images as rational, progressive, and balanced (Mitchell 118).

II.2. Orientalism sublime

Delacroix was uniquely attuned among the Romantic artists to the Sublime as expressed in such poetry as Byron. Delacroix confesses in his Journal that Byron's poetry remained in his mind and encouraged him to exercise his imagination and was perfectly suited to his artistic requirements (Delacroix p. He was particularly attracted to Byron's tragic works, raw scenes where great grief, anger, violence, and horror-moments the most intense and most perilous

passions of human life were portrayed. Most importantly, the images of men staring death, even death long ago, in the face or embroiled in existential struggle in Byron made a lasting impact on Delacroix. Delacroix was inspired by the subject of Byron's paintings: The Bride of Abydos; The Corsair; Lara; Sardanapalus; The Prisoner of Chillon; Don Juan; Marino Faliero; and Mazeppa. This conversation, however, is limited to his paintings of violence, death, and defeat featured in The Giaour, which Delacroix perceived to encapsulate the Oriental Sublime at the core of Byron's Eastern stories.

Now, before we can analyze the Sublime in the art of Byron and Delacroix, it will first be necessary to outline the theoretical criteria of the Sublime in reference to violent engagements with the self and the other. By doing so, I demonstrate in this chapter that Delacroix, who has often been seen as serving to illustrate the romanticism of Byron, was remarkably successful in identifying the Oriental Sublime in the terror and death, and defeat-defining images of helpless and irreversible encounters between self and other (Oueijan 16).

As Schiller explains, the self's fear of the unknown and of external, inhuman, violent powers, is part of the Sublime. The separation of self from other, the beginning of that fear, is what also leads to the nineteenth-century construct of the "exotic" to which people become addicted. This obsession resonates with the Oriental Sublime: it is a form of distance — distance between the observer (the exotic) and the exotic, the self and the other (118). Hence both exotic and Sublime experiences are preserved through the challenge of the Other; which we face via exciting or powerless discovery of alien reality, rather than partaking in it. This is how the self is able to remain separate from the other, extracting its own pleasure out of the exotic or Sublime.

Notice the connection between the Sublime and the exotic; exoticism is deeply rooted in Orientalism!! Oriental scenes as violence and terror that nineteenth-century Western viewers could only experience and relate the shock came also the exotic and the Oriental Sublime.

Delacroix's The Massacres of Chios (1824) represents art that scares viewers but protects them through a "protective but transparent barrier" and one of Hinnant's primary examples. Injustice becomes apparent to the viewer, and ignorance of such evil poses a threat to us vulnerable to the ruins of inner evil under veneer beauty (Hinnant134, 135). As Delacroix himself wrote, the terrible is — like charm — a natural gift in the arts but it "must never be abused" (. 369). The Sublime, he describes, as "the most lofty; whole; perfect, of the most complete, most finished" (391). Both subject and medium need to be effective in arousing the deepest feelings possible in the viewer, for Delacroix, art, at least great art, is not about beauty but about the highest truths. Genuine beauty, he famously asserted, is "truth conversed" (442). So, forget about the visual beauty for a nobler cause: Truth. This imposition of a critical, shocking Truth upon the viewer is what generates the experience of the Sublime itself (119).

Delacroix liked people in extreme situations, caught in inevitable and often self made conflicts. His colour palette is bright and vivid, reflecting the quick action and dramatics that he choose to illustrate. His use of these dark, muted tones conjures that sense of the powerful pull of terror, and that force of death, that is unique to his work as an Orientalist painter (Stevans 20); contrasting with the "brilliant, explosive colours" (Stevans 20) enjoyed by his predecessors. The Orient, to Delacroix, was more than a carnival of light and beauty, it was a world in which the richly primal emotions and conflicts of mankind played out. His goal was to expose his audience to a universe steeped in the sinister horror that emerges when humanity is confronted with the naked truths of savagery and the unsettling mysteries of existence and extinction.

As in Byron, Delacroix sought to dislodge the viewer, to displace their comfort, to stir them — to bring the viewer face to face with overwhelming impotent horror and disgust. Hinnant goes on to say that this sensation is vital to the Sublime because he makes us view

the landscape as a power so enormous that all of our power is very little when by itself (Schiller 120).

III. Synopsis of "The Death of Sardanapalus (Historical background)

III.1. The Legend of Sardanapalus: myth and reality

Ancient Assyria, based in Northeastern Iraq, was an incredibly complex state with deep bureaucratic organization as well as an imperial power that found itself almost perpetually at war with its neighbors. Its cultural reach extended all the way to present-day Cyprus and Armenia and beyond the borders of the region. The period from the second millennium BCE to the seventh century BCE was one in which Assyria vied with other major powers for preeminence, including Hittites, Egyptians, Medes, Elamites, and — above all — Babylonians, long Assyria's closest hereditary enemies both on the battlefield and in the cultural arena.

The Neo-Assyrian period (911–612 BCE) witnessed the desire of the empire to extend its hegemony over the Levant, acquiring lands formerly occupied by the Israelites and Egyptians. Assyrian military campaigns against Egypt, Elam, and Babylon (which had been under Assyrian control since 745 BCE) under the last great Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal (c. 669–630 BCE) Nevertheless, soon after the death of Ashurbanipal, the empire fell into a rapid decline and was conquered in 612 BC by a coalition of Medes and Babylonians. (Sarha 3.4)

Ashurbanipal (669–c.627 BC): The final king of the Assyrian Empire, identified in the Bible as "the great and honorable Asnapper" (Ezra 4:10). Sardanapalus—his Greek name—was the most extraordinary of ancient kings here: literate, his reign a high-point of Assyrian

culture. But what has baffled him in particular does not appear filled with words — the last few years of his life and how he died. Only fifteen years after his death, in 612 b.c.e., the Assyrian capital of Nineveh (modern-day near Mosul, Iraq) was captured and destroyed by the Medes under Napobalassar, and the empire collapsed. (Cochran 1)

And that all might have made perfect sense to one of the greatest kings in history, but it meant nothing to the Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus (90-30 BC) This was not the careful approach of Thucydides, who attempted to verify every fact. In the forty-book Bibliotheca Historica ("Historical Library"), he gives the following tabloid description of "Sardanapallos":Sardanapallus, the thirtieth in descent from Ninus, the founder of the empire [husband of Semiramis, whom she murdered], and the last king of the Assyrians, exceeded all his ancestors in effeminacy and luxury.

To say nothing of the fact that he was scarcely noticed by any man who lived outside the palace, he dwelt in the fashion of a woman, and amid his harem and the dashing of purple and the rest of the finest wool, he had taken on the apparel of femininity, and from plenty of powders had made his visage and in fact all his body much whiter than any woman who fed herself with luxury; he had moistened all over with the avaricious scents of courtesans to the point that it appeared softer than that of any woman nesting in a lap of luxury. And he went so far as to make his voice like a woman and at his drinking parties both to drink and to eat those things which are pleasure-giving, but also to chase the pleasures of love, with men and with women, for he indulged in both kinds of intercourse without the least concern for the blame resulting from such behaviour. He indulged himself in luxury and in the most immodest sensual pleasure and intemperance to that excess, that he wrote and purposed a dirge for his funeral, and ordered also his successors to the throne, that it should be engraven upon his sepulcher after his death (Siculus23-27).

All previous assumptions of Assyrian kingship were overthrown by Sardanapalus. Diodorus Siculus gives the most colorful account of the life of Harpalos in his palace: "He did not leave the palace, but spent his time beside their concubines, bedecked as a woman and painted (his face)" (Diodorus Siculus 2.27.2). Sardanapalus' characterization plays up traits that would have been especially transgressive for Greek characters: gender nonnormative, removed from the physical world, and haunted by concern for the body. As classical scholar Dominique Lenfant puts it, "this description is emblematic of Greek concerns around eastern luxury and gender inversion rather than authentic Assyrian history" (117).

The revolt of his generals bring the sordid narrative to its tragic climax, inviting Sardanapalus's response. Upon sensing defeat is unavoidable, the king chooses a very raucous form of suicide, building a great pyre in his palace and immolating himself, his concubines and servants, and his symbols and riches. Whether or not the event was historically accurate, it took on a huge weight in subsequent accounts. As the literary scholar Emily Wilson analyzes in her commentary on the text, "the destruction of Sardanapalus is both the ultimate act of hedonistic consumption — consuming his own flesh and all of his possessions, not merely in the space of the imagination — and some kind of twisted masculine rebellion in the face of implicit defeat" (Wilson 87).

At least in this final act, the density of meaning is what makes the Sardanapalus story so alluring for Romantic artists and writers, who are invariably drawn to elements of sensuality, violence, and psychological extremity. Byron reframes the king in his play Sardanapalus from 1821 as a kind of early Romantic, his debauchery readable as a philosophic protest against society. As the literary scholar Andrew Elfenbein writes, "[Byron's] Sardanapalus takes the classical trope of Oriental effeminacy and turns it inside out: the king's sensitivity and sensuality become not vices but virtues, a critique of masculine militarism" (Elfenbein 132).

III.2. Byron's *Sardanapalus* as Source Material: Summary of the play

Lord Byron's Sadanapalus tells the dramatic story of Sadanapalus, the last king of Assyria, a ruler who prioritized peace, pleasure, and personal happiness over war and conquest (Farivar et al., p. 16). Although he was married and had a son, he was most closely associated with a wise and courageous Greek slave, Myrrha. Myrrha was more than a lover; she embodied Western rationality and frequently challenged Sadanapalus to face the realities and responsibilities of a leader (p. 20).

Sadanapalus's gentle yet indulgent lifestyle was criticized from the beginning by his brother-in-law, Salamenes. Salamenes warned that neglect of royal duties and a life of luxury would breed apathy and provoke rebellion among the people, exposing the king to internal and external threats (p. 18). Despite these warnings, Sadanapalus persisted in ruling with kindness and rejected violence and harsh punishments. He believed that kindness and tolerance would win the loyalty of his people. But his trust was misused. Two governors, Arbaces and Beleses, secretly conspired against him. Salamenes urged Sardanapalus to take decisive action, but the king, true to his ideals, refused to believe her guilt and released her. This act of mercy only further encouraged the conspirators, who soon launched a full-scale uprising to overthrow the king's rule (p. 19).

by the intensity of the rebellion, Sardanapalus must face the aftermath of his philosophy. He leads his army into battle and initially achieves some success, but the rebels are determined and the situation in the capital, Nineveh, becomes increasingly unstable (p. 22). Sardanapalus's hesitation to use force and his lack of political wisdom degraded his authority. Citizens, whom he often calls "slaves," begin to recognize his legitimacy as king, reflecting the breakdown of the relationship between the king and his people(p. 23).

The drama reaches its climax when the rebels break through the city's defenses. Sadhanapalas recognizes his inevitable defeat and decides to die on his own terms. He builds

a pyre in the palace and dies in the fire along with Myrrha, who refuses to leave his side (p. 20).

III.3.Analysis of lord byron's Sardanapalus

Sardanapalus embodied something of a Byronic hero-someone sensitive, imaginative, but often swayed more by emotion than rationality. Set in ancient Assyria, the play itself follows the course of a day in dramatic rather than historical time, compressing the fall of the kingdom into the classical tragedy convention of a single-day timeframe.

The article begins by portraying Sardanapalus as a king who is detached from the actual obligations of governing. He has a taste for the pleasures of life, and is soft and even somewhat effeminate, which is atypical for a king who should be strong and firm (Farivar et al p. 16). As noted in the article, critics such as Wolfson and Poole argue that the way Sardanapalus is presented - in flowing garments and surrounded by women and slaves - subverts the archetype of the strong, masculine sovereign. His desires are more focused on pleasure and self-interest than the arduous process of governance and maintaining his own kingdom (p. 17).

The heart of the article is its application of Hegel's master-slave dialectic to the play's relationships. According to Hegel, the roles of master and slave are shaped by a struggle for recognition: the master depends on the slave to confirm his status, while the slave gains self-awareness through serving and enduring hardship (p. 17). In Sardanapalus, this dynamic is seen in the king's interactions with three main groups: Myrrha (his lover and slave), Salemenes (his brother-in-law and advisor), and the citizens of Assyria (p. 18).

Sardanapalus' relationship with Myrrha is mostly significant. depending emotionally dependent on her, to the extent of admitting that he would rather lose his empire than her (p. 19). The slave Myrrha, despite being a caged, is portrayed as intelligent, courageous, and

confident. She often urges Sardanapalus to accept his duties as king, telling him that sometimes one must be in awe of the ruler to be effective. In fact, in their relationship, Myrrha holds the real power, guiding Sardanapalus to a better understanding of himself and pushing him to face the realities he is escaping from (p. 20).

Salmenes, on the other hand, is loyal to Sardanapalus but also critical of his leadership style. He warns the king that neglecting his duties and showing excessive tolerance will only encourage rebellion and undermine his authority. The forthrightness and rationality of Salmenes are the opposite of Sardanapalus' indecisiveness. The article shows that the master-servant relationship between them is not fixed; it changes as both characters strive for recognition and struggle for their own identities (p. 21).

Sardanapalus calls his people "slaves", beliving that maintaining them with luxury and peace is quite enough but he does not truly understand their needs. he fails to realize that they also require justice, security, and strong leadership. As the rebellion against him raises, Sardanapalus is forced to confront his own shortcomings and the consequences of his decisions. He slowly realizes that his authority means nothing if his people do not accept him as the legitimate king (p. 22).

In the final part of the play, Sadhanapala's self-realization deepens further. He tries to protect his family and Myrrha, and when failure is inevitable, he chooses to die on his own terms. He builds a pyre in the palace and dies with Myrrha as the city collapses (p. 20). This final act is both the fulfillment of his destiny and his final act of personal action, even as everything collapses.

IV. Literary Themes in Byron's Sardanapalus

IV.1. East versus West Cultural Dichotomy

One of the most notable elements of the cultural dichotomy between East and West depicted in Byronic tragedy Sardanapalus lies in the playwright's explicit contrast of sets of cultural values that reveal both the political climate of Byron's day and fundamental concerns regarding cultural identity. It simultaneously reinforces stereotypical European notion of the East as cowardly, effeminate, and morally enervated (Sardanapalus) and of the West as courageous, active, and morally strong (Myrrha), while at the same time challenging those same Western notions of cultural superiority.

From historical Assyrian kings to mythical legend, the move from the specific to the fantastic illuminates the ways in which cultural distance and ethnocentric perspectives guided the interpretation of the East by the West, starting with Greek historians such as Herodotus in the fifth century BC, whose fictions created in rhetoric were attempts less at the difficult task of understanding than at the easier task of continuing to express, in terms of familiar and comforting tropes of cultural distance and estrangement, bewilderment faced with cultural differences presented to an "eastern other. Mesopotamian despots, like the Greeks, were artistically depicted as decadent, venal, effete rulers who had ruined their Empires, Mesopotamian models for Greeks who brutally created their own radically different political organization by establishing Athenian "Democracy" in the 5th century BC (roza 330) This model demonstrates the fictional melding of three distinct Assyrian kings—Ashurbanipal, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, and Sîn-šar-iškun—into the Greek constructed legend of Sardanapalus, which would survive for millennium (pp328-330)

Sardanapalus has its roots in the Romantic obsession with the differences between Eastern and Western values, a subject that runs through the play as it does through Byron's

life and his campaign on behalf of Greek independence from the Ottomans. The tragedy marks the exotic Sardanapalus as an allegorical figure of "Oriental" luxury, physical enjoyment, and love of peace opposed to characters like Myrrha and Salemenes who exemplify the "Western" traits of bravery, activity, and self-sacrifice. This division is not just a literary tool but an expression of the politics of Byron's period, during which the theme of freedom and nationhood was dominant throughout Europe and here – most significantly – was the land where Byron himself lost his life whilst fighting for liberation (Koçi 2–3).Byron's role reversal of the ancien régime source (Diodorus Siculus) is significant: whereas the Greek historian deprecated Sardanapalus's lack of virility and luxury, Byron privileges his pacifism and his contempt for warfare (Schmiesing 6) This is, indeed, what Sardanapalus himself states:

"*Eat, drink, and love; the rest's not worth a fillip."* (Act I, Scene II.15)

When Salemenes urges him to emulate his warlike ancestors, Sardanapalus retorts:

"Oh, thou wouldst have me doubtless set up edicts—
'Obey the king—contribute to his treasure—
Recruit his phalanx—spill your blood at bidding—
Fall down and worship, or get up and toil.'
...I leave such things to conquerors; enough
For me, if I can make my subjects feel
The weight of human misery less, and glide
Ungroaning to the tomb: I take no license
Which I deny to them. We all are men." (Act I, Scene II.15)

This passage encapsulates Byron's radical reimagining of kingship, contrasting the "Eastern" model of despotic conquest with an idealized, almost utopian, vision of benevolent rule (Koçi

6). Myrrha's Greek identity and her conflicted love for Sardanapalus further reinforce the cultural tension:

"Why do I love this man? My country's daughters

Love none but heroes. But I have no country!

The slave hath lost all save her bonds. I love him;

And that's the heaviest link of the long chain—

To love whom we esteem not." (Act I, Scene II.27)

Byron's own death in Greece solidified his image as a Romantic martyr for Western liberty, intertwining his personal myth with the East-West theme of the play (Koçi, p. 4–5)1. The play thus becomes a meditation on the limits and possibilities of power, filtered through the East-West divide (Schmiesing, p. 6)

IV.2. Gender Roles and Effeminacy as Imperial Weakness

The tragedy engages in a detailed exploration of the nature of "manhood," and in doing so potentially subverts the masculine ideal in its satirical depiction of Sardanapalus as a kind of effete modern "man," in that he aesthetically appears stereotypically feminine with a feminine voice, and having renounced martial activity, seems more interested in women than "men"). From the beginning of the play, we learn that Sardanapalus is "effeminately clad, with a garland of flowers on his head, and his Robe flowing negligently; [...] having a Train of Women and a number of young Slaves" (Schmiesing 23), therefore establishing his femininity from the very start. While the Byronic hero is characterized by emotionality, day dreaming, and impulse, his gender reversals are utilized both to develop his character on a personal level

and, on a larger scale, to criticize the impotency of the imperial, which was threatened by people who diverged from established gender norms, male and female alike (16-17).

William Hazlitt calls effeminacy "the pre-eminence of the sensibility over the will," and Susan J. Wolfson defines Sardanapalus as, as an "effeminate character," producing not only a politics of evasion but also a pampered, aristocratic, effeminate hero (Wolfson86). The feminine qualities of the king are depicted not merely as individual eccentricities but as symptomatic of larger imperial malaise, directly relating to the fallibility of the empire and the ultimate downfall of the empire, with the king's failure to fulfill traditional masculine roles as warrior and man-of-action. His climax as the effiminate of queens arrives when he is forced to "take on some masculine duties," exposing the constant contradiction between his nature and his duties as monarch.

The second theme is gender subversion connected to larger issues of political authority and legitimacy, wherein Sardanapalus inherits kingship through hereditary hierarchy, but has no conscious acknowledgment of royal identity and duties (farrivar 19-21). The confusion of what governance is and the needs of the people versus the responsibilities of nobility — inherited privilege versus earned authority lead him to no small awakening to his weakness. Gradually as he becomes aware of responsibility for his actions and the honor of his position he begins to understand better the impossibility of position and the weight described by various metaphors throughout the work. This self-actualisation leads to the realisation of his true nature and inescapable attributes and ultimately to his own view of his contempt from others and immolation. Byron's investigation into gender identity and implications of power emanates from his sources, especially Diodorus Siculus, who has the king dwell with women, dress as and utter with a soft voice and attire in a fashion that would be deemed fair of a Greek man (roza330)

Sardanapalus of Byron is a stinging evocation of gender and masculine sexuality, where the king's effeminacy constitutes a dramatic tension and an imperial symptom of failure. In “Sardanapalus and Gender: The Question of Sexuality and Gender in Byron and Delacroix,” Stacey Schmiesing observes that Byron's king is described as "dressed in female habit, his head crowned with flowers and his Robe negligently flowing; attended by a Train of Women and young Slaves" (Schmiesing 23). The image, from Diodorus Siculus, gets a new life in Byron: the pacifism and sensualism of Sardanapalus forms a loftier and more human creed, When Salemenes urges Sardanapalus to take up arms, the king resists:

“Must I consume my life—this little life—
In guarding against all may make it less?
It is not worth so much! It were to die
Before my hour, to live in dread of death,
Tracing revolt; suspecting all about me,
Because they are near; and all who are remote,
Because they are far.”
(Act II, Scene I. 31)

Byron’s inversion of the classical source is clear: what Diodorus condemned, Byron admires. The king’s refusal to shed blood, even when betrayed, is a mark of his tragic nobility:

“I thought to have made mine inoffensive rule
An era of sweet peace ‘midst bloody annals,
A green spot amidst desert centuries,
On which the future would turn back and smile,

And cultivate, or sigh when it could not

Recall Sardanapalus' golden reign."

(Act IV 87)

Yet, as the rebellion grows, Sardanapalus's effeminacy becomes a political liability, and his inability to act decisively leads to catastrophe, a classic Romantic meditation on the tragic consequences of virtue in a corrupt world (Schmiesing 23,24).

IV.3. Imperial Decline and Moral Decadence

Byron's narrative of the fall of the Assyrian empire shows such decline to be the result of moral rot and overindulgence in luxury, a lesson in history and admonition which brilliantly exposed how empires decay when leaders become more interested in sensations than in the ground of their responsibility toward a commonwealth. This theme of decline is dramatically represented in Sardanapalus's life of pleasure, with its "long loves and banquets and down cushions," as a metonym for widespread moral decay that is destructive of the conditions in which laws can be well-kept (Roza331). The end of the tragedy, in the burning of Nineveh, is the culmination of this theme and by a deliberate burning of his own palace Sardanapalus, rather than defending his realm, opts for spectacular suicide, his political defeat being transfigured into a last triumph of aestheticism.

This historical shift effortlessly bridges the three historical Assyrian kings (Ashurbanipal, Šamaš-šumu-ukin, and Sîn-šar-iškun) who were melded into the mythological Sardanapalus figure revealing the Greek potent myth-making that would be sustained for centuries to come (Roza 328-330). The dispute between Ashurbanipal and Šamaš-šumu-ukin, and especially the struggle of Babylon that lasted more than two years and resulted in the city's burning, provided a historical frame for the mythical story of the destruction of the

empire through civil war (329). This family feud steeped in sadness and grief would permanently brand the Western imagination, gathering multiple contributions to its narrative until it finally reached the West's romanticist brain during its imperialist days in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Sardanapalus by Byron is a verse drama: it is tragic in the sense that it has a serious subject, it is grand such as exhibits human greatness, and it is romantic such as it is a product of the romantic spirit. The dramatic style, compared with narrative style, it has unique traits and skills, and the entire story was administered character-versus-character dialogue by the language (Conventional shapes in this regard are dialogue, monologue, or both, with what is perhaps the most noticeable performances of the soliloquy, "a passage “in which a character in a novel or drama is alone and directs his thoughts to the audienceIndeed, it is through the soliloquies Byron articulates the motivations and thoughts of the character, particularly in Sardanapalus final speech in which he transforms his death into “a light to lesson ages, rebel nations, and voluptuous prince” (Mutlaq 306-307)

In Sardanapalus, moral decadence and imperial decline are intricately entwined. While Byron's king rules over a court of opulence and sensuality, his abdication of traditional kingly responsibilities, which include fighting wars and delivering punishment, diminishes any real claim to power. Both the rebellion that brings Nineveh to ruin and Nineveh's ruin itself are actual and figurative consequences of this decadence (Schmiesing 6).
In many ways, the structure of the playis also reminiscent of Greek tragedy, and Sardanapalus emerges as a tragic hero, falling because of his own virtues as much as his crimes (Van Kooy 80). As his city crumbles around him, he wonders why his people are so *ungrateful:*

"Oh, men! ye must be ruled with scythes, not sceptres,

And mow'd down like the grass, else all we reap

Is rank abundance and a rotten harvest

Of discontents infecting the fair soil,

Making a desert of fertility."(Act IV.90)

The final act of self-immolation is both a rejection of humiliation and an assertion of agency in the face of inevitable defeat:

". . . and the light of this

Most royal of funeral pyres shall be

Not a mere pillar formed of cloud and fame,

A beacon in the horizon for a day

And then amount of ashes—but a light

To lesson ages, rebel nation, and

Voluptuous princes." (Act V, I, 73. 307)

IV.4. Love, Sacrifice, and Transcendent Devotion

Sardanapalus's dynamic with Myrrha highlights such issues as romantic love overcoming social class differences, and power play within relationships. Their connection, despite their disparate social conditions—king and slave—becomes the tragedy's moral focus, his own filiation towards her finding its climax in the fact that he dies like a Polar hero, myrrha in person, at her side, and that their love, instead of being crude desire like Andromaque's, is instead a self-sacrifice, since it transcends mere sexuality and is able to reach a higher degree on the scale of human devotion. (Mutlaq 307).

strictly political story. The private and the public collide when personal lives inform public events, and a shared death elevates personal tragedy to mythic dimension. Myrrha also evinces motherly instinct as she hovers over the king's bed after he awakes from a bad dream, revealing woman as a rock upon which man is allowed to rest his troubled head, a support upon which he may lean and which bears his weight in certain moments of his life (Schmiesing 12). This moment illustrates the dichotomy that exists within their relationship, a relationship where gender roles are both upheld and reversed in the rest of the play.

the rivalry for Myrrha's love was destructive, showing personal relationships to be enmeshed in the political (Roza 333). This motif reaches its climax in the last scene when Myrrha sets the funeral pyre on fire, thereby indicating her and Sardanapalus' ultimate devotion and by the same token overcoming the defeats in the political sphere (332) philosophical core. Their love transcends social boundaries, but is also shadowed by political turmoil and personal doubt. Myrrha's devotion is unwavering, even as she recognizes the king's flaws:

"He loves me, and I love him; the slave loves

Her master, and would free him from his vices.

If not, I have a means of freedom still,

And if I cannot teach him how to reign,

May show him how alone a King can leave

His throne." (Act I, Scene II.27)

In the play's final moments, Myrrha chooses to die with Sardanapalus rather than survive him, lighting the pyre that will consume them both—a supreme act of Romantic love and sacrifice: "I've lit the lamp which lights us to the stars." (Act V 110).This act elevates their deaths from mere defeat to mythic transcendence, embodying the Romantic ideal of love as a force that defies even death (Schmiesing, p. 24

Conclusion

This chapter analyses The Death of Sardanapalus as a central image of the articulation between Romanticism and Orientalism and the complex interrelation between art, literature and ideology. By examining Delacroix's life and artistic evolution in relation to the persona and mythology surrounding Byron's Sardanapalus, the study has established how Delacroix shaped his unique artistic persona, which opposed the neoclassical strictures and occupied the field of the painterly possibilities of color, movement, and emotional energy.

One of the primary discoveries is that Delacroix's painting isn't simply an illustration of Byron's play, but is a radical reimagining of it, one that hypostatizes and inverts the play's themes. If Byron's Sardanapalus is a brooding post-hero, Delacroix's king surveying the massacre in his palace is a model of detached indifference that suggests, in its randomness and unaccountability, the real nature of power and control. With its composition and color scheme tending to overload the senses, the painting cultivated a Sublime sense of the simultaneous attraction to and terror inspired by images of violence and excess (Fraser 322; Delacroix, Journal 40).

Feminist and psychological perspectives further enrich the analysis and show how the painting's gendered violence and emotional intensity resonate with contemporary questions about representation, trauma, and the politics of the gaze. The murdered women in The Death of Sadhanapalas are not merely decorative objects, but central figures in the painting's

critique of patriarchy. The king's psychological distance and the viewer's voyeuristic stance invite reflection on the ethics of representation and how art can challenge and reinforce social hierarchies (Schmiesing 67; Nochlin 43).

There are broader implications to this work that reach beyond Delacroix and Romanticism. By showing how art and literature interact to create cultural stories, the study leads the way to new interdisciplinary research. Future studies could emphasize the psychological aspects of Delacroix's paintings, as trauma, dissociation and the Sublime are dominant themes in their production and reception. Comparative research, too, could address how non Western artists have responded and recast Orientalist subjects, through critiquing Eurocentric paradigms and contributing to the expansion of our understanding of the historyof global art.

Chapter two: Analysis of the painting Themes and Artistic Interpretation

Introduction

The beginning of nineteenth was an era of fundamental transformation in European art and culture, its perceived a rise of Romanticism and a consistent shift in the practices of visual and literary representation. In the same context, Eugène Delacroix's works stood as crucial contributions to the evolution of French painting, embodying the tensions and aspirations of a

period seeking to break free from the constraints of neoclassical tradition. Delacroix's canvas, The Death of Sardanapalus (1827), take a place as a focal point for examining the interplay between artistic innovation, literary inspiration, and the broader ideological currents of the time.

This chapter investigates The Death of Sardanapalus as a complex piece of art, and Orientalism converge, Delacroix's painting reimagines the legendary last king of Assyria in a moment of spectacular destruction and self-immolation. While Byron's play presents Sardanapalus as a tragic, introspective figure—an alternative to the traditional heroic ideal—Delacroix's visual interpretation amplifies the themes of violence, sensuality, and chaos, transforming the drama into a tableau of emotional and moral ambiguity (Fraser 322; Nochlin 42–43).

Through close visual analysis, the study explores how the painting's composition, color, and brushwork create a "sensory pandemonium" that overwhelms the viewer and mirrors the moral disorder of the scene ,The research also considers the political and social implications of this spectacle, situating the painting within the context of post-Revolutionary France and the anxieties surrounding royal authority and the collapse of traditional power structures.

Further interrogates the painting's relationship to Orientalism, drawing on the frameworks of Edward Said, , and others. Delacroix's use of an Orientalist setting. replete with exotic luxury, violence, and eroticism—serves both to distance and to dramatize the themes of power and desire at play. The study explores how the painting participates in Western fantasies of the "East," while also reflecting contemporary debates about colonialism, gender, and the politics of representation (Said 3). Accordingly the exsistance of intervisuality in the painting in context of orientalism .

Finally, the reception and legacy of The Death of Sardanapalus, tracing its journey from scandal and controversy at the 1827 Salon to its later recognition as a masterpiece of modern

art. The paper incorporates feminist and intersectional readings that reveal new layers of meaning related to gender, race, and the ethics of spectatorship (Schmiesing 67).

By weaving together these methodological strands, the introduction establishes the research questions and objectives: How does Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus reinterpret Byron's literary themes within the visual language of Romanticism and Orientalism? What does the painting reveal about the cultural anxieties and aspirations of its time, particularly regarding gender, power, and the representation of the "Other"? And how the critical reception of the painting evolved under the changeof sensibility in both politics and art ?

Through a combining of visual analysis, contextual research, and theoretical reflection, this chapter aims to illuminate the enduring significance of Delacroix's masterpiece—not only as a product of its historical moment but as a work that continues to provoke debate and inspire new interpretations in the present.

I.Visual Analysis of "The Death of Sardanapalus

But there was a moment that Delecroix had chosen that was classic: after all, the legend was all about the death of Sardanapalus and the manner of that death. The title of the painting itself, La Mort de Sardanapale, tells you enough—Sardanapalus is not dead yet but Delacroix depicts the king contemplating the fate that he knows is about to befall him. Delacroix somehow crystallizes the so-called "most fecund moment" that Lessing talks about—folding past, present, and future into a single tableau, the court's bygone debauchery, the slaughter underway, and the smoke of Nineveh's impending fall rising against the city's ramparts (Zanetta p. 128). Sardanapalus looks towards a world which like, him as a ruin shortly joining it.

By choosing to exhibit this carnage, Delacroix was able to violate the conventional rules of both decency and artistic presentation. With Sardanapalus, he further developed his aesthetic philosophy, to a degree that was previously unexposed to his work like The Braque of Dante (1822) and The Massacres at Chios (1824). The painting's extravagance, its rejection of neoclassical style, the cruelty of the scene, its sexual undertones, and the violent coloring all contribute to its status as a kind of statement against formal art. The response was significant: the critic called it " possessed", " wild," and "mad." These same words were applied to both Delacroix and Sardanapalus, as if the artist's art were as extravagant as the monarch's actions (129).

The color and composition of the painting is essential to the painting's influence. Even with the smoke and darkness, red and gold are the dominant colors: the sheets, the turbans, the horse's bridle, all of them serve as a guide to the viewer's eye while the background is still lit. Blood and fire are implied, but never directly demonstrated; the wounds are depicted with delicacy, and the smoke alone suggests an inferno. The red sheets serve as a diffuse source of color, this creates the impression of a "lake of blood" according to Baudelaire. The body's luminous nature, the combination of beauty and horror, and the interplay of romantic and mortuary tension (Eros and Thanatos) all contribute to the controversy and intense discussion that followed the painting (p. 130).

The composition is inherently complex and mutable. The gestures, lighting, and figure cascading create a organized chaos that is choreographed. The viewer, who is looking from a higher position, appears to be suspended directly on the logs of the pyre, without having to distance themselves from the unfolding story. The area is permeated by violence, but there is still a perceivable structure: Sardanapalus's head, located at the top of the bed, is the place where all of the diagonals intersect. He functions as both the narrative and formal apex: the still eye in the storm, the source of action and judgment (p. 130).

In terms of symbolic meaning, Sardanapalus's position—his head hanging off his hand—reminisces to mind classic images of sadness. The painting combines opposing concepts: passive acceptance and active enjoyment, despondency and a strange form of pleasure. Delacroix's diary admits these variations in his personal nature- periods of profound sadness that are interspersed with bursts of fiery energy. The painting, based on the legend, functions as a kind of memory enhancer, increasing the story's impact and making it more profound. Delacroix described the legend of Sardanapalus as being similar to the impossible joys that only come in dreams, he also had a memory of a different life. After all the drama, sadness and romanticism have returned as a result of the destruction of the past, just as the remnants of Troy are left to demonstrate the glorious past. Delacroix's concept, as well as his painting, demonstrates the conflict between beauty and destruction, forgetting and commemorating (p.132).

To respond to this argument, "The Death of Sardanapalus" poses as an emotional spectacle which you would think of as an all at once facade that incites the harshest responses through its theatrical, sensual and violent display. Delacroix provides "a literal theatre of representation" through composition, color and the placement of bodies that Said calls "a bounded stage" that "preserves the representational theatre of the Orientalist work." in Fraser 333). Presented through this high-drama staging, the history is not merely told as a bare fact, but illustrated in dramatic theater, giving viewers the obsessive, intoxicating feel of being plunged into the emotional experience of the scene.

It starts with the way the painting organises its space and continues into its dramatic nature. Delacroix stages the scene, as if from an audience seat at a dramatic performance. The colossal bed is in the center stage, a raised platform, above the cacophony of mortals below with bodies posed similar to a tragic play. This vertiginous configuration produces, according to Fraser, the "theatrical quality of the postures" that are "staged vignettes" that appear to her

"more melodrama than moral tragedy" (326). The individualized placement of bodies across the scene directs the viewer's gaze through the story like blocking in theatrical performance.

Sardanapalus himself is in the psychologically difficult position of both participant and spectator of this tragic spectacle. Commencing from his raised cot, he watches with almost dispassionate detachment the ruin he has called for. His nonchalant spectatorship evokes that of the onlooker of the artwork, thereby crating an uncomfortable complicity between the gazing king and our gazing selves, a phenomenon that has been noted by art historians. The painting implicates viewers as much as it offers aesthetic pleasure, providing a dual role that bolsters its unsettling emotional effect.

This combination of sensuality and violence gives much of "The Death of Sardanapalus" emotional punch. Throughout the entire surface of the canvas, Delacroix establishes an uneasy mix of sensual exhibitionism and violent slaughter which dares the viewer to consider the relationship between desire and violence. A number of women feature either in varying degrees of undress or a display of physical impotence, but for the viewer, the female body becomes both an object of visual fixation, and the sight of violence enfolds and distorts the feminine form. Fraser writes that "the opposition and conjunction of allusions to violence and femininity" persist throughout the piece; "red wound-like streaks" serve as "a visual analogue to the theme of violence" (332).

This attention to emotional extremes reflects an aspect of Delacroix's own Romantic sensibility in the painting. Instead of expressing feelings by the restrained, heroic counts of the Neoclassical painters, Delacroix embraces human emotion in all its aspects: dread and suffering, sensuous pleasure, and resignation. The faces of the dying women are a blend of pure terror and agony, while Sardanapalus, in contrast has a highly-complicated expression of both pleasure, sadness and indifference. The emotional spectrum results in a psychological complexity that was rare in period history painting.

Another key element of the emotional fulcrum of "The Death of Sardanapalus" is its monumental scale. With dimensions of just under 4 × 5 meters, the canvas overawes the viewer much as does attending a theatrical production. That scale makes it necessary to interact with the work, to move in to scrutinize details and to move back to see the whole, a viewing situation that parallels the interplay between audience and performance in live theater.

This exuberance, precisely, disturbed the critics of the time. The aged Auguste Jal admitted that "M. Delacroix is not mistaken; he painted his Sardanapalus in earnest; he abandoned himself to it, piteously, passionately, and--unluckily... to excess.... He wished to compose disorder, and he omitted to remember that disorder itself is logical" (Jal 312-13). Yet, this critique does inadvertently point to the emotional rhythm fundamental to the painting: a will to swamp the rational with perceptual and affective impulses.

Given the period was Restoration France, that increased emotion has political implications. The Bourbons themselves were enacting extravagant politic ceremonies of legitimation, the most famous being that of Charles X in 1825 which was filled with extravagant pomp and circumstance intended to reaffirm monarchical power. Delacroix's devastation of royal power culminating in a spectacular destruction performs a criticism of performances of power implicit to such spectacles. As noted by Fraser, "The Death of Sardanapalus," both addresses "the symbolic challenges of coming to terms with revolutionary regicide, and the recent death of Louis XVIII in 1824" (320). In staging the monarchy as tragic spectacle, Delacroix creates an aesthetic that poses awkward questions about the sustainability of restored royal power in the aftermath of the Revolution.

Finally, the painting turns history into visual drama, providing the image with what Timothy Mitchell identifies as an "'external reality' of modern Europe—the most familiar

object of its display" (Mitchell 423). Delacroix thus uses this theatrical framing to imagine the Orient itself as a stage set for European fantasies of excess, violence, and tragedy.

II.Themes in Painting

II.1.The Feminine Mystique: Gender / Power in The Death of Sardanapalus

Eugène Delacroix The Death of Sardanapalus is not merely a fever dream of blood and pigment, it's also one of the great essays on gender, power, and agency. On the surface, the artwork seems to reinforce the patriarchal structure present in its original text: women are arranged as objects for male enjoyment and as victims of male violence, their destinies merely the result of the king's last, lethal command. And while this is part of the context we expect to find as we study painting in this era, a closer look—especially if it is informed by Lord Byron's play, Delacroix's preparatory studies, and recent scholarship—demonstrates that something more complicated and even subversive is in play. The women of Delacroix, and specifically Myrrha, are not passive victims, but participants in this drama who draw upon and upend the structures of power that seek to oppress them.

In order to make sense of this theme, it is most helpful to think about the overall sense of gender in the Romantic period. The nineteenth century was, notes Marziyeh Farivar, a "confidently patriarchal era in British and European society," where women were largely confined to the realm of domesticity and their roles all too often dependent upon the expectations and desires of men. Norms that were both embodied and repeated in literature and art reflected this order: The woman who was object of the love, the inspiration, the sacrifice-goddess, a muse for a tragic heroine, doomed to a fate that the men around her

orchestrated her way to. But as Farivar points out, the Romantic period presented the very first inklings of a change: women "were no longer only objects of representation, but active subjects of representation as reasoned, self-aware, and agentive" and female writers and characters began to "contest the limits of their social roles" (Farivar 23–25)1.

This sense of female agency, despite Delacroix painting what looks far more brutal than what Byron described in prose, is preserved in Delacroix's painting. They are not passive bodies, they are flesh which resists, flesh which struggles, flesh which confronts its fate in fear and defiance, in dignity. The preparatory studies leading up to the painting, like the pastel Crouching Woman, demonstrate Delacroix's highly animated experimentation with the expressive capabilities of the female body. They are dynamic, emotionally charged figures that capture the viewer's gaze, and not just victims only but also vessels for both empathy and horror (Honore 13–15)2. In the completed painting one of the women sitting at the foot of the bed looks straight at the viewer, piercing the fourth wall and daring us to see her pain.

In the ambiguity of the relationship between Sardanapalus and Myrrha According to Farivar, the master-slave dialectic is a mode for recognition, whereby it is the seeming “slave” (in this instance, Myrrha) that ends up with a greater self-consciousness and authenticity than the “master” (Sardanapalus). Myrrha's love for the king should not be seen as a sign of weakness but rather of strength, as her path of confronting danger and staying with Sardanapalus is her own act of defiance, not docility. However, in Byron's play Myrrha ascends the pyre with the king, declaring that she too will kill herself and insisting that she be free even in death. By doing this, it turns her from a victim into a hero, and, in Hegelian terms, a slave into a master (Farivar 27–29).

needs to be contextualized in the current discussion on Orientalism and the portrayal of the Other, as surely does the contrast between Delacroix’s presentation of women in The

Death of Sardanapalus. As art historians have noted, the Oriental context of the painting—complete with Turkish carpets, luxuriously dressed men, and sumptuous environment—both embodies and tells a fantasy of the East. Orientalist art objectified women saborde du in English women were portrayed as sexual, docile and as feminine provide a Carnival for men maintain possible hammer of Middle Eastern indulgence sloops to swapping side with the West. However, Delacroix's women, though unmistakably eroticized, are also individuated and vocal; their pain is not just ornamental, but harrowing. Accordingly, the painting both partakes of the Orientalist tradition and complexity of these micropractices, the spectacle of the suffering on display a critique of the regimes of power and desire that create and reproduce it1 (Honore 15 -17).

The gender dynamics of the painting are not obvious only in the relationship Sardanapalus holds with Myrrha, however. Each of the other women in the red room—concubines, slaves, and servants—practices her own kind of self-defense or submission. Some cry out for mercy, some try to escape and others, such as the woman locking eyes with the viewer, lay claim to their humanity. They cannot be horn objects in the cathartic chaos of the scene: they have to be subjects, each with a history, each individual with their own measure of agency of dignity.

II.2. Decadence and Destruction

At first sight of Eugène Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus, viewers experience a vision of total disintegration--a world where pleasure, luxury, and beauty are crowded into a maelstrom of destruction and violence. Completed in 1827 and 1828, Delacroix's painting is an epic rumination on the self-destruction of a civilization that has become ensnared in excess. The subject of the painting is the Assyrian king, Sardanapalus, who Delacroix draws on Lord Byron's 1821 play and ancient sources. King Sardanapalus, facing defeat and the

collapse of his kingdom, commands the annihilation of all his pleasures: his animals, his slaves, his concubines and his treasures. Rather than surrender these items to his enemies, he would destroy everything associated with him, including himself; irreversibly transforming his palace into a theatre for one of the most lavish forms of modern self-destructive indulgence found in Western Art (Honore 6-8).

The canvas is a symphony of color and movement filled with sensations of glorious objects--goblets, opulent fabrics, glittering jewels--and bodies in agony. Sardanapalus reclines on top of a massive bed strewn in crimson while the destruction of his empire and the slaughter of his men unfolds around him. Delacroix's composition explicitly rejects the order and clarity of a Neoclassical history painting. Rather, everything on the canvas tilts towards oblivion, as if the world of Sardanapalus is being siphoned into a totalizing annihilation. The critics at the installation of the 1828 Salon immediately reacted to the radical break at which this painting emerged from tradition.They were unsettled by the notion that "everything in it revolves around a center rather than but would be arranged in a habitual pyramid" (Honore 17). This instability is not incidental; it is a visual metaphor for an order falling apart, and the painting's thematic heart is this order collapsing.

Delacroix's subject matter would already have compelling meaning. Byron's Sardanapalus is a ruler who is left without the ability to rule after following every pleasure and can only destroy. In Byron's play, the king is a creature of sensuousness and fatalism, a man undone by his own appetite and vacillation. Delacroix amplifies these traits and makes the king's last act a kind of allegory for the end of civilizations. The disaster of the painting is not just gore and decoration; it is a meditation on the dangers of unbounded pleasure; its inevitable result is decadence. The king's personal dissolution - his refusal to fight, his submission to despair - reinforces the larger collapse of his kingdom. The Death of Sardanapalus, in this sense, operates both privately and publicly and asks viewers to think about the fate of societies that

indulge in pleasure to the point that they abandon values of discipline and self-control (Honore 8-10).

Delacroix's interest in this subject of destruction was not limited to this painting.In previous efforts like Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi, he had studied the outcomes of war and the precarity of human achievement. In The Death of Sardanapalus, he assumes a tragedy rooted in the sickness of his craft, that of civic corruption and impotence. The palace as a true svēta-brahma had become a tomb for everything that he has ever loved and owned. The botanical excess of the surroundings: silks, gold, and sensual bodies only enshrined the horror. Delacroix's brushwork evokes this feeling of dissolution; forms blend into one another so that the distinctions between pleasure and pain; life and death; have entirely evaporated (Honore 13-15).

What may make Delacroix compelling is how he involves the viewer in the spectacle of ruin. The work fails to have a safe moral distance; it involves the viewer in the frenzy of ruin at once holding a mirror to both the seduction of decadence and a horror of it. The cool detachment of the king, the almost serene witness of carnage, stands as a terrible reminder of the threat posed by indifference to human life or the self-indulgence of power. He is both the agent and a hapless victim of his demise, a tragic parody occupying a kind of crippling sovereignty available only to destroy himself and everything he ever held significant.The theme of decadence and destruction complements the formal inquiries and historical moment of The Death of Sardanapalus so completely that they cannot be examined separately. Delacroix had the misfortune to be working in an age where the grand tradition of history painting - which embraced history's most beautiful moments - was colliding with new inquiries related to art, feeling and identity. If Delacroix is truly serious about embracing chaos and shifting the meanings connected to beauty and horror, he was preparing himself to be associated with a pioneer of the Romantic movement. The Death of Sardanapalus performs

as both a warning and a monument; a warning related to excess and a monument to the power of the imagination to make sense of the preconditions that inspire the worst of humanity (Honore 21-23).

Ultimately, The Death of Sardanapalus, is far more than a representation of ancient violence. It is a deep reflection on the rise and fall cycle present in both individuals and civilizations. Delacroix's understanding of decadence and destruction is very much alive today, reminding us how easily the pleasures of the present can become the ruins of the future.

II.3.Crisis in Power

Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus is a depiction of the theme of "power in crisis," which represents not only a theme, as it is expressed visually, but also the animating source of the painting's emotional and psychological tension. This is a painting about a king who finds himself at the extreme end of powerlessness, a ruler with unquestioned power that is suddenly revealed to be meaningless in the face of disaster. Delacroix's Sardanapalus is not the heroic figure of the classical tradition, rather a figure whose power has turned rancid, and whose final act skills are unable to safeguard, but utterly destroy. The composition, color, and narrative all serve to reproduce a conception of authority unraveling, and communicate a crisis of the meaning of power itself. At the literal center of the painting, and literally, the Assyrian king Sardanapalus reclines on an enormous, canopied bed that rests at the top section of the canvas. Surrounded not by loyal subjects or courtiers, Sardanapalus is situated in the center of a catastrophic storm of violence and despair - concubines are being murdered, treasures looted, and animals butchered. And somehow, Sardanapalus remains awkwardly calm; he lazes on the bed and gazes far away into emptiness. This is not the body language of

a man fighting for the sovereignty of the kingdom, the conditionality of his life; it is the posture of a man who is too far gone to invoke fate.

Delacroix's decision to represent the king in this way significantly departs from the traditions of history painting, which sought to glorify the heroism as established by great men.The king is presented here with less agency than a single ruinous directive, after which he is a passive bystander to the havoc he has created (Honore 8–10). The arrangement of the painting reflects this moment of power in disarray. Rather than place Sardanapalus in a hierarchically superior position of elevation, as one would expect in an academic history painting, Delacroix has instead framed him out of focus and on the oblique angle of one of the corners in the image space, so that he almost seems to recede into the shadows; and the lines of action do not converge towards the king, but instead move outwards and away from him, into a dangerous whirl of violence and confusion.

The image chaos prompts the viewer away from the figure of the king and instead towards the victims, their suffering, and their resistance. The destabilized composition is further a visual metaphor for the crumbling of order and the failure of power to create meaning upon the chaos of a cataclysm. As Andrea Swanson Honore writes, "the swirling, asymmetrical, arrangement of figures and things in Delacroix's rendition visually demonstrates the disintegration of control and the unsettlement of power confronted with devastating crisis" (8-10).

Delacroix's treatment of Sardanapalus's internal state is also a complex phenomenon. More importantly, the king's detachment is not simply a sign of weakness or cowardice but rather a representation of the existential disorder of power itself. In Byron's play, Sardanapalus is an ambivalent ruler who is bewildered by violence and conquest, who looks for peace and pleasure rather than a glorious life of conquests or accomplishments. Delacroix amplifies this vision of Sardanapalus as a ruler above, removed from and away from the

violence that precedes and surrounds him-a hero and a victim at the same time.Sardanapalus's command to destroy everything he loves represents both an assertion of power and an admission of defeat; it is a final, desperate act to impose will on the world that has veered out of his control (Farivar 28-29). The crisis of power does not resolve upon the figure of the king; it reverberates throughout the painting, touching every character, action, and object. The soldiers executing the king's wishes also exist inside their own circle of violence and fear; likewise, the concubines relenting to their fate or resisting surrender are in a world where power cannot be separated from violence. Even the objects in the painting - jewels, weapons, silks - are whirling along oblivion; their potential futures reduced to rubble by the king's catastrophic command. In this way, Delacroix's painting is a reflection not simply of a historical event, but a contemplation of the nature of power as such, capacity for obliteration, capabilities of self-obliteration, and ultimate impotence amidst chaos and the inevitability of death (Honore 10-12).

The reviews of The Death of Sardanapalus at the 1828 Salon reflect the very discomfort that this vision of power-in-crisis produced. Many critics were scandalized by what they viewed to be a lack of compositional order, and refusal to proffer a clear moral statement.Whereas many paintings embrace support and sacrafice, Delacroix's painting embraced collapse and despair. One critic would lament that “the eye cannot disentangle the confusion of lines and colors, where the first principles of art purposefully seem to have been violated” (Honore 17).

As chaotic and confusing as it may be, this chaos- this refusal to force order onto chaos- is what makes the painting so powerful and so modern. In investigating the representation of power in crisis, Delacroix was informed by his historical predecessors, specifically Rubens and Géricault. The paint swirls and chaotic movement of the figures recall Rubens and the wildness of his immense history paintings, while the psychological and physical radicalism is

derived from Géricault's Raft of the Medusa. Delacroix pushed all these influences into breaking, creating a painting where the concept of power itself was subjected to heuristic scrutiny and intensive doubt (Honore 18-20). The theme of power in crisis in Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus connected with wider Romantic ideologies and cultural perceptions. In the early nineteenth century, there were profound political shifts and turmoil; revolutions, the fall of empires, and the rise of new types of authority and reconciling radical resistance. The painting can be read as an allegory of monumental change- a vision of a world without past certainties and where the only power that survives posits destruction. In many ways, the endings for these two ruled Sardanapalus do not portray an ancient king, but rather a modern condition: isolated, alienated, and ultimately powerless against their forces (Farivar 29-30). With that being said, the theme of power in crisis in Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus articulates the most primitive forms through every aspects of the painting: composition, color, narrative, and psychological consideration. The painting itself stands as a monument of Romantic explorations of limits of authority and tragic destinies of art's social contexts. Sardanapalus' final act is not an act of power, but rather an act of submission with recognition that power is only in requisition at some point, and that chaos is always waiting at the gate.

II.4.Sensuality and Violence

Few paintings in the history of Western art combine sensuality and violence with the audacious passion of Eugène Delacroix’s The Death of Sardanapalus. This great, feverish canvas is a raucous mass of flesh, colour, and pain, in which violence and beauty are not only juxtaposed, but intertwined. In viewing Delacroix’s vision, one is simultaneously captivated and horrified, witnessing both the pleasures of the senses, and their obliteration. The power of the painting is this uneasy position-one that shocked and unsettled viewers at the time of Delacroix and continues to elicit an emotional response now.

From the first moment of viewing, the painting's sensuality is impressive. The bodies of the concubines, slaves, and servants of Sardanapalus are rendered in the foreground, aglow with luminous flesh tones, as though the flesh tones shimmer against a background of reds and golds of the palace décor. The brushwork of Delacroix is bold and free, imparting a tactile representation of the figures in which limbs writhe and twist, skin glistens, and hair tumbles chaotically. There are a number of naked and semi-naked forms-a clustered representation of bodies poses that not only suggest the ecstasy of classical nudes, but a sensuous abandon that is elegiac of bacchanalian revelry. Neither Delacroix nor the viewer should ignore the eroticism, the objecthood of the feminine form was not an incidental choice. Study sketches, like the Crouching Woman study, in his earliest pastels illustrate the compelling expressive and sensual abilities of the female form, embracing horror and beauty in equal measure (Honore 13–15).

Nonetheless, this sensuality is inseparable from violence. The unique feature of the painting is that it actively depicts massacre. The women just in the midst of being killed by the king’s eunuchs and palace officers, their throats are being cut, and their bodies are being contorted in agony and resistance. Delacroix does not hesitate to show how horrific the scene is with a blood-stained bed linen and carpet and how weapons glimmer in the candlelight, while the faces of the dead women are terrified, in pain, and resigned. The violence is evident, unfiltered, and shocking. The fusion of violence and sensuality is even more unsettling because we are confronted with the closeness of pleasure to pain and desire to death. The use of color and composition enhances this intense effect in the scene. The red of the bed covering, for example, is both the color associated with passion and the blood color associated with death. The bodies and objects are arranged in swirling confusion and frenzy, as if the scene is swirling down into destruction. The viewer cannot find stable ground, nor is the viewer observing carnage from a safe distance (which Delacroix enables), instead the viewer

is colluding in the chaotic spectacle. As Honore points out, Delacroix's use of color and movement "amplifies the drama to the point of being unbearable". (Honore, 16–17).

The drama of ruin and despair, is a radical venture for Delacroix's time. In early nineteenth century, French art was dominated by Neoclassicism that valued clarity and order and higher morals, showed virtue, were rational and harmonious ideals, indeed classically aligned with Enlightenment ideas. The Death of Sardanapalus is a juxtaposition of excesses: excessive, in emotion, color, violence, and eroticism. Contemporary audiences and critics were deeply disturbed by the paintings explicit sensuality and brutality, which they saw, on many levels, in direct opposition to the established taste of Neoclassical art. One critic described the painting as simply being a "Persian carpet" or "kaleidoscope", unable to accommodate the visual excess (Honore, 17).

III.Historical and contemporary critical reception

III.1. 1827 Reactions: Scandal and Shock

The Death of Sardanapalus by Eugène Delacroix caused an uproar among critics and the public when it was shown at the Paris Salon in 1827-28. No work of art prior to this exhibited its chaotic and lurid depictions of violence and luxury, or its vast scale, confronting viewers with the so-called "fanaticism of ugliness" (Bussy 151). Conservatives—practiced in Neoclassical ideals of logical order and moral unambiguity—were appalled by the way that Delacroix cast off ordinary rules of composition. In the influential journal Le Globe, Louis Vitet recognized Delacroix's imaginative strength but criticized the disarray seen within the painting itself, stating the need "to separate painting from a sketch," (Spector 81). A competitor critic, Étienne-Jean Delécluze, attacked Delacroix for breaking "the first rules of art," by letting the eye flow off the canvas at the edges of the painting and designing the

scene so violently that “the eye cannot disentangle the tangle of lines and colors” (Spector 81).

Special Report: Scandal intensifies over subject matter A far cry from a hero, however, Delacroix's eastern despot, Sardanapalus, coolly survey the destruction of his treasures (and concubines) before his own suicide—a tableau of moral indecency and erotic extravagance many found nigh on unrepentantly unacceptable. As art historian Elizabeth A. Fraser remarks, the painting “would not provide the easily delimited moral lessons to which Salon art was thought to aspire;” instead, it provided “a spectacle of violence and eroticism that appeared to call into question the very foundations of the social order” (Fraser 116). The passivity — bordering on indifference — of the king in the truly terrifying slaughter scene was most troubling, and in the view of many critics positively typified the sort of moral vacuum that was the very opposite of the heroic virtue glorified in Neoclassical painting (Britannica).

Indeed, the critical blow hit home deeply to the very core of Delacroix's artistic being. On his journal, he complained: “I am fed up with this entire Salon of. They alone will succeed in persuading me that I have committed a true debacle indeed...that the Death of Sardanapalus is actually the death of the Romantics' (Delacroix, qtd. in Schmiesing 99). So total was the painting's rejection that it would not hang in public again for many years, and Delacroix's notoriety as a Romantic rebel was secure.

Adding to the controversy was the political context. The violence and Orientalist setting of Delacroix’s painting struck nerve with contemporary anxieties of the cultural difference and of colonial expansion into North Africa, as France still bore the scars of the Revolution and Napoleonic wars (Fraser 116, Spector 83). Dr. Jack J. Spector, explains that "the term irrational has been verging on the cliche: one casual critic of a painting can be damning another more rational' (Spector 813). To sum up, the scandal brought on by The Death of

Sardanapalus caused the painting to be a revolutionary one, ultimately becoming a landmark in modern art history.

III.2. 20th-Century Reevaluation: From Controversy to Genius

The critical reputation of Eugène Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus underwent a dramatic reversal in the twentieth century. The painting, once ridiculed as a scandalous flop, became hailed as a work of prophetic genius. An appreciation for forms of expression that eschewed the grandiose or frankly conceived any other crafts as art helped foster this change, as new movements and critics began praising traits and qualities that previous generations had dismissed. In the words of art historian Jack J. Spector, “the painting…leads listeners away from the immediate notoriety of the work to an appreciation of its innovation in color, composition, and storytelling.” (Spector 145)

Impressionists were the first artists to show signs of this shift when they admired Delacroix’s use of colour and their brushwork. Sardanapalus was noted as significant influence on the work of Pierre-Auguste Renoir and Claude Monet in their later forays into bright, expressive color. The 19th century poet and critic Charles Baudelaire wrote that Delacroix was "madly in love with passion," (though, it seems, quite able to discipline and clarify that ardor) (Baudelaire 252).

By the twentieth century critics were more inclined toward examining the work on the basis of its form, composition, color harmonies, and brushwork, rather than its subject matter. Fry, one of the foremost modernist critics, enabled audiences to look beyond the sensational storyline and to recognize Delacroix's mastery of technique. Fry maintained Delacroix's "mosaic-pictures…startling in their rich oppositions of color," were prophetic of modern art preoccupations when "formal elements" were made "the basis of the aesthetic experience" (Britannica, "Art Criticism in the 20th Century").

As modern art movements began to rise, Delacroix seemed to live ahead of his time. What had once appeared to be incompetence — his unusual willingness to distort anatomy and space for emotional effect — was now seen as innovation. In the opinion of art historians like Elizabeth A. Fraser, Delacroix stands as an important bridge between classical and modern, declaring that "he paved the way for later developments in the art of painting with his theatricality and expressive brushwork (Fraser 134).

Delete it the mid twentieth century, Delacroix was well documented and scholars placed Sardanapalus at the heart of his career. Suggesting this capacity for visual drama, some critics balked at the theatricality of the painting, arguing that the effects of cinema—at least in how the craftsman who painted the work visualized it to operate—had come to the canvas (Spector 147).

It was also a time when psychological interpretations made headway. For instance, André Malraux believed that the painting expressed primal, transgressive desires—sex and death, creation and destruction—that transcend social prohibitions, and that this distancing of the painting from a seemingly moralistic context rendered it a powerful reflection on the human condition (Malraux 211).

This revised understanding was aided by technical studies. Such was the apparent chaos of Delacroix's composition that several risks were resolved thanks to X-rays in the 1950s (Spector 149) revealing how methodically Delacroix constructed his work. In 2023, conservation efforts at the Louvre revealed ever-brighter colors and previously-hidden details, upping the ante on appreciation of Delacroix's technical prowess all the more (Benhamou, The orgiastic resurrection of Sardanapalus at the Louvre).

This change in reputation was also reflected in the financial value of the painting. After a long period of relative obscurity, The Death of Sardanapalus was purchased by the Louvre in 1921 for 800,000 francs, a purchase price that represented a dramatic rise above all previous

sales and a record for Delacroix at the time (Benhamou, "L'orgiastique résurrection de Sardanapale au Louvre"). At the turn of the twenty-first century, the painting was a fixture in the art historical canon, its image found in all the major textbooks, it hailed as a revolutionary masterpiece that pointed modern art in a new direction. Something one century shamed as overkill, the next hailed as genius (Benhamou, Judith).

III.3.Modern Feminist and Political Readings

If they were all, as I have argued, written in a pre-WWI insider/outsider dialect, reader response theory taking a turn and recent feminist and political scholarship fundamentally altering our understanding of Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus in terms of gender/power to cultural representation. In her seminal 1983 essay, art historian Linda Nochlin lambasted the scandal that seemed to surround the work, claiming that the real scandal had less to do with its style and much more to do with the power that men wield over women embodied within the image. Although the work ostensibly seems to be about "the Exotic East," Nochlin pointed out that the "power relation" of "the contemporary Frenchmen" over "the women" provided the intended center of gravity in the painting, which is "the gender relation" (120).

Following Nochlin, more recent scholars considering the figure of the women in this painting have explored how they function as aesthetically pleasing objects on display to the beholder, as well as narrative victims or aesthetic objects—killed by the command of the king. This duality forces the viewer to ask themselves whether we are valuing beauty, or are we part of the act of violence? Stacey Schmiesing rightly remarks that, in the context of the painting, "the women are simultaneously objects of desire and destruction," and such tension challenges us to interrogate our own gaze (Schmiesing 45).

People have also noticed the masculinity illustrated by the painting. The figure of Sardanapalus, reclining passively as pandemonium reigns, incarnates a paradox of masculine power—total, but remote. That king, Schmiesing continues, "rejects the new ideal of active, virtuous masculinity" and embodies a "weak king, lounging in the corner while destruction rages around him," a type of figure representing contradictions in nineteenth-century concepts of manhood (67).

Political readings associate the canvas with Orientalism and with French colonial ambitions. Sardanapalus, made as France was asserting its colonial power over North Africa, plays on timeless European fantasies of the East as tempting yet lethal. Setting the painting in an "Oriental" milieu gave Delacroix the ability to create extreme situations— violence, decadence, sexual excess— that would have been too provocative within a present French context (Fraser 121). Received scholarship, like that by Nochlin and the others before, have intimately tied this phenomenon, to the larger European project of Orientalism in which European artists displaced their anxieties and desires on imagined eastern “others” (Nochlin 119).

Others interpret Sardanapalus as a subtext on contemporary French politics. According to Elisabeth Fraser, the chaotic king in the painting may represent fears of royal power in post-revolution France, where the nature of legitimate rule remained contested. Fraser argues that the formal disorder of the painting "was in large part the incendiary message" of the piece itself aside from it being a representation of a dissolute and gluttonous monarch (121).

The depiction of violence in the painting also begs the question of whose pain counts. Some victims are specific and identified, others fall into the background as background. As Nochlin mentions, this visual hierarchy reflects larger social structures that decide who merits sympathy when it comes to suffering, a question that is relevant even today (Nochlin 121).

Intersectional approaches have examined the ways in which Delacroix's painting creates implications of gender, racial, and class hierarchies. The dark servants reiterate something of a racial trope that is typical in the 19th century European art. The painting thus explores, and avoids confrontation with, the power dynamics that govern European society by situating them in an "Oriental" context (Dear 3).

The Death of Sardanapalus remains relevant precisely because of its potentially disturbing complication. The painting denies simple readings but rather embodies unresolved contradictions about power, desire, violence and ethical representation that haunt our contemporary culture. It is a lack of understanding that has led to the ongoing debate around the work and is a continual source of inspiration towards new readings of the piece almost two hundred years later (Nochlin 122).

IV. Dialogue with Orientalism

IV.1. Oriental tradition

The Death of Sardanapalus (1827) by Eugène Delacroix constitutes a landmark in the history of Western Orientalist painting, appropriating and responding to prior Orientalist traditions as well as establishing paradigms that formed the basis of future artists for generations. Linda Nochlin asserts that Delacroix's complex engagement with Orientalism simultaneously exposes his embrace of troubling Western paradigms to depict the 'East' while also reflecting an authentic interest in other cultures and art (Nochlin 33). Importantly, Delacroix produced this Orientalist masterpiece before he ever set foot in North Africa, relying on the power of imagination and a wealth of cultural resources he had access to in Europe.

Delacroix's Orientalism was informed by the historical climate of France's burgeoning colonial aspirations. In The Death of Sardanapalus, "Delacroix transposed the Romantic Orientalist portrayal of ancient Assyria just before Europeans began reimagining the true history of ancient Assyria" (Benjamin 45). His painting is a case in point of the way Western Orientalists created a mythical Orient by "the mingling of sex, violence, luxury, and despotism that marked Romantic Orientalism" (Porterfield 78). This treatment of the East as a place of wonderment as well as moral decay was a soundbite common to early nineteenth-century European cultural attitude.

Delacroix was inspired by a wide variety of literary and visual sources for his Orientalist imagery. The main narrative draw, per Christine Peltre, was Lord Byron's 1821 play Sardanapalus, based upon 'a fragment of the ancient Greek historian Ctesias (ca. 400 BCE)" (Peltre 62). But in just what visual particulars of his exotic locale Delacroix enshrined, he relied to the artifacts and reports made available in Europe after "Napoleon's victory in Egypt" (Johnson 193). composed of "the Egyptian winged sun and the Egyptian-styled hood worn by the Moors" (Johnson 193) and "the cupbearer's Indian turban and the elephant ornamentation was Indian" (Jobert 85).

What is specific to Delacroix's Sardanapalus is the attitude towards the color and the setting that indicates the artist's incorporation of traditional visual codes of Orientalism. As art historian Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby notes, in this painting, Delacroix offers "an orgy of cruelty... in all reds and golds" (Grigsby 203). This deep, luminous palette was such a staple of Orientalist painting that "the East" became visually synonymous with saturated color, as opposed to the more muted palette frequently used to depict European subjects. The Orientalist motifs of high, rich textiles and exotic, decorative accoutrement, however, seem to directly connect to the Orient, which was often seen as an exoticized land of culture and

mysticism, with the setting of the bedchamber of the King, again allowing for both an intimate and sexual atmosphere (Porterfield 80).

Sardanapalus is one of the clearest examples of how the Orientalism of Delacroix has gendered dimensions. The women in the painting are objects of the exotic, completely beholden to the male ruler. As Rae Beth Gordon observes, the king "commands his eunuchs and court officials to slit the throats of his women, his pages, and even his prized dogs and horses. How interesting that women are equated to horses and dogs" (Gordon 156). The objectification of female bodies reflects a general Orientalist tendency to conceive the "East" as a place where male domination goes unchecked and female domination is patently obvious, thus reinforcing Western images of "Oriental" despotism.

The painting can thus be read "as a manifestation of masculine sadism; the cool, dandyish Sardanapalus being a stand-in for the artist himself, both creator and destroyer of everything around him" (Nochlin, The Politics of Vision 42). As if to exemplify this notion, Nochlin states that "the painting applies a masculine fantasy of owning, enjoying, enjoying and personally, if not literally, destroying the woman's body" and "the Oriental locale of the background neutralizes its sadistic charge by placing the subject outside of nineteenth-century France" (Nochlin, The Politics of Vision 43). His appositional focus indicates how Orientalism operated to replace Western fears and fantasies onto an invented 'Other.

An instructive case is between Delacroix's early Orientalist notes (like Sardanapalus) and the later, more perceptive paintings he made after his 1832 visit to North Africa. James Thompson states that the Orientalist images of Delacroix prior to his journey were "an imagined construction" (Thompson 112). One result of Delacroix's North African journey was a more sophisticated approach to Orientalist subjects based on direct observation rather than fantasy. According to art historian Helene Gill, "Morocco was an affront to the system. It was primarily a visual shock," (Gill 27) This change reveals the positioning of

Sardanapalus within a particular phase in the development of European Orientalism, prior to immediate colonial contact offering new visual points of reference for artists.

Sardanapalus in particular represents more than the exotic virtue of Delacroix's Orientalism and cannot be simply chalked up to the work of same Asian history and cultural stereotypes. Despite this, some academics have interpreted the painting as containing more subtle suggestions against European power structures. Elisabeth Fraser claims that "his allegory of the tale of Sardanapalus serves as a critique of 19th century French politics... but he also alerts his French readers that their country may not be far from such a fate" (Fraser 72). This indicates that Delacroix's Orientalism not only created an exotic « Other » but also reflected a distorted mirror to European society in itself.

Delacroix's Sardanapalus outlined a new way of working on Orientalist painting. According to the art historian Barthélémy Jobert, "Delacroix made the oriental picture with a technique similar to the modern vignette pictures. (jobert 86) This new approach would impact generations of Orientalist painters. To quote Lee Johnson, "By this I mean that Delacroix wanted to present here as far from the European aesthetic as he could (Johnson 196)," showcasing how aesthetic choices were intentionally deployed to create a fictional Orient that was an inverse of European visual practices.

IV.2. political and social meaning

In this context the analysis will concentrate on a recent trend that connects Delacroix Sardanapalus with orientalism – as far as it concerns the French colonial endeavour. Linda Nochlin and Todd Porterfield are among the scholars who have argued that the image invokes Orientalist notions of French cruelty and inertia that sensitized sentiments to French colonialism. But they also reveal that these ideas are inextricably tied up with France's post-Revolutionary sense of self. Quoting Tocqueville, Porterfield writes, "In fact, the attraction of

empire was that it was a substitute, a disguise, and a diversion from the Revolution. France had to make a choice, destroying itself in endless revolutionary struggle or pivoting to projection of power at the expense of the East. Orientalism had the ability to divert its gaze from the French political scene, but at the same time, the same Orientalism turned its glance toward France (Porterfield 5).The passions for revolution and nationalism were the two dominant features of French society, and only the nationalism, manifested in a form of Eastern intervention could bring back the order of things in the home.(Porterfield 5) In the end, however, I will argue that it was the chiaroscuro depicted in Delacroix's Sardanapalus, and its relation to domestic turmoil within the French royal house, that rendered the painting both so inflammatory and financially perilous for the artist.

This, the argument claims, is why Delacroix and actually other artists either such as Franco and Picasso or mere subjects of paintings and works are debated, because they represent far more than what they might have intended at a particular moment in history. The notion of the "political imaginary", familiar currency with historians but less so with art historians, aptly accounts for how artworks may unintentionally accrue meanings and tacit understandings over time. Such an extended hermeneutical framework reveals fresh, resonant insights into Delacroix's Sardanapalus, and relatedly, its intimate links to the historical problems of the Restoration era in which it was produced.

IV.3. Orientalism in Art: Fantasy vs. Ethnography

The 19th-century artists exercised their own modes of Orientalism. To painters in the manner of Jean-Léon Gérôme, the Near East was literally a place to be puzzled by hyper-realistic particulars. For others, such as Eugène Delacroix, it was simply an imaginative realm—a fantasy land upon which we could project forbidden desires (sexual, aggressive, or both). Not an ethnographic study of the East, Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus (painted

prior to his trip to North Africa) Rather, it is a stage where outlandish passions play safely from a distance in time and space. Both the dreams of the beleaguered monarch and, arguably, those of the artist himself

Delacroix researched the work, reading classical texts such as Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus for ancient Eastern decadence; accounts of Babylonian excesses by Quintus Curtius; and perhaps Etruscan frescoes or Indian miniatures. But he never set out to be accurate. Compared to Orientalist works that came after (Gérôme, for example), this probably has less to do with Western mastery over the East, than with French male mastery over women—mastery conditioned by the erotics of the moment.

Promised we would one day be together, like the poet once said — in dreams begin responsibilities. However, the truth is also that power fuels fantasies — in this case, the fantasy of total power, in which men are taking pleasure in obliterating women. Crude reduction of Delacroix's complex work to sadistic fantasy under the mask of Orientalism would be irresponsible. But the violent drama of the painting — here, Sardanapalus is ordering the destruction of his treasures and the women in his harem, before he himself dies in flames — is part of a larger societal assumption that men of Delacroix's class and era felt an innate right to women. For artists such as Delacroix, this entitlement also included models, bodies whose flesh had become quasi-public property for their craft.

V.Intervisuality in Delacroix’s painting

In addition to intertextuality Eugene Delacroix’s death of sardanapalus possibly inspired by other paintings, what called intervisuality can be including other pictures visual one from any culture into painting in the same time involving images from a canva in the excisting one, therefore many element, figure’s gesture and contexts of the portrait may be comparable

to delacroix's piece of art. Accordingly, the following two painting serve as an example of intervisulaity .

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's painting La Grande Odalisque 1814, wherehe takes the viewer to the Orient, which is a far-away land for a Parisian audience in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Portraying a woman who wears nothing but jewelry and a turban and lies on a divan; she does so with her back to the viewer, although she appears to peek over her shoulder, as if she is looking at someone who has just entered her room, a space luxuriously appointed with fine damask and satin fabrics. She wears what seems to be a ruby and pearl-encrusted brooch in her hair and a gold bracelet on her right wrist. In her right hand, she takes a peacock fan, another symbol of wealth, and another piece of metalwork, a laid face bejeweled mirror, possibly, shows along the lower left edge of the paint (Zygmont).

In 1621, Peter Paul Rubens received an official order to paint a majestic series of pictures dedicated to the life of Marie de' Medici, the Queen of France, for the newly constructed Palais de Luxembourg. Probably the most renowned work from this series, *The Landing of Marie de' Medici at Marseilles*, illustrates the moment when Marie arrived in France in 1600 to be the wife of King Henry IV. Troubled though their marriage was and negligent though Henry IV was in not coming to meet her, Rubens converted the event into a scene of quite potent mythology. He filled the painting with allegorical and mythological figures: winged Fame trumpeting Marie's arrival from above, and personified France, draped in blue with the fleur-de-lys, welcoming her with open arms. The Medici coat of arms on the boat pays tribute to her Italian heritage. Below, three nude Nereids—those were sea-maidens from Greek mythology—swimming in the Mediterranean, symbolized divine protection and safe passage. Neptune the sea god grows new ripples while Fortune a naked strong man leads the boat showing Marie's trip was lucky. In this mix of past and story Rubens lifts Marie's coming to a

time of greatness showing it as a godly allowed and country cheered event (Marseilles, artble)

Conclusion

Through this analysis of Eugène Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus, it has been shown the painting to be a dense and deeply ambivalent text, one that embodies the contradictions of Romanticism, the seductions of Orientalism, and the destabilizing gender and power ideals of post-Revolutionary France in the early nineteenth century. This study has shown that Delacroix's masterwork can both reproduce and resist the dominant narratives of its moment by situating the painting in its literary, cultural, and historical contexts.

An important discovery of this study is that Delacroix´s painting renders Byron´s text a spectacle which delights the eye and yet discomposes it. In contrast, then, to Byron's Sardanapalus as a tragic self-examination, Delacroix's king is described as abstracted in a cold, almost philosophical way from a cold chaos (and at the same time a destruction) that erases distinctions between beauty and horror, pleasure and violence (Fraser 322; Lorlin 42-43). Delacroix's bold, experimental use of color, composition, and brushwork converge to produce a kind of "sensory pandemonium" that envelops and implicates, rather than simply invites, the viewer (Fraser 327).

the painting reflects the gender ideologies of its matrix while also exposing them (Schmiesing 12.11, 40; Serullaz 262). The violence enacted upon each of the women in the painting, while largely interpreted as an ornamentation, as with much of the female bodies seen, is instead a critical reflection of how female bodies are represented, objectified, and viewed as disposable in both art and society, something that is heavily discussed in contemporary feminist and intersectional discourse (Nochlin 43; Schmiesing 67).

Not only does The Death of Sardanapalus partake of the Western project of fashioning the "East" as a locus of exoticism, decadence, and moral ambiguity in its Orientalist staging (Said 3; Benjamin 92). However, as the research has demonstrated, the work is not merely a work of fantasy or power for Delacroix. Through the varied, literary, historical, and visual sources he drew upon, and by investing the scene with psychological and political complexity, he produced a work that, while it becomes in large part a projection of Western anxieties and desires, is equally if not more a critique of those affects (Fraser, 121; Nochlin, 119).

This change, in turn, is indicative of the changing standards for what makes art valuable and where the standards for taste and morality lie during each era, a metamorphosis perhaps most evidently mirroring the critical response to the painting from scandal at the 1827 Salon to a reassessment in the twentieth century that classified it as a masterpiece (Spector 145; Benhamou). That the painting has fared so badly, to render it in these terms - excess, moral ambiguity, unsettling emotional power , is how it has continued subsequent survival as a site of debate and reinterpretation.

This chapter has shown that examining the negotiation of art, literature, politics, and psychology in The Death of Sardanapalus highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding sometimes complex cultural artifacts. The painting lives on in its power to raise questions about authority, representation, and the role of art in reflecting and creating a collective memory and identity. Additionally, the investigation og the possibility of intervisuality of existing painting in Delacroix’s masterpiece.

General Conclusion

In the Final thoughts for Recasting the conversation between Byron and Delacroix. The death of Sardanapalus by Eugène Delacroix (1827), romanticism, literary inspiration and visual novelty This thesis has demonstrated that Delacroix paints not just (1) a simple mirroring of Lord Byron's Sardanapalus (1821) or (2) a passive visual transposition of the text's themes, but a pictorial re-writing that (3) amplifies certain thematic aspects and, at times, (4) critiques and (5) reshuffles the thematic organisation of the original text. We have seen how the artist transformed psychological introspection into bodily spectacle, Orientalisim fantasy into political critique, literary nuance into visual unease, and Byron's

verse into the Delacroix canvas. The rest of this piece summarizes key findings; briefly reflects on methodological challenges; and reveals how I at least think a dialogue of this kind matters both for art history and for literary studies, and what implications my positivist rendering of psychological interpretation has for the kinds of meanings we can extract from it.

In the first chapter, we saw how Eugène Delacroix, in the spirit of Romanticism and inspired by Géricault, found his subject in Lord Byron and the play of Sardanapalus. It is this dichotomy that Delacroix appeals to in the figure of the doomed Assyrian king as depicted by Byron: a figure caught in the middle of decadence and insurgence. Chapter one illustrated how the perfervid persona and art of Delacroix embodied the defiance and complexity of the Byronic hero. That free-play allowed Delacroix to paint more than an anecdote, his work became an archetype of the human condition, an essay about power or destiny, a romantic orientation for the exotic "Orient" ideal of the time.

Therefore, Chapter two treated how Delacroix adapted Byron as ‘drame en peinture’. Delacroix did not just transcribe Byron in his painting The Death of Sardanapalus. Rather than produce a narrative of sensible events, he composed a cacophony of tragic emotions focusing on violence, sensuality, and disorder. The painting subverts conservative notions of amiability and beauty and overall posits ideas about how the West considers and depicts the East. The painting is more than just an ancient king, as revealed by feminist and psychological interpretations, and show a deep-seated anxiety around human gender dynamics.

the inner conflict of Delacroix becomes a cataclysm of orderliness. Sardanapalus sprawls atop a mound of treasure, casually watching his concubines butchered as a portent of foreign ruin washes over the kingdom. This compositional choice, rather than the psychological deliberation seen in Byron, helps to create a more pronounced sensory overload: one that compels one to consider the moral turpitude of power. (Fraser 322) Introduced by Francesca into a world where neoclassicism reigned supreme—both through its emotionality and its

visual language—her fiery diagonal organization and vibrant color palette reject the neoclassical ethos of order and calm (Johnson 173).

And while this absolutely adheres to Orientalist ideas of East luxury, this work also challenges Orientalist ideas of East luxury. That ostensible show of positiveness is further undermined as an idea, as the faux royal detachment of the piece and chaotic energy of the painting simultaneously undermine such stereotypes as deserving of celebration. And thus grotesquely it exposes the double tenderness of European dreams (Nochlin 36) concerning the Orient, to borrow from Linda Nochlin once again. In this sense, this tension reflects the Edward Said quote in which he states that "the art of the Orient has done more to show Western anxieties than Eastern realities" (5). moreover the intervisuality depicted in Death of Saradanapalus from works that already delt with orientalism features in its themes .

The women who are slaughtered may be seen as little more than orientalist props, but they end up at the centre of the painting's critique. Under the patriarchy the display of corpses — in a taking-start-to-finish cliche tableau —becomes flesh of victimhood. As feminist scholars like Stacey Schmiesing have observed, the brutalization here echoes the ambivalence of Delacroix (and society) around female agency—patriarchal motifs that resonate in present-day discourses on gender and representation (67, Schmiesing).

The challenge was to engage his/her visual representation with cultural meanings, and whilst one must not generalise too far the symbols depicted without delving into primary sources, in Delacroix's case sketches and contemporary reviews, the mere task of doing so pressed into one's conscious. Yet it has also demonstrated that, to critique the Eurocentric biases of Orientalist scholarship, it is necessary to temper a Saidian approach with feminist and postcolonial criticisms.

The study challenges our understanding of influence as a one-directional effect. Instead of simply depicting Byron, Delacroix is reinterpreting Byron: this is the kind of engagement in

which visual art can critique, respond to, and overshadow writing. Hence, this extrinsic popularity of Byron's dramas inspired fresh reconsideration of the poet-writer, Which goes to show that a visual adaptation can influence the literary tradition. Future research might finally investigate how Delacroix's work may have paved the way for subsequent readings of Sardanapalus as a proto-feminist or anti-colonial text. The duality within the Sardanapalus of art historian, David J. Weigel, shows Delacroix's Sardanapalus both as the tyrant and the victim, which brings to mind our own ambivalent attitude toward power players, like politicians or even celebrities. That ethical ambivalence of the work resounds in conversations about cancel culture and the role of violence in historical representation.

It is this refusal of easy categorization that ensures the lasting power of Delacroix's The Death of Sardanapalus. A Romantic masterwork, an Eastern fantasy, a feminist condemnation, a psychological riddle — all at once. Delacroix challenges the viewer to struggle with the paradoxes of power, identity, and creativity by reworking Byron's text in visual form; it is one of the many ways in which Delacroix suggests a connection between national agency and artistic vision.

And in our age of re-polarizing coarseness and existential howling, the painting itself is fraught with urgence, its details delightfully obscure but pungent. It instills the question in us: How can we properly represent the “Other” without treating them like a character? Trauma-free art: how to provoke empathy? Lastly, what might critique as a burden — if any, do the creators feel in transmuting pain into beauty? This thesis in no way professes to do so. Instead it seeks to forge a dialogue one which is interdisciplinary, temporal, and simultaneously simple and complex as both art and humanity itself.

خلاصة

تستكشف هذه الأطروحة الحوار الأدبي والفني المعقد الذي يدور بين مأساة اللورد بايرون الشعرية "سردانابالوس" (1821) ولوحة يوجين ديلاكروا الأسطورية "موت سردانابالوس" (1827). وتتناول استلهام ديلاكروا من تصوير بايرون للملك الآشوري القديم، وتضع كلا العملين في سياق تيارات الاستشراق الأوسع. تبدأ الدراسة بمقدمة عامة توضح دوافع البحث وأهدافه ونطاقه، مسلطةً الضوء على أسئلتها الرئيسية حول العلاقات المتبادلة بين الأدب والفنون البصرية في بناء صور الشرق. وفي هذا الصدد، ومن خلال أقصر السير الذاتية - وهي مجرد مقدمة للهوية الفنية ومسارها - يُعرّف الفصل الأول ديلاكروا على التيارات التاريخية والثقافية التي وجد نفسه فيها. تتبعًا لاهتمامه بالاستشراق، واستنادًا إلى نقد إدوارد سعيد الأساسي، تساءل الكتاب عن كيفية إلقاء الفنانين والكتاب الغربيين أحلامهم ومخاوفهم على مواضيع شرقية. ثم يستكشف الكتاب كيف أثرت شاعرية بايرون السامية على ديلاكروا، وخاصةً تصويره للعنف والحالة الإنسانية، وكيف أدخلت رحلاته في الفصل الثاني، أجري .التحويلية في شمال إفريقيا إلى قاموسه التصويري تجارب جديدة للضوء واللون والسياق الثقافي تحقيقًا مقارنًا في الموضوعات المشتركة في مسرحية بايرون ولوحة ديلاكروا، مثل التوتر بين الجنسين، واستخدام السلطة وعجزها، والبطل البايروني، والانحطاط، والدمار. يتناول هذا التحليل البصري الكتابي تركيب لوحة "موت ساردانابالوس" ولونها وتأثيرها العاطفي، ويخلص في النهاية إلى أن ديلاكروا يتجاوز سردية ساردانابالوس لالتقاط مشهد ينقل هذا التعقيد ووحدته في إطار واحد. في دليلٍ مُفصّل، يناقش الفصل الاستقبال النقدي للوحة - بدءًا من عرضها الأول المثير للجدل وحتى إعادة تقييمها الحاد من منظورين نسويين وسياسيين مُعاصرين. وينتهي بمناقشة تفاعل ديلاكروا مع التقاليد الاستشراقية، وأخيرًا، تتأمل الأطروحة في العلاقة المتغيرة بين الفن والأدب في بناء السرديات .والأبعاد السياسية والاجتماعية الأوسع لفنه الثقافية، مُبيّنةً كيف يُحوّل ديلاكروا ويتفاعل مع صورة غربية مُحددة للشرق كما طوّرها بايرون في "سردانابالوس". في النهاية، تُقدّم هذه الأطروحة تداعيات أوسع نطاقًا للنقاشات المُستمرة حول التمثيل والهوية والاختلاف الثقافي، بالإضافة إلى المسؤوليات الأخلاقية للفنان في تصوير الاختلاف الثقافي، حيث لا يزال إرث هذه الأعمال يُشكّل المخيلة الغربية.

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