

Portrait of madame recamier analysis essay sample



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Jeanne-Francois Julie Adelaide Bernard Recamier is a renowned French beauty, who is also by some people believed to be the most beautiful and decent person of her age. However her beauty wasn't the only thing that attracted people to her because it was more than that. It was her charming personality, confidence and the brains, which made all the difference. Moreover, she was witty, a great conversationalist and a natural beauty and the soirées she held at her salon attracted the most important politicians and literary figures.

History:

Jeanne was born in 1777 in Lyons and when her portrait was painted, she was only 23. Interestingly enough, David the painter began this painting in the year 1800 but abandoned it, saying the words, “ Madame, women have their caprices; artists have theirs too. Allow me to pander to mine; I shall keep your portrait as it stands” Nonetheless, he did complete the painting in the year 1805.

Her father Bernard was a banker and when she was young, she and her father moved to Paris. When she was fifteen, she married Jacques Recamier a wealthy banker, thirty years older than her.

Personality:

Beautiful, accomplished, and with a love of literature, Juliette was always shy and modest by nature. From the earliest days of the French Consulate to almost the end of the July Monarchy, her salon in Paris was one of the chief resorts of literary and political society that followed what was fashionable. The habitués of her house included many former royalists, with others, such

as General Bernadotte and General Moreau, more or less disaffected to the government. This circumstance, together with her refusal to act as lady-in-waiting to Empress Consort Josephine de Beauharnais and her friendship for Germaine de Stael, brought her under suspicion. In 1800 Jacques-Louis David began his portrait of her, but left it unfinished on learning François Gerard had been commissioned to paint a portrait before he had.

Interpretation of the portrait:

Her portrait is the ideal depiction of an era that expresses itself through a sought-after simplicity, a refined taste. Madame Recamier represents the “new company” resulting from the coup d'état. The very symbol of social climbing is the image of the big bourgeoisie, the image that portrays a new world, without origins, which seeks to impose itself by exploiting values and representations from antiquity. The painting is, in short, a work of art that has for many decades now been a source of awe for the people of the coming generations.

The simple, white and unadorned gown she wears requires no artificial supports or decoration to be elegant and that clearly references the artificial structures of society: the differences between the poor and upper classes and the means to keep people within their class. Her bare feet, used as a religious device, provide the key to letting us know she is an allegorical figure (at the same time she was a real woman). “Take off your shoes for the ground you stand upon is holy to the Lord your God”, the Lord told Moses from the Burning Bush. Her bare feet are not meant to invoke the Christian God (far from it) but to enthrone a new goddess, France, as the queen of

people's hearts, who would be good and true to her children (especially the poor ones), and two elements of the painting provide this detail.

First, note the way the gown is not bulky at all (compared to the court gown of Marie Antoinette) but there is additional fabric hanging down over the side and reaching the floor. Today, we would call this “trickle down economics” from the Reagan administration, but her gown, reaching from the lounge to the floor, is meant as the good which would come down to them from on high; and the second device, the little floor table by the fabric, provides the symbolic means for climbing up the social ladder to a higher realm. It's not an abolition of the upper classes (that's why she reclines [a sign of leisure] on a chaise lounge, a piece of furniture for the wealthy and aristocrats, they will be retained) but now anyone would be able to obtain to that station, not just by birthright, but by their talent, industry and usefulness—which of course comes from the writings of Rousseau and the American Revolution.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Jacques-Louis David was a master of painting because he could incorporate political undercurrents into his works, regardless of his subject or what he wanted to say. While dethroning Marie Antoinette as Queen of France, David enthroned the Age of Enlightenment as Queen and goddess in the person of Madame Recamier. Again, it's wise of us to remember how political revolutions have been encoded in the past, as we will have a chance to refer to these elements in upcoming posts on films which are probably politically revolutionary themselves.

References:

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