

The rejection of classicism and academic arts english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



INTERIOR DESIGN 1ADTR1PRETORIA CAMPUSBrief 2:

THE REJECTION OF CLASSICISM AND ACADEMIC ARTS

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this essay is to give an explanation of why the rationalist approach to philosophy and the production of art was rejected by artists during the Romantic period. During the Age of Enlightenment, the fear that the human spirit may die, was common, therefore, artists felt that the defining characteristics of humanity would be buried under the mass of impersonal rationalism, therefore artists focused on emotion, passion and imagination, rather than reality and intellect. Artists were free to paint what they wanted. I will be discussing and comparing the artwork of Henry Fuseli, Théodore Géricault and Joseph Mallord William Turner. These artists have the rejection of rationalism in common.

art history iii: the art of the modern world: from baroque to modernism (portfolio)

<http://ha217c.wordpress.com/2009/09/09/6-romanticism/>

by Neil Calvin on September 9, 2009

HENRY FUSELI, THE NIGHTMARE, 1781.

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3121726%2521John_Henry_Fuseli_-_The_Nightmare. jpg

Figure 1. Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781. Henry Fuseli, born in Switzerland, but lived in England, was a well known artist during the Romantic period. Fuseli became a member and later an instructor at the Royal Academy. Henry Fuseli had a vivid imagination and he wanted to express his ideas to the world. Fuseli's artworks depicted moods of horror, dark fantasies, demonic and frequently consisted of a sadistic nature. Fuseli was among the first painters to depict the dark terrain of the human subconscious. (Kleiner, 2013) According to the website, WTF art history (n. d.), " Henry Fuseli tapped into a region of art that had often been neglected and left unexplored by artists." Henry Fuseli's painting, *The Nightmare*, depicts a young woman, asleep, on a bed with one arm dangling down the side. Sitting on top of her body is a demon figure, called incubus, supposedly preying on sleeping women in a sexual manner. (Kleiner, 2013) In addition, some believe that the incubus shows the artist's desire for an unanswered love and sexual interest, while others believe it represents the suffocation of the sleeper. (WTF art history, (n. d.)) In the background of the painting is a horse with a ghostly appearance and flaming eyes, coming through the curtain. According to Graham (2000), " The inclusion of a horse in the scene is unexplained but may simply be a play on words." However, the title of the painting is seen as a pun because of the word nightmare, where " mare" is associated with a female horse. Furthermore " nightmare" derives from " night" and " Mara", which is a spirit in the northern mythology, believed to torment and suffocate sleepers. During the painting of *The Nightmare*, Henry Fuseli used his imagination and

artistic freedom to cleverly channel ancient superstitions and religious fears into what he hoped people would accept as a new form of entertainment.

THÉODORE GÉRICAUT, RAFT OF MEDUSA, 1818-1819.

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[com/-LCDIEu6b0Hk/Tae6WBOvjsI/AAAAAAAAAvM/uEGh9V69JLY/s1600/Gericault_The+Raft+of+the+Medusa. jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-LCDIEu6b0Hk/Tae6WBOvjsI/AAAAAAAAAvM/uEGh9V69JLY/s1600/Gericault_The+Raft+of+the+Medusa.jpg)

Figure 2: Théodore Géricault, Raft Of Medusa, 1818-1819. One of the artists that were closely associated with the Romantic period was Théodore Géricault. Géricault took interest in heroic and epic training in classical drawing, however, he produced artwork that was captivating to the viewer, had an emotional force, visual complexity and drama. In France, Géricault created an extremely large painting titled, Raft of Medusa. In this artwork he rejected the Neoclassicism but accepted the theatrical style of Romanticism.(Kleiner, 2013)The subject matter of this artwork is based on the tragic naval accident that took place in 1816, off the African coast, due to the inexperience of the captain. The French frigate named Medusa, ran aground on a reef. According to Kleiner(2013), " In an attempt to survive, 150 passengers built a makeshift raft from pieces of the disintegrating ship. The raft drifted for 12 days, and the number still alive dwindled to 15. " According to De Beaufort(2009), " Because of the extreme conditions endured by the survivors, the story evokes deep sympathy for the epic struggle of human survival in the face of overwhelming odds. It is this harsh realism and visceral connection to the privations and horror of constant death, madness, cannibalism, and hopelessness that connect the work to the larger Romantic sensibility that was much evident in painting at

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the time." The artwork has a sense of moody darkness due to the sombre colours and pale flesh tones. Movement and energy is given to the artwork through the clouds and dangerous waves surrounding the raft of survivors. The focal area seems to be with the man in the lower left and the figure that waves a cloth in the upper right. This creates a strong diagonal composition from the lower left hand corner to the upper-right. Géricault incorporated the nature of survival, the unforgiving power of nature as well as the inner-struggle for meaning and purpose . There is also a hint of exoticisms as people started to travel and explore other areas of the world.(Analysis and synthesis, 2009)

Joseph Mallord William Turner, The Slave Ship, 1840.

[http://www. ibiblio. org/wm/paint/auth/turner/i/slave-ship. jpg](http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/turner/i/slave-ship.jpg)Figure 3: Joseph Mallord William Turner, The Slave Ship, 1840. After the publishing of a book, " The History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade", William Turner was inspired to paint, " The Slave Ship" The book was about an incident that happened in 1783, involving a ship filled with slaves. The captain of the slave ship realised that his insurance company would not pay him for slaves that died on the ship but those whom were lost at sea. The captain then ordered the sick and injured slaves to be thrown overboard. This was the inspiration for Turner's painting, The Slave Ship. Turner was influenced by the Turner was largely affected by the cruelty that was expressed towards these people, and he is able to portray this through the " frenzied emotional depiction of this act" (Kleiner). This particular landscape also reveals Turner's preoccupation with the Industrial Revolution and its effects on society. The

painting has a dramatic affect on the viewer and this was created by using a variety of colours, from dark maroons, to yellows, reds, oranges and blues. The maroon spots in the water is the main focus in the painting because it represents the bodies of the slaves. The power of nature is depicted by the fierce waves in the storm and this is created using various paint strokes. The ship sailing on the water in the rainstorm is very visable and gives a deeper understanding of the power nature holds. According to the website, British Romanticism (2007), " throughout history, it is perceived that in Turner's eyes, the ship was a punishment to the earth's habitants and their industrial actions. It is also important to note that among the upset waters, the sunset in the background portrays nature's beauty, serenity, and peace." William Turner does not use defined brush strokes therefore causing the painting to blur, this will allow the viewers to use their imagination. Also, the most vibrant colours can be found in the background as Turner does not want to place the focal point on the ship but on the power that nature possesses.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is clear how artists during the romantic period rejected realism and started using their imagination. In the works of Henry Fuselli, Theodore Gericault and William Turner, it is clear how the wanted to explore and move away from the religious factors and more into the unknown through escapism and exoticism.

DEFINITION OF TERMS