

**THE DESTRUCTION OF THE IDEAL: ROMANTICISM AND
GÉRICAULT'S PORTRAITS OF THE INSANE**

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Bachelor of Arts, 2003
Rice University
Houston, Texas

Submitted to the Faculty
Graduate Division of the
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2009

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE IDEAL: ROMANTICISM AND GÉRICAULT'S PORTRAITS OF THE INSANE

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Dimier thought that great passions were the source of genius. I think that it is imagination alone, or better still, what amounts to the same thing, that delicacy of the organs that makes one see what others do not see, and which makes one see in a different way. I was saying that even great passions joined to imagination lead most often to disorder in the mind, etc. Dufresne said a very true thing: what made a man unusual was, fundamentally, a way utterly peculiar to himself of seeing things. He applied it to the great captains, etc., and finally to the great minds of all sorts. So, there are no rules for great souls: rules are only for people who have merely the talent that can be acquired.¹

Eugène Delacroix, 1824

Though Théodore Géricault's five portraits of the insane were not seen by the public in his lifetime, the sway they have held over the construction of the relationship between late eighteenth century-classicism and Romanticism showcases their importance. How could paintings that were never exhibited at the Salon and possibly never seen by Eugène Delacroix presage the Romantic art movement that would reach ascendancy after Géricault's death? What influence could Géricault have over such a tumultuous period of art when so little of his work was known to the public? Géricault exhibited only four paintings at the Salon during his short life: the military portraits *Charging Chasseur* (1812) and *Wounded Cuirassier* (1814), the lost *Firing Exercise on the Plains of Grenelle* (1814), and the epic condemnation of the Restoration government, *Raft of the Medusa* (1819). What must be regarded as most important to understanding the portraits of the insane, then, is how they interact with a specific time and place. Historically, the paintings are innovative meditations upon disease and reflect the progress of psychiatric thought in the early nineteenth century. Art historically, though, the paintings exist at a significant time in the development of art, providing a fulcrum between the traditional classical system of painting and the Romantic and Realist modes of representation. Géricault spent his entire artistic life attempting to synthesize Jacques-Louis David's style into

¹ April 27, 1824 diary entry of Eugène Delacroix, *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix* trans. Walter Pach (New York: Covici, Friede, Inc., 1937), 82.

his own, while sweeping away the cold, calculating finesse of post-Davidian classicism. The portraits of the insane, painted near the end of the artist's life, symbolize Géricault's move away from external influence to a more personal painterly style that complicates the narrative of Delacroix as Romantic innovator. Therefore, just as Géricault often represents the crux between classicism and Romanticism, or between David and Delacroix, his portraits of the insane also represent the crux of his own career.

In discussing the portraits of the insane, it is important not to project upon the portraits unproven assumptions regarding their commission and use. The mosaic of information regarding Géricault, France after the Revolution, portraiture, insanity, and the liberalization of French psychology in the nineteenth century make possible a wealth of interpretations. Instead of employing an overly positivist approach in which the political and social atmosphere in France during Géricault's lifetime function as a lens through which to examine the portraits in art historical terms, we should approach the portraits themselves as enlightening their time period. It is difficult to approach a painter with so few works exhibited, but Nina Athanassoglou-Kalmyer has provided a welcome line of attack. In her essay on Géricault's images of severed heads and limbs, she discusses the inherent problems with investigating those works through their proposed uses as studies. Géricault's works, she contends, open themselves to a more interesting interpretation when viewed as autonomous works. The portraits of the insane can likewise be understood more clearly by setting aside questions of usage, whether as studies for larger paintings or possible lithographs for a book diagnosing features of insanity.² That is not to say that the potential use of Géricault's portraits of the insane is not interesting in its own right, or that the progression of French psychiatry is immaterial, but these contexts are more valuable

² Nina Athanassoglou-Kalmyer, "Géricault Severed Heads and Limbs: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Scaffold," *The Art Bulletin* 74 (December 1992): 599-618.

when viewing the actual work as something that reflects and interacts with a climate rather than being a product of explicit cause and effect.

This artistic climate into which Géricault was born was still overwhelmingly framed around David. When Géricault exhibited his *Charging Chasseur* (Fig. 1) at the Salon of 1812, David admired the painting, but noted that he did not recognize the hand.³ What David could not recognize was his own hand in the painting, for he continued to hold sway over the Salons, influencing hundreds of artists. Géricault could not have existed outside this realm of ateliers, Salons, artistic criticism, national movements, and the powerful draw of classicism as embodied by many of the Renaissance masters at the Louvre. To attribute to Géricault an ability to completely disregard the model of David and his preeminent students would be a disservice to Géricault's more impressive ability to address a variety of stimuli and synthesize them into a style that may be referred to as the portent of Romanticism. Would it not be naïve to assume that Géricault, at such a young age and in such a short career, could have carelessly tossed aside decades of Davidian classicism as mere jetsam floating behind the pure path to "originality" and "genius"? The continued hold of David over French art certainly concerned Géricault, who wrote in an undated journal entry: "one sees every year ten or twelve compositions, of almost identical execution, whose every stroke is painstakingly perfect, offering no germ of originality whatsoever."⁴ Géricault noticed in the multitude of works exhibited at the Salon a repetition of style, palette, expressions, and composition. Delacroix, while complimenting David, also noticed his negative effect upon painting in 1824: "How strange it is, after all, to believe that the

³ David is recorded as saying "D'où cela sort-il? Je ne reconnais pas cette touche." This comment was first noted in Louis Batissier's biography of Géricault from 1842 and reproduced in Charles Clément, *Géricault: A Biographical and Critical Study with a Catalogue Raisonné of the Master's Works* (New York: Junius Press, 1972), 55. According to Lorenz Eitner, Clément draws heavily on Batissier's biography for information (See Note 10 in Lorenz Eitner, *Géricault: His Life and Work* (London: Orbis Publishing, 1983), 322.

⁴ Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory: 1815-1900* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 26.

French School should be immobilized for ever more, simply because it was lucky enough to produce the greatest painter of the eighteenth century in the shape of David.”⁵

There was certainly no confusing Géricault’s works with that of the followers of David; in his drawings he put forth an energy that even the most devoted classicist would admit had not translated to the students of David’s students.⁶ Géricault studied in the schools of Carle Vernet and Pierre Guérin for short periods of time but found their structure inhibitive to his creativity.⁷ In fact, the *Charging Chasseur* bears little resemblance stylistically to the work of Guérin and Vernet. Additionally, the naturalistic style that Géricault developed while copying Baroque masters at the Louvre and on his trip to Italy created a subtle movement away from classicism. Géricault’s career did not begin with a complete rejection of classicism: his career arc instead varies between classical, monumental, sculptural compositions and the more contemporary Romantic style with which he is more often associated.⁸ Sometimes, as in the *Raft of the Medusa* (Fig. 2), this varying of styles could appear in one work; Géricault effectively combined the strong sculptural draftsmanship of a classical master with the Romantic emotions of a young painter exploring controversial contemporary subject matter. The manner in which he drafted sketches for his final works hints at a strong classicism, especially in the heroic nudes, with their classically athletic physiques, that continuously appeared in his sketches and studies.⁹ The evidence of his surviving work suggests that Géricault was not wholly interested in creating a

⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁶ Lorenz Eitner, “Géricault’s ‘Dying Paris’ and the Meaning of his Romantic Classicism,” *Master Drawings* 1 (Spring 1963): 29.

⁷ Vernet and Guérin both achieved early professional and academic success. Vernet is now known for his moderately successful landscape scenes of hunters and horses. Guérin was more of a classical painter, and was often frustrated by Géricault’s more painterly enthusiasm. Vernet’s son, Horace, achieved great success during his lifetime and was an intimate friend of Géricault.

⁸ Eitner, “Géricault’s ‘Dying Paris’”, 23.

⁹ Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism: The Mythology of Nineteenth-Century Art* (New York: The Viking Press, 1984), 45-46.

signature manner, but instead in exploring heterogeneous styles.¹⁰ Thus, Géricault's art often defies categorization. Additionally, Géricault's willingness to abjure traditional subject matter gave him an independence that was almost unbelievable by the standards of French painting.¹¹ Géricault frequently sought contemporary events as inspiration, including the *Raft of the Medusa*, his military portraits, and the unfinished *Fuadès* and *Barberi Horses* paintings. Though he looked often to contemporary events, Géricault never explicitly rejected classicism, and often returned to it: after the collapse of the Napoleonic empire in 1814 and upon visiting Italy two years later. Géricault simultaneously absorbed old masters, antiquity, and Davidian classicism, while formulating an expressive style truly his own.

In refusing to reject classicism, he also refused to be defined by classicism through his rejection. A rejection implies the same dependence as blind acceptance. The example of Jean-Antoine Gros illustrates this point: unlike Géricault, Gros undertook a "guilty modernism" where he was trapped between Davidian imitation and the temptation of a more realistic style.¹² In trying to define himself through a rejection of David, Gros defined himself through David. Géricault, on the other hand, arrived at an eclectic emulation which defined his style through the positives of assimilation rather than the negatives of exclusion. Géricault's most famous expression of personal style in a public setting would come with the *Raft of the Medusa*, for the Salon of 1819. The *Raft* was also the first time Géricault dealt with madness. In his many studies for the work, he explored the look of mental imbalance and acquainted himself with the realities of hunger, thirst, depression, mania, suffering, cannibalism, and murder. His seamless assimilation of contemporary, and controversial, subject matter with Baroque chiaroscuro and

¹⁰ *Citizens and Kings: Portraits in the Age of Revolution* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2007), 325.

¹¹ Frances Jowell, "Book Review of Géricault: His Life and Work," *The Burlington Magazine* 125 (December 1983): 771.

¹² Jean Lacoste, "Le Beau Moderne," in *Géricault: Ouvrage collectif dirigé*, ed. Régis Michel (Paris: La Documentations Française, 1996), 836.

modeling, however, proved troubling to the public. The *Raft* was an explicit evisceration of Bourbon government policy. The government ship the Medusa had run aground just off the coast of West Africa and the captain and officers jettisoned a large group of men aboard a makeshift raft. When the horrific story of their days on the raft came to light from the few survivors, the Bourbon government was impugned because of its appointment policy, which had put vastly unqualified people in charge. In exploring a controversial subject from only three years earlier, Géricault assimilated the pictorial vocabulary of traditional history painting with contemporary subject matter. *Raft of the Medusa* combined the sculptural bodies of David with the sickness of mind and body that would be completely anathema to David and his followers, though Gros did experiment with these concepts in *Bonaparte visiting the Plague Victims of Jaffa* of 1804. He also imbued the subject with tremendous significance and emotion that extended beyond its subject matter.¹³ However, the discontinuity between the contemporary moral dimension and the sculptural qualities reminiscent of David made the painting difficult to approach and its rejection for purchase by the Restoration government could not have been wholly surprising.

After the semi-disastrous reception of the *Raft* at the Salon, Géricault traveled to England to exhibit the picture to great acclaim. As a welcome supplement to the trip, Géricault studied a strain of English artistic style that was wholly different from the majority of art produced in France. The English painters David Wilkie, Thomas Lawrence, and John Constable made a deep impression on him stylistically, especially in the aspect of their bright and vivid colors. Wilkie's *The Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Waterloo Dispatch* of 1822 (Fig. 3) was notably admired by

¹³ James Rubin, "Delacroix and Romanticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Delacroix*, ed. Beth Segal Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 28. The *Raft's* continuing legacy as one of the most highly regarded works at the Louvre testifies to the timelessness of its depiction of explicitly contemporary subject matter.

several French Romantics including Delacroix.¹⁴ In England, he began to experience and experiment with the combination of Baroque modeling and chiaroscuro with enhanced English colorism. However, the greatest impact upon him was made by the advent of naturalism, or the interest in depicting the natural world with less sculptural and more painterly sensibilities, in England, a country in which the Davidian style did not have the artistic stranglehold it had in France. The artist's friend and fellow painter Horace Vernet noted that Géricault had pointed to "naturalness" as a special virtue of English portraits.¹⁵ Lorenz Eitner argues that Géricault experienced a horrified fascination with London's industrial landscapes and this profoundly shifted his view on subject matter.¹⁶ In reality, Géricault found an affinity for naturalism earlier in his rejection of the French academic system. The trip to England merely confirmed this interest.

It was when he returned from England to France that Géricault supposedly completed his portraits of the insane. The circumstances surrounding the commission and execution of Géricault's portraits of the insane remain a complete mystery. There are no contemporaneous accounts of Géricault completing the portraits, so every aspect of the process, other than the work itself, has been obscured. Consequently, the possibilities surrounding the paintings have often taken precedence over the works themselves. Though the enigma of their completion deserves attention, the temptation to project associations upon works based upon potentially false assumptions should be resisted.

¹⁴ Walter F Friedlaender, *David to Delacroix*, trans. Robert Goldwater (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 102. The English architect and writer Charles Robert Cockerell was an acquaintance of Géricault and kept a diary in which he noted that, on December 1st, 1821, he traveled with Géricault and the painter Jules-Robert Auguste to visit Wilkie's studio to see him painting *Chelsea Pensioners*. This visit is noted in Lee Johnson, "Géricault and Delacroix Seen by Cockerell," *The Burlington Magazine* 113 (September 1971): 548. Johnson also references a letter Géricault wrote to his friend Horace Vernet on May 1st, 1821 that detailed Géricault's admiration for Wilkie's painting in Pierre Cailler, *Géricault raconte par lui-meme et par ses amis* (Geneva: 1947), 105.

¹⁵ Eitner, *Géricault: His Life and Work*, 249.

¹⁶ Lorenz Eitner, "Géricault at Winterthur," *The Burlington Magazine* 96 (August 1954): 258.

Even the titles of the works were given by the biographer Charles Clément around forty years after their supposed painting. Clément became the art critic of *Le Journal des Débats* in 1863, after the death of Etienne-Jean Delécluze. In the 1860s and 1870s, he compiled a series of biographies of various artists, Géricault's among them. Earlier biographies existed of Géricault, but were extremely limited and obfuscated by the dearth of details regarding his paintings. As he compiled Géricault's biography, Clément spoke directly to a number of witnesses to Géricault's career and viewed the works that were just beginning to be dispersed to major collections.¹⁷ However, the portraits of the insane are not mentioned at length, being only referred to in Clément's cursory catalogue of later works. Clément stated about the portraits:

They are a group of ten paintings that Géricault did, between the years 1821 and 1824, after his return from England, for his friend, Dr. Georget, the head physician of the Salpêtrière. Dr. Georget died a very short while after Géricault. At the sale of the pictures, five of these studies were bought by the doctor Maréchal, who took them to Brittany where they no doubt remain; the five others that we describe became the property of Dr. Lachèze. These are portraits in bust - three men and two women - showing different types of madmen.¹⁸

Clément's information appeared to come from letters the writer Louis Viardot wrote to Charles Blanc and Théophile Thoré in 1863 and 1864, concerning his discovery of the five works in the

¹⁷ Phillipe Grunhech, *Master Drawings by Géricault* (Washington, D.C.: International Exhibitions Foundation, 1985), 20.

¹⁸ The full text states: "font partie de dix peintures que Géricault fit, entre les années 1821 et 1824, après son retour d'Angleterre, pour son ami le docteur Georget mourut très-peu de temps après Géricault. A sa vente, cinq de ces études furent achetées par le docteur Maréchal, qui les emporta en Bretagne où elles sont sans doute encore; les cinq autres que nous décrivons devinrent la propriété du docteur Lachèze. Ce sont des portraits en buste – trois homes et deux femmes – reproduisant différents types d'aliénés" and can be found in Clément, *Géricault: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 317.

attic of Dr. Lachèze.¹⁹ The five works purchased by Dr. Maréchal subsequently have disappeared (though the question of their existence remains an open one since no one has ever written of seeing the works). Viardot tried to interest Thoré as well as the Louvre in the five works he discovered, but neither desired to purchase the portraits.²⁰ From Viardot's descriptions of the works, Clément added titles to each painting: *Monomanie du commandement militaire* (Fig. 4), *Monomanie du vol des enfants* (Fig. 5), *Monomanie du vol* (Fig. 6), *Monomanie du jeu* (Fig. 7), and *Monomanie de l'envie* (Fig. 8) (the individual paintings will be referred to as *Military Grandeur*, *Child-Kidnapping*, *Theft*, *Gambling*, and *Envy*.) All five are different sizes; the smallest painting is three-quarters the size of the largest. Viardot suggests that the paintings were commissioned by Dr. Étienne-Jean Georget after Géricault's return to France and were used as illustrations for Georget's work with insanity.²¹ In a letter of reply to Viardot, Thoré speculated that the paintings might fetch 500 francs and, upon viewing them, reiterated that they were "très authentiques, très bien peints, très laids et très difficiles à placer."²²

The most important questions surrounding the portraits have little to do with what happened to them after they were discovered, but with how they came to be. Theories alternate between Géricault fulfilling commissions to paint the insane *upon returning* from London (as Clément suggested between 1821-1824) and *before leaving* for London, in a spiritual quagmire as a result of his failed unveiling of the *Raft of the Medusa* and committed by his friends to a clinic run by Dr. Georget. The focus upon these elements has led to a deeper understanding of how Géricault worked and how he operated under artistic influences. It also helps construct a

¹⁹ See "Portraits de fous" as well as "Documents" in Sylvain Laveissière and Bruno Chenique, ed., *Géricault: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1991), 244, 322-323.

²⁰ Ibid., 244.

²¹ "Very authentic, very well painted, very ugly and very difficult to place." Ibid.

²² Frances Jowell, "Thoré's Géricault," in *Géricault: Ouvrage collectif dirigé*, ed. Régis Michel (Paris: La Documentations Française, 1996), 792-793.

linear narrative of his career in order to comprehend his aesthetic variations and dalliances. However, this focus has led to a reductive account of the portraits' function and importance deriving more from specific questions of timeliness at the expense of broader questions of timelessness. In focusing upon how the paintings were commissioned and used, historians neglect the internal importance of the paintings and why they attract our attention today.

As noted earlier, Clément originally dated the portraits between 1821 and 1824. Margaret Miller concurred that Géricault was in England until the spring of 1822 and would have painted the portraits before the first of a series of accidents that led to his death in January, 1824.²³ Clément noted that when Géricault returned from London, "There was... throughout his being a trouble difficult to define, but impossible to mistake."²⁴ One of the implicit questions that appears to be wholly unacknowledged is Géricault's capacity, while suffering from a complete mental and physical breakdown, approaching death and confined to his bed, to complete such works of stunning veracity and artistic skill.

The general motivation behind dating the portraits after Géricault's trip to England is stylistic; they would form a fitting conclusion to a brilliant but interrupted life. In this manner, art historians have created a trajectory to Géricault's career in which the paintings form a bookend. After absorbing the naturalist style of English painting, Géricault returned to his home and completed five (or ten) brilliant masterpieces before dying. Another tempting theory, based almost purely upon speculative historical motivations, has been proposed that dates the portraits quite a bit earlier. After the *Raft of the Medusa* was hung in the Louvre, at such a height to be detrimental to the overall effect of the work, Géricault, already suffering from extreme

²³ Margaret Miller, "Géricault's Paintings of the Insane," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (April 1941 – July 1942): 152. This article is the earliest, and most thorough, account of the genesis of Géricault's portraits of the insane and most studies of these portraits derive from her work.

²⁴ "Il y avait alors, me semble-t-il, dans tout son être un trouble difficile à définir, mais impossible à méconnaître" in Clément, *Géricault: A Biographical and Critical Study*, 228-229.

exhaustion, apparently became disconsolate and depressed. Soon after the Salon opening, his friend René-Richard Castel wrote of Géricault being confined to his bed with delirium. When he traveled, he was convinced that enemies were spying on him and this period was followed by two months in which no documents attest to his whereabouts.²⁵ Denise Aimé-Azam has posited that Géricault sought medical help at this time, probably from Georget, and that the portraits may have been painted then or after his return from England as a debt of gratitude.²⁶ This theory proposes that the aforementioned friendship between Géricault and Georget probably began as patient and physician and that Géricault spent those undocumented two months in a psychiatric clinic.²⁷ Inherent in this belief is the romantic notion that, in painting the *Raft* with little regard for his own health, Géricault suffered a complete nervous breakdown. Eitner, on the other hand, believes that circumstances suggest that Géricault was already suffering from poor mental and physical health and that the lack of public appreciation and savage critical reviews exacerbated his situation.²⁸ It certainly seems plausible that Géricault suffered from profound emotional problems and that the exhaustion of *Raft* sent him into such a depression that he required the services of Georget, one of France's preeminent physicians, whom Viardot noted Géricault had known from childhood.²⁹

Historians have generally agreed that the portraits could have been used by Georget as physiognomic studies to illustrate subsequent editions of his work *De la folie* (1820).³⁰

²⁵ See Bruno Chenique, "Géricault: Une Vie" in Laveissière and Chenique, *Géricault: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais*, 286, under "Départ de Féricy" and "La 'dépression' de Géricault (?)" as well as Thomas Crow, *Emulation: Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 294.

²⁶ Lorenz Eitner, *Géricault* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971), 171.

²⁷ Christopher Sells, "Two Letters from Géricault to Madame Horace Vernet," *The Burlington Magazine* 131 (March 1989): 217.

²⁸ Lorenz Eitner, *Géricault's Raft of the Medusa* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1972), 57.

²⁹ Laveissière and Chenique, *Géricault: Galeries nationales du Grand Palais*, 244.

³⁰ Klaus Berger, however, contends that if the portraits had been conceived for illustrating a book, they would have been completed as lithographs rather than paintings. Berger argues that the portraits do not coincide with any cases demonstrated in Georget's book; the portraits would have been used instead as instructional material for his students

However, it is difficult to match the paintings with Georget's specific cases of insanity because, assuming that Géricault painted these with great naturalism, the superficial signs of psychiatric neuroses are simply not there. Though the question of commission is one that will probably never be resolved, these paintings make sense as a commission from Georget to Géricault as a friend and possible patient to complete portraits of people suffering from mania and other mental derangements. Albert Boime has proposed that the possibility of the five paintings being painted with another five suggests there might have been a pairing, in which before and after scenes were constructed to show the visage of sufferers before and after treatment.³¹ Boime associates Géricault's paintings for Georget with the practice of the physician Dr. Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, who employed artists to compose before/after scenes. For instance, Esquirol's collected papers, published under the title *Des maladies mentales* in 1838, were illustrated with 27 drawings of patients in various states of derangement.³² However, Esquirol's "before" portraits show overwhelming signs of derangement in contrast to the "after" portraits of normalcy. Boime's proposal lacks credibility because Géricault's portraits negate these outward signs of disease, instead hinting at something unsettling simmering just below the surface. Also, it was not necessary for Géricault and Georget to follow the absolute precedent of Esquirol's commissions; Georget was not wholly concerned with the effects of moral treatment that necessitated those drawings.³³

to assist in physiognomic diagnosis of insanity. The idea that the portraits could be used as teaching materials rather than book illustrations is not farfetched. The contention that posthumously titled portraits do not correspond to specific Georget cases, however, is specious. Berger's contention depends on the art historian's ability to guess what the portraits mean (i.e., which insanity is demonstrated) aside from their questionable titles. There are certainly valid questions, though, regarding whether nineteenth century viewers would have seen the portraits differently than twentieth and twenty-first century viewers. See Klaus Berger, *Géricault and his Work*, trans. Winslow Ames (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1955), 88.

³¹ Albert Boime, "Portraying Monomaniacs to Service the Alienist's Monomania: Géricault and Georget," *Oxford Art Journal* 14, no. 1 (1991): 83.

³² *Ibid.*, 81.

³³ Boime, "Portraying," 88.

The paintings themselves showcase Géricault working at the height of his talent and his capacity for flawless execution. Each figure is set off against a darkened and unrecognizable background (only *Gambling* hints at the setting, with barely discernible outlines of bricks). The figures stare away from the painter/viewer, with three of them looking to their left and the two others looking to their right. Each face occupies the upper central portion of the frame; their heads reach near the top of each painting, while the bottom cuts off their bodies just below the elbows. Non-facial characteristics like clothing and background are hazily sketched. However, Géricault paid close attention to the modeling of the hats on four of the subjects as well as the medal around the neck of the subject in *Military Grandeur*. The contours generally vary from work to work, with stronger lines in the clothing of the male subjects than the female. More detail occurs in the faces of the females. Though the subjects do not bear stereotypical marks of insanity, or types of monomania, the shabbiness of the clothing and accessories they wear indicate their low social status.

Similarly, their facial expressions exhibit a profound disaffection (perhaps most noticeable on *Child-Kidnapping*) that points to a removal from their position in society. The absence of narrative in the facial characteristics, at least superficially, allows the viewer to instead project a narrative upon the subjects. Géricault allowed for an ambiguity between the subjects posing (either as hiding their madness or consumed by it) and a more naturalistic depiction (as in capturing their condition with the instantaneity of a photograph). In this manner, Géricault refuses to choose anonymity and typology over individuality, instead combining elements of both. The faces vary greatly in flesh tone and convey a range from the greenish tint of the faces in *Gambling* and *Envy* to the darker tones of *Theft* and *Child-Kidnapping*. Géricault explicitly focuses the viewer's gaze upon the face and the eyes. Additionally, he distinguishes

the painterly style of the face from the glassy and precisely modeled qualities of the eyes. In *Envy*, the remarkably bloodshot eyes point to some immediate distress, while in *Child-Kidnapper*, their glassiness portrays a more permanent suffering.

In many of Géricault's earlier drawings and portraits, the sculptural quality of his works was sometimes at odds with the non-sculptural quality of those areas of the painting he found insignificant. In reducing the tendency to classically model the faces and moving towards a more painterly style (a move evocative of a gradual rejection of classicism and the stirrings of Romanticism), Géricault creates a far greater unity between the significant and the insignificant. In the portraits of the insane, a strong contrast occurs between the light application of paint in some areas and heavy application in others, but these somehow fail to detract from the overall unity. While one could argue that the handling of the clothing of the two female sitters is almost haphazard (not unlike the modeling in the lower body of Géricault's *Wounded Cuirassier* of 1814 (Fig. 9)), the strong physiognomic details in the faces play off this loose approach to background and clothing rather than diametrically opposing it. Though Delacroix often complained about an absence of compositional unity in Géricault's portraits, Géricault seems to have resolved these qualities of disunity. He better modulated the effects between the impasto of background details and the more precise detail of the faces. Additionally, the growth of his painterly approach allowed him to compose only hazy sketches of some areas; a more sculptural approach to painting demands consistent and exquisite modeling. This painterly approach to depicting his subjects gives the viewer a better sense of capturing a condition instantly; the more classical approach dependent on draftsmanship and sculptural modeling infers a greater preparation than Géricault probably intended.

The figures occupy a blank space. Géricault presents them in no specific environment and committing no specific action, carefully undermining the signs of segregation from society, much like David's *Self-Portrait* of 1794 (Fig. 10).³⁴ Like the portraits of the insane, David's portrait refuses to indicate the facts concerning his incarceration, preferring to allow the viewer to imagine a backdrop to the scene. In this sense, the portraits elicit reactions from the viewer based on the skillful handling of the subject rather than the extraneous symbols that are often prevalent in most portraits of late classicism. This allows viewers to construct their own narrative regarding the sitter; the identification of the sitter is achieved through the removal of conventional identification. Whereas the plates that illustrate Esquirol's works (Fig. 11) overtly convey the sitters' illness to the viewer, four of Géricault's sitters are marked by their neutral expressions.³⁵ They must have posed for Géricault (putting their best face forward, so to speak), but Géricault treats them as if he has caught just a glimpse of their everyday behavior.

Géricault's subjects do not make direct eye contact with the painter/viewer. Georget described monomaniacs as "absorbed and profoundly attentive to the idea that dominates them, [they] flee their fellows, sometimes to remove themselves from their sight if they believe they displease them."³⁶ Géricault, however, upsets the traditional modes of representation by having some of his subjects look directly away from the viewer while others appear to look through the viewer. This uncertainty of gazes does not allow the viewer to be drawn into the sitters' preoccupations. In some portraits, this preoccupation is more readily accessible than others (a notable contrast between the passivity of *Gambling* with the activity of *Envy*, the only one of the

³⁴ Miller, "Géricault's Paintings of the Insane," 153. David completed this self-portrait while incarcerated in the Hôtel des Fermes in 1794 after the downfall of Robespierre.

³⁵ Gilman, *Seeing*, 84.

³⁶ "absorbés et profondément attentifs à l'idée qui les domine, fuient leurs semblables, tantôt pour se soustraire à leur vue si'ils croient leur déplaire" in Dr. Étienne-Jean Georget, *De la folie: Considérations sur cette maladie* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 112.

portraits to show outward signs of aggression with her bloodshot eyes and face contorted as if responding angrily to some external stimuli.) Yet the affinity between the works showcases the brilliance with which Géricault could subtly alter aspects of painting to suit each individual sitter, while retaining his artistic personality throughout each work. Linda Nochlin notes that even traditional gender distinctions are muted: more details unite the male and female subjects, as in the gazes and hinting of inner tension, than distinguish the male from female.³⁷ Géricault plays with the concept of typology, by blurring distinctions between male and female, and insane and sane.

The portraits are often associated with Géricault's pictures of severed heads and arms or understood as deriving solely from Georget's commission, but Margaret Miller has noted that the portraits are rarely understood as historically significant simply due to their "fidelity and sympathetic restraint."³⁸ Certainly, no portrait of the insane exists before Géricault's that portrays disaffectedness and inner tension with such efficacy. Insanity had in fact attracted other notable artists, including William Hogarth and Francisco Goya, an artist who is often associated with classical and Romantic sensibilities, but whose *Yard with Lunatics* of 1793/4 could not be more different from Géricault's portraits (Fig. 12). It is not farfetched to assume that Géricault was drawn to a commission to paint the insane, whatever the final use of those portraits would be, because he rarely painted commissioned portraits and even then most portraits were of his family and close friends.³⁹ However, the boundaries of consciousness and reason were something that seemed to appeal to artists, and what better subject to explore those boundaries, through their lack, than the insane?⁴⁰

³⁷ Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 71.

³⁸ Miller, "Géricault's Paintings of the Insane," 153.

³⁹ *Citizens and Kings*, 325.

⁴⁰ *French Painting, 1774-1830: The Age of Revolution* (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1975), 450.

Artists, like psychiatrists, recognized that conceptions of abnormality could reveal truths much greater than the self-fashioning inherent in traditional portraiture. Additionally, abnormality was often seen as born of the same inspiration as genius, and the connection between the two was often repeated by philosophers, artists, and writers. In his essay on Goya's portrayals of madness, Peter Klein notes that genius and madness occupied two opposing poles within the human mind, yet

both genius and madness were, however, seen as connected by the power of imagination, which did not yet play such a role in the classical art theory of the seventeenth century, the significance of which for artistic creation became increasingly recognized and emphasized in the eighteenth century.... The majority of enlightened French critics warned against genius as a danger which could threaten art by its unrestrained imagination and passions, and even end in madness.⁴¹

However, the philosopher Denis Diderot would articulate what would also become a prevalent "minority" viewpoint. Diderot commented that "I have ever been the advocate of strong passions.... If dreadful actions which discredit our nature are performed through them, it is through them too that we are brought to attempt wonders that exalt that nature."⁴² Diderot articulates what would come to be a common mindset among many physicians and artists: a strong ambiguity regarding the effects of insanity. Possession was a state that could arise from muses as well as demons. This ambiguity had deep roots in ancient philosophy: the writer Seneca quoted Aristotle as declaring "Never has there been great talent without some touch of

⁴¹ Peter Klein, "Insanity and the Sublime: Aesthetics and Theories of Mental Illness in Goya's *Yard with Lunatics* and Related Works," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 61 (1998): 219-220.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 236-238.

madness.”⁴³ Because of its connection to genius through imagination, madness was not a trait that always had negative connotations.

It is precisely this ambiguity that defines Géricault’s portraits of the insane: an ambiguity between internalization and externalization, between anonymity and individuality, between individual identification and typology, between madness and genius, and between sublimity and beauty. Miller has noted that typical depictions of insanity focus upon behavior rather than the mind, a substituting of the outward symptoms of an illness for the fundamental concept of that illness. Géricault combats this tendency to depict mind only through action by intimating the scene of distress just below the surface of the subjects’ faces. This lack of stereotyping in the portraits plays a large part in the efficacy of the works, but should give pause to art historians who conduct studies of these portraits based upon assumptions regarding their “meaning,” which more often than not, simply refers to the works’ titles. Miller further contends that the portraits resist medical classification because they are constructed as normal portraits so that Géricault could study the personality and state of mind.⁴⁴ In this manner, Géricault emphasizes the individuality of the subjects. Representations based on behavior necessarily limit individuality because behavior can be seen to occupy a more finite and repetitive realm than personality. Géricault has allowed the sitters to impose on the painter and viewer some idea of their own reality, in which “their abnormal state of mind can only be deduced from their physical bearing and the disquietude of their faces.”⁴⁵ Géricault and his sitters have disrupted the normal association between sign and meaning, disease and clinician, and physical and metaphysical.

⁴³ Diane Karp, “Madness, Mania, Melancholy: The Artist as Observer,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 80, (Spring 1984): 5-6.

⁴⁴ Miller, “Géricault’s Paintings of the Insane,” 153.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

Even though many scholars assume that these portraits were intended as some sort of physiognomic accompaniment to Georget's lectures on the insane, they rebuff any attempt to read them through the phrenology of the head or the stereotypical markers of the insane. Georget described consistent features for specific monomanias in *De la folie*. How useful then could Géricault's portraits have been to his study? The answer may lay in the fact that Georget, as well as many physicians in the still developing field of French psychiatry, often contradicted himself. If Georget truly believed that monomaniacs exhibited typical features that were easily read, his argument for the importance of the physician skilled enough to discover the invisible monomania in the courtroom holds no weight. Georget himself wrote an almost purposefully contradictory account in *De la folie*:

It is difficult to describe the physiognomy of the insane; it is necessary to observe them to retain an image of them. Persons are unrecognizable at times, the features of the face have altered their alignment, the arrangement is totally deformed. The physiognomies are as different as the individuals; they vary according to the passions, the diverse ideas which occupy or agitate them, the character of the delirium, the period of the illness, etc. In general the face of idiots is silly and insignificant; that of maniacs, as agitated as their spirit, is sometimes twitching and convulsed; the faces of stupid people are cast down and without expression; the faces of melancholics, contracted, marked by the imprint of pain or extreme preoccupation; the monomaniacal king has a proud and haughty air; the devout,

humble and praying while fixed on heaven or the earth; the coward flees, looking to the side, etc.⁴⁶

This variance would seem to prescribe a reaction against physiognomic portraits, since Georget consistently emphasized the importance of the clinician in diagnosis and the utter variability of the outward signs of disease. However, Georget made frequent use of drawings in his studies and believed in their ability to better inform observation.

This slippage between anonymity (or identity based only upon a typology of behavior) and individuality is one that Géricault exploited in these portraits. As Georget's synthesis of illness and behavior created a theory in which outward signs could be read as most significant, Géricault simultaneously explored a sympathetic representation of facial characteristics, while removing from them the stereotypical signs of illness. Géricault produced a more nuanced, perhaps contradictory, system of diagnosing illness compared to Georget. The sitters provoke something unsettling in the viewer through the ambiguity of sanity and insanity that is present in their faces. Géricault refuses to portray them performing the stereotype of insanity. He instead individualizes the insane, by removing them from the teeming masses in the madhouse, while withholding judgment on their physiological state. It is precisely the unspecific nature of monomania that prevents a superficial reading of that illness. According to Georget's account, the "ill are not to be recognized"; this contention would seem to absolutely undermine the fundamental tradition of identification of the sitter in portraiture. The true achievement of

⁴⁶ "Il est difficile de décrire la physionomie des aliénés; il faut l'observer pour en conserver l'image. Les personnes sont méconnaissables alors; les traits de la face ont changé de direction, leur ensemble est tout déformé. Les physionomies sont presque aussi différentes que les individus; elle varient suivant les passions, les idées diverses qui les occupent ou les agitent, le caractère du délire, l'époque de la maladie, etc. En général, la figure des idiots est niaise et insignifiante; celle des maniaques, aussi agitée que leur esprit, est quelquefois crispée, convulsée; chez les stupides, les traits sont abattus et n'ont aucune expression; le facies de mélancoliques, contracté, porte l'empreinte de la douleur ou d'une préoccupation extrême; le monomane, fier et haut, a l'air fier et haut; le dévot, humble, prie en fixant le ciel ou la terre; le craintif fuit en regardant de côté, etc." in Georget, *De la folie*, 133.

Géricault's depictions is to allow the reality of behavioral variance to permeate the paintings, rather than approaching them stereotypically as one would expect of any other artist or physician. Though Géricault had worked with terror, madness and despondency before, these portraits not only do not follow normal standards of portrayal, but also move away from his own previous tendencies.⁴⁷ In the *Raft*, the scene is portrayed as a sympathetic view of the degradation of people upon the raft, but this is not an individualized sympathy. Death, cannibalism, and self-destructive violence reference not bodies but groups of bodies; the overwhelming effect of the scene is the incoherence of the subjects.

How can we then assume the portraits were intended as we view them today: as sympathetic portraits of suffering from mental derangement meant to evoke identification without stereotyping their suffering? The paintings certainly exact demands upon the viewer. Most art historians project upon the portraits a narrative based upon Clément's titles. The subjects themselves are rendered with a sense of distress and Brendan Prendeville argues that most people would guess that the sitters were inhabitants of an asylum.⁴⁸ Though this may not be true, the paintings definitively evoke something troubling that is wholly absent from and goes against the inherently "positive" attitude of most portraiture. The clothing, the disaffected glances, the glassy bloodshot eyes, all contribute to unsettling feelings the paintings suggest. Consequently, most viewers would have a prescribed emotional response to the paintings, whether or not they were informed of the titles. Yet, it is in the absence of strong outward elicitations of feeling that Géricault evokes this response. The weakness of French painting following David was the stultifying evocation of antique notions of citizen and state through incredible precision in an increasingly mannered style, as in Girodet's *Ossian Receiving the*

⁴⁷ Miller, "Géricault's Paintings of the Insane," 162.

⁴⁸ Brendan Prendeville, "The Features of Insanity, as Seen by Géricault and by Buchner," *Oxford Art Journal* 18, no.1 (1995): 96.

Ghosts of French Heroes (Fig. 13). Here, Girodet intends to elicit very specific responses in the viewer through a conflation of classical allegory with toadying to the Napoleonic government. It is then Géricault's "naïveté" to evoking emotional reactions (or as we now understand it, a keen sense for avoiding the omnipresent emotions of late classicism) that creates such a reaction to these paintings.

Géricault's portraits of the insane were not his first efforts to offer a different way of approaching portraiture. Portraits generally confer a social hierarchy upon sitter, painter and viewer in which the sitter has achieved status, individuality, and power. The only two portraits composed by Géricault that were known to the general public during his lifetime obliterate that hierarchy: the *Charging Chasseur* and the *Wounded Cuirassier*. In the sense that they also fall within the subset of military portraiture, they further erode qualities inherent within that genre. In the slippery evolution between classicism and Romanticism, one of the fundamental changes was the updating of subjects. In the sense that David, Gros, and others would come to paint heroes of the Revolution, military luminaries, and heads of state, classicism was certainly moving in a direction away from the constant reference to Greek and Roman subject matter. But in the sense that these portraits carefully evoked a powerful individuality (though in an anonymous figure) meant to simultaneously attract and awe the beholder, the emotions of classicism still held sway within portraiture.

The *Charging Chasseur* of 1812 and the *Wounded Cuirassier* of 1814 do not initially evoke a general sweeping away of military stereotypes (and it can perhaps be surmised that Géricault himself did not even intend such a bold move while in his early 20s.) When the *Charging Chasseur* was exhibited, it suggested the style of grand portraiture reminiscent of David's and Gros' pictures of Napoleon. Certainly its large size contributed to its grand manner.

However, Géricault's portrait focuses upon a lowly officer seated upon a rising horse, almost rendered anonymous by the drawing of the viewer's eyes to the powerful hindquarters of the horse. In this manner, Géricault countered the normal hierarchy of genres, simultaneously lowering the usually elite subject to an anonymous soldier, while raising that soldier to the elite status reserved for military heroes. The painting showcases what would become Géricault's customary strategy: bypassing the superficial excesses of likeness and commemoration for "truth" and emotion.⁴⁹ In the *Wounded Cuirassier* of 1814, he continued to reduce portraiture from its exaltation of forceful personalities to the nameless, notable especially in light of the ignominious ending to Napoleon's reign. The portrait freed the sitter from social identity; in this manner, Géricault replaced the glory and individuality of victory with the anonymity of defeat.⁵⁰ The two military portraits exist as early efforts at portraying a type rather than a named individual in his portraits; Géricault thus presages his portraits of the insane with his portraits of these military officers.

Géricault's works suggest a belief that portraiture did not depend on precise verisimilitude. Though one cannot deny that a portrait that reproduces the sitter with detailed physical fidelity and material specifics can be great art, the requirement that this fidelity is necessary for great portraiture is misguided. Géricault continually practiced the concept that truth lay in what was significant about the sitter. In Géricault's portrait of *Alfred and Elisabeth Dedreux* (Fig. 14), the artist concentrates on the faces and has little patience for composing the details of the fabric of their clothing. The setting and their dresses, particularly in the lower hems, appear only crudely sketched, as if barely transposed from an earlier study. The concentration on facial characteristics in the painting not only overwhelms the other details, but

⁴⁹ Henri Zerner, "Le Portrait, plus ou moins," in *Géricault: Ouvrage collectif dirigé*, ed. Régis Michel (Paris: La Documentations Française, 1996), 334.

⁵⁰ *Citizens and Kings*, 334.

completely obliterates them.⁵¹ Extraneous detail is just that: extraneous. This sense of fidelity to something besides explicit realism was further confirmed upon his visit to England, where the works of David Wilkie and Thomas Lawrence exerted a strong influence on him. Lawrence particularly held sway with younger painters who found in his reconciliation between likeness and imagination a means by which to place portraiture on the same level as history painting.⁵² Lawrence's drawing *Samuel Lysons* (Fig. 15) of 1799 represents this delicate balance between representation and imagination. The penetration of the sitter's gaze exists at the expense of details such as clothing and even the outlines of his face. Géricault was not often concerned with a preponderance of detail, instead choosing to focus the eye upon the important facet of portraiture: the face of the sitter. Like Lawrence, Géricault's portraits focus upon introspection rather than external likeness.⁵³

Perhaps most relevant to the examination of Géricault's portraits of the insane are his studies of severed heads and arms, which Delacroix claimed had more life in their dead flesh than David's live portraits (Figs. 16 and 17). Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's study of these paintings has revealed that they can only be fully understood as existing within a political and social debate, rather than solely being used as studies for paintings. She writes that "Géricault's depictions of beheaded victims... can only be understood in this context of impassioned debate, in which scientific, humanitarian, and political discourses mingled and intersect. Their imagery is unthinkable without the lingering threat of the guillotine during the Restoration."⁵⁴ The Revolution and its incredible public violence had a profound effect on popular culture. The cases of homicidal monomaniacs captured the public's attention; in the aftermath of the

⁵¹ Ibid., 325.

⁵² Ibid., 43.

⁵³ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁴ Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, "Géricault," 609.

Revolution, a number of scandalous criminal cases occurred in which “normal” persons engaged in wantonly horrifying acts. Gothic horror became a wide-spread infatuation and a fashion in French society during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; cheap horror novels and sinister melodramas performed on stage and in the streets became overwhelmingly popular.⁵⁵ The French author Théophile Gautier noted in 1834 that “the age was disposed to carrion, and the charnel-house pleased it better than the boudoir.”⁵⁶ Explosive urban growth had given birth to a large consumer-oriented culture in which the “high” and the “low” shared a mutual interest in arts, literature, theater, and other interests.⁵⁷ In his studies of severed heads and limbs, Géricault positions himself as a consumer/producer of this popular culture. The choice of subject matter places Géricault firmly within the bounds of Gothic fashion, focusing upon abject subjects, as in the works of Mary Shelley and, later, Victor Hugo. Certainly the Gothic interest in the abject informs his portraits of the insane, those normally outside the boundaries of society like a Hugo protagonist. In processing this modern culture into studies and portraiture, he reveals more of an emotional and direct engagement with the subject, than a disaffected participation with themes resonant of antiquity. Nowhere is the slippage between high and low better demonstrated than the combination of the high aspects of portraiture with the low characterization of the insane.

Géricault approached his portraits of the insane as an amalgam of previous styles: the anonymity in his military portraits combined with the expressive documentation of his severed heads and limbs. However, Géricault confers upon his sitters a desperate heroism which refuses to reduce them to their behavior.⁵⁸ This desperate heroism arises in the ambiguity between the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 610.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 611.

⁵⁷ Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, “Eugène Delacroix and Popular Culture,” in *Cambridge*, 50.

⁵⁸ *Citizens and Kings*, 45.

sitters giving in to illness versus trying to maintain a level of normalcy. Géricault refuses to privilege one manner over the other because this slippage between sanity and insanity precisely defines the aspect of the disease he tries to capture. David's portraits often portrayed heroism in the face of difficulty, but this heroism existed on the level of the state (whether it was Greece, Rome, or France.) In his military portraits, the *Raft*, and the portraits of the insane, Géricault's heroism exists as a personal exercise in overcoming abject conditions, whether these conditions are created by external or internal forces. Géricault had depicted the sublimely heroic before, but whereas the *Raft* approached this condition as a group, Géricault's portraits singularized the condition. No longer was insanity simply a mass of dead and decaying bodies and minds, reminiscent of Bedlam on a raft.

Though the drawings for the *Raft* demonstrate a similar psychological penetration of individuals, in the portraits of the insane Géricault has effectively reduced the scene to intimate studies. The *Raft* and the portraits of the insane do have significant aspects in common. The individual sitters in his portraits are not historically important, but their struggle against their condition implies heroism similar to those subjects in the *Raft*.⁵⁹ In this manner, anonymity complicates heroism; it would be difficult to ascertain which subjects in the *Raft* survived the ordeal "heroically" and which ones survived by resorting to other means, as in the murder and cannibalism that apparently occurred. In the *Raft*, identifiable and unidentifiable subjects triumphantly/desperately reach towards the rescue ship, while anonymous figures in the foreground play out a different scene of horrifying reality. The victims occupy the role of heroes in Géricault's innovative history painting. The same is true of the portraits of the insane. This implies that traditional Davidian heroism could not connect on an emotional level with French society, which surely felt victimized through the decades of political tumult. Those in the *Raft*

⁵⁹ Crow, *Emulation*, 299.

had a recognizable enemy in the mind of the beholder: that of the Restoration government, while by contrast the enemy in his insane subjects was more insidious and unassailable.⁶⁰

The development of the medical understanding of insanity greatly affected the portrayals of the insane. In ancient times, the healthy human body was believed to hold an equilibrium of the four humors, or fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Any disruption in this equilibrium was seen as the root cause of different forms of madness. An excess of black bile, for instance, could lead to melancholy as well as other neuroses such as hysteria.⁶¹ Because of the mysticism surrounding this equilibrium, insanity was most often viewed through a metaphysical, or religious, prism. In artists' conceptions, insanity maintained a strong relationship with the religious concepts of sin and possession, and Saint Anthony was seen as the patron saint of mental derangement. In Martin Schongauer's *Saint Anthony Tormented by Demons*, insanity was invoked by temptations from the devil (Fig. 18). It was Saint Anthony's ability to resist temptation that provided a model for sufferers; this belief implied that the insane could choose whether or not to participate in this behavior. While this concept of culpability would hold sway for a great number of years, the artistic interest in insanity eventually shifted towards the questionable institutions established to house the maniacs.

Among the eight-plate series of engravings, *A Rake's Progress*, created by William Hogarth in the mid-1700s, the last scene depicted *A Rake in Bedlam* (Fig. 19). Here, the Rake arrives at the Bedlam hospital having willfully squandered away his life and fortune. That a "rake" would be imprisoned in an asylum implicitly comments on the backwardness of imprisoning the insane. Through the allegorical tale, the Rake has given no indication of general mania, but rather aristocratic yearnings and a fixed and isolated desire for fortune, something that

⁶⁰ Miller, "Géricault's Paintings of the Insane," 161-162.

⁶¹ Karp, "Madness," 7.

one could associate with many members of English society during this time period. Yet this has landed him in an asylum along with a religious maniac, a man who believes himself king and urinates on the wall, and several mad people of various professions. The inhabitants of the asylum are looked upon by two women who serve as surrogates for the viewer. They turn away in disgust while still discreetly viewing and, thus, participating in the grotesquerie. Though Hogarth certainly intended to comment upon the disturbing decadence of English elites rather than the treatment of the insane, his characterization of the asylum participates in an objectification of the insane.

The increase in depictions of insanity during the late eighteenth century can be related to a growing concern about the relationship between institution and individual that derived from Enlightenment theory. Klein states that madness began to be viewed in two different ways: the medical community sought to isolate lunatics in an attempt to classify, treat, and cure, while the artistic and philosophical community maintained an ambiguity towards insanity that romanticized and idealized it as commensurate with genius.⁶² Institutions were not the only aspects of insanity depicted during the 1700s and 1800s, however. Esquirol and Georget commissioned pictures of asylum residents in a clinical style. Georges-François Gabriel was commissioned by Esquirol to travel to various Paris asylums in 1813 and record the physiognomies of inmates (Fig. 20). Similarly, in Esquirol's *Des maladies mentales* (1838), Ambroise Tardieu engraved twenty-seven portrait drawings of people in the throes of mania (Fig. 21). These illustrations lack the introspection, and the artistic skill, that Géricault's works displays. The most striking difference is the instantly observable behavioral aspect to their disease. The subjects, instead of provoking questions of normality and abnormality, instead "perform" illness. In Gabriel's and Tardieu's works, the patients are labeled and categorized,

⁶² Klein, "Insanity," 198.

explicitly bridging the theoretical with the observable.⁶³ Though Gabriel's subject is depicted with facial characteristics of insanity, and Tardieu's with characteristics of imprisonment in an asylum, both works are explicitly recognizable depictions of the insane. These illustrations construct a hierarchy, where their categorization instantly places the viewer, artist, and physician above the sitter. Géricault, however, refuses to engage in this concept by removing from his portraits of the insane the elements of the institution. Throughout the depiction of mental disease, some reference usually has been made to institutional control, whereas Géricault has obliterated that concept. The hazily sketched areas of the background behind his sitters do not convey any setting; Géricault could easily have composed these portraits in his apartment rather than an asylum.

Géricault's innovation comes from his own concept of portraiture, in which he arrives at fidelity to the sitter's identity through a balance between faithful representation and invention. One could imagine the spectrum of the appearance of residents of an asylum involving full madness on one end, and attempting to cloak any hint of madness on the other. Géricault's portraits seemingly exist in the middle of this spectrum, in which the mental disease has been reduced to the indications of eyes, glances, and facial characteristics (and even then this inference might be simply the projection of the viewer). Quite simply, Géricault has rejected the stereotypes not only of portrayals of the insane, but also of conventional portraiture. Where conventional portraiture creates individuality by rendering faithfully the appearance of the sitter, typical portraits of the insane reduce the subjects to anonymity. Insanity becomes a collection of institutional details; even the physiognomical portraits that Esquirol commissioned convey little emotion while implying institutional and clinical control. Géricault's works produce this slippage between anonymity of the insane and individuality of the portrait subject. His portraits

⁶³ Sander Gilman, *Seeing the Insane* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), 81.

further bind the abjectness of insanity with the beauty of the portrait. In doing this, the works give the viewer a sense of unease of which few portraits from this time are capable.

In his portraits, Géricault abstains from grotesquerie and instead confers heroic qualities upon disturbed individuals suffering from physical and moral decomposition.⁶⁴ This absence of grotesquerie must be seen as the hallmark of his portrayals and moves them outside of the history of insanity painting. In their sympathetic objectivity, Géricault places his insane between the raving lunatics possessed by the devil and the sympathetic sufferers, as in Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia I* of 1514.⁶⁵ Géricault abstains from dramatizing his subjects, preferring instead to allow their concept of (delusional) self-representation to come forward, while allowing the viewer to project their own. In this manner, all involved attempt to construct a normality around a fundamentally abnormal scene. This normality was not only an artistic conception, but also had a basis in the changes and upswing in insanity diagnoses.

In 1837, Dr. James Prichard compiled statistics of insanity during the early 1800s in Europe. From 1801 to 1823, there occurred a 133% increase in lunatics admitted to Paris hospitals: from 1070 to 2493.⁶⁶ We can ascertain from the increase that there was a greater focus on insanity from the late eighteenth century through most of the nineteenth century, regardless of whether the actual cases of insanity increased or whether physicians became more inclined to give those diagnoses. Hospital reform began to appear as a social cause as early as 1773, as the various institutions of insanity in France were increasingly scrutinized.⁶⁷

Though asylums were sometimes a popular attraction for tourists, as in the visitors to the Bedlam hospital in London depicted in Hogarth's *Rake*, the treatment of insanity did not receive

⁶⁴ *French Painting*, 451.

⁶⁵ Eitner, *Géricault*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 123.

⁶⁶ Dr. James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (Philadelphia: Haswell, Barrington, and Haswell, 1837), 243.

⁶⁷ Miller, "Géricault's Paintings of the Insane," 154.

much public scrutiny, and when it did, it was certainly not in a positive light. During the reign of Louis XIV, any threat to social order, including blasphemy, vagrancy, immorality, and debauchery, was deemed dangerous and offenders were incarcerated together with those actually suffering from mental derangement.⁶⁸ The insane were routinely characterized as criminals and the poor as disruptive to social order. In Enlightenment thinking, the soul, mind and reason distinguished man from animal, and sickness of the mind necessarily implied sickness of the soul. Thus, the irrationality of insanity could not be a simple corporeal matter, but rather a conscious choice of disorder over order.⁶⁹ Given that the insane willingly subjected society to their derangement, they merited no better treatment than those criminals who also engaged in disorder. However, as the nineteenth century approached, psychiatry began to recognize the folly of irrationality as a choice, as well as the reprehensible conditions the state imposed upon the mentally deranged. In his 1817 book *Observations on the Deranged Manifestations of the Mind, or Insanity*, the German physician Johann Gaspar Spurzheim wrote:

The thing which strikes me as the most shocking and abominable is, that the villains who have disturbed the peace of society live in palaces, have an airing, sometimes a playground, have often the whole building, even their place of worship, warmed, fresh water in the yards, often cold and warm baths, and everything comfortable and clean, while the poor insane, who want and deserve our pity, lie on straw and dirt, exposed to all vicissitudes of season and weather, reduced to the mercy of the turnkey, and less attended to than a horse or a wild beast.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Karp, "Madness," 11.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁷⁰ Stephen Meyer, "Marschner's Villains: Monomania, and the Fantasy of Deviance," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 12 (July, 2000): 130.

Spurzheim sufficiently demonstrates that the treatment of the poor insane was something that was at best questionable during this period, especially in contrast to the treatment of the criminal. However, the tide began to move towards a moral obligation on the part of the State.

During Géricault's short life, the fortunes of the indigent insane underwent as dramatic a shift as had occurred during the history of French psychiatry. The reformation of treatment of the insane began to be tied in to a social context, carried over from the Revolution, in which the treatment of the lowliest is a direct responsibility of the elite, and therefore the State.⁷¹ The physician Philippe Pinel was an important advocate for humanizing the treatment of the insane. Pinel was renowned for touring the asylums and liberating the insane from their prison chains (though these claims appear to be more propagandistic than verifiable.) Aside from the romantic image of Pinel unshackling inmates of the horrid asylums that spread across France, the structure of academic psychiatry underwent an even more fundamental change. Beginning with his tenure as chief physician at the Bicêtre and the Salpêtrière asylums and chair of medical pathology at the Ecole de médecine in Paris in 1795, Pinel saw a categorical growth in cases of insanity. He also believed that insanity was rectifiable through moral treatments that emphasized healing rather than incarceration. Pinel thought that the antique notion that insanity was a willful choice of irrationality and disruption must give way to treatment through kindness and the reinstatement of a "proper relationship with nature."⁷² Under Pinel's leadership, the concept of the four humors gave way to a modern understanding of mental derangement, which Pinel divided into

⁷¹ Though the alternative of asylums to jails was doubtlessly a better option, Michel Foucault has argued that substitution of surveillance and judgment for indifference was merely a different type of authority determined to marginalize the insane and impose an oppressive patriarchy. For more information, see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965), 253.

⁷² Karp, "Madness," 15.

melancholia, mania without delirium, mania with delirium, dementia and idiotism.⁷³ This separation of facets of insanity from each other was not a novel concept, and in fact derived from the concept of humors. However, if insanity could be separated into a simple hierarchy of social acceptability (say melancholia over dementia, for example), the concept of insanity would become understandable and less mystical. As insanity would become more socially tolerable to the public, the alienist would achieve acceptance of their professional status.

Pinel's most talented student, Esquirol, shared a similar belief system. In *Console and Classify*, Jan Goldstein notes that "Esquirol looked to a linguistic change as an additional vehicle of medicalization": some of the central aspects to this were the introductions of the term *aliénation* to replace *folie* along with term *aliéniste* to signify the new physician.⁷⁴ Additionally, Esquirol sought to remove the connection of diseases to fluids and bodily organs as psychiatry came to the slow realization that mental health had more to do with the brain and the nervous system than superstitious beliefs in mediations of black bile.⁷⁵ Esquirol's efforts mirror Géricault's attempts to change the pictorial language in general during his career. As Pinel, Esquirol, and Géricault positioned themselves as anti-classical, in terms of sweeping away antique mannerism (though Pinel and Esquirol were sweeping away mysticism and Géricault was sweeping away overly-rational painting), they positioned themselves as modern. Like Géricault, psychiatry's reasons for changing public perception were related to self-sufficiency. The only manner in which Géricault could gain artistic fame was to individualize himself from

⁷³ See the Table of Contents in Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity*, in *Significant Contributions to the History of Psychology*, Series C, Volume III, trans. D.D. Davis (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1977).

⁷⁴ Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 133.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

the classical school. By individualizing their new profession, psychiatry sought a professional function in which their expertise would become a better endowed apparatus of the State.⁷⁶

One of Esquirol's most significant contributions to psychiatry, and the one that would inspire the most debate, was monomania. Esquirol named the disease around 1810 and, by the 1820s, the term had begun to appear in popular culture with as much controversy as it was received in medical circles. He conceived of monomania as existing between mania and lypemania (his new term for melancholia) and sharing with each several ideational aspects of disease. As would come to supreme importance later, monomania existed as a state of *partial* delirium, in that insanity was limited to a fixated idea or trigger and that the rest of the brain remained ordered and healthy.⁷⁷ Moreover, this fixed idea, when triggered, would be characterized by extreme excitation and delusion. Esquirol frequently cited Don Quixote as the standard bearer of monomania.⁷⁸

The greatest articulation of monomania's possibilities would come from Esquirol's student Georget. Under Georget's influence, monomania would quickly enter into public consciousness. He distinguished himself from Pinel and Esquirol, to whom he had dedicated *De la folie*, by concentrating on the root cause of insanity.⁷⁹ Where Pinel and Esquirol sought to classify the disease and validate it through careful observation and academic philosophy, Georget initiated what would become a long and protracted battle between psychiatry and the French courts. When Esquirol had entered monomania into the lexicon of psychiatric diagnoses, he conceived of the term as ideational preoccupation, an intellectual monomania, such as the posthumous titling of Géricault's works *Military Grandeur* and *Envy*. Georget furthered the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁷⁸ Dr. Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. E.K. Hunt (Birmingham, AL: Classics of Medicine Library, 1987), 331.

⁷⁹ Boime, "Portraying," 87.

discussion of monomania by bringing it to the realm of volitional preoccupation, or monomania of will, as in the titles *Gambling*, *Theft*, and *Kidnapper of Children*. Georget denoted these two types as “‘lesions of the intelligence,’ the traditional type, long known under the name of ‘delirium’ and meaning ‘aberrations of ideas, disturbance in intellectual combinations, manifestations of bizarre ideas and erroneous judgments’; and ‘lesions of the will,’ meaning ‘perversions of the natural penchants, affections, passions, sentiments.’”⁸⁰ Volitional monomania demanded the expertise in courts of the physician over the layperson because the accused could hide the disease of will under a façade of intellectual sanity. This was a mania without delirium, insanity without identification.⁸¹ As noted in Georget’s account, the contrast between this new insanity and conventional identification informs a great deal of our understanding of Géricault’s portraits. Whether monomania was the intended subject of Géricault’s works, his paintings truly exhibit “insanity without identification.”

An insanity that was invisible to the layperson would certainly be a frightening concept to the French public. It is easy to see why the concept of monomania would become instantly controversial in medical circles, but the controversy surrounding its entrance into the public realm says something entirely different about the political and social ramifications of the disease. The controversial aspect of the disease was the belief that there existed illnesses that affected only part of mental function, and that this mania could profoundly affect the behavior of the individual, but would not affect the ordered rationality that composed the rest of the sufferer’s mental function.⁸² Thus, one of Géricault’s subjects would not necessarily be feigning sanity (if one chooses to see that in the paintings), but simply would be demonstrating the rational aspect of the disease. This notion of partial insanity inspired strong reactions. Goldstein contends that

⁸⁰ Goldstein, *Console*, 171.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁸² Crow, *Emulation*, 296.

monomania became popular fodder for newspapers because it caricatured a post-Revolution bourgeois single-mindedness, as opposed to a traditional well-rounded life. Monomania was perceived as a perverse result of a “*mal du demi-siècle*.”⁸³ Even if the identification of insanity is tenuous within Géricault’s paintings, identification between the public and the paintings, if they had been exhibited, could have been much more overt.

Géricault’s engagement with Georget and psychiatry appears to be one of mutual interest; both fields of non-classical art and new psychiatry were nascent during the early 1800s, but began to increase in popularity during Géricault’s last years.⁸⁴ However, psychiatry’s entrance into public consciousness through monomania proved short-lived. Monomania began a sharp fall into obscurity in the early 1850s with the publishing of several criticisms of its viability. The attacks were pointed and noted that psychiatrists had begun to approach their profession as Romantic novelists, rendering patients as characters and projecting artistic order upon their pathological chaos.⁸⁵ By 1870, monomania had all but vanished as a diagnosis.⁸⁶ Today, monomania has taken on the legacy of a utopian psychiatry. Monomania had formulated a claim that not only passed into the everyday consciousness of the public, but was used as a tool to blur the lines between medicine, law, state, art, and philosophy. Its importance, though, like that of Géricault’s work, resides in its appearance during a particular point in time when psychiatry and modern art were just beginning to assert their respective disciplines. As Georget confidently articulated the viability of monomania, Géricault confidently painted his sitters with an anti-classical and painterly sensibility.

⁸³ Goldstein, *Console*, 161-162.

⁸⁴ Crow, *Emulation*, 298.

⁸⁵ Goldstein, *Console*, 190-191.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

Géricault's portraits of the insane mirrored the growing infatuation of the French public with the dark side of the post-Revolutionary society and Enlightenment and Romantic thought. His portraits simultaneously look to the popular culture of Romanticism while breaking free from dominant norms of representation. In the startling power of his five paintings of the insane, Géricault removed the tenets of Romanticism from high up on the Salon wall and brought them to a highly personal dialogue between sitter, painter and audience, composing these pictures in a quick but careful style. They promote an explicit movement away from exquisitely unfeeling post-Davidian studies of classical bodies. The sitters have been reduced to minds, faces and gazes in a simple diminution of extraneous parts. These portraits truly presage a Romantic sensibility and artistic feeling for the subject. While the school of David deified perfect soundness of mind and body, Géricault conceived in the insane frailty, irrationality, shortcomings, and ugliness.⁸⁷ Portraits tend to replace ugliness with invention (creating a utopian image of the person depicted); Géricault embraces the ugliness that sets his works off from typical portrait images. Ugliness had become a Romantic conceit: in his preface to *Cromwell* in 1827, Hugo stated that "the beautiful has only one type: the ugly has a thousand." Whereas the beautiful offers a limited ensemble, the ugly "harmonizes not with man, but with the entire creation. That is why it presents us forever with new but incomplete aspects."⁸⁸ Géricault allowed those viewing the portraits to identify with the ugliness and the imperfections because they transcended a classical nature that was no longer relevant. Géricault engaged continuously in a dialogue with Davidian practice, but the portraits represent his strongest break with classicism.

⁸⁷ Crow, *Emulation*, 299.

⁸⁸ Rosen and Zerner, *Romanticism*, 18-19.

How then do the portraits fit into our conception of Romanticism? In 1798, Friedrich Wilhelm Schlegel, the first writer to create a binary between classical and Romantic (though at this early stage he was referring to poetry), stated that Romanticism

exists only to characterize poetical individuals of all sorts; and yet there still is no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author: so that many artists who started out to write only a novel ended up by providing us with a portrait of themselves. It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also – more than any other form – hover between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest.⁸⁹

By bringing artistry to a more contemporary practice, Romanticism offered a greater connection between subject and author, portrayed and portrayer. By interacting with people, ideas, and concepts that had contemporary resonance to the public, Géricault evokes a sense of himself in the portraits of the insane; this conceit is surely missing from the late classical works displayed at the Salon during Géricault's career. However, focusing upon Géricault's Romanticism as a function of his independence from David reduces our ability to perceive greater continuity between the artists.⁹⁰ As Romanticism's key tenet was freedom from academic rules, Géricault simultaneously exploited continuity and disjunction. If an artist is required to reject a previous style, his style becomes even more dependent on what came before. In the manner in which Géricault had the audacity to assimilate those aspects of classicism that appealed to him while presaging a modern approach to painting, we find an artist truly operating at the brink. That

⁸⁹ Ibid., 16-17. Though Schlegel's Romantic notions of "spirit of an author" and freedom from "self-interest" appear contradictory, Schlegel seems to conceive that the purity of Romanticism allows artists expressing themselves to connect with the public on such a fundamental level that their self-interest is subsumed by the spirit of the times.

⁹⁰ Crow, *Emulation*, 281.

Géricault was not painting these portraits with a Salon audience in mind furthers our understanding of the works. Would Géricault have painted such works of modern force, more powerful today than most contemporaneous Salon works, if he had chosen to modulate the concept of insanity for a Salon audience?

Today, we see an artist exploring his own conceptions of portraiture, insanity, classicism, and Romanticism, and forging a thoroughly unique style. French painting would begin moving further away from classicism, save for holdovers like Ingres (who even then defies characterization.) Géricault's painted his portraits well before the height of Delacroix's Romanticism and Courbet's realism, yet they anticipate both. Whether Géricault painted the portraits of the insane immediately after the *Raft* or after returning from London, they exert power over the viewer almost 200 years after their creation. Delacroix noted that passions, imagination, creativity, and insanity often exist within the same spectrum. The ability to see things in an utterly peculiar way can lead one to normality or abnormality; it is precisely through identification with his subjects that Géricault's portraits of the insane demonstrate that genius and disorder are not always mutually exclusive.

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Figure 1.

Théodore Géricault
Charging Chasseur, 1812
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 2.

Théodore Géricault
The Raft of the Medusa, 1819
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 3.

David Wilkie

The Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Waterloo Dispatch, 1822

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Figure 4.

Théodore Géricault
Monomanie du commandement militaire
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Figure 5.

Théodore Géricault
Monomanie du vol des enfants
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Figure 6.

Théodore Géricault
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Figure 7.

Théodore Géricault
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Figure 8.

Théodore Géricault
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Figure 9.

Théodore Géricault
Wounded Cuirassier, 1814
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 10.

Jacques-Louis David
Self-Portrait, 1794
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 11.

Ambrose Tardieu
Dementia, 1838

Reproduced in *Des maladies mentales considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et medico-légal*, vol. 2

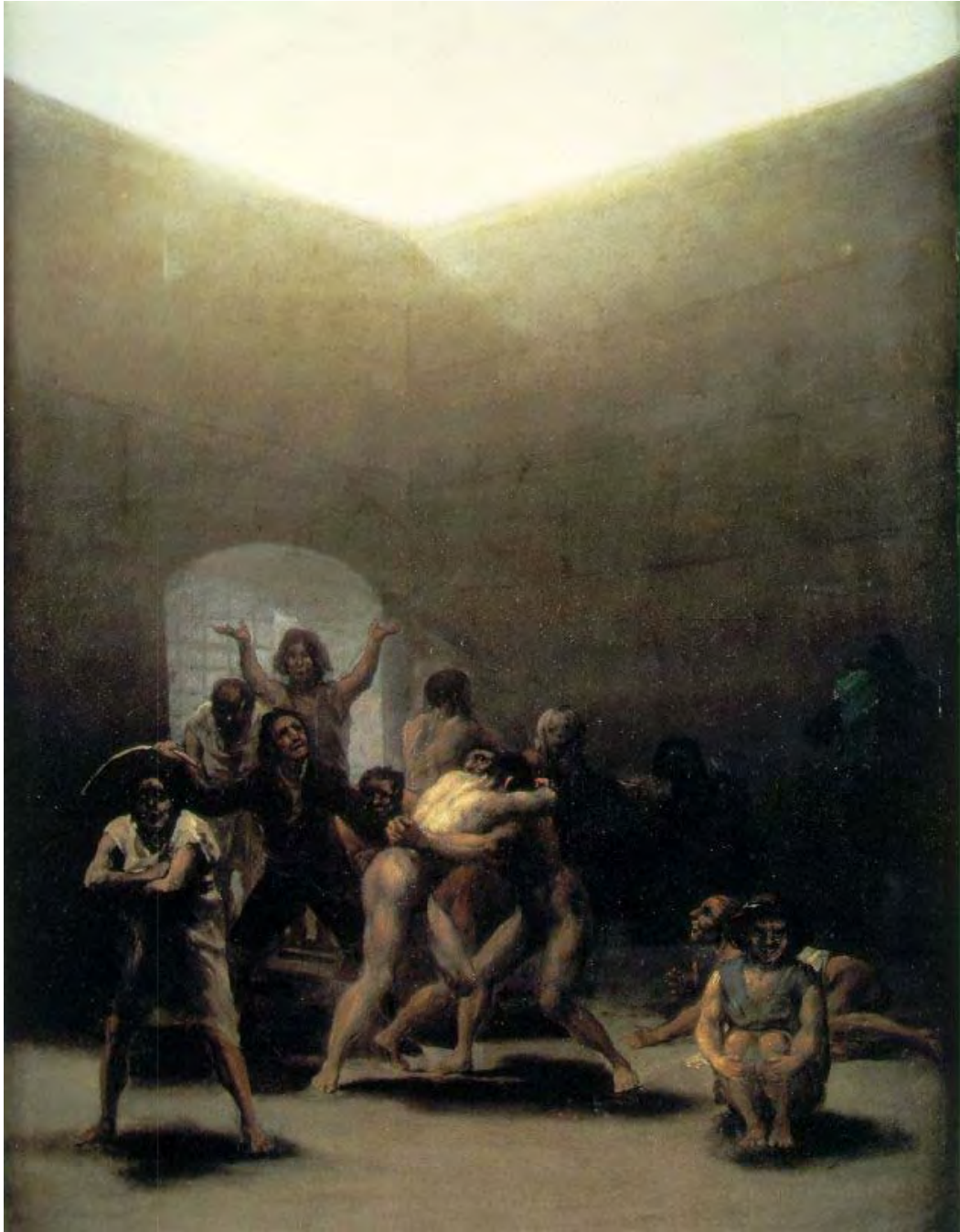


Figure 12.

Francisco Goya
Yard with Lunatics, 1793/4
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Figure 13.

Anne-Louis Girodet
Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of French Heroes, 1802
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Figure 14.

Théodore Géricault
Alfred and Elizabeth Dedreux, 1818
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Figure 15.

Thomas Lawrence
Samuel Lysons, 1799
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Figure 16.

Théodore Géricault
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Figure 17.

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Figure 18.

Martin Schongauer
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Figure 20.

Georges-François Gabriel
A Maniac, 1814

Reproduced in *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*



Figure 21.

Ambroise Tardieu
Case of Mania, 1838

Reproduced in *Des maladies mentales considérées sous les rapports médical, hygiénique et medico-légal*, vol. 2

VITA

Andrew Dawson was born November 16, 1981 in Annapolis, Maryland to Elaine Biko and the late Richard Dawson. He grew up in San Diego, California and Fort Worth, Texas. He graduated from Fort Worth Country Day School in 1999 and attended Rice University in Houston, Texas as a National Merit Scholar. He received Bachelor of Arts degrees in art history and history in 2003. After graduating, Andrew worked at the law firm of Baker Botts L.L.P. in Houston for two years. He entered the museum world in 2006 at the Glassell School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston before enrolling for graduate study at Texas Christian University in August of 2007.

While working on his master's degree in art history, Andrew has received a tuition scholarship and a Kimbell fellowship, as well as a Mary Jane and Robert Sunkel Travel Endowment which allowed him to travel to the Springfield, Massachusetts Museum of Fine Arts to study one of Théodore Géricault's portraits of the insane. Andrew also completed several internships while attending TCU. He worked as an intern in the education department at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and in the registrar department at the Kimbell Art Museum of Fort Worth. Andrew received a David Driskell internship award at the African American Museum of Dallas which allowed him to work in the education and curatorial departments, as well as teach art history, photography, and sculpture to children during the summer of 2008. He is married to Maria Dawson and they currently reside in Fort Worth, Texas.

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the five portraits of the insane created by Theodore Géricault at some point between 1819 and his death in 1824. I approached this not as an overly biographical subject but one which allows us to gain a greater understanding of the period after the French Revolution and between the styles of Davidian classicism and Romanticism. Additionally, I placed the subject paintings among the liberalization of French psychology during this immediate period under J.-E.-D. Esquirol and Étienne-Jean Georget, for whom the portraits were supposedly painted.

Much has been studied regarding the circumstances of Géricault committing supposedly ten images (five of which survive) of patients suffering from insanity, or monomania, to canvas. Several scholars have attempted to attribute the paintings to certain dates and to certain conditions from which Géricault might have suffered. Scholars have also posited that Géricault in fact might have been committed to a clinic suffering from depression and decline of mental function; in this case Géricault would have been painting fellow sufferers rather than fulfilling a commission. While these circumstances might certainly affect our viewership of these works, I focused my thesis on how the paintings may be extrapolated to a broader study. These portraits reveal much about how Géricault approached his subjects, how he disassociated himself from conventional portrayals of the insane, and how he reflected profound shifts in politics, popular culture, and artistic styles. In *Raft of the Medusa*, Géricault first began to explore the placement of weakness among superficially classical subject matter. But Géricault's portraits of the insane demonstrate a point in his career in which he had come to embody his full potential. My thesis demonstrates that these paintings represent a significant moment in portraiture, and certainly reveal much about Géricault himself.