

EDUCATION COLLECTION NOTES

HSC ENGLISH EXTENSION 1 ELECTIVE, ROMANTICISM

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ART
GALLERY
NSW

PRINTMAKING IN THE AGE OF ROMANTICISM

6 AUGUST – 25 OCTOBER 2009



TEACHER NOTES

The broad view of texts taken by the English Stage 6 Syllabus allows students to consider works of art as texts. The glossary in the Syllabus defines texts as:

Communications of meaning produced in any medium that incorporates language, including sound, print, film, electronic and multimedia representations. Texts include written, spoken, nonverbal or visual communication of meaning. They may be extended unified works or series of related pieces.

The same glossary defines language forms and features as:

The symbolic patterns and conventions that shape meaning in texts. These vary according to the particular mode or medium of production of each text.

Clearly, a visual art work is a text that uses its own special 'language' to shape meaning.

Romanticism is a term that describes a movement in art that is **not** confined to:

- Literature
Note that Romanticism also found expression in music, architecture and visual arts.
- England
Even though all the texts prescribed for study in the HSC English Extension 1 elective, Romanticism, are English, Romanticism flourished in most of Western Europe and its impact was even felt in far-flung colonies, such as New South Wales.
- Late 18th and first half of the 19th century
The influences of Romanticism extended into the second half of the 19th century and the 20th century, although students of the Extension 1 elective, Romanticism, should note that they are required to confine their studies to 'Romanticism in the late 18th century until the mid 19th century'.*

*page 32 of NSW Board of Studies, English Stage 6 Prescriptions 2009–2012

Acknowledgments

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Thomas RYDER 1746–1810 after Henry FUSELI
Titania's awakening. A Midsummer Night's Dream 1803
vol I, plate XXI, Boydell Shakespeare
stipple engraving, 49.5 x 63 cm (plate mark)
Purchased 2008

PRINTMAKING IN THE AGE OF ROMANTICISM

The Romantic movement of the 19th century rose up as a revolt against the 18th-century Age of Reason. Unfolding against the political and social turmoil of European history in the wake of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, it emerged as a dominant force in the development of music, literature and painting. It is less often appreciated that Romanticism also found strong expression in the graphic arts. Major painters such as Blake and Turner, Géricault and Delacroix, all turned to printmaking in one form or another for its capacity to create aesthetic effects not achievable in other media. Many artists worked primarily as printmakers (and not painters), and besides these there were also armies of highly skilled reproductive engravers – their names now largely relegated to history – whose work contributed much to the extraordinary richness of printmaking in the Romantic age.

The exhibition is drawn almost entirely from, and has been shaped by, the holdings of the permanent collection at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. As such, it cannot pretend to tell the full story of Romantic printmaking in all its abundance and diversity – almost certainly an impossible task in any case. The focus is on Britain and France for the simple reason that, historically, the Gallery did not collect prints, in any important way, outside these national schools. The earliest print comes from 1781, the latest 1879, but most belong to the 1820s and 1830s, the decades in which Romanticism assumed its decisive form in the visual arts.

Romanticism remains an elusive concept to define. The earliest significant use of the term 'Romantic' was by the German critic Friedrich Schlegel, who, in 1798, applied it to contemporary poetry. The choice of the word itself stemmed from Schlegel's appreciation of the medieval literary genre of the romance – tales of courtly love and fabulous events – which appealed to the imagination and represented the antithesis of the classical tradition.

Only later in the 19th century did 'Romantic' come to have the broader meaning in relation to the arts that it has today. Even so, Romanticism is not really a coherent style, like neoclassicism, nor is it a consistent doctrine. Many of the artists later seen to be associated with the movement did not see themselves or their age as Romantic. Indeed, Romantic artists were a far from unified group, and one of the things this exhibition shows is that their diversity is often their most obvious characteristic. Yet there was during the period a strong sense of its own collective aspirations and achievements, and an expression of attitudes to art and life that were inherently different from those of an earlier age.

The question of a precise beginning and end for the Romantic period remains a moot point. Charles Baudelaire suggested the demise of Romanticism in 1846 when he wrote, 'few people today will want to give a real and positive meaning to this word'. Other writers have indicated that it came to a close with the revolutions

of 1848, although most agree on the 1820s and 1830s as the movement's heyday. Nevertheless, the impact of Romanticism endured throughout the 19th century and into the art of the 20th century and beyond.

One of Romanticism's most enduring legacies is the popular image of the artist as creative genius and outsider – often misunderstood because of his prophetic insight – whose works are to be judged according to the criteria of integrity, individuality and originality. The Romantics believed in the primacy of imagination over reason and the freedom of the artist to express personal, as opposed to shared, experience. Art, they were convinced, should be a private quest for authentic emotion rather than the pursuit of a universal, timeless ideal of beauty – that it should be charged with the artist's own anxieties and aspirations, dreams and desires, and awaken those emotions in us.

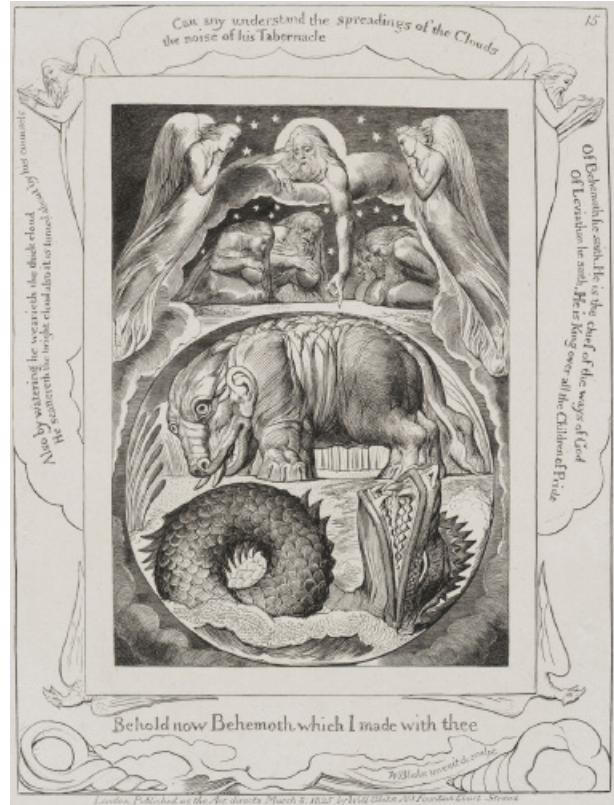
Peter Raissis
Curator of European prints, drawings & watercolours



PELTRO W TOMKINS 1760–1840
AFTER HENRY FUSELI 1741–1825

THE WEIRD SISTERS 1786
 stipple engraving, 20.4 x 26 cm (outer ruled border)
 Courtesy Josef Lebovic Gallery

The stylised depiction of the three witches from *Macbeth* is based on the motif of overlapping profile heads as seen on Roman coins and bas-reliefs. Each witch is shown pointing with one hand and with the other laying a choppy finger upon skinny lips. The insect-like creature on the left was probably inspired by Fuseli's passion for entomology. Fuseli was a collector of moths and butterflies and is known to have bred rare species of insects.



WILLIAM BLAKE 1757–1827

BEHEMOTH AND LEVIATHAN
 plate 15 *Illustrations of the Book of Job* 1825
 set of 21 engravings with title page
 each approximately 21.6 x 17 cm (plate mark)
 Purchased 1949

Blake undertook the 21 illustrations to *The Book of Job* in the final years of his life as the result of a commission from the painter John Linnell. The prints are based on a series of watercolours that Blake had executed between 1805 and 1810 but they do not include the elaborate borders and inscriptions seen in the engravings. The Bible story describes Job as a righteous man who persisted in his faith in the Lord through all manner of afflictions and punishments, and was rewarded in the end for his steadfastness. Blake was fascinated with the story of Job and identified with his struggles. His engravings offer a highly original interpretation of the story rather than merely illustrating the biblical text.

**JMW TURNER** 1775–1851**THE SOURCE OF THE ARVERON** 1816

from *Liber Studiorum*

etching and mezzotint, 21.6 x 29.3 cm (plate mark)

i of 3 states

Turner mezzotinted a small number of the plates himself. The early state (above) was printed in dark red ink but subsequent states were printed in a colder tone more to Turner's liking.

**ALEXANDRE-EVARISTE FRAGONARD** 1780–1850**RUINS - THE GREAT CHURCH OF THE ABBEY OF ST WANDRILLE** 1820

from *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France*

lithograph with tint stone

32.7 x 19 cm (image)

Private collection

Picturesque and Romantic Travels in Old France was a vast printmaking venture begun in 1820 with the aim of recording the country's monuments and scenery. Images of desolate and crumbling abbeys feature prominently among the plates. Alexandre-Evariste Fragonard was one of the principal contributors to the series. His father was the great rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard.



THÉODORE GÉRICAUT 1791–1824

THE BOXERS 1818
lithograph, 35.5 x 41.5 cm (image)
ii of 2 states
Parramore Purchase Fund 2004

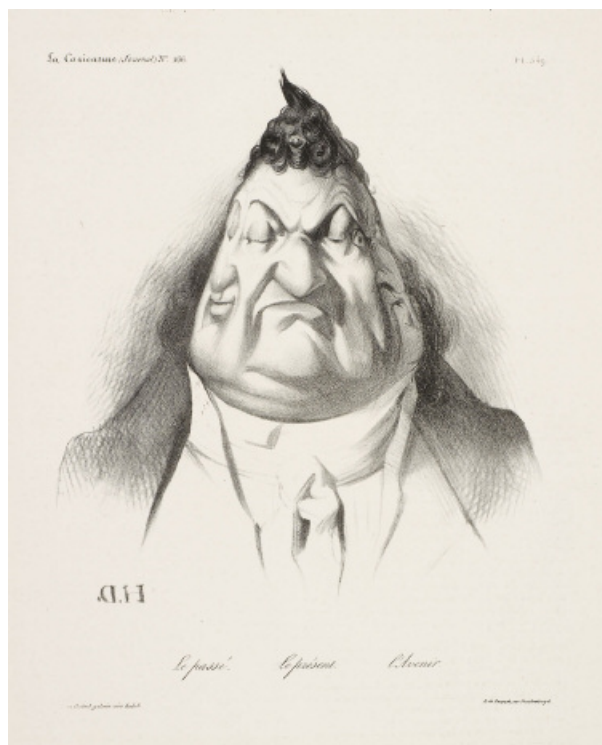
The print is considered the first masterpiece of lithography. Géricault sought to derive maximum pictorial effect from the medium by pitting the two opponents against each other not just by their stances and the contrasting colour of their skin, but by an adept reversal of his drawing technique. The strongly modelled torso of the black figure is drawn in pen and ink while soft crayon is used for his trousered legs. The reverse technique is used for the white boxer. Géricault would have seen amateur boxing matches in Paris but he was probably more directly inspired by popular English sporting prints.



EUGÈNE DELACROIX 1798–1863

ROYAL TIGER 1829
lithograph, 32.3 x 46 cm (image)
iii of 4 states
Purchased 1993

Delacroix never had the opportunity to observe lions and tigers in the wild. His superbly vivid renderings of big cats are based on careful studies of their anatomy and poses which he made at the various Paris zoos and menageries in the company of the animal sculptor, Antoine-Louis Barye. The large body of the reposing tiger in this print echoes the shapes of the distant mountains.



HONORÉ DAUMIER 1808–1879

THE PAST, THE PRESENT, THE FUTURE 1834
 lithograph, 33 x 26 cm (sheet)
 Purchased 1988

The familiar image of Louis-Philippe as a pear was invented by Charles Philipon but it was Daumier who employed it most brilliantly in many of his prints. Here the expressions on a three-faced pear change from a smile to a malevolent scowl.

SAMUEL PALMER 1805–1881

THE SLEEPING SHEPHERD 1857
 etching, 12.5 x 10.3 cm (plate mark)
 iv of 4 states
 Purchased 2007

Palmer turned to etching in 1850 in a deliberate effort to revive the visionary intensity of his youth when he was a disciple of William Blake. His prints evoke an idyllic earthly paradise. In the foreground a shepherd sleeps under an Italianate pergola. Far in the distance, beyond the flock of sheep, a ploughman and his oxen work the hillside.



DAVID LUCAS 1802–1881
AFTER JOHN CONSTABLE 1776–1837

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL c1831
mezzotint, 17.4 x 25 cm (plate mark) proof before lettering, touched in pencil
Purchased 1949



JOHN MARTIN 1789–1854

SATAN AROUSING THE FALLEN ANGELS 1824
Illustration to *Paradise Lost*
mezzotint with drypoint, 26.7 x 20.1 cm (image) proof before lettering
Courtesy Josef Lebovic Gallery

The scene shows Satan:

... on the beach

Of that inflamed sea he stood, and called

His legions, Angel forms, who lay intranced

Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks

In Vallombrosa ...



RODOLPHE BRESLIN 1822–1885

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT 1855
lithograph, 17.9 x 22.4 cm (trimmed to image)
i of 4 states
Purchased 2008

Breslin was a lonely and isolated artist whose work was scarcely understood by contemporary audiences. He worked solely as a printmaker and appears to have been self-taught. His lithographs are characterised by intricate and profuse detail which Breslin drew slowly and with obsessive concentration. Breslin never drew from life but invented a dream-like world of moody skies, dark forests and mysterious distant prospects.



CHARLES MERYON 1821–1868

THE VAMPIRE 1853
etching, 17 x 12.8 cm (plate mark)
iv of 8 states
Purchased 1940

The etching shows one of the stone gargoyles projecting from a tower of Notre-Dame Cathedral. A flock of ravens circle in the air. The image was almost certainly inspired by Victor Hugo's evocation of the medieval city in *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), in which the writer describes a bird's eye view from the cathedral towers.

Meryon's inscription at the base of the print proclaims:
*The insatiable vampire, eternal lust
Forever coveting its food in the great city.*



JEAN-BAPTISTE-CAMILLE COROT 1796–1875

REMEMBRANCE OF ITALY 1863
etching, 31.7 x 23.5 cm (plate mark)
iii of 4 states

Gift of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1978



JEAN-BAPTISTE-CAMILLE COROT 1796–1875

THE GUST OF WIND 1872
transfer lithograph, 21.9 x 27.7 cm (image)
edition 8/50
Purchased 2008

Following the siege of Paris in 1871 Corot went to work in the peaceful countryside of northern France near Douai and Arras where he drew a series of 12 lithographs. Seven from that series are shown here. When the set appeared in 1872 it contained the following note from the publisher: 'We are confident that these sometimes extremely fleeting reflections of the very thought of the Master will be appreciated by Amateurs & by Artists; that is why we have wished to omit nothing, deeming that the admirers of the work of M Corot will be grateful to us for supplying them with the slightest sketches of such a painter in all their spontaneous and frank execution.'

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHILE VIEWING THE EXHIBITION

- 1 View the exhibition without reference to any notes.
Write down words and phrases to describe:
 - the prints
 - your reactions to them
 - the layout and design of the exhibition space
- 2 Choose one print that particularly appeals to you. Sketch.
Describe the art work. Explain why it holds such appeal for you.
- 3 Read *Printmaking in the age of Romanticism* by the exhibition's curator Peter Raissis (page 3).
 - Identify six to eight defining characteristics of Romantic art.
 - Choose an example of a print that you think effectively demonstrates these characteristics. Sketch the print, and annotate the sketch to highlight its Romantic features.
- 4 Find an example in the Art Gallery of NSW collection, either on display in the Gallery or via the online collection search (www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection) of an art work such as *Narcissus* 1829 by John Gibson that represents the Neoclassical style, against which Romanticism reacted and rebelled.

Sketch this work, again highlighting its features.
What differences can you see between the Neoclassical work and the Romantic print identified for Question 3?
- 5 Can you explain the attraction of printmaking for Romantic artists? How might the process of collaboration between artists and printmakers worked against the spirit of Romanticism?
- 6 Curator, Peter Raissis, states that 'Romantic artists were a far from unified group and that diversity is often their most obvious characteristic'.¹ Select two prints that demonstrate the diversity of Romantic art. Identify and discuss their differences.
- 7 Choose a print from the exhibition for close study that you think links to one or more of the prescribed texts that you have studied for Romanticism. Sketch. Write detailed notes under these headings about this art work as a Romantic text:
 - subject matter
 - themes and feelings communicated through the text
 - techniques, such as contrast, texture, tone and composition
 - personal response
 - qualities of the text that shape personal response
 - links to one or more prescribed texts
- 8 What new insights into Romanticism does the exhibition offer you?

RELATING THE EXHIBITION TO YOUR STUDY OF PRINT TEXTS FOR THE HSC ENGLISH EXTENSION 1 ELECTIVE, ROMANTICISM

- 1 Romantic visual arts and Romantic literature were each products of their age, yet they also influenced each other. What evidence can you find that Romantic artists and Romantic writers influenced each other?

Curator of the exhibition, Peter Raissis, talks about the poetic qualities of the art works. Can you identify painterly qualities in the Romantic literature that you studied?
- 2 Choose a Romantic text you have studied for English.
How do the same Romantic features evident in the art works find expression in this example of Romantic literature?
- 3 The exhibition demonstrated the diversity of Romantic art. Choose two Romantic print texts you have studied which also demonstrate this diversity among Romantics. Identify and discuss their differences.
- 4 Curator Peter Raissis refers to 'the popular image of the artist as creative genius and outsider – often misunderstood because of his prophetic insight'.² Is this true of the composers you have studied? How can you explain the development of this popular notion?
- 5 Consider this statement, 'Art ... should be charged with the artist's own anxieties and aspirations, dreams and desires, and awaken those emotions in us'.³

To what extent is this statement true of:
 - one art work from the exhibition?
 - one print text from your study of Romanticism?
- 6 Research the particular artwork that you chose for close study (see Question 7).
 - Find out what you can about the context in which this art work was created. How does an understanding of context help you to make meaning of the text?
 - Find out what you can about another critical opinion about this text, or if that is not possible, find a critical opinion about the body of works created by the artist. To what extent is this response similar or different to your own? How can you explain any differences?
- 7 Write an essay response to this question:
'The Romantics believed in the primacy of imagination over reason.'⁴
 - Evaluate this statement in the light of your studies of Romanticism, referring to two prescribed texts and other texts of your own choosing.
 - You might like to consider using one of the prints from the exhibition, or indeed any other Romantic art work from the period set for study, in your response.

NOTES

- 1 Peter Raissis, *Printmaking in the age of Romanticism*, exhibition brochure, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney 2009
- 2 Raissis 2009
- 3 Raissis 2009
- 4 Raissis 2009

SELECTED RESOURCES

Exhibition brochure

Raassis, Peter. *Printmaking in the age of Romanticism*, exhibition brochure, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 2009

Vodcast

Printmaking in the age of Romanticism, introduced by curator Peter Raassis

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/events/multimedia/printmaking_romanticism

Websites

Art Gallery of NSW Collection

Search the Gallery's collections online

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection

Art Gallery of NSW, My Virtual Gallery

Create your own exhibition and supporting text online

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NSW Board of Studies, Stage 6 English Syllabus

www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english_syl.pdf

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An introduction to the grammar of visual design

www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/secondary/english/assets/pdf/grammar.pdf