Last Words: David's *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* (1824). Subjectivity, Death, and Postrevolutionary Late Style

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Abstract

Completed as he was approaching death in 1825, Jacques-Louis David's final refractory history painting is an intricate summation of a life in politics and painting. The article attempts to re-interpret the canvas in relation to the dual problem of 'late style' and the condition of exile. I argue that this history painting invokes the metaphor of non-sex for the condition of exile; and as a late gesture stages an anomalous return to a pre-lapsarian eighteenth century. The painting, I conclude, reveals less the transcendent subjectivity of an artist approaching biological death, than the critical disarming of a once-radical neoclassical aesthetic itself, in its tragic late phase.

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The force of subjectivity in late works is the irascible gesture with which it leaves them. It bursts them asunder, not in order to express itself but, expressionlessly, to cast off the illusion of art. Of the works it leaves only fragments behind, communicating itself, as if in ciphers, only through the spaces it has violently vacated.
Adorno, "Late Style in Beethoven"

Farewell to Painting

[1] If it is true that the nearer one comes to death the more vividly distant memories are stirred up, then David's last public history painting, *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces*, completed in Brussels some twenty months before his death in December 1825, should constitute a veritable Proustian archive (fig. 1).

[2] As David was drawing to his death, he decided to exhibit the work to audiences in Restoration Paris and in politically neutral Brussels, where he had settled in exile for almost a decade. When it was exhibited in Paris in the spring of 1824, the public and critics were astonished that at the age of seventy-six David's ambition and his painterly virtuosity was undiminished.[1]

[1] In 1824, several reviews emphasized the remarkable "jeunesse" and vigour of the execution of the painting. See, for example, Adolphe Thiers, "De M. David et de son dernier tableau", *Revue*

1 Jacques-Louis David, *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces*, 1824, oil on canvas, 308 x 262 cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (© Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels [dig. photo: J. Geleyns / www.roscan.be])

[3] Although one contemporary scholar has hailed *Mars Disarmed* as David's "ultimate achievement, almost superhuman", the painting has been relatively ignored in the scholarly literature on David.[2] One reason for its neglect is that until very recently David's work during the period of Empire and then exile in Brussels (1804-1825) has been

Européenne, 1824, 335-339; reprinted in *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, April 1873, 295-304 (I will henceforth refer to this latter version). For a bibliography of early reviews see Antoine Schnapper and Arlette Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David 1748-1825*, Paris, 1989, 541. The best critical analysis of the painting's critical reception in 1824 is Daniel Harkett, "The Parisian Exhibition of Jacques-Louis David's *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* (1824)", in Daniel Harkett, *Exhibition Culture in Restoration Paris*, unpublished PhD, Brown University, 2005; and the published Daniel Harkett, "Revelation, Narrative, Rupture: Viewing David in Restoration Paris", in *David after David: Essays on the Later Work*, ed. Mark Ledbury, Williamstown, Massachusetts, 2007, 315-320. See also Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David. Art in Metamorphosis*, Princeton, 1993, 260-272; and Beth Wright, "'David, where are you'" David's Continuing Presence in Restoration Art Criticism", in D. Johnson, ed., *Jacques-Louis David. New Perspectives*, Delaware, 2006, 147-49.

[2] Philippe Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, New Haven and London, 2005, 189. For modern commentary on the painting see the catalogue entries in *1770-1830. Autour du néo-classicisme en Belgique*, Ixelles, 1986, 184-85; and Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 541-42. See also note 1 above, and Hubertus Kohle, "Jacques-Louis Davids Stil im Exil", in *Künstlerischer Austausch. Artistic Exchange*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehgtens, Berlin, 1993, Vol. I, 175-86. The most extensive treatment has been Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis*, Princeton, 1993, 260-72.

viewed as aesthetically eccentric, politically retrograde and art historically insignificant.[3] *Mars Disarmed* has in particular been viewed as testifying to the historic exhaustion of French neoclassicism's moral or utopic force, an argument in this essay I will seek to illuminate rather than contradict.[4] Yet even with the remarkable recent rehabilitation of David's later work – all the major late works have now received extensive and probing critical attention – *Mars Disarmed* remains sorely under-interpreted, if frequently acknowledged as the most significant work of his later period.[5] As such, it constitutes something like a final frontier of modern David studies.[6]

[4] Of this (in the words of Anita Brookner) "terrifyingly large" work, David wrote revealingly to his former pupil Jean-Antoine Gros in October 1823 "it is my final farewell to painting"; a statement he was shortly to go public with.[7] As such, the painting openly announces, and reckons with, a certain end, at once inextricably personal and cultural. Cultural, because it marks the end of the authority of the aesthetic of radicalized neoclassicism begun by David and his compeers in the 1780s: 1824, famously, is the year in which Delacroix's *Massacre of Chios* and Constable's *The Hay Wain* proclaim themselves at the Paris Salon as the future of a modern art.[8] Personal, because it announces the death of a certain subject, or self, Jacques-Louis David, whose once-radical political and sexual

[3] The single exception is Dorothy Johnson's early path breaking focus on these works, in Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David: Art in Metamorphosis*.

[4] For Agnès Humbert, the painting makes cruelly apparent a 'pathetic need to please' the Restoration bourgeoisie (Humbert, *Louis David, Peintre et Conventionnel. Essai de critique marxiste*, Paris, 1936). For Brookner there is no longer any 'ought' to its classicizing language (Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David*, London, 1980, 184). Norman Bryson views it as "dismal" (Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire From David to Delacroix*, Cambridge, England, 1984, 115); on the work's exhausted antiquarianism see Régis Michel and Marie-Catherine Sahut, *David. L'art et le politique*, Paris, 1988, 126-27. On the insistently negative modern reception of *Mars Disarmed*, from Louis Rosenthal (1905) to Antoine Schnapper (1980) see Jean-Claude Lebensztejn, "Histoires Belges", in *David contre David: Actes du Colloque au Louvre*, Vol. II, ed. Régis Michel, Paris, 1989, 1013-4.

[5] In the important 1989 Louvre exhibition of David the painting was exhibited and received due attention in the catalogue (see note 1, Schnapper and Sérullaz). However, in the 2005 exhibition that aimed to signal a comprehensive rehabilitation of David's later work, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, Los Angeles and Williamstown, Massachusetts (see note 2, Bordes), it was strikingly absent. On the curious omission of David's "last major statement" see curator Philippe Bordes, "After the exhibition in Los Angeles and Williamstown", in *David after David*, 347. Bordes predicts there, however, that "the time is near when it will be possible to consider this picture with more informed eyes and more diversified angles of interpretation".

[6] Mark Ledbury has astutely observed how since the 1980s David studies have shifted focus from the prerevolutionary to the Revolutionary to the postrevolutionary figure of David. The watershed 2005 *Empire to Exile* exhibition and the scholarship that emerged from it marked a further stage in this "crescendo" by building beyond 1800. Mark Ledbury, "Introduction", in *David after David*, viii.

[7] Anita Brookner, *Jacques-Louis David*, 84. The work was the largest David produced in exile – apart from the repetition of the *Coronation of Napoleon* (completed 1822) – and the only full-length of all the exile mythological paintings. The canvas measures H. 3.08: L. 2.62. "C'est mon dernier adieu à la peinture", Jules David, *David*, Paris, 1880, 588-89. For the repetition as a public statement see Daniel and Guy Wildenstein, *Documents complémentaires au catalogue de l'oeuvre de Louis David*, Paris, 1973, no. 1945. "C'est le dernier tableau que je veux faire, mais je veux m'y surpasser. J'y mettrai la date de mes 75 ans et je ne veux plus ensuite toucher un pinceau", *L'Oracle*, 8th December, 1823, in Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 1947. The Paris exhibition was then advertised by Eugène as "l'exposition du dernier tableau de mon père", *Journal des Débats*, 26 May 1824, as cited in Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 1960.

identity had been definitively forged in the Parisian political arena of 1793 and 1794, known as the Terror, and whose biological life was now rapidly coming to an end.[9] "It is in the signifier and insofar as the subject articulates in a signifying chain that he comes up against the fact that he may disappear from the chain of what he is', declared Jacques Lacan in his *Seminar* of 1959-60, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.[10] For Lacan, the subject and its language are destinally intertwined: we are both formed and deformed – *and finally dismissed* – through our constitutive and terminal relation to the chains of signifiers (verbal or visual) through which we live, and, ultimately, apprehend death.[11] My argument here is that David approached his death in *Mars Disarmed* as the dismantling of the aesthetic that bore his name.

[5] It is a paradoxical work. For all that it is motivated by senescence and the consciousness of approaching death – and the canvas is, I will argue, death-infused – it is not what we have come to expect of a 'late' work.[12] Instead of profundity, everything is on the surface here: the first thing that strikes us is the showy brilliance of its polished surface. Rather than a 'late' ego-dissolving dissolution of form, ego boundaries in *Mars Disarmed* are powerfully delineated and insistently marked as gendered. The work, in fact, insistently strains to present itself as youthful, not least through its *claritas*, or aesthetic of transparency. Following T.J. Clark's astute observation, such transparency might be thought of as the trace of the ethical in David's painting, and in this last work he refuses (contra Brookner) to abandon it.[13] And yet, we will see, the final assertion of an ethical

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[8] On the formation of a Davidian 'school' of radical neoclassicism, which underwent significant variations in the work of his pupils, see Thomas Crow, *Emulation. Making Artists for Revolutionary France,* New Haven and London, 1995. On the Restoration culture wars that erupted in Paris in 1824, played out between the more modernizing Stendhalian 'romantics' and the inheritors of David's once-republican, but now widely considered perverse, neoclassicizing aesthetic see Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *L'État et les Artistes De la Restauration à la Monarchie de Juillet (1815-1833)*, Paris, 1999, 80-81.

[9] This is not to suggest that David could have foreseen his death on December 29th 1825, which was precipitated by a fall in early 1824; but in publicly stating that he was laying down his brush for the last time in this work the artist was conceptually embracing its approach. He may have laid down his brush literally for the last time on 15th December 1825, when increasing physical debility made it impossible for him to grasp it. See the anxious correspondence on this between pupils François-Joseph Navez and Jean-Antoine Gros, in Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 2011.

[10] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 1959-60, trans. Dennis Porter, London 1992, 295. See also Paul de Man, for whom "death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament". De Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism*, New York 1984, 81.

[11] For poststructuralist interpretation of David see Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire from David to Delacroix*, Cambridge, 1987; and, on David as a politically desiring subject running along the 'chain of signifiers', my *Chains. David, Canova and the Fall of the Public Hero in Postrevolutionary France*, Pennsylvania, 2007, Chapter V, 'Sade/David, in Chains'.

[12] David himself would not have been labouring under a concept of 'late', either 'romantic' (transcendence, expressive introversion) or 'modernist' (formal dissonance, disenchantment). His Winckelmannian assumptions would have associated post-maturity with decline and deterioration. This partly explains the studied 'jeunesse' of *Mars Disarmed*. For discussion of 'late' as historical construct see Karen Painter, "On Creativity and Lateness", in *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, eds. Karen Painter and Thomas Crow, Los Angeles, 2006, 1-6.

[13] Brookner, note 7 above. For Clark, "the general clarity and distinctness [in David's painting] offered as a guarantee of other forms of rectitude, moral and perhaps political" involves an "ethic

aesthetic is rendered ironical by the very theme that David chooses to paint, that of the disarming or the dismantling of heroic ethical action; and David's working processes of revision, erasure and narrative blockages end by producing a 'late' dissonant and disenchanted image of the mythological and allegorical theme of 'Peace' that is the ostensible subject of the work. Several endings are alluded to in *Mars Disarmed* and David works at them all: the ending of an aesthetic, the termination of David as a powerful cultural producer, and the ending of a life of political struggle with the end of the Revolutionary wars in Europe that culminated in the deadly fallout of Waterloo.[14]

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A Schizophrenic Subject in Exile

[6] For the French Revolutionaries of David's generation, 'last words' were critical opportunities for self-definition.[15] For the group of exiles who had settled in Brussels, ex-regicide members of the National Convention of which David was perhaps the most prominent and famous member, the matter of last words was urgent. In his fine study *Mémoire de la Terreur*, the historian Sergio Luzzatto provides a collective portrait of the community of exiles in the 1820s.[16] Luzzato reminds us that in the immediate aftermath of the Terror there were two sequences of the fabrication of Revolutionary memory: the first was the post-thermidorean moment, circa 1795; the second was the critical decade of the 1820s. Critical, because it was then that survivors who had lived through the Terror began one by one to meet their biological deaths. The consciousness that they

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and aesthetic of disclosure […] to which, at one level, David was deeply committed". See T.J. Clark, "Gross David with the Swoln Cheek: An Essay in Self-Portraiture", in *Rediscovering History. Culture, Politics and the Psyche*, ed. Michael Roth, Stanford, 1994. 285.

[14] This essay is an elaboration of brief concluding comments on *Mars Disarmed* in my essay "Dispossessed. On 'Late' David", in *David after David,* 311-312. Modern, and modernist, studies of 'late style' begin with Theodor W. Adorno's revisionary essays "Late Style in Beethoven" (1937) and "Alienated Masterpiece. The *Missa Solemnis*" (1959), both reprinted in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, Berkeley, 2002, 564-83. Adorno's laconic thoughts are elaborated upon in Edward Said, *On Late Style. Music and Literature Against the Grain*, New York, 2006; and Michael Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy. Adorno and Beethoven's Late Style*, Indiana, 2006. As Spitzer has put it, Adorno paints an image, very much in visual metaphors, of late as a landscape, a "barren, volcanic world pitted with abysses and craters". My aim here is to argue that an analysis of *Mars Disarmed* bears out Adorno's modernist notion of what a late work in the early nineteenth century looks like; and that through it David's last painting gains an unusual significance *as* the very Adornian *visual* image of late. For recent thinking on aesthetics and mortality – in the work of Mondrian, de Kooning, Eva Hesse, Richard Strauss and others – see *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, eds. Karen Painter and Thomas Crow, Los Angeles, 2006.

[15] On the classical Revolutionary generation see Harold. T. Parker, *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries*, New York, 1965. On the bourgeois Revolutionary's "publicly valid way of controlling his own death" see Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class and Political Culture*, New Haven, 1989, 96-7 and 103. For the last words of victims of the 'Terror' see Olivier Blanc, *Last Letters. Prisons and Prisoners of the French Revolution* (1984), New York, 1987. While David's art – *Death of Socrates* (1787)*, Lepeletier on his Deathbed* (1792), *Marat at His Last Breath* (1793), *Bara* (1794) and *Leonidas at Thermopyla*e (1799-1814) – obsessively and repeatedly focuses on the eloquence of the expiring subject, none of those works can be claimed to be their author's 'last words'.

[16] Sergio Luzzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur: Vieux Montagnards et jeunes Republicains au XIXe siècle*, Lyon, 1991 (first published as *Il Terrore Ricordito*, Genoa, 1988). See also Eugène Welvert, *Lendemains révolutionnaire: les regicides*, Paris, 1912.

were dying threw an entire community of exiled regicides into a profusion of memoir writing. Luzzatto's *Mémoire* substantially draws upon this extraordinary archive of memoirs, some of which were published in the 1820s, but most of which had to await posthumous publication from the Third Republic onwards. What emerges forcefully is that the ex-Revolutionaries – these men who had attempted to change the world – had an urgent and acute sense of the fragility of their posterity.[17]

[7] Once-powerful, these men in their seventies, who were still being branded as blood-sucking pariahs, were the dispossessed of the modern world. In some sense their memories of a radical agency were all that sustained them as a community. Walking arm in arm in the public parks of Brussels, these ancient members of the National Convention spoke lowly with one another of things near and distant. In the afternoons they would meet at the Café de Mille Colonnes. Evenings were frequently spent at the theatre – David was particularly fond of this.[18] Jean-Jacques Régis de Cambacères, Emmanuel-Joseph Sièyes, Antoine de Thibaudeau, Charles-Jean-Marie Alquier, David: what did they speak of, whisper to each other, remember of their pasts, and how?

[8] To begin with the unspeakable, Robespierre. Against the still powerful cultural spectre of Robespierre as a blood-loving tiger, each has to excommunicate the Robespierre that continues to haunt them. To kill the Robespierre in oneself became a ritual act of self-cleansing, it being one of the functions of these written memoirs repeatedly to enact.[19] Having expelled the ghost, they can begin to speak of the Revolution, live it a second time. Self-justification, obstinate shoring up of the old partisan political identities, a certain nostalgic return to the ancien régime as a place or a space before they took on the burdens of political responsibility; the memoirs console them as they write towards death.

[9] Now David, it must be said, refuses this mode of self-reckoning. When in 1816, as a regicide and supporter of Napoleon's 'Acte Additionel', David was forced to leave French territory and decided on Brussels as his new home, he at once posited it as a *free* space, uncontaminated by the noisy past. In an oft-cited letter of May 1817 to his pupil Jean-

[17] The period covering the genesis of *Mars Disarmed*, from 1821 to 1824, saw the publication of the memoirs of Barbaroux, Buzot, Meillan, Louvet, Condorcet, Fouché, and Thibaudeau. On the uneven publication of the ex-conventionnels' memoirs see Luzzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur*, 24-25.

[18] David drew inspiration for *Mars Disarmed* from the anacreontic ballet *La Naissance de Venus et de l'Amour* by Petipa, performed in the Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels on 17th June 1821, and revived in October 1823. See S. Carroll, "Reciprocal Representation: David and Theatre", *Art in America*, 78, 5 (May 1996), 259; and Jules Guiffrey, "David et le théâtre pendant son séjour à Bruxelles", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (September 1903), 201-8. For the repertoire see Lionel Renieu, *Histoire des Théâtres de Bruxelles Vol. II*, Paris 1928, 731-46.

[19] Luzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur*, 31-32 and 48 (note 38). The memoirists *spat* out the calumnies against Robespierre in Sadean fashion: "[…] une morosité dangereuse, un acharnement bilieux contre ses ennemis, une jalousie atroce contres les talents qui l'éclipsaient, une manie insupportable de dominer, une defiance sans bornes, une démagogie féroce et un fanatisme de principes qui lui faisait preférer l'établissement d'une loi à l'existence d'une population". Barère, *Mémoires de B. Barère*, Vol. II, Paris 1843, 235.

Antoine Gros, David deliberately proclaims his newfound youth: "Moi je travaille comme si je n'avais que trente ans; j'aime mon art comme je l'aimais à seize ans, et je mourrai, mon ami, en tenant le pinceau. Il n'y a pas de puissance, telle malveillante q'elle soit, qui peut m'en priver: j'oublie toute la terre […]."[20] This fantasy of return to a period of his life before the Revolution – specifically to that free youthful one of his Roman sojourn of 1775 to 1780 – simply fails to acknowledge his early political radicalism, the traumatic events of Year Two and its descent into violence, the loss of Jacobin power during the Directory and the installation of an authoritarian Empire. David's blithe assertions seem unconvincing to us, and not only because they contradict both ancient and modern understandings of the self in exile as painful, tragic and wrenching.[21] For even if David in Brussels is for the first time free of any constraining external agent who might deprive him of the newfound pleasure in his brush – free now from Napoleon, from the old authoritarian Academy – can he nevertheless control the brush, or the crayon, that continues to be haunted by the failure of his radical Revolutionary hopes?

[10] In his exile David paints a series of stunningly immediate portraits: in this way he makes for himself a new little community.[22] In a major turn to what has been described by Susan Siegfried as "fantasies now formed around libidinally charged situations rather than devotion to a public cause", he produces in this second flush of youth the canvases *Cupid and Psyche* (1817), *Farewell of Telemachus and Eucharis* (1818), *Anger of Achilles* (1819), and finally *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces*, begun in 1821.[23] With the possible exception of *Anger of Achilles* David in these works has largely given up on attempting to depict the 'we', the community or the group, in favour of the 'I', the isolated 'bourgeois' couple. Such a renewal of creative energy in the service of an early-nineteenth-century bourgeois 'domestic' ideal, dressed up as myth, might appear to lend credence to his self-proclaimed forgetting of his political past; the passage to Brussels being instantly and insistently reparative. Were it not for the corpus of small, intense drawings that David in his idle moments produced in numbers. As if work had been left unfinished – or unfinishable – many of the late drawings, such as *Composition with Five Figures* (fig. 2), can be said to dramatize, in their weird invocation of the collective, the fissuring and fragmentation of the once-transcendent *communitas* that David had so powerfully envisioned, and which he had been forced to leave behind in ruins.[24]

[20] Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 1799 bis.

[21] For the ancient – exile as a living death, the subject 'torn asunder', 'broken', forced 'to dwell at the edge of the world' – see Ovid, *Tristia*, Loeb, London and New York, 1924. For the modern – exile in Conrad, Joyce, and Adorno, as sad, sorrowful and crippling – see Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile", *Granta*, Autumn 1984, reprinted in E. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, 173-186 (I will henceforth refer to this latter version).

[22] See Philippe Bordes, "Portraits in Exile", in Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, 293-329.

[23] Susan L. Siegfried, "The Artifice of Antiquity: Sappho's Dream", in *David after David*, 93.

[24] On the corpus of late 'expressionist' drawings, become the object of intense recent critical attention, see Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 547-57; Philippe Bordes, "Late

2 Jacques-Louis David, *A Scene of Mourning (Composition with Five Figures)*, 1819, graphite and black chalk on paper, 13.1 x 20 cm. Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, Aschenbach Foundation for the Graphic Arts Endowment Fund (© Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco)

[11] The trouble that is attested to in the corpus of 'private' Brussels drawings is, then, less individual, or subjective, than that of the *group*[25]: the 'private' drawings paradoxically disclose the fate of publicness, while the public canvases retreat into the pseudo-domestic. Violent and disturbing, the drawings are indeed impossible not to think of as hysterical repetitions of a collective trauma of Terror re-iteratively performed in his new dwelling. They belie David's declaration of newfound happiness, and render it precarious.

[12] As perhaps the most famous name in the exile community David in fact was urged to write his memoirs – by Dominique-Vincent Ramel de Nogaret, who was the subject of a "disturbingly direct" portrait by David – but he declined to do so.[26] He was not alone in this, for along with the veritable flood of memoir writing in the 1820s there co-existed a certain resistant silence amongst certain of the exiles, a refusal to produce the memory.[27] Such muteness does not necessarily amount to a forgetting of the radical Revolution. In

Drawings. Experiments in Expression", in Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, 263-91; and Dorothy Johnson, "Lines of Thought: David's Aporetic Late Drawings", in *David after David*, 153-70. On *Composition with Five Figures* see the catalogue entry in Louis-Antoine Prat and Pierre Rosenberg, *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825: Catalogue raisonné des dessins*, Vol. I, 320; and Bordes, *Empire to Exile*. 276

[25] On memory as a group matter see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (first published 1941), translated by Lewis A. Coser, Chicago and London, 1992.

[26] On the 'disturbing' portrait see Alan Wintermute, *The French Portrait 1550-1850*, New York, 1996, 76-78; and Bordes' catalogue entry in *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, 314-18. David had depicted Dominique-Vincent Ramel de Nogaret, fellow regicide and exile, on a previous occasion in the unfinished *Tennis Court Oath* (1791). Here we might add that the 1820 exile portrait transforms and displaces the fraternal embrace of this ex-participant of the Tennis Court Oath: in the later portrait while the upper part of the body in it is now notably constrained, the unusually 'penetrating' – for Wintermute "disturbing" – gaze speaks of a continuing fraternal desire. On Ramel's attempt to elicit David's memoirs see Louis-Jules David, *Le Peintre Louis David, 1748-1825, souvenirs, documents inédits*, Paris 1880, 617; and Luzzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur*, 105.

the 1820s David's silence, it could be argued, *protects* the memory of the Robespierrian Revolution, guarantees its inviolability.[28]

[13] For in Brussels the name David continued to be closely identified with that of Robespierre. Etienne Delécluze, writing in 1855, relates the possibly apocryphal story of the Englishman who at the theatre one night had attempted to get near the great painter but it turns out, only in order to shake the hand of someone who had *touched* Robespierre.[29] David/Robespierre, the names have forever remained inextricable. Given this proximity, is not David's abstention from publicly uttering the name 'Robespierre' in all the years of his exile remarkable? Does it not suggest a *protecting* of the name, an awaiting of the future promise of Year Two, unapologetically allied to an emancipatory vision that bears the name 'Robespierre'? David's rare anecdotally recorded private responses to being reminded of Robespierre in his exile attest to an increasingly powerful, rather than diminished, reverence: Robespierre, David asserted, was a virtuous citizen, like Jesus Christ altars will be raised to him.[30] Public silence, then, avoided the need for an act of repudiation, or ritual self-cleansing under the hegemonic force of an early-nineteenth-century bourgeois order. No need to justify oneself for there are no regrets, no need to write the memoir. On being urged to write his memoirs, David is said to have rejoined, "Le temps rendra à chacun ce qui est dû".[31] Such a comment implies a certain faith in the persistence of Year Two, a belief in its ultimate vindication.

[14] And yet, in 1824, as he approaches death, there is, perhaps, a certain loosening of the tongue in the form of the final 'youthful' painting *Mars Disarmed*. Already in 1821, when David began to work on *Mars Disarmed*, visual evidence testifies to a certain release of affect – the previously suppressed exilic anger – in the thematically related drawing *Mars and Rhea Sylvia*.[32] This perceptible shift in David's subjectivity could have been prompted by the bitter experience of being left behind: many of David's fellow regicides returned to Paris in 1818, taking advantage of Louis XVIII's government's decree granting reprieve to

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[27] It has been argued of David's oddly restrained *Portrait of Emmanuel-Joseph Sièyes* (1817), for example, that we might discern there a certain tight-lipped quality: old Sièyes is weary, still distinguished, but absolutely mute, harbouring his thoughts and his memories. See Luzzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur*, 112; and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, "The Self in Exile: David's *Portrait of Emmanuel-Joseph-Sièyes*", in *David after David*, 233-251.

[28] See Wendy Brown, "Freedom's Silences", in *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation*, ed. Robert C. Post, Los Angeles, 1998, 313-27, on "refusing to speak" as a mode of resistance to "radical denunciation, hystericization, exclusion or criminalization". Brown draws upon the work of Michel Foucault (and his remarks on silence and secrecy in *The History of Sexuality*) for her analysis of "the relationship between silence, speech and freedom".

[29] Etienne Delécluze, *Louis David. Son École et Son Temps* (1855), Paris 1983, 372-73.

[30] See Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 1889 and no. 2004.

[31] David, *Le peintre Louis David, 1748-1825: Souvenirs et documents inédits*, Paris 1880, 616.

[32] On the drawing see the catalogue entry in Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David*. *Empire to Exile*, 258. As recounted in Ovid's *Fasti* (Introduction and book 3), following his 'disarming' Mars rapes Ilia (Rhea Sylvia) and causes her begetting of Romulus and Remus: this is the violent prelude to the foundation of Rome.

exiled regicides and Bonapartists.[33] In contrast to him, they willingly made public declarations of remorse and expiation, asking forgiveness from God and King.[34]

[15] The subject of *Mars and Rhea Sylvia* is rape, and if it is not in itself particularly disturbing this only readies us for its shocking transformation into the later violent 'pendant' *Rape of Lucretia* (fig. 3), a drawing which, dated 1825, could be the last work from David's hand.[35]

3 Jacques-Louis David, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 1825, black crayon and white gouache on paper, 17 x 20 cm. Private Collection (reprod. from: Philippe Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, New Haven and London, 2005, 261. Photo: Christie's Paris)

[33] In respect of the rigor of the law David assumed an uncompromisingly Kantian position, even as it harshly construed his outcast individuality. A year earlier, in 1817, upon being offered a personal exemption from the law, he laconically declares its illegitimacy: "J'ai été exilé par une loi; je ne rentrerai que par une loi", 1817 (Louis Hautecoeur*, Louis David*, Paris, 1954, 261). See also note 34, on his refusal to comply with special advantages.

[34] The decree was promulgated on December 23rd 1818. See Eugène Welvert, *Lendemains révolutionnaire: les régicides*, Paris 1912, xlvi-xlviii, and lix-lx. David, in a letter to his son Jules dated 1st January 1819, ruefully explains his newfound isolation: "Tous mes collègues rentrent en France. Je serais certainement du nombre si j'avais la faiblesse de redemander mon rappel par écrit. Vous connnaisez votre père et la fierté de son caractère; peut-il faire une pareille demarche? J'ai su ce que je faisais, j'avais l'âge pour savoir ce que je faisais, je ne l'ai pas fait par passion […]". Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 1841.

[35] On these drawings conceived as "conceptual pendants", a phrase borrowed from Mary Vidal, see Mark Ledbury, "Roman Dreams: Two Late Drawings", in *David after David*, 171-187. See also Philippe Bordes. *Jacques-Louis David*. *Empire to Exile*, 257-261; and on the obvious thematic slippages between them and *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces,* Louis-Antoine Prat and Pierre Rosenberg, *Jacques-Louis David, 1748-1825: Catalogue raisonné des dessins*, Vol. I, Milan 2002, 372.

[16] As Mark Ledbury has argued, David vents his continuing sense of victimhood and subjection in this deeply terrorized image in no uncertain terms.[36] In fact victimhood is doubly articulated here; on the one hand in the cowing and terrified figure of Lucretia; on the other in the bent, abused figure of the male slave, which it has not been previously noted is burdened with a 'gross swollen cheek' that appears distinctly Davidian.[37] Furthermore, if David is able to identify with every subject position within the picture, his exilic anger may be articulated equally through the *vengeful* figure of the rapist itself. Here in this depiction of violent forced sexual encounter is the return of the repressed of those libidinous anacreontic images that David produced in the rejuvenated, happy and 'free' early years of his exile – *Cupid and Psyche*, *Eucharis and Telemachus* – a return of the repressed which is heralded at least thematically by the transitional, yet still highly controlled, Ovidian painting *Anger of Achilles* of 1819.[38] We should not think of David's subjectivity in exile as monolithic and unchanging: in the later Brussels work, David shifts into the condition of "absolute exile".[39]

[17] As chronologically bracketed by the two rape drawings, I want to suggest that *Mars Disarmed* is a work in which David is ready to speak of what has happened to the Revolution, to his once-Revolutionary self, but now in a valedictory *public* mode. As such, the painting may take its place amongst the proliferation of Revolutionary memoirs by the dying regicides. As a strategic missive to Paris it intervened actively in a Paris that in the 1820s was mad about memory – although quite careful to attempt to forget its *radical* past. As Pierre Nora has shown, in the years between 1820 and 1840 some five hundred published volumes of memoirs appeared on the Paris market, transforming the city into a veritable theatre of memory.[40] And yet as a public statement of 'all said and

[36] Ledbury, "Roman Dreams", 185, in particular, argues convincingly for David's "self-identification" with the figure of "doomed" women in the drawings.

[37] David suffered from a jaw tumour for which he came to be known by his contemporaries – more or less contemptuously – as *la grosse joue* (the swollen cheek). The tumour was on the left side of his face, although in the Louvre *Self-Portrait* of 1794 he depicts it as seen by himself in a mirror, on the left. For discussion of the swollen cheek as a 'difficult sign', which David was conscious of having to negotiate (i.e. downplay) in relation to his 'deformed' Terroristic political past see T.J. Clark, "Gross David with the Swoln Cheek: An Essay in Self-Portraiture", 243-307; and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*, New Haven 1999, 36-7, and 41-2.

[38] See Thomas Crow, "The Imagination of Exile in David's *Anger of Achilles*", in *David after David*, 123-135.

[39] Edward Said speaks of "the transformation of the passive feeling of being in exile into the decision to take up a deliberate physical exile", that is "absolute exile". Said, *Reflections*, 186. From 1819, an increasing public acknowledgement of the position of absolute exile is indicated by the testamentary signature on the lower left corner of the Brussels version of the *Coronation*: "Commencé à Paris en 1808, terminé à Bruxelles en 1822 *dans mon exil*" (my emphasis). See Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 534.

[40] Pierre Nora, "Memoirs of Men of State. From Commynes to de Gaulle", in Nora, *Rethinking France. Les Lieux de Mémoire. Vol. I. The State*, Chicago, 2001, 405. On commemoration become "a fashionable occupation in Restoration Paris" see Philip Mansel, *Paris Between Empires 1814-1852*, London, 2001, 194. The possibility of Montagnard commemoration – rather than royalist or bonapartist – was, nevertheless, still politically stigmatized, and foreclosed. Discussing the reception of the painting Harkett interestingly argues that on the occasion of the 1824 Paris exhibition of *Mars Disarmed*, David's pupils "receive the painting as a memorial", and that "David is

done', *Mars Disarmed* is not a justification of a Revolutionary life *cleansed* of the Robespierrian Terror, disclosing a David finally pacified with the 'Restoration' world.

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Painting on the Far Shore (back to the Rococo)

[18] Paradoxically, David's turn to mythology, to this 'offshore' realm of the Gods, is something of an *anti*-lieu de mémoire: a space that resists the ideological constructions of sites of memory as they were being erected, normatively, all over postrevolutionary Paris.[41] To the extent that David has not previously broached it, the site of this encounter between Mars and Venus is a motivated leap away – exile, *ex salire* – from all his earlier and problematic selves, to a free and uncontaminated space.[42]

[19] There is a current of postrevolutionary painting – by Gérard, Girodet, Prudhon, Guérin, Ingres, Mongez and others – that collectively turns to myth, and David's mythological work in exile has been understood as concurrent with this.[43] Yet, I want to propose a more complex sense of time involved in David's 'late' turn to the mythological in *Mars Disarmed*, whereby he recourses to the eighteenth-century figure of Boucher – and to never-forgotten aspects of his early self – *through* those very mainstream modern mythologizing movement that would rather deny the latter a place in history. David's last major work is haunted, by a very specific past.[44]

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treated, in effect, as if he were already dead". See Harkett, "The Parisian Exhibition", 139.

[41] I refer here of course to Pierre Nora's concept of the 'sites of memory' as constitutive of, and concretizing, collective identities. See Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, New York, 1996-1998; and above, note 40. My point here is that in exile David is disconnected from these normative sites and their ability to work through – and *to forget* – the community's lived experiences of the radical French Revolution.

[42] However, we should note that when received in Paris in 1824 *Mars Disarmed* was regarded as bearing the scars of David's political past: Royalist critics tarred it as painted by the hand of one of the "murderers of Louis XIV […] fanatical friend of Robespierre" and "with the same brush that painted the death of Marat with such patriotic energy and friendly zeal" (*Le Drapeau Blanc*, 21 May 1824, as cited in Harkett, "Revelation, Narrative, Rupture", 318); while, as Harkett argues, the "rhetoric of elevation" in the picture itself, and its distinctive conditions of installation in Paris in 1824, offered David's more politically sympathetic viewers an "imagined sharing of the painter's exile". See Harkett, "The Parisian Exhibition", 131-136. For his part, David indicated that the painting represented an entirely new departure (evidently overlooking his youthful exercises in mythological painting; notably *Combat of Minerva and Mars* of 1771), stating: "je me suis lancé de nouveau, dans la grande carrière d'un plus grand style historique. Je me suis avisé de peindre des Dieux, nouveau titan, j'ai osé pénétrer jusque dans leur demeure; puissé-je n'être pas foudroyé commes eux." Letter to Mongez, 12 May 1824, as cited in Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 630. On exile as involving an *imaginative* leap – etymologically, *ex sal* (*salire*), to leap out of – see Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative of Imagination*, New Haven and London, 1986, 1-2.

[43] See Dorothy Johnson, "Myth and Meaning: Mythological Painting in France circa 1800", in *Frankreich 1800: Gesellschaft, Kultur, Mentalitäten*, ed. G. Gersmann and H. Kohle, Stuttgart, 1990, 23-33; and D. Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David. The Farewell of Telemachus and Eucharis*, Los Angeles, 1997, 53-91. Johnson traces the 'renascence' of mythology back to the late eighteenth century.

[44] In reinventing the mythological, ambitious early-nineteenth-century painters of myth renounced Boucher as thoroughly outmoded; as did dogmatic devotees of a return to antiquity, such as the radical *barbus* group emanating from David's studio. But David, it seems, continued to view Boucher as a great painter. See Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, *François Boucher*, Lausanne, 1976, Vol. I, 151 (no. 1179); and Melissa Hyde, *Making up the Rococo. François*

[20] For by the look of it, there is the return here of *another* ghost: rather than Robespierre, the haunting presence that returns in *Mars Disarmed* is François Boucher. What looks out at us through the glance of the figure of Cupid is Boucher as a spectral presence. Through this recursion into the 'pre-historic' – prerevolutionary – territory of gods and goddesses, quivers, Graces and Cupid, David bypasses the Restoration, the Empire, the Revolution, his first (and every subsequent) encounter with Rome, and sets himself, painting now towards death, squarely where he was at the age of seventeen; encountering his first and most important mentor, the ageing Boucher.[45] As Edward Said has noted, an artist's 'late' style characteristically involves a "return or homecoming to realms forgotten or left behind by the relentless advancement of history".[46] In its anomalous 'late' temporality – and much of the painting's oddity derives from the crushing together of the fusionary language of 'Boucher' and that of a transparent ethical neoclassicism – *Mars Disarmed* recalls eighteenth-century painting, just as the regicide community in their memoirs were fond of remembering a life before the Revolution.[47] The mark of its lateness is in fact in its radical turn to the early, to what for David was, pre-dating his discovery of the archaic Roman and Greek, *his* primal scene of art.[48]

[21] Boucher is invoked through the very theme of the painting. This paradigmatic articulation of sexual differencing in art – Mars and Venus – was one that from *Venus Requesting Vulcan to Make Arms for Aeneas* of 1732 to *Mars and Venus* of 1754, Boucher had explored famously in all its narrative complications.[49] Even as the ruins of Greece in the form of Corinthian columns and gold palmettes surge in the background, the entire scene is in fact erected upon the typically rococo motif of the *cloud*; a rococo cloud that in its brooding and inexplicable darkness is glimpsed, one could say, through the Terror, 'Boucher' overshadowed, as it were, by ineradicable traces of the violence of Year Two.[50]

Boucher and his Critics, Los Angeles, 2006, 7-8. Included in the inventory of David's Brussels apartment drawn up after his death in 1826, amongst engraved portraits of the young Napoleon, Josephine Bonaparte, Canova, and Count Sommariva, was a portrait of Boucher. See Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 2041, item 68.

[45] David had been introduced to Boucher, his grandmother's cousin, at age sixteen in 1764. On David as an artist raised within Boucher's vision see Norman Bryson, *Word and Image. French Painting of the Ancien Régime*, Cambridge, 1981, 218; and Hyde, *Making up the Rococo*, 7.

[46] Said, *On Late Style*, 135.

[47] On the exiles' nostalgia for the ancien régime – as produced, for example, in the memoirs of Barère, Prieur de la Marne, and Dubois-Crancé – see Luzzatto, *Mémoire*, 43-44.

[48] This is to take seriously David's statement that he was putting *all* of his seventy five years into this final canvas. "C'est le dernier tableau que je veux faire, mais je veux m'y surpasser. J'y mettrai la date de mes 75 ans et je ne veux plus ensuite toucher un pinceau", *L'Oracle*, 8th December, 1823, in Wildenstein, *Documents*, no. 1947.

[49] On the culminating 1754 canvas, now in the Wallace Collection, London, see J. Ingamells, *The Wallace Collection Catalogue of Pictures, III, French before 1815*, London, 1989, 42-45 and 49-54. Melissa Hyde has argued for Boucher's powerful identification of his artistic persona with the figure of Venus. See Melissa Hyde, "Getting into the Picture: Boucher's Self-Portraits of Others", in *Rethinking Boucher*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Mark Ledbury, Los Angeles, 2006, 21-23.

[50] I am building here upon Ewa Lajer-Burcharth's brilliant reading of David's earlier use of dark shadow as an "aesthetic articulation of grief" in the prison drawing *Homer Reciting His Verses to*

David, for sure, is not altogether comfortable of his footing in the amorphous 'free' space he now embarks upon – not sure of his ability to grasp Boucher's brilliant spatial fluidity – and he anchors the scene with the overbearing structure of the temple that he borrows from David Le Roy's *Ruines des plus beaux Monuments de la Grèce*; stamps his neo-Greek aesthetic on it from the back, as it were.[51]

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The Metaphor of Non-Sex in Exile

[22] As Norman Bryson has observed, the non-space of the Rococo aesthetic – the diaphanous, space-dissolving cloud setting in which everything takes place – is the ground and condition of a distinctive eroticism that seeks to stage the body for the viewer's optimal voracious sexual pleasure.[52] Here it is insistently heterosexual, for the politically compromised homoerotic of *Death of Socrates*, *Oath of the Tennis Court*, *Marat at his Last Breath*, and *Leonidas at Thermopylae* is long left behind on the 'far shore'.[53] If we turn to the genesis of the work we will see that what we see in the painting is actually only the traces of a sexual relation that has been rejected; that remains in ruins, as a measure, I will suggest, of David's postrevolutionary disabusement in exile. In *Mars Disarmed*, sexual pleasure is staged, but only to be simultaneously repressed. If David's is possibly the most un-sexy image of Mars and Venus ever to have been painted, we should inquire how and why this is so.

[23] In 1821, David's independent choice of the political subject of Mars Disarmed by Venus as an allegory of Peace was apposite to the post-Waterloo European desire for peace after a generation of war. In the *première idée* sketch of about 1821, the figure of the hero, Mars, is replete with sexual satisfaction (fig. 4).[54]

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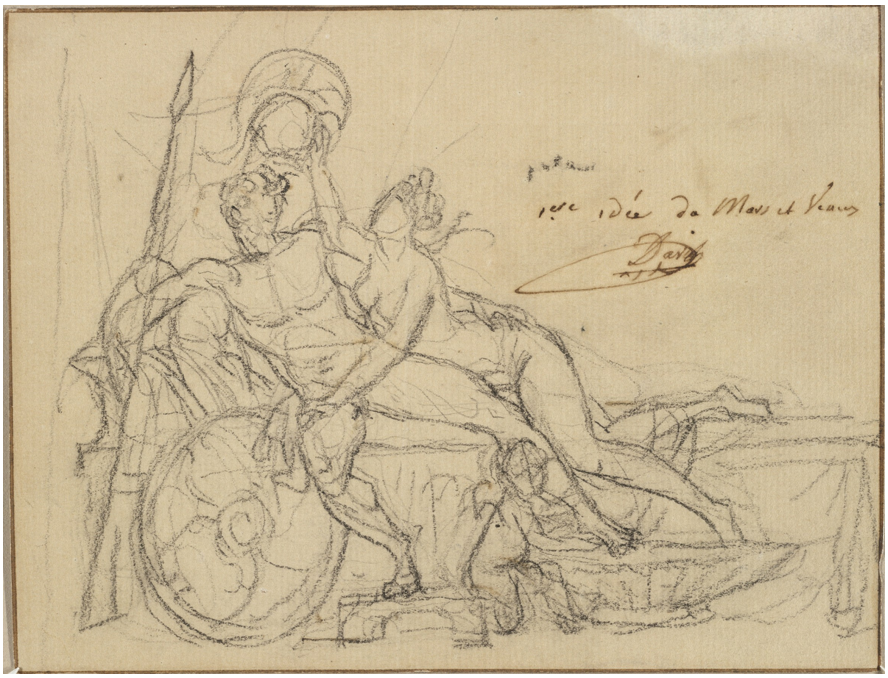
the Greeks (1794). See Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*, 82-86. The inclusion of the essentially Baroque device of the cloud, inherited from Boucher, is of course overdetermined. It is also a formalistic painterly device that functions to vivify the colours – this is how Gros viewed it – and an emulation of mediating mythologizing successors Prudhon and Ingres (specifically Ingres' *Jupiter and Thetis* of 1811).

[51] On the borrowing see Hautecoeur*, Louis David*, 271. David Le Roy's *Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* was published in 1758, revised edition 1776.

[52] Bryson, *Word and Image*, 95.

[53] On that homoerotic ideal, become the object of lively scholarly debate, see Alex Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution", *History Workshop Journal*, 31 (Autumn1990), 1-21; revised version in Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal. Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History*, New Haven and London 1994, 223-38; Abigail-Solomon Godeau, "Male Trouble. A Crisis in Representation", *Art History* 16, no. 2 (June 1993): 259-74; and idem, *Male Trouble. A Crisis in Representation*, New York 1997; Whitney Davis, "The Renunciation of Reaction in Girodet's *Sleep of Endymion*", in *Visual Culture: Images, and Interpretations*, ed. Norman Bryson et al., Hanover, N.H., 1994), 168-201; Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Endymion était-il gay? Interpretation historique, histoire de l'art homosexuelle et historiographie queer", in *Girodet 1767-1824*, ed. Sylvain Bellenger, Paris 2005, 81-95; Satish Padiyar, *Chains. David, Canova and the Fall of the Public Hero in Postrevolutionary France,* Pennsylvania, 2007; and Satish Padiyar, "Who is Socrates? Desire and Subversion in David's *Death of Socrates* (1787)", *Representations* 102 (Spring, 2008).

[54] Antonio Canova also essayed the political theme: his colossal marble of *Venus and Mars* (1816-22, London, Buckingham Palace, Royal Collection) was commissioned by George Prince Regent. See



4 Jacques-Louis David, *Première idée* for *Mars Disarmed by Venus*, 1817, black crayon on paper, 13.5 x 17.5 cm. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Gift of John S. Newberry (Photo: Allan Macintyre © President and Fellows of Harvard College)

[24] The solid, erect neck holds up a head that is un-bearded, and covered with tousled, tight curls. Although the furrowed brow implies a hint of consternation at the performance to come, there is a faint, but distinct, smile on the youthful face. And the body is ready. Muscular, but languorous, Mars sprawls out on the bed, legs apart, edging his left thigh and leg up towards the genital area of the figure of Venus: with his possessive left arm he reaches across to grab her buttocks. The body of Venus is twisted, contorted, for optimal sexual availability, his and ours. Mars' left hand invites the viewer to take hold of the body, to follow the direction of the hand that leads down Venus' right buttock and into her plump thigh. The breasts are exposed, the genital slit is graphic. As Venus pushes and slides her belly and sex along Mars' powerful thigh, she reaches out her erect right arm – while the other substitutes his stiff penis – as if to crown him, phallus upon phallus.[55] But the final painting stages a negotiated withdrawal from this vision of *jouissance*.

[25] From sexual merging in the earlier drawing David shifts to sexual alienation in the painting. In the only other extant preparatory drawing for *Mars Disarmed*, the Besançon *Study* that was probably executed in the latter half of 1823, we see him working towards a disturbing transformation (fig. 5).

Christopher M.S. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe*, Los Angeles and London, 1998, 163-169. I will go on to show that in many ways David works the theme of political reconciliation in a markedly perverse manner.

[55] On this drawing see Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 544-45; and Prat and Rosenberg, *Catalogue raisonné des dessins*, Vol. I, 43 (380).

5 Jacques-Louis David, Besançon*Study* for *Mars Disarmed*, 1823 (?), lead pencil, 20.4 x 27.5 cm. Besançon, Musée Des Beaux-Arts et D'Archéologie (© Besançon, Musée Des Beaux-Arts et D'Archéologie. Photo: Charles Choffet)

[26] Here, the body of Venus is reversed – the view of breasts and genital area withdrawn – and thus de-sexualized. David had first visited such a de-sexing operation upon the body of Juliette Récamier in the unfinished 1799 portrait.[56] That work was later to be appropriated, and re-eroticized, by Ingres in *La Grande Odalisque*, via Antonio Canova's marmoreal but erotically fleshy *Pauline Borghese as Victorious Venus*.[57] In this self-conscious circuit of appropriations and re-appropriations – in which the powerful female body is a focus of competitive struggle between male artists – memories of Boucher again come to intervene. The back view of the female nude with one leg extended and the other implied only by the protruding sole of a foot is a pose that is specifically and repeatedly encountered in the mythological nudes of Boucher.[58] David's composite figure of Venus is, then, a substitutive one. As Norman Bryson has remarked, David was finally to "claim his figure back from Ingres" in *Mars Disarmed*.[59] But what is striking about the

[56] On the 'flipped body' and the ensuing foreclosure of the signs of sexual difference in David's *Juliette Récamier*, see the incisive discussion in Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*, 268-76.

[57] Mark Ledbury recently suggested that the "decentering" of David's work during Empire and exile calls for synchronic rather than traditionally diachronic understanding of the artistic networks within which his painting is imbricated, "less as the leader of a school than as part of a complex generation of cultural creators". See Mark Ledbury, "Introduction", in *David after David*, x.

[58] One sees it, for example, in the bottom right-hand 'repoussoir' female nudes of Boucher's *The Rape of Europa* (c.1733-4); and reiterated in *The Rising of the Sun* (1753), *Pan and Syrinx* (1759), and *Juno Asking Aeolis to Release the Winds* (1769), as well as in several extant related drawings. For French modernity, Boucher expertly depicted the female nude from the back in the libertine *The Brunette Odalisque* (1743) and *Blonde Odalisque* (1752). See Alexandre Ananoff and Daniel Wildenstein, *L'Opera Completa di Boucher*, Milano, 1980, nos. 105, 272, 295, 444, 547, and 712.

[59] Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire*, 139. On the relative 'chasteness' of Ingres' flipped *Grande Odalisque* (1814), see Carol Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies: Retracing the Serpentine Line*,

Besançon *Study* is that it is so *weakly* transformed in its recitation between Ingres, Boucher, Canova and his earlier *Récamier*. It is hardly surprising that David scholars have been led to question the authenticity of this drawing, for its spectacular pastiche-like awkwardness, the impress of the body of Venus at the centre of the *Study* is so *superficial*.[60] Rather than an act of reclamation, one is led to conclude that the agency that is producing it has perhaps entirely withdrawn from aesthetic work *per se*, as well as from the fantasized field of homosocial entanglement, and that as such it is typically 'late'.[61] But leaving aside the drawing and the question of its authenticity – and I am suggesting that its petrified awkwardness could be the very sign of its late aesthetic – the visual effect of the rotation of Venus' body, as seen in the final painting, is to expose the virtually undifferentiated smooth expanse of the back; there it is raised as a limpid pool of derealized flesh, troublingly incompatible with the head that, for critic Thiers, bespeaks anxiety.[62] In this way, David creates a vacant centre at, or rather as the heart of the image; registering, we might say, the loss of centre in David's exilic self.

[27] The process of the formal undoing of a sexual encounter – and concomitantly the disturbance of the political allegorical message of Peace that is being worked off – leaves its traces in the final painting. There, the upper haunch of the body of Venus is still supported by the left arm, unchanged from its position in the *première idée* drawing; it continues to lean uncomfortably on Mars' right thigh. The function of this arm now as buttress drains it of the erotic charge that it had in the *première idée*. The flipped body, now autonomous, is pulled away from that of Mars. All that is left of phallic potency and of sexual congress, of bodies lustfully merging, is the comically banal substitutive motif

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New Haven, 1995, 35. On the utter "derealization of the Ingresque female nude", its masculinist exclusion of all disturbing carnality see Régis Michel, *Posseder et Détruire. Strategies Sexuelles dans l'Art d'Occident*, Paris, 2000, 167. On Canova's *Pauline Borghese as Victorious Venus* (1804-1808), see *Venere Vincitrice. La Sala di Paolina Bonaparte alla Galleria Borghese*, ed. Claudio Strinati et al., Rome, 1997.

[60] See Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 544-55; and Prat and Rosenberg, *Catalogue raisonnée des dessins*, Vol. I, 384, who comment that "certaines parties (of the drawing), notamment le corps de Venus, sont d'un schématisme assez décevant".

[61] Adorno describes the late work of Ludwig van Beethoven as artless, where "often convention appears in a form that is bald, undisguised, untransformed […]". See Adorno, "Late Style", 565. For Adorno, this refusal to develop the motif is a formal enactment of the individual artist's withdrawal from Enlightenment ideals of (musical) agency and progress, and a breaking away of subjectivity from it, leaving forms petrified (see my epigraph). More generally – and to link Beethoven with David – one could say it is a typical 'late' formal strategy of the politically disabused classical revolutionary artist in conditions of emerging calamitous modernity. For commentary see Richard Leppert, in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, 513-28; Rose Rosengard Subotnik, "Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition," in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*, Minneapolis 1991; and Michael Spitzer, *Music as Philosophy*, 58-60. On Beethoven and David see my "Dispossessed: On 'Late' David", in *David after David*.

[62] Adolphe Thiers praised the body of Venus in his 1824 review, but saw there a disturbing lack of conviction and an inexplicable anxiety, which, he implied, drains Venus of her putative binding powers: "[…] la Vénus, quoiqu'elle montre un beau corps et des pieds admirables, est peu voluptueuse; il y a plus d'anxiété que de charme dans son visage." He goes on to add that the female body in *Mars Disarmed* falls short of the "*femme forte* de l'histoire" of David's earlier *Oath of the Horatii, Brutus* and the *Sabines.* Thiers, "De M. David et de son dernier tableau", 302. On viewers' difficulties in 1824 with the central body of Venus, see Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David,* 266.

of the two doves that perch and linger around Mars' left thigh. Yet, if these 'symbols of Venus' succeed in linking Mars' occluded penis and the exposed buttocks of Venus, it is only the more effectively to register the careful separation of the bodies of the two gods: in 1824, critics applauded the sheer beauty of the individual bodies of Mars and Venus, but were struck by a puzzling lack of reciprocity between them, and the symptomatic omission of a loving look.[63] In their disconnection and aesthetic incongruity they register, we can say, the alienated and discontinuous experience of exile, as *non-sex*.[64]

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Activating the Graces

[28] The sexy youthful male hero of the *première idée* is startlingly transformed in the final painting into a mature figure that resembles and recalls the beleaguered protagonist of David's earlier critical neo-jacobin painting *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, completed in 1814.[65] The figure of Mars is a final and passionate adieu to the Winckelmannian – or reformulated postrevolutionary Kantian – *beau idéal t*hat David had promoted most ambitiously in the *Leonidas at Thermopylae*.[66] David imbues the body of Mars with glowing nudity (especially evident in the smooth extended left leg and the torso), adorns it with gold-spattered drapery and a sash of flowers, and finishes it off with a particularly fine, if distracted, head, generous, large-featured and handsomely framed by the tight ring of dark curls.

[29] And yet in 1824 this Mars stretches out his left arm willingly to surrender, to give up his arms: cutting right across the image, the arm reaches out past the body of Venus, his quizzical, alienated look failing to answer hers, towards the Graces. In exchange for this

[63] On the anxious (i.e. unanswered) expression on Venus' face see Thiers, "De M. David et de son dernier tableau". In his review P.A. Coupin complained that this Mars is neither properly belligerent nor amorous in its relation to Venus, and specifically that "le tête de Mars est d'un beau caractère, mais d'une expression froide et incertaine", *Revue Encyclopédique*, Paris, 1824, 772. A related work which probably would have satisfied Coupin's expectations is Antonio Canova's statue of *Venus and Mars* (1816-22: Buckingham Palace, London), which is remarkable for the erotic compress of the protagonists' bodies as for the rapt intensity of their absorbed gazes. On the sculptors blatant invocation of touch and gaze in this work for postrevolutionary political allegorical ends See Christopher M.S. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe*, Berkeley, 1998, 163-69.

[64] This is not the first time that David staged heterosexual sex only to figure disjunction. Siegfried sees in the earlier Empire anacreontic painting *Sapho, Phaon, and Cupid* (1809), for example, a distinct "evacuation of affect" and a detachment between the depicted lovers, which she interprets as David's mature acknowledgment of the artificiality of inherited fragmentary classical narratives. See Susan Siegfried, "The Artifice of Antiquity. Sappho's Dream", in *David after David*, 97-98.

[65] See Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David,* 542. Mars' resemblance to Leonidas, as well as to the seated figure of Agis, in *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, was noticed by critics in 1824. The critic of *La Quotidienne*, for example, reminded his readers in the course of reviewing the Salon that "one of the main reproaches recently directed at M. David is that he plundered himself, that he transported the head of Leonidas into his picture of Mars disarmed by Venus", M.J. [Marie Mély-Janin], "Salon de 1824", *La Quotidienne*, 4 October, 1824, 3, as cited in Harkett, "The Parisian Exhibition", 157-158. On the Spartan theme of *Leonidas* as critically neo-Jacobin, see my *Chains*, 18.

[66] On the Winckelmannian *beau idéal* see Régis Michel, *Le Beau Idéal, ou l'Art du Concept*, Paris, 1989; and Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal.* For an extended argument that the *beau idéal* was reformulated in postrevolutionary Europe as pseudo-Kantian see Padiyar, *Chains*, 87-117.

spectacular act of self-disinvestment the central of the three Graces pours and proffers the nectar. In addition to the dark encroaching clouds and the classical backdrop, the great addition to the early *première idée* drawing is the introduction of these Graces. They radically reconfigure the *conception d'ensemble*, and introduce into the tableau intimations of death and provocative laughter. They come to ruin the hero, with a delicate expertise and through a precise division of labour.

[30] It was in late 1822 that David decided to include the three Graces in the composition, possibly as a response to the death of his long-time friend and contemporary Antonio Canova in October of that year.[67] Canova had been famous as the "darling of the Graces", and his preoccupation with the theme can be traced back to about 1795, therefore well in advance of David.[68] It was then that Canova had invented the combination of Mars, Venus and the Graces – one which had no literary source – in a minor cabinet work entitled *Venus and the Graces Dancing in the Presence of Mars*, which David could have encountered through engraving.[69] Subsequently, Canova's more famous sculptural version *The Three Graces* (1813-17) depicts the trio absorbed in narcissistic self-entanglement.[70]

[31] Belying this retreat into privacy, David's Graces intercede in the encounter between Mars and Venus as publicly *active* 'historical' agents. In radically revising the tableau in late 1822 David displaced the *executive* role in the picture from the figure of Venus (who in the *première idée* actively removes Mars' helmet) to that of the Graces.[71] Proper to their agential function in the picture, it is indeed these figures that David appears to have

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[67] I first made the suggestion in my "Dispossessed. On 'Late' David", 312 and 313, note 25. David had first met Canova in Rome in the early 1780s. An infrequent but enduring epistolary correspondence lasted until at least 1816, and attests to mutual esteem and admiration. On the relationship between the artists see Hugh Honour, "Canova and David", *Apollo*, October 1972, 312-318.

[68] See *Canova e la Venere Vincitrice,* ed. Anna Coliva and Fernando Mazzocca, Rome, 2007, 186-87. On Canova and his culture's conception of the Graces see Honour, op.cit.; and Gianni Venturi, "Grace and the Graces", in *Canova*, Venice, 1992, 69-75. It is worth noting that Anne-Louis Girodet also invoked 'grace', in self-conscious opposition to David, as a term of artistic self-definition. See Marc Fumaroli, "La Terreur et la Grâce: Girodet, poète de *La Peinture*", in *Girodet 1767-1824*, ed. Sylvain Bellenger, Paris, 2005, 65-67.

[69] Canova would send David prints of his new sculptures, for example, that of *Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker* in March 1811. On Canova's low plaster relief of *Venus and the Graces Dancing in the Presence of Mars* (1795-97, Gipsoteca Canoviana, Possagno), as well as the small tempera painted version (1794-99, Casa Canova, Possagno), see Honour, "Canova's *Three Graces*", 24 and 28; and *Canova e la Venere Vincitrice*, 186-187 (illustrated). In both, Mars is seated languorously on the far right of the image, cradling Cupid between his legs, and visibly pacified and charmed by the central trio of Venus' dancing handmaidens. The image was engraved in 1810.

[70] Commissioned by Josephine de Beauharnais, Canova's *The Three Graces* (1813-1817) was engraved and published in 1815. See Hugh Honour, "Canova's *Three Graces*", in *The Three Graces: Antonio Canova*, Edinburgh, 1995, 19-45.

[71] I turn below to the irresolute central gesture of Venus in the final canvas. Here I agree with Johnson that the Graces "have become active participants in the drama" yet disagree that they "do not know exactly what to do" (Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David,* 266-7). Two of them appear to be performing the 'politically' decisive action of disarming; the third, I argue below, performs an equally determinant, if highly ambivalent, function in the picture.

worked at the hardest. Countless exploratory drawings testify to the artist's endless adjustment of their poses and gestures.[72] The copious number of studies for them might testify to a difficulty – a residual defensiveness – in assuming what for David was the *dissident* language of 'grace', which finally leaks into his picture making, in the manner of a contamination.[73] The French grand tradition and renaissance visual sources from which David apparently drew for them – Raphael's *Banquet of the Gods*, Girardon's *Apollo Tended by the Nymphs of Thetis* – indicate that David was searching for icons of succouring and servile femininity in relation to an idealized godly male hero.[74] But what is striking is that in *Mars Disarmed* the avatars of Venus are assembled to do precisely the opposite; they come to disband Mars, to toy with his trophies.

[32] Traditionally, the Graces – Euphrosyne, Aglaia and Thalia – represented mutual exchange, an allegory of gift giving, and the beneficence of friendship.[75] If Canova's modernizing sculptural version brilliantly interpreted this idea for modernity as a tightly self-contained unit of reciprocal self-involvement – figuring a privatization of the idea of exchange - David articulates mutuality as occurring between the Graces and the male hero across the vast public picture surface: in abandoning the *première idée*'s intimate image of sexual exchange David reverted to the type of imagery of public contractual exchange he had so powerfully envisioned in the prerevolutionary *The Oath of the Horatii*.[76] But between the 1784 *Oath* and *Mars Disarmed* the significance of the exchange, or *gestural contract*, has become significantly perverted.

[33] Held out in 1824 are the phallic attributes of the agonistic male hero; sheath and sword, helmet, shield, bow and quiver of arrows. Received 'graciously' are the remnants of a disarticulated martial masculinity, fragments spectacularly dislodged from the male body, held aloft and displayed to a postrevolutionary public. Traditionally, the iconography of 'Mars Disarmed' sanctions this type of disassembling or unlayering of the protective layers of the belligerent masculine subject: usually it is left to Cupid to carry out this work (there is a trace of this in the untying of the sandal in *Mars Disarmed*). But normally that threat is alleviated by a compensatory surrender of the male hero to the 'higher' pleasures – for the good of society – of an embracing Venus; we see it, for example, in the work of an artist who David was especially interested in his later years, Peter Paul

[72] This is particularly evident in David's *Carnet* 14, which contains numerous studies for the Graces. See Prat and Rosenberg, *Catalogue raisonnée des dessins*, Vol. I, 383, 381; and Vol. II, 1159-1178.

[73] See above note 69, and on late David as finally 'contaminated', Padiyar, "Dispossessed", 312.

[74] On the irruption of the Renaissance and grand French tradition in *Mars Disarmed* see Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, 189.

[75] See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance*, London, 1958, "Seneca's Graces", 26-35.

[76] The exchange gesture as the crux of *Mars Disarmed* is more lucidly articulated in the Besançon *Study*, where a space is cleared for it as the focal point of the composition. The more tightly arranged final composition intertwines each of the gestures in the tableau more subtly, more intricately: David effectively abstains from the 'youthful' stridency of positing any one overriding central message, to move towards a late and mature complexity.

Rubens. Rubens' *The Return from War: Mars Disarmed by Venus*, of about 1610 (fig. 6), with its still glinting, but now abandoned, prominent shaft of cannon on the left hints at the logic of the displacement of phallic urgency in the turn of the figure of Mars away from it towards the body of Venus.[77]

6 Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Breughel the Elder, *The Return from War: Mars Disarmed by Venus*, c. 1610-1612, oil on panel, 127 x 162.6 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (© J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles)

[34] In normative representations of the subject, then, Mars as a male heroic subject is never really disarmed; after some customary play with gender role reversal, Mars is redirected, in the interregnum between war and peace, towards a normative *phallic* duty. In David's *Mars Disarmed* there is no consolatory embrace, and the hero is frozen in unyielding isolation. This abstention of Mars renders the actions of the Graces catastrophically deflating: their action on the right of the picture comes across as less the receipt of a gift – with an implied reciprocating gesture to the hero – than as an outright *theft* of phallic attributes. The gender politics of *Mars Disarmed* is in this sense critically non-normative, if not exactly queer. *Mars Disarmed* has often been likened to Ingres' *Jupiter and Thetis*, the pupil's Rome envoi of 1811 that David struggled to comprehend. But if Ingres, in seeming to represent the very process of sexual arousal in Jupiter and Thetis, has been described as *revering* the Phallus, David's self-exposing *Mars Disarmed* discloses it to be possessed by neither man nor woman, castrated Mars or anxious de-sexed Venus.[78]

[77] On David's late admiration for, and ambivalence towards, Rubens, see Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, 186.

[78] On *Mars Disarmed* as a response to Ingres' *Jupiter and Thetis* see Hautecoeur, *Louis David*, 272; Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*. 218; and *Ingres 1780-1867*, ed. Vincent Pomarède et al., Paris, 2006, 164. On Ingres' "reverence towards the phallus" in this work see Bryson,

[35] If the two flanking Graces activate the dismantling of the male hero and its intricate dispersal into fragments, the central one offers sustenance, but also suggestively implicates it in death. David is indeed an artist unusually sensitive to the immanence of death, and in *Mars Disarmed* it – biological death and the death of community – erupts for the last time with terminal urgency. David's adieu to painting is indeed death-infused. The black clouds which all around engulf its uncertain actions appear as if imminently to blacken out painting itself. They darkly encroach upon the signature to which Mars' right foot points, 'L. DAVID. BRVX 1824', threaten the artist's name and the testamentary specificities of place and time with extinction. In its self-conscious invocation of *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, *Mars Disarmed* is imbricated too with the iconography of the death of community. On the other side of Mars on the bed flesh abruptly stops and David paints there the pillow as an excessive senseless protrusion, a deathly white shroud that simultaneously repeats and smothers the motif of the lusty living doves.[79]

[36] But it is in the figure of the mordant central Grace that death is perhaps ambivalently invoked, under the mask, ironically, of succour. In a clear gesture of exchange for Mars' sheathed sword, the middle Grace delicately holds out a bronzed cup in her right hand, which cuts across the luminous flesh of the first Grace.[80] This, ostensibly, is a cup of nectar just poured from the flask that is daintily held aloft by the left arm; a reciprocal gift of godly immortality whose charge oscillated in David's mind between a female Grace and a male Ganymede (fig. 7).[81]

Tradition and Desire, 133-36. On Ingres' excessively gendered *Jupiter* as revealing prevalent anxieties about sexual difference in the early nineteenth century see Ockman, *Ingres's Eroticized Bodies*, 65. A major reappraisal of the sexual and power dynamics of *Jupiter and Thetis* can be found in Susan Siegfried, *Ingres. Painting Reimagined*, New Haven and London, 2009, 149-68. *Mars Disarmed* is very un-queer in its hypostatization of extreme gendered bodies, which, we should note, David specifically visits upon his material: the model for the figure of Venus, dancer Marie Lesueur, was actually well-known for the 'manliness' of her figure. See Jacques Isnardon, *Le Thêatre de la Monnaie Depuis sa Fondation jusqu'à nos Jours*, Paris, 1890, 171. As such, *Mars Disarmed* exemplifies the consolidation of a nineteenth-century bourgeois male fantasy of exclusive and separate sexual spheres, an "extreme male bourgeois fantasy" in relation to the *beau ideal*. See Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, 237-38. However, unusually, it insists on the separation without a concomitant empowering of the male sex.

[79] The bloated shape of the pillow on the right arm of the bed in *Mars Disarmed* is exceptional and excessive – the antique bed in *Mars Disarmed* most closely resembles the bed in the David's 1813 preparatory drawing for *Cupid and Psyche*, notably in the relative simplicity of its concave curvaceous right (from our viewpoint) arm – and through it David creates an iridescent space of blatant white blankness, very striking when viewed as embedded in the painting within a riot of colour and textural detail. There is a repeated association of antique beds with death – Thanatos – in David's work. Alvar Gonzalez-Palacios has demonstrated how, from *Madame Récamier* (1800) to *Cupid and Psyche* (1817) David confounds fashionable modern furniture with specifically funerary antique models, and only ends by reiterating the confusion in the 1824 picture. See Alvar Gonzalez-Palacios, "Le Décor de L'Antiquité", in Régis Michel, ed., *David contre David*, Paris, 1993, 940. On David's allusions to death and the deathbed in *Madame Récamier* see also Lajer-Burcharth, *Necklines*, 269-270; and for *Cupid and Psyche*, Isse Lampe, "Repainting *Love Leaving Psyche*: David's Memorial to an Empire Past", in *David after David*, 115.

[80] See above, note 76.

[81] See Arlette Sérullaz, "A propos de quelques dessins de Jacques-Louis David pour 'Mars désarmé par Vénus et les Grâces'", *Bulletin. Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts Belgique*, 1972, 1-4, 1975, 110-13. Prat and Rosenberg also comment on this transformation of Ganymede into Grace, *Catalogue raisonnée des dessins*, Vol. II, 1045 (no. 1628).

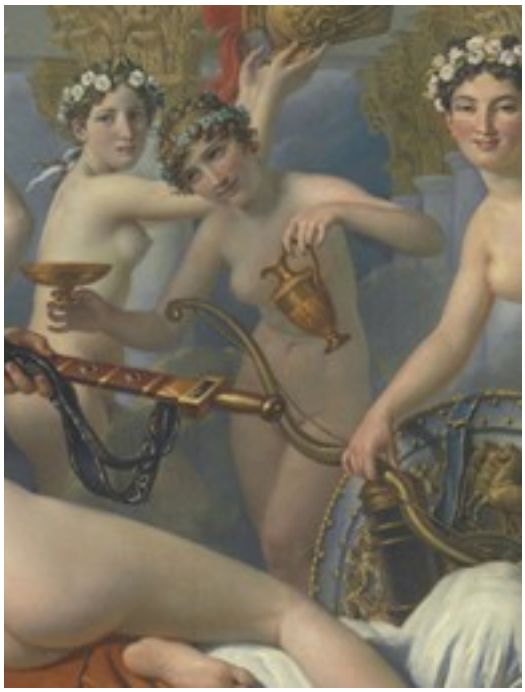
7 Jacques-Louis David, *Ganymède*, 1823-1825, black crayon. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques (© RMN/Madeleine Couraget)

[37] Yet the gesture also echoes and re-inscribes that of David's earlier celebrated figure of the slave in the 1787 *Death of Socrates*: at the crux of that tableau the male slave offered a kylix of poison in return for Socrates' willingness to surrender to the Law (fig. 8a), a figure that Thomas Crow has described as a "Ganymede assisting at the passage to immortality".[82]

[38] "Les trois Grâces sourient désagréablement" ("The three Graces grin disagreeably"), Adolphe Thiers noted in his review.[83] In fact the Graces break into a *graduated* laughter, beginning with the slightly open-lipped one in the furthest background (barely a smile), and ending with jarring physiognomy of the Grace on the furthest right (fig. 8b). This sonority of suppressed laughter through the picture is a disturbance, both to our vision of David as insistently serious an artist, and to the thematic of death and senescence which I have argued is present within the picture.

[82] Thomas Crow, *Emulation. Making Artists for Revolutionary France*, New Haven and London, 1995, 98.

[83] Thiers, "De M. David et de son dernier tableau", 302.



8a Detail of Jacques-Louis David, *Death of Socrates*, 1787, oil on canvas. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

8b Detail of Jacques-Louis David, *Mars Disarmed by Venus*, 1824, oil on canvas, 308 x 262 cm. Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (© Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels [dig. photo: J. Geleyns / www.roscan.be])

[39] David as a humorous artist? This is a notion we are only recently beginning to come to terms with.[84] But what precisely is laughter's place within David's last public statement? As Dorothy Johnson has noted, the mythological subject David chooses for his adieu to painting and to politics is meant to be both funny and subversive. In the classical sources that tell the story of Mars and Venus – Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Art of Love* and *Metamorphoses*, and Lucian's *Dialogue of the Gods* – the adulterous union of the two 'ideal' gods turns into something of a running joke. The gods gossip, wasn't that just hilarious, don't you remember when Mars, urgent with passion and Venus, besotted, thought they were having a secret tryst. But Venus' husband, the cuckolded Vulcan, came to discover their adulterous ways, and he spun a net metal so fine around their love-bed that they were trapped in mid-lust, for all the gods, who Vulcan brought on, to

[84] Mark Ledbury in *David after David* (xi) notes David's stated enthusiasm, circa 1800, for Rabelais. During the exile years in Brussels David was fond of attending Italian *opera buffa*. See Jules Guiffrey, "David et le théâtre pendant son séjour à Bruxelles"; and S. Carroll, "Reciprocal Representation: David and Theatre". As Carroll (259) notes, already in the 1780s actors were parodying David's more celebrated paintings in *tableaux vivants* on the Paris stage – including *Oath of the Horatii* and *Death of Socrates*. Evidently, David enjoyed such light-hearted homage, and it is possible that eventually, as in *Mars Disarmed*, he incorporates them into the making of 'serious' history painting itself. The whole question requires more attention. However, that said, my commitment is that David is a deeply serious artist, and I take issue with the reductive characterization of *Mars Disarmed* as a work of parody *tout court*, as argued by Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David, Revolutionary Artist: Art, Politics and the French Revolution*, Chapel Hill, 1989, 206; and Dorothy Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, 264.

see. It was hilarious.[85] In the sources, then, the adulterous union is ultimately rendered a parody of the normative 'bourgeois' fiction of heterosexual romance, as they are finally publicly entrapped and unmasked by the cuckolded labourer Vulcan. This is the comic moment of exposure, which of course Boucher could not resist depicting as such.[86] It explains the fact that in *Mars Disarmed* Cupid, untying the ribbons of Mars' sandal (the boots come off for the last time) smiles at the viewer with complicity; that the Graces, in the very action of the theft of the Phallus, grin with a certain triumphant malice.[87]

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Two Crowns

[40] All that is left for the figure of Venus to do is to parade the once-Revolutionary gesture of fraternal oath taking, sign of social reconciliation, for the last time: but the central extended pallid arm that bears a wreath of flowers is now withered away, and hovers uselessly.

[41] Ostensibly, the beautifully painted and slightly oversized rose-laurel wreath she holds aloft is to crown the hero, but everything seems to mitigate against the certain outcome of this action: the bodily separation of the two gods, the missed or anxious gazes of Mars and Venus, and above all the obvious lack of formal alignment between the crown and its supposed destination, Mars' mistrustful head.[88] Now, for this crucial action of the 'crowning' of the hero it is possible that David was recalling Rubens' *The Hero Crowned by Victory*, a painting that had once hung above Napoleon's desk at Fontainebleau, where it was then misread no doubt as a facile statement of virtue as unchecked military prowess.[89] And it is precisely the Napoleonic and Revolutionary question of political

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[85] Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, 263. See Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.226-366; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.169-257; Ovid, *Art of Love*, 2.569-71. For post-renaissance visual elaboration of the comic aspects of the narrative, see Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods*, Oxford, 2005, 183-87.

[86] See above, note 49.

[87] Provocatively, in *Cupid and Psyche* (1817) David had given his figure of an adolescent Cupid a malign, libertine grin; many commentators found it disturbing. In *Mars Disarmed* the more infantile Cupid is depicted with a pretty *graceful* expression; the grimace here is *displaced*, provocatively and inappropriately, onto the figure of the Grace on the furthest right. This Grace's appeal to the viewer interpellates, then, in the manner of a menacing *threat*: precisely the destabilizing threat of the Revolutionary male heroic subject's historic dispossession. For discussion of the grin in *Cupid and Psyche* see Bordes, *Jacques-Louis David. Empire to Exile*, 234-35; and Isse Lampe, "Repainting *Love Leaving Psyche*: David's Memorial to an Empire Past", in *David after David*, 109-20. On Cupid as a figure of menace in *ancien régime* art (with reference to Étienne-Maurice Falconet's iconic 1757 sculpture *Amour Menaçant*), see my "Menacing Cupid in the Art of Rococo", in Dimitri Ozerkof et al., *The Triumph of Eros. Art and Seduction in 18th-century France*, London, 2006, 21-33.

[88] Johnson (*Jacques-Louis David*, 266) observes, "Venus […] raises a crown of flowers that she hesitates to place on the head of Mars […] she certainly seems uncertain of the outcome". While agreeing with the observation, my reading of the significance of the 'hesitation' differs substantially. Johnson regards it as a narrative blockage to the picture's ostensible theme of sexual consummation: here I am interested less in Venus' hesitation in narrative terms, than in David's 'late' investment in this charged and stilled motif, painting it as a Revolutionary exilic subject for the last time, in a transformed social world.

[89] See Lisa Rosenthal, "Manhood and Statehood: Rubens's Construction of Heroic Virtue", *Oxford Art Journal*, 16, 1, 1993, 99-102.

power, or sovereignty, that is *still* raised by David, unremittingly and as an open and unresolved question at the very centre of this tableau that has too long been misunderstood as a final withdrawal from the field of politics. The wreath of flowers hovers above all the bodies and tilts towards the viewer as if to pose a question. Where does political sovereignty lie? The uncertain outcome of a crowning.[90] These are questions David had struggled with before, notably in the Napoleonic painting *The Coronation of Napoleon* - or *Couronnement* (Crowning) – which, repeated in exile in Brussels, was fresh in his mind in the early 1820s.[91] In the *Coronation* David's uncertainty about where to put the crown ended (in both versions) with its unresolved hovering at the juncture of that tableau; all eyes anxiously upon it, it is held there permanently aloft by the world-historical figure of Napoleon, who is its pretentious, and as it turned out, *failed* modern appendage. The substitution of one crowning by another – from the *Coronation* to *Mars Disarmed* – amounts to a sustained suspension of the question of sovereignty in the modern public sphere.[92] The late Besançon *Study* is immersed in this question: in another temporally anomalous 'late' gesture, we find David has drawn on the verso of the sheet a figure of an outward-looking seated woman dressed in seventeenth-century costume – possibly the interregnum sovereign Anne of Austria – a half-hidden sceptre and a *crown* prominently placed, and emphatically traced, on her lap (fig. 9).[93] Unresolved as to its destination, the hovering wreath in the painting *Mars Disarmed*, this celestial crown, is doubled and differenced by David – let us say *deferred* – for on the canvas he places another 'crown' that vies for our attention.[94]

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[90] On the central question of 'sovereignty' for the French Revolutionaries see Keith M. Baker, "Sovereignty", in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989, 844-858.

[91] The repetition of the *Couronnement* was commissioned by Americans in 1808, reactivated in Brussels by news of Napoleon's death in May 1821, and brought rapidly to completion in the summer of 1822. See Schnapper and Sérullaz, *Jacques-Louis David*, 534-39; and Sylvain Laveissière, *Le Sacre de Napoléon peint par David*, Paris, 2004, 118-119. The wreath of flowers in *Mars Disarmed* is of course referred to as a "*une couronne* […] de laurier-rose" (my emphasis). See P.A. Coupin, *Revue Encyclopédique*, 772. For a reading of David's highly charged and overdetermined investment – political, aesthetic, erotic – in the wreaths of flowers in the earlier *Leonidas at Thermopylae*, see my *Chains*, "Chains of Flowers", 172-74.

[92] On David's uncertainty about the positioning of the crown, understood as a visual correlate of sovereignty in the modern public sphere, see Laveissière, *Le Sacre*, 83-84; and Todd Porterfield and Susan Siegfried, *Staging Empire: Napoleon, Ingres, and David*, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2007, 129-30. When working on the Brussels copy David continued to experiment with the position of the crown. Prat and Rosenberg find 'astonishing' a late drawing, now in Zurich, in which David places it now on the head of Empress Josephine (otherwise unremarkable, the female figure is depicted in exactly the same pose). See Prat and Rosenberg, *Catalogue raisonnée des dessins*, Vol. I, 381 (345).

[93] On the verso drawing see Prat and Rosenberg, *Catalogue raisonnée des dessins*, Vol. I, 384. The authors identify the drawing as a copy after the seventeenth-century French artist Philippe de Champaigne's portrait of Anne of Austria as regent. They view it as 'enigmatic' in its relation to *Mars Disarmed* and suggest that it might date from much earlier in David's career. The dating is inconclusive; but in my view it can be no coincidence that David chose to work his developing idea for *Mars Disarmed* on the back of the portrait of a sovereign who is both *temporary* and *substitute*. Anne of Austria assumed sovereign power between the death of her husband, Louis XIII, in 1643 and the coming of age of her son, Louis XIV, in 1651.

9 Jacques-Louis David, Besançon *Study* for *Mars Disarmed*, verso, date unknown. Besançon, Musée Des Beaux-Arts et D'Archéologie (© Besançon, Musée Des Beaux-Arts et D'Archéologie. Photo: Charles Choffet)

[42] To its right is Mars' red-crested helmet, which in the *première idée* drawing was fingered by the figure of Venus. Now the first Grace open-lipped and with an enigmatic look, raises it in the act of confiscating it high above every figure. Does not the piercing insistence of its red-ness – far redder than the orange-brown of the material spilling over the bed or the deep pink of the drapery across Mars' shoulder – recall that other collective Revolutionary symbol of sovereignty, the 'bonnet rouge'?[95] In spite of David's

[94] "Deferred", because this is precisely a matter of the deferral of the question of sovereignty, which the French Revolution opened up on the European stage, and remains in 1824 undecided. On differencing and deferring see Derrida, "Différrance", in *Marges de la Philosophie*, Paris, 1972. On nascent and contestatory republican movements in the 1820s – and subversive plots to destroy the Bourbon government – see Alan B. Spitzer, "La République Souteraine", in François Furet and Mona Ozouf, *Le Siècle de l'Avènement republicain*, Paris 1993, 345-69; and R.S. Alexander, "Restoration Republicanism Reconsidered", *French History*, 8/4, 1994, 442-69.

[95] "The liberty cap, woven and offered by the hands of the Graces, will double, if that is possible, the civic ardour of the heads which this impressive sign must electrify", speech delivered in September 1792 by the President of the district of Saint-Calais upon presentation by *citoyennes* of liberty caps – the *bonnet rouge* – to the town; in Froger, *Histoire de Saint-Calais,* cit. Marc de Villers, *Histoire des clubs de femmes* (Paris, 1910), 143-44, as cited in Richard Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearances. Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France*, Oxford and New York, 2002, 160. On the significance of 'red' (of the *bonnet rouge*) as signalling both violence (blood, Terror) and fraternal ardour for the radical Revolutionaries see the discussion in ibid. 143-44, and 173-74. On the coloration of hats – or *bonnets* – understood as politicized symbols in David's earlier *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* (1799) see Norman Bryson, "Centres and Margins in David", *Word and Image*, Jan-Mar 1988, 43-50; and Valerie Mainz, "David's *Les Sabines* and the Colouring of History Painting Post Thermidor", *Interfaces* 10, Dijon, 1996, 45-48.

wish to turn to an uncontaminated shore in *Mars Disarmed*, the spectre of Year Two floods in, and shines out like the 'sudden entry of a high, bright solo violin' in Beethoven's volcanic fragmented late landscape; David here an irascible subjectivity on his way out, playing the Carmagnole.[96]

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Conclusion

[43] How does one paint when waiting for a future that has not come? In *Mars Disarmed*, as we have seen, David goes both before and beyond the French Revolution: before to the prerevolutionary ancien regime territory of Boucher, beyond to the far shore and over the summit, the untainted mythological; both, and together, wrought-out spaces of hope. What David does there is strange and refractory. In the painting the language of Boucher collides with an anomalous Revolutionary aesthetic of ethical transparency, the subject of love is raised only then to frustrate it, the cloud and the bed and the looming temple are absurd in their inappropriate conjoining, the figures of the Graces are brought on to disarm and disassemble; and through the unresolved oscillation between two 'crowns' the crucial political question of sovereignty is permanently deferred. Adolphe Thiers was right: in its spectacularly assertive self-ruination David's adieu could never make a convincing *leçon*.[97] Or rather, after David it was left to that other *internal* exile, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, to continue, complete, and repeat the work of the undoing of the legacy of a radical neoclassicism.[98]

[44] David's peculiar conjunction of circumstances – as the virtual inventor of that once-radical language, as a displaced exile who was now 'free' to do with it as he wished, as an artist in his late phase and approaching death – enables him to speak a both general and precise truth about the derangement of the neoclassical aesthetic when after, following the French Revolution and Empire, its social purpose was, astonishingly, withdrawn. David in *Mars Disarmed* was conscious, I suggest, of the threat of his

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[96] See my epigraph. The *bonnet rouge* was worn by militants of the Sections of Paris (not by bourgeois revolutionaries) after 1792 and as a radical emblem of Year II replaced the crown. See, Albert Soboul, *Les Sans-Culottes Parisiens en l'An II*, Paris 1962, 650-53; and Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Class and Culture in the French Revolution*, Berkeley, 1984, 93. On the *bonnet rouge* as a Revolutionary symbol of opposition and contestation see Hunt, *Politics*; Jennifer Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans, 1789-1794", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, 1981, 283-132; and Wrigley, *Representations of Dress*, 135-86.

[97] On the painting understood – fetishistically – as a longed-for lesson by Parisian acolytes see Hautecoeur, *Louis David*, 273-4; Johnson, *Jacques-Louis David*, and Harkett, "Revelation, Narrative, Rupture", 323, note 9. On the impropriety of 'excessive' *Mars Disarmed* as an exemplar for classical art, or indeed for any art at all, see Thiers, "De M. David et de son dernier tableau", 302.

[98] On a chronic warping, fracturing, and pulling apart of classical gestures in Ingres, see Adrian Rifkin, *Ingres Then, and Now*, London and New York, 2000 (esp. 86-90); on Ingres as exiled and alienated (in his "dangerous" identification with Poussin), ibid. 11-13. On Ingres' manifold undoings see Susan Siegfried, "Ingres's Reading – The Undoing of Narrative", *Art History* 23, 5, 2000, reprinted in *Fingering Ingres*, ed. Adrian Rifkin and Susan Siegfried, London, 2001.

individual death coinciding with the generic, of his approaching death as the death of the signifier.

[45] The aggressively 'youthful' *Mars Disarmed* is revealing of what happens to the public language of radical neoclassicism in its late phase. Through his 'last words' David publicly and eloquently enacts the objective failure of a politically engaged aesthetic which through him emerged in the pre-Revolution and the French Revolution, pulls his once-authoritative language apart, shatters and disarms it. If our thoughts are generally fastened on to the invigorating moments of innovation in history – involving the supercession of styles, of artists, of political ideologies and communities – the risk is that we ignore such tragic but searingly lucid moments and archives of the dying fall.[99]

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[99] I should like to thank for their generous assistance on this essay Caroline Arscott, Daniel Harkett, and Katie Scott and the peer reviewers for the *RIHA Journal* Sarah Betzer and Susan Siegfried.