

\*From  
Stues & Oppenheim, Europe 101: History and Art  
For the Traveler (2000)



Delacroix, **Liberty Leading the People**, 1830 (Louvre, Paris). This dramatic scene captures the spirit of patriotism. Liberty, in the form of a woman, carries a gun in one hand and a flag in the other—the winning combination for 19th-century nationalist movements.

## Modern Europe A.D. 1815–Today

### The Age of Nationalism

A brief conservative backlash followed the French Revolution and Napoleon, but, overall, the rights of individuals and nations had forever replaced the world of feudalism and the Old Regime.

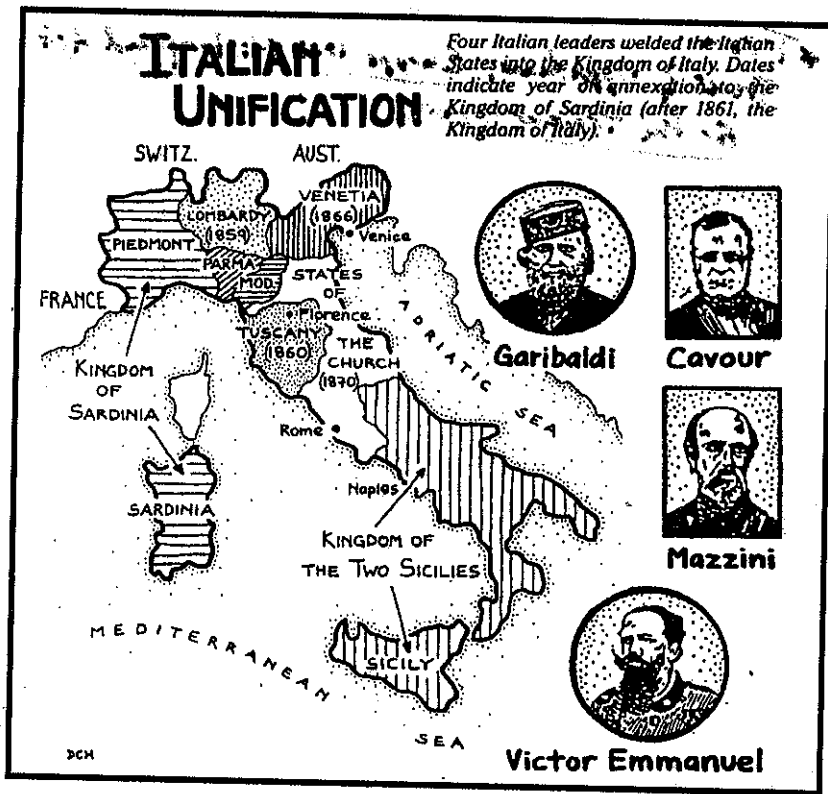
Nationalism, a patriotic desire for national unity, was the dream and the political drive of the 1800s. When you travel in Europe, keep in mind that 150 years ago Germany and Italy did not exist. They were patchwork quilts of feudal baronies, dukedoms, and small kingdoms. As you tour castles, treasuries, and palaces scattered across these nations, you're seeing the White Houses and crown jewels of such "countries" as Piedmont, Saxony, and Bavaria.

In the 1800s, as democratic ideals became popular among the middle class and intellectuals, the people were no longer satisfied to be ruled by a royal family that was usually from another country. In the previous century, most of Europe had been ruled by the Bourbon (French), Hapsburg (Austrian), and Hohenzollern (German) families. The king often spoke a language different from that of his subjects.

Now people insisted on a government that reflected their language, ethnic heritage, culture, and religion. People identified themselves as citizens of a particular ethnic heritage, even if their nation was not yet a political reality. The stove setting switched from "simmer" to "high" and Europe's nationalistic stew was ready to boil over.

### Unification of Italy

In the mid-1800s, the petty kingdoms and city-states of the Italian peninsula began a move toward unity. The governments were content but the people weren't, and talk of the "*Risorgimento*" (resurgence) of national pride was everywhere. As national revolts were crushed by



local governments, patriotism grew. The liberals of Europe supported the Italian cause, and a local writer, Mazzini, made unification almost a holy crusade. Several shrewd patriots organized a campaign for unification, channeling nationalistic fervor into the formation of Italy.

The logical first king of Italy was the only native monarch of the region, Victor Emmanuel II, King of Sardinia. His prime minister, Cavour, a cunning, liberal, yet realistic politician, orchestrated Italy's unification. Guided by Cavour, Sardinia joined the Crimean War in order to get allies who would later support Sardinia in a war with Austria (a war Cavour needed for unification, though Sardinia couldn't win it alone). Sure enough, Cavour wrested Italian Lombardy—North Italy—from Austria. His clever statesmanship, combined with many local revolutions that were legitimized by plebiscites (local votes of popular support), brought most of northern Italy together by 1860.

Meanwhile, the powerful revolutionary general Garibaldi sailed with his motley army of a thousand "red shirts" to Sicily, where his

forces were joined by local revolutionaries in annexing the Kingdom of Two Sicilies into the New Italian State in 1861.

Remember the names of these Italian patriots. Throughout Italy you'll find squares and streets named after the "Washingtons" and "Jeffersons" of the Italian resurgence—Via Cavours, Piazza Garibaldi, and monuments to Victor Emmanuel. (The most famous of these is the giant Victor Emmanuel monument near the Roman Forum.)

National pride was fueled by the romantic movement in art. Artists returned to their ethnic roots, incorporating folklore into their novels and folk music into their symphonies. In Italy, Giuseppe Verdi used the opera to champion the unification movement. In a time when flying the Italian colors was still dangerous, opera houses rang with the sound of patriots singing along with anthemlike choruses. The letters in Verdi's name were used as a nationalistic slogan: Victor Emmanuel Roi (king) di Italia.

### Unification of Germany

In 1850, Germany was 39 little countries. When it was united 20 years later, it was Europe's number-one power.

During that period of growth, German iron and coal output multiplied sixfold, surpassing that of France. Cities, industries, and trade boomed. German unification seemed inevitable. The big question was: would Germany be united under Prussia or Austria?

Otto von Bismarck, one of the greatest political geniuses of all time, knew the answer. He was the prime minister of Prussia, a militaristic German state, and the goose-stepping force behind German unity. The original master of "realpolitik," Bismarck said, "Not by speeches and majority votes are the great questions of the day decided, but by blood and iron."

Bismarck united Germany as if reading from a great political recipe book. With a logical, calculated, step-by-step approach, he created the dish nobody in Europe wanted—a united Germany.

Bismarck accomplished



Otto von Bismarck, 1815–1898. The great realistic politician of the 1800s, Bismarck created a united Germany.

## Germany Before Unification



his objective by starting and winning three wars after carefully isolating each opponent. He got into a war with Denmark over the disputed territory of Schleswig-Holstein. Bismarck won easily, with Austria's unnecessary help. Dividing the spoils gave Bismarck the excuse he needed to fight Austria. His goal was only to knock her out of the lead, which he did. The last step necessary for German unification was to get the small German states between Prussia and France in his fold. The only thing these states hated more than Prussia was France. So, Bismarck got into a war with France and these states were forced to choose. The Franco-Prussian War lasted only a few weeks and the Sparta of modern Europe emerged as the leader of a united Germany.

Bismarck made alliances simply to break them, thereby creating a handy excuse to fight. After wiping out his opponent, he would make a fast and generous peace so he could work with that country in the future. He made concessions to the liberals of his parliament to win

their support. He levied and collected unconstitutional taxes to build up his armies. He winked at Europe's great leaders, gained their confidence, and proceeded to make them history's fools. He leaked inflammatory comments to the press to twist public opinion into just the political pretzel he needed.

He did whatever he had to, and in the end he got exactly what he set out to get. In 1871, the fragmented Germany that Europe had enjoyed for centuries as a tromping ground became a Prussian-dominated conservative and militaristic German empire. The leaders of Europe were concerned. The balance of power had been disturbed. They hoped the unification of Germany would not lead to a large war or two.

## Romanticism and Romantic Art

Nationalism and the artistic movement known as "Romanticism" went well together. Romantics and nationalists each threw rules and authority out the window to assert their right of personal expression. And just as national groups could not be suppressed by Old Regime aristocratic rulers, Romantic artists refused to conform their powerful inner feelings to society's code.

Romanticism, which has little to do with roses and chocolate hearts, was a reaction to the stern logic and reason of the neoclassical movement. While neoclassicism was a return to Europe's Greco-Roman roots, Romanticism was a return to a country's indigenous roots, folklore, and nature. Like neoclassicism (which carried on through much of the romantic period), Romanticism went beyond art—it was a way of living. It meant placing feeling over intellect and passion over restrained judgment. The rules of neoclassicism were replaced by a spirit that encouraged artists to be emotional and create not merely what the eyes saw but also what the heart felt.

Romantics made a religion of nature. They believed that taking a walk in the woods and communing with nature taught us about our true self—the primitive, "noble savage" beneath the intellectual crust. They looked back with nostalgia at the medieval age and appreciated the timelessness of the sublime. While many abandoned Christianity in the 18th century, those who did still needed to find the divine. They found it in nature.

The cultural heartbeat of this movement came not from the rich Medici palace in Florence or the elegant salons of Paris but from a humble log cabin in England's Windermere Lake District, the poet William Wordsworth's "Dove Cottage." English poets Blake, Coleridge,



Géricault, *Raft of the Medusa*, 1819 (Louvre, Paris). Géricault goes to great lengths to portray the death and despair on this raft. At the same time, a powerful pyramid of hope reaches up to flag down a distant ship.

and Wordsworth rejected the urban, intellectual, scientific world for "simple living and high thinking." They nourished their souls in nature.

At Oxford and Cambridge, a stroll through the woods was a part of every scholar's daily academic diet. Even today, the Lake District in northern England is a popular retreat for nature lovers. Its hostels (more per square mile than any place on earth) are filled with rucksack romantics worshipping the wonders of nature-walking.

Until the Romantic era, mountains were seen only as troublesome obstacles. Now they attracted crowds of admirers drawn to their rugged power. High-class resorts, such as Interlaken in the Swiss Alps, were born. Why did people climb these mountains? Because they were there. Romanticism.

### Constable, Delacroix, Géricault, and Ludwig II

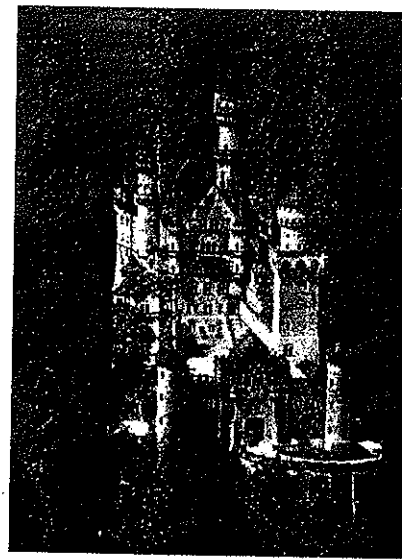
Romantic artists glorified nature. Landscapes illustrated nature's power. Englishman John Constable (1776–1837) painted honest, unidealized scenes. He let nature be natural. His contemporary, J. M. W. Turner, differed by charging his landscapes with emotions, using bright supernatural colors and swirling brushwork. Peopling his paintings with clouds, Turner personified nature. He gave it the feelings

and emotions of a romantic human being. (London's Tate Britain has the best collection of Turner landscapes.)

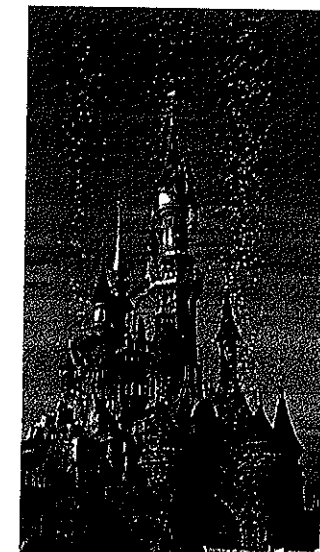
Eugene Delacroix (1798–1863) is a classic example of a Romantic painter. Solitary, moody, emotional, and endlessly imaginative, he broke all the neoclassical rules. His exotic and emotional scenes, wild color schemes, and complex, unrestrained compositions bubble with enough movement and excitement to ring any viewer's emotional bells. (See *Liberty Leading the People*, facing this chapter's title page.)

Theodore Géricault (1791–1824), in preparing to paint his gripping masterpiece *Raft of the Medusa*, visited an insane asylum and slept in a morgue so that he could better portray death and terror on the faces of his subjects. Nature was awesome, emotions were truth, and the Romantic artists were the prophets of this new religion.

The fairy-tale castle of Neuschwanstein is textbook Romanticism. King Ludwig II of Bavaria put it on a hilltop not for defensive purposes . . . but for the view. The king was a romantic. His architect was



Neuschwanstein Castle, 1869-1886, near Füssen, Germany.



Disneyland Paris, 1991

The fairy-tale castle of Bavaria's "Mad King" Ludwig II is typical of the Romantic period. It was built on a hilltop in medieval style long after castles had lost their function as fortresses. Ludwig put it here for the view. The only knights in shining armor you'll find in his castle are on the wallpaper.



London's Houses of Parliament look medieval but are Romantic, built around 1850 in a neo-Gothic style. In the wake of the Age of Revolution, mid-19th century Europe took a more romantic look at the previously disdained Middle Ages.

a designer of theater sets. His best friends were artists, poets, and musicians. Scenes from Wagner's Romantic operas decorate the castle. His dreams were not of empires and big armies, but of fairy-tale castles and candlelit concerts.

Ludwig II is known as "Mad" King Ludwig because of his romantic excesses. He drowned mysteriously before Neuschwanstein castle, his dream about to come true, was completed.

Ludwig almost bankrupted Bavaria building his Disneyesque castles, but Germany is recouping its investment a hundredfold as huge crowds of tourists from all over the world pay to see Europe's most popular castle. Get there early or late, or you might spend more time in line than in the castle.

## Goya

Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) was a portraitist for the Spanish royal court. A Romantic painter, he's been described as the first painter with a social conscience. His *Third of May, 1808* is a gripping combination of nationalism and Romanticism, showing a faceless government execution squad systematically gunning down patriots with all the compassion of a lawn mower.



Goya, *Third of May, 1808* (Prado, Madrid). Romanticism expresses itself here in a powerful social statement against war and repression by faceless foreign invaders. The victims are Spaniards gunned down by Napoleon's troops for resisting French occupation.

Artistically, Goya went through several stages. His last, after he lost his hearing and became bitter and disillusioned with life, was one of nightmarish fantasy. It's as if his innermost emotions finger painted in blood the grotesque figures that mirrored the turmoil that racked his soul. (Romantic, huh?)

The Prado Museum in Madrid has a room dedicated entirely to the bizarre visions of Goya's "Dark Stage." One of the most gripping is the painting, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, detailing in ghastly, twisted lines and vivid, garish colors how time eventually "eats" us all. "Romantic" isn't only "mushy kissy." This is Romanticism at its emotional best. No matter how cheery you are when you enter, you'll leave Goya's Dark Stage in a gloomy funk.



Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, 1823 (Prado, Madrid). While this gives "child's portion" a new meaning, Goya's intended message is that "Time devours us all."

**Romantic Art Highlights**

- Paintings in the Louvres' Romantic art rooms (Delacroix and Gericault) Paris
- Chopin's grave, Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris
- Late Britain (Blake and Turner) London
- Neo-Gothic halls of Parliament London
- Neuschwanstein and Linderhof castles, Bavaria, Germany
- The Rhine and the Loreley poem, Germany
- The Alps, Switzerland
- Poetry by Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Blake
- Music by Liszt, Chopin, Beethoven, Wagner, and Schumann



Delacroix, Frederic Chopin, 1838 (Louvre, Paris). *Our romantic artist scribbles to a froth!*

**Blake**

William Blake of England was another master at putting inner visions on canvas. A mystic, nonconformist poet, he refused to paint poses for his supper. He made a living only through the charity of fellow artists who recognized his genius. Blake's watercolors (in London's Tate Britain), with their bizarre, unearthly subjects and composition, reveal how unschooled he was in classical technique. But his art grabs the viewer by the emotional lapel. That's what Romanticism is all about.



Blake, *Elohim Creating Adam*, 1795 (Tate Britain, London). Blake, who hobnobbed with the heavenly hosts, painted God creating Man.

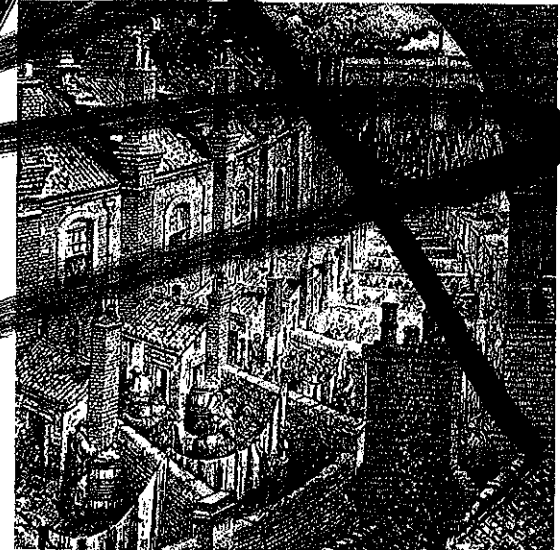
**The Industrial Revolution**

The Industrial Revolution, characterized by capitalism and democratic reforms, powered Europe into the modern world. While the scientific achievements of the Enlightenment broadened human knowledge, practical inventions and applications (such as the steam engine and telegraph) didn't crank into motion until the 1800s.

This century of exciting technological advancement shifted nations from dependence on agriculture to dependence on industry. Britain's textile industry led the way as new, steam-powered factories lured people from the countryside to the cities.

The invention of the train shifted the world into high gear. As more products could be made more quickly to more people, huge markets opened up. Rails bound European nations together. A person could travel across a country in a day's journey or less. From 1830 through 1860, one-sixth of the world's track was laid (and then came the Eurailpass).

Europe's business bent satisfied its colonial appetite. The world was Europe's buffet line and it was "eat what you can eat." Europe divided up the underdeveloped world, harvested raw materials, processed them, and sold the resulting products at great profit. Many European nations grabbed a slice of the economic quiche. Britain's empire included a number of the world's richest lands and people. England boomed. The sun never sets on the British Empire." (While others added to the cause, the sun never sets on the British Empire.)



The richest England's Industrial Revolution came with its problems. 19th-century engraving shows the poor, dirty, crowded slums housing masses of industrial workers under roaring smokestacks.