



Romanticism and Its Discontents

Anita Brookner

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In this lavishly illustrated book, Anita Brookner examines the masters of French Romantic painting in the context of nineteenth-century poetry, literature, and criticism. Here are Gros as hero and victim, Alfred de Musset as infant de sicle, Delacroix as Romantic classicist, and, later in the century, Zola as an advocate of life for art's sake and Huysmans indulging in the madness of art. Brookner traces the way that French Romanticism followed the political turmoil of the late eighteenth century and the defeat at Waterloo in 1815, and replaced the agnosticism of the Enlightenment and Revolution with a new heroism.

"By almost common consent the Romantics in France transferred their idealism to the domain of art, either as practitioners or as critics," writes Brookner. "Art was common ground, almost as religion had once been; art, moreover, was an elite calling, a vocation, 'un apostolat' according to Ingres. And few were inclined to doubt that there was something sacerdotal in operating even on the fringes, in celebrating the new that might in turn be revelatory."

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