

# Book Reviews

## Mosaic Imaginings: French Art and Its Revolutions

Jonathan P. Ribner, *Broken Tablets: The Cult of the Law in French Art from David to Delacroix*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993. Pp. xxiii, 222. \$50.00.

### Carl Landauer

According to a contemporary account describing the festival of Simonneau, which took place in Paris in June of 1790, the “most curious item in the procession as a whole was a kind of shark raised aloft on the end of a pikestaff; the sea animal had its mouth open and was showing its teeth; on its body was written, ‘Respect for the law’.”<sup>1</sup> Later in the procession, a “sword of the law” was held aloft, and concluding the procession was a “colossal statute of the law” with an inscription reading: “Truly free men are the slaves of the law.”<sup>2</sup> If these symbols seem rather artificial—we learn that the sea monster

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1. This account is provided in *REVOLUTIONS DE PARIS*, quoted in *MONA OZOUF, FESTIVALS AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION* 70 (1988).

2. *Id.* at 71.

frightened no one “but made everybody laugh”<sup>3</sup>—they clearly articulated the festival’s overall message of the supremacy of law. The festival marshalled these curious elements to nurture what Jonathan Ribner, in his book *Broken Tablets*, characterizes as “the cult of law.”<sup>4</sup>

Ribner locates the French Revolution’s cult of the law in its concentrated form as pronounced by the founder of the Tennis Court Society, Gilbert Romme: “Law is the religion of the state, which must also have its ministers, its apostles, its altars, and its schools.”<sup>5</sup> Starting with this image of law as a new religion, Ribner chronicles the cult of law in its various incarnations from the storming of the Bastille to the Revolution of 1848. As he tells us, “from 1789 to 1848—a period that saw the introduction of constitutional, parliamentary government and the adoption of the Code Napoléon—law and lawgiving were imbued with evocative power, expressed in art and poetry as well as in political discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

Ribner’s book, as announced in its subtitle, concentrates specifically on the legal encoding of the French visual arts from Jacques-Louis David to Eugène Delacroix. Ultimately, however, Ribner’s title overpowers his subtitle, for his study focuses predominantly on the thematization of Moses, the stone tablets, and the status of the lawgiver. In essence, Ribner has filtered out many other pictorial images of law as white noise, except to the extent that they seem to reinforce his central theme. And Ribner’s focus on Moses translates into an examination of a central political issue regarding the relationship of the legislator to divine sources, the French people, and the law itself. Against the backdrop of French revolutionary history of the period studied by Ribner, that political issue is of central importance. But French society from 1789 to 1848 underwent a range of evolutionary changes that involved transformations of legal relationships. By focusing on images of legal relationships at the highest level of French politics, Ribner loses sight of the cultural images of law that pervaded French society—the world, for example, created by the novels that make up Balzac’s *Comédie humaine*.

Ribner’s Mosaic theme is nevertheless of immense importance, and he carefully traces the image of Moses in French political culture, starting with the fashioning of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in the shape of the tablets of the Ten Commandments.

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3. *Id.* at 70.

4. JONATHAN P. RIBNER, *BROKEN TABLETS: THE CULT OF THE LAW IN FRENCH ART FROM DAVID TO DELACROIX* (1993).

5. *Id.* at 1.

6. *Id.*

As an instance of this symbolism, Ribner provides Louis-Jean Allais's 1793 print commemorating the Festival of Unity and Indivisibility with its caption: "The republican constitution, like the tablets of Moses, comes from the heart of the mountain in the midst of thunder and lightning."<sup>7</sup> Ribner then follows the relocations and redefinitions of Moses and his tablets through the political landscape of early nineteenth-century France as the legal order and its artistic representations develop.

Certainly, Moses and the Decalogue were important figures for the Revolutionary reconfiguration of French political life and for the supremacy of law over monarchy. But the Revolution and its various factions made use of a large vocabulary of iconic personages. Ribner names Lycurgus, the founder of the Spartan legal system, and Numa Pompilius, the legendary successor of Romulus and initiator of Roman ceremonial law.<sup>8</sup> But they appear in *Broken Tablets* as if they were Moses' subalterns. Ultimately, they do little more than magnify the image of Moses as representative of the sacred sources of the law.

Other figures play significant roles in the legal posturings of the Revolution. Although of little interest to Ribner, one particularly important candidate is Brutus, not the Brutus involved in the assassination of Julius Caesar but Lucius Junius Brutus, who was thought to have led the insurrection against the Tarquin monarchy of Rome. Brutus's story, as it came to the eighteenth century from Livy, is quite evocative, the stuff of operatic hyperdrama. Tarquin, we learn, assassinated his way to the throne and proceeded to kill most of the family of Brutus, who avoided death only by pretending imbecility.<sup>9</sup> The narrative continues with the rape, by Tarquin's son, of Lucretia, who, in an act of purification, stabs herself in front of her husband, Collatinus, and Brutus. Brutus swears to end the Tarquin rule and convinces three others to repeat the same oath over the bloody knife. But it is the next narrative turn, Brutus's condemnation of his two sons to death for their involvement in the royalist conspiracy against the new republic, that provides the source of David's famous *Brutus* of 1789.

Robert L. Herbert has, in fact, written a compelling study of the political significance of Brutus not only as a result of David's *Brutus* but also due to the revival of Voltaire's *Brutus* at the National Theater on two nights in November of 1790, performances taking

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7. *Id.* at 15.

8. *Id.* at 4.

9. ROBERT L. HERBERT, DAVID, VOLTAIRE, *BRUTUS* AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION: AN ESSAY IN ART AND POLITICS (1972).

place flanked by two busts—one of Voltaire, by Houdon, the other of Brutus which David had discovered in Rome.<sup>10</sup> “From that point forward,” Herbert tells us, “David, Voltaire and the figure of Brutus were thoroughly intertwined in the events of the Revolution.”<sup>11</sup> In his book on the subject, Herbert reproduces more revolutionary Brutuses, whether in anonymous prints or marble sculptures, than Ribner discovers images of Moses. If, as Herbert tells us, the eighteenth-century “restitution of rule by law, assuming the proportions of national fervor, was a rebirth of the laws of Rome that Brutus restored,”<sup>12</sup> we should see in Brutus a powerful symbol of the supremacy of law that must ultimately be read alongside Ribner’s Moses in decoding the political symbolism of Revolutionary France.

It is notable that in the very images that Ribner selects to assert the presence of Moses in the French Revolution, Moses himself is missing—except to the extent that his tablets metonymically stand in for him. If the caption of the Allais print compares the Republican Constitution to the tablets of Moses, the image portrays the tablets emanating rays of light and touching off lightning bolts, while Moses is nowhere in sight to shatter the tablets. This brilliant light and lightning, which appears as well in Pierre-Michel Alix’s *The Triumph of the Mountain*, provides a clear iconographic emblem of the otherworldly, an unmistakable register of the sanctity of the new legal order. But Moses, the deliverer of the law, is absent. Is his absence ultimately a token of revolutionary leadership as ephemera, of the contingent nature of any human protagonist in Revolutionary France?

T. J. Clark has recently urged an interpretation of David’s *Marat* as the beginning of modernism by suggesting just such a contingency as the cornerstone of the modern. *Marat*, he tells us,

could not be made to embody the Revolution because no one agreed about what the Revolution was, and least of all about whether Marat was its Jesus or its Lucifer. David’s picture—this is what makes it inaugural of modernism—tries to ingest this disagreement, and make it part of a new cult object.<sup>13</sup>

10. *Id.* at 15.

11. *Id.* at 16. In this context, it is interesting that David’s *Brutus* had been purchased for the French crown by the Comte d’Angiviller. HUGH HONOUR, NEO-CLASSICISM 72 (1968).

12. HERBERT, *supra* note 9, at 51.

13. T. J. Clark, *Painting in the Year Two*, 47 REPRESENTATIONS 13, 40 (1994). It is interesting here to compare Anita Brookner’s assessment of David’s *Marat* as an inauguration of the modern:

This is the true wonder of *Marat assassiné*: David has made real life the pretext for a new type of high art. It is not, as is sometimes stated, that a sordid political assassination has been transformed into great art. It is that art and life have become indistinguishable, and that professional preoccupations of artists will never again operate in a purely traditional way.

ANITA BROOKNER, JACQUES-LOUIS DAVID 115 (1980).

Clark tells us that "Marat's body is maneuvered into a state of insubstantiality."<sup>14</sup> Clark is indeed convinced that whatever composure adheres to the pale, dead body of Marat slain in his bathtub was "bought at the cost of too much gender uncertainty."<sup>15</sup> But if Clark's Marat is politically and sexually vague, "a kind of scaffolding on which other particulars . . . are hung,"<sup>16</sup> the Revolutionary Moses has all but disappeared, visible only in his attributes—mountain and tablets. Possibly, Moses must disappear because his features were too sharply engraved on the Western imagination to be subject to the sort of painterly legerdemain Clark attributes to David. But perhaps Moses' absence expresses not so much the ambiguity of the modern as a desire that the tablets of the law not be overshadowed by the powerful figure of a Moses. Having just eliminated the monarch as the embodiment of the nation's law, it was important that the law in its stone incarnation occupy the skies alone.

Personality was not similarly dispossessed during Napoleon's reign for the very reason that Napoleon stage-managed his own personality cult and made certain that the new legal system he put in place throughout Europe bore his name—the Code Napoléon. Napoleon's legislative genius is the central iconographic message in Ribner's narrative of Napoleon's reign. It is therefore not surprising to find in Ribner's book a relief produced for the Cour Carré of the Louvre entitled *History Inscribing upon Her Tablet the Names of Napoleon the Great and the Legislators Moses, Numa and Lycurgus*.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Ribner tells us that Moses' pose in this relief "derives from conventional representations of Saint John the Baptist, suggesting, further, that the Hebrew legislator is a prophet of Napoleonic legal genius."<sup>18</sup> Jean-Simon Barthélemy also identifies Napoleon with Moses in *The Passage of the Isthmus of Suez and His Majesty Visiting the Wells of Moses*, a painting that, as Ribner tells us, "was subtly accented in the official guide to the Salon of 1808, which noted that before visiting the fountains of Moses, Napoleon had crossed the Red Sea at a ford accessible only at low tide."<sup>19</sup>

To amplify the Mosaic images deployed by Napoleon, Ribner describes a creative little fantasy, Napoleon's convocation of the Grand Sanhedrin in 1807.<sup>20</sup> A strange bit of playacting complete with costumes invented for the purpose, this reincarnation of the

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14. Clark, *supra* note 13, at 39.

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.* at 40.

17. RIBNER, *supra* note 4, at 32.

18. *Id.* at 35.

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.* at 40-42.

Jewish governing body from the period before the destruction of the Second Temple appeared in Paris to add to Napoleon's glory and to create a symbol of Napoleon as the founder of Jewish law. As an example of this Napoleonic conceit, Ribner reproduces a medal struck in commemoration of the meeting which depicts Napoleon bestowing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments to a kneeling Moses.<sup>21</sup> In this medal, Napoleon has not so much succeeded to Moses' position as he has supplanted God as the source of divine law.

While Ribner has clearly established Napoleon's use of Mosaic imagery, he understands that the Mosaic theme is supplemented by others articulating a similar message. In Ingres's *Napoleon on His Imperial Throne*, for example, Ribner identifies a Napoleon-as-Charlemagne, replete with the appropriate accoutrements of a Carolingian emperor.<sup>22</sup> But Ribner undercuts the power of Ingres's painting by suggesting that, although its "cold glamour" has

proved irresistible to late twentieth-century eyes familiar with Pop Art and Photo-Realism, the artist was deeply pained to learn that this strangely hieratic and airless portrait had failed at the Salon of 1806, where the likeness was faulted as well as the resemblance to the fifteenth-century art of Jan van Eyck.<sup>23</sup>

Ribner explains that, in fact, modern art historians have traced Ingres's emperor to the *God the Father* panel of the Ghent altarpiece. Perhaps even more telling for us is the fact that the painting's likeness to Napoleon was faulted; finally—despite the Napoleonic orchestration of various traditions—the true hero of Napoleon's reign is not Napoleon-as-Moses, as Ribner's book suggests, or even Napoleon-as-Charlemagne, but Napoleon himself. And even Ingres's painting, despite its imperfect likeness, is unmistakably of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Thus, although Ribner sees a "conflation of Zeus and Saint John the Evangelist"<sup>24</sup> in Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse's post-Napoleonic *Allegory of Napoleon Writing the Code*, the obvious may be overlooked: that all of Napoleon's customary attributes are present, from his signature hat and dark wave of hair across his forehead to his white-smocked uniform and epaulets. In essence, Napoleon succeeded at making himself into a cultural icon who would long outlast his reign. There is, indeed, a reason why Stendhal had the protagonist of his novel *Red and Black*, Julien Sorel, so caught up in Napoleonic reveries. But this is not merely a question of a nostalgic

21. *Id.* at 41 (medal reproduced at 43).

22. *Id.* at 38.

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.* at 49.

post-Napoleonic Bonapartism, for Napoleon brilliantly managed his own image during his reign. As one looks through the images reproduced in Ribner's *Broken Tablets*, it becomes clear that, despite the various legitimizing references identified by Ribner, the core legitimization was an intensification of Napoleon's personality.

If the person of Napoleon, and not the allegorical flourishes that attract Ribner's attention, is the ultimate centerpiece of Napoleonic representation, the Code Napoléon remains a common attribute in those portraits not unlike the attributes of medieval depictions of saints, such as Saint Barbara's tower or Saint Sebastian's arrow. Among the images reproduced in *Broken Tablets*, the Code appears only once as the roundheaded tablets of the Ten Commandments, and that is on the commemorative medal struck for the convocation of the Grand Sanhedrin. Basically, the image of the Code was invoked not so much in an effort to portray a Mosaic Napoleon as to underline the importance of the Code to Napoleon's empire and the empire's self-image. Thus, in David's *Napoleon in His Study*, the viewer's eye, after lighting first on Napoleon and the crisp white of his uniform, is drawn to the right, to the white rolled-up Code with only the letters "COD" to identify it. In a sense, the Code is the second subject of a double portrait. Ribner tells us that legislative activity under Napoleon "shifted from the public to the private domain, that is, from constitutional to civil law."<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, Ribner leaves it at that, rather than analyzing more deeply the significance of Napoleon's attempt at legal codification, its relation to French legal traditions, and the competition between natural law and positive law philosophies in France.<sup>26</sup>

If Ribner's Napoleon draws upon cultural resources to legitimize his legal order, the Bourbon monarchs of the Restoration, Louis XVIII and Charles X, are rather more desperate in their legitimizing efforts. And their task is complicated, as Ribner explains, by their "explicit denial and implicit co-option of the modern French political tradition."<sup>27</sup> Surveying the Restoration paintings produced for the Council of State rooms—which go by titles such as *France, in the Midst of the Legislator Kings and French Jurisconsults, Receives the Constitutional Charter from Louis XVIII* and *The Law Descends to the Earth*—Ribner finds that, apart from contributions by Delacroix and Delaroche, the "pompous, redundant program has a hollow ring that suggests not only the weakness of Restoration history painting but

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25. *Id.* at 30.

26. See, e.g., DONALD R. KELLEY, *THE HUMAN MEASURE: SOCIAL THOUGHT IN THE WESTERN LEGAL TRADITION* 222-28 (1990).

27. RIBNER, *supra* note 4, at 50.

also the disparity between the triumphant rhetoric of the preamble to the Charter of 1814 and the vulnerability of this post-Napoleonic constitutional monarchy.”<sup>28</sup> Yet Ribner, who reminds us that our appreciation of Ingres’s Napoleon may be due to our “twentieth-century eyes familiar with Pop Art and Photo-Realism,”<sup>29</sup> may be responding too much to the primitive aesthetic of a painting like Mauzaisse’s *Divine Wisdom Giving the Laws to the Kings and Legislators*, which has none of the artistry of a David or the power of a Delacroix. Moreover, if the painting’s absurd crowd of “legislators”—from George Washington and William Penn to Mohammed and Confucius, not to mention Moses—jostle each other in a flattened space, the scene ultimately provides no indication of the bankruptcy of the Restoration’s legal order.

Similarly, Delacroix’s intriguing image of Justinian, which draws, as Ribner explains, from the iconographic tradition of the Evangelists,<sup>30</sup> cannot bestow intellectual coherence on the Bourbon Restoration simply by its artistic power. Nevertheless, Delacroix’s decision to picture Justinian, the emperor who codified Roman law and consequently an obvious Napoleonic predecessor, is fascinating; it compels us to ask whether Delacroix’s image embodied an errant Bonapartist gesture, or, rather, represented an effort to remind visitors to the Council of State rooms that the process of codifying law did not begin with the First Consul.

Ribner’s fascination, however, is not with Justinian but with Moses, and he portrays the Restoration as the site of a growing interest in Moses, an interest that developed mostly on France’s political right. As Ribner explains, “[e]ncouraged by the new edition of the Bible of Antoine-Eugène Genoude, the young poets Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo came of age intoxicated by Scripture.”<sup>31</sup> From that immersion in Scripture, the young poets adopted Moses as the patron of their Christian, anti-Enlightenment camp. Thus, Lamartine opened a poem dedicated to anti-Enlightenment publicist Louis-Gabriel-Ambroise de Bonald with these words:

Just as, long ago amid storms  
On the burning peak of Sinai  
The greatest of prophets  
Engraved the tablets of Judah.<sup>32</sup>

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28. *Id.* at 60.

29. *Id.* at 38.

30. *Id.* at 58-59.

31. *Id.* at 60.

32. Quoted in *id.* at 63-64 (translated from French).

And in a poem commemorating the coronation of Charles X in 1825, Victor Hugo referred to the two rays that emanated from Charles's head.<sup>33</sup> In all of these phenomena, Ribner identifies the "broad appeal of Mosaic imagery in the ongoing crisis of authority that plagued, and eventually destroyed, the Bourbon Restoration."<sup>34</sup>

In Ribner's story, however, the fascination with Moses develops into a full-fledged cult of Moses, and it is here that Ribner is at his most colorful. He sets the mood for his chapter on the "Romantic Moses" by telling the story of Millet's gift of a painting, later known as *Self-Portrait as Moses*, to the Municipal Council of Cherbourg. The gift was meant as a sarcastic gesture in response to the council's rejection of his portrait of Colonel Javain. In his letter to the council, Millet explained: "I did not believe that I could offer a subject more appropriate to the magistrates of the city of Cherbourg than the image of this ancient and severe legislator of the Hebrews"<sup>35</sup>—that is, everything they were not. But the joke of the painting was that the image of Moses was unmistakably a self-portrait.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, however, Ribner suggests that the joke should be taken as entirely serious. And with this, Ribner introduces the self-mythologizing identification of the Romantic artist with Moses. Indeed, the *Self-Portrait as Moses*, with its Michelangelesque monumentality and its movement drawn from Delacroix, is the perfect painting to introduce the Romantic genius. We learn from Ribner that the painting "continues a tradition of self-aggrandizement through biblical reference established by the young poets of the 1820s."<sup>37</sup> After citing Victor Hugo, he turns to Alfred Vigny's "Moïse" of 1822 with its Moses as "an overpowering individual presence at variance with the traditional conception of him as the obedient servant of God."<sup>38</sup> Although Ribner does not make a Nietzschean turn here, it is clear that this is a Moses on the way to becoming Zarathustra.

As Ribner notes, the Romantic Moses is such an overpowering figure that the *Moses and the Brazen Serpent*, submitted by a young artist to the Academy of Fine Arts Prix de Rome competition of 1833, revised Hubert Sableyras's eighteenth-century painting by isolating Moses from the crowd as an overarching powerful figure: "Silhouetted against the sky, Roger's Moses combines the authoritative gestures of Plato and Aristotle in Raphael's *School of Athens*. He stands on

33. *Id.* at 65.

34. *Id.* at 69.

35. *Id.* at 139.

36. Here Ribner reproduces a self-portrait drawn by Millet in 1845-46 to make the self-portrait point unmistakable. *Id.*

37. *Id.* at 142.

38. *Id.* at 143.

raised ground, fully clad, above the seminude crowd at his feet."<sup>39</sup> Ribner finds a similar movement from Poussin's *Moses Striking the Rock* to the two young prizewinners' versions of the same theme for the Academy's competition of 1836. But Ribner does not explain why the Academy of Fine Arts, in the midst of its usual run of classical themes, had selected these two themes for its competitions of 1833 and 1836. Certainly, Moses' striking of the rock against God's command is a moment of particular pathos in the Biblical story because of the divine retribution it would bring, a retribution that sealed Moses' fate forever. But the two prize-winning renditions, like their predecessor by Poussin, show not Moses' wrathful striking of the rock, but a later moment when the life-giving flow of water is scooped up with jugs by the crowd around him.

If Ribner finds examples of the new Romantic Moses in these Prix de Rome prize-winners, he finds further support in the renewed appreciation of Michelangelo's *Moses*. Just as Freud found that descriptions of Michelangelo's *Moses* each varied in some important detail or another from Michelangelo's sculpture,<sup>40</sup> Ribner finds the prints of Michelangelo's *Moses* circulating in nineteenth-century France to have subtly manipulated the image.<sup>41</sup> But more important than manipulations emphasizing Moses' musculature or drawing from the pictorial tradition of the ecstatic saint is the canonization of Michelangelo's *Moses* because of its resonance with champions of Romantic genius. Ribner is excellent as a cultural historian fleshing out the heroic Moses of nineteenth-century France, moving from visual arts to poetry and back to the visual arts, but the deeper he enters the realm of Romantic genius, the further he strays from the place of law in French society. We have moved from Moses as a symbol of written legal order to a celebration of Moses' personality.

At the very end of his epilogue, Ribner introduces a political cartoon, drawn by Adolphe Willette in 1886 for *Le Courrier français*, depicting Edouard Drumont (one of France's best known anti-Semitic publicists and author of *La France juive*) dressed as a medieval Crusader and trampling over a white-bearded Moses whose tablets are broken on the ground behind him.<sup>42</sup> For Ribner, this trampled Moses represents a conflation of the French right's anti-Semitism and antiparliamentarianism. Clearly, readers of *Le Courrier français* were expected to recognize the cartoon Moses with his beard, his round-

39. *Id.* at 148.

40. Sigmund Freud, *The Moses of Michelangelo*, in *CHARACTER AND CULTURE* 80, 83-84 (Philip Rieff ed., 1963).

41. *Id.* at 152-53.

42. *Id.* at 161.

headed tablets, and rays emanating from his head. The question, however, is not so much whether Willette's audience could easily identify the fallen Moses, but whether the parliamentary associations of this cartoon Moses were assured in 1886. In essence, the more we are convinced of the legislative encoding of this Moses, the stronger is Ribner's case regarding the centrality of Moses and his tablets in artistic representations of law in post-1789 France. While the principal message of the Willette cartoon seems to be the religious confrontation signified by the cross-emblazoned Crusader vanquishing the embodiment of Judaism, a broader political message is present in the words on the Crusader's shield, "ça ira," which, as the title of a Revolutionary song, signals hostility to the reigning legislative order. But such an antiparliamentary interpretation may not exactly fit the words of the song reproduced by Ribner in an earlier chapter: "Du législateur tout s'accomplira."<sup>43</sup> The cartoon may not so much provide final proof of Ribner's general argument as require the additional layer of contextualization offered by his *Broken Tablets* to certify his reading of the cartoon. Ironically, however, just prior to the epilogue, Ribner's Moses was becoming more diffuse and straying further from an explicit relation to legislation.

Whether or not Ribner is finally persuasive in his reading of Mosaic imagery in French culture, the focus on Moses and the Ten Commandments results in a loss of other important avenues in the representational history of law and justice in French art. In his discussion of Napoleonic France, for example, perhaps Ribner should have more thoroughly considered one of the most powerful images of law produced during Napoleon's reign, Pierre-Paul Prud'hon's *Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime*, created for the criminal courtroom of the Palais de Justice and exhibited in the Salon of 1808. Despite its obvious allegorical rendering and its incarnation of Justice and Divine Vengeance as winged angels, Prud'hon's painting of a criminal dashing from the scene of his crime and the fallen body of his victim is full of passion and power.<sup>44</sup> That such an allegorical painting can so vividly suggest the immediacy of criminal violence, as well as the entreaty to Justice and Divine Vengeance, indicates that French law occupied a cultural space more immediate than the Mosaic posturings of Napoleon.

Similarly, Ribner shows little interest in Delacroix's *Justice of Trajan* of 1840. This painting portrays an episode from Canto X of Dante's *Purgatorio* in which Emperor Trajan, on his way to battle

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43. *Id.* at 7 ("The legislator will accomplish everything.").

44. On the "brutal realism" of Prud'hon's painting, see LORENZ EITNER, AN OUTLINE OF 19TH CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTING 52-53 (1987).

with a “great press of horsemen,”<sup>45</sup> is stopped by a woman begging him to carry out justice on behalf of her murdered son. Only after further appeal, he assures her: “Now be comforted, for I must / Carry out my duty before I go on: / Justice requires it and pity holds me back.”<sup>46</sup> With Dante’s *Purgatorio* in the background, this painting, like the Prud’hon, tells us something about the urgency of justice for French society.

Ultimately, Ribner’s focus is somewhat narrower than the range suggested by his book’s subtitle, “The Cult of the Law in French Art from David to Delacroix.” He has, however, created an exemplary instance of art history as cultural history, skillfully moving among literature, art, and political history. But in practicing art history as cultural history, he forgoes other art-historical approaches, including stylistic analysis. This choice is underlined by the obvious debt of his subtitle to Walter Friedlaender’s famous *David to Delacroix*. One of the major themes of Friedlaender’s book was a reading of artists such as Géricault, Ingres, and Delacroix through their use of Correggio, Caravaggio, and Rubens. Friedlaender tells us, for example, that after the artistic assimilation of Correggio, “[t]he next decisive step, the acceptance and assimilation of Rubens, was to be achieved in the art of Delacroix.”<sup>47</sup> By analyzing the values represented by Correggio, Caravaggio, and Rubens, it is possible to create a semiotics of style—that is, a fleshing out of what the Renaissance and the Baroque meant to nineteenth-century painters. Similarly, one can enter more deeply into French legal developments during the period covered by Ribner to create a semiotics of law, essentially a symbolic analysis of the major legal values debated in post-1789 France. As one moves between Caravaggiesque chiaroscuro and the law of contracts, one will find Ribner’s “broken tablets,” and one will find much more.

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45. DANTE, *THE DIVINE COMEDY* 241 (C.H. Sisson trans., 1981).

46. *Id.*

47. WALTER FRIEDLAENDER, *DAVID TO DELACROIX* 58 (R. Goldwater trans., 1952).