

Merry Company on a Terrace and The Death of Socrates Comparison

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Oil On Canvas, Salon Of 1787

Jan Steen's *Merry Company on a Terrace* and Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Socrates* both paintings have similar compositions, but they depict very different events. There is a group element, and the people use gestures and body movements to express themselves. In Steen's painting, the groups of people are celebrating a joyous occasion, while in David's painting, the groups of people are mourning over the soon-to-be-dead Socrates. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.)

Merry Company on a Terrace

Steen's *Merry Company on a Terrace* was painted on a 55.5"x51.75" oil canvas during the late 17th century. The painting has a closed form. He depicts a lively scene with a group of people celebrating some kind of festival under a pergola. The people are enjoying food and drink in the company of one another. Along with food and drink, there is music that adds to the festivities. In the painting, the central figure is the woman in the blue dress. Steen's distribution of light focuses the most on her. He also uses different textures to describe the objects.

Steen incorporates a lot of characters into the painting. There is a young couple on the left dancing together. Below the couple is a disheveled man who has slung over a chair, perhaps having a little too much to drink. He has one hand holding the chair and the other hand holding a pitcher. Next to him is a young girl playing with a dog. In the center background is a grandmother and grandfather playing with their granddaughter. The grandfather is playfully giving the wine glass to his granddaughter, and she has her hands stretched out, trying to get a hold of the glass. There is a man sitting on the ledge playing an instrument and behind him are more people. The central figure in the painting is a young woman in the center. She has rosy cheeks and blonde hair and is wearing a light blue dress. Steen paints her in cool colors while the rest of the characters are painted in warm colors. He also distributes the most light on her, and her brown skirt shimmers in the light. The woman has her arm extended very gracefully as if she were posing for a picture.

Steen's *Merry Company on a Terrace* is a closed painting. The people are all together under the pergola and they are all interacting with each other. Music plays an important role in the painting. Along with food and drink, music adds to the merriment of the group. Music makes the mood livelier, and it brings people together. There is a sense of unity and balance.

Steen paints the people very naturally. He uses a lot of warm colors, such as shades of brown and red, to depict the people. It adds to the homely feeling and invites the viewers into the painting. For inanimate objects such as the pitcher lying on the floor and the flowers next to it, Steen paints it very realistic as if it were a still life painting. The pitcher is durable and smooth, and the flowers are fresh and alive. In the background, there is a glimpse of the sky. There is a hint of blue sky amidst all the fluffy, white clouds. There are also sunflowers next to the trees, taking in the sunlight.

The Death of Socrates

Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Socrates* was painted on a 51"x77.25" oil canvas during the late 18 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.)th century. The painting has an open form. In the painting, David portrays his take on the final moments of the famous Classical Greek philosopher. The setting takes place in a chamber with arches in the hallway and windows, perhaps influenced by the Romans. Socrates is seated on his deathbed with his hand stretched out to take the poisoned drink, and he has his right finger pointing up to the ceiling. He is surrounded by his grief-stricken disciples.

David depicts Socrates as stoic and strong-willed. Socrates would rather die than go against his principles. Even on his deathbed, Socrates is calm and tranquil, and he shows no worries or fears about his impending death. In his final moments, he is still teaching and giving a passionate speech. He is pointing up saying that there is higher knowledge. His truth and knowledge will live on and they will not disappear when he is dead. Socrates is portrayed as an ideal man with infinite wisdom. He has a well-proportioned body and a beard. David also distributes the most light on Socrates as well as his disciples. The source of the light is not from the windows or the lamp so it may show divinity since Socrates is pointing up to the sky, toward the heavens.

In contrast to Socrates' calm composure, his disciples are all consumed by grief. Most have their heads down, while others have their arms above their heads. One disciple has his face and arm against the wall for support. There is a scroll lying on the floor which can imply that the disciples believed that the truth is lost. They are unable to look at their mentor.

The painting has an open form. Socrates is pointing up, indicating a higher truth. Some of his disciples are looking in opposite directions with their heads down. The people are not interacting with each other, and there are also people leaving the chamber. David uses a lot of geometric shapes in the painting. There are Roman arches in the hallway and window. The disciple who is sitting on a block at the end of the bed, his body forms a triangle shape. David also pays very close attention to the details. The way the cloak is draped over the people shows the folds and creases.

Comparative Analysis

In *Merry Company on a Terrace* and *The Death of Socrates*, the paintings have similar compositions. Both paintings are painted on large oil canvas. The size may indicate that these paintings are an

important depiction of the events during the time and they are painted on a large canvas to exemplify the emotions. In *Merry Company on a Terrace*, the painting conveys happiness and celebration, while in *The Death of Socrates*, there is a strong feeling of sorrow and anguish.

In both paintings, there is a group element and the groups of people are expressing their feelings through gestures and body movements. In *Merry Company on a Terrace*, the people have their arms raised and they are swaying to the music, as well as having a feast. In *The Death of Socrates*, Socrates' disciples have their arms up in anguish at the impending death of Socrates.

In both paintings, there is a central figure, and they both have their arms extended in a diagonal line, which moves the viewers' eye across the paintings. In *Merry Company on a Terrace*, the central figure is the woman in the blue dress and in *The Death of Socrates*, the central figure is Socrates. Both painters distributed the most light onto the central figures. The lesser figures are wearing dark colors, and the central figures are dressed in light colors, with the woman wearing a light blue dress and Socrates wearing a white cloak. Also, in both paintings, there is a man sitting on the left on an object that is perpendicular to the picture plane.

In both paintings, the cup represents an important symbol. In *Merry Company on a Terrace*, the cup is filled with wine and represents happiness and life. The wine is making the people cheerful. In *The Death of Socrates*, the cup is filled with poison and it represents the end of life. The poisoned drink kills Socrates, and it causes pain and suffering for the disciples.

Differences in Form and Emotion

Although both Steen and David's paintings are compositionally similar, there are many differences in the paintings. The most obvious difference is the emotion that the paintings are trying to convey. Based on the title alone it tells the viewers what the painting is about. *Merry Company on a Terrace* depicts a cheerful group. The people are celebrating some kind of festivities and they are enjoying food, drink, and music in the company of one another. In *Death of Socrates*, it depicts a mourning group. Socrates is on his deathbed, and the disciples are all consumed with grief.

Another difference is that *Merry Company on a Terrace* is a closed painting, while *The Death of Socrates* is an open painting. In *Merry Company on a Terrace*, the people are all coming together for a celebration. They are all together under the pergola, and they are interacting with each other. There is a sense of unity and balance. In *The Death of Socrates*, the people are distant, and most are not interacting with each other. They are all looking in different directions. Most disciples have their heads down, while Socrates has his finger pointing up. Socrates believed that the truth would live on, but his disciples believed that the truth would be gone when Socrates died.

Conclusion

Although both paintings have very similar compositions, they depict very different events. In both paintings, there is a group element and a central figure, but they represent different things. In *Merry Company on a Terrace*, Steen depicts the people celebrating, and he captures their merriment through the gestures and interactions of people. In *The Death of Socrates*, David depicts the final moments of Socrates and the reaction of his disciples. His disciples have their heads down and their arms over their heads. David is able to capture the anguish and distress of Socrates' disciples as well as capture Socrates' stoic image as someone who sacrificed himself for his beliefs.

References

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). *Merry company on a terrace*, by Jan Steen.
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