Delacroix, ‘J.’ and ‘Still life with lobsters’

by MICHELE HANNOOSH and BERTRAND and LORRAINE SERVOIS

'I've finished the General's animal picture', Delacroix wrote to his friend Charles-Raymond Soulier on 28th September 1827, 'and I've dug up a rococo frame which I am having regilded and which will do wonderfully. It has already struck the fancy of a store of collectors and I think that it will be amusing at the Salon'. As Delacroix here suggests, the Still life with lobsters (Fig. 5) is a very curious painting. While lobsters sometimes figure in still-life painting, usually on a table with game or fruit, Delacroix's picture is very different. Two enormous cooked lobsters lie in the foreground of a distant landscape depicting a hunting scene; the lobsters are surrounded by a pheasant, a jay and a hare, a hunting rifle, a tasselled mesh game-bag and a Scottish plaid; a lone (live) lizard occupies the foreground; the perspective is from high up, looking out over the countryside. The picture makes little narrative or iconographical sense: although one may, as others have done, invoke a 'British' theme in the hunters, arms and plaid, the prominent lobsters are wholly incongruous with these other elements. The brilliantly

lobsters executed before Delacroix's, mostly by Dutch artists of the seventeenth century; only one, from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, contains a hint of landscape. Authors contains a further ten, none of which are in a landscape. In the catalogue of the 1827–28 Salon, Delacroix's painting was entitled 'Tableau de nature morte'. The 'British' character of the picture was noted as early as E. Moreau-Nélaton's Delacroix raconté par lui-même, Paris 1916, I, p. 81; see also L. Johnson: The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix: A Critical Catalogue, Oxford 1982–2002, I, no. 161 (cited hereafter as J followed by catalogue number).
coloured still life boldly set against the deeply recessive landscape is consistent with Delacroix’s reliance in this period—one that also produced the *Death of Sardanapalus*—on ‘romantic’ theatricality and flourish. Yet despite its prominence in the Louvre since 1914, and the near-universal admiration it has gained, the still life remains one of the painter’s least studied works, its idiosyncrasies largely ignored, its intended strangeness unaccounted for, its origins and inspiration unexplained. Scholars who have commented on the oddity of the lobsters, at least, have seen them either as allusions to still-life precedents or as a sly comment on the conservative politics of the man for whom the picture was painted, through an association of the lobster with the backward-moving crayfish.\(^4\)

Research conducted independently led the present writers to similar hypotheses about some of the questions surrounding this painting. Working together has allowed us not only to clarify some of its idiosyncrasies, but also to shed light on an obscure but crucial chapter of Delacroix’s life and relations involving at least two other paintings and several unpublished letters. Last, but hardly least, it enabled us to resolve with certainty one of the few remaining mysteries in Delacroix’s biography: the identity of the famous ‘J.’ with whom he was carrying on an assiduous flirtation unaccounted for, its origins and inspiration unexplained.\(^4\)

It has long been known that the *Still life with lobsters* was executed in 1826 for General Charles-Yves-César-Cyr, comte de Coëtlosquet, at the latter’s château in Beffes, a village in the Cher.\(^5\) In June that year Delacroix spent time there on a visit to Soulier who managed the property; it was then that he began the painting.\(^7\) In an unpublished letter to Soulier of 17th July 1826, Coëtlosquet expresses his hope that Delacroix will ‘finish his dining-room painting’ for which they will provide a fine frame and a place of honour in the château.\(^4\) This was the *Still life with lobsters*. It is unclear whether the initiative came from Soulier, who was an amateur painter, from Delacroix himself or from Coëtlosquet, although the latter was not a collector and owned virtually no other paintings.\(^7\) A brilliant Napoleonic general who had taken part in all the major campaigns of the Empire, Coëtlosquet had become during the Restoration a high-ranking administrator in the War Department, serving as Director of Personnel from 19th December 1821 and as interim Minister from 19th October 1823 to 5th August 1824. Delacroix had met him through Soulier, whose relationship with this family was close: Coëtlosquet was the nephew of the former councillor of State and Director, under the Restoration, of the *domaine extraordinaire* (state funds distributed as pensions and retainers to loyal subjects), the colourful marquis de La Mansfort, to whom Soulier had served as private secretary since at least 1814 and whom he had followed to Italy when La Mansfort was appointed Minister to Tuscany in July 1820.\(^10\) The marquis’s wife had stayed behind in Paris along with their daughter Mme de Pron, both of whom lived at Coëtlosquet’s ministerial residence in rue Saint-Dominique until he left the War Department in 1828. Thus

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\(^4\) Donated by Etienne Moreau-Nélaton in 1906, the painting was exhibited from 1907 in the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, before entering the Louvre in 1914. The *cadre noir* mentioned by Delacroix (see note 1 above) is visible in early photographs; see F. Lachin and P. Rosenberg et al.: exh. cat. *De Coret aux Impressionnistes, donations Moreau-Nélaton*, Paris (Grand Palais) 1991, pp. 7–8.


\(^6\) In a letter to Soulier of 23rd March 1850, Delacroix writes that a month or two earlier he saw for sale ‘le tableau d’animaux que j’ai fait à Beffes il y a quelques vingt-quatre ans’; Joubin, III, p. 11. Adolphe Moreau, whose father purchased the picture in 1853, catalogued it as ‘Painted at Beffes, in 1826, for M. le général de Coëtlosquet’; see A. Moreau: *E. Delacroix et son œuvre*, Paris 1877, p. 169.

\(^7\) It is uncertain how long Delacroix’s stay was: the two letters published in Joubin date from Sunday 18th and Monday 19th June 1826. Coëtlosquet hopes ‘que le seigneur La Croix va terminer son tableau de salle à manger et qu’alors nous lui donnerons un beau cadre pour le faire figurer au mieux dans Beffes’; sale, Hôtel Drouot-Montaigne, Paris, Manuscrits et lettres autographes, 15th May 2001, lot 22.
Delacroix’s letters to Soulier from the mid-1820s often evoke the ‘General’ (Coëtlosquet), the ‘marquise’ (de La Maisonfort, wife of the marquis, Coëtlosquet’s uncle), ‘Mme de Pron’ (their daughter, Coëtlosquet’s first cousin) and the ‘Dominicans’, a playful reference to the street in which they lived.11

But Delacroix’s connection to this family had in fact been established earlier than the mid-1820s when the painting was executed. It was the collector Roger Leybold who first proposed that the unknown woman, referred to simply as ‘J.’, with whom much of Delacroix’s journal from 1822 to 1824 is concerned, may have been the wife of General Coëtlosquet. As is well known from the journal, ‘J.’ had been involved with Soulier, and during the latter’s absence in Italy had been courted by Delacroix. The entry for 27th October 1822 introduces the story in a manner worthy of a comic opera:

My dear Soulier is back [. . .] At first I thought only of how happy I was to see him. Then my heart stopped. As I was getting ready to take him up to my room, I remembered a wretched letter whose handwriting he might recognise. I hesitated. That destroyed all the pleasure I had in seeing him again. I tried various subterfuges; I pretended to have lost my key, what have you. Finally, I pulled myself together. He went away, saying he would come back to collect me in the evening, at which time we went out for a walk. I hope that the wrong I’ve done him won’t affect his relationship with [. . .] Please God that he may remain unaware of it!12

It is also clear from Delacroix’s letters to Soulier from late 1820 to early 1822 that the latter had asked Delacroix to paint a portrait of the lady’s son, ‘Adrien’.13 An unfinished portrait of a child, which was passed down in Soulier’s family and was copied by Alfred Robaut in 1878, was tentatively identified by the late Lee Johnson as the unknown ‘Adrien’ referred to in Delacroix’s letters (Fig.6).14 The picture resurfaced in 2000, but with no new information to confirm or reject the identification.

Leybold had based his identification of ‘J.’ on an unsigned letter then in his collection, in which the lady writes to Delacroix: ‘the G[eneral] is asking for his armour back’. Since Delacroix had noted in his journal on 1st May 1824 that he could borrow some Mameluke arms and armour from General ‘Köt[los]quet’[sic], Leybold surmised that the lady was Coëtlosquet’s wife. This hypothesis was accepted and transmitted by Raymond Escholier and René Huyghe.15 Plausible though it is, it runs up against the fact that Coëtlosquet remained, for his entire life, a bachelor.16

So if ‘J.’ was not Coëtlosquet’s wife, who was she? The many drafts of letters which Delacroix pens to her in his journal between 15th April 1823 and 19th June 1824 imply that she was a woman of some standing. She had a son at school whom she visited on Thursdays and Sundays, stopping each time at Delacroix’s studio (note 6), p.169.

His posthumous inventory lists only two paintings; Archives départementales du Cher, E-13779, ‘Inventaire après décès des objets appartenant à Charles-Yves-César-Cyr, comte de Coëtlosquet’, 4th February 1836, no.2. Although it is often claimed that Still life with lobsters was commissioned by Coëtlosquet, this may be a (mistaken) inference from Moreau’s statement that it was painted for him; see Moreau, op. cit. (note 6), p.169.


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When Delacroix first met her, probably in April 1822, she lived with her mother at her cousin Coëtlosquet’s official residence at 62 rue Saint-Dominique. She nevertheless seems to have retained accommodation in the hôtel du Domaine Extraordinaire at a place Vendôme, which had been her father’s official address and where Soulier had a garret room from 1816 until his departure for Italy. Indeed it was from there that on 2nd April 1819 she registered her son Adrien de Pron for the Collège Louis-le-Grand where he remained until 30th September 1823.23 The entrance to the school was in rue des Grès, where Delacroix had his studio. And so it was that, in the spring of 1823, on Thursdays and Sundays when the pupils had visiting hours, Sarah, as she was familiarly called, stopped at the painter’s studio en route to see her son.24

The adventure may have begun innocently enough. From 24th November 1820 to 30th July 1821, Delacroix expresses to Soulier his readiness to fulfill his friend’s request to paint the child’s portrait: ‘I haven’t forgotten the commission which you charged me with for the little boy’s portrait’; ‘I haven’t yet had any news of Adrien. I don’t know if they will be able to obtain authorisation for him to leave the lycée to sit for me. In any case, I’m still at your disposal for that’; ‘I haven’t had a single word of the little fellow or of the portrait to be done. I’m ready; I’m just waiting for the person’; ‘… M. Vignon [?], your little fellow’s tutor […] came by bringing a letter from you in which you sent him to me about the portrait. But it transpires that the little boy cannot in any way leave his school for this purpose. I am therefore forced, despite my good will, to wait till a little later’.25 On 15th April 1822, emerging from a period of intense work on his Dante and Virgil in preparation for the Salon, Delacroix wrote: ‘I saw la Cara. She took the trouble to come to my place; at the time I was deep in the work that I’ve just finished. She herself could tell that I was short of time […] At the first opportunity I’ll be very pleased to make good on the promise I made to you’.26 This must have been Delacroix’s first real meeting with ‘J.’, and the reference to the ‘promise’ suggests that it concerned plans for Adrien’s portrait. Her first extant letter to him, postmarked 3rd June 1822 (see Appendix 2a), has a formal tone: ‘I received, Sir, your kind note on Thursday at 9 in the morning. If you are free, I will be honoured to go to your house, and I beg of you beforehand to accept my sincere and warmest thanks’.

Was this in order to view the portrait already under way? In fact, it is not known whether the portrait was ever painted. If it was, then the sitter would have been aged thirteen and a half at the time. The sitter in Fig.6 (IL75), however, seems considerably younger than this and, unless Adrien was late to mature, could not be he. Of Delacroix’s unattributed male portraits, Portrait of a youth in a blue beret (J95; Fig.8), is a possibility, since the sitter in a scholar’s type of beret seems closer in age to the adolescent Adrien. Once thought to be Delacroix’s nephew, Charles de Verminac, represented in other portraits by Delacroix (e.g. J62), the sitter of

J60 was tentatively identified by Johnson as Newton Fielding; but to judge from a drawing of Newton in a Fielding family memoir (Fig.9), this is not the case. The provenances of the portraits are unhelpful: the Portrait of a youth (J60) was in Delacroix’s studio when he died and the unfinished Portrait of a child ([JL]75) belonged to Soulier. Johnson reports Robaut’s private note that Soulier’s son, who owned the Portrait of a child when Robaut copied it, ‘believed’ he remembered that his father ‘thought’ it represented one of ‘Fielding’s’ sons. Was this, as Johnson suggests, a deception on Soulier’s part in order to hide the truth from his son? But the uncertainty of the recollection, at two removes, could make it unreliable. More important, why would Soulier need to hide the ‘truth’, since it can be proved that Adrien, born in 1808 when Soulier did not even know Mme de Pron, was not his son? There would be no scandal in owning the portrait of the cherished grandson of his former patron and protector. Finally, if either portrait represented Adrien, one might ask why it did not belong to Mme de Pron, whose visits to Delacroix’s studio it would, at the very least, have justified. In the absence of new information, the question must remain open, including the possibility that the portrait of Adrien was never painted and that our two pictures are of different sitters altogether.

In any case, by October 1822, as we have seen from Delacroix’s diary, his relations with Mme de Pron were well advanced. Soulier’s return from Italy must have put a stop to them temporarily – the draft of a letter, which Delacroix wrote to Soulier the day after his return, is unhelpful: the draft of a letter, which Delacroix wrote two pictures are of different sitters altogether.

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that Mme de Pron’s letters were sent from the post office near her home in place Vendôme.

Delacroix lamely defending himself on the grounds of his own (unstated) ‘problems [...] and adversities of more than one kind’. Mme de Pron may have been going through a turbulent time of her own. In addition to her double flirtation with Delacroix and Soulier, there is circumstantial evidence that she may, at the same time, have been pregnant by her cousin Coëtlosquet: on 17th February 1823, a certain Charles-Louis, the natural son of a ‘demoiselle Louise Du Bois’, a ‘entente’ of thirty whose address is not stated, and an unnamed father, was born in Paris at a midwife’s in rue d’Argenteuil, a few streets away from place Vendôme.30 Coëtlosquet was later to leave most of his fortune to his own child by a different mother, or for Mme de Pron rather than to his own sisters.33

After attempts to revive it in fits and starts over the first half of 1824, Delacroix’s fling with Mme de Pron thus came to an end. He nonetheless remained on good terms with her and her family: she must have facilitated the loan to him in 1824 of Mameluke arms and armour from her cousin Coëtlosquet, whom Delacroix (as his misspelling of the name in his journal suggests) probably did not yet know. These served for the Massacres of Chios.34 Since leaving the service of La Maisiron in October 1823, Soulier had been taken on to manage the property at Beffes, and Delacroix thus continued to call on the family to obtain news of his friend.35 Writing to Soulier from London in 1825 he asks to be remembered to them, and adds this discreet compliment to his old flame: ‘You can tell Mme de Pron that French women are unequalled when it comes to charm’.36

The family seems to have invented ways to combine Soulier’s new job at Beffes with his talents as a painter. ‘Although I don’t really understand why you are sacrificing your future fortunes to your arabesque decorations for the General, you are right to stick to it if you are enjoying it’, Delacroix wrote to him on 21st April 1826:37 indeed, one of Soulier’s tasks, or pastimes, was to decorate some of the château’s walls. Two months later, as we have seen, Delacroix visited him there and began the Still life with lobsters. In 1939 André Joubin published three watercolours, which he identified as self-portraits by Delacroix coming from an album he called ‘album de Beffes’; he did not give the whereabouts of the album or provide any details about it.38 One of the watercolours carried the caption ‘Eugène Delacroix peignant les fresques de la chambre de Mme de Pron’, and represented a young man seated on the floor, holding a palette and painting the walls in the third Pompeian style: a female dancer occupies the centre of the fresco and the painter is working on the surrounding arabesques (Fig.10). Arabesques also cover a door in the corner, above which a painted overdoor is visible; through the window a rooftop and the greenery of a park can be seen. The painter scarcely resembles Delacroix, and Joubin gave no explanation for the picture.

In fact the album, recently rediscovered, belonged to Mme de Pron: the name ‘Louise de la Maisiron’ is embossed in gold on the front cover and ‘Beffes’ likewise on the back cover. It measures 24.8 by 30.55 cm. and contains forty-one folios, onto thirty-eight of which pictures of varying sizes, with captions, have been mounted. Where Joubin saw it is unknown; it was acquired in Stockholm by the present owners in the summer of 1991. The place-name led them to the château, where restoration works in 1970 had indeed uncovered, in the current dining room, frescos corresponding to the one in the album (Figs.11 and 12). While the caption may not be exactly contemporary with the execution of the watercolour itself, it cannot date from much later, since Mme de Pron died in 1842 and few surviving her would even have known about the episode in question.39 The writing matches that of the captions to the other pictures in the album, some of which are dated 1836, providing a fairly secure terminus post quem.

35 ‘Tu dois à Mme de Pron que les Français n’ont pas d’égales pour le géant’, ibid., I, p.159, 6th June 1823. The name was misread and added to by Joubin as ‘Roncherolle’, then ‘corrected’ to ‘Provençères’ (ibid., V, p.273); see Paris, Bibliothèque centrale des Musées nationaux, MS 0540 (03).
36 ‘Quoique je ne comprenne pas bien pourquoi tu cauchem arEs ton sort futur à ta décoration en arabesques du général, tu as raison de t’y prendre si cela t’amuse’, Joubin, 1, p.178.
38 Her brother Max, who died in 1848, her mother, who died in 1849, and Soulier himself, who last touched with her after 1831, could not have written the captions.
39 The consistency of the handwriting in the captions indicates that they were all written on or after the latest date of 1836. Thus, either ‘1808’ refers to the view rather
The album contains two series of images. The first fourteen are views of the château and surrounding countryside, and may be by Mme de Pron herself: nine are dated 1836, two are dated 1808 and the others are undated. One of them, a view of the countryside from the terrace, confirms that the landscape behind Delacroix’s *Still life with lobsters* is indeed that of Beffes. Following these are twenty-four undated watercolours, including the three published by Joubin as by Delacroix, and in a different style altogether from the topographical views. They depict comical scenes of daily life at Beffes and feature the administrator of the property, referred to as ‘Son Excellence’, a painter, guitar-player and lover of the fine arts: this is probably Soulier, who was an amateur painter and, as we know from two lost portraits by Delacroix, played the guitar. He is surely the author of these watercolours too; their style is very different from Delacroix’s muscular graphic style. One carries the title ‘*Le Courrier beffois. Journal hebdomadaire*’ in a letter from Coëtlosquet to Soulier which, despite its early date, may be relevant, Delacroix refers to Soulier as ‘son futur Excellence’ (Joubin, I, p.98), perhaps referring to his diplomatic career.

Letter of 22nd October 1825; included in sale cited at note 8 above. In a letter of 25th June 1826 – thus just after Delacroix’s visit – Coëtlosquet writes to Soulier: ‘J’ai reçu votre caricature’, ibid.


As the allusion to the ‘General’s arabesques’ in Delacroix’s letter suggests, the wall-paintings, like the pictures in the album, are almost certainly by Soulier, whose work Delacroix held in high regard all his life. These very accomplished paintings are based on the famous ‘Dancers of Herculaneum’, frescos of Bacchants from the so-called Villa of Cicero in Pompeii, which were exhibited in the Naples Museum and which had become, in tapestries, porcelain and architectural ornament, one of the most widespread decorative motifs of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These were reproduced in *Le Antichità di Ercolano*, which was a primary source for painters, Delacroix included, throughout the decades following its publication in nine volumes from 1753 to 1792; but Soulier may have been inspired by the originals, which he would have seen during his stay in Naples from July 1821 to May 1822.

suggests that they may have originally been sent to the General in Paris as a periodic ‘report’ of happenings in Beffes. As the allusion to the ‘General’s arabesques’ in Delacroix’s letter suggests, the wall-paintings, like the pictures in the album, are almost certainly by Soulier, whose work Delacroix held in high regard all his life. These very accomplished paintings are based on the famous ‘Dancers of Herculaneum’, frescos of Bacchants from the so-called Villa of Cicero in Pompeii, which were exhibited in the Naples Museum and which had become, in tapestries, porcelain and architectural ornament, one of the most widespread decorative motifs of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These were reproduced in *Le Antichità di Ercolano*, which was a primary source for painters, Delacroix included, throughout the decades following its publication in nine volumes from 1753 to 1792; but Soulier may have been inspired by the originals, which he would have seen during his stay in Naples from July 1821 to May 1822.
The north wall (Fig. 11) features a dancer dressed in yellowish-gold, wearing a crown of flowers and ivy and holding a pair of cymbals: the image is based on a dancing Bacchant (Fig. 13; Naples inv. 9297), though it is in reverse, is differently coloured and has the added detail of a white chemise rather than the exposed breast of the original. The dancer on the east wall (Fig. 12) is inspired by another Bacchant (Fig. 14; Naples inv. 9295), with differences of detail (the girdle, the gesture of the left arm, the jewellery, the hairstyle and the mirror and snake). The wall-painting represented in Mme de Pron’s album (Fig. 10) has not been uncovered, and, judging from the location of the window and door in the picture, would have been on the north wall of what is now an adjacent room, the original room having been divided late in the nineteenth century. From the sketchily drawn image visible in the album, it may have been based on another part of Naples inv. 9295 (Fig. 15), once again with differences of detail, for example, the position of the feet, the colour of the drapery – red in the album versus diaphanous blue in the original – and the lack of drapery around the head in the album. The architectural surrounds freely re-use common patterns derived from the ancient and Renaissance traditions of grotesque and arabesque decoration. In addition to paintings from Pompeii and Herculaneum, the most celebrated example was the Vatican Logge, themselves based on the Domus Aurea in Rome. Soulier would have had ample occasion to view these works along with others of a similar type, such as Pintoricchio’s arabesques in S. Maria del Popolo. In the Beffes paintings, the border consists of two painted ‘pilasters’ enclosed within painted candelabra-style columns made to look like carved wood. The latter have the ‘ear-of-corn’ pattern common to candelabra and to paintings of them, from Pompeii and Herculaneum, which, as an unpublished drawing shows, Delacroix himself considered using in the Palais Bourbon library (Fig. 16). At the bottom of each ‘pilaster’ is a large terracotta vase filled with flowers, out of which climbs the arabesque. While these too have ancient and Renaissance

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Le Daghe di Raffaello. Maestro e bottega di fronte all’antico, Rome 1977.


Deheul, op. cit. (note 50), no. 45, after a coin from Syracuse; no. 46, after a coin from Celeno; 114, after a coin from Naples; see also Gerini, op. cit. (note 50), p. 21.

This was defined as a billiard room in an inventory from 1845, when the château

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The existence of a wall-painting in this location was noted at the time of the 1970 works.


Drawing in Paris, Institut national d’histoire de l’art, fonds Cl. Roger-Marx, carton 120, autog. 1357/10, late 1839 or early 1840. See also Le Antichità di Ercolano, 8, pl. LXXII, and 4, pl. LXVII, for a similar painted motif.

For the Ara Massima, see K. Stemmer: Casa dell’Ara Massima, VI, Hausier in Pompeji, Munich 1992, west wall of Attium B. For the Vatican Logge, see N. Dacos: Le Daghe di Raffaello. Maestro e bottega di fronte all’antico, Rome 1977.
precedents, such as the House of the Are Massima at Pompeii, or pilasters IX, XII and XIII of the Vatican Logge, they are more indebted to flower-painting, being luxuriant bouquets.49 Dolphins, birds, a monkey, a snail, goldfish in a bowl, a soldier, a girl with a mirror and various insects grace the colourful curling tendrils, fronds and flowers. At regular intervals, small insets punctuate the arabesque with figural depictions such as a charioteer and quadriga, a camel with palm tree and pyramid, a human-headed bull, a mask, a warrior on horseback and a lion (Fig.17). A floral garland overhangs the top and, below the bottom frame, the traces of a painted masonry-pattern like the second Pompeian style are visible.

While style and documentary evidence indicate that Soulier may have lent his friend a hand, at least in design and conception, during his visit to Beffes in June 1826. Some of the small insets depict the same images as Delacroix’s lithographs of ancient coins, published in 1825: the lion looking back at the story from Beffes; the small inset depicts the same images as Delacroix’s lithographs and conception, during his visit to Beffes in June 1826. Some of that Delacroix may have lent his friend a hand, at least in design the probable author of these paintings, some elements suggest

Two series within the caricature frieze relate to Delacroix’s Still life. The first depicts a woodcock (bécasse) dressed as an abbot preaching to an enormous lobster (homard) seated like a pasha on a throne of cushions, smoking a narghile and surrounded by couriers in Oriental dress (Fig.25). The caption reads ‘L’abbé Casse, missionnaire, prêchant devant le calife Homard’, punning on both ‘l’abbé Casse’ and ‘Homard/Omar’. The former type of wordplay had been popularised by the marquis de Bivèvre in his Lettre à la comtesse Tation of 1770 and was common during the Restauration; it was used frequently in Delacroix’s circle, as an album in the Louvre attests.53 The caption ends, as a kind of sign-nature, with a prominent image of a lobster. The Oriental scene can be explained by one which precedes it, entitled ‘L’Ours et le pacha’ (Figs.26 and 27), referring to a popular vaudeville from 1820 about a pasha whose favourite bear has died, and whose council, Marécot, seeks to divert him with a new interest.54 The caption – ‘Un poisson de mer! Prenez mon ours!!’ – is from the play, as are the dancing and harp-playing bears. In the caricature from the frieze, the pasha figure, corresponding to the lobster in

Navarino affair has to be after 20th October 1827; other dates can be had from a mention of the Treaty of London (6th July 1827), relating to Turkey’s role in Greece, and from a possible allusion to the ordinances of 16th June 1828 removing a number of schools from Jesuit control. Soulier may have done some of these during a stay in Beffes from August to October 1828, but it is unknown when he was there in the following two years – perhaps in the same period in 1829 or 1830. His marriage in July 1831 soon brought the chapter of his visits to Beffes, and his relations with its inhabitants, to a close.55

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was sold by the dowager marquise de La Maisongriffort to the ancestors of the current owners; in Cœtlosquet’s posthumous inventory it is called ‘le salon’ and contained a billiard table (see document cited at note 9 above).10 It should be noted that a paint-box is listed in Cœtlosquet’s posthumous inventory from Beffes, ibid, no.25.

The extant letters, included in the sale cited at note 8 above, from Cœtlosquet to Soulier, run from 1824 to 1831.

The so-called ‘album de la Saint-Sylvestre’, recording the annual New Year’s Eve festivities of Delacroix and his friends Perrier and Guillumet, has numerous examples;
The Oriental theme also seems to have had personal associations. Coëtlosquet was a good friend of the French Consul-General at Alexandria, Bernardino Drovetti, who, in December 1827, sent him and Mme de Pron some coffee and a pipe — perhaps the narghile represented in the caricature.19 Moreover, in a letter of 9th December 1828, Coëtlosquet writes to Drovetti to ask whether the consul could send some Egyptian fabric and furnishings for an ‘Egyptian room’, which he and Mme de Pron wished to establish in their country house for her brother Max, who had a taste for all things Oriental, especially Egyptian.20 This taste may account for the Oriental themes of ‘L’Ours et le pacha’ and the sequence on the ‘calife Homard’ in the caricatures, although the pasha resembles Coëtlosquet and not Max de La Maisonnfort. In addition, Turkish-inspired puns animate a portion of the frieze’s carnival sequence, in which a ‘Turkish’ figure says to a ‘Greek’: ‘Je te ferai une avaniti! Je t’enverrai à la Porte’; with the caption indicating ‘Traité du 6 juillet’. This refers to the Treaty of London of 6th July 1827 between France, England and Russia relating to Turkey’s role in Greece. ‘Aranie’, meaning a slap in the face, originally referred to a tax inflicted on Christians by the Turks; and ‘Je t’enverrai à la Porte’ means both ‘I’ll throw you out’ and ‘I’ll send you to the [Sublime] Porte’.

The second of the caricatures pertinent to this story is a fragment, the rest of which has been lost and which is obviously out

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19 Joubin, I, pp.180 and 218. Les Ecrevisses à Longchamps; Delteil, op. cit. (note 50), no.57, was published in Le Mois (4th April 1822), accompanied by a text (not by Delacroix) satirising ‘des gens qui ne s’élèvent jamais et sont habituellement à racleurs’, notably censorship and the conservative daily La Quotidienne. Articles in other issues (3rd and 5th March 1822) created a new honoific Order in the Academy of Ignoramus and named its degrees according to different types of shellfish — crayfish, crab, lobster, shrimp. On the popularity of the crayfish, see J. Grand-Carteret: Les Mammes et la caricature en France, Paris 1888, p.185, and figs 34 and 206.

20 Coëtlosquet was born in Morlaix and the family came originally from the diocese of Saint-Pol-de-Léon; see Kerlever, op. cit. (note 16), pp.5 and 13. The pipe was sent through the intermediary of General Joseph Rossetti (1776–1840), a friend of Coëtlosquet’s from their days in the Russian campaign. In a letter to Drovetti of 13th December 1827, Rossetti sends greetings from Coëtlosquet, Max de La Maisonnfort and Mme de Pron, and continues: ‘Je te renvoie de bon cœur du café et de la pipe que tu m’envoies, j’en disposerais d’une partion selon tes désirs et d’une autre selon les miens, mais en ton nom; j’en ai déjà prévenu le [General] Coëtlosquet et Madame de P...’, B. Drovetti: Epistolario, ed. S. Curto and L. Donatelli, Milan 1985, p.127. Coëtlosquet is misidentified in the edition, his name misspelled (‘Collosquet’, ‘Coestorquet’), but this was corrected in a review of Epistolario by R.J. Radley: Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 77 (1991), p.241.

21 ‘Notre ami commun le bon général Rossetti m’a laissé espérer que vous rouveriez bien nous aider à satisfaire une idée que Madame de Pron et moi avions eue, de faire à la campagne un Cabinet égyptien pour son frère qui a le goût le plus prononcé pour tout ce qui est oriental, et surtout de votre beau pays: [...]. Nous désirons que les objets ayent la mémoire (quelques lames qu’elles puissent être de recto) d’être celles plus en usage dans le pays, ainsi que les deux ou quatre petits meubles bien nationaux, faits-ils encore inutiles à nos usages. Ce que nous souhaitions avant tout c’est le cachet du pays!’; see Drovetti, op. cit. (note 39), p.578. Max had served in the army of the Danube fighting the Turks under Prince Bagration in 1809, marquis de La Maisonnfort, op. cit. (note 18), p.xvii.

61 Johnson suggests that, because the woman in Jofy wears seventeenth-century dress,
of place in the sequence as now constituted (Fig. 10). On the right, now cut off, are the traces of a painter holding a palette and tumbling head-first from a ladder. A black cap of the type 'Soulier' wears in the pictures from Mme de Pron's album has fallen from the painter's head and lies on the floor. Behind him, stacked against the wall, are two paintings: in the foreground, a caricatural version of the Still life with lobsters, complete with lizard; in the background, a portrait of a woman wearing a large hat. While the still life is clearly recognisable as Delacroix's, the portrait raises an intriguing question, for Delacroix indeed painted a portrait of a Young woman in a large hat which has been missing from the Louvre since at least the Second World War (Fig. 29), and whose sitter has never been properly identified (Fig. 29). Was she Mme de Pron? For the moment, this question must remain unanswered but, if we allow for the caricatural nature of the frieze, the likeness in the face and the hat is not entirely implausible (see Fig. 23).31

General Coëtlosquet died in Paris on 23rd January 1836. The inventory of his Paris residence lists a 'wool cloak with a tartan lining', which may account for the Scottish plaid which Delacroix included in the still life.32 The inventory of his rooms in the château at Beffes lists 'two large oil-paintings representing landscapes', one of which may be the Still life with lobsters; and two trophys of arms, one French and the other foreign, the latter of which may be the ones borrowed by Delacroix through the intermediary of Mme de Pron in 1824.33 Both the paintings and the trophies, inherited by Mme de Pron, turn up in her own posthumous inventory in 1842.34 Her possessions passed with rights of usufruct, the paintings included, to her mother.35 It is likely that, when the château was sold in 1845 and the dowager marquise de La Maisonfort moved to smaller accommodation in Nevers, the Still life with lobsters was retrieved by her son, Mme de Pron's brother Max, now marquis de La Maisonfort, for after his death on 25th March 1848 it appears in the inventory of his residence.36 Max bequeathed his possessions to his friend Josephine Delacquis who, having received her inheritance by early 1850, must have sold the Still life with lobsters almost immediately. This is the period when Delacroix would have seen it, reporting to Soulier on 23rd March 1850 that he had been shown it a month or two before, the painting being for sale because 'the poor marquis [had] died in his turn'.37 It was bought by the painter Philippe Rousseau, who sold it in 1853 to Adolphe Moreau.38 It is well known that Delacroix's 'betrayal' of Soulier was repaid in kind by Soulier's apparent adventure with Delacroix's lover Mme Dalton in 1829–30. Away in Normandy visiting relatives, Delacroix writes how pleased he is to learn that Soulier has gone to see Mme Dalton, and asks him to 'give her a kiss from me [...] and encourage her in her painting' – an order of which Soulier, to use Alfred Dupont's words, acquitted himself only too well.39 All these farces came to an end with the Revolution of 1830: the July Monarchy was a more staid time for all and a distinctly more unhappy time for some. With the arrival of the new regime, Coëtlosquet, no longer in royal favour, retired to Beffes, took up agriculture and died in 1836. Mme de Pron also retired to Beffes, where she died on 4th September 1842, exhorting her grandson 'never to forget his poor grandmother who was so unhappy', and pardoning her son for all the sorrows he had caused her.40 Adrien had entered the military in 1827 as a member of the King's Bodyguards, had risen to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the first regiment of light infantry and in 1846 was imprisoned for financial forgery;41 he had married in 1831 and
had a son who was raised by Mme de Pron and who died three days after she did.72 As we have seen, Max died in 1848 and the dowager marquise de La Maisondfort, having outlived her husband, daughter, son, nephew and great-grandson, died on 17th May 1849.

For his part, Soulier married in 1831 the daughter of a minor aristocrat and lived a settled life in the provinces, spending his career in the canals administration. He died on 23rd December 1866, three years after his friend Delacroix, who during his lifetime had never ceased, in his letters, to recall the ‘good old days’ of their carefree youth, their diversions, their outpourings of feeling and — a recurrent term — the ‘happy insouciance’ of that time.73 The Still life with lobsters, the pages about ‘J.’ from his journal and the album, wall-paintings and caricatures from Belfes preserve the traces of some of that frivolity, and provide new insight into Delacroix’s life and work during the 1820s.

Appendix


a. Letter from Delacroix to Mme de Pron [Wednesday 11th November 1823]

Dis-moi, aime chère, que tu ne regrettas pas les instants de bonheur que tu donnes à ton ami, dis-moi que tu ne m’en veux pas. Je rentre le soir tout pleins de bonheur, et ta jolie petite mine boudeuse, je n’en veux pas croire un mot pour passer une bonne nuit complete. Auras-tu eu le courage d’en garder rancune en retenant dans ta petite chambre adrette, et où reposent toutes tes tigresses dans ce lit que mon amant jaloux ne peut partager? Aime-moi comme je t’aime, comme l’amour que ton amour a. En étater une parcellée de ses divines jouissances, c’est le tromper, c’est aller contre son vent. Tu le sais, c’est un tyran: il veut tout, et quand il a tout, il voulait l’impossible. Je voudrais circular avec ton sang dans les veines et aller dans ton cœur, y voir si je l’occupe tout entier. Dis, puis-je-l’occuper et te mérite[e]s-[je]-je?

Encore une fois, ne refuse rien au tendre amour. Pourquoi est-ce que je dois encore mon mouchoir qui s’a touchée tout à l’heure, qui s’a touchée partout! Ouvrez-tu dire que c’est folie: de toi que ne dois-je pas aimer? Quel moment que celui où il faut quitter ce qu’on aime! Quelle solitude jusqu’à ce qu’on retrouve et qu’on presse sa main! Demain je te verras. Que tes yeux me disent que tu m’aimes. N’en-cest pas! Demain soir qu’écrits pour que je lise de toi vendredi, dans cette maudite journée qui aurait dû être divine. Que je reçoive quelque chose et bien long encore de toi, amour, pendant ce jour-là qui me paraîtra si longue. Adeieu, aime-moi comme je t’aime.

Me coucher! C’est me séparer de toi une seconde fois, car ton souvenirs est encore avec moi, et qui s’attache ce que m’apporthera le vague des songes. Sera-ce ta douze image? Ou ma triste imagination enfantera-t-elle encore des monstres horribles? Il est tard, je ne puis encore renouveler au souvenirs de ma soire. Toi, tu dors sans douce. Si je pouvais t’occuper en songe. Adeieu, il le faut à la fin. Amour, aime-moi. [mercredi 11 nov[embre].

b. Summary of undated letter


Adieu, quand vous serez dans votre abbaye,77 pensez un peu à une vieille amie qui a pour vous une sincère amitié.


[Saturday 11th November 1823]

Soyez sans inquiétude sur ma santé! J’ai été dimanche bien malade, bien sérieuse- ment malade, hier encore. Ce matin je suis mieux mais je garde le lit et ne pourrai pas encore sortir de quelques jours. Ne m’en voulez pas pour dimanche. Hélas, j’étais bien triste, bien désolée, ayant une fièvre violente et le délire. Tous ma famille est arrivé hier soir.

Adieu

mardi 4 hr (on the outside fold, interrupted by the seal: ‘J’écris aussi que je le plaignai!’)


vendredi 11 hr [Friday 21st November 1823]

J’ai été bien malade hier mon cher Eugène. Je n’ai pas pu aller au spectacle. Il a fallu me coucher. Si demain, samedi, vous pouvez venir me voir, venez de midi à une heure. Je serai charmée de vous voir et le bien que j’éprouverai me guérira, j’espère.

Il faudra [sic] une charte, il en faut une. 75 Vous voyez que je vous sers d’abord.76 — Mon médecin sort d’ici. Il m’ordonne le repos et de garder le lit une partie de la journée. Je vais lui obéir.

Adieu, quand vous serez dans votre abbaye,77 pensez un peu à une vieille amie qui a pour vous une sincère amitié.

e. Monsieur Eugène de la croix, rue des grès no.16, près, la Place St Michel, Paris Jeudi soir [postmark, Thursday 12th November 1823]

Vous ignorez à quel point je suis accablé de chagrin. Mon fils est malade au lit pour un mois entier sans bouger et cela par une chatte [sic]. Il est menacé de l’accident le plus grave. — Paignez-moi, je le souigne, je le console, et je gémis toujours seule — que de larmes une pauvre mère verse — J’ai été bien malade, bien gravement malade, pas une visite de vous, pas un seul mot. —

Ah, que je suis triste.

Adieu. Si vous vous intéressez aux malheureux j’ai droit à votre souvenir. — Adieu, adieu.

[f. Delacroix’s response in the Journal, see Wednesday 17th December 1823]

f. Monsieur Eugène de Lacroix, rue de Grenelle St Germain, no.118 — f. St Germain, Paris

Sunday 4th July 1824, postmark 5th July]

J’ai été à votre atelier [sic]. Monsieur, sans pouvoir avoir le plaisir de vous voir. Le Gé réclame ses armures. Veuillez les renvoyer, vous serez bien aimable. Vous m’avez promis une visite, venez donc demain lundi de midi à une heure.

Dimanche 10 hr

—

72 Adrien had married Armelée Gauitz on 23rd June 1817 (we thank Eric Bertin for this date). Their son, also named Adrien, was born in October 1833 (he was 8 years and 11 months old when he died on 7th September 1842); Archives départementales du Cher, archives notariales, notaire Naudin. Widowed, Adrien pêche remarried in 1851. Horace Raisson, the friend of Soulier and Delacroix, was a witness at the ceremony. Paris, marriage register, Église Saint-Roch, Archives de Paris, D 16020, 14th October 1851.

73 See Joubin, III, p.11 (23rd March 1850); p.177 (10th November 1853); p.348 (10th December 1850); and IV, p.4 (17th January 1858).

74 Delacroix had a flat and a studio at this address.

75 This enigmatic comment refers to a statement which Delacroix makes in his letter to her of 10th November 1823 (see under this date in Hannoosh, I): ‘J’ai jura, avant si je puis, mais bien sûr, bien sûr après vous auriez encore un dimanche, mais seulement peu de temps. Puis après, tout ne sera pas fini, ô non. Je veux de l’amitié bien douce, bien bonne, bien franche, je ne veux pas vous tourmenter. Je veux que vous soyez heureux et que mon âme sache entendre la vôtre, que vos chagrins soient moins pesants partagés par moi. — Vos plaisirs, mon ami, vous m’en parleriez et j’y prendrais parti. Adeieu, j’écris à la hâte. Adeieu."

76 The studio at 16 rue des Grès was a former abbey.