From Homer to the Harem. The art of Jean Lecomte du Nouy (1842-1923)
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Jean Lecomte du Nouy descended from a noble Piedmontese family that had settled in the French region of Languedoc late in the fourteenth century. His ancestors were primarily involved in the military or the legal profession, but his great-grand-uncle, Alexandre Hyacinthe Dunouy (1757-1841), was a painter who was active in Lyon, Naples, and Paris during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and his father was a musician. Jean Antoine Jules Lecomte—the son of Jules Louis Michel Lecomte (1814-?) and his wife, Félicité Alexandrine Dunouy (1817-?)—was born on June 10, 1842, in Paris at place Dauphine nos. two and four, in what was then the eleventh arrondissement. Eventually both of his parents’ family names were combined, and Jean signed his first salon painting (1863), Francesca da Rimini and Paolo (fig. 13), as well as most subsequent works, with the surname Lecomte du Nouy. This name change, which

1 A landscape painter, he exhibited at the Salon from 1798 through 1833 and worked for several years at the Neapolitan court of Joachim (1767-1815) and Caroline Murat (1792-1839). He decorated various salons in the palais des Tuileries (destroyed in 1871) and the château de Saint-Cloud and produced etchings after his own painted oeuvre. Montgailhard 1906, p. 2, gives this artist’s name as Hyacinthe-André du Noüy. However, the lexicons by Bellier/Auvray 1882, I: p. 482-3; and Bénézit, rev. ed. 1994, IV: p. 866, both give the first name as ‘Alexandre-Hyacinthe.’ Bellier/Auvray lists a death date of 1843, and Bénézit one of 1841. Montgailhard 1906, p. 2 gives some further anecdotal information.

Archives du Louvre (P7 1892 30 Janvier), correspondence between Jean Lecomte du Nouy and the Direction des Musées Nationaux. On December 18, 1891, Lecomte du Nouy writes from Paris (20 Blvd Flandrin) that he would like to offer a painting of his “arrière grand oncle Alexandre Hyacinthe Dunouy,” who was the teacher of Achille Michallon (1796-1822), as the Louvre possessed none of his works. The Museum’s response, dated January 30, 1892, was that the painting could only be accepted for the galleries in Compiègne or Fontainebleau, due to lack of space in the French Galleries of the Louvre, for which Lecomte du Nouy had intended it. The landscape with small figures (63 x 94 cm) was accepted on February 4, 1892.

The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (BN: DC 309, II, p. 31) keeps a print depicting Alexandre Du Nouy, not signed or dated, in the collection of prints and photos of works by Jean Lecomte du Nouy.

2 The exact spelling of the artist’s name – and more particularly, the placing of the diacritical mark on the u or the y – is a matter of confusion and inconsistency, as is the alternative use of “Dunouy” or “du Nouy.” The artist’s birth certificate gives it as “Jean Antoine Jules Lecomte” and names his mother as “Dunouy,” written in one word, and that is the name he eventually added to his own family name. However, that name has since often been split into “du Nouy,” and Guy de Montgailhard opted in his 1906 biography of the artist for “Lecomte du Noüy,” a spelling that has been followed in most of the subsequent literature. Yet, the painter initially signed most of his paintings with “Lecomte du Nouy,” placing the diacritical mark on
was made official in 1876, probably served to distinguish him from the painter Émile Lecomte (dates unknown) and perhaps also to create an aura of nobility. In addition to a sister, Émilie Lecomte (1848-?), Jean had a younger brother, Émile André Lecomte (1844-1914) (who also changed his name to Lecomte du Nouy), an architect who studied with Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-79) and ultimately moved in 1875 to Romania, where he restored and designed many churches and other buildings.

Jean Lecomte du Nouy outlived his first wife, Valentine Peigné-Crémieux (1855-76), as well as his second, Caroline Evrard (1851-92), with whom he had his only child, Jacques Théodore Jules Lecomte du Nouy (1885-1961), an architect and archeologist.

Lecomte du Nouy’s third and final marriage was to Térésa Marie Fisanne (sometimes written Fizanne, 1862-?), who survived him.

In his 1906 book *Lecomte du Nouy* the artist’s biographer, Guy de Montgailhard, recounted a wealth of anecdotes about Lecomte du Nouy’s youth, which seem to have been drawn from a long friendship between the author and his subject. According to

the y. But even he himself was not consistent in this practice and also used “Lecomte du Nouy”, or sometimes signed simply “du Nouy” or “du Nouy.” As “Lecomte du Nouy” best indicates the change in pronunciation of the vowel in the last name, and his most important works bear that variant of the spelling, I have opted for that spelling in this book.

3 Paris, Archives Nationales, Lecomte Dunouy, Jean Antoine Jules, 20877 – 10 Juin 1842. Here the artist is officially authorized to add Dunouy to his father’s name and call himself henceforth “Lecomte Dunouy.”

4 A photograph of a portrait of the artist’s sister by Lecomte du Nouy is kept in BN: DC 309, II, p. 45.

5 Popescu 1999, p. 287-308.

6 Jacques Théodore Jules Lecomte-Dunouy, Attaché à l’Institut Français d’Archéologie du Caire, demeurant 59 rue des Belles Feuilles. See also Aurillac: 82.13.215, appendix I.

7 Paris, Archives du Louvre, various documents regarding the artist and his third wife: Document L-5 1942-20 Juin: Reply from the Directeur des Musées Nationaux et de l’École du Louvre to Madame Lecomte du Nouy / 6, rue des Réservois / Versailles. Before the war, she had apparently requested that a painting by her husband be acquired for the Musée du Luxembourg. This request was denied, and the book by Guy de Montgailhard that she had presented for this purpose was being returned to her.

Document Lecomte du Nouy J.A.J. M-7 1926-29 Juillet: Several documents regarding the coffret (box) donated by the Queen of Romania to Lecomte du Nouy (repr. in Montgailhard 1906, p. 95). In his testament, he willed it to the “Musées des Souverains de la Galerie du Louvre.” His widow contested this donation as the gallery no longer existed and as the Louvre did not want to accept it.

Document 1926-18 Mars: “Le Maire de Versailles a l’honneur de faire connaître, en réponse à la demande ci-dessus, qu’il résulte des renseignements … que Mme Vve LECOMTE DUNOUY, âgée de 64 ans, habite Versailles depuis plusieurs années et actuellement 10 rue des Résevoirs, ou elle paie un loyer annuel de 9.000 frs. Elle est veuve d’un artiste peintre décorateur et elle n’a pas d’enfants. La susnommée a fait un héritage de 140.000 frs. à la mort de son mari. Ce dernier, par testament en date du 31 Mars 1917, donnait lors de son décès, tous pouvoirs à sa femme de choisir et de garder par devers elle tous les objets mobiliers qui lui plairaient.” M. Marquet de Vasslot, had visited and did not accept the objects for the Louvre.
Montgailhard, for example, the view of a sunset behind a church that Lecomte du Nouÿ saw as a four-year-old boy made such a lasting impression on him that as an adult, he set many of his paintings at that time of day. While that anecdote may be apocryphal, sunsets or star-studded skies do indeed form the backdrop for many of the artist’s chimerical inventions.⁸

Lecomte du Nouÿ started drawing early, inspired by childhood trips to a zoological garden, and at age six, he made portraits of his uncle and father. His parents recognized their son’s artistic talent and encouraged an education devoted to the arts, sending him for drawing lessons in the evenings with Mme Emerie Bouveret, a family friend. Like other aspiring artists of his era, the boy copied such images as a lithograph by Émile Lassalle (1813-71) of the turbaned head of a pasha, as well as works by Horace Vernet (1789-1863). He continued to draw throughout his youth, all the while aspiring to become a painter.

Though Lecomte du Nouÿ was according to Montgailhard’s reports supposedly a delicate child, he lived to be eighty-one years old. His appearance can be deduced from several of his self-portraits (fig. 1; cat. 211, and fig. 2; cat. 222) and a photograph taken by Nadar (fig. 3) (his Italian roots were evident to such extent that he was once mistaken for a native while traveling in the Piedmont), yet his artistic personality is perhaps best captured in a self-portrait in which he is seen drawing in an Oriental setting (fig. 4; cat. 165), and in three photographs taken in his studio (figs. 5-7).⁹

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⁸ The Musée d’Art et d’Archéologie in Aurillac keeps a charming oil sketch depicting a cloudy sky against an orange sunset (inv. 82.13.297, see appendix I). The artist employed this atmospheric condition in several depictions that included imaginary apparitions of (female) figures in the sky, for example, in a small sketch of Venice (fig. 46).

⁹ A photograph of an 1886 plaster or terracotta bust of the artist by Gustave Deloye (born 1838) is reproduced in BN: DC 309, 1, p. 3. See also Drouot 2003, lot 118, see appendix III, representing an 1869 bronze medal by Louis Maximilien Bourgeois of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s head in profile. A drawn portrait of Lecomte du Nouÿ (1905) by Fernand Cormon is reproduced in Montgailhard 1906, p. 101.
II. THE FORMATIVE YEARS: 1861-72

Charles Gleyre’s Atelier: 1861-63

In 1861, at the age of nineteen, Lecomte du Nouy started his professional artistic education by entering the private studio of the Swiss painter Charles Gleyre (1806-74) in Paris. The atelier had been run by Paul Delaroche (1797-1856), but when Delaroche stopped teaching in 1843, he encouraged Gleyre to take over. Delaroche had himself inherited the atelier from the Neoclassicists Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) and Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835). An important historical document in this respect is a pair of paintings of portraits of the students in the Delaroche and Gleyre ateliers, painted over many years and by different hands. Based on comparisons of the paintings with other portraits of the artist, I would suggest that Lecomte du Nouy is second from the left in the third row of the second painting (fig. 8). Gleyre’s work represented the juste milieu: he did not adhere to the prevalent Neoclassical school or the Romantic school, but was of a more independent persuasion. Gleyre’s and other private ateliers prepared students for passing the examination (concours des places) that enabled them to enter the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where Lecomte du Nouy was admitted to classes on October 9, 1861. Admission to that hallowed institution allowed the young man to vie for the prix de Rome, the highly coveted honor that rewarded each laureate with up to five years of board and lodging at the Académie de France in Rome, which was housed after 1803 in the Villa Medici.

It is not clear why Lecomte du Nouy entered Gleyre’s studio rather than that of, say, Thomas Couture (1815-79) or Léon Cogniet (1794-1880), but several factors may

10 The following assessment of Gleyre’s teaching practice is based on Hauptman 1985, p. 79-119. Of further interest in this respect is Boime 1971, p. 58-65.
11 For an extensive article on these two paintings, with an attempt to identify all the individuals, see Hauptman 1985, p. 79-119. Hauptman does not identify the head I here suggest might represent Lecomte du Nouy. A comparison with Lecomte du Nouy’s portraits (figs. 1-3) reveals the artist’s distinctive mustache as being a main characteristic for comparison. For another publication on these student portraits, see Bailey 1997, cat. 1, and a good detail reproduction on p. 90.
12 In the artist’s dictionary, Bellier/Auvray 1882, 1, p. 959, it is mentioned that Lecomte du Nouy entered the École des Beaux-Arts on October 9, 1861. This date is confirmed by file 4084 “du Registre Matricule. École Nationale et Spéciale des Beaux-Arts”, on microfilm AJ52 264, held at the Archives Nationales, Paris. This document notes all the contests at the École that students enlisted for, and which prizes they were awarded.
have played a role. When Delaroche asked Gleyre to succeed him in 1843, Gleyre’s fame was based solely upon the painting *The Evening* (1843, also known as *The Lost Illusions*; fig. 9), which he had submitted to that year’s salon. The painting was much admired: it won a second-class medal and was soon purchased by the French state. It was hung in the national museum of contemporary art, the Palais du Luxembourg, an important official recognition for any living artist, and one which suggested that the artist was just one step away from having his work shown at the Louvre itself. Yet Gleyre did not exhibit at the salon after 1849, when he was at the height of his fame. He also remained detached from the state-funded Académie des Beaux-Arts and never taught at the closely related École des Beaux-Arts, although he did at times serve as a member of its salon jury. It has been argued that the particular qualities of *The Evening* as well as Gleyre’s independence must have persuaded Delaroche to appoint him as his successor.¹³

By 1861, when Lecomte du Nouý enrolled, Gleyre must have had a strong reputation as a private teacher, for his atelier was very popular. On principle, his students paid fees only for the studio rent and the cost of hiring live models. Gleyre gave each student individual attention and championed personal expression over the slavish following of a recognized artist or style. This approach was embraced by such young painters as Frédéric Bazille (1841-70), Auguste Renoir (1841-1919), and Alfred Sisley (1839-99), all of whom entered Gleyre’s studio around 1862 and subsequently became leaders in the Impressionist movement.¹⁴ It may have been a combination of all of these elements that encouraged Lecomte du Nouý to study with Gleyre. Yet, apart from the reasonable fees and the master’s pedagogical qualities, another reason Lecomte du Nouý found Gleyre appealing may have been that he had visited many countries in the Near East. Beginning in 1834, Gleyre had accompanied the American John Lowell, Jr. (1799-1836) for almost two years through Greece, Turkey, Rhodes, Egypt, and Sudan, all the while recording sites and people in a multitude of drawings and watercolors.¹⁵ Considering Lecomte du Nouý’s future interest in Oriental subjects, it is plausible that as

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¹⁴ Hauptmann 1985, provides fairly precise dates for when these artists entered Gleyre’s studio. Renoir enrolled in the fall of 1861, Bazille in September 1862, and Sisley in October of that year. Monet is generally also listed as being a student of Gleyre beginning March 1863. However, Hauptmann (p. 108) argues that Monet’s exposure to Gleyre’s instruction may not have lasted more than two or three weeks.
a student he was already more attracted to the dreamlike, exotic character of Gleyre’s *The Evening* (which Montgailhard described as “poetically archaeological”\(^\text{16}\)) than he was to the master’s advocacy of artistic independence, something that must have encouraged the future Impressionists.

In discussing Lecomte du Nouÿ’s early atelier training, Montgailhard singles out, among the artist’s fellow students, the now-forgotten François-Émile Ehrmann (1833-1910), Firmin Girard (1838-1921), and Albert Lambron des Pitières (1836-?) rather than the now rather more famous future Impressionists who studied with Gleyre. According to Montgailhard, Lecomte du Nouÿ was hard-working but insecure, and with good reason: his works seem to have been the laughing stock of his fellow students; he hesitated to submit his drawings of genre subjects (rather than the more highly esteemed classical studies) to Gleyre. He was eventually encouraged, however, when an artist’s supplier bought his study of a black woman’s head wrapped in a yellow scarf.\(^\text{17}\) This particular work has not been identified, but it is a reminder that models of various races were employed to pose for the students. Gleyre had already visited foreign lands, so he may have appreciated the importance of learning to render a range of different skin tones.

Montgailhard expressed surprise that the atelier of Gleyre—“this careful, timid, even classical painter”—was to become a breeding ground for the most “romantic” (that is, non-classical) ideas, and that these rambunctious, though hardworking, students nurtured sentiments of artistic revolt. Gustave Courbet (1819-77) had recently opened his own studio in 1861 and offered his students a cow as a life model, declaring: “That’s nature!” For these “revolutionary” Gleyre students, as Montgailhard put it, “Delacroix was God, Hugo the verb, and their sketches resounded with spurs, armors, and swords.”\(^\text{18}\) Gustave Doré’s (1832-82) *Dante and Virgil in the Ninth Circle of Hell* (1861; fig. 10) was hailed for its daring composition, which apparently influenced all of Gleyre’s students. Though unpracticed, Lecomte du Nouÿ attempted a picture with which to measure himself against Ary Scheffer’s (1795-1858) famous *Francesca da Rimini and Paolo in Hell* (1835; fig. 11). Yet even after extensive research and study of Delacroix’s

\(^{16}\) Montgailhard 1906, chapter II.

\(^{17}\) See cats. 346, 347.

\(^{18}\) Montgailhard 1906, p. 9: “Pour ces révolutionnaires, Delacroix était le dieu, Hugo le verbe, et leurs esquisses résonnèrent d’éperons, de cuirasses et d’épées.”
Dante and Virgil (1822; fig. 12), Lecomte du Nouy apparently only represented the gloomy and horrific aspects of the subject, and he never exhibited the painting. After he left Gleyre’s studio, however, Lecomte du Nouy returned to the subject of the doomed couple in what was to be his first salon painting. In the catalogue for the 1863 Salon, this picture was entitled Francesca di [sic] Rimini et Paolo (1863), and the artist was listed as “élève de MM. Signol et Gleyre” (pupil of Messrs. Signol and Gleyre; fig. 13; cat. 2).

According to Montgailhard, Lecomte du Nouy’s second attempt at depicting this tragic story was painted while he studied with Émile Signol (1804-92). There are several explanations for why he may have left Gleyre’s atelier to study with Signol. Art historian William Hauptman explains that Gleyre’s studio was beset with problems of various kinds. By early 1862, the master’s eyesight had deteriorated tremendously due to an eye inflammation he contracted while traveling in Egypt. And although Gleyre’s vision improved by the end of the year, the studio was also experiencing financial problems Lecomte du Nouy may have left, therefore, because of Gleyre’s medical troubles, the precarious atelier situation, a desire to work with Signol, or a combination of all of these factors.

Émile Signol’s Atelier: 1863-1864

Montgailhard hardly addresses Lecomte du Nouy’s brief period of study with Signol except in the context of Lecomte du Nouy’s second version of Paolo and Francesca, which apparently benefited much from Signol’s advice. Signol won the prix de Rome in 1830 and resided at the Villa Medici from 1831 to 1835, when Gleyre was also in Rome. Signol and Gleyre undoubtedly met there, and Gleyre himself may have encouraged Lecomte du Nouy to study with Signol. Upon his return from Italy, Signol received many commissions for religious pictures in Paris churches and for history paintings for the museum at Versailles. In 1860, Signol was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, filling the seat left vacant by Louis Hersent (1777-1860). But even though

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19 Montgailhard 1906, p. 9.
20 Hauptman 1985, p. 88.
21 Montgailhard 1906, p. 10-11.
22 On Signol, see Merson 1899; and, Foucart 1987, p. 262-263, figs. 226-27, 230-31.
Lecomte du Nouy was already working under his new teacher, I believe that he referred to a painting by Gleyre when he composed his Paolo and Francesca of 1863. Gleyre’s *The Dance of the Bacchantes* (1849; fig. 14) had been exhibited briefly at the Salon of 1849. The work won great acclaim but it had already been sold to Francisco de Asis de Borbón, the titular king of Spain, which meant that it was only shown for about one month before it disappeared from public view. Lecomte du Nouy was only seven years old in 1849, and even if he had been taken on a visit to that salon, he probably would not have remembered it vividly enough to faithfully copy parts of it. Nonetheless, there seems little doubt that the figure for his Francesca is derived from the central nude dancer in Gleyre’s painting. Lecomte du Nouy must have known the composition through the two engravings made after it, or through studies and sketches for the painting that he could have seen while working with Gleyre.

The subject of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo had long been popular among artists inspired by Dante Alighieri’s epic poem *La Divina Commedia* (The Divine Comedy, ca. 1300-20), in which Francesca was forced to marry the loathsome Giancotto, though she loved his brother Paolo. Traditionally, artists depicted the couple in an amorous embrace, just before the jealous Giancotto brutally stabbed them. Ary Scheffer’s innovative decision to represent the lovers in the second circle of Hell—where the souls of those whose passion prevailed over reason whirl through a tempestuous darkness—made his picture an icon of Romanticism. In 1863, twenty-eight years and many painted copies and engraved reproductions later, Scheffer’s composition endured. After his 1861 *Dante and Virgil*, Doré exhibited a Paolo and Francesca at the Salon of 1863 (fig. 15). The critic C. de Sault regarded this as the best of Doré’s three submissions: the figures appeared to float convincingly in the air, and Francesca had a charming face, yet he regretted that her proportions were not more delicate and feminine, and that the work did not rival Scheffer’s achievement.

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24 For a well-illustrated survey of this subject in art, see Popp 1994. The museum in Aurillac also keeps an undated oil-sketch by Lecomte du Nouy depicting Dante and Virgil, Aurillac: 82.13.295, see appendix I.  
25 Sold at Christie’s New York, 22 May 1996 (lot 82), oil on canvas, 280.6 x 193.6 cm, reproduced.  
26 de Sault 1864, p. 57, “La Françoise de Rimini est de beaucoup le meilleur des trois tableaux de M. Doré; le groupe vole bien, et la tête de Francesca est d’un beau sentiment; mais on aimerait à lui voir des proportions plus délicates et plus féminines; et l’on regrette que M. Doré se soit exposé à ne pas égaler Scheffer.”
Lecomte du Nouy’s salon debut that year—his interpretation of the Paolo and Francesca theme—was not reviewed at all (the twenty-one-year-old artist must have been virtually unknown to the critics), but it was spoofed in a caricature by Cham (fig. 16). The obvious reference to Gleyre aside, Lecomte du Nouy understandably tried to formulate his own interpretation of Scheffer’s composition, placing the figures vertically in the picture plane (as did Doré). Whereas the couple designed by Scheffer floats in a gracious diagonal, Lecomte du Nouy’s group struggles somewhat to defy gravity. Keeping in mind the criteria with which de Sault judged Doré’s picture, it is unlikely that critics would have given Lecomte du Nouy’s work much credit. The particular pose of the female nude may have been suited to a dancing bacchante, as in Gleyre’s picture, but the form did not adapt so well to that of an ethereal spirit.²⁷ Although Lecomte du Nouy suggested an upward movement with the ascending horizon line, the severe backward bending of Francesca’s figure, with her long hair falling, slightly negates this sense of movement.²⁸ It was this very element on which the caricaturist Cham based the pun of his drawing and caption: “Francesca da Rimini no longer needs to fear for breaking her neck if she were to fall from this height, it has already happened!” In further emulation of Scheffer’s painting, Lecomte du Nouy framed the two bodies within the bluish-green fabric of Paolo’s garment. But this decision, which rendered the two bodies more voluminous than slender, was also somewhat counterproductive. Apart from these weaknesses in composition, though, the picture is well crafted and must have displayed enough redeeming qualities for the jury, as it was ultimately accepted for the 1863 Salon. That the young Lecomte du Nouy could gain such approval after a relatively brief training indicates not only his innate ability, but also his eagerness to advance his career.

²⁷ In this context it is telling to cite Clément 1886, p. 339, who explains Gleyre’s tendency to paint his female subjects with thick legs. Gleyre’s picture La Charmeuse (1868, Basel, Kunstmuseum) (see note 77) had been criticized for the thick lower legs of the female figure, yet Gleyre is to have replied: “Des jambes minces par le bas, disait-il, sont des jambes à cordoniers, des jambes à bottines qui font bien sur le trottoir quand il y a de la boue; c’est comme les grands yeux et les petites bouches une affection de fausse élégance. Dans l’extrême jeunesse, la jambe près du pied est épaisse et comme engorgée; du jarret au talon qui ne doit pas saillir, elle descend par une ligne presque droite. Dès que le mollet s’accuse fortement, que la cheville se dessine, s’étrangle et se décharne, c’est que la décrépitude commence; et ajoutait-il en s’échauffant, la décrépitude commence à vingt ans au plus tard. Ainsi prenez des modèles très-jeunes. Passé vingt ans, la femme n’existe plus pour l’artiste. Les formes n’ont plus la pureté, la chasteté qui permettent le nu. Voyez plutôt la Chloé du grand Bain de Prud’hon. C’est une fille de vingt ans; elle est délicieuse, mais presque indécente.”

²⁸ A formal comparison for this pose could also be made with the girl in David’s The Lictors Bringing to Brutus the Bodies of his Sons (fig. 74).
There is a more cynical explanation for the picture’s admittance to the salon, however: Lecomte du Nouy’s new teacher, Signol, served on that year’s salon jury. He must have encouraged his pupil to present the work in public and may have even convinced his fellow committee members to accept it. That very year, a record number of the 5,000 works submitted were rejected, such a large number that Emperor Napoleon III felt obliged to appease the outraged artistic community by permitting the organization of the parallel Salon des refusés. With 2,217 paintings in the regular exhibition, and 680 in the alternative venue, the critics had ample material to discuss, in addition to Manet’s shocking Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe (1863, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), which defied all pictorial and social conventions.²⁹ With so many works vying for attention, Lecomte du Nouy cannot have been surprised that his painting—an attractive but unassuming depiction of a traditional subject—elicited little response.

Academic Reforms

The artistic turmoil of 1863 went far beyond the issue of which artist was or was not admitted to that year’s salon. The educational system of the École des Beaux-Arts had long been criticized, and in November of 1863, pedagogical reforms were finally instituted.³⁰ The Académie des Beaux-Arts, founded in 1803 as a successor to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, controlled the salons. It was, and still is, one of five academies that form the Institut de France, the organization that oversaw the government’s involvement with the arts and sciences in the nineteenth century.³¹ In addition to the official exhibitions, the Académie des Beaux-Arts also controlled the École des Beaux-Arts, where official art instruction took place, as well as its Italian outpost, the Académie de France in Rome, where winners of the prix de Rome resided for up to five years. Following a decree issued jointly in 1863 by the surintendant des Beaux-Arts, Alfred-Émilien Comte de Nieuwerkerke (1811-92), the secretary of the École, the

²⁹ In the catalogue of the Salon des Refusés, Manet’s painting bore the title Le bain (The Bath), but it soon became to be known as, Le déjeuner sur l’herbe (Luncheon on the Grass).
³¹ Damien 1999.
Prosper Mérimée (1803-70), and the architect and writer Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814-79), the École became disassociated from the Académie des Beaux-Arts, which consequently lost much of its power. The École, traditionally perceived as the bastion of Davidian classicism, was now subject to administrative changes and a restructuring of the coursework. Among many other innovations, three painting ateliers were introduced at the École, where students would be taught painting (as well as comparable ateliers for sculpture and architecture). Before then, the courses were only structured to teach drawing skills and students had to rely on private studios for instruction in painting. In 1871, however, the year Lecomte du Nouÿ was admitted to compete for the prix de Rome, the members of the Académie regained their jurisdiction over that crucial contest.

The three artists appointed to lead the newly created studios at the École were Alexandre Cabanel (1823-89), Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904), and Isidore Pils (1813/15-75), all of whom were at liberty to select their own pupils. Each teacher represented a different style and was chosen in order to open up the curriculum. Cabanel, a favorite of Napoleon III and his court, was one of the most decorated artists of his age. After Ingres’s death in 1867, he was seen as the foremost history painter in France. He infused Ingres’s rigor with an almost eighteenth-century playfulness that attracted a more mainstream audience. Pils, meanwhile, was especially appreciated by the authorities for his military paintings heralding France’s heroic exploits. And Gérôme offered his néo-grec variant of the classical idiom, a far cry from the grand history painting of David and Ingres. Appointing this painter of historical genre scenes was as bold a move as could be expected from the usually conservative members of the Académie, who sought, in the end, to safeguard the well-being and continuity of their institution. According to the painter Luc-Olivier Merson (1846-1920), it was in light of these reforms that Signol closed his studio and moved his students to the official ateliers at the École des Beaux-Arts.32

While Lecomte du Nouÿ was still in Signol’s studio, a fellow student by the name of Lehoux31 strongly encouraged him to read a historical novel by Théophile Gautier

32 Merson 1899, p. 13.
31 Refers most likely to the history painter Pierre-Adrien-Pascal Lehoux (1844-96), who is listed in Bénézit 1994 as a pupil of Alexandre Cabanel. The other Lehoux (Pierre-François) (1803-92), an Orientalist painter
(1811-72), *Le roman de la momie (The Novel of the Mummy, 1856).* This story of a pharaoh enamored with an Egyptian beauty must have struck a chord, as it became a significant source of inspiration for many of Lecomte du Nouy’s later pictures. Perhaps paradoxically, he seemed attracted as much to Gautier’s minute and scholarly descriptions of an ancient civilization as to the story’s exotic and fantastic potential. As will be argued in the next chapter, these elements together would become important characteristics of Lecomte du Nouy’s *néo-grec* and Orientalist pictures. Apart from the turbaned head he had copied in childhood, some of the earliest seeds of his interest in exotic subjects must have been planted by Gleyre, who had himself traveled extensively. Later, when Lecomte du Nouy showed *The Female Egyptian Musician (Musicienne d’Égypte, 1860s, location unknown; cat. 345)* to Signol, his teacher reportedly thought he was seeing a work by Gérôme. Even if apocryphal, this story suggests that the kinship between Lecomte du Nouy and Gérôme was already established before he entered that master’s studio in 1864. By then, Lecomte du Nouy knew where he wanted his career to go, and who better to follow than Gérôme (himself a student of Gleyre), who could teach him precisely what he wanted to learn?

*Jean-Léon Gérôme’s Atelier: 1864-72*

The new ateliers at the École des Beaux-Arts opened on February 22, 1864, and Lecomte du Nouy belonged to the first group of thirteen students in Gérôme’s class. In his 1906 biography of Gérôme, published two years after the subject’s death, Charles Moreau-Vauthier (himself a student of Gérôme) oversimplified the origins of the reforms at the École, attributing them solely to financial issues. He contended that de Nieuwerkerke thought the government should provide students with free training, rather than obliging them to attend private painting studios with admission fees. The author described the opening of the new studio as follows: “The model during the first week in

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and pupil of Horace Vernet, was already in his sixties when Lecomte du Nouy was in Signol’s atelier, and would then not have been a fellow pupil as mentioned by Montgailhard.

34 Montgailhard 1906, p. 10, 13.
35 Moreau-Vauthier 1906.
Gérôme’s atelier was an antique statue, *Germanicus*. Among the thirteen students, the majority coming from the studio of Signol, were Lecomte du Nouÿ, Leyendecker, Blanc, Rixens, Lehoux, and Pelissier whom his comrades appointed as the *massier* [a student in charge of an atelier].

Even in Gérôme’s class the students did not just paint historical subjects. Another student in this class seems to have been Louis Jacquesson de la Chevreuse (1839-1903), whose amiable likeness Lecomte du Nouÿ painted in 1864 (fig. 17; cat. 9). Apart from a dedication and signature by the author in the upper left corner, this portrait also bears the initials “JIG” in the lower left corner, indicating that Jean-Léon Gérôme countersigned the work in approval.

The 1864 Salon opened on May 1, and Lecomte du Nouÿ was again among the exhibitors. This time he acted a little more prudently, and rather than showing an ambitious history painting, he submitted portraits of the painter Adolphe Morin (1841-?), also a pupil of Gleyre, and Mme la baronne Morin (ca. 1864, whereabouts unknown; cat. 3 and 4). These works did not provide Lecomte du Nouÿ with the critical attention he was undoubtedly seeking, but an equally important reason to show portraits at the salon was to secure clients from among the immense number of visitors. Indeed, as a source of income, portraiture was to become an intrinsic part of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s œuvre.

Lecomte du Nouÿ was clearly not yet finished with his apprenticeship, and the period in which he studied under Gérôme turned out to be highly significant. Moreau-Vauthier described Gérôme as having addressed his first students in a firm yet amicable tone, stressing that they should work assiduously and scrupulously study nature by drawing, using color, and making oil sketches. One was never to start a picture unless one’s craft had been completely and perfectly apprehended. This striving for the highest

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36 Haskel & Penny 1981, no. 42. The work is in the Musée du Louvre, but is also now mostly identified as Augustus. See also chapter II, p. 65 note 18.


38 Moreau-Vauthier 1906, p. 176: “Durant la première semaine de travail, le modèle, dans l’atelier Gérôme, fut un Antique, le *Germanicus*. Parmi les élèves, au nombre de treize, la plupart venus de l’atelier Signol, il y avait Lecomte du Nouy, Leyendecker, Blanc, Rixens, Lehoux et Pelissier que ses camarades nommèrent *massier*.”

39 One of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s sketchbooks that is kept in Aurillac (inv. 82.13.352, p. 24, see appendix I) provides a rare description of an incident that he witnessed at some point in Gérôme’s atelier. This text, on a page without any drawings, reads as follows: “Forain et Villeminton / Atelier Gérôme / Boulanger interim / porte monnaie de Dieterle / volé – Lérrysky soupconné / par Poilpor[...] pleure / et quitte l’atelier / Selon le modèle declaire / qu’on s’est trompé et disegne / Forain et Villeminton comme / les auteurs du vol. / Boulanger mis au courant / des faits a fait chaser / Forain de l’atelier.”
standard was always integral to the student’s conscience and search for truth. Gérôme’s advice defined the academic artist’s quest for perfection and beauty, a concept known as the beau idéal. Only thorough training would enable the painter to convincingly re-create the perceptible world on canvas. Technical skill, however, was not an end in itself but only the tool with which the search for truth could be fulfilled. The goal was to depict la belle nature, the representation of natural forms in their purest and most beautiful manifestations. Montgailhard portrayed Lecomte du Nouy’s early training with Gérôme in a flattering light. For two years in a row, the students of the rival ateliers singled out Lecomte du Nouy’s work as the best by any of his class. An 1866 letter from the director of the École, the sculptor Eugène Guillaume (1822-1905), to Nieuwerkerke refers to Gérôme’s enthusiasm for his pupil:

The young painter Lecomte du Nouy, a student from the atelier of Mr. Gérôme and recipient of a medal at the exhibition of the Champs Elysées, has been strongly recommended to me by his professor to solicit from you an encouragement that will permit him to continue his studies. Mr. Gérôme considers him one of the students from his atelier on which he has the highest hopes for the future. In compliance with the wish from one of our best professors, I therefore ask you kindly, in your efforts towards our young artists, to include Mr. Lecomte du Nouy among those who merit your favors. In 1868, Gérôme himself wrote to Nieuwerkerke on behalf of his pupil, asking if it would be possible to re-hang a still life by Jean Siméon Chardin (1699-1779) in the Louvre, as Lecomte du Nouy had been commissioned to copy it, and the work was hanging too high. Gérôme assured his superior that Lecomte du Nouy was already a

40 Moreau-Vauthier 1906, p. 176-77: “Il prononça une petite causerie d’ouverture qui, sur un ton cassant mais que l’on sentait amical, recommanda le travail assidu et persévérant, l’étude scrupuleuse de la nature par le dessin avant tout, par la couleur, par la composition des esquisses, pour n’arriver au tableau qu’après l’acquisition d’un métier aussi complet, aussi parfait que possible, et qui devait toujours s’entretenir dans la conscience et la recherche de la vérité.”

41 Paris, Archives Nationales, Microfilm AJ52 264: 1321 Lecomte Dunouy 298 / Paris le 11 Juin 1866 / Monsieur Le Surintendant / Le jeune peintre Lecomte Dunouy, élève de l’atelier de M. Gérôme, et qui vient d’obtenir une médaille à l’exposition des Champs Elysées, m’est bien vivement recommandé par son professeur afin que je sollicite auprès de vous un encouragement qui lui permette de continuer ses études. M Gérôme le considère comme l’un des élèves de son atelier sur lesquels il peut fonder le plus d’espérances pour l’avenir. Selon [?] les voeux de l’un de nos habiles professeurs je viens donc vous prier de vouloir bien, dans votre sollicitude pour nos jeunes artistes, mettre Mr. Lecomte au nombre de ceux qui méritent vos faveurs. / Veuillez agréer Monsieur le Surintendant / l’expression des sentiments distingués / avec lesquels j’ai l’honneur d’être / Votre très humble serviteur / Le Directeur de l’école de Beaux-arts / Membre de l’Institut / Monsieur Le Sénateur / Surintendant des Beaux-arts.
worthy painter, but the request was not granted. These letters on behalf of the young artist imply that his teachers thought he had a promising future, but also that he was not a man of independent means and that he needed commissions in order to make a living.

Gérôme also chose several of Lecomte du Nouy’s drawings to be reproduced in lithographic form for the so-called cours de dessin (or cours Goupil, named after the dealer/publisher Goupil & Cie), a widely disseminated drawing course for aspiring students comprising 197 lithographs by Charles Bargue (1826/7-83). Montgailhard mentioned seven drawings (cat. 16) after the antique that were then lithographed by Bargue, as well as a drawing called L’Antonello de Messine (ca. 1865; cat. 17). The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris holds three plates from the cours de dessin with annotations in Lecomte du Nouy’s handwriting, identifying them as his own contribution to the project. These belong to the course’s first volume, which factures images after sculptures and plaster casts; they show a horse’s head from the west pediment of the Parthenon (fig. 18), the reclining figure of Theseus from the Parthenon (fig. 19), and the Belvedere Torso (fig. 20). The first annotation reads: “Lithographié par Bargue d’après mon dessin. Lecomte du Nouy,” (Lithograph by Bargue after my design, Lecomte du Nouy) while the other two are simply signed “Lecomte du Nouy.” It is possible, as Montgailhard suggested, that the artist provided four more drawings after plaster casts. There is no lithograph after a work by Antonello da Messina in the second volume of the

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42 Paris, Archives du Louvre (P18, 1868 31 Octobre), Letter from Gérôme to the Surintendant des Beaux Arts, Paris, Oct. 31, 1868: “Monsieur le Surintendant. J’ai l’honneur de vous adresser une requête pour un de mes élèves – le jeune homme a la commande d’un tableau de Chardin à copier – (c’est une nature morte de Chardin inscrite au livret sous le no 97). Il est très haut placé et je viens vous demandez s’il ne serait pas possible de le lui descendre afin qu’il peut faire le travail qui sans cela serait impraticable. Celui pour qui je vous fais cette demande est M. Lecomte-Dunouy qui a du talent et qui déjà a plusieurs reprises a exposé des tableaux qui ont eu un succès mérité. Veuillez agréer Mr le Comte l’assurance de mon dévouement, JL Gérôme.” The response in pencil on the same document, however, was negative: “j’ai le regret de lui dire que la dessus le règlement est formel et pour le grand danger qui en résulterait pour les tableaux [in pen: fait 2 Nov. 1868].”


44 See also a red chalk drawing of a horse’s head, Aurillac: 82.13.4, see appendix I.

45 BN: DC 309, II, p. 110-112. See also BN: DC 309, II, p. 107-109, which contain three plates after drawings by Lecomte du Nouy for another drawing course: 1) (plate no. 2) female head, “étude pour la Chapelle St Vincent de Paul.” In cartouche on plate: Les Maîtres Contemporains / Lith. par F. Grellet / Publié et Imprimé par / Alp. Delarue Fils / 68, Rue J.J. Rousseau / Paris. 2) (plate no. 1) A head of a baby and a woman’s head on one plate, details from the same painting. 3) (plate no. 72) two men’s faces (one with laurel wreath) on one plate, inscribed: “d’après Lecomte-du-Noüy,” no further reference.
cours de dessin, which contains copies after drawings by old and contemporary masters, but perhaps the drawing was ultimately not selected, or the subject was incorrectly identified.

For Lecomte du Nouy’s The Greek Sentinel (La sentinelle grecque, 1865; fig. 69; cat. 11), a painting which was shown at the Salon of 1865, the artist used a passage from Aeschylus’s tragedy Oresteia (458 BC). The picture depicts a watchman standing under a starry sky on a rooftop, beside a tripod containing a fire. The artist placed a cartouche around the painting—apparently an unusual practice—with the text that had inspired him: “All year round, like a dog I guard, atop the palace of the Atreidae, facing the assembly of the stars of the night.” This small, generally well-received work can be regarded as Lecomte du Nouy’s first néo-grec painting (a term explored in chapter two) When Gonzague Privat reviewed Lecomte du Nouy’s career in 1877, he defined this picture as the artist’s breakthrough work.

The First Journey to Egypt

After the Salon of 1865, Gérôme encouraged Lecomte du Nouy to visit Egypt with the painter Félix Clément (1826-88). Clément had first traveled there in November of 1862 to “study types and nature in this eminently picturesque country.” Prince Halim Pacha eventually commissioned several projects from Clément, notably works for his palace at Choubrah. Clément stayed in Egypt until 1868, though he returned to France several times. In 1865, for example, he came home to exhibit, among other works, his large painting The Hunt for Gazelle in the Desert of Gatha by Prince Halim (Istanbul, former residence of Halim Pacha), and when he returned to Egypt, Lecomte du Nouy

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47 Montgailhard 1906, p. 16, claims that the work was mentioned in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts soon after the Salon had opened, yet I have found no mention of the picture in the journal’s 1865 Salon review.
48 For his earlier negative approach towards néo-grec art, see chapter II, note 41. On Privat, see chapter II, note 42.
49 Privat 1877; for text see appendix V. See also chapter II p. 76.
accompanied him. For Clément, the Egyptian adventure ultimately turned sour, as the prince suffered financial reversals and failed to reimburse him for the extensive investments of time and materials he had already made. But for Lecomte du Nouy, now twenty-three, this first of many journeys abroad provided him with direct experience of a country he had learned about only secondhand, in Gautier’s novel *Le roman de la momie*, for example. His representations of subjects drawn from Greco-Roman history and mythology, however, continued to play a role in his oeuvre, co-existing with his Orientalist themes. For example, while in Egypt, Lecomte du Nouy started a sketch for the classical *The Invocation to Neptune* (L’invocation de Neptune, 1866; fig. 70; cat. 26) there as well, which he then submitted to the 1866 Salon. This picture, based on the Homeric hymns, allowed the artist to surpass his success with *The Greek Sentinel*, bringing him his first gold medal, an award that freed him from having to submit all his future entries for the Salon jury’s consideration. Lecomte du Nouy’s work was almost continuously shown at the salon until his death in 1923.

For the 1867 Salon, Lecomte du Nouy prepared two pictures that reflect his exploration of new artistic areas. From small *néo-grec* works he moved on to a biblical scene with life-size figures, *Job and his Friends* (Job et ses amis, 1867; fig. 108; cat. 30), thus presenting himself as a history painter. *The Dancing Fellah Woman* (La danseuse Fellah, 1867; fig. 21; cat. 31), on the other hand, is one of his first paintings inspired by his journey to Egypt. The salon catalogue explains that the scene takes place in Kaphra, in Lower Egypt. In paying close attention to the local architecture, costume, and landscape, the artist creates the impression that he had actually witnessed this tantalizing campfire scene. Whether an Egyptian woman would have actually danced naked before a group of men in such a setting remains unclear, and the work should perhaps be assigned to the abundant category of Orientalist erotic fantasies intended for a western audience. On the other hand, one of Lecomte du Nouy’s travel sketchbooks containing many

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52 I would like to thank Hélène Moulin, conservateur du musée de Valence, for providing me information concerning the existence of a portrait by Lecomte du Nouy of Clément. The portrait was purchased in 1954 by the city of Donzère, yet its present location is unknown; see cat. 357.
53 Montgailhard 1906, p. 16.
54 Montgailhard 1906, p. 114-5, lists under the year 1866 two works called [Fr. Title] *A Gatekeeper in Cairo* (cat. 25), and [Fr. Title] *Pastophorus, a begging priest in ancient Egypt* (cat. 27), which may be his first easel pictures inspired by Egypt. The artist also made many drawings and oil sketches on his trips, such as a view of the Sphinx and Great Pyramids, dated 1865, see cats. 21-24.
Egyptian scenes includes a small scribble-like drawing of a female dancer wearing only a belt on her hip, very similar to a finished drawing of the same subject (An Almeh; cat. 32). The sketchbook drawing is annotated “entierement nue” (completely naked), implying that the artist indeed witnessed this performance. Whether The Dancing Fellah Woman represents reality is ultimately less important than the fact that it sets the tone for a whole group of later paintings by Lecomte du Nouy that relate in some way to the harem, all discussed in chapter two.

As both of the 1867 Salon entries are only known from black-and-white reproductions, it is difficult to assess them properly, but the critical response was generally negative. Only Privat, a personal friend of the artist, commented that Job evinced natural grandeur, and that The Dancing Fellah Woman introduced grace to Lecomte du Nouy’s oeuvre. The influential critic, art historian, and cultural administrator Paul Mantz reviewed both works harshly in the Gazette des Beaux-Arts. After describing Job as boring, he argued that the painter treated all his subjects similarly, and that his talent lacked a certain emotion. He also found the Orientalist picture merely a weaker repetition of Gérôme’s The Almeh of 1863 (fig. 22) and sniped that Lecomte du Nouy’s dancer did not dance. Indeed, the almost straight contours formed by the woman’s proper left leg and upper body make her appear somewhat static. On the other hand, Lecomte du Nouy was more successful in suggesting a rapport between the dancer and her audience than Gérôme had been in The Almeh. The lecherous grin and chuckles of the men at left leave no doubt about their thoughts.

Even though Job and his Friends hung in the salon’s gallery of honor —probably because of the gold medal the artist was awarded the previous year —Lecomte du Nouy had trouble finding a buyer for this picture. This may have stemmed from the work’s aesthetic deficiencies, given its fairly static composition, but Privat blamed its large size

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55 Aurillac: 82.13.364, p. 34; see appendix I, and cat. 32.
56 Privat 1877, see appendix V.
57 Mantz 1867, p. 519-20; on Mantz, see Bouillon 1990.
58 For other reviews of the work see cat. 30. Montgailhard 1906, p. 17 added that Lecomte du Nouy was inspired by Hippolyte Flandrin’s [Fr. Title] Dante and Virgil in Hell (1834-35, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts), yet, even he had to admit that Lecomte du Nouy’s picture did not “manifest any great personality.”
59 He must have finally given it to his friend the painter Charles Toché, with whom he traveled to Venice in 1875. Montgailhard lists the work as being in Toché’s possession in his catalogue of works (cat. 30). See also the anecdote about this work in Privat 1877, appendix V.
and biblical subject, predicting that Lecomte du Nouy would soon return to smaller pictures such as *The Madness of Ajax the Telamonian* (La folie d’Ajax le Télamonien, 1868; cat. 43). Smaller works were in much greater demand among private collectors, and Privat claimed that his friend would henceforth embark upon large-scale projects only if they were commissioned, as were two altarpieces he was asked to paint for l’Église de la Sainte-Trinité in Paris (figs. 113 and 114). Yet as an artist rooted in the tradition of academic history painting, Lecomte du Nouy always yearned to create works of monumental proportions, and he made (and planned) several additional large-scale paintings that had not been commissioned. Selling them would always be difficult, and he often donated them to museums, a strategy that sustained the tradition of grand academic painting, not to mention his own reputation, at least from his point of view.

In 1869, Lecomte du Nouy received another award for his two salon entries, an allegory entitled *Love that Goes, Love that Remains* (L’amour qui passe, l’amour qui reste, 1869; fig. 23; cat. 48). This work—inspired by a love affair turned sour—depicts a female nude carried away by cupids, while a heartbroken young man is consoled by his mother and faithful dog. The critic, art administrator, and Louvre curator Georges Lafenestre praised the contrast between the cold-blooded Venus flying off to new adventures and the tender mother with her noble profile.  

Elie Roy hailed Lecomte du Nouy as one of the great néo-grec painters and described this picture as an eternal poem of human deceptions. Montgailhard suggested that the work might have been inspired by Gleyre’s *The Evening* (fig. 9), given the sense of melancholy, chagrin, and sentimental restlessness shared by both works.

Privat, however, abandoned his support for the artist, calling the painting “a sentimental bourgeois success, a mother’s success.” Even Gérôme reportedly told his student: “It’s well done, but it is not to be repeated.” Jean Marie Marius Chaumelin was ruthless in his criticism of the work, observing that the female figure, whom he dubbed “Calypso,” was too ugly to be regretted by the young man. The distinguished man of

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60 Lafenestre 1881, p. 103-4; for French text see cat. 48. On Lafenestre, see Bouillon 1990.
62 Montgailhard 1906, p. 18.
63 Privat 1877, see appendix V; and Gérôme cited in Montgailhard 1906, p. 18.
64 Chaumelin 1873, p. 228, 231, 302; for French text see cat. 48. A brief biography of Jean Marie Marius Chaumelin appears in Sloane 1951.
letters Jean Dolent (the pseudonym of Charles Antoine Fournier) argued, on the other hand, that the surprise was not that the woman had left the young man, but that she had loved him in the first place!65 The future minister of fine arts, Paul Pierre Casimir Périer, who one year earlier had praised Lecomte du Nouy’s Ajax effusively,66 generally approved of the subject but suggested that Lecomte du Nouy had failed in its execution. He objected to the workmanlike “academic” handling of the woman, which rendered the man’s sorrow unconvincing. In short, according to his critics, Lecomte du Nouy should have demonstrated here either more emotion or less ambition.

Although this picture contributed to Lecomte du Nouy’s second gold medal, he did indeed paint the woman’s head slightly too big for her body. One wonders, therefore, if the untraced variant he made of this subject in 1876 resolved some of his contemporaries’ criticisms.67 In more general terms, the composition of the flying female in Love that Goes, Love that Remains marks a transition between the earthbound representation of Francesca da Rimini in 1863 (fig. 13) and the more elusive but convincingly rendered chimerical woman in The Dream of a Eunuch of 1874 (fig. 87).

Lecomte du Nouy’s other submission to the 1869 Salon was a woman’s portrait, listed in the catalogue as “Portrait de Mlle E. T…” (1869; fig. 24; cat. 49). In 1906, Montgailhard recorded the subject of the portrait as “Mme Églantine Pujol,”68 a change reflecting the sitter’s new marital status. It is not clear whether she commissioned this picture or the artist offered to paint her in the hope of attracting new sitters at the salon, and since the artist himself donated the painting only five years later to the museum in Lille, she may never have owned it. Chaumelin criticized this portrait severely, as he had Love that Goes, Love that Remains, arguing that while it placed Lecomte du Nouy in the

65 Dolent 1869, p. 66; for French text see cat. 48. On Dolent, see Bouillon 1990.
66 Périer 1869, p. 116-118; for French text see cat. 48. His review of Ajax (see chapter II, note 55) was published under the name Paul Pierre (and there seem to be other variants of his name as well), also the name given for the author on the title page of this 1869 publication. He was briefly Ministre de l’Instruction Publique et des Beaux Arts, from July 1, 1894- Jan. 26, 1895.
67 Montgailhard lists a “variation” of this composition under the year 1876, see cat. 112, without much further elaboration. From Samuel P. Avery’s diaries we know that he acquired a reduction of this work in 1872. Fidel Beaufort 1979, p. 104; see note 85 below for text. As Montgailhard is known to have misplaced other works chronologically in his catalogue, it is not clear whether this is the same work, or whether there where two more pictures with this title.
portrait tradition of Ingres and Hippolyte Flandrin (1809-64), it was a banal and crude abstraction of life, as cold as a grisaille. 69

Flandrin’s portrait of his wife (fig. 25), and even more so the two portraits of Mme Moitessier by Ingres (figs. 26 and 27) had indeed set crucial parameters for Lecomte du Nouy. 70 The portrait of Mme Églantine Pujol is more or less a synthesis of the two representations of Mme Moitessier, whom Ingres first depicted standing in a dark dress, one arm lowered alongside her body. In his second portrait of her, she is seated and wearing a vivid floral dress, holding one hand against her head with her fingers spread in a seemingly impossible way. Their elegant rendering and exquisite detail are what make both portraits supreme manifestations of Second Empire aristocracy. Lecomte du Nouy obviously aimed for a similar effect, combining Ingres’s poses into a new composition, but Chaumelin was not entirely wrong in his criticism. Ingres can occasionally be faulted for compositional inconsistencies and anatomical oddities, but he always achieves a radiance and overall luxurious effect that compensates for such flaws. Lecomte du Nouy’s technique and palette, which he had acquired mostly from Gérôme, prevented him from obtaining a similar brilliance, leading Chaumelin to compare it to a dull grisaille. Ingres used almost the same range of colors in his standing portrait of Mme Moitessier, yet her radiant skin tone, the flowers in her hair, the abundant jewelry, and the fleeting glimpse of a stark white lace handkerchief provide the accents necessary to bring the canvas to life. Lecomte du Nouy ultimately leaned more towards Gérôme, who himself clearly looked to Ingres for guidance in his own portraits. Whether he did it consciously or not, Lecomte du Nouy’s portrait of Mme Pujol has a great kinship in tonality and execution with Gérôme’s portrait of Mlle Durand of 1853 (fig. 28). 71 On the other hand, Chaumelin’s dismissal of the portrait was an extreme reaction to a work that has its merits. Mme Églantine Pujol epitomizes the characterization of Lecomte du

69 Chaumelin 1873, p. 231, 329; see cat. 49. Périer 1869, p. 92; see cat. 49.
70 That Lecomte du Nouy admired Ingres’s work is once more demonstrated by two reproductions of Ingres’s Joan of Arc (1851-54, Paris, Musée du Louvre; repr. in Tinterow and Conisbee 1999, fig. 215) and the portrait of Baronne James de Rothschild, née Betty von Rothschild (1848, Private collection; repr. in Tinterow and Conisbee 1999, cat. 132) that can be seen hanging in a photograph of Lecomte du Nouy’s studio, beneath his own large The God and the Mortal Woman (cat. 232), see fig. 6. For further information on the portraits of Mme Moitessier, see Tinterow and Conisbee 1999, cat. 133, 134.
71 See also Gérôme’s Portrait of a Woman, 1851, oil on canvas, 92.5 x 73.5 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago. See, Ackerman 2000, cat. no. 38, repr. p. 32.
Nouÿ’s art as “*Ingres faisant du Gérôme*” (Ingres painting like Gérôme), which Bouchot did not interpret as in any way derogatory.\(^7^2\) Although Lecomte du Nouÿ’s portrait may not have equaled the technical wizardry of Ingres, the salon jury awarded him his second gold medal.

At the Salon of 1870, the artist presented *The Charmer* (*Le charmeur*, 1870; fig. 29; cat. 54), a painting that Montgailhard says originated because an unidentified student of Courbet insisted that Lecomte du Nouÿ should paint a nude (*un morceau*).\(^7^3\) For this unnamed advocate of realism, the invention, idealization, compositional complexity, and harmony of a picture would not have been of primary importance; rather, one simply had to “observe nature and paint.”\(^7^4\) Lecomte du Nouÿ accepted the challenge, but the meticulously finished result looks more like an embellished académie (a life study of the male nude that focuses on composition and ideal proportions) than an informal rendition of the body. His attempt to merely “observe nature” remains deeply indebted to his academic training: although the main compositional element is a young man in a nondescript forest, the painting still contains such customary references to antiquity as a double flute, an animal skin, and a staff.

Montgailhard cited a sculpture by Emmanuel Fremiet (1824-1910), surely the popular marble *Pan and the Bears* (1867; fig. 30), which depicts the god as a boy with human torso and goat legs who plays with two little bears,\(^7^5\) as the direct inspiration for this picture. Several other compositions also come to mind, among them paintings by Lecomte du Nouÿ’s friend Clément, who painted *A Boy Emptying a Bird’s Nest* (1861, location unknown),\(^7^6\) and by his former teacher Gleyre, *Minerva and the Graces* (1866; fig. 31), and its closely related *The Temptress* (*La Charmeuse*, 1868, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel).\(^7^7\) Clément’s work depicts a nude boy sitting beside a nest of birds, while Gleyre’s *The Temptress* shows a naked girl playing a double flute for the

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\(^{7^2}\) Bouchot’s preface in Montgailhard 1906, p. ix.

\(^{7^3}\) Henri Boucher defined the term “*un morceau*” as such in his review of *The White Slave*, cited in Montgailhard 1906, p. 129; for French text see cat. 196.

\(^{7^4}\) Montgailhard 1906, p. 19.

\(^{7^5}\) Chevillot 1988-89, p. 157-58, repr.

\(^{7^6}\) *Le dènicheur d’oiseaux*, reproduced in Moulin 1996, p. 11.

\(^{7^7}\) Both works by Gleyre are reproduced and discussed in Hauptman 1996, II, cat. nos. 872, 914. *La charmeuse* only depicts one standing female seen from behind, playing the double flute. This exact same figure appears as one of the graces in *Minerva and the Graces* (fig. 31). See also note 27.
birds in a tree (the figure derives directly from Gleyre’s Minerva composition of two years earlier). Countless variants on this theme existed, including Jules Élie Delaunay’s (1828-91) *The Flute Lesson* (Salon of 1859, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes), in which a nude shepherd teaches another boy to play the flute.\(^78\) These artworks, probably all known to Lecomte du Nouÿ, convey the image of an idyllic Arcadia and present the truly academic version of the idealized nude, expressing innocence and purity.

The critic Dubosc de Pesquidoux argued that *The Charmer* could be seen as a pendant to Gérôme’s famous *The Cock Fight* (1846; fig. 32).\(^79\) And this time around the critic Chaumelin mocked the birds in Lecomte du Nouÿ’s picture as borrowed from a Black Forest clock. But Lecomte du Nouÿ was far from alone in taking up the subject of a *charmeur/charmeuse* at the 1870 Salon, and Chaumelin appreciated *charmeur*-pictures by other artists,\(^80\) so he must have particularly disliked Lecomte du Nouÿ.

*The Franco-Prussian War (1870-71)*

In an attempt to restore his declining popularity, Napoleon III (1808-73) declared war against Prussia in July of 1870. This proved to be a serious miscalculation, and the French were forced to sign a humiliating peace treaty in May of 1871. In September of 1870, after Napoleon III had lost the battle of Sedan, his Second Empire, established in 1852, ceased to exist, and the Third Republic was proclaimed in 1871. In Paris, however, a group of revolutionaries formed the Commune, with Courbet as the leader of their Art Commission. Soon afterwards, the president of the new republic, Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), sent troops from his Versailles headquarters to besiege the Communard-held city. In addition to the political and social consequences of these events—thousands of people lost their lives and the city of Paris suffered much destruction—the artistic community was deeply affected. Lecomte du Nouÿ, as well as such artists as Degas, Manet, and Renoir, enlisted to fight against the Prussians; Regnault died during the final battle, and others fled Paris. Gérôme, Monet, and Tissot, for example, escaped to London, where

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\(^{78}\) Another painting that relates is Jean Baptiste Poncet’s (1827-1901) *The Young Flute Player* (Jeune joueur de flûte, 1861, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. B-402).

\(^{79}\) Dubosc de Pesquidoux 1878, p. 24; for French text see cat. 64.

\(^{80}\) Chaumelin 1873, p. 430; for French text see cat. 54.
they invigorated that city’s cultural life. Not surprisingly, there was no salon in 1871, and commissions of art all but ceased, though that did not stop artists from expressing themselves.81

In this context, Lecomte du Nouÿ painted a view of a snow covered Paris street in the winter of 1871, noting on the reverse that the temperature was a miserable -21.5°C Celsius (fig. 33; cat. 75) at the time. The work contrasts sharply with the charming view of the village of Mallevial, in the Loire region near Saint-Étienne, which he had painted just one year earlier (fig. 34; cat. 61), yet both works are typical of the informal oil sketches Lecomte du Nouÿ made in Paris and throughout his travels. It may have been on the journey to Mallevial, for example, that he painted a touchingly simple view of the snow-covered Alps (ca. 1870; fig. 35; cat. 62). But no matter how appealing, such pictures were merely pleasant diversions for an artist with grander ambitions. The Franco-Prussian War, for example, inspired Lecomte du Nouÿ to paint a political allegory entitled The Besieged City of Paris, Rescued by English Assistance (Paris secouru par la bienfaisance anglaise, cat. 68). The meaning of this untraced picture remains somewhat obscure, and it was probably created on the artist’s own initiative. Beneath two herald angels holding an open book inscribed “1871” is a woman sitting on a throne, holding a scepter and a dove as a lion rests at her feet. The scene includes a naked corpse and many suffering people receiving alms in the lower foreground. The central figure in the right foreground is a woman supported by two figures, just below the French tricolore, who holds a palm frond and seems to be wearing a city crown, probably an allegory of the distressed city of Paris. In the center of the composition, another figure holds a banderole with the text DIEU ET MON DROI, beside a crest. Lecomte du Nouÿ himself may have benefited from the assistance France received from the British during the war, which may have inspired him to create the composition.82

Montgailhard asserted that Lecomte du Nouÿ’s professional dry spell broke when an unidentified American collector commissioned one work and bought two more, one titled A Woman from Bethlehem praying on the Terrace of her House (Bethlemitaine

81 For two recent studies on this subject see Milner 2000, and Clayson 2002.
82 See also Aurillac: 82.13.129, appendix I. In a similar context, Lawrence Alma Tadema, submitted A Staircase (1870, Dahesh Museum of Art, New York) to a London exhibition as a lottery prize, whose proceeds benefited French peasants who had suffered from the Franco-Prussian War. See, Diederen 2001, p. 26-27.
print sur la terrasse de sa maison; possibly cat. 77). 83 This must have been George A. Lucas, the well-connected Paris-based agent who roamed Europe acquiring works of art for the great American collectors of the Gilded Age. His diary of 1874 contains several brief entries recording visits to Lecomte du Nouy, from whom he bought a picture of a “house top” for 2,000 francs, paid in two installments. 84 He acquired the work for Samuel P. Avery, also a dealer and eventually an important collector as well. A Woman from Bethlehem praying on the Terrace of her House, may match Lucas’s cryptic description of the “house top” painting, but Avery’s own diary sheds further light on the situation.

Two years earlier, on July 2, 1872, he communicated with Lucas, who had indeed bought three pictures from Lecomte du Nouy, one depicting a female figure, most likely the woman from Bethlehem mentioned by Montgailhard. 85 This earlier date also supports the notion that Lucas’s purchase improved the artist’s fortunes soon after the war. The fact that Lucas and Avery, who had the power to make and break artists’ careers, bought and ordered paintings from Lecomte du Nouy confirms his status as a member of the artistic establishment. 86

A Woman from Bethlehem praying on the Terrace of her House, as well as a composition depicting two Christian women praying in Jerusalem, called At the Tomb of the Virgin (Chrétiennes au tombeau de la vierge, Jérusalem, 1871; fig. 124; cat. 63), raise the question of whether Lecomte du Nouy had recently visited the Holy Land. But though he did travel around that time, there is no proof that he actually visited the Middle East. In 1871, however, the Secrétaire des Beaux-Arts, Georges Lafenestre—one of the few critics who had written kindly about Love that Goes, Love that Remains (fig. 23; cat.

83 Montgailhard 1906, p. 34. This picture is likely identical to Christmas Night in Jerusalem (La nuit de Noël à Jérusalem), cat. 77, which Montgailhard lists in his catalogue under the year 1872. See photo BN: DC 309, l, p. 23, it depicts a woman standing alone on a terrace.
85 Fidell Beaufort 1979, p. 104: July 2, 1872 “Lucas called went to Lecoimt e d e Nouy [sic] engaged picture of 3 figs. Men at a church door – moonlight, snow on ground 21 x 25 for 2500. [probably cat. 82] one, female figure 14 x 21 for 1800. also a reduction of Love going and Love remaining – several figures – about 3 ft long – for 3500 f.”; p. 172, June 24, 1873: “to Lecomte de Nouy image girl ready – ordered The siesta on house top at Cairo about 15 x 24 for 2000 f.” [see also chapter II note 118]; p. 230, June 22, 1874: “called on Du Nouy” [This last work must be the one mentioned in Lucas’s diary, see note 84.]; p. 272, Paris, Aug. 28, 1874, “to Dunouy and paid for picture of artist on buoy at Venice 2000.” [see cat. 93].
86 Apart from the diaries by Lucas and Avery themselves (Randall 1970 and Fidell Beaufort 1979), see also Haskell’s review of their editions, Haskell 1981, p. 243-244.
—asked Lecomte du Nouÿ to visit Venice to copy a picture by Vittore Carpaccio (1460/6-1525/6) for the newly created Musée des copies. It is not clear exactly when Lecomte du Nouÿ traveled to Venice, but it must have been after December 4, 1871, when the commission was awarded, until as late as 1873, since there exist several Venetian oil sketches dated August 1873 (fig. 45; cat. nos. 91, 91a-c). In 1871 the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, Charles Blanc (1813-82), initiated the then already somewhat outdated concept of a Musée des copies and immediately commissioned a great number of copies after masterpieces located outside of Paris. The museum finally opened in the Palais des Champs-Elysées in April 1873, but in the wake of President Thiers’s death one month later, Blanc lost his post, and the museum closed in January 1874. A selection of the best copies, including Lecomte du Nouÿ’s *The Departure of the Ambassadors*, after Carpaccio, (1873; fig. 36; cat. 90) was installed in the École des Beaux-Arts, where they remain today.

One of the last pictures Lecomte du Nouÿ made under the direct guidance of Gérôme, *The Bearers of Bad Tidings* (Les porteurs de mauvaises nouvelles, 1871; fig. 82; cat. 64), turned out to be one of his greatest triumphs. He exhibited it, along with a work from 1870, *Demosthenes Practicing his Declamation* (Demosthène s’exerce à la parole, fig. 75; cat. 58), at the Salon of 1872, where it immediately became a “succès d’attraction.” It was awarded a second-class medal and the government purchased it for the Musée du Luxembourg, then the foremost repository of contemporary art in France at the time. Based on Théophile Gautier’s *Le roman de la momie*, it depicts, in a direct and graphic manner, the moment after a pharaoh has killed three messengers for bringing him bad tidings. According to Charles Moreau-Vauthier, Lecomte du Nouÿ had started the work in 1864, but did not finish it until 1870. Moreau-Vauthier considered it one of those pictures that “everyone should know and admire.”

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87 See note 60.
88 Montgailhard 1906, p. 35. On the Musée des copies, see: Vaisse 1976; and, Duro 1987, p. 298, no. 93 is the work commissioned from Lecomte du Nouÿ. The commission was issued on December 4, 1871, for FF 8000. Originally, *The Reception of the Ambassadors* was commissioned, but it turned out that Édouard-Théophile Blanchard (1844-1879) was already copying that work (no. 26). Lecomte du Nouÿ consequently painted another subject from the cycle, *Les ambassadeurs d’Angleterre prenant congé du roi*. For copies of the same painting by Gustave Moreau (1858, Musée Gustave Moreau, inv. 13612) see, Tadié 1999.
89 On the current collection of copies, see Schwartz 2002.
90 Claretie, *L’art français en 1872*, for French text see cat. 64.
91 Moreau-Vauthier 1900; for French text see cat. 64.
The prix de Rome Competition

During his student years, Lecomte du Nouÿ had made several vain attempts to win the prix de Rome. To compete for this highly coveted government scholarship, which funded a five-year stay at the Villa Medici in Rome, an artist had to be of French nationality, male, under thirty years of age, and unmarried. He had to have met the entrance requirements of the École des Beaux-Arts and ideally, he had the support of a well-known art teacher. The competition was grueling, involving several stages leading up to the final one, in which ten competitors were sequestered in studios for seventy-two days to complete their final history paintings (there were separate competitions for sculptors, architects, composers, and engravers). The only time Lecomte du Nouÿ Lecomte du Nouÿ was admitted to the final round of the competition was in 1871, when he received the deuxième accessit (honorable mention) for Oedipus’s Farewell from Jocasta (Les adieux d’Oedipe à Jocaste, 1871; fig. 37; cat. 67). Although Montgailhard erred in stating that the artist was awarded this honor in 1872 (he probably confused Lecomte du Nouÿ’s attempt to win the 1871 prix de Rome with the medal for The Bearers of Bad Tidings one year later), he did provide a look behind the scenes of this important contest. The list of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s competitors conveys an idea of the “formidable” competition he faced: Urbain Bourgeois (?), Théobald Chartran (1849-1907), Léon-François Comerre (1850-1916), Édouard Dantan (1848-97), Gabriel Ferrier (1847-1914), (Oscar-Pierre?) Mathieu (?), Aimé Morot (1850-1913), Édouard Toudouze (1848-1907), and Édouard Vimont (1846-1930). Though none of these artists are familiar today, Montgailhard claimed: “No year has ever been more abundant with future great painters for this famous concours.” Montgailhard may have been simply assuaging his friend Lecomte du Nouÿ with this statement, but it also demonstrates how many nineteenth-century academic artists are completely unknown today.

Montgailhard also explained how Lecomte du Nouÿ went about his submission to the prix de Rome. That year’s subject, of Oedipus’s farewell to his dead mother, Jocasta, seem to have pleased the artist. The composition and execution went fairly easily, and after only six weeks he had completed the picture. However, then doubt set in, and he

92 Montgailhard 1906, p. 23. The 1872 subject for the prix de Rome was Une scène du déluge (A Flood Scene), and the first prize went to Gabriel Ferrier (1847-1914).
began to work on a new canvas. He submitted both pictures to the jury, but the jurors made him choose only one for submission. Lecomte du Nouy chose his second version, which prompted the director of the École, the sculptor Eugène Guillaume (1822-1905), to observe that the first would have won him the prize that Toudouze ultimately received. Nonetheless, his effort was recognized when the government bought a picture for the Musée d’Arras, a work that was also shown at the Exposition Universelle of 1878, but that was destroyed in a fire in 1915. Its final composition is known only through a black-and-white photograph, which shows Oedipus kneeling beside the corpse of his mother, Jocasta, her face expressionless (fig. 37). His daughter Antigone, who has cut her hair as a sign of mourning, accompanies him and tenderly touches her father’s shoulder.

It seems that the government ultimately bought Lecomte de Nouy’s first version: a student traditionally made a preparatory oil sketch of his composition before beginning the final canvas that would be judged. To force them to stick to their original composition, students were required to make a tracing of the sketch, which would be approved by the professor and remain with the École. Lecomte du Nouy’s tracing is still in the École’s collection, and it shows a composition very similar to that in the photograph of the painting acquired for Arras (fig. 38).

Lecomte du Nouy surely regretted his failure to win the prize, a sentiment presumably addressed in an undated later sketch titled The 41st Seat (Le 41e fauteuil). The title refers to the fact that a maximum of forty individuals were elected to the Académie française, and the sketch shows a group of famous writers who had never been nominated standing outside the Académie’s distinctive domed building. Lecomte du Nouy clearly identified with their exclusion from the highest level of state-recognized stardom. But despite his failure to receive the prix de Rome he had, by the age of thirty, become a fully-fledged artist ready to leave Gérôme’s atelier and the École des Beaux-Arts.

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93 See also Privat 1877, appendix V.
94 Aurillac: 82.13.201; see appendix I. The artist eventually reused this composition for The Philosopher, cat. 321.
III. THE MATURE ARTIST

The period from 1861 through 1872, when Lecomte du Nouý studied with various teachers, constituted his most formative phase. Virtually all of the artistic themes he explored then would remain in his repertoire, and he would treat them in a similar fashion for the rest of his career. He continued to paint portraits, subjects derived from the Bible, classical and contemporary literature, and compositions generated by his many travels. In addition, however, he also tried his hand at sculpture.

In 1873, Lecomte du Nouý received a commission from the city of Paris to paint altarpieces for l'Eglise de la Sainte-Trinité. He ultimately painted scenes showing *Saint Vincent de Paul Bringing the Galley Slaves to the Faith* (1876, fig. 113; cat. 111) and *Saint Vincent de Paul Helping the Inhabitants of Lorraine after the War of 1637* (1879, fig. 114; cat. 139). The latter also commented on contemporary events, alluding to the Prussian occupation of Lorraine since 1870. Lecomte du Nouý received the Légion d'Honneur in 1876 for the first altarpiece.

But he made a number of other paintings before presenting these altarpieces at the salon (he showed the first in 1876, the second in 1879). At the Salon of 1873 Lecomte du Nouý exhibited what appears to be a charming genre scene in an Oriental city (1873, fig. 39; cat. 84); a pencil sketch with the same composition can be found in one of his travel books. The title of the painting, *The Philosopher without Knowing It* (Le Philosophé sans le savoir), however, seems to define it as an allegorical scene, and suggests a literary source, perhaps a Middle Eastern fable. A young nude man drinks from a fountain in an Oriental city, while a woman and an old man observe him. As in *The Charmer* (fig. 29), the boy’s nudity as well as the drinking water should probably be read as symbols of purity. The critic Jules Claretie found the picture too dry and not coloristic enough for a good Orientalist work, and for once he found Lecomte du Nouý too close to Signol, rather than to Gérôme and Gleyre. This lackluster assessment, however, did not prevent Elizabeth Gardner (1837-1922), the wife of Bouguereau and herself an accomplished

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95 Aurillac: 82.13.361, p. 53, see appendix I.
96 There is no clear indication that the painting's title refers to the famous play by Michel-Jean Sedaine (1719-97) of the same title, which was first performed at the Comédie-Française in 1765.
97 Claretie 1876, p. 109; for text see cat. 84. On Claretie, see Bouillon 1990.
painter, to acquire the painting in 1873 for the collection of Jonas and Susan Clark in Williamstown, Massachusetts. At the Salon of 1874, Lecomte du Nouy exhibited two rather different pictures. The catalogue listed one as *I Macellaj* [sic] *(les bouchers) de Venise (Souvenir de Voyage de 1873)* (The Butchers of Venice, Souvenir of a Voyage from 1873, 1874; fig. 40; cat. 101). Both the picture’s subtitle and a pencil drawing in one of his travel sketchbooks imply that this composition was inspired by a trip to Venice, where he would have seen butchers transporting large slabs of meat on a gondola. Yet, with this painting, Lecomte du Nouy also seems to have made an implicit reference to Gérôme’s enormously famous *The Prisoner* (1861; fig. 41), as well as to his own *The Bearers of Bad Tidings* (fig. 82). Gérôme’s painting shows a manacled prisoner lying in a small rowboat being transported over the Nile. It illustrates the fateful story of Jaafar El Barnekee, Vizier to the Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun Er Rasheed, who had ordered Jaafar to arrest the murderer of a young woman within a three-day period. Having failed in this mission, the Vizier himself became the victim of the despot whom he had so faithfully served. He is being rowed across the Tigris (even though the Temple of Luxor on the Nile appears in the background of Gérôme’s painting) to his own execution, at which forty of his kinsmen will lose their lives as well. Gérôme exhibited *The Prisoner* at the Paris Salon of 1863, the very year of Lecomte du Nouy’s salon debut, and the painting was immediately seen as one of his masterpieces. Furthermore, Lecomte du Nouy was also commissioned to paint a copy of his teacher’s painting in 1871 (cat.76).

Although the settings of Gérôme’s Oriental scene and Lecomte du Nouy’s butchers rowing through foggy Venice are quite different, they clearly share a visual heritage. Lecomte du Nouy’s boat is not a typical gondola, and his highly stylized integration of the picture’s date and his own signature into the rear of the decorated vessel, gives it an Egyptian flavor. Further, the seated butcher who stares blankly at the slabs of meat while resting his head in his left hand, is reminiscent of the pharaoh in

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98 I would like to thank Bonnie Grad, Professor of Art History, Clark University, Worcester, MA, for providing me with information about this painting. She wrote an unpublished catalogue of the Clark paintings that are deposited at the Worcester Art Museum.

99 One of the travel sketchbooks kept in Aurillac: 82.13.361, p. 2, contains a drawing with a very similar composition, and strongly suggests he witnessed this scene in Venice.

100 Sirahan 1881, n. p., text to the plate of *The Prisoner*.

101 See cat. 76 for a letter by Gérôme regarding this copy.
Lecomte du Nouy’s *The Bearers of Bad Tidings*, who overlooks an ancient city, with three corpses beside him. Like Gérôme’s painting, *The Bearers of Bad Tidings* departs from the customary notion of barbarism in the Orient, a topic that will be further discussed in chapter two. Lecomte du Nouy must have intended his Venetian butchers as a personal commentary on these two successful pictures, which avid salon visitors would certainly have recognized. Indeed, Claretie noted that the work brought him some success.102

Lecomte du Nouy’s other picture at the 1874 Salon could be regarded as his own, decidedly more sugary, version of Caravaggio’s *Amor vincit omnia* (Love Conquers All, 1601-02, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin). Its listing in the salon catalogue as *Eros* (*Imité d’une pierre antique*) suggests that the composition was inspired by an ancient gemstone (fig. 42; cat. 83). Indeed, the painting’s main figure in profile can well be imagined to derive from such an object, but given the painting’s larger than life format, their character could not differ more strongly. The work also conveys a far more extravagant atmosphere than Lecomte du Nouy’s earlier representation of a nude boy, *The Charmer* (fig. 29). This cupid arches his bow while seated on a cloud overlooking an ancient Greek city on a bay, which is depicted innocuously in the lower right corner of the composition. Behind him appear fragments of the zodiac with the Greek words for Dioscuri and Taurus and their respective symbols, Gemini and Taurus. Before its appearance in Paris, *Eros* was shown at the Vienna World Exhibition of 1873, which might explain why the scroll uncoiling from the little putti illustrates the verb “to love” in German, French, Italian, and English. During its Paris showing critic Dubosc de Pesquidoux described the painting in these terms:

*Eros* by Mr. Lecomte du Nouy is a beautiful pink-toned boy with lascivious eyes holding a bow and quiver. He is surrounded by little boys with butterfly wings who serve as messengers. Caskets abundantly filled with jewelry and pearls serve as his artillery, one far more effective than the terrible cannons by Krupp. Urns, garlands, and cooing doves on a pillar complete this picture in which the Greek traditions and the lessons of Mr. Gérôme mingle with memories of Boucher.103

102 Claretie 1876, p. 272: for French text see cat. 101.
103 Dubosc de Pesquidoux 1874, 87; for French text see cat. 83.
Apart from such generic references to Caravaggio and Boucher, *Eros* seems to refer most specifically to Édouard Toudouze’s *Eros and Aphrodite* of 1872 (fig. 43). Both works were presented to the public at the Salon of 1874 and they share a certain exuberance and fantastical atmosphere. Toudouze’s painting features Aphrodite reclining on a fur-lined shell, pulled by giant blue butterflies whose bridles are held by a blindfolded Eros. It was to Toudouze that Lecomte du Nouy had lost the *prix de Rome* competition in 1871, and *Eros and Aphrodite* was the laureate’s *envoi de Rome* of 1872.

The works that *pensionnaires* (the resident students) at Rome’s French Academy sent back to Paris to demonstrate their artistic progress were usually exhibited first at the École des Beaux-Arts. Lecomte du Nouy must have seen Toudouze’s work there and he may have decided to create a painting of similar scale and character that would measure up to it, if not outdo it. Even though Lecomte du Nouy omitted the figure of Aphrodite, there are several similarities between the two paintings that seem too specific to be merely coincidental. Both pictures contain the vague outlines of an ancient coastal town at the bottom of the composition. The unusual butterfly wings Lecomte du Nouy gave to his putti must refer to the butterflies in Toudouze’s picture, and the extravagant parrot wings of Lecomte du Nouy’s *Eros* certainly upstage those of Toudouze’s *Cupid.*

In photographs, Lecomte du Nouy’s *Eros* (with its cooing doves and mischievous putti) may seem an overtly saccharine image, yet it is striking when seen in person. Lecomte du Nouy apparently wanted to prove that he could work on a large scale (something Gérôme hardly ever did) and that he could manipulate and apply paint without his accustomed smoothness and polish. Reproductions inadequately convey how certain areas of paint, especially the boy’s parrot wings and the headband studded with roses, are built up in heavy impasto on the canvas. Surrounded by a massive frame, the picture exudes a formidable power.

Shortly after he painted *Eros*, the artist produced *The Dream of a Eunuch* (*Un rêve d’eunuque*, 1874; fig. 87; cat. 92), in which he treated the theme of love far less conventionally. The painting relates to a fascinating group of works depicting the eunuch Cosrou, a subject derived from Montesquieu’s *Les lettres persanes* (*The Persian Letters*, 1721). These pictures, which reveal a great deal about Lecomte du Nouy’s art, both

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104 On this painting, see Bonfait 2003, p. 357, 370-71, 559-60, cat. 198.
practically and intellectually, are discussed extensively in chapter two. More reminiscent of *Eros* is a much later composition that Lecomte du Nouy exhibited at the Salon of 1891, *The God and the Mortal Woman* (Le dieu et la mortelle, fig. 6; cat. 230), as well as a related (possibly preparatory) pastel from 1889 bearing the inscription *Antiope - Jupiter* (fig. 44; cat. 223). In both works, a sensual, mortal woman embraces the immortal Jupiter in a scene that also depicts a putto carrying a flower and ring. The catalogue of the 1891 Salon provided the public with the following information: “*Le Dieu et la Mortelle.*

“*Relevez-vous, jeune mortelle, / Vous lirez l'amour dans mes yeux.***” (Philemon et Baucis. – *Dédie au maître musicien Gounod.*) (Fragment d’un triptyque sur l’Amour.),” confirming that Lecomte du Nouy intended this as part of a triptych on the theme of love.  

The critic Véron interpreted this painting, which was dedicated by the artist to the famous composer Charles Gounod, as depicting the muse who implored divine inspiration.  

Montgailhard, on the other hand, saw the woman as representing earth, and the god as transforming everything he touches.  

For this composition, Lecomte du Nouy had obviously been inspired by Ingres’s famous *Jupiter and Thétis* (1811, Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence), once more placing himself in the lineage of that great master.

Although he had visited Venice before, that city would represent a recurring theme in Lecomte du Nouy’s oeuvre after 1874. In addition to the historicized scene of butchers in a gondola mentioned earlier (fig. 40), the works inspired by this singular city ranged from charming informal sketches (fig. 45; cat. 91c) to finished easel paintings. Lecomte du Nouy returned to Venice in 1875 for about ten months, accompanied by the painter Charles Toché (1851-1916).  

Lecomte du Nouy’s infatuation with the city culminated in a large triptych that he exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Français of 1910

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105 *The God and the Mortal Woman. “Raise yourself, mortal girl, / You will read the love in my eyes.”* (Philemon and Baucis. Dedicated to the master musician Gounod.) (Fragment of a triptych on love.) *Philemon and Baucis*, given as the painting’s source in the Salon catalogue, is a story by Ovid. Philemon, an old man, and Baucis, his wife, entertained Zeus and Hermes in disguise as hospitably as their poverty would allow, after the gods had been repulsed by the rich. For this Philemon and Baucis were saved from a deluge, and their dwelling was transformed into a temple of which they were made the first priest and priestess. They were also granted their request to die at the same time, and were then turned into trees whose boughs intertwined.

106 For the French text see cat. 230.

107 Montgailhard 1906, p. 77, repr. before p. 97.

108 Montgailhard 1906, p. 45-46, mentions that they met Manet in Venice. As Manet was there only in October 1875, Lecomte du Nouy’s trip must have occurred that same year. On this encounter with Manet, see also chapter II, part V, *Lecomte du Nouy: an Assessment.*
as *Venise* (ca. 1910; cat. 319). In a photograph of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s studio, this work can be seen hanging in an elaborate Neo-Renaissance frame (fig. 7). Its left wing depicts Alfred de Musset (1810-1857) and George Sand (1804-1876), who consummated their stormy love affair in Venice, while the central canvas shows a self-portrait of the artist at work with Venice in the background, beneath an apparition of three female figures in the sky. This element may have had its first trial in a small sketch showing the vague contours of a woman holding the moon, her head crowned by a star that glitters like a jewel (fig. 46). The right wing of the triptych portrays a woman holding a fan while standing behind a balustrade; this is presumably the artist’s wife, though it is not clear which one.\(^{109}\)

On August 1, 1876, the artist married Valentine Peigné-Crémieux (1855-76), the granddaughter of the famous French Jewish statesman Isaac Adolphe Crémieux (1796-1880). In 1878, Lecomte du Nouÿ painted an imposing portrait of this influential politician (fig. 47; cat. 134), which seems heavily indebted to the marvelously penetrating likeness of Count James-Alexandre de Pourtalès Gorgier by Delaroche (1846; fig. 48). Holding a quill in his right hand, Crémieux rests his left arm upon a pile of official documents, one inscribed with the year 1870. After disappearing from public life in 1864, Crémieux played an important role in the government that replaced Napoleon III, and his name remains attached to the law of 1870 that gave French nationality to the Jews of Algeria. Crémieux fought passionately for things in which he believed, and the bronze statuette of the ancient orator Demosthenes stands appropriately on the mantle beside him.\(^{110}\) A staunch Republican, he also believed in the separation of Church and State, free and compulsory basic education, the dissolution of the Assembly of Versailles, and a general amnesty for those condemned for their involvement in the Paris Commune.\(^{111}\)

Lecomte du Nouÿ’s marriage to Valentine Peigné-Crémieux and his consequent association with her prominent family may have influenced his frequent portrayal of Jews during later trips to North Africa and the Middle East. Unfortunately, their life together

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\(^{109}\) The artist’s autograph inscription “Madame du Nouÿ” on a photo of the Venice triptych indicates that the right wing depicts his wife (Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, microfilm Nr 63 Fol., Collection Laruelle, Tome 132). Another photo of the painting can be viewed on www.roger-violett.fr. The predella contains several small portraits of Venetian painters and some allegorical scenes.

\(^{110}\) See cat. 109: Crémieux owned a drawing of Demosthenes by Lecomte du Nouÿ.

\(^{111}\) See Dominique Lobstein’s text on this painting on the website www.histoire-image.org/index.php; and, Sigal 2003, p. 103.
lasted only a few months: Valentine fell ill at the beginning of their honeymoon in Italy and died soon afterwards.\textsuperscript{112} Though close scrutiny of the actual painting, which has not been located, is not possible, it could be that the right wing of the 1910 Venice triptych is a posthumous homage to Lecomte du Nouÿ’s first wife, especially as the left wing depicts George Sand and Alfred de Musset as an amorous couple.\textsuperscript{113}

After Valentine’s death, Lecomte du Nouÿ visited the northern French cities of Lille and Arras, until the warmer climate lured him south towards Bordeaux. From there he boarded a ship for Lisbon and finally ended up in Tangiers, a journey that must have occurred in the summer of 1877.\textsuperscript{114} He encountered a scripture-reading session in Morocco that inspired the 1882 Salon picture \textit{The Rabbis Commenting the Bible on Saturday} (1882; fig. 126; cat. 172). This voyage also inspired various other pictures that Lecomte du Nouÿ would exhibit many years later.\textsuperscript{115} The titles of the artist’s works catalogued by Montgailhar for 1877 and after confirm the strong impression made by this trip: \textit{The Jewess of Tangiers} (cat. 120), \textit{A Temple Guard in Jerusalem} (cat. 121) and \textit{At the Gate of a Mosque} (cat. 122). Yet Lecomte du Nouÿ’s lifelong infatuation with the Middle East is perhaps most touchingly rendered in the 1881 self-portrait that shows him sketching in the company of a local (fig. 4; cat. 165).

Around 1878, Lecomte du Nouÿ moved into a former studio of Gérôme’s in the so-called Boîte à thé, a large complex in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs that housed nine studios and had once constituted the epicenter of the néo-grec movement.\textsuperscript{116} Among his fellow residents were the painters Auguste Toulmouche (1829-90), who had first built a studio there and who was also a former Gleyre pupil; the painter Émile-Antoine Bayard (1837-91); Louis Claude Mouchot (1830-91), a painter of Venetian and Egyptian views; the printmaker Charles Albert Waltner (1846-1925), who also owned several of Lecomte...

\textsuperscript{112} She lays buried on the Montparnasse cemetery, and her tombstone, sculpted by Lecomte du Nouÿ, reads: VALENTINE LECOMTE DU NOUÿ / NEE PEIGNE-CREMIEUX. NEE 31 MARS 1855, MARIEE 1er AOUT 1876, MORTE 15 OCTOBRE 1876. At the Salon of 1875, he had already shown a historicized honeymoon in Venice, see cat. 97.
\textsuperscript{113} If the picture was indeed painted around 1910, when shown at the Salon, the artist was not married at that time. The inscription on the photo (see note 109) antedates 1910, and even though he may have known her already by 1910, he only married his third wife in 1914.
\textsuperscript{114} Montgailhar 1906, p. 44, 49.
\textsuperscript{115} Montgailhar 1906, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{116} Montgailhar 1906, p. 53. See also chapter II p. 63, and note 15.
Montgailhard claims that Lecomte du Nouy painted his famous The Gate of the Harem, Souvenir of Cairo (La porte du sérial, 1876; fig. 101, cat. 116) in this artistic environment. Yet the 1877 Salon catalogue that features this picture gives the artist’s address as “Rue des Beaux-Arts, 9.” It was not until the Salon of 1878 that such catalogues began to provide Lecomte du Nouy’s address as “Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, 70 bis.”

It is not clear when the artist relocated from his studio in the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs to a house at Boulevard Flandrin 20, an address recorded in the catalogue of the Exposition Universelle of 1889 though it may have been related to his second marriage, which occurred in 1882. Montgailhard describes this hôtel as filled with trinkets: “at his place, there is not a piece of furniture or an object that isn’t old, foreign, or beautiful.” Wooden latticework screens divided the ground floor into such areas as an Arab salon, a library, and a music room. A large studio was located on the top floor, which was also filled with objects. A Romanian journalist, Lucile Kitzo, described Lecomte du Nouy’s home as follows: “we enter a beautiful salon, whose walls are covered with pictures by the master. Through the open doors, we perceive a series of reception rooms, furnished with large divans draped with fabrics from the Orient, and further, a garden [...]”

In 1881, Lecomte du Nouy painted two female portraits, one of which depicts the elderly Madame Evrard seated with her glasses in one hand and her embroidery in the other (cat. 156). The sitter was the mother of Caroline Evrard (1851-92), the artist’s second wife, who is featured in the other portrait (cat. 159). In 1891, Lecomte du Nouy exhibited a portrait at the salon depicting himself, Caroline, and their son, Jacques (1885-1961) (fig. 49; cat. 231). Caroline died in 1892, and the artist married a third time, in

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117 See cat. nos. 19 and 20.
118 Most of the Salon catalogues for the years 1878 through 1889 that I have consulted do not record artists’ addresses, and therefore provide no indication when Lecomte du Nouy would have moved. Furthermore, in various documents related to the artist’s death in 1923, the house number is given as 30, which could mean that he also moved once within the Boulevard Flandrin, or that the numbering there changed at some point.
119 Montgailhard 1906, p. 103-4.
120 Guémin 1895; for the French text see cat. 279. Kitzo 1900, for the French text see appendix VI.
121 After viewing it at the 1883 Salon, a critic called this small work more finished than a Holbein, and characterized it as pure ‘Ingrisme’ pushed to the extreme. For the French text see cat. 159.
1914, to Térésa de Fisanne (born 1862). An inscription by the artist on a photograph of the painting Madrigal (cat. 310) refers to “Madame Lecomte du Nouy,” implying that the woman portrayed is Térésa de Fisanne (although it would have been painted before they married).122

Sculptures

Lecomte du Nouy’s initial foray into sculpture is represented by the tomb he created for his first wife, Valentine Peigné-Cremieux, after her death. Montgailhard lists four sculptures depicting “Valentine du Noüy” created in 1877 (cat. 125-128); one was identified as “Pour le tombeau,” (for the tomb) and another as “Pour son tombeau au cimetière Montparnasse” (for her tomb in the Montparnasse Cemetery; in situ).123 In addition to following in the long tradition of tomb sculpture, Lecomte du Nouy also addressed the concepts of immortality and eternity by making sculptures alongside his more fragile paintings in order to commemorate his wives. Montgailhard suggests that a sculpture submitted to the 1895 Salon — listed in the catalogue as “Portrait de Mme L.-D. N...”—bore the features of his second wife, Caroline, and was created under the same sad circumstances.124

Lecomte du Nouy also made a number of sculptures that were the result of commissions, among them one from the Romanian royal family for a commemorative plaque in honor of the Austrian emperor’s visit to Romania in 1896 (cat. 267). Three years later, he made a plaque showing the profiles of the Russian Tsar and the King of Romania (cat. 280). In addition to an allegory of triumphant Romania (cat. 330), Lecomte du Nouy created a large bronze monument to Prince Barbo Stirbey (Salon of 1908) that was eventually erected in the city of Craiova (cat. 316). At the Salon of 1903, Lecomte du Nouy showed the preparatory plaster (cat. 301) of a marble (which he showed at the Salon of 1905), called The Iron that Provides Bread (Le fer qui donne du pain, 1905; fig. 50; cat. 308), which depicts a bare-chested peasant hammering a scythe, while seated on sheaves of wheat. The work bears the inscription “Pour l’oeuvre de vie internationale”

122 Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des estampes, microfilm N e 63 Fol. Collection Laruelle Tome 132.
123 Montgailhard 1906, p. 122. See also note 112.
124 Montgailhard 1906, p. 87-88. See cat. 245.
and was conceived during the negotiations among the French President, the King of Italy, and the Austrian Emperor to promote an international agricultural league. The marble was eventually acquired by the French government and exhibited at the Ministry of Agriculture.

At the Salon of 1913, Lecomte du Nouÿ exhibited a large marble group called *The Divine Singer* (*Orpheus*) (*Le divin Chanteur*; cat. 325), which was originally made for the music room of the Queen of Romania. It seems never to have arrived there, however, and in fact was considered for installation in the Paris Opéra. However, the successor to architect Charles Garnier (1825-1898), Joseph Marie Cassien-Bernard (1849-1926), wrote to the artist informing him that there was no space for such a large sculpture in the foyer of the Opéra, though Cassien-Bernard appreciated Lecomte du Nouÿ’s work. The statue now adorns the grand interior staircase of the town hall of Versailles.

Lecomte du Nouÿ’s nationalist sympathies emerged in a sculpted allegory of the establishment of the French border with Germany along the river Rhine, called *Victorious France* (*La France victorieuse*; cat. 366), which pays homage to the victorious swords of Caesar, Louis XIV, Napoleon, and General Floch. It was to have been erected on the left bank of the Rhine, facing Germany, but was only executed in a large (2.30m) plaster model that has since been destroyed. Reminiscent of the implied subject matter in one of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s altarpieces for l’Église de la Sainte Trinité (fig. 114; cat. 139), which dealt with a dispute over the Alsace and Lorraine regions, this sculpture also touched upon Franco-German animosity. In contrast to most of these fairly straightforward allegorical representations, Lecomte du Nouÿ’s most touching sculpture is perhaps *For Liberty* (*Pour la liberté*; fig. 51; cat. 286), which he showed at the Salon of 1901. It depicts the naked corpse of the Parisian street urchin Gavroche, a character in Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862), who died on the barricades during the Revolution of 1830, while clasping the flag for which he fought. The open book beside him reads: “Feu! L’enfant tomba et sa petite grande âme s’envola...” (Fire! The child fell and his great little soul flew away...). The sculpture closely resembles the artist’s painting *Dying for the*

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125 Los Angeles, Getty Research Library, Special Collections, ID number 89-A168, call number 890058: letter dated April 9, 1913, addressed to “Mon cher Maître.” It is not evident who this “Maître” is.
Fatherland (1892; fig. 54; cat. 236), which depicts a naked soldier fallen on the battlefield.

Romania

In 1895, Lecomte du Nouy planned a trip to Constantinople by way of Bucharest, where his brother André had been appointed architect to the crown. He may have planned the journey to distract him from his sorrow at the death of his second wife, Caroline. (After the death of his first wife, Lecomte du Nouy had acted similarly, traveling to North Africa in 1877.) André Lecomte du Nouy introduced his brother to the Romanian royal family, who commissioned several works from the artist. Consequently, what was intended as a brief reunion with his brother developed into a sojourn of several months and led to several subsequent visits. The works he produced there include a sensitive plein-air sketch of the Carpathian Mountains, dated 1897 (fig. 52), and at least two pairs of large state portraits of the royal couple (cats. 256 and 257, and 258 and 259). The Romanian government also commissioned several church frescoes, which Lecomte du Nouy executed in a neo-Byzantine style (cat. 283). These frescoes gave him an opportunity to realize his ambition of creating large-scale pictorial programs. Together with a few of his easel paintings and some drawings, a substantial part of Lecomte du Nouy’s oeuvre remains in Romania and deserves further scrutiny.

Queen Elizabeth of Romania seems to have appreciated Lecomte de Nouy’s company as much as his artistry (he painted several portraits of the queen alone, such as cat. 269), not to mention his musical talents, which he probably inherited from his musician father. In her memoirs, Princess Marie, the wife of the heir to the throne, who was herself somewhat less impressed by this “Frenchman of advanced age,” wrote:

The queen could not live without the excitement of discovering unusual people and encouraging their talents. That would not have been a problem if Aunty had been content to praise her protégés to the skies for her own pleasure. But she insisted we must all be enraptured by them, which amused me sometimes. At a certain moment she favored a Frenchman of advanced age, in whom she thought to have discovered a musical genius, even though he was really a painter. She assured us that he not only knew all operas by heart, but that he could also sing all their roles whether they were for a tenor, baritone, or
bass. Aunty, who was a great musician and a true artist herself, invited us in a circle around this pretentious individual who screamed in all kinds of tones. Burning with sincere enthusiasm, she saw in this sad gentleman a prodigy, listened to him with her arms crossed and lost in ecstasy, while we had to leave the room periodically for fear of bursting out in laughter.126

Napoleon and Nationalism

At the Romanian court Lecomte du Nouÿ also met Princess Charlotte of Saxony-Meiningen, the sister of the German emperor Wilhelm II (1859-1941) and an ardent admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte. She asked Lecomte du Nouÿ to paint the picture _Bonaparte Annotating the Commentaries of Caesar_ (Bonaparte annotant les Commentaires de César, 1897; cat. 264). This depiction of Napoleon was not unique within Lecomte du Nouÿ’s oeuvre: in 1869, he had executed his first Napoleonic subject, _The Supper at Beaucaire_, which served as the model for an illustration in the Larousse encyclopedia (cat. 35). Some twenty-five years later, he reworked the same canvas before showing it at the Salon of 1894 (Le souper de Beaucaire, fig. 53; cat. 244). Apart from offering a tribute to the young Bonaparte, Lecomte du Nouÿ must also have conceived the painting as an artistic homage to Rembrandt (1606-69).127 The artist employed a tonal range of golden browns and strong chiaroscuro, infusing this scene from the life of the young general with an almost religious quality, reminiscent of Rembrandt’s _Supper at Emmaus_ (ca. 1628, Musée Jacquemart André, Paris). The subject relates to a 1793 pamphlet published by Napoleon under the same title, after he had witnessed a bloody battle for the liberation of Avignon from occupying National Guardsmen from

126 I would like to thank Gabriel Badea-Păun for providing me with this citation, from his book Badea-Păun 2004: “La reine ne pouvait vivre sans la surexcitation de découvrir des êtres rares et d’encourager leurs talents. Cela n’eût présenté aucun inconvénient, si Aunty s’était contentée d’êlever aux nues ses protégés pour son plaisir personnel. Mais elle exigeait que nous nous extasions tous devant eux, ce qui m’amusait quelquefois. À un certain moment elle protégeait un Français, d’âge mûr, en qui elle s’imaginait avoir découvert un génie musical, bien qu’il fût peintre de son métier. Elle nous assurait qu’il ne se contentait pas de connaître par cœur tous les opéras, mais qu’il pouvait en chanter tous les rôles, aussi bien celui de ténor que celui de baryton et de basse. Aunty, quoique bonne musicienne elle-même et véritable artiste, nous invitéait à faire cercle autour de cet individu prétentieux qui gazouillait ou hurlait sur tous les tons. Brillant de sincère enthousiasme, elle voyait dans ce triste sire un être prodigieux, l’écoutait les mains croisées, perdue d’extase, tandis que nous étions obligés de quitter parfois la chambre de peur d’éclater de rire.”

127 Through one of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s sketchbooks we know that he has visited Amsterdam, where he is likely to have seen Rembrandt’s work, if he had not already seen it in Paris. Aurillac: 82.13.352, p. 13, appendix 1.
Marseilles. The pamphlet recorded the conversation over dinner at an inn where Bonaparte shared the table with various businessmen attending the fair at Beaucaire. In the heat of the argument, Bonaparte stood up and ardently defended the Jacobin point of view, urging the men of Marseilles to accept a republican solution to the conflict.

Five years later Lecomte du Nouy painted *The Dictation at Austerlitz* (*La dictée d’Austerlitz*; cat. 279) and subsequently exhibited both works together at the Exposition Universelle of 1900. Finally, in 1920 he revisited his hero with *Imperial Destiny, Napoleon on Saint Helena* (*Le destinée impériale, 1821*; cat. 338), possibly conceived as a centennial commemoration. A photograph of Lecomte du Nouy’s studio (fig. 7) shows this painting second to the right of the artist, with another apparently Napoleonic picture on the second easel to the left of him.¹²⁸

Lecomte du Nouy is not known to have written much about his political ideas (apart from certain informal scribbles on sketches and drawings, see appendix I), yet his numerous Napoleonic scenes reveal his strong sense of patriotism, which is further confirmed by his decision to fight during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71) and by various other works with nationalistic and military themes. In a late picture exhibited at the 1892 Salon as *Dying for the Fatherland* (*Pour la patrie*, fig. 54; cat. 236), a male nude, positioned somewhat awkwardly in the composition, is lying face down on the tricolore, his sword still in his hand and his helmet and armor lying beside him. The position of the body was prepared in a drawing (fig. 55),¹²⁹ in which the man’s right hand can already be seen holding the sword, and the forward movement of his upper torso implies that he lies on a mound in the battlefield. In the finished painting, however, the man’s face is turned more toward the viewer, a compositional change that contradicts the strong upward position of his right shoulder. Unless the artist simply failed to depict an anatomically convincing corpse, he may have sought to render here the last desperate struggle to live; though the left arm seems already lifeless, the man’s feet, but not the lower part of his legs, seem to touch the ground.

Montgailhard had discussed this work with the painter, and notes that he had criticized its cold mythological approach and questioned the representation of a modern

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¹²⁸ A preparatory sketch for this latter composition is kept in Aurillac: 82.13.218, see appendix I. Another close-up photo of the artist standing next to the 1921 painting is kept at Roger-Viollet, RV 632 837.
¹²⁹ The museum in Aurillac also keeps several preparatory drawings, see cat. 236.
soldier lying naked on the battlefield. The artist defended himself, claiming that, in the
ture academic tradition, he had not wanted to depict any one soldier, but rather to
represent every man who had died fighting for his country—thus the timeless nude,
evoking an ancient Greek warrior. A historical photograph of this painting in
Montgailhard’s book clearly depicts a battle in the background, featuring warriors in
identifiable nineteenth-century uniforms probably like those worn during the Franco-
Prussian War (fig. 54a). Yet this battle scene is no longer visible in the painting today.
The discrepancy suggests that the artist took his friend’s criticism to heart and painted a
generic landscape over the battle scene. In doing so, he concentrated the viewer’s
attention completely on the nude, strengthening his objective of honoring every fallen
soldier, rather than depicting a specific battle scene. Lecomte du Nouy’s commitment to
such iconography is underscored by his marble sculpture of 1900, For Liberty (fig. 51;
cat. 286), which reveals a similar approach.

Lecomte du Nouy’s late works clearly reveal his personal convictions, but from
an artistic point of view they are often less compelling. The Guardians of the Great City,
Dedicated to the Heroes of the Air (Les veilleurs de la grande cité, depicted in fig. 7; cat.
333), for example, which contains a similar patriotic message, is a weaker work. Two
nude male winged figures on clouds hover above Paris while one embraces a propeller
plane. The artist obviously intended to honor the fighter pilots who defended Paris during
World War I; he had been in Paris when the church of Saint Gervais was bombed in 1918
(depicted in fig. 7; cat. 334). The composition contains all the elements of a traditional
historical allegory, but the work fails to capture the impact either of a horrific war or
modern industrial society (despite the presence of the planes). It is in works like this that
the shortcomings in Lecomte du Nouy’s academic approach become most evident.
Moreover, the artist, now well into his seventies, was probably no longer physically able
to paint his figures with the precision and finish required by academic convention.

\[130\] Montgailhard, 1906, p. 77-78, repr. after p. 136. The museum in Aurillac also keeps three preparatory
drawings for a fallen soldier in the painting’s background (visible in the Montgailhard reproduction near
the right bent elbow of the main character), inv. 82.13.36, 82.13.37 and 82.13.130, see appendix I, and cat.
238.
Throughout his years as a mature painter, Lecomte du Nouÿ continued to paint and exhibit portraits and Orientalist scenes. Yet, he always sought recognition as a history painter in the grand academic tradition, the genre that once bestowed the greatest prestige upon artists. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, these works came to be viewed by many as an outmoded means of expression. Even a traditionalist like Lecomte du Nouÿ must have felt a need to somehow reinvent the model that he had been taught at the École des Beaux-Arts. The limited critical and commercial success of his first large-scale work, *Job and his Friends* (1867; fig. 108; cat. 30), did not prevent him from trying his hand at further large-scale narrative paintings. His next grand composition, *Eros* (1873; fig. 42; cat. 83), for example, seems to have been motivated by his personal rivalry with Toudouze (fig. 43). Ideally, artists created such large-scale works for a specific commission, so that they could be assured of payment and a destination for their finished canvasses, like the two altarpieces Lecomte du Nouÿ painted for the church of the Trinity in Paris (1876 and 1879; figs. 113 and 114). In short, the challenge to be true to his calling was often as formidable as the size of the canvas Lecomte du Nouÿ wished to create.

Judith Gautier, the daughter of the writer Théophile Gautier, described Lecomte du Nouÿ’s predilection for the grand gesture as follows: “He is inspired by Homer, the Bible, and Victor Hugo, and he only proceeds in series, polyptychs or triptychs, which take him many years to complete.” A good example of how the artist sought to demonstrate that he had mastered *la grande peinture* is his monumental Homeric triptych from 1881 (fig. 80; cat. 160), a reworking of a composition he had executed earlier, on a much smaller scale (fig. 77; cat. 105). In the mid-1880s, Lecomte du Nouÿ embarked upon an ambitious series of pictures that he envisioned as a tribute to the great Romantic poet, novelist, dramatist, and artist, Victor Hugo (1802-85). Having already honored Homer, Lecomte du Nouÿ now sought to create an epic project of no less than twenty canvasses illustrating all of Hugo’s major literary achievements. He ultimately completed

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131 For the French text see cat. 160.
132 For an extensive treatment of Hugo and his impact on French culture and society, see *La gloire de Victor Hugo* 1985, as well as Barrielle 1985.
only four, each bearing the title of the novel that inspired it. At the Paris Salon of 1884, he exhibited *The Toilers of the Sea* (Les travailleurs de la mer, 1884; fig. 56; cat. 181), listed in the catalogue as a "fragment d'un pentaptique", implying that the series was to contain five pictures. The following year, he exhibited two more works at the salon, *The Orientals* (Les Orientales, 1885; fig. 57; cat. 186) and *Contemplations - At Present* (Les contemplations – Aujourd’hui, 1885; fig. 58; cat. 191), listed respectively as the second and third works in the series. A year later, the Paris dealer Tripp organized a major exhibition of Lecomte du Nouy’s work in which he united these pictures with the fourth work, *Contemplations - Past Times* (Les contemplations – Autrefois, 1885; fig. 59; cat. 197). Although this painting does not appear in the Paris salon catalogues of these years, Tripp’s exhibition pamphlet lists it as the first in the series. It is impossible to assess their artistic significance, however, because after this 1886 exhibition, Lecomte du Nouy donated the ensemble to the museum in Caen, where they were destroyed by a fire in 1944.

Hugo’s *Les contemplations* (published in 1856) is a collection of lyric verses in two volumes—one titled *Autrefois* (Past Times), the other *Aujourd’hui* (At Present)—written after his exile to Jersey in 1852. The painting illustrating volume one (fig. 59) depicts the author as a young man holding writing paper and quill, receiving inspiration from Venus, pictured as the muse seated beside him. In the other work (fig. 58), a bearded Hugo, seated next to a grave, has a vision of a young woman being carried off into the sky. *The Toilers of the Sea* (fig. 56) is based upon Hugo’s 1866 novel, set on Guernsey, in which the character Gilliatt Clubin fights a giant octopus. This memorable subject was treated by many illustrators, François Chifflart, Gustave Doré, and of course Hugo himself, among them, as an image of torment in which the battle between man and the elements is rendered in a truly Romantic spirit. Judging from a photograph of Lecomte du Nouy’s work, he made an intense and forceful depiction of struggle and anguish. It seems that he was again inspired by a classical source, the famous *Laocoön* sculpture (1st century A.D., Vatican Museums, Rome), though Montgailhard likened the

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133 See appendix IV.
painting to the work of the Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), and he contrasted it with the fourth picture in Lecomte du Nouy’s series, *The Orientals* (Salon 1885, fig. 57). In this last picture, derived from Hugo’s collection of lyrics titled *Les Orientales* (1829), Lecomte du Nouy infused an exotic setting with strong doses of sexuality and violence. This formula would recur in several of his other paintings, including *Ramses in His Harem* (1885; fig. 102; cat. 201), *The Sadness of Pharaoh* (1901; fig. 104; cat. 290), and *The White Slave* (1888; fig. 105; cat. 219), all of which will be discussed in chapter 2.

The Tripp exhibition catalogue (appendix IV) also mentions two studies related to Hugo’s satirical poems *Les Châtiments* (The Punishments, 1853), possibly preparatory works for another large composition within the series as originally conceived. Lecomte du Nouy’s ambitious project of illustrating a writer’s entire oeuvre is reminiscent of similar British endeavors. The London-based Shakespeare Gallery (1789) was initiated by the engraver John Boydell (1719-1804) in order to stimulate history painting in England by persuading famous artists to illustrate the bard’s works, and the Milton Gallery (1799), in which Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) mounted his own tribute to Milton. Both projects closed soon after they opened, however, and it is more likely that Lecomte du Nouy had in mind the success of the Doré Gallery, where Gustave Doré showed twenty enormous biblical paintings to large crowds, first in London from 1868 through 1892, then in various North American cities, until 1898.

Montgailhard argued that Lecomte du Nouy never finished his Hugo project because he feared becoming repetitive, but it might well be that the artist was not encouraged by the public reactions to the project when it was exhibited at Tripp’s. The project’s practical and physical complexity may have been factors, but Lecomte du Nouy may also have sensed that there no longer existed a receptive audience, let alone clients, for such a dramatic gesture. (Indeed, Doré started his gallery in London because his project was far less appreciated in France.) In 1896, the critic Henri Jouin praised the artist for abandoning this gargantuan endeavor. Although he acknowledged the picture’s overall quality, especially the savage reality Lecomte du Nouy had evoked in *The Toilers*

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135 For the influence of Spanish painting on the work by Lecomte du Nouy, see also the discussion on *The Begging Homer*, chapter II.
136 For an extensive account on the relation between painting and literature in British art, see: Altick 1985.
of the Sea, he argued that Hugo had died too recently for the painter to have the final word on his literary achievements. Lecomte du Nouy had contemplated other major projects, such as illustrating the poems of Virgil, and an enormous fifty-meter long depiction of the legend of the Romanian master mason Manole, who had built the Church of Curtea-de-Argès, but none were realized. In his own way, Lecomte du Nouy aspired to revive an art of epic proportions and at the same time stake out his position as a history painter. Shifting his attention from the ancient Homer to the contemporary Hugo probably served his efforts to invigorate and modernize traditional academic painting as it faced ever-greater opposition. But the project’s failure suggests that he was waging an uphill battle, if not an impossible one.

In this biographical overview, it has become evident that Lecomte du Nouy was unwavering in his commitment to his initial artistic convictions. For him, art was about eternity, not about the here-and-now or trends and fashion. After the artist’s death on February 19, 1923, Le bulletin de l’art ancien et moderne ran a brief obituary that characterized him as a painter, sculptor, médailleur, and musician. Again, his allegiance to Gérôme was cited. He presumably died of old age at eighty-one, after a long and prolific career. He had suffered personal tragedies—his first two wives died young—yet professionally he had achieved a considerable degree of success. His reputation, however, did not long outlive him, and it was already much diminished toward the end of his life.

In a 1919 letter from the Musées Nationaux, his proposed donation of ten copper plates to the chalcographie du Louvre (where such plates are kept and prints are still being sold today) had been declined: “under the impression that the portraits and genre pieces that were offered did not fit in the series that are in demand by the public.”

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137 Jouin, l’Oeuvre d’art (September 25, 1896); for the French text see cat. 181.
140 Archives du Louvre (1919.13 Oct) Letter of the Direction des Musées Nationaux: “estimant que les portraits et les pièces de genre qui lui étaient présentés ne rentraient pas dans les séries qui sont demandées par le public et les amateurs.”
There are several questions regarding Lecomte du Nouÿ's biography that remain to be answered. It is not clear, for example, whether he taught many students. A photograph of the artist in his studio shows an unidentified man behind an easel (fig. 5), who seems to be an apprentice or an assistant, yet the literature leaves this subject mostly untouched. Only once does Montgailhard refer to a student of Lecomte du Nouÿ, Charles Toché (1851-1916), who spent time with him in Venice.\(^\text{141}\) Toché is listed as having owned *Job and his Friends* (cat. 30), but he ultimately pursued an Impressionist style rather than following his teacher's path. The only other clue that Lecomte du Nouÿ had students is a dedication on a preparatory drawing for *The Begging Homer* (fig. 66, lower right image; cat. 160), which reads: "Études pour Homère / A mon eleve et cher ami / Georges Sauvage / Du Nouÿ" (Studies for Homer / To my pupil and dear friend / George Sauvage / Du Nouÿ).\(^\text{142}\) Born in Caen, Georges Sauvage (dates unknown) was also a portraitist and history and genre painter who exhibited at the salon from 1874 through 1913. It remains unclear whether Lecomte du Nouÿ actively chose to limit his teaching, or whether the lack of students resulted from a fading artistic reputation. Lecomte du Nouÿ’s conservative approach and artistic convictions may have alienated younger artists, though it could be argued that his fondness for traveling prevented him from accepting many pupils.

Another open question relates to Lecomte du Nouÿ’s working method. He clearly made many preparatory drawings and sketches for his paintings, but it is less obvious whether he used photographs as well. Current research shows that many late nineteenth-century painters relied heavily on photographs to create their compositions.\(^\text{143}\) Yet, among Lecomte du Nouÿ’s many sketchbooks, sketches, and studies in the Musée d’Art et d’Archéologie in Aurillac that derive from the artist’s studio, there is only one photograph,\(^\text{144}\) a portrait of a young Egyptian boy wearing a turban, an image which cannot now be linked to any of his surviving paintings.

\(^\text{141}\) Montgailhard 1906, p. 45-46.
\(^\text{142}\) See cat. 160, related works. Lecomte du Nouÿ also made a portrait drawing of Sauvage, see cat. 207.
\(^\text{143}\) Recently this aspect was extensively explored in two monographic exhibitions of 19th-century painters, Thomas Eakins and Pascal Adolphe Jean Dagnan-Bouveret. See Sewell 2002, and Weisberg 2002.
\(^\text{144}\) Aurillac: 82.13.375, see appendix I. The fact that this collection contains only one photograph, however, is not necessarily representative for how many photographs the artist actually possessed during his lifetime.
Building upon this general outline of Lecomte du Nouÿ’s career, chapter two will provide an in-depth discussion of the artist’s most distinctive works. These can be divided into three general groups: néo-grec, Orientalist, and religious.