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Contrived Resemblance – Delaroche and Napoleon

ABSTRACT

Several contemporaries highlighted the physical resemblance between Delaroche and Napoleon, of which Delaroche appears to have been acutely conscious. The way the painter's identification with the French emperor has been understood in academic research bears the clear hallmark of biographically psychologising interpretations. This article proposes an alternative way of interpreting this staged similarity between Delaroche and Napoleon. This interpretation derives firstly from an observation of the drastic change in the artist's professional circumstances that took place in the late 1830s, and then takes into consideration the specific characteristics of Napoleon's popularity in the 1820s, which precipitated multiple forms of projection and identification. Largely depoliticised, the immediately recognis-

able figure of Napoleon cut across national and social boundaries, and had tremendous potential for marketing. During the 1840s and 1850s, the visibility of Delaroche's pictures extended beyond Europe – not only as a result of the reproductions in circulation, but also by virtue of numerous versions painted by the artist's own hand. Given this wider context, it may well be assumed that Delaroche's staged similarity to Napoleon was an experiment in form and a way to establish an image compatible with the demands of the public market and mass audiences. He very adeptly used his paintings to link this image to the cult figure of Napoleon. In a period in which the artist was forging a new career path, he found himself faced with the challenge of responding to an art market of increasing structural and geographic complexity by adopting innovative self-marketing strategies.

“I then went to see [Delaroche], who had his studio on Montmartre in a small building on the rue de la Tour-des-Dames [...]. I found a small middle-aged man, the clearly defined form of whose head bore a certain similarity to that of Napoleon, which he did not shy

from using to his advantage, duly adopting some of the bearing befitting a world ruler”.¹ This account is given by the Munich painter Friedrich Pecht (1804–1903), describing his first encounter with the history painter Paul Delaroche (1797–1856) in 1839. Shortly afterwards, Pecht enrolled as a student at the artist’s studio.

Pecht was not the only person to highlight the similarity between the two figures – of which Delaroche appears to have been acutely conscious. The author of Delaroche’s obituary in *The Illustrated London News* in 1857 remarked on the similarity, apparently emphasised by the lock of hair that fell over the artist’s forehead in Napoleon’s trademark style: ‘The mention of the little grey coat reminds us of the partial likeness of him who wore it to Napoleon Bonaparte; the lock of hair ostentatiously curling in front aiding somewhat the allusion’.²



Fig. 1: Paul Delaroche, *Self-portrait*, 1838, charcoals drawing with estompe and sanguine, 30 x 20 cm, private collection. > Bildzitat nach: Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche. History painted* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 220.

A similarly ‘Napoleonic’ lock of hair can be seen in one of the painter’s very few self-portraits, a work from 1838 that more than any other came to define Delaroche’s public image [fig.1].³ The chalk drawing shows a frontal view of the 41-year-old artist, his head turned slightly to the right. The slight fall at the corner of his mouth, the furrowed brow, and a gaze seemingly unfixed on any physical object convey a serious, thoughtful impression. The same expression and lock of hair can also be seen in other artists’ subsequent portraits of Delaroche, with the result that he is lent a strikingly homogeneous appearance even in works that differ in technique and form [fig.].

Tellingly, the artist created this self-portrait in the period when his artistic gaze first turned to Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1838, he completed the painting *Napoleon in His Study* [fig.5]. This was to be the first of four paintings of the French emperor by Delaroche, who

1 Friedrich Pecht, *Aus meiner Zeit, Lebenserinnerungen von Friedrich Pecht*, 2 vols. (Munich: Verlagsanstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1894), vol. 1, 172.

2 Anonymous, M. Paul Delaroche, in *Illustrated London News*, vol. XXIX/ no. 830 (15 November 1856), 506–508, here, 508.

3 It appeared as the first illustration in the catalogue raisonné of Delaroche’s works, published in 1858. See Henri Delaborde and Jules Goddé, *Œuvre de Paul Delaroche reproduit en photographie par Bingham accompagné d’une notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de Paul Delaroche par Henri Delaborde et du catalogue raisonné de l’œuvre par Jules Goddé* (Paris: Goupil & Cie, 1858), no page numbers.

returned to the subject in the intervening two decades before his death. The work was followed by *Napoleon at Fontainebleau* (1845) [fig.], *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps* (1848), and finally his incomplete project, *Napoleon at St Helena*.⁴ In all these works, Delaroche was less concerned with painting a heroic depiction of the ruler than creating a penetrating portrait of Napoleon as a thoughtful, doubt-ridden ‘human’.⁵ The extent to which these visual similarities had entered public consciousness is evident from a number of cartoons in the contemporary press. Honoré Daumier’s *Les Saltimbanques* appeared in April 1839 in *La Caricature* magazine [fig.2]. The caption indicates that the group of



Fig. 2: Honoré Daumier, *Les Saltimbanques*, Lithographie, 30.5 x 23.5 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Musique, ESTMACNUTT026

figures shown cooped up in a fair stall are “célébrités de la France littéraire, musicale et artistique”. Delaroche is depicted in the throng, alongside Jules Janin, David d’Angers, Victor Hugo, Hector Berlioz, and Paul Delaroche. A canvas held by the artist, which serves as an attribute, almost completely obscures his body. On the reverse of the canvas (which is turned towards the viewer) are listed the titles of Delaroche’s most famous works: *Jeanne Grey*, *Les enfants d’Edouard*, and *Cromwell*. Perched across the painter’s head, meanwhile, is a bicorne (also known as a ‘Napoleon hat’) – and so, inevitably, the viewer forms an association between the image and the French emperor.

That same year, the cartoonist Benjamin also portrayed Delaroche wearing a bicorne. Published in the satirical magazine *Le Charivari*, the

4 We know of the project thanks to an oil study (*Napoleon at St Helena*, c. 1855/1856, oil on canvas, 40.9 x 32.5 cm, London, Royal Collection Trust, acc. no. RCIN 404876) and a photograph showing a large-scale pen drawing of the same subject on a wall in Delaroche’s studio. See Delaborde/Goddé, *Œuvre de Paul Delaroche*, 61.

5 Hans-Werner Schmidt, Jan Nicolaisen and Martin Schieder, ed.s, *Eugène Delacroix & Paul Delaroche. Geschichte als Sensation*, exh. cat. Museum der Bildenden Künste (Leipzig: Imhof, 2015), 121.

cartoon shows the artist with a disproportionately large head, gazing decisively into the distance [fig.3].⁶

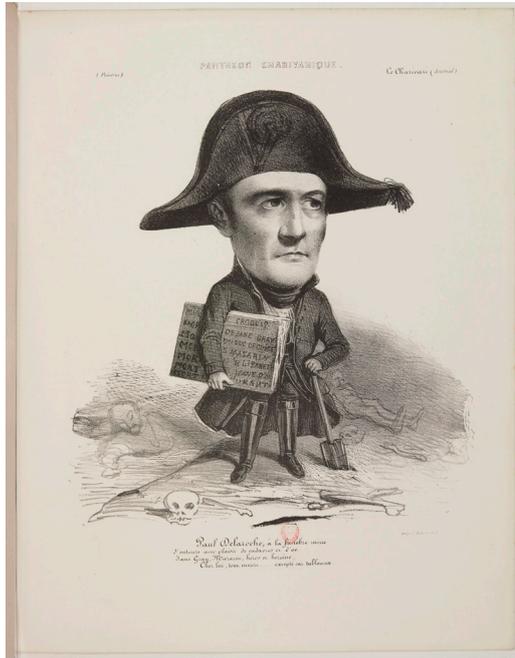


Fig.3: Benjamin Roubaud (called Benjamin), Delaroche, Lithographie, 36.0 x 27.3 cm, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie, RESERVE ZF-279-4 ZF-279-4.

Room for interpretation

The way the painter's identification with the French emperor has been understood in academic research bears the clear hallmark of biographically psychologising interpretations. Stephen Bann traces Delaroche's identification with Napoleon back to artist's inner insecurity – he was considered to be a reserved, melancholy character.⁷ The “staged similarity” evident in the self-portrait of 1838 might therefore be understood as a “Napoleonic alibi”,⁸ designed to counteract what Bann describes as the “burden of self-expression”.⁹ This line of reasoning underlies interpretations that view Delaroche's representations of Napoleon as reflections of the artist's particular state of mind.¹⁰ Thus, according to Norman Ziff and Stephen Bann, the explanation for the downtrodden expression with which the emperor is portrayed in *Napoleon at Fontainebleau* and *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps* is to be found in two dramatic events from the artist's own life, which respectively

coincide with the years in which the paintings were created: in 1845 Delaroche was plunged into deep despair following the death of his wife Louise at just 30 years of age;¹¹

6 The cartoon shows Delaroche in the midst of corpses and bones, holding a spade in his left hand and a sketchbook under his right arm. Listed on the sketchbook's binding are all the works in which the artist takes the deaths of famous historical figures as his subject: 'Mort de Jane Grey, Mort du Duc de Guise, Mort de Mazarin [...]'. The lithograph is one of a series of satirical portraits that first appeared in the *Le Charivari* magazine. They were later published as an album. See *Eugène Delacroix & Paul Delaroche* 2015, 119.

7 See Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 68, 246.

8 Bann, *Paul Delaroche*, 68.

9 *Ibid.*, 246.

10 See (inter alia) Ziff, *Paul Delaroche*, 199: “And if the proud Napoleon in the Sandwich painting [*Napoleon in His Study*] is an accurate reflection of Delaroche's confident self-image in 1838, the more troubled Napoleon Delaroche would produce later would appear to speak no less eloquently of subsequent transformations in that self-image.”

11 See Stephen Bann, *Delaroche, Napoleon and English Collectors*, in *Apollo – International Magazine of Art and Antiques*, 2005 (October), 25–30, here, 30: “*Napoleon at Fontainebleau* had been painted in 1845, and reflected the deep despondency that he felt as a result of the illness and death of his wife in the same

then, in 1848, profoundly unsettled by the political and social unrest triggered by the February Revolution, the artist even considered leaving France.¹²

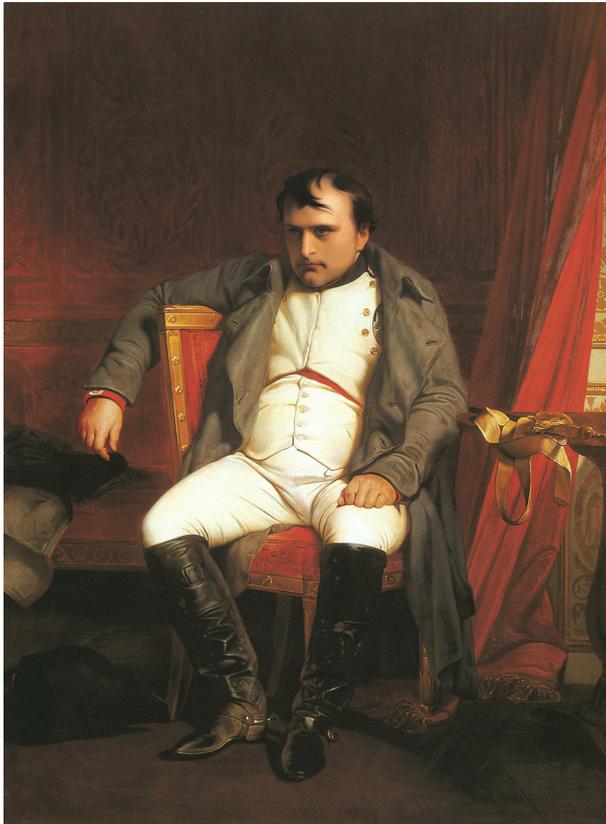


Fig. 4: Paul Delaroche, Napoleon at Fontainebleau, Napoleon at Fontainebleau, 1847?, 181 x 137 m, Paris, Musée de l'Armée, 11931 [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Others, such as Michael Marrinan and Uwe Fleckner, have indirectly challenged this biographical interpretation. They refer in particular to *Napoleon in Fontainebleau*, a painting in which the emperor is shown collapsed in an armchair at the Chateau de Fontainebleau, after learning on 31 March 1814 that enemy troops had entered Paris. (Fig.4) The ambivalence and tension that inhabit the depiction, they argue, make it impossible to see Delaroche's Napoleon as a *definitively* failed and depressed hero.¹³

To date, art historians have remained silent about the public 'play acting' that emerged from Delaroche's similarity to Napoleon. This article proposes an alternative way of interpreting this staged similarity between Delaroche and Napoleon. This interpretation derives firstly from an observation of the drastic change in the artist's professional circumstances that took place in the late 1830s, and

then takes into consideration the specific characteristics of Napoleon's popularity in the 1820s, which precipitated multiple forms of projection and identification.

year." See also Ziff, *Paul Delaroche*, 228: "When interpreted autobiographically, as it must also be, Delaroche's very grim, Christ-like *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* betrays an unmistakable air of personal crisis."

12 Claude Allemand-Cosneau, Isabelle Julia, ed., *Paul Delaroche. Un peintre dans l'histoire*, exh. cat. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes; Pavillion du Musée Fabre, Montpellier (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1999), p. 256.

13 "To characterise the Napoléon of Delaroche as 'tragic' registers one point of the work's expressive charge but fails to capture the splendor of the hero's isolated, though unbroken spirit." See Michael Marrinan, *Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe: Art and Ideology in Orleanist France, 1830–1848* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press), 1988, 181. See also Uwe Fleckner, Napoleon am Scheidewege. Paul Delaroches "Napoleon I. in Fontainebleau" und die Ikonographie des Herkules, in Uwe Fleckner (inter alia), ed. *Jenseits der Grenzen. Französische und deutsche Kunst vom Ancien Régime bis zur Gegenwart*, 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 2000), vol. 1, 145–167, here, p. 159; *Eugène Delacroix & Paul Delaroche*, 121.

Upheavals

During the 1830s, Delaroche worked primarily on highly detailed and often dramatic paintings that explored subjects from French and English history, which were characterised by a heightened sense of pathos. Small-scale pictures such as *The State Barge of Cardinal Richelieu on the Rhône*¹⁴ and *Cardinal Mazarin's Last Sickness*¹⁵ and the large-scale painting of *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* enjoyed acclaim and considerable success at the exhibitions of the Paris Salon. Considered to be “*le peintre le plus populaire de la France*”,¹⁶ Delaroche received lucrative commissions from the French government and royal family, as well as aristocratic and bourgeois collectors.¹⁷

However, Delaroche decided that his seventh appearance at the Salon Exhibition of 1837 would also be his last. The decision signalled the artist's rejection of what was then *the place* in France for the public display of art. At a stroke, he not only withdrew his original works from the gaze of art critics (and hence the purview of institutional recognition), but also deprived the French art public of its role as the decisive ‘addressee and power broker in the art market’.¹⁸ Instead, in the years that followed, Delaroche turned increasingly to the foreign art market – both with respect to his involvement in exhibitions and the commissions he accepted. A more international perspective, and the challenges this brought with it, now informed his practice.

The reasons the artist turned his back on the Salon are various and it is only possible here to give a brief outline of them. From the mid-1830s, there was a distinct sharpening of tone in the language used by some critics about Delaroche's exhibited works. The experience was shared by other artists, who felt they were on the receiving end of disproportionate attacks. The outrage this development provoked among artists intensified after the tragic suicide in 1835 of Delaroche's former teacher, Jean-Antoine Gros. Shortly after his painting *Hercule et Diomède* received damning reviews in the press, Gros took his own life.¹⁹ Delaroche held critics partially responsible for Gros's death in the eulogy

14 Paul Delaroche, *The State Barge of Cardinal Richelieu on the Rhône*, 1829, oil on canvas, 57.2 x 97.3 cm, London, The Wallace Collection, acc. no. P320.

15 Paul Delaroche, *Cardinal Mazarin's Last Sickness*, 1830, oil on canvas, 57.2 x 97.3 cm, London, The Wallace Collection, acc. no. P314.

16 “The most popular painter in France.” Anonymous, Salon de 1837, in *L'Artiste*, XIII, 1837, 193–200, here, p. 194.

17 There was such demand for his work that Delaroche was himself able to dictate the themes and conditions of his commissions. See Stephen Bann, *Delaroche – Ein moderner Künstler und sein Markt*, in *Eugène Delacroix & Paul Delaroche*, pp. 82–90, here, p. 84.

18 See Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler. Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem* (Cologne: DuMont, 1997), 9.

19 Sébastien Allard, Marie-Claude Chaudonneret, *Le suicide de Gros. Le peintre de l'Empire et la génération romantique* (Paris: Gourcuff Gradenigo, 2010), 13–24.

he gave at the artist's funeral.²⁰ Artists also became more vocal in their protests against the partisan nature of the Salon jury. Delaroche, himself a member of the jury, tried unsuccessfully on numerous occasions to introduce reforms.²¹ Eventually, in 1836, he and Horace Vernet felt they had no choice but to tender their joint resignation as members.²² It was against this background that a whole swathe of established artists – which, in addition to Delaroche, included Vernet, Jean-Dominique Ingres, and Ary Scheffer – opted either to refrain entirely from participating at Salon exhibitions, or just to exhibit there infrequently.²³

Delaroche's urge to experiment with new approaches may well have favoured several factors that ultimately secured his independence from the Salon – not only from a social and institutional perspective, but also economically. For even after he stopped participating at the Salon, as a member of the Institut de France, a professor at the École des Beaux-Arts, and with his own studio and students to teach, he remained firmly anchored in the French art system and continued to obtain commissions from the state.

Furthermore, after marrying Horace Vernet's daughter Louise in 1835, this personal union with the Vernet family – an established dynasty of artists – may well have given him a sense of security from which he also derived the confidence to experiment. Carle and Horace Vernet both worked with a close eye on the art public and market, weathering changes in political circumstances and economic demand by adopting a flexible approach to genre, subject, distribution methods, and self-promotion.²⁴

An important force behind this shift was undoubtedly the publisher and art dealer Adolphe Goupil (1806–1893), whose close and highly productive partnership with Delaroche dated back to the late 1820s when he began publishing reproductive prints after the

20 “L'auteur de la *Peste de Jaffa* n'est plus! [...] Si des critiques inconsidérés, méconnaissant les chefs-d'oeuvre dont il a enrichi l'École française, n'ont pas craint d'abreuver d'amertume les derniers jours de cette utile et glorieuse vie, la postérité, qui n'est jamais ingrate, le vengera par son admiration de ce coupable oublié et de cette persécution, qui eût été ignorante». Quoted after J. Tripier le Franc, *Histoire de la Vie et de la Mort du Baron Gros* (Paris: Jules Martin, J. Baur, 1880), 545–546.

21 See Bann, *History Painted*, 118. Delaroche and Vernet were not alone in being critical of the Salon. Following King Louis-Philippe's accession to the throne, increasing numbers of artists argued in favour of having closer involvement in determining exhibition-related matters – particularly since an artist's career was so heavily dependent on participation at the Salon. See Andrée Sfeir-Semler, Andrée, *Die Maler am Pariser Salon 1791–1880* (Frankfurt/Main, New York: Campus-Verlag, 1992), 123.

22 “On annonce que MM. Horace Vernet et Delaroche viennent de donner leur démission de membres du jury d'admission. L'excessive partialité de leurs collègues en faveur des artistes qui tiennent plus particulièrement aux doctrines de l'Académie les a forcés de prendre ce parti”. Anonymous, *Variétés*, in *L'Artiste*, vol. XI, 1836, 36.

23 See Sfeir-Semler, *Die Maler am Pariser Salon*, 216–217.

24 See Alexis Joachimides, *Verwandlungskünstler. Der Beginn künstlerischer Selbststilisierung in den Metropolen Paris und London im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2008), 315–321; Daniel Harkett, Katie Hornstein, eds., *Horace Vernet and the Threshold of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2017).

artist's paintings.²⁵ Goupil had access to transnational distribution channels that contributed considerably to the worldwide dissemination and popularisation of Delaroche's work in the form of high-quality reproductions.²⁶ From 1846, he also assumed responsibility for selling the artist's original paintings. With his knack for spotting trends, Goupil was able to recognise and use to his advantage the growing numbers of people involved in the art world, and the proliferation of new exhibition spaces and media. From the mid-1840s, Goupil and his business partners also set about giving his company an international profile by opening new branches in Europe and the USA.²⁷



Fig.5: Paul Delaroche, *Napoleon in his Study*, [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

“Napoleon is more popular than Jesus”

Another way to consider Delaroche's identification with Napoleon and his depictions of the emperor is as part of the ‘Napoleon mania’ that swept across Europe. As the *Revue de gazette musicale* described the phenomenon in 1839: “Napoléon est l'homme du siècle; sa gloire, son génie, ses étonnantes prospérités, ses adversités plus étonnantes encore, sont objet constant de toutes les réflexions, de toutes les études, de tous les enthousiasmes”.²⁸

By no means limited to France, the personality cult that grew up around Napoleon instead took on an international dimension.²⁹ It had already emerged in the immediate wake of Napoleon's death

25 See Pierre-Lin, Renié, *Oeuvres de Paul Delaroche reproduites et éditées par la maison Goupil*, in *Paul Delaroche. Un peintre dans l'Histoire*, 176; Linda Whiteley, Goupil, Delaroche and the Print Trade, in *The Van Gogh Museum Journal* (2000), 74–81.

26 Goupil published Delaroche's works in a variety of forms – both in terms of format and technique, and hence also price. See Renié, *Oeuvres de Paul Delaroche*, 177.

27 Agnès Penot, *La maison Goupil: galerie d'art internationale au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Mare & martin, 2017).

28 “Napoleon is the man of the age; his glory, genius, great wealth, his yet greater hardships, are the perennial object of all thoughts, study, and passions”. Anonymous, *Nouvelles*, in: *Revue et gazette musicale*, no. 67 (12 December 1839), 535.

29 Antoine Lilti, *Figures publiques. L'invention de la célébrité (1750–1850)* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), 287: “Napoléon est connu dans le monde entier; quelles que soient leurs opinions politiques, les gens veulent savoir ce qu'il fait, ce qu'il devient, comment il se porte”.

on the island of St Helena in May 1821, which put an end to the emperor's politically tendentious reputation as a heroic conqueror and transformed him into a legend. "Over the next two decades, writers, historians, biographers, and artists constructed the myth of Napoleon and produced a massive body of Napoleoniana for popular consumption as well as learned contemplation."³⁰

In France, King Louis-Philippe embarked on a politically motivated rehabilitation of Napoleon through the promotion of official memorialisation – for example, by commissioning paintings of Napoleonic battles and reconstructing (or completing) monuments in Paris. Napoleon was to be transformed from a hero into a legend.³¹ The state-sponsored Napoleonic cult reached its apogee in a magnificent mass spectacle: on the initiative of the king and the prime minister, Adolphe Thiers, the emperor's mortal remains were transferred from St Helena to Paris in December 1840. Hundreds of thousands of spectators lined the route of the procession carrying Napoleon's coffin through Paris to its final resting place in Les Invalides.³²

Interest in France and abroad was not limited simply to Napoleon's military and political achievements. The source of his new celebrity lay "beyond the pure exercise of power"³³ and was lent expression in a variety of commemorative media.³⁴ Hence Delaroche's paintings were not unique in responding to this new form of veneration. On seeing how depictions of Napoleon outnumbered religious paintings exhibited at the Salon of 1837, the painter Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps remarked: "Napoleon is more popular than Jesus".³⁵

Transformations

The cult of Napoleon was also evident in the visible presence on Paris's streets of young people known as *jeunes Napoléon*. In 1835, the British novelist Frances Trollope (1779–1863) described how a generation of students at the city's École Polytechnique had transformed their physical appearance to resemble their idol, despite barely any of them

30 Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 85; see also Marrinan, *Painting Politics*, 142.

31 See Uwe Fleckner, *Le retour des cendres de Napoléon. Vergängliche Denkmäler zur Domestizierung einer Legende*, in Michael Diers, ed., *Mo(nu)mente. Formen und Funktionen ephemerer Denkmäler* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1993), 61–76. See also Marrinan, *Painting Politics*, 146.

32 Fleckner, *Napoleon am Scheidewege*, 159–160.

33 See Antoine Lilti, *Die Politik der Berühmtheit*, in *Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, December 2015, vol. 69, no. 799, 20–35, here 34.

34 Chateaubriand writing about London: "En 1822, je trouvais cette grande ville plongée dans les souvenirs de Bonaparte; on y était passé du dénigrement pour Nic [a nickname then popular in Britain for Napoleon] à un enthousiasme bête. Les mémoires de Bonaparte pullulaient; son buste ornait toutes les cheminées; ses gravures brillaient sur toutes les fenêtres des marchands d'images [...]". François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Paris: Garnier, 1910), 251–252.

35 Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, *Salon de 1837*, in *Le National* (26 March 1837), quoted after Ziff, *Paul Delaroche*, p. 198.

having even been born when Napoleon departed from France’s shores for the last time.³⁶ A few years later, the recent ubiquity of Napoleonic look-a-likes was the subject of an article entitled “Les Napoléon” in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*: “Une race innombrable, infinie, immense, de Napoléon dans toutes les catégories politiques, littéraires, musicales et industrielles”.³⁷ Wherever people went, they would stumble across Napoleon, apparently alive and well.

These countless “Napoleons” also included a large number of cultural figures. Similarity to Napoleon did not necessarily relate to appearance, as it could just as easily be a matter of a person’s character or bearing.

With Paris as its hugely influential epicentre, the world of music globalised at an early stage³⁸ (Delaroche himself cultivated contacts with numerous musicians and composers³⁹) and duly produced two notable personalities in the Napoleonic mould.⁴⁰ In 1822, Heinrich Heine wrote in his *Letters from Berlin* about the “remarkable similarity to the Emperor Napoleon”⁴¹ borne by the French violinist Alexandre-Jean Boucher (1770–1861), who was regarded as the biggest attraction of that year’s musical season in the Prussian capital.⁴² Furthermore, his fellow violinist and composer Louis Spohr (1784–1859), whom Boucher had met in Brussels in 1819, gave an account of the latter’s highly effective strategy with audiences. In performances throughout Europe, Boucher not only adopted the theatrical persona of Napoleon, but also drew upon the tragedy implied by the resemblance: “He had practised so that he could mimic the banished emperor as faithfully as possible – his bearing, the way he wore his hat – while assuming a dash of his personality. On tour, when he arrived in a city where he was still unknown, he would immediately adopt these affectations and show up at the promenade or the theatre in order to attract the attention of onlookers and ensure he was the subject of conversation. Indeed, he even tried to spread the rumour that his resemblance to Napoleon had brought him to

36 See Trollope, Frances Milton, *Paris et les Parisiens en 1835*, 3 vols (Paris: H. Fournier, 1856), vol. 1, 342–343.

37 “An innumerable, endless, immense tribe of Napoleons in every single political, literary, musical, and industrial category”. Paul Smith (pseudonym of Edouard Monnais), Les Napoléon in *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris. Journal des artistes, des amateurs et des théâtres*, vol. 8, no. 16 (25 February 1841), 120–21.

38 See Osterhammel 2010, p. 28.

39 As is attested, for example, by his portraits of Liszt, the composers Richard Wagner and Giacomo Meyerbeer, and the soprano Henriette Sontag. Moreover, Delaroche also designed the costumes for Meyerbeer’s opera *Les Huguenots*, which received its premiere in Paris in 1836. See Paul Delaroche. *Un peintre dans l’Histoire*, p. 251.

40 One could also mention the Parisian publisher *par excellence* during the July Monarchy, Émile de Girardin. His moniker “the Napoleon of the press” derived not only from his vague physical similarity to Napoleon, but also because of the scale and speed of his success. See Fabrice Copeau, Émile de Girardin. Héros de la liberté et inventeur de la presse moderne, in *Contrepoints*, 14 December 2010 (<https://www.contrepoints.org/2010/12/14/9059-emile-de-girardin>).

41 Heinrich Heine, Briefe aus Berlin (26 January 1822), in Manfred Windfuhr, ed. *Heinrich Heine. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1973), vol. 6, 15, 473.

42 See *ibid.*, 402.

the attention of the current regime in France, which, he claimed, had forced him to leave the country because he reminded the people of their beloved leader-in-exile.”⁴³

Another example is the concert virtuoso and composer Franz Liszt, whose face was, for a time, famously one of the most reproduced images in Europe.⁴⁴ Even early on in his concert career (from around the early 1840s), his highly expressive performance style drew comparisons with a military spectacle and earned the musician a reputation as the “Napoleon⁴⁵ of the piano”.⁴⁶ The comparison was made at a time when the musician was travelling extensively, touring and giving concerts throughout Europe more than ever before.⁴⁷ In addition to his style of performance, Liszt’s personality and appearance were repeatedly described in public discourse in comparison with the young General Bonaparte – an association generally considered to have positive connotations. In 1840, the *Birmingham Journal* noted: ‘He is a very good-looking young man, pale, thin, and intellectual; with a fine forehead, good nose, and well-cut mouth; not a little resembling the portraits of Bonaparte, when a captain of artillery. He is plainly, in his department, a man of great genius and originality’.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Delaroche’s “play acting” and use of his similarity to Napoleon and public perception of the emperor was not, then, unique. Largely depoliticised, the figure of Napoleon cut across national and social boundaries. Many figures from cultural life, who notably were known not merely in France but increasingly across Europe and even often beyond, channelled this tremendous potential for public display as a means to market themselves. The power of this cultural association derived primarily from the wide degree of recognition it elicited, which guaranteed that the projected image would be greeted with the desired reaction from audiences and consequently enter public discourse.⁴⁹ A small hint – a Napoleonic lock of hair, a bicorne, a particular bearing – was sufficient to evoke comparisons with Napoleon and so draw the audience’s attention to the artist.

43 Louis Spohr, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 1968), pp. 58–68, here pp. 61–62. The magazine *La France Musicale* described Spohr in 1843 as the “Napoleon of the violin”. Anonymous, *Nouvelles*. Paris, in *La France Musicale*, no. 49 (3 December 1843), p. 195.

44 Eduard Hanslick, *Musikalisches Skizzenbuch. Neue Kritiken und Schilderungen* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1888), 167.

45 Franz von Schober, *Briefe über Franz Liszts Aufenthalt in Ungarn* (Berlin: Schlesinger’sche Buch- und Musikalienhandlung) 1843, 4.

46 See Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, 80.

47 Responding to the musician’s tremendous success with audiences in Berlin, Heine spoke of a veritable “Liszt-mania”. See Heinrich Heine, *Musikalische Saison von 1844*, in Manfred Windfuhr, ed., *Heinrich Heine. Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, vol. 14/1, 131.

48 *Birmingham Journal* (28 November 1840), quoted after Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt*, p. 88. That same month, a critic from the *Hamburger Neue Zeitung* wrote an article about Liszt’s performance in the city in which he mentioned the musician’s striking resemblance to the young Napoleon. See *ibid.*, 87.

49 See Stefan Borchardt, *Heldendarstellungen. Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet und die Legende vom modernen Künstler* (Berlin: Reimer, 2007), p. 201.

Even though it is near-impossible to prove how the association of these various elements – emperor cult, artistic subject, work series, and public perception – directly affected the (commercial) success of the paintings, the following quotation from an advertisement placed in the *The New York Herald* in April 1852 gives some idea of the resounding success and huge public interest that greeted Delaroche's Napoleon pictures: "500,000 persons have, during the last two years, visited Paul Delaroche's world-renowned picture of 'Napoleon at Fontainebleau, March 31, 1814 – The Eve of His Abdication', now exhibiting at the Stuyvesant Institute, 659 Broadway".⁵⁰

During the 1840s and 1850s, the visibility of Delaroche's pictures extended beyond Europe – not only as a result of the reproductions in circulation, but also by virtue of numerous versions painted by the artist's own hand.⁵¹ The works were bought internationally, and their owners in Germany, Great Britain, and the USA⁵² repeatedly proved willing to send their valuable paintings on tour. Just like Goupil, who organised exhibition tours of Delaroche's paintings as a way of drumming up publicity to sell his own reproductions, the owners recognised the power of public exhibitions to lend prestige to works and significantly increase their market value.⁵³ Different versions of *Napoleon at Fontainebleau* were exhibited in Berlin (1847), London (1847), Vienna and Prague (1851), before touring various locations in the USA between 1850 and 1852. The works were then displayed in Liverpool and Edinburgh in 1854, followed by an exhibition in Manchester in 1857.⁵⁴

Given this wider context, it may well be assumed that Delaroche's staged similarity to Napoleon was an experiment in form and a way to establish an image compatible with the demands of the public market and mass audiences. He very adeptly used his paintings to link this image to the cult figure of Napoleon. In a period in which the artist was

50 Anonymous, [without title], in *The New York Herald, Morning Edition*, (24 April 1852), p. 7.

51 In the case of *Napoleon at Fontainebleau*, there existed at least three other large-scale repetitions and three smaller oval-shaped versions by created by Delaroche himself. See Paul Delaroche. *Un peintre dans l'Histoire*, pp. 315–316.

52 These included the British banker and art collector John Naylor (1813–1889), John Henry Schröder (1825–1910; a London-based banker, originally born into a family of leading Hamburg merchants), Queen Victoria, and the New York businessman John Cleaves Henderson (1809–1884). See *ibid.*

53 While Schettler had in 1845 paid the already considerable sum of 12,000 francs for the first version of the painting, which thus became the most expensive object in his extensive collection, a *répétition* was sold at the New York branch of Maison Goupil in 1852 for 18,000 francs to the well-known art dealer John Clowes Grundy (1806–1867) of Manchester. As mentioned above, the picture had toured throughout the USA over the preceding two years. See Goupil, Book 1, stock no. 414, page 46, row 3, entry date: 31 March 1852, sale date: 27 April 1852.

54 See Fleckner, *Napoleon am Scheidewege*, pp. 156–159; Anonymous, The "Napoleon" of Paul Delaroche, in *The Art Journal*, 9 (1847), p. 142; *The New York Herald* (24 April 1852), 7; Anne MacPhee, Two Patrons of Victorian Art, in Pat Starkey, ed., *Riches into Art: Liverpool Collectors 1770–1880* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 45–66, here p. 50; Esme Gordon, *The Royal Scottish Society* (Edinburgh: Skilton, 1976) 124; Algernon Graves, *A Century of Loan Exhibitions, 1813–1912*, 3 vols (Bath: Kingsmead Reprints 1970), vol. 1, 271.

forging a new career path, he found himself faced with the challenge of responding to an art market of increasing structural and geographic complexity by adopting innovative self-marketing strategies.

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